

Bringing BikeMovement Home

A guide to conversation and group study

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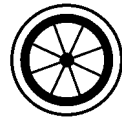
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

On BikeMovement and afterward many of us have appreciated the openness of discussions and ability to bring in and hear new people all along the way. *This study guide is our attempt to extend that kind of discussion to groups even in places we couldn't visit.* There's a lot of thinking and biking on the DVD, and the study guide aims to provide an array of discussion questions, stories and activities to help participants (that's you!) get a feel for the kind of conversations we valued on the trip.

A number of young adults on this trip feel like they struggle to connect with church in terms of age. This documentary is intended to illustrate various whys and hows. These experiences may not be yours, but the conversation takes on broader importance in relation to exclusion from church based on personal and social factors. While recognizing that forms of exclusion work in different ways, *this study guide uses the experience of these young adults to suggest reflection on other margins of the church as well.* In that way, we hope this film can help continue and expand the conversation.

Since part of having a genuine conversation means more than thinking and talking, so we've included sections "**Use more than your mind**" and "**Beyond the session**" as options for connecting on multiple levels. Equal participation is crucial to the success of the conversation. *We hope this study guide encourages participants to think critically about the trip and their church experience, feel empowered and hopeful, and join in working for broader and more authentic inclusion in their daily lives and in the church.*

Enjoy the ride! 

Jason Shenk, *Chief Editor*

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DVD Table of Contents

BIKEMOVEMENT - THE DOCUMENTARY

A Young Adult Perspective on Church - 80 minutes

Part I

Section A - Trip Introduction 13.5 minutes

- Chapter 1 Planning
- Chapter 2 Day 1 Montage
- Chapter 3 Church Conversations
- Chapter 4 Day to Day Logistics

Section B - Community 11.75 minutes

- Chapter 5 Community
- Chapter 6 Amigos and the global community

Part II

Section C - Questions 10.75 minutes

- Chapter 7 Day 12 Montage
- Chapter 8 Questions?
- Chapter 9 Day 16 Montage

Section D - Connecting with Church 18.5 minutes

- Chapter 10 Young Adults: Connecting with Church
- Chapter 11 Single & Transitory
- Chapter 12 Creative Church
- Chapter 13 Postmodernity

Part III

Section E - Language 16.25 minutes

- Chapter 14 Values
- Chapter 15 Language: "Jesus" and other church words
- Chapter 16 Language: Generational Differences
- Chapter 17 Intergenerational Dialogue: Overcoming Barriers

Section F - Final Reflections 10 minutes

- Chapter 18 Final Day Montage
- Chapter 19 Reflections
- Chapter 20 Credits

DVD Table of Contents *continued*

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Supplementary material that is referenced in this study guide.

Community: Lessons from the Road	<i>3.5 minutes</i>
Feeling Alone: Reflection on Race and the Racial/Ethnic Conference	<i>3.75 minutes</i>
Gender Equality in Church	<i>2 minutes</i>
Holly's Story: Finding faith through experience & hard questions	<i>4.75 minutes</i>
Interaction between people of different beliefs	<i>4 minutes</i>
Language: Individual Salvation	<i>4.75 minutes</i>

SHORT TOPICAL CLIPS

Short summaries from the documentary. Ideal for church services or meetings where the full-length documentary would be too long.

1. Introduction to BikeMovement	<i>1.5 minutes</i>
2. Community: Parallels to Church	<i>2.75 minutes</i>
3. Questions?	<i>2.75 minutes</i>
4. Young Adults: Visions for Church	<i>2.75 minutes</i>
5. Language	<i>2.75 minutes</i>
6. Living the call: Re-imagining Church	<i>3.25 minutes</i>

How to use this study guide:

NUMBER OF SESSIONS:

The study guide divides the documentary into three parts so that a group can study the issues raised in the documentary over three sessions, though other arrangements also are possible.

