CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
MESSENGER
APRIL 2016 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

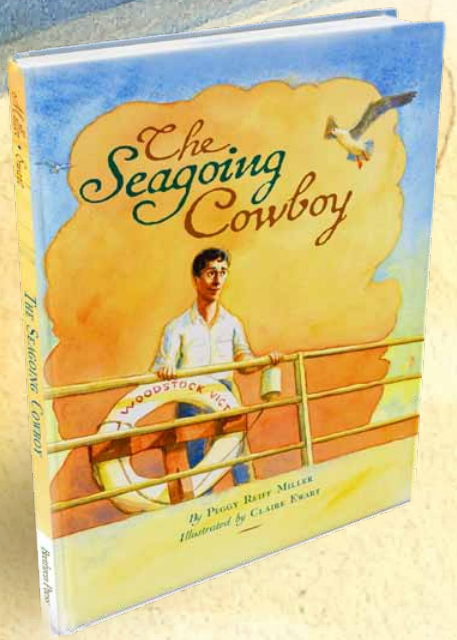
Carry the light

CREATION RECONSIDERED 6 WHERE THE BEAUTY LIVES 9 PUTTING THE SUN TO WORK 11

A long time ago,
when I was looking for adventure,
I became a seagoing cowboy.

We didn't ride horses. We rode

waves.



Take a trip with the seagoing cowboys.

Through Peggy Reiff Miller's expert prose and Claire Ewart's luminous paintings, learn the real-life story of seagoing cowboys who took livestock to people suffering the effects of World War II. Thousands of men signed up to serve. They returned with a wider view of the world around them.

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MESSENGER

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From the Publisher

Borrowing from the world of literature, here are two ways to react to declining church membership numbers: 1) The sky is falling. 2) I'll think of it all another day.

The situation does seem dire, and it's easy to be either alarmist or in denial. The latest statistics (see p. 19) show membership of 114,465 and 967 congregations. This decline is evident throughout the Church of the Brethren: in financial support to denominational ministries, the number of congregations that are able to support a full-time pastor, the viability of district structures, sales of Sunday school materials, attendance at Annual Conference. These measurements are all related, and it's short-sighted to tackle them as separate issues.

WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

There are plenty of factors contributing to the long slide in church membership figures in the Church of the Brethren and in many other denominations in North America. We can point to sociological changes such as smaller family size, increased mobility, sports on Sundays. Research shows a dramatic rise in the "nones," those that say they don't affiliate with any religious group.

Whatever the causes, we know that there are also tectonic shifts going on inside the church at large. Phyllis Tickle says the church undergoes a massive rearrangement every 500 years, and we're undergoing one now—500 years after the Reformation. Protestantism is giving way to a new form of Christianity that she calls the "great emergence." That sounds epic, but in reality it's more like travail.

Today, as we feel buffeted by change and diminished institutionally, it can be difficult to know what to preserve and what to let go of. What parts of our church are ready to come to an end? Could other parts be groaning in the pangs of birth? At any given moment, how do we know whether our job is to give hospice care or attend as midwives?

The Messenger editors invite thoughtful essays on questions such as these. How do you assess our current situation? What is our identity in post-Christendom North America? What is the future of the church? How do we live as faithful Christians? Is there a middle ground between Chicken Little and Scarlett O'Hara? Submit your essays of no more than 600 words to messenger@brethren.org.

Wendy McFadden

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Congregation Close-Up

courtesy of Jessi Marsiglio

Cooper Simpson shows his contribution to the project of yarn bombing the pulpit.

Yarn bombing at Pomona

Yarn bombing is an old art form using yarn and other media in several manners, such as crocheting and knitting, to create a fresh facade on objects such as statues, buildings, or lampposts.

Several months ago, while getting ready for Bible study at Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren, Sander Eller was perusing the yarn bomb sites on Google and shared them with the group. After discussion, the group decided to yarn bomb the pulpit at the church as an expression of a desire to honor God and bring a new perspective to the service.

Several people were asked to assist with the project but in order to avoid a stylistic formal display, they were not told what it was for. Neither were they told the size, color, or format to use. The work was done by experienced and beginner knitters and crocheters.

On Jan. 7, on Transfiguration Sunday, the group "transfigured" the pulpit with the finished product. —Jessi Marsiglio

Baugo children purchase a heifer

At the beginning of Advent, pastor David Stackhouse challenged children and parents at Baugo Church of the Brethren near Wakarusa, Ind., to raise enough money to purchase a heifer. As the project went on, he counted the money in the donation basket prior to each service, and each week the children chose a crayon color to color in a Holstein picture to denote their progress. In the end, the project raised not only $500 to purchase one heifer but a total of $2,000—and four colorful pictures of Holsteins were found at the pulpit. The money purchased a variety of animals for donation on several continents in an attempt to reach out to all of God's children. The animals included goats, llamas, ducks, chickens, a water buffalo, and of course a heifer.

Do you have district or congregational stories that might be of interest to Messenger? Short items with a photo are best. Send them to Messenger, c/o In Touch, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or messenger@brethren.org.

Beauty in a diversity cup

courtesy of Janice Shull

Jim Graybill, associate pastor of Venice (Fla.) Community Church of the Brethren, has long been an artist in wood. Through the years he has crafted a number of items from wood for the church, including a model of the Brethren Service cup.

In worship last November he announced a gift for the church, a "Diversity Cup." A few days earlier he had been inspired by the theme of unity at the Thanksgiving Eve worship service of the Venice Interfaith Community Association. As Graybill looked around at the many faith groups represented in one small city, he felt the unity of God's presence.

He wanted to make a statement that reflects the love, hope, and solidarity with all of God's humanity, as a way to refute the hate, fear, and divisiveness in our world. "We all come from different stripes, different colors, different textures, and different cultures," he explained. "Only when we come together as one body can the beauty of God's diversity be illuminated." He translated his vision into an intricately patterned vessel, created from many different kinds of wood. On the bottom of the cup he carved the words, "Beauty in Diversity."

With each cup goes a prayer for appreciation of our differences, that diversity never separates us but rather binds us together into a beautiful vessel for God's love. —Janice Shull

Serving others

A party for Nigeria

Penn Run (Pa.) Church of the Brethren held a holiday home party and craft show, with proceeds benefiting the Nigeria Crisis Fund. The four-hour event at the church's Christian Outreach Center was packed full of options for Christmas shoppers. There were more than 40 spaces filled with merchandise, a silent auction with over 50 theme baskets and individual items, as well as a pie auction of more than three dozen homemade pies. A sale of homemade vegetable beef and chicken noodle soup, concessions, and a bake sale rounded out the day.

Lori Fackler

Penn Run pastor Jeff Fackler (right) and board chair John Clevenger with the check for Nigeria.

The center was decorated for Christmas, but also showcased several display boards so shoppers could learn more about what has been happening in Nigeria, as well as the Church of the Brethren mission work over the decades.

Pastor Jeff Fackler posed for a photo with board chair John Clevenger, displaying a check in the amount of $3,200.75 raised by the event. They posed in front of a tree covered with stars bearing names of the schoolgirls abducted from Chibok. The white stars represented the girls who were able to escape. — Lori Fackler

Fairview shares its blessings

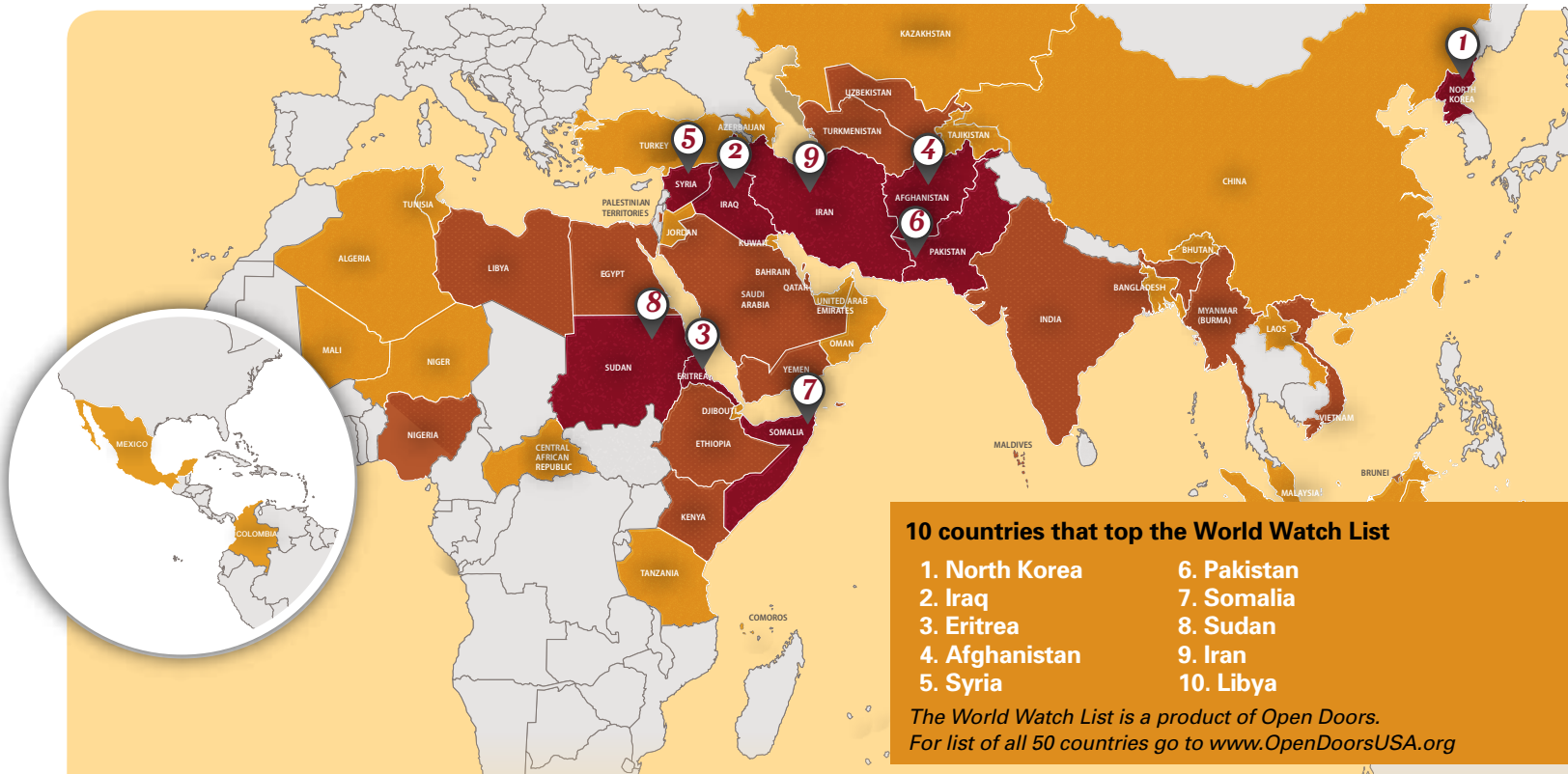
Fairview Church of the Brethren in Iowa this year voted to tithe the income from bequests. Half the tithe went to the district's "Love Your Neighbor" fundraising for district ministry and the Nigerian church. The other half was to be used locally.

