

Faith Mennonite High School Commencement Address
to the CLASS OF 2007
by Mr. Sauder

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU!

Congratulations on your hard work, graduates! I have enjoyed my four years with you here and feel quite honored to be the last one to address you before you claim your permanent hall passes.

At the last graduation in which I took part as a student, at another Mennonite school, the administrator told us to accept our diplomas with the understanding that we must seek to lay down our lives for the world, even to the point of shedding our own blood. I would like to pass that commission on to you now.

Tonight I'd like to encourage you to reflect on one statement and three big words:

First, the statement: True human freedom is freedom from self-interest and freedom to live in the continuously arriving reality of God's kingdom. Life is not all about you. It's all about Jesus.

Next, the vocabulary: What does it mean to be given a diploma in the name of these three common, but heavily freighted, terms: "Faith," "Mennonite," and "High School?" What kind of commission does a diploma like that carry with it? What kind of vocation does it call you to?

To live for your own survival is to live in bondage.

Living for self-preservation makes sense if death is the ultimate reality, the defining fact around which all the lesser realities must be organized. Living for self-preservation makes sense if survival is the ultimate value, if your most important duty before God is to guarantee that you and yours do not get killed.

In this section we'll follow the logic of self-preserving religion and see where it will take you.

If death is to have the last word, if death is the meaning source in your life, then like every other religiously minded person out there, you will serve God by protecting yourself. You'll feel duty bound to save your life by saving it. You're no good to His kingdom if you're dead, are you? The Common Sense answer to that is "No, you're not." And anyone who through fear of death is all his lifetime subject to bondage is going to rely more on Common Sense in deciding moral issues than on the hope of resurrection.

Self-protection takes many forms: Darwinian business practices [remember Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth], legal killing, and strategic gossip are only three among many. Notice as we list those three again, that with each one, this basic truth holds true: **To protect yourself, you must be ready to make others sacrifice.** You must be ready to sacrifice your neighbor's wealth by accumulating it to weave your own financial insulation from poverty. You must be ready to sacrifice your neighbor's security by making a contract, usually involving the payment of protection money, with whichever dynasty or elected officer currently maintains a monopoly on legal violence in your region. You must be ready to sacrifice your neighbor's reputation at those times when the only way to preserve your status is to belittle him.

The list could go on and on. But the most important point I want to make in connection with this sort of sacrifice is that you must be committed to it, in the deepest parts of your soul, in order to go through with it. There will be difficult moments, perhaps when your investments have displaced the resources that another tribe survived on for centuries and you have to briefly glance at painful newspaper pictures of their starving bodies over your morning cup of coffee, or listen to sobering 25 second sound bite analysis of their deadly poverty during which Expert Economists try to explain that their deaths were unavoidable. Or, perhaps your difficult moments will come when those to whom you've paid protection money step out of the bounds of the police officer role that is described in

Romans 13 and begin to declare distant communities, over whom they have no jurisdiction, to be full of evildoers whose destruction by jellied gasoline or other more sophisticated killing technology is our only hope of being saved. It is especially at moments like this, when the human cost of your survival is so high, and the emotional impact can threaten your good conscience, that you will need to rely on your relationship with God. You will need to thank Him for saving your life. Large scale human sacrifice can be unsettling if photos are not sufficiently censored, and you will need to remind yourself regularly that it's really God who is killing your enemies. You will need to do conscience maintenance by doing a reality check, that is a review of Common Sense (the kind of logic common to all members of the race - survival logic) something like this: God is all powerful, God is on my side, Jesus and me are the winning team, God loves me and I live for His Cause, and No sacrifice, however permanently it may be built into the economic insulation between the rich and the poor, or however bloody it may become, is too great for Our cause ("Our" is capitalized there, because it will be a first person plural pronoun that includes you and God).

