

**Church of the Brethren Annual Report of 2020**

**Published in June 2021**

*Dear Church*

*Living Letters of Christ*



## Report of the Church of the Brethren

*“You yourselves are our letter,  
written on our hearts, to be known and read by all;  
and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us,  
written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,  
not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”*  
–2 Corinthians 3:2-3

In 2020, almost no part of the church’s ministries were unaffected by COVID-19. Most staff worked from home. Travel to mission partners came to a halt. Events went online or were canceled. But in a world where “distance” became part of everyday vocabulary, the church developed new ways to connect. In discomfoting times, the church remembered the apostle Paul’s words to people who were far away and became “living letters” to one another. As this report attests, the work of Jesus continued, often in unexpected ways.

## GLOBAL MISSION

The Global Mission office seeks to deepen faith and relationships with partners around the world. A newly developed map of the Global Communion shows 11 countries in which there are registered Church of the Brethren denominations.

After executive director Jay Wittmeyer resigned in early January 2020, interim directors Norman and Carol Spicher Waggy, with support from Roxane Hill as interim office manager, helped mission work continue during the search for a new executive director. Organizational restructuring separated Global Mission from Service Ministries, though these departments still work together closely. The Global Food Initiative remains lodged within Global Mission, and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy is now part of the Office of the General Secretary.

### **Global Church of the Brethren Communion**

The vision of Global Mission, based on the 2018 Church of the Brethren statement on the Global Church, is that partner denominations in other countries will develop a structure to encourage interdependent relationships and partnership in mission. While no physical gathering of international partners was possible in 2020, two meetings were held via videoconference.

The second included representatives from all but one of the 11 international denominations. A committee is working on a constitution and bylaws for this organization. Under the leadership of Marcos Inhauser as chair, the work is proceeding through email and videoconference meetings.

### **Country Advisory Teams**

Country Advisory Teams (CATs) were developed this year to facilitate communication between the Global Mission

office and the partner denominations in other countries. Each country team of two to three people has representation from that country and the US. These teams report quarterly to the interim directors and can offer advice and counsel. For example, the American member of the CAT for the Dominican Republic has been active in mediation efforts between factions within the church in the Dominican Republic.

### **Countries with Church of the Brethren denominations**

Brazil's Igreja da Irmandade continues under the leadership of Marcos and Suely Inhauser. The church provides small group worship, counseling, and ministries of theological teaching and writing. The Inhausers produced a bilingual video on the Pietist and Anabaptist roots of the Church of the Brethren that is accessible at Brethren.org.

Challenges abound for all of our partner denominations. There was major flooding in Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). World economies suffered this year, especially in the poorer nations. Every partner was affected by COVID-19. Day laborers could no longer find work as the pandemic caused lockdowns, creating increased financial hardship.

These challenges affected the Iglesia de los Hermanos in the Dominican Republic and in Spain and Eglise de Freres in Haiti. Church of the Brethren involvement in Haiti remains strong and includes the work of the Haiti Medical Project.

In the Great Lakes region of Africa there are growing Brethren groups in Rwanda, the DRC, and Uganda, the newest one. The internet helps the Global Mission office connect with these brothers and sisters, who are so distant given travel restrictions this year.

Concerns for Nigeria have not diminished, as the violence there worsened

through the year. Attacks from Boko Haram and the pandemic compel the church to ongoing prayer for our brothers and sisters of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria.

The office attempts to maintain relationships with two groups in India, the Church of North India and the Second District Church of the Brethren. This year Global Mission helped with an evangelistic project of the Iglesia de los Hermanos in Venezuela, which continues to grow and reach out to those in need.

### **International relationships**

The Global Mission office also relates to a number of ministries that are not yet officially registered as denominations. A map is available to illustrate these connections as well.

South Sudan is prominent on that list. Athanasus Ungang is Global Mission staff working at the Torit Peace Center and engaging in church development.

The other country with Global Mission workers is China. Eric Miller and Ruoxia Li work with a hospice program at the Friendship and Love Hospital, a successor to early Brethren mission work in China.

Churches in Burundi are growing; contacts with groups in Mexico continue; and exciting contacts have been established with a congregation in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

### **Other relationships**

The Mission Advisory Committee has met several times this year, providing helpful feedback to the interim directors as they have worked with changes in staff structure and the development of the CATs. The Global Mission office also benefits from the Brethren World Mission group, which raises funds for mission and supports the mission work of this office.

Global Mission allocated a total of \$783,816 in 2020. Some expenditures were

decreased in 2020 because of the inability to travel and concern that pandemic-challenged economies and congregations leaving might result in decreased giving to the denomination.

These included:

- \$105,403 for salaries of staff and contract workers in four countries
- \$28,563 for education and scholarships in six countries
- \$44,125 for church construction in three countries
- \$109,907 for ongoing program costs in six countries
- \$289,525 for the Haiti Medical Project
- \$145,891 through the Global Food Initiative

- \$60,401 for additional special projects in seven countries: Spain received \$10,094, Haiti \$8,005, Venezuela \$15,669, South Sudan \$3,200, Dominican Republic \$3,900, Vietnam \$4,533, and Nigeria \$15,000.

Another way to look at Global Mission expenditures (apart from Global Food Initiative) is by country: Brazil \$23,364; China \$24,000; Dominican Republic \$39,618; France \$2,400; Haiti \$319,000; Honduras \$1,057; India \$6,015; Lebanon \$500; Mexico \$1,001; Nigeria \$47,122; Rwanda \$27,490; South Sudan \$97,447; Spain \$18,094; Uganda \$91; Venezuela \$25,669; and Vietnam \$4,533.

