

Mennonite Hospitality

Synopsis:

In the summers of 2013 and 2015, our family drove across North America. During our travels, we spent several nights in the homes of people we had never met before, using a directory called Mennonite Your Way. Their Hospitality Directory (see photo) lists the addresses and contact information of over 1600 hosts in over 60 countries by province/state/country. As we drove, we would call a host family a couple days in advance to see if they could accommodate our family. While travellers are expected to leave a donation, it is a cost-effective way to travel, and we met wonderful and interesting people.

The purpose of Mennonite Your Way is to continue “an old tradition among Mennonites, Brethren, and other Christians of “like spirit” by organizing a hospitality network so travellers can share Christian courtesy and fellowship” (p. 2). While most of our hosts were Mennonite or Brethren, the directory includes hosts from a wide variety of Christian denominations. Mennonites and Brethren are (or were historically) religious groups who lived in communities that separated themselves from the modern lifestyles and conveniences, choosing instead lives of simplicity and peace. They are most visible in communities where they maintain distinctive dress and drive horse-drawn buggies, but many within the Mennonite tradition embrace modern conveniences. Over a century ago, immigrant Mennonites were “sponsored” by Mennonite families who were already established in Canada. This spirit of showing hospitality to strangers and strengthening bonds with co-religionists continues through Mennonite Your Way.

In a small town in the upper peninsula of Michigan, we stayed with an elderly couple. They welcomed us into their large three story home twice, on both our westward and return trips. Both times, we were asked to arrive later in the evening because our hosts would be at church on both Sunday evening and Wednesday evening (prayer meetings are often held midweek). As we visited, our hostess, dressed in typical Amish dress (plain long dress with bonnet) was regularly texting with her travelling grandchild. The juxtaposition of the traditional and modern was fascinating. After breakfast, we listened with our hosts to a radio preacher (on his cellphone), followed by a brief reading in “Our Daily Bread”, a daily devotional booklet popular among (older) conservative Protestants, followed by prayer. As we left, they wished us God’s blessing and safety on our trip.

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