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The Challenge of Yesterday: A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church at Rosedale, California

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On the morning of October 12, 1909 a small group of Mennonite settlers found themselves deposited on the barren, sagebrush-dotted floor of the great Central Valley of California. They had traveled by train for 129 hours from the Midwest and were tired, hungry, and dirty. Much of their remaining strength had been spent unloading belongings and livestock from the train that had arrived at 3:00 a.m. Now the train was gone, and they were alone on a vast, empty valley — strangers in a strange land. Instinctively they gathered together and recited these words in the language of a far-off land, "*Lasset uns alle zusammen dem Herrn danken.*"¹

Seventy-five years later, a large church building dominated the sea of well-kept and prosperous farms in what once had been wasteland. The white plaster was visible from miles away, shimmering in the warm spring sun. Automobiles filled the parking lot and side streets as hundreds of people gathered to remember and to look forward. It was March 4, 1984, and the sign on the front of the building proclaimed it as the "Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church." Again the persons gathered spoke the same words, but this time in a new tongue: "Let us unitedly praise God."

These were very different people than their ancestors,

and not only in language. What it meant to be Mennonite Brethren in 1984 was in question, and many church members could plainly see that momentous changes were about to happen.

Today this church is known as "Rosedale Bible Church,"

testimony to the changes that have occurred in the past decade. How and why did these changes take place? What happened to a people who struggled for decades to remain separate but now are fully acculturated? What does the future hold for these people of God based on their history?

The Mennonites who helped found the Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church had for the most part migrated from Russia to the North American Midwest in the 1870s. Most of these people had settled in Kansas and Nebraska, though by the early 1890s

dwindling availability of farmland forced many of them to look elsewhere for agricultural opportunities. One of the most common destinations for these migratory Mennonites was Oklahoma.

Though Oklahoma proved a favorable home for many Mennonites, it was a disappointment to others. The Oklahoma land and climate proved difficult, and frustrations mounted. In the face of seemingly futile efforts to turn a profitable year, talk of moving circulated through the



*The Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church building in the late 1940s.
Photograph from the Henry J. Wiens Collection, Center for MB Studies, Fresno*

communities.

Into this volatile situation came a most unusual man. Henry J. Martens was a Mennonite realtor with impressive promotional skills. He circulated widely in Mennonite communities of Oklahoma and elsewhere, and left lasting impressions on the people there. One such person recalled that,

In the summer of 1909 Dad, and perhaps Mom too, got involved with a realtor, Mr. Martens, who came from Kansas to Fairview and Weatherford, Oklahoma. Mr. Martens highly and effectively praised California as the "land flowing with milk and honey." He came to our home in a topless car. We had seen a few cars at a distance, but he gave us our first ride. Wherever Mr. Martens went he was sure to attend midweek prayer service with a big Bible under his arm. Such a man was deemed honest and trustworthy.²

Martens sponsored several excursions to California to "spy out the land" that he claimed to have purchased for a Mennonite settlement in Kern County. Since the most direct train routes from Oklahoma to the San Joaquin Valley went through Southern California, Martens showed his excursionists the well-established and highly profitable orchards and farms of that region before proceeding to their destination in Kern County. The tour groups came back to Oklahoma singing the praises of California and Martens.

Martens offered to sell prospective settlers property in California in exchange for their land in the Midwest. A group of about sixty-five families from Fairview, Oklahoma accepted Martens' offer, some trading as much as 240 acres of land for 60 promised acres in California, all on a handshake deal. Mennonites of that day readily trusted each other in business deals; written legal contacts were deemed worldly and inappropriate among fellow believers. Thus, without showing any proof that he actually had land in California and providing no contacts, Martens became the possessor of large amounts of Oklahoma land.

