

## Content and Controversy Richard Taylor

“Is it not awful to have so many of the good columns of the Banner filled with such poetry as we get? More than one full page was published on Eddyism in the last issue. This thing should be stopped. We object to such selections as Whately’s article and Butler’s article from his Editorials and some raw stuff against eternal security, why don’t we use the better method of putting in some thing better? And crowding this other stuff out – the expulsive power of a new and better effective method of procedure.” (W. G. Gehman to E. N. Cassel, February 4, 1941)

W. G. Gehman gave a rare expression of what sounds like criticism and frustration with the Gospel Banner. His comments were made in a personal letter to E. N. Cassel. No such negative statements would be made in a more public setting. Statements like these would be viewed as divisive and disloyal. Unity and loyalty were highly rated values among the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. So such negative thoughts were not voiced openly in the pages of the Gospel Banner and were rare even in the public minutes of the various denominational meetings. Gehman’s private opinion is pretty clear. A review of the Gospel Banner and a close look at editorial comments and editorial changes also indicates that not everyone was happy with what was appearing. Sometimes, one must read “between the lines” to pick up the sense of dissatisfaction.

Why was there controversy about the content of the Gospel Banner? How did the content change over the years? Did the Gospel Banner actually unite the denomination or reveal fractures in denominational unity?

The Gospel Banner was birthed in 1878. Religious periodicals were not uncommon. Even local newspapers carried religious news and Christian writings. Most of these periodicals had a general audience with general content intended for a general audience. The problem such a periodical has is like the problem faced by a television news program. The goal is to present news. But, it must do more. It must present the news in a way that will be attractive and interesting to its viewers. The program costs a lot of money which comes from advertisers. Unless a lot of people are viewing the program, advertisers will not buy time and the program cannot afford to continue. So, it is not enough to present the news but the news must be presented in a way that will attract an audience or they will no longer afford to air the program. A general religious periodical seeks to present writing and content that will bless those who read it. But, the periodical had expenses that must be met. So, the content had to be such that people would buy the periodical to read what was in it. Articles and news items must be

chosen to draw and maintain the attention of the readers. If no one bought the periodical, the periodical could not afford to publish.

A denominational publication was not confronted with the same dilemma. Yes, it needed readers. And yes, the bills had to be paid. But the audience was not a general one but rather people who belonged to the denomination. The content of the publication did not need to draw a general audience but would need to be relevant and attractive to the members of the denomination who would read the periodical. The goals of publication would be confined to the interests and needs of the denominational reader. If the purpose of a denominational periodical was not to serve the needs of its denomination, then what was the point? If readers did not think the articles were relevant to them and serve their needs, they would stop reading and stop subscribing.

According to J. A. Huffman, the commitment to a denominational periodical began early before the series of mergers creating the Mennonite Brethren in Christ took place.

The launching of the Gospel Banner, which has ever since been the official organ of the church, came about in this way. A conference of United Mennonites was in session in Natawasago Township, Simcoe County, Ontario, from June 5-7, 1878. The need of a periodical was discussed and a plan for the publication of such a periodical was outlined by Elder Daniel Brenneman. After the discussion the following resolution was passed: "Resolved, That D. Brenneman will proceed at once with the editing and printing of a church paper called The Gospel Banner, to be printed at Goshen, Indiana." (Huffman, History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, page 166)

And so it began. Brenneman outlined his intentions and goals in the first edition of The Banner.

Our object shall be to see well to it that the Gospel Banner shall be a purely religious journal, and that anything of a vain or trifling nature shall not be admitted to its columns...

Whilst it shall be an object to guard against the sin of selfishness and vain sectarianism, the Gospel Banner shall yet be a plain and free outspoken exponent of the faith and doctrines of the Bible as understood by the United Mennonites, without any design of marring the feeling, or of gratifying the selfish principles and vain desires of our fellow men... (Gospel Banner, Vol. 1, Num. 1, July 1878.)

What would be included in the periodical would relate to the denomination. The magazine would be an “exponent of the faith and doctrines of the Bible as understood by the United Mennonites.” The general Christian public or other denominations were not the intended audience. A denominational periodical would serve as “connective tissue” between the churches. Without apology, the doctrines and practices of the denomination would be promoted and encouraged. If a reader did not appreciate the doctrines and practices, they were in the wrong denomination. The editors of the Gospel Banner would never want to discourage anyone from reading the magazine but it was clearly not their purpose to hold people who held a different theological outlook.

