

of engaging kids during a pandemic and you met that challenge with so much creativity and dedication. We appreciate you!"

Laura Shank and Paul Swanson

In a note to AMC, MaryAnn said that she thanked God for the opportunity to serve the kids, and that "in truth, I'm not going anywhere. Neither are the children of our church. I remain committed to them, even as I step down from this official position. Our congregation's able storytellers are already signing up, and my name is on the list."

Thank you so much, MaryAnn, for your faithful and creative service to the next generation! Blessings in this transition time.

“With Care...”

By Alice M. Price, long-time member of the Conference Dialogue Resource Team and lay leader with the Anabaptist Fellowship of Alamosa



A new book recently caught my eye: *The Neutrality Trap: Disrupting and Connecting for Social Change*. (Wiley 2022). Questions about the role of neutrality often tug at my somewhat disparate practice areas of conflict mediation, dialogue facilitation, and social change advocacy. I was also drawn by some small world connections with the authors. Well-known in the field of conflict studies, Bernie Mayer helped found CDR, a pioneering mediation group in Colorado. They led my first in-depth mediation training in 1983, while based in their original quarters at First Mennonite in Denver. Jacqueline N. Font-Guzman's name was less familiar, until I saw she is the new director of DEI at Eastern Mennonite University.

So when do we call for dialogue in the face of conflict, division or harm? When is a more direct calling out of injustice or other needed change warranted instead – or at least first? Mayer and Font-Guzman explore this inherent tension in effective social change, which often requires a back- and-forth between communication across differences and disruption of existing systems and patterns. Faced with this dynamic, many of us instinctively or have been taught to favor connection over confrontation. This is true not only for professional peacebuilders, but many educators, social workers, pastors, therapists, journalists, scientists, healthcare providers, and so on.

While the authors uphold and practice the value of human connection across differences, they raise concerns that many well-meaning efforts at dialogue are premature or disconnected from a commitment to confront the systems and issues driving a conflict or division. The challenges they raise are not new ones, but important reminders. Among the questions they frame, I offer these three for our reflection as individuals, local communities, and in our broader church and civic contexts:

- When does our identification with neutrality stand in our way of being “transparent, authentic, and rounded participants” in the struggles of our time?
- How may the good work we do help maintain or reinforce systems that need to be changed?
- How can we use our capacities and intentions to nurture, rather than tamp down seeds of needed change we see around us?