### Global Food Initiative

One constant in a world of great change is that people need to eat, and, for people to eat, farmers need to plant. Locally produced food became even more important in 2020 as the transport of food across long distances was hampered by border closings and travel restrictions globally, leading to rising food prices.

In 2020 the activities of the Global Food Initiative (GFI) Fund centered on supporting churches and organizations dedicated to growing food and serving neighbors in need. Income to the fund was \$205,877. The sum of all funds given to both international and domestic partners through GFI was \$145,890.

GFI works to keep administrative percentages low in awarded grants, but as the year progressed the struggles facing international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) came into sharp focus. Special administrative grants of \$5,000 were awarded to four GFI partners: Proyecto Aldea Global in Honduras, Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services in Burundi,

Bittersweet Ministries in Mexico, and Fundación Brethren y Unida in Ecuador.

Other international grants were given to support agricultural development work in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Haiti, Nigeria, Rwanda, Spain, and Venezuela. Projects included animal raising, tree planting, soil conservation, water harvesting, appropriate scaled mechanization, and crop production. International allocations totaled \$107,159.

In the US, grants were given to churches and organizations in Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Ohio, and Virginia. These domestic grants are connected primarily to church-based community gardens. Total allocations of domestic grants equaled \$21,989.

GFI supports advocacy work on food sovereignty through yearly contributions to Bread for the World, Growing Hope Globally, and the National Farm Worker Ministry, with contributions tallying \$16,742.

## SERVICE MINISTRIES

The spread of COVID-19 heightened the need for Service Ministries in the US and throughout the world. At the same time, programs had to adjust to live out their mission in new ways. The focus on equipping individuals and congregations to address humanitarian needs safely helped these ministries have a significant impact.

During 2020, the Service Ministries programs were separated from Global Mission and carried out under the leadership of executive director Roy Winter, who also directs Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM).

### Brethren Disaster Ministries

“If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (Isaiah 58:10). This scripture text provided encouragement and inspiration to develop two pandemic grant programs funded through the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF).

A grant program for US congregations and districts provided 44 grants across 11 districts. In total, \$174,062 assisted community-based ministries serving vulnerable people. A global grant program provided seven global Brethren communions and four Church of the Brethren mission points with \$208,550 in critical humanitarian support for impoverished people. These international grants were in

#### Home Rebuilding

Although fewer volunteers were able to serve with the Home Rebuilding program, many protocols and mitigation efforts were put into place so that disaster survivors, some of whom had waited two years, could finally have work completed on their homes. Throughout the year, 618 rebuilding volunteers, including 46 project leaders, committed 38,368 hours of service to survivors in three states and Puerto Rico. Valued at \$1,043,609, this work assisted 125 families needing repairs or rebuilding. The rebuilding ministry was led by director Jenn Dorsch-Messler. Terry Goodger, who served

Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Spain, and Venezuela.

An especially destructive hurricane season and other disasters, combined with the global pandemic, provided the backdrop for observing 60 years of Church of the Brethren humanitarian response through EDF. The pandemic caused the cancellation of the three district-run disaster auctions that provide major funding for the fund, reducing resources for programing in 2021. In response, a fundraising campaign, “Rise Up Brethren,” was initiated in the fall.

BDM office manager Sharon Franzén provides administrative support, and Darlene Hylton gives database support. as program assistant, resigned at the end of the year.

Despite travel restrictions, rebuilding in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria was completed in 2020, as planned. The project, in partnership with Puerto Rico District, was led by Carrie Miller and construction assistant Carmelo Rodriguez, in collaboration with district disaster coordinator José Acevedo and the district recovery committee. In 2020, 59 volunteers traveled to Puerto Rico and 58 families were served.

Rebuilding led by project leaders Kim Gingerich and Steve Keim took place in two North Carolina locations that served



survivors of hurricanes Matthew and Florence. Despite an early closure in Lumberton in March, 133 volunteers served 19 families. When the Coastal North Carolina site opened in September with extensive COVID-19 mitigation measures, 77 volunteers were able to serve 14 families.

A rebuilding project in the Tampa, Fla., area served 21 families affected by Hurricane Irma. Sammy Deacon and Jerry Moore served as leaders for the site, where 125 volunteers repaired homes from January to March.

In July, a new site opened in Dayton, Ohio to help with recovery from a 2019 tornado. Project leaders Deacon, Rex Miller, and BVS volunteer Evan Ulrich provided support for this site that began solely with local Southern Ohio/Kentucky District volunteers. A pandemic-modified housing location opened in August, allowing for weekly volunteers from outside the area. Over five months, 219 volunteers safely worked on 12 homes before the site was paused at Thanksgiving.

### **Children's Disaster Services**

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) expected 2020 to be a milestone celebration of 40 years serving children and families after disasters. The year turned out quite differently, with the limitation of in-person trainings and deployments due to the pandemic.

The year started strong, with associate director Lisa Crouch traveling to New York City to initiate a new Red Cross pilot program. Project leaders were given intensive training so they could lead small teams caring for children in daily deployments to pop-up shelters. While this program will eventually allow CDS to help children in metropolitan areas facing local disasters such as building evacuations, transportation incidents, and fires, it was put on hold due to the pandemic.

Two trainings were held in early March in Bridgewater, Va., and La Verne, Calif., with 59 new volunteers trained. The remaining training schedule was postponed until 2021. CDS ended 2020 with 842 certified volunteers.

