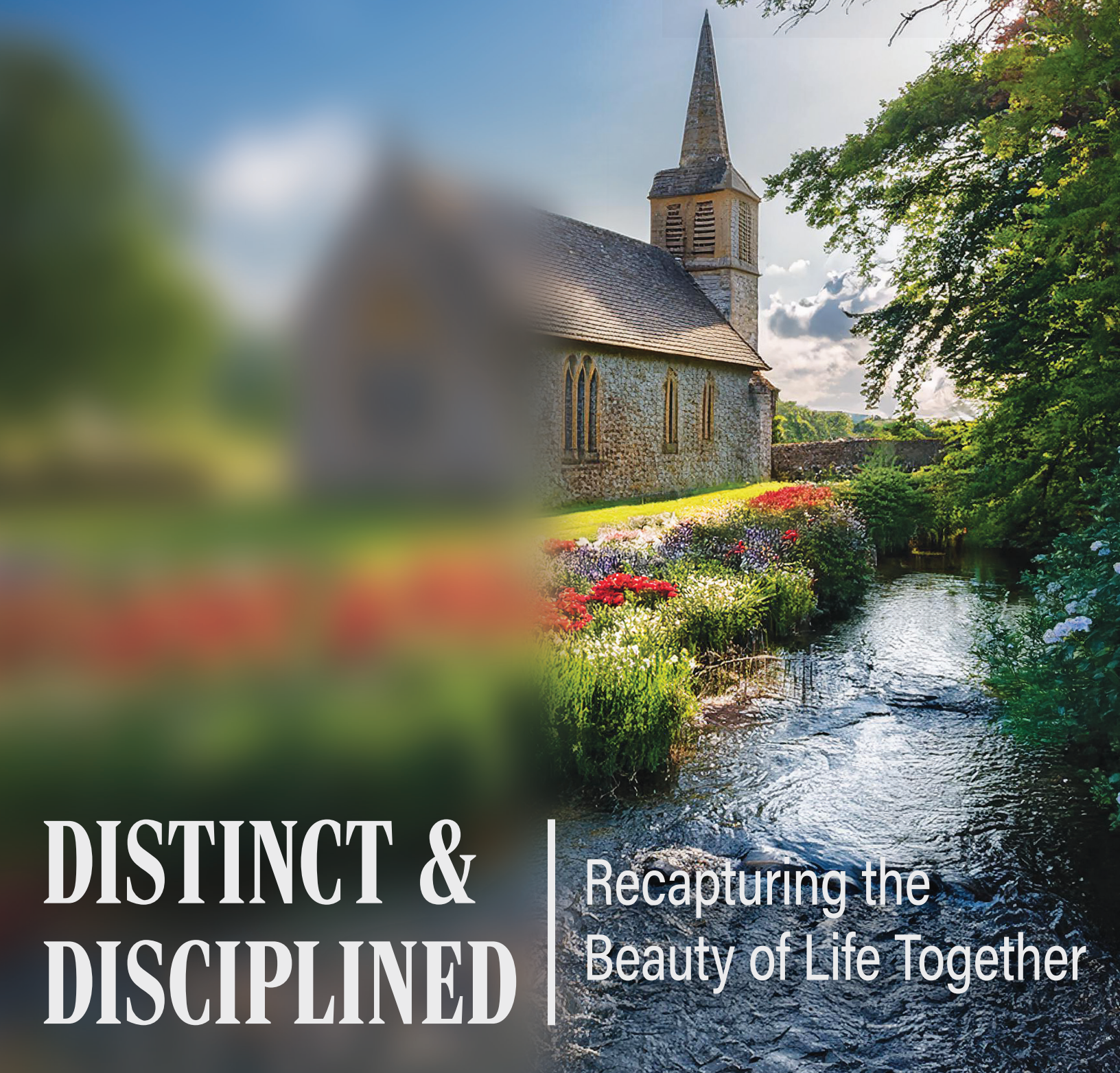


THE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER OF ROSEDALE BIBLE COLLEGE

WINTER 2025

MIRROR



**DISTINCT &
DISCIPLINED**

Recapturing the
Beauty of Life Together

RECLAIMING SHARED COMMITMENTS: DISCIPLESHIP OR LEGALISM?

