



# WINTER 2011

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# SEEDpacket

A newsletter for faith formation in the Church of the Brethren

## ***In the Beginning Was the Word* is 2011 Advent Devotional**

The 2011 Advent Devotional from Brethren Press, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, is written by David W. Miller.

This pocket-sized paperback offers a devotion, scripture, and prayer for each day of Advent. It is designed for individual reading and for congregations to provide to members as a spiritual resource for the season.

Order for \$2.50 each or \$5.95

for large print. Shipping charges will be added. Call 800-441-3712 or order online at [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com).

The devotional series is published

twice a year for Advent and Lent.

Becoming a seasonal subscriber costs only \$4 a year for both booklets.

Subscriptions are renewed automatically at the discount rate and bulk quantities can be adjusted with a phone call. Call 800-441-3712 for more information about this subscription program.

### **Anna**

#### **A meditation by Christy Waltersdorff**

*"There was also a prophet, Anna" (Luke 2:36-38).*

Anna was an elderly woman who lived in the temple. She prayed and fasted and was devoted to God. She, too, recognized the face of God in the baby Jesus and she sang her own song of joy. She told everyone about his arrival and what it would mean for God's people.

I can picture the young couple, Mary and Joseph, standing there with their baby representing God's glorious future, being blessed by an old woman and an old man who represented the best of the past. At this moment in the house of God the past and the present, the old and the young, the promises and the fulfillment meet and praise God.

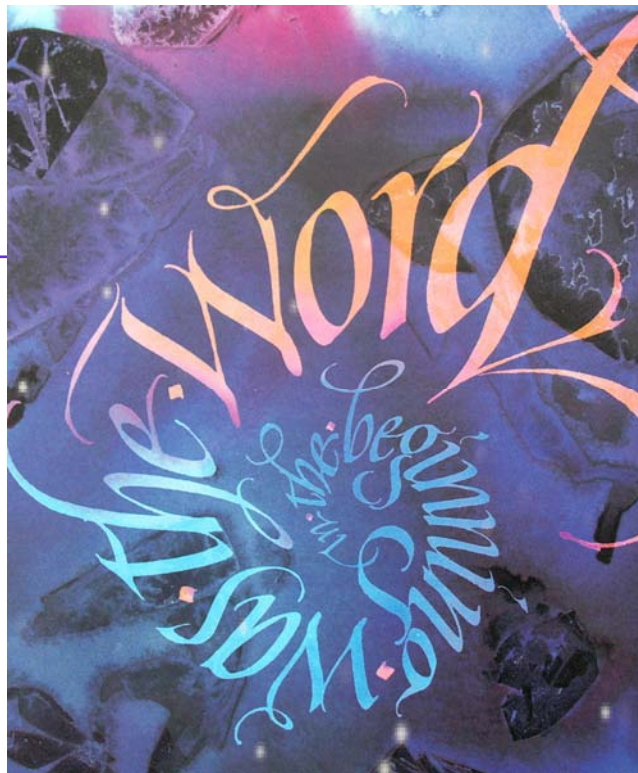
After the prayers and songs of joy, each went their own way, but that encounter was important enough for the Gospel writer to remember and give thanks.

Isn't that a beautiful picture of what the church is called to be? The family of faith is not complete unless all generations are present, supporting and blessing each other.

*In your prayers today:*

- Give thanks to God for those whose spiritual maturity is a blessing to you.
- Pray that you may share your wisdom and faith with people of all ages.

*Christy Waltersdorff is pastor of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill. This meditation was one of the resources provided for the 2011 Older Adult Month, observed in May ([www.brethren.org/oam](http://www.brethren.org/oam)).*



*Christmas cards featuring this calligraphy by Gwen Stamm, from the cover of the 2011 Advent Devotional, are available from Brethren Press. Call 800-441-3712.*

## **Winter curriculum**

**"Meet Jesus, our Teacher: Stories from Matthew"** is the theme for the Winter quarter of *Gather 'Round*, the Sunday school curriculum from Brethren Press and MennoMedia. *Gather 'Round* offers classes for children in preschool, primary, middler, junior youth, youth, and multi-age (grades K-5, with tips for older students). This quarter's lessons begin the first Sunday of Advent, Nov. 27, and continue through the first Sunday of Lent, Feb. 26. To order call Brethren Press at 800-441-3712. For more information about *Gather 'Round* go to [www.gatherround.org](http://www.gatherround.org).

**"God Establishes a Faithful People"** is the theme of the Winter *Guide for Biblical Studies*, the Brethren Press curriculum for adults. Written by Tom L. Zuercher, copies of this Bible study may be purchased for \$4.25 each or \$7.35 large print, plus shipping and handling. Call 800-441-3712 or order online at [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com).

## Embrace the wisdom of each age

By Anita Smith Buckwalter

When we are children we can't wait to grow up. Many of us eagerly count the months, the weeks, the days until we can date or drive a car. We look forward to getting a job and our own place to live.

At some point we begin to feel as though time is passing too quickly and we wish we could slow things down as we watch our children grow up and move out, or we get near retirement and think of all those dreams that look as though they will never happen.