To adapt to the needs of non-congregate sheltering, CDS designed an Individual Kit of Comfort (IKOC) to be distributed to children through Red Cross operations for the disaster season. IKOCs were deployed to California and Colorado wildfires, Tropical Storm Hannah (Texas), Hurricane Laura (Louisiana), and Missouri flooding. Over 2,500 kits were distributed to children in 2020, with 1,000 sent through new partner Partnerships with Native Americans to tribal communities hit hard by COVID-19.

A newly formed Children and Family Task Team gave families facing pandemic-related isolation a social media support group, devotional videos, and resources for coping with quarantine. Program assistant Sherry Chastain assisted with this committee, CDS programing, and special pandemic response activities.

### **International response**

The COVID-19 response program and Nigeria Crisis Response were key features of international programing. Early in 2020, grants supported Church World Service (CWS) responses to Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas (\$25,000) and flooding in Kenya (\$25,000).

Lebanon was already struggling with high unemployment, a failed economy, and the pandemic, when an August explosion in the port of Beirut caused widespread destruction in the city. Working with IMA World Health and the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, the Church of the Brethren provided \$35,000 in EDF funds for emergency food, medical care, and livelihood recovery.

Smaller flood responses in Venezuela and the DR Congo were followed by

devastating hurricanes Eta and Iota, which struck Central America in November. Grants totaling \$45,000 provided emergency food, shelter, and medical care through CWS, Proyecto Aldea Global (Project Global Village), and new partner Christian Solidary Program for Honduras.

### **Nigeria Crisis Response**

The Nigeria Crisis Response continues to aid our global neighbors affected by the violence from Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria, which began in 2009 and has resulted in the displacement of 70 percent of members of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The significant recovery of EYN and continued relief programming contrasts with the violence that is spreading throughout Nigeria.

In more stable areas, EYN churches, families, and communities are rebuilding. In other areas, the burning of churches, killings, kidnappings, banditry, food shortages, and malnutrition are regular challenges. The pandemic has made all these situations worse, so additional grants were made for pandemic relief.

Working in partnership with EYN and the European organization Mission 21,

BDM is helping lead an extensive program that includes sponsorship of four camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), food distributions, medical assistance, livelihood training centers for widows and orphans, seeds and fertilizer, new wells for drinking water, education assistance for orphan children, trauma workshops, training of one-on-one counselors, home repairs for the most vulnerable, and continued development of a long-term soybean program.

### **Financial details**

Donations to BDM, CDS, the Nigeria Crisis Fund, and the Emergency Disaster Fund totaled \$1,136,978 in 2020, which was about half of average annual donations over the last five years. This giving and EDF reserves provided for all BDM expenses, including staff, programs, and allocations for disaster response totaling \$1,835,546.

The special COVID-19 relief programs, including domestic and global grants, totaled \$422,612. Other expenditures included \$127,469 for the Puerto Rico hurricane response; \$221,552 for other US responses, including Home Rebuilding and CDS; \$287,548 for the Nigeria Crisis Response; and \$166,000 for other international responses.

## **Brethren Volunteer Service**

Many Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) workers had to cut short their terms of service in early in March or April because of the pandemic. This included all German volunteers who were in the US through BVS partner organization EIRENE.

Nevertheless, orientations were able to be shifted to a virtual process, and BVS welcomed 18 new volunteers in 2020. Staff shifted the volunteer placement process so that the two-week virtual orientation could double as quarantine at the volunteers' new project sites.

Interim orientation coordinator Pauline Liu and assistant Kara Miller led orientations in the summer and fall. A unit with the Brethren Revival Fellowship was held in Newsmantown, Pa.

At the end of the year, 58 volunteers were serving in 5 countries, 12 states, and Puerto Rico. The annual Partners in Service Award was given to SnowCap Community Charities in Portland, Ore. Jocelyn Siakula resigned mid-year after five years as orientation coordinator.

### **Faith Outreach Expeditions**

*(formerly Brethren Workcamps)*

The theme “Voices for Peace,” based on Romans 15:1-6, encouraged workcamp participants to consider how God is calling them to use their distinct voices and skills to advocate for peace and justice in their communities. Workcamps were scheduled in 12 states and in Rwanda, with 321 people registered.

After in-person workcamps were canceled due to the pandemic, the workcamp team offered seven weeks of virtual workcamp experiences. For an hour each week, workcamp staff, leaders, youth, and advisors gathered by Zoom to hear a

reflection, engage in discussion, play games, and create memories.

The 2020 season was organized by assistant coordinators Kara Miller and Liana Smith, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service, and Hannah Shultz, coordinator of short-term service. In August, BVSers Alton Hipps and Chad Whitzel began work on the 2021 season.

After a lengthy discernment process, staff changed the workcamp name to Faith Outreach Expeditions (FaithX) to better speak to the spiritual component of the program, the emphasis on service, and the sense of adventure in traveling to provide ministry.

### **Material Resources**

Material Resources (MR) program staff responded to needs in 24 states and 22 countries. Their 114 shipments totaled 590 tons of hospital supplies, quilts, health kits, school kits, baby kits, cleanup kits, and other supplies and were valued at \$5.7 million.

During January and February, 156 volunteers supported the ministry, and local volunteer Jerry Duple baled 30 tons of cardboard for recycling. But volunteering stopped in March, and Material Resources was closed through May except for limited staffing for deliveries, shipments, and coordination with partners. The contact with volunteers was greatly missed, and their absence significantly slowed the processing of donated kits.

Loretta Wolf directed Material Resources, while Scott Senseney and Glenna Thompson coordinated warehouse and office operations. Warehouse staff Richard Best, Melissa Fritz, Brenda Giles, and Trent Turner packed items for shipping. Ed Palsgrove managed the trucks, delivered shipments, and picked up donations.

