

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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War, Terror, and Christ's Peace



Robert C. Johansen is co-founder of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. A life-long member of the Church of the Brethren and a student and then professor at Manchester College, Johansen has devoted his professional life to doing peace research, writing, and teaching about how to live faithfully to Christian teachings while simultaneously striving to be politically responsible. He currently is writing about how to be a responsible global citizen while faced with international violence, poverty, denial of human rights, and environmental disasters that are not being addressed effectively by most governments and major corporations.



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Come by the Annual Conference bookstore and receive an early-bird discount on Brethren Press' new book *Speak Peace: A Daily Reader*. This essential collection of 365 peace offerings was edited by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and ships Fall 2016. Watch www.facebook.com/brethrenpress for further details.



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Contributing editors: Eric Bishop, Sandy Bosserman, Dana Cassell, Daniel D'Oleo, Emmett Eldred, Tim Harvey, Bob Neff

Steve Miller



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Cover photo by Steve Miller

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Avid readers tend to use just about anything to mark their places in books. A proper bookmark isn't always handy, so there are plenty of makeshift ones: a boarding pass, a napkin, a receipt. I'm fond of using ticket stubs, which are the right size and weight and also make a memento practical.



But my favorite bookmarks now are "sprouts," which fold up when the book is closed and then spring out from the pages when it opens. The stem stands up in the gutter of the book, and the two leaves spread cheerfully to greet the reader. With a bookmark like this, every open book displays its potential for creativity and life.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

A whole collection of the spring-green sprouts would be useful in the next big book coming from Brethren Press, *Speak Peace: A Daily Reader*. With 365 readings curated by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford from sages past and present, you might need more than one bookmark.

While the book's release is half a year away, its theme of peace will be explored this summer by Robert Johansen, one of the voices represented in *Speak Peace*. At the Brethren Press/Messenger Dinner July 2 at Annual Conference, Bob will speak on "War, Terror, and Christ's Peace." (You can order tickets at www.brethren.org/ac.)

Bob is co-founder of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. A lifelong member of the Church of the Brethren, he has lived out his Christian convictions through peace research, writing, and teaching about international ethics and global governance.

In a world that seems dangerously inclined to attitudes and tactics that fuel terrorism, speaking peace is a rare and brave activity. We can be encouraged by the cloud of witnesses surrounding us. We can turn the pages of their wise words and find signs of God's new thing. As the prophet says, now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?

Wendy McFadden

How to reach us

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

Diane Stroyeck
messengersubscriptions@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 327
Fax: 847-742-1407

Advertising:

Karen Stocking
messengerads@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 308
Fax: 847-742-1407

Editorial:

messenger@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 326
Fax: 847-742-1407

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Blended beautifully for Lent

For the second year, two very different congregations from Mid-Atlantic District joined together for a time of Lenten worship. On the fourth Sunday of Lent, pastor Doug Diamond and Fellowship Church of the Brethren in Martinsburg, W. Va., once again played host to pastor E. J. Rice and the congregation of First Church of the Brethren in Baltimore, Md.

The hour and a half drive is not the only thing that could separate these two bodies. The two congregations are culturally very different. The Fellowship Church is a predominantly white congregation located in a rural/suburban area of West Virginia. First Church is a predominantly African-American congregation located in the city of Baltimore.

Differences aside, the two churches blended beautifully together. The choir from First Church sang and Pastor Rice brought an inspiring message reminding the joint congregation that they need only know one thing, that Jesus died for each one. But the real highlight of the service was the First Church youth who served as ushers. The entire room shook as the youth enthusiastically ministered to the two church groups. And the service was followed by a covered dish meal.

“We love coming together,” said Pastor Diamond. “I’ve already extended an invitation to Pastor Rice to come back next year. The people here love it. They bring their whole church!”

Plans are under way for another joint service in Baltimore later this year.

Prayer vigil for Nigeria

For nearly two years, members of two congregations in Wenatchee, Wash.—Brethren Baptist Church United and Sunnyslope Church of the Brethren—have been praying for those harmed by terrorism in Nigeria.

The group started meeting for prayer after the nearly 300 schoolgirls were kidnapped from Chibok by Boko Haram. A large interchurch group came together to pray, sing, read the names of the kidnapped girls, and create cards to send love and prayers to the girls’ families and communities.

A smaller group, some of whom were raised in Nigeria in missionary

families, kept meeting weekly on the church lawn for prayer. Sometimes they have been joined by those passing by on the sidewalk.

They pray for the concerns sent by members of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria): for peace in the country, provision to the displaced, condolence for those who have lost relatives, the insurgents to change their hearts and minds, the government to be just, comfort for parents who have lost children, release of the abducted.

When a year went by and most of the girls were still captive, the group

continued sharing news from Nigeria, singing and praying together monthly. They are still doing that, and invite others to join them the third Wednesday of each month.—**Merry Roy**



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.

The open roof

Accessible congregations form a new fellowship

by **Debbie Eisenbise**

“Then some people came, bringing to Jesus a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him” (Mark 2: 3-4).

Here, in this Bible story, we find the inspiration for our ministry to and with those with disabilities in the Church of the Brethren: “The Open Roof.” This cooperative, compassionate, empathetic ministry reminds us that through sharing our vulnerabilities and participating in community we all draw closer to Jesus.

In 2004, the Association of Brethren Caregivers began formally recognizing congregations engaged in this significant ministry. The first recipient of the Open Roof Award was Lansing (Mich.) Church of the Brethren. Since then, an additional 19 congregations in 10 districts have been recognized for their efforts to welcome, include, and empower persons of all abilities in the church.

Our Annual Conference resolution (2006), “Commitment of Accessibility and Inclusion,” urges the church to recognize that more must be done to ensure that all people may worship, serve, be served, learn, and grow in the presence of God as valued members of the Christian community—a commitment to enable all people to participate fully in all ministries of the Church of the Brethren.

Over the last decade this has become

imperative for the Church of the Brethren. Most of our congregations now include older persons with age-related disabilities that require accessible facilities for continued participation. Also, since the 2006 resolution was passed, we have an increased awareness and cultural acceptance of mental illness, and developmental, intellectual, and learning disabilities. Congregations are hearing and responding to the call to welcome and include all in Christian fellowship, worship, education, discipleship, and service.

To effectively minister to and with persons with disabilities, and meet challenges that arise along the way, congregations need to hear each other’s stories, share ideas, and receive mutual encouragement. Engagement in such a ministry may involve

- facility modifications to allow full participation for people with physical limitations,
- program changes to accommodate and empower those with developmental and/or learning disabilities,
- staff hires or volunteer designations to advocate for and assist individuals with varying abilities, and their families,
- building relationships with those in the wider community who serve people with disabilities and/or mental illness.

Because so many congregations are now involved in making such changes, all who are so engaged are invited to join the new Open Roof Fellowship. This includes

all congregations that have been recognized for their efforts by the previous award, and will facilitate conversation and resource sharing between congregations. Applications for the Open Roof Fellowship are available at www.brethren.org/disabilities/openroof.html. Recognition of new fellowship members will take place at the Mission and Ministry Board meeting prior to Annual Conference in Greensboro, N.C., in late June.

Our commitment to accessibility and inclusion extends to Annual Conference itself, and so this year, Congregational Life Ministries is sponsoring Rebekah Flores to serve as disabilities ombudsman. Her purpose will be to provide support for those with physical and/or intellectual disabilities, a listening presence for caregivers, and information and advocacy to make Annual Conference a worthwhile and beneficial experience for all. During the Conference week, Congregational Life Ministries will offer an insight session, “Breaking Down Barriers: Welcoming Persons of All Abilities,” and mutual help groups for those who are struggling with grief, coping with mental illness, affected by addictions, and caring for those with varying abilities and needs. 

Debbie Eisenbise is the Church of the Brethren’s director of Intergenerational Ministries. For additional information and resources, go to www.brethren.org/disabilities. For a free copy of *Inclusion Handbook: A Resource for Disability Advocates*, contact disabilities@brethren.org or call 847-429-4306.

To learn more

The following books published by the Anabaptist Disabilities Network are available to purchase through Brethren Press at www.brethrenpress.com or by calling 800-441-3712:

After We’re Gone: A Christian Perspective of Estate and Life Planning for Families that Include a Dependent Member with a Disability

Circles of Love: Stories of Congregations Caring for People with Disabilities and their Families, which includes a chapter about Oakton (Va.) Church of the Brethren, an Open Roof congregation

Supportive Care in the Congregation: Providing a Congregational Network of Care for Persons with Significant Disabilities



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Expecting the best of the Brethren

An interview with the moderator

MESSENGER's Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford recently sat down with Annual Conference moderator Andy Murray to talk about how his work in peacemaking has prepared him for the 2016 Conference, and what he has learned about the church during his time as moderator. His travels as moderator and moderator-elect have taken him to all the regions of the United States, as well as Puerto Rico, Haiti, and South Sudan.

Messenger: You have worked at Juniata College as chaplain, you've taught peace studies, you were founding director of the Baker Institute, you've been involved in peacemaking with the United Nations. And you've done some actual on-the-ground reconciliation work in different places around the world?

Just in Mali. My role was more educational and cultural. I was working at the whole concept of building a culture of peace, but also participated in developing a military-civilian code of conduct and a small arms moratorium. That was in the middle '90s.

W Was that prior to the rise of the Islamist extremists in Mali?

It was a situation very similar to what's happened recently. It was the first time there was a serious civil conflict in Mali, and essentially it was—as most conflicts are—a combination of things. But it happened because there were serious sanctions put on Gaddafi in Libya. He was blamed for the Lockerbie crash of a Pan Am flight, so his government was sanctioned.

