

Living Faithfully on the Land: An Anabaptist Approach to Sustainable Community in Ontario

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1 Introduction:

In Ontario, the escalating cost of land mirrors a challenge that our Anabaptist ancestors frequently encountered. For instance, in the 1760s and 1770s, Mennonites and Amish, seeking more land and desiring to avoid contacts with others, settled in Pennsylvania and Maryland, forming the Allegheny Conference. The subsequent move to Ontario, initiated by Mennonite families as early as 1786, was driven by the same need for land. A significant example of this migration is the Amish farmer Christian Nafziger from Bavaria, who, unable to afford land in Pennsylvania, moved to Ontario in 1822 after learning about the availability of cheaper land there.

Biblically, this aligns with the principle of stewardship of the earth as mentioned in Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The Anabaptist commitment to stewardship and community is reflected in our historical responses to land scarcity and economic challenges.

2 The Vision:

The vision of a food forest Anabaptist community in Ontario is inspired by our history of resourcefulness and collaboration in the face of economic challenges. This community would embody self-sufficiency, ecological stewardship, and strong community bonds. Hutterites, for example, have historically pooled resources to acquire large tracts of land for their communities, using modern farming techniques to foster growth and prosperity. This reflects a commitment to communal living and shared resources, resonating with Biblical teachings found in Acts 2:44-45, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

3 The Opportunity:

The idea of pooling resources among interested families to purchase land for a food forest community in Ontario is an innovative response to rising land prices and economic challenges. This approach is reminiscent of the historical Anabaptist practice of mutual support and cooperation, as seen when Mennonites from Pennsylvania assisted their counterparts in Waterloo County, Ontario, with a mortgage issue on purchased land.

This proposal invites interested families to become founding members of a pioneering endeavor, inspired by our Anabaptist heritage of communal living, shared resources, and stewardship of the land. This endeavor would not only provide a practical solution to current economic challenges but also foster a lifestyle deeply rooted in our Anabaptist values and principles.

4 Potential Location and Features:

In selecting a suitable location for our Anabaptist food forest community in Ontario, we must ensure the land can sustainably provide for the community's needs. Can use a hybrid approach of communal and private ownership, where each member's suballocation of land is guided by the principle found in Micah 4:4, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid." This scripture reflects our commitment to individual stewardship within a communal framework.

Central communal buildings for various functions will serve as the heart of the community, symbolizing our unity in Christ as described in Ephesians 4:16, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Surrounding these, private residences would be arranged, where each member has a 1.2-hectare parcel for personal stewardship, reflecting individual freedom and responsibility within the community.

The land should cover at least 180 acres (or 72 hectares) for a community of 60, respecting the regional carrying capacity of roughly 1.2 hectares (or 3 acres) per person. This allows for self-sufficiency in terms of food and firewood, echoing the Biblical ethic of responsible land use and stewardship as exemplified in Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

The layout requires the land to be at least 100 meters wide, optimally more than 200 meters, up to an ideal square shape, to facilitate the planting of edible and useful perennials, shrubs and trees in concentric circles around the community. This design ensures that the trees, each symbolic of the 'tree of life' from Revelation 22:2, do not overshadow each other, allowing for full growth and sunlight.

Regarding soil quality, the land must have at least moderate fertility with a minimum soil depth of 15 centimeters. If necessary, we can import soil or organic matter, embodying the principle of transforming and enriching the earth as seen in Isaiah 58:11, "You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."

Finally, the buildings should be constructed with local materials, aiming for high efficiency to be heated with approximately a tonne of wood or less per capita annually. This approach aligns with the Biblical teaching of wise and prudent use of resources, as advised in Proverbs 21:20, "The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down." This principle encourages us to build and live in a way that is sustainable and respectful of the gifts God has given us.

5 Hutterite Colony Precedent:

The Lehrleut method of colony division is a practice commonly associated with Hutterite

communities. As these communities grow and reach a certain size, typically around 100 to 150 people, they divide to form new colonies. This division is not just a physical separation, but also a sharing of resources, knowledge, and people. The community splits in a way that ensures both the new and the old colony have a mix of skills, ages, and resources, maintaining a balance that supports the self-sufficiency and sustainability of both colonies. This method ensures that the colonies do not become too large, which could strain resources and complicate communal living, while also enabling the spread of the Hutterite way of life and beliefs.

Relating this to the establishment of a food forest community in Ontario, the Lehrleut method offers a model for sustainable growth and expansion. As the community grows, it can apply similar principles to ensure that each new settlement is viable and maintains the core values and practices of the original community. This method of division and growth aligns with the Anabaptist values of stewardship, community living, and mutual aid, ensuring that resources are used wisely and that the community remains a supportive and sustainable environment for all members.

In this context, the Lehrleut method can be seen as a practical application of the Biblical principle found in Acts 2:44-45, where early Christians shared everything they had and met each other's needs. This approach to community growth and resource sharing can help the food forest community in Ontario to thrive, embodying the spirit of mutual support and stewardship that is central to Anabaptist values.

6 Initial Roles for Sustainability:

While initial roles may be recommended based on historical precedent and perceived needs, the community can revise the roles, what they involve and who is doing them during perhaps monthly stewardship meetings.

