



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

JULY/AUGUST 2016 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

CHURCH PLANTING

Hope and   
imagination

# Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me...”

Matthew 19:14



In times  
of disaster  
or crisis, we  
care for the  
children.



Help us meet  
the needs of the  
littlest disaster  
survivors.



In Houston, TX,  
volunteers recently  
cared for nearly 400  
children affected by flooding.

*“The parents’ faces grew  
brighter each day as they  
watched their children  
laughing and smiling.”*  
— a CDS volunteer

In Nigeria,  
14 Women Theologians,  
trained through a CDS-created  
trauma recovery program for  
children, are helping children begin  
the healing process after the  
violence they have experienced.

*“My burden is gone, so I have peace  
in my mind.”* — a Nigerian boy  
after a trauma healing  
session



**Children's  
Disaster Services**

Emergency Disaster Fund  
1451 Dundee Avenue • Elgin, IL 60120  
[www.brethren.org/cds](http://www.brethren.org/cds)

Photos by Susan Gibson, Kathy Fry-Miller, Karen Hodges



**BRETHREN  
Disaster Ministries**

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford Web editor: Jan Fischer Bachman Design: The Concept Mill  
Contributing editors: Eric Bishop, Sandy Bosserman, Dana Cassell, Daniel D'Oleo, Emmett Eldred, Tim Harvey, Bob Neff

**JULY/AUGUST 2016** Vol.165 No. 6 [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger)



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**T**he sign caught my eye. After the church name was the slogan “where it’s never church as usual.”

I found myself feeling defensive. The message was meant to be positive, but it seemed to be wrapped around a negative: We’re not boring like all those other churches. Or even: We’re more entertaining than *your* church.

Of course if “church as usual” means stuck and stagnant, the leaders of that church are right to avoid it. But they might simply be saying that they’re not traditional—that they don’t have pews or hymnals, the preacher wears jeans, or the coffee is exceptionally good.



**WENDY MCFADDEN**  
PUBLISHER

Maybe I felt defensive because I like a few traditions. I can still remember the thrill of a sanctuary filled with *Sine Nomine* on a thundering pipe organ. Traditional organ music was church as usual for the large congregation of my childhood.

Maybe I felt defensive for all the tiny congregations for whom church as usual is their dearest desire, as they struggle to maintain regular services with dwindling numbers.

It’s true, though, that the church should not be about either nostalgia or maintenance. What does it mean to live into the future with hope and imagination?

There are many ways to answer that question, and those gathered for the recent church planting conference engaged it seriously. (You can read a news report at [www.brethren.org/news](http://www.brethren.org/news).) Among participants were a number of people leading innovative church plants that are featured in this issue of MESSENGER. I guess you could say these congregations are not church as usual, but that’s not the language they use. Their identities seem more about who they are and less about who they are not.

These fledgling communities are living in hope and imagination. Hope isn’t wishful thinking, and imagination isn’t just creativity. Hope is seeing beyond the cultural trappings of all our churches—traditional or contemporary, large or small—and recognizing the body of Christ. Imagination is living into new possibilities as if they were already real.

*Wendy McFadden*

## How to reach us

### MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue  
Elgin, IL 60120

### Subscriptions:

Diane Stroyeck  
[messengersubscriptions@brethren.org](mailto:messengersubscriptions@brethren.org)  
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 327  
Fax: 847-742-1407

### Advertising:

Karen Stocking  
[messengerads@brethren.org](mailto:messengerads@brethren.org)  
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 308  
Fax: 847-742-1407

### Editorial:

[messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org)  
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 326  
Fax: 847-742-1407

### Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate  
- \$32 for 2 years  
\$14.50 gift rate  
\$14.50 church club rate  
- \$27 for 2 years  
\$ 1.25 student (per month)

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MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © July 2016, Church of the Brethren.

MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.

 Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)



## Stand-up comedy benefits Africa

Congregation Close-Up

**Imagine a church offering stand-up comedy!** According to pastor Gail Erisman Valeta, churches can't just be stuffy, serious places. "Stand Up for Africa" at Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in Littleton, Colo., on May 21 was a way of bringing laughs in a family-friendly environment while also raising awareness of issues affecting Africa and raising funds for two charitable projects. Open to the public, with no charge to attend, the event asked audience members to make donations to help victims of Boko Haram in Nigeria and to help build a well for clean water in Ethiopia. Proceeds of more than \$1,500 were split between the two projects.

The winner of Denver's Clean Comedy Act, Bob Meddles, was the featured comedian. Meddles bills himself as "The Comic Next Door" and has created what he calls his "Slap the Stupid People" campaign. Church members Paul Neal Rohrer and Tom Mauser co-hosted and offered some of their own humor.

Rohrer produced the show. He is a professional actor, and has a teaching studio in the greater Denver area.

Mauser is known in the Denver area and nationally as the father of Columbine victim Daniel Mauser and an outspoken advocate for stronger gun laws. Said Mauser, "Most people only know me for my serious side, but don't know that for years I've entertained conference audiences with my unique brand of humor. I love to make people laugh."

Erisman Valeta pointed out the nature of the need for the two charitable projects in Africa. The event raised funds to aid victims of the extremist group Boko Haram, which has killed thousands of members of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, driven many more Nigerian Brethren from their homes, and similarly affected other Christians and Muslims.

In Ethiopia, the KAFFA Development Association is raising funds to bring clean water to the village of Muti, where people are traveling great distances with pack animals to fetch water from streams that are neither protected nor clean. KAFFA's project will pipe water from a nearby spring to the village. —Paul Neal Rohrer



Terri Snyder

### What is a seagoing cowboy?

Della Watters, the children's storyteller at Snake Spring Valley Church of the Brethren near Everett, Pa., recently read *The Seagoing Cowboy* by Peggy Reiff Miller as a new addition to the church library. To introduce the book, the children were asked, "What is a seagoing cowboy?" Little Carter had the logical answer: "Someone who rides a sea horse!"

More than 25 children came up for the children's story. Also at the front of the sanctuary that day was a Heifer International quarter tube, which is being filled with donated quarters to purchase a Heifer Ark of animals. The church's children have sent around \$13,000 to Heifer International since starting the quarter tube in 1996. —Doris Dibert

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.

## Breakfast on the beach

In April, Live Oak (Calif.) Church of the Brethren had a special guest speaker, the Disciple John (aka pastor Erik Brummett). The congregation wore beach clothes, sat in beach chairs and on blankets around a fire pit, and ate finger foods, while Disciple John told about having breakfast on the beach with Jesus. —**Terry Kauk**



## Codorus hosts Dunkard Valley Live

The hills and hollows around Codorus Church of the Brethren in Dallastown, Pa., again will echo with sounds of Christian music at the annual Dunkard Valley Live Christian Music Festival the weekend of Aug. 6-7.

The festival began 13 years ago after Becky Innerst of Red Lion, Pa., attended the Creation Music Festival. “God laid it on me to do this,” she said. “I was just overwhelmed with the idea, and I said, ‘God, I can’t even sing,’ but he kept telling me this was something he wanted me to do.” She took the idea to Duane Bahn, who along with Innerst formed a committee, and the event took shape.

Many volunteers help with the festival, including the groups and speakers who perform. Saturday afternoon and evening events are geared toward youth and feature some of the louder groups. Sunday is more traditional with family-oriented groups. The church’s ballfield provides the setting. A kids tent provides activities for children, and there are always plenty of good food and cool T-shirts for sale. The event is free and open to the public. Go to [www.DunkardValleyLive.com](http://www.DunkardValleyLive.com) for more information. —**Duane Bahn**



## Tie dye for camp scholarships

**Marilla Church of the Brethren** may be in the Michigan north country, 29 miles from the county seat, but members are going to look cool this summer in their new church-made tie dye. The church held a tie dye workshop to raise money for church camp scholarships. Both youth and adults learned about tie dyeing from their new pastor, Frances Townsend, who is a fiber artist in her spare time. Even the non-artists were amazed at the pieces they produced. More workshops are being planned.

# Proclaiming freedom

## Reflecting on the Christian Citizenship Seminar

by Melen Ghebrai

*In April, Church of the Brethren youth from around the country met in New York City and Washington, D.C., for Christian Citizenship Seminar (CCS). The senior high youth studied the problem of mass incarceration. Presenters Richard Newton, a professor at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, and Ashley Ellis, an advocate for incarcerated persons re-entering society, made connections between mass incarceration and racism in the United States. Youth also made lobbying visits to their senators and representatives on Capitol Hill. CCS is organized by Youth and Young Adult Ministries and the Office of Public Witness ([www.brethren.org/ccs](http://www.brethren.org/ccs)). Melen Ghebrai is one of the youth who attended from Olympic View Church of the Brethren in Seattle, Wash.*

**C**hristian Citizenship Seminar (CSS) was an incredible, life-changing experience. We began the week instantly exposed to the injustices of the criminal justice system and the immediate urge for reconstruction rather than reform. Each day we had new speakers explain what was happening and why it was important.

I recognized the injustice but was confused about what we could do about it. As a high school student and person of color, throughout my life I have been given the impression that my opinions on certain social and political issues do not matter. CCS, however, changed my doubt and gave me the voice I longed for. Throughout the week each powerful speaker built my passion, interest, and desire to advocate for a renewed system in society that provides redemption and mercy for its citizens.

I met several students from around the US and even overseas who share the same faith and belong to the Church of the Brethren, and this created a sense of community. We learned beside each other and asked questions that fueled our interest and passion.

As the week came to an end, we divided into groups for our lobbying visits. I was accompanied by a volunteer from Brethren Volunteer Service, but did the visits mostly on my own. The experience was rewarding and very powerful.

Just a week prior I was sitting in a classroom advocating for students pushed from school into the prison pipeline. It was nice walking through Capitol Hill and meeting with senators and representatives who are pushing for an end to this destructive system.

CCS is something I would be very happy to attend again. It opened new doors and enlightened youth about the importance of remaining socially aware of the issues and solutions that shape our country. 

This reflection first appeared in *eBrethren: Stories of Brethren Stewards*, an e-mail newsletter from Church of the Brethren Donor Relations.

Kendra Harbeck



**Melen Ghebrai (left) with new friends who attended CCS from First Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa.**

# To small congregations: you are enough

**T**o those who find themselves in small (or smallish) congregations, I have a word for you today. You are enough.

I know of the countless hours you have spent praying about growing in size. I know you have given much thought about growth strategies and various ways to reach out to your community. I know how you have tried to create new programing in hopes to attract new families. Year after year,



RACHEL S. GERBER

you have offered a warm welcome to the new students in your college town, and have been gracious in saying goodbye time and time again. But for whatever reason, your size, give or take a few, generally remains the same.

As parents, you wonder if you are doing the right thing by continuing to bring your children to a multi-age Sunday school class where your three year-old is grouped with a fifth-grader because there aren't enough children to make a full fledged program. You worry about your high-school son and his faith development, as it is only him and his cousin in youth group. Should you stay? Or should you go to find a larger church that can offer more?

Listen to me. And hear me loud and clear.

You. Are. Enough.

No matter how big or how small your congregation might be, size *shouldn't* matter.

Because in the end, it *doesn't* matter.

Too often we believe the croon of the world that "bigger is better." We have the FOMO disease—the fear of missing out.

Which often spills out into the life of the church, being distracted by the "If onlys."

*If only* we had more children than we could attract more families. . . .

*If only* we had more money, we could offer bigger and better programs. . . .

Let me tell you: Programs rarely make a difference.

But genuine encounters with people *always* do.

Authentic faith formation is always rooted in relationships, not in the flashiest curriculum or best-decorated children's wing.

As children feel a connection to your congregation, as they develop a deep sense of belonging—that their pres-

ence is not only valued but needed—they understand what it means to be true church. That is more than enough. Because especially in small congregations, everyone really *does* matter.

The best opportunity to create durable faith in our children and youth comes when they know that they matter *and* are invited to participate alongside a community that actively lives out their love for Jesus in the world. In this they experience a faith that actually makes a difference. And they in turn, want to join in the action.

In time, church becomes less of a place to go and much more of something they are.

I know this is true because I attend a small Mennonite fellowship. On a good Sunday evening, we might have 20 people, eight being children. Let me tell you, my children are known. And they are invited to participate. Often they are asked to read the scripture or choose the songs to sing. Blessings are given and received. We respect the spirituality that they bring and listen intently to their questions and answers. They sit among us for worship, and at fellowship meals there is often someone else cutting their food.

