

THE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER OF ROSEDALE BIBLE COLLEGE

WINTER 2024

MIRROR

ROOTED

rooted and grounded in love -Ephesians 3:17b

UPROOTED



Passing Faith from Generation to Generation

“About 40 million adults in America today used to go to church but no longer do, which accounts for around 16 percent of our adult population. For the first time in the eight decades that Gallup has tracked American religious membership, more adults in the United States do not attend church than attend church. This is not a gradual shift. It is a jolting one.”

That dramatic description is among the opening lines of *The Great Dechurching*, a 2023 book by Jim Davis and Michael Graham exploring what they describe as “the largest and fastest religious shift in the history of our country, as tens of millions of formerly regular Christian worshipers nationwide have decided they no longer desire to attend church at all.”

Why is that happening now? And is there anything to be done about it?

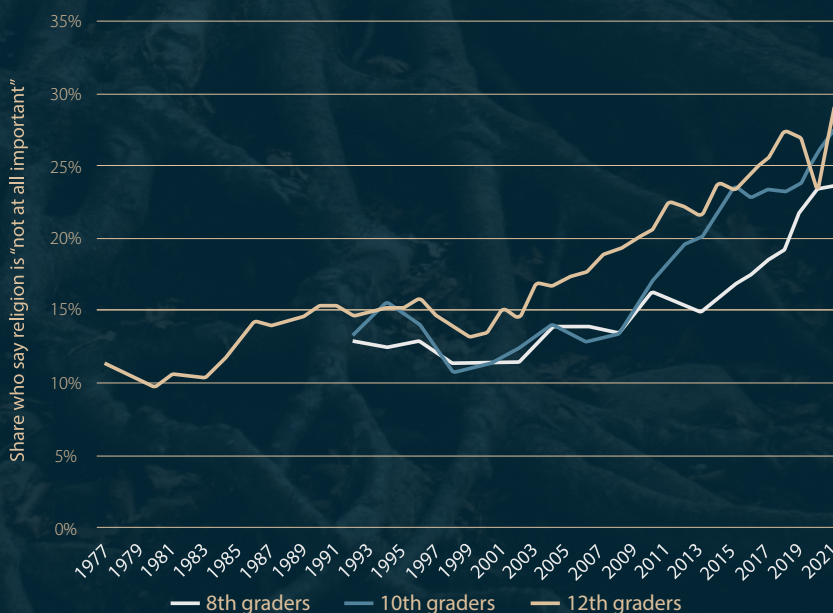
The question of how best to nurture faith in the rising generation is hardly new. For as long as I can remember, Christian pastors and parents have recognized that “God doesn’t have grandchildren,” which is just another way of saying that faith in Jesus is not inherited. In the Anabaptist faith tradition, emerging as it did from the context of sixteenth-century European Christendom, there’s always been a strong emphasis on personal, adult decision, though it’s not always been clear how old someone needed to be for the decision to qualify as “adult.” But members of the free church tradition aren’t the only ones concerned with passing along the faith. Roman Catholics – and Protestants that practice infant baptism – also recognize the need for an adult “confirmation” of the faith exercised on their behalf in their infancy. Even within the Reformed tradition, where some people refer to children born to believing parents as “covenant babies,” no one suggests that faith is passed along genetically like other family traits.

So how is faith nurtured? What can we do, not only on behalf of the young, but for all of us living in a

world that’s bringing fresh challenges to healthy Christian faith? With regard to children, we sometimes read Proverbs 22:6 seeking assurance that if we “train up a child in the way he should go . . . when he is old, he will not depart from it.” But few people consider that a promise, though no one questions the significance of parental influence and training. Indeed, if it were an absolute promise it would seem to undermine or even negate individual agency and decision.

Looking back across the history of the church, it’s apparent that the strength of Christian communities in particular places has ebbed and flowed. In the first centuries after Christ, the church was largely centered in the Middle East, Asia Minor, and North Africa. By the time of the Reformation, the stronger centers of Christianity were no longer to be found there, but in Europe. In the nineteenth century, missionaries, first from Europe and later from North America, were carrying the gospel (imperfectly

More American Teens Say Religion Not Important at All



Note: Data from all Monitoring the Future survey waves, using standard population weights

Jon Showalter ('76-'78) has taught and served in various administrative roles at RBC for 25 years. He continues as an adjunct instructor. Jon and his wife Dawn are the parents of four young adult sons and are enjoying their new role as grandparents. They have lived and served in Ecuador, China, North Africa, and Costa Rica.



though it was done) to previously “unreached” parts of the globe. And now, in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, the most vibrant expressions of the Christian church are often found not in Europe or North America, but in sub-Saharan Africa, in Asia, and in Latin America.