In December of 2024, the *New York Post* published an article which pointed out the steep increase in the number of evangelicals turning to Eastern Orthodoxy, particularly young men. Shortly after reading this article, I was eating lunch with a group of RBC students. I asked why they thought young people might leave evangelical churches for Orthodoxy. Without hesitation they articulated with uncanny precision the arguments laid out in the *NY Post*.

- It is tied to the past; there are deep and lasting traditions.
- We don't get to make it up. We submit to something larger and longer lasting than ourselves.
- It feels steadfast. The structure provides a sense of stability and durability.
- The evangelical church seems overly focused on feelings and personal expression.
- It requires actions like fasting and prayer, and people are taught how to do those things.
- It isn't about us or how we feel, it's about God.

The general longing seemed to be for a greater sense of clarity, order, expectation, and discipline.

The above-mentioned inclinations stand in some tension with much of the RBC constituency. Many grew up in churches with maximal clarity, order, expectation, and discipline. There were guidelines for how men and women dressed, appropriate leisure activities, and even the color of one's car. Expected hair and veiling styles for women were spelled out. Men's hair couldn't be too short or too long. The goal was faithfulness to Jesus and becoming a distinctive group of people who were "separated unto God."

This kind of clarity is often associated with conservative Anabaptist groups or Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles. Gothard's Institute wasn't a church but taught clear and orderly patterns of living. Many families from a variety of denominations adopted these teachings. I also have Baptist friends who remember their denomination's prohibitions against dancing and rules defining "modest dress."

The downsides to many of these orderly versions of church life have been well documented. Both former conservative Anabaptists and Bill Gothard adherents speak of the tendency these communities have of trapping people in a state of spiritual adolescence without the need to learn the skills of discernment and response to an ever-changing world.

Some speak of the abuse of power from those responsible for the enforcement of community expectations. Perhaps most personally for many, critics of these highly codified forms of church life speak of the absence of warm personal faith.

Against this backdrop, and in an age of anti-institutionalism, it seems inevitable that we would see the rise of evangelical churches which minimize personal and corporate expectations while maximizing the endeavor to feel close to God.

For the last 30 years, very few evangelical churches have said anything about hair, but almost every church has invested significant resources in sound, lighting, and other modern worship essentials. This shift has also lessened the need for membership, a longstanding component of church life. Membership serves little function if there aren't firm expectations.

So, what's the problem?

Change is afoot. The church is a living body and in a continual state of reformation. As the children of church minimalists are growing up, they are noticing the gaps in a church devoid of discipline and shared commitments.

Topping the list is the devaluation of scriptural authority. Over the last 15 years, pastors, Bible teachers, and statisticians like George Barna have decried the loss of biblical literacy. This should come as no shock if our primary emphasis is on personal experience with Christ and a skepticism of structure and discipline.

The pages of the New Testament are filled with teaching about who God is and what He asks of His

people. The NT straightforwardly addresses the ways we should live and interact with God and neighbor. There are demands on our lives. We discover them through the often-dry discipline of reading scripture. How do modern Christians deal with uncomfortable words that intrude into our inspiring worship experiences? All too often, we avoid the Book.

Recently one of my dear friends left a large evangelical church to join a smaller, very intentional church. At his new church, members painstakingly preach/teach through books of the Bible on Sunday mornings. They gather on Sunday evenings to learn systematic theology. His life bears witness to the impact of his search for God through the scriptures. He witnesses to coworkers, gives generously, consciously avoids sin, and teaches his young children the church catechism. He says that God's Spirit is transforming his family through a church that takes the scriptures seriously.

This story is only one of many friends and acquaintances who are moving toward more disciplined communities of faith.

Minimalist church structures have also led to increasing loneliness. No organization (business, church, family, or non-profit) thrives without boundaries or clear expectations. Shared commitments with enforced boundaries and expectations help give identity and promote belonging.

One reason many Christians feel lonely in church is that we have removed the very mechanisms that facilitate meaningful relationships. Individuals can simply believe what they want, do what they want, and move in and out of church groups with minimal discomfort. In communities of deep belonging, this level of spiritual autonomy is impossible.

