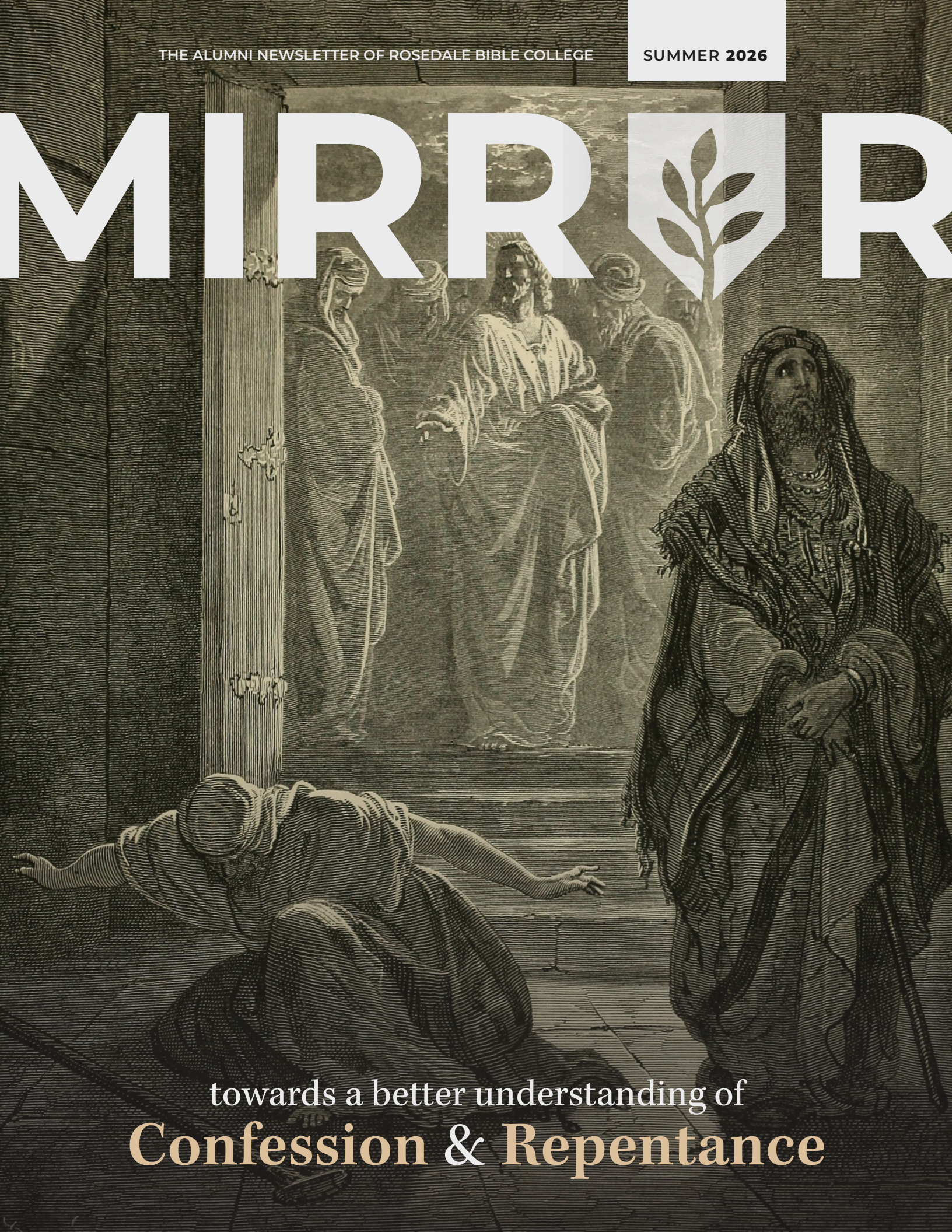


# MIRROR



towards a better understanding of  
**Confession & Repentance**

# TOWARDS A GODLY VISION OF Confession & Repentance

by Merle Nisly

**M**y life story began in a family where the highest values included pleasing God and seeking forgiveness and approval when we didn't please Him. I learned very early to feel guilt and shame for words and actions that met with the disapproval of parents, authority figures, and God. I was taught the importance of comparing my behavior and attitude with what we understood the Bible to reveal of God's ideals and directives.

