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Can a New Layer of Leadership Save Sectarian Practice? A Decentralized Denomination's Experiment with a Central Committee

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Abstract: The Beachy Amish-Mennonite bishop committee was established at the 1991 annual ministers' meeting as a conservative response to uncertainty about religious practices across the denomination. The committee was tasked with developing 18 concerns from the meeting into a denomination-wide standard of practice. While majority support was forthcoming for this statement, leadership from some influential, moderate congregations worked against the committee for two reasons. First, the congregation's leaders wanted a think tank-style advisory committee, not a committee that made and enforced regulations. Second, these congregations feared being ousted due to eventually falling out of conformity. Due to this opposition, the committee began rotating members and the initial goal of a standard of practice was lost, except a prohibition against television and radio that was ratified in 1999. The committee was an institutional focal point that allowed conservatives and moderates to express their goals, and when the moderates gained control, some conservatives took independent initiative to establish a constitution, to which congregations voluntarily adhered. This eventually turned into the Maranatha Amish-Mennonite and Ambassadors Amish-Mennonite denominations.

Keywords: Institutional conflict; Conference; Division; Internet; Divorce and remarriage; Woman's head covering; Boundary maintenance

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INTRODUCTION

The Beachy-Amish Mennonites carry with them an Old Order Amish-inclination to congregationalism. They are among the most congregational even of the denominations occupying the eminently congregational Anabaptist movement.

Yet, they are rightly called a denomination, for lines of membership are relatively clear even if informal, and Beachy churches collaborate on institutionally based projects of mutual interest, including two major mission organizations, a Bible school, and a periodical.

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As the Beachys grew numerically, they diversified, and as they diversified, leaders sought clarification about what common symbols and practices defined Beachys. In 1991, conservative leaders succeeded in establishing the Beachy bishop committee that was charged with implementing minimum standards for congregations. What began as an impromptu organizational effort gradually morphed into an organization that accomplished quite the opposite: a bureaucratic apparatus that generally pre-empted any further efforts to define affiliation-wide practices, at least for a generation.

To develop this account of the Beachy bishop committee, I collected, organized, and annotated numerous primary documents pertaining to the Beachy bishop committee and denominational affairs from 1991 to 2006 and beyond. The compiled collection is the first of its kind and a valuable historical record. I stop at 2006 not because the story is over—it is still unfolding—but because a period of relative inactivity around 2005-06 provides an opportunity to reflect on two major phases, what I call the original committee (1991 to around 1997-99) and the rotating committee (1997 and on).

BACKGROUND

The Beachy Amish-Mennonite denomination originated when a scattered group of Old Order Amish factions recognized one another and exchanged fellowship, largely between 1928 and the 1940s. Fellowship allows churches to work together on projects of mutual interest, preach in one another's churches, and have leaders investigate another church upon request when problems arise. The initial fraternization occurred between an Amish faction in Somerset County, PA (Mountain View, est. 1927) and another in Lancaster County, PA (Weavertown, est. 1909-10). From there, Bishop Moses Beachy of Somerset County assisted additional Amish factions in Pennsylvania and the Midwest, reinstating and ordaining leaders, while also extending fellowship to three Amish-Mennonite factions with Conservative Amish-Mennonite Conference roots (Beachy 1952; Mast 1950).

In the early years, the Beachys were in essence a technologically progressive version of the Old Order Amish, similar to the King Church of Hartville, OH (Yoder 2005) albeit not necessarily with the moral reforms of the King Church. As non-operation of automobiles became a salient

boundary demarcating Old Orders, the Beachys aligned more with the Amish-Mennonites, i.e., those churches that had parted ways with the Old Order Amish in the 1860s (Yoder 1991; Yoder 1999) and the Conservative Amish-Mennonites that started in 1910. Nevertheless, over the years, and especially from mid-century on, the Beachys developed organizations and committees that represented denomination-wide programs yet none formally representing the denomination (Anderson 2012; Yoder 1987). Those churches self-identifying as Beachy are those supporting Beachy organizations through donations, personnel, and attendance at functions, such as an annual ministers' fellowship meeting (Anderson 2011).

Annual ministers' meetings grew out of occasional meetings of ministers interested in Amish-Mennonite Aid's (AMA) Berlin, Germany, relief project. An early 1957 meeting invitation from the young AMA board to discuss Berlin concluded that

the committee believes this is all it is authorized to submit, but does understand that other bishops and ministers will probably desire to discuss other problems with the assembled group; probably this can be taken up in the afternoon.¹

With this letter, the committee enclosed a list of 64 Beachy ministers, helping to identify the in-group and establishing a precedent for annual, discussion-oriented meetings. That same year, the Mennonite Yearbook separated the Beachy congregations from other Amish-Mennonites for the first time, signaling a consolidated identity. These shifts toward formalized association, however small, became urgent, as at this time most Beachy churches began to face turmoil. Parties representing two visions of church were vying for influence: those Old Order in socialization and church polity versus those influenced by evangelization methods characteristic of Protestant evangelicalism. In response, in 1958, the Beachy ministers met in Somerset County, PA, and developed a method for admitting congregations into the group: a three-man bishop committee would investigate and

¹ Norman D. Beachy, Elam L. Kauffman, and Jacob J. Hersberger to "Ministers of the Beachy Amish Churches"

accept a church² following 14 points of practice and beliefs (Figure 1). The response to revivalist impetus, some points targeted those Beachys who retained certain practices common among the Old Order Amish: condoning tobacco, alcohol, and unrestricted courtship practices among the young people. However, the document also contained guidelines for dress, activities to avoid, and technology not permitted. Several evangelically oriented Amish-Mennonite congregations were admitted soon after.

Without a mechanism to enforce existing churches' practice, many points were soon discarded. Consequently, three-man committees gradually dropped the guidelines when investigating, and eventually, the investigating committee itself passed. Furthermore, several churches—and of note the sizeable and involved Center Amish-Mennonite Church of Hutchinson, KS—never applied to join but over the years were included by sheer merit of involvement. In any case, decentralization and congregational autonomy remained. Even the Beachy ministers' meetings moved away from administrative discussions, eventually consisting almost entirely of sermons and socializing, with a few reports from Beachy-supported agencies interspersed. The administration of a church remained with local leaders, although informally, the presence of other ministers and bishops at a church's ordinations was a sign of support.

The consequence was considerable variation in thought and practice. During these years, churches affiliated or withdrew from the Beachys based on a realization of identity, but this was hardly simple. Many churches were divided, creating much restlessness and ending in divisions. Eventually, churches outside the progressing Beachy mainstream emerged in one of three (Old) Beachy networks, what is today the "Highest Amish," Midwest Beachy Amish-Mennonites, and Berea Amish-Mennonites. The Mennonite Christian Fellowship, a strict yet evangelical movement, similarly organized outside the Beachy churches (Anderson 2011).

THE 1991 MINISTERS' MEETINGS AND THE FOUNDING OF A DENOMINATIONAL BISHOP COMMITTEE

The annual Beachy ministers' meeting has been an important mechanism in which ministers voice and diffuse their ideas, especially in informal conversations between sermons and during meals and the sermons themselves. Additionally, the church(es) hosting the meetings each year set the tone, for they are responsible for moderating, selecting sermon topics, and assigning speakers. Thus, the execution of the meetings tend to reflect the host congregation(s)' practice and thought. Because these large meetings are hosted in large communities, and because large communities tended to be more progressive than single-church settlements, the meetings more often than not tend to have moderate and non-sectarian contours. One exception was the 1991 meeting in the Milverton-Wellesley, ON, community, where the Amish-Mennonite churches are relatively conservative. The Cedar Grove Amish-Mennonite congregation, with help from neighboring churches, hosted the meetings.³ The program title *Set for the Defense of the Gospel*, the sermon topic assignments, and speakers chosen sounded an alert against compromise at a time when Beachys were facing a new generation of boundary testing.

Historically, Cedar Grove had been on the fringes of fellowship with the Beachys. During the early 1900s, Cedar Grove extended fraternal recognition to the Weavertown Amish-Mennonite (A-M) congregation in Lancaster, PA, and Peachey group (later Valley View A-M) in Belleville, PA, off and on. As these two Pennsylvania bodies associated more closely with the revivalist influx of Amish-Mennonites during the 1960s, Cedar Grove remained ambivalent about ongoing fellowship, choosing to remain on the social fringes. Under the leadership of Bishop Arthur Gerber (ordained 1973), the church strengthened its stance against Old Order Amish practices criticized by revivalist-style Beachys, such as smoking and unsupervised youth activities. They also conformed to common Beachy patterns of dress and grooming,

²Schrock, Enos. 2007. "The Third Family, Enos & Nora Schrock." Pp. 12-13 in *Oak Grove Mennonite Church, 1957-2007*, edited by Miller, Schrock, and Kipps. Aroda, VA: Oak Grove Mennonite Church.

³This has been the last time to date (2019) that the Ontario churches have hosted the annual meetings. No Amish-Mennonite leaders from southern Ontario have attended Beachy ministers' meetings in recent years.

FIGURE 1: 1958 MINISTERS' MEETING AGREEMENT (MOUNTAIN VIEW CHURCH, SALISBURY, PA)

The following is a result of a ministers' meeting at the Mountain View Church, Salisbury, Pa., Aug. 6, 1958; of the Beachy Amish Mennonite affiliation. Ten bishops and twenty-five ministers had come "together for to consider" (Acts. 15:6) these matters.

1. We accept and embrace the Eighteen Articles of Confession of Faith as drawn up in Dortrecht, Holland. April 21, 1632. We believe these Articles to be based upon and in harmony with the inspired Word of God, which is the Authority by which we embrace said Articles as worthy of propagation from one generation to another. Exo. 18:20.
2. As to Missionary work; we believe that God, "who wishes all mankind to be saved (das allen Menschen geholfen werde"--Ger). "and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4 weymouth). expects His church today to be "ambassadors for Christ"-- "Botschafter an Christi Statt" (2 Cor. 5:20; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 14-16.
3. Alcoholic beverages shall not be tolerated; Individuals who persist in this practice shall be denied communion, and shall be dealt with according to Article sixteen of Confession of Faith Prov. 20:1. Furthermore we urge to discourage the use and production of chewing or smoking tobacco. 2 Cor. 7:1.
4. Ministers of this affiliation shall exercise caution and good judgement in ministering to congregations or conferences with whom we are not affiliated. Approval of home congregation should be obtained, and our own congregations should not be bypassed in favor of others. Luke. 24:45-49. Gal. 6:10.
5. Victrolas, recorders, radios, and musical instruments are not to be tolerated. Isa. 5:11, 12; Eph. 5:18-21.
6. Congregations who allow cameras shall instruct their members that pictures are not for display; and cameras and pictures are not to be taken to other congregations where such are not permitted. Rom. 14:13; I Cor. 10:31, 32; I John 2:15-17.
7. We see a danger in college attendance, where a higher education is required we recommend correspondence courses in preference to college attendance. Those attending college should do so only with approval of congregation. I Cor. 18:31, 2:1, 2; 8:1; James, 1:5; 3:13-18. On the other hand, we would not give the impression that "ignorance is bliss". The Bible likewise warns against intellectual laziness and ignorance. God lamented, saying, "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (darum das es nicht lernen will"--Ger,) (Hosea 4:6) "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge---" (2 Pet. 1:5) We are instructed to search for understanding "as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God". Prov. 2:2-5; 15:14; 23:23.

8. Both sexes shall wear clothing which cover and conceal the body as becometh all Christians. Semi-transparent clothing are not Christ-like and shall not be permitted, Deut.22:5; I Tim 2:9,10; I Pet.3:3,4; 5:5.

9. Public bathing beaches shall not be patronized, neither for bathing nor gazing. Such scenes have led to the downfall of chosen men of God. 2 Sam. II. Boys or men should not go bathing with trunks alone; the upper body also be covered. If women and girls go bathing, they shall wear modest, form-concealing suits. I Thess. 5:22; I John 2:15-17.

10. No flowers shall be displayed at funerals, and we suggest that funeral notices published in community newspapers (such as dailies) might carry a "No flowers" notice. We encourage simplicity and good stewardship in funeral arrangements, and in the purchase of coffins. Rom.12:2; I Cor. 7:31.

11. Theater attendance, whether outdoors or indoors, shall not be tolerated regardless of what is on the screen. This also applies to watching the show from outside the ticket booth I Thess.5:22; I Tim. 5:6; 2 Tim.3:4,5.

12. Churches having rules that automobiles are to be black shall maintain that order; others are encouraged to establish similar regulations. Good Christian stewardship shall be conscientiously practiced in purchasing automobiles. I Cor. 7:31; Eph.5:15; I Pet. 5:5.

13. Wearing the beard shall be maintained. Isa. 5):6; Rom. 12:2; I Pet. 2:1.

14. Whereas the annual Youth Fellowship Meeting has become so large that many of our congregations do not have facilities to accomodate all the people, attendance from other communities shall be confined to youth and such ministers or others who have assignments on the program, as well as all members of the hostess congregation. Further-more we recommend that each congregation appoint a responsible married couple, preferably a minister, to accompany and have oversight of their youth, 2 Tim. 2:22; I Pet. 5:5.

15. Congregations or groups of believers wishing to affiliate with this group shall make application to be investigated by three or more bishops, who shall proceed according to their findings and the Word of God. If affiliation is accomplished all congregations should be informed. Acts. 8:14.

These papers are produced and distributed among our group of churches, for the ministers' or the churches' approval, if approved, they should be used hereafter to present to groups or churches wishing to affiliate with this group. If disapproved, by any of our ministers, please inform, giving reason, and what changes should be made.

even retaining this form when other congregations relaxed certain distinctive elements. In the several years before the 1991 meetings, Cedar Grove further strengthened its position, forbidding practices such as working as a long distance truck driver (White 2009). For an Amish-Mennonite congregation to move from a more permissive to a more selective stand in practice was unusual. Thus, by 1991, the Beachys were relaxing their practices at an uncomfortable speed while Cedar Grove was strengthening its stands.

The meeting speakers were generally conservative and echoed the sentiments of the Cedar Grove ministry. From the first night on, those preaching expressed concerns about behaviors and activities of Beachy members. The memory of the meetings remained in attendees' minds for years to come, the sort of meeting where retelling the events did not justice to conjuring the fervor that gripped attendees, whether in rallying to the call or dismissing the purported urgency. Excerpts from sermons covering two and a half days can give readers a glimpse into the content—if not the emotion—of the meetings.

The Urgent Tone of the 1991 Sermons

The 1991 meeting's sermons lasted from Tuesday evening, April 9, to Thursday evening. Bishop Eli Kauffman of Montezuma Amish-Mennonite in Georgia began the meeting with a tightly Scripture-citing message about the "Unsearchable Greatness and Wisdom of God." The Montezuma church had been somewhat geographically isolated from the rest of the mainline Beachys since established as an (Old) Beachy-style exodus from Kempsville A-M (Virginia) in 1953; the church was nonetheless sizable. Though Kauffman suggested no rousing reading of the denomination, his forensics and sermon structure were concretely Old Order, an expository, memorization-heavy style long abandoned by most mainline Beachy leaders. The evening's second sermon was the other side of the oratorical coin. With a mastery of syntax and vocabulary characteristic of the school-smart Kansas Beachy congregations, Bishop Paul L. Miller of Cedar Crest A-M (Hutchinson, KS) based his sermon content on scholastic inquiry to present a fresh twist on Scriptural renderings. He clarified the nature of "world" as "culture" in

Biblical texts, and pressed that the church "be not conformed to this *culture*..." (Romans 12:2).

The next morning, Roman Mullet, an influential leader of the 1950s evangelically-oriented Fellowship division from the Amish in Holmes County (Anderson 2011), delivered a calm but focused directive for the older generation to be the example they want the younger generation to follow, to turn from lavish living and focus on building the church, to not cater to the people's wants but to give a stern, gripping, yet edifying proclamation of the Word that brings confession and confirmation in truth. While Mullet's and Miller's sermons were general, their sermons' concerns turned the key for others to open up specific issues.

Ordained a year after a conservative faction withdrew from the Valley View Amish-Mennonite church in Belleville, PA, the young minister Enos Kurtz, age 31, preached "Building Conviction." He closely cross-examined the ministers: "Do our church members know where we stand?" He questioned the conviction of those whose children had left the plain setting. Why, he wondered, do church leaders often have the children who are the most "worldly and liberal"? Ministers must take time to explain why the church does what it does when children come with questions. Further, he admonished ministers to teach areas of needed conviction without excuses of possibly offending someone, and that repetition is required "until it brings results." He lamented the shrinking size of women's coverings and the quickness with which some ministers are willing to help a faction divide from the mother church. Coming out from behind the pulpit, he ended with an elicitation of sympathy, sharing the pain of having been hit by a church division as a young married man.