Aging—it happens to all of us. It begins the moment we are born and continues until we die. We don't usually call it aging until sometime in midlife.

strangers to the young; our reserves of bodily energy have always been limited; we are dependent on others throughout our lives; and death has always been a certainty. In youth it is easier (at least for some) to ignore the facts of our finitude, to pretend that they are unimportant. When we grow older, it becomes difficult to keep up the pretense.

It is also easier to maintain the illusion that we have immunity from illness, disability, dependency and death when we have plenty of material resources. In poor, less developed parts of the world people witness daily these givens of human life.

### How do we cope?

So how do we cope with this uncertain endeavor we call life and especially with the lengthening of our days and years? I'd like to share the reflections of two different women. The first is well-known author Madeleine L'Engle, from her book *A Circle of Quiet*:

*I am still every age that I have been. Because I was once a child, I am always a child. Because I was once a searching adolescent, given to moods and ecstasies, these are still part of me, and always will be. Because I was once a rebellious student, there is and always will be in me the student crying out for reform.*

*This does not mean that I ought to be trapped or enclosed in any of these ages, the perpetual student, the delayed adolescent, the childish adult, but they are in me to be drawn on; to forget is a form of suicide; my past is part of what makes the present Madeleine and must not be denied or rejected or forgotten.*

*Far too many people misunderstand what putting away childish things means, and think that forgetting what it is like to think and feel and touch and smell and taste and see and hear like a 3-year-old or a 13-year-old or a 23-year-old means being grown up.*

*When I'm with these people I, like the kids, feel that if this is what it means to be a grown up, then I don't ever want to be one.*

*Instead of which, if I can retain a child's awareness and joy, and be 51, then I will really learn what it means to be grown up. I still have a long way to go.*

Certainly an important aspect of aging with integrity is integrating what has happened to us in the past with the needs of the present. We can sort our life experiences—deciding what we want to keep, what is still useful to us in the present and what is out of date and we need to let go of. In this process of sifting and learning from our past we gain wisdom and often a



Photo by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

*Participants at the 2011 National Older Adult Conference chat during a break in the gathering that took place at Lake Junaluska, N.C., in early September. The event commonly called NOAC is an every-other-year opportunity for the upper generation of Brethren to get together for spiritual growth, fellowship, and just plain fun.*

Early in life we call it growing up or maturing and it is a positive thing. When we feel like we are losing stamina, physical strength and flexibility, or mental ability then we call it aging and feel upset about it.

The aspects of aging which we fear or would like to avoid such as illness, lessening of energy, increased dependence on others, the threat and certainty of death are really nothing new. They are the natural, ever-present realities of what it means to be living embodied human beings. Pain and illness are not

sense of peace.

Elizabeth Welch in *Learning to Be 85* (1991, The Upper Room). tells this story:

*I remember when I said out loud to myself, 'You're old!' I do not recall the exact date, but I remember the event vividly. In retrospect, I believe that I uttered my declaration of independence in defiance of a television commercial that I had just heard in which*

*someone had exclaimed that she was not old, was not going to be old, and in short, seemed to be promising to live forever. I was indignant at her denial of an inevitable reality, and I said to the commercial, 'You're so busy trying*

**An effort to stress the positive side of aging can mask its adversities. A focus on the problems of aging can obscure its possibilities.**

*to recapture the fantasy of youth that you're wasting the reality of age and the life it has given you!*

*When I went to the mirror, looked myself straight in the eye, and said, 'I'm old!' it became real. But the corners of my mouth were turned down, and my frown was grim and joyless. Those two words went downhill all the way to the bottom. Then I said it again; my eyes gleamed, the corners of my mouth turned up in a wide grin, and my voice rang out as if in a proud declaration. That day I learned something important to my being 84—for oldness is very special and very precious; it is not to be denied. We have to make age work for us; we can't treat it as an enemy."*

To not treat our own aging as an enemy we will be working counter to the values and standard operating procedures of our youth-oriented culture. To advocate for dignity and justice for aging members of our communities will likely put us in conflict with business-as-usual in our society. But treating aging as an enemy and allowing the elders among us to become sidelined or invisible deprives our churches and communities of the rich, full experience of a large segment of the population at a time when pressing global issues require all the wisdom humanity can muster.

To change this negative view, we need an understanding of the realities and possibilities of the second half of people's lives. But it is difficult to talk about an experience as diverse as aging. In our discussions we tend to veer back and forth, like someone just learning

to ride a bicycle, between a consideration of the gifts of aging and a focus on its losses.

### Is it the best of times or the worst of times?

An effort to stress the positive side of aging, naming it "The Golden Years," can mask its adversities. A focus on the problems of aging can obscure its possibilities. We are asked to somehow hold together a paradox encompassing the reality of suffering and loss with the truth of resurrection and new life.

A woman described it in terms of the seasons. Her life felt like the autumn she was enjoying in nature in early October that year: "The days are gorgeous and full of color," she said, "but I know that it will be cold at night and get dark earlier. It is a very good time, but more lies behind than ahead. There is a poignancy and sadness along with the happiness" (from *Autumn Gospel* by Kathleen Fischer).