Fairview offered two projects as an outreach to surrounding communities. "Starry Night, Holy Night, Toys That Bring Our KIDS Delight" invited anyone with a child 16 and under to apply for help providing Christmas gifts. Gifts ranged from clothing and bedding to toys and educational items. "Blessings by the COAT Load," invited applications for anyone in need of a winter coat. Every coat was hand-picked with the recipient in mind.

courtesy of Diane Mason

Ashley Brinegar spearheaded the projects. "It was amazing to work alongside many of the local businesses, the newspaper, and school personnel to make sure every child would be warm this winter season. What a great way to witness in our small community," she said. "Personally these projects have changed my life. I was in contact with all of the families. I learned a little about each family and how the help that Fairview has given touched their hearts in a time when they needed it most."—Diane Mason

"I've often felt a dissonance between the highly individualistic, painless, convenient communion practiced in many Western churches and the unifying, collective, costly, reconciling work that Jesus did on the cross. . . . If the cross is a critique of power, then why doesn't our practice of communion critique it as well? Why do we rarely talk about societal injustice when we're taking communion? . . . I'm starting to think that the way we do communion is not scandalous enough to represent the cross."—**From a blog by Christena Cleveland.**



10 countries that top the World Watch List

1. North Korea
2. Iraq
3. Eritrea
4. Afghanistan
5. Syria
6. Pakistan
7. Somalia
8. Sudan
9. Iran
10. Libya

The World Watch List is a product of Open Doors. For list of all 50 countries go to www.OpenDoorsUSA.org

Persecution of Christians worldwide

Every year Open Doors, an organization that monitors the persecution of Christians, issues a World Watch List ranking the top 50 countries where Christians face the most severe persecution for their faith. The persecution of Christians and other people of faith also is a concern for the Church of the Brethren and ecumenical partners, including the World Council of Churches (WCC).

In 2015 the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference adopted a "Resolution on Christian Minority Communities" (www.brethren.org/acstatements). The resolution followed on concern for Christians in countries like Nigeria, and in areas of the Middle East and Asia, expressed by the WCC's 10th Assembly in 2013. WCC documents include "Statement on the Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities" and "Statement affirming the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East" (www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/).

courtesy of Nate Inglis

Nate Inglis with friends in Union Victoria, Guatemala

Creation reconsidered

an interview with Nate Inglis by Jonathan Stauffer

Nate Inglis began last summer as assistant professor of theological studies at Bethany Theological Seminary. Previously, he worked in Union Victoria, a village in Guatemala, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service. Nate has been active at Olympic View Community Church in Seattle, Wash., and First Church of the Brethren in Brooklyn, N.Y. He currently attends the Richmond (Ind.) congregation.

Q: How do you describe the discipline of theology?

A: Theology is often described as "faith seeking understanding." In this sense I'd call theology a spiritual practice rather than a discipline. Essentially we're doing theology whenever we try to articulate our faith. Why do Brethren practice the love feast? What does Jesus' commandment to love my neighbor mean in the world we live in today? By putting what we believe and why we act the way we do into words, theology helps us live our faith in Christ more consistently.

Q: Last fall you taught a course called "ecological theology and Christian responsibility." Can you summarize ecological theology for us?

A: In ecological theology the focus is on understanding the purpose of the created world from a faith perspective. In the history of Christian theology, at least since the Protestant Reformation, the human drama of sin and salvation held central focus and the rest of the world just served as a stage. However, several references in the Bible indicate God's concern for the earth and its role in supporting life. So in ecological theology theologians are rethinking the significance of God's relationship to creation and our Christian responsibility to live faithfully within it.

Ralph Miner

As I read the creation stories in the Bible, I see God entering into a loving relationship with the created world.

Q: In your class, you mentioned a kinship model for Christians. How do we relate to God and the earth through this perspective of creation care?

A: Sometimes people talk about stewardship in terms of managing resources. The rest of creation is thought of as God's property that we've been charged to protect. But as I read the creation stories in the Bible, I see God entering into a loving relationship with the created world. And if God relates to the world this way, I think seeing ourselves as part of a community with other creatures is a better starting point for thinking about creation care, because it extends the boundaries of our responsibilities to the rest of the world as well.

Q: What does the Bible have to say about stewardship and kinship with the earth?

A: The Bible actually has a lot to say about stewardship and kinship, but many people usually stop looking after the first three chapters of Genesis. For example, I think Psalm 104 and Job 38-41 offer some really interesting accounts emphasizing God's profound concern for other life forms that surpasses human perspectives and interests.

Q: In the Gospels we read that Jesus held concern for the sick and poor. Do you see poverty and health connected to environmental issues?

A: Sometimes people think that if you care about protecting the earth, then you must not care about the well-being of people. But in so many ways the opposite is the case. We don't always see the consequences of environmental destruction that affect poor and marginal communities in the United States and in the global south.

One of the worst consequences of industrial pollution, for instance, is the health toll it takes on poor communities of color. In Louisiana there's an area called "cancer alley," and it's called that because the people who live there are disproportionately diagnosed with cancers related to their exposure from chemical plants surrounding their towns. The fact is that in many cases concern for the environment and concern for basic human needs go hand in hand.

Q: Before coming to Bethany, you and your spouse served in Guatemala through Brethren Volunteer Service. How has your experience in Guatemala shaped your faith and practice?

A: Living in a rural, indigenous village in Central America taught me so much about what it means to live simply, based on what you truly need, and to come up with creative solutions to meet those needs. When you don't have trash service to whisk away any garbage you create, when you have to purify all of the water you drink, and when you are involved in planting, harvesting, drying, grinding, and cooking the corn that you use for your daily food, you become very aware of your ecological footprint.

During our time there, a group of high school students from our home congregation came down on a learning tour. They, along with high school students from the village, attended

Ralph Miner

A bee and monarch caterpillar on a milkweed flower.

Seeing ourselves as part of a community with other creatures is a better starting point for thinking about creation care.

a workshop from the nearby Institute for Mesoamerican Permaculture to learn about building school gardens. The Guatemalan students came back and spent the rest of the school year creating a beautiful, organic school garden without spending a cent on any materials. They harvested seeds from plants that were already growing in the village and gathered materials that were already there. These students really inspired me to think creatively about doing more with less and using what you already have in new ways.

Q: What are some gifts you see the Church of the Brethren offering towards the care of God's creation?

A: I think the Brethren have much to offer in the conversation about environmental stewardship and creation care. One of the many things I love about the Brethren is their commitment to service and to meeting the needs of others. I remember hearing a story once about Dan West. He refused to own more shoes than he really needed, and wouldn't even eat cake since so many people in the world were starving.

The best way we can care for the earth is by refusing to consume things we don't need. Our ideal of simple living is a revolutionary idea that a lot of people espouse in environmental circles, but few practice it as consistently.

Q: What are some good ways for congregations to become involved in creation care?

A: There are lots of things congregations can do, but I would suggest volunteering with a local organization already doing environmental advocacy work that your church is excited about. Too often we try to reinvent the wheel when there's someone else already doing the same thing. By helping another organization you can also build friendships with others in your community who share your ethical commitments even if they are not part of the church.

Jonathan Stauffer is a second-year student at Bethany Theological Seminary in the master of arts program. In 2011-2013 he was advocacy assistant in the Church of the Brethren Office of Public Witness, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service.

Savannah sparrow

Where the beauty lives

story and photos by Ralph Miner

I take photographs almost every day. I walk every day for health reasons, but find walking boring. Combining it with taking pictures keeps me motivated. As I learn more about photography, I learn to take better pictures. The key is slowing down.

I take photographs of everyday things, mostly of nature. I like taking pictures of flowers because they don't move much. One of the benefits of taking nature pictures is that I have visited many of the local nature preserves and have been able to learned a little about wildflowers and birding. I am just as happy photographing a dandelion or a sparrow as some uncommon bird.

Over the last two years, I have had a number of health issues with my vision. When you start to lose something, it

Downy woodpecker

Green darner dragonfly

Canada thistle

Great blue heron

I have had a number of health issues with my vision. When you start to lose something, it is natural to appreciate it.

is natural to appreciate it. One way I cope with my vision issues is to engage in a visual hobby. As my vision has gotten worse, I have needed to slow down and be more intentional in my technique.

Doing photography has taught me

- to slow down,
- to be aware of how my point of view influences what I am seeing,
- how the lens through which I look at the world affects what I choose to look at,
- to be aware of what is going on in the background,
- the importance of focus,
- the need to avoid clutter,
- how imperfection is where the beauty lives,
- that less is more,
- the world around us is constantly changing,
- that if you look at things the right way, they look great.

Ralph Miner is a life-long member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., and a strong supporter of Camp Emmaus, a camp and outdoor ministry center of Illinois and Wisconsin District.

Beacon Heights pastor Brian Flory

Putting the sun to work

One church's journey to solar energy

by Megan Sutton

Ironically, it wasn't a bright sunny day when Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren had solar panels installed. It was an overcast, breezy day in November 2015. That didn't matter to the Fort Wayne, Ind., congregation. What mattered was seeing their hard work and dedication to creation care come to fruition.

"Beacon Heights has long sought to proclaim and embody being good stewards of God's creation," said pastor Brian Flory. "To us, that means taking seriously the gift of the earth from God to humanity, and all of the creations that live upon this planet. This teaching is rooted in the beginning, in the creation stories in Genesis, and continues throughout the biblical narrative. In every decision we can, we factor in ecological impacts, whether in the coffee we buy or the soap we use, or in how we generate our energy."

In 2014, the church began a journey toward solar panel installation with help from a grant through Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light. The grant offered a portion of the cost to install solar panels if the congregation could reach several milestones. These included one-third of the congregation committing to reducing their own personal energy use by one-seventh, reducing electricity and gas consumption of the church facility by 25 percent, promoting and hosting a solar leadership forum, providing at least two congregational representatives to serve as panelists at a minimum of two regional workshops on energy conservation, along with a long list of other requirements.

To start the process, Beacon Heights turned to the capital campaign committee and the congregation. Each family unit was asked to sign this creation care pledge: "Our faith calls us to care for creation both for the world's well-being and our own. We are connected in a great web of life that links together the love of God and neighbor with that of God's whole creation. I wish to join a movement of those dedicated to using the gifts we have been given prudently by reducing household energy usage by at least 14 percent or less than half that of an average Hoosier household that is the size of my household. I understand that I do not act alone but in consort with this community, as well as with many other faith communities, as together we respond to

this great challenge of our time."