Thousands of Tuareg from northern Mali, and from Chad and Niger, were in Gaddafi's army. They were trained, and

given modern high-tech weapons. Then suddenly Gaddafi couldn't pay them. So they left Libya, came back home and had nothing to do, and conflict ensued.

When the conflict was over the Tuareg turned in their weapons, but no one knew what to do with them. They were in a mud armory because most buildings in Timbuktu were of mud construction. So it wasn't very secure, but there were millions of dollars worth of weapons. The government said, send them to us—the conflict's over, and we're extremely poor, we'll take the weapons. The Tuareg said, no, we didn't turn them in so our former enemies could be better armed.

There was a young UN operative that developed the idea of burning them, and they did! I wasn't there for the actual burning of the weapons, but I came right after that. The people said, this was such a powerful moment that it should become a part of Mali's history. So I helped with the first anniversary celebration of the Flame of Peace, and as far as I know they continued to celebrate that for years. Whether they still do I don't know.

W How has your work with peace studies and on-the-ground mediation fitted you into this work as moderator?

The work I did in Mali connects with the work I did for five years as director of a school on arms control and



Bob Deff

You're constantly encouraged by individual levels of commitment to the church, and the really wonderful people that you meet everywhere you go. Delightful, committed, thoughtful people.

disarmament for university professors from conflicted nations, sponsored by the UN and the International Association of University Presidents. Over a period of 5 years we brought in more than 60 university professors for intense seminars. It was a three-week program each summer, taught by some of the best arms control and disarmament experts in the world.

Even more important to me was our peace and conflict studies committee at Juniata College, that started a new academic program. Anyone who has tried to start a new academic program knows that colleges are intransigent—maybe more so even than churches—in terms of new programs. The variety of people involved ran from Quakers to high-level people who had been in the State Department, from pacifists to soldiers. The experience of trying to get people with such diverse backgrounds to actually work at a project together was probably the most useful thing in terms of getting ready for Annual Conference.

📖 Working up a committee to get a new program going at a college is more difficult than moderating Annual Conference?

Probably. I really do not have training or skill directly in conflict resolution. My interest in peace studies was always at the level of trying to provide support for the various disciplines to use their methodologies and knowledge base to help us be more sophisticated about why humans organize to kill each other. So in our peace studies program we had courses taught by psychologists, political scientists, anthropologists, historians, physicists, geologists, etc.

📖 What skills do you bring to the moderator position for this time in the church?

I'm not sure anybody has the kind of skills you need. It's more a matter of attitude than a matter of skills. Any answer you give is going to sound cliché-ish: openness, willingness to listen, ability to look at things from both sides.

📖 Don't you think, in today's political climate, that's not the kind of leadership that's being held up elsewhere? So it's not really a cliché anymore, it's something different.

Add a certain level of humility—which I probably have very little of, but more than in the political world. I'm greatly amused by paradox and ambiguity, and that might be useful. I don't have the kind of spiritual sensitivities that a lot of people bring to the moderatorship. It's hard for me to say a long prayer. On the other hand, I live in constant amazement at the beauty of how things happen when people talk and work and think together, and try to discern the leading of the Spirit.

📖 What have you learned about the church?

I've been surprised and saddened by the depth of the anger that some people feel about other people in the church, or about people that don't agree with their own particular way of understanding an issue or of reading the Bible.

I've been disturbed at how much we've begun to operate in different arenas without understanding how those arenas relate in the larger church. This is true in terms of our theological perspectives, but also in terms of our leadership and our organization.

We have tendencies to think about what's best for the group that we work with, rather than to think about what's best for the Church of the Brethren. We've lost sight of the fact that unless we do well together, we're not going to do well separately. When we get in groups, the group seems to become more important than the faith that brought us together in the first place. I knew that attitude was there, but I didn't know how pervasive it is.

The positive thing I've learned, of course, is that you're constantly encouraged by individual levels of commitment to the church, and the really wonderful people that you meet everywhere you go. Delightful, committed, thoughtful people.

There's another thing that has been fun for me to see. I always knew that the Brethren had left a lot more good works in their wake, far beyond their size. But seeing the kind of work that's being done in Haiti, visiting Castañer, P.R., seeing what [former mission worker] Roger Schrock meant to the people in South Sudan—those things have filled me with both wonder and admiration.

Q Do you have advice for people coming to Annual Conference in Greensboro?

The best idea that I have comes out of our instructions to the delegates, in the Conference booklet. There

are difficult things that we will need to talk about, but Annual Conference is not a place where people should come to win their argument. Rather they should in prayerful attention try to discern—in community with the brothers and sisters who are also there with them—the leading of the Spirit.

I hope people will really take advantage of the opportunities at Conference to become equipped for doing congregational work back home. And that they will enjoy the music and the worship together. For me that's just as important.

Q What are you looking forward to in Greensboro?

I'm looking for the best, and I'm expecting the best. I'm not pessimistic. I'm looking for good conversation. I'm looking for creative thinking. I'm looking for biblical guidance and spiritual openness.

And Sunday noon!

Q When it's all over? (laughter) So is it worth it being moderator?

Oh yes. Sometimes I am giddy with appreciation for the opportunity to do this. And sometimes it's challenging and tiring, but it's always rewarding.



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A quick guide to Annual Conference

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

The 2016 Annual Conference will be the 230th recorded annual meeting of the Church of the Brethren, on June 29-July 3 in Greensboro, N.C., at the Koury Convention Center and Sheraton Hotel. All are invited, particularly members and attenders of the church, as well as family and friends. Each congregation and district is encouraged to send its delegates. More information and registration is at www.brethren.org/ac. Contact the Conference Office at 800-323-8039.

On the agenda

Districts have passed five queries to the Conference officers for consideration in 2016:

- “Same-Sex Weddings” from West Marva District,
- “On Earth Peace Reportability/Accountability to Annual Conference” from West Marva District,
- “Viability of On Earth Peace as an Agency of the Church of the Brethren” from Southeastern District,
- “Living as Christ Calls” from Pacific Southwest District, and
- “Continuing the Study of Our Christian Responsibility to Care for God’s Creation” from Illinois and Wisconsin District.

Because the 2011 Conference decided “to continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process,” the officers will ask Standing Committee to first decide whether to recommend that the delegate body reopen the query process to discuss a topic related to human sexuality. Only if the delegates decide it is time to open up the topic again through the query process, can a recommendation regarding the query on same-sex marriage be considered. The full text of the queries is online at www.brethren.org/ac/2016/business.

Also on the agenda are numerous reports and interim reports from three committees: the Review and Evaluation Committee, the Vitality and Viability Committee, and the committee charged with bringing a “Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st Century.”

Hearings will be held by the Review and Evaluation Committee and the Vitality and Viability Committee on the opening evening, June 29.

On the ballot

Annual Conference moderator-elect: Samuel Kefas Sarpaya of Rockford, Ill., and Walt Wiltschek of Broadway, Va.

Program and Arrangements Committee: Emily Shonk Edwards of Nellysford, Va., and John Shafer of Oakton, Va.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Raymond Flagg of Lebanon, Pa., Elsie Holderread of McPherson, Kan.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 3: Marcus Harden of Gotha, Fla., and John Mueller of Fleming Island, Fla.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 4: Katie Carlin of Monument, N.M., and Luci Landes of Kansas City, Mo.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 5: Thomas Dowdy of Long Beach, Calif., and Mark Ray of Covington, Wash.

Bethany Theological Seminary, representing the laity: Miller Davis (incumbent) of Westminster, Md., and Robert C. Johansen of Granger, Ind.

Bethany Theological Seminary, representing the colleges: Mark A. Clapper of Elizabethtown, Pa., and Bruce W. Clary of McPherson, Kan.

Brethren Benefit Trust board: Katherine Allen Haff of North Manchester, Ind., and David L. Shissler of Hummelstown, Pa.

On Earth Peace board: Beverly Sayers Eikenberry of North Manchester, Ind., and Mary Kay Snider Turner of Gettysburg, Pa.

Daily worship

June 29: Moderator Andy Murray will give the opening sermon.

June 30: Kurt Borgmann, pastor of Manchester Church of the Brethren, North Manchester, Ind., will preach.

July 1: Dennis Webb, pastor of Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, will bring the message.

July 2: Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship at Bethany Seminary, will preach.

July 3: The closing sermon will be by J. Eric Brubaker, a minister at Middle Creek Church of the Brethren, Lititz, Pa.



International Civil Rights Center



Jon Kobel



Concerts and dramas

“**Sing with Us,**” a hymn sing and concert with Brethren musicians Shawn Kirchner, Mutual Kumquat, and Terry Murray, is open to all Conferencegoers on the first evening, June 29. The concert is sponsored by Bethany Seminary.

The Ted & Co. drama **12 Baskets and a Goat** will be performed during the “Jubilee Afternoon” on June 31 as a benefit. There is no cost to attend, but items will be auctioned to support the work of Heifer International. The drama is sponsored by Brethren Benefit Trust and the Council of District Executives.

Jubilee afternoon

A Jubilee afternoon on July 1 will offer a range of activities for the whole family including opportunities to serve and reach out to the community, learn more about the civil rights history of Greensboro, enjoy “mini-concerts,” participate in inter-generational activities, take in “Equipping Workshops” on three tracks—Spiritual Practices, Bible Study, and Music—and even eat ice cream.