**Benediction:** May you embrace the wisdom of each age with wit, with grace, with power, and with faith. And may the blessing of the God of all ages be with us in youth and old age and fill our mouths with praise for such goodness. Amen.

Anita Smith Buckwalter, pastor of Lansing (Mich.) Church of the Brethren, contributed this reflection for the Church of the Brethren Health Promotion Sunday 2003. More resources for older adult faith formation are at [www.brethren.org/oam](http://www.brethren.org/oam).

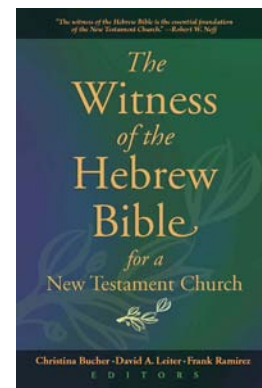
### The Witness of the Hebrew Bible for the New Testament Church: A Continuing Education Event

Nov. 7 from 9 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, co-sponsored by the college's Department of Religious Studies and the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center. \$50 registration fee, \$10 additional charge for continuing education units.

Although the church affirms that its scriptures include both the Old Testament, and the New Testament, Christians often downplay or ignore the witness of its "first testament" the Hebrew Bible. In a 2010 Brethren Press publication titled *The Witness of the Hebrew Bible for a New Testament Church*, 13 Brethren scholars addressed the question, "Of what relevance is the Old Testament for Christians today?"

Contributors to the book who will speak include Robert Neff, Jeff Bach, John David Bowman, Eugene Roop, and co-editors Christina Bucher, David Leiter, and Frank Ramirez.

For registration information call the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center at 717-361-1450.



## National Council of Churches releases four 'webisode' videos promoting quality education for children

Equal and quality education for all children is the focus of four short videos released by the National Council of Churches (NCC). The videos and a study guide are at [www.nccusa.org/elmc/publiceducationwebisodes.html](http://www.nccusa.org/elmc/publiceducationwebisodes.html).

**“As people of faith we do not view our children as products to be tested and managed but instead as unique human beings, created in the image of God, to be nurtured and educated.”**

The video resources follow up on a Pastoral Letter on education sent to the US President, Congress, and the Secretary of Education last year by the NCC's Governing Board. The letter declared, “At a moment when childhood poverty is shamefully widespread, when many families are under constant stress, and when schools are often limited by lack of funds or resources, we know that public schools cannot be improved by concentrating on public schools alone... In this context we must address with prayerful determination the issues of race and class, which threaten both public education and democracy in America.”

The Governing Board also questioned test-based

accountability as the philosophy that dominates today's media conversation around public education: “We worry that our society has come to view what is good as what can be measured and compared... As people of faith we do not view our children as products to be tested and managed but instead as unique human beings, created in the image of God, to be nurtured and educated.”

In a short clip that introduces each video, Michael Kinnamon, NCC general secretary, endorses public school justice reform as a priority for churches. “Each child has special, sacred gifts that need to be nurtured, and all children are special and precious in God's eyes,” he declares, “which means that a system in which some children have access to excellent instruction while others don't is simply unacceptable.”

Jan Resseger of the United Church of Christ and chair of the NCC Committee on Public Education and Literacy, said she “looks to the four short films as a comfortable context for church study groups to confront what have become heated issues.”

The films, each six or seven minutes long, feature Diane Ravitch, education historian at New York University, and John Jackson, president and CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education. Titles are “Educational Opportunity for All,” “Public Schools and the Common Good,” “Public Schools, Part of the Community or Marketplace?” and “Supporting Our Teachers.”

*Philip E. Jenks is on the NCC communications staff.*

## New from Brethren Press

***Secrets of the Kingdom: The Parables of Jesus*** is the 2012 Outdoor Ministry Resource. \$325 plus shipping and handling. Storytelling is as ancient as human communication. From writing on the walls of caves to oral tradition to written words to campfires and dinner tables, stories are how we pass on the meaning and beauty of our history.

Jesus used stories called parables to teach his disciples—and us—about what it means to live in his kingdom. In *Secrets of the Kingdom*, campers look to the Master Storyteller to discover six different parables and their meanings for our lives today.

***Miracles of Jesus*** is a *Covenant Bible Study* by James Benedict. \$7.95 plus shipping and handling. An examination of the role of miracles in the ministry of Jesus, this study promotes discussion about how the signs, wonders, and works of power that Jesus performed help us better understand the one we call Lord and what it means to be his disciple. Covenant Bible Studies guide small groups into a deeper understanding of God's word. Each includes 10 sessions with questions for group interaction and discussion about practical aspects of Christian faith.

***2011 Church of the Brethren Yearbook on CD***. \$21.50 plus shipping and handling. An essential resource for Church of the Brethren information. The disc format is searchable, easy to navigate, and contains contact information for congregations, districts, pastors, ministers, moderators, and Church of the Brethren agencies. Includes previous year's statistical report. Order one per user.

Order these resources from Brethren Press. Call 800-441-3712 or go to [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com).