If I'm honest, I used to wonder and worry if this was enough. Aren't my kids missing out on the Sunday school experience? What will happen when they are old enough for youth fellowship?

But as I look around and see they way they are deeply loved and cared for, known and noticed, the gentle whisper of the Spirit reminds me that this is enough.

This is more than enough.

Because this is faith formation.

It is a holistic approach to spiritual formation, not to be confused with simply Christian education. Authentic faith formation is a call for everyone in the congregation—not just the pastor, not just the parents, not just the Christian education director.

This is a call for the entire community.

For we all belong to one another in this journey of faith.

To my dear small congregation, you are not lacking.

You are such an asset.

You are enough. 

Rachel S. Gerber is denominational minister for youth and young adults for Mennonite Church USA. She is leading a workshop on this topic at a conference called "Deep Faith: Anabaptist Faith Formation For All Ages", Oct. 6-8, at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind. This post originally appeared on the Menno Snapshots blog of Mennonite Church USA ([mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/to-small-congregations-you-are-enough/](http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/to-small-congregations-you-are-enough/)) and is reprinted with permission.

# Prayer for tough times

by Jan Orndorff

*“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:31-32).*



**God, if you have sent me here to help this church die in peace, help me to do that well.** If not, show me what to do.”

That was my prayer almost 20 years ago when I started as pastor of a congregation of 6 people over the age of 60, my husband, and myself.

I went into that situation determined to serve God wherever he was leading. I prayed, listened, encouraged, and prayed some more. I didn't try to give people what they wanted or make the church the best entertainment on the block. I tried to give my people what they needed to grow closer to God. I tried to listen to God and obey his voice. Today, the congregation has an average attendance in the mid 20s. Most Sundays a third or more of the attendees are under the age of 18.

Last year, we had a huge conflict. Our attendance, which had often been in the low 30s, dropped. People were feeling emotionally and spiritually battered. When I asked God, “Why?” his response surprised me. I became convinced that we had been attacked by the devil because we were doing too many things right, and our service to God was being too successful.

We have tried seeker-sensitive models that never led to deep commitments or lives of discipleship. We have tried to tighten up our polity, revamp our denominational offices, and go through one program approach after another.

It is time for us as a denomination to ask God, “What do you want us to do?” When we hear the answer, we need to have the courage to act on it. It is time to return to a focus on prayer, Bible study, accountable community, and making disciples instead of counting how many bodies are in the pews. It is time to realize that tough times mean one of two things: It may be that we are doing something wrong and need to ask God to be in control again. It may be that we are doing something right, and we need to ask God to give us the courage to press on. Either way, we need to be in close communication with God.



**I tried to give my people what they needed to grow closer to God. I tried to listen to God and obey his voice.**

When we as a congregation were able to see the conflict as an opportunity to stay strong in Christ, praise God that we were doing his work enough to face opposition, and work to serve God in the midst of the pain, things turned around. While we are not completely recovered, God has been in control in surprising ways that have worked for the strengthening of his kingdom.

As I think of my congregation's story, I ask myself what it says about the problems we are facing as a denomination. I think we have tried too many of the wrong approaches.

In addition, we need to return to realizing that each congregation and each member is part of the Church of the Brethren. We need to become a body again, instead of scattered outposts of independence. We need to help each other, pray for each other, and feel responsible for each other. I am convinced that when we can seek God's kingdom together, he will allow us to find it. 

Jan Orndorff is pastor of Sugar Grove Church of the Brethren in Wardensville, W.Va.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

## CHURCH PLANTING

# Hope and imagination

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
and Tyler Roebuck

*The biennial church planting conference brings together an array of people with a passion for planting the church. The group is diverse, but also has a lot in common. Here are snapshots of several of the new groups growing in the Church of the Brethren.*

### LIVING STREAM

**L**iving Stream Church of the Brethren is the first and only entirely online Church of the Brethren. Its first webcast was held in December 2012. Initiated by planter and pastor Audrey deCoursey, with help from Pacific Northwest District, Living Stream currently is led by a pastoral team that includes Enten Eller, Monica Rice, and Mary Sue and Bruce Rosenberger.

Along with the unique nature of a church that meets online, Living Stream offers an entirely unique format for worship. “There are a number of churches that offer a stream of traditional services,” said Bruce Rosenberger, “but in terms



of exclusively online, I am not aware of any others.”

Living Stream webcasts worship, and there is no physical congregating. Discussion is encouraged during worship through the medium of a chat box running alongside the webcast video. According to Rosenberger, this offers something purely local churches cannot. “We are engaging a number of people who have been active in the Church of the Brethren but are currently in places with no physical church,” he said. “We also have people who are not engaged with the Church of the Brethren who find our message meaningful.”

Rosenberger says the church is growing. “I am quite excited with the statistics and degree of participation,” he said. “One thing that surprised me is the increased number of chats shared during the live worship.” During live streams, the church is seeing between 18 to 25 active devices, about one quarter of which are being viewed by more than one person, and 12 to 15 people engaged in the chat function.

The most exciting part, however, is that “people who cannot worship with us in the live broadcast follow up during the week in the archives,” Rosenberger said. Recordings (archives) of worship are posted online, and in views of recordings the church sees attendance of 80 to 150 per week. Connect at [www.LivingStreamCoB.org](http://www.LivingStreamCoB.org).

## PARABLES COMMUNITY

**According to planter Jeanne Davies**, the logo of the Parables Community says it all: a red fish swimming in a sea of diversely colored fish—but seemingly against the current. It’s the image of a person with special needs swimming a different way, but not the “wrong” way.

Parables is a new faith community with children and adults who have special needs and their families. The vision is for a church where all contribute. “People with special needs also have special gifts,” Davies said. “It’s a ministry with, not for.” The community also welcomes “neuro-typical” families.

Hosted at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., Parables receives support from Illinois and Wisconsin District. Its inaugural gathering was in mid-April. As the ministry gets going, worship services are planned for

just one afternoon a month this summer.

Davies, who is new to church planting, had hoped to start in January. The delay was caused by the amount of behind-the-scenes work required to start a new church. “It actually takes a long time to get your organizational, legal, financial ducks in a row, which I had not expected,” she said. As a nonprofit organization, a new church needs a board, bylaws and a constitution, an accounting system, banking, insurance.

Collaborating on the vision for the church with other people who are involved also takes time, she said. Parables has a board of four members, and four consultants who work with Davies as the planter. Also required are extensive contacts in the community. Davies has worked to spread the word through visits to schools, libraries, park districts, places that serve families with special needs, and media outlets.

Parables Community is modeled after the Parables Worship Ministry in Wayzata, Minn., whose leader spoke at the Faith Forward conference in Chicago last year. Davies was also there, and was inspired. The vision struck her as uniquely respectful of people with special needs “as having wisdom, as having gifts, as being teachers,” she said. “Sometimes the lessons are difficult, but they kind of turn the world upside down, just like Jesus’ parables do.”

After just a few experiences of adults and youth with special needs leading in worship, Davies said, “they are teaching us how to worship, they are teaching us how to pray.” Find out more at [www.ParablesCommunity.org](http://www.ParablesCommunity.org).

## THE CHURCH IN DRIVE

**A product of Michigan District’s “Standing in the Gap”** campus ministry-based new church planting movement, the Church in Drive is on the verge of gaining official congregational status in the denomination. Leadership has come from planter and district executive minister Nathan D. Polzin.

In 1996, New Life Christian Fellowship, then Shepherd Church of the Brethren, called Polzin to begin an outreach to college students at Central Michigan University. That outreach became Standing in the Gap Christian Fellowship. More than a decade later, Polzin began a new chapter at Saginaw Valley State University, which became the Church in Drive.

Although New Life Christian Fellowship has chosen to leave the denomination, Standing in the Gap continues as a strong Brethren movement with a new chapter at Ferris State University and a new church plant, the Lost and Found Church in Big Rapids—led by Jake Davis, who came to Christ through Standing in the Gap at CMU. Polzin has an ambitious goal: to establish a Standing in the Gap chapter and a Church of the Brethren church plant in all Division I and II college towns in Michigan.



In the meantime, the Church in Drive has matured earlier than expected. He had hoped to reach congregational status in 10 years, but now “it appears we are a year ahead of schedule.”

Mostly made up of young adults and college students, the Church in Drive has begun to attract older people and has a growing children’s ministry. Most participants are new Christians, and “the faith and work of the Church of the Brethren has captured the hearts and minds,” Polzin said. “District and denominational interest and involvement is high. We’ve had over 30 people attend each of the last two district conferences, we have 5 people going to Annual Conference this year, and many have attended other denominational events. Several of our folks are serving at the district level.

“Two of our members, Emily Woodruff and Kindra Krieslers, have been especially touched by the crisis EYN [the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria] is experiencing,” said Polzin. “In cooperation with the denominational staff, they have developed a unique fundraising and awareness-raising vehicle. Gallery One:1 is an artistic event whereby people come and learn together to paint a picture themselves, while hearing about the work of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria and the plight of our EYN brothers and sisters. The Church in Drive supports Gallery One:1 and the profits go to benefit EYN.”

The Church in Drive looks forward to new responsibilities once it gains congregational status. Its leaders early on

put in place financial requirements within the constitution so that the congregation “would have mission beyond ourselves engrained in our church’s DNA,” Polzin explained. The church’s outreach includes support for Standing in the Gap at Saginaw Valley State University, two missionaries, a homeless shelter, and local ministries. Once it becomes a congregation there are several other requirements in place: setting aside 10 percent of income to support the next church plant/Standing in the Gap chapter; setting aside another 10 percent to be divided among the district, denomination, and Bethany Seminary; and paying pastoral staff according to denominational scale.

“We are a church mainly begun with college kids,” Polzin said, “and God has done an amazing thing among us!”

## THE GATHERING CHICAGO

**Its first meeting was a love feast complete with footwashing and communion,** on Pentecost Sunday on May 15, in an “upper room” on the 40th floor of a high rise south of the Loop, with a brilliant view of the Chicago skyline. A potluck of international food accompanied an extended evening of conversation and fellowship.

With this auspicious beginning, and aid from Illinois and Wisconsin District, LaDonna Sanders Nkosi is forming the Gathering Chicago into “a community of prayer and global/local service.”

# CONFESSIONS OF A FAILED CHURCH PLANTER

**A**mericans don’t like the word “failure.” We like winning.

Christians in America don’t seem to be immune from this tendency, despite



BRIAN GUMM

New Testament stories and teachings such as Paul’s theology in 1 Corinthians on “the foolishness of the cross” (1:18) and “God’s weakness” being “stronger than human strength” (1:25). In the person of Jesus, God chose to show what true love and divine power looks like

through something that the world (and initially Jesus’ disciples) considered to be a shameful death and humiliating defeat. A failure.

But failure of a different sort is what I experienced for the past few years while trying to plant a church in rural Iowa, after graduating from Eastern Mennonite University four years ago. I had spent four years in Virginia working on graduate degrees in theology and peacebuilding, getting my head full of big, wonderful ideas about the church and its participation with God’s redemptive mission in the world.

Then the heady days of university life gave way to a new chapter in a socioeconomically depressed community, my wife’s hometown in rural Iowa. We moved “back home” out of

a sense of her being called to practice her craft as a mental health counselor in a community whose needs in that area are significant, and to be close to both our families.

“Bivocational ministry” was a buzzword in the missional church circles in which I congregated online through grad school. I have not once sensed a call to pastoral ministry in a traditional or established congregation, so I thought church planting and bivocationality were the recipe for me. I got a job with EMU that I could do from Iowa and we settled in. I fancied myself to be “seeking the peace of the farm town.”

To my knowledge there was no financial support for church planters, so in our district we got creative. I started



The Gathering Chicago won't always meet in that same upper room, because it is not tied down to one location. Future meeting places may include a beachfront park on Lake Michigan, other venues in Lincoln Park or Hyde Park, perhaps a location at one of the city's seminaries. There will be "Soul Food Sundays," guest speakers including well-known seminary professors, presentations by activists in various movements, and testimonies from everyday people.

As she worked at the vision, Nkosi received a strong message through prayer: "God was saying, 'I don't want you to be one more church among all these churches.'" She became convinced her mission is to form community with people

who are feeling called to pray for the city, the nation, and the world, with the goals "to pray, to serve, and to encounter Christ."

She envisions the Gathering Chicago as a circle of people in prayer. "In the circle, you take time to hear people, what brought them here. Everybody has a voice." The circle of prayer empowers people to live out what God is calling them to do.