Greensboro’s civil rights legacy

The Jubilee afternoon includes bus trips to the **International Civil Rights Center and Museum** in downtown Greensboro. This archival center, museum, and teaching facility is devoted to the international struggle for civil and human rights. It celebrates the nonviolent protests of the 1960 Greensboro sit-ins that served as a catalyst in the civil rights movement. The museum is housed in the original F. W. Woolworth building where the “Greensboro Four” sit-in movement began. The guided tour showcases numerous films, enactments, interactive displays, live narration, and civil rights artifacts that include the original lunch counter. Tickets may be purchased when registering for the Conference at www.brethren.org/ac.

Several insight sessions and meal events also highlight Greensboro’s civil rights legacy and links it to

today’s concerns. See the list of guest speakers or go to www.brethren.org/ac/2016/activities.

Other sites of interest in Greensboro are listed at www.brethren.org/ac/2016/greensboro.

Service projects

Jubilee afternoon service projects include a community prayer walk, a Random Act of Kindness activity to hand out water bottles at the Four Seasons Town Centre, serving at the Habitat ReStore, sorting and organizing food at Greensboro’s Urban Ministry Food Pantry, gardening with clients at a facility serving people with developmental or other disabilities called Peace Haven Farm, building a fence at the Caldcleugh Organic Outreach Garden, and entertaining children at Shalom Christian Community Church Camp. Those who have registered for the Conference but have not yet indicated interest in a service project may contact kgingerich897@gmail.com. Those who have not yet registered may sign up during the registration process.

Witness to the host city

Conferencegoers are invited to bring items to donate as part of a collection for Backpack Beginnings and Encore! Boutique Thrift Store.

BackPack Beginnings provides children in need with nutritious food, comfort items, and basic necessities. Donate hygiene items for Comfort BackPacks from the following list: toothbrushes, toothpaste, new backpacks, shampoo, new washcloths, spiral notebooks (wide-ruled), combs or hairbrushes, fleece blankets that are rolled and tied with a ribbon.

Encore! Boutique Thrift Store is part of First Presbyterian Church’s Step Up Program providing job readiness and life skills training, and economic stability. The boutique provides professional clothing for people interviewing for and starting new jobs. Bring gently used classic clothing, shoes, and accessories for men and women, including

business casual and professional attire. Please bring only dresses, pantsuits, suits, dress shirts, dress pants, belts, shoes, and handbags, that are in top-quality condition.

Continuing education

A number of events before and during the Conference offer continuing education credit, among them:

The Ministers' Association Pre-Conference Event, "Walking Toward Peace" with John Dear, June 28-29.

Two workshops on congregational care and vitality, June 29: "Living in Unconditional Love: The Power of Forgiveness," 9 a.m.-12 noon; "How Our Story Shapes Us," 1:30-4:30 p.m.

A Latino Leadership Conference on the theme "Para Su Gloria," June 29, 12-6 p.m.

"Equipping Insight Sessions" on a wide variety of topics are offered June 30. Many other insight sessions and events also offer continuing education credit. A detailed schedule is included in the Conference Book.

International and ecumenical guests

Stephanie Adams, director of the Greensboro office of Church World Service, will lead an insight session on "Showing Hospitality to Strangers: Action for Refugee Resettlement."

Dominican Church of the Brethren board president Rafael Augusto Mendieta Amancio and treasurer Gustavo Bueno Lendi, insight session, "Iglesia de los Hermanos—Looking Forward and Looking Outward."

Vildor Archange, community health coordinator for Haiti Water Projects, and Jean Bily Telfort, staff of the Haiti Medical Project, insight session, "New Pure Water Projects and Maternal Care Work in Haiti."

Britt Cesarone, president of Ponder Investment Co., insight session, "Keeping an Eye on the Market."

Jennifer Copeland, executive director of North Carolina Council of Churches, General Secretary's Luncheon.

Alan Cross, Evangelical Immigration Table, Montgomery, Ala., insight session, "Hispanic Ministries in America—The Sojourner, the Law, and God's Law."

Joyce and Nelson Johnson, co-directors of the Beloved Community Center and founders of Greensboro's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, insight sessions, "Biblical Basis for Racial Justice: A Black Lives Matter Update" and "Greensboro's Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

Wesley Morris, Beloved Community Center, Congregational Life and Intercultural Ministries Dinner, "The Pain You Don't See—Bridging the Gap Between Dr. King's "Two Americas."



Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller, who have established a hospice program in Pingding, once the center of the Church of the Brethren mission in China, Global Mission and Service Dinner.

Tracy S. Murray, founder of RecycloCraftz, Elizabeth-town College Alumni and Friends Luncheon, "Bringing Hope in a Handbag to Zambia."

Marie Schuster, refugee resettlement case manager, International Institute of Buffalo, N.Y., insight session, "BVS: Informing Current Refugee Resettlement."

Wayne and Turner Tamborelli, president couple of North Carolina Better Marriages Organization, insight session, "Every Marriage Can Be Better—Starting with Our Own!"

Julie Taylor, executive director National Farm Worker Ministry, insight session, "Shining Light on America's Fields."

Request for photos

Every congregation is invited to send creative pictures of its ministries illustrating the Conference theme "Carry the Light." Photographs will be used for a "congregational collage" on the screens before and after worship and business sessions. Send no more than 10 photographs in jpg format, including one of the church building or meeting place. Send photographs as e-mail attachments to accob2016@gmail.com with the subject line "Collage and [name of congregation]." Photos are due no later than May 15.

Children's and other group activities

Mutual help groups, single adults, and age groups will have special programming. Childcare is provided for the youngest children, and programming and field trips for children in elementary school, junior high, and senior high. Young adults also have an activity each day.

Join us for the Brethren Press/Messenger Dinner
Saturday, July 2, 2016 · Greensboro, North Carolina

Order tickets before June 6 at www.brethren.org/ac

War, Terror, and Christ's Peace



Robert C. Johansen is co-founder of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. A life-long member of the Church of the Brethren and a student and then professor at Manchester College, Johansen has devoted his professional life to doing peace research, writing, and teaching about how to live faithfully to Christian teachings while simultaneously striving to be politically responsible. He currently is writing about how to be a responsible global citizen while faced with international violence, poverty, denial of human rights, and environmental disasters that are not being addressed effectively by most governments and major corporations.



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Camino

PILGRIMAGE TO SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

story and photos by Steve Miller

Have you ever considered walking 500 miles? Do you believe in “saints”? Could you simplify your life into a 15- to 20-pound pack that you could carry for 30-45 days? Looking for a place to contemplate life changes ranging from retirements and mid-life to graduation or divorce? Interested in history or trekking through scenery so beautiful you feel as though you’re walking in a travel brochure?

Answering yes to any of these questions could land you in the middle of an incredible, life-altering adventure of walking Spain’s Camino de Santiago de Compostela, the Way of Saint James.

For over a thousand years, *peregrinos* (pilgrims) have been walking a route known as the Camino Francés. Beginning in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, then continuing 800 kilometers through northern Spain to the city of Santiago de Compostela, pilgrims sojourn to the cathedral where many believe the remains of the apostle James (known as James the Greater), the brother of John, the son of Zeb’edee, were discovered some 1,200 years ago.

Compostela (Field of Stars), the site of Saint James’ interment, was rediscovered when a monk saw unearthly lights dancing in a Galician field. After the discovery of the crypt and remains of James (Santiago) and his two disciples, the bishop Theodomirus verified the site officially. Thus, roughly since AD 813 people have been traveling to Galicia in northern Spain to pay their respects to Saint James.

There are a few movies and lots of books about the Camino. *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez, remains the most popular movie, and often an introduction for people who have never heard about the Camino before.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is one of the big three historical Christian pilgrimages, the others being to Rome and to the Holy Land. Those traveling to Rome were traditionally known as roamers. Those who traveled to the Holy Land adopted the palm branch as their symbol and were often known as palmers. (Check your last name and you may find a surprising connection to this pilgrimage!)



Cathedrals, castles, cities, and tiny villages all await the interested traveler.

Historically, the Knights Templar, El Cid, Charlemagne, and Napoleon, all left their mark in northern Spain. Ferdinand and Isabella and Saint Francis of Assisi are a few of the many notables who undertook the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Not all have had a positive view of the idea of pilgrimage. Protestant reformer Martin Luther was vocal about his disapproval of the practice, one reason being the Catholic Church's promotion of a pilgrimage as a way to earn indulgences, a certificate absolving one of sin or spending less time in purgatory. There were also "professional" pilgrims who were hired to make a pilgrimage for someone else.

In the Middle Ages it was not uncommon for criminals to be sentenced to walk the Camino to atone for their crimes. Today a judge might sentence a wayward youth to some Camino time.

Pilgrimage was not without risk. Many pilgrims never returned home, succumbing to disease, bandits, or wild animals. However, upon completing the journey pilgrims received a written *compostela* from the church absolving them of sin. Staying out of hell or purgatory became a cottage industry of sorts, with the unofficial creed being "The more trips you make, the less you'll bake."

What would make someone, medieval or modern, leave the comforts of home to endure hardship or risk death to walk across Spain? Is it for the adventure? A chance to test one's physical limits? A need for solitude or spiritual growth? To meet interesting people? Experience another culture? Perhaps it is a combination of all these or more. Either way, since being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, the Camino has seen an incredible revival in the number of pilgrims.

There is something compelling in the simplicity of the pilgrim lifestyle. Many pilgrims choose to have only one change of clothes. The daily routine of waking, taking care of basic necessities, and walking is often described as freeing.