The masthead of volume one, number one, laid out the major identifying emphases.

Devoted to the dissemination of Gospel Truth, Vital Godliness and Experiential and Practical Religion.

Some of its leading features are: That Christians are a Separate people from the World – “A peculiar people.” That it is inconsistent with the Spirit of Christ which is in them to engage in Warfare. Also, that it conflicts with the teaching of the Bible to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” by belonging to Secret Organizations... Recognizes Baptism of Believers only. Also, recognizes Feet Washing as a command to the believers. (Gospel Banner, volume 1, number 1, page 1)

The initial publication contained the contents that were to flow from the stated emphases. Page 1 included an original poem entitled, “The Gospel Banner,” and a sermon by Brenneman from 2 Kings 4:26, “Is it well with thee?” Page 2 contained correspondence, a report of a trip to Canada, followed by letters from various people. Page 4 brought an editorial which explained the purpose of the Banner and what is probably to be called fill, i.e., pithy paragraphs with spiritual messages. Page 6 presented the Youth’s Department, edited by Brenneman’s son, Timothy. Also, the report of the minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference of the United Mennonites was printed followed by more fill. Obituaries appeared on page 8 with more fill, the list of subscribers, an advertisement for a hymn book and finally train schedules for the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad and The Cincinnati, Wabash and Michigan Railroad.

Presumably, the content is what Brenneman envisioned for the Banner. The content of the following volumes changed little and for many years to follow, would be very similar.

While the new year did not bring radically different content, the emphases of the Banner were refined and redefined.

Devoted to the dissemination of Gospel Truth, Vital Godliness and Experimental and Practical Religion.

Its most prominent theme shall be, "Holiness to the Lord."

Its leading or characteristic features, Separation from the world in all its departments of life. Strict submission and obedience to all His ordinances and commandments, and the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ, upon Gospel principles.

Basis.- "The apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ the chief corner stone."

Purpose.- "Contending earnestly for the faith – once delivered to the Saints."

Peculiarities.- Non-resistance; Non-swearing of oaths; Anti-secrecy; Anti-Rum and Tobacco; Adult Baptism; Open Communion and Feet Washing

Motto.-- The Honor of God and the Salvation of men.

This set of editorial guidelines was included in the masthead for over 30 years until 1909 when it no longer appears.

The denominational mergers which took place between 1879 and 1883 had little effect on the content of the Banner. The January, 1887, carried a recognizable package of content: Page 1 – sermon – Filled with the Spirit, Page 4 – Our Field of Labor – (reports of work), Page 6 – Temperance Department, Page 8 – editorial, Page 11 – Testimonials, Page 14 – more articles, and Page 15 – advertising.

In 1886, Jacob D. Detwiler, from the Canadian Conference, replaced founding editor Daniel Brenneman. Two years later in 1888, he was replaced by another Canadian, H. S. Hallman. Hallman would serve as editor for nearly 20 years. Hallman's introductory comments show what he saw as the task. "The question was brought to my mind: How can the Banner be made most interesting? I know a great deal rests on the editor, still if the editor does all he can and the readers do nothing, the end will not be accomplished. Each reader has a part to act. Some are called to pray, some to write short spicy articles and others to solicit subscribers." (Gospel Banner, volume 11, number 21, November, 1888)

While the focus of this paper is on the content of the Banner, the printing and publication of the Banner was a central concern when the Banner was discussed at the General Conference. The costs were significant and needed subsidizing. Finding the printer who would be most economical and paying the bills were continuing concerns. So, Hallman draws attention to the need for good material and more subscribers. More

subscribers would mean more income. But, the Banner showed little change in its format and the sort of articles which were printed.