Furthermore, at some point in your future others may seek to increase their income by moving the gasoline price in your country upward toward something more like it's real global market value, thereby damaging your ability to make payments on your vacation cottage or on the second sport utility vehicle God has been waiting so long to give you (in gratefulness for your past tithes to His church gymnasium building fund). Or, worse yet, evildoers may seek to save their lives or national pride by sacrificing your life or by threatening your threat-based, death-dealing National Security system.

At this point, when you see, listen closely here, when you see that you might die anyhow, when you see that your financial or contractual insulation is breaking down, you may feel your God calling you to lay down your life in order to sacrifice the lives of other humans. Your theology (belief about who God is) will not let you lose your life to reconcile your enemy to God, but will let you risk your life in the noble pursuit of your enemy's blood. This is tragic, of course, and like they say, war is hell, and you will genuinely regret needing to start one, but remember your values. Stay in touch with reality. Your standard of living,

that is, your ability to consume as many resources as you want to before you die, is something to which you have a sacred duty. This will again be a time for deep soul commitment. You will need to live by sight, and not by old-fashioned Sunday-go-to-meeting Nice Guy ethics. Keep your eyes on the facts. Death, and your enemy's intention to visit it on you, must be kept uppermost in your mind. After you have recovered your money- and sword-based distance from the one who is trying to save his life at your expense, you will again have leisure to forgive others, to love all men, and maybe even, perhaps in a voluntary service situation, to suffer a little bit, in carefully measured amounts of course, for people less "fortunate" than yourself. Of course you are under no obligation to help others at all if that in any way interferes with your primary obligation - postponing your death.

Notice the conscience-easing power of the word "fortunate" -- there is no moral connection between your luxury and their poverty; they are merely "unfortunate," while you "happen" to be "more fortunate." [That's the sort of thinking that Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus is built to challenge. The rich man is not accused by Abraham of having directly taken anything from Lazarus. Abraham merely says the rich man "receivedst thy good things." Jesus could not have made a clearer or stronger statement of His own belief that the rich are morally responsible for the poor than to put a surprised rich man in hell. There's no mention of any legally recognized crime on the part of that rich man. Abraham then says that no one reading the Torah or the prophets should be surprised that there's hell to pay for what is today called a "high standard of living."]

True freedom is in living for something more important than life itself.

If you aren't living for something you'd gladly die for, you're not very alive. Only what's worth dying for is worth living for. Don't spend your life on you; invest it in the kingdom. What is life, anyway? To judge by the way most of our neighbors live, one might guess that life is a longevity contest. Don't enter that contest! Don't waste your life by saving it as long as you can, and then losing it. Instead, invest your life by losing it for Jesus.

Don't become someone that this human-sacrificing, Wordly Economy, or Way of Life, (or Standard of Living) can hire, promote, and envy. I'm calling you to become conformable unto the prosecution and execution of Christ so that you may know the power of His resurrection. Become a character that the oppressed of this world, those who are economically and socially invisible, can respect and look up to.

Dear friends, I'm begging you tonight to consider committing yourselves, body and soul, to a Way of Life (the Economy of God) that will only make sense if there be, as the Apostle Paul and a few others now long dead have claimed, a "resurrection from the dead."

Now before we go any further, I must make it very clear that this perspective that I'm recommending is only accessible through faith. This is not something that will stand up under the sort of routine reality checks that any self-respecting person who lives by Common Sense will naturally subject it to.

What I'm recommending is the New Testament perspective. The Resurrection Perspective. Follow me closely here. You've heard every Biblical term I am about to use in the upcoming section on a weekly basis from the time you were an infant. And it is precisely for that reason that what I have to say seems to most "born againers" to be not merely extreme or wrongheaded but simply in-credible - not capable of being believed. You live, here in southern Pennsylvania, around enemy-hating, religiously conservative Evangelicals who have a superb ability to use NT language itself to cover up the Gospel's original, world-inverting meaning.