"The support (of the congregation) was unanimous and made the job of the fundraising committee awfully easy," said Ann Waters, capital campaign chair. "I did not, during the campaign, encounter one conversation that involved explaining why we should do it. It was always about how and when."

In addition to the listed requirements, Beacon Heights received 100 percent staff and board member participation in the capital campaign as well as overwhelming support from the congregation. The installation of the panels was $44,000, of which $24,000 was funded by the grant. The congregation, church staff, and board worked diligently toward the goal of installing solar panels by the end of 2015.

Right in the middle of their campaign, Indiana House Bill 1320 posed a legal hurdle to Beacon Heights' goals.

The bill proposed to restrict businesses and Indiana citizens from choosing how they power homes, businesses,

Our faith calls us to care for creation both for the world's well-being and our own. We are connected in a great web of life that links together the love of God and neighbor with that of God's whole creation.

schools, and churches. If passed, the bill would make rooftop solar more expensive and would stifle the growth of clean energy solutions like rooftop solar panels.

"I was invited to share our story, through guest editorials in the Fort Wayne *Journal Gazette* newspaper and by testifying at a house energy and telecommunications subcommittee hearing in Indianapolis," said Flory.

Flory worked closely with the Sierra Club, and Beacon Heights hosted rallies and protests against HB1320. "As a community organizer," said Megan Anderson, Sierra Club conservation organizer, "I look forward to working with faith leaders like Brian, and the members of the Beacon Heights congregation who courageously speak up so that everyone can have access to clean energy, protecting their neighbors from pollution, and ensuring a healthier planet for future generations."

Local and larger publications, such as the *New York Times* and *Sojourners*, ran articles highlighting creation care at Beacon Heights and how the Indiana state legislature was acting as a barrier to cleaner energy solutions and choices.

On Feb. 24, 2015, Beacon Heights received word that Indiana's speaker of the house pulled HB1320 from a vote on the house floor. The victory propelled Beacon Heights to the next and final stages of solar panel installation.

"This effort saw the alliance of groups not normally aligned: environmental groups, consumer advocacy think tanks, church and other faith community leaders, and tea party organizations. Fortunately, the legislators listened and the bill was not passed," said Flory.

In October, the church received the go-ahead to install the solar panels. On Dec. 7, solar panel installation was officially complete and powering the church.

Since their installation, the solar panels have acted as a visual symbol of the congregation's dedication to creation care. Both inside and outside of the facility, staff and congregation members work to maintain a building that promotes energy choice, renewable energy sources, recycling, and a large reduction in energy consumption.

Already in 2016, Beacon Heights conservatively estimates saving $2,500 on electricity over 2015, possibly more. Compared with electrical use in January 2015, the January 2016 bill saw a savings of more than 50 percent, resulting in savings of nearly $200 just in that month alone. Some of the savings was due to other energy efficiency improvements.

The financial impact is substantial. "When we first estimated the solar system we would purchase, the price per watt was $2.85, resulting in a 15.4 kilowatt (kw) array," explained Flory. "By the time we signed a contract over a year later, the price per watt was $2.31, resulting in an 18.81 kw array. Or to put it another way, the payback period (the amount of time it takes to recoup through savings and efficiency) without the grant, using the original price point, would have been 18 to 19 years. With the grant and the larger array, our payback period is 7 to 8 years."

The panels are expected to last up to 40 years, a substantial cost savings and faith statement for the church. Beacon Heights is one of only three churches to have solar panels in Fort Wayne, a city of more than 400,000 people.

"There was never any doubt of our reaching our goals," sums up Waters. And the proof sits right above worshipers every Sunday morning.

Megan Sutton is program coordinator for Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren.

Ralph Miner

Zebra longtail butterfly

How does your garden grow?

by Ken Gibble

As a youngster, I was frequently assigned to pull weeds in my dad's large garden lot. I didn't like it much when we worked together, but I absolutely hated it when I had to pull weeds alone. I despised the garden: despised the dirt that got under my fingernails, the hot sun, the humidity, the endless bending over. I hated hoeing corn and picking cucumbers and shelling peas. I hated everything about the garden.

After such wretched childhood experiences, how do I explain the fact that now I welcome the yearly ritual of planting seeds in my backyard plot and watching my garden grow?

The explanation that makes most sense to me is to say gardening is "in my blood." A biblical way of saying it is that gardening is one of the things humankind was created for. A return to our gardens is necessary if we are to recover the in-God's-image humanity that we have lost. A return to our gardens is necessary if we are to keep our world from becoming uninhabitable.

How can I make a case for such a statement? The place to begin is in the beginning. "In the beginning," says the book of Genesis, "God created the heavens and the earth." Then follows a magnificent recital of creation with the repeated refrain, "And God saw that it was good." Into this good creation comes the human creature ("male and female God created them"). Creation is now completed and God pronounces it "very good."

What is the place of the man and the woman in such a wonderful world? Genesis tells us that God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

The key word here is "dominion." One interpretation of this word is that humanity has been given absolute control over the created world. Some critics of the Judeo-Christian tradition have said that this passage of scripture is what has led to today's blighted environment. When

Why are such things important? Because being in touch with the earth and its creatures helps us keep in touch with the One who put us here.

people thought they had been given dominion over the earth by God, runs the argument, they ruthlessly asserted themselves against nature by leveling forests, polluting rivers, and fouling the atmosphere.

But "dominion" as it is used in Genesis does not condone exploitation or abuse. As Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann puts it, dominion means securing the well-being of all the creatures and bringing them to the fullness of their potential. Furthermore, in its dominion over nature, humankind is required to "image" God, to carry out authority just as God does.

So we must ask: How does God exercise dominion? For the display of God's own power, for the sake of meeting God's own needs? No.

God's rule is always for the sake of God's subjects, God's children. The dominion of God is nothing other than God's love, expressing itself in order, according to Douglas John Hall in *Lighten Our Darkness*. So we see that when God gave the man and the woman dominion over the earth and its creatures, God intended that this dominion be expressed as loving care of the natural world.

As we plant seeds in the earth, it is easy to pray, to ask God to bless the seeds we sow, inch by inch and row by row.

We have to be careful what we mean by "loving care," however. It is easy to get sentimental about nature, to picture burnished bronze sunsets, to conjure up visions of lazy days spent fishing on the lake, to speak of the "simple life" of country folk.

Actually the world of nature is a nice place to visit, but a hard place to live in. Dominion, even when we define that word as loving care of the earth, does not mean going about with a watering can showering blessings on weeds and flowers alike. Only those who have never encountered nature's own violence could suppose that nature left to itself would always be wonderful.

In the second chapter of Genesis, there is another account of creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Work is thus part of the divine plan; the human creatures have a vocation, and God is prepared to entrust the garden to them. Each creature has its special needs, and even the ground itself must be cared for. If not, soil is washed or blown away.

Modern agriculture has methods of preventing erosion, but the motivation behind these methods has more to do with economics than with loving care of the earth. On today's large farms in North America, agri-business entrepreneurs have taken on the mentality of technology, an attitude that understands natural laws and how to deal with them, but has little time to waste on loving the world.

I'm not suggesting we take all tractors out of the fields, but I am suggesting that we have become increasingly distant and alienated from the earth. We are more and more out of touch with our God-given vocation of tilling and keeping the garden.

I believe this fact helps account for the rootlessness, the anxiety, the sense of lostness that haunts so many people today. In an increasingly technological age, we must work harder than ever to remind ourselves and others that the earth is the Lord's, that God has given it to us for a home, that we know ourselves most fully when we accept our relationship with this earth.

What can be done to remedy the situation? More to the point, what can you and I do that is simple, practical, and (forgive the pun) down to earth? First, we can have one or more living creatures we attend to regularly—if not a dog or cat, then a goldfish, or at least birds that come to a feeder. We can have plants in our rooms, growing things that remind us of our common dependency on nature. We can plant flowers outside. The next step is growing some vegetables, even if it's only a few tomato plants in a pot. And if a garden plot is available, we can get out there in springtime and try our hands at gardening.

Why are such things important? Because being in touch with the earth and its creatures helps us keep in touch with the One who put us here. It confirms our identity as caretakers of creation. As we plant seeds in the earth, it is easy to pray, to ask God to bless the seeds we sow, inch by inch and row by row.

In the process we will gain increasing awareness that all food comes from the earth and increasing concern that every child of earth and child of God have enough to eat.

In elementary school I learned a little song the likes of which they probably don't teach in schools today, though I wish they did. Here are the words:

Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
Back of the flour, the mill.
Back of the mill is the wheat, the shower,
The sun, and our Father's will.

That is how your garden grows . . . and mine too.

Ken Gibble, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, lives in Camp Hill, Pa. He blogs at https://inklingsbyken.wordpress.com.

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Deb Ziegler praying with a Nigerian woman.

Dale Ziegler

We are one body in Christ

Mun daya ne cikin Kristi

by Carl and Roxane Hill

In the Church of the Brethren's first group trip to Nigeria since the crisis of violence by Boko Haram reached extreme levels, 10 members of Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren spent two weeks there in January. Pastor Pam Reist led the team, which we accompanied as co-directors of the Nigeria Crisis Response.

Everywhere we went, people welcomed and prayed with us. We were dipped in prayer the entire time. The Nigerians showed us what it really means to be a praying people. "For some of us, the praying got us out of our comfort zone, but by the end of the trip, even I found myself praying out loud," said Karen Hodges. "It was contagious."

Our two Nigerian companions on the trip were Markus Gamache, staff liaison for Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), and Joshua Ishaya, a student at Kulp Bible College. Both provided immense help for us "batures" (white people) as we all needed assistance navigating in a different culture, complete with language barriers.

After arriving in Nigeria's capital, the team was hosted for several dinners by the leaders of the EYN church in Abuja, who donated the church bus for our travel, and by

Karen Hodges

The Elizabethtown group helps with distribution of relief supplies in Nigeria.

the Brethren Evangelical Support Trust (BEST) group. It was the BEST group that sponsored and accompanied the EYN Women's Fellowship Choir on their tour in the United States last summer.

We visited two "care centers," new communities built for the displaced people of the northeast. "We had some time to spend with the children," remarked Deb Ziegler, who led some of the children's activities. "It was really precious to see the smiles on all the children's faces."

The second week was spent in Jos, a city in the center of the country. EYN leaders welcomed us, and the team became the first occupants of the newly constructed "Unity House" built especially for Church of the Brethren visitors. During our stay in Jos, EYN leaders tried to familiarize us with the critical work of keeping the church going during a time of crisis and upheaval.

