

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

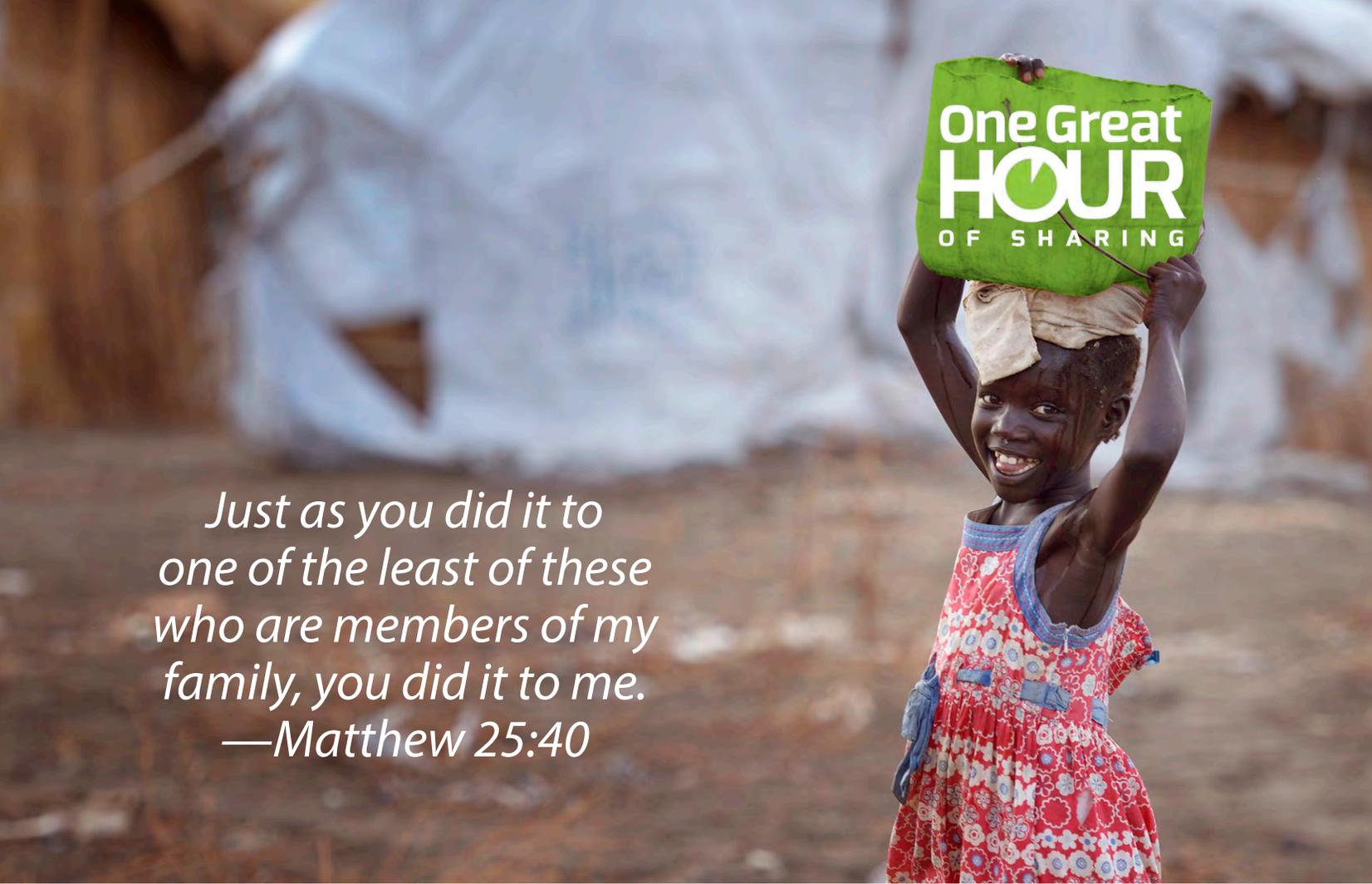
MESSENGER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Thermometer or thermostat?

The church in a multicultural world

A young girl with a joyful expression is carrying a green bag on her head. The bag has the text "One Great HOUR OF SHARING" printed on it. She is wearing a red and white floral dress. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a white tarp.

One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING

*Just as you did it to
one of the least of these
who are members of my
family, you did it to me.
—Matthew 25:40*

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Church of the Brethren

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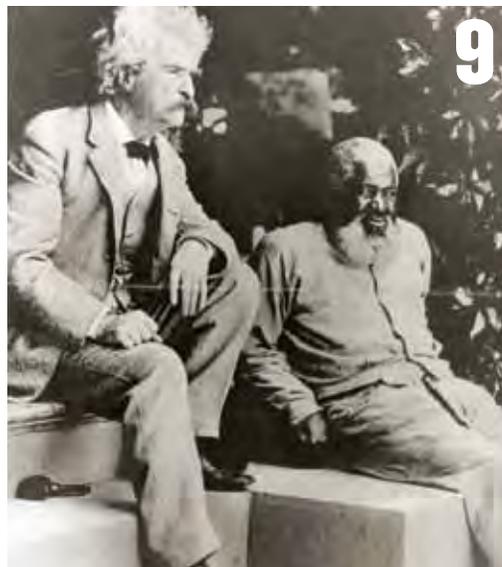
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Service and workcamp team

Paul Stocksdale



Some of us remember the days when stores weren't open on Sunday and buying things wasn't an option. Sunday felt different for everyone, even those who didn't regard it as a day of sabbath rest.

A great sabbath practice today would be to forgo consumerism, says evangelical environmentalist Matthew Sleeth. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" means "Don't be a run-on sentence. Don't go 24/7."

In *Between God & Green*, Katharine Wilkinson summarizes Sleeth's ideas:



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

"The way we live has destructive consequences for ourselves and for our planet. Embracing a day of rest, of idleness, would benefit the entirety of creation—both human and non-human. For Christians, Sabbath could be a day to tread lightly on the planet."

This is such a good idea that I'd like to expand on it. How about a seven-week sabbath from shopping at the beginning of every new year? Not a complete ban on shopping—but a break from buying nonessentials. We'd buy groceries and toilet paper, for example, but not new clothes. The seven weeks (not quite a seventh of a year) would be about the same length as the frenzied Christmas shopping season.

This could be a modern-day version of the sabbath year specified in Leviticus 25. It's not just the people who are supposed to rest, but remarkably the sabbath extends to the animals and to the land.

Choosing not to buy things we don't need could be our way of letting the land rest. We may wonder how this instruction applies to us if we don't own a field, but we're all connected to the land: The things we use are either grown on top of the land or taken from underground. We're using the land whether we own it or not.

The idea of sabbath goes even further. There's an instruction to have a really big jubilee year after seven cycles of sabbath years. In that 50th year, land goes back to the original owner. It's like pressing the reset button.

What's the point of jubilee? It's a reminder of who owns the land. God says, "For the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (Leviticus 25:23).

Treading lightly on the planet is not easy today, but we can look for inspiration to those spending a year in Brethren Volunteer Service. In this issue, see how BVS orientation is also a reset button. In a sense it's *re-orientation* to a different set of values. For all of us, sabbath can be a regular recalibration to the ways of God.

Wendy McFadden

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Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

Shepherd's Spring celebrates 25 years

Shepherd's Spring, a Church of the Brethren outdoor ministry center in Sharpsburg, Md., marked its 25th anniversary this past year, culminating with a closing campfire celebration on Nov. 5.

The event included a potluck meal capped off with S'mores, a camp song sing-along, skits, and special recognitions. It included a presentation of a 25th anniversary offering plate that was created out of wood from the Shepherd's Spring property and spent the year traveling to congregations around Mid-Atlantic District, raising more than \$11,000 along the way.

Other events have included a "25 for 25" fundraising campaign, special anniversary pricing for summer campers, a 185-mile bike ride along the neighboring C&O Canal to raise money for improvements to the camp's initiatives course, a chicken pot pie supper at Bush Creek Church of the Brethren, and sharing memories at the camp's fourth annual Celebrate Summer Festival.

"In 25 years we have gone from a seemingly empty field to one filled with cabins, swimming pool, lodge, goats, and gardens," wrote former administrator Ann Cornell, in the camp newsletter. "Our success is shared in the stories of leadership development, of God's love felt for the first time or once again, and of friends to share joys and sorrows."—Walt Wiltschek

'You gave me something to eat'

The youth of Mt. Carmel Church of the Brethren in Scottville, N.C., spent eight weeks studying the work and mission of Heifer International. The project included a fundraising campaign. Families were asked to save money for one month to donate to Heifer, and more than \$1,200 was collected. The youth used the money to purchase a heifer, a water buffalo, rabbits, an alpaca, a flock of chicks, and an irrigation pump, which were donated to families in India, Peru, and Ghana.

The youth painted a mural to commemorate their study, using Matthew 25:35, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat." The countries that received gifts are prominently painted in yellow on the figure of a cow. The mural can be seen outside the church from US Highway 221.—Susanne Murphy



Youth at Mt. Carmel Church of the Brethren with their Heifer mural (from left): Ally Hanson, John LeMasters, Phoebe Murphy, Addy Douglas, Delia Hanson, Ellie Crouse, Dillon Marlow, Mack LeMasters, Blake Murphy, Hanna DeBord, and Mary Beth Burgiss.

THE EXCHANGE

“‘What is necessary?’ is a different question than, ‘How can I spend less?’ or, ‘How much can I save?’ Those questions help us adapt to our culture without ever questioning its premises and beliefs. ‘What is necessary?’ is an exit door. It invites us to take a good look at a concept of ‘the good life’ that always requires more and start considering other sources of wisdom. Like God’s maxims for the good life... Might the powerful question, ‘What is necessary?’ teach us to live in ways that help shape our culture into God’s culture?”