For those who seek it, walking becomes a daily moving meditation. The rhythmic sound of boots crunching along the trail, the simple beauty of the wide-open Meseta, majestic mountains of the Pyrenees, the misty, green fields



The very stones found along the road provide opportunity for prayer.

Cairns—piles of rocks—are created by pilgrims leaving a prayer. People also leave a stone at the Cruz de Ferro (Cross of Iron), situated at the highest point of the Camino, almost 5,000 feet above sea level, and reached about three weeks into the journey. The cross sits atop a long wooden pole in a pile of rock that grows a little larger nearly every day. The tradition is to bring a stone from home and symbolically unburden oneself from something the pilgrim alone can name, perhaps with a prayer.



Through the Pyrenees: The scenery is beautiful, but the day is one of the most difficult. Pilgrims climb 1,390 meters before dropping steeply into Roncesvalles, Spain, for the night.



top right: Cirauqui. top left: Roncesvalles. bottom: The Cruz de Ferro.

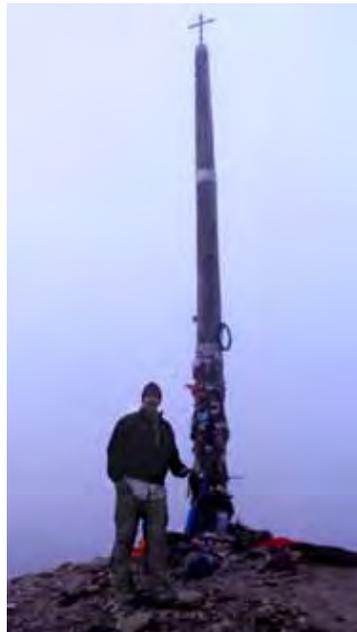
The idea of walking the Camino may seem foreign to the Brethren, but in reality pilgrim metaphors are nothing new for us.

of Galicia all provide a visual backdrop of inspiration. Sunrises over mountains you climbed just a few days before remind you of the earth's vast beauty.

Many use the opportunity to reflect upon their lives. Are there people you need to forgive? Maybe yourself? Where have you been? Where are you going? The Camino provides ample opportunity for pilgrims to examine, in minute detail, as much of their lives as they wish.

Not an introvert? Pilgrimage supplies an endless number of fellow pilgrims with whom to interact. Life-long friendships are formed. Some people even discover a future spouse. Pilgrims may find themselves bumping into the same people and sorting themselves into groups. These often get referred to as their "Camino family." The bonds grow stronger each day. The chance to share, listen, and grow are always present.

One morning I found myself walking next to another guy. Soon we discovered we both came from California. It wasn't long after that we uncovered mutual *Brethren* ties! Not being folks to shirk our duties, we soon engaged in that time-honored tradition known as playing the Brethren Name Game.



Though we were eight thousand miles from home, it wasn't long before we discovered a list of mutual acquaintances.

The idea of walking the Camino may seem foreign to the Brethren, but in reality pilgrim metaphors are nothing new for us. A brief glance at the hymnal reveals a myriad of references. We often use the metaphor of pilgrimage or sojourn to describe our faith journey. Even more common is the practice of going on a retreat to a Brethren camp or retreat center.

The Camino is not magic and it is not a deity. A popular saying on the road is "The Camino will provide," which unfortunately seems to deify the path. The Way of Saint James is, however, an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. The journey has a rich history and traditions stretching back over a thousand years and beyond, into the very beginnings of Christianity itself.

If one day you find yourself in northern Spain, guided by the yellow arrows and scallop shell symbols along the path to Santiago, you too will be a pilgrim on the Way of Saint James. *Buen camino!* 🚩

Steve Miller, an educator, attends Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.



What church statistics mean for our life together

Do not fear

The Church of the Brethren General Offices holds a special place in my heart. I first came here in the summer of 1986 as a wide-eyed BVSer with relatively little knowledge of the denomination. But after Brethren Volunteer Service orientation in Chicago, here I was in Elgin in my very own office with my very own electric typewriter, on which I eagerly set to work writing articles. The offices were bustling back then, or at least it seemed so to me.



DON FITZKEE

When I come to meetings now, I am reminded of those wonderful days when I was young and idealistic and the church seemed strong and exciting. But sometimes I also feel a twinge of sadness. I see empty offices. We have gone through too many rounds of budget-cutting to count since then. Our staff is smaller, our budgets are smaller, MESSENGER circulation is smaller, our church is smaller. And the staff we do have are stretched thinner and thinner and asked to carry impossible workloads.

When I start thinking like this I realize I'm like the old people in Ezra 3, who longed so much for the good old days that they couldn't see what God was doing in the present.

A short history lesson: The original glorious temple that Solomon had built was destroyed in 588 BCE, and most of the residents of the southern kingdom of Judah were marched off into exile. After spending some 50 years in Babylon, the Jews received the green light from King Cyrus of Persia to return to their homeland. So a group came back, led by Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, and began to rebuild the temple.

When the foundation for the new temple had been laid,

they paused for a dedication service. It says in Ezra 3:11, "All the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

There was great celebration. But then verse 12 adds this: "But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when



Those who had known no temple rejoiced in the promise of the new. Those who had known the glory of the former temple could only lament the loss of the old.



People like me need to dry the tears of lament over what once was and look clear-eyed into the future that God has in store.

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I’m old enough now that I understand the oldtimers’ sadness. But their tears were clouding their vision. So God spoke through the prophet Haggai (2:3-9 NIV) to help them see more clearly.

The Lord speaking through Haggai asked, “‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? Be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.”

Haggai went on to promise that God would fill the new temple with glory, and in fact its glory would exceed that of the former temple.

What wonderful words of reassurance. And you know, it took decades, but that new temple eventually was completed. And God continued the plan of working through his chosen nation to one day bless all nations. The temple wasn’t as big as the previous one. The number of priests was smaller, the wealth of the kingdom was smaller, and the nation itself was smaller. But God was still working.

After 500 more years it became clear what God’s plan was. This was the temple where Jesus would clear out the money changers and worship and teach. This was where Jesus would boast he would rebuild the temple in three days, pointing to his own victorious resurrection. This was the temple where the curtain to the Holy of Holies would be torn from top to bottom as Jesus gave up his life for the sake of humanity. Haggai had promised that the glory of this temple would be greater than the former. That came true when Jesus—both high priest and sacrificial lamb—came to fulfill God’s plan of salvation.

This is a tough time for the Church of the Brethren—and for our staff, what with a shortfall in income and major transitions in leadership. But a recent *Newsline* put some of

this in perspective for me. *Newsline* published an address that EYN president Samuel Dali delivered to the Minister’s Council of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The title was “We Can Recreate a New and Better Tomorrow.” Toward the end of his address, he said this:

In view of all this, I can safely ask, what else do we need from God that He has not done for us during this period of crisis? Yes, we have not forgotten the fact that we have lost some of our friends, parents, husbands, wives, children, uncles, relatives, and countless properties. We have acknowledged these as part of our fatal injuries and we cannot recover any of them. They have gone forever and we cannot reverse the history, but we can recreate a new and better tomorrow.

. . . Those of us who are still alive must make use of the time and the opportunity which God has graciously given to us. We need to recognize the grace of God and thank Him for taking us so far. The Lord is about to do something new in EYN and he has started. Hence, let us look forward to the new thing that the Lord is doing. . . .

What a remarkable perspective from a man who has witnessed so much tragedy.

Our church in the US isn’t what it used to be. We face serious challenges, but let us look forward to the new thing that the Lord is doing among us. Better yet, let’s do what we can to help God usher in the new.

But for that to happen, people like me need to dry the tears of lament over what once was and look clear-eyed into the future that God has in store. We don’t know what that future looks like. In fact, part of our job as a board and staff is to figure it out.

But we still know Jesus. We still love Jesus. We still want to follow Jesus. We still can share Jesus and his salvation and justice and peace with a hurting world. God can work with that. 

Don Fitzkee is chair of the Mission and Ministry Board. This is excerpted from his opening meditation at the March board meeting in Elgin, Ill.

Fellowship across boundaries

story and photos by Jennifer Hosler

Last year was a big year for Puerto Rico. No longer a sub-district, the US territory is now just like the States—at least in terms of polity in the Church of the Brethren. Last July Puerto Rico was welcomed as the 24th district in the Church of the Brethren.

Also known as the Caimito church, for the barrio where it is located, Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera (Second Missionary Church of Christ) is one of eight churches in the newly established Puerto Rico District. I visited the congregation last November as part of the Stories from the Cities project.

Caimito is on the outskirts of metropolitan San Juan, and Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera has been faithfully serving the community for several decades. Pastors Juan Figueroa and Isabel Martinez have committed more than 30 years to service in Christ's name. The Caimito church is a congregation dedicated to meeting the needs of its neighborhood, wel-

coming all to its services regardless of who they are or where they are from. Their story with the Brethren is one of being surprised by love, of a joint commitment to service in Christ's name, and of partnership and fellowship across boundaries.

Caimito and the Church of the Brethren

Figueroa and Martinez have a long history of doing Christ's mission work. They met as young people who had each ended up in Haiti, separately, as missionaries. After marrying and then returning to their native Puerto Rico, they took up the leadership of Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera in Caimito.

Convinced that Christ's example involved meeting peoples' spiritual and physical needs, the two pastors founded the Christian Community Center in 1981. Unfortunately, the denomination they were in at the time was not convinced that such service efforts were an important part of the gospel and the relationship was severed, making it an independent church despite retaining its name. Together, they set out in faith to care for a community struggling with poverty.

