

# An Introduction to PMC

by

Dr. Edward C. Epp  
April 2, 2019

I am Mennonite by birth. I can cook the family recipes, I work too hard and laugh too little. I also embody a strong sense of family, heritage, hard work, education, risks taking and service. Community service was a core theme in my great grandad Heinrich's life and that theme carried on through his children and their children. Service is the value I embraced during my early life.

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# The Rev. Heinrich H. Epp

“Rev. Heinrich H. Epp is a retired farmer residing in Henderson township, his home being on section 9. For many years he was closely associated with the agricultural development of this section of the state and owns a highly improved and productive farm which annually returns in him a substantial income. Mr. Epp was born in southern Russia, April 8, 1857, his parents being Heinrich and Marie (Regier) Epp, who were also natives of Russia, in which country the mother passed away. Later the father married again and in 1874 came to America, settling on the farm in Your county which is now owned by his son Heinrich.



In 1880 Mr. Epp was married to Miss Helena Peters, a native of Russia, who came to America in 1878 with her parents, Dietrich and Helena (Fast) Peters, who were also natives of that country. ...

In his political views Mr. Epp has been a stalwart republican since age conferred upon him the right of franchise and for several years he served as school director. He has always been interested in everything pertaining to public welfare and progress and his cooperation has been an important element in advancing many interests for the public good. He has long been a most active worker in the Bethesda church, served as deacon for eleven years and in 1895 was ordained as a minister of the church in which he is now also serving as elder. He has always stood for those forces which make for the material, intellectual, social and moral progress of the community and has long been recognized as one of the valued and representative citizens of Your county.

Theron E. Sedgwick, York County, Nebraska and Its People, 1921.

# Storefront Learning Center

AmeriCorps VISTA  
Boston, Massachusetts 1971-73



# Swan Lake Christian Camp

Northern District Conference  
Camp Counselor and Program Staff  
Viborg, South Dakota middle 70s  
(One summer at Camp Friedenswald in Michigan)



# Freeman Junior College and Academy

Chair of Electronics Program  
Science and Math Instructor  
Northern District Conference  
Freeman, South Dakota late 70s



# Goshen College

Director of Administrative and Academic Computing  
Chair of Computer Science and Professor  
"Old" Mennonite  
Goshen, Indiana 1980-84

# University of Portland

Associate Professor of Computer Science  
1989-99



Goshen College

# Forget Sacrifice



Service was never a sacrifice. There were good people at every stop. At the Storefront Learning Center I worked with Thelma Burns. She became my surrogate mother. Today at 81 “She fights against rising housing costs in Roxbury and Dorchester and works to improve educational access for minority students. In her spare time, she volunteers at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.” The Action for Boston Community Development named a building after her.



Mary Lee Warren was a force in the Boston School System. She assisted Jonathan Kozol before becoming instrumental in the Storefront’s mission. Eventually she became a Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice in Washington where he was the primary liaison in the U.S. justice sector that reformed work with Columbia, Mexico and Afghanistan. From these two I learned about the leadership of women.

I learned about friendship and melting barriers from Laverne Berry. Some were unexpected, simple and profound after walking into a Cambridge ice cream parlor on a warm summer afternoon. Laverne is now a Brooklyn, New York Entertainment Lawyer. “Capturing The Flag” documents her efforts doing voter protection work in North Carolina.



In 1981, Jane Wipf who was a biker on one of my Camp trips, won the Enschede Marathon in the Netherlands, was second in the Tokyo Marathon and eleventh in the Boston Marathon. My running was no match.

Christine Kaufmann retired recently from the Montana Senate. She served first in the State House of Representatives and was the first openly gay Montana state senator. Chris is a graduate of Goshen College. I first met her at Swan Lake and later we continued our friendship at Goshen College. She is one of many reasons I cringe when I hear of barriers between the LGBT community. See Page 7 of the November, 2018 “The Mennonite.”