"My call really is to nurture leaders," she said, "and to provide a respite to justice workers, and people who have been discarded by the church or who are new to the city." The Gathering Chicago is for "the person who says, 'I'm looking for belonging.'"

Nkosi brings an international connection with South Africa, where she is involved with a Christian ministry. One of the goals of sharing between Chicago and the world is to network people together and foster common work by those who might not otherwise connect. "We are partnering in the gospel together," Nkosi emphasized.

She is well aware that some participants do not want to be part of a Christian denomination, and have no interest in the Church of the Brethren. For most, the Pentecost Sunday love feast was their first. However, "it was a healing presence of the spirit of Jesus Christ, so heavy that we couldn't really end [the feetwashing], and break to eat," she said. "Everyone was in awe, it was really powerful." See [www.TheGatheringChicago.org](http://www.TheGatheringChicago.org).



Christy Watersdorff

working in a few administrative roles for the district in hopes that I would also be able to work on local church planting efforts.

What actually happened is that my two non-local, paying jobs left nothing for local church planting, and I hit a wall. I had been running on fumes the entire time anyway, trying like mad to find a suitable work/church/family configuration, but eventually the fumes of big ideas from grad school ran out. Nothing left in the tank but dust, disappointment, and exhaustion.

So last year I said "Enough." I slowly phased myself out of the district roles and put the church planting project on indefinite hold. While I still currently work three-quarter-time for EMU, I've replaced the "church stuff"

with starting a small business in our local community. In a strange way, that has satisfied my search for local belonging and purpose that the church planting efforts never quite did.

I have to confess that this experience has soured my hopes for what the Church of the Brethren might become in 21st century America, particularly in communities like ours where economic and social capital is severely constrained. Personally, I've had to work through my own self-imposed feelings of guilt, which hasn't been easy or quick. It's also been a real struggle to find a worshiping community in which to belong, and my family has been essentially church-less for two years.

But as I've told my spiritual friends and mentors in recent months: My faith

in the institutional church and big-idea theologies might be shaken, but my faith in the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ endures. By the work of the Holy Spirit through people who love and support me, I've learned from and grown through this failure, even as I continue to sort through the wreckage.

The holy, catholic, apostolic church will not, ultimately, fail. But its current earthly manifestations might have some more dying left to do before something new can be (re)born. I await with a sobered sense of hope in resurrections big and small. 

Brian Gumm is an ordained minister in the Northern Plains District. He works remotely for Eastern Mennonite University in the school's online education initiatives, and is the owner/coffee roaster for Ross Street Roasting Company. He lives in Toledo, Iowa.

## LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

**Perhaps the Church of the Brethren's only Arabic-speaking fellowship**, the Light of the Gospel has emerged as a leading church plant in Atlantic Northeast District. Don Mitchell and Sandy Christophel of the district's commission on church development described the church and told the story of how it developed, in an interview during the 2016 new church planting conference.

The Light of the Gospel was begun by First Church of the Brethren in Brooklyn, N.Y., which has a history of birthing new congregations. Now it has moved to Staten Island, and has its own building, with about 130 people attending worship. The group includes a variety of Arabic-speaking national backgrounds and ethnicities, including Egyptian, Syrian, Israeli, Lebanese, and people from other parts of the Middle East. Pastor Milad Samaan is of Egyptian heritage. The congregation already has a preaching point in New Jersey, where the pastor goes to preach to an Arabic-speaking group of about 80 or 90 people from a Syrian background.

This success has been "accomplished by hard work," Mitchell emphasized, both by the congregation and its leaders, and by leaders and friends in the district. Atlantic Northeast congregations have partnered with the new church, and many individuals in the district have given it support. For example, when the church purchased a building on Staten Island that had been abandoned for a decade and required a lot of renovation, the volunteer efforts of

many people in the church and in the district made it into "a nice worship space," Mitchell said. Christophel said it was the need for volunteer work like painting and refurbishing that brought many district people to visit the new Staten Island location.

Christophel helped introduce the new congregation to experiences that are uniquely Brethren, including a 2013 love feast held with Coventry Church of the Brethren, Providence Church of the Brethren, and district leaders. He noted that the visits by district leaders to the congregation continue, and this year on Memorial Day Weekend a carpool of district leaders was planning to drive to Staten Island to join in worship with Light of the Gospel.

Atlantic Northeast has a motto for this kind of intensive work, Mitchell said: "All In: Going, Glowing, Growing, and Godly." Being "all in" means strengthening each congregation through interchurch connections, and partnering with each other to do more effective ministry, Mitchell said. The district's goal is to "reverse the trend of being stuck" as a church of old ways and old problems, and to move forward together.

## WILDWOOD GATHERING

**Hosting a church plant in her living room in Olympia, Wash.**, is a new experience for Elizabeth Ullery Swenson. "We had a group of people who were

# FIVE WAYS CONGREGATIONS HELP THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

by Daniel D'Oleo

**T**he Latino immigrant population is a very devoted community with a deep faith.

The presence of Catholicism as the official religion in almost all Latin American countries allows us to be able to see the church as more than just a place of worship. In other words, faith cannot be separated from human experiences.

For Latino immigrants, faith goes with them without regard to the experiences emigration has given them. It seems to me that the experiences of immigrants intensify the need to see more in the church than just a place of worship.

I can identify five practical areas in which congregations, beyond their spiritual role, help the immigrant community.

**The church is a place of worship where faith grows within a new sense of family.**

It's logical to view the church as a place of worship and spiritual growth, but the church also fills emotional voids of the immigrant community. Believers join together with the intent to worship and at the same time fill emotional voids

that come from leaving mothers, fathers, wives, and children in their countries of origin.

Let's remember that loneliness is not just the absence of people around us, but also a melancholy feeling, a sadness for loved ones. For immigrants, this feeling can be overcome by making the church their "family."

**The church is a place of companionship and human and spiritual support.**

For immigrants, the church is their family and ultimately the place they feel comfortable being themselves. They feel free to share their emotions and spiritual needs alongside others who are in the same situation.

It's because of this that the church, as a place of faith and companionship, seeks to offer human and spiritual support that fills the deepest voids of each individual. I believe that the congregations that achieve a greater family and companion environment are the ones that grow the most, precisely because those people feel loved, accepted, and supported.

ready, eager, and interested,” she said, and so WildWood Gathering was born.

The group meets once a week, on Thursday evenings. Her living room is not as accessible a location as desired, so she is on the lookout for better—a location in the downtown area, perhaps hosted at an art gallery or a community multipurpose space.

Location is important because the gathering is “a place to heal and reclaim spiritual practice” for “spiritual refugees,” she said. The gathering is meant for those who “have found church irrelevant, painful, exclusive, inhospitable,” and for whom a traditional church “doesn’t meet their worldview.” Locations that pose difficult physical or emotional boundaries to cross, will not be considered safe space.

“My generation really struggles with the concept of church,” she explained. Her generation—the millenni-

als—are not the only ones she hopes to gather, however. She hopes WildWood will be intergenerational as well as a church for LGBTQ individuals. “They’ve had the hardest time in finding safe communities,” she said.

WildWood Gathering started meeting earlier this year, in March. Prior to that, Ullery Swenson spent four to five months preparing the ground for the plant, with help from the district. Her training at Bethany Seminary, where she is working on a master of divinity with a focus on evangelism and missional ministry, gave her the impetus for going into church planting. Her involvement in leadership of the Open Table Cooperative, a progressive Brethren organization, also helped prepare her. She continues to see the Open Table Cooperative as part of her pastoral ministry.

For Ullery Swenson, WildWood Gathering is a way of reaching a new generation without upsetting the relationships, security, and safe space of the existing congregations. However, existing congregations have an important role to play, she said: they must empower and support new churches. It’s a “both/and” for her: both existing congregations and new church plants are needed, both tradition and innovation are important in the body of Christ. More information is at [www.WildWoodGathering.org](http://www.WildWoodGathering.org). 

Tyler Roebuck assisted with this set of stories. A student at Manchester University, he is a Ministry Summer Service intern with MESSENGER and the Church of the Brethren communication team.



*Daniel D'Oleo's workshop on the Renacer movement at the 2014 new church planting conference*

### **The church is a place of service.**

The church serves as a vehicle of internal and community service. The immigrant community can help others with the abilities they bring from their countries, as well as the new abilities they acquire in this country. Given the variety of human and social needs of immigrants, the church identifies the abilities of its members with the end goal of sharing their skills and talents for the benefit of the others.

It’s like a woman who makes tamales. She can help by selling her tamales, and in that way collaborate to pay for a new roof that the church needs. This same idea is practiced when there is a need in the community.

### **The church is a place of cultural refuge and preservation.**

The common denominator for Latino congregations is the diversity of the countries represented, and all of them, in one way or another, seek to preserve the traditions and culture of those countries of origin. It’s for that reason we see

Latino festivals in these congregations, flags from different countries, and worship with traditional music.

### **The church is a place of reflection and personal growth.**

It’s common to see how immigrants in our congregations have been able to adapt and make personal adjustments for their development. This includes economic and educational development. Many learn English through classes their congregations offer, some can get better employment by being employed by members who already have their own companies, and others develop leadership skills as a result of becoming leaders in their congregations.

The church can positively influence the lives of Latino immigrants! 

Daniel D'Oleo is pastor of La Iglesia Cristiana Renacer in Roanoke, Va. This article first appeared in LaConexiónVa.org, an online news and resource organization in southwest Virginia, and is reprinted here with permission.



# Resurrection

## in Clay County

by Tim Harvey

**M**any Church of the Brethren congregations face the challenge of declining membership and the absence of young adults and families. This concern often occupies the pages of MESSENGER and our conversations at district and Annual Conferences.

There is one new congregation among us, however, whose experience is the opposite. The Rock Bible Church in Atlantic Southeast District has witnessed rapid growth during its two years as a congregation. Beginning with 15 members of the former Clay County Church of the Brethren, The Rock Bible Church has rapidly grown to over 250 in worship under the leadership of pastor Nate Mattox. With a contemporary style of worship and small group ministry geared toward young adults, families, and children, this new congregation is making its presence known in Atlantic Southeast District.

### A struggle to hear God's call

In one sense, The Rock Bible Church is over 100 years old, and the congregation's story begins out of that history. Clay County Church of the Brethren ministered to the Middleburg, Fla., community for over 100 years. Three years ago, the congregation of about 50 members was looking for a children's pastor. To aid their search process, they placed an advertising sign in the church yard.

The Middleburg area was home for Nate Mattox, a graduate of Baptist College of Florida and current graduate student at Liberty University. He and his family had previously served at Fellowship Church in Atlanta, before returning home to Clay County, Fla., seeking to raise their

family and serve in church leadership there.

Mattox inquired about the job at Clay County Church of the Brethren, and he and his family attended worship the next Sunday. When they arrived, they were warmly greeted by an older man serving as head usher that day. But it was quickly apparent that there were no provisions for any children's nursery or ministry.

"We greatly appreciated their willingness to care for our children," he says, "but the lack of an established children's program was unappealing." They found the traditional style of worship "difficult"—in part because of what they were used to in their former congregations. They decided to not pursue the position.

But pastor Charles McGuckin saw something in Mattox and encouraged him. After a sleepless night in prayer and further encouragement from his wife, Brittany, Mattox accepted the position with the assurance that congregation was committed to pursue children's ministry.

Initially, the changes went well. Office space inside the church building was repurposed into attractive children's





ministry space, and outreach efforts were undertaken with some success. But after nine months of work, the continued changes were more difficult than the congregation was willing to pursue. McGuckin retired, and nearly 35 members of the congregation stopped attending shortly thereafter. This was a painful time in the life of Clay County Church of the Brethren, and it was a very difficult transition.

The remaining 15 members were committed to continuing ministry in that location. Calling Mattox as pastor, the congregation allowed a long season of ministry as Clay County Church of the Brethren to die, so that The Rock Bible Church could be born.

### Contemporary, family-oriented worship

The Rock Bible Church offers two Sunday worship services. The sanctuary of this very traditional-looking church building has been transformed into a contemporary worship space, using chairs instead of pews; a creatively designed chancel area; video monitors for announcements, song lyrics, and sermon illustrations; and worship led by a praise band named United Passion. Pastor Nate preaches on a topic chosen to aid young adults and young families pursue their faith.

Approximately one-third of those in attendance weekly are children and youth. Growth has come largely from individuals who attended church as youth, but left when they went to college. Many of these people decided to return to church after their own children were born, but were looking for a different experience at this point in their lives. Along with those returning to church, the congregation has also baptized 40 new Christians in the past two years.