I still remember the many weeks I carried the guilt of breaking one of my father's tools, hiding it and lying about its disappearance. Each church service and family devotional tormented my 10-year-old soul.

Finally, one Sunday night when the service ended with an altar call, I gathered up the courage to confess my secret to the associate pastor. He advised me to tell my dad, and I did it that same evening. What a huge relief for a tortured spirit. My father was gracious and forgiving. We retrieved the tool from a dry cistern and restored it to use. And I was restored, for the moment, to a childhood sleep free of guilt and shame.

Today, as I look back on that experience, I still identify with one of the primary motivations for confessing personal sins: the release of guilt and shame, and the expectation of forgiveness.

However, I'm now looking at my motivations for confession and repentance with a more mature set of questions and observations. Our traditional Anabaptist understanding of salvation has evolved significantly during my lifetime. We now have a more robust emphasis on God's grace and sovereignty, and this has obscured the maturing fear of God's justice and individual culpability.

**Do I, in fact, need to regularly confess my sins in repentance? If so, why? What is God's purpose in calling us to confession? Is confession necessary for our legal justification in God's eyes? Is it necessary for transformational healing both in us and the church communities of which we are a part?**

When reviewing my own experiences of confession and repentance, I find that I too quickly look for a judicial result in a process where I restore my legal status. I am learning to appreciate the perspective that confession in community contributes to healing of my entire being, as described in James 5:16. *"Confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

Legally resolving my guilt (justification) may actually have little effect on my inclination to practice sins or my addictions to sinful vices. Healing, on the other hand, is an essential miracle resulting in my progressive transformation into the likeness of Christ "from glory to glory"—sanctification.

## Confessional Hurdles

When it comes to the confession of sins, I have consciously or unconsciously absorbed (in my more than 70 years with traditional Mennonite culture), some commonly held assumptions.

- My sins are my own personal business; my direct relationship to Jesus means I don't actually need any help from others to obtain forgiveness of my sins.
- My certainty of "personal salvation"—as a result of what I did in the past—encourages me to consider my current sins as innocuous and ultimately irrelevant.
- Any suggestion that I might follow a prescribed, required oral confession of sins is an assault on my individual dignity and sense of freedom in Christ.
- Public confession of sin is reserved for either the most heinous or the most generic of the available sin categories.
- Corporate confession is an entirely foreign concept and has little meaning or relevance—except to lament certain societal sins of which we ourselves are completely innocent.
- Interpersonal and relational sins should be addressed if the victim or the offended party suffers enough emotional injury that it affects the relationship.

Let's unpack some of these assumptions:

**"My sins are my own personal business; my direct relationship to Jesus means I don't actually need any help from others to obtain forgiveness."**

**"Do I, in fact, need to regularly confess my sins in repentance? If so, why?"**

## About the cover:

*The Pharisee and the Publican* wood engraving by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

Certainly, confession of sin as a private exercise is essential; it is part of what John explains in I John 1, “*If we walk in the light as he is in the light*” and “*if we confess our sins...he is faithful...to forgive us...*” It may seem more efficient and legally effective to simply ensure, privately, that my legal status in Christ is restored or renewed. However, if I am pursuing purification and healing from the infectious disease that I am carrying, I will learn to draw others into my healing experience. My sins affect, and tend to infect, others. Only God forgives our sins, but healing is also ecclesial.

**“My certainty of ‘personal salvation’—as a result of what I once did—encourages me to consider my current sins as innocuous and ultimately irrelevant.”**

The careless certainty of being “saved from eternal damnation” when paired with the belief that we will not be eventually judged for our actions encourages us to consider regular confession of sins as insignificant. When I was a child, the phrase “once saved, always saved” was soundly rejected in my church family. Today, its wholesale acceptance into the doctrinal treasures of evangelicals contributes to a careless mindset regarding confession of sins as an essential element of a repentant Christian lifestyle.