Following the turn of the century, subtle signs seem to indicate that changes were occurring bringing new expectations for the Banner. These changes and perhaps some of the controversy may have originated in the Pennsylvania Conference. Because differences of opinion were rarely articulated openly, the problems were not put into print. One has to observe the events and often has to read between the lines. In the years before and after 1900, the Pennsylvania conference formed an attachment to A. B. Simpson and what would eventually be known as the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Albert Funk was rising in the leadership of this new movement. Funk was from Hereford and acquainted with the men who had helped to form the Pennsylvania conference. C. H. Brunner, who knew Funk, had even taken correspondence courses from the Missionary Training College, the preparation school for the CMA movement. Brunner was being exposed to another view of sanctification. Harold Shelly writes, "Undoubtedly it was Brunner who steered the Conference towards the teachings of Albert B. Simpson, whose Four-fold Gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King, he promoted." (Harold P. Shelly, *The Bible Fellowship Church*, page 164). In 1903, the Annual Conference of Pennsylvania resolved, "That we as a Conference unitedly protest against higher percentages as well as against more books of theories, arts, etc., in our Reading Course and to substitute some book on the deeper life in Christ instead of 'Lessons in Holiness.'" Pennsylvania had begun to move away from the holiness emphasis that had formed denominational doctrines. This holiness emphasis was reflected in the content of the Banner. One can almost predict a growing fracture in the denomination.

What was brewing beneath the surface appeared to come to light at the 1908 General Conference.

On, or about Sept. 1, 1908 charges were preferred against the Editor which compelled the Chairman of the Executive Committee to call a Meeting which met on Sept. 14th, 1908 in Berlin, with the object of considering the charges. Owing to the way in which the charges were worded and made they were not sustained, but we are grieved with our Editor for persisting in refusing to comply with the request of the Committee, by avoiding to publish such articles in the Banner as tend to controversies and misunderstandings more than for unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. Whereupon H. S. Hallman agreed to submit to the ruling of Committee until General Conference.

After further consideration, Hallman agreed to continue as the editor until January, 1909. 1909 brought a new editor, C. H. Brunner, and a new publisher / editor, W. B. Musselman, leaders from the Pennsylvania Conference. Of note is the fact that the masthead with its statement of doctrinal values which had appeared for nearly 30 years without change was gone.

Brunner gave expression to his editorial intentions.

I don't believe in making apologies neither in the paper nor in the pulpit, but I wish to earnestly ask the prayers as well as the hearty co-operation of the readers of the Banner as it is the aim and object of the Banner to teach a full Gospel and to advocate a standard of complete redemption in Christ. Can we find a reason why the Gospel Banner should rank with the foremost religious papers of the country in the purity of its doctrines and clear cut lines of sanctification and separation from the world? Let us make it straightforward and radical without becoming fanatical. Uncompromising and yet full of love, unsparing in the denunciation of sin and yet tender as the compassionate heart of Jesus. Who will help to make it such? Let us hear of the victories God has given you. Reporting defeats are an encouragement to nobody but the devil...

Perhaps some posturing is buried in these words: no apologies, a full gospel, complete redemption. Some changes seemed to be in the works.

Brunner continued his editorial leadership for another three years. In 1912, without explanation, his name disappears as editor to be replaced by the words, published and edited by the Union Gospel Press. This would of course be W. B. Musselman. What explains the sudden disappearance of C. H. Brunner as editor? Could it be a growing criticism that led him to believe he should step aside? The silence seems to tell a story.

The minutes of the 1912 General Conference record the minutes of the Executive Committee which indicate that the issues had quickly come to a head. Brunner began his editorial work in January, 1909, but he and Musselman soon requested a meeting in August. The record stated,

Whereas, Eld. W. B. Musselman, publisher of the Gospel Banner, and Eld. C. H. Brunner, editor, have felt that they could no longer serve in their respective positions in consequence of some misunderstanding in regard to their rights and duties, which were not clearly defined by the last General Conference, and in consequence have tendered their resignations.  
Resolved, That we accept their resignations, which shall take effect as soon as arrangements can be made and not later than January 1, 1910.

Apparently, the 1910 resignations were not applied. The arrangement continued through the 1912 General Conference. At that conference, what was percolating became evident.

Another Executive Committee meeting was called in November, 1911. The 1912 Conference Minutes make note of this meeting.

This meeting was called owing to difficulties concerning doctrine, failure of associate editors in their duties, and apparent failure of the Executive Committee to come to the help of the publishers.

Apparently, the rift was widening. A new editor, Jasper A. Huffman, would now be called to take the reins. He was a college and seminary graduate and would later receive an honorary doctorate from Taylor University. It was perhaps the hope that he would be able to give leadership that would end the apparent turmoil. The first edition of 1913 carried his name as editor and his editorial introduction. He wrote:

The ideal Church Periodical contains many original articles from the ministers and members of the Church. These are earnestly solicited. The Gospel Banner is the property of the M. B. C. Church and it is our only paper. Its success means success to the Church, and its failure would mean failure to the Church, likewise. Let every man, woman and child consider himself or herself a part of the Gospel Banner Concern, and no prophet shall be required to predict the results.

