



Out & About

Feb. 25 — Cluster Meeting
at Pike Mennonite, Elida

Feb. 28 — Preach at West
Clinton Mennonite,
Wauseon

Feb. 29 — Leadership Team
Meeting

March 2 — OC and CDC
Pastor Peer Meeting, Grace
Mennonite, Pandora

March 7-9 — Constituency
Leaders Council, Goshen,
Ind.

March 11-12 — Annual
Conference Assembly,
Central Mennonite,
Archbold



Travels and News
from Transitional Conference Leader George O'Reilly
Feb. 25, 2016
pastorgeorgeoreilly@gmail.com

A Most Neglected Commandment

Having come into Mennonite circles from an evangelical background and seminary, despite attempts at understanding this new approach to life and discipleship, I was not always able to quickly "track" the peculiarities of typical "Mennonite theology." During my first pastorate at a Mennonite congregation in Illinois, I found myself personally taking issue with an article on the theme of evangelism by a conference staff person which appeared in a Mennonite publication.

So I took aim at this issue in a sermon without naming the individual but taking care to clearly challenge this line of thinking. I had a fairly high degree of certainty that my "theological approach" was preferable and more correct.

Some months later, when placed on a conference committee, I began to work with this very staff person who was tied to this group. I soon discovered that I had misunderstood seriously this individual's perspective. While I did not at the time identify this in this particular way, I will readily admit now that I had failed to consider carefully a most neglected commandment:

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." — Exodus 20:16 (NIV)

This "most neglected commandment" may seem to some to apply only to judicial matters, but I have come to see it as often and freely violated in relating with sisters and brothers over controversial issues in the life of the Church.

As in my personal example above, in times of controversy over things which we consider crucial theologically, strong feelings can combine with a confident certainty of "having it right" and lead us to forget our obligation not to say of others something which is actually not true. I suppose I would say that over the years I acknowledge my need to admit that God is less impressed with my certainty than I am at times. Furthermore, I must admit that when I assert of a sister or brother some inaccurate error in thought or motivation, the Holy Spirit is grieved over my readiness to perpetuate tension or party-spirit on the basis of my undue certainty in my "correctness." The preservation the unity of the Spirit is a primary recurring theme of Paul's writings, and appears to be the basis of much theological discernment in the life of the body.

When we speak strongly against another with whom we have limited relationship, we should caution ourselves about this most neglected commandment. Especially we should consider whether this neglected command might not have as much to teach us about "robbing another of reputation" in our everyday dealings with one another as it might teach about judicial truthfulness. When we give ourselves to "opposing another," can we not easily fall into excessive censure which is really "bearing false witness"?

Furthermore, if we give ourselves to resisting and censuring an entire group, how can we possibly imagine that assertions of evil motivations or of general error can equally apply to all persons in that group? Should we deceive ourselves in believing we have not violated this most neglected commandment? Perhaps before censure we should engage in one of Paul's calls to relational self-discipline:

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things." — Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

Perhaps if we were to begin with identifying and naming the good in others first, our challenge to them across divisive issues could be more balanced, more fair and even more truthful. Perhaps naming the admirable first would discipline us against neglecting this "most neglected commandment."