In addition, practices of confession and repentance are often based on our ranking of sins and consequences. And some sins are not considered especially consequential in comparison to others. I was thoroughly convinced, as a teen, that the worst sins can all be traced to some evil desire related to sexuality. But the Apostle James’ warns that the tongue is a source of “all manner of evil.” (James 3)

On the other hand, I have never heard a sermon from traditional Mennonites that warned of the wrath of Jesus toward those who ignore and neglect the oppressed, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, and the stranger. This has not ranked among the sins of ultimate concern. Do we encourage or expect confession of such sins of omission? Is this the business of the faith community, at all?

**“Any suggestion that I might follow a prescribed, required oral confession of sins is an assault on my individual dignity and sense of freedom in Christ.”**

In my early experiences, the only scheduled church confessional was the twice-annual “preparatory service” the Sunday before communion. It was where public confession of sin or “peace with God and my fellowmen—as far as I know” was as close as I got to confessional practices. I don’t know when this practice was discontinued, but in most churches with which I’m acquainted now, this would be an unusual expectation. I’m thankful that my current church experience includes prayers of confession prayed out loud and as a group. I am much more aware of the value of regular, planned times

of reviewing and confessing personal sins in some level of community.

**“Public confession of sin is reserved for either the most heinous or the most generic of the available sin categories.”**

I have witnessed the harm caused by excessive public exposure of details regarding personal sins and the damage caused by such confessions. We may depend on the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of the church elders when we consider what it means to seek healing for our whole being as James describes, “*confess your sins one to another so that you may be healed...*” There’s something critically important there, and we do well to incorporate that practice with humility and transparency. In my childhood, only sexual sins or the abuse of alcohol warranted public confession. And then only if it was already common knowledge, or about to become so.

**“Corporate confession is an entirely foreign concept and has little meaning or relevance—except to lament certain societal sins of which we ourselves are completely innocent.”**

We have the example of Daniel in the scriptures, an impressive display of humility and identification with the sins of his people. (Daniel 9) The concept of prophetically identifying with the sins of our community, in contrast to an aloof and condescending prophetic expression may be the means of turning hearts toward God in true repentance and healing. Imagine the difference in impact within our communities and through our social media posts if we humbly identified while calling out societal sins. And how might God respond?

**In summary**, I suggest we review all of our preconceived ideas about the place of confession in repentance. I call us to reconsider some of our certainties of position and destiny based on our own actions and decisions; and to replace those certainties with humility and deepening trust in the transformative nature of our salvation in Christ.

I believe that confession of sin, godly repentance, and restitution (when necessary) will be a recurring feature in the lives of faithful Christians and their faith communities.

**“ My sins affect, and tend to infect, others. Only God forgives our sins, but healing is also ecclesial. ”**



*Merle Nisly (’71) is mostly retired from a lifetime of ministry among the First Nations people of Canada. He spent more than 50 years filling various roles in discipling, Bible teaching, administration, and reconciliation efforts. Merle and his wife Rita live in Thunder Bay, Ontario, continuing to mentor and serve in the Kingdom.*

# REFLECTIONS

## on repentance and reconciliation

by Jeremy Miller

### “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

There was a time when I thought relationships were, by and large, easy to navigate if you had any ability to see things from another point of view and apologize sincerely for your own shortcomings. Early in my pastoral ministry, I quickly set up meetings between parties in conflict, convinced that if people would just hear each other out and openly admit failures, there could be a fairly quick and bloodless restoration of relationship.

I wasn't wrong, just naive and inexperienced. The first 30 years of life were largely celebratory with very little resistance. Family, church, and school relationships were mostly easy, usually fun, and required very little in the way of deep restoration. There were certainly bumps in the road, just not the deep, soul-crushing sort that dramatically change a person's way of being.

What I didn't properly account for in my early years of pastoring was the profound effect of negative experiences associated with failed attempts at restoration. For instance, it bothered me that some people found vulnerability so difficult until I learned that several had felt the sting of having vulnerability utilized as a weapon to destroy reputation.

Others had trusted a vulnerable and sincere apology only to later discover no heart-level change in the offender. The result was that these people were understandably hostile to more “words.” They simply wanted to know if the fundamental posture of the offender had been altered—and that required time.