It shall be the policy of the Periodical to represent fairly and equally all the interest of the Church throughout. It shall not represent one department of work, or one section, at the expense of the other. From the General Conference down – the Annual Conferences, the Presiding Elders, the Ministers, and the laity, let all seek to make this Periodical their “Banner”. It should not only be eagerly read in every Mennonite home, but can easily be placed into the home of many other, by a little effort.

While personalities and undue controversy is discouraged, considerable latitude will be given in the discussion of worthy subjects. Honest convictions, which are scriptural, should be voiced through these columns. The fundamental principles of our faith should be declared, clearly and fearlessly. If our Church has a mission, that mission should be carried out aggressively.

Such an aggressive policy, as is here suggested, may startle a little at first; drive from ease and retirement some who have settled down into inactivity; may cause some to examine anew the foundation of their faith; but cannot fail to work out larger things for the church, and for the interest of Christ’s kingdom. (The Gospel Banner, volume 36, number 1, page 2)

By 1916, the issues had heated up again. It would seem that not only theological issues were bringing tension but also regional rivalry. Huffman's book, published in 1920, did not even mention two significant recent accomplishments in the Pennsylvania Conference, the publication of the Rose of Sharon hymnal and the circulation of the Eastern Gospel Banner. Articles and information from Pennsylvania seemed to be minimized. Perhaps the Pennsylvania Conference felt it was being neglected.

The last issue of the Banner in 1916 carried remarks that show how strained things had become. It carried no information relating to the Pennsylvania Conference.

Our policy in the future will be the same as in the past. We want to keep The Gospel Banner clean. By this we do not mean that there shall not be liberty exercised in expressing ourselves in matters where there is not perfect agreement. We need the rod of chastisement, and let any exemplary person wield it relative to matters of doctrine or practice. There are some subjects over which we can afford to quibble a little, but on the great, fundamental doctrines of Christian faith we cannot afford to unsettle even the weakest Christian. We should remember what Jesus said about offending one of His "little ones. (The Gospel Banner, volume 39, number 50)

The publishers notes on page 10 of the same edition carried the following declaration, "The Union Gospel Printing Company, Cleveland, Ohio, has from henceforth NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH THIS "GOSPEL BANNER." The editor continued by stating, "It appears that there have been two parties, for some years, and each party apparently saw the weakness of the other party's representatives and, for reasons best known to themselves, each part felt responsible to oversee 'the Banner matter.' It therefore is very evident that each party should in reality be, and have the unrestricted liberty of being, responsible in the fullest sense of the term. Hence a Banner for each party can only prove a blessing until --?"

With the new year in 1917 came the publication of the Eastern Gospel Banner with C. H Brunner as editor. It seems that the Pennsylvania Conference had decided to launch its own version of the Banner and put an end to the turmoil. Brunner's first editorial offered no explanation for the beginning of the new publication. The silence may again carry the message of the discontent. He wrote:

The Eastern Gospel Banner will retain the name Gospel Banner in honor of the first and original Gospel Banner...

This the first issue of the Eastern Gospel Banner. It can not be called a perfect "Sample" of what the following issues are supposed to be. However, the general makeup, the size, the number of pages, and the material all foreshadow its expected future fairly well. Its actual consistency in sight is comparatively small, yet we predict that each issue will contain a fair amount of original and edifying reading matter. Elder C. H. Brunner, the editor, the presiding elders, the staff of associate editors, and others, undoubtedly, will feel at perfect liberty to freely voice their convictions in these columns.

The format and content of the Eastern Gospel Banner varied little from what was appearing in the Gospel Banner. It was a large undertaking to publish a 16 page periodical every week. It continued but became less regular until publication was terminated in 1924.

The Pennsylvania Conference returned to the Banner even providing some of the assistant editors. In 1925, a new editor, A. B. Yoder of Indiana Conference, was appointed. His opening editorial in January, 1925, carried no indication of a new direction or of any controversy. His pleas were for people to write and send articles but no indication of a new direction was given.