Supporting Kurtz's message, Bishop Henry Hershberger, hailing from a conservative mission-minded church in northern Indiana, preached "Maintaining Convictions." "To maintain convictions, we need to have convictions." In a metaphor of church practices and discipline, he said the vines on the wall need to have thorns, lest people use the vines to climb over the wall.

Bishop Leonard Overholt, who had 35 years of experience in the ministry, preached decisively on "Keeping the Lord's Day Holy." He set the stakes high from the start: "When we begin to set aside the Lord's Day, we're going to lose out on our salvation. Lose this, and we lose our concept of

Christ being alive.” He described three churches that were weak on Lord’s Day observance, especially with firemen working “seven days a week.” Some Beachy churches have “so much other stuff going on” beyond preaching in Sunday services, such as skits. This spirit coincides with greater tolerance of casual dress. Drawing chuckles, he undercut mixed-gender seating in services:

I was in a church where they were doing this, and I noticed a young man and a young woman sitting together, and the man had his arm up around [her]; it appeared to me he was afraid she was going to get away from him!

He buzzed other trends, too:

There are people who feel that they need to take their families on a camping trip over the weekend to try to keep their family together; I believe that’s the wrong way to try to keep your family together. I believe that the Lord comes first. ... Some people say, ‘Well, I went to church.’ Where did you go to church? Some wishy-washy church down the road? You missed something.

By this point, a sense of urgency was well-developed but a course of action remained elusive. Preaching on “Relationships with the Constituency,” Bishop Eugene Eicher of Fort Wayne, IN, forewarned that “destruction (may) come from within.” He asked, “Are we united in the fact that we do have some similar convictions... and we want to work together as a body?” and followed up with a list of “pressures coming from within:” lifting standards to keep young people (in vain), taking in transferring members without consulting with their first church, and being quick to start another congregation when there are problems. Speaking of the young people and their conduct at Calvary Bible School and Youth Fellowship Meetings, he concluded “things are going and they’re going fast ... Some young people can’t go because of ... drift.” He appealed for working together as ministers, not as a conference, but not “fall(ing) out on the other side ... I look to you older brethren to pave the way for us. Won’t somebody arise ... so that we can work together? ... Can’t we draw some lines?”

The program continued with talented extemporaneous speakers addressing tangibly specific topics, each taking a cue from the other. Following Eicher, Bishop Perry Troyer, with a moderate,

measured tone, addressed “Fearless Preaching” and encouraged ministers to address areas of concern, such as shrinkage in women’s head coverings, divorce & remarriage (Mark 10:11), and others. “Far too many people and preachers don’t really know where they stand on these issues. Is it any wonder our people are confused?” He also decried forces on ministers that keep them silent on certain topics: pressures from co-ministers, fear of popular opinion, loss of interest in church, and loss of conviction. At one point in his sermon, he interjected: “Should we not as a constituency band together and conclude on some of these principles that we together and unitedly uphold ...?”

Perhaps no topic title promised to polarize opinion as “Sports Versus Church-Related Activities.” Finishing the second evening off, Bishop Thomas Rock, an Anabaptist convert, recounted how he had gone “wild after sports in high school” by first listening to it on the radio and then traveling to distant cities to watch major league baseball games. He spoke decisively at an allegro tempo, wandering occasionally from the pulpit, mingling Scripture with stories from his life and examples of sports-related happenings in plain churches. Sports, he said, are not of the pilgrim mindset, are extra-curricular to the Christian life and should not compete against it, and cannot be used to enhance one’s spiritual life. He then pulled from Scripture examples of church activities, such as prayer meetings, and pointed out the incompatibility of sports: the need to entertain, the need to appeal to the flesh, and the drive for casual wear.

To have had hit as hard such specific activities of worldliness as Wednesday’s speakers left a precedent for Thursday’s speakers. If the sermons got that uncomfortably detailed for some, could it continue for a whole additional day? Will the denomination divide? Will anyone actually do anything against the denounced trends? These and other questions plugged the channels of many ministers’ minds as they chatted with their hosts, wives, each other, and themselves as they drifted to sleep. As opportunity permitted between sermons, leaders from like-minded churches sought one another out to confer and affirm their private response to the sermons.

Thursday morning, Deacon Menno Kuhns of Arthur, IL, opened another gate for the surging protest movement. With a durable conservative reputation as a popular evangelist at protracted

meetings, Kuhns brought the topic “Nonresistance” to the level of reputation-smearing among ministers. “We’re only half as nonresistant as we think we are.” He encouraged the ministers to not track down gossip, to suppress mental arguments, to beware of always telling other people about a disagreement where you come out the winner, and to use disciplinary action in a redemptive way. Like previous speakers, he went in and out of his topic, throwing in his hat to the pile of warnings during the off beats of his sermon.

The greatest threat the church of Jesus Christ faces today is the threat of liberal theology... Liberal theology doesn’t begin with theology at all; it begins with liberal practice, and it ends up in theology. I don’t have to prove that point, you just take a little look at what’s happening, and you will see it for yourself. I’ve seen it happen in our community, in some of our beloved Mennonite churches, in my lifetime, in my short lifetime.

These churches, he continued, are not discussing nonresistance or nonconformity but whether the Bible is the Word of God; they’re not discussing casual clothing, haircuts, and covering size but rather what they’re going to do about alcoholism and pregnancy problems.

“The way has been prepared for this message” began Bishop Frank Menkin, whose assignment was “Nonconformity.” A Jew turned Christian Scientist turned Catholic turned and ordained minister as Conservative Mennonite, Menkin eventually joined an Amish-Mennonite congregation of two other widely used convert ministers, Ron Border and William McGrath (McGrath 1988). In 1990, Menkin initiated an outreach in Maine, where he was later ordained bishop. Steadily spoken, as if in conversation, he said, “My message has been given very largely already. The hard part ... is can we hear these things and then reconvene next year and not have done anything about it? The right words were spoken, and they demand action.”

Menkin spent his time expanding on concerns brought up by previous speakers. He described how a church standard promotes submission, a godly trait difficult to achieve without a standard. With no standard,

...you find it pretty hard to find how they really are; they can hem and they can haw. But the people with the standard ... can say, ‘Yes, I’m being

submitted. There are things that I’m doing that I could do otherwise with a clear conscience, and yet because I care for my brothers and sisters, this is a better practice for us.’

He paused as several from the assembled offered ‘amens.’ “But if the Bible doctrines and principles are being laid aside, then it would seem to me that there are people who ... are on Satan’s side, and maybe don’t know it,” and this has slipped by because

...we’re too polite to say that what’s being done is damnable sin, and that within our midst, there are people who are not headed on the Lord’s road... Is a trend causing greater godliness? If not, it’s against. We’re either for him or against him.

Beachy sermons about nonconformity often include discussions about garb, and Menkin certainly met expectations.

If there were soldiers of one side and another side together and they were to mix up their clothing, I think they’d be afraid to go into battle. The mixing up of our clothing is causing a major problem, because there are some of us who can say, ‘Well, to me it doesn’t matter very much; I know my life is right before God.’ But this clothing you’re wearing may be dragging you down, but even if it doesn’t, it’s a sign that you are in another camp. It can be a small sign, a little fluff of the hair.

Finishing the Thursday morning sessions, Abner Kauffman, speaking about “Remedy—Apostasy and Deception,” lambasted casual and selfish Christianity in a battle cry. Kauffman was part of the Mennonite Christian Fellowship, which was more conservative in practice than Beachys yet also had an extra dose of revivalist excitement (Anderson 2011; Miller 2004). Responding to Menno Kuhns’ earlier assessment of churches in his Illinois community, Kauffman mused that

the Mennonites in that community are facing the question [of] whether the Word of God is true. He made a statement that jarred me. He said ‘When I was a boy, they were where we are.’ That shakes me to my soul ... Are we saying that in 30, 40 years, we’re going to be questioning the inspired Word of God? ... Unless we’re ready to face it, that trend, we’re not going to have anything for our children.

Kauffman called listeners to action: “We can go home from the ministers’ meetings and say they were beautiful messages, but unless we put shoe leather in what we hear...” He stopped and restarted. “You have an opportunity to go back and proclaim this to the people; are you willing to do it?” A sheet of suggested topics and Scripture verses accompanied his sermon topic. For the remedy of deception, the sheet had Jeremiah 10:29. In preparing the sermon, he turned there, but found there was no Jeremiah 10:29. (It was supposed to be Jeremiah 10:2a.) He asked: is there then no remedy for apostasy?

The reason we have apostasy is because of self... self wants the throne... We want to give the old nature a little bit of room just so it can live a little. That’s why we have apostasy, and that’s why we have become deceived.

In emotional bounces from stratospheric sonic booms to pleading whimpers, he packed the shelves of his sermon tightly with an assortment of cases. “Where does apostasy start? I believe it starts in very little ways. We heard things ... concerning the covering ... I have been in Mennonite churches, Beachy churches, our Fellowship churches, the Nationwide Fellowship churches, and there’s one thing that stands out tremendously these days, and that is the tendency,” and he softened suddenly, twisting out the rest,

for casualness to come in. Do you know where that starts? It comes from a casual relationship with God... Where does it start? In the clothing? No, it starts with a casual relationship. ‘You know, my devotional life, well, it’s just not what it ought to be,’ and that’s how the thing goes on... I was in a church some time ago, [and] I was shocked. There was mixed seating, there was the hair on the boys that were teased with the hair dryer to stand up in the air, there were sweaters where the shoulders... looked like a horrible rag—the shoulders were down on the elbows—the pants had all kinds of pleats. When I was a young boy, I would have thought, ‘Why don’t you go and get decent clothes?’ But you know what? It’s the style.

Vehicles are “jacked up or jacked down and it’s the same spirit, and we see that in clothing.” He then picked up a parallel from the Book of Judges.

[Samson] stood up and shook himself, and he whist not that the Spirit had departed. We’ve got a lot of ‘whist not’ people. They don’t know that the Spirit, the power that comes along from Jesus Christ, is gone. ... Are we convinced that cut hair and the non-wearing of the covering, no practice of separation, is apostasy? If we are not convinced on that, there’s no use that I spend my efforts preaching this morning, because we’re not going to gain any ground at all unless we see that as apostasy. I’m moved how callous we can get... We’re accepting things that we didn’t accept; that’s why we have to preach on these things, because we’re becoming indifferent.

He described how church members justify buying a VCR because of some of the good videos and how young men secretly have boom boxes and listen to the radio.

...with no discipline [in families], it’s the worst child abuse you can have. With no discipline in the church, it’s the worst member abuse you can have. Because you’re going to let that person go on thinking that he stands right with God and at variance with his brotherhood... You can’t just have the love between you and God and ignore your brethren.

Kauffman concluded with a discussion about excommunication. At a church he visited, a member got into drinking and other immoral sins, and

they believed very strongly that you do not excommunicate someone unless you’re convinced they’re cut off from God. And I said, ‘What did you do with him?’ And they said, ‘Nothing.’ And I said, ‘Why not?’ And they said, ‘Because he moved to California,’ and I said, ‘I don’t care if he moved to Alaska!’

He concluded that if they don’t deal with and preach against such vices, then “we are already in an apostate state of mind, and I’m going to say there is no verse 29, there is no remedy.”

Formation of a Bishop Committee

One after another, the speakers grew combative against slippage. One after another, they called for action. As each spoke more boldly, the next raised the stakes. Bishop John Mast’s afternoon sermon would bring the rising action to a climax that spilled into the business meeting. In 1969,

Mast was among several conservative yet mission-oriented families that moved out of the permissive Holmes County, OH, community to establish a church in Tennessee. His topic was “Committee Work to Build the Church,” where “committee” referred most immediately to the three-man, outside investigation committee when churches had difficulties, a committee Mast had been on multiple times.⁴ In his research, Mast found that bishop committees were mentioned in Anabaptist confessions of faith and disciplines, and from there, the meaning of “committee work” started to expand to something new.

As I sat through these meetings, and as I heard the urgency of the message, and as I thought of these articles as our forefathers wrote up, I wondered . . . , what will this meeting be leaving if the Lord tarries for 50 years? Will our children, our grandchildren, be able to look to some book that we have written, and that we have come to a conclusion and that we have agreed upon, and that we have said ‘Here is where we stand’? Or will they read in history that we had a wonderful meeting, and it was a fellowship meeting, and wonderful messages, and we all went home and did the way we wanted to?

Not if they do as the Anabaptists had done:

I thank God for forefathers that had the insight to get together and have ministers’ meetings and be able to come together on some agreement and write the articles so today we have them. The one I read was a couple hundred years ago, and it gave us some insight, why we’re doing what we’re doing.

With church problems, why, Mast asked, do committees make a recommendation, it is not followed, and then committees give the go-ahead to divide? The late bishop Eli Tice of Mountain View (PA) wrote a letter in 1965, which Mast read in part. “It is alarming and a worry to a large extent to me . . . of all the disunity and divisions . . .” and that committee would come in after committee to a church and all work differently. Mast then raised the idea of an executive committee. “The idea of an executive committee: the question I have, if

we have not learned to respect committees, why would we respect an executive committee?”

As Mast stepped back from his sermon, the Ontario moderators responded to the meeting’s emphasis on apostasy and drift by inviting the assembled to vocalize concerns. One by one, ministers called from the crowd: sports, the head covering, divorce and remarriage, casual dress, public bathing, radio, TV, VCRs, music, unsupervised youth activities, hair styles, respect for committee work, inappropriate Sunday activities, and on and on until 18 issues were discernible. Among the few who spoke out against the list, one man said that ministers should instead focus on doing a good job at their own church.⁵

The moderators suggested a committee be created to examine the issues and propose a course. The ministers cast ballots for committee members. Four of the five bishops elected had stood before the assembled and warned against undermining trends: Leonard Overholt, Eugene Eicher, Perry Troyer, and John Mast; Bennie Byler of Pilgrim Christian Fellowship (Stuarts Draft, VA) was also elected (see appendix 1 for a full list of members since). While some applauded the formation of a committee as establishing “much-needed inspirational leadership,”⁶ others thought it “was a quick response upon an emotional stir.”⁷

The Final Word for the 1991 Meetings

The assembled were dismissed for supper, having passed through a denominational rite of passage. Only two sermons remained for that evening; only two men had an opportunity to be public respondents to the initiative. Deacon L.J. Helmuth of Whiteville Mennonite (TN) gave affirmation in the first message.

Are we hurting? I believe we should be, because of what has become evident, because of the discussion this afternoon, and because of about 18 or 20 things that were mentioned that it is high time that we take a look at. . . . Unless there is a change . . . , many of the congregations that are represented here will allow television, radio, and all of those things that go with it. My prayer

⁴ Investigation committees consist of three ordained men, one chosen each by the two sides and a third chosen by the two selected men.

⁵ As related in L.J. Helmuth’s sermon that evening.

⁶ Ronald Border to Bishop Committee, April 29, 1991

⁷ Conveyed in the “Beachy Fellowship Committee Meeting,” minutes, June 28, 29, 1991

is that someone will mark it down and 20 years from now come to me and say, ‘Brother you were dead wrong.’ ... I believe it is possible to come up with some guidelines to address the issues at hand that will help us to cope and to curb...⁸

When members in rebellion and disobedience are in church positions, he argued, the purity of the church is affected.

Do any of your standards allow your young people to carouse around on Saturday nights, go to the honky-tonks, the game rooms, then slide in after midnight? But I know that there are young people who have done that, then those very same young people will get up Sunday evenings to have devotions in the worship services.

If accountability and the purity of the church is a vision, then “we must have congregational support if we’re going to get it off the ground. We can agree to what needs to be done here, but unless our people commit themselves to what is given, we aren’t any further than we were before.” Pausing and then ironing his tone to a conversation style, he continued.

Now I have an encouraging statement to make as well. There are those who are operating under guidelines like that—they call it a constitution... The churches in that constituency have committed themselves to that constitution, and they are just as much against conference as we are, and it’s working. Encouragement.

Helmuth was pushing back against a stigma, for the dysphemisms “executive committee” and “conference,” fighting words for an affiliation that had long praised congregational autonomy, were already being thrown at this new committee and its responsibility to write a constitution. Concluding his message, Helmuth read the lines from the hymn, “A Charge to Keep I Have” by John

Wesley, the eventual title used for the proposed constitution.