Three Sessions	The study guide is divided into Parts I, II, and III -- one part per session.	
One Session	If your number of sessions is limited, you could show the film in one session and select discussion questions, activities, and/or resources from all three parts.	
Five Sessions	If you want to explore these complex issues in more depth:	
	Session 1	<i>Section A</i> Introduction, Church Conversations
	Session 2	<i>Section B</i> Community *
	Session 3	<i>Section C</i> Questions *
	Session 4	<i>Section D</i> Connecting with Church
	Session 5	<i>Sections E & F</i> Language*, Connecting Generations, Final Reflections
* Additional DVD Material Available		



WITHIN A SESSION:

Parts I, II, and III in this study guide each include three main headings that consist of questions to guide discussion:

- JOINING THE CONVERSATION**
- THINKING A BIT FURTHER**
- WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

Each heading contains a number of questions that we offer – along with “**Biblical reference**” and “**Use more than your mind**” – as a menu of options for the session. A given group might not address every question or activity. Participants can choose topics that connect most with their own experience and interest.

The time suggestions for each heading assume about 30 minutes for discussion, but can be adjusted for the time available for the session. Parts I, II, and III each end with “**BEYOND THE SESSION,**” a collection of practices and stories that young adults connected with BikeMovement have found valuable. We invite discussion participants to consider if any practices might enrich their ongoing faith journeys.

It may be helpful for group leaders to watch the documentary portion before each session in order to become familiar with its themes as well as the technology for showing this DVD.

This study guide is intended for:

- Sunday schools
- church retreats
- young adult groups
- intergenerational gatherings
- Bible studies
- book clubs

or anywhere people care about young adults, faith, biking, or church.



BEFORE WE GET STARTED:

As noted in the Letter from the Editor, this study guide begins with the experiences of a particular group of young adults and expands to address broader questions. The study guide's *open-ended questions* make space to discuss exclusion from church based on age, race, educational background, money, sexual orientation, disability, and/or gender. Exploring the movement of these themes in your context will help the discussion take a shape relevant to your group.

We hope that conversation from these materials will bring up *multiple experiences of church*, dislodge stereotypes, explore issues about which your group has questions, and lead to suggestions about the kind of church you want to be.

Part I – Introduction, Church Conversations, Community


Purpose of this section:

- Introduce session participants (you) to the trip and riders
- Explore who is in church community (or not) and why
- Reflect on how lessons learned on the trip can relate to church life
- Imagine ways to build community in groups, congregations, and the global church

Biblical reference: *Acts 10:9-16, 28-29* – Peter's vision reveals a new way of seeing the community of believers.

While you watch: Think about a time you saw church in a new way.

Use more than your mind: Before starting the film, give some clay to each person. Use this clay to represent something you see, think, or feel while you watch the documentary. After watching the section, take a minute or two to work with the clay and sense the connections you feel. If time permits, take turns sharing a few words with the group about what you made.

 **Watch Part I - Introduction, Church Conversations, Community**

JOINING THE CONVERSATION: (5 MIN)

1. Share with the group about a time when you saw church in a new way. Did anything in the film seem similar to that experience?
2. **The trip planners believe that church is meant to have a place for everyone, but they noticed that many young people weren't feeling connected to church. They wanted to talk to young adults and share those conversations with the larger church. ~ Who would you like to talk with about church? Whose voices does the church need to hear? Why?**
3. The Mennonite church in the United States is multiethnic and multi-lingual; with growing numbers of churches in the South and West. BikeMovement conversations were led mostly by white people from Mennonite colleges, and – due to suitable geography and summer heat – visited congregations on a northern route across the United States. Therefore, the issues included here come from the concerns and ideas of people from particular social groups. ~ How does your ethnic and cultural background shape your faith?
4. **Kendra Nissley was seeking time to talk and ask questions with others but had never had time or space to do it. ~ How would you interact with church if you had the time and space?**
5. Anna Roeschley describes finding community in the tough, raw and earthy moments. ~ Where have you found community that feels the most genuine?