I recently preached in a church where a former member shared with the elders her intent to transfer to another church. When this news was shared publicly with the congregation, they prayed a prayer of blessing over the one who left. This church showed practically that membership means something, that they care about their members' decisions.

But what about all those who fled from the "legalism" of their highly ordered church communities over the last four decades? The reasons for their departure are not insignificant.

A test case for Christian community

While we are not a church, RBC is a sort of test case for Christian community. Forty years ago, our campus

community looked very different. I suspect we were not accused of having too few rules!

In the mid 2000's, the Administrative Council felt strongly that we needed to stay in closer step with many of the churches we were serving. We reduced the number of rules and expectations. Our handbook became smaller, but we worked hard to be intentional about spiritual formation and Godly expectations for our life together. Our students today don't generally feel "smothered", but they also know that life on campus comes with demands on their time, relationships, and activities.

The teachings of the Bible and our worship of Jesus are central to our ordered life together. We expect students to follow the scriptures as we understand them. We have daily morning worship, twice-weekly chapels, weekly discipleship groups, and church services on weekends. All students spend time serving a minimum of one hour/week in non-profit ministries. We have stated expectations for how students treat each other.

While the rhythm of life at RBC is an adjustment for many students, by the end of the first year, most are rewarded with a kind of community life of faith they hadn't experienced heretofore, and they flourish.

Could it be that our church communities might benefit from a clearer set of expectations for life and practice? If students can find belonging in a disciplined RBC community, might they not also find belonging in a disciplined church community hungry to help each other follow Jesus? In His last words to His first disciples Jesus said, "teach them to obey **all things** I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20).

But what about intimacy with Christ? Can intimacy with Jesus and a disciplined church community coexist?

article continued on next page...



Jeremy Miller

Jeremy Miller ('00) is the president of RBC and lives in Rosedale with his wife Sarah and their four children.

article continued from previous page...

The Bible holds many spiritual principles together that seem at odds with each other. For instance, true freedom in Christ requires submission to Him and His body. Spiritual intimacy comes as we align with Christ's instructions. (*The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me.* – John 14:21 CSB)

What's next for the Church?

To be sure, systematic plans to spell out Christian beliefs and practices for a group can overreach and lead to spiritual adolescence and the loss of communal harmony. This does not mean that wise church communities disregard the entire enterprise of shared commitments.

As Martin Luther's "grace" swung Protestants away from the rigidity of Roman Catholic works/rituals, Anabaptists tried to walk the tightrope of "grace" expressing itself daily in "word and deed" rituals. We agreed that following Christ daily affects every area of life – our speech, our attire, our finances, our free time, our jobs.

If older generations focused too much on "works" and rigid church standards, and the following generation fled "legalism" for total "freedom in Christ," is it time for another correction?

Many young men and women are hungry to commit to a church that is "distinct and disciplined," clearer about the scriptures and Christ's call on our lives.

What should that look like? Perhaps this generation will help us rediscover the beauty of a more disciplined body of Christ.

We have 500-year-old roots in a renewal movement whose watchword was, "show us from the Scriptures." We don't look to our "feelings" to lead us. We look to the ancient paths of Jesus and the early church. We yield to a community of like-minded brothers and sisters who are committed to "seeking first the Kingdom" in the power of the Holy Spirit.

the **VISIBLE** & **INVISIBLE** church

Celebrating
500 years
of the Anabaptist
movement out of
which RBC was birthed

Five centuries ago, in 1525, a transformative movement emerged in Switzerland, challenging long-held views about the church and its ties to the state. For nearly 1,200 years, Christendom—the union of church and state—defined most of Europe. However, the Anabaptists, as this movement became known, questioned and ultimately undermined this model.

Initially, the debate centered on whether baptism should involve infants or adults. Beneath this surface issue lay a deeper question: What defines the church? Should all citizens, baptized as infants, automatically

gain church membership? If so, how could the church distinguish those living unjustly, and who would handle discipline? Moreover, who decides what constitutes authentic Christianity?

At its heart, the Anabaptist movement argued that the Gospel calls individuals to make a conscious, adult decision to follow Jesus as a disciple and abandon sin. Baptism served as a declaration of allegiance, signifying to both spiritual and earthly authorities where one's loyalties lay. This act of baptism symbolized not only a commitment to Christ but also a bond with others who made the same choice.