A special train was assembled at Fairview to transport the settlers to California. Martens had infected Mennonites in various parts of Oklahoma with his land offer, and settlers came from Rush, Fairview, Orienta, Weatherford, and Gotebo to join the train to California.³ Three engines were needed to pull the long number of cars: passenger cars at the front and livestock and implements at the rear. Martens had secured a right of way for the entire trip, again proof to the settlers that he was an honest and influential man.⁴ On October 6, 1909 the train moved out for California. The group stopped in Los Angeles where they encountered President William Howard Taft. The president told them that they had come to a wonderful place. One settler later remembered, "He, of course, didn't know what would happen to us."⁵ The train traveled over the Tehachapi Mountains and entered Bakersfield on October 11, 1909.

After paying more fees due to the excessive weight of the cars, the group traveled on to their new home.

Lerdo, the name of the railroad station where they disembarked, had been renamed "Martensdale" by the Mennonite settlers. After a long day of unloading hundreds of sheep, horses, cattle, ducks, chickens and their belongings, the group gathered for a brief celebration of praise and worship. Martens distributed maps to the families clearly showing where their parcels were located.

A great surprise to the settlers was the desolation of the terrain. Some had expected to see vast orchards and fields of corn and wheat, not sagebrush and tumbleweeds. Reports from the excursion groups emphasized the well-developed farmland of Southern California, and some settlers expected the Central Valley to be in the same condition of prosperity. One eyewitness recalled that "It was barren land, sagebrush and no alfalfa, but Mr. Martens, the realtor, had said that all you have to do is go to work and put a little water on and till the soil and you will soon have it."⁶ Another remembered that "it looked mighty bare when the sun came up and there was nothing available."⁷

The community quickly went to work, building a small frame church, German school building and a few shops to meet the supply needs of the settlers. Some settlers quickly built homes on their property, while others lived in tents along the banks of the Calloway Canal under the large cottonwood trees. Most noticed that the land set aside for them bore marks of previous attempts at cultivation, and had then been abandoned – an ill omen.⁸

Around Christmas of 1909, the settlers discovered some angering news. Martens had never purchased the land he had sold to them and thus they were living illegally on land owned by the Kern County Land Company. Martens had told the settlers they had a six-month option on the land, which they mistakenly thought meant a six-month period in which to try the land. If they didn't like it, they could get their money back from Martens. An eyewitness said years later that "those German Mennonites didn't have any idea what a six-month option meant."⁹ In addition, Martens had now disappeared and could no longer be found. The settlers were furious, and at their insistence the sheriff issued a warrant for Martens' arrest and return to the county. In a move that completely broke with centuries of Mennonite teaching, several settlers sued Martens on a variety of charges. When questioned about this change of behavior one Mennonite leader said: "It is true we do not believe in having anything to do with actions at law, but when one has been stripped to the bone – well, it is different."¹⁰ The Kern County Land Company allowed most of the settlers to remain on the land and harvest their first crop, which had already been planted, following which they would have to vacate.

In only three months Martensdale was dead and the settlers began to scatter about the Central Valley, searching for new homes. A large group went to Reedley, which already had a sizeable Mennonite community, and others

went to Delano. A third group discovered some favorable land deals in the Rosedale area just west of Bakersfield and about eight miles from Martensdale. In January of 1910 the first meeting of the Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church took place.

In all, twenty-eight people presented church letters from the MB Church in Fairview, Oklahoma, and formed the nucleus of the new Rosedale church. An additional twenty-three people participated in that first meeting but did not have letters to present for membership. Later in 1910 the church building and school were moved from Martensdale to Rosedale—not to the present church location on the corner of Heath Road and Rosedale Highway, but on Hageman Road further northwest.

