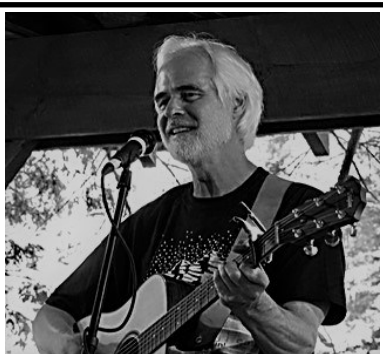


JOURNAL

Wednesday, July 13, 2022 – Omaha, Nebraska

Defining the Church



Tonight after worship

It's a sign of the times that, thanks to COVID-19, it's unclear just who'll be onstage for the "Michael Stern and Friends" concert, tonight after worship in the Grand Ballroom. But Stern promises the music will run the gamut from "sweet and soft to tap your foot." Based in Seattle, Stern has been creating inspiring music of peace, justice, and compassion since the 1970s. "I usually don't say I'm just a folk singer," he said. "It might feel gospel, it might feel jazzy, from a soft, symphonic, melodious thing to more bluegrassy."

If you're interested in using one of the skits that have been performed in worship at your church contact Frank Ramirez or Jennifer Keeney Scarr. Write to jkscarr07@gmail.com or ramirez.frank.r@gmail.com.

Tonight's offering supports the Core Ministries of the Church of the Brethren, and the call to be Jesus in the neighborhood. Your gifts support youth and young adult and intercultural ministries, training leaders, renewing churches and planting new congregations, for the glory of God and our neighbor's good.

Given as his "assigned topic" the theme "Embracing One Another Amidst Our Diversity as a Faith community," Nathan Rittenhouse said his task has three parts.

"The first is defining the church. The second is discerning the will of God. And the third is the delighting in harmony."

The church will be defined by those who do the will of God. The important part of this is that Jesus uses family language to define the church, Rittenhouse said, citing Mark 13:35, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

"Jesus' definition of the church is a family that does the will of God. And what is the will of God?"

In answer, Rittenhouse cited Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

"The discernment community is about conforming to what God wants for us, not what the world wants for us."

Rittenhouse is one of five preachers who are part of the team at New Hope Church of the Brethren in Green Bank, W. Va. "The way it works is we're all bivocational, a team of five rotating through three preaching points."

He and his wife, Erin, share a daughter and three sons. In his spare time, he said, "We grow a lot of vegetables. We do extensive gardening. And we're attempting to keep bees." He also enjoys biking, reading, and the great outdoors.



Nathan Rittenhouse

Tonight the Children's Choir will debut "God Made Them All," written by Michael Stern for this year's Annual Conference. The choir, under the direction of Stern and his wife Carol, also will lead the children in "One World." Carol, an education specialist, worked with the children and their group leaders to develop the signs used in tonight's songs.

By the numbers.

Worship attendance: 749; English stream 344; Spanish stream: 344; YouTube: 28; Facebook: 54

Offering for Girls, Inc. of Omaha: \$10,617.71

Scott Graybill of Bremen (Ind.) Church of the Brethren won \$250 worth of books for the church library, in the daily Brethren Press drawing. Congratulations!

Come and See!



Photo: Glenn Riegel

About the Artist

You've probably noticed the sculpture assembled piece by piece during the processional before each worship service.

The artist is Dave Thornburg, who works from a studio in Indianapolis. His kinetic sculptures are often fashioned from repurposed and recycled materials. Each of the figures in the worship center includes a drum of a different type representing commonality and culture differences. Music is one of the things we all have in common, and at the same time it is one way a culture declares its identity.

In the design of this sculpture, Thornburg tried to symbolize many characteristics of diversity including ethnic identity, size, age, and disability. He is "excited and honored" to be invited to participate in Annual Conference through sculpture and wishes to thank, among others, "the youth of Northview Church of the Brethren... for assisting with the 'hair' of the bucket drummer, for engaging in conversation about diversity and the chal-

When it comes to the story of the Samaritan Woman whom Jesus met at the well, tonight's speaker, Belita Mitchell, said, "I think that our moderator has chosen a wonderful theme, and I think this text as the final message gives a charge to Conferencegoers to reach out to our neighbors. I've always viewed this text to be an evangelistic text."

Mitchell, whose message is titled, "Share the Love and Make the Connection," said that it is important to remember the woman went back to her town, and told everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" (John 4:29) This caused the people of her village, formerly skeptical of her, to seek Jesus. "As a result, they heard Jesus and they believed."

This story from John has been important to Mitchell for a long time. "I took a preaching class at Fuller Theological Seminary before I left Los Angeles, and I preached on this text."

Mitchell, immediate past lead pastor at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, concluded 18 years of service there in December 2020. She was moderator of the 2007 Annual Conference, served on the Brethren Press Reimagining Team, and held the position of chair of the Harrisburg chapter of Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence from 2009-2018. Mitchell is married to Don V. Mitchell and they are parents to three children (one deceased).



Belita Mitchell

Tonight's Offering

As we all prepare to go our separate ways, it is appropriate that our Thursday offering will go to transportation for international guests attending Annual Conference. Each year representatives from the International church are invited to join us at Annual Conference. Their presence provides us with an opportunity to build relationships with our brothers and sisters across the globe; to share our joys and sorrows, struggles and triumphs; to challenge and inspire one another to continue the work of Jesus. Peacefully, simply, together. Your generous gifts will help underwrite the transportation costs for our international guests.

Goodbyes float dandelion seeds of Hello.

The Conference Journal is edited by Frank Ramirez, with help from the press team, and is sponsored by the Conference Office.



Photos: Keith Hollenberg, Glenn Riegel