Medical supplies were sorted and prepared for shipment by Winni Wanionek and Jeffrey Brown.

On behalf of CWS, kits and/or blankets were sent in response to hurricanes Delta, Dorian, Eta, Kito, Laura, and Sally, as well as to Puerto Rico earthquake relief efforts. In shipments to a dozen states, Material Resources sent supplies for homeless people and refugees and for responses to floods and COVID-19.

CWS and International Orthodox Christian Charities collaborated to ship school kits to Romania and Armenia. Lutheran World Relief shipments sailed to the Bahamas, Bosnia, Chile, Republic of Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. Donations of hospital supplies shipped to Dominican Republic, Haiti, Italy, Liberia, Nigeria, Panama, Puerto Rico, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe on behalf of Brothers Brother Foundation. In October, Material Resources began receiving items for an airplane hangar that will be shipped to Liberia in 2021.



## DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

Discipleship Ministries seeks to equip the people of God, new and renewed, to embody and articulate their faith. The team of Joshua Brockway, Stan Dueck, Becky Ullom Naugle, LaDonna Sanders Nkosi, and Randi Rowan serves the Church of the Brethren through planning events and building relationships. Nkosi joined the team as director of Intercultural Ministries. A pastor and church planter, she adds experience in ministry in addition to skills in building intercultural communities in both religious and academic settings.

Because of the pandemic, all in-person events planned for 2020 made significant transitions. The National Young Adult Conference and the New and Renew Conference deferred their onsite agreements to 2021 and hosted digital resources and community building spaces. Ministry Summer Service continued in 2020 by providing Zoom meetings for learning and formation while interns served in their home communities. A generous grant from the Gahagen Trust supported these interns financially and funded the resource leaders.

Discipleship Ministries partnered with several organizations. Brockway co-taught a course on urban ministry in Atlanta through Bethany Theological Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. The team supported a webinar series from Freedom Road on the Latinx church. Church of the Brethren leaders received financial assistance to attend the Inhabit Conference organized by the Parish Collective. Dueck led a course through the Ventures initiative hosted by McPherson College.

Videoconferencing capabilities made it possible for a number of conversations to take place across the church. Some were

simple conversations for pastors as they transitioned their congregations into online worship. Others were extended dialog and study opportunities such as the Healing Racism book studies hosted by Nkosi. She facilitated a conversation around the book *Everyday Ubuntu*, and hosted the author of the book, Mungi Ngomane. Nkosi also facilitated a journaling workshop with Dana Cassell, Thriving in Ministry program manager.

The team's use of social media increased with creation of a Facebook page for Discipleship Ministries. It joins existing pages for youth advisors, young adults, church planters, and intercultural ministries, along with pages for events such as National Youth Conferences and National Older Adult Conference.

Staff continued to train leadership and offer consulting ministries with congregations and districts. With co-presenter Kayla Alphonse, Nkosi led a session on Healing Racism for the Mission and Ministry Board. She also worked with the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District race relations team. Dueck worked with eight congregations and provided 105 hours of coaching for pastors and leaders. Brockway preached at the Idaho/Montana district conference and met with pastors groups interested in resources available through the church's partnership with the Christian Community Development Association. He and Traci Rabenstein of Mission Advancement researched online giving guidelines and recommendations for congregation.

Staff administered grants from the Brethren Faith in Action Fund and the Health Education and Research Fund. The latter was tapped for a special one-time

disbursement of \$500,000 that was shared among all Church of the Brethren retirement communities for increased costs due to the pandemic. The fund regularly provides continuing education grants for member communities of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes and scholarships for nursing students.

The discipleship team continued planning for conferences and events in 2021. Both National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) and the New and Renew Conference will take place virtually in 2021. The events are made possible by countless hours of volunteer time from people across

the denomination. These working groups include the NOAC Planning Committee, New and Renew Team, Young Adult Steering Committee, National Youth Cabinet, National Junior High Conference Committee, Intercultural Ministries Advisory Committee, and Spiritual Directors Advisory Team.

Two key contractors also expand the team's capabilities: Christy Waltersdorff leads the planning for National Older Adult Conference. Rebekah Flores serves as a disabilities ministries advocate and represents the Church of the Brethren on the Anabaptist Disabilities Network board.

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

Organizational Resources, which supports all staff and ministries of the Church of the Brethren, consists of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Buildings and Grounds, Finance, and Information Technology. Shawn Flory Replogle is executive director, and Ed Woolf is director of finance and treasurer.

### **Brethren Historical Library and Archives**

The Brethren Historical Library and Archives (BHLA), directed by Bill Kostlevy, is the official repository for Church of the Brethren records documenting the ministry of the church. Allison Snyder, who began in June as BHLA intern, was instrumental in planning and executing several virtual library tours with participants from as far away as India and Germany. Jessi Marsiglio provided regular volunteer assistance in the archives.

Even with pandemic restrictions, the archives provided the following services:

294 written requests, 103 phone requests, 28 onsite researchers, and tours for 9 people. Staff processed about 135 feet of archival material. Among the important collections received and processed were the papers of Eugene Roop and the records of the Geneva, Switzerland, office of Brethren Service and Brethren Volunteer Service, 1959-2019. One special project included scanning hundreds of photographs concerning Brethren missions, service, events, personalities, and institutions.

## Buildings and Grounds

Salvador Campero and Francie Coale oversee the care and maintenance of the Church of the Brethren properties. Campero directs the Buildings and Grounds team at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. Coale directs the team at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., assisted full-time by Felix Hill, maintenance assistant. Both locations experienced prolonged closures to all staff except those deemed essential. During those closures, Buildings and Grounds staff developed and implemented plans to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19 and prepared the buildings for eventual reopening.