Our team split up and attended three different church services in Jos. Each group experienced something a little

The gift of presence

We were going to Nigeria to listen, learn, comfort, and encourage. My life experiences have prepared me to do just that. As an occupational therapist in early intervention my goal is to listen to parents and children, to learn what is going well in their daily routines and what is challenging.

Another life experience that influenced this trip was the unexpected, accidental death of my son, three years ago. He was 19. The support that others have shown to our family, and my personal journey of grief and forgiveness, deep loss, and search for meaning are part of who I am and what I have to share.

I often thought how much more my Nigerian friends have endured. Not only have they lost loved ones—by no accident but at the hands of violence—but they lost homes and churches, jobs and resources. Many fled for their lives with only the clothes on their backs. And it was not just one family suffering, but all.

How do you lift one another up, when everyone is grieving? I tried to clear my mind and be present in the moment.

One morning we visited the Gurku interfaith camp of Christian and Muslim families displaced by the violence. We met a family who recently had a sickness. Carl Hill asked me to pray. Roxane Hill whispered to me that the family had suffered a miscarriage. That is all I knew—no names, no faith background, no other details. I knelt down to meet the woman where she sat, unable to stand, and I prayed for God's grace and healing, for strength and courage, and for God's goodness. I do not know if they understood English but they understood the prayer, the touching of hands, and the tears. I have to believe they understood I was sharing with them in their sorrow and they understood my message that God holds all our children in his hands.

And the tears of compassion continue. I have learned the Nigerian way of answering the question, "How many children do you have?" "I have two children, one is living." That is a healing way for me to confront that sometimes difficult question.

We were told that love is in the feet. The journey of the feet is what we were a part of during this trip.

—Debra Ziegler

Carl and Roxane Hill

Members of the Elizabethtown group play with EYN children.

Karen Hodges

The importance of prayer

In Nigeria we heard stories from women, men, and children who have experienced tragedies in their lives that are almost beyond belief. Homes and churches burned to the ground, husbands and sons murdered, and daughters and sisters abducted by Boko Haram. For many Nigerians, it is belief in God and the power of prayer that gives them the strength to hope.

The prayers we experienced and that I grew to appreciate, were spoken, spontaneous, unrehearsed, often long prayers. I learned to deeply appreciate these prayers, especially from those who have suffered in unimaginable ways.

On New Year's Eve we attended a "Crossover Service," crossing over from one year to another. The service included beautiful music from several choirs, including our own Elizabethtown Kumbaya group, and a sermon. The highlight for me was the end of the service when the pastor invited people forward, asking them to pray for a specific topic in their tribal language. Pastor Pam Reist was among the few invited forward and she prayed a beautiful prayer for the schoolgirls abducted from Chibok. Although I could not understand the languages, it was obvious the prayers were meaningful to those who could understand. It was a beautiful way to bring in the new year.

Our belief in God, and the power of prayer, whether spoken out loud or silent, give us the strength to have hope for tomorrow. –Karen Hodges

different. Some attended an English service and others went to Hausa services. Pastor Pam Reist got an opportunity to preach, with Markus Gamache translating into the Hausa language. "We wanted our Nigerian brothers and sisters to know that we had been with them in spirit, and now we were united in both spirit and physical presence," she said. "We are one body in Christ . . . *mun daya ne cikin Kristi*."

We assisted Dr. Rebecca Dali of the nonprofit group CCEPI with distribution of food and household items to displaced persons. Each member of the Elizabethtown group helped distribute items, had a chance to look recipients in the eye, and gave words of encouragement. In all, 470 women received relief items; 342 of them were widows.

A highlight was a visit to a school in Jos that is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren. This school is home to more than 100 orphans from the northeast. Our group presented a Bible story for the children and some fun activities including a soccer game between the adults and children.

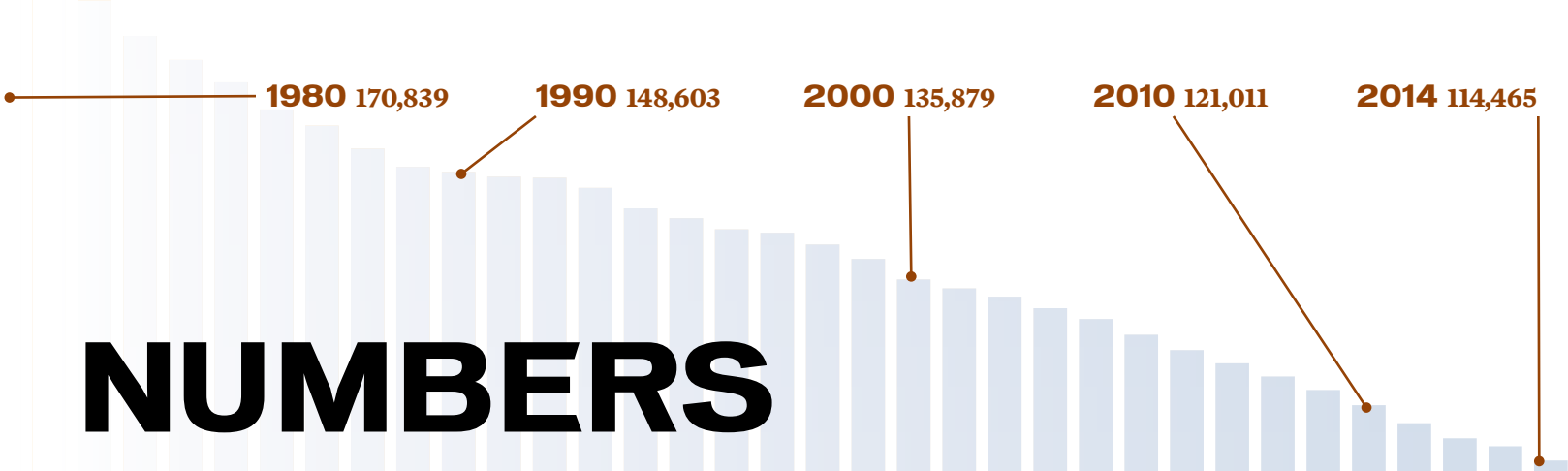
Throughout the two weeks, there were many opportunities to listen to heart-wrenching stories that the Nigerians were willing to share. Real ministry took place as these people truly felt encouraged by their American brothers and sisters.

Carl and Roxane Hill

Carl and Roxane Hill are co-directors of the Nigeria Crisis Response, a joint effort of the Church of the Brethren and Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

Lamps for Nigeria

Dale Ziegler, one of the group who traveled to Nigeria, is making lamps to be sold to raise funds for the Nigeria Crisis Response. Each is inscribed on the bottom with the words "One Body In Christ," in the same design as lamps the group gave to their Nigerian hosts. The lamps are made from *bubinga*, or Nigerian rosewood. The price is $500. For more information contact Carl and Roxane Hill at CRHill@brethren.org.



NUMBERS

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

The Church of the Brethren denomination has experienced a decades-long trend of declining membership, and statistics in the most recent yearbook show that trend is continuing.

The Church of the Brethren denominational membership was 114,465 in 2014, according to data from the *2015 Church of the Brethren Yearbook*. Compared to 2009, when denominational membership was 122,810, this represents a decline of 8,345 members during the previous five years.

Denominational membership is one of the numbers included in the statistical section of the annual yearbook, which collects statistics from the previous year. The 2015 yearbook reports statistics from 2014.

Yearbook figures are based on data provided by congregations that turn in statistical reports. The numbers of reporting congregations are relatively consistent from year to year, and so provide a means for comparison.

In 2014, the total number of congregations in the denomination was 967, which includes congregations in the United States and Puerto Rico but not in Church of the Brethren bodies in other countries. In addition, there were 54 fellowships and projects across the denomination. Five years previously, in 2009, congregations numbered 994, and fellowships and projects numbered 53.

The denomination reported a total average weekly worship attendance of 50,625 for the year in 2014, also a decline from five years previously when average attendance was 58,830.

Congregations reported 1,074 baptisms in 2014, compared to 1,394 in 2009.

The denomination gained a district in 2014, with the addition of Puerto Rico District. This increases the number of Church of the Brethren districts to 24 from 23.

Shenandoah District has overtaken Atlantic Northeast District as the largest district in the denomination, in terms of membership. Shenandoah had 13,763 members in 2014. In 2009 Shenandoah came in at second largest, with 14,189 members. In 2009 Atlantic Northeast had 14,336 members; in 2014 its congregations reported 13,551 members.

The third largest district continues to be Virlina, with 10,598 members in 2014. In 2009 it also was the third largest district, with 10,947 members.

2014 numbers

1,074
baptisms

967
congregations

54
fellowship and projects

50,625
weekly attendance

114,465
membership

About those numbers

What do numbers like church membership, attendance, and giving really mean for a kingdom people? On the one hand, numbers are important markers of progress or decline, they are a handy tool for planning church budgets, and we need them to figure out basics like how many place settings are needed for love feast.

On the other hand, do numbers and statistics really say anything about the spiritual quality and value of the church? What do attendance figures have to do with the Holy Spirit's presence in worship? or the meaning of the cup of cold water offered in love?

New Testament Christians, people who are called to focus on the kingdom of God, may hear echoes of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20 even as they feel the pressure of the numbers that weigh heavily on the church during a season of membership decline and economic recession: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

This article kicks off a series of occasional pieces responding to the numbers that record the statistics of our lives together as the Church of the Brethren, with a focus on what this means for us as a people. The Messenger editorial team invites responses and submissions on this topic, for consideration in future issues of the magazine. Send your brief articles to messenger@brethren.org.

Standing idly by

by Bob Bowman

In chapter 34 of Genesis there is a terrifying story. Simeon and Levi, two sons of Jacob, killed every male in Shechem in revenge for the rape of their sister in that city. Not satisfied, they also dragged into slavery every female in the city.

Jacob scolded his sons for their actions. Admittedly, Jacob's words sound more like self-pity than moral outrage. He says, "You have brought trouble on me by making me displeasing to folks of this land." It sounds as though Jacob worried more about what the neighbors would think of him than that the killing and plundering was out of proportion to the crime.