At its first meeting the small congregation elected a leader, deacon and Sunday school teachers, set times for communion and Sunday school, decided who would clean the building each month and discussed how to pay the debt that they had inherited from the now-defunct Martensdale MB Church. There were good feelings that evening and the church “departed in peace” after fellowship and organization.¹¹

By June of 1910 church leader Jacob Kliewer had moved on to Reedley, finding conditions in Rosedale too difficult. Another member of the congregation, J. H. Boese, was elected leader in Kliewer's place. Boese was a farmer, as was most of the congregation, and received no salary for the entire decade of his church service. Indeed, he refused to be paid, even returning offerings given to him at Christmas. Boese felt that he had no right to be a financial burden on the church, and he set a pattern of unpaid leadership in the church that lasted until the early 1930s. Few leaders of the church have been so highly regarded as Boese, and no one ever seemed to speak ill of him.

The years from 1910 to 1917 were very vigorous ones for the church. Membership grew to forty-two by January of 1917, and the church was very active in the lives of the people. Members were routinely disciplined for a wide variety of offenses, from watching a movie to not paying a bill on time. A member under discipline in this era was usually excommunicated or “put out, according to 2 Thessalonians 3:14.”¹² Even J. H. Boese's daughter felt compelled to leave the congregation for marrying a member of another church.¹³ After every Sunday service a time of discipline was held when any member who had a complaint with another's behavior would take the matter to the church for decision. There were generally many complaints, with the discipline time often going an hour.¹⁴ In almost all cases the accused party would admit wrong and receive the church's forgiveness. Occasionally special meetings of the church would be called to excommunicate someone when an offense hap-

pened in the week and could not wait for Sunday.

Deep resentments began to build up when people would accuse others of a wrong just because they disliked them, forcing offenders to admit the “sin” publicly to avoid excommunication.¹⁵ The anger and hurt of the Martensdale fraud had never healed, and those tensions were pulled straight into the Rosedale church. Now on top of this was added hurtful accusations and dissensions—a pressure-cooker situation in the making.

Most church members were impoverished during these years. The total of all offerings given in 1915 was \$69.40, reflecting the relative poverty of the group.¹⁶ No homes had electricity or indoor plumbing, and only a few members owned cars. Crop irrigation was done by hand with buckets and ditches.

When America entered World War I there were forty-two members on the roll at the Rosedale church, all of them ethnic “Low German” Mennonites. Because of the Mennonites' Germanic culture, some local residents absurdly viewed them as spies and enemies during the war. The church received threats that its school would be dynamited, and it subsequently was closed for many years.¹⁷ All persons in the county were ordered to buy “Liberty Bonds” to finance the war, and those who refused were brought to trial and threatened with jail.

On April 1, 1918 the leaders of the Rosedale church appeared before a local judge to answer why they had refused to purchase Liberty Bonds. The leaders made a well-spoken and convincing case based on traditional Mennonite non-participation in war. They suggested that instead of buying Liberty Bonds they would donate a large sum of money (\$355) to the American Red Cross. The judge accepted their argument and ordered them to give to the Red Cross for the duration of the war.¹⁸

A few of the church's young men did enlist in the military during the war. All of them, however, served in non-combatant roles such as medical or support services. Upon their return they were warmly welcomed home and no disciplinary action was taken against them. This marked a major change in the church's attitude toward military service. Many of the young men's fathers had fled Russia to avoid conscription into both the regular army and medical corps. Now the sons had willingly joined the military. There was a great deal of concern over this among the older generation, who saw it as a loss of a centuries-old distinction.¹⁹

After the war, modernity greatly accelerated in the Rosedale area. The church was electrified in February 1919, and by 1923 most members owned cars and were beginning to farm with tractors. War-time demand for farm products had for the first time created a level of prosperity among church members. Children in the church began to attend high school

around this time instead of staying to work the farms, the first of whom graduated in 1924 from Bakersfield High School.

In 1922 the congregation purchased land at its present site and began construction on a new building. Most of the labor was done by the members, and the architect was a Mennonite who had designed many other churches on the West Coast. Building and grounds were completed by 1925 and the stately, if small, edifice would serve the congregation well for some forty years.

By 1924 membership had grown to ninety-three: still all ethnic Mennonites and mostly transfer members who had moved to California from Oklahoma. In January of that year J. P. Gunther became the new pastor. He had been a long-time member of the church and also received no salary during his service.