In Elgin, with fewer people in the building, extensive servicing of the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems was undertaken, extending the sustainability of

the systems for many years to come. Over 2,000 donation boxes were received on behalf of Church World Service and transferred by semi-trailer to New Windsor. In addition, a new Brethren Volunteer Service house was purchased closer to the General Offices. It was renovated and made ready for volunteers to move in by July. The old BVS house was sold in December.

In New Windsor, while Material Resources staff were out of the building, the packing area was painted and tables were resurfaced. Old lighting was replaced with LED lighting throughout the warehouse. Other upgrades included improvements to staff areas in the kitchen, installation of personal lockers, and replacement of dock doors.

## Finance

During the uncertainty of 2020, the finance team was a stable presence, providing the same quality information about the financial health of the organization as they would in any year. Ed Woolf managed estate giving, split-interest gifts, pastors' housing fund accounts, corporate credit card accounts, corporate insurance policies. He also provided financial, budget, and accounting services.

Pat Marsh, accountant and assistant treasurer, oversaw the annual audit and provided budget support, financial reports,

and cash management services. Lynn Phelan, accounts payable specialist, provided financial and administrative support in processing and reporting all types of payments and funds transfers. Barb Watt, financial operations specialist and payroll manager, provided accounts receivable, accounts payable, and financial reporting services to staff in New Windsor. Nancy Watts, donation and accounts receivable specialist, managed invoicing, along with all donations and gifts received for the Church of the Brethren and its ministries.

## Information Technology

The work of Information Technology proved especially important in March, when all office staff were sent to work at home until further notice. The IT team made sure every staff member had access to a laptop computer and was connected to the virtual

private network so that the work of the organization could continue. The team also updated server storage space. Audiovisual equipment in the main conference room in the Elgin offices was upgraded to be ready for a Zoom world, and this upgrade was

used by the Mission and Ministry Board for its virtual meeting in October.

Francie Coale is director of information technology for the organization, overseeing IT at both the Elgin and New Windsor

facilities. Fabiola Fernandez is manager of information technology in Elgin. They provide computer, telephone, internet, and audiovisual support for all staff.

### Financial results for 2020

Shortly into the pandemic, the Mission and Ministry Board approved a revised budget for Core Ministries in 2020. In this new budget, expected income was lowered by \$446,960 and expected expenses were lowered by \$339,850. With these changes, the Core Ministries Fund ended the year with a net surplus of \$127,487, with the church able to set aside funds for future budget shortfalls and for costs associated with implementing the new strategic plan.

While giving was \$143,942 above the revised budget, total giving to Core Ministries was down \$52,330 from 2019. Congregational giving totaled \$1,682,892, a decrease of \$81,187. Individual giving rose by \$28,857 to \$574,050.

The denomination's Self-Funding Ministries were drastically affected by the pandemic. For Material Resources, a significant drop in service fees and processing income led to a deficit of \$121,958. The Conference Office was helped by more than \$70,000 in donated registration fees, but the cancellation of Annual Conference caused a deficit of \$116,366. For Brethren Press, sales fell sharply when congregations could no longer meet in person, but a fundraising campaign

brought in more than \$117,000—enough that the publishing house finished the year with only a small deficit of \$4,648.

Giving to both the Global Food Initiative and the Emergency Disaster Fund decreased sharply, especially because of the cancellation of district fundraisers. Donations to Brethren Disaster Ministries totaled \$1,136,987, a decrease of \$865,948. Giving to the Global Food Initiative Fund totaled \$205,877, down \$57,540.

Despite the volatility and uncertainty of 2020, investments increased over \$1.6 million to finish the year at \$36.1 million. Total net assets were \$42.3 million, an increase of \$1.5 million from the start of the year. Approximately \$1 million in grants from the Ministry Assistance Fund, Emergency Disaster Fund, Global Food Initiative Fund, Brethren Faith-in-Action Fund, and other designated funds were given in this season to provide much-needed support for the larger church.

*[The above amounts were provided prior to completion of the 2020 audit. Complete financial information is available in the Church of the Brethren Inc. audit report published in June 2021.]*

## OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The general secretary of the Church of the Brethren, David Steele, serves as staff for the Mission and Ministry Board and oversees the employees and ministries of the Church of the Brethren. He also represents the church in its various ecumenical commitments. Nancy Miner is manager of the Office of the General Secretary.

### Mission and Ministry Board

The Mission and Ministry Board serves as the board of directors of the Church of the Brethren, carrying out the direction set by Annual Conference.

The board gathered in Greenville, Ohio, for its March meeting. Unfolding COVID-19 restrictions necessitated canceling plans to meet at the Brethren Retirement Community, and the board met instead at Oakland Church of the Brethren. Despite the last-minute change of venue and the inability to worship with area congregations as planned, the board affirmed the value of holding offsite meetings every five years and decided to do so again in 2025.

In response to the pandemic, the board approved grants totaling \$500,000 from the Health Education and Research Fund to support increased costs incurred by Church of the Brethren retirement communities, and \$195,000 from the Emergency Disaster Fund for congregations and districts to provide relief for congregational and community members. In addition, through the end of 2020, the matching funds requirement for Brethren Faith in Action grants was waived and eligibility expanded to include Church of the Brethren camps.