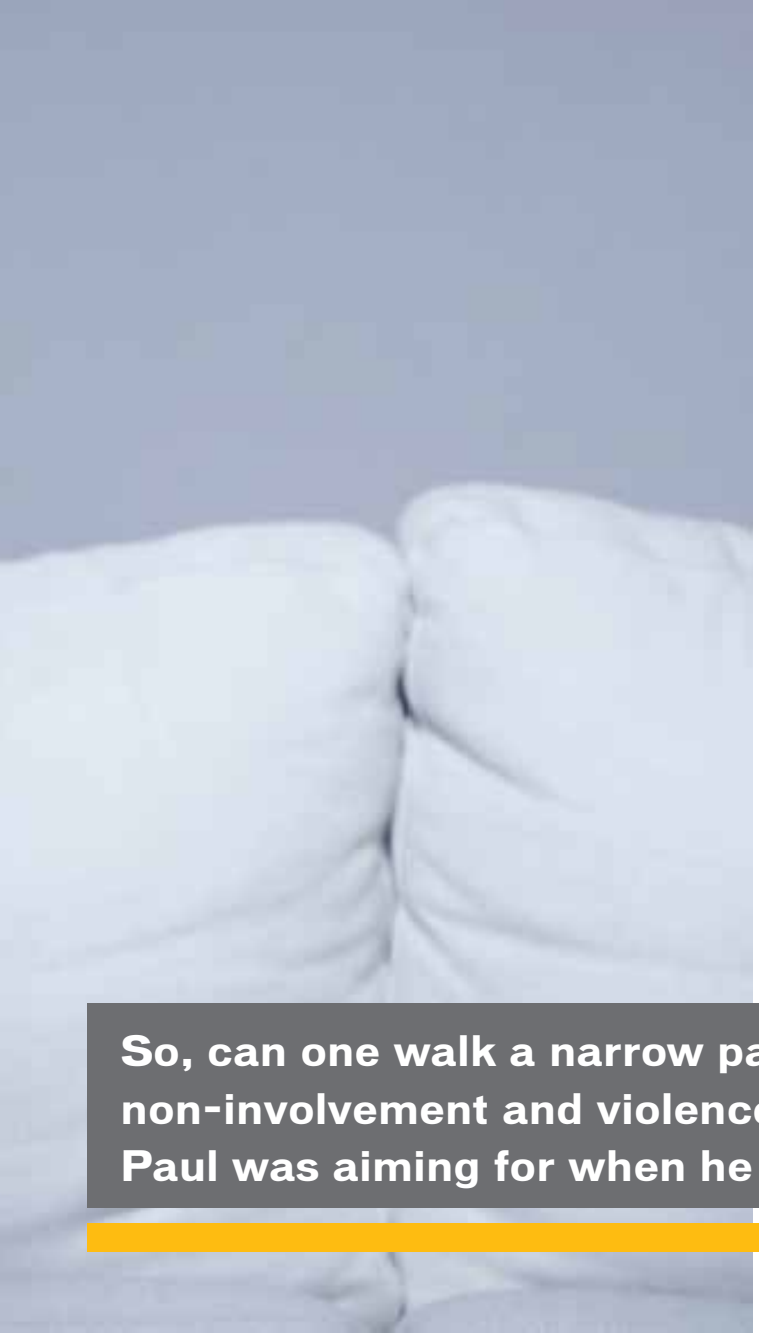
His sons defend their actions, saying, "Should we let our sister be treated as a whore?"

The chapter ends at this point. Jacob offers no response to their question. In fact, throughout the chapter Jacob's lack of response is shocking. He has no answer, no solution to the violence against his daughter nor to the revenge wreaked by her brothers. And between Jacob's lack of action and the extreme violence of Simeon and Levi, the question is left hanging in the air: "Should our sister be treated so violently and we do nothing about it?" Should brutality, skullduggery, and mayhem abound and we do nothing about it?

I am disturbed that this story is unfinished. I am not satisfied with either the brothers' desire for revenge or for Jacob's willingness to put the crime behind them and move on. Nobody comes out of this story unstained. Who was right and who wrong is left undecided in the text. No answer to the dilemma is given.

Unfinished stories happen with disturbing frequency in scripture. We are presented with moral dilemmas that call for careful exploration and debate. In that process of exploration and debate, we hone our own moral tools as we deal with current problems.

Perhaps the situation in Genesis 34 is one in which there



is no perfect course of action. There may be situations in which any response one offers will involve some compromise of a moral principle. But if we look more widely in the scripture, we may find additional insight.

Tucked among a miscellany of Old Testament laws in Leviticus 19 is this line: "You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor." It is a verse that is especially difficult to translate satisfactorily. Several versions interpret it—rightly, I think—to mean one should not stand idly by when a neighbor is bleeding. Older commentaries often expanded this verse to mean that whether a neighbor is suffering from a physical attack, unjust legal treatment, or any heartfelt pain, one must not stand idly by, but must intervene to help. This is the law that reminded the Good Samaritan of his duty to come to the aid of the man beaten and bloody by the side of the road in the famous parable of Jesus.

Our world has grown small enough that everyone is our neighbor, and some neighbor is always bleeding. It doesn't allow much time for standing idly by unless we close our eyes and refuse to face the bleeding.

We are told that Jacob "held his peace" when first informed about his daughter, Dinah. And in further discussions with representatives of Shechem, it is not Jacob, but Jacob's sons who do the talking. Jacob's only words in this chapter are in his rather mild chastisement near the end. Jacob, it seems, was willing to "stand idly by." One is reminded that King David, too, was oddly passive when his daughter was raped. In both cases the silence of the father led to a spiral of violence. One could almost imagine that the story of Jacob was shaped as a subtle criticism of King David.

Perhaps this chapter of Genesis is most critical of Jacob's lack of action and the mildness of his criticism of the action his sons took. At least, for us the message is clear that lack of involvement in another's suffering is not the way of Christ.

Simeon and Levi may have been appealing to the same motive as the verse in Leviticus, as if to say, "We will not stand idly by while our sister is hurting." Yet it is hard to see how their "over the top" vengeance did anything positive for their sister or anybody else's sister.

So, can one walk a narrow path between passive non-involvement and violence? Is this what the apostle Paul was aiming for when he said, 'Be angry but do not sin.'

The heaviest criticism of the action of Simeon and Levi comes toward the end of Genesis. As old Jacob is about to die, he gathers his sons around and leaves each one with a last message. His message for Simeon and Levi is especially harsh: "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company—for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel!"

So, can one walk a narrow path between passive non-involvement and violence? Is this what the apostle Paul was aiming for when he said, "Be angry but do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26)? Be angry about injustice. Be angry about oppression. Be angry at the cancer attacking your friend. Be angry that neighbors are bleeding in the Middle East and in Africa. Angry enough to get involved. But do not sin. Be, as Jesus once said, "wise as serpents and innocent [harmless] as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

An ordained minister, Bob Bowman is professor emeritus of religion at Manchester University, North Manchester, Ind.

Sunday supper

Ah, Sundays. My little-girl memories of Sunday mornings involve flowery dresses and white tights, scribbling in the bulletin while my grandfather preached, and my mother teaching me to sing the alto lines in the hymnal. But I will admit to you that my favorite part about Sundays was coming home and smelling whatever Mom had put in the crockpot or oven before we left.

The aromas were delectable, but more than the food I remember the satisfaction that came from the joy of loved ones gathered around the dinner table. Most Sundays it was just my immediate family, but it was not uncommon to pick up dinner guests during fellowship hour or at the end of worship. Sundays also regularly featured birthday and holiday celebrations with cousins and aunts and uncles, because it was a day set aside for worship, family, and good food.

AMANDA J. GARCIA

These days my Sundays are a little different—I've long forsaken the white tights, my grandfather is retired, and now I sing the alto line on my own. However, I recently returned to this idea of preparing Sunday dinner. In a moment of clarity a few months ago I realized the brilliance of the roast: namely, if you plan to make dinner that feeds more than your family, you always will have enough to invite others to join the feast.

It's beautiful, really. The Sunday roast creates freedom to be spontaneous, to invest in new relationships and catch up with old friends. It offers the opportunity to practice proactive hospitality. It is also practical, because a large roast requires very quick and simple preparation, yet the time it takes in the oven allows it to caramelize into slow-cooked goodness.

When I think back to the simpler times of breaking bread with loved ones after church on Sundays, I can't help but wonder why that tradition now seems old-fashioned when it perfectly embodies what Sundays ought to be. Can that richness be regained if I get up an hour early to preheat the oven? If I prepare to invite my church family to come over for Sunday lunch? I don't know for sure, but I am confident that my mother was on to something sacred in her meal planning, and engrained in me something that I still crave as I set my own Sunday dinner table.

Amanda J. Garcia is a freelance writer living in Elgin, Ill.

Leftovers!

If you decide to roast a turkey this Sunday, here is a week's worth of dinner ideas for your leftovers—and don't forget to use it for lunches, too!

1. Roasted turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans, biscuits.
2. Tacos with turkey, peppers, and onions, served with Spanish rice.
3. Turkey broccoli casserole, served with fruit.
4. Turkey pot pie, served with a simple green salad.
5. Turkey and penne pasta with sun-dried tomatoes, spinach, and creamy garlic sauce.
6. Stir-fried turkey, bell peppers, onions, garlic, and green beans seasoned with soy sauce and sesame oil and served over rice.
7. Turkey potato soup, served with crusty bread and salad.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Brethren mourn associate general secretary

Mary Jo Flory-Steury

Mary Jo Flory-Steury, associate general secretary of the Church of the Brethren and executive director of the Office of Ministry, died March 4 at Hershey (Pa.) Medical Center.

On Feb. 21 she was hospitalized with bleeding in her brain, and subsequently underwent surgery. At the time, she and husband, Mark Flory Steury, were driving home to Elgin, Ill., following a visit on the east coast.

A strong leader

Over the course of her career Flory-Steury held numerous leadership positions. She oversaw the Office of Ministry, a position she held since 2001. Her appointment as associate general secretary came in 2011. She had chaired the former General Board, during her term of service on the denominational board 1996-2001.

Her work included oversight of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the human resources department of the denomination. She provided support for district executives and district offices, in particular assisting districts with the hiring of staff, and the ministry training, certification, and placement of pastors, and continuing education requirements, among other services.

Also in the purview of her work were the Ministry Summer Service program, ministry training for pastors in sister churches in Haiti and elsewhere, service as staff liaison for the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee and for the Ministers' Association, and participation in a group working on a new minister's manual to be published by Brethren Press.

She led a revision of the denomination's ministerial leadership polity, which was adopted by Annual Conference in 2014, and shepherded a revision of the Ethics in Ministry Relationship paper in 2008.

Over the years she helped convene consultations about leadership in the church, including a 2012 leadership summit held in northern Virginia, a unique event examining the role of young adults in church leadership, and retreats for clergywomen.

She took an active interest in mission work, having been born in India to parents who served in the Church of the Brethren missions in China and India. As a young woman, she taught at Hillcrest School in Nigeria. In 2003 she was part of an American Brethren delegation to India. In 2010 she traveled to China, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the arrival of western medicine in Shansi Province brought by Brethren missionaries. In 2012 she was on an ecumenical delegation to Israel and Palestine.

She spent some 20 years as a pastor in Ohio. She was a graduate of Bridgewater College and Bethany Seminary.

She is survived by her husband, son Joshua (Stacy) Bashore-Steury, daughter Jessica (Logan) Strawderman, and two grandchildren.