In the midst of this progress and growth, trouble lurked in the background. On June 2, 1924, years of rising tensions and anger in the church erupted when an ordinary business meeting turned into a shouting match that dragged on for days. The minutes recorded that "the problem," as it would come to be known, was over the quality of teaching by one J. P. Nord.²⁰ Pastor Gunther and another man reportedly said that Nord was not fit to teach and should resign his positions in the church. Nord protested and several members sided with him against the pastor, leading to the shouting match. According to one witness, however, the minutes did not record the real reason for the dispute, accusations that Nord had stolen money from the building fund. This was not the first instance of conflict between Gunther and Nord. They had repeatedly called for each other's excommunication in the past decade and apparently now that Gunther was pastor he decided to get rid of Nord by accusing him of theft.²¹

Church members quickly took up sides, each hurling accusations at the other. Gunther tried to use his authority as pastor to settle the issue, but only succeeded in turning most of the church against him. He was forced out in April of 1925 and moved to Reedley.²² Even with Gunther gone, the problem continued to escalate, fueled by years of repressed anger and bitterness. By the end of 1925 half the church membership had transferred to MB churches in Bakersfield and Shafter.²³ Those who remained fought among themselves and also with the Shafter and Bakersfield MB churches, where some of their enemies had fled. By November of 1925 the situation at Rosedale was out of control. The Pacific District Conference of MB Churches presented a letter to the church requesting outside mediation to solve the problems.²⁴

Rosedale refused the Conference request and continued to squabble fiercely. The problem was not resolved until August of 1927, when the congregation wrote a formal letter

to the Pacific District Conference, the Bakersfield MB Church and the Shafter MB Church, requesting forgiveness for having caused much hurt. Membership at Rosedale had declined to fifty-one by 1930, with some twenty of those not attending or affiliating with the church.²⁵

The Rosedale Church would never be the same after the years of bitter internal fights, and the remaining members resolved never to let this happen again. By 1930 the rigid disciplinary policy was abandoned, and it would be a decade before another disciplinary action was taken.²⁶ During this time the church hired its first salaried pastor, J. D. Hofer, who was well-liked by some for his grace and easy-going manner, and disliked by others for his Pentecostal ideas. The congregation spent the 1930s licking its wounds and mellowing.

In 1935 oil was discovered in the Rosedale area and many of the MB farmers benefited financially from the spouting wells on their property. The church built a parsonage, purchased Hofer an automobile, and increased giving to the Conference and missions. The church building was remodeled in the late 1930s, evidence of the increased prosperity brought by the oil boom.²⁷

World War II came to the United States in December of 1941. Unlike the first World War, America was less xenophobic about Germans this time. No threats were made against any of Rosedale's members or buildings during the war, nor was anyone ordered to buy war bonds to finance the war. Nevertheless, at a business meeting in January of 1942, the church agreed that "since we are again at war with Germany we will from now on conduct all of our business in the language of this country."²⁸ English had been used in much of the church's life since the first World War, but from now on it was the only language ever used in any assembly or meeting.

Continuing the trend of military service that occurred in World War I, many young men from Rosedale enlisted in the military during World War II. These men were merely acting upon the model of their fathers who had served in the military during World War I. Most, though not all, of them served in non-combatant roles.

Despite its ambivalent record on military conscription, the church both supported and staffed the Civilian Public Service camps that had been set up for conscientious objectors during the war. This seemed to be mainly a project of the older members of the congregation, with the youth more interested in actual military service. Also significant was the church's decision to ignore a Mennonite Central Committee letter requesting that churches discourage their members from buying war bonds.²⁹ These events were reflections of the acculturation that had occurred since the Mennonite Brethren had come to California and especially since the

church split in the 1920s.