Then there was the persistent problem of differing perceptions of difficult situations. My youthful exuberance failed to account for a complex world where two very different perspectives of a single event might both be true at the same time. One doesn't have to subscribe to a postmodern worldview to understand this reality. The same storm system that brought crop-saving rain to the plains of Kansas might also flood acres of corn in Ohio two days later. Same storm, distinctive experiences for farmers.

*Jeremy Miller ('00) pastored for 12 years in northeastern Ohio before beginning service as president of RBC. Jeremy and his wife Sarah are the parents of four children and attend Shiloh Mennonite Church.*



This problem of differing perspectives of painful situations is a particularly difficult challenge to meaningful repentance and reconciliation. When parties have very different understandings of the same event, neither may feel as though they can sincerely apologize for wrongdoing.

### “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Life and ministry after age 30 looks different. The price tag of sin and conflict rises with age. When one is 18 and makes an off-hand remark that hurts another, the social cost is minimal and often can be repaired with a relatively short conversation and sincere apology. As we age, those same careless words may cost some their careers, marriages, or healthy relationships with children. Conflicts cut more deeply and the stakes are usually higher. I didn't recognize this as a young pastor.

But out of that place of difficulty can grow beautiful things—recognition of our own brokenness, reliance on the King, and confidence in His promise of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is at the heart of God's purpose in the world. (2 Cor. 5:18-20) As intractable as some relational tensions appear, the gospel reminds us that Jesus came to reconcile us to God and to each other. He managed to rescue us and loved us before we ever loved Him (Rom. 5:8). If reconciliation is God's purpose, then we are never without hope. Moreover, He invites us into His work of reconciliation.

Christ's restorative power and work make His gospel stunning. It's why we often weep when we experience a deep forgiveness of our sins, either from Christ or someone we have wronged. It is why we can endure tremendous difficulty if our closest relationships are in harmony. Restored relationships nourish the soul and bring heaven to earth.

Even so, my days of zealously launching into relational tensions, convinced of their solvability have passed. These days I carry a more tempered approach, still firmly believing in the restorative power of Christ and His Kingdom, but more aware of our frailty and the need to daily keep our hearts aligned with Jesus and those near us.

Several years ago, I attended a prayer school and learned the ancient Jesus prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Over the years, this prayer has been a lifeline in dark seasons of relational distress. It forces my heart to a place of surrender, which is the birthplace of reconciliation.

# missional REPENTANCE

by Jewel Showalter

In 1727 there was a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Herrnhut on the estate of Count Zinzendorf of Moravia in the present-day Czech Republic.

Disgruntled bands of persecuted Anabaptists sought sanctuary there. But the various persecuted minorities were not getting along with each other. In fact, there was so much bickering and quarreling that one leader moved his hut to the edge of the settlement saying he was leaving “Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Zinzendorf moved among the groups preaching unity and drawing up a code of conduct for Christian behavior that superseded any specific creeds. He announced a joint communion service for the whole community—wanting all to whom he offered sanctuary on his estate to confess “peace with God and their fellowmen” and to act accordingly.

Everyone knew that there was an ongoing feud between two of the leading men in the settlement. They weren’t speaking to each other. Would both or neither come to the communion service?

As the worshippers streamed to the meeting place that morning, the two estranged men met on a narrow path. Unable to avoid each other any longer they both broke down and asked each other for forgiveness.

Worshippers who were present that morning after the reconciliation say that “heaven came down.” Others called it “the Moravian Pentecost.” A continuous, round-the-clock prayer meeting broke out and lasted unbroken for 100 years. Hundreds streamed out of Herrnhut—taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

**Public confession, repentance, and reconciliation between estranged brothers who then shared communion with the whole believing community sparked this revival and the subsequent international missions’ movement.**

But by the time this practice of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation prior to communion—“preparatory service”—came down to me in a Pennsylvania Mennonite church, the ritual seemed almost dead.

Our bench of nervous young women tugged skirts over knees as the bishop’s eyes roved the ante room asking us to nod evidence of “peace with God and our fellowmen”—as well as affirming a sober commitment to keep the standards of the church.

One year I noticed a young woman who kept her seat as the rest of us filed into the ante room. With bowed head and teary eyes she refused to go forward for the “preparatory service.” She did not take communion.

