



## Circles of Fellowship (...continued from June)

—by Joe Keim

*In the June Ministry Update, Joe related how he and Esther began to explore local Circles of Fellowship. These are small pockets of Amish people who are leaving the Amish system and beginning to establish their own meetings in garages and pole barns. (continued...)*

We decided to attend God's Word Church in Dundee, Ohio. I knew about this church because of Owen Yoder. I was first connected with Owen when he was still Amish. He had called, upset that we had added him to our *Amish Voice* mailing list. His words on the phone were, "Take us off your mailing list because your publication is deceiving." As we've done many times before, we respected his request and removed him from the list.

Two full years passed, and then one day I received another call from Owen, asking if I could meet him in Berlin, Ohio. I agreed, not knowing whether God had changed his heart about the Scriptures or if he was planning to confront me and "set the ministry straight" (it's not uncommon for Amish individuals to call and criticize us for sending *The Amish Voice*).

Around 2017, I traveled to Berlin, where Owen said he would meet me. I walked into the Farm Homestead Restaurant, looking around for who might be Owen Yoder. Soon, I spotted an Amish man about twelve inches taller than me,



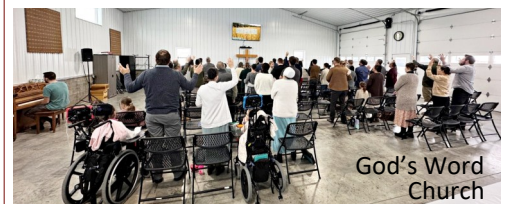
Owen Yoder

sitting at a table with four open books spread out before him. If I recall correctly, he had a Bible, a dictionary, and a couple of commentaries—clearly ready for a serious discussion. I quickly learned that God had been working in Owen's heart, and he was beginning to see the light of the gospel. Not only did we have a wonderful time discussing scripture and praising the Lord, but he and his wife, Ada, later came to a *Step Out of the Boat* Conference and shared their powerful testimonies.

You know what else was amazing? When our ministry needed a new editor for *The Amish Voice*, guess who called me? None other than Owen Yoder—asking if I would consider him for the

role. That said, never give up on God. If He can get a hold of Saul's heart, and if He can get a hold of a man like Owen Yoder—a man once drowning in a manmade religion—then He can reach anyone. Amen?!

Anyway, we visited God's Word Church that day in October of 2024 and began worshiping with about 100 people, dressed in both English and Amish clothing. Some wore head coverings, some did not. Some drove cars, others didn't. Everyone in the building could speak Pennsylvania Dutch.



God's Word Church

Esther and I had no agenda. We were there for one reason—to encourage people we didn't know but could relate to on every level. We were there to pray with them, rejoice with them, and help carry any burdens they might have been bearing as a result of being excommunicated and shunned by family members in the old culture. Little by little, we gained the trust of the bishop and other ministers. Some of the mem-

Joe &amp; Esther Keim

Savannah, OH

(419)651-6813

jkeim@mapministry.org

Samuel &amp; Polly Girod

Bennington, IN

(419) 631-5162

samuel@mapministry.org

New Beginnings

Savannah, OH

(419) 962-1515

map@mapministry.org



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bers occasionally asked if I would preach, but I declined, at least until the bishop invited me to do so.

Like in the old culture, God's Word Church meets every other Sunday. Early on, Owen asked if I would help them start a Bible study on the Sundays when the church didn't meet. "Well now," I said, "You're speaking my language, Owen. I can't wait!" I suggested we start with *The ABCs for Christian Growth*, a workbook we have used in our ministry for twenty years and have taken hundreds of Amish and former Amish individuals through.

Within a few weeks, we had printed

forty workbooks and invited anyone interested to join the in-between Sunday Bible study. Since Esther and I would occasionally need to travel and speak at other churches, we decided to have Ryan lead the study. Ryan is a single young man who faithfully attends church and has clearly been given the gift of teaching. There's no doubt about it—he knows the Word of God better than many Christians with decades of experience. We all love sitting under Ryan's teaching.

Here are a few things you should know about Ryan: he lives at home on his parents' farm and helps with the farm-

ing. His mother, though still dressing in Amish clothing, is saved and attends church and Bible study with Ryan. His father, however, is not saved and continues attending the Amish system every other Sunday.

As Ryan and I talked, I learned that his dad enjoys fishing in Lake Erie. I told Ryan, "Well, I'm not much of a fan of lake fishing, but if it helps reach your dad with the gospel, I'll go. I'll fish, I'll help with the farm—whatever it takes to sit down and get to know him." As of now, we are planning a trip to Lake Erie this summer. If I don't forget, I'll be sure to tell you how it goes!

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