According to most religious people, even many who name the name of Christ, it is possible, in fact, it is necessary to "do evil that good may come." There is a good kind of evil, they believe, though when they mention it they always call it "necessary" evil. They cannot even imagine, let alone believe, that the universe is arranged in such a way that good will triumph without the aid of strategically administered evil. They say they are in touch with enough facts to demonstrate that careless or unlimited love and forgiveness can do nothing but long term damage to the moral order of the universe. Vengeance, they believe, is a more basic reality, and therefore much more effective for salvaging our fallen world,

than forgiveness. It is unrealistic, they say, to forgive people who might hurt you again, or to love people whom you know will not love you back. They believe, in the depths of their souls, that the deep fabric of the universe consists in the law of retaliation and that in the end it is that law - and not the scandalously forgiving love of God - which will save the world itself. They take no note of the fact that the first man God promised to protect with vengeance was a murderer on whom God refused to take vengeance. They don't seem to notice that God did not give mankind permission to kill killers until after He'd tried it Himself with a global water eraser and determined never to do it again. It is endlessly significant, I believe, that when God announced the termination of His use of that method of ridding the world of evil, He took a bow, which everyone could recognize as a weapon of war, and aimed it UPWARD, away from man, toward Himself!

Enter Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus made the claim that He Himself is the most accurate picture of Who God really is and of how God really salvages the world. Well, it was soon obvious that this man was capable of doing everything God's Messiah would need to be able to do in order to rid the world of the evil people and save the good people. When they realized the extent of his miracle-working power, people thronged Him and He began saying very strange things. He began to say that people looking for security and success should stay away from Him. He said that the only people that were capable of following His way of life were people who determined to live in such a way that the Roman method of capital punishment, specifically the horrible method that they reserved for treason, would become an inevitable part of their future.

If a very intelligent but intentionally homeless ex-carpenter walked around your area talking like that, casting out demons, and refusing to give a straight answer when asked about the source of his authority, would you consider Him sane? How is it then that most of the people who bear the name "Christian" today are convinced that common sense, the survival logic with which all people are born, is deeply compatible with discipleship?

Word # 1:

What does it mean to have "faith" in Jesus?

For the writers of the New Testament, to have faith in Jesus was to believe that His Way was God's Way. That to participate in the life of God here on earth, to have fellowship with God, is to refuse, like God in Jesus, to make people pay for their own sins. To sacrifice oneself sooner than to condemn another.

Jesus' life and death are not just the means by which God salvages the world, they are the method. The Way of Jesus and "The Way" of the disciples in the book of Acts (9:2, for example) are one and the same. They are still the way God reconciles the world now and we are to take part in and promote that reconciliation. We are here and now part of Christ's suffering Body. The bread we break in remembrance of Him is our means of communicating to each other our identity as part of the visibly discernible Body of Christ.

The appendix to the Disciples' Prayer in Matthew 6:14,15 and the latter part of 1st Peter 2 are only two of many New Testament passages that establish a moral link between God's undeserved love for us and our unconditional love for others.

For the author of the first epistle general of John, God is love, and we should be like Him. In fact, we shall be like Him when we finally see Him as He is. The opposite of love, according to this epistle, is murder. Not apathy. **There was and is no more thorough way of denying that Jesus is God come in the flesh than to demand that another's life be taken to save yours.** Jesus is our pattern. He died so that we can be resurrected after our sufferings - not so that we can bypass them!

For the first centuries of Christian history, the incarnation and the resurrection were the primary topics in public and private worship of Jesus. For Christians at that time, suffering unjustly was not something they had to meditate on or imagine. Their daily lives were lives of suffering. True Christianity was and still is most easily accessible to slaves and other victims of the impersonal industries that powerful men live by - the fine food industry, the tourist industry, the weapons industry, the sex industry, the clothing industry, and many more, all driven by price-manipulating international merchants who know how to

turn the desperate needs of others to the benefit of their own felt need for infinite accumulation. For early Christians, cross bearing was a daily reality. When they lived out the Beatitudes: when they mourned oppression instead of quietly cooperating with it through pious resignation, or hungered and thirsted for a righteous world, or showed mercy even where the laws of profit-making prohibited it, their witness was a constant threat to the carefully groomed consciences of the powerful. They stood in daily danger of being executed for insisting that the lynched Jesus was more worthy of their unqualified obedience than the living Caesar.