CCT
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TOGETHER

CCT holds 10th annual convocation

At the 10th annual convocation of Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT), held in early 2016 in Arlington, Va., member churches and organizations deepened their work on racism and other issues of common concern.

Well-known anti-apartheid leader Allan Boesak gave an insider's critique of the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa, and applied that to the struggle for racial reconciliation in the US. He drew a sharp distinction between political reconciliation, which he said has proven to be short-lived, and the Christ-centered reconciliation that is at the heart of Christianity.

"If we say 'justice' we must say 'Jesus.' If we say 'Jesus' we must say 'justice,'" Boesak insisted. Describing reconciliation as "holy ground," he said it must be "real, radical, and revolutionary."

St. Louis pastor and activist Michelle Higgins brought a Christian view of Black Lives Matter, which she described as a "pro-life" movement. Lamenting the dehumanizing practices facing people of color, she urged churches "to tell the truth about their own history so that they might be a united front to tell God's story in the world." This should come naturally for Christians, she pointed out: "As a body of believers, we already participate in an alternative history. Sunday school is an alternative institution."

At this anniversary meeting, participants reviewed the history of CCT and furthered understanding of the themes that have been examined over the past decade. In addition to race, sessions focused on poverty, immigration, and how to witness to the gospel respectfully in a multi-religious world.

Church of the Brethren representative Wendy McFadden completed eight years on the CCT steering committee, the last three as president of the Historic Protestant family. The other four families are Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Black, and Orthodox.

Congregational Life Ministries and ADNet extend agreement

In January, Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADNet) and the Church of the Brethren Congregational Life Ministries extended an agreement to work together to advocate for persons with disabilities in the church.

Since 2014, the Church of the Brethren has had a representative serving on the ADNet board of directors and has worked in cooperation with ADNet's mission to "support Anabaptist congregations, families, and persons touched by disabilities to nurture inclusive communities."

ADNet
Anabaptist Disabilities Network

This renewed agreement provides for increased cooperation in disabilities ministry over the next three years. Debbie Eisenbise, director of Intergenerational Ministries for the Church of the Brethren, with primary staff responsibility for disability ministries in the denomination, serves on the board of Anabaptist Disabilities Network. She will work with ADNet staff Kathy Nofziger Yeakey, executive director, and Christine Guth, program director, on developing resources and providing communication to support families, individuals, and congregations ministering to and with persons with disabilities of all kinds, including mental illnesses.

Rebekah Flores of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., serves as an ADNet field associate on behalf of the Church of the Brethren. She is a resource person for the districts, congregations, and denomination. In 2016, she will serve as an ombudsman for persons with disabilities at the Annual Conference in North Carolina.

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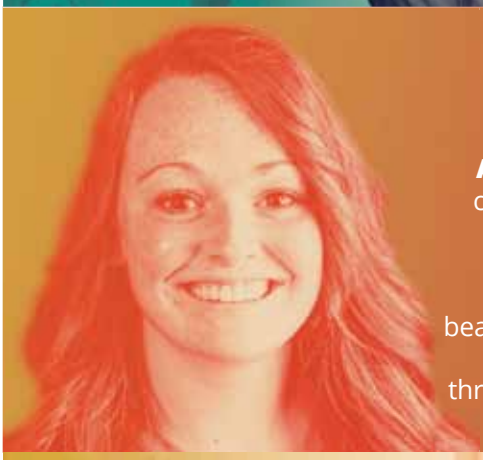
Jasmine Benson, '16

PHYSICAL EDUCATION & HEALTH

Jasmine Benson developed a social media campaign and promotional video to bring attention to and raise money for clean water and quality medical attention for those in Haiti.

Entrepreneurship is recognizing the needs of others across the globe.



Ashley Long, '16

BIOCHEMISTRY

Ashley Long founded an MC club designed to give our pre-health students professional development opportunities. It has organized food drives, beautified campus and engaged elementary school-aged kids through an interactive field day.

Entrepreneurship is creating opportunities for aspiring health professionals.

Logan Schrag, '18

MARKETING/PUBLIC RELATIONS

Logan Schrag is a founder and one half of Resurrection Duo, a Christian, non-profit public speaking team that travels across the country, speaking from the heart.

Entrepreneurship is spreading the Good Word through dynamic speaking.

Shining a light

***Spotlight* follows the *Boston Globe* investigation that uncovered decades of child sexual abuse by clergy** in the Catholic Church. Walter Robinson (Michael Keaton) heads an investigative team known as Spotlight. Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber) is the new editor who has taken the reins of the paper. As an outsider, he is there to shake things up in the newsroom. As a Jewish newcomer to the largely Catholic community, he is shaking things up outside the newsroom as well.

MICHAEL MCKEEVER

The action begins when Baron asks Robinson to investigate charges of local clergy abuse. Robinson is quite hesitant to do so in the powerful church culture of Boston, the only Catholic-majority town in the US. The journalists are not certain they can successfully pursue this story here. Indeed, as events unfold the journalists encounter frequent obstacles and cover-ups that ultimately lead to the highest legal, government, and religious levels.

Spotlight is one of the best movies about journalism ever made. It is reminiscent of *All the President's Men*, yet presents an even more compelling—though grim—drama. Like journalism itself, it sweats the small details as the story builds methodically, much like steadfastly pursuing a lead. Though the outcome is well known, navigating the process generates incredible suspense as the film builds toward its climactic scenes.

Spotlight underscores the important role that journalists play without romanticizing or venerating them. In the end, it is not the reporters but the story and the reporting itself that are championed. Yet this kind of reporting involves patiently developing relationships with reluctant sources and tenaciously dogging obstructionists. The investigation entails knocking on doors, sifting through dusty archives, or just waiting to talk to officials, always painstakingly trying to confirm what they suspect but can't prove.

Director Tom McCarthy, known for character studies such as *The Station Agent* and *The Visitor*, has assembled an outstanding ensemble cast. Rachel McAdams' amicable Sacha Pfeiffer is perfectly understated, while Mark Ruffalo's frenetic and resolute Mike Rezendes is especially memorable. Stanley Tucci plays victims lawyer Mitchell Garabedian, an Armenian who is also an outsider in the majority Catholic community. It is said the best way to illuminate complicated legal and procedural details in a film is to hire a first-rate actor and have him explain it to another character in the movie. Tucci shines in this role, as he lays out the minefields that obstruct the ugly truth of this scandal.

We want to know more about these characters but are granted few glimpses into their personal worlds. Rather, we only witness the toll this story takes on their lives as the immensity of the scandal gradually dawns upon them. We only observe their silence, dismay, and weary body language as they wade through the ethical morass and extensive cover-up.

At one point, Garabedian states, "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one." Many in the Catholic Church and broader Boston community were complicit in the cover-ups, private mediations, and victim payoffs that kept these cases outside the court system. Yet the film is not self-aggrandizing; editor Robinson has his own realization of complicity in missing the story that was there all along.

Spotlight illuminates how it is the critical perspective of outsiders that may awaken communities, religious and otherwise, to failure and blindness. Yet *Spotlight* is neither exploitive nor self-congratulatory. Neither does it primarily focus on individual perpetrators or victims. Rather, it elucidates the systemic policies and practices that allow the victimization to take place, as well as the grinding effort required to bring such activity to light.

Near the end of the film, Rezendes observes some victimized children waiting in Garabedian's office. The timing of the scene drives home how the the discovery of each abusing priest signifies immense suffering among the most vulnerable and defenseless. The film concludes by noting that 249 priests were implicated in the Boston area and that over 1,000 victims had come forth. This is followed by a lengthy list of other cities in the US and abroad where the Catholic Church was found to have concealed clergy sexual abuse of children.

The extensive investigation and coverage by the *Boston Globe* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2003.

Michael McKeever is professor and chair of Biblical and Theological Studies at Judson University, where he founded and directs the Reel Conversations film series. He is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Spotlight won the 2016 Academy Award for best picture. Theatrical release: Nov. 6, 2015. DVD release: Feb. 23, 2016. Director: Tom McCarthy. MPAA rating: R for some language, including sexual references.

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It is time to abolish draft registration

by Bill Galvin and Maria Santelli

With the combat restriction for women in the US Armed Forces now lifted, discussion of draft registration is back in the news, the courts, and the halls of Congress. But the problems with Selective Service System (SSS) registration go much deeper than gender equality. There is little political interest in bringing back the draft. Yet draft registration remains a burden upon our nation's young men—and now, potentially our young women as well.

The extrajudicial penalties imposed upon those who choose not to or fail to register make life more difficult for many who already are marginalized, and they particularly target conscientious objectors who believe that registering with Selective Service is a form of participating in war.

In 1980 President Carter reinstated registration. This is still the law of the land today.

The penalties for failure to register are potentially quite severe: it is a federal felony carrying a penalty of up to five years in prison and a fine of up to $250,000. Since 1980 millions of young men have violated the law by failing to register. Of those who did register, millions more violated the law by failing to register during the time period prescribed in the law. But since 1980 a grand total of just 20 people have been prosecuted for failure to register. Almost all of those prosecuted were conscientious objectors who publicly asserted their non-registration as a religious, conscientious, or political statement.

In response, beginning in 1982, the federal government enacted punitive legislation and policies designed to coerce people to register. These laws, commonly called "Solomon" laws after the member of Congress who first introduced them, mandated non-registrants be denied the following: federal financial aid to college students, federal job training, employment with federal executive agencies, citizenship to immigrants.

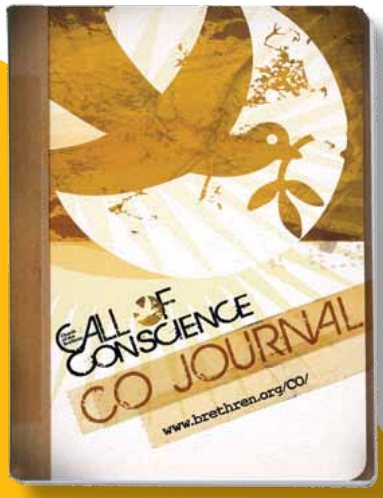
Selective Service has stated consistently that their goal is to increase registration rates, not prosecute non-registrants. They happily accept late registrations until one turns 26, after which time it is no longer legally or administratively possible to register. Because there is a five-year statute of limitations for violations of the Selective Service law, once a non-registrant turns 31 he can no longer be prosecuted, yet the denial of federal financial aid, job training, and employment extends throughout his life.

Former Selective Service director Gil Coronado observed, "If we are not successful in reminding men in the inner cities about their registration obligation, especially minority and immigrant men, they will miss out on opportunities to achieve the American dream. They will lose eligibility for college loans and grants, government jobs, job training, and for registration-age immigrants, citizenship. Unless we are successful in achieving high registration compliance, America may be on the verge of creating a permanent underclass."

