Fire destroys Paradise church

The Camp Fire in northern California’s Butte County overran the town of Paradise and other smaller communities on Nov. 8, 2018. Lost in the fire were all of the buildings on the property of Paradise Community Church of the Brethren, including the main church facility and sanctuary, the parsonage, a youth building, and two rental cottages.

All of the people who are a part of the congregation evacuated safely and are living with relatives in other parts of northern California. The membership was very small, as was that of the Rock Fellowship, which had been renting space from the church and sharing in worship and ministry for some years.

In the face of this devastation, the congregation has let the district know that it will not continue in ministry.

The Pacific Southwest District conference held in La Verne, Calif., shortly after the fire swept through Paradise—a town of about 26,000 people located 15 miles east of Chico—opened with a time of prayer for the congregation and those fighting the fires. Rains over the Thanksgiving weekend helped firefighters reach 100 percent containment and extinguish the fire. Joel Price, district stewards chair, and district executive Russ Matteson visited pastor Melvin Campbell and his wife, Jane, on Nov. 28.

Several Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) teams have traveled to California to provide care in two locations beginning Nov. 16. Volunteers at the Chico site reported serving as many as 70 children per day.

The district is receiving donations to provide direct support to the pastor and members of the Paradise congregation as they seek to recover. Checks can be sent to Pacific Southwest District of the Church of the Brethren, P.O. Box 219, La Verne, CA 91750 (note “Paradise Fire” in the memo line). Donations for the CDS response and the planning for a Brethren Disaster Ministries long-term response may be sent to the Emergency Disaster Fund, Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 (note “Camp Fire Response”).

Workcamp office announces 2019 schedule

The Church of the Brethren Workcamp Ministry has released dates and locations for the 2019 summer workcamps. A total of 18 workcamps will be offered for junior high, senior high, young adult, and “We Are Able” participants.

The six junior high sites are in Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Senior high workcamps will take place in 10 locations from coast to coast, including Oregon, Idaho, Colorado, Tennessee, and Massachusetts. Young adults may choose to travel to China, or to assist in Elgin, Ill., with the “We Are Able” workcamp for youth and young adults with intellectual disabilities.

To view the schedule, which includes dates, locations, costs, and descriptions, visit www.brethren.org/workcamps/schedule. Registration will open on Jan. 17 at 8 p.m. (Eastern time). All youth and young adults in the denomination are encouraged to attend. For questions or to request a brochure, contact cobworkcamps@brethren.org.
NOAC committee unveils 2019 logo

Planners of the 2019 National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) have unveiled the logo for the event, highlighting the theme, “Reaching . . . across generations, beyond differences, through conflict . . . into joy” (Romans 15:7). The flowing blue and green logo was designed by Brethren graphic artist Debbie Noffsinger.

The conference will take place Sept. 2-6 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center near Waynesville, N.C. The NOAC web page, www.brethren.org/NOAC, will go live with 2019 information in January. Registration opens in April.

Christy Waltersdorff, pastor of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., is serving as NOAC coordinator this year. Serving with her on the planning team are Rex Miller, Pat Roberts, Karen Dillon, Glenn Bollinger, Paula Ziegler Ulrich, and Church of the Brethren staff members Stan Dueck and Josh Brockway.

SVMC celebrates its silver anniversary

With a festive banquet meal and worship, the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC) celebrated its 25th anniversary Nov. 3, 2018, at Chambersburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

About 85 people attended the event, spanning the 5 districts served by SVMC—Atlantic Northeast, Southern Pennsylvania, Middle Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, and Mid-Atlantic—along with denominational staff.

SVMC, which began as the Susquehanna Valley Satellite with two district partners in 1993, was created to provide quality Brethren ministry education in the area of the country with the denomination’s highest population. To date, it has served more than 2,900 students in continuing education, TRIM and ACTS ministry training programs, and graduate courses.

Many changes and additions have occurred over the past quarter-century, but SVMC director Donna Rhodes said the organization’s mission “is as strong today as it was 25 years ago.” That strength, she said, is due in large part to the healthy partnerships that SVMC has nurtured with its partners, especially the cooperating districts, Bethany Theological Seminary, and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

Bethany dean Steven Schweitzer served as featured speaker for the evening’s worship, drawing from the anniversary theme, “Growing in Knowledge, Rooted in Christ.”

Yearbook changes process for collecting congregational information

A November letter from the Yearbook Office informed Church of the Brethren congregations that changes are forthcoming in the way directory and statistical data will be collected. No Form B was mailed this past fall, but instead will be combined into a later mailing. This is the first step, and further changes will be made over the course of a couple of years. More details and instructions will be sent to congregations and districts in early 2019.

The end goal is to reduce the collection of information from multiple forms and mailings to a single mailing to be sent out early each year. There will be an online option for congregations to submit their information—something many have asked for—but a paper option will still be offered.

“We appreciate the time and effort you put into completing these forms each year—a vital way for the church to stay connected,” said Yearbook specialist Jim Miner. “Form B and other forms are used to collect directory and statistical information from congregations. Much of it is published in the annual Church of the Brethren Yearbook.”

For questions and more information contact yearbook@brethren.org or 800-323-8039 ext. 320.