### Intentional, focused ministry

The church's leaders are focused on their vision statement: "To be a church where people can know God at their own pace." Ministry is based on four "rings."

The center of their ministry (ring 1) sounds quite familiar to Brethren: a focus on Jesus. Their great desire is for all people to have a living relationship with Jesus Christ that influences their home life, their marriage, and their outlook on the world.

Ring 2 is the *atmosphere* of the church. This ministry focus concerns everything that happens on Sunday morning: preaching style and content, songs led by the worship band, children's ministry, the arrangement of art in the

sanctuary, and the cleanliness of the building. One question leadership consistently asks of potential new endeavors is "will it upset this ring?" If it does, then the idea—however potentially beneficial—will not be pursued.

A significant part of the atmosphere has been the repurposing of the building for children's ministry. Space is a challenge, and nearly every square foot of available space has been repurposed for children's ministry. This means the church offices are now housed in the former lawn mower shed.

The third ring is about *advocates*. These are the members and regular attenders of The Rock Bible Church and the congregation's focus on discipleship ministries. Pastor Nate and the other leaders want ministry that builds disciples, believing that if people are focused on following Jesus (ring 1) and the atmosphere of the church (ring 2) is being done well, then people will naturally invite people to worship, or to a ROCK group—one of the many small groups available for persons of all ages.

Ring 4 focuses on *advertisement*. More than just ads in the paper, advertisement covers anything the church does outside the four walls of the building. It is no surprise that mission and outreach ministries fall under this category, but so does the way the grass is cut, a community Easter egg hunt, or a flier posted in a coffee shop advertising congregational ministries.

### Ministry opportunities

Atlantic Southeast District and The Rock Bible Church are working together to ensure that this large, young, rapidly growing congregation is both nurtured and received by other congregations in the district. At their most recent district conference, delegates approved a significant financial contribution to the church, as well as calling Mattox to serve on the program and arrangements committee. In return, The Rock Bible Church contributes financially to the district budget, and has offered to assist other congregations with website development and children's and family ministries. District executive Terry Grove serves as a mentor to Mattox.

In the meantime, the leadership of the church continues to wrestle with a sanctuary that is quickly becoming too small for even two worship services. Worship attendance on Easter Sunday this year was 345, and the congregation has already noted a pattern of "this year's Easter attendance becoming next year's average worship attendance," according to Mattox.

The Rock Bible Church has a different atmosphere than most Church of the Brethren congregations. Because of this, their experience has the ability to show other congregations one way to be successful in outreach to young adults and their families. 

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

# Herz und herz

## Heart with heart

by Karen Garrett

*“That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:21-23).*

**F**rom these words recorded by John it is clear that unity is crucial as we witness Christ to the world. Is unity also crucial for protection from, in Christ’s words, “the evil one” (John 17:15)? How can we “become completely one” at this time in our denomination? Are we allowing the evil one to block our unity and our witness?

As I seek to live a Christ-like life in this world, and determine how to respond to current issues, I look for guidance first to scripture, and then to other sources such as poetry and hymns.

The poem *Herz und Herz verint zusammen* by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf offers one way to be in dialogue with Jesus’ words calling for unity.

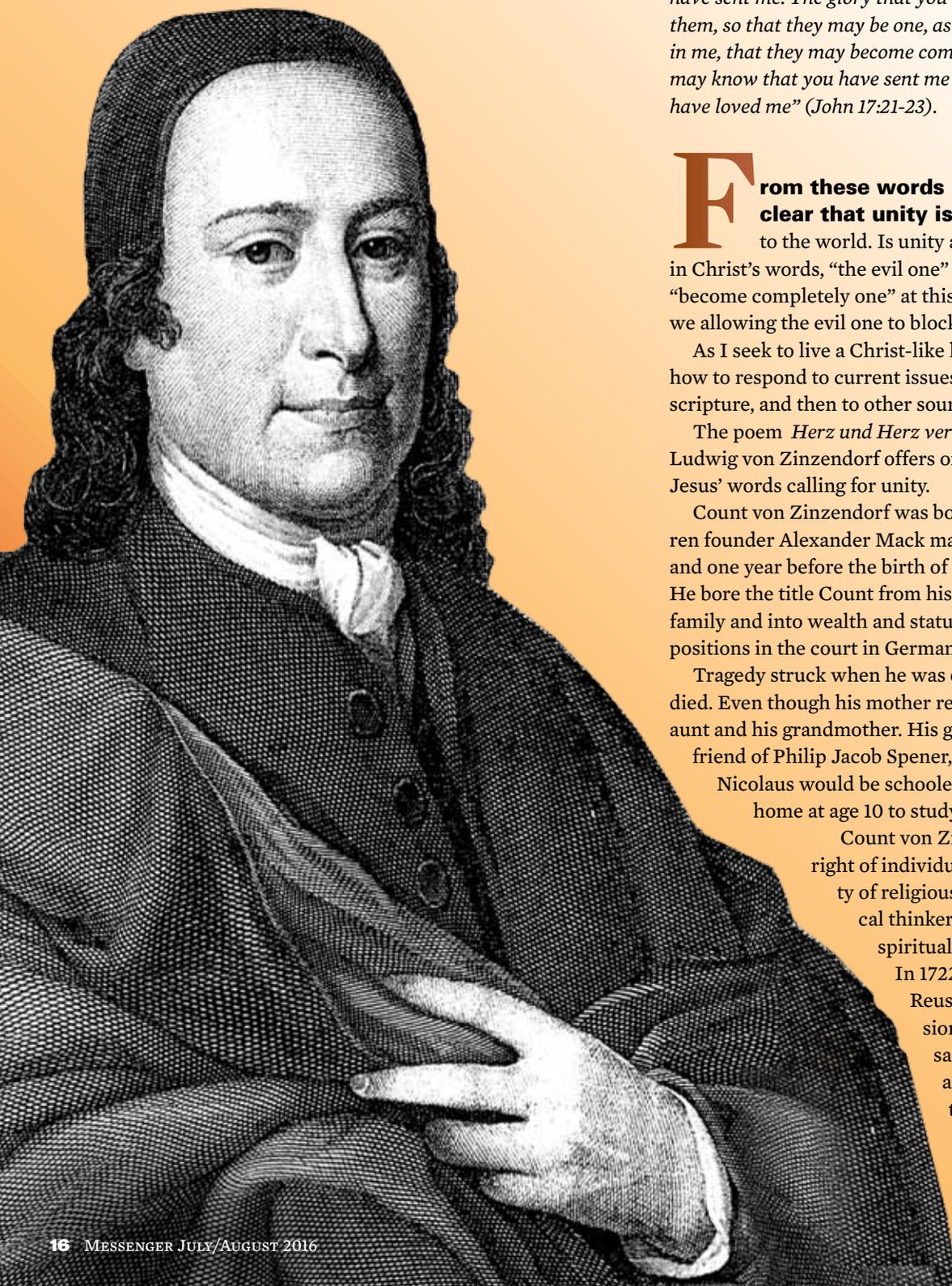
Count von Zinzendorf was born in 1700, the same year Brethren founder Alexander Mack married Anna Margretha Kling, and one year before the birth of their first child, Johan Mack. He bore the title Count from his birth. Born into a Lutheran family and into wealth and status, he was destined to hold high positions in the court in Germany.

Tragedy struck when he was only six weeks old. His father died. Even though his mother remarried, he was raised by his aunt and his grandmother. His grandmother happened to be a friend of Philip Jacob Spener, a founder of Pietist thought.

Nicolaus would be schooled in Pietist thought, leaving home at age 10 to study with August Francke.

Count von Zinzendorf came to believe in the right of individuals and groups to hold a diversity of religious understandings. He was a radical thinker in that he also believed in the spiritual unity of all Christian believers.

In 1722 he married Dorothea von Reuss, a woman who shared his vision for the Christian church. That same year, Moravian refugees arrived at his estate, and though the Zinzendorfs were Lutheran, they welcomed the Moravians and gave them a place to live.



A few years previously, in 1719, the first group of Brethren had migrated to America in search of freedom of religious thought. The printing press had opened the door for individuals to read scripture and come to their own understandings of religious belief, but it also brought diversity.

We can learn Zinzendorf's theology from his poems and hymn texts. From these writings we can conclude that on the one hand he was conservative and evangelistic, and on the other hand he was a progressive thinker. He didn't fit in any one camp—one reason I am drawn to learn more about him.

Here are a few stanzas from a longer poem he wrote in 1725, in which I hear echoes of John 17. These stanzas are a translation by Walter Klaassen, from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*:

Heart with loving heart united,  
met to know God's holy will.  
Let his love in us ignited more  
and more our spirits fill.  
He the head, we are his members,  
we reflect the light he is.  
He the master, we disciples,  
he is ours and we are his.

May we all so love each other and  
all selfish claims deny,  
so that each one for the other  
will not hesitate to die.  
Even so our Lord has loved us,  
for our lives he gave his life.  
Still he grieves and still he suffers,  
for our selfishness and strife.

Since O Lord, you have demanded  
that our lives your love should show,  
so we wait to be commanded forth into  
your world to go.  
Kindle in us love's compassion so  
that everyone may see  
in our fellowship the promise of  
a new humanity.

This text uses the word love twice in each stanza. The words we, us, our, or ours appear 15 times! Line two calls for our love to be ignited. Love is a key to unity. We do okay at loving, don't we?

One line that cuts me to the heart, though, especially in our present denominational climate, is the last part of the

second stanza: "Still he grieves and still he suffers, for our selfishness and strife." I am one who reads Christ's suffering on the cross as an act to free me to live transformed, freed from punishment due me because of my sin. To be reminded that divisive words I speak—even though they are stating my convictions, which I have a right to hold—when spoken in ways that break spiritual unity cause Christ to suffer anew . . . that causes me to pause. I would rather focus on love, that God loves me and thus I need to love others. But "God loves me" can become "God loves my ideas, my theological understandings, my opinions . . . more than yours!"

Peter Vogt quotes Zinzendorf as saying, "The essence of religion should be something quite different than holding an opinion" (*The Pietist Theologians* ed. Carter Lindberg, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 213). For Zinzendorf, opinions are creations of human minds. Religion, or spiritual belief, is a sensation—a knowing that does not come from our heads but rather from our hearts or souls. In other words, thinking about ideas and opinions, no matter how right or scriptural they are, can get in the way of centering on Christ.

Zinzendorf's dream of all Christians united around their belief in Christ as Savior was not accomplished. In fact, maybe the opposite. In the 1740s he traveled to America. Meetings were held in Pennsylvania. People from a wide variety of denominations and Christian thought were invited, and they attended. There were even some Brethren ministers in attendance at these synods.

The result was that many groups left the meetings determined to define in clearer ways their theological thought and doctrines. Zinzendorf headed back to Europe. A few Moravians settled in Bethlehem, Pa. Some scholars say that the Brethren began holding regular annual meetings and began publishing materials to explain their positions.

Now we face another annual meeting where we may find ourselves focused on our differences, not our unity in Christ.

Christ in God and God in Christ. Christ in me and me in Christ. Christ in you and you in Christ.

If I have love from God in me, I can love you. If you have the love of God in you, you and I can be one in Christ. 

Karen Garrett is managing editor of *Brethren Life and Thought* for the Brethren Journal Association and coordinator of assessment for Bethany Theological Seminary. This is excerpted from a sermon she preached at the seminary.



# Part of one humanity

Young adults comment on the state of the church

by Tyler Roebuck

## One notion is clear for young adults across the denomination:

Greensboro's Annual Conference will be contentious and significant for the direction of the church. Older adults feel it as well; active members have known this time of tough discussions is forthcoming. How do young adults feel regarding the coming tensions? What do they think of the state of the church?

National Young Adult Conference (NYAC), the every-four-year gathering of Church of the Brethren adults ages 18-35, afforded an opportunity to ask these questions, and to have profound conversations with young adults from all walks of life. Interviewees ranged from pastors to college students, members active at the district level to Brethren Volunteer Service workers.

The young adult perspective at NYAC, though far from definitive or representative, reduces to this: amid the threats of a potential split and a continued decline in membership numbers, young adults see room for hope and offer words of advice for the course ahead. Their overwhelming feeling of hope is coupled with recognition of the genuine issues we face as one body.