What had she done, I wondered. What did she have trouble committing herself to?

Gradually those ritualized preparatory services were discontinued in the Mennonite churches in which I worshipped. We no longer publicly confessed our peace with God and man. We did not regularly commit ourselves to obeying “church standards.”

But what has replaced these centuries-old times of communal confession and commitment that bound us together and kept us from fragmenting into “Sodom and Gomorrah?”

The last communion service I participated in was very informal. We formed congregational circles and youths passed around baskets of sealed wafers atop sips of grape juice. We fumbled to open our sealed packets and downed the contents after a brief prayer.

I found myself longing for something more. Self-examination. Confession. Repentance. Forgiveness. Awe. Commitment. “Do this in remembrance of me...” Joining the multitudes on every continent who reverence these age-old symbols.

I believe that as we trivialize and individualize “communion” we miss its powerful and solemn communal dimensions. Anabaptists, along with most other Protestants, view communion as symbolic rather than sacramental. We believe these powerful symbols don’t magically impart “grace” that absolves us from sin but rather are highly meaningful symbols that move us to examine our hearts, confess our sins, and find healing.

We believe church membership means a commitment to follow Jesus seriously, every day, and to “walk in the light” with brothers and sisters when we fall short.

Bickering and quarreling will break out—as it did among the diverse Anabaptists in Moravia. But if our families, our marriages, our friendships, our churches are going to be healthy places of comfort, support, and inspiration we’ll need to learn how to confess our sins to God and one another—and find healing.

This calls for the humble prayer of the biblical Publican—“Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!” rather than the self-justifying prayer of the Pharisee. “I thank you God that I’m not like those militant Christian nationalists, those woke, trans baby-killers...”

And maybe, just maybe, as we humble ourselves in prayer and confession, we will experience the unifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit that thrusts us out in mission.



*Jewel Showalter works one day a week in communications and development at RBC. She also enjoys hospitality and volunteering opportunities with church, family, and community.*

# RBC NEWS & NOTES

## Generation to Generation campaign: Celebrating our 75th Anniversary in 2027

We hope you've had a chance to see and respond to our latest plans to strengthen and improve the ministry of RBC. Our consultant, Jules Glanzer, compiled the results of the recent survey. In addition to the pressing needs the campaign addresses—things like debt elimination on the Student Center and upgrades to Sattler Hall, the men's dorm—we're also excited to see projects like a thrift store and solar panels that will provide income to offset our ongoing needs. Then, of course, there's always unanticipated needs like a major overhaul for the RBC bus used for the Chorale tour and other student outings. Thanks for standing with us in meeting these needs. Our fiscal year ends June 30.

Make plans next year to join us in Rosedale for the 75th anniversary of our founding. RBC will be hosting the annual Multiply Conference, August 6-8, 2027, on our campus. We'd love to have a homecoming for as many alumni as possible along with other conference attendees.

## ABHE Team reaccredits RBC for next decade



Matt Showalter, academic dean, and Heather Maust, registrar, led the reaccréditation process in 2026

On their April reaccréditation visit to campus, the six-member Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) team which represented six different Bible colleges and seminaries, gave RBC high marks for the strength of its community life and integration of study, worship, and service. RBC is unique as a junior Bible college offering only one degree, an AA in biblical studies that makes transfer to other colleges or online degree completion programs relatively smooth and affordable.

"The site visit went better than we could have hoped," said Matt Showalter, dean, and Heather Maust, registrar, who took the lead in preparing for the accrediting team's visit.



Leon Zimmerman, president, and Jon Showalter, academic dean, led the first accreditation process in 2001

A collage of six photographs showing students engaged in various service projects. Top left: two students raking leaves. Top middle: a band performing on stage. Top right: a group of students smiling for a photo. Middle: a student speaking at a podium. Bottom left: a group of students sitting on a couch in a living room. Bottom middle: two students talking on a walkway. Bottom right: a student with arms raised in a dark setting.

**SERVE WEEK '27**  
*serve · worship · learn · connect*

## Serve Week, June 20-26, 2027

Come join us for a fully planned week of service projects, worship, engaging speakers and connecting with other youth groups.