Rather than rescind this unpopular and burdensome law, recent political attention has been focused on extending it to women. In early February the Draft America's Daughters Act was introduced in the House of Representatives.

Now that women are no longer barred from combat, the reason the Supreme Court allowed a male-only registration system no longer exists. Several court cases in recent years have challenged the male-only draft on constitutional "equal protection" grounds, and one of those cases was argued before the 9th Circuit Federal Court of Appeals on Dec. 8, 2015. On Feb. 19, the court of appeals rejected the lower court's technical reasons for dismissing the case and sent it back for further consideration.

The time is ripe to challenge the registration system—not add women of conscience (or any other women) to the group being punished. On Feb. 10, HR 4523 was introduced in the House. It would repeal the Military Selective Service Act, abolishing the registration requirement for everyone, while requiring that "a person may not be denied a right, privilege, benefit, or employment position under Federal law" for having refused or failed to register before the repeal. A petition is now circulating to support this sensible and timely effort.



The Church of the Brethren encourages young people to seriously consider conscientious objection. Learn more at www.brethren.org/CO.

Bill Galvin and Maria Santelli are staff of the Center on Conscience and War. CCW was founded in 1940 by the historic peace churches (Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, and Quakers).

Inspiring articles

This morning I sat down to read the latest issue of MESSENGER's inspiring articles about "Being Brethren."

Then I turned the page to "District terminates ordination of pastor who performed same-sex marriage." Wow! Really? That LGBT couple is living on the margins. Obviously, we who are "being Brethren" do not wish to relate to them! How does terminating the ordination of a pastor who performed a service of love bring us closer to leading a life of humility and gentleness? Perhaps someone will defend the actions with the statement, "It was against our rules, so we had no choice but to terminate him," or maybe, "We don't wish to be of this world and the Supreme Court decision should not impact our beliefs." But isn't love first and foremost in our beliefs? There was no love in that decision, unless it was love for the institution.

Beth van Haaren
Tipp City, Ohio

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Responding to district decision

Responding to "District terminates ordination of pastor who performed same-sex marriage": In the spirit of peace, in the spirit of hope, in the name Jesus of Nazareth, who is the all inclusive Shepherd of unconditional love, I respectfully ask you to reconsider your decision to remove the ordination of Chris Zepp, associate pastor of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren. With the joy of Advent in my heart, I bow down to symbolically wash your feet as I make this request.

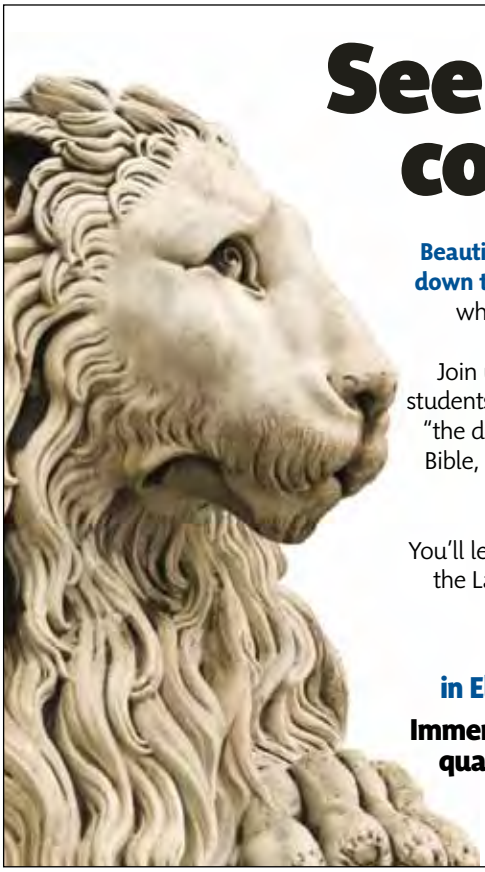
Marcia Wright
Fort Wayne, Ind.

CLASSIFIEDS

Connecting Families-East Retreat May 20-22 at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center. Hear Stephanie Krehbiel present "Cultivating Hope: Tools for Holy Inclusion." Stephanie recently completed her PhD studies at University of Kansas. Connecting Families welcomes LGBT people and their families and allies to a weekend of sharing common thoughts regarding sexual minority concerns as they affect families, friends, and churches. Email connectingfam@gmail.com to request registration materials.

If you live in or are visiting Tucson, AZ, check out the TUCSON CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN. Traditional Worship is at 10:45 AM and Sunday School is at 9:30. For a more informal fellowship time join us the 2nd Sunday of the month at 4:00 PM for a time to address our faith in today's world, followed by a potluck. Tucson Church of the Brethren is located at 2200 N Dodge Blvd in Tucson and our phone number is 520-327-5106.

WANTED—Messenger magazine is seeking an editorial assistant who will serve as an intern through Brethren Volunteer Service. The volunteer will write articles and assist the editorial team. The position, located in Elgin, Ill., provides room and board, insurance, and a small stipend. For more information, contact Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, associate editor, at cbrumbaugh-cayford@brethren.org.



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Anti-racism resources

I was very sorry to learn that the January/February issue was the last for Randy Miller as editor. I wish him the best. I'm sure the new team will do a great job also.

I appreciated Benjamin Leiter's article, "Being Brethren in a World Not Our Own." A step toward the referenced "denominational-wide training program" would seem to be the Bible study by Kathryn Goering Reid and Stephen Breck Reid, *Uncovering Racism*, available from Brethren Press. The Brethren Press book *Mattie Loves All* by Mildred Hess Grimley, tells the story of Martha Cunningham Dolby. In the early 1900s Rev. Dolby and her family were excluded because of the racism of a Church of the Brethren congregation in the Midwest.

Charles Thomas
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

TurningPoints

Send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039, ext. 320; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published.

New Members

Alpha & Omega, Lancaster, Pa.: Loida De La Rosa, Evelyn Shappen, Jennifer Rivera, Johana Ortiz, Luis O. Almodovar, Joel Ibarez, Jaime Medina, Eva Cartagena, Arecely Nater, Ever Sandoval, Dawn Sandoval

Bakersfield, Calif.: Jasmine Celedon

Bridgewater, Va.: David Michael, Frank Oncken, Taylor Metzler, Mike Fike, Cindy Fike, Jimmy Ross, Betty Ross

Coulson, Hillsville, Va.: Ethan Higgins, Emily Higgins, Wayne Shupe, Gail Shupe, Linden Shupe, Vassie Vaught, Linda Vaught, Gerald Keegan, Diane Keegan

Drexel Hill, Pa.: Brandon Hanks, Katrina Hanks

Elizabethtown, Pa.: Gerald Baer, Rose Baer, Richard Newton, Amy Ward Nilsen, Hyung Ku Nilsen, Jeff Bingeman, Alyssa Cross, Jordan Eberhart, Ben Hoover, Candace Hoover, Bob McFarland, Peggy McFarland

Manassas, Va.: Tom Schaeffer, Nancy Schaeffer, Jim Healy

Mohican, West Salem, Ohio: Brent Altenburger, Mitchell Altenburger, Robert Altenburger, Jamie Bowman, Michelle Bowman, Barbara Calihan, Dalton Espy, Lester Howman, Sue Howman, Brooke McNeil, Chet McNeil, Carolyn Morris, Doug Morris, Emily Ott, Katherine Orosz, Amelia Palmer, Brennen Topp

Peoria, Ill.: Katie Whalen, Kennedy Whalen, Keely Whalen, Emma Lauterbach, Mary Grace Patton, Wyatt Freiburger, Jesse England, Jenna England, Cassandra Ethridge

Rossville, Ind.: Guy Studebaker

Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.: Maggie Dorn, Arrington Krull, Shawn Krull, Lissa Krull, Pierce Atkins, Jane Atkins, Aaron Atkins

Anniversaries

Forry, Lawrence and Beverly, Palmyra, Pa., 50

Gingrich, Samuel and Mildred, Palmyra, Pa., 65

Grubb, Wilmer and Dorothy, Palmyra, Pa., 70

Landes, Olen and Alice, Harrisonburg, Va., 79

Sager, William and Agnes, Harrisonburg, Va., 66

Shanks, Ernie and Jeanine, Astoria, Ill., 65

Sheets, Vernon and MaryLou, Nappanee, Ind., 60

Simmons, Benjamin and Sondra, Manheim, Pa., 50

Southerly, Norman and Mary, Port Republic, Va., 60

Stanbury, Leighton and Dottie, Harrisburg, Pa., 65

Stemen, Cliff and Marlene, New Paris, Ind., 50

Weber, Dick and Lana, Milford, Ind., 50

Deaths

Bongard, Merritt Franklin, 72, Ludington, Mich., Jan. 19

Bowers, William, 91, East Petersburg, Pa., Jan. 21

Bowyer, Marjorie Hessong, 93, Peru, Ind., Nov. 7

Bradley, Phillip K., 79, Cheverly, Md., Jan. 9

Bucher, Gary, 67, Hershey, Pa., Oct. 5

Cearley, John, 66, Modesto, Calif., Jan. 3

Corby, Agnes, 94, Walkerton, Ind., Jan. 11

Dell, Joe, 95, Sacramento, Calif., Feb. 8

Downs, Maria Fisher, 68, Live Oak, Calif., Dec. 27

Dudley, Pearl, 94, Charlottesville, Va., Dec. 15

Eby, Bradley Devon, 56, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 24

Fiddes, Claire S., 85, Oakland, Calif., Jan. 8

Flory, Rowena E. Frantz, 97, McPherson, Kan., Jan. 12

Gomola, Janet M. Platt, 91, Verona, Pa., Dec. 28

Grass, Margaret J., 92, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 7

Grove, Charles, 92, South English, Iowa, Jan. 23

Hartman, Gladys M. Worst, 100, Wooster, Ohio, Jan. 20, 2015

Herder, Lois Katherine, 93, Bakersfield, Calif., Sept. 10

Herr, Larry L., 72, Nappanee, Ind., Aug. 21

Hershey, Robrt E., 92, Mount Joy, Pa., Jan. 9

Hollinger, Dorothy, 97, Lancaster, Pa., Dec. 23

Holsinger, Elaine Hay, 90, Somerset, Pa., Dec. 6

Horst, Ervin Eugene, 66, West Salem, Ohio, Sept. 19

Johnson, Donald, 93, Somerset, Pa., Jan. 3

Kiracofe, Carson Lee, 68, Bridgewater, Va., Sept. 14

Knieriem, Samuel Ray, 94, Sebring, Fla., Feb. 5

Landis, Linda, 68, Lititz, Pa., Feb. 6

Lehman, Elmer R., 92, Salem, Ohio, May 13

Leiter, Crystal Berkey, 80, Dover, Del., Jan. 12

Light, Adam Ephraim, 96, Palmyra, Pa., June 8

Light, Robert Hetrick, 90, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 25

