

MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.

May 2008

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

Messenger's 300th Anniversary series looks at the years 1908-58. Two leaders of the time are highlighted in “**I.N.H. Beahm: ‘Little Man’ with a Big Heart**” (pp. 8-9) by Anna M. Speicher; and “**Dan West: Pied Piper for Peace**” (pp. 12-14) by Denise Kettering. Other historical articles include “**Ring in the Bicentennial**” (p. 9) and “**Brethren and the Pandemic**” (p. 10) by Frank Ramirez; “**Caught Off-Guard at Goshen**” (p. 11) by Steve Longenecker, about how Brethren recanted an anti-war statement under threat of a sedition charge; “**Let’s Go Camping**” (p. 14) by Jane Davis; “**China Revisited: A Legacy of Mission**” (pp. 15-17) by Gene Wampler; and “**From Humblest Beginnings to the Largest of All**” (p. 17) by Janis Pyle, about Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

“**John: Signs of the Divine**” (pp. 20-21) by Graydon F. Snyder offers a Bible study on the gospel of John.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Hebrews 13:7-8 and Hebrews 11:1-12:2. **Read *Little Man*, the children’s book about I.N.H. Beahm** by Dorothy Brandt Davis, published by Brethren Press (find it in your church library or order a copy from Brethren Press at 800-441-3712). If you are a parent or grandparent of young children, read the book to them. If you are a Sunday school teacher, read it to your class. **Invite the children to write and illustrate their own book** about a famous Brethren leader. Ask for their suggestions of Brethren leaders to write about. As you help them come to a consensus, make sure you accept suggestions such as your pastor or a popular parent or grandparent in your church, as well as more prominent names. To create the book, write down the story of that person’s life as the children tell it, using their own words as much as possible. Then have each child illustrate one section of the story or one event in the person’s life. Assemble the children’s drawings with a printout of the story to make the book, and include each child’s name as an author/illustrator. When the book is finished, read it to the children, and make each of them a copy. Show it to your pastor and place a copy in the church library.

Read John 1:1-18 and 14:1-7. **Create a piece of art** exploring the concept of truth, after reading these and other relevant passages in John. You may write an essay on how you understand truth, or a poem; create a drawing, sculpture, photograph, or other art piece; write a piece of music or a hymn; or create a collage from magazines or make a collection of items that represent truth for you. **This month, use this creative process to center your prayer.** Let the process of creating art, and then contemplating it, help you search for a more complete understanding of God’s truth.

Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the life and work of I.N.H. Beahm with the life and work of Dan West. On what issues and types of work did each man focus? What church institutions and programs did each

have a hand in, either as a founder or a leader? What Christian convictions did Beahm and West have in common? How was each man either a force for unity or disunity in the church, or both?

2. Other accounts of Dan West's life give more emphasis to his choices to live simply and to say no to affluence. Do some more research about West, for example view *Dan West, Peacemaker*, a documentary by David Sollenberger in DVD format (\$15 plus shipping and handling from Brethren Press, call 800-441-3712), or read *Passing on the Gift: The Story of Dan West* by Glee Yoder (\$8.95 plus shipping and handling, call Brethren Press at 800-441-3712; or find it in your church library). How did Beahm and West both work at living simply, and why? How did the financial choices they made affect themselves and their families? Did the choice to live simply increase their personal integrity as church leaders? Why or why not?

3. Ramirez asserts that the results of the pandemic of 1918-19 included significant change in the Church of the Brethren. What changes in the church does he connect to the pandemic? Do you agree that these are connected? Why might a widespread experience of serious illness and death focus the ministry of the church in new directions, from outgoing evangelistic mission to service and pastoral care? Recently, medical experts have warned that the world is "due" for another pandemic. How could churches prepare for such an event? How might it affect Brethren today?

4. Compare the beginnings of the missions in China and Nigeria. What obstacles did the mission in China encounter, including historical events and political movements? How did those obstacles affect the mission? Why has the Nigeria mission been so successful in comparison?

5. What did missionaries to China, and Chinese converts, suffer in their quest to follow Jesus? How many people related to the China mission—American missionaries and Chinese Christians—lost their lives? Spend time in prayer for these martyrs of the faith, and then contemplate the questions: What am I willing to give for Christ? What am I willing to give that others may receive the Good News?

6. Wampler claims lasting achievements for the Brethren mission in China (pp. 16-17). What are they? List the achievements on the left side of a large piece of newsprint. Then think of equivalent achievements of the Church of the Brethren in the US and Puerto Rico, and list them on the right side of the newsprint. When the lists are complete, read them aloud as a litany, reading first an achievement of the China mission, and then one of the US church. Close this section of study by singing a Chinese hymn, "Now Go Forward" (399 in the *Hymnal*).

7. How did Jesus make the truth known through signs, as told in John? What five signs does Snyder highlight? Read the scripture passage about each sign. What truth does each sign reveal? Why are these important to us? Do you think these signs hold important in and of themselves, beyond the truth that they reveal about Jesus Christ?

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