Young adults are undoubtedly pleased with the church's compassionate and sincere response to the crisis in Nigeria that affects our brothers and sisters in *Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa* a

Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Rachel Ulrich, a Manchester University graduate, finds the actions taken to be compassionate. "I think the church has shown how much they care about the church in Nigeria. Churches here are putting a lot of thought toward Nigeria, long past when it was a topic in the news." Amanda McLearn-Montz, a BVS volunteer with the Workcamp Ministry, also believes the response has transcended expectations. "[Church volunteers in Nigeria] know the communities there well, and because we have those connections, the recovery effort is more effective."

History is important to the church, and young adults sense and respect that we are rooted in tradition. As Bridgewater College junior Jon Wilson admires, Brethren have "a focus on living simply with service and action, which has a place in today's world. Delight in our history is well deserved—the Brethren story is a great tale, and our way of living is a method respected and needed in greater frequency in the world."

This fascination with history, however, can lead to stagnation through reminiscence rather than forward thinking. Eric Landram, pastor of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and a relative newcomer to the denomination, is exuberant about the church but not about dwelling on our history. The fascination with history makes him feel "like I was 300 years late to the greatest party ever thrown."

**Waltrina Middleton, one of the featured speakers at NYAC.**



How do we move that “greatest party” to the present? According to Colin Scott of Harrisburg, Pa., the key lies in conversation. “I think we are afraid to even discuss important issues,” he says. “There are divisions, divides, and we do not know where they are going.” However, he says, “this generation is open to having these important discussions.”

Landram believes that “the biggest challenge we face is accepting the new way the Spirit is moving. There is going to be pain with change, but through it all we have each other. If we are all smiles all the time, we are missing something. We love where we have been—let’s love where we are going.”

Young adults are managing to hold onto hope. “As the Church of the Brethren, we are going through a transition where the church as it has been may not exist now, or in the future, but this is not a bad thing,” says Ulrich. “It is a great opportunity to ask questions about who we want to be in this world.”

Landram summarizes well the hope young adults have in moving forward, saying “this is a time for creativity and possibility.”

He also offered perhaps the best piece of advice, when confronted with the question of how Jesus would deal with the issues we face as a church, responding with a verse from John 21: “Feed my sheep.” 

Tyler Roebuck is a student at Manchester University and a Ministry Summer Service intern, serving this summer with MESSENGER and the Church of the Brethren communication team.

## National Young Adult Conference seeks to create harmony

**Over Memorial Day weekend, more than 45 young adults from across the country** met at Manchester University in Indiana for National Young Adult Conference (NYAC). The weekend was filled with worship, workshops, and Bible study focused on the theme of creating harmony in everyday life.

NYAC attendees discussed the theme of “Creating Harmony.” Each day focused on a different line in music that creates a chord. The four parts of a typical chord as sung by a choir—melody, bass, tenor, and alto—each became a metaphor for how Jesus, scripture, society, and individuals all contribute to form a melodious tune. Colossians 3:12-17 provided the scriptural foundation.

Guest speakers from Roanoke, Va., to Santa Ana, Calif., led conversations centered on the theme. Supplementary workshops discussed real-world issues facing the nation including prison reform and intergenerational relationships, as well as other topics such as the history of church music. Service projects in the area were also offered.

Drew Hart, a doctoral candidate and

professor at Messiah College and author of the blog “Taking Jesus Seriously” and the book *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, offered a profound analysis of the way God’s melody interacts with our lives. According to Hart, God’s melody—or Jesus’ melody—is a blues melody. “[A blues melody] engages with the bad in the world but does not lose hope,” he said. “It enters into the pain and presses further into the suffering to find the source.”

Jim Grossnickle-Batterton of the Bethany Seminary staff led a Bible study that continued engaging with pain, as attendees examined Psalm 88 and discussed personal periods of pain and struggle.

Eric Landram, pastor of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and a Bethany graduate, delivered a sermon discussing how God is not only the foundation of everyday life, but also the predominant force in the universe. Science and religion seem to be in constant conflict, but Landram said, “Science is one of the greatest gifts . . . because it allows us to attempt to understand the vastness of God’s creation.”

Richard Zapata, pastor of Principe de la Paz Iglesia de los Hermanos, a Church of the Brethren congregation in Santa Ana, Calif., led a Bible study on the week’s key scripture, and also shared about the ministry he and his church provide for his community.

Waltrina Middleton of Cleveland, Ohio, who is one of *Rejuvenate* magazine’s “40 Under 40 Professionals to Watch in Non-Profit Religious Sector” and one of the Center for American Progress’s “16 to Watch in 2016,” offered insight into the story of God calling out to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. She related this scriptural call to our call to respond to injustice.

Christy Dowdy, a Bethany graduate who has been pastoring for the last 27 years, brought the differing parts of the event together to form harmony. “It seems that God never tires of beckoning us to join in a holy chorus,” she said.

During worship services, offerings were collected for the Nigeria Crisis Fund and a local food pantry, and overall donations eclipsed \$300.

—Tyler Roebuck

# Not yet the end of the story

by Bob Bowman

**In the book of Ruth** are four chapters of wisdom, love, and the mystery of God's action.

The first chapter opens with the widow Naomi, weeping and saying goodbye to her beloved daughters-in-law who are also widows. Naomi is going home to Bethlehem after living more than a decade in Moab. She has been devastated by the death of her husband and two sons.

Her Moabite daughters-in-law insist on going with Naomi, but she firmly urges them to stay in Moab. One obeys her, but Ruth will not give up. As she clings to Naomi, Ruth's speech is one of those passages of scripture that everyone knows but few remember its source. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee," begins the familiar King James Version.

The loss of Naomi's loved ones is pain enough but, for a woman in those days and in that culture, there was added tragedy. Every woman in the ancient world had to be moored to her community through a male: father, husband, son, uncle, brother, or cousin. Having lost her men, Naomi

has gone from being a person to a non-person. What more could happen?

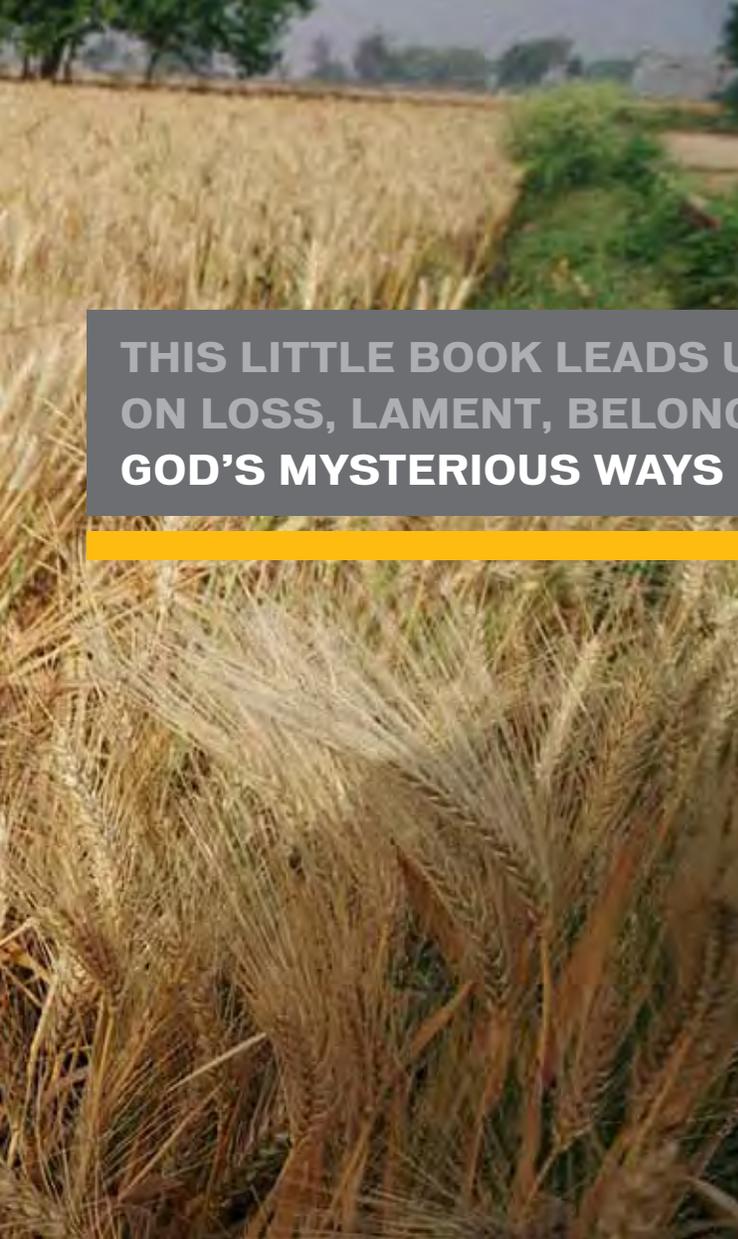
The book of Ruth begins where most stories end. When Naomi declares her intention to leave Moab and return to her hometown of Bethlehem, we expect she is returning home to die. What else could there be?

Accompanied by Ruth, Naomi arrives in Bethlehem and the chapter closes with her bitter lament that she has been given a hard and sad life by the hand of the Lord.

Two thirds of the Psalms are laments, bitter complaints. It seems that God not only tolerates complaints, but practically demands them. For three thousand years and more, human being have tried to reconcile the goodness of God with the bitterness of life. We have decided that they can not be reconciled. Nor can either be denied.

Despite Naomi's bitter lament, we do not close the book at the end of chapter one. There is chapter two, and more. We are reminded of the saying, "Everything will be all right in the end. If it's not all right, then it's not yet the end."

In chapter two, Ruth takes initiative to provide food



Scott Wallace / World Bank

## THIS LITTLE BOOK LEADS US THROUGH MEDITATIONS ON LOSS, LAMENT, BELONGING TO EACH OTHER, AND GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS BEHIND THE EVENTS OF LIFE.

for her mother-in-law. She goes out to glean grain. Gleaning (gathering fallen grain at harvest time) was a privilege granted to the very poor: those who had no other way of finding food.

Ruth gleans in the field of Boaz. When Boaz arrives he is curious about the new face among the gleaners. He asks, "To whom does this young woman belong?"

The answer to that question was complicated. In that ancient world, a person was not simply who they were. More important was how they were connected. One of the insights of modern spirituality is the way we have, in a profound way, recovered this ancient insight. We see God acting in the spaces between individuals, in our relationships. Even the Lord's Prayer does not start with "My Father," but with "Our Father." To say "our" with integrity demands that we explore relationships more deeply.

In the case of Ruth, it was especially complicated because, like any woman in the ancient Israelite world, she needed to be related to some man for her to be whole. And failing father, husband, or son, the next set of male rela-

tives would be expected to step in. Boaz himself was of that ilk but had failed to act in that way. Any related male heir should look out for relatives in need and give them support.

In the third chapter, Naomi conceives of a plan to practically force Boaz to act as any related male heir should. True, he had been generous, kind, and protective to Ruth while she worked gleaning in his fields. But now that harvest was over, it was time that he formalized his protective role.

This chapter is the most difficult to comment on. It is so delicate that words practically spoil the scene. Naomi asks Ruth to go where Boaz will be sleeping. She tells her to lie down near him, and then let Boaz take the initiative.

Ruth, however, does not give Boaz the initiative. As soon as he awakens and recognizes someone is there, Ruth asks—perhaps demands—that he act as protector of Naomi and her. "Spread your cloak over me, for you are next of kin."

We are a bit shocked by Ruth's boldness. As a poor immigrant widow, she may be overstepping her bounds. The gracious response of Boaz, however, makes us feel that something more is going on than responsibility and obligation. Boaz needs Ruth to make his life complete as much as Ruth needs Boaz for protection and support.

Boaz will not act hastily, however. Procedures must be followed. That's what it means to belong to community.

In the last chapter, Boaz risks it all by acknowledging another person who has prior rights and responsibilities for Naomi and Ruth. Perhaps Boaz cannot have Ruth until he is willing to give her up in a "Thy will be done" moment.

The other party backs out and Boaz takes his role as husband of Ruth and protector of Naomi. The child of Boaz and Ruth becomes the great-grandfather of King David and, therefore, an ancestor of Jesus.

When reading the book of Ruth, we feel we can sit back and relax with a sweet, simple love story. But when finished, this little book has led us through meditations on loss, lament, belonging to each other, and God's mysterious ways behind the events of life. We think of immigrants and social safety nets but, perhaps most of all, faith. 

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

# speakeace

## A DAILY READER



*Speak Peace: A Daily Reader* will be published in late 2016

*Speak Peace: A Daily Reader*, edited by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, is a collection of readings about peace and peacemaking. It features writers from within and outside the Church of the Brethren, both current authors and voices from the past. The book will be available from Brethren Press in late 2016.