Enter Constantine. A genius and an emperor. He almost single-handedly changed the meaning of cross-bearing for all of the centuries since then. His alleged vision of a cross in the sky next to a visible promise of military victory (during his campaign to steal someone else's portion of the divided Roman Empire) changed the primary meaning of that perpendicular symbol from a gallows to a sword.

By the 1100's, the Latin word for "taking up the cross," the word "crusade," had come to be seen as the perfect term to describe an activity that was the **precise opposite** of Jesus' activity on the cross and of the New Testament understanding of what it means to have faith in Jesus.

By now, Christendom was used to worshipping a God whose presence and saving work in the world were thought to be visible in the same way that the work of the old pagan gods had been: it was assumed that God loves and saves good people by hating and destroying bad people. This also meant that suffering for challenging the false righteousness of a peasant-starving Economy and an allegiance-demanding Emperor was now considered to be as unnecessary and abnormal as it had first been considered normal and normative for all Jesus-followers. No, more than that! It was now considered treasonous to question, especially in the name of God, the righteousness of the National Security project that was set up to kill in His name numberless people made in His image.

By what kind of theological wizardry was the primary meaning of the cross so piously canceled out? The original Gospel message was that even God Himself can more effectively

conquer evil and save humans by dying than by killing. By what mental gymnastics, you may be asking, was this meaning so exactly reversed?

Enter Anselm. A genius and an archbishop. The exact shape of his agenda and quality of his motives are nearly as widely debated today as those of Constantine. I will not take the time to investigate them here. But as with Constantine, the long-term effects of his legacy are indisputable. Anselm emphasized the **uniqueness**, I repeat, the unrepeateable, one-of-a-kind, pointless-to-even-imitate, **UNIQUENESS** of Christ's sacrifice to such a degree that it came to be seen as the basis for our self-preserving, massacre-making crusades. Personal, cross-remembering suffering on the part of Christians was now theologically limited to those sufferings unrelated to contact with enemies. Retaliation was now restored to its preChristian priority over forgiveness. Of course, given the prevalence of common sense, the definition of "saving faith" had been decaying long before Anselm's appearance. But now the decay had official, theological warrant.

Now more than ever since the age of Constantine, the cross itself came to be considered a holy, grotesquely fascinating object of worship. Centuries before, the Roman catacombs had been loaded with symbols of Christian faith and illustrations of Christian worship. The "fish signs" were very common. But the symbol of the cross is nowhere to be found among them. Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame. His followers did not avoid the cross and commemorate the shame.

But after Constantine's era, for a fallen Christianity that fully intended to avoid any and all suffering, but most especially unjust suffering (and it was just this kind of suffering that Augustine's Just War Theory, coming on the heels of Constantine, was designed to prevent), the New Testament's central message, about the disciple's personal relationship to the suffering Jesus, had to be fundamentally changed. The New Testament's primary thrust was that Christians are those who, because they believe in God through faith in Jesus, participate both in unjust suffering and in resurrection. Now, in Anselm's day, the tendency that had been at work since Constantine, to speculate on just how Jesus' death was a death "for our sins," and therefore uniquely different from our cross-bearing, moved

beyond the speculation stage and assumed the central position in the theology of the war-making churches that it has claimed there ever since. Yes, the New Testament had included language about sin-bearing, but not until Anselm's book, Why God Became Man, was that metaphor given sufficient emphasis to theologically legitimate the idea that Jesus' suffering guaranteed our resurrection even if we chose not to suffer with him here. Anselm carefully disallowed the New Testament metaphors that pictured the crucifixion as a revelation of the fact that the powers of this world are rebelling against their Creator.