In February of 1942 the church elected a new pastor, H. A. Kliever. Church membership had reached 125 by 1944, and in August of 1943 the first non-ethnic Mennonite family to join the church did so in a ceremony marked by great joy. For this family's benefit the last bit of German used in the church was ended: a German hymn sung before communion services was replaced with "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."³⁰

The years 1945 to 1960 were marked by massive increases in prosperity and standards of living for church members. They quickly moved into the American middle class after the war, making money on real estate, farm products and services. Many young people began to attend high school, colleges, and Bible schools. Acculturation was fully under way as the church members became more like their American neighbors and less like their Mennonite grandparents and great grandparents.

Within an eight-year stretch during this period the church went through five pastors for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the main reason was that the congregation was changing more rapidly than were MB pastors in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

A notable concern of the church in this era was reaching out to the local community through "home missions." The Resthaven Chapel, for example, was established to minister to people in a community several miles from the church. Many young people attending Pacific Bible Institute in Fresno came home and worked at the Chapel. Several members of the congregation participated in mission work to the Navajo in Arizona and New Mexico during the early 1950s. The church supported the Bakersfield Rescue Mission in finances and staffing. Several members began mission work among Mexican laborers in migrant worker camps in the early 1950s. A local Youth for Christ chapter was established with the help of the church. All of this reflected a growing concern for the local community that had been absent previously.

There was tremendous optimism in the Rosedale church of the 1950s that was in some ways a reflection of the optimism of the larger American culture. But it was more than that: a church that had almost died of self-inflicted wounds had seemingly been reborn, and was now moving forward with confidence. Noteworthy in the 1950s was the lack of major disputes and controversies. In 1959 the church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a well-attended service. After a brief acknowledgement of the past, the anniversary celebration mostly looked forward to the future: the pastor's sermon was appropriately entitled, "The Challenge of Tomorrow."³¹ In 1959 the members had every reason to believe that tomorrow would bring ample rewards.

By 1962 the little building constructed almost forty years earlier was becoming too small for the congregation. Membership stood at 185, although more than 90 percent were ethnic Mennonite. Growth in the preceding decades was mostly by transfer and birth. In 1965 Pastor Dan Friesen of the Reedley MB Church admonished Rosedale pastor Leo Wiens, "When is the Rosedale congregation going to build new facilities? Your place of worship was full on Sunday morning; you can't grow that way!"³² The congregation decided to construct new facilities to encourage church growth.

In retrospect, this decision was based upon assumptions that may have been incorrect. The church assumed that the growth up to that point would continue and even increase if new facilities were built.³³ In reality, church membership had already peaked and would steadily decline from the late 1960s to the present. Actual attendance at the services also peaked in the late 1960s at around 225 to 275 people. Annual financial giving per member had peaked in 1959 at \$260, and would also steadily decline throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The idea that a new building would bring in new people and new vitality failed to consider the dynamics of the congregation and community.

The church refused to cut its giving to the Conference causes, remaining deeply committed to the larger MB Church. Therefore, funding for the building project would have to come from elsewhere. In December of 1965 an oil drilling crew struck a major deposit of oil some five hundred feet east of the church's property. The church quickly began negotiations for a well to be drilled on its own property. After long and intense negotiations with several oil companies, and having to vigorously defend its rights to the mineral assets of their property, the Rothschild Oil Company of Santa Fe Springs, California began drilling on the church's property in 1966. Twenty-four hours a day for some three weeks the rig drilled, and a very high producing well was realized.

The church believed the oil well was an answer to its prayers about funding a new building program. The well out-produced all others in the area for many years, giving the church a substantial financial base from which to proceed. The oil company that leased the wells surrounding the church well, however, began litigation to stop the church from producing on its own property. Eventually the parties reached an out-of-court settlement, allowing the church to proceed with its building plans.

Proceed they did. The massive new sanctuary would seat several hundred, with an equally large fellowship hall. The sanctuary was laid out in the style of a Roman basilica, with three interior sections: a large rectangular inner room with a platform at one end separated by colonnades from two

smaller hallways down each side. The roof would fly upward to a dizzying height, invoking memories of medieval cathedrals that drew worshippers' minds upward to God. A full-length stained glass window would run from floor to ceiling behind the platform.