### Being a CO with George

*“Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10b).*

**Read:** 1 Samuel 3:10–4:1a

Everything that had happened to George in punishment for his attempt to do constructive work had strengthened his conviction that he was right to rebel.

“One night I was put in a cell by myself, Bill—in an empty block. There was only one light, and it was out in the corridor, a dim connection between me and the world, between me and light and life. And that night the bulb burned out; I was sitting there, and suddenly it was dark. Just stones and iron around me and no light, no noise. Do you know how it would be?”

I looked at George and tried to imagine; I try to imagine it sometimes now.

“I suddenly realized where I was, what might happen—how far I was from any kind of life I had ever dreamed of living. I thought of my mother, of my friends. What if no one ever got me out of there? What if it stayed dark—with bars around and me screaming—forever?”

George put his hands carefully on his knees and sat without moving, his eyes turned toward the islands.

“I think that was the worst night.” . . .

And the last time I heard of George I read about him on the front page of a paper in San Francisco. He and about ten others were on the fifteenth day of a hunger strike, protesting the continued imprisonment of men who would not kill and the continued drafting of men for the purpose of killing. . . .

As I read that paper about George, he was in prison—to stay, evidently, for some time. The war had been over for a year, and I had been free for six months. I sat there in my home, with the newspaper in my hand, and thought about George and our talk and his question, “Can you imagine how it is?” And I thought about him that night, or any

night, sitting in a cell, with one bulb burning in the corridor to light the stone between him and his friends and work and the islands off across the channel.—**William E. Stafford**

**Respond:** Name your convictions. What you are willing to risk for them?

**Pray:** Even through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you, God, are with me.

**Bibliographic note:**

William E. Stafford, who died in 1993, was a poet and writer of more than 65 volumes, including two books for Brethren Press. This is excerpted from *Down in My Heart*, published in 1947 by Brethren Press with stories from Stafford's CO experiences during and after World War II.

 **Epidemic of love**

*“So that we may become co-workers with the truth” (3 John 8b).*

**Read:** 3 John 1-8

Our communities need to be constantly threatened by an epidemic of love for God, the infection of which spreads from a little group of devoted souls.

In every local community the Church of the Brethren will be a center of activity for peace and against the war method, whether between classes, sections, or nations. That is, if we are determined to fulfill our doctrine. It will care first for the innocent victims of group conflict, economic or otherwise, carrying on “with new thoroughness its ancient task of doing the ambulance work of the world,” as the first, not the last, step in its work for constructive living. It will habitually examine its own life to avoid any spirit of hypocrisy or Pharisaism.

But it will go further and oppose in unhesitating terms the war method, the local acceptances of war, and war preparations. It will publish, perhaps on its bulletin board, the statement: “This church has renounced war as an instrument of national policy,” and give the date when the action was taken. Its weight will be steadily against all the war forces in the community.

Where there are Quakers, Mennonites, or other groups or persons who have renounced the war method, the Church of the Brethren will be aggressive in bringing together, informing, developing, and organizing increasing portions of the community for the establishing of the peaceable way of dealing with conflict and for opposing the war way. As persons and as a group the membership of the Church of the Brethren will keep in touch with their state and national governments, lending their influence constructively toward peace and aggressively against war. The church in America will help to lead America to renounce war in deed as well as in word.—**Dan West**

**Respond:** How does your congregation embody this vision of a church that renounces violence and is a center for peacemaking?

**Pray:** Dear God, let churches everywhere threaten their communities with an epidemic of love.

**Bibliographic note:** Dan West, known for founding the Church of the Brethren Heifer Project, now Heifer International, in 1938 put together a booklet *The Coming Brotherhood* (Elgin Press, 1938) outlining a vision for “an aggressive program” to make the Church of the Brethren into an organization to carry out the work of Christ on earth. This excerpt is from pp. 33-34.

 **Act strongly and boldly**

*“Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves” (1 Peter 1:13a).*

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:13-16

“It just isn’t right! It just must not happen!” I cried out to God one day when grief and anger overcame me. I just couldn’t imagine the terror of it all—what people will suffer. “God, you must step in and do something to stop it! It is the innocent, the helpless, who will suffer, not the ones who are greedy and ruthless and uncaring, not the ones who are orchestrating this war.” But, I wondered, what good would it do for me to die here with them? Does that help them? No, except that we share in their suffering. We must not give up, lose hope, stop praying, walking, writing, visiting, and putting our bodies on the line. What I really wanted to do was stop this horrible thing from happening.

I was afraid. I didn’t want to die. But I was willing to take the risk if my presence could help prevent thousands of people from dying and suffering war here or elsewhere, in the next countries on Bush’s agenda.

I believe that it is important for thousands of us to be willing to die, not because dying is important, but so that we can say no to war so strongly that governments lose the support for these wars and there are no people left to fight them.

It is especially important that people of conscience and faith act strongly and boldly to declare a gospel of peace, or we lose our very soul. Christianity loses its soul if it loses its witness of the one who laid down his life for his friends, who gave us the ministry of reconciliation, of peace, of non-violent, suffering love.—**Peggy Faw Gish**

**Respond:** Think about what you are willing to risk for Jesus’ sake.

**Pray:** Lord, what am I ready to give up for the sake of your call? I give myself to you, as your disciple. Embolden me to follow Jesus in all the ways of peace.

**Bibliographic note:** Peggy Faw Gish has been a long-term worker with Christian Peacemaker Teams, and is a Church of the Brethren peace activist. This is from her book *A Journey of Hope and Peace* (Herald Press, 2004). 

# Campfire freedom

by Sandy Bosserman



When the sun slumps behind the trees,  
volleyball wannabes give up the boast;  
conventional vespers of chapel abandoned  
for an hour to relish more, even most—  
campfire freedom is at hand.

When the fire is laid, a motley pile  
of stick and leaf, branch and log;  
and smoke is rising to forest roof,  
mingling darkness, star, and fog—  
campfire freedom is at hand.

When the air is saturated with spirit and song  
of campers and critters present and past:  
“Grey squirrel, swish your bushy tail”;  
how long can a 10,000-stanza cicada-hymn last?  
Campfire freedom is at hand.

When glowing flames reach peak performance,  
and every face, fire-brushed, turns sublime  
“you will always be beautiful in my eyes,”  
seen in the fullness of this time:  
Campfire freedom is at hand.

When words turn solemn and measured,  
matters of love, hope, and commitment drop by,  
all we’ve mumbled and groaned by light of day  
is absorbed in still, endless dome of God’s night sky.  
Campfire freedom is at hand.

When feet that freely kicked gravel slow to the twitch of a toe  
and prayer lays a blanket of warmth on weary eyes,  
when ponderings of the far-away sacred and holy  
become a pleasant and quite near-by surprise,

Then without an evening-shadow of a doubt  
campfire freedom has passed through our orbit’s sight,  
and perches in the tall oak with the night hawk,  
revisiting on mysterious and holy campfire nights. 

An ordained minister, Sandy Bosserman is a former public school teacher, pastor, and district executive. She is a member of the Cabool (Mo.) Church of the Brethren.

## Mission and Ministry Board names general secretary-elect

**D**avid A. Steele has been named general secretary-elect of the Church of the Brethren. The Mission and Ministry Board announced his appointment on May 23. Since 2005 he has been district executive minister of Middle Pennsylvania District. He will begin as general secretary on Sept. 1.

“I am humbled to be called,” Steele said. “It is a privilege to serve.” He added, “obviously it is a daunting call in some respects, given the currents in the life of the church, but it’s an exciting call. I look forward to the opportunity of serving in this capacity.”

Steele is an ordained minister who brings extensive experience of church leadership to the position of general secretary. He has experienced the highest elected position in the denomination, having served as moderator of Annual Conference in 2015. He has been a leader in the Council of District Executives, and has been a member of the Ministry Advisory Council.

In youth ministry, he has coordinated music and/or worship for three National Youth Conferences. He was an adult advisor for the National Youth Cabinet in 2002. He was involved in leadership of two National Junior High Confer-



**David A. Steele**

ences, serving on the planning team and as a worship coordinator.

His experience of the wider church includes relating with ministry education, outdoor ministries, and ecumenical partners. He has been a board member of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center based at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, and has been a program director, board member, and board chair for Camp Blue Diamond near Petersburg, Pa. Since 2009 he has served on the board of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches where from 2012-14 he was vice president.

He spent 13 years as a pastor, at Bakersfield (Calif.) Church of the Brethren and Martinsburg (Pa.) Memorial Church of the Brethren.

He holds a bachelor of arts in religion and philosophy from McPherson (Kan.) College and a master of divinity from Bethany Seminary.

Until Sept. 1, he will close out his work with Middle Pennsylvania District and will collaborate with interim general secretary Dale Minnich to make a smooth transition in denominational leadership. Steele will be introduced to Annual Conference on July 1, during the morning business session, with an opportunity to meet and greet the general secretary-elect over the lunch break.

## Personnel notes

**Mark Flory Steury** has transitioned to the position of Donor Relations representative for the Church of the Brethren. He previously worked for Donor Relations as a contractor. This new part-time position is located at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill.

**Ann Cornell** began May 9 as interim executive director of Camp Eder, a Church of the Brethren outdoor ministry center near Fairfield, Pa. She recently completed a long tenure as administrator of Shepherd’s Spring Outdoor Ministry Center near Sharpsburg, Md.

**The Fellowship of Brethren Homes** has named a new executive commit-

**tee:** Jeff Shireman, CEO/president of Lebanon Valley Brethren Home, Palmyra, Pa.; Chris Widman, executive director of Good Shepherd Home, Fostoria, Ohio; Maureen Cahill, administrator of Spurgeon Manor, Dallas Center, Iowa; Ferol Labash, CEO of Pinecrest Community, Mount Morris, Ill.; Carma Wall, CEO of the Cedars, McPherson, Kan.

**Ministry Summer Service interns and mentors for 2016** are Kerrick van Asselt, who will be mentored by Megan Sutton and Brian Flory at Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Indiana; Nolan McBride, mentored by Twyla Rowe at Fahrney-Keedy Home and Village in Maryland; Rudy Amaya,

mentored by Rachel Witkovsky at Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; Ruth Ritchey Moore, mentored by Donita Keister at Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren in Pennsylvania; Sarandon Smith, mentored by David Miller at Blackrock Church of the Brethren in Pennsylvania; Tyler Roebuck, mentored by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford at MESSENGER and Church of the Brethren communication team; and Youth Peace Travel Team members Jenna Walmer, Kiana Simonson, Phoebe Hart, and Sara White, who will be mentored by Sarah Neher, Chelsea Goss, Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey, and Dana Cassell, respectively.



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## Bethany Seminary graduates 13

On May 7, Bethany Theological Seminary recognized its 13 newest graduates, the class of 2016. Surrounded by faculty, staff, family, and friends, the following students received graduate degrees and certificates:

**Master of Divinity:** Thomas N. Appel of Aurora, Colo.; Karen M. Duhai of Richmond, Ind., with an emphasis in peace studies; Donald E. Fecher of Milford, Ind.; Angela S. Finet of Nokesville, Va.; Harvey S. Leddy of Eden, N.C.; Ela J. Robertson of Barnesville, Ohio; Christopher E. Stover-Brown of Wichita, Kan., with an emphasis in peace studies.

**Master of Arts:** Jana Carter of Los Angeles, Calif., with a concentration in theological studies; Kristin Shellenberger of Goshen, Ind., with a concentration in biblical studies;



Bethany Theological Seminary

Beth B. Wethington of Henrico, N.C., with a concentration in peace studies.

**Certificate of Achievement in Theological Studies:** Angela L. Adams of Tiskilwa, Ill.; Brody S. Rike of West Alexandria, Ohio; Roxanne M. West-Johnson of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

## Bethany offers new certificates

**Bethany Seminary is launching three additions** to its academic offerings: graduate certificates in Biblical Interpretation, Conflict Transformation, and Theopoetics and Theological Imagination.

The three new certificates are graduate-level study, and all qualifying courses already are offered as part of the master of divinity and master of arts programs. However, the new certificates are designed for those who want to explore and gain experience in a specialized area of interest.

The certificates open up possibilities for students who may not need or want a full master's degree or who want to supplement their degrees with further work in a certain field. With pastors in mind, they are also continuing education opportunities. Each is designed to be completed in one to two years, depending on when

the student's selected courses are offered. Through a financial aid arrangement, students may reduce their total tuition costs to \$2,200 if certificates are completed in four semesters.