—Anne Basye writing in *Sustaining Simplicity: A Journal* (2007, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)



A year of service in the Church of the Brethren

Over the course of this past year, 2016, Brethren and others put in thousands of hours of volunteer service at hundreds of sites in the United States and around the world. Here is a snapshot of a year of service, with statistics from Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS), the Workcamp Ministry, Brethren Disaster Ministries, and Children’s Disaster Services (CDS):

BVS

70 full-time volunteers

142,800 hours of volunteer service

62 project sites in the US and around the world



Workcamp Ministry

324 participants

18 workcamp sites



CDS

112 caregivers

7,160 volunteer hours

12 responses at disaster sites



Brethren Disaster Ministries

5 project sites in Spotswood, N.J.; Harts, W.Va.; Detroit, Mich.; Loveland, Colo.; and Columbia, S.C.

60 disaster project leaders

77 volunteers who worked 5,184 hours in West Virginia to serve 7 families

300-plus volunteers who worked 15,856 hours to rebuild basements in Detroit for 42 families (total as of Nov. 28)



17 volunteers from the Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who participated in a combined Leadership Training in Detroit

1 partner site in Columbia, S.C., that welcomed volunteers from the Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as well as other denominations, from January to October



Thermometer or thermostat?

Conversations with Brethren in intercultural ministries

by Gimbiya Kettering

Visiting Church of the Brethren districts,

I have been struck by the ways we strive to reflect the Revelation 7:9 vision of all tribes coming together to worship. It can be complicated to blend different styles of worship and slow down for translation, but it is always a beautiful glimpse into God's vision for us. Beyond the compelling aesthetic imagery of Revelation, God's vision is one rooted in a reality where we are all brothers and sisters—family—to each other, a community bonded by love and respect.

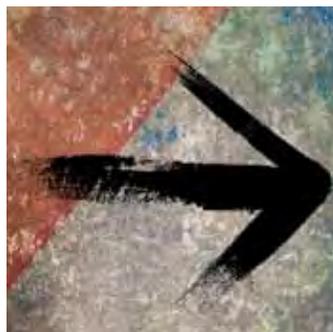
As early as the 1800s, while the national economy was dependent on the moral compromises of slavery, our denomination spoke out against racism, segregation, and oppression based on race. From district queries to Annual Conference

statements, we have asserted a scriptural reading that people of other races are equals before God and are to be welcomed and supported in our midst. Yet recent events have incited an increase in racialized violence and hate crimes, including arson and graffiti tagging of African-American churches.

Guided by the 1997 “Separate No More” paper that calls for us to be in dialogue to hear one another's stories and experiences, I began to check in with the leaders in our denomination who are part of the umbrella of Intercultural Ministries. I wanted to hear about the impact of the election season and the weeks following on their communities, especially people whose identities were targeted by the campaign rhetoric.

THE CHURCH WAS NOT MERELY A THERMOMETER THAT RECORDED THE IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES OF POPULAR OPINION; IT WAS A THERMOSTAT THAT TRANSFORMED THE MORES OF SOCIETY.

—Martin Luther King Jr.'s, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”



AS HARD AS THESE CONVERSATIONS WERE, THERE WERE MOMENTS OF LAUGHTER AND AN ACCEPTANCE THAT WE ARE IN GOD'S PLAN, BUT ALSO A DETERMINATION THAT **WE NEED TO BE DOING "SOMETHING"**

As of writing this article, I have had more than 25 telephone conversations, ranging from 25 minutes to over 2 hours, with a group that includes the Intercultural Ministries Advisory Committee; leaders of congregations that identify as multicultural, African American, and Latino; multi-racial families who attend predominantly white congregations, including white members of these families; leaders of color who have been active in district and denominational life; pastors of color who serve in white congregations; and white pastors whose youth groups reflect the growing ethnic diversity of our neighborhoods.

These calls have included conversations about concerns for individual church members, the impact on church maintenance and growth, questions about whether the church can provide sanctuary for those threatened with deportation, and, of course, prayers both while on the phone and continuing now.

The concerns that I am hearing include:

Vulnerability: People who have identity points that have been part of the political rhetoric are feeling vulnerable for the ways policy, politics, and social discourse have shifted. They are concerned about how this unfolds in the upcoming years for individuals, communities, and congregations. There are specific concerns such as those related to deportation of immigrants, anti-Semitism, police violence (i.e., stop-and-frisk, driving while black, police shootings), the school-to-prison pipeline, etc. Underlying most of these concerns and vulnerabilities is the fear of the rising racism in our country and culture.

Witnessing and experiencing increased racism: This includes individuals being called derogatory names

(which sometimes do not even reflect their own identities, such as a citizen being mistaken for an immigrant, and Christians from other parts of the world being mistaken for Muslims); witnessing groups/mobs chanting “build the wall” and “throw them out”; racist graffiti and increased Confederate flags in our communities; the awareness that hate groups including the nebulous “alt right” are growing; online conversations/interactions that have racist overtones; news reports of students being attacked in school/youth settings, which are scaring our Church of the Brethren youth who fear that they will be next or that it could happen at their schools.

Prayers for leaders: Many have spoken of the importance of praying for our leaders—denominational, national, local community, and of course, presidential. At least one conversation included explicit references to the way God was able to change the heart of Pharaoh. In this, I have been amazed at both the depth of compassion and trust that God has the power to make all things possible, and that God’s will—though we do not understand it in the moment—continues to unfold. In these conversations, it also is clear that while “God is God” the identity of many in the intercultural church is not aligned with that of formal, national leadership. Rather there is greater empathy and spiritual alignment (for a lack of a better term) with the ways in which early Christians were persecuted, and seen as outsiders within the context of the Roman Empire, and the times when the “chosen people” were enslaved or wandering as foreigners in a foreign land. I am hearing a faith journey in which Christianity is distinct from political power, not just distanced in a hands-washed kind of way but rather engaged through the lens of persecution.

What happens next? There is a great sense that we do not know what will happen next—and while that is always true it seems to be particularly important now. Most immediately, there is the concern of deportation. For some congregations this literally means devastation. As one pastor said, “We will not have any complete families left.” These leaders and congregations want to know what options there are for churches to provide sanctuary and if our wider denomination would be part of that conversation. There are very real questions about how this would impact the lives of specific congregations. Many of our immigrant pastors are documented, but they are worried about their congregations and communities. Also, it is important to note that many are wondering if/when “bad things” start happening will we as a denomination recognize it, be able to speak up, or even advocate on behalf of our members?

We have seen this before—will we live through this again? Some people in the Church of the Brethren have lived under dictatorships and in authoritarian states in other countries and are holding that lens to our current situation in the United States. They are remembering what congregations and church leaders did to advocate and protect their communities in other nations. A number are remembering that is part of why they are in the US now. They are remembering others who fled their own nations during difficult political times. Among those who are African American or have African Americans in their families, there is a strong sense of a return to a time when to be black was to be vulnerable, hated, and/or oppressed. The rise of new hate groups and a resurgence of the KKK has them very worried about what comes next. Public rallies and the online presence of these groups is a regular reminder that the violence and vulnerability experienced by African Americans in the past could also return in some form.

Pastoral care: Our pastors are thinking a lot about the type of care they need to provide for their congregations and communities at this time. However, I also am hearing hope that the wider denomination will be part of the community that supports their congregations in this time. Also, there is a longing to hear from the denomination. During these calls, I was asked if I was bringing prayers and greetings and a message on behalf of the whole denomination that would be inspiring/comforting to their members and could be shared at worship or during Bible studies.

Having conversations with white people: People who are white and deeply engaged with multicultural congregations or families have a sense that they should have done more to have honest conversations about race and racism and what was happening in the election season.

Some are now trying to engage and have these conversations after the fact. Others are still afraid of these conversations. A few think that it is someone else’s job to have these conversations and to keep white people informed about the dangers of race and racism. There is a feeling of profound disconnect with how good, Christian people can be blind to the racism and racialized violence that is being fostered and encouraged in our society right now.

We have struggled with racialized violence and discrimination in our country in the past, and we have models of earlier Christian leaders to inspire us during this time. I have been returning to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”—a letter that feels particularly relevant because it is addressed to white Christians who are struggling to do what is right during a divisive and difficult time. King wrote, “There was a time when the church was powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”

In many ways, I feel that this report is doing “thermometer” work—trying to describe many conversations across several weeks. I hope that it leaves you with a feel for what I heard. Yet, I do not think I fully conveyed how joyful and happy people were to hear from me. They told me how much it meant to know that someone else in their denomination was aware of their situation, sensitive to their concerns, and reaching out to them. As hard as these conversations were, there were moments of laughter and an acceptance that we are in God’s plan, but also a determination that we need to be doing “something”—although there is not yet clarity on what that something is.

That leads to the thermostat metaphor in King’s letter. There is a strong desire for the church to act. For some that means finding their own voice. For others it is a desire to see the wider denominational leadership act so that they can join with a larger movement. I look forward to seeing how we build on our values—from the early Brethren statements on slavery, to the 1963 call to action in “The Time Is Now to Heal Our Racial Brokenness,” to the call for continued education about the intricacies of intercultural competency and racial awareness in “Separate No More.”

We have an opportunity to build on this legacy in a way that honors our history and the unique ways that the Church of the Brethren continues the work of Jesus . . . peacefully, simply, and together. 

Gimbiya Kettering is director of Intercultural Ministry for the Church of the Brethren, serving on the staff of Congregational Life Ministries. Contact her at gkettering@brethren.org.

An Election Day love feast

Love feast is perhaps the most sacred and treasured of the Brethren ordinances. The very name suggests its purpose, a gathering to celebrate the love we have for one another. Such a ritual is always needed “where two or three are gathered” (Matt. 18:20), for just as surely as God is present among us when we gather together, so too is the possibility of conflict.



TIM HEISHMAN

The 2016 election season was painful, raw, and emotional. It was in that season of division that staff at Brethren Woods Camp and Retreat Center (Keezletown, Va.) sensed a call to bring people together. After all, if the people of God cannot find any unity under which to gather, then what hope is there for the world? If those who follow the Prince of Peace cannot wash one another’s feet, then who will?

Participants were invited to gather after the polls closed on Election Day. Whether they voted Democrat, Republican, independent, third party, write-in, or not at all, everyone was invited. Glenn Bollinger led the service, which included the traditional feetwashing, fellowship meal, and communion. People from all across Shenandoah District

took the time to gather to make one choice together, the important choice of unity in Christ.