Construction proceeded rapidly and the new facilities were finished by 1968. Over seven hundred people attended the first worship service in the new sanctuary, one of the largest crowds to ever fill the building.

In March of 1968 the church officially set forth a "Declaration of Intent" as to the ultimate purpose of the church. The statement said, "We declare our intent that evangelism and church growth . . . shall become a primary thrust of all phases of activity of our Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church."³⁴ As a result, various groups were formed or retooled to become "evangelistic" in nature. Visitation groups were assembled, as were prayer cells, Good News Clubs, and Sunday school classes. Because of this effort, some families did join the church in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and this helped to diversify the church. But on the whole the evangelistic thrust showed few results, and most growth continued to be biological and transfer in nature.

Also in 1968, the church sent an official letter to the United States Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches stating, "We are concerned over the rather large amount of controversial material being published in *The Christian Leader* during the past conference interim—such as political and social issues, having to do with political, social, racial, economic and labor controversies in our national life; response to our involvement in the Vietnam war, etc."³⁵ The body of the church had grown increasingly acculturated since the 1930s and by this time identified mainly with conservative American politicians and viewpoints. Traditional Mennonite beliefs regarding church/state relations and nonresistance were not crucial to most members.

Pastor David Plett led the church during the 1970s. He was deeply committed to his people and warmly remembered. During this time the church began a preschool program to meet a new need for a changing community. The preschool brought several families into the church and had a positive impact in the lives of many children. The church hired its first associate pastor; Dave Reinbold, as it moved toward a team ministry concept to better serve its members. The traditional Wednesday night prayer meetings ended, a victim of declining interest, replaced by the "Wednesday night fellowship," a meal and recreation program.

Perhaps the words that best sum up the 1970s in the church's life were "friends and family." While other Mennonite distinctives were being lost, the importance of community—of family—became increasingly important during this decade. During this era, new people were added, one by one,

to the kingdom of God and the Rosedale church with faithful, consistent, individual care and love.

When pastor David Plett resigned in 1980, the church called Norm Thiesen as his successor. Thiesen had just completed doctoral studies in psychology—a first for the church. Besides pastoring, Thiesen did counseling work in the larger community, which resulted in many new people joining the church. The church formalized the counseling program in the mid-1980s by hiring Brad Hannik, an associate pastor devoted to a counseling and discipling ministry.

Thiesen made several decisions early in his pastorate that would eventually cause him to resign in 1986. Chief among these controversial decisions was forcing changes in church administration, worship and operation. He did not anticipate the opposition he would face in attempting to bring about change in a short period. Some members began holding informal gatherings in which they discussed ways to undo the changes.

By 1984 it was obvious that trouble was brewing. Growing dissension was splitting the church into two camps: one for Thiesen and one against. Adding fuel to the fire were the people coming into the church as a result of Thiesen's counseling work. These people tended to side with him against the other members of the church. The dissenting group issued written notices to the pastor that he should refrain from certain activities that were displeasing to them, such as styles of leadership and sermon delivery. Rumors began to circulate that an attempt to vote Thiesen out during a business meeting was under way, adding to the growing strife.

Finally, in 1986, Thiesen resigned and took a teaching position with a Baptist seminary in Oregon. Nonetheless, two groups eventually left the church. The first went mostly to Laurelglenn Bible Church in Bakersfield. Another group started an Evangelical Free Church in Bakersfield. Thus, the church was reduced to about 150 attenders by 1987, down from the high during Thiesen's pastorate of about 250.

The church hired Steve Fast as pastor in 1988. Since that time the church has continued to experience changes, some quite significant. One change was a move toward a "contemporary" style of worship service, with electric keyboards, guitars, and drums, led by a praise team. The stage in the sanctuary was enlarged so the team would have room to work. The large pulpit and communion table were removed and a simple metal music stand put in their place. The counseling ministry was eliminated, as was the associate pastor and the deaconate. All these changes were in place by the early 1990s.