From the outset, the movement emphasized that these connections were expressed through baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper. According to Dirk Philips, "Although existing in spirit and truth, the church is nevertheless also visible."

The idea of a visible church played a crucial role in the movement. Leaders understood that some might desire baptism without leaving the state church, becoming part of an "invisible" church. Thus, the movement stressed the importance of adult baptism as a means of joining others who had consciously made the same commitment. This visible church consisted of small, localized groups of believers living near one another. Within these communities, members provided both spiritual and physical care for each other.

The movement's rapid spread stemmed from its belief in the visible gathering of believers. Lacking a centralized hierarchy or uniform theological statements, the group's cohesion came from allegiance to Christ, reflected in baptism, and the shared practice of communion. Geography and culture shaped the movement as it expanded across German-speaking regions of Europe. Communities in the Swiss mountains differed significantly from those in Amsterdam's urban alleys. Despite these differences, the movement consistently emphasized that small, visible gatherings served as the primary expression of Christ's love and the source of mutual accountability and strength.

Hans Denck, an early Anabaptist leader, wrote in 1527, "The children of love may not act against love for the sake of love." He argued that genuine love requires believers to engage with one another in giving and receiving care and correction. If Christ's love fills both individuals, acting against love becomes unthinkable. This mutual love reflects Christ's presence on earth.

Without a centralized authority or rigid theology, the movement trusted local gatherings to decide how to live faithfully in their specific contexts. Like other Protestants, Anabaptists rejected the Catholic hierarchy's authority and elevated Scripture. However, they viewed biblical interpretation as a communal activity, occurring within local gatherings united by Christ's love. Men and women,

peasants and nobility, scholars and tradespeople all participated, reading Scripture together and determining how to embody their faith.

The movement also emphasized the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ, as the key to interpreting Scripture. Menno Simons stated, "All Scripture must be interpreted according to the Spirit, teaching, walk, and example of Christ and the Apostles." This belief empowered individuals, regardless of training, to understand and apply the Bible. Local gatherings of diverse members became spaces for discerning how to live faithfully in their unique contexts.

For those identifying as Anabaptist today, the movement's principles remain relevant. The essence of Christianity is to follow Jesus who calls disciples to "come and follow me." This involves more than intellectual agreement or a simple prayer; it requires choosing to live as a disciple, recognizing Jesus as the sole ruler of one's life. Allegiance to Christ forms the foundation.

This commitment leads to connections with others who share the same purpose. Together, believers form visible, local churches where baptism and the Lord's Supper create unity. These gatherings extend Christ's love through care, admonition, and at times, correction. In doing so, they bring God's community into a fractured world.

Local gatherings also explore Scripture together, shaping their Christianity to fit their cultural and geographical contexts. God calls believers to work together, using their resources and gifts to transform the world around them. As Menno Simons reminded us, the foundation remains unchanging: "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

“The movement’s rapid spread stemmed from its belief in the visible gathering of believers.”



Marcus Yoder

Marcus Yoder was born into an Amish family but later moved to the Mennonite church where he actively preaches, teaches, and writes. He is the executive director of the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center and the Ohio Amish Library in Berlin, Ohio. He enjoys reading, writing, painting, and spending time with his wife, Norita.

From *DISCOURAGING DECLINE* to **HEALTHY GROWTH**

Welcome to Fairview Mennonite Church in Oscoda County, the only church in Fairview, Michigan. Founded in 1904, FMC was well known for hosting a large winter Bible school program and grew to a size of 300-350 members in the early 1900's.

But in the late 1990's the church and community began to shrink. When our family moved to the community and began attending in 2003 there was growing disappointment and frustration with the church, but we just couldn't seem to identify what was wrong. Attendance continued to decline. Some moved away, others switched churches, and some just quit coming.

By 2008 we had become a group of about 100 individuals that attended church on Sunday mornings but as soon as the last "amen" was said the building and parking lot emptied out in less than 15 minutes. Really it was probably closer to five minutes – lights off, doors locked, church empty.

The sense of community was gone.

The leadership team, of which I was a part, knew something had to change. Eventually we decided

that the current leadership needed to step down. We needed outside help if we were going to continue. The pastor was retiring, and so we brought in an interim pastor. We gave him the power to make changes to anything in our structure, building, and worship.

