

Moderator Musings December 2021

Welcome to the December 2021 edition of **Moderator Musings**...It has come to my attention that some people feel I need to explain some of my facetious comments which arise at times in my writing. For those who are unfamiliar with that term, here's an official "googled" definition, which I'm sure we all agree is the "be all" and "end all" source of information:

fa·ce·tious (/fə'sēSHəs/, *adjective*)

treating serious issues with deliberately inappropriate humor; flippant

Okay, I'll accept the word flippant, but fiercely (in a gentle, Brethren kind of way) object to the notion that it's inappropriate. [Acts 10:15](#) comes to mind, "The voice spoke to him a second time: 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'" Okay, maybe that's too loose an interpretation. But in the midst of very serious issues in the church, I believe there's time for humor, even as I apologize in advance to those who believe that treating serious issues with humor IS, in fact, inappropriate.

Here are a few "joys and concerns" that I've experienced in my role as Moderator since my last column:

- I was impressed by a news report in the Associated Press on Oct. 31st sharing how the Anabaptist related groups who support Christian Aid Ministries are actively praying not only for the release of their kidnapped workers in Haiti, but also for their kidnappers—the so called 400 Mawozo gang. That was really not news to us who take seriously Jesus' call to pray for our enemies and those "...who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28 NIV). But what impressed me was the reasoning behind those prayers, coming from a secular writer who put into words the Church of the Brethren distinctive better than I could have expressed it myself. "Anabaptists draw on the biblical Sermon on the Mount, which contains some of Jesus' most radical and countercultural sayings—to love enemies, live simply, bless persecutors, turn the other cheek, endure sufferings joyfully." Such a succinct explanation, from a secular publication, for why we believe in Another Way of Living.
- I was amazed at the efforts of Ilexene Alphonse, pastor of the Eglise des Freres Haitiens in Miami, Florida, who facilitated the delivery of three trucks of relief supplies to earthquake stricken parts of Haiti. Under incredibly difficult circumstances, he helped navigate the dangerous, difficult and costly journey for the trucks to Saut Mathurine, the area in



photo courtesy of Ilexene Alphonse

southwest Haiti where the Haitian Brethren are beginning to rebuild after the earthquake. Ilexene's description of the difficult journey, achieved through the grace of God and the determination of Haitian Brethren, was described in a special October 29th Newline article which can be found at: <https://www.brethren.org/news/2021/a-container-of-faith/>

- Continued appreciation for the varied ways in which Church of the Brethren congregations are being "Jesus in the neighborhood" as called for by the newly adopted Compelling Vision. During Halloween, many congregations participated in a candy distribution system called Trunk or Treat, satisfying the yearly compulsion of visitors for both candy and healthy treats, while allowing for social distancing. At the Shepherd's Heart Fellowship in Osceolo, Indiana, children were invited to the church for games and prizes.



photo by Jeff Tuholski

- I discovered the wide variety of ministries that we Brethren are engaged in a few years ago, even before there was a Compelling Vision, when I agreed to visit every church in the South Central Indiana district and record a 10-15 second description of one of their ministries. Frankly, I expected 30 food pantries and maybe 20 women's fellowships making quilts for a near-by homeless shelter. I was so wrong. What I found was incredible variety in the ways in which congregations in this one district were reaching out to the needs of their communities. You don't need to watch the whole video, but if you have a few minutes, check out what 43 congregations were up to as of a few years ago in one Indiana district: <https://youtu.be/oJtG1g-j75Y?t=10>. To my knowledge, no one in any of those congregations thought that just because another congregation looked at mission differently, they were not "being Brethren". Romans 12:6 says: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith" (NIV). I continue to believe that Brethren need to embrace one another, even amidst our different approaches to serving Jesus, all the while acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- I am concerned that so few of our Church of the Brethren members are aware of the inspirational growth of our denomination across the globe. We are truly working at becoming a global church, as people in almost a dozen countries are embracing the Church of the Brethren approach to faith and finding new life in Jesus Christ. Plans are shaping up to share these developments in the coming year and at Annual Conference in Omaha, Nebraska, July 10-14, 2022. (I have been telling the district conferences that have invited me to bring greetings that Omaha is very easy to find. If you're coming from the East, you travel to Missouri and turn right. If coming from the west, go to Kansas and

turn left. Or you can always google it.) Here's one example: In Rwanda, the Gisenyi congregation is constructing a building to house the two services held each Sunday.



Chris Elliott, a volunteer for the Church of the Brethren Global Mission reports: "The Gisenyi church has been holding two services on Sunday morning and is in need of a larger worship space. Among their other needs are offices for the emerging denomination, as well as classroom space for Sunday school and a proposed preschool." The Global Mission office is receiving donations for the construction project. These may be made online at www.brethren.org/give-gisenyi-church or by mail to Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Donors should write Gisenyi on the check or in the comments box online.

My prayer continues to be centered on the theme that has been chosen for next year's Annual Conference: Embracing one another, as Christ embraces us. Part of the process of embracing each other is to lovingly communicate issues that we feel we need to discuss, but to do it directly. That's the formula outlined in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18, verses 15-17. If we feel like we have an issue between our brother or sister, Jesus instructs us to go to that person and share the concern. I consider that to be part of the act of embracing – showing that we care enough to relate to one another, to hear each other's story, and to share ours.

Finally, the Annual Conference Officers, Program and Arrangements Committee and Leadership team all met in Elgin last month and addressed plans for the 2022 Annual Conference... Needless to say, there are an enormous number of details to be worked out, complicated by the uncertainty of the Covid situation and its impact on how we gather. Please continue to pray for the plans to gather and embrace one another, both figuratively and literally, in order to "...unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus" (from the Annual Conference mission statement).

I welcome your feedback, observations and your own musings, joys, or concerns. You can email me at moderator@brethren.org. And remember:

The musings of Moderator Dave are his opinions and observations only, and do not necessarily reflect the views of other denominational Leadership Team members, or anyone else connected with the Annual Conference, or for that matter, the National Archives, the Meat and Poultry Hotline of the U.S. Dep't of Agriculture, the Federal Reserve Board, or any other organized or unorganized organizations. They are also void where prohibited, except where not prohibited.