Where do we go from here? Love feast cannot just be a one-time event, and it cannot be limited to just one district. An “Election Day love feast” is a choice we must make every day.

At times in our history, Brethren elders would go door to door visiting members of their congregation to see if there was any dissension among them. I’m not advocating for a return to the annual visit, but there is something to be said for the seriousness with which our Brethren ancestors maintained their relationships with one another. Sometimes, love feast would even be postponed until disagreements could be worked out!

We always will have disagreements with one another in the church, but if we can continue to wash one another’s feet—literally and metaphorically—then the church will continue to be the light of the world.

I can’t help but be overcome by the vision of what is possible if Christians have the reputation of being the folk who made different choices in the voting booth on Election Day, but still washed one another’s feet all year long. As we sing, “They will know we are Christians by our love,” may this be said far and wide about the Church of the Brethren. **W**

Tim Heishman and his wife, Katie, are program directors at Brethren Woods in Keezletown, Va.

THE 2016 ELECTION SEASON WAS PAINFUL, RAW, AND EMOTIONAL. IT WAS IN THAT SEASON OF DIVISION THAT STAFF . . . SENSED A CALL TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER.



Memorable

Some stories for Black History Month

The following stories commemorate just a few of the African-American leaders in the Church of the Brethren over the centuries. These stories are gleaned from the Brethren Encyclopedia and past issues of MESSENGER, among other sources. (The four-volume Brethren Encyclopedia is available from Brethren Press, call 800-441-3712 or go to www.BrethrenPress.com and click on the link for “Heritage” resources.) —Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

John T. Lewis

Mark Twain called him “the most picturesque of men” and “an implacable Dunker-Baptist.” He was one of the few black members of the Brethren in the years before the Civil War, having united with the Pipe Creek congregation in Maryland

in 1853 when he was 18 years old.

Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain) had many reasons to admire Lewis, his friend for more than 30 years. Lewis had served as coachman for Clemens’ father-in-law and later was a tenant farmer at Quarry Farm near Elmira, N.Y., where the famous writer spent many summers. On Aug. 23, 1877, Lewis saved the lives of Clemens’ sister-in-law, Ida Langdon, her young daughter Julia, and Nora, a nurse, when a runaway horse carried their carriage dangerously downhill toward a turn in the road. Clemens, in a letter to his friend, William Dean Howells, described how Lewis, who was coming up the hill with a load of manure, “gathered his vast strength and . . . seized the gray horse’s bit as he plunged by and fetched him up standing!”

Lewis, in preparing his own obituary, observed that he had long been cut off from the church, but he wrote, “I have tried to be faithful to the New testament and order of the Brethren.” —Kenneth I. Morse

...

Samuel Weir

Samuel Weir was born a slave in Bath County, Va., on April 15, 1812 and grew up in Botetourt County. He was the son of James and Lucy Bird Weir. At age 12 he was sold to Andrew McClure, who freed him in 1843 when McClure joined a Brethren congregation in Botetourt County. Weir requested baptism a few months later. Virginia law required slaves who had been freed to leave the state within one year. With the help of B.F. Moomaw, Weir made his way to Ohio, where he became a

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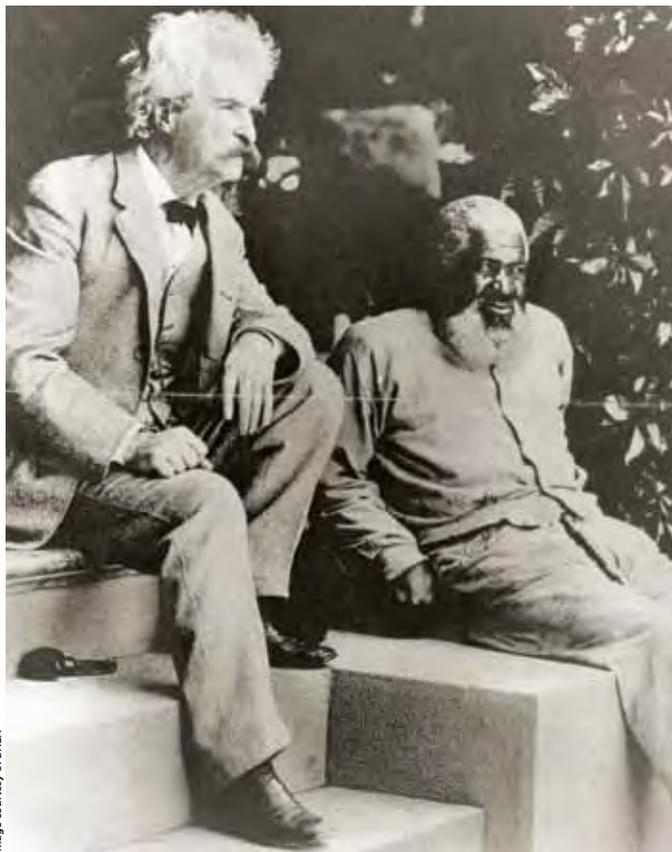


Image courtesy of BHLA



member of the Painter Creek congregation and lived with William Bryant. He began to learn to read and write from Bryant's granddaughter, Catherine Long. He continued his education through studies with Jacob Emmings, a black Baptist minister in Highland County. During this time (1845-46), Weir was denied admission to Brethren fellowships in Highland County.

In 1849 Weir returned to Ross County, Ohio. At a meeting at the Bush meetinghouse in the Paint Creek congregation, he was permitted to preach. As a result, Weir was licensed to ministry among blacks in the area.

It was not until 1865, after 16 years of ministry, that he had his first black converts, Harvey and Martha Carter, and a church was formed. Known as the Frankfort Colored Church, the congregation was never large but it led to the formation of another black congregation at Circleville, Ohio.

In 1872 Weir was elected a minister in the Fairview congregation. On Feb. 9, 1881, he was ordained an elder for Black members in the Scioto Valley. During the same service, Harvey Carter, Weir's first black convert, was elected to the ministry. Weir gave his house and lot to the church to be used for ministry to blacks and died penniless after a protracted illness on March 15, 1884.

Harvey Carter and James May were elected ministers and continued Weir's work in the Scioto Valley after 1884. The Circleville church became a white congregation in 1907; the

Frankfort congregation disbanded in 1917. Another concentration of black Brethren lived near Jeffersonville, Ohio, with Wiley Dolby as their minister. Southern Ohio was the most active area of Brethren work with blacks following the Civil War. —Stephen Breck Reid and John W. Lowe, Jr.



Martha Cunningham Dolby

Born Oct. 28, 1878, in Cottage Grove, Ind., Mattie Cunningham's parents were both German Baptist Brethren; she was baptized when she was 16. She graduated from high school in 1899 and spent 1900-1903 in the Bible Department at Manchester College. In 1903 Cunningham and James and Susan May were sent by the General Mission Board of the Church of the Brethren to establish a church among the black people in Palestine, Ark. Mattie's father, Richard Cunningham, had contributed funds for a mission in the South. Mattie Cunningham established a Sunday school for the children. Her letters reflect her commitment to the people. She wrote, "It has long been proven that we can be somebody if we only have an opportunity." Ill health resulting from malaria forced Cunningham to leave Arkansas in 1906.

She returned to southern Ohio and worked among the black churches there. In 1907 she married Newton Dolby. That same year Mattie and Newton Dolby were installed as deacons in the Frankfort congregation. On Dec. 30, 1911, Mattie Dolby was installed into the ministry, one of the first women to become a minister in the Church of the Brethren.

Six children were born to the Dolbys, who spent the years





of their marriage in Ohio and at Mt. Morris, Ill.

After their move to Urbana, Ohio, in 1917, the family attended the Springfield congregation. Though 12 miles away, it was the closest Church of the Brethren congregation. Then in 1924 a new administration there asked them to find a church closer to their home. Racial prejudice was the motive, as the Dolby children remembered. The family then joined the Methodist Church, where Mattie ministered for nine years. From 1936 until her death Oct. 21, 1956, she served as the first resident minister of the Church of God in Urbana. She is buried next to her husband, who died in 1926, at Oak Dale Cemetery in Urbana. —Pamela Brubaker

the National Council of Churches. Bill Hayes died on Aug. 21, 1993, age 65.

Excerpts from the moderator's profile by Don Fitzkee in the June 1988 MESSENGER:

Born and raised a Baptist in South Bend, Ind., Bill [was] the youngest of four children. His parents separated when Bill was four, leaving his mother to support the children on the meager wages she earned as a domestic worker.

Despite their poverty Bill became the first in his family to go to college, graduating from what is now the University of Indianapolis, a United Methodist-affiliated school. While there he began to feel called to ministry.

After earning his degree at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Bill had trouble finding placement with the American Baptist Churches, and turned to the United Church of Christ instead.

After a one-year stint in Brooklyn, N.Y., Bill pastored a UCC congregation in Buffalo for 12 years. From there, he moved on to Kansas City, Mo., to serve as administrative director of St. Mark's Church, the nation's first ecumenical church to unite Protestants and Roman Catholics in a single congregation. After four enjoyable years there, Bill, his wife, Vera, and daughter, Eileen, moved to Columbia, Md., in 1972.

In their search for the nearest UCC congregation they stumbled upon the Oakland Mills Uniting church, a congregation jointly affiliated with the Church of the Brethren and the UCC. He met other Brethren through his work with Internet, an experimental, ecumenical interfaith seminary in Washington, D.C., where he served as vice president for five and a half years.

In addition to his seminary responsibilities, Bill filled in as

“WHAT I FOUND,” SAID HAYES, “WAS A GROUP OF HEARTY SOULS, PEOPLE WHO WERE REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH.”

William A. Hayes

William (Bill) Hayes was the first African-American moderator of Annual Conference. He served as pastor of First Church of the Brethren in Baltimore, Md., from 1977 until he retired in 1992. He died at age 65 on Aug. 21, 1993. Over the years of his ministry, he held numerous leadership positions in the denomination in addition to the highest elected office of moderator. He was a member of the former General Board, chair of the board's Parish Ministries Commission, chair of an advisory committee on issues of concern for black church members, and was elected as a Brethren representative to

a preacher at Baltimore First Church of the Brethren. In the summer of 1977, about the same time Internet “closed gracefully,” unable to make it financially, Baltimore First was again in need of a pastor.