A new strategic plan, adopted in July, aligns with the compelling vision being considered by 2021 Annual Conference delegates. The plan, titled “Jesus in the Neighborhood,” will guide the work of the board and staff over the next 5-10 years, beginning with strategies to pursue Christ’s call to discipleship, embody the biblical command to love our neighbors, seek God’s

racial justice, and reclaim New Testament models of giving.

Following a previous board directive to explore relocation of the BVS house in Elgin, the board approved the purchase of a house near the General Offices. It houses Elgin-based volunteers and interns.

In other actions, the board named Ed Woolf as treasurer; supported continued hurricane response in Puerto Rico and the Carolinas; approved a new project for tornado rebuilding work in Dayton, Ohio; extended support of farmer training efforts in Burundi; approved a plan to ensure long-term support of ministry programs by limiting future draws from the BSC Quasi-Endowment fund; tabled a recommendation to write off Brethren Press’s negative net asset balance, allowing staff time to work on a systematic plan for the publishing house; and supported the Healing Racism program of The Gathering Chicago with a distribution from the Wieand Family Trust. The board’s Living Together as Christ Calls Team paused its work in order to observe the continuing Compelling Vision Process before discerning next steps.

In October, the board called David Steele to a second 5-year contract term as general secretary, running to September 2026.

The elected membership of the Mission and Ministry Board consists of 8 women and 9 men. One member is Indo-American, one is Hispanic, two are African American, and 13 are white.



## Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

The Office of Peacebuilding and Policy (OPP) in Washington, D.C., has focused its efforts on policy supporting peacebuilding, Nigeria, the Middle East, and a range of other topics articulated by Annual Conference. In 2020, additional attention was placed on COVID-19 response and economic peacemaking.

OPP director Nathan Hosler hosted interns Priscilla Weddle in January and Galen Fitzkee in May; both completed their internships remotely. In August, Manchester University graduate Naomi Yilma joined the office through Brethren Volunteer Service.

Oversight of the Death Row Support Project (DRSP) moved to OPP. DRSP director Rachel Gross added more than 300 letter writers, bringing to over 13,000 the pen pal relationships established to date. Gross continued to advocate for an end to the death penalty, issuing action alerts and circulating petitions.

The Church of the Brethren representative to the United Nations, Doris Abdullah, spoke at “The Church in Black and White,” an event hosted by the Brethren and Mennonite Heritage Center. Abdullah’s UN involvement has centered on human rights and understanding women’s perspectives during COVID-19.

OPP worked with Church of the Brethren colleagues to coordinate response to the pandemic. The office has also been

active in Advocacy Network for Africa’s COVID-19 working group, which has been advocating for the release of funds to help with COVID response and equitable vaccine distribution.

OPP convenes the Nigeria Working Group, which this year hosted two roundtables with the State Department and a series of action items on End SARS, a movement in Nigeria to protest police brutality. The office facilitated the drafting of letters to Nigerian President Buhari, the US administration, and the international community.

In November, Hosler began as Church of the Brethren representative on the board of Heifer International and as official proxy to the National Council of Churches governing board on behalf of the general secretary. Susu Lassa, former BVSer now studying at Bethany Theological Seminary, is proxy to partner organization Creation Justice Ministries and contributed to Earth Day resources.

In December, Hosler and Yilma participated in PeaceCon 2020, hosted by the Alliance for Peacebuilding and Policy. They have also written a series of blog posts and articles on the broader theme of economic peacemaking, with a focus on economic justice, racial justice, and climate justice.

## Annual Conference Office

The past year was like none other in the 233 years of recorded annual meetings of the Church of the Brethren. Acting on a recommendation from Program and Arrangements Committee and the Leadership Team, Standing Committee

voted for the first time ever to cancel Annual Conference.

In its meeting May 7 by videoconference, Standing Committee deferred the theme, program, and resource leaders to 2021. The committee also decided to defer the ballot, with the understanding

that those with terms expiring in 2020 would be asked to serve an additional year; those elected in 2021 would serve one year less, except for the moderator-elect; and another ballot would be prepared to replace people whose terms concluded in 2021.

Negotiations with the convention center and the hotels in Grand Rapids resulted in the waiving of \$665,000 in cancellation penalties in exchange for the church's commitment to return to Grand Rapids for Annual Conference 2024, the next available year.

Some churches and individuals chose to donate their registration refunds to the Annual Conference budget. Even with those generous donations, Annual Conference expenses for fixed costs such as rent and

staff salaries resulted in a deficit for 2020, which necessitated a reduction in staffing.

Though Annual Conference could not meet, a special online denominational worship service and an online concert featuring Brethren musicians were offered on the evenings of July 1-2. Both events were planned by the Program and Arrangements Committee.

Planning for the 2021 Conference began immediately with staff support from Annual Conference director Chris Douglas and registration coordinator Debbie Noffsinger and guided by the mission statement, "Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus."

### Brethren Press

In a unique project, Brethren Press published *We Bear It in Tears: Stories from Nigeria*, with interviews by Carol Mason and photographs by Donna Parcell. This full-color volume, developed in collaboration with the Global Mission office, is a collection of first-person accounts of Nigerians who have suffered from Boko Haram.

Other books published in 2020 were *Small Wonders: Stories for Worship with Kids*, by Kate Finney, and *La iglesia no tan grande* (a Spanish translation of *The Not-So-Big Church*). The 2020 Covenant Bible Studies were *God's Steadfast Love in the Psalms*, by Christina Bucher, and *Birth of Jesus*, by Richard Gardner. Devotionals, published in two sizes of print editions and two digital editions, were *Holy Manna* (Lent), by Paula Bowser, and *Give Light* (Advent), by James Benedict. Brethren Press also published the Living Word Bulletin Series and the 2020 Yearbook.