For more information visit [www.bethanyseminary.edu](http://www.bethanyseminary.edu).

## Academy names new EFSM tracks

**At the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership**, women and men are equipped for leadership in the church through four training programs: Training in Ministry (TRIM), Education for a Shared Ministry (EFSM), Seminario Biblico Anabautista Hispano (SeBAH-CoB), and district-based Academy Certified Training Systems (ACTS). The academy is a ministry training partnership of the Church of the Brethren and Bethany Seminary.

New EFSM tracks for congregations working to develop leaders from

among their own members are offered. These are for congregations and potential ministers working toward credentialing in the denomination's new "commissioned minister" status.

**Track 1** continues the EFSM format for congregations with a bi-vocational pastor, aiding that person in developing as a pastoral leader alongside lay leadership from the congregation.

**Track 2** is for congregations working to develop a group of people who will serve together as a ministry team.

**Track 3** serves congregations seeking to develop pastoral leadership in a specialized ministry such as Christian education, visitation, pastoral care, music, evangelism.

**Track 4** is for Spanish-speaking congregations with a bi-vocational pastor, to aid in developing a pastoral leader alongside lay leadership from the congregation.

For more information go to [www.bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy](http://www.bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy).



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# The culture of ‘the Big Me’

**If you recognize the name of this book’s author,** you may know that he is not a Bible scholar, theologian, or minister. In fact, David Brooks is a columnist for *The New York Times*. Wikipedia describes him as an “American conservative political and cultural commentator.”

That word “political” may be a red flag to many readers. So why did I suppose a book by such a writer would be considered worthy of a review in these pages?

To be honest, I approached *The Road to Character* with some trepidation. The title did intrigue me, but the political upheaval in our country in recent months has made me long for a break from political news in general and political commentators in particular. But I decided to give the book a try. By the end of the introduction, entitled “Adam II,” I was hooked.



KEN GIBBLE

In that chapter Brooks refers to a book written in 1965 by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in which the rabbi asserted that the opening chapters of Genesis depict what he called Adam

I and Adam II, who represent two opposing sides of human nature.

Adam I wants to build and produce. He wants to have high status and win victories. He wants to “conquer the world.” Adam II wants to love intimately, to have “a serene inner character.” He does not want to conquer the world; he wants to “obey a calling to serve the world.”

In the next 250 pages, Brooks holds up for the reader’s consideration his conviction that our world is in great need of Adam II people. The more I read, the more I recognized the values that the author was saying are needed in our time. They were the same values embraced by our Brethren forebears and, I continue to believe, by their descendants when we are at our best—values such as honesty, simplicity, sacrificial service, and humility.

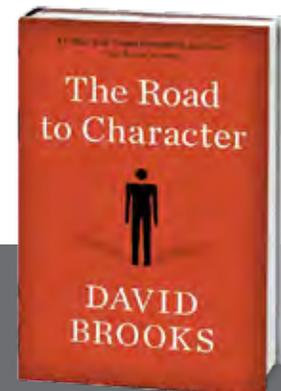
Brooks devotes eight of the book’s 10 chapters to a portrayal of individuals whom he credits with living by those values. The portrayals span more than a millennium and a half and include such well-known people as St. Augustine and President Dwight Eisenhower. Others are not so well known, such as 19th-century English novelist Mary Anne Evans (known as George Eliot), Frances Perkins (the first woman appointed to a US cabinet position), civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, and the woman whom Pope Francis named when he addressed the US Congress, social activist Dorothy Day.

Brooks acknowledges that all of them were flawed in a number of ways. Nevertheless, they were able and willing to recognize those flaws, repent of them, and sacrifice worldly success for the sake of an inner victory.

In our present culture, which Brooks calls “the Big Me,” narcissism is on the rise. He cites a Gallup poll in 1950 in which high school seniors were asked if they consider themselves to be a very important person; 12 percent said yes. The same question was asked in 2005; this time 80 percent said yes. Brooks considers such findings to be, at the very least, troubling. He commends to his readers the examples provided by the people he portrays in his book: men and women who, to borrow a phrase from the apostle Paul, did not think of themselves more highly than they ought to have thought (Romans 12:3).

If you don’t have time to read all the chapters in the *The Road to Character*, read at least the introduction and chapter one, “The Shift.” That chapter ends with these words: “You can’t build Adam II out of a recipe book. There is no seven point program. But we can immerse ourselves in the lives of outstanding people and try to understand the wisdom of the way they lived.” 📖

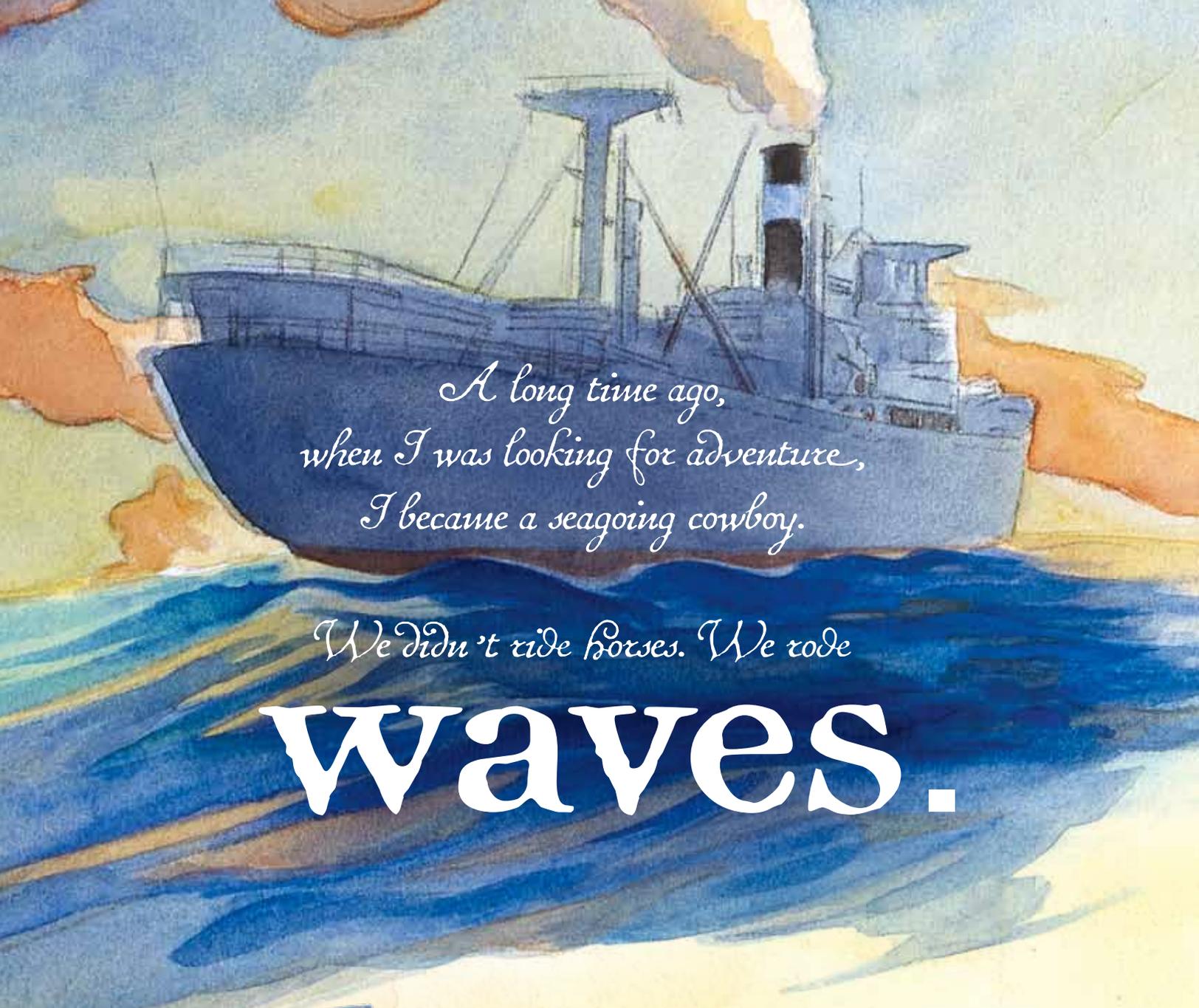
Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, writes from Camp Hill, Pa. Read more on his blog at [www.kenslines.blogspot.com](http://www.kenslines.blogspot.com).



## ABOUT THE BOOK

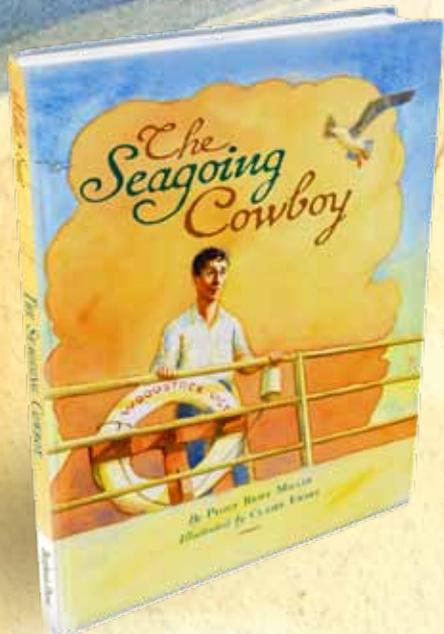
**Title:** *The Road to Character*. **Author:** David Brooks. **Publisher:** Random House, 2015.

**Number of pages:** 320.



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when I was looking for adventure,  
I became a seagoing cowboy.*

*We didn't ride horses. We rode*  
**waves.**



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## What is the great journey that Jesus is taking us on? It is a spiritual journey, with Jesus as the leader, pointing out the way.

### Like an airport

I spent some time in Chicago O'Hare airport waiting with my family for a grandson's arrival from Germany. With all the activity around me, I was thinking that the church is like a huge airport. Jesus has called people to go on a great journey with him and they have followed him to the airport.

But it is such a fascinating place, with all the shops, eating places, recreational facilities, and even entertainment. It's such a delightful place, and everyone gets so caught up in the delights of the airport that they don't hear Jesus say, "Follow me, and I will show you the Father." They think that they have arrived at the kingdom of heaven and stay in the airport.

Most of Jesus' teachings are centered on seeking the kingdom of heaven. His illustrations seem to say that the kingdom of heaven must be searched for.

What is the great journey that Jesus is taking us on? It is a spiritual journey, with Jesus as the leader, pointing out the way. The Beatitudes are the road

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signs, but we have to want to go first . . . and be willing to give up control of our wants and wishes and let Jesus take over.

How do we get out of the airport and on our way to the kingdom of heaven? Everyone has to find their own way. The only one who can really give us the right answer is God.

**Ellen Boos**  
Plymouth, Ind.

### Turn around

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die. . . ." I don't think the Church of the Brethren will live forever. I don't think the Roman Catholic Church will live forever. Sometime out there, an end will come.

However, I am hopeful that the

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Church of the Brethren will live and serve well for a long time. I am hopeful that we will be flexible enough to change when needed, without diminishing our key values. Brethren can make a turn-around in numbers and in strength if God so wills and if we make the right decisions along the way.

The Church of the Brethren would not exist if it were not for people like Martin Luther and Alexander Mack. Luther translated the Bible into German and Mack invited like-minded persons to study Luther's German Bible. They discovered the teachings and life of Jesus and were led to form a church that would seek to follow those teachings. Leadership with vision and with skills to make that vision reality, is essential.

The Church of the Brethren has some options:

1. Decide to be a multi-cultural, multi-racial church, and focus on being a diverse church. This involves leadership recruitment and training, evangelism and church development, Brethren Volunteer Service *en español*,

peace education for Spanish- and Creole-speaking leaders, and placement of strong ethnic leaders in denominational positions.

2. Adjust the denomination's position on inclusion of homosexual persons so that congregations can choose their own stance, and can be respected for whatever stance they adopt.

3. Invest in the Brethren Service Center at New Windsor, Md., as an international peace center. Increase peacemaking ministries and use the center as a symbol and place for peace programming. This means raising funds to upgrade the facilities, putting able staff in place, attracting more peace and justice organizations to locate their ministries there, enabling the center to have its own development program.

4. Pursue an international organizational structure that gives Brethren worldwide a global voice and opportunity for doing ministry together.