The final message, the final response to the actions of the meeting and the messages of all previous speakers, put a mark of ambivalence on the effort. Grabbing each sentence spoken in a torrential flow, Minister Dale Heisey—a short-stayed founder of the 1980s charisma-charged Remnant (“Charity”) movement (which rejected all written standards) who soon joined the Beachys in Costa Rica—drilled the listeners about “United for the Defense of the Gospel,” preaching forthrightly.

As we think about problems in our congregations, I’d like to ask you something. And I wasn’t here, so I’m going to ask you a question with perfect innocence... Now I didn’t know it was going to be as long as the New York City telephone directory..., but he said 15 to 20 things, if I heard him right... The things that you named that went on the list, the things that you named, *you*, the 15 or 20 of you that gave the 15 or 20 things, did you name things in your own heart and in your own congregation, or things in somebody else’s congregation? Do you see any wisdom in that question?

Like a diesel truck shifting up gear upon gear, he rolled into an early climax, yelling,

You can make that list a whole lot longer, from 15 to 1,500, and have committees be voted on for ten years and write a bunch of books, but until we get our people’s hearts like the heart and mind of Jesus Christ, it’s not going to have a unifying effect in the church. We can paint everyone with a paint brush when they come in the church door, it will not unify their hearts, until they have this mind which was also in Christ Jesus. With all of our getting, and our putting away, and all our changing, and all our proving, and all our encouraging, and all our correcting in our churches...

...and pausing, he gently landed, “let’s get this mind in the process.”

He then gave his testimony of moving from a “liberal Mennonite” church to the Beachys and drew analogies from Biblical texts, expounding on the mind of Christ for the remainder. He then arrived at the take-away:

Separation from the world is not a beard on the face, and it’s not a pair of suspenders over the

⁸ Was he wrong? Yes and no. Mainline Beachy churches have still not technically allowed radio, though the issue is shrouded with ambiguity, and they have not permitted the medium of television. However, audiovisual content through the computer—both through internet-based streaming media and DVDs—is common and open, e.g. DVDs visibly shelved near computers in some homes and viewed content discussed casually in conversation. Viewed content includes programs that may air on the television, in addition to a vast spectrum of other content.

shoulders, and not a little bow tie under the chin of the ladies; it is a separation of heart from this world. When the power of sin is cut off from me and this world, and the attraction that drew me is broken, until I have that experience, any amount of regulation will not bring me into conformity with the mind of Jesus Christ... I'm concerned about liberal theology, yes, but I'm more concerned about Protestantism... teaching principles without applications.

And the Beachys may be too polite to address specifics, he continued, paradoxically juxtaposing the stigma he had just given several specifics. When courtship was discussed in an earlier message, he noted, there was a lack of specificity. What about the engagement photos pinned to the church bulletin board?

I'm brought to a Beachy church to preach, and the first thing that meets me in the door is a picture of the boy with his hands on the girl. I left that, brethren; are you taking me back to it?

This final sermon clocked in at over an hour, well beyond the allotted 40 minutes. The red light from the back held steady for the last third of his sermon. Yet, through these meetings, as the denomination entered the switch station to change tracks, time lost its authority. Despite the meeting's strong thrust to turn the group in one direction, uncertainty foreshadowed a jagged transition. Heisey's capstone sermon embodied this ambivalence. Was he in favor of the committee work and list of concerns but also reminding them that the heart must be transformed, or did he see the committee work and a potential constitution as distracting from a deeper religious need? Did he identify the voiced concerns as unrelated to spiritual commitment or as needed practices in danger of being locked into an absent devotion? Despite his arousing extemporaneous speaking and glass-cut sharpness, his sermon epitomized what would be a perennially compounded flow of nebulous—yet endearingly invested—reactions to the committee work.

EARLY BISHOP COMMITTEE WORK

The idea of a denomination-level committee had been entertained before, first during a sermon at the 1988 ministers' meeting. Then it was elaborated on in two *Calvary Messenger* commentaries,

one by Editor Ervin Hershberger, deacon of Mountain View Mennonite (Salisbury, PA), and the other by "Observations" columnist David L. Miller, minister at Center Amish-Mennonite (Hutchinson, KS). Hershberger and Miller then formally proposed a committee structure in a 1989 open letter with 12 other names listed in support. In two pages, the writers proposed a "counseling committee" that would assist local churches with problems and "compile information and offer insights particularly applicable to our Amish-Mennonite setting..."⁹ No further details of developments in 1989-90 are known, but of importance is that none of the six main signers of the letter were put on this new committee; two of those who signed as third party reviewers were on, Bennie Byler and Perry Troyer. Hence, the stage was set for a power-struggle between an establishment-moderate leadership that had the rapport to openly write about and suggest a committee and those who were wary of trends, willing to occupy the conservative margins as a consequence, and, across an unforeseen set of events over two days, found themselves the executor of the establishment's 1989 proposal. The initial proposal was for a "counseling" body, not a committee to implement, let alone enforce, a denomination-wide standard. Those with concerns, though, saw little difference between local church troubles that required a counseling body and the pandemic religious compromises besetting the denomination. Those signing the 1989 letter presided over churches that, on average, were generally more progressive than the five bishop committee members.

With the task of exploring the 18 voiced concerns (Figure 2), the committee took immediate action. The committee sent the 18 issues to three prominent ordained men for written feedback. David L. Miller was one recipient. While he offered a few thoughts on each point, his feeling was that there need not be a list of items but a "building (of) conviction for principles of holiness and non-conformity."¹⁰ Ervin Hershberger was a second recipient but no response is on record. The third recipient, Minister Ron Border of Christian Fel-

⁹ March 1, 1989. Letter from Dannie Diener, Elmer Gingrich, Ervin Hershberger, David L. Miller, Elmer J. Miller, and John Yutzy to Beachy Amish-Mennonite church leaders, with additional names included indicating support.

¹⁰ David L. Miller to Perry Troyer, June 24, 1991

FIGURE 2: 18 ISSUES OF CONCERN RAISED AT THE 1991 MINISTERS' MEETIN

1. Divorce and remarriage
2. Excommunication and shunning
3. Television
4. Radio
5. Video
6. Sisters veiling (size)
7. Instrumental music
8. Public bathing
9. Casual wear
10. Rock, country, secular music
11. Courtship standards
12. Sports
13. Lords day activities
14. Proper chaperoned youth - motels, materialism, etc.
15. Hair styles - both sides
16. Mutual respect for committee work
17. Effective teaching program for parents
18. Scriptural unity

lowship, Minerva, OH, felt as David L., that "if we would be more 'holy' as a people, many of the listed problem areas would be non-existent."¹¹ Yet, he saw value in the list and composed a constitution-style treatise.

The committee then mailed a letter to the ministers "to suggest the possibility of drawing up a statement in booklet form of our belief, faith and practice, and our position on Biblical principles and issues facing our churches."¹² The committee

added that "we do not want a conference setting nor take the exec[u]tive board approach. However, the other extreme has left us hanging with some weaknesses."¹³ Defined lines would help define denominational membership, they contended, pointing to the 1958 statement and calling for an "update."

By December 1991, they had received nearly 40 responses by letter, in conversation, and through phone call, most affirmative.¹⁴ While the response

¹¹ Ron Border to Perry Troyer, June 22, 1991

¹² "Beachy Fellowship Committee Meeting," minutes, June 28, 29, 1991

¹³ Bishop Committee to Beachy ministers, August 12, 1991

¹⁴ "Beachy Fellowship Committee Meeting," minutes, December 18, 19, 1991

was well below the 270 letters they had sent,¹⁵ the committee pressed on, developing a document to propose at the April 1992 ministers' meeting, using Border's essay.¹⁶ At the annual meeting, the committee "sense[d] a strong support for the work and at the same time some still express fears of developing a conference."¹⁷ With a few touch-ups, the statement was mailed to all Beachy ministers. Entitled *A Charge to Keep, I Have* (appendix 2), it was accompanied by a short questionnaire asking if the recipient can accept, accept with specified amendments, or not accept the position.

By late October 1992, Secretary Perry Troyer of Bethesda Fellowship (Plain City, OH) had received 39 replies, 26 showing support; Christian Fellowship (Minerva, OH), for example, officially adopted the statement for their church.¹⁸ Less supportive responses can be categorized as:

- 1) A desire for more specificity and thereby a stronger statement; some also questioned how the statement would be enforced.
- 2) Support, but mentioning that one to three points in *A Charge to Keep, I Have* would exclude one's church.¹⁹
- 3) Respectful but decisive opposition to a conference-style approach. For example, the ministry of Woodlawn Amish-Mennonite near Goshen, Indiana, argued "that local congregational autonomy takes precedence over constituency-wide government."²⁰

Three issues loomed over the committee: (1) Would some churches be required to change to achieve compliance? (2) Would lack of compliance cause disaffiliation? (3) How would the bishop committee enforce compliance?

¹⁵ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, no date (between August and October 1991)

¹⁶ "Beachy Fellowship Committee Meeting," minutes, December 18, 19, 1991

¹⁷ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, April 17, 1992

¹⁸ Interview with Leonard Overholt, October 2010

¹⁹ The two most common conflicts with the statement were its disallowance for instrumental music on tapes/records, and its disallowance of video projectors/players (VCRs). Several other conflicts were mentioned only once.

²⁰ Woodlawn Amish-Mennonite Church ministers to bishop committee, September 21, 1992

Though the majority at least nominally supported the constitution, a lack of "solid unanimity" prompted the committee to quietly abandon implementation of the document as a whole. What factored into this decision is difficult to reconstruct, but it is apparent that those opposing the document offered enough resistance by way of phone calls, letters, and conversations that the committee could not implement the document, let alone enforce it with the accusation of "executive committee" loaded and ready to fire. Among the sizeable and influential congregations opposing the statement were Woodlawn A-M (Goshen, IN), Center A-M (Hutchinson, KS), and Haven Fellowship (Plain City, OH); others, including Mountain View (Salisbury, PA) and Cold Spring (Abbeville, SC), are possible. While some opposition came from progressive churches, they tended to hold little status and were sideline voices in this debate. Most churches expressing opposition had solidly moderate, establishment-oriented leaders who were often involved in denominational affairs and embraced the Beachy identity; yet, these churches also had sizeable progressive elements among the laymen for whom Beachy identity was not quite as important. While sharing concerns about drift, they nevertheless advocated a tender approach to policy and enforcement, which gave room to liberalizing tendencies in their churches. So if these church leaders felt particularly targeted by the 1991 meetings and the committee, there was certainly justification enough to support their conclusion.

The committee decided to instead seek support for one issue at a time. At the 1995 ministers' meeting in Hutchinson, KS, "mention was made [by the bishop committee] of drawing up a statement of position on Radio and T.V., and Divorce and Remarriage... to establish a biblical position for present and future reference."²¹ This statement, sent to leaders several months later, had two points: (1) the non-use of the radio and television "to avoid all it's [sic] enslaving effects," and (2) non-acceptance of members who were remarried after divorce.²² Perry Troyer expected opposition to a concluding caveat in the remarriage statement, that a single who had married a divorcee may not

²¹ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, September(?) 1995

²² The statement cites Mark 10:11-12 and Romans 7:2 to support its conclusions.

remarry and that one who had remarried may not return to the first spouse. This was a hot debate among Beachys, due to situations a few laity—ethnics and converts alike—were facing and also a struggle with the new Kenyan mission. In Kenya, many potential converts were from polygamous, live-in, common-law, arranged, forced, and other rather complex marriage situations when measured by Beachy nuclear standards.²³

At the spring 1996 ministers' meeting in Sarasota, FL, the committee presented the radio/TV and marriage statements (appendix 3) and suggested that, if the statements were adopted, those churches not in compliance would be "considered ineligible to serve on the annual Ministers' Meetings."²⁴ In the Wednesday business meeting, Chairman Bennie Byler presented the divorce and remarriage statement. Some felt his presentation, in content and style, was bold,²⁵ forcing a conclusion; one young, charismatic bishop felt that the statement was presented with a "double barrel shot gun."²⁶ Enough push-back arose during open comments that the committee opted not to take a vote. Soon after, a group of ministers approached the committee, voicing opposition to such ultimatums; one minister reasoned that it is not fair to young bishops who inherited the leadership from lax bishops to now have to pull the church back in order to stay Beachy.²⁷

When Byler was called away from the meetings because of a sudden death, Perry Troyer presented the statement about radio and television on Thursday. The meeting's moderating bishop suggested that they take a vote on the issue to see if there was unity: everyone who didn't want the radio or television were to stand; all who could be seen stood. This inquiry "made a statement."²⁸ However, Troyer, writing later to the committee, sensed

an alarm go off concerning the statement that those who choose not to support a decision made by the body, would then forfeit the privilege to host the Ministers Meetings, share a topic at the Ministers Meetings, or teach at Calvary Bible School.²⁹

Indeed, David L. Miller wrote publically in the "Observations" after the April meeting that "[s]ome brethren had reservations, not about the three issues addressed, but their cause for pause was related to procedure, structure, etc."³⁰ Furthermore, while withstanding 'drift' is a priority, statements about remarriage should "stick closely to what the New Testament teaches rather than addressing all the possible variables."³¹ A newly proposed remarriage statement, sent privately to the committee by David L. Miller and Kansas co-ministers, permitted the conditions the original statement prohibited.

Stepping back to reflect, the committee concluded it was "receiving mixed signals as to what is expected and desired." "Some" wanted the ministerial body to "curb undesirable practices" and looked to the bishop committee to "lead and moderate" while "some are uncomfortable with this arrangement." The committee sent out a questionnaire, asking whether they should terminate or proceed, and if proceed, how. They also asked, "Would you see the value in reaching a decision by the ministerial body concerning the non use [*sic*] of the radio?"^{32,33} By the spring 1997 ministers' meetings, around 110 of 300 questionnaires had been returned "of which a large percent were positive" for the committee to continue, but "the majority favored rotating committee members." Feedback about the committee's purpose was "rather scattered." The committee surmised: "Probably provide some kind of guidance, addressing needs and concerns facing the church.

²³ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, September(?) 1995

²⁴ Miller, David L. "Observations." *Calvary Messenger* (27)6, 22-24.

²⁵ [Name withheld], interview with author, 2009. This was the committee's assessment of people's reactions, not the interviewee's opinion.

²⁶ [Name withheld], interview with author, 2011.

²⁷ [Name withheld], interview with author, 2010.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, circa January 1997

³⁰ Miller, David L. "Observations." *Calvary Messenger* 27(6):23.

³¹ *ibid.*, 24.

³² While the television is sometimes discussed with the radio and sometimes the radio is discussed alone, this does not imply that the television is absent from considerations. Rather, churches are more likely to accept the radio first.

³³ Bishop committee to the "Ministerial Body of the Beachy Fellowship," February 3, 1997.

And of course continue to address the original 18 issues given at the Canada Ministers Meetings.³⁴

Among the scattered responses was one from David L. Miller, which included a two-page statement “Church and Inter-church Structure” that had the support of five influential leaders.^{35,36} The statement aligned with his 1989 proposal mailed to ministers that emphasized general alertness to trends with “a willingness to take necessary steps to guard ourselves,” attention to teaching programs, and perhaps even a method which individuals could bring a concern to the larger body. Consistent with his earlier proposal, no enforcement mechanism or constitution was mentioned.³⁷

Supporters of David L. Miller’s statement also individually returned their questionnaires. One bishop, who had signed David L.’s 1989 committee proposal, wanted a “low profile awareness of seriously slipping practices.” While “increasing outward rules is certainly necessary at times, I have the feeling it is often the sign that the ‘inward’ rules (consciences) are decreasing.”³⁸ Another minister responded that the committee should discontinue its work altogether, that “if we move toward the idea that [any given church] doesn’t come up to our expectations, then are they not only not one of us but anyone who preaches for them will also be cut off?”³⁹

Nisly’s statement laid out a central fear among sizeable, reputable, moderate churches that had permissive elements: they would be disfellowshipped. Without a constitution, they could continue expressing concern about drift with “teaching and training programs that establish ourselves in the Lord and His Truth, developing convictions

that are not easily swayed,”⁴⁰ but without needing to discipline to enforce compliance with what was taught. Indeed, several congregations later abolished or severely curtailed their written practices; theoretically, individuals should be able to make the best choice when confronted with temptation if they have right teaching. To what extent leaders believed this logic versus realized its rhetorical power in instigating institutional change without losing rapport or being disfellowshipped can only be surmised.