The Protestants, remember, coming five centuries after Anselm, made no substantial changes to the Catholic understanding of salvation. Cosmetic changes, yes. They threw out transubstantiation and prayers to the saints, etc. But they paid Anselm the highest of all possible compliments by taking his theory as settled, timeless, unquestionable fact, and then, instead of crediting him for his innovation, claiming that they had gotten it straight from the text of the New Testament. Thus for both Catholicism and Protestantism, what it means to "have faith in Jesus" is to achieve mental consent to certain narrowly defined statements about the legal deal God was cutting with himself on the cross. It's about how He invented and executed a "plan of salvation" by which to escape the moral dilemma He has of figuring out how to get totally depraved people into a sinless heaven. Of course today Catholics and Baptists will disagree over whether your parents' mental consent to the plan of salvation is or is not sufficient basis for your baptism. But that debate barely scratches the surface of the huge issue that initially divided Constantinian, Anselmian Christendom from the Swiss Brethren and Mennonite Jesus-imitators who appeared in the 1500's.

Word # 2:

What does it mean to be "Mennonite?"

Well, perhaps a lightning speed review of God's first covenant with a peculiar people would provide us with context. In the Torah, the Law, God outlined a pattern of land ownership, debtor redemption, and Jubilee that guaranteed that his people's sinful oppression of each other would always be local, short term, and on a small scale. Far from

being Communism, His pattern was equally distant from today's unregulated international Capitalism. Disproportionate land ownership was never to become legally irreversible and thus a structural part of the economy. Justice and mercy were the goals.

God also instituted a detailed animal sacrifice system to hold the people accountable for individual sin against Him and each other. But we have no record of the Israelites ever observing a 50th year Jubilee. That sort of thing would have violated common sense. We read in Nehemiah 8:13-17 that Jews returning from exile kept the first Feast of Booths since the days of Moses' successor, Joshua. Think about it. What sense does it make, when you have a sturdy house to live in, to annually sleep outside in stick houses? What's the point? It makes you feel ridiculously vulnerable. Answer: The point was to make God's people feel vulnerable enough to remember that HE was their Savior and that they could not rely on financial or military or architectural power to save them from their enemies.

What happened to the teachings of the Torah? The portions of it that called for justice and special care of the poor were ignored, and the sacrifices were vigorously maintained in order to compensate for that.

What happened to the teachings of the New Testament? The portions of it that called for believers in Israel's God to imitate the fatal vulnerability of Jesus were ignored, and the sacrifice of Christ was doctrinally promoted to compensate for that.

The Old Testament prophets claimed that God cared more about mercy than about animal sacrifice. Politically powerful and religiously conservative men, following the logic of their faith in a God who favors the powerful, killed the prophets to save their kingdom, which they equated with God's kingdom.

Jesus claimed that God cared more about healing than about the observance of ordinances and claimed that the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection would replace that of the temple. Politically powerful and religiously conservative men, following the logic of their faith in a God who favors the powerful, killed Him.

Anabaptists claimed that God cared more about enemy-reconciling imitation of Jesus' life-surrendering love than about the crusading defense of the correct doctrines about

Jesus. They did not set out to be heretics any more than did Jesus or the prophets. But they refused to let the medieval doctrine of Christ's sacrifice serve as a substitute for faith-based, self-sacrificing love of enemies. And that put them theologically much further away from both Catholics and Protestants than either of those two are from each other.