One of the most interesting changes was the church's decision to write its own Statement of Faith in 1989. In so doing, the congregation moved away from the Mennonite

Brethren Confession of Faith, and toward a more “evangelical” confession. Written by a team of leaders, the new Confession of Faith contains no explicit references to traditional Mennonite theological distinctives.

The name “Mennonite Brethren” also came to be seen by many at Rosedale as a hindrance to evangelism and growth. Accordingly, the name of the church was changed in 1987 to “Rosedale Bible Church.” Many members hoped that this would bring in new people and make the church more accessible to the community. The new Statement of Faith was also seen in this light—it would bring in new people and more accurately reflect the membership as a whole.

These changes have not been without controversy. Additionally, the church has been faced with an ongoing decline in membership coupled with a paradoxical rise in attendance. A further challenge is the fact that ethnic Mennonite Brethren continue to hold most leadership positions. According to the latest information available, only 28 percent of leaders in the church have non-Low German ethnic background.³⁶ These challenges are not unique to Rosedale; many congregations face them, and solutions remain to be found.

The Rosedale congregation has a rich heritage spanning eighty-five years. Many people, including me, have experienced the rich love and concern of the members over those years. A heart for people has always been the hallmark of the church, as witnessed by the failure of number-driven evangelism and the success of person-oriented evangelism. While the congregation has had more than its share of difficulties and disputes, it has shown a remarkable resiliency and adaptability. In addition, the tremendous generosity of the members has touched the lives of people around the world. In all things they have struggled to be faithful to God. Perhaps that is ultimately the best that can be said of any church; it certainly is fitting for the Rosedale Bible Church.

Heath McClure, a former member of the Rosedale Bible Church, is currently the pastor of the Madera Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Madera, California. An earlier version of this article won the 1994 P. M. Friesen History Essay Contest, sponsored by the Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Notes

1. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Rosedale, California: Its Organization and Its Development, 1909-1984* (Bakersfield, Calif.: Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church, 1984). 1.

2. Regina M. Becker, *A Bundle of Living: Recollections of a Shafter Pioneer* (Shafter, Calif.: Shafter Historical Society, 1986). 17.

3. Leland Harder and Kevin Enns-Rempel, “The Henry J. Martens Land Scheme,” in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Econom-*

ics, ed. Calvin Redekop, Victor A. Krahn and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America), 1993), 199-222.

4. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Rosedale*, 2.

5. *Ibid.*, 9.

6. *Ibid.*, 2.

7. *Ibid.*, 6.

8. Becker, 20.

9. Interview by author with anonymous member of Rosedale Bible Church, 14 May 1994 (Hereafter “Interview”).

10. Harder & Enns-Rempel, 216-217.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Congregational meeting minutes, November 1915, Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church Records, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Calif. (Hereafter Rosedale Church Records).

13. Congregational meeting minutes, 21 March 1915 and 7 April 1915, Rosedale Church Records.

14. Interview, 14 May 1994.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Congregational meeting minutes, Rosedale Church Records.

17. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Rosedale*, 16.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Congregational meeting minutes, Rosedale Church Records.

20. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1924.

21. Interview, 14 May 1994.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Congregational meeting minutes, 20 September 1938, Rosedale Church Records.

28. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Rosedale*, 17.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Our 50th Anniversary, November First, 1909-1959: Rosedale Mennonite Brethren* (Bakersfield, Calif.: Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church, 1959).

32. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church at Rosedale*, 17.

33. Congregational meeting minutes, Rosedale Church Records.

34. *Ibid.*, 20 March 1968.

35. *Ibid.*, 16-17 September 1968.

36. “Leadership positions” are defined as salaried staff, elder board members, and all committee members. Data drawn from 1987 and 1992 directories of the Rosedale Bible Church.