

## Editors' Introduction

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The dynamics of continuity and change in Plain communities are especially evident in the opening articles of this issue of *JPAC*. Joseph Miller's leadership roles at Mennonite Central Committee, an inter-Anabaptist service agency, have given him a front row seat to observe recent Amish relief and development work. Such work, Miller contends, is both an expression of traditional Amish religious values and commitments and a new sort of venture expressing increased Amish agency and decision-making over where and how they will be engaged in helping others beyond their communities. No longer content merely to respond to invitations from others to work in disaster cleanup or pack aid kits for refugees, Amish communities are increasingly initiating and managing their own service efforts. Miller ties these emerging realities to other recent developments, such as the rise of entrepreneurship and the cash and labor flexibility that has attended the shift to off-farm employment in many Amish settlements. Miller's essay documents an important aspect of vitality in contemporary Amish community life.

The growing number of Amish settlements—some 637 in North America in mid-2024, according to the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies—is well known, at least to readers of this journal, and various demographic, economic, and historical studies have sought to discern and explain patterns amid this growth. Equally persistent, but less often noted, has been the decline and dissolution of Amish settlements. Amish historian David Luthy documented settlements that failed in a *Family Life* series that later became a book, first issued in 1985, and in a series of booklets that he produced over the years. In that tradition, sociologist Joe Donnermeyer has built on and continued Luthy's efforts by creating an updated list of extinct Amish settlements and analyzing the most common reasons for their demise.

In a third article, Gerald G. Huesken Jr., a teacher and regional historian in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, uses athletics as a lens to explore the issues of assimilation and resistance to change among Plain Church of the Brethren members in the early twentieth century. Scholars such as Carl



Desportes Bowman and Donald Fitzkee have charted the challenges to nonconformity among Brethren, including those in eastern Pennsylvania who remained the most traditionalist segment of their church well into the twentieth century. The story of an unofficial 1928 football team put together by students at Elizabethtown College, a school then controlled by decidedly Plain Brethren, and the reaction to the team's short-lived existence, offers a memorable window into the dynamics of continuity and change in this group, but does so with several surprises and with all the excitement of a six-game gridiron season.

Mark Dewalt, professor emeritus at Winthrop University, provides an important research note on the rise of Old Order Mennonite schools and their characteristics. Although most research on schooling among Plain groups has focused on Amish schools, Dewalt reminds us of the parallel growth and development of Mennonite schools. As of the 2022–2023 school year, some 427 Old Order Mennonite schools existed in 14 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. Dewalt charts change over time, including a shift to more two-teacher schools and more special education classrooms.

Our series featuring research centers with holdings related to Plain groups continues. This issue includes the two Indiana libraries, Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College and Northern Indiana Amish Library, which has a location in LaGrange County and another near Nappanee.

We conclude with six book reviews, including a review of two quite different memoirs by individuals who grew up in Amish homes, as well as reviews of books on Amish and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women's use of technology, Plain Mennonites in southern Illinois, Low German Mennonites in Latin America, Old Order Mennonite bishop Joseph O. Wenger, and the memoir of a convert to the Amish.

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*JPAC* is dedicated to publishing both empirical and theoretical work related to Plain Anabaptist communities, including, among others, the Amish, conservative Mennonites, Amish-Mennonites, Apostolic Christians, Brethren, Bruderhof, and Hutterites. *JPAC* articles may include emerging issues associated with Plain Anabaptist communities, diverse theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches to the study of Plain Anabaptist groups, and significant research findings about Plain Anabaptist populations.

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*JPAC*'s predecessor at OSU was the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies (JAPAS)*. Articles from volumes 1–6 of *JAPAS* can still be accessed, free of charge, in the Knowledge Bank of the OSU Libraries: <https://kb.osu.edu/handle/1811/54888>.

To discuss ideas for manuscripts for possible publication in the journal, contact Joe Donnermeyer ([donnermeyer.1@gmail.com](mailto:donnermeyer.1@gmail.com)) or Steve Nolt ([nolts@etown.edu](mailto:nolts@etown.edu)). For details about *JPAC*, including author guidelines, visit <https://plainanabaptistjournal.org/index.php/JPAC/about>.