While the center was founded in 1981, the couple did not encounter the Church of the Brethren until 1989. That year Hurricane Hugo devastated parts of Puerto Rico, including Caimito. Brethren Disaster Service (now Brethren Disaster Ministries) set about rebuilding homes in affected areas and encountered the work of the Christian Community Center.

The church in Caimito quickly realized that it had much in common with these volunteers from the United States. Cliff Kindy led one of the disaster response teams and began





a friendship with the pastors. Figueroa recalled looking at the work of the Brethren and the work of the center and saying to Kindy, “Without the name, we are Brethren! We are doing exactly what we love and what you love to do.”

While the service and spirit of the Church of the Brethren resonated with the church in Caimito, they were hesitant at first to get involved with another denomination. It was only after attending Annual Conference and a district conference, and partaking in an anointing service that they felt God calling them to join the Church of the Brethren.

“We thank God because of the blessing that is the Church of the Brethren. We have met a lot of people and they’ve loved us—and we loved them,” Martinez described. This love and welcome was not something that they assumed would happen. Figueroa explained. “We thought that Americans are Americans and we are Puerto Ricans, that we are different . . . but the love which they showed us surprised us.”

Hospitality, welcome, and inviting Figueroa in 1991 to a leadership position on the Church of the Brethren General Board (now called Mission and Ministry Board): these all demonstrated a Brethren commitment to transcending differences in language, ethnicity, culture, and geography. In Figueroa’s words, “Everybody knew that I was black and poor but they welcomed me.”

The Caimito church became the second Puerto Rican Brethren congregation, after Castañer. Through Caimito, Brethren from Puerto Rico and the mainland US expanded cooperation in workcamps, service, and in peacemaking—including protests over the US bombing policies on the small Puerto Rican island of Vieques.

Caimito’s Christian Community Center

“The Hole” is part of the Corea neighborhood in Caimito. The neighborhood descends down from the Brethren church building, a steep, windy, and narrow road lined with houses and banana trees. While some of the houses look well-maintained on the outside, the neighborhood struggles with hunger, drug addiction, and crime.

The Christian Community Center, coordinated by the church and its members, tries to meet these needs by providing services at no or minimal cost. Each week, community members benefit from the doctor, dentist, social

worker, and psychologist who provide services through the center. Monday through Friday, hot lunches are served for any person in need. In addition to mid-week prayer gatherings hosted by the congregation, Monday nights are art nights, where people in the community can paint and learn handcrafts such as making candles and jewelry.

An emerging aspect of the center’s ministry is gardening. Church members are starting to teach basic gardening techniques for patios, something which Figueroa is very passionate about. An empty lot across from the church was cleared by a 2015 workcamp team from La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren and beautified with a mural. Figueroa has since planted vegetables and more fruit trees, to serve as a demonstration garden and to supplement food purchased by the center for the hot lunches.



Pastor Juan Figueroa in the garden

Continued and strengthened relationships between US churches and Puerto Rican churches is something the two pastors also seek.

Strengths and challenges

Serving the community is a core value that shapes the church's work and membership. Rebeca Zabala got to know the center's work "serving people in need" and it "touched" her. She joined the church and later became a cook for the lunch program. Another member, Evelyn "Tita" Rosario said the combination of "serving the community and preaching the gospel" is a main strength of the church.

Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera is a very small congregation, with around 20 people at worship on the Sunday I visited. Yet its members are "very dedicated" to its work in the community and has a larger impact than its size, according to Shirley Baker. Upon retirement, she moved to Caimito from Western Pennsylvania District to serve as the center's secretary, following 15 years of visiting and serving through workcamps.

While commitment to service is a strength, Rebeca Zabala explained that "making a difference in the people around the church is a challenge." Said Tita Rosario: "Working with young people is also a big challenge," especially due to the issues of drugs in their community. A lack of jobs in Puerto Rico's struggling economy—and the accompanying future uncertainty—seemed to be a contributing factor to the community's hardships.

Money is a challenge for the center too, as they recently lost a sustaining governmental grant that provided a significant portion of their budget. Martinez explained that appeal letters have gone to potential supporters, but it is still uncertain where the needed funds will come from.

To the future

What lies ahead for the Caimito church and its Christian Community Center? Church members expressed a desire for increased reach of the gospel and of the center's ministries. However, it is uncertain who exactly will be leading these future efforts. Figueroa and Martinez, both in their late 70s, have been building up leadership skills within members of the congregation and foresee leadership transitions in the near future. They hope new leadership emerges from within the church and the center.

Continued and strengthened relationships between US churches and Puerto Rican churches is something the two pastors also seek. Workcamps from US Brethren, such as ones from La Verne Church of the Brethren and Western Pennsylvania District, are crucial to maintaining the center's physical space and to keeping ties between US and Puerto Rican Brethren.



Pastor Isabel Martinez leads worship

There are numerous barriers to close relationships between Puerto Rican and continental churches: language, culture, worship styles, food, and a big geographic distance (just under 1,000 miles from Miami). But as Figueroa said, the differences can be overcome. US Brethren visit and "they don't care about my English. I don't care about their Spanish. We are one family."

The connection in Christ and through the Church of the Brethren provides a way to break down barriers. At the end of my visit, this question remained with me: How can we work to make "every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3) with our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico? 🙏

Stories from the Cities is a project of Church of the Brethren Congregational Life Ministries, presented in conjunction with MESSENGER. This article is last in a series that has highlighted seven urban churches across the denomination. The project has been conducted by Jennifer Hosler, licensed minister at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren and community psychologist. Read the whole series at www.brethren.org/messenger.



Words from an intemperate heart

by Bob Bowman

I have to work to appreciate the book of Jude in the New Testament. Not that I'm complaining. Working to think deeply about the Bible is an acquired taste.

The book of Jude seems written by someone who has a burr under his saddle or, as William Beahm of blessed memory used to say, "a raspberry seed under his dentures." Some identify the author of Jude as a brother of Jesus, but that is a guess and not a proven fact. I have my doubts about that guess but, if we are all brothers and sisters of Christ, perhaps the genealogy of the author is not an issue.

Jude begins endearingly. "I wanted to write to you, O Best Beloved, about the salvation we all share. But I really must write urging you to fight for the way of life that was once entrusted to the people of faith" (verse 3).

The ending of Jude is also rich, including one of the most spiritually moving benedictions in the Bible. In the classic King James translation it reads, "Now unto him that is able

to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (verses 24-25). I always feel richly blessed when a pastor quotes that benediction at the close of worship.

Reading what is between is a bit of a downer. Jude chastises a group of people who are never clearly defined. It seems there were persons who have driven Jude crazy with their brazen attitude and behavior. But Jude never clearly defines just what about those folk irritates him the most.

He warns that folks slip into our congregations and lead us astray. "I want you to remember," says Jude in verses 5 and 6, "that the Lord rescued people from the land of Egypt, but then destroyed the ones who didn't live out their faith. Even angels who did not keep their assigned places were placed in darkness until judgment day."

About this time I begin to grow uneasy with Jude. It is



basic in speech.” They are “autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted.”

Through most of Jude, I do not feel uplifted. His benediction lifts my spirits, but what does one do with the rest of the book? One commentary says that “most people find this brief work too negative, too dated, and too apocalyptic to be of much use.”

At this point I grow uneasy again. This time I am not so uneasy about Jude as about myself. What business do I have to pass judgment on a book of the New Testament? On the other hand, many scriptures urge us to have discernment. For example, Paul prayed in Philippians that our “love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.” Yet, if I accept only scriptures that are acceptable to my limited “discernment,” I will end up trying to be my own god.

What if I think of Jude not so much as a book of the New Testament, but as a human being and a brother in Christ?

If I look past Jude’s harsh language, I can see his heart hurting because the holiness of the church is being compromised. His intemperate language comes from his pain.



not just the examples he chooses. I’m more uneasy that he begins by warning everyone of divine punishment. I grew up in a church and in a home that did not talk about God as one who punished, but as a God who forgave and encouraged. Years of Bible study have made me convinced that it is better to talk of consequences than punishments.

Both of Jude’s examples are aimed at the possibility that folks who began with a strong and well-grounded faith may end up compromising and sliding into faithlessness. That’s true enough. Sometimes I, too, find it hard to distinguish between “growing in my faith” and “compromising my faith.” But if I end up losing faith, I am convinced that God’s response is not wrath but sorrow, and I am in more danger of destroying myself than I am in being struck by a lightning bolt from heaven.

Jude goes on warning about people who are, in his judgment, “blemishes on your love feasts” or “like irrational animals.” They are “grumblers and malcontents . . . bom-

Then, as much as the harshness of his words bother me, I remember he is my elder in Christ. As a fellow Christian I owe him my respect. The least I can do is to grant him the benefit of the doubt. I can try to listen more respectfully to his concern.

It seems Jude has a great concern for the church. So do I. Jude is disturbed by church members who take less seriously the call of Christ. So am I. If I look past Jude’s harsh language, I can see his heart hurting because the holiness of the church is being compromised. His intemperate language comes from his pain.

I know that nearly two thousand years separate me from Jude and we may not agree about which actions and attitudes are most threatening to the church. Yet, as I listen beyond his words to his genuine love for the church, I feel close to him as a brother in Christ.

Jude’s harshness reminds me to be less harsh toward him and, naturally, toward others whose attitude and language disturb me. Today’s heated debates often result in harshness. How do I learn to moderate my language when my heart hurts for the church? And how do I learn to listen beyond the words? 