At the 1997 annual meeting in Arthur, IL, the ministerial body approved committee member rotation, replacing one member once a year and offering new members a five-year term. Ernest Hochstetler (Cold Spring Mennonite, Abbeville, SC),⁴¹ an advocate of David L. Miller’s statement, was elected to replace the first out-going member.⁴² The committee also took “a hand raised vote concerning radio and TV”⁴³ to estimate how the ministers felt by then. While some ministers expressed disappointment that the committee “didn’t conclude on the use of the radio,”⁴⁴ the committee felt that “the time didn’t seem right without more discussion from the ministerial body and conclude with a better support.”⁴⁵ Evidently, public votes this year or the prior did not represent actual sentiment.

In December 1997, in an open letter to ministers, the committee wrote strongly against conference-style approaches. Opening by commending the constituency for the show of support against the radio and television, the letter climaxes:

³⁴ Perry Troyer, “Committee Meeting, April 7, 1997, Arthur Illinois”

³⁵ They included Bishop Elmer Gingerich (Shady Lawn Mennonite, AR), Bishop Paul Miller (Cedar Crest Amish-Mennonite, Hutchinson, KS), Bishop Ernest Hochstetler (Cold Spring Mennonite, Abbeville, SC), Deacon Ervin Hershberger (Mountain View Mennonite, Salisbury, PA), and Bishop Elmer Miller (Woodlawn Amish-Mennonite, Goshen, IN).

³⁶ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, April 1, 1997

³⁷ David L. Miller, “Church and Inter-church Structure,” spring 1997.

³⁸ “Bishop” [name withheld] to bishop committee, spring 1997

³⁹ “Minister” [name withheld] to bishop committee, spring 1997

⁴⁰ David L. Miller, “Church and Inter-church Structure,” spring 1997.

⁴¹ The Cold Spring Mennonite Church had earlier given the committee “the assurance of our support in your assignment, in working for God’s glory through issues our churches face today... May the maintaining of Biblical principles not become clouded but stand clear within the Brotherhood is our prayer.” When this letter was written on September 10, 1991, Bishop Andrew Hershberger led the congregation but was preparing to retire. With a change of leadership came a change in support.

⁴² Perry Troyer, “Report of the Bishop committee presentation at the 1997 Spring Ministers Meeting, Arthur, Illinois.”

⁴³ David L. Miller to bishop committee (a letter for the committee to consider sending to the constituency with their names signed), June (?) 1997.

⁴⁴ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, July 7, 1997

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

It does not seem that congregational autonomy is violated by some inter-congregational appeals when there is significant concern about the influence of some practices. Congregational commitment to respect basic inter-congregational issues would seem appropriate for the sake of keeping up inter-congregational fellowship and ministries.⁴⁶

After working for another year to develop informal consensus, at the 1999 annual meeting hosted by Mountain View Mennonite (Salisbury, PA), the ministerial body overwhelmingly stood to their feet in an official show of support for adopting the statement against radio and television.⁴⁷ Eight years after the conception of the committee, two of the 18 points were approved: no radio, no television. The remarriage statement, on the other hand, sat in the 'to-do' box since its troubled debut in 1996, this to say nothing of the 15 other issues. Furthermore, the problem of enforcement remained unaddressed.

DIVISION FROM THE BEACHYS: MARANATHA AMISH-MENNONITE AND AMBASSADORS AMISH-MENNONITE

Not long after the 1997 meeting, bishop committee secretary Perry Troyer, writing to the other members, closed a letter with this: "Most of you are aware that some churches are pursuing a more structured approach. This of course would appeal to most of us. Let us hear from you."

Shortly before, many leaders whose voices had birthed the bishop committee in 1991 held a separate meeting in Whiteville, TN, to discuss a way their churches could implement *A Charge to Keep, I Have*. They had become discouraged and frustrated with perennial resistance against the bishop committee, especially at the 1996 Sarasota, FL, meeting, and the way advice of leaders called in to assist troubled congregations was too often casually ignored, resulting in divisions. These leaders wanted a stronger association than the Beachys offered. The ministers represented well-established congregations. The meeting consisted of a series of sermons and conversations that ultimately led to the formal establishment of

the Maranatha Amish-Mennonite denomination. While originally intended to be an accountability-focused, voluntarily-joined association within the Beachys, Maranatha soon became a separate affiliation.⁴⁸

Their constitution, based off *A Charge to Keep, I Have* but newly written, provides for the following organization. Congregations are admitted by ministerial request and laity support. Leaders uphold constitution guidelines, which are a minimum practice and do not replace a local, written church practice. Local leaders enforce the constitution's standards; where external help is desired, the local ministry requests assistance. Congregations failing "to maintain the doctrines and discipline accepted by the fellowship" are addressed by the biannually elected moderator, assistant moderator, and secretary. Churches are disfellowshipped when the committee presents a proposal to the Maranatha ministers and it's approved by vote.⁴⁹ Through this arrangement, the Maranatha churches developed a method of respecting congregational autonomy while also identifying and enforcing certain boundaries.

Early churches to join Maranatha included Cedar Grove A-M (where the 1991 meetings had been held), bishop committee member John Mast's Mt. Moriah Mennonite (Crossville, TN), and the sizeable Summitview Christian Fellowship in Lancaster County, PA. Other leaders attended the ministers' meetings, including other bishop committee members, but did not join. Some leaders agreed with nearly all points, but not every point of the document, such as Montezuma Amish-Mennonite, which differed on the controversial clauses of the divorce and remarriage stand. Some did not see the benefits in actually becoming a member of the group. Some ministers desired to join but would not be able to drum up support from the laity. Some wanted to allow time

⁴⁶ Bishop committee to constituency, December 1997

⁴⁷ Ernest Hochstetler to bishop committee, March 29, 2001; Bishop committee, statement to constituency about Eastern Youth Fellowship Meetings, April 5, 2001

⁴⁸ Some of the original bishop participants included John Mast (Mt. Moriah Mennonite, Crossville, TN), Leroy Lapp (Summitview Christian Fellowship, New Holland, PA), Eli Kauffman (Montezuma A-M, GA), Arthur Gerber (Cedar Grove A-M, Wellesley, ON), Jim Yoder (Cedar Springs A-M, Leitchfield, KY), Elmer Mast (Whiteville Mennonite, Whiteville, TN), and John Smucker (Greene County Mennonite, Chuckey, TN). The source of the information in this paragraph and footnote comes from two interviews.

⁴⁹ *Constitution and Bylaws of the Maranatha Amish Mennonite Fellowship*. Pp. 1-2.

to see if the movement would ultimately ‘go conference’ while others were concerned that there was not enough structure. Still others were unsure if the approach would really curtail drift any more than the Beachy approach.⁵⁰

Membership with Maranatha did not immediately exclude a congregation from the Beachys. John Mast, for one, served out his term on the bishop committee. Young adults attended Calvary Bible School, and Maranatha has during some periods contributed more staff to Faith Mission Home than the Beachys.⁵¹ Pulpit exchanges between Maranatha and Beachy churches were commonplace in subsequent years. Beachy churches, however, have not necessarily recognized the work of Maranatha bishop committees when invited into a church to address controversies. For example, if a Maranatha committee is asked into a church and they silence a minister, that minister may be used by a Beachy church, depending on the church. The Mennonite Christian Fellowship churches, on the other hand, formally agreed to recognize Maranatha committee work.⁵²

The tension between Beachy and Maranatha—especially in the first years—was high. Each felt preached-over-the-pulpit by the other. Individual Beachy churches also assisted several splinter groups in Maranatha churches. In Lancaster County, PA, for example, Bishops John U. Lapp (Weavertown A-M, PA) and Elmer Smucker (Faith Mennonite Fellowship, TX) “assisted the Bethel Christian Fellowship ... to become established as a congregation in affiliation with Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church,”⁵³ the splinter coming from Summitview.⁵⁴ In the Midwest,

a committee of Maranatha bishops investigated a Maranatha church, Locust Creek A-M (Brookfield, MO). The eventual faction, which included a deacon and silenced minister, rejected the committee recommendations and requested help from David L. Miller and Bishop Howard Kuhns of Pleasant View Mennonite (Arcola, IL). They helped organize a nearby splinter congregation, affirming the deacon’s charge and reinstating the silenced minister.⁵⁵

Now, two-plus decades after Maranatha’s establishment, the demarcation lines are clearer. Maranatha ministers no longer attend Beachy ministers’ meetings, Maranatha holds church-hosted annual winter Bible schools and summer youth fellowship meetings as alternatives to the Beachys’ Calvary Bible School and Youth Fellowship Meeting, and members have gotten heavily involved in their own mission churches in Mexico and Ukraine. However, some Maranatha churches still support some Beachy programs, such as Amish-Mennonite Aid (AMA) in Kenya and Faith Mission Home. Geographically, Maranatha churches are heaviest in Tennessee (7), while smaller clusters exist in Pennsylvania/New Jersey, Ontario, Idaho, and Kansas/Missouri. Like most plain Anabaptist denominations, they have been rocked in recent years by controversies over the internet and smartphones.

The Ambassadors Amish-Mennonites emerged soon after Maranatha. The Cedar Springs A-M church in Leitchfield, KY, founded in 1993 as an outreach from Plainview Mennonite (Auburn, KY), was looking for a more closely structured association than Maranatha provided. The Cedar Springs church model—leaders give strong, proactive direction without compromising sustained input from laity—attracted people from a variety of plain backgrounds, so the church initiated a series of church plantings, in 1999, 2004, and 2010, all in or near Kentucky. Its outreaches started outreaches in 2007 and 2017 while one existing church re-affiliated from the Berea Amish-Mennonites—a more conservative break-off from the Beachys—and another from the Beachys. From this rapid growth, Ambassadors Amish-Menno-

⁵⁰ The observations in this paragraph are aggregately sourced from five interviews.

⁵¹ Using a March 2009 list of staff and matching them with churches, six of the Faith Mission Home staff were Maranatha and twelve were Beachy (the remainder were other conservative Anabaptist affiliations). As a denomination, Beachy is approximately ten times as large as Maranatha.

⁵² Interview with a Mennonite Christian Fellowship minister.

⁵³ John U. Lapp and Elmer Smucker to “whom it may concern,” May 26, 2001

⁵⁴ Tensions did calm as years passed, as signaled by the Summitview chorus singing at an evening service at Bethel or the Bethel deacon preaching at an evening service at Summitview. See *Harvesting* 48(2), June 2008; *Harvesting* 49(1), May 2009.

⁵⁵ The minister, Aaron Miller, had been silenced by a Fellowship church prior to moving to Brookfield, MO. Locust Creek A-M honored the silencing, and Miller remained inactive.

nite formally organized in 2008 with a constitution similar to Maranatha but with a few additional restrictions.⁵⁶ Ambassadors churches maintain close associations, have a monthly periodical, *The Connector*, and hold semi-annual ministers' "confering" meetings where ministers may "share areas of concern, and by positive peer pressure and encouragement attempt to 'strengthen the things which remain.' (Rev. 3:2)"⁵⁷ As with Maranatha, the Ambassadors churches also developed an area-wide Bible school as an alternative to the Beachys' Calvary Bible School. They produce the most widely circulated Anabaptist periodical in North America, *Beside the Still Waters*, a daily devotional meant to replace plain people's use of the evangelical *Daily Bread*.

THE ROTATING BISHOP COMMITTEE AND THE REORIENTATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S PURPOSE

As the Maranatha division was unfolding, the Beachy bishop committee began rotating old members out, introducing a slightly younger generation of bishops who steered the committee toward David L. Miller's conception: not developing and enforcing a constitution but serving as a counseling body and think-tank. When the last of the original members stepped off the committee in 2001, Ernest Hochstetler of Cold Spring Mennonite (Abbeville, SC) was through the first of his three years as chairman, followed then by one year of chairmanship by Ivan Beachy of Faith Mission Fellowship (Free Union, VA). Under Hochstetler and Beachy, the committee actively addressed concerns through teaching (e.g. adding their endorsement to sermon cassettes distributed by *Cal-*

*vary Messenger*⁵⁸), drafting written statements of recommendation, and, if invited, counseling conflicted congregations. This shift at last eclipsed the memory of *A Charge to Keep, I Have* and sterilized the fervor of the 1991 Ontario meetings.

The First Phase of the Rotating Bishop Committee (1999/2000–2003)

The younger committee concretized David L. Miller's earlier proposals. Integrating wording from David's 1989 letter and correspondences from several collaborators, Ivan Beachy drafted a proposed "Statement of Purpose, Function, and Structure"⁵⁹ (Figure 3) which was approved by vote at the spring 2000 meetings. This effectively ended the accusations of "conference" and "executive committee," for those who had objected were now on or represented by the new committee.

One of Hochstetler's first actions as chairman was to address computer technology. In the summer of 2000, the committee mailed out an "E-Technology" questionnaire to ministers,⁶⁰ stating that "to remain consistent with our stand on the radio and TV, we believe we cannot disregard this interference." Concerns the internet triggered included "indecentcy ... and stewardship of time, money, and spiritual resources."⁶¹ When the committee met to discuss questionnaire responses, they had a "lengthy discussion on issues and concerns the church is facing today... Parents should be encouraged to take more responsibility."⁶² Hochstetler agreed to compose a statement for the spring ministers' meeting, and the committee

⁵⁶ Divorce and remarriage receives an extended explanation that similarly upholds the two controversial clauses. The statement also prohibits a minister from continuing in his office if he has committed adultery, whereas a Beachy statement from 2008 lists considerations if a congregation is proposing to restore an ordained leader, concluding that "each situation is unique and will need to be considered individually" ("Leadership Failure Statement," presented March 26, 2008).

⁵⁷ *Constitution and Bylaws of Ambassadors Amish Mennonite Church*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Elmer Smucker to bishop committee and *Calvary Messenger* board, December 25, 2001; Ivan Beachy, minutes, "Bishop Committee Meeting, Aug. 10, 2001"

⁵⁹ Perry Troyer, minutes, "Committee Meeting held at Plain City, Ohio, Sept. 17, 1999"

⁶⁰ They asked how and where members are using computers, if there is internet filtering/blocking in place, if accountability programs or restrictions are in place, if they have concerns or see legitimate uses with the internet, and how they would like to receive help sorting through technology issues. Bishop committee to constituency ministers, "E-Technology" questionnaire, July 31, 2000.

⁶¹ Bishop committee to constituency ministers, July 31, 2000.

⁶² Ernest Hochstetler to bishop committee, March 09, 2002.

asked Ron Border to prepare a talk about technology.⁶³

Hochstetler read the technology statement (appendix 4) at the 2001 meeting: "...the issue must be faced by each congregation and it's [*sic*] membership" with the ministry taking initiative to establish a "standard of practice and conduct," not allowing Internet/computer usage by default. Accessing radio and TV programs through the internet "should be abstained from" with the "recommend[ation] that our homes remain free of the internet. Whether a business needs such a service is to be evaluated by the local ministry on an individual basis."⁶⁴ Hochstetler then asked those to stand who will "go home and take a serious look at the ... issue." The committee observed none remaining seated.⁶⁵ As an additional endorsement, the *Calvary Messenger* printed the technology statement in its June 2001 issue.⁶⁶ Worded strongly, the statement was nevertheless neutered of any new requirements; it just made suggestions, shifting emphasis to family and church. Leaders were asked only to think about the issue. For emphasis, the statement was iterated at the 2002 spring meeting.

Concern and teaching were not action or enforcement; some realized that, some probably mistook them, assuming attention to the subject meant (pending) action. The committee continued researching computer issues, such as commercial website-blocking services and the "line between Internet access and radio/television usage," but expanded to other subjects as well. Ministers had perennial concerns about women's head coverings shrinking, and by the early 2000s, several outlying churches, to some alarm, had switched from the Beachy cap to the hanging veil used in foreign AMA missions.⁶⁷ Again, the committee emphasized teaching and advice, including a sermon topic, *Calvary Messenger* article, and a page-long

list of thoughts and recommendations distributed to ministers (appendix 5).⁶⁸ One appeal was that veils omit lacy edging and remain white; however, all five committee members allowed veils in their churches by 2008, and all but one also overlooked lacy styles, drawing some hindsight attention to the "teaching" approach as, in fact, ineffective. Perhaps the leaders were genuinely concerned but did not realize that the "teaching" approach evidently contained the seeds of a change-oriented mentality, or possibly "teaching" was used deliberately as a rhetorical device to co-opt and own the concerns of those seeking action.

