A “Brethren Faith in Action Fund” has been created to provide grants to congregations for outreach ministries in their communities. Be sure to find guidelines and application in the delegate packet and at www.brethren.org/faith-in-action.

Compelling Vision

“The Compelling Vision Process team thanks the 2018 Annual Conference for contributing to the work of developing a compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren. We hope to continue to hear from you and your church through the district gatherings scheduled to happen between now and Annual Conference 2019. May God bless our work together!” — Kayla Alphonse

By the Numbers

Blood donations:
Thursday: 85 pints
Friday: 74 pints
Total: 159 pints
Thanks to all donors and to the Hoxworth Blood Center.

Final registration:
Delegates: 673 (on-site 667)
Non-delegates: 1,560
Total: 2,233

Angela Finet asks, ‘Who Is Our Neighbor?’

Angela Finet, pastor of Nokesville Church of the Brethren, addresses the question, “And Who Is My Neighbor?” in Saturday’s message built around Luke 10:25-37. Finet said, “The first thing people asked me when I told them I was preaching at Annual Conference was ‘What scripture did they give you?’ When I said, ‘The Good Samaritan,’ the reaction was ‘Ew! What could you possibly tell us we haven’t heard before?’ This sermon is my response to that.” The Saturday offering assists the Batwa (Pygmy) communities in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

BBT Fitness Challenge

Some 74 runners and walkers participated in this morning’s BBT Fitness Challenge 5K at Cincinnati’s River Walk. Photo from left, top finishers among female and male walkers and male and female runners: Susan Fox (40:42), and Don Shankster (35:56), Matthew Muthler (18:48), and Karen Stutzman (25:03). (Photo by Glenn Riegel)

Sunday Service is at 8:30 a.m.

Scholar, theologian, and author Leonard Sweet of Eastbound, Wash., preaches about the parable of the seeds from Matthew 13:1-9. His sermon is titled, “A Charge to Keep: Keep Charged for 21st Century Ministry and Mission.” Sweet is the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University in New Jersey. The offering will support Spanish translation at Annual Conference.

See You in Greensboro!

Don’t forget! Head east, not west for Annual Conference next year at Koury Convention Center and Sheraton Hotel in Greensboro, N.C. Dates are July 3-7, 2019.
The Underground Railroad: What Was the Brethren Connection?

Brethren have stood unwaveringly against the institution of slavery since the church’s founding, even at times when it has meant persecution and in some cases death. But did some Brethren actually work proactively against slavery?

According to William Kostlevy, Church of the Brethren archivist and director of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Philadelphia was an important terminus for the Underground Railroad, so it is likely that some Brethren were involved there. He cites the William Bucher farm in Lancaster, Pa., as another location where escaping slaves were hid. But the best known and most spirited Brethren involved with the Underground Railroad were Isabel Umstad Fitzwater (1805-1879) of Port Providence, Pa., along with her husband, Abel.

The Fitzwaters operated what is now known as the Fitzwater Station out of their farm that lay along the Schuylkill River. The two were founders of the Green Tree congregation and employed James Quinter before he became a leading Brethren publisher. Isabel Fitzwater was accused of taking part in “promiscuous prayer meetings,” so-called because they were led by women in the presence of men.

In this year 2018, when we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the granting of full ordination rights to women in the Church of the Brethren, it is worth remembering that Brethren leader Peter Nead criticized women like Isobel when he complained, “It is nothing uncommon for the false church to send females both old and young . . . thinking that by their sobs, and cries, and mournful entreaties, might prevail on them to come to the converting bench.”

Isobel Fitzwater was a leader in the Temperance Movement, so it is ironic that her farm is now the site of a restaurant and bar known as the “Fitzwater Station.” The location commemorates its association with the Underground Railroad by featuring artisanal beers. For homeward bound Brethren traveling in an easterly direction, this article in no way suggests that the Fitzwater Station should be a stop on your Brethren Heritage tour!