Letter opposes drone strikes, Brethren invited to rally

The Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in February signed an interfaith letter about CIA drone strikes. The letter from 25 faith-based organizations asked Congress to end the CIA’s use of armed drones to carry out lethal attacks.

“There must be transparency and accountability regarding the use of lethal force undertaken on our behalf,” the letter said, in part. “The CIA’s program of drone strikes has expanded in the past two years to include strikes in Libya and Afghanistan. This is in addition to the CIA’s long-term program of carrying out strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and possibly other countries. . . . By refusing to acknowledge most of its strikes, the CIA prevents civilian victims from receiving justice and conveys moral responsibility for killing on to an American people who have never been informed about this secret war, nor had their members of Congress vote on it.”

The office invites Brethren to a rally against drone warfare on May 3 in Washington, D.C. The rally will call for an end to CIA drone strikes and for General Atomics, the company responsible for development of Predator and Reaper drones, to sign the “Future of Life” pledge on lethal autonomous weapons.

GFI visits Brethren-founded groups in Ecuador

Although Church of the Brethren mission work in Ecuador ended in the 1970s, the name lives on in Fundación Brethren y Unida (FBU, Brethren and United Foundation) and Unidad Educativa “Brethren” (Brethren Educational Unit). FBU is a non-governmental organization in Picalqui, about an hour north of the capital Quito, focused on environmental education for youth and teaching organic food production to women’s groups. Unidad Educativa “Brethren” is in Llano Grande, in the greater Quito metropolitan area.

In 2017, Dale Minnich, a former Brethren mission worker in Ecuador and the first executive director of FBU, revisited Ecuador and the Global Food Initiative (GFI) began collaborating with FBU. Two GFI grants supported FBU work with women and youth. This January, GFI manager Jeff Boshart visited to see FBU’s work and attend a meeting as a newly appointed board member.

FBU is repairing and upgrading its facilities to attract more international volunteers and visitors. Boshart observed a cooking class and made several field visits. One morning was spent hiking near Lagunas de Mojanda, a crater lake in a protected biological reserve. Although deforestation is extreme in the area, the road to the lake was lined with more than 500,000 native trees planted over 15 years by school children with direction from FBU.

FBU maintains a tree nursery, a small dairy herd of 12 cows, plots of blackberries, tree tomatoes (tomarillo), and vegetables. Larger fields produce wheat, alfalfa, and corn. FBU is seeking those with farming or gardening experience to spend time working on the farm and in community programs. Contact JBoshart@brethren.org.

In Llano Grande, Boshart was greeted warmly by elders who remember the US mission and asked about many mission workers by name. These elders were educated in the Brethren school and remain fiercely proud of the formation they received in both school and church many years ago. Although the church is now United Methodist, Brethren values of service, peacemaking, and concern for the most vulnerable members of society have become embedded in the community. In parting, the elders sent their greetings and hopes for more news and communication from old friends.

A photo album is at www.bluemelon.com/churchofthebrethren/globalfoodinitiativeecuadorvisit.
Detrick and Sollenberger top ballot for moderator

Topping the ballot for the 2019 Annual Conference are nominees for moderator-elect Joe A. Detrick of Seven Valleys, Pa., an ordained minister and retired district executive; and David Sollenberger of Annville, Pa., a videographer who has documented Brethren conferences and ministries.

Other positions and nominees:
Program and Arrangements Committee: Carol Hippes Elmore, Salem, Va.; Seth Hendricks, North Manchester, Ind.
Brethren Benefit Trust board: Audrey Myer, Elizabethtown, Pa.; Derrick Petry, Beavercreek, Ohio.
On Earth Peace board: Catherine K. Carson, Fairfax, Va.; Carla L. Gillespie, Tipp City, Ohio.
Elections will be held during Annual Conference July 3-7 in Greensboro, N.C. For more information and to register go to www.brethren.org/ac.

Dikaios pilgrimage will visit Cherokee

Intercultural Ministries offers a Dikaios and Discipleship
Pre-Conference Pilgrimage on July 2-3. The bus trip will start in Greensboro, N.C., make an overnight stay in Cherokee, and visit the Museum of the Cherokee and Oconaluftee Living Village.

Themes for the tour include righteousness and justice, a history of faith, land and lament, and doctrine of discovery. An announcement described Cherokee as “a place that is at once a sacred homeland for the Cherokee tribe, a place of modern cultural rebirth, and a tourist destination . . . where layers of history and a modern American dream collide. Join us on a scripture-inspired tour of a region to reflect on how our values—and those of our ancestors—have shaped the lives of Native Americans.”

For more information and to register go to www.brethren.org/dikaios.

Personnel notes

Dana Cassell is managing Thriving in Ministry, a grant-funded initiative of the Office of Ministry offering support for multivocational pastors. She started half-time on Jan. 7 while continuing to pastor Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C. Three-fourths of Brethren pastors are multivocational. Recognizing one challenge for them is less time and availability to travel for education, conferences, and fellowship with other pastors, Thriving in Ministry will offer resources and support in their own context.

Shannon McNeil began March 4 as a Mission Advancement advocate working out of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. She and Nancy Timbrook McCrickard are a team of advocates working at relationship-building with donors. She most recently was manager of human resources and constituent affairs in the Office of the Governor, in Chicago. She holds degrees from Bridgewater (Va.) College and the University of Chicago. She is a member of Neighborhood Church of the Brethren in Montgomery, Ill.

Emily Tyler started as director of Brethren Volunteer Service on Feb. 4. She continues to work out of the General Offices where she had coordinated BVS recruitment and Workcamp Ministry since June 27, 2012. In 2006, as a BVSer, she co-coordinated National Youth Conference and Young Adult Conference. As coordinator of the Workcamp Ministry she supervised BVSers each year as the ministry offered workcamps for junior and senior highs, young adults, multi-generational groups, and We Are Able.

Steve Van Houten started March 6 as interim coordinator of the Workcamp Ministry, working out of the General Offices. He coordinated the ministry July 2006 through January 2008 after serving as temporary coordinator beginning January 2005. He is retired as senior pastor of Pine Creek (Ind.) Church of the Brethren.

National Youth Cabinet members have been named for 2019-2020: Eric Finet, Nokesville congregation, Mid-Atlantic District; Grace VanAsselt, McPherson, Western Plains District; Lucas Musselman, Oak Grove, Virlina District; Madison Creps, Mechanisburg, Southern Pennsylvania District; Rachel Johnson, Mechanic Grove, Atlantic Northeast District; Tristen Craighead, Manassas, Mid-Atlantic District; adult advisors Leslie Lake, Illinois and Wisconsin District, and Dennis Beckner, Northern Indiana District.