The young committee also resurrected the remarriage topic,⁶⁹ noting that its failure was due to disagreement about the two concluding clauses. While the original committee had not wanted to omit the scenarios to ensure the statement's passage,⁷⁰ the young committee—indebted to the work of co-member David Yoder of Center A-M (Hutchinson, KS)—wrote a new, and lengthier, statement; significantly, it no longer forbid the two scenarios.⁷¹ They presented this "position statement"—a minimum every Beachy church already met—at the 2002 ministers' meetings (appendix 6). Then at the spring 2003 ministers' meeting, Chairman Ivan Beachy asked the assembled: "Can you find rest in your heart with the currently revised proposal?"⁷² The statement was ratified by a closed-eye vote and raise of hands.⁷³

⁶³ Perry Troyer, minutes, "Committee Meeting, January 22, 2001"

⁶⁴ Bishop committee, *The Computer, Email, and the Internet: What are they? What do they do for us? What will we do with them?* Presented April 4, 2001.

⁶⁵ Perry Troyer, minutes, "Committee Meeting, April 3, 2001"

⁶⁶ Bishop committee. 2001. "The Computer, Email, and the Internet: What Are They? What Do They Do for Us? What Will We Do with Them?" *Calvary Messenger* 33(6):8-10.

⁶⁷ Ernest Hochstetler to bishop committee, March 09, 2002.

⁶⁸ "The Covering/Headship Veil," April 2002. They made contact with churches that allowed black veils—likely the northwestern Ontario missions—emphasizing that the statement was not binding, just advice.

⁶⁹ Ernest Hochstetler to bishop committee and Perry Troyer, May 9, 2001

⁷⁰ Ivan Beachy, minutes, "Bishop Committee Meeting, Aug. 10, 2001"

⁷¹ David Yoder to bishop committee, January 6, 2002. The committee did not grant a nonchalant thumb-up to remarriages complicated by past "marriage" situations, but they also did not forbid what the two clauses had.

⁷² David Yoder, minutes, "Bishop Committee Meeting, April 1, 2003"

⁷³ *Ibid.* and *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage*. Calvary Publications. Pg. 3.

FIGURE 3: ROTATING BISHOP COMMITTEE STATEMENT, RATIFIED AT THE 2000 MEETING (KALONA, IA)

Bishop Committee

(PROPOSED STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, FUNCTION, and STRUCTURE)

A. Statement of Purpose:

1. The Committee is to serve as a resource and counseling body, remaining alert to trends or practices that may hinder the constituency's effectiveness.

2. The Committee is to be available to listen and give counsel to any church leaders who desire advice in resolving congregational problems.

3. The Committee is to take initiative in unusual situations to express concern to a congregation when it seems apparent they are operating unsuccessfully, or that conditions are fostering alienation from the larger body.

4. The Committee is to compile information and offer insights particularly applicable to our Amish Mennonite setting that would encourage unity in belief and practice among the larger body.

5. This Committee does not replace the three-member committee of bishops when congregations ask for assistance or an investigation.

B. Functions and Responsibilities:

1. The primary function of this committee is to stay abreast of trends or teachings that pose specific deceptive dangers to the constituency.

2. They are responsible to present Biblical Principles and Practical Applications of current concerns at the annual Ministers' Meeting.

3. They may solicit suggestions and concerns from constituency ministers and lay brethren.

4. When requests for counsel are received, the Committee shall seek to give proper priority to help the congregation resolve their own problems.

5. The Committee is to respect congregational autonomy in addressing concerns, or if asked to assist in resolving conflicts.

C. Structure:

1. This committee is accountable to the ministerial body.

2. One person shall be elected at the annual Ministers' Meeting by the ministerial body to serve a five year term on a five-member committee. Continuous tenure for any one person is limited to one term. A person who has served a full term is eligible for re-election only after a two year absence from the committee. The ministry of the hosting community is responsible to receive nominees from the ministerial body and conduct the election of a new member.

3. Changes in designated function or responsibility of the committee shall be approved by the ministerial body at the annual Ministers' Meeting.

The Second Phase of the Rotating Bishop Committee (2003–2006)

After Beachy's one-year term, the committee elected Elmer Smucker of Faith Mennonite Fellowship as chairman at the 2003 ministers' meetings. In Lott, TX, Smucker's congregation was geographically isolated from other Beachys, giving some room for practice divergence from Beachy identity, including print clothing fabric (versus solids) and hanging veils. Faith Mennonite's ministers had attended the first Maranatha Amish-Mennonite meeting but declined further involvement; shortly thereafter at the Beachy meeting, he was nominated and elected to the bishop committee, a surprise, having decided to leave the meeting early to go home.

Smucker's chairmanship style was responsive, not proactive. He lacked enthusiasm for the position and the idea of the committee. Indeed, during his chairmanship, he led an effort to eliminate written standards at his church, allowing the Spirit to show each person how to live; a division a decade later demonstrated that the paradigm never reached stability, suggesting he was probably preoccupied with his church during his tenure. Archival records are in short supply during his leadership: "It appears," he once wrote to the others, "that we do not have a large amount of things to take up for consideration for this years Ministers Meetings" [*sic*].⁷⁴

During his three years, several projects concluded. At the 2005 meeting, the committee released the final remarriage statement, reminded attendees of the technology statement, and admonished on the women's covering sizes and styles—and in all of these matters, to teach and be proactive at the church level.⁷⁵ Several issues also lost momentum. At the 2003 ministers' meeting, the bishop committee, under Ivan Beachy's chairmanship, had cautioned about new DVD technology, that it could "compromise the positions that many of us have taken on radio, TV, and video issues"; they entreated the following year's planning committee to "include some of the concerns on the

program," though no further action ever appears. Furthermore, the committee reported that the response to their appeal for feedback on healthcare issues "has been minimal. We desire to keep this open for further discussion." No further discussion ever arose. Finally, former chairman Ernest Hochstetler had researched counseling issues as early as 2000⁷⁶ though no report ever emerged. In a January 2004 *Calvary Messenger* article, David L. Miller appealed to churches to consider both lay-level and professional counseling when needs arise. Within the article, both Elmer Smucker and committee Secretary David Yoder (David L. Miller's bishop) welcomed responses from "persons who are interested as potential counselors or counselees."⁷⁷ The bishop committee gave a "strong endorsement to the vision and burden of" David L. Miller's article, asking him to continue his research and suggesting a "formal presentation" at the next ministers' meeting; this never occurred.

One new initiative during Smucker's years was "creating procedures that could be helpful" in handling "[p]astors who are failing significantly in their role as Leaders" or experience "moral failure."⁷⁸ At the 2005 ministers' meeting, they asked for feedback, although the bishop committee did not appear to meet or formally discuss the issue until the 2006 meeting.⁷⁹ Smucker announced that Bishop John U. Lapp of Weavertown A-M (Lancaster County, PA) would be "responsible for compiling [a] questionnaire" to solicit feedback.⁸⁰

While a very few churches requested the committee's assistance sorting through difficulties during Smucker's three-year chairmanship, the committee involvement was minimal. At the beginning of Smucker's chairmanship, David L. Miller wrote in the *Calvary Messenger* that "the five-man bishop committee is a body whose statement of purpose would be ideally suited to... listen

⁷⁴ Elmer Smucker to bishop committee, February 29, 2004 (fax)

⁷⁵ "Presentation at 2004 Ministers Meeting by the Bishop Committee"; David Yoder, "Bishop Committee Report, April 7, 2005."

⁷⁶ Dave Plank to Ernest Hochstetler, June 25, 2000

⁷⁷ Miller, David L. 2004. "Hurting Hearts/Crying Needs." *Calvary Messenger* 36(1):23-24.

⁷⁸ David Yoder, "Bishop Committee Report, April 7, 2005," "Moral failure" means sexual impropriety and includes anything from lustful thoughts to fornication/adultery to violating minors.

⁷⁹ Elmer Smucker to bishop committee, March 20, 2006

⁸⁰ Glenn Yoder, minutes, "Bishop Committee Meeting, April 4, 2006"

and possibly make non-binding recommendations [to local churches when] the work of a [three-man] bishop committee [is] considered less than satisfactory.” He pointed out that “the function of the elected bishop committee is specifically non-binding. This is to preserve our concern to keep our system congregational rather than conference-controlled.” He further writes that

there may be times that the elected committee would be asked to review a situation without the prior involvement of a three-man investigation. Perhaps the involvement of other impartial third-party listeners would also deserve consideration at times.⁸¹

Miller’s published statement was as significant for what it said as what it didn’t say: it did not have a warning against ‘conference’ or an ‘executive committee.’ While not suggesting complete non-involvement in local church affairs—upon request—he seems pleased with a limited use of the bishop committee. Likewise, Smucker probably saw no need to arouse a mechanism that was apparently no longer in demand.

THE ROTATING COMMITTEE’S STATEMENTS AND LEGACY (1999-2006)

The original bishop committee was to “assist in drawing up a statement of position” in response to the concerns raised at the 1991 ministers’ meeting. This statement was written and presented⁸² but never ratified. The committee then tried to implement issues from the statement one-by-one; the radio & television statement eventually passed but only after much opposition from the moderates. The first committee felt wedged between expectations of “curb[ing] undesirable practices, and thereby build[ing] safety into our churches” and resistance to this objective.⁸³ At the 1997 meeting, the committee started rotating members and developing a statement of purpose. This cemented the existence of the committee but not upon its founding objective. The committee would now

instead “protect congregational integrity [and] at the same time effectively address... common concerns,”⁸⁴ to act as a resource for churches and ministers, a think-tank, a watchdog. This purpose not only guaranteed the committee would exist in perpetuity but also freed it from proposing binding statements, which immunized it against the type of conflicts plaguing the original committee.

Was the rotating bishop committee of the late 1990s to 2006 successful in its stated objectives? Did their advice carry weight? While we cannot measure how much their advice was appreciated, we can with ease assess actual practice. The end of Elmer Smucker’s term as chairman—April 2006—provides a convenient point to reflect. The story from 2006 gets complex and is, as of 2019, yet to have a clear conclusion: a new generation’s push to adopt minimal requirements, an incredible expansion of affiliation-level ministerial and bishopric bureaucracy by those who did not want denomination standards, the multiplication of rhetorical devices and institutional resources mobilized by both parties, and novel discussions of proactive division that, due to the stalemate between parties, resulted in a planned, yet unilateral, division, this time on the progressive end. Rather than pressing ahead, this article will close by analyzing how the four main issue statements from 1999 to 2006—of radio and television, divorce and remarriage, Internet usage, and the woman’s head covering—fared.

Statement #1: Radio and Television

Other than the 1999 radio and television statement (appendix 3), no binding agreement had emerged from the Beachys since the 1958 statement at Salisbury, PA. Those Beachy churches adopting the radio or television would forfeit their ability to host Beachy functions including ministers’ meetings, preach or vote at meetings, teach at Calvary Bible School,⁸⁵ and serve on committees. At its adoption, procedures for addressing violations were ambiguous. Yet, within two years of its 1999 adoption, the statement came under test.

In 2000, the committee discussed how the new bishop committee purpose statement applied

⁸¹ Miller, David L. 2004. “Observations.” *Calvary Messenger* 36(5):18-20.

⁸² Beachy Bishop Committee. 1992. *A Charge to Keep, I Have*.

⁸³ Bishop committee to constituency ministers, December 30, 1996

⁸⁴ Bishop committee to constituency ministers, December 1997

⁸⁵ Perry Troyer to bishop committee, April 1, 1997

to churches that had adopted positions at odds with the Beachy practice, as had Mountain View Mennonite (Salisbury, PA), “where the beard for married men is optional, and the radio is not an issue.”⁸⁶ No conclusion was reached at that time.⁸⁷ However, shortly before the spring 2001 ministers’ meeting, the bishop committee learned that the Mountain View church was scheduled to host that summer’s Eastern Youth Fellowship Meetings (YFM),⁸⁸ that at a time when church leaders had been raising concerns about “negative influences” at Youth Fellowship Meetings due to their size and, therefore, lack of accountability.⁸⁹ At the ministers’ meeting, the five bishops discussed this trial. Committee member David Yoder of Center A-M (Hutchinson, KS) reported that junior bishop Jerry Yoder of Mountain View had “explained that the radio was used by church brethren before he was ordained bishop and Lewis [Tice, senior bishop] didn’t do anything about it.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the committee concluded that it would be “inconsistent to ask our youth to not have the radio at home but then send them to a meeting hosted by those no longer affirming that standard.”⁹¹ They then met with the five Mountain View ministers and conveyed that

it was inappropriate for the Mountain View congregation to host the Youth Fellowship Meeting Summer 2001. All five of the Mountain View ministers gave expression, selecting their words carefully. It appeared obvious they were not on the same plane on the radio issue. Jerry felt the

radio was in before he was ordained bishop and nothing was done about it, or in essence he inherited the problem. Jerry mentioned that a survey showed 25% of the church brethren were using the radio and he felt it was inconsistent to continue in this kind of disobedience.⁹²

The committee publically reported their decision to the assembled ministers, adding that allowing the radio should “disqualify a congregation from hosting these meetings” and that the Eastern YFM would be relocated. What the committee did not do was intervene in Mountain View’s congregation; neither did the committee forbid their attendance at the ministers’ meetings or YFM. The only agreement made by the committee and the Mountain View ministry was that Mountain View’s ministry “would plan to review their decision and also the related matters leading up to it and to consider the ramifications of their action.”⁹³ Whatever the follow-up, the congregation did not change its position. The Mountain View ministers continued to attend annual ministers’ meetings. At the 2009 meeting, the bishop committee reaffirmed its position against the radio.

As of 2019, only the Mountain View congregation has been publically defrocked for its allowance of the radio. Are they the only church with members using the radio? No, even as early as 2006, they were not. So why did they get singled out? First, the congregation made a clear decision to permit the radio. Thereafter, most churches whose members used radio did not proactively allow it but rather never addressed the issue or procedurally mentioned its nonuse on occasion, which satisfied technical requirements. Second, at the time Mountain View addressed the radio, the church was scheduled to host an event closely on the heels of the radio being forbidden; this called for an immediate response. Third, radio was a distinctive technology in 2001, but it was on the verge of obsolescence due to internet-based technologies. Not only could radio programming be internet-streamed without the radio as a device, but whatever purpose radio served to the general public, it was also being fast replaced by other mediums. A 2010 bishop committee statement acknowledged that

⁸⁶ “Committee Meeting” minutes, July 1, 2000.

⁸⁷ That this particular church came under scrutiny is a double irony, in that it was their late bishop, Moses M. Beachy, after whom the Beachy Amish-Mennonites are named, and that Mountain View was central in the 1958 meeting that developed the first set of denomination-wide guidelines.

⁸⁸ For an early history of the Youth Fellowship Meetings, see Yoder (1987, 188-96) and Yoder (1962).

⁸⁹ Youth Fellowship Meetings committee, report to constituency, April 4-6, 1995. The next year, 2002, meetings were divided into five districts and integrated adult members more in the planning. See “Guidelines for Youth Fellowship Meetings.”

⁹⁰ “Committee Meeting,” minutes, April 3, 2001. Differences between Jerry Yoder and Lewis Tice soon climaxed in the withdrawal of Tice and an elderly lay couple from Mountain View Mennonite in 2007.

⁹¹ Bishop committee, statement to constituency about Eastern Youth Fellowship Meetings, April 5, 2001

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

radio in the old form as well as the new ones on the internet, cell phones, etc is still an influence to be avoided. We further believe that the influence of video in most of its forms, TV in all its forms and other modern medium are simply compounding the ways the enemy is distracting, destroying...⁹⁴

Finally, 2001 was a time when church standards were still largely viewed as obligatory; across the early 2000s, churches would engage in standard overhauls that not only lowered requirements but also represented weakening conviction about the binding power and importance of standards, even as these revised documents were much more eloquent than earlier drafts.

The bishop committee held its official position by the letter in the years after the statement's adoption. However, the statement did not adapt to changing mediums—especially if radio content was the concern more than radio wave technology—and the committee failed to develop a mechanism for enforcing the radio statement beyond one early disciplinary action. That said, the disciplining of Mountain View for allowing radio was oft discussed among ministers and laity; the rejection of television, however, was largely omitted from conversation and thought. Perhaps radio was seen as the prerequisite to television, although the spread of high-speed internet connections during the 2000s, at least in communities not far from the city, quickly made television content available through a more readily accepted medium.