THINKING A BIT FURTHER: (10 MIN)

1. **One thing that drew many BikeMovement participants was the challenge of biking across the United States. ~ What are you passionate about? What do you enjoy doing? How could those interests connect to doing church outside of a traditional meeting on Sunday morning?**
2. A constant theme that came up throughout the trip was that many young people are looking for a safe place to ask real questions. ~ When you have hard questions or struggles, where have been safe places to voice those? What needs to happen in order for safe places to be created? What are young people in your area looking for?
3. **One of the values of a church community is to bring new people in. David Landis emphasizes that these new people have to be able to influence the whole community. ~ How do you form a close community and also welcome new people? What could it look like to value the voices of these new members and make space for them to help shape the group?**
4. Anna Roeschley notes that it's always good for a community to ask, "Who isn't present, and why?" How would you answer that question – in your group today, your local congregation, or the global church?
5. Sarah Thompson points out that there are 1.4 million members of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family, more than half of whom are outside the United States. ~ As followers of Jesus, how can we support and learn from members of Christ's body around the world?
6. How would you describe your experience with church? How have you been challenged, hurt, or blessed? If you are a member of a church community, in what ways do you feel valued and supported? In what ways would you like to be more valued or supported?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

(10 MIN)

1. BikeMovement came together less than four months after the initial idea. ~ What crazy ideas do you have where you can talk about God, faith, and how that applies to your life? What do you need in order to put your ideas into action?
2. David Landis notes that it takes privilege to be able to bike across the country. ~ How does privilege influence projects and who tends to participate within your congregation?
3. **Some BikeMovement participants desired for church to be a safe place for all people to come with joys, questions, frustrations, etc. ~ Is the desire for a safe place a priority for members of your group? If it is important, how do/might safe places come about within your congregation?**
4. What other ideas have connected with your group? What next steps might you like to take?

Side Story: BikeMovement creates space for honest sharing

One activity early on in the trip to intentionally get to know each other better was to set aside one night for each person to tell the group her/his personal story on such topics as private struggles, matters of faith, doubts, and hurt at the hands of family and church. Many of the trip participants had never shared our story before, but because a safe place was created, we were able and willing to do so. While it was scary to be that vulnerable to other people, the value of that level of transparency was that the group grew much closer and was able to talk about areas of struggle that were relevant to our shared experiences.

Do you have a small group, or friends with whom you are truly honest and transparent? What is the value of being vulnerable with one another? Why might it be hard to share your struggles, hurts, and weaknesses with others?

BEYOND THE SESSION:

1. In some situations, it may be easier to open up to one person than to a larger group. Some riders have valued making spiritual friendships or finding accountability partners -- and meeting to discuss struggles and faith journeys. Is there someone in the church whom you trust and get along with well? Meeting on a regular basis can help you both receive ongoing support from one another.
2. **One of the many ways to continue the global conversation comes through the Global Youth Summit of Mennonite World Conference that will be taking place July 10-12, 2009, in Paraguay. If young people in your area are interested in making connections with the global church a big part of their lives, consider supporting them to attend this gathering and matching the cost with an additional \$3,000 (US) to support the expenses of a delegate from the Global South. For more information contact amigos@mwc-cmm.org.**
3. Consider a place outside this session (in a group or as a congregation) for people to tell their faith stories. Listen for variety. For an example from this trip, read "**BikeMovement creates space for honest sharing.**"

For additional reflections on parallels between the trip and church (such as mutual support and spiritual fitness), see the [additional material](#) menu of the DVD for:

Community: Lessons from the road

GROUP ACTIVITY: Explore our experiences of church

As seen in the film, the “Machine” is an activity that can be used to facilitate conversation about experiences in church. Start by seating yourselves in a circle with an open area in the middle.



Warm-up Machine: The first exercise is a warm-up activity. Have someone come to the middle and start by doing a motion and a sound that would replicate part of a machine. Have the others join, each adding their own part to that machine so that in the end you are one collective machine working together.

Church Machine: For the second activity, return to your seats, and think about your experiences with church and how we have been challenged, hurt, or blessed by church. As you feel led, come to the center with an action and a sound that demonstrates this experience.

