



**Worlds Collide**  
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Rachel Yates

Last week I had the privilege of representing the Milwaukee Presbytery at a consultation with the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board in Baltimore. The consultation was held on the margins of Big Tent, a learning and mission gathering of Presbyterians. Thousands of Presbyterians could be found in three hotels downtown, in large ballrooms and small meeting rooms, in coffee shops and restaurants. What a showing of unity! Or so it seemed ... until we realized another group had taken center stage.

This August, Presbyterians shared Baltimore with BronyCon – a convention of “My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic” fans. Starting in 2010, the animated tv show and plastic toy collection produced by Hasbro are marketed especially toward young girls. Appropriately, the conventioners (“bronies”) wore costumes, bright t-shirts, and tutu’s, walking with their favorite, plush characters tucked under one arm. What stood out, however, is that the majority of these conventioners were middle-aged males.



In its eleventh year, BronyCon brings My Little Pony fans together in a “brotherhood” of sorts – hence, the “bro-ny.”<sup>1</sup> The adult fans’ receptiveness to the tv show’s friendship theme has prompted two documentary films and multiple psychological studies. Some fans, who otherwise feels unaccepted or isolated, find community among other bronies. The 2019 convention set a record of more than 10,000 fans, more than double the number of Presbyterians attending Big Tent.

I rode the train to the airport with several bronies, each of us dragging luggage. Two Baltimore women in their twenties boarded a few stops later, wearing airport uniforms. The two women talked with each other, while watching hip-hop videos on their phones. Presbyterians, bronies, and Baltimore residents: three different groups traveling together, but almost as if we were on parallel lines that did not intersect...until two worlds collided.

Somehow one woman’s comment about the airport train prompted a brony to mention the light rail system in her Canadian hometown. That led to a question of why she and her brother were in town, and BronyCon became the subject of conversation. Other bronies excitedly joined in, as the two Baltimore workers listened with sincere interest, asking questions about this community, why they met, and what they did. The young women might well have exited the train with skepticism about brony-ism. For the duration of a train ride, however, there was an openness to sharing and listening.

The lure of community is irresistible. If an animated tv show about imaginary ponies can draw more than 10,000 people because of the welcome and acceptance they find, surely the gospel has more to offer. My Little Pony will go off the air this year, and BronyCon has decided to disband. The gospel knows no such programming limits. It is up to the church to be the place of welcome and acceptance, not just in our buildings but on the streets, in the restaurants, and on the train.



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<sup>1</sup>“Bronies” usually refer to male fans but can be applied to fans of either gender. Pegasisters (from the flying pony Pegasus) is sometimes used to refer to the older, female fans of the show.