Statement #2: Divorce and Remarriage

No congregation has challenged the divorce and remarriage statement (appendix 6). However, the issue remains contentious, especially since the statement passed only by dropping the two aforementioned clauses. On the B[eachy]-A[mish]-Men email listserv, a post from October 3, 2008, about divorce and remarriage touched off 133 responses before the moderator ended the discussion October 27. This post received the most responses ever, from the listserv's establishment in 2000 to today.

Why this issue? Primarily because (1) some had relatives who left the Beachys and found themselves in complicated marriage situations (so, interested for personal reassurance reasons)

and (2) churches sometimes had to decide whether to accept outside converts or returning defectors who had divorce in their history. Fresh on many people's minds was the much-discussed marriage of Abigail Overholt, age 38. Abigail was the daughter of the late John Overholt, a charismatic yet eccentric figure in the mid- to late 1900s who compiled the widely adopted *Christian Hymnary*. This added a sort of celebrity tabloid layer of human interest to her story. Abigail desired to marry a recent outside convert to the Amish-Mennonites, Desmond Berryman, 61. Berryman had been married and divorced three times and had two grown children. His first wife died in 2004, almost ten years after his third wife left him. In 2007, he joined Sunnyside Fellowship in Sarasota, FL. Berryman met weekly with Bishop Lester Gingerich, who in time agreed to marry him and Overholt. Gingerich's decision quickly hit the grapevine, sharply dividing his church. The debate also spilled into the denomination. Proponents of the marriage argued that Berryman was not technically married to the second or third wife, since the first marriage is the binding one, and that these were adulterous relationships. The death of the first wife freed Berryman to marry. Opponents of the marriage argued that the second and third marriages were just as binding as the first because of the vows given, and thus, Berryman was not free to remarry. Both sides built cases from the New Testament.

In response to the strong reactions at home and from afar, Gingerich reneged on his decision to marry them. Overholt and Berryman then moved to Southern California Bible Fellowship, Lebec, CA, an unaffiliated conservative Mennonite church, where Bishop Isaac Martin agreed to marry them, but the controversy followed the couple from one coast to another. Martin also reneged and the couple moved on, leaving Martin's church divided. The couple finally married when, David Keeling, a charismatic evangelical leader who had earlier joined and then left a Missouri-based Mennonite Christian Fellowship church, conducted the ceremony. Leaving no shortage of discussion topics, rumor holds that a gust of wind blew over the large reception tent, fueling speculation of divine commentary.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ "Bishop Committee Report." April 7, 2010. Goshen, IN.

⁹⁵ The information for this account comes from two anonymous interviews and data compiled in Miller (2008).

The ordeal bubbled well over the pot of one church and onto the stove of the denomination. The couple's situation was not addressed directly by the 2003 statement: "the first marriage is binding as long as both of the partners are still living... The party legitimately freed from the adulterous marital union may return to his or her partner."⁹⁶ The return to the first partner, must have "CLEAR CONSENSUS on the part of the home church."⁹⁷ However, the statement did not directly address the couple's scenario one way or another, thus making the position statement irrelevant to controversial cases such as Overholt's. Indeed, the controversies from 1996 regarding the two clauses were not dead after the 2003 marriage statement was released. The 2003 statement has otherwise not been tested, for to violate any of its clauses would likely jettison a church from the ranks of plain Anabaptist circles altogether.⁹⁸ Thus, as far as records indicate, the bishop committee has not encountered a test case violation. Privately, the committee stayed informed, in contact, and in counsel with those involved in the Overholt-Berryman case from the beginning but did not intervene.

Statement #3: Internet

Soon after Ernest Hochstetler took the chairmanship, the committee developed a computer, email, and internet statement (appendix 4). It directed leaders to "be informed, ... seek information on the use of filters, blocks, and passwords, [and] abstain from ... all radio and television programs" available through the Internet. The committee also recommended that "homes remain free of the Internet. Whether a business needs such a service is to be evaluated by the local ministry on an individual basis." In congruence with the committee's purpose of respecting congregational autonomy, the statement said that the internet issue "must be faced by each congregation and it's [*sic*]

⁹⁶ *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage*. Sugarcreek, OH: Calvary Publications. pp. 6-7.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 7.

⁹⁸ Exceptions among plain churches include the Holdeman Mennonites and Reformed Mennonites (both of which hold true church doctrines that help accommodate a predilection to ignore couples' divorce/remarriage history prior to joining), as well as the "Highway C" Seymour, MO, Amish, who, after years of Bible study and discussion, allowed an outside couple to join who had been remarried.

membership. The local ministry must assume their calling and establish a Biblical mandate as their standard of practice and conduct."⁹⁹ The committee recommended that a church policy on electronics "should be reviewed annually." A standing vote of endorsement ratified the document, and "all agreed to work on this matter within their home congregations."¹⁰⁰

"What will historians write about the church of 2001?" the authors ended the document, aware that other once-plain Anabaptist groups had "fall[en] to the pressures of their own lusts and desires [through] materialism." This concluding acknowledgement harkened to the urgency of the 1991 meeting. Within six years, however, the churches of the five committee men¹⁰¹ had allowed internet in their churches.¹⁰² Likewise, most Beachy churches permitted internet with little fuss. Some churches implemented detailed accountability programs and filters (ultimately ephemeral for most) while others allowed it by default without any guidance.

Beachys use the internet in ways paralleling most Americans—consumerism, business, entertainment, communication, news, professional sports, reference, banking, theology (especially ministers seeking sermon outlines), and, in all

⁹⁹ *The Computer, E-Mail, and the Internet: What Are They? What Do They Do for Us? What Will We Do with Them?* Beachy bishop committee, statement ratified April 4, 2001.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ At the time, the five committee members were David Yoder (Center A-M, KS), Perry Troyer (Bethesda Fellowship, OH), Ernest Hochstetler (Cold Spring Mennonite, SC), Nelson Beachy (Canaan Fellowship, OH), and Ivan Beachy (Faith Mission Fellowship, VA). In Yoder's community, Center A-M allowed the Internet followed by neighboring sister church, Cedar Crest A-M. Many of those opposed to internet usage in the home transferred to the third sister church in the community, Arlington A-M. A 2008 ballot at Arlington A-M showed "strong support" for continuing the stance against Internet in the home (*Arlington Amish Mennonite Church Brotherhood Discipline & Decisions*, pg. 8). After Troyer retired as bishop, the junior bishop at Bethesda permitted the internet. Before retiring, both Hochstetler and Nelson Beachy permitted the internet within several years. Ivan Beachy proposed to allow internet usage with a filter and accountability program in 2007, which the membership approved by vote.

¹⁰² That is, allowed members to purchase subscriptions that gave access to the world wide web from their home computers.

likelihood given general statistics, pornography,¹⁰³ certainly not condoned. In the early 2000s, many signed up for Juno's dial-up internet service because it was free (initially). Forwarded chain letters were the first craze, as it took advantage of email-only connections. By the middle of the decade, many Beachys, especially young adults, had blog accounts such as with Xanga. During the winter of 2008-09, Facebook became an overnight epidemic among young people and some parents. Facebook really invited Beachys into internet communication, for Facebook did not have the writing demand of blogs such as Xanga. Simultaneously, high-speed connections replaced dial-up, bringing with it streaming media. Around this time, business owners started setting up websites, advertising storage barns or bulk food stores, for example. A handful of churches cobbled together small websites, though few developed and maintained fully-functional sites for any duration. Beachy organizations and laity developed some websites, including a website about the denomination, another advocating mission agencies, and yet others describing voluntary service units or non-profits.¹⁰⁴ Several satirical sites by young adults—namely Bird-in-Hand News and Beachy Complex (both now defunct)—offered commentary about issues of the time. Two Amish-Mennonite owned dial-up internet service providers¹⁰⁵ designed for conservative Anabaptists attracted some subscribers but waned as high-speed connections overran dial-up and churches gradually stopped enforcing the kinds of filtered connections these services provided.

A 2005 oral statement at the annual ministers' meeting encouraged ministers to "renew [their] caution and encourage appropriate vigilance in the area of filters and blockers." The torch of teaching was then passed on as a topic at annual meetings. In 2006, Samson Eicher (Hicksville, OH)—a younger brother of an earlier bishop committee member Eugene Eicher—preached "A Healthy View of

Technology," and in 2008 preached "Confronting the Evils of Technology." Ronald Miller (Oswego, KS)—a son of David L. Miller—preached "Digital Discipleship" at the 2009 meetings. These topics were all designed to educate ministers about the internet. A minority echoed the dangers described in the internet statement and spoke against internet connections. At the 2008 meeting, Bishop Charles Hamilton of Little Flock Christian Fellowship (Harrison, AR)¹⁰⁶ preached "The Truth War," saying,

TV is not just entertainment; it is addictive! ... The addictive element is an absolute, Biblical concern... How can we make a good case for having internet access while not having TV and radio in our homes? I would be interested if there's one single person who can make a legitimate case, give one distinct difference between having a television in our home, a radio in our home, or Internet access in our home. If self-restraint, accountability, and blocking is all it is, I can get all of that and have a television. There is one difference: We never figured out how to make a nickel off of television.¹⁰⁷

A few holdouts such as Little Flock church aside, by the decade's end, internet ceased to be a contentious issue; the 2001 statement was, therefore, forgotten and anachronistic. Internet was not dislodged or tempered. While the rotating bishop committee achieved its goal of not interfering with congregational matters, the statement did little to curb de facto internet adoption. In that the only binding agreement was that ministers were to "work on this matter with their home congregations,"¹⁰⁸ the statement was never tested or challenged.

Statement #4: The Woman's Head Covering

Beginning in Belize in the 1960s, the Beachys gradually adopted cloth-style hanging veils for

¹⁰³ A Barna Group survey in 2014 reported that 64% of self-identified Christian men and 65% of non-Christian men view pornography at least once a month.

¹⁰⁴ The websites are, respectively, BeachyAM.org, Mission Resource Network (missionresourcenetwork.com), mvnursing.net (Mountain View Nursing Home, VA), and hillcresthome.net (Hillcrest Home, AR), among others.

¹⁰⁵ eMyPeople (emypeople.net) and Agape Internet (agapeinternet.com).

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton is one of only two North American non-Anabaptist background converts to the Beachys ordained a bishop

¹⁰⁷ As quoted in the sermon and paraphrased in *Calvary Messenger* 41(3):25. March 2009.

¹⁰⁸ *The Computer, E-Mail, and the Internet: What Are They? What Do They Do for Us? What Will We Do with Them?* Beachy bishop committee, statement ratified April 4, 2001.

women in their foreign missions while, simultaneously, Beachy churches were forging a Beachy-style cap covering and moving away from their local Amish style caps (Figure 4) (Anderson and Anderson 2019). Not until the 1990s did the hanging veil first replace the traditional cap-style covering in the U.S. Wanting to start a church geographically close to Latin America, seven couples, most of whom had been foreign missionaries in Latin America, started Faith Mennonite Fellowship in Lott, TX (Camden and Gaetz Duarte 2006; Yoder 1987, pp. 359-60). Because of their previous missionary experience, the founders were familiar with the hanging veil and adopted it in the early 1990s.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, returning missionaries to the United States and Canada, also familiar with the hanging veil, often pressed for it as an option in their churches. As more congregations deliberated about covering style, the bishop committee received requests for assistance. In 2002, the committee issued a statement (appendix 5) that circulated considerably less than the Internet or divorce and remarriage statements. In this statement, the committee warned against shrinking coverings and a variety of styles. They placed responsibility on local ministers to explore the implementation of “Biblical teaching and effective enforcement.” After offering a page of points for consideration, the document concludes with a reminder of groups that “at one time practiced the wearing of the covering but today have dropped it completely.” While the speakers at the 1991 meeting had emphasized an almost verbatim concern about drift and called for firm lines, the rotating bishop committee concluded with a call “for messages and teachings on this practice.” Moving beyond the style issue at the 2004 meeting, the committee again encouraged “teaching and admonishing on this important principle and where necessary prescribing the type and size of the veiling.”¹⁰⁹

This covering statement was not intended to be ratified but rather be a response to requests for direction about styles and sizes. The committee’s strategy—general teaching, alertness, and action at the congregational level if needed—proved only as effective as the local leaders of individ-

ual congregations felt competent, empowered, or able to follow up. The results over the years testify heartily to covering style fragmentation. Through the 2000s and into the 2010s, covering styles diversified, especially as cloth styles proved to be more varied than an imagined, monolithic “hanging veil” that was used in foreign countries (Figure 4). Sizes, material, and decorative features varied tremendously, both across and within many congregations. Ultimately, the committee succeeded in being a resource and respecting congregational autonomy but evidence of unity, intentional stands, or pro-active direction is largely lacking. Among the five members on the committee in 2002, by 2008, cloth styles were permitted as an option in all five congregations and most had a variety of design elements in these cloth styles.

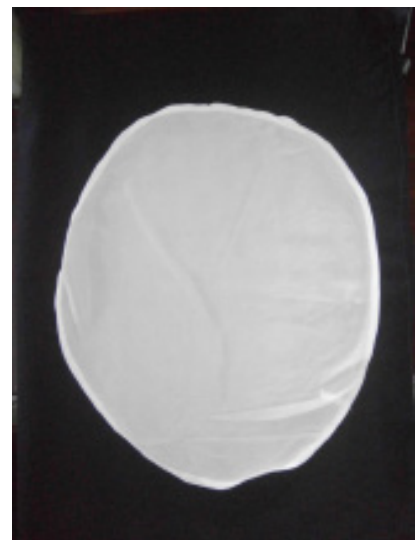
DISCUSSION

The original bishop committee was unsuccessful in implementing a common and binding set of practices for the denomination. The rotating committee of the 2000s inverted the objectives of the first committee to a hands-off think tank. While the rotating committee succeeded—like the first—in respecting congregational autonomy, it was ineffective in halting most stated issues of concern from taking seed in the denomination’s members. Beachy churches experienced significant changes in the 2000s, most churches rewriting their church standards, relaxing practices of dress, recreation/leisure, household décor, and other salient cultural-religious boundaries. With the radio, the committee demonstrated that it could effectively enforce statements where it had the denomination’s backing and where the chairman takes initiative to intervene but would do nothing if a church simply ignored the issue.

The Maranatha and Ambassadors Amish-Mennonites implemented the vision of concern expressed at the 1991 meeting. They have formal qualifications for a church to be accepted into denominational membership. In their constitutions, these two denominations emphasize the need for local leaders to enforce constitution standards; the rotating Beachy bishop committee encourages local leaders to teach on areas of concern and make standards where and if needed.

This study contributes to a small body of literature focusing on internal conflict among Amish

¹⁰⁹ *Presentation at 2004 Ministers Meeting by the Bishop Committee*

FIGURE 4: BEACHY HEAD COVERING STYLES UNDER DISCUSSION, CAP AND CLOTH STYLES (“VEILS”)**STANDARD BEACHY CAP****HANGING VEIL, ON HEAD****HANGING VEIL, FLAT****VARIETIES OF LACY FABRIC AND EDGING FOR VEILS****VEIL, LACY FABRIC & EDGING**

traditions. Other studies have focused on cases of conflict over technology allowances (Cong 1992; Petrovich 2014), evangelical vs. Old Order theology, (Petrovich 2013; Waldrep 2008), the *Bann* and *Meidung* (Beachy 1955; Yoder 1949), counseling practices (Reiling 2002), and general tensions between extended families (Hurd 1983).

These studies draw attention to the way agents apply symbolic and material resources to conflicts within institutional contexts using rhetoric to establish what is good and what is stigmatized. It helps bring relief to an overly reified framework of the Amish that denies actors agency (Anderson et al. 2019).

Few studies address Amish conflict within an institutional context; Kniss's (1997) work on the (Old) Mennonites, a strongly empirical contribution to understanding institution and conflict, is a strongly empirical piece about a related group. Kniss analyzed conflicts from the late 1800s to the mid/late 1900s in a variety of institutions, from the conference to non-profit organizations to congregations. He identifies two parties, the "traditionalists" (sectarian) and "communalists" (socially progressive). Each mobilized symbolic and cultural resources in their conflicts. Conflicts often focused on nonresistance and nonconformity. When one side succeeded in codifying their position in writing, the opposition's arguments turned to the authority to enforce this position.