Conversation: After everybody has come to the center and is interacting with each other with their “part” of the church experience, return to your seats, then divide into groups (5-10 people) to discuss what you noticed.

Questions:

1. How have you experienced church? What are the ways you can rebuild or reshape what you saw in the center?
2. As people of faith, why do we church like we do?
3. Is the church a safe place? Can church be a place where authentic people come and share who they really are? Express what’s really going on in their life?

Part II - Questions and Connecting with Church

Purpose of this section:

- Tell stories and invite discussion about questions in church contexts
- Explore the experience of going away to college or a cross-cultural program and returning to a home church
- Discuss the challenge of engaging multiple identities and points of view
- Consider benefits and drawbacks of both traditional and innovative ways of doing church
- Investigate what can make church relevant

Biblical reference: *Mark 6:8-11* – Jesus tells the disciples to go out on journey, to stay where they are welcomed, and to leave where they are not.

While you watch: Think about a time you felt left out.

Use more than your mind: Before starting the film, give out a pencil and a piece of paper with a circle on it to each person. After watching the section, explore the circle as representing the church and draw how you see yourself in relation to the church. If time permits, take turns sharing a few words about what you drew.



Watch Part II - Questions and Connecting with Church

JOINING THE CONVERSATION: (5 MIN)

- 1. Tim Showalter talks about times away from comfortable living – like biking – as enormous growing experiences. ~ What are growing experiences for you? How does that impact how you do (or want to do) church?**
2. David Landis states that tough questions often arise both during and after college and cross-cultural experiences. ~ What experiences have raised tough questions for you?
- 3. Jessica Roth mentions the experience of people who’ve grown up Christian rethinking something they’ve been taught all their life. ~ Have you experienced questioning and returning to faith? Where have you known transitions in faith?**
4. Neil Richer notes that many people assume all young adults are saying the same thing, when there’s actually such a wide variety even in the Mennonite Church. ~ What are young adults you know saying about church? How does that compare with what’s shared in the film?
5. Modernity has been described as consisting of absolutes and stable standards. ~ What standards are important? What costs and benefits come from emphasizing standards? From de-emphasizing them?

THINKING A BIT FURTHER: (10 MIN)


1. Some riders express a desire to address the practical meaning of theological questions. ~ How have questions or answers about God and faith had a practical impact in your life?
- 2. Jenny Hartwig suggests that to have deeper faith, you sometimes have to dig deep and be unsure. ~ Do you think that’s the case? Very few people would say that no questioning is appropriate in the church. What kinds of questions are you comfortable with? Uncomfortable with? Why?**
3. Some trip participants said they wanted church that impacts lives. ~ What are ways church might be relevant place to live out faith for you? What creative examples do you know of?
- 4. Timothy Shenk observes people being “pushed out” of church. ~ How might this happen? On purpose? As a side effect of other decisions? How might church be a more life-giving space? Where do you feel welcomed?**
5. Postmodernity is described in the film as emphasizing context, morals relative to experience, and valuing relationships. ~ What stories come to mind when you hear these values? What’s your reaction when you consider applying these values to church? Why?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

(10 MIN)

1. Jenny Hatwig says, “In your faith walk, there’s a time questions have to be asked, and maybe that’s your whole life.” ~ What faith questions do you continue to wrestle with? To what extent do you value deep questioning throughout your life? Why is that? How can deep questioning happen and with whom?
2. Tim Showalter sees that capital-T truths are hard to talk about for a number of young adults. ~ What “Truths” do you feel uncomfortable with? Is there agreement in the group? Is coming to agreement the point? If multiple views exist, how might the church or members respond?
3. Conversations have noted that some young people change locations frequently. ~ How do churches connect with young people who move around a lot? What examples do you know of?
4. **Some conversations suggested that church is often set up for families of the traditional variety. ~ Does this seem to be the case in your experience? How might a church welcome families of all kinds? How welcome both people who are partnered and those who are single?**
5. Tim Showalter asks, “What if churches forgot about buildings?” ~ What would it look like to de-emphasize a church building? Is your church active outside its walls?