The term "Anabaptist" means "rebaptizer" and describes someone who identifies violence-justifying Christendom as being itself AntiChristian and a bigger obstacle to communicating the love of God to the world than simple paganism ever could be. Built into the very meaning of the word "Anabaptist" is their theological rejection of any human government's claim to represent the will of God on earth. They saw all Christians who considered the will of God and National Security to be similar as people who needed to convert to Jesus and be baptized. Mennonites who grow up today in a Christianity that applies Biblical sacrifice and redemption language to Total War are firmly situated in the very same theological stance that was invented and maintained by the persecutors of their ancestors. Anabaptists were people who did not recognize Christendom as being a part of the Body of Christ.

The term "Mennonite" today refers to a denomination within Christendom. "Denominations" are names of separately organized churches within a common theological heritage. The Mennonite acceptance of the word "denomination" to describe themselves signals a loss of theological self-awareness. In other words, they now see themselves as just another instance of the Christianity that persecuted their group into existence centuries ago. Those persecutors were conscience-driven Conservatives who punished Anabaptists for vocally opposing the gospel of Jesus to war-based Christendom.

I am not suggesting that Mennonites should set out to be heretics again. It is clear that Protestant and Catholic churches are undergoing a rapid loss of many of the assumptions by which they justified war in the past. The Anabaptist leaven did leaven the lump a bit.

But I do think that we need to be especially careful today not to maintain outward separation from other Christians while aligning ourselves with the theology of survival and

common sense that denies the power of the resurrection by celebrating war. This temptation to a miniChristendom called Mennodom (we owe the concept to John Yoder and the word itself to Javan Lapp), this tendency to justify those killing projects that benefit us and our prosperity while condemning those that threaten our lives, can actually lead us to an even more complex and loathsome unfaithfulness than that against which our forefathers publicly witnessed all the way to the stake.

Christendom has claimed the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for itself while insisting on personally shedding the blood of its human enemies as well in order to redeem (save) itself.

Mennodom, at least the part of it thriving contentedly at the heart of the world's only current superpower, is on the verge of going even further. We are tempted today to claim the spiritual benefits of Christ's sacrifice for us, in addition to the material benefits that accompany the shedding of the blood of foreigners **while claiming exemption from joining the uniformed killing services ourselves**. The enormity of this position, if we were to adopt it, is hard to grasp. We are losing our conscience against war - our consciousness that the resurrection of Jesus shows that God gives eternal salvation to those who give up trying to save their own lives. But even while we demand the privilege (the "private law") of military exemption, we insist that this not be interpreted as a suggestion on our part that other "denominations" who claim to be disciples of Jesus should second-guess their survival-based ethics. We don't risk our own lives in warmaking activities but we do "have pleasure in them that do them."

It is one thing to risk your life to take your enemy's life. It is quite another to claim conscientious objection to taking your enemy's life yourself while publicly proclaiming your belief that the work of the military is more effectual in redemption - in ridding the world of evil - than the cross-carrying work of congregations that imitate Jesus.

People who believe that it is the military that really has the salt of the earth function, and is the true preserver of human life, are engaging in a thorough and exact reversal of the Gospel that turned the first century world upside down. Roman Christians would not have been persecuted for preaching merely a "plan of salvation" or life after

death if they had limited the meaning of Jesus' death to that. Pagan religions around them were preaching that sort of thing all the time. No, Christians were persecuted because they believed that after the violent powers of this world tried to silence Jesus by killing Him in the name of law and order, God's decision to raise Jesus from the dead was a once for all announcement that Jesus' teachings and actions did indeed bring the true Kingdom of God. That is why they used the most politically loaded terminology available at the time to describe the significance of Jesus, and that, in turn, is why they were persecuted. They couldn't pledge allegiance both to Caesar and to Jesus. They couldn't both participate in the enemy-reconciling sufferings of Christ's Body and accept the enemy-sacrificing protection of a Worldly Power that did not acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

We need to ask ourselves tonight how the beliefs of the Conference of East and West Prussian Mennonites must have decayed over the decades of prosperity in order for them to be able to send this formal group pledge to Adolf Hitler on September 10, 1933:

“. . . [we] pledge, for our part, joyful cooperation in the building of our Fatherland from the power of the Gospel, faithfully from the Motto of our fathers: Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is already laid, Jesus Christ."