January 1, 1944, saw the appointment of a new editor, Ray P. Pannebacker. His editorial introduction began with what may have been the demands on him. "This weekly messenger visits approximately 3000 homes, each of which presents a need in itself, often the members of these homes are waiting for the spiritual guidance or encouragement that they will herein find. Thus people enter in the picture, and people are all different. No two will appreciate quite the same talents, art, poetry or music. Some will agree on one thing only to disagree on another..."

This follows by three years the comments of W. G. Gehman which introduced this presentation. And, three years later, the Pennsylvania Conference would vote to sever their ties with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ over what were largely theological issues.

The new denomination began to work through the issues relating to what sort of church they would be. They took a new name, Bible Fellowship Church. While some may have continued to read the Banner, the new denomination had no publication. Finally, in 1960, a commitment was made.

Believing that it is not enough just to state that we want our own Church Paper or to proceed along a certain path just because we have not done anything else in years gone by, we endeavored to consider the objective and

basic need of having a denominational paper. The following objectives were delineated by the members of the Committee:

1. That news of our denomination's activities could be presented to all of our constituency.

2. That specific articles promoting our denominational program could be put before the members and friends of our church.

3. That our people might be informed and instructed of our doctrinal position.

4. That our members and those who worship with us might be strengthened spiritually.

5. That we might have an organ for disseminating information that is produced solely by and for the Bible Fellowship Church.

The new publication was called Fellowship News. David E. Thomann was appointed the first editor continuing the tradition of filling this responsibility with a pastor.

Thomann declared what he saw the purpose to be in the first volume in February, 1961. "With the help of the Lord we will do our best to bring you what is needful for our Church. There will be devotional articles by our pastors, information about Foreign and Home Missions, Berean Bible School, and general news of our local churches, Sunday Schools and youth fellowships." (Fellowship News, volume 1, number 1, page 2)

The content of the new magazine changed little. Probably, what denominations need to hear in their publications changes little. So, spiritual teaching, church news, announcement of meetings, Sunday School information, youth news, and personal information of marriages and deaths are all found in the new periodical.

Like the Banner before, Fellowship News had a commercial side since it required a subscription of \$1.50 per year and was mailed to its recipients. That immediately created the demand not only to meet denominational needs but to be attractive and relevant enough that subscribers would pay to receive it. Even with subscriptions, deficits were a regular occurrence.

In 1968, Robert Smock assumed editorial duties. The next nearly 30 years brought a succession of pastoral editors including Willard Cassel, Richard Harris, Randall Grossman, Steven Van Eck, Thomas MacMillan, Daniel Allen, and James Neher. In June, 1996, Carol Snyder assumed the editor's task.

Carol was the first editor of Fellowship News who was not a pastor. However, Carol's Bible Fellowship Church credentials were noteworthy. Carol had grown up in the Bible Fellowship Church as the daughter of Daniel Ziegler, a layman from the Hatfield Church who served in significant denominational capacities. Carol's brother, Daniel, was the

leader of the church planting ministry. Carol's sister, Laura, was married to a Bible Fellowship Church pastor. Carol and her husband, Clyde, were on the faculty of Pinebrook Junior College. She would serve as the editor for over 15 years.

Carol did not set out a new radical course. Carol was quoted in her first edition, "Fellowship News has great potential to bring us together, to promote unity." (Fellowship News, June 1996, volume 36, number 5, page 10) What the denomination needed had not changed much. The denominational publication was still seen as connective tissue that helped to hold the churches together.

The contents of the second issue after Carol's appointment show similarity to what had gone before. An editorial comment and reflective article on page one based on the theme of suffering, another article on page three, and news of Christian education, Victory Valley, and Church Extension, names of people baptized and new members on page five. An obituary of a missionary and more articles on suffering filled out the rest. Fellowship News was shorter, only eight pages, a smaller format, and perhaps a lesser quality printing. The battle to pay for the publication was leading to economizing.

That the content was not significantly different was certainly not due to any lack of creativity. What appears to have driven the content of Fellowship News was the desire to serve the denomination by keeping people informed about what various matters that the editor thought would be significant. There is no reason to think that what was being included in Fellowship News was not appreciated. Carol continued as editor for over 15 years until 2011.