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

Brewed

work a few mornings each week at my favorite neighborhood coffee shop. On those days, I wake up long before the sun, tie on my apron, and get the beans brewing in time to serve my early rising regulars.

If you frequent a place enough to be a “regular,” you know the comfort of a place like mine: You’re warmly greeted (often by name), and your usual coffee is sitting on the counter by the time you make it to the cash register. People who see you several times each week—employees and even other regulars—ask about your life. If you’re feeling sick or sad, someone offers to fix you a cup of tea. It might be only five minutes, but five minutes



AMANDA J. GARCIA

every day adds up to enough time to truly care about a person.

Last week I was sitting by myself in the cafe, trying to finish writing an article. I was frustrated because so many customers and co-workers had interrupted me to say hello, and I was debating moving to a quieter spot. But when I looked around I realized how silly it was

to be frustrated by a group of people who cared so much about each other—and about me. I couldn’t help but notice that we were quite the mix of age, gender, race, and background, and we likely would never have otherwise met. Yet there we were, accidentally belonging, immersed in a highly caffeinated community centered on something as simple as coffee.

If a neighborhood cafe can foster the kind of uplifting relationships that God surely intended for humans, how much more should the church? If coffee is a good enough catalyst for people to form bonds and become vulnerable with one another, shouldn’t mutual faith in Jesus and a shared need for his transformational love be an even better one?

Of course many church “regulars” have developed deeper, more substantive relationships with each other



than typical coffee shop regulars, but it’s also true that many move through their Sunday routine without ever exploring the richness of the community that surrounds. It doesn’t happen overnight, and it doesn’t happen with everyone, but I have seen such friendships bloom between the most unlikely of pairs in 5 minutes every day (or 20 minutes every week). All it takes is a little vulnerability—and a little cream and sugar.

On occasion, we church folk over-complicate our faith communities with intimidating expectations of time or commitment or fear of others seeing our imperfections. So maybe it’s overly simplistic to think that deep communities of faith can grow through brief, consistent interactions, or that lasting friendships can form through only a few minutes of authentic sharing and receiving each week. But maybe the key is somewhere between—in welcoming and storytelling and serving and tea-fixing. Maybe it’s as simple as never missing another coffee hour. ☕

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



Coffee punch

This decadent treat is sure to please even the non-java drinkers at your next coffee hour. Be sure to start it the night before.

- Mix 4 tablespoons instant coffee with 2 cups boiling water.
- Add 1/2 cup sugar and 6 cups cold water.
- Refrigerate overnight.
- Add 1 pint half-and-half and 1/2 gallon each chocolate and vanilla ice cream.
- Stir and serve.

Mission and Ministry Board allocates \$1 million to continue Nigeria work

At its meeting in March, the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board allocated another \$1 million of donated funds to continue the Nigeria Crisis Response.

The board also discussed financial shortfalls for other denominational ministries, how to develop support for those ministries, and how to foster relationship-building across the wider church. A group of executive staff and board members was commissioned to develop financial planning to stabilize the denominational budget.

The meeting was led by chair Donald Fitzkee and chair-elect Connie Burk Davis, assisted by interim general secretary Dale Minnich.

General secretary search Davis reported that the committee was unable to come together on one candidate, and was "regrouping." This may mean Minnich will continue as interim general secretary for several months. In addition, one of the committee members, David Steele, has resigned from the group. The search committee was to meet again in April.

Nigeria Crisis Response funding The \$1 million for Nigeria Crisis Response was allocated from dollars donated to the Emergency Disaster Fund and designated for Nigeria. This will continue funding the crisis program in Nigeria for 2016. Current priorities include transition from relocation housing to a focus on repairing homes damaged by fire and vandalism; continuation of peacebuilding and trauma recovery in partnership with Mennonite Central

Committee; a new program developed by Children's Disaster Services focused on trauma healing for children; agriculture development; training and support for livelihoods; education for children and support for orphans; continuing provision of food, medicine, and supplies; and strengthening of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

Financial reporting The board learned that, although the wider church gave generously and sacrificially to support the Nigeria Crisis Response, the overall budget for 2015 experienced a deficit of more than \$500,000. A Stewardship Task Team reported concern about lagging giving from congregations to the ongoing core ministries.



An anti-racism training was part of the Mission and Ministry Board meeting in March, led by Gimbiya Kettering, the denomination's director of Intercultural Ministries.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Denomination to share insurance dividend

The Church of the Brethren has received another large dividend amounting to \$63,784 from Brethren Mutual Aid and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, through the Partnership Group Program.

Brethren Mutual Aid is the sponsoring agency for the program, which rewards the annual claims experience of the congregations, camps, and districts

that make up the group along with the denominational organization, if the group collectively enjoys a better-than-average claims experience.

This year's may be the final dividend since Brotherhood Mutual has become a national company and some states do not allow excess premiums to be shared this way.

The denomination's Leadership

Team decided to share the dividend as follows: 15 percent of the gross amount, or \$9,567.60, to the Brethren Mutual Aid Share Fund, Inc.; \$5,000 to the new Puerto Rico District; \$23,000 to the other 23 districts (\$1,000 each); \$1,000 to the Church of the Brethren finance office to pay related administrative costs; and the remaining \$25,216.40 to the Nigeria Crisis Fund.



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Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 312 begins work

Volunteers who underwent orientation in Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) Unit 312, Winter 2016, have been assigned to projects. The

volunteers, their hometowns, and project assignments are *(from left)*:

Julie Thomas from Council Bluffs, Iowa, serving at the Rural and Migrant

Ministry in Lyons, N.Y.

Karen Nieto of Cochiti Pueblo, N.M., serving at L'Arche Belfast Community in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Katie Dalphon from Frederick, Md., serving at the Rural and Migrant Ministry in Liberty, N.Y.

Tibby Miller of Laramie, Wyo., serving at Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Danny Ruppert of Albuquerque, N.M., serving at Lybrook Community Ministries in Lybrook, N.M.

Jane Webb of Noblesville, Ind., serving at L'Arche Kilkenny Community in Kilkenny, Ireland.

For more information about BVS volunteer opportunities see www.brethren.org/bvs.



Mid-Atlantic District will move

its office from the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., to Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren, by June 1. Reasons cited for the move include finances, space constraints at the current location, and the fact that the Brethren Service Center is up for sale making tenancy there unsettled.

Personnel notes

Manchester University has announced transitions in campus ministry. **Walt Wiltschek** has completed six-plus years as university pastor and director of church relations, departing for a position at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. **Rebekah (Bekah) Houff** has been named university pastor, transitioning from a position at Bethany Theological Seminary. Houff earned her bachelor of arts in philosophy and religion at Bridgewater (Va.) College and holds a master of divinity degree from Bethany. Since 2012 she has coordinated outreach programs for the seminary. She served through Brethren Volunteer Service as coordinator of the National Young Adult Conference in 2008, and the National Junior High Conference in 2009. More recently she was on the task team that created the denominational vision statement.

Bethany Seminary has promoted **Brian Schleeper** to coordinator of student financial services and Title IX. He has served in the Student and Business Services Department since 2007. **Brian Mackie** of Hagerstown, Ind., has been named coordinator of 2016 programs for the Institute for Ministry with Youth and Young Adults. He is a 2007 graduate of Bethany and will continue to pastor White Branch Church of the Brethren and Nettle Creek Church of the Brethren in Indiana.

Karen Hodges has been appointed program coordinator for the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and most recently served as administrative support assistant to the director of undergraduate studies, School of Business Administration, at Penn State University in Harrisburg, Pa.

Russ Barb, pastor of Buena Vista/Stone Church of the Brethren, has been named director of pastoral care at Bridgewater (Va.) Retirement Community.



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What to pack for college

by Gail Erisman Valeta

As a pastor and the parent of young adults, at times I am stumped when it comes to passing along the life-giving, life-altering concepts of faith and Bible teaching that have deeply influenced me. Dale Goldsmith, a professor and dean at McPherson College for 28 years, has spent considerable time paying attention to this topic and has addressed some of these questions in two recent books, *Growing in Wisdom: Called to the Adventure of College* (Cascade Books, 2014) and *Look—I Am With You: Daily Devotions for the College Year* (Cascade Books, 2015).

Growing in Wisdom addresses questions that a Christian family or faith community might want to raise with a young person heading off to college: How do you navigate a new college landscape if you have roots in a Christian way of viewing the world? What if college is part of your calling as a Christian? What if you take your Christianity to college with you?

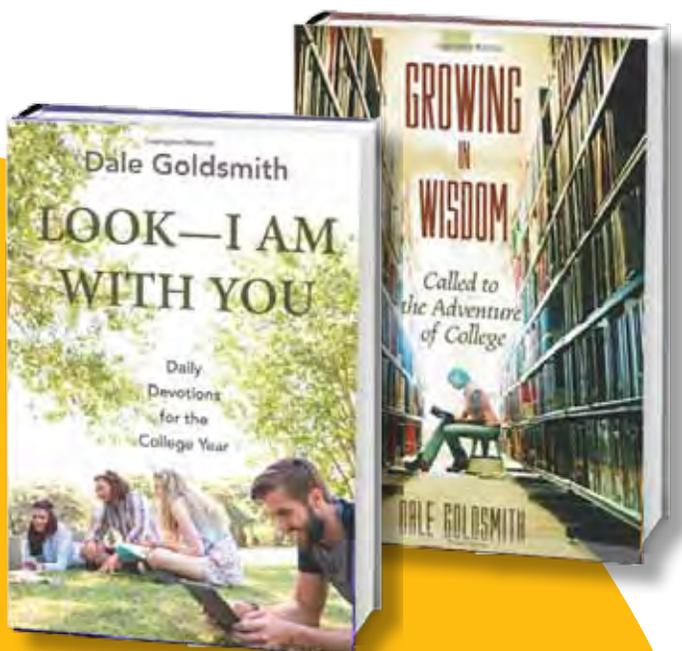
Growing in Wisdom helps reveal options for using scripture as a way to approach life's questions and the prob-

lems a college student might face, from “What is faith?” to “What should I choose for a major?” More than a manual of how to avoid beer pong and bad behavior, this book looks at what *college* has to offer to young adults alongside what *Jesus* has to offer to college students.