As a source of inspiration here are Hutterite occupations:

6.1 Hutterite Departments

Adapting the concept of self-sufficient roles to fit within the context of a Hut-

terite colony, especially one formed by the Lehrerleut group, requires a focus on communal living, agriculture, and traditional Anabaptist values. In a Hutterite colony, work is typically communal, and the distribution of roles reflects the needs of the community as a whole. Here is a breakdown of roles and departments that would be integral to such a community, considering its Anabaptist traditions and the communal ethos:

1. **Spiritual Leadership:** Including a minister and assistants, responsible for religious services, spiritual guidance, and maintaining religious education and practices within the colony.
2. **Colony Manager/Overseer:** Overseeing the day-to-day operations of the colony, coordinating between different departments, and making executive decisions in consultation with other leaders.
3. **Agricultural Managers and Workers:** Responsible for the planning, implementation, and management of agricultural activities. This includes crop farming, animal husbandry, and possibly aquaculture, depending on the colony's resources and location.
4. **Education:** Teachers who are dedicated to educating children in the colony, focusing on both religious and secular education, up to a certain age, typically around 15.
5. **Kitchen and Food Services:** Including cooks and kitchen staff responsible for meal planning, food preparation, and management of the communal dining hall.
6. **Craftsmen and Artisans:** A range of skilled workers such as carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, and other artisans who produce goods for the colony and potentially for external trade.
7. **Healthcare Providers:** This could include nurses, midwives, or healthcare workers trained in basic medical care, focusing on the health and wellness of colony members.

8. **Manufacturing and Industrial Workers:** In colonies that have manufacturing capabilities, roles would include machine operators, mechanics, and technicians, especially if the colony produces goods for external markets.
9. **Administration and Finance:** Individuals responsible for managing the colony's finances, records, and external business relations, ensuring the economic stability of the community.
10. **Maintenance and Infrastructure:** Workers responsible for the upkeep of colony facilities, including buildings, machinery, and communal areas.
11. **Youth and Elder Care:** Individuals dedicated to caring for the young and the elderly, ensuring their well-being and integration into the colony's daily life.
12. **Transportation and Logistics:** Managing the colony's transport needs, both internally and for connections with the outside world, including the operation and maintenance of vehicles.

In a Hutterite colony, particularly one established by the Lehrerleut, these roles would be distributed based on individual skills, interests, and the communal needs. The focus is on self-sufficiency, communal ownership, and the well-being of all members, aligned with their Anabaptist faith and traditions. The success of such a colony hinges on the cooperation and shared commitment of its members to their communal lifestyle and values.

And a different take with gender preferred roles here:

6.2 Gendered Occupations

A person can do more than one role, and the roles could be different based on community needs, this is just a demonstration for an example of if 10 families were in the colony, then each man and woman each could have their own role.

For Men:

1. **Farmer:** Handling crop growing and animal care, using sustainable methods.

2. **Energy Worker:** Managing solar, wind, biofuel or hydro power sources.
3. **Builder:** Constructing and repairing community buildings with natural materials.
4. **Water and Waste Manager:** Taking care of water supply and waste recycling.
5. **Smith and Tool Maker:** Making and fixing tools and equipment.
6. **Woodland Keeper:** Looking after forests and managing timber.
7. **Animal Caretaker:** Providing care for livestock and pets.
8. **Tech and Communication Keeper:** Handling computers, phones, and community internet.
9. **Vehicle and Machine Keeper:** Maintaining community vehicles and machinery.
10. **Peace Leader and Emergency Helper:** Offering spiritual guidance, resolving conflicts, and handling emergencies.

For Women:

1. **Health Helper:** Providing medical care and looking after public health.
2. **Teacher:** Educating children and adults in community and environmental values.
3. **Food Manager:** Overseeing the kitchen, meal planning, and food storage.
4. **Herbalist:** Growing and using medicinal plants for health.
5. **Craft Maker:** Creating clothing, pottery, and other handcrafted items.
6. **Matchmaker:** Ensuring the biodiversity and land races of local plants and animals.
7. **Event Organizer:** Planning and coordinating community events and activities.
8. **Gardener:** Caring for community gardens and plants.
9. **Beekeeper:** Managing bees and supporting pollination.
10. **Librarian:** Managing books, resources, and community records.

Shared Roles:

1. **Community Planner:** Handling administrative tasks and colony finances. Such as accountants and secretaries.
2. **Trade and Market Coordinator:** Managing sales and trade of community products.
3. **Community Representative:** Interacting with government and neighboring communities. Men tend to be more assertive in negotiations, whereas women are better at gauging facial queues and giving feedback on how the negotiations are going.
4. **Tree and Plant Nursery Worker:** Responsible for the propagation, care, and management of young trees and plants, essential for the community's agricultural and ecological goals.

7 Invitation to Join:

We warmly invite interested individuals and families to become a part of this pioneering endeavor. To learn more about this unique opportunity to live out our Anabaptist values in a sustainable, faith-centered community, please join us at our upcoming informational meeting. For those who cannot attend or wish for more details, we encourage you to reach out to us.

8 Closing:

In closing, we extend a message of hope and unity. This community represents more than just a living space; it is a beacon of sustainable and faith-centered living for future generations. Rooted in the rich soil of Anabaptist tradition and Biblical principles, we envision a future where our collective stewardship, community bonds, and lived faith create a lasting legacy. Just as Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Let us join hands in this endeavor, building a community that not only meets our present needs but also secures a hopeful, prosperous future for the generations to come.