The historic Beachy case herein follows the evolution of an institution that aimed to strengthen and secure boundaries. After a decade-long leadership scuffle, the original founders failed to implement their vision; those wanting to implement the vision withdrew into a new institutional arrangement, eventually a denomination. Rhetoric against this new movement or pure circumstance prompted others to remain with the Beachy denomination and concede loss, or at least hold to faint hopes that progressive tendencies would somehow slow. Gingerich's (1986) analysis of the 1865 Old Order/Amish-Mennonite division holds some parallels. Gingerich argues that the Old Orders viewed the *Ordnungsbriefts* of occasional prior meeting as binding codes, representing present and future stands. The Amish-Mennonites, alternatively, viewed the *Ordnung* of annual meetings as a means of addressing specific cases. Positions were adaptable and supportable only as ministers gave them support each year. Thus, Amish-Mennonites viewed annual meetings as an authoritative way to perennially identify the issues of the moment and where everyone stands. These conferences became hierarchical and procedural. Old Orders instead defined lines of association based on who holds a common *Ordnung*, protecting these lines by not allowing outsiders of different persuasions into governing matters of local churches and having ministers regularly visit other churches to check in and remind each other of commonly held *Ordnungsbrief*. Thus, while congregations remained independent, an informal organizational structure was operative to enforce what defined the fellowship.

For the Beachys to operate congregationally and without a central conference structure does not mean that status roles, denominational infrastructure, and hierarchy are absent. As with the Old Order Amish, power and structure are informal and therefore harder to document, since status and power are not immediately revealed by roles. Among Beachy leaders, some leaders' voices carry more weight than others. This article's narrative cannot account for many leadership conversations that are undocumented but nevertheless important to history's course. With the review of enough archival materials, the between-the-cracks conversations become evident, even if not identifiable.

As Gingerich (1986) notes, the Old Orders rejected centralized conferences. Both the original and the rotating Beachy committee generally rejected centralized conference while accepting modest vestiges of formal bureaucracy. The Maranatha and Ambassadors churches codified a basic structure and enforcement apparatus. The rotating bishop committee, on the other hand, leaned toward parliamentary procedure and, hence, a bureaucratic reading of committee work. The initial committee members, alternatively, saw their responsibility as five men working toward an appointed, concrete goal with a terminating point.

Where the two poles differed on structure was not in adding a bit more of it but in their objectives in adding. The original bishop committee and the resultant Maranatha and Ambassadors denominations saw the need for a new statement to clarify areas of practice that were bringing uncertainty to inter-congregational religious bonds. In this way, they were similar to the Old Orders in the 1860s, who saw need for occasional statements to clarify the group's collective position. The rotating committee agreed that collective uncertainty existed. However, their solution approximated the 1860s Amish-Mennonite view: annual meetings and continual conversations are what defines who we are because it clarifies what we all agree on at any given moment. As people change practice in their day-to-day lives, change to our agreements is inevitable; those who do not change fast enough (e.g. Maranatha/Ambassadors churches) or change too quickly (Mountain View Mennonite) fall out of favor with the establishment who define the pace of change. Enduring statements would stifle such conversations; they represent leaders who once had the power to define their desires at a given

time, reducing the potential power of leaders who may come later and want to redefine the group's lines. Old standards thereby stigmatize new generations of leaders who seek change.

The main alarm that the original bishop committee set off was to prominent, moderate leaders who were solidly in the middle of gradual change, neither too fast nor too slow. Yet, they saw that they would be in trouble if a denominational standard passed, for they would be unable to curtail forthcoming changes among their laymen (or did not want to curtail it) and a solid benchmark privileging conservative leaders would be laid circa 1991. The original bishop committee was to affect a standard that, when their congregations fell out of conformity in a few years, would cost certain moderate leaders rapport. The progressive Mountain View Mennonite ministers discovered this when they tested the radio statement; the resulting stigmatization consequently marginalized their opinions among the denomination's leaders.

The 1990s resistance to the original committee resembles how Kniss (1997) describes resistance to conservatives in the (Old) Mennonite's general conference: questioning their authority and, therefore, their ability to act and enforce. Though not as explicit in the case of the Beachy bishop committee due to a stronger emphasis on submitting to authority, a reoccurring rhetoric of resistance invoked caution against "conference" and "executive committee" approaches. For a people who tend not to speak their ideas directly on controversial issues lest they appear too aggressive, roundaboutly invoking caution is as good as actually making the accusation. Therefore, if the bishop committee is really a conference-style executive committee, then they are relying on an illegitimate form of authority and should not be permitted to make and enforce rules.

Hence, when the rotating bishop committee came to power, they quickly concretized a teaching-oriented program, rhetorically cautioning against certain changes to mollify conservatives while knowing that these changes were just around the corner in their congregations. When a controversial boundary issue gets explicit and deliberate teaching attention from moderate leadership, conservatives may perceive it as "the issue is finally getting addressed" when what is really happening is the concern is being reframed so as to be left castrated. In this way, the moderate members of

the rotating committee salvaged a potential threat to their rapport after the Mountain View case by neutering the committee of any ability to define standards and enforce them while also appearing to be concerned about high-profile changes. By leading the conversation on these issues, they also intercepted any other potential institutional efforts to address these changes. Notably, nearly all mention of "conference" and "executive committee" ceased, for the former opposition was now in power and wanted to legitimize its understanding of the committee.

Both the rotating committee and the Maranatha/Ambassadors denominations continued to operate according to Old Order autonomy, defining lines based on who holds a relatively similar standard and enforcing these lines based on the sways of those holding power. A division from the Beachys in their case occurred because two sets of informal networks, with respective power hierarchies that represented two different outlooks on change, had risen to prominence. The committee itself became the institutional mechanism that allowed polarized sides to approach each other and engage their differences rather than provide an answer to the differences. What hastened the division was that the side with slightly less aggregate rapport—the conservatives—happened to organize the institutional apparatus first. Had the committee never developed or had it developed in the hands of moderates, a division may have taken longer to unfold (and may have been less dramatic) or may never have occurred.

This discussion notably omits most mention of progressives, those actively making changes ahead of the average. It focuses on the conflict between conservatives and moderates. During this time, the progressives were stigmatized. However, they were also looking for direction from the bishop committee as to whether they were in or out. They dealt with much uncertainty during this era that would eventually lead to another division in 2015; this time, the progressives withdrew, an account that will need to be addressed elsewhere.

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APPENDIX 1: ROTATION OF BISHOP COMMITTEE MEMBERS^a

Bishop	Admitted	Released	Positions held
Eugene Eicher (IN)	1991	1997	
Leonard Overholt (OH)	1991	1998	
John Mast (TN)	1991	1999	
Bennie Byler (VA)	1991	2000	Chairman, 1991-2000
Perry Troyer (OH)	1991	2001	Secretary, 1991-2001
Ernest Hochstetler (SC)	1997	2002	Chairman, 2000-02
Ivan Beachy (VA)	1998	2003	Secretary 2001-02, Chairman 2002-03
Nelson Beachy (OH)	1999	2004	
David Yoder (KS)	2000	2005	Vice Chairman 2001-02, Secretary 2002-05
Elmer Smucker (TX)	2001	2006	Chairman 2003-06
Glenn Yoder (IN)	2002	2007	Secretary 2006-07 ^b
Joe Peachey (PA)	2003	2007 ^c	
John U. Lapp (PA)	2004	2009	Chairman, 2006-08
Tim Miller (VA)	2005	2010	Secretary 2007-09, Chairman 2009-10
Roman B. Mullet (OH)	2006	2011	
Raymond King (PA)	2007	2012	Secretary 2009-12
Philip Miller (OH)	2007 ^c	2013	
David Yoder (KS) <i>[2nd]</i>	2009	2014	Chairman, 2010-2014
Ivan Beachy (VA) <i>[2nd]</i>	2010	2015	
Laban Kaufman (OH)	2011	2016	Chairman, 2014-16
Tim Miller (VA) <i>[2nd]</i>	2012	2017	Secretary 2012?-17
Steve Miller (IN)	2013	2018	
Bobby Miller (OH)	2014	2019	Secretary 2017-19
Thomas Mast (IN)	2015	2020 (tent)	Chairman, 2016-
Roman Miller (IN)	2016	2021 (tent)	
Ben Stoltzfus (PA)	2017	2022 (tent)	
Wayne Lapp (PA)	2018	2023 (tent)	
Jonathan Raber (OH)	2019	2024 (tent)	

^a Rotation occurs at the conclusion of each year's annual ministers' meeting, usually the first full week of April

^b No secretary was appointed between the 2005 and 2006 ministers' meetings.

^c Philip Miller was appointed to replace Joe Peachey, who resigned prematurely.

APPENDIX 2: STATEMENT (1992)—“A CHARGE TO KEEP, I HAVE”

**A CHARGE TO KEEP
I HAVE**

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill --
Oh, may it all my pow'rs engage
To do my Master's will.

Arm me with jealous care,
As in thy sight to live;
And, oh, Thy servant, Lord, prepare
A strict account to give.

Help me to watch and pray,
And on thyself rely;
Assured if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die.

Charles Wesley

**(The Christian Responding to God's
Call to Holiness)**

Preface:

Having been reminded of the various concerns among our churches in the 1991 Ministers' Meeting in Canada, we as a committee are resolved to assist in drawing up a statement of position on the issues brought to our attention. A listing of these follows:

1. Divorce and Remarriage
2. Excommunication and Shunning
3. Television
4. Radio
5. Video
6. Sister's Veiling (size)
7. Instrumental Music
8. Public Bathing
9. Casual Wear
10. Rock, Country, Secular Music
11. Courtship Standards
12. Sports
13. Lord's Day Activities
14. Properly-Chaperoned Youth
15. Hairstyles (Brethren and Sisters)
16. Mutual Respect For Committee Work
17. Effective Teaching Program For Parents
18. Scriptural Unity

It is with great thanksgiving to our God that we notice considerable conviction in these areas among our congregations. We wish to express our appreciation to all those who are supporting the church's program and who have been faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our prayer that God would continue to bless the faithfulness of His people with stability, direction, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost!

We are, also, aware that there is need for growth and maturity in some aspects. It is our conviction that we need to persist in those things which are good and to keep building on the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. A faithful church is one that is ever growing in the Lord through the preaching and exercise of the Word. It is our desire to effectively strengthen our congregation's position on the above-mentioned areas of concern by lifting up a program of clear teaching on the pertinent principles of God's Word.

This printing has been prepared as a brief statement of our Biblical position as it touches most of these situations. It is designed to be a "spring-board" to further consider the call to Holiness, and the work of the church. It is our prayer that we may grow together "till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

Bennie Byler
Bennie Byler (Chairman)

John Mast
John Mast

Leonard Overholt
Leonard Overholt

Eugene Eicher
Eugene Eicher

Perry Troyer
Perry Troyer

I. THE SANCTITY OF THE LORD'S WORK

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Scriptural Unity

We believe and confess that the Lord's work is most effectively undertaken when the saints function together on a plane of scriptural unity. There is a common walk of obedience to God (ISam.15:22; John 14:15; Acts 5:29), a working together (ICor.12:4-12,25-27), a mutual sharing (Rom.1:12); a unified approach to a separation to God and from the world (Rom.12:1,2; IICor.6:14-18), a loving forbearance (Gal.6:2; Eph. 4:1-3) and a careful administration of scriptural discipline in a God-honoring body of born-again believers. Sin cannot be condoned in the Body of Christ, but it must be addressed and rooted out with the discipling ministrations of the loving brotherhood (Matt.18:15-17). We adhere to the articles of the Dortrecht Confession (1632) as they discuss excommunication and shunning. God's method of scriptural discipline must be employed if the Bride of Christ is to remain "pure" and the saints are to be "warned" and the sinners are to be "reclaimed". The Bible teaches redemptive and corrective discipline, and that it is the duty of the church to administer it. Membership in the church is granted by the voice and consent of the body. Therefore it is the responsibility of the church to restrict the privileges of disobedient members, and to select and administer whatever discipline the case requires, in keeping with the following scriptures: Gal.6:1 **Restore such an one;** Luke 17:3 **rebuke him;** Rom.16:17 **mark them, avoid them;** ICor.5:11 **not to keep company, with such an one no not to eat;** v.13 **put away from among yourselves;** IIThess.3:14 **note that man, have no company with him;** IIThess.5:14 **warn them;** IIThess.3:6 **withdraw yourselves;** ITim.1:19,20 **delivered unto Satan;** ITim.6:3-5 **from such withdraw thyself;** Titus 3:10 **reject.**

Excommunication & Shunning

The two-fold purpose and goal is to keep the church pure, (ICor.5:6) **A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;** and to restore the offender, (ICor.5:5) **that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.** In reproving or in shunning we are not to count them as enemies, but **to admonish them as brethren** (IIThess.3:15). The church is not to be partakers of the evil deeds of the erring one, but to show Christian love and concern for his soul.

Faithfulness

Because of the urgency of the work and the much work to be done, it is necessary that the believers are diligent in the exercise of their God-given ministries and areas of service. There is something for everyone to do! **"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"** (ICor.15:58). In this time of spiritual "laxity" and "drifting", we call each believer to **"take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them"** (ITim.4:16). We believe that each one of the true believers in Christ Jesus has been called to **"Study (give diligence) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"** (IITim.2:15). The church is to continually challenge the believers to accept their responsibility in walking carefully before the Lord. **"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as**

wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph.5:14-16).

Witnessing	As faithful children of God, we will be diligent to heed the Great Commission and we will be a witness for God in all of life's experiences. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matt.28:19,20). Also, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt.5:16). The scriptures teach us it is God's desire that ALL men would be saved (ITim.2:3,4). This, however, will not be possible until they hear the Gospel! We have been given the ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation and we are to exercise ourselves as ambassadors for Christ (ICor.5:18-20). As we are "distinctive" for God and for Christ, we will shine forth clearly for Him (Matt.5:14) in the midst of the confusion of our surrounding society. Because of the many ecumenical pressures to "compromise" and to "blend" our witness, we warn against identifying with an involvement in anything which would serve to diminish the "distinctive" principles and applications by the which we live. Our witness can only be "genuine" and "alive" when it maintains the savour, or saltiness (Matt.5:13) of the Word! A positive testimony for Christ will be hindered if it is not guided by the Holy Spirit and marked by a godly carefulness and consistency!
Christians Are Distinctive	
Ecumenical Compromise	
The Importance of Consistency	
Propriety	In all aspects of the Lord's work, it is important that we observe the principle of godly propriety. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (ICor.14:40). For this reason our services are to be conducted with all gravity and carefulness. We should avoid things or situations which detract from the worship of God. We avoid drama which is built upon pretense. Pretense borders on hypocrisy, making it inconsistent with worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).
No Drama	
Musical Instruments	We believe that God's perfect and consistent order for music is the unaccompanied (a cappella) singing from a heart that is sanctified unto our God. We avoid Rock, Country or Secular music. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph.5:19); "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" Col.3:16
Rock, Country, & Secular Music	
Committee Work	Church committee work is to be sanctified unto God in its sphere of usefulness. Each committee member (in Christ) is motivated by the Spirit of God to reach for the highest level of God's purpose in the midst of each decision. There is no place for politics when a group of Christians get together to do God's business! There is a mutual respect and christian courtesy for one another in committee work. We are taught in the Holy Scripture to be unified and of one mind as the body of Christ. Each member functioning for the well being of the Body. John 17:20-26; 13:34-35; ICor.12:12-31. All labors in the work of the church are to edify the body, rather than cause division. ICor.1:10; 11:17-19. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col.3:17).
No Politics	

II. THE SANCTITY OF GOD'S ORDER

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" ICor.11:3.

The Priority of God's Order

God has specifically detailed an order of headship so His will and work might be best accomplished. It should be noted that God's work must be done in God's way. We chose to accept the lines of responsibility which God intends for the home, the Church, the Christian Day School, or any part of God's program. A good guideline for us to follow as we walk with God is found in Proverbs 3:6: **"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."**

Devotional Head Covering

One of the beautiful expressions of God's order of the headship is found in I Corinthians 11:1-16, as it discusses the woman's devotional head-covering. This devotional covering is a testimony of God's order of headship in practice. To be the most effective and consistent symbol possible, it is necessary that the expression be church-regulated. Several basic principles should be clearly manifested by the wearing of the devotional head covering. 1. The covering should be religiously distinctive in appearance (a symbol of a religious application). 2. The covering should be large enough to cover (a symbol of obedience). 3. The covering worn within the church fellowship should be of the same type (a symbol of unity). 4. The covering should be worn consistently throughout the day (a symbol of faithfulness). 5. The covering should be of a solid color (a symbol of simplicity and solemnity). The devotional headcovering is commanded for the woman as a sign of her submission to her three-fold Head: man, Christ, and God. Man, then, is to show absolute submission to his invisible Head, and to pray and prophesy with his head "uncovered". (I Cor.11:7).