By the time Bill arrived, membership and morale had hit rock bottom. Members, most of whom were white, found themselves in a neighborhood that had become mostly black. Some thought it was time to move; others wanted to stay and reach out to the community. Those who wanted to stay won out. Many of the others left.

“What I found,” said Hayes, “was a group of hearty souls,



people who were really serious about their commitment to the church. When they called a black pastor—which was really a bold step—they were saying, ‘We want to move aggressively into this neighborhood.’”

•••

Belita D. Mitchell

The first African-American woman to be ordained in the Church of the Brethren also is the first black woman to lead Annual Conference: Belita D. Mitchell, pastor of First Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa.

She served as Conference moderator in 2007, and since then has been a popular preacher and speaker at various events across the denomination. Being “prayed up” was a theme of her leadership as moderator. Another theme was developing the diversity of the denomination.

Mitchell made themes of diversity “a cornerstone of her year as moderator, particularly in regards to building a more cross-cultural and ethnically rich church,” said a MESSENGER profile by then-editor Walt Wiltschek, published in June 2007. “She acknowledges that issues of race and inclusion can be complex and difficult ones, finding ways to appreciate difference without dwelling on it. Then again, she observes

that even people who marry into the church or enter in other ways can feel like they’re outsiders if they’re not long-time Brethren, regardless of race.”

Mitchell told Wiltschek: “I hope that as we have more underrepresented ethnic groups and cultures making decisions to be Brethren, that if we connect with them that might be a starting point.”

Witnessing and embodying love

“When violence erupted in cities across the country in 1968, following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago did not escape, nor did the community in which we ministered [First Church of the Brethren on Chicago’s west side]. What is more memorable than the violence was a small group of Christians, black and white, who, on the Sunday following King’s death literally walked past soldiers occupying the steps of the church in an air heavy with the stench of smoke and gunfire—heavy too with hate and hostility. They filed into church to wash each other’s feet, even as they had attempted to wash the feet of the world, and to participate in the love feast and communion service. As they broke bread, fellowshiped, and drank together, washing each other’s feet and embracing, they knew in that moment, so pregnant with meaning, they had been saved from bigotry, the sin of judging others by skin color or by status in life, and were called to a life of love, of giving and forgiving, and to witnessing and embodying that love in such a time as this.”

—Tom Wilson in *Call the Witnesses: Perspectives on Evangelism in the Church of the Brethren* (Paul M. Robinson, ed., Brethren Press, 1974). Wilson, a graduate of Bethany Theological Seminary, pastored First Church of the Brethren in Chicago and was a consultant for church and community involvement for the Church of the Brethren denomination during the late 1960s and early ’70s.



Image courtesy of BETHA

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad has become one of the iconic romantic images of American history. Who doesn't love the

thought of fugitive slaves daring to escape from bondage



ANNA SPEICHER

and being aided by a network of courageous women and men? The topic has generated thousands of books, both nonfiction and fiction. Colson Whitehead's new novel, *The Underground Railroad* (Doubleday, 2016), though, is surely one of a kind.

Whitehead told radio host Terry Gross that the idea for the book came to him in the form of a question: "What

if the Underground Railroad was an actual railroad?"

When you're a kid and you first hear about it in school or whatever, you imagine a literal subway beneath the earth. And then you find out that it's not a literal subway, and you get a bit upset. And so the book took off from that childhood notion. And that's a premise, not that much of a story. So I kept thinking about it. And I thought, well, what if every state our hero went through—as he or she ran North—was a different state of American possibility? So Georgia has one sort of take on America and North Carolina [another]—sort of like Gulliver's Travels.

The Underground Railroad tells the story of Cora, whom we first encounter as a young woman enslaved on a plantation in Georgia. She has no family, and after she successfully defends her small garden plot against a new field hand who wants it for his dog, the black community ostracizes her as well. Then Caesar, another new field hand, asks her to run away with him. She is suspicious of his intentions, but some time after she is brutally beaten for interposing her body between a boy and the master bent on punishing him, she tells Caesar yes. Caesar and Cora flee, knowing that they have just a small window of time before the master sets men and dogs on their trail.

The first stop on their freedom train is South Carolina. Here, and in every subsequent stop, we see that these places really are "states of possibility" (although often not happy possibilities) not geographical locations. In contrast to the real antebellum South Carolina, Cora and Caesar find an institution

that takes them in, provides them with food, lodging, education, and employment. Too good to be true? Well, yes.

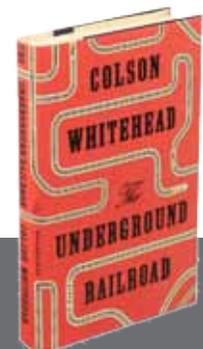
The cracks in this philanthropic project start to become evident when Cora begins to work in the Museum of Natural Wonders. She is part of a living exhibit, playing a slave in a sanitized version of American history. Cora is also encouraged to be sterilized by a doctor who tells her that this is a way for her to control her destiny. And she discovers that the hospital that had given such excellent care to her and other black residents was allowing men to contract syphilis—which researchers then observed rather than treated.

The ingenuity in Whitehead's treatment is that although none of these elements existed in historical South Carolina, all of them have been part of the fabric of American history in different times and places. Living exhibits of native peoples were, for example, on display at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Coerced sterilization programs targeting African Americans have been well documented. Between 1932 and 1972, researchers at Tuskegee University conducted a syphilis experiment similar to the one described above.

Similar stops in the book describe other realms of possibility. Throughout, Cora encounters some of the worst of human behavior. And yet, she also meets people who are noble, giving, and loving. She herself remains resilient and determined through all the hardships she encounters.

As we travel with Cora, we cheer her successes and grieve her losses. In the end, the book is a success in three important ways. First, Whitehead tells an engaging and occasionally heart-stopping story of enslavement and liberation, hope and despair. Second, his characters and dialogue are realistically rendered, faithful to the spirit of the times. Finally, his work has staying power because he calls his readers to consider how themes of exploitation, abuse, perseverance, and love have been part of the African-American experience throughout time and continue to be relevant today. 

Anna Speicher is an independent scholar who earned her Ph.D. in American Studies from George Washington University. Her book, *The Religious World of Antislavery Women: Spirituality in the Lives of Five Abolitionist Lecturers* (Syracuse University Press, 2000), explores the relationship of faith to social activism in the lives of some 19th-century women abolitionists. She is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Underground Railroad*. Originally published: August 2, 2016. Author: Colson Whitehead.

Page count: 320. Publisher: Doubleday. Winner of National Book Award for Fiction in 2016.



Tutor Brock Ashford working with children in mobile lab.

A vision for transformation

Rockford's mobile labs project

Story and photos by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

This has become one of the unifying ministries in the city," said Samuel Sarpiya, pastor of Rockford (Ill.) Community Church of the Brethren and moderator-elect of Annual Conference, showing off a mobile lab housing activities for children and youth.

The mobile lab—a renovated RV donated by the Rockford police department—was parked in what Sarpiya described as a “hot spot” for gang violence in the city. But the mobile lab was offering something entirely different.

“How possible would it be to have every child have access to computers and graphic design, make it mobile and accessible, or even music recording?” Sarpiya said. That’s the vision for the mobile lab project sponsored by the Rockford church in partnership with the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation.

The congregation began work on the project after the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Mo., looking “for ways to avert such from happening in Rockford, knowing that back in 2009 we had a similar incident,” said a church statement in 2015. The congregation already was working with the Rock-

ford police to build a healthy and positive community/policing relationship. The mobile lab project launched with the idea that it would become a safe place for young people caught in cycles of violence to be trained in nonviolence and conflict response, and to use their creative skills and talents.

The initiative quickly gained traction within the black community as well as the wider community in Rockford, and has been supported by the police department, city officials, and business leaders. Now, more than a year later, it is an independent nonprofit with its own staff,



Samuel Sarpiya chats with a neighborhood girl in the mobile lab.



Left: Music coach Gus Hall working with kids. Right: Samuel Sarpiya with Antar Baker and a youth. Below: Tutor Ariel Haugabook working with children in mobile lab.

raising its own funding, and Sarpiya has been honored with Rockford's "Jane Addams Peace Award" for his leadership of this and other efforts.

The project has two mobile labs up and running, with hopes to soon commission a third. When the weather gets too cold for an RV to be comfortable, the Booker T. Washington Community Center is lending its computer lab to the project. This winter the lab will be newly outfitted with upgraded computers that have been donated by local businesses, thanks to Sarpiya's persuasive skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

Children and youth who participate in the labs' after-school and summer programming learn computer literacy and skills such as coding and programming, graphic and web design, and app development. They create videos and post them online. They make art, learning painting and drawing. They compose music, sing and play keyboards, and drum in



the Mobile Recording Studio that is offered alongside the tutoring that staff and volunteers provide.

Sarpiya envisions the mobile labs as "incubators for transformation." Spending an afternoon in one of the labs, observing interactions of tutors and children, it is clear the emphasis is on creativity and free exploration of gifts and talents, just as much as on learning and peacemaking.

At one lab, two tutors—Ariel Haugabook and Brock Ashford—worked with several children on computers in a central room of the RV. Haugabook works full-time with the project as a computer instructor, with responsibility for the computer set up in the lab, and this winter in the Booker T. Washington Community Center. He was already in conversation with Sarpiya and Antar Baker, director of the center,

about the needs for the indoor computer room once cold weather set in.

In another small room in the RV, music coach Gus Hall played keyboard as a cluster of small boys sang into microphones and played along on a second keyboard and a set of conga drums. Hall explained that one mobile lab is focused on computer skills and music making, while the other is focused on art, painting, and drawing.

He commented about the importance of the work with younger children. "If you catch them now, it gives them a new perspective," he said. "We're making our own music. Just doing this gives the kids a sense of hope."