So what Davis and Graham describe in *The Great Dechurching* is not new within the broad sweep of church history. But to the extent that the trends they describe and attempt to quantify are new in the context of the American evangelical church, they pose the troubling question: why now?

The factors are many and varied. For starters, life in the digital age allows anyone who’s not completely off the grid to interact easily and instantly with a wider spectrum of voices and ideas than could even be imagined for previous generations, and those voices and ideas have influence. But every individual story is unique. Some of the “dechurched” quit attending during COVID and haven’t gone back; they got out of the habit. Some left disillusioned with the political polarization that increasingly characterized communities and churches over the past decade. Others have left because their changing perspectives on human sexuality or the doctrine of eternal punishment no longer matched the views held by their church. Still others left in the wake of pain or abuse they experienced at the hands of the very people they had looked to for help and healing.

It’s probably never been easy for Christians to sort out life at the interface of faith and culture. Davis and Graham describe it this way: “If one generation bases their religious beliefs and practice on cultural issues, then when the next generation’s culture departs from theirs, it forces a religious rift as well. Sadly, the dechurched feel that their parents don’t offer them or others the basic kindness of listening to differing thoughts and opinions.” (p. 48)

It would be reassuring if we could demonstrate that RBC alumni or churches in the Rosedale Network are immune to the trends that *The Great Dechurching* describes. I would be pleased if it turned out that learning and being discipled at RBC guaranteed a trajectory of steady faithfulness. But that’s not the case. While there aren’t statistical studies of RBC alumni that allow meaningful comparisons to the data that Davis and Graham present, it’s not hard to find examples among RBC alumni (or more broadly, among the churches that send us students) who fit the “dechurched” profile.

So, what’s to be done? What can RBC do, what can the constituent churches of RBC do, to nurture faith in an era that

seems to be bringing such daunting challenges? That’s among the questions that other articles in this issue address.

For now, it’s worth reviewing three things that we already know.

1 Christ promised to build His church, a church against which the gates of hell would not prevail. But that promise didn’t specify if or how the promise would apply to any particular time, place, or group of people. As already noted, the “centers” of Christian faith have shifted repeatedly over the centuries since Christ said those words to Peter: from the Middle East to Asia Minor to North Africa to Northwestern Europe to North America to Asia, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Things change.

2 There has never been nor will there ever be a mechanism guaranteeing the successful passing on of faith from one generation to another. If there were, the whole concept of a “voluntary church,” made up of people who have made a decision to place their faith in Christ, would be subverted.

3 But there are things to be done. The calling of every new generation of Christian parents and Christian churches – to disciple both the young and the old in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” – doesn’t change.

SOLAR ECLIPSE AT ROSEDALE BIBLE COLLEGE

RBC friends and alumni are invited to a Solar Eclipse Rosedale Reunion, April 7-8!

Solar Eclipse: 3:08-3:19 on April 8, 2024

Special alumni package: \$100 for two people or \$150 for a family (overnight camping, two meals per person, and glasses)

Spend the day with us: \$30/person or \$100/family (two meals, glasses, and a parking spot)

Free to any who have donated \$1,000 for the new dorm before March 18!

More details and events coming, but come share this once-in-a-lifetime event with the Rosedale community.

Please register by March 18! Space is limited.



Scan the QR code or visit rosedale.edu/events to register

For questions, contact Annika Miller at amiller@rosedale.edu or 740.857.4053

GROWING ROOTS IN NEW CHURCH PLANTS

A Place to Belong

“See you at home again on Sunday!”

The man who said this to me had spent most of his adult life in prison. The home he referred to is not where he grew up or his birth family. By coming home, he meant the community he experienced for the first time in his life in the body of Christ, his new family, West End Mennonite Fellowship in Lancaster, Pa.

This man, like all of us, is looking for a place to belong. His experiences reminded me of my own journey with roots in the Catholic tradition. Our family went to church every Sunday and while the sacraments of communion and confession were strangely comforting to me, I never felt that anyone would miss me if I stayed away.