And the changes started! Our interim pastor really put us to the test. First, he said we needed to remove one third of the pews from our sanctuary. He said we'd feel closer to each other spiritually if we were closer physically. He told us our singing would sound better. So, we removed pews. After all there were now only 60-70 of us left. There was no real constitution, no real church structure. What did we have to lose?

I remember that first Sunday without the extra pews. I kept looking around trying to figure out where all the extra people had come from, and the singing was louder. I began to think . . . huh, maybe this guy knows what he is doing.

Our interim pastor helped us establish a new leadership board, four individuals that were committed to meeting weekly for prayer—not just asking God for things but listening to God. We also started having monthly congregational meetings on Saturday or Sunday afternoons to pray, listen, and discern the things we needed to work on. We had 30-40 people show up regularly for these meetings.

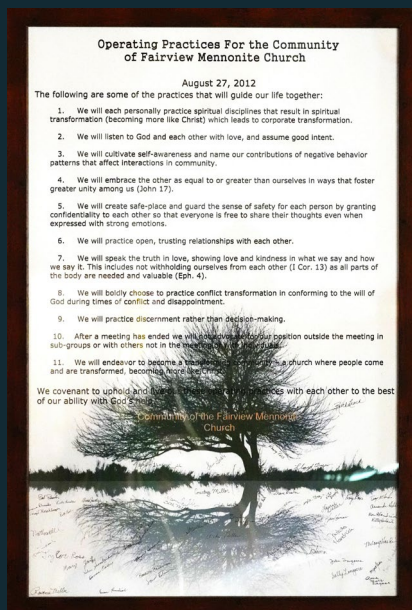
Things we addressed included: gossip, a community survey, a worship survey, vision for the church, confessing past sins, and healing past hurts. Even as our Sunday morning group dwindled, we remembered Gideon's small army. We wanted the victory to be God's alone. We knew that church was important, but we just didn't know how to do it together anymore.

These monthly congregational meetings lasted for three to four hours and often included a potluck. As we sat at round tables encouraged to share our thoughts and ideas, we began to notice common themes emerging. We learned to know each other in new ways. We began to become a group, a body, a community rather than a handful of individuals.



Lowell and Rachelle Eastman

Lowell ('21-'24) served as an elder from 2007-2011, 2020, and on the pastoral team from 2021-24.



Community was also fostered through other small – and almost silly – changes. Once a month we had a “Cookie Sunday” to celebrate the birthdays of that month. We brought in candy to slow people down on their way out the door.

During this time the leadership group developed a list of “Guidelines and Practices” for our interactions in meetings and as a church. This list spelled out our commitments to life together as a body of believers at FMC. We read these guidelines together frequently in worship and at the beginning of meetings. In these guidelines and practices we committed ourselves to listening to God and to each other. We committed to assuming good intent and to creating space to listen and maintain confidentiality so that everyone was free to share.

In times of conflict, we choose to work things through rather than sweep them under the rug. We committed to transparency and not advocating for personal positions outside the open meetings. The guidelines also stated expectations for our spiritual disciplines, unity, openness and trust, “speaking the truth in love,” and committed us to being mindful of our interactions in the broader community.

After two years our interim pastor moved on, and we called a full-time pastor. We had learned that this was God’s church, and we were here to glorify Him. We had learned to discern instead of decide, to listen instead of assume, to love and live together. Now we were ready to grow!

The first year of our new pastor’s tenure we each brought a small stone to put into a container shaped like our church as a part of our new covenant membership process. We have kept that as a monument just like God’s people when they crossed the Jordan into the promised land. Those stones remind us of God’s goodness and faithfulness to His people.

We also have a picture of our church that has been turned into a puzzle. We put a piece of the picture together for each one that signs our annual covenant. This reminds us that we each have a part to play in God’s plan. We only get a good picture of what the church should be if we include everyone. This past year we added a light fixture from a former building as a reminder that one generation calls to the next, telling of God’s goodness, His faithfulness and love.