Hall said the mobile labs serve hundreds of children and youth. Some days, they have to limit children to 10 minutes each in the lab because of the heavy demand. Sarpiya put the number of children and youth involved just this past summer at some 2,600.

A conversation was interrupted by a girl who asked Sarpiya and Baker to join her outside the lab to make a short video. She used a tablet to film a video promotion for the 100th year of the Booker T. Washington Community Center—which Sarpiya explained is one of the few black-owned community organizations in town.

Baker led a quick tour of the center, which he said is experiencing a revitalization. He seemed very happy with the cooperative work the center is doing together with the mobile labs.

"We are constantly doing new things," Sarpiya said, as we ended the tour in the computer room, and he began to assess the needs for the winter. Before staff pulled him aside to begin more planning, he added that his hope is to intentionally work himself out of a job by continuing to develop the project into a fully independent operation.

A core group of 12 people currently work on the project, some as full-time staff, some as volunteers. One of them, treasurer Ellynn Ahmer, had just secured a \$10,000 grant. Another woman, Bessie Alberty, paused in the midst of a conversation about next steps to express her excitement with the way children and youth are responding.

"The kids just love it," she said. "They just love being involved, and it represents new opportunities for them. In everything we do, we underscore principles of non-violence, team work, character building." 

When the doors of hope open up

Brethren assistance to Armenians 1917-1920

by Marlin Heckman

Near East Foundation / Wikipedia commons



Armenian woman with her children in a field near Aleppo.

Stanley E. Kerr, from "The Lions of Marash," provided to MESSENGER by Frank Ramirez



Between 1915 and 1923, one and a half million Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turkey, and the remaining Armenians were forced to flee from their homeland. The attention of the world was drawn to the plight of thousands of Armenian refugees and orphans. This has become known as the Armenian Genocide.

American Board of Missions and Near East Relief personnel remaining in Marash after the battle of January 1920, during the Armenian Genocide, included Church of the Brethren mission worker Evelyn Trostle (fourth from left). Trostle was a former professor at McPherson (Kan.) College who decided to stay in Marash despite the fact that the French Army was leaving. She went on to stand her ground at an orphanage, protecting children under her care, while the massacres that marked the genocide took place all around.

A voice for the voiceless by Archbishop Vicken Aykazian

I have always admired the work of the Church of the Brethren. For centuries, you have pursued justice and peace and defended the weak and powerless. Truly the Church of the Brethren has been the voice of the voiceless.

To illustrate my conviction, allow me to refer to an example that occurred just before the outbreak of the first World War, on Aug. 6, 1914, when one of the best theologians of the 20th century named Harnack, a German, was lecturing to his class of 600 students training to be theologians and pastors. During his lecture, he urged and encouraged them to become soldiers to fight for Germany.

At the same time on the other side of the ocean, a church called the Church of the Brethren was appealing to the American people to donate funds for relief efforts to benefit the Armenian people being massacred in the Ottoman Empire.

This is the Church of the Brethren that I have come to greet wholeheartedly today. I have admired and commend you in your unwavering pursuit of peace and human dignity.

Today I come here as an Armenian, as a representative of the Armenian church, to thank you on behalf of one and a half million victims of the first genocide of the 20th century, for what you did about 100 years ago for my people. I came here to express my gratitude to you for changing your bylaws in order to be able to help my people in Armenia.

May our shared history always be a light to a world desperately in need of examples of peace and love. And may our common devotion to the risen Lord Jesus Christ always be the foundation of our profound friendship.

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America gave this address to the 2010 Annual Conference held in Pittsburgh, Pa.



Photo courtesy of Wendy McFadden

Adolf Harnack was a German theologian, church historian, and professor. Following Germany's 1914 invasion of Belgium, Harnack signed "The Manifesto of the 93," expressing support for Germany's war efforts. Excerpts include:

It is not true that Germany is guilty of having caused this war ... Germany did her utmost to prevent it ...

It is not true that we trespassed in neutral Belgium. It has been proved that France and England had resolved on such a trespass....It would have been suicide on our part not to have preempted this.

It is not true that our warfare pays no respect to international laws. It knows no indiscriminate cruelty. But in the east the earth is saturated with the blood of women and children unmercifully butchered by the wild Russian troops....Those who ... present such a shameful scene to the world as that of inciting Mongolians and negroes against the white race, have no right whatever to call themselves upholders of civilization.

How could a Christian leader justify a brutal war effort? It seems that Harnack believed German civilization and Christianity were so entwined that an assault on the one was an assault on the other. In addition, he seemingly felt truth itself—not to mention the white race—to be under attack.

— Jan Fischer Bachman

A concern was expressed to the Standing Committee of the 1917 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, meeting in Wichita, Kan., concerning the suffering of the Armenian refugees and orphans. The Standing Committee referred the issue to the delegate body of the Annual Conference. It voted to set aside existing guidelines for missions in foreign lands in order to provide funding and support for the Armenian people. It was further suggested that delegates take the matter to their local congregations for the possibility of raising funds for this need.

Many Brethren probably did not know that Armenia had been a Christian nation in the Near East for centuries. But when the Brethren heard of the need for funds to help refugees and orphans, their hearts were opened. Between 1917 and 1921, the Church of the Brethren—then about 115,000 members—contributed \$267,000 to Armenian relief efforts. That would amount to about \$4,227,000 in 2016 dollars.

Former general secretary Stanley J. Noffsinger has written, "In a time when many question the relevance and vitality of the church in the United States, I want to shout from the highest hill: 'Thanks be to God for the generosity, compassion, and love the Brethren have shown for the people of good faith in Nigeria—just as they did 100 years ago for and with the Armenian people.'"

In a MESSANGER article in April 1981 Richard Keeler wrote, "A familiar saying among the Armenian people is 'Yerpor Patzwin Toornern Hooso,' which translates, 'When the doors of hope open up.'" During and immediately following World War I, the Brethren played an important role in opening up the doors of hope for the Armenian people. 

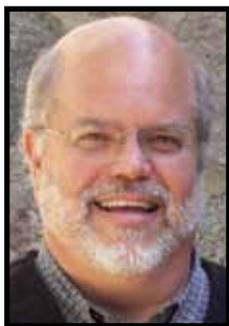
Marlin L. Heckman is a member of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, and a former librarian and archivist at the University of La Verne. He has served on the denomination's historical committee and on Standing Committee.



Service and simplicity

A conversation with the Brethren Volunteer Service and workcamp team

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford from the Messenger editorial team sat down with the staff and volunteers who work together in the office of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) and the Workcamp Ministry to talk about service and simplicity—two foundational Brethren values. In the group were staff Dan McFadden, Jocelyn Snyder, and Emily Tyler, and BVSers Elizabeth Batten, Deanna Beckner, and Shelley Weachter. Here is a taste of the conversation:



DAN MCFADDEN

Dan: When BVS orientations went “on the road” in the early ’70s [previously they were held at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.], they started cooking for themselves. We’ve followed the same practice over the years, giving orientation units an amount of money per person that forces simplicity in our meals. Not without frustration, not without complaint! It is a very good learning experience. It forces groups to work together, and it levels the playing field. We can have PhDs and high school graduates and people who are over 65 and people who haven’t cooked before in the same group, forced to put together a meal for \$1 per person, per meal, per day. They’re not elaborate meals. They are oftentimes one-item meals. Generally speaking, they’re pretty healthy. Not everybody enjoys them, but overall I think they’re pretty good



EMILY TYLER

Emily: After BVS orientation I realized it’s so much cheaper not to buy meat! That was something I learned really quickly in BVS.

Deanna: Living simply has helped me to shift my mindset and be more thankful for what I have. BVSers don’t make a lot of money—a \$100-a-month stipend, and mine’s up a little bit from that because I’m in my second year—and it forces you to look at the things that are provided for you and the things that you do have and realize that’s more than enough. I make less now than I did in college, but here your utilities are paid, your transportation is paid, not having to pay the rent and everything, it balances out. You’re living more intentionally because that’s the nature of volunteer service. You have to be more frugal, keep a budget, make sure you know what you’re spending your money on. It’s good preparation for the future and life in general.

Elizabeth: Realize what you need instead of what you want. We need to buy food. Does it have to be fancy-shmancy? No. Do I need a new pair of shoes more than a couple times a year? No. But do I want them? Yeah. BVS teaches you to realize the difference between the two. It makes you really think and be conscious of what you spend your money towards.

Shelley: BVS has taught me to be more creative with my resources.



DEANNA BECKNER



ELIZABETH BATTEN



SHELLEY WEACHTER

THERE JUST WASN'T A LOT OF ENTERTAINMENT. YOU SPENT MORE TIME WITH PEOPLE. RELATIONSHIPS WERE IMPORTANT AND TOOK PRIORITY.

Instead of using something I buy for just one thing, I think about how something I buy can stretch farther.

Jocelyn: In South Sudan when I was in BVS, it was easy to live simply because there wasn't electricity, so you couldn't watch TV. There just wasn't a lot of entertainment. You spent more time with people. Relationships were important and took priority. There were four of us who were friends, and once a week we would all go and share a meal. One friend would always order for everyone, and we would share a big plate. You would never know what you were going to eat, but it was something we looked forward to, just to be able to sit and share food together.

Dan: In BVS orientation there are a number of things we do to encourage simplicity. We try to encourage people to pack light, people share rooms, we might be in a camp setting—but the thing you always think about is food. I even



JOCELYN SNYDER

talk with the volunteers about the fact that we do not always have quite enough for everybody to be filled up. I have two reactions to that, myself. First, that it's fine if you're a little hungry after a meal because many in the world who are poor might have that sensation of not being filled up, and [here in the United States] we're so used to eating beyond what we need that we really pack it in. Second, I figure some volunteers are going to call their families and say, "Mom, they're not feeding me enough!" So I also have that reaction as a parent, and ask, "Did you get enough to eat? Are you still hungry?" It's challenging as one of the leaders of BVS to feel we may not be giving people enough food. Food is one of the basic necessities and so that change is what people notice the most at orientation—it can be pretty dramatic.