When I was ten, my parents dropped me off at a Catholic boarding school run by monks. As they pulled out of the parking lot, I felt uprooted from anything called home. I longed for the familiar and can still taste the salty tears burning down my cheeks as I hid in a closet. I came to believe that fending for myself was the only way to survive, and my tears dried up.

Anger replaced sorrow in my calloused heart and on the eve of my 18th birthday, I walked outside on a moonless night reflecting on my life and its trail of broken relationships. I felt like I didn't belong anywhere and screamed into the night sky, “Is anyone out there?”

Shortly thereafter I met a young man on the streets of Munich, Germany, where I played as a street musician. He spoke about Jesus, and invited me to Immanuel Gemeinde, a small church plant supported by German Mennonites and Eastern Mennonite Missions. There I encountered people like me – people who longed to belong.

For the first time I experienced real community. There were people from all walks of life – from lawyers to the homeless; people with traditional views and rebels and political activists like me – all meeting to discover and follow Jesus together.

I never felt I was different or unacceptable. My heavy smoking, foul language, and anger towards organized religion did not keep people from welcoming me. I came to realize I was not only tolerated but truly wanted and needed.

So, 25 years ago when my wife and I stepped out to plant a church in Lancaster, we prayed, “Lord, bring us those no one else wants,” and we saw God drawing those who felt alienated and uprooted – the mentally ill, drug addicts, single moms. All were welcomed, not only because we invited them, but because Christ wanted them to find a place of belonging.

Our first church building for this straggling group of misfits was an old VFW bar. The bar counter was still intact – a place where the lonely and weary had often gathered. Here the barkeeper, patiently and without judgement, listened to the confessions that patrons spilled out ever more freely as the drinks numbed their pain.

But what patrons likely did not find in the bar was absolution and a new way of seeing themselves with worth and significance.

That old bar counter is still here – symbolizing the table around which we gather as Jesus people in need of belonging. The drinks we receive no longer numb our senses. We drink Living Water and eat the Bread of Life. (And yes, we did use the shot glasses left on the bar for our first communion service!)

We gather, knowing each other's names, grateful to see each other. Christ himself is inviting us, calling us into a community of forgiveness and healing.

When it came to choosing a name, we opted for West End Mennonite Fellowship. West End signifies the place in which we are planted. Proximity to the neighborhood is important to us as we want to share life together 24/7.

While using the name “Mennonite” seemed at odds with conventional missional wisdom and many who came did not trace their roots to a Swiss-German heritage, the newcomers were grateful to be “grafted in.” They recognized the need for roots in a tradition, planted in the rich soil of a community committed to following Jesus daily.

At West End, we've all found seats at a table gathered around Jesus. We share our gifts and together make Christ visible. It takes a whole community and a whole lifetime to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.

Christ welcomed me years ago – a lonely, wandering young man and now at West End He's welcoming an ex-prisoner who is experiencing freedom and family for the first time after 40 years behind bars.

“We know you by name, and we're glad you came. You belong. Welcome home!”



Josef and his wife Brenda planted West End Mennonite Fellowship in Lancaster, Pa., 28 years ago. Josef continues to pastor West End as well as oversee a network of related churches. He was born in Germany and met Brenda through short-term missions. They raised three sons. Josef enjoys nature and riding motorcycle. His greatest fulfillment is “to bring the lonely into families.”

A New Church Plant

While plugging in at West End, Robin Ehst and her husband Jordan initiated a Rosedale Network house church in 2011. Robin shares three lessons they've learned:

1 Embrace the hard: The local church needs spiritually mature mothers and fathers, older brothers and sisters, to raise spiritual infants to adulthood.

2 Partner with co-laborers: Don't take on the weight of creating community in ways that are reliant on your own strength. Join with other like-minded people. Even Jesus employed disciples in his mission, sending them out to preach and perform miracles.

3 Adopt Kingdom values: Jesus is looking for sacrificial obedience. What matters is the good that flows out of our hearts in loving action toward Him and others, not the measurable good of numbers and results.



Robin and Jordan have two sons, Aaron, 12, and Isaiah, 10. Robin is a homemaker, active neighbor, mentor, and bookkeeper for the automation and robotics company that Jordan owns with his brother.

GROWING ROOTS in long-established churches

Turkey Run Mennonite Church in Logan, Ohio, has been around for 220 years!

