

## **NEH Collaborative Research Project “Amish Diversity and Identity: Transformations in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America”**

The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded the Young Center of Elizabethtown College a \$100,000 grant for a three-year collaborative research project titled “Amish Diversity and Identity: Transformations in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America.” The project will produce a national socio-cultural history of the Amish in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will investigate the Amish experience at the national level, giving attention to geographic expansion, growing diversity, changing conceptions of identity, and evolving patterns of interaction with the larger society. It will also explore how the Amish have contributed to shaping the identity of a nation that, despite its high level of technology and bureaucratic regulations, made exceptions (education, Social Security, child labor laws) for a religious minority living on its cultural margins.

Using primary source documents including those written by the Amish, oral history interviews, and secondary sources, the investigators will describe and analyze the cultural influences that shaped the Amish story in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The project will explore three dimensions of the Amish experience: 1) the growth of Amish diversity, 2) the construction and reconstruction of Amish identity within their own communities, and 3) the transformation of American understandings of the Amish. The products of the study will provide the first scholarly synthesis and understanding of the Amish in the American experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The project will produce: 1) a seminal scholarly book on the Amish in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 2) a major academic conference, 3) an annotated bibliography of Amish studies, and 4) an academic website with resources on Amish studies for scholars and students.

The principal investigator is Donald B. Kraybill, Young Center Senior Fellow. The research team includes two co-investigators: Steven Nolt, professor of history at Goshen College (IN) and Karen Johnson-Weiner, professor of anthropology at SUNY Potsdam (NY). A national panel of seven scholars advises the research team throughout the project.

Proposals undergo a rigorous scholarly review process by NEH staff, a panel of five national scholars and the National Council on the Humanities. The collaborative research program is very competitive with a success rate of only 17.2%. Five of the four scholarly reviewers gave the proposal an “excellent,” the highest possible score.

Comments by reviewers included:

*“This is a fine proposal that combines interests in religion, social history, and folklore.”*

*“The proposed book, conference, and bibliography would make available to scholars and the public an up-to-date and sophisticated analysis of the role of this little understood community in American culture and provide a fascinating case study in the construction of group identity in particular historical and cultural settings.”*

*“An especially good team of investigators with access to a highly reputable series of publications on the subject.”*

*“This proposal is a model of clarity and organization. It is abundantly careful and thorough in asking a range of popular and scholarly questions.”*