But the refrain returns, "The times they are a-changing." A Board of Publication and Printing was first appointed in 1910. The task then was to prepare material and oversee the printing of such things as report forms. The Gospel Banner had always had not only an editor but assistant editors who added articles but apparently had a say about what articles appeared. The Board of Publication and Printing was not directly involved in the editorial decisions but rather in the printing or preparation.

This Board was appointed every year and was part of the new structure when the Bible Fellowship Church broke away from the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. As has been noted, in 1959, they were assigned the task of defining the purpose of the publication. The oversight of printing materials continued and the editorial content was still largely determined by the editor.

The denomination, like the whole American culture, was changing. Perhaps the changes were most evident in what was communicated and how it was communicated.

The internet, email and digitization were changing everything. At the Annual Conference in 2003, the following was approved, "Whereas, Board of Publication and Printing is involved with more than the printed page, therefore be it, Resolved, that the name of the Board be changed from the Board of Publication and Printing to the Board of Communications." Many of the functions of the old board were continued with the new board new communication opportunities were recognized.

The Board of Communication announced significant changes at the 2011 Annual Conference.

The Board of Communication does not need to concern itself with the printing or distribution of God's Word. There are plenty who take care of that. But we do handle the BFC writings and interpretation of God's Word in various documents and forms. For instance, although the present hard-copy of the *Faith & Order*, which contains that which we affirm and believe, is now woefully out-of-date, due to many of the recent changes in the administration of the denomination as represented in the "Order" section, an updated copy is available via CD and at our website. The *Fellowship News*, which has reported on conference activities, encouraged us with stimulating articles and kept us up-to-date with the happenings of the BFC family, celebrates its fiftieth anniversary by transforming itself, once again, into something we believe will be even more practical - a monthly bulletin insert sent via email or downloaded from the website as a PDF suitable for copying on pre-printed paper and distributing to the fellowship. A new publication, periodical fashion, ***BFC OneVoice***, will debut soon in both print and online. We hope that this latest edition to the Board of Communications family will permit us to expand in our writings and presentations. (2011 Yearbook, page 91)

When OneVoice appeared, major changes were taking place. The new publication had a dramatic new look and a new format. Now, there were two publications. Fellowship News appeared in a half page printable format. It could be circulated through email or downloaded from the BFC website. No postage costs meant no expense. Fellowship News would carry announcements of denominational events and church news which would list new members and baptisms. OneVoice came with a new appearance, glossy paper, professional layout, and eye-catching graphics. The stated intention for OneVoice is "to connect, inform and promote." "It is our prayer that both BFC-OneVoice and the Fellowship News insert will continue to bring our fellowship of churches closer together through encouragement and edification." (OneVoice, Spring 2011, page 5) The Bible Fellowship Church, like all denominations, is what it is because of the connection between the individual churches. Our denominational publications are intended to be a significant factor in those connections.

The Communications Committee makes most of the decisions about the content of OneVoice. The masthead lists David T. Allen as the Executive Editor and Ralph Ritter as the General Editor. Major editorial decisions are made by the Communications

Committee. David and Ralph consult on content. Ralph does the “nuts and bolts” of finalizing the magazine. A professional graphic artist does the final layout in preparation for printing.

OneVoice and Fellowship News have no subscription fees but whatever costs are connected to the printing and publication are paid out of denominational funds. That is good news to those who read what is available. The problem with this system of funding is that it remains unknown how many people actually read what is presented.

This review of our denominational magazine shows how difficult it was to maintain interest. For many years, geographic expansion, doctrinal differences, and changing times were not factored into the editorial equations. The expansion of the denomination made the publication of marriages and death in Indiana irrelevant to the people of Pennsylvania. Doctrinal differences simply could not have been anticipated. The changing culture was to be irrelevant to a church that sought to be separate and unaffected by the world. The Gospel Banner was not producing unity but division.

Because our denomination continues to change and seeks to minister in a changing world, our denominational publications will need to be sensitive to change and continue to determine the needs of our denomination and seek to meet those needs. What does a church in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, have in common with a church in Merida, Mexico? What concerns are shared by millennials and boomers? What sort of articles will connect, inform and promote in an increasingly diverse denomination? Editorial challenges are ahead.

## Addendum

[Fellowship News, May 1998, Volume 38, number 4, page 9]

Sending A Message...

What Did You Say?

"It's like hearing from an extended family."