Pastor Mike Bender says, "We have always been a church of volunteers. There is an eagerness to serve and see that needs are met. Whether a librarian, Sunday school teacher, music director, pastor, maintenance overseer, or head of hospitality, it is an honor to serve. Lawn care and janitorial services are our only paid positions! Because of the voluntary and bi-vocational nature of the congregation, we've not become an overly program-driven church. This simplicity helps prevent burnout. We look forward to being together."

"Since Turkey Run has historically never been a large congregation all are wanted and needed. Church leaders have encouraged and supported individuals' ministry passions in areas such as prison ministry, tract distribution, street evangelism, and crisis pregnancy center involvement. Children are valued participants in the services – helping to take up the offerings and providing special music. This involvement fosters a sense of importance and belonging, providing natural stability. Everyone has a place and there's a place for everyone!"



Mike Bender ('78) has been a bi-vocational pastor at Turkey Run Mennonite Church for two decades. He and his wife Ruth ('77) have been married for 45 years and have nine children. They are also blessed with 19 grandchildren. Mike is currently helping to oversee an expansion for their church building.

Re-Rooting

Derrick Fisher grew up at Turkey Run but says, "As I began attending college, I left the church and established myself in the world. My choices led me down a lonely path of bitterness and resentment. I was a frustrated and anxious young man trying independently to solve my life's problems. Like a Christian lacking fellowship, lone trees cannot withstand the winds and storms as easily as those rooted in a forest with other trees for protection."

"Returning to sit in the same church from which I had uprooted myself two decades earlier was terrifying. How would the church members react when I entered the sanctuary? In the most humbling and gratifying experience I have ever known, God has allowed this once withering tree to be replanted in the fertile ground of a compassionate church, allowing my roots to regrow and begin bearing fruit for the kingdom of God."



Derrick Fisher ('24TiM) lives with his family near Rushville, Ohio, where he serves as a public school teacher of Latin, coordinates studies abroad, and coaches basketball. At Turkey Run he serves as a teacher and director of Christian Education. During free time the Fisher family enjoys exploring the U.S. in their camper.

HOME GROWN ROOTS IN THE GOSPEL

"It has been special to see evidence of growth in our children's lives. They have gone from refusing to pray, to telling God what they did that day, to more meaningful prayers that ask God to do big things for others. We're trusting God to take our everyday walk with Him to help our children grow and flourish."



Amber (Yoder) Miller ('06) and her husband David ('06) live in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In addition to helping "root" their four children in faith, Amber says she enjoys reading, gardening, exercising, kayaking, and working on craft projects.

"I was once a Roman Catholic, then baptized in the Indiana-Michigan Conference of MCUSA, ordained in LMC, and now serve as a pastor in the Rosedale Network. I cannot claim to have learned much from those transitions, but the little I have learned, I hope to have learned deeply.



"When you focus on the gospel, I can't guarantee that this will make your life easier, but I can promise that it will root you — together with all God's people — in the only source of **stability, nourishment, and resilience** that endures forever. I can promise this to you because God Himself does."

Matt Cordella-Bontrager and his wife Rachel are the parents of three children with another one on the way! After a stint of teaching at RBC, Matt currently pastors Pike Mennonite Church in Lima, Ohio.

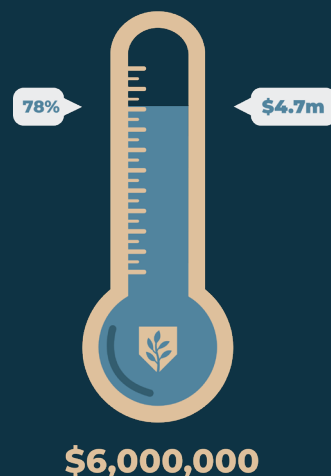
NEW RESIDENCE HALL UPDATE

Our goal is to break ground this summer! Currently we've raised \$4.7 million in pledges and donations toward our \$6 million goal, and need your help to cross the finish line. The RBC board approved kicking off the pre-build process of drawing up final blueprints.

Our architects are working to value-engineer the dorm so that it is functional, beautiful, and adequately-sized, but could be built for a lower price than originally estimated as businesses and tradesmen offer free or discounted labor, time, and materials.

We continue to look for alumni, friends of RBC, and business partners who may be able to assist through "gifts-in-kind."