Since that low ebb, as we have committed ourselves to new levels of discipline and togetherness, our church has grown to a body of 180 or more. Now after that last “amen” the church family stands around talking and eating chocolate or cookies for an hour or more. Young children run and play. We really enjoy and appreciate each other. The lights still get shut off, and the doors get locked, but it’s hard to say when because we just say “last one out shut off the lights.”

People continue to share their lives with each other and enjoy being the body of Christ in Fairview!



NEW DORM CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

The beginning stages of construction on the new women’s residence hall has finally commenced.

First builders laid a new road behind the library/chapel to the construction site bordering the pond. Then the large earthmoving equipment began to arrive. Enormous yellow machines crawled around scooping mounds of clay from the field beside the pond, scattering it across the building site and pounding it down for a firm foundation pad.



Next excavators elongated the existing pond, grading the sides for grass planting. They placed new drainage boxes and trenched new field tiles.

The hill beside the pond is also growing wider as excess building dirt piles up, awaiting the final sculpting and seeding.



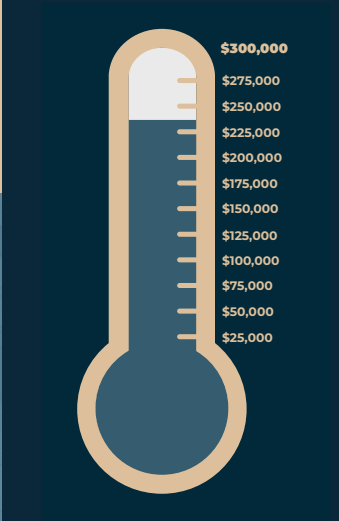
A new athletic field – sowed with grass instead of winter wheat – is taking shape between the pond and Rosedale-Milford Center Road.

Balmy fall weather facilitated the earth moving. As winter moved in, work is proceeding on the footers and plumbing. We still anticipate occupancy by women students in the fall of 2025. At that time men students would move into the current women’s dorm.

MATCHING FUND UPDATE

We have raised \$236,000 of the \$300,000 for our Matching Fund Campaign!

The completion of this matching grant will bring us to \$5.95 million of the \$6.25 million needed to complete the dorm debt-free. We solicit your prayers and thank you for your support as we finish this last lap. The matching grant challenge will remain active until the completion of the building.



Four Mini-barns Constructed During Rosedale Trades' Deadline Weekend Marathon

Titus Beitzel, Rosedale Trades director, kicked off the “barn raising” marathon at 6 pm on October 25. Four teams, each led by three Trades students and students they’d recruited, ran ¼ mile through an obstacle course, found their mostly pre-cut kits, carried the materials to the field behind the Student Center and began construction. Judging commenced at 11 am on October 26.

Diesel operated flood lights illuminated the field as teams labored throughout the night with assistance from Beitzel and his assistant, Steve Shoup. As soon as the walls were up team members hand-painted the sheds with unique designs. Some teams pushed on for 12 hours straight while others knocked off at midnight and returned at dawn for the finishing touches.



The four finished sheds are currently for sale. If you are interested in purchasing one of the sheds, call 301-616-8067.



One group of Rosedale Trades students joined a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) team in Penitas, Texas, during winter term. Other Trades students served at MDS locations in California, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas.

All students who participate in Rosedale Trades are part of normal RBC campus life. They attend general Bible classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and trades courses on Tuesday and Thursday. The fall semesters of years one and two will focus on general carpentry and plumbing respectively. Spring semesters will focus on general electrical studies.

RBC Celebrates 500 Years of Anabaptism



A few days before RBC’s 500th Anabaptist anniversary assembly on January 21, 2025, students chopped through ice on the Rosedale pond to reenact the famous etching of Dirk Willems from the *Martyrs Mirror*. RBC student, Jaxon Miller (Dirk Willems), saves the life of his pursuer (Josiah Swartzentruber), while magistrates Jadon Miller, Caleb George, and Tyler Stoltzfus look on.

STUDENT & ALUMNI TESTIMONIES: How We Are Living Out Distinct & Disciplined Lives



Alta Horst (Second-Year Student)
Mount Crawford, VA

Thanks to the thought-provoking lectures and conversations on campus, I have developed a more disciplined thought process. It is important to think analytically to clearly present your ideas and beliefs while maintaining empathy, kindness, and humility in conversation.