Jocelyn: [A volunteer at a recent orientation] had heard about the food and so she brought half of her suitcase filled with snacks, candy, and chips. This is what she brought from Germany. You laugh, but she showed it to me. I asked, "Why do you have so much candy?" She said, "I love candy." That was what was important to her.

What is simple living?

Dan: I think of it as a mindset or an attitude, an approach to a lot of different things that you do.

Emily: Thinking about what you need, what really fulfills you or is meaningful to you.

Deanna: Making conscious

decisions and living within your means.

Jocelyn: Investing in what's important to you.

Elizabeth: Investing in what you need versus what you might want, and knowing the difference

between the two—and if you really want something seeing how that would fit into your life.

Shelley: Not living in excess and being grateful for the things that you have, even if they're not the best things; making that a lifestyle.

AS A GROUP LIVING IN COMMUNITY, IT HELPS YOU TO LEAN ON EACH OTHER, USE EACH OTHER'S STRENGTHS, AND BALANCE OUT EACH OTHER'S LIVES.

Dan: We've seen that increase in the last couple of years, that volunteers will buy snacks or bring snacks. This fall I saw for the first time volunteers at the grocery store buying more food for themselves, which we would generally discourage.

Elizabeth: They went and bought a bunch of snacks, and then one night one person said they would share their snacks. And somebody else brought their snacks, too. It was like everyone pulled out all their snacks for this big snack fest.

Dan: It was "stone snack" instead of "Stone Soup"!

Emily: As a BVSer I was aware of free entertainment, ways I could have fun without spending money. On the weekends, a train ride into the city was \$7. For \$7 you could go into the city for a day, and there's tons of free stuff to do. Even just walking around, that's a whole Saturday right there full of entertainment. I'm from a small town in Kansas, and I was so amazed by the city.

Dan: By the time BVSeers come to their mid-year retreat, we have a session about life after BVS. There's this desire to hold onto what they've learned, and there's a sense that they're working with organizations that are important. These are not-for-profit organizations. Their work has a focus, it has value, it has meaning, and a particular goal. Volunteers have this uneasiness about how to maintain that sense of meaning when they leave BVS. I've heard the question, "How can I hold onto the values I've learned?"

Deanna: In BVS you're around like-minded people, and you grow in those understandings and lifestyles. We're all in community, even just as a community of Brethren Volunteer Service workers. Having BVSeers to talk to and have common experiences with is special, and you can take that with you and reconnect later. It helps you remember those things that you've learned.

Emily: That relational aspect of BVS is an awareness of "other." There's somebody else in the world that you affect other than yourself. You learn things, like that eating beef makes a larger footprint on the earth. That larger awareness has really stuck with me.

Dan: In our BVS placement sites we would encourage people to connect with the community, and with the people around them. That takes a little more work these days because we're so often on a device—and this includes me. Our hope would be that in BVS, simplicity allows for making connections and relationships.

Emily: In mission work and service work, it's important

that you know where you are and what the community actually needs, instead of coming in and saying, "This is what you need." That's not helpful! Within service is community. They are so necessary to each other.

Deanna: As a group living in community, it helps you to lean on each other, use each other's strengths, and balance out each other's lives. Make everything a little better. Even at workcamps you all work together. Community and relationships make it more meaningful, they give you the heart in service. Actually, they help you remember the experience for longer, because of those connections.

Shelley: On a personal level, I find myself being more creative with my clothes because the majority of my wardrobe is in Virginia—like wearing this sweater with five different shirts that I normally wouldn't wear it with when I was back home, or getting one pair of brown shoes and wearing them with everything. Thinking, "How many ways can I use this one item before I commit to buying it?" A unique scenario to me is that I'm getting married next year and I'm trying to plan a wedding, while having ideas of simplicity. There is a lot of tension between the world of weddings, with all the "needs" and waste that accompany that, and the idea of simplicity. I struggle with the way weddings are "supposed" to be, and I frankly don't want to take part in a traditional wedding. I'm trying to find ways of doing things that are more cost efficient and earth friendly. I think my views have changed since I've been in BVS. There's more friction with the lifestyle that everyone's expecting.

Elizabeth: It's interesting that all the things we've learned about living simply in BVS carry that tension. I remember going to the grocery store with my mom, and saying, "We don't need this thing. We can make do with something else instead." She said, "It's fine. We can buy it." And I said, "No, it's expensive. We don't need it." Then we had a conversation about it, because she was open to listening. It's interesting having conversations with people now, with a shift in view toward simplicity and what that means.

Dan: It's a healthy tension. I don't mean to imply that the tension is simple or easy. If the tension is with family it can be really painful. Our culture's level of extravagance can be pretty high, and to work at changing that can be really challenging. But if some of that tension is influenced by BVS, I cheer it! 🙌

Find out more about Brethren Volunteer Service at www.brethren.org/bvs. Find out more about the Workcamp Ministry at www.brethren.org/workcamps.

Dear fellow BVSer...

by Stephanie Barras



You are reading this because you have made a commitment to offer yourself and your time with the belief that you will be making a difference through Brethren Volunteer Service. Ask yourself over and over why you have chosen this path, for it will surely benefit you to remind yourself why. When the mundane and the unexpected arise and steal your motivation and energy and enthusiasm, your reasons for coming here are your way to revive your purpose as well as your energy and get you through the tough times. Although your reasons may change during your experiences, they do somehow provide insight since they are what led you to your decision in the first place.

From the start, I had three reasons for choosing this path: my enthusiasm for and fascination with language and desire to learn one, my belief in the strength and importance of interculturalism (in the beginning it was more of just a curiosity about cultures and a belief that individual uniqueness is very valuable), and a wish to take on what I knew would be a great challenge for me. I hoped it would push me to change, inside and out. Throughout my time here at the youth center at OKC Abrašević in Mostar,

Bosnia-Herzegovina, I have never been more greatly challenged nor experienced so much growth.

This youth cultural center run by youth is an environment of non-stop change and development, a working group of people who each have a role but in the end share the load to the extent in which they can. The work pace and style is nothing close to that of our American culture—our non-stop “go-go-go” environment in which we live by the clock and schedules and endless deadlines just sounds stressful compared to the “drinking coffee slowly with good conversation before work” environment here.

I had come here with no previous experience in anything specific that was needed at Abrašević. I was drawn to the center because of its mission and because I love environments promoting culture and environments of a minority group (a community of outsiders). I knew that it would be a challenge for me because it lacks that structure in which expectations are laid out for a specific role. I wanted to develop the ability to work independently, something that I find difficult. Other skills I needed to work on and develop included flexibility and adaptability. This position pushed me to choose to either commit to changing, growing, and making something of myself, or simply give up. I chose the former.

Self-development is a life-long process. I know it is a cliché to say that life is a journey, but because it is so true it is important to remind ourselves of that fact. I am still learning, growing, and changing because that is what one does throughout a journey. So . . . if you choose Abrašević, or another BVS project, you will create your own experience. It will be helpful to accept that there will always be challenges. Through your time in BVS, embrace the journey. Although there will be moments when you are misunderstood or feel alienated, you will be enlightened, humbled, grateful, and above all, changed. 

Stephanie Barras wrote this as she was completing her third and final year of volunteering at the OKC Abrašević Youth Cultural Center in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina. She currently is living in Indianapolis. This article was first published in May 2016 in “Sharing BVS.”



On the way to destruction

by Bob Bowman

Balaam's donkey deserves a place in the Donkey Hall of Fame. According to the story in Numbers 22, Balaam set out on his donkey on a mission contrary to the will of God. He hadn't gone far before a threatening angel stood on the path blocking him. The donkey saw the angel and, wisely, stepped off the path to reroute Balaam. Balaam, however, did not see the angel, so he whacked the donkey with his staff.

A bit later, the donkey saw the angel standing in the path again. This time the donkey was going between two walls, and as she tried to squeeze past the angel, Balaam's foot scraped against a rock. He took his staff and gave the donkey another wallop.

The dangerous angel appeared a third time. The donkey was in a place too narrow to turn around and too narrow to squeeze past. There was nothing she could do to protect Balaam except simply to lie down. So she did. Balaam, still not aware of the angel, became furious. He picked up his

staff and began to thresh away at the donkey.

That's when Balaam's donkey earned her place in the list of famous donkeys. She spoke to Balaam: "What did I ever do to you? Why did you beat me these three times?"

It is a wonder that the donkey spoke. It was, perhaps, a greater marvel that Balaam never noticed it was a wonder.

Talking donkeys are really strange. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner called this "the lollapalooza grand-daddy of all the off-the-wall Bible stories. It's so preposterous it makes splitting the Red Sea look like child's play." Is it simply a fable, or is it factual history? One theologian said that most of the year Balaam's talking donkey may be a mere fairy tale. But when it is read in worship with the gathered community as scripture, then it not just a fairy tale. Then it speaks to us out of the open Bible. Then something is communicated to us if we are able to honor the hour of worship by opening our ears.

Another strange wonder in this story is the dangerous angel. When Balaam's eyes were finally opened he, too,

SOMETIMES I WONDER HOW MUCH IN THE WORLD OF NATURE IS IGNORED OR BEATEN WHEN IT IS ONLY TRYING TO WARN US OF THREATENING ANGELS.

saw an angel standing there with sword in hand. The angel asked him why he had thrashed his donkey. “That donkey saved your life three times, and yet you tried to beat the living daylights out of her.” The angel was a symbol of the fact that if Balaam continued the way he was going, it would end in death and destruction.

Where was Balaam going? Balaam was a hired gun in a Western movie. The king of Moab wanted to defeat the Israelites who were coming up from Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. But he felt he could not defeat them with the current condition of his military force. He needed something extra, something that would be absolutely devastating. That is where Balaam comes in. Balaam had a reputation for being able to lay on curses that really worked. If true, it would be the ultimate weapon. It was the mustard gas of the First World War, the atomic bomb of the Second World War.

Balaam, as any good person would, first asked God whether he should accept the assignment from the king

of Moab. God’s answer was clear and concise. “Don’t do it. Don’t lay your curses on the people. They are blessed.” Later, when Balaam was asked a second time to come and curse the Israelites, Balaam told the king’s emissaries to wait and he’d ask God again.