Special thanks to you who took the time and effort to respond to the reader questionnaire included in the March issue. We received seventy-four responses, and that's not too bad, considering that FN is not mailed directly to homes and readers have very little personal investment in the paper.

Experts who conduct surveys consider a one to three percent response good. So with 1.5 percent response, we are working on the assumption that we have received a representative reader sampling. Predictably, the greatest response came from the largest general population group—those in the 65-80 age bracket. It was encouraging to note, however, that "boomers" and "busters" make up the next two largest reader groups, ages 26-40 and 41-50. In fact, their combined number is about twenty-five percent greater than those in the 65-80 age group. Sadly, there is no indication that teens and young adults are reading FN.

What about delivery? The greatest response came from readers who receive FN in a church mailbox. Since the majority of churches probably do not use individual mailboxes, this may indicate that mailboxes provide the most effective means of distribution.

With this background info, here goes—what did you say about FN?

### WHAT YOU LIKE BEST . . .

"Stories about BFC people," took first place followed by "articles and news about what's happening in other churches." "Theological/devotional articles" was a close third and "agency news, baptisms and church memberships" the least interesting reading material. But even this latter category had its appeal, for forty-three percent said they find it enjoyable.

### WHAT YOU WANT TO READ . . .

Your response to "I would like to see more articles/topics about," will give us much direction for future articles. Two general topics tied for the greatest reader interest — articles about current issues, and information about BFC distinctives. Here is a sampling of topics you suggested: the church's view on national and world issues, current events related to our Christian view, what Washington is doing to hinder godliness, moral issues, current issues relating to integrity, signs of the times, prophecy, and the death penalty.

Regarding BFC distinctives, readers suggested: topics about the BFC and culture, BFC theological position on issues, BFC doctrine and history.

Many said, "I want articles and news about what's happening in other churches." "How do different churches deal with current issues like support ministries to singles, divorced/single parents?" "Why not feature a particular church or pastor in each issue?" (Keep watching!)

You also noted interest in these, listed in order of interest: BFC history, children and youth ministries, evangelism/missions, Christian living, music and literature.

#### AUTHORS YOU SUGGEST . . .

Now, some of you had better start sharpening your pencils because when readers were asked to suggest authors, the group receiving the greatest number of votes was "lay people." Both young and old were included, "BFC members of long standing," and "young people—their view of the church." "Pastors" received many votes; a few loyal parishioners even voted for their own pastors!

#### MAKING FN MORE HELPFUL. . .

What would make FN more enjoyable and helpful? "Thumbnail sketches of pastors and their churches. It is easy to forget there's more to the BFC than just our immediate congregation," "I really enjoyed the article on women... I had to chuckle as I was reading it, wondering if it wouldn't cause a bit of a stir from the otherwise well-intentioned." This particular topic received the single most responses. For instance, "[Women's articles] were so helpful," "the article on role of women was excellent and timely," "[I like articles about] our BFC position versus culture, like 'Role of Women,'" and "I have been very annoyed with the articles on the role of women in the church."

You gave helpful comments about editing and style: "large size font for headlines," "more focus on truth and less on emotionalism." "shorter articles to match the short attention span of a TV addicted generation," "variety of pictures, a lot of pictures of 'fat men in suits,'" "I enjoy picture and info on the authors," "theme issues are outstanding," "more articles but reduce the length of each."

We received many suggestions about what to include: something about music, Q & A column, book reviews, list BFC churches and pastors, a recipe corner, section for youth, half page for children, about Fellowship Homes, Victory Valley, Church Extension; theological/devotional articles, controversial issues, introduction to missionary appointees, kid's art, about the elderly, interviews . . . "How about a larger paper." YES!!

Some reminisced, "We miss camp meeting," "I was carried into church as a baby;" and there were words of appreciation for the BFC, "I grew up as a Baptist, but am happy to be a member of the BFC." "Though not born into BFC, we are glad the

Lord got us involved." "We need to create denominational awareness inside and outside the church."

Many expressed appreciation for FN and encouragement for the staff. Thanks! Finally, "[FN] is a great unifier and means of knowing what is happening in our denomination. We need to publicize it more to our many new attenders to give them a 'denominational' feeling. I'll talk to our pastor about that." Sounds good to me!

C.Z.S. (Carol Z. Snyder)

for the BFC Board of Publication and Printing