The largest focus for Brethren Press is curriculum, with new materials written each

year for *Shine: Living in God's Light* and *A Guide for Biblical Studies*. Once congregations couldn't meet in person for worship and education, Brethren Press immediately offered a number of spring quarter resources digitally at no charge. By summer, the Shine curriculum—co-published with MennoMedia—had shifted teacher's guides to digital products and produced two extra resources, Shine Connect and Shine at Home, to help congregations teach online. With preparations begun long before the pandemic, Shine unveiled a new round of curriculum for fall and a new vacation Bible school curriculum, *Great Big Beautiful World*, for summer.

Sales were hit hard by the upheaval in congregational life. To help fill the gap, Brethren Press developed a number of new products for individuals, including face masks, a jigsaw puzzle of the Eder River, and an updated Forerunners card game and mug. The publishing house also launched a #ReadThisDay campaign and recommended

books on racial justice. Eventually, Brethren Press had to eliminate two half-time positions. Many people gave bountifully to a year-end fundraising campaign that raised more than \$117,000, making it possible for the publishing house to come close to breaking even.

Wendy McFadden, publisher of Brethren Press and communications, completed a term as president of the

Protestant Church-owned Publishers Association. Other members of the Brethren Press team are James Deaton, managing editor; Jeff Lennard, director of marketing and sales; Karen Warner, customer service specialist; Jim Miner, Yearbook specialist; and Karen Stocking, finance and production assistant for both Brethren Press and Communications.

## Communications

The pandemic and racial justice were top themes in *Messenger* magazine in 2020, as the magazine adjusted to address the issues of the day. A new effort called “Messenger Radio” now features audio recordings, the largest of which is 11 episodes of a podcast series “Speaking Truth to Power,” hosted by Anna Lisa Gross. Issues of *Messenger* from 2000 to 2019 are being added to a new online collection, filling in a gap following the digitizing years ago of volumes from 1851 to 1999 on Archive.org.

The magazine’s editorial team consists of communication staff Wendy McFadden, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Jan Fischer Bachman, along with Walt Wiltschek, contracted as part-time at-large editor. Diane Stroyeck is subscriptions specialist. The magazine won honorable mentions from the Associated Church Press for three articles in 2019: coverage of Annual Conference, a humorous article called “Will it blend?” and a theological reflection titled “Creation and the cross.”

In 2020, news representing the breadth and depth of the denomination was distributed through Newsline—an email news service sent free to individual and

congregational subscribers—as well as online news stories at Brethren.org, the Newsline Digest in each issue of *Messenger* magazine, and social media. For much of the year, news director Brumbaugh-Cayford doubled the frequency of Newsline because of the pandemic-related volume of news.

In 2020 the web team of website producer Fischer Bachman and media support specialist Russ Otto finished the massive project of moving the Church of the Brethren website to WordPress, a less expensive and more robust platform. When the pandemic struck, they created a new website with related resources, <https://covid19.brethren.org>. In addition to larger projects, the team produced and updated web pages, created and scheduled bulk email messages, designed and edited online forms, and assisted with Church of the Brethren online video and social media.

The annual report theme “Living Letters,” which spoke to the distancing forced by the virus, was carried out in both video and print form with postcards that drew from the New Testament epistles to convey the ministries of the church in 2020.

## Human Resources

The office of Human Resources, staffed by manager Shamek Cardona, oversees the organization's employment policies and services, ensuring compliance with legal requirements.

Employees hired in 2020 were LaDonna Sanders Nkosi, director of Intercultural Ministries; Norman and Carol Spicher Waggy, interim co-directors for Global Mission; Harold Kline, temporary truck driver for Material Resources; Shawn Flory Replogle, interim executive director of Organizational Resources; and Pauline Liu, interim volunteer coordinator for Brethren Volunteer Service. Later, Flory Replogle and Liu transitioned from interim to permanent status.

Staff departing were Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service; Andie Garcia, Information

Technology systems specialist; Jocelyn Siakula, orientation coordinator for Brethren Volunteer Service; Jon Kobel, conference assistant; Margaret Drafall, customer service specialist for Brethren Press; and Steve Bickler, warehouse/shipping specialist for Brethren Press and Buildings/Grounds assistant.

Regular full-time and part-time employees and Brethren Volunteer Service workers serving Church of the Brethren programs totaled 62. As requested by Annual Conference, the report of ethnic/racial composition of these employees is the following: Asian-2; Black-5; Hispanic-3; white-51; two or more races-1.

In addition, there are 23 contract, shared, and temporary employees, as well as program volunteers.

## Ministry

Sustaining ministers during a year of increased demands due to the pandemic was an important focus of the work of the Office of Ministry throughout 2020. This support began in early January in Scottsdale, Ariz., through a retreat for the denomination's credentialed clergywomen. Pastor and author Mandy Smith of Cincinnati, Ohio, led a three-day experience offering rest, reflection, and spiritual nourishment centered on the theme "Treasure in Clay Pots."

In February, the Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program, staffed by program manager Dana Cassell, hosted a training event in Richmond, Va., for eight "circuit riders"—a team of ministers from across the country who now serve as companions and connectors for the 77 percent of Church of the Brethren pastors who work in multivocational roles. Referred to as

"MVPs," or multivocational pastors, more than 25 have joined the program since March.

The pandemic made in-person visits impossible, but circuit riders have been persistent in connecting via email, phone, and video calls; supporting the varied ministries of these leaders; and learning how multivocational ministry is enabling innovative and faithful discipleship in congregations. Circuit riders have connected pastors with resources on financial planning, mental health, grief counseling, and urban ministry, and a dozen MVPs participated in an extended study of G. Jeffrey MacDonald's book, *Part-Time Is Plenty: Thriving Without Full-Time Clergy*.