And if a person wants to pass along Bible insights and life-changing foundations of Christian teaching, where does one begin? Goldsmith starts with Colossians, the book that “holds all things together”—not a bad place to begin for the life-changing experiences that college can bring. He then turns to the book of Matthew, which offers the picture of Jesus as the teacher—a good fit for a college devotional. Then 1 Corinthians focuses on life when things get messy. And finally 1 Peter, where Jesus’ followers are sent out into the world as exiles. The devotional reads each book as a whole, gleaning the powerful insights that the book has to offer. This is then related to the many challenges and experiences that college students will likely face.

For many young adults heading off to college, we in the church may have dropped the ball. This is the time and place for resources that give serious consideration to what lies ahead for young adults. Where are the tools for Christians who care about young people and wish to share possible resources for life changing conversations? Why wait until a faith crisis to offer a book that can sustain them spiritually while in college? Remember that vow at the time of child dedication to “provide spiritual nurture” and to “help them grow in the knowledge of Christ”? These are resources that can help a church put “walking shoes” on that vow.

As author and poet Annie Dillard writes in *When People Come to Church*, “On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? . . . It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets.” These books provide a source for crash helmets. 



Gail Erisman Valeta is a pastor at Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in Littleton, Colo., an instructor in conflict transformation, and wife and mother of two young adults.



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Breaking new ground

AS MESSENGER breaks new ground I wanted to respond positively to Dana Cassell's comment on expectations! As we anticipate the future we may be confronting the dissolution of the Ameri-

can branch of the denomination. Dana is one of several strong and perceptive young thinker/writers in our church. Those of us who have commented on her Twitter posts are often challenged to think deeper about our assumptions. It was refreshing and prophetic to

see her challenge her own in this first "Potluck."

The denomination gives us an umbrella for identity, except the American umbrella is shrinking not only in numbers but is divided by various strands of belief systems. The old (myself included) are passing away from center stage and often have left the living domain entirely. I commend this voice to a wider audience that she may help guide us toward the Master.

Bill Kinzie
Midlothian, Va.



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Thank you for "Called to Love the Enemy: Lebanese Christians Welcome Syrian Refugees," by Roy Winter. Powerful! Thank you, Roy. What a marvelous, needful example our Lebanese brothers and sisters set! Truly, they are practicing the example and teaching established by Jesus himself. Could I?

We within the Church of the Brethren, while claiming to be makers of peace, often exhibit attitudes and behavior to the contrary. Lord, have mercy. For a change of heart and mind by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit, fill us with the compassion of Jesus Christ whom we call Lord. Let it be so.

Thank you, MESSENGER, for your ministry through the printed and digital word that prompts us to think, reflect, and recommit ourselves to better exemplify the way of Jesus, Prince of Peace.

Emily Mumma
Lorida, Fla.

Send letters to MESSENGER, Attn: Letters, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or email messenger@brethren.org. Please include hometown and phone number. Letters should be brief, clear, and respectful of the opinions of others, with strong differences handled in the spirit of Matthew 18. Preference is given to letters that respond directly to items in MESSENGER. Anonymous letters will not be considered.



Thank you for your ministry through the printed and digital word that prompts us to think, reflect, and recommit ourselves to better exemplify the way of Jesus

Another view on Daniel

Sometimes I read MESSENGER with appreciation but other times with concern. One concern occurred when reading the November 2015 book review by Frank Ramirez about Robert Alter’s *Strong as Death Is Love*. Ramirez is esteeming Alter’s writings too highly. There is a faulty conclusion regarding Daniel being written later than the generally accepted date of around 530 BC.

Critical thinking regarding the authorship and date of Daniel by many who have trouble believing in the supernatural is not new. Such critique has the hope of avoiding the conclusion that

Daniel wrote detailed predictive prophecy. I believe that attempts to dispute the authorship and dates of biblical writings not only ignore the supernatural, but can contribute to the advent of non-biblical “Replacement Theology,” the false notion that Christians are now in line to replace Israel as recipients of promises made to Israel.

Roger Truax
Needmore, Pa.

A heart for Flint

I hear a lot of political discussion and have often heard, “He is a bleeding heart liberal.” I often think of the story

of the Good Samaritan, the man that Jesus describes as having heartfelt feelings about an injured and robbed Jew. Many people have concerns for the people in Flint, Mich., because of the water crisis. Others have shown feeling from the heart for the people of Flint. The Psalmist has written, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight.” The idea of “heart,” was significant in Jesus’ day. It was used to describe what was at the center of one’s feeling, thinking, and being.

Donald Flint
Flint, Mich.



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It feels like my church

Regarding the questions raised about the future of the Church of the Brethren: I know what you should do. You should move back to Europe! My son would go to the Church of the Brethren, and I would too. When he was in Brethren Volunteer Service, he attended Peace Church of the Brethren in Portland, Ore. We don't have anything like that in Germany. I had a chance

to visit and attend church in Portland, and I felt like I was coming to my church. It felt like mine, like the one I was looking for for many years, and I can't find it in Germany. In America you don't know how lucky you are to have really good churches.

Ralf Ziegler
Neuwied, Germany

Ralf Ziegler is coordinator of volunteers for EIRENE, a partner organization of

Brethren Volunteer Service that every year sends German volunteers to serve in the US.

Focus instead on Jesus

The report in the January/February MESSENGER, that Shenandoah District had defrocked Chris Zepp, one of the pastors of the Bridgewater Church, was deeply disturbing. It said that the action was taken at the recommendation of

CLASSIFIEDS

Consignment sales at Annual Conference. Brethren Press makes space available at Annual Conference for individuals and groups to sell items to Conference attendees on a consignment basis. Consignment space must be reserved by June 1. For information on consignment sales, contact Brethren Press Consignments, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694 or kstocking@brethren.org.

Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore? Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Greensboro, North Carolina. If you have

interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120 or jdeaton@brethren.org.

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.

GENERAL SECRETARY'S LUNCHEON

Thursday, June 30 • 12:00 noon

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference • Greensboro, North Carolina

Privileging Faith in the Public Square

Guest Speaker

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland

Executive Director, North Carolina Council of Churches

To live faithfully in the public square is to live authentically. As people of faith, all of our choices should occur through the lens of our faith, even while we admit our faith and the choices we make about how to live into that faith are always evolving. All of us participate in the spiral of doing and believing. Our faith guides our behavior even as our behavior influences our faith, in the public square as much as anywhere.

The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland is the first woman to serve as executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches in its 75-year history. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in English, Religion, and Women's Studies from Duke University, where she served for 16 years as the United Methodist campus minister and executive director of the Wesley Fellowship prior to being called to her current position in 2015.

Go to brethren.org/ac/2016 to purchase tickets.



Church of the Brethren

the district's ministerial team. What kind of leadership is that? It is the attitude and kind of leadership that is illustrative of why the institutional church has steadily declined in membership since 1961. And it is illustrative of why our own Church of the Brethren has

declined in membership.

From my perspective, if the church is going to survive in the 21st century and beyond it is going to have to scrap its outdated doctrines and dogmas and theologies and focus instead on the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who had the

fantastic insight that for the human family to thrive it will have to be guided by—and practice—love, compassion, and justice.

Galen L. Miller
Wenatchee, Wash.

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

Bakersfield, Calif.: Olivia Celdon, Andrew Esquivel
Chambersburg, Pa.: Stacy L. Gray, Scott Hambricht, Alicia H. McLaughlin, Elaine Morgret, Christopher Fyock, Kathleen Fyock, Marcia Wilkins
Faith Community, New Oxford, Pa.: Dale Alwine, Anna Mae Alwine, Jane Burdan, Edith Gardner, Carl Pease, Ethel Pease, Harvey Zook
Fellowship, Martinsburg, W. Va.: Pamela Lovett, Wilma Riner, Bill Anderson, Gail Anderson
Frederick, Md.: Charlie Dalphon, Dottie Dalphon, Jacob Deater, Hunter Gift, Toby Gift, Rosalie Hester, Paul Hockenberry, Shirley Hockenberry, Brittany Hottel, Kellie Hottel, Chris Juenger, Jennifer Juenger, Jim Kissner, Sue Kissner, Zach Murdock, Ashley Rhea, Adrian Rivera
Garbers, Harrisonburg, Va.: Dorothy Ritchie, Jeremy Alexander
Geiger, Friedens, Pa.: Jason Stephens
His Way, Mills River, N.C.: Santiago Crisostomo, Alma Jimenez, Juan Daniel Crisostomo, Isaia Crisostomo, Dalia Isabel Crisostomo, Eduardo E. Rodriguez, Janet Pena, Janelly Rodriguez, Gina M.