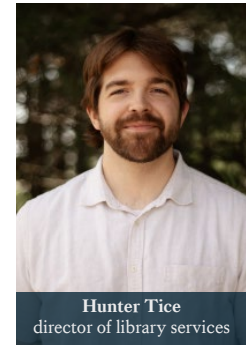
For more information or to register your youth group, scan the QR code or visit [rosedale.edu/serve-week](https://rosedale.edu/serve-week).

Have Questions?  
Contact [serveweek@rosedale.edu](mailto:serveweek@rosedale.edu).

## Staff Transitions



Hunter Tice ('22), a recent graduate of Ohio Dominican University with an MA in English, will become the new director of library services, replacing Reuben Sairs. Tice will also teach Public Speaking while working to complete a degree in library science. Jamison Miller ('23) will begin work as an admissions counselor, replacing Esther Snyder ('22) who has served in that capacity for the past four years. Esther and her husband Mark ('25) will be giving leadership at Oasis Community Church in Lexington, KY. Matt Showalter ('95) is leaving the academic dean's office to serve as president of Rosedale International, and Phil Weber ('79) will step in as interim dean. Rick Griest who has structured and led the Business and Leadership track for the past five years will be moving to an adjunct status.



### Reuben Sairs retires after 25 years as librarian and teacher

"I want to see Anabaptist Christianity nurtured and thriving. RBC is one of the few places where I see that happening," Sairs said, and that's what's kept him at RBC for two and a half decades. Besides his work as librarian Sairs has taught World Religions, Public Speaking, Christian Ethics, Apologetics, Hebrews, Personal Evangelism, Preaching, Anabaptist History and Theology, and the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. Sairs will continue as an adjunct faculty member at RBC along with his work as an associate pastor at London Christian Fellowship.



### 2026 Graduation

We held our 60th annual commencement ceremony to celebrate 40 graduates on May 23. This is the largest graduating class in school history since we've begun conferring associate degrees. Reuben Sairs gave the commencement address.

## 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](https://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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Thanks!

## A LONG WAY FROM HOME

Guest Editorial by  
REUBEN SAIRS

**I'm a long way from home.** I often say I've crossed two lines in life. I became a Christian as a young teenager. For a couple of generations my family were not believers or church goers. After being a Christian for almost 10 years, I associated with the Mennonites.

I knew that second move would be a challenge—I was from a different culture and had already been formed with different ideas about discipleship. However, that last line was crossed 46 years ago!

Why I'm here and why I've stayed are closely connected. It is because of the conviction that an Anabaptist/Mennonite approach to Christian faith is not just valid but preferable. All Christians have to make difficult decisions about doctrine and practice. An Anabaptist approach was the best I could do in my early 20s and remains the best I can do many years later. At the same time, it is very important not to divide the body of Christ—His church, and not just that, but nurture the unity we have in the Holy Spirit. I assume others are doing the best they can with the issues of belief and practice, too.

I teach at RBC and serve as associate pastor at London Christian Fellowship keenly aware that to function as a believer we all need to “do the best we can” at putting our faith together coherently. I want to see an Anabaptist/Mennonite faith flourish and grow. I do not regard the issues that have made this an identifiable movement as optional or secondary.

**New Testament finality.** The New Testament asserts itself in front of the Old Testament. God is no longer exclusively working through a single nation, but calling His people out of all nations, languages and ethnicities. It is obviously His will that we will spread out throughout various systems, nations, groups in order to be the salt of the earth. This approach to the Kingdom is a direct challenge to much of the church.

**Peace.** Peace is not an optional or extra teaching on top of the gospel. It is, rather, the difficult but very explicit teaching of the New Testament. We are to step away from violence in all its forms as best we can.

**Nonconformity.** We don't hear much about this in our churches, but it was a central theme for earlier generations of Mennonites. Christians are called out of the world and will be different. God is 'nonconforming' us. We rightly dispensed with much of the legalism of the past, but we have an ongoing need to understand Romans 12:2 in our time and situation.

My hope is that our churches will hang on, or regain, or become convicted as appropriate about Anabaptism.