We need to examine ourselves to see if we be in the faith. Common sense, the instinct to equate our survival with God's work in the world, threatens to make the faith that originally produced our tradition appear absurd to us. If that happens, the generation after you will not merely reject the gospel, they will not even "have ears to hear it."

One South German Mennonite newspaper around that time printed numerous articles that said the Book of Revelation predicted a German victory.

James Peter Regier, who has studied this part of Mennonite history more than most, says "that the biggest flaw of the Mennonites was not any immediate error. Instead, it was the natural consequence of years of gradual theological adaptations and compromises to better fit within the German community."

So what? What can we do?

You cannot afford to spend very many hours doing what we have just done here - investigate what's going wrong with our witness to the world. Investigation is indispensable but it is also impotent.

Grouchy prophets wound their people. Weeping prophets insist that God send down healing waters. Remember Isaiah 62:7. Don't give God a break, don't cut him no slack, give HIM no peace day nor night till He make our congregations and our school and our homes a praise in the earth! Demand a blessing! Wrestle His angel. Weep at him furiously like Jeremiah. Don't let Him get away with leaving his people in the shape they're in! Don't let Him spew us out of His mouth! Beg Him to either turn up the heat on us or move us to coldness. Our complacency is deadly!

Come and die the Master calleth, Come and die! You may feast at Jesus' table or at Mammon's table, but not at both.

Some of you are as full as Moses was of righteous indignation at his people's complacency. Maybe some of you will be tempted to go out and kill Egyptians or at least tip a couple of Mennonite canoes. But if you make those harmful mistakes, don't say you learned them at FMH. What you've heard here for four years from all your teachers, and what I've walked up here tonight to say is: Follow hard after Jesus. Crucify the flesh. Hide yourself, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your everything in Jesus. He may or may not choose to call a Moses or a prophet or a martyr from among you. But this much we know: no one can preach unless he is sent. Pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His vineyard. There are so many potential disciples of Jesus in the Christian churches today that the fields appear to be white already unto harvest!

Word #3:

What is a Mennonite High School For?

Mennonite high schools have the opportunity to give adolescent minds a chance to gain critical distance on the Mennonite tradition in a question-friendly environment.

The New Testament is not about common sense. It's about faith. That means that it teaches a way of life that it is impossible to grow into. You must **convert** into the kingdom of God. The New Testament is all about choice.

Too many children growing up in supposedly Anabaptist (adult believers only) churches and homes don't get a choice. They're not given enough distance on what their parents stand for to have sufficient time to knowledgeably choose or knowledgeably reject it. We have far too many cookie cutter Mennonite youth these days who've never been given room to ask the questions and pose the challenges that always accompany a person's entry into a demanding Way of Life. And we have far too many youth in our County today who not only have no idea who they are, they have no idea how to find out. Their identity is summed up in one bitter word: they are NOTMENNONITES. They don't know who they are, they only know who they aren't.

Yeah, but what's this have to do with you graduates tonight? This: Take what you've learned here about giving people room and time to take second and third looks at things about their churches that take time to understand. Things that can only make sense to people who are alienated from the world. In other words, things that only nonconformists can happily participate in.

Your parents sent you to high school instead of wordlessly pressuring you into "rumspringa." Some plain churches want their children to hurry up and be bad so they can get around to making an adult decision to be good forever. Some just brainwash their children into groupthink and call it nonconformity. Your parents picked a third option. Not a perfect one. There are no perfect ones. But I want you to be grateful for the gift your parents gave you in letting you come here, and I want you to determine to be a mobile high school to the adolescents you meet in the future. Let them know that you're not scared of questions, precisely because you have not coasted into mindlessly parroted beliefs but because you have **wrestled your way through Faith**. Congratulations!

I love you. Go with God.