Why did Balaam need to check with God the second time? Am I merely being cynical to ask? If Balaam knew it was wrong to act as the king of Moab’s ultimate weapon, why would he think the mind of God had changed? If I am suspicious of Balaam’s motives, then so is the New Testament. Balaam “loved the wages of doing wrong” (2 Peter 2:15). Perhaps it was the “house full of silver and gold” that persuaded him. Perhaps it was a matter of honor or a desire to keep his reputation intact.

When Balaam asked God a second time, he was told, “Go if you must, but only do what is right.” So Balaam went. That’s when the donkey helped him see the danger of his choice. Balaam is no longer interested in knowing God’s will. He is seeking to influence it. Or to circumvent it. Perhaps he wanted to see how far he could go in the wrong direction before God got angry.

Balaam is not the only one who fails to listen to a message from the natural world. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote about the world being filled with heaven and every common bush ablaze with God. Only those who see take off their shoes, she said, while “the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.” Sometimes I wonder how much in the world of nature is ignored or beaten when it is only trying to warn us of threatening angels. What are melting glaciers and endangered species trying to tell us?

Dangerous angels still stand in the pathways of our world. They warn those who have eyes to see that, if we keep going the direction we are going, there will be death and destruction at the end. Singer Bill Mallonee in his song, “Balaam’s Ass” from album *Blister Soul*, says, “I will bind myself to the truth and speak it like Balaam’s ass once more. . . . Life boats are burning!” 

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

Hacksaw Ridge

knew if I ever once compromised, I was gonna be in trouble,” said Desmond Doss, “because if you can compromise once, you can compromise again.”

It wasn't long before the death of Desmond Doss on March 23, 2006, that I had the chance to speak with the Congressional Medal of Honor winner by telephone while interviewing Terry Benedict, director of a documentary based upon Doss's life, *The Conscientious Objector*. Having already possessed a lifelong commitment to nonviolence myself, even from my childhood days as a Jehovah's Witness, that brief conversation



RICHARD PROPES

forever changed the way I view my commitment to creating a peaceful world.

I'm not certain, of course, exactly how Doss would feel about *Hacksaw Ridge*, the Mel Gibson-directed feature film based upon his life. Somehow, Gibson is both faithful to Doss's story and yet glorifying of the violence that Doss so committedly shunned and that left him 90 percent disabled at war's end.

His severe injuries were visible reminders of Doss's commitment to his faith and commitment to his fellow man.

Despite being eligible for a deferment and having a religiously grounded opposition to violence, Doss opted to enlist as he felt he could not sit idly by while others fought for his freedom. Doss unwaveringly believed he could both serve his country and remain faithful to his commitment to not kill another human being. Doss was so committed to nonviolence that he refused to hold a gun, train with a gun, or ever consider carrying a gun as a member of the Army Medical Corps—even when his platoon was sent to Okinawa in the perilous battle to climb the Maeda Escarpment, aka Hacksaw Ridge. It was through this battle that Doss would become the first conscientious objector ever to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, having saved approximately 75 lives despite never having picked up a single weapon.

It is worth noting that Doss himself shunned the conscientious objector label, preferring to see himself as a “conscientious collaborator” who was committed to serving in the military but doing so within the framework of his deeply rooted faith as a Seventh Day Adventist.

They say that real pacifism isn't just avoiding conflict, but being at peace amidst the conflict.

Doss lived it and nearly gave his life doing so.

Even if Doss might have issues with the overall tone of *Hacksaw Ridge*, especially the latter half, it's hard to imagine he wouldn't be enthralled by Andrew Garfield's pitch-perfect portrayal of the quiet and humble man whose faith and commitment to nonviolence should be the textbook role model for any true pacifist or peacemaker. Gibson prefers relentless authenticity, and he lives into that with *Hacksaw Ridge*—a film that is at times jarring in its brutality and relentless in its carnage.

As I left the theater, I found the lingering effects of that relentless carnage blurring the line between the brutalities of war and tiny, shimmering lights like that provided by Doss's uncompromising devotion to “Thou shalt not kill,” a scripture seldom taken as seriously as it was by this unassuming man from Lynchburg, Va. In one of the key battlefield scenes, while other men have taken cover to protect themselves Doss can be seen exposing himself to artillery fire while lowering a soldier to safety, then praying aloud, “Lord, give me one more!”—an action and a prayer he would repeat dozens of times before his own body could do no more.

After being pummeled by Gibson's re-creation of the battle, the truth is I felt even more enveloped by that brief conversation with Doss just over 10 years ago. That conversation has served to remind me time and again that I can choose love instead of hate, peace instead of conflict.

Hacksaw Ridge deserves to be mentioned among 2016's finest films and, most assuredly, Garfield's stand-out performance as Doss must be mentioned among the finest performances. It would be as hackneyed and clichéd as the film itself is on occasion, however, to suggest that Gibson has, perhaps, integrated into his own worldview the reality that one can be fully immersed in the world but not of the world. Has that lesson helped him direct this film about a man considered one of America's unlikeliest heroes? **Z**

Richard Propes is a graduate of Bethany Theological Seminary and a member of Northview Church of the Brethren, Indianapolis. He is founder/director of the Tenderness Center, a non-profit dedicated to using the arts to break the cycle of abuse and violence. He is also the author of *The Hallelujah Life*.



ABOUT THE FILM

Title: *Hacksaw Ridge*. Theatrical release: November 2, 2016. Running time: 139 minutes. Director: Mel Gibson. MPAA rating: R (for intense realistically graphic sequences of war violence).

Workcamp in Nigeria helps build church for IDPs

With blue and yellow T-shirts marking the occasion, a group of Brethren from the United States joined Nigerian counterparts in a workcamp with the motto, “Come Let Us Rebuild.” The workcamp was sponsored by the Brethren Evangelical Support Trust (BEST) and Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Nine American Brethren led by Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer traveled to Nigeria for a two-week church construction project Nov. 7-18, 2016.

The Nehemiah Project, EYN’s new emphasis on rebuilding its devastated infrastructure, seeks to recover from years of attacks on its community and the destruction of churches and church properties, estimated at 1,600 worship centers. The project is seeking to initiate a spirit of volunteerism and support from local churches to assist in the construction of churches in communities affected by violence.

The workcamp began construction of a large church in the village of Pegi, on the outskirts of Nigeria’s capital city, Abuja, serving families displaced from the district of Chibok. Along with the American Brethren, members of BEST, EYN leaders including president Joel Billi, and busloads of volunteers from local churches in the Abuja district including the district secretary, joined together to work on the project. The pastor of Pegi and local church members participated daily in the camp.

BEST member Abbas Ali, the architect of the building and

leader of the project, laid the foundation of the church and built toilets so that the site would be ready for workcampers to raise walls and pour lintels. After the two weeks of effort, the workcamp closed with worship and singing, celebrating completion of the walls in preparation for the roofing of the new church.

The Church of the Brethren is partnering in at least three Nigeria workcamps. A second scheduled for January will complete the Pegi building, and a third is scheduled in February. The denomination also is raising funds for church reconstruction to assist Nigerian congregations to rebuild their structures in secure areas. The Nigeria Crisis Fund continues to be the main focus, as a fund to meet the humanitarian needs in Nigeria. For more information go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis.



Creation Care Study Committee invites responses to survey

The Creation Care Study Committee was created at the 2016 Annual Conference in response to a query that challenges the church to respond more fully to two resolutions on climate change (1991 and 2001). The group’s charge is to catalyze action, particularly in relation to transitioning to renewable energy and reducing fossil fuel* usage.

Committee members are: Sharon Yohn, Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.; Duane Deardorff, Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C.; Laura Dell-Haro,

Holmesville (Neb.) Church of the Brethren.

“Our committee believes that action should occur on the denominational, congregational, and individual levels,” said an invitation to fill out the survey. “We are currently in conversation with relevant agencies of the denomination to determine the best course of action. However, at the congregational and individual levels, we feel we need a better understanding of your hopes and limitations, as well as a better understanding of what resources may be valuable to you. After we have some insights

from this survey, we will work toward making those resources available.”

Fill out the survey at <https://goo.gl/forms/kqZk5PsZAt405yqq2>. No information about an individual person or congregation will be published without direct permission. All reported data will be summarized and anonymous.

**Fossil fuels include energy sources such as heating oil, gasoline, coal, natural gas, as well as electricity generated from these sources. Renewable energy sources include wind, solar, hydroelectric, biomass (such as firewood), as well as electricity generated from these sources.*

✓ The Conference Office reminds congregations and districts that there will be no early registration for their Annual Conference delegates in January as in years past. Delegate and non-delegate registration will open online on the same day, March 1. Annual Conference will be held in Grand Rapids, Mich., from June 28 to July 2. More information can be found at www.brethren.org/ac/2017.

Brethren Academy offers Clergy Tax Seminar

The **Clergy Tax Seminar 2017** sponsored by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, the Office of Ministry, and Bethany Seminary is scheduled for Jan. 28. The registration deadline is Jan. 20. Students, pastors, and other church leaders are invited to attend in person at the seminary in Richmond, Ind., or online. Ministers may earn .3 continuing education credits. Sessions will cover tax law for clergy, changes for 2016, and detailed assistance to correctly file the various forms and schedules that pertain to clergy. Cost is \$30. Current Bethany, TRIM, EFSM, and SeBAH students may attend at no cost, although registration is required. Leadership is pro-

vided by Deb Oskin, EA, NTPI Fellow, who has been doing clergy tax returns since 1989. Go to <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/clergy-tax-seminar>.



The Young Adult Steering Committee includes (from left) Renee Neher, Mark Pickens, Amanda McLearn-Montz, Kyle Remnant, Rudy Amaya, and Jessie Houff.

Personnel notes

The Youth and Young Adult Ministry has named a **Young Adult Steering Committee** and a **National Youth Cabinet** for 2017-18.