Side Stories: Experience brings up hard questions

Jessica Roth tells about the breaking down and rebuilding of her faith at college, which included questions about theology, and asking, “Who is God?” She says this questioning is a hard process to talk about but that she has gradually raised some of her questions that seemed outside the usual experience of her church. 

Kristen Swartley discusses questions that came up for her about the God of the Old Testament when she participated in a cross-cultural program in the Middle East. She has continued to process these questions about the image of God and what God is in her life after her return.

David Landis talks about how reading, thinking, and exploring the world led him to no longer see things in terms of either/or. Then he saw people shutting down other people’s questions and experiences, and it seemed to him that those people were scared of the questions. He hopes that people who set standards for others first take the initiative to understand people in their context.

How might your church have responded to young people in situations like these? How would you like to respond?

BEYOND THE SESSION:

1. **Bringing up hard questions:** *Question session/Fishbowl:*

As a smaller group (perhaps 5-10 people), ask each individual to come to up with a list of the questions she or he wrestles with that may not be easy to ask in a church setting. Submit these questions to a discussion leader – anonymously if necessary. Decide on a way to address all the questions, a way that gives each question the space it needs. Before the discussion, the leader can summarize the submitted questions and help prepare the group with context (scripture, stories, outside research, etc.). Work to make sure each member of the discussion can participate equally.

2. **Some congregations have a group that focuses on including people who are on the margins or often excluded by church. If your church doesn't have such a group, consider if there a people who would be interested in working with one.**

3. Think about doing church in a way that doesn't involve a building.

For **additional reflections** on the topic of tough questions in community, see the [additional material](#) menu of the DVD for:

Feeling Alone: Reflection on Race and the Racial/Ethnic People's Assembly

Gender Equality in Church

Holly's Story: Finding faith through experience & hard questions

Side Stories: For broader relevance, churches look local

Church hospitality with global impact: La Iglesia de la Floresta, a Mennonite-Anabaptist church in Buenos Aires, Argentina is a congregation whose activities make it relevant in the life of the city and the global family of faith. Its Hogar Belén (Bethlehem Home) is a hospitality house and residence for Anabaptist students who come from countries all over the world to study at the ecumenical seminary and universities in Buenos Aires. Hogar Belén, funded by members' generosity, helps university-age Anabaptists connect and form community when they are far from their home congregations. The church also welcomes visitors from around the world and, over a fellowship meal of empanadas and soda, engages them in lively discussion about the politics of churches in Latin America, as well as current events in ecumenical activism for human rights.

Considering service units close to home: Several churches in the historical Mennonite centers of Eastern Pennsylvania and Northern Indiana are developing ideas for Christian service units where intergenerational groups of people will commit themselves to live and serve together in community for a year or two. Traditionally, service units have been placed in more urban areas considered "needy" and volunteers "sent away" to serve. By calling attention to the needs and possibilities in these traditional Mennonite communities, these churches are finding new ways to be relevant in their local areas and emphasizing the reciprocity of service and social justice work.



Part III – *Language, Connecting Generations, & Final Reflections*

Purpose of this section:

- Explore how various people relate to language traditionally used in a church setting
- Explain the importance of clear communication across differences such as age
- Reflect on the outcomes of the trip

Biblical reference: *I Corinthians 13:1* – Paul writes that speaking beautifully does not matter when compared with the spirit in which you speak.

While you watch: Think about a time you felt misunderstood due to difference in language.

Use more than your mind: After watching the section, pair up in twos. Take a minute to reflect about an image to symbolize either the church as it is -- or as you would like it to be. Share your image with your partner through either body movement or words. If time permits, take turns telling the group about your partner's image.