Trinidad
Maple Grove, New Paris, Ind.: Breydon Kirkdorffer, Jean Krull, Wayne Yoder, Nancy Yoder
McPherson, Kan.: Joel Holloway, Helen Ullom-Minnich, Jessica Ullom-Minnich
Ridge, Shippensburg, Pa.: Jordan Rudisill
Roxbury, Johnstown, Pa.: James Braunns, Joyce Braunns
Sebring, Fla.: Phil Petry, Evelyn Petry, Jim Baker, Debra Baker, Josh Baker, Rose Baker
West Charleston, Tipp City, Ohio: Kacey McCray, Carson McCray

Anniversaries

Bridgeman, Jim and Doris, Willow Street, Pa., 60
Buckingham, Samuel and Francisse, Prairie City, Iowa, 70
Fogle, Charles and Mary, Frederick, Md., 55
Holdeman, Gilbert and Mary Ann, Goshen, Ind., 50
Nelson, Robert and Ferald Gray, Winston-Salem, N.C., 65
Jasper, Dale and Adeline, Franklin Grove, Ill., 73
Parker, Creed and Vonnice, Frederick, Md., 55
Simpson, Willard and Maxine, Franklin Grove, Ill., 69
Thompson, Clarence and Margaret, Independence, Mo., 73
Wilson, Jack and Flo, Lancaster, Pa., 65

Deaths

Bates, Richard A., 91, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 7
Bittner, Georgeanna M. Williams, 89, Johnstown,

Pa., Feb. 28
Blacksten, Wayne E., 71, New Windsor, Md., Feb. 29
Bowman, Raymond Cleveland, 92, Boones Mill, Va., Nov. 17
Brandt, Anna Lucille Lehman, 90, Wrightsville, Pa., Feb. 2
Brewer, Glenn H., 94, Greenville, Ohio, Jan. 16
Brubaker, Barbara Jean Marshall, 71, Frederick, Md., July 3
Brumbaugh, Bernadine M., 90, Roaring Spring, Pa., Feb. 10
Butts, Lewis E., 102, Topeka, Kan., Feb. 20
Cregger, William C., Jr., 63, Frederick, Md., Nov. 13
Cupp, Judith Elaine, 77, Greenville, Ohio, Jan. 20
DePoy, Charles Jerry, 76, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 8
Dutton, Kenneth R., 77, New Paris, Ind., Oct. 7
Flory-Steury, Mary Jo, 59, Elgin, Ill., March 4
Fogle, Lena Grace Weddle, 84, Frederick, Md., Oct. 15
Ford, Charles Wesley, 58, Piney Flats, Tenn., March 1
Garner, Lawrence H., 58, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Jan. 22
Geer, Lloyd W., 85, Fairfield, Pa., Feb. 24
Harshman, Harold L., 90, Frederick, Md., Sept. 18
Hartman, Charles Reese, 91, Broadway, Va., Dec. 22
Hawbaker, Joseph H., 91, Saint Thomas, Pa., Feb. 7
Hochstetler, Robert L., 86, Ashland, Ohio, Jan. 28
Honsaker, Ronald C., 76, Masontown, Pa., Nov. 19
Hoover, Leroy, 89, Roaring Spring, Pa., Feb. 19
Hunn, Phyllis Joyce Heeter, 83, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 8
Kyger, William Holmes, 90,

Timberville, Va., Sept. 26
Landes, Merle K., 77, Hatfield, Pa., Nov. 25
Lasiter, Lenora, 101, Frederick, Md., Sept. 20
Leu, John D., 71, Brunswick, Md., Dec. 31
Lilyquist, Everett Floyd, 86, Sebring, Fla., Nov. 29
List, P. Henry, 72, Beaverton, Mich., Feb. 27
Mackey, Florence Thrush, 93, Chambersburg, Pa., Feb. 16
Mason, Dorothy Trumbo, 91, Broadway, Va., Sept. 23
McComb, Wilma Marion, 91, Beaver, Iowa, Jan. 16
Metzger, Loren R., 95, South Whitley, Ind., Feb. 5
Negley, Ada Picking, 93, Delray Beach, Fla., Feb. 18
Neher, Harvey Lee, 92, Mountain Grove, Mo., Feb. 26
Newcomer, Hubert Rex, 93, North Manchester, Ind., March 10
Ours, Randall Smith, 92, Broadway, Va., April 2, 2015
Peterman, Kenneth Willis, 94, Harrisburg, Pa., Feb. 7
Pfoutz, Daryl F., 74, Franklin Grove, Ill., March 22, 2015
Price, William H., II, 83, Naples, Fla., Feb. 6
Puderbaugh, Helen Louise, 87, Topeka, Kan., Feb. 25
Rice, Henry Lawrence, 94, Roanoke, Va., March 4
Rice, Lester F., 89, Frederick, Md., Oct. 1
Romick, Ray, 93, Alleman, Iowa, Feb. 25
Shumate, Hersey Robert, 83, Sparta, N.C., Feb. 27
Simpson, Douglas Brian, 59, Franklin Grove, Ill., Oct. 23
Skursha, Sharyn, 68, Uniontown, Pa., Dec. 2
Talton, Carolyn J., 76, Windber, Pa., Feb. 17

Watkins, Lawrence A., 100, New Paris, Ind., Nov. 26
Werner, Diane Browning, 77, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 19
Wolf, Pat, 76, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 27
Woolley, Carl W., 70, Somerset, Pa., Feb. 14
Yingling, David Addison, 75, York, Pa., Feb. 17

Ordained

Lowe, Steven W., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Pipe Creek, Union Bridge, Md.), March 13
Sayler, Barbara Jean, S. Ohio Dist. (Beavercreek, Ohio), Feb. 21
Tolton, Joseph, S/C Ind. Dist. (Richmond, Ind.), Feb. 20
Ziler, David W., W. Marva Dist. (Danville, Rawlings, Md.), March 13

Licensed

David Soto, Sandra, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Puerta del Cielo, Reading, Pa.), Feb. 14

Placements

Eikenberry, James O., co-pastor, Mount Wilson, Lebanon, Pa., March 1
Eikenberry, Susan L., co-pastor, Mount Wilson, Lebanon, Pa., March 1
House, Daniel S., pastor, Pleasant Valley, Weyers Cave, Va., March 1
House, Rebecca J., pastor for youth, Pleasant Valley, Weyers Cave, Va., March 1
Sell, Janet E., from interim to pastor, Twenty-Eighth Street, Altoona, Pa., March 1
Shaver, Paul S., pastor, Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa, March 1
Wolf, Robert, from interim to pastor, Pleasant Hill, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 24

Discerning the mind of Christ

At one Annual Conference I was sure the delegates had made the wrong decision and I knew what we should have done. In the months after, my pride waned as I began thinking about what it meant to disagree with a position of the wider church.

A decade later, I found myself writing these words for the Church of the Brethren congregational ethics paper:

“The prayerful conclusion not to support a denominational position or program should be a matter of anguish, not competitiveness or superiority.”



JOSHUA BROCKWAY

Unfortunately, I experience disagreements within the church as a quest for power and an assertion of superiority. Often the lines are drawn between what some might call progressive and conservative cultures.

Yet, I believe that when the church gathers to ask questions about the faithful response to our times, the wisdom of the whole church informs our decision. So when I disagree with what the wider communion has said, I have to ask myself what I am missing. What have I overlooked in my prideful positioning? What part of the gospel is being raised to my attention? With this posture, I find myself assuming that above all else the people I am with are sisters and brothers seeking

Conservatives teach me that systems do not change on their own, and that we must work on our own inner heart as much as we work for justice in the world. Righteousness and justice are two sides of the same coin.

Progressives remind me that there are many roads to faithfulness. Just because someone’s path is not my own does not mean that they are wrong and I am right.

Conservatives teach me that truth is real and not relative. While we may be on different paths, there is still a need to discern whether we are indeed seeking after the same God.

Progressives teach me to value the experiences of others. In listening to their testimonies, I learn to see the ways God is at work around and in us.

Conservatives remind me that deception is a real part of our fallen nature, and that in listening I must also test the spirit in which a testimony is given.

The greatest reminder of this balance has come through the Nicene Creed. In the last section the words are both plain and convicting: “We believe . . . in one holy catholic and apostolic church. . . .” It is that tension between being one and being holy that gets me every time. How is it that we can be one and at the same time hold up the holiness explicit in following Jesus?

Holiness highlights the boundaries that make unity a difficult project. In the practice of “seeking the mind of Christ” the Brethren have worked out a way to attend to

When I disagree with what the wider communion has said, I have to ask myself what I am missing.

to follow Jesus. This helps me listen differently.

So what I have learned?

From progressives I am reminded that love and grace are the root of the good news. In order to witness to the wider world, I must act from a posture of grace.

From conservatives I am reminded that grace is the catalyst for transformation. As I often have heard said: Come as you are and leave as you never were.

Progressives teach me that the church witnesses to the ways of God in the world, and our actions manifest the kingdom of God here and now.

Conservatives remind me that this building of the kingdom of God is not my own doing but is the work of God in and around me.

Progressives teach me the world is a fallen place, where war and systems of oppression diminish the image of God in everyone.

both boundaries and unity, oneness and holiness. But I am not convinced that our current models of doing so have actually produced the fruit we seek.

We have become too proud of our positions and have confused discernment with coercion. We assume that our processes are about setting one another straight, and that one side must win the argument in order for truth to be proclaimed.

Since that conference long ago I have come back to the words of Thomas Merton. Just because I think I am following the will of God does not actually mean that I am doing so. But I believe that the desire to please God does in fact please God. I pray that we will have that desire in all that we do. 

Joshua Brockway is director of spiritual life and discipleship for the Church of the Brethren. This essay is adapted from an original blog post from *Brethren Life and Thought* (brethrenlifeandthought.org).



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