Beginning in the months in which ministers responded to unexpected increased demands, the office, directed by Nancy Sollenberger Heishman, provided a video

expressing prayer and concern for clergy and also coordinated Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday's sabbath sermon as a resource for pastors and congregations. Two webinars focused on the themes of the Holy Spirit's work and Intercultural Ministries, respectively, and were both led by Grace Ji-Sun Kim of Earlham School of Religion.

Leading up to Holy Week, the office invited pastors to gather online for sharing ideas and worship resources. A denomination-wide love feast service was initiated and organized with the technical assistance of the Living Stream Church of the Brethren's pastoral staff and was viewed by close to 10,000 "persons/devices." Beginning in mid-March, the office hosted weekly online meetings for district executive ministers for the purpose of mutual support and resourcing among colleagues.

A significant every-five-year task of the office is the credentialed ministers' renewal process. Supported by office manager Mishael Nouveau, this process gathers reports from all 24 districts regarding ministers' credentialing renewals and subsequently issues identification cards.

A major requirement for the renewal is advanced level ethics training. Early in the pandemic, the office shifted to offering these training events solely online. Nineteen sessions were hosted by districts during the year and were led by trainers in multiple languages. Attendees expressed appreciation for the online format, opportunity to engage with ministers from other districts, and flexible nature of the online platform used.

Transitions of district executive leadership are in process in approximately one-third of all districts, with some using an interim team model and others employing traditional, albeit in some cases virtual, interims. Those who concluded their service were Scott Kinnick (Southeastern) and

Kevin Kessler (Illinois/Wisconsin). Atlantic Southeast District experienced the untimely death of district executive Terry Grove in early December. Interim executive team arrangements are in place in West Marva, Michigan, Southern Plains, Pacific Northwest, and Southeastern districts. Virtual orientation sessions for new district executive ministers or teams were provided by the office in lieu of onsite events.

The office disbursed six Ministry Assistance Fund grants totaling \$11,115 to ministers in need in four districts. Donations to the fund of \$10,637 were received from individuals and congregations. Additional donations were received from the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company (\$25,000) and the Robert C. Wenger Charitable Trust (\$5,000). Scholarship and continuing education grants totaling \$5,200 were disbursed to eight ministers.

The number of ministers added to the ministerial body included 40 ordained (24 male, 16 female), 4 commissioned (4 male), and 25 licensed (12 male, 13 female).

### **Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership**

Equipping leaders through four training programs, the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, directed by Janet Ober Lambert, is a ministry training partnership of the Church of the Brethren and Bethany Theological Seminary.

Training in Ministry (TRIM) engaged 29 students, 3 of whom completed the program. The congregationally based training program, Education for a Shared Ministry in English and Spanish (EFSM/EPMC), involved 7 congregations, with a combination of 8 ministry students. Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (SeBAH-CoB), supported 12 students, 3 of whom completed the program. Academy Certified Training Systems (ACTS) offered



regionally based, onsite courses involving 11 districts.

Through the academy, 64 people took courses or seminars to earn continuing education credits. Three people received credit through a new policy allowing clergy to receive credit for viewing and reporting on prerecorded events. The academy also reviews and certifies programs of other agencies for continuing education credit. In 2020, these certificates totaled 439, in

addition to 182 certificates for ministerial ethics.

Aida Lymaris Sánchez joined the Brethren Academy team as coordinator of Spanish-Language Ministry Training programs. Other staff are Carrie Eikler, coordinator of English-Language Ministry Training programs, and Fran Massie, administrative assistant.

### **Mission Advancement**

The Office of Mission Advancement cultivates relationships and passion in order to advance the mission and ministries of the Church of the Brethren. The team focuses on relationship building with congregations and individuals through visits, interpretation, and education about the church's ministries, and provides ways for people of passion to give financially to support those ministries as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18).

Mathew DeBall, coordinator of Mission Advancement communications, and Traci Rabenstein, director of Mission Advancement, reviewed giving trends to inform the way the office works at communications. Staff worked to better educate and equip donors and congregations concerning how financial gifts impacted those the church helped and places where the church served. DeBall represented the denomination on the One Great Hour of Sharing committee, oversaw congregational offering emphases, and coordinated writers

for the biweekly eBrethren articles and monthly direct mailings.

With travel halted in March, Mission Advancement advocates Nancy McCrickard and Shannon McNeil worked at relations with individual donors by writing letters and cards and making hundreds of phone calls. As they checked in on donors to see how they were holding up during the pandemic, they also provided updates on the work that denominational staff implemented on behalf of the church, described how staff were making changes due to pandemic restrictions, and offered words of gratitude for all the ways donors support the work of the church.

Rabenstein was able to visit virtually with a few congregations and pastors to provide insight into the work we do together as a denomination. Within the denominational offices, she facilitated staff conversation around data management and worked at reviewing and updating processes and procedures.

## CONCLUSION

In a year of adversity, there was nevertheless much to be thankful for. People across the Church of the Brethren joined in ministry, prayed, and sent words of encouragement. They created new ways to widen the church's witness. When events went virtual, geographical barriers fell away and more people could participate. Congregations and individuals gave from the heart.

Members of the Mission and Ministry Board and the denominational staff are grateful for all these partners in the gospel, true living letters within their communities and far beyond. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to bear witness to the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit through the ministries of the Church of the Brethren.

*Patrick Starkey, chair*

*David Steele, general secretary*