Watch Part III - *Language, Connecting Generations, & Final Reflections*

JOINING THE CONVERSATION:

(5 MIN)

1. Anna Roeschley notes that many riders on this trip are hesitant to use language they experience as exclusive, such as, “If you don’t claim Jesus Christ, you’re going to hell.” ~ How do you interact with this way of talking? Do you use it? Avoid it?
2. **Even if we as Christians speak the same language, certain words have different meanings for different people based on how we’ve heard them used. ~ What biblical or religious words do you avoid? What do you associate with the use of that language?**
3. Speaking of the tendency to avoid historically biblical or religious language, Neil Richer suggests that we lose something if we can’t describe our experience. ~ What might be drawbacks of avoiding traditional religious language? What’s meaningful to you about using such language? Is there non-traditional language you value for describing your experience?
4. Does there seem to be a generational gap in your congregation? Are there other gaps?

**THINKING A BIT FURTHER:****(10 MIN)**

1. Some riders express the desire for church language to be translated into practical terms. ~ Is this a desire that connects with you? Where have you seen church language lived out in practical ways?
2. Sarah Thompson states that the power of intergenerational dialogue comes only when both generations are open and ready to hear from one another. ~ When have you seen openness in conversation across generational differences? In conversation across differences other than age?
3. **Alicia Horst notes that both young adult riders and older adults express a hunger for spaces to talk about their true experience of faith. ~ Are you interested in those kinds of spaces? What else do you hunger for in church?**
4. One participant asserts that we all need accountability. ~ What does accountability mean to you? Do you believe everyone needs accountability? Why or why not? In what forms have you experienced accountability?
5. David Landis states that it's hard to generalize about riders' various experiences on the trip. ~ What would it mean for church to be a place that upholds and honors diverse experiences? Is there a kind of diversity you would like to see embraced in your congregation or community?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**(10 MIN)**

1. **In order for people to really communicate, Jessica Roth recommends being clear about what we mean, really listening, and admitting when we don't understand one another. Admitting we don't understand can be hard, and many riders call for mutual vulnerability in these situations ~ When have you or others been vulnerable in church? When else might vulnerability be needed?**
2. Sarah Thompson suggests that genuine interactions are less likely when responses don't acknowledge the challenge of the question. ~ What would it look like to engage authentically with questions?
3. A number of trip participants call for creative church that's more than Sunday morning. ~ Where have you seen church involvement outside of the traditional Sunday morning setting? How do you feel about it?
4. **Andrew Foderaro talks about how many of the trip's conversations focused on the themes of vulnerability, accountability, and practicality. ~ What do those words make you think of? Can church do that? What else have people on the margins of church suggested is needed for fuller inclusion?**
5. Alicia Horst says that for her, this trip was more about the process than an end product. ~ In what ways have you seen church focused more on the end result it wished to produce than on the process? How does that approach feel to you? What would it look like for the church to place more value on growth that happens together in the process than on the end result?

**BEYOND THE SESSION:**

1. Personal relationships across generations:
Find or become a mentor with someone of a different age. With a relationship of mutual learning, both can benefit from the experience of the other.
2. **Jessica Roth tells about an intergenerational conversation when young adults on BikeMovement and members of a church were able to bring up new ideas and talk about topics that usually aren't talked about. Consider what intergenerational spaces enrich your church: Sunday schools across generations? Bible studies? Service projects?**
3. What church resources might you draw on to help understand the language, story, and experience of groups on the margin?
4. The riders came together for many different reasons, but decided on one statement of purpose that Denver Steiner summarizes, saying, "We want a space that cultivates relevant community through open, honest conversation." ~ What are some spaces where you can help cultivate relevant community through conversation?

The BikeMovement online forum at <http://bikemovement.org/forum/> is one of many places, virtual and physical, to continue the conversation and share stories. All are invited and welcome to come and discuss.

For **additional reflections** on the topics of language that many riders avoid and interfaith communication, see the [additional material](#) menu of the DVD for:

Interaction between people of different beliefs
Language: Individual Salvation

Additional Resources

WEBSITES

<http://bikemovement.org/> Read journal entries from this and other BikeMovement trips and join the discussion in the online forum.

<http://young.anabaptistradicals.org/> A community blog for those exploring what the Anabaptist tradition means today.

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