Marilyn Johnson was among the first crop of US Peace Corp volunteers. She served as a public health educator in the Antique Province on one of the Visayas islands in the Philippines. After retiring as the directory of science education at OMSI she cofounded Saturday Samaritans. It is a mobile soup kitchen feeding the Portland homeless.

I met Marilyn at Goshen College. She is an extraordinary friend who has taught me more than I can ever account. This December we celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary. I sit her dumbfounded that I could be so fortunate. Family is one of those other cornerstones of my Mennonite life which became my focus.

# Two Weeks in May Swaziland 2014



For two weeks I was part of the Intel Education Service Corp (IESC) program in Swaziland coordinated with the Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

In May 2014 I'm standing in front of a Swaziland classroom desperate to make a connection with the teachers of Mayiwane Primary School. It dawns on me that my ancestors go back to Africa. Tens of thousands of years ago we migrated from Africa, eventually ending up in the Netherlands and Prussia. From there it was to the Ukraine and finally to North America. I started by saying that we are cousins and that I have come home.

The room changed for me in that instant. I no longer felt like a stranger. I was standing among equals. I was at home with family, with the crazy cousins, favorite aunts, and doting grandparents. There was a connection that flowed through the Rev. Heinrich H. Epp, the two Heinrich Epps before him and the people in this room. A ploy I had calculated to change how these African teachers viewed me through family had instead profoundly changed me.

The next day we were given our Swazi names. I became Babe Sive (Baa-bee See-vay). Sive comes from Nation, a people united by common descent. Babe is father. It's an expression of respect. I have become a father for all nations. I was stunned into silence. I had heard much about Africa but nothing had prepared me for this. I left Swaziland two weeks later - changed.





Faith, a Mayiwane first grade teacher, says: “The computer is made of parts just like our body. Do you get it?”

The students sing out: “Yes.”

“Uyeva na?” (Do you get it?)

“Yes.”

On the third day the Mayiwane teachers have taken what we taught them and made it their own. This is a big deal.

The following week, Faith teaches Lego robot construction and programing to a group of sixth and seventh graders.

I congratulated myself on my ability to step back and let these teachers leverage their own teaching abilities using their own style. Eventually, I realized that this had nothing to do with me. I was the novice in this situation. I was the one who was learning from these Mayiwane teachers.



# Confessions of Faith

## The Swaziland Festival

I knew going in that the Church of the Nazarene is the prominent religious order of Swaziland. This part of my journey was the most dreaded. My stomach turned at the thought of immersing myself with an evangelical Christian denomination. I didn't know how I would channel those questions of faith without me being characteristically illusive, non-committal and American rude.

One afternoon I found myself riding along a dusty road on my way to a small ranch where we were about to butcher a steer for the festival. The Mayiwane community was engaged in a celebration to commemorate the donations of the 25 computers and the end of their training.

I sat myself in the weeds among the ranch hands and worked hard at small talk, a skill I simply do not possess. A hand turned to me and asked if I had voted for Obama. His eyes were clear and welcoming. In an uncharacteristic manner I answered that question without hesitation. I simply answered "yes." He smiled and my heart melted.

To this day I cannot explain why that moment was so impactful. I have thought about it long and hard and I am still no closer to the answer. I have learned so much from that ranch-hand's question, from my answer, and from his response. In that moment my theology evaporated.

While sitting in Friends meetings and Mennonite churches I have heard the question "why don't people of color come to our meetings because our theology matches their predicament?". This question has long bothered me.

I grew up in the Mennonite faith. I was baptized into the Mennonite church. I was educated at and taught at Mennonite colleges. My theology is deeply rooted and strong. However, my theology is no longer important. It has only gotten in my way. I have read much of the "Confessions of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective." It only troubles me. I find it divisive. I have seen these kinds of



statements used to justify the Vietnam war, build barriers with the LGBTQ community and justify racism.

A new question came to my mind. "Why do I not go to a church of color?" It haunts me because I cannot answer this question.

I have found that the straightest line between two people is to simply say an honest "yes" to the simple question "Did you vote for Obama." Keep in mind that it is not the question or the answer that is important here.