**Merle Crouse**  
Saint Cloud, Fla.

## Extend grace

Now that we have districts in the business of judgment and punishment for going against church policy, are we going to punish churches that refuse to interview and hire women as pastors, since this goes against church policy? The Church of the Brethren does, after all, fully ordain women. Obviously, in this matter we extend grace to these congregations and allow them to pro-

ceed as they have discerned appropriate for their congregation.

I believe the same grace needs to be extended to congregations that, through a discernment process, have agreed to support same-sex marriage and offer leadership positions to members of the LGBT community, without those churches or pastors facing ridicule or punishment.

Those on both sides of this issue have arrived at their understandings through prayerful consideration of scripture. We need to acknowledge this, especially for those with whom we disagree. We are clearly not of one mind on this subject, whether or not we include that statement in our documents. I strongly feel the only path forward is to permit each individual faith community to determine its own beliefs and practices about the issues of same-sex marriage and church leadership. I believe this is a healthy path for our church because it acknowledges faith as a journey, recognizing that the Holy Spirit is still moving, and God is still speaking.

It also follows the greatest commandment of our Lord—to above all, love.

**Julie Richard**  
Westminster, Md.

## In a human context

Thank you to Eric Bishop for his article, "Just Christians," March 2016. I'm taking the following verses out of context, but the familiar texts of Amos

## CLASSIFIEDS

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**The same grace needs to be extended to congregations that, through a discernment process, have agreed to support same-sex marriage and offer leadership positions to members of the LGBT community**

5:24 and Micah 6:8 express ideas similar to the verses referenced in Matthew.

I also appreciated Bob Bowman's Bible study article in the same issue, but prefer the interpretation of Rashi. Would it be acceptable within a "Church of the Sisters" context? If "Brethren" can include

sisters, then can "Sisters" include Brethren? Would it be acceptable to say that Genesis 6:1-4 represents entirely human ideas, or must it be said that these verses are somehow divinely inspired within a human context?

On the subject of Bible study in gen-

eral, I can recommend *The Witness of the Hebrew Bible for a New Testament Church* (Brethren Press, 2010), including David M. Valeta's study on the book of Daniel.

**Charles Thomas**  
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

## TURNINGPOINTS

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

### New Members

**Bethany**, New Paris, Ind.:

Criss Edwards II, Dean Kauffman, Dora Kauffman, Jarad Miller, Stefanie Miller, Brad Showalter, Rebecca Showalter

**Champaign**, Ill.: Destyni

Hughes, Ray Hughes, Aden Runge, Trinity Runge, Chelsea Singleton

**Chiques**, Manheim, Pa.:

Austin Balmer, Kevin Balmer, Tammy Balmer, Rachel Hollinger, Joseph Meisenbach, Nathan Sauder

**Evergreen**, Stanardsville, Va.: Katie Batten, Stacey Batten

**Grottoes**, Va.: Alexis

Chavez, Alicia Chavez, Jeni Chavez, Kalob Chavez

**Lorida**, Fla.: Kadin Baker,

Evy Tumbleston

**Manchester**, North

Manchester, Ind.: Andy Butterbaugh, Betty Butterbaugh, Raymond Johnson, Dean Kagarise, Janet Kagarise, Nelson Metzger

**Maple Spring**, Hollsopple, Pa.: Amy Conrad, Ethan

Hoffman, Kate Martin, Casadie Miller, Joy Miller, Nathan Niovich, Jack Strait, Sally Strait

**Northview**, Indianapolis, Ind.: Cara August, Tom August, Cara Eastis, Em Ezell, Jake Ezell, Beulah Morphew, Kathleen Morphew, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm, Caroline Sausser

**Skyridge**, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Rejoice Musa

**Somerset**, Pa.: April Hahn, Ken Hahn, Sharon Hahn, Donnie Smith, Linda Smith

**Thurmont**, Md.: Brittney Colburn

**West Charleston**, Tipp City, Ohio: Eduvina Bacón, Jacob Kraus, Dagoberto Lozoya, Maria Trujillo, Miguel Trujillo, Victor Trujillo, Victoriano Trujillo

**White Oak**, Manheim, Pa.: Aubrey Cassel, Kaylie Copenhaver, Valerae Rohrer, Kelci Sauder, Delaney Wenger

### Anniversaries

**Berkey**, Phil and Barbara, Goshen, Ind., 50

**Davis**, Jim and Phyllis,

Warsaw, Ind., 50

**Deboy**, Gary and Beth, Rossville, Ind., 55

**Hicks**, Ira and Mary, Bradford, Ohio, 60

**Light**, Harry and Dorothy, Columbia, Pa., 50

**Mellinger**, Allen and

Joanne, Ronks, Pa., 60

**Morris**, Wilbur and Nancy,

Stanardsville, Va., 60

**Nolin**, Carroll and Marilyn, Prairie City, Iowa, 60

**Seitz**, Harry and Dorothy, Phoenixville, Pa., 70

**Stevens**, Owen and Marian, Davidsville, Pa., 70

**Stutzman**, Clifford and Sally, Hollsopple, Pa., 66

**Wright**, Herbert and Pauline, Sykesville, Md., 70

### Deaths

**Baker**, Ralph R., 87, Somerset, Pa., March 21

**Ball**, Shirley, 72, Garden City, Kan., April 27

**Bowers**, Wayne E., 84, Dixon, Ill., April 3

**Boyer**, Bryan, 57, Claremont, Calif., April 23

**Brant**, Wayne W., 94, New Oxford, Pa., April 23

**Brower**, Selma, 94, Portland, Ore., Feb. 17

**Chandler**, James, 91, Nampa, Idaho, Jan. 5

**Conrad**, Larry, 70, Goshen, Ind., April 23

**Cook**, Darlene, 75, Arcanum, Ohio, Oct. 3

**Deatrick**, Dessie, 81, Chambersburg, Pa., April 14

**Domer**, Earl, 92, Somerset, Pa., Dec. 25

**Eveland**, Melbourne, 72, Urbana, Ill., April 20

**Finney**, Harriet Jane Wenger, 75, North Manchester, Ind., April 26

**Gnegy**, Merlin, 92, Somerset, Pa., April 18, 2015

**Godfrey**, James E., 85, Dallastown, Pa., May 2

**Groff**, Elizabeth, 98, Manheim, Pa., March 11

**Groff**, Reba, 86, Manheim, Pa., Jan. 2

**Henry**, Mahala, 88, Hollsopple, Pa., Jan. 19

**Lehman**, Vicki, 60, Elkhart, Ind., April 17

**Logan**, Ida, 91, North Manchester, Ind., April 9

**Loump**, Mary, 95, Mount Joy, Pa., Feb. 4

**McEntire**, Marci, 59, Lower Gwynedd, Pa., April 16

**Messick**, Mylin, 85, Middletown, Pa., April 21

**Rothermel**, Freda I., 95, Elkhart, Ind., March 25

**Shaffer**, Arlene, 90, Palmyra, Pa., May 9

**Shilling**, Margaret, 88, Sabillasville, Md., March 23

**Sollenberger**, Benjamin T., 82, Fort Wayne, Ind., March 30

**Swope**, Audrey, 85, Everett, Pa., Feb. 13

**Thomas**, Aldine, 82, Boswell, Pa., Jan. 25

**Weaver**, Francis, 78, Mechanicsburg, Pa., May 2

**Weber**, Dena, 88, Brush Prairie, Wash., March 25

**Wickert**, Alice Mae, 96, Dixon, Ill., April 20

**Wickert**, Alice Mae, 96, Dixon, Ill., April 20

**Wickert**, Alice Mae, 96, Dixon, Ill., April 20

### Ordained

**Brummett**, Erik, Pac. S.W. Dist. (Live Oak, Calif.), April 24

**Davis**, Leon, S. Pa.

Dist. (Tuscarora, Thompsontown, Pa.), April 24

**Heinlein**, Christopher G., Mid. Pa. Dist.

(Bannerville, McClure, Pa.), April 24

**Satvedi**, Purvi, Ill. & Wis. Dist. (Neighborhood,

Montgomery, Ill.), May 15

**Smith**, John C., Southeastern Dist.

(Pleasant Grove, Bakersville, N.C.), March 20

### Licensed

**Elkins**, Roger Jr., W. Plains

Dist. (Wichita, First, Wichita, Kan.), May 1

### Placements

**Bergen**, Wesley J., pastor, Morgantown, W. Va.,

May 1

**Hall**, Edward W. Jr.,

pastor, Peak Creek, Laurel Springs, N.C., Feb. 21

**Hamilton**, Andrew, pastor, Stevens Hill, Elizabethtown, Pa., May 9

**Hubbell**, Donald G., from pastor of special ministries to pastor, York,

First, York, Pa., Jan. 1

**Murr**, Martin C., youth pastor, Sunnybrook,

Bristol, Tenn., Feb. 1

**Simmons**, Keith W., pastor, Leake's Chapel,

Stanley, Va., May 1

# Our tiny, enormous congregation

**O**ur congregation is small. By some standards, it might even be considered *tiny*. On any given Sunday, there might be 20 or 30 people in worship, and half that in Sunday school. It's a small congregation. But our congregation is also mind-bendingly enormous.

For example: every week, I sit in Sunday school with 5 or 10 people. A few weeks ago, I realized—with an actual,



DANA CASSELL

physical start—that our tiny group of Brethren gathered around the scriptures included people born in five countries on four continents.

I began to pay attention to the ways our congregation is intimately connected to places very far away. Our prayer requests include people on three continents. One of our members might be in China or Romania or Costa Rica when we

gather for worship. Because of the passion we share for international students, refugees and cross-cultural con-

intentional ways to foster connections of depth and joy among our community, to capitalize on the gifts of being such an intimate group. At that same meeting, we approved a request to share our building with a Korean Presbyterian congregation, considered how that would affect the Chinese language school that meets there, and began the process of turning a burgeoning desire to befriend recent local refugees into an active involvement. We are tiny, yes. And we are also enormous.

Parker Palmer, a Quaker teacher and author, says that the heart of human experience is paradox: not consistency, not chaos, but a deep truth that comes from peering in and through a thing that appears, at first, to be a contradiction. This is a familiar concept for Christians. After all, didn't Jesus preach that the one who loses her life will find it? Didn't Jesus talk about the last being first and how his yoke was easy, his burden light? The Christian life is filled to the brim with paradox.

That's helpful, because I can think of no other way to express the surprising beauty I find in our tiny, enormous congregation. We are small, yes, but our community ex-

**We are small, yes, but our community extends around the world. That seems, at first, like a contradiction. But in Christ, all things are possible.**

versation, we regularly enjoy visitors who've only recently arrived here in the United States. When I asked for volunteers to read the Pentecost scripture in many languages this spring, people responded with offers to share in nearly a dozen different languages—languages that are already present among us every week.

Last month, at our coordinating council meeting, we talked about how we're really interested in finding more

tends around the world. That seems, at first, like a contradiction. But in Christ, all things are possible. In Christ, the weak turn out to be the strong ones, the blind are the ones with the best vision, the neglected become the locus of community, and tiny congregations turn out to contain enormous realities. 

Dana Cassell is pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C.



# Persevere

Stand together in faith

“Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that... you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.”

Philippians 1:27

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# September 18

# Mission offering



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 • JAMES BECKWITH • TOM BENEVENTO • SHANTILAL P. BHAGAT • SANDY BOSSERMAN • CARL F. BOWMAN •  
 ROBERT C. BOWMAN • S. LOREN BOWMAN • CHUCK BOYER • DALE W. BROWN • KENNETH L. BROWN  
 • PAMELA BRUBAKER • CHERYL BRUMBAUGH-CAYFORD • JOAN CHITTISTER • CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA •  
 ROBERTA (WILES) COLDREN • WILMER A. COOPER • FLORENCE CRAGO • THE DALAI LAMA • RICHARD DEATS  
 • JOAN DEETER • EMERY DEWITT • DONALD DURNBAUGH • PETER EDIGER • KATE EISENBISE • VERNARD  
 ELLER • JACQUES ELLUL • DESIDERIUS ERASMUS • HARRY W. FARRINGTON • CHALMER E. FAW  
 • GEORGE FOX • MOHANDAS GANDHI • JULIE GARBER • RICHARD B. GARDNER • LINEA REIMER GEISER •  
 JUDITH GIBBLE • ART GISH • PEGGY FAW GISH • ANNA LISA GROSS •  
 MAURICE HESS • JAN HOGAN • ALLAN A. HUNTER • ROBERT  
 JOHANSEN • RUTHANN KNECHEL JOHANSEN •  
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