Tim Miller ('83, '84) Sr VP and Manager at First National Bank
Hutchinson, KS

“You are what you have been becoming.” I used to think that when I became a Christian, God would make me into something different, despite what I did. Now, I believe that the Holy Spirit gives me guidance, but I am still required to do something. In a word – discipline. When I choose to learn and follow His way (discipleship), He gives joy and peace, even when circumstances shout otherwise.



Clara Weaver ('23, '24) Women's Resident Director at RBC
Baltimore, MD

When I'm not at Rosedale I feel the loss of intentional times of worship with God's people. It encourages me to create these rhythms in my own life and in my home community.

Jennifer Martin ('95, '96) Artist/Watercolor Instructor
Lebanon, PA

Prayer is an area of my life that I have put disciplines in place. I pray weekly with a group of women from church. I keep a list of unsaved people who I pray for regularly, and make a habit of writing down other prayer requests. I find great joy in seeing God answer prayer.

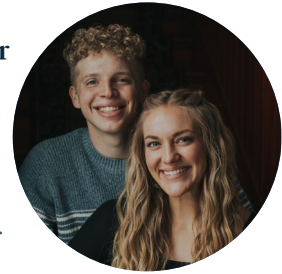


Jonathan Rensi (First-Year Student)
Mechanicsburg, OH

During my classes, I've come across spiritual disciplines and prayers that have led me to investigate ideas and beliefs and through that investigation, I've enacted practices and behaviors into my life that have positively benefited my life and my faith.

**Abi Voth ('21, '22) High School Spanish Teacher
Canton, PA**

In different seasons of life, I have focused on developing different spiritual disciplines. Now when my life feels more hectic than ever, these practices don't feel like items to check off my to-do list, rather, they connect me to God and enable me to meet the demands of the day. For me, the spiritual disciplines bring freedom and connect me to God's grace.



**Chris Yoder (Second-Year Student)
Hartville, OH**

Throughout my life I have felt closest to God when practicing a spiritual discipline, because they are physical reminders of spiritual realities. Our hearts need to be shaped to love what God loves, and this happens through structure alongside other disciples of Jesus as well as in personal disciplines which only the Father may see, but He will surely reward (Matthew 6!).

**Donny Beachy ('13, '14) Management & Truck Driver at Beachy Trucking
Sugar Creek, OH**

When I think of RBC, the first thing that comes to mind is 'a firm foundation.' I've been in many different school and work settings since Rosedale, and the principles and spiritual disciplines taught and practiced at RBC have helped build a firm foundation in my walk with Christ. Furthermore, the community and friendships that you build by walking with each other through these is invaluable.



MIRROR

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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!

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EMBRACING THE TENSION

The tension between “nurture” and “discipline” can be very real. Do we want our churches to be nurturing or disciplined? Do the presence of rules and “codes of conduct” foster a legalistic environment that fails to grasp the meaning of God’s grace? On the other hand, have we cheapened grace to the point that no care is given to how we should then live?

As a college, at RBC we have felt this tension. Are we fostering a nurturing environment or a disciplined environment? Some might consider our rules arcane and overly discipline oriented. No guys are allowed in the women’s dorm and vice versa. We are a dry campus. We care about the conduct of our students. On the other hand, others might say that we have become too undisciplined. If I look through old yearbooks, RBC has changed dramatically. Women now wear pants. Dorm time is no longer 10 pm. Shorts are normal gym attire. Have we become too undisciplined?

Church history often teaches us that when we try to resolve tension, heresy is not far behind. In the

great Christological debates of the first centuries of the church, we tried to resolve the tension of who Christ is. Is He God? Is He human? Heresies surrounding this tension abounded. The church finally stopped trying to resolve the tension and embraced the fact that Jesus is fully God and fully human. It’s a hard position to argue for logically, but it embraces the tension rather than resolving it.

When John introduces Jesus in his Gospel, he embraces this tension. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17) As a church, we could emphasize grace to the detriment of truth, or we could hold up truth as we sideline grace. Jesus came, though, as the embodiment of both. Nurture or discipline? Fully God or fully man? Grace or truth? These aren’t either/or questions. They are both/and. Let’s embrace the tension as we follow our Lord and Savior who was full of grace **and** truth.

Academic Dean
MATT SHOWALTER