If you have a business or connection to one of these industries and would like to invest in this project please contact Aaron Miller Director of Development at 740-857-4056, or by email at aaronmiller@rosedale.edu



Do you have a business that can help us out in the following areas:

- Excavation
- Electrical
- Heating/plumbing HVAC
- Framing (both wood and steel)
- Masonry
- Cabinetry
- Carpeting and flooring
- Painting
- Trim and finish
- Dry wall
- Concrete
- Landscaping
- Paving
- Roofing
- Furnishings: chairs, beds, desks
- Appliances

ALUMNI NEWS & RBC UPDATES

Coming fall of 2024:

ROSEDALE TRADES

“Developing skills in the trades
and in Biblical truths”

Rosedale Trades is structured to include:

- Skills training in fundamentals of the building trades
- Bible classes at RBC
- Partnership with Mennonite Disaster Service to spend time rebuilding homes in disaster recovery areas
- Full-time participation in the life of the RBC community



Forty-one Attend '75-'77 RBC Reunion

Luke ('76,'77) and Sylvia (Longenecker) Weaver ('77) rallied members of their RBC classes to a reunion at the Lodestar Mountain Inn in Upper Tract, West Virginia, on July 14-16, 2023. Co-planners Phil ('77-'79) and Twila (Mayer) Weber ('76-'78, '83,'85) reported that the reunion included “great food, spontaneous and planned singing and stories” as well as a time of remembering and honoring classmates who have already passed away. Sunday morning RBC president, Jeremy Miller ('00), joined the group for a message and update on life at RBC. Other planners included Rich ('74,'75,'77) and Marj (Steiner) Heatwole ('76,'77) and Ron ('72,'78) and Martha (Wehry) Yoder. RBC printed and mailed the invitations.

Aaron Miller, director of development said, “We are glad to assist other alumni groups with mailing lists and invitations. We love these kinds of gatherings so please be in touch with suggestions about how we can help facilitate more RBC reunions.”

MIRROR

Our Mission: We exist to prepare Kingdom workers through collegiate biblical education in the context of authentic community, experiential learning opportunities and skill development, Spirit-led prayer, worship and devotional Bible reading.

Alumni Updates: Please go to rosedale.edu/alumni-resources » “Update your Contact Information”. High-res photos are always welcome. We'd love to be in touch!

Please address all correspondence to:

Rosedale Bible College
Jewel Showalter, Editor
2270 Rosedale Road
Irwin, Ohio 43029-9504

740.857.1311
Fax: 877.857.1312
Email: info@rosedale.edu

Receive the next Mirror edition and our monthly updates by email!

Message your full name and email address to

(740) 857-4050 or bpeachey@rosedale.edu to sign up.

Scan the code below to manage your subscription!





ROSEDALE
BIBLE COLLEGE

2270 Rosedale Road
Irwin, Ohio 43029-9501
rosedale.edu

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Urbana, Ohio
Permit No. 29

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Parents—if this is addressed to a son or daughter who has established a different address, please give us the new address.

Call 740.857.1311 or e-mail info@rosedale.edu.

Thanks!

WHO KNOWS YOU?

I recently learned of a group of friends who committed to discussing among themselves any purchase over \$1,000. These are grown men with families. While \$1,000 is still significant cash, my mechanic seems to think this is now a normal repair bill. What compelled these guys to engage in this mutually-agreed-upon invasion of privacy?

In a related but very different observation, I've noticed increasing references to "being in therapy." It is common for our students to ask for counseling services, and we have made special arrangements for mental health services on campus. Author A.J. Swoboda said that it was only after the Reformation that the idea of counseling became a concept. He notes that James 5:16 tells us that confessing our sins to each other brings healing. This used to happen as people "went to confession" in the Roman Catholic Church.

Many of us now seek healing by sharing our deepest selves with our culture's "priests" — counselors and therapists.

What does any of this have to do with rootedness?

Rooted people are *known* people. We are known by Christ and subsequently by His people. The price

of rootedness can be steep. One couple I know decided not to move out of the community to a more lucrative job because they couldn't imagine leaving their church. This is notable in an era when our career commitments are viewed as primary and deep church affiliations a luxury.

I wonder if the tide is turning for the people of God. It is apparent to the young people I serve that a lonely, individualistic culture exacts a high cost on our faith. There is a rootlessness that plagues many who claim Christ.

The people of God are finding ways to create rooted lives in authentic communities of faith. Some have quit hiding their finances. Others refuse to move for better paying jobs and still others are finding ways to bring to light and heal their brokenness. I believe we will continue to see fresh expressions of friendship and commitment among God's people as we recapture the basic tenets of *koinonia* or the "life together" we see described in the New Testament.

President
JEREMY MILLER