The Principle of Submission

The woman's submission to man is also manifested in her "carefulness" to stay in her appointed place within the public assembly. ITim.2:11-12 expresses this point: **"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence"**. It is important for both men and women and the boys and the girls to be submitted to the headship order of God, both as a "spiritual" reality and as an "outward" expression of faithfulness. As each one faithfully moves within the appointed sphere of responsibility, God's witness is magnified in all the earth.

The Walk of Orderliness

The apostle Paul wrote something wonderful about the church at Colosse: **"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ"** (Col.2:5). The Christian walk is a life of godly order. The

Casual Attire Worldly Hairdos Permissiveness

Christian's being is filled with the presence of God. Individuals, who have "ordered" their lives after the example of Christ Jesus, will abstain from casual attire, worldly hair-dos, and such casual permissiveness.

Mixed Bathing

Christian discipline cannot countenance mixed bathing, or any other uncomely associations that would mar the holiness of God in His children.

III. THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb.13:4). We believe and confess that there is an "honorable" state of marriage which has been instituted of God (" and He brought her unto the man" Gen.2:22) for the preservation and welfare of mankind.

Honourable Marriage	This blessed state of matrimony, according to the holy design of God, consists of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:22) and is indissoluble (except by death - ICor.7:39) according to the "one flesh" principle established by God in the Garden of Eden (Gen.2:24) and the express words of our Lord, when He said, " Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder " (Matthew 19:6).
No Divorce/Remarriage	Divorce and remarriage is therefore condemned by the clear pronouncement of God's eternal Word (Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18). The scripture also does not sanction any excuses, loop-holes, or the exceptions to its own clear statement on the permanence of the marital union.
Honourable Pre-Marital Conduct	The holiness of the marital relationship is attested to and supported by the gravity and solemnity of the pre-marital days. Pre-marital conduct is an expression of holy purity (" ...keep thyself pure " ITim.5:22) and submissive trust in the leading of the Lord (Psalms 34:8,9). Knowing that the lust of the flesh indwells the body, and that Christian courtship depends on the soul and spirit, we believe that all forms of physical contact (holding hands, petting, hugging, kissing, etc.) are wisely withheld until after marriage. This "hands-off" policy contributes positively to the stability and nurture of the relationship on a spiritual plane and, therefore, it is to be taught diligently among our people.
Christian Courtship	

IV. THE SANCTITY OF THE HOME

"For I know him (Abraham), That he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment..." (Gen.18:19). **Choose this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord**" (Josh.24:15).

Elements of God's Order	We believe and confess that the Christian home was ordained of God to be a place of divine blessing and godly instruction. God's order (ICor.11:3) is beautifully manifested in the husband's <u>love</u> (Eph.5:25), the wife's <u>submission</u> (Eph.5:22), and the children's <u>obedience</u> (Eph. 6:1-3). Christian parents are obligated to exercise their parental responsibility in bringing up the children " in the nurture and admonition of the Lord " (Eph.6:4). Much of the disarray and trouble in church settings (and, of course, in the "world!") is due to homes which are slothful, careless, or rebellious in applying Biblical principles to everyday life. WE HEREWITH CALL UPON OUR HOMES AND OUR FAMILIES TO BE ORDERED BY GOD! By disciplining ourselves and our children for God, we are preparing for heaven and for Christian service. Christian hospitality is much encouraged as a vital part of Christian family life! The fathers are to be faithful "priests" of the daily family altar, and, in addition to this larger family worship, private devotions are to be expected of each member of the family. Fathers and mothers are to be united by the Spirit of God
Family Worship	

**Teaching
Program By
The Parents**

**The Christian
Father Is
Responsible**

in their vision, administration and discipline, so as not to confuse or frustrate the children's heaven-ward direction. God's holiness is to pervade every issue in the home and will be evidenced in such things as the attire that is worn, the attitudes which are taught and caught, and the furnishings which are present in the home. The church standard is to be faithfully observed in our homes by older and younger alike. The Christian father is responsible to create and maintain this environment of "separated" consistency and is charged, after the example of Abraham, to **"command his children and his household after him."**

V. THE SANCTITY OF THE LORD'S TIME AND TALENTS

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:39).

**Lord's Day
Activities**

"Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:1-3). May the Lord's day (Sunday) be set aside from secular toil of the week to rest and worship; a day to be refreshed and strengthened in the Christian fellowship and holy meditation, and to draw our souls into the presence of God. The Lord's day should not be considered leisure-time to indulge in activities that are not conducive to the purpose for which it is set aside.

**A Walk of
Holiness**

It is our belief that we are under "holy orders" in the midst of our total life experience. **"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:13-16).** We are to conduct ourselves with sobriety as becometh followers of the Lord (Titus 2:1-8; 11-12). We will not be a friend of "worldliness" (James 4:4), but will instead walk as "strangers and pilgrims" in this world, thus, abstaining **"from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11).**

**Principle of
Self-Denial**

Colossians 5:24 reminds us: **And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts".** Because we are now **"risen with Christ, we seek those things which are above"** (Colossians 3:1) with a renewed mind and a separated unto God conformity (Romans 12:2). In the midst of the many choices in life, we humbly say, after the manner of our Saviour: **"...not my will, but Thine, be done"** (Luke 22:42). We walk with God in Christ (Col.2:6) and we are God's possession (I Cor.6:20).

**Radio, T.V.
Videos**

Due to this divine orientation in our lives, we will not consent to be under the bondage to the enslaving entertainments of our technological age. We acknowledge the aggression of the mass media arrayed against the saints of God. Radio, television, videos, and the movie theaters seek to propagandize the Christian spirit to compromise and to let-down on a Biblically-principled life. We reject these overtures of "the prince of

**Principle of
Separation**

the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:20 to draw us into a "worldly" mindset. We reject the presence of the radios, televisions, and the videos in our homes due to their subverting and immoral influence. **"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"** (II Corinthians 6:16-18). It is, therefore, our further contention that it is wrong to own any of these devices, to borrow them, or to be involved with them so as to hazard losing our own soul or the souls of our children. The Christian's attention is fixed on the Lord Jesus, because in Him alone are we "complete" (Col.2:9-10) and in Him alone can we be satisfied (John 6:35).

**Competitive
Sports**

Despite the fact that the strength of the youth is being constantly challenged by the pressures of worldly society to squander and waste its talents and energies in the area of competitive sports, we believe and confess that God has a higher calling for our dear young ones. I Tim.4:12 challenges us: **"let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."** Competitive sports is an expression of the lower nature accenting pride and the love of praise, fan(-atic) worship, tribal "warfare", controlled aggression, and tremendous financial greed. It is the goal of Christian youth to dedicate themselves to God's will and Christian service. This cannot be accomplished effectively when the false god of competitive sports rules in the lives of the young. Christians reject the allurements of competitive sports because they weaken the priorities and claims of heaven upon the tender souls involved. Fulfillment is not found in athletics, but instead in standing **"perfect and complete in all the will of God."** (Colossians 4:12).

**Fulfillment In
The Will of God**

APPENDIX 3: RADIO & TELEVISION / DIVORCE-REMARRIAGE STATEMENTS (1996)

Dear Brethren in Christ,
 Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus,
 "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a
 wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another
 buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth
 thereupon." I Corinthians 3:10

In the Spring 1995 Ministers Meetings in Kansas, mention was
 made of drawing up a statement of position on Radio and T.V.,
 and Divorce and Remarriage. Many of you have expressed the need
 for something of this nature to bring awareness, and to establish
 a biblical position for present and future reference.

The committee met in September and felt led to present the
 following for your evaluation.

1. Radio and Television

Because of the many dangers the radio and television impose
 upon and expose to the mind, we believe God will honor our
 faithful response to reject these in an effort to avoid all
 it's enslaving effects. The church will without doubt experience
 a brighter future without these undesirable influences.

You will also find a statement on Divorce and Remarriage for
 your evaluation. Please consider the content carefully and
 bring your comments to the Spring Minister's Meeting. Do remember
 this is not a final draft. It is subject to your approval and
 support.

If you cannot be at the Spring meetings, feel free to write or
 call one of the committee members.

For Christ and the Church,

Bennie Byler

Bennie Byler (Chairman)

John Mast

John Mast

Leonard Overholt

Leonard Overholt

Eugene Eicher

Eugene Eicher

Perry Troyer

II Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce, followed by remarriage, has become a monstrous evil in our day, and we need to face the issue honestly and courageously. Marriage is more than a contract or a partnership; it is a union where God performs a miracle as two become one.

Mark 10: 11,12 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

In the matter of marriage, God has made some clear statements. They are definite: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth." Romans 7:2
What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder. This is God's design from the beginning.

We do not tolerate remarriage while former partners are living. This position would apply to all cases.

A. A single person is married to a divorced person.

If a single person is married to a divorced person, we call it an adulterous marriage. He or she must separate from this marriage and remain single as long as the one they were married to lives. This situation could be argued from various perspectives, but we find this to be the safest position.

B. The first marriage vows are broken.

We believe God recognizes the original vows in a marriage to be honored. If one or both partners remarry after divorce, it is called an adulterous marriage, and separation is required, after which the original two could be reunited in marriage.

APPENDIX 4: STATEMENT (2001)—“THE COMPUTER, EMAIL, AND THE INTERNET: WHAT ARE THEY? WHAT DO THEY DO FOR US? WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THEM?”

that were using filters only to have them fail. The local Internet Service Provider (ISP) can assist you with establishing any guards that you request. You have the power of limitations. Exercise it.

4. A computer with video capability is now and will become even more so a direct connection through the internet to all radio and television programs. The ability to access such programs is dangerous and should be abstained from. It also presents a conflict with our position as a constituency.

In Conclusion

We recognize that in our daily living we are constantly dealing with the world and many ungodly people. We're admonished to maintain a "separated" lifestyle. (II Cor. 6:17) Because of that we are accountable to God and to our fellowman for all our actions. We must warn ourselves that when we turn to technology for information it must be done with a great deal of discretion. We should never waste hours of time simply seeing what's there or be found surfing the net.

Due to the call and design by God for the Christian home we recommend that our homes remain free of the internet. Whether a business needs such a service is to be evaluated by the local ministry on an individual basis. Some degree of accountability should be established with dependable brethren and the electronic technology policies that you set should be reviewed annually. This is due to the rapid changes and developments that need constant evaluation.

Summary

Why are we facing such an issue? Could it be that we have moved into areas of life and living that we didn't have access to until we gained the present level of materialism and affluence? Although materialism wasn't listed in the "A Charge to Keep" paper we see it as a subject that also needs careful study. The more we have the more responsible we are. The more responsibilities that we have the more likely it is that we'll find less time for God because so much of it is spent on ourselves. History reveals that both the Dutch and Russian Mennonites were affected by the abundance of material things. In the end this infected them to the point where they lost the battle and materialism took over. This is a very sad part of our history with a very sad ending. It was written about people who once were enlightened and faithfully serving the Almighty God falling to the pressures of their own lusts and desires. What will historians write about the church of 2001? We hold the key to each word that they'll ever pen!

May we be diligent students of the Word and careful shepherds of the flock which we have been called to serve.

The above is given to you for your prayerful consideration in preparation for the Wednesday business session.

April 4, 2001

*Your Bishop
Committee*

THE COMPUTER

The computer has become a fixed tool in many of our homes, businesses, and schools. It is however useful that we constantly remind ourselves of its limitations. With our use of the computer it is important that it serves us and not we it. This is useful in order for us to keep our homes spiritual and the environment a Godly one. To assist us in that we forbid the use of the computer as a tool for entertainment. No games are allowed that take away from us the desire for a Holy testimony for Christ. I Cor. 6:17

E-mail

Where allowance is made for e-mail services it should be with an e-mail only service provider. This still allows for the sending and receiving of e-mail without the dangers of the world wide web. It should also be noted that while e-mail is heralded as a quick and cheap way of communicating it can also become very time consuming and therefore more of a burden than a true blessing. Heb. 13:16

The Internet

The internet is a connection to a world of information unprecedented in history. It is truly living up to its world wide web title. This world of information reaches from one end of the information spectrum to the other. It reaches from those helpful and good facts to the most destructive. Due to its power and design it brings with it an alluring attraction to the worlds attractions. When this enticement is yielded to it brings with it deeply rooted hurts which may cause serious character damage. Zech. 3:3

We believe that this issue must be faced by each congregation and its membership. The local ministry must assume their calling and establish a Biblical mandate as their standard of practice and conduct. To allow the internet by default is an open invitation to an even greater set of problems.

From your responses to this past years e-technology questionnaire we submit the following as areas of concern that need to be dealt with:

1. Access to the internet is not as valuable as is assumed by some. We've lived a good life without it and will find that the quality of life is not related to the internet and all the data it has awaiting it's retrieval.
2. Be informed. If you're not informed become informed. Ignorance is not a viable excuse. To be uninformed is to be poorly prepared to make a proper decision on a very important matter.
3. Seek information on the use of filters, blocks, and passwords. Learn about the disabling of the browser. There are many companies that offer such services and will gladly help you with information. You may find such an informed person within your congregation. The use of a blocking service is seen as a much stronger guard than filtering. There are testimonies of individuals

APPENDIX 5: WOMAN'S HEAD COVERING STATEMENT (2002)

THE COVERING/HEADSHIP VEIL

The hanging veil and its use -

1. Considerations in making a covering style change.

Several congregations have requested help from our committee with this issue. A congregation can make a decision like this and go it alone. Those requesting help however are aware that there are other neighboring congregations and they want to be considerate of them. As a committee we see that desire as commendable and appreciated.

2. Our discussion and review follows:

A. Why the change? What is the goal?

B. The following are things that we feel should be considered:

1. Is the change to strengthen the application of the headship principle or is it for practical considerations only?
2. Many of the changes in our Beachy Amish fellowship have been based on the practical side of the issues. ie: color of cars, buttons vs. hooks and eyes, discussion on or about covering strings.

3. Our recommendation -

A. Consider these facts. We have those among us who have made the change to the hanging veil and we have been able to maintain full fellowship. Some of these have made a complete change where every member is uniform. Others have allowed the dual practice of either the conventional veil or the hanging one. Some allow the hanging veil to be used during the week but ask that the conventional veil be worn on Sunday or other church worship services.

B. Carefully consider the following as you consider or plan any change.

1. Make well thought through plans with prior set goals
2. Never allow this to be a divisive issue - no church splitting!
3. Remember that words of experience are wise words -seek to listen
4. Changing to the veil is not a way (of itself) to regain covering size. Those who choose to wear small coverings will probably do the same with the veil.
5. The veil is not totally more convenient. Both can be caught with the wind and both are on the back of the head. You have heard about bothersome covering strings - the trailing edge of the veil is much the same and both are objects for the child's grabbing hand.

C. Coverings are to cover

1. Have white opaque material as the choice of covering. (This follows our present practice) Varied colors seem to register instability.
2. This choice of color has been cleared with our missions in the north and they support our recommendations.
3. Make a choice that reflects both the sign and the symbol of the covering.
4. Consider with serious thought all changes and do not allow lacy or doily type of (so called) coverings to be worn.
5. Many communities have had a problem finding someone to make conventional coverings. We have been told that many sisters that already practice the wearing of the hanging veil do not make the veil either.

History has stories to tell of far too many church groups (including but not limited to our own Mennonite church) who at one time practiced the wearing of the covering but today have dropped it completely. For that reason we feel that any changes must be made on solid Biblical principles. There is need for messages and teachings on this practice if we desire to see it kept alive.

Summary - Let us all be committed to maintaining the use and practice of the veil and the headship order.

1. Preach it and teach it
2. Constant struggle at Calvary Bible School.
 - A. Among students
 - B. among teachers wives.
 - C. let us review the CBS standard. (and practice it at home)

LET US GO HOME AND ASSUME OUR GOD GIVEN DUTY AS HIS SERVANTS

Shared at the 2002 ministers' meeting business session.

Committee members - David Yoder, Elmer Smucker, Ivan Beachy, Nelson Beachy, and Ernest Hochstetler.

Shared for the committee by Ernest Hochstetler

APPENDIX 6: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE STATEMENT (2004)

Document available at: <http://www.beachyam.org/secure/archive/BCS2003-divorce&remarriage.pdf>