Longanecker, Muriel Henrietta, 94, Columbiana, Ohio, Jan. 8

Metzger, M. Louise Penrod, 97, Claypool, Ind., Dec. 21

Miller, James D., 83, Wooster, Ohio, Dec. 26

Mummau, Jean Bollinger, 90, Florin, Pa., Jan. 21

Negley, William B., Jr., 83, Harrisburg, Pa., Feb. 8

O'Donnell, Miriam Kline, 97, Elizabethtown, Pa., Nov. 8

Radcliff, G. Richard, 90, Blue Ridge, Va., Jan. 23

Rench, Daleen, 76, North Manchester, Ind., Nov. 5

Rensberger, Daniel A., 63, Lakeville, Ind., July 30

Ridgway, Jesse W., 91, Connellsville, Pa., Jan. 23

Ringgold, Ethel Liskey, 97, Bridgewater, Va., Jan. 24

Runkle, John L., 87, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 9

Shellenberger, Ralph M., 88, Palmyra, Pa., Feb. 1

Showalter, Doris, 78, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 26

Smith, Earl, 96, Fort Worth, Texas, Sept. 25

Stevens, Janet Waring, 94, Bridgewater, Va., Oct. 3

Stockton, Virginia M., 87, North Manchester, Ind., Jan. 12

Stong, Alan Leon, 86, Huntington, Ind., Sept. 2

Tate, Rebecca P., 93, Salem, Va., Nov. 20

Taylor, William O., 90, New Oxford, Pa., Nov. 22

Thompson, James A., Sr., 93, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 8

Thralls, Rex LaVerne, 86, Billings, Okla., Sept. 22

Ulrich, Joan M., 82, Napoleon, Ohio, Jan. 20

Wallace, Twila R., 87, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 29

Weese, Hazel K., 95, Keyser, W. Va., Jan. 27

Wentz, E. Marie, 84, Friedens, Pa., Jan. 6

White, Bob, 91, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 10

White, Eunice R., 90, Kokomo, Ind., June 14

White, James, 82, Springfield, Ohio, Oct. 7

Wicks, Ruth C., 98, Adel, Iowa, Dec. 15

Williams, Myrna M. Lippert, 80, Mount Morris, Ill., Jan. 21

Wine, J. Floyd, 98, Winchester, Va., Dec. 13

Woodzell, Vera Emily Miller, 85, Mount Jackson, Va., April 24, 2015

Young, Reda V., 96, New Oxford, Pa., Nov. 21

Zumbrun, Evelyn Marie, 90, Columbia City, Ind., Dec. 11

Ordained

Whitacre, Kathryn, W. Plains Dist. (McPherson, Kan.), Feb. 14

Licensed

Michael, Kathleen F., Shen. Dist. (Montezuma, Dayton, Va.), Jan. 31

Placements

Brummett, Erik, pastor, Live Oak, Calif., Feb. 1

Erisman Valeta, Gail, from team to pastor, Prince of Peace, Littleton, Colo., Sept. 1

Farrar, Stephen M., associate pastor, Sunrise, Harrisonburg, Va., April 26, 2015

Gaunt, Craig A., pastor, Conemaugh, Johnstown, Pa., Feb. 1

Hanks, Brandon, pastor of teaching, Drexel Hill, Pa., Jan. 10

May, W. David, pastor, Independence, Kan., April 26, 2015

Rhoades Clarke, Nelda, pastor, Tucson, Ariz., Jan. 1

Shaffer, Daniel P., pastor, Morrellville, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 1

Thompson, Katie Shaw, from pastor, Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa, to pastor, Highland Avenue, Elgin, Ill., Nov. 29

Townsend, Frances R., pastor, Marilla, Copemish, Mich., Jan. 1

Weiss, David, from interim to pastor, Springfield, Coopersburg, Pa., Jan. 18

Yoder, Vernon E., pastor, Mont Ida, Garnett, Kan., and Scott Valley, Westphalia, Kan. (yoked), Oct. 1

Yowell, Richard H., from pastor, Cedar Run, Broadway, Va., to pastor, Mount Olivet, Broadway, Va., Feb. 1

What Jesus said

One sign of brilliance is the ability to take very complicated ideas and summarize them in a way that is easy to understand. Jesus was a master at this. The "golden rule" is one of several instances in the Gospels where Jesus focuses us on the heart of the matter with laser-like clarity.

The golden rule comes at the end of a section in Matthew 7 that describes the character of our relationships with one another. Jesus describes times to point out the obvious faults in others (7:1-5) and times we are not to (7:6). We are able to be in relationship with one another like this only if we are imitating our Father in heaven, who not only answers our prayers but also gives us the very best (7:7-11).

TIM HARVEY

Jesus sums up this passage and the entire ethical side of our faith with these familiar words: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). It is brilliant because it is so simple to understand.

We live in a day when simplistic answers to complex problems abound. Every pronouncement—from those made by presidential candidates to responses to local news stories made by a stranger with a smartphone—seems crafted to settle the debate in a Facebook meme or 140-character tweet, as if the usefulness of an argument is determined by the number of "likes" it receives.

Pronouncements like these don't really solve anything. While Jesus was truly brilliant, it turns out that people generally are not—at least not as much as we think we are.

This is a very interesting time for the church. Our society is faced with extremely complex problems that need attention beyond that of political ads or social media pronouncements. They are the types of issues that Christian ethics speaks to with great clarity: how we are to be in relationship with "the other." While the level of our public discourse is a problem, the issues facing us are ultimately ones of Christian mission.

On any given day, we hear stories about race relations, public safety, immigration (legal and illegal), and the threat of Islamic terrorism, to name just a few. The challenges presented in any of these areas are complicated, and require much time and patience to address. Reducing any of them to catch phrases such as "don't resist arrest" or "a good guy with a gun" or "build a wall" simply does not help.

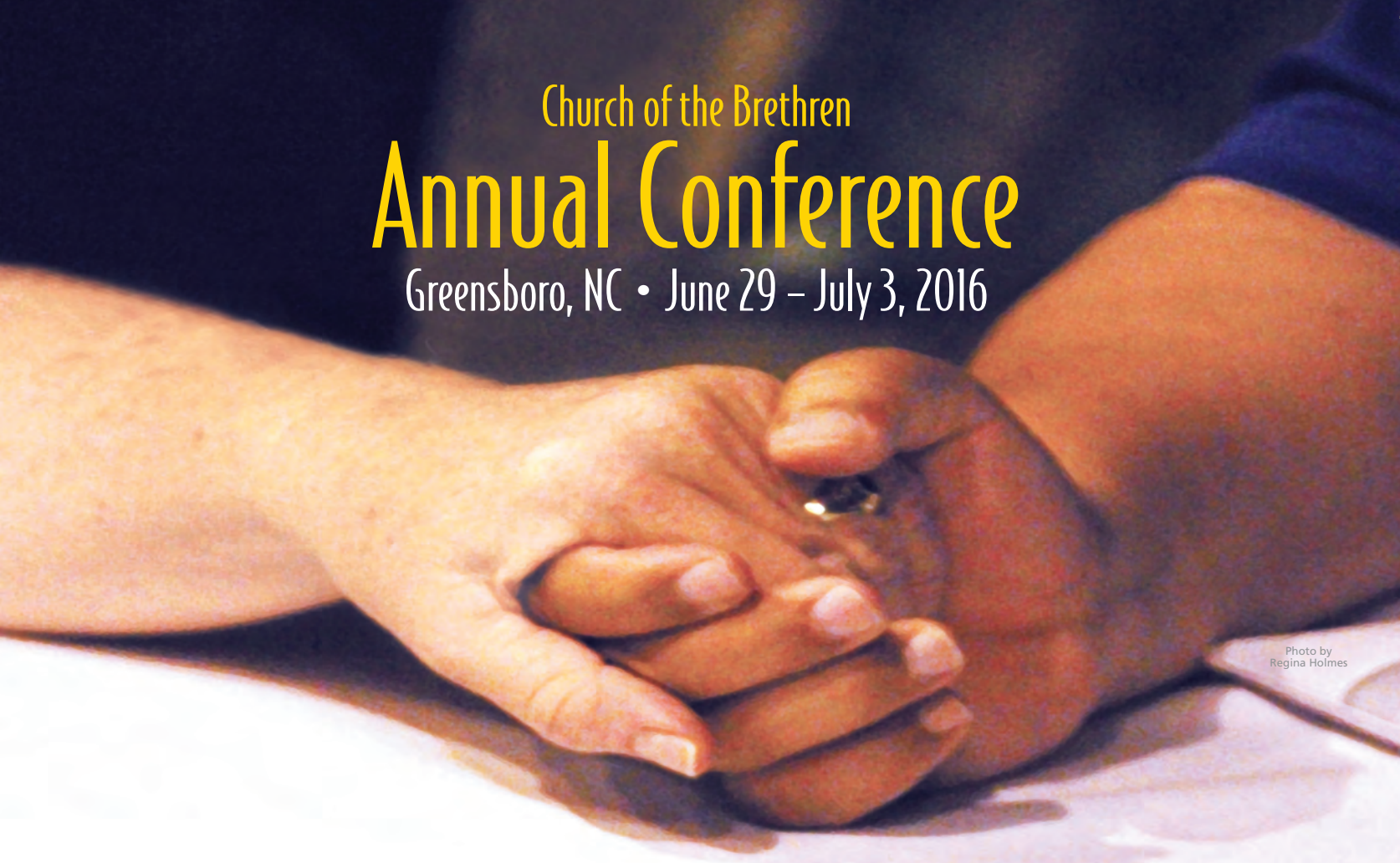
An important step in addressing the challenges of our day may come by listening to our own first response to any of them. Notice how often people respond to these issues by saying something like "I'm not racist" or "I'm not responsible for that." Perhaps this is true. But our commitment to Jesus is not measured only by the things we *don't* do. It's as if we've been reading the golden rule in the negative: "Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." If that were the standard, we'd all pass the test of faith spectacularly. But it isn't what Jesus said.

In many ways, the golden rule is a measure of our commitment to mission. It invites us to be actively engaged with all kinds of people around us because, if the tables were turned, we'd surely hope someone were paying attention to our struggles.

An important step in addressing the challenges of our day may come by listening to our own first response to any of them.

And so we might ask ourselves a few questions of how the golden rule is shaping our mission: What kinds of relationships do we have with people of a different ethnic group, nationality, or religion? What are the challenging social or ethical issues facing our own community, and what is our congregation doing to address them? How are those relationships and knowledge of those changing our prayer, Bible study, and outreach?

Tim Harvey is pastor of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va. He was moderator of the 2012 Annual Conference.



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