The Young Adult Steering Committee includes **Rudy Amaya** of Pasadena, Calif.; **Jessie Houff** of Hurleyville, N.Y.; **Amanda McLearn-Montz** of Iowa City, Iowa; **Renee Neher** of Lombard, Ill.; **Kyle Remnant** of Cincinnati, Ohio; and **Mark Pickens** of Harrisburg, Pa. The committee is planning the 2017 Young Adult Conference that takes place May 26-28 at Camp Harmony, Hooversville, Pa.

Members of the 2017-18 National Youth Cabinet are **Hannah Buck** from Mt. Wilson Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District; **Erika Clary**, Brownsville Church of the Brethren, Mid-Atlantic District; **Emilie Deffenbaugh**, Somerset Church of the Brethren, Western Pennsylvania District; **Haley Dulabaum**, Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Illinois and Wisconsin District; **Connor Ladd**, Columbia City Church of the Brethren, Northern Indiana District; and **Trevor Haren**, Ivester Church of the Brethren, Northern Plains District. Adult advisors are **Carol Elmore**, Virgina District, and **Nathan Hollenberg**, Shenandoah District. Becky Ullom Naugle, director

of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, will work with the cabinet to plan National Youth Conference 2018.

Nicole and Jason Hoover of Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren and Mifflinburg, Pa., have begun a term of service in the Dominican Republic. They will work with Iglesia de los Hermanos (the Church of the Brethren in the DR) on behalf of Global Mission and Service. The Hoovers will support the Dominican church in the areas of church growth and outreach, service, and reconciliation, helping the church to strengthen its voice of Anabaptism and peace. They also will assist in various educational and agricultural activities.

James Miner of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., has been hired as *Yearbook* specialist with Brethren Press. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the field of data processing. From October 1981 through May 1992 he was a computer programmer and systems analyst for the former General Board. He most recently has been a software engineer for Kronos in Schaumburg, Ill. He also is web administrator for Camp Emmaus and Illinois and Wisconsin District. He holds degrees from Elgin Community College and Manchester University.

Lori Current has been hired as executive director of admissions and student services at Bethany Theological Seminary. She comes to the seminary from Indiana University East in Richmond, Ind., where she has been assistant director of admissions. In her six years with IUE, Current has focused on improving a partnership with community colleges, especially Ivy Tech in Richmond, and increasing the number of transfer students enrolling at the university in consecutive semesters. She is a graduate of Taylor University.

Bailey Schroeder has begun as administrative assistant for admissions and student services at Bethany Seminary. Also from IUE in Richmond, Ind., Schroeder has been assistant director of admissions at the university for three years. In addition to managing recruitment from more than 25 high schools, she has provided leadership in the implementation of the computer database and maintenance of web pages for the admissions department. She is a graduate of Earlham College.

Kelly Wiest has retired from his position as administrator at Casa De Modesto, a Church of the Brethren-related retirement community in California. His retirement was effective Dec. 15.



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LETTERS

An inspiring issue

I don't know when I last sat down and read a whole issue of MESSENGER from cover to cover on the day that I received it, but that's what I did with the November issue. And I was inspired.

From Wendy McFadden's history lesson and wise opening words on controversial elections to my old friend Sandy Bosserman's refreshing column at the end I was challenged and encouraged. In between I enjoyed reading the short stories by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and others about Brethren congregations who are resettling refugees and the accompanying articles on that topic. I recognized some of those congregations and noticed that they spanned the theological spectrum in our denomination. It made me wonder whether there are other things nearly all of us could agree on.

Dean Johnston's article, "What Mus-

lims are experiencing in America today," helped me to empathize with some of these refugees who are becoming our neighbors. The article on the crisis in Nigeria by my relatively new friend Markus Gamache touched my heart and reminded me that our work in Nigeria is far from done, even as other urgent needs compete for our attention and support. And my brother-in-law Jeff Boshart's article on how work in the Great Lakes Region of Africa is contributing to a physical and spiritual harvest reminded me that when we Brethren are at our biblical best we have always cared about spiritual and physical needs. Throw in some thoughts about thankfulness, a Bob Bowman Bible study, and more, and the November issue reminded me why I'm still part of this bunch we call Brethren.

Don Fitzkee
Manheim, Pa.

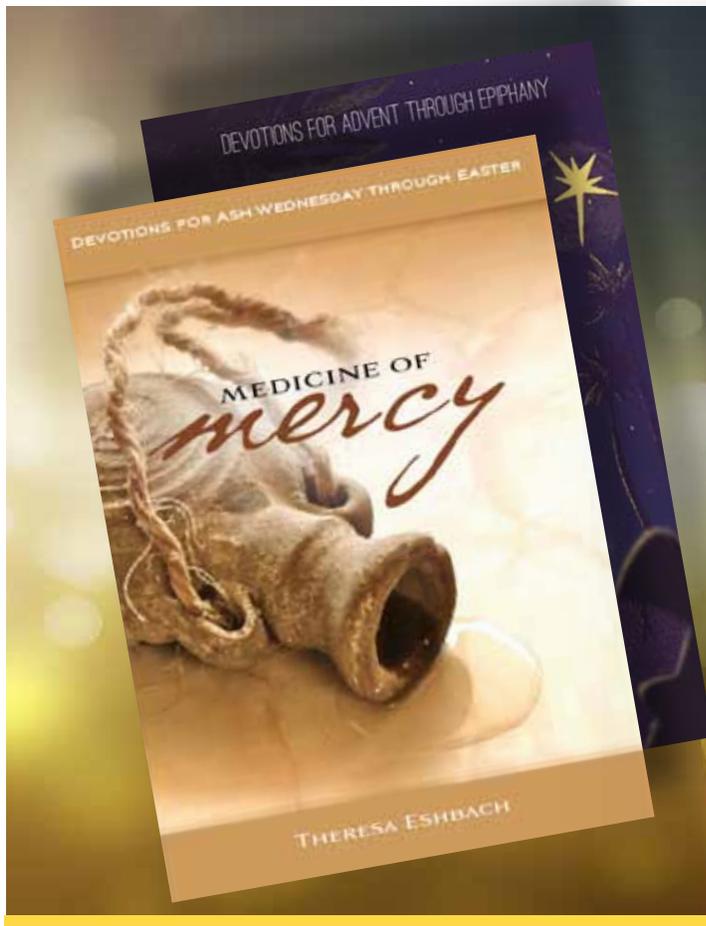
Full of grace

Ken Frantz's article, "Beautiful imperfection," spoke to me. We live in a world whose engineering often appears perfect. We expect absolute dependability. Applying that to our faith we want it to be airtight and unquestioned.

Even a cursory reading of the scriptures, however, generates questions about Old Testament versus New Testament world views, and disagreement from writer to writer within the New Testament Gospels.

To promote the notion that we all see imperfectly and understand imperfectly seems a full-of-grace notion to put forward. If we are to survive as a denomination, perhaps it is this "servant" idea we should be promoting rather than the "master." Thank you, brother Frantz!

Bill Kinzie
Midlothian, Va.

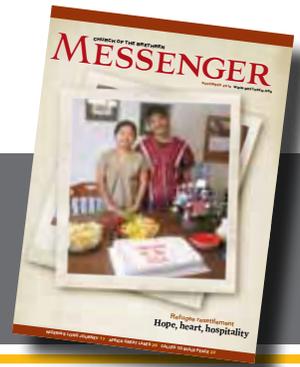


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THE NOVEMBER ISSUE REMINDED ME WHY I'M STILL PART OF THIS BUNCH WE CALL BRETHERN.

What seems forgotten

Thank you, Wendy McFadden, for “A playlist of mercy and hope” [published in Messenger Online]. I couldn’t help but think about our Korean daughter when she was in first grade. Some boys at school saw her walking home with her brother (our biological son who is Caucasian) and the boys beat them up on the sidewalk, then ran away. Our children were afraid to walk home from school after that. They constantly were looking over their shoulders, afraid they’d be attacked again.

What hurt our daughter was knowing somehow she was “different” because she was Korean. Until that day, I don’t believe she ever thought much about race. All of a sudden, she was informed that she was an outsider. Later, a boy at church denigrated her for her racial background. That hurt the most because up until that time, she had felt accepted there.

Recently, as a young mother, she has been invited to her daughters’ classrooms at school to talk about racism. The first time she spoke with the children, she broke down and cried. The pain doesn’t diminish with time.

What seems to be forgotten by our society and, sadly, sometimes by our churches, is that all are children of God—exactly the way God made us, regardless of race, creed, religion, nationality, physical and/or mental disabilities. I’m sure there are other categories that need to be added to the list as well.

We need to remember Martin Luther King Jr.’s proclamation to our nation, “Let freedom ring from . . . every mountainside, let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every vil-

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LETTERS

lage and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

Jeanne Smith
McPherson, Kan.

Seeking to express God's love

At our church we felt the need to respond in faith to the election and sent this message into our community:

"The church board of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren acknowledges with pain the divisiveness and bitterness that has consumed the nation throughout much of the long and grueling electoral season. We

have seen that people of all political persuasions have experienced suffering that goes much farther back than this campaign.

"We note with concern the increasing incidence of hate crimes being reported in various places, and see in this an indication that rhetoric heard during the campaign is continuing to have an effect on the nation.

"Regardless of our political views Christians are called to treat others as we would be treated. As members of a historic peace church, the Church of the Brethren, we are called to live out Christ's way of peace, following Jesus' example of building bridges across lines of race, class, and creed.

"We accept our complicity in institutionalized systems that have injured and oppressed many. While we cannot make all right, we want to be agents of change in our community. We feel especially called to speak on behalf of

those marginalized by racism, sexism, religious intolerance, economic status, sexual identity, or disability.

"We want to work with others who share our views. We want to listen to those who do not. Above all, we seek to express God's steadfast love in all our relationships. We wish to help set an example in our community that can serve as a beacon of hope in a struggling world."

Anna Speicher
Church board chair
Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren
Elgin, Ill.

Continue to help

Make sure you read the article by Markus Gamache in the November issue. He wrote the article well and it brings us to the edge of hope, but with many problems to overcome. Bless our EYN sisters and brothers who are working so hard to provide for the "long journey home." We must continue to help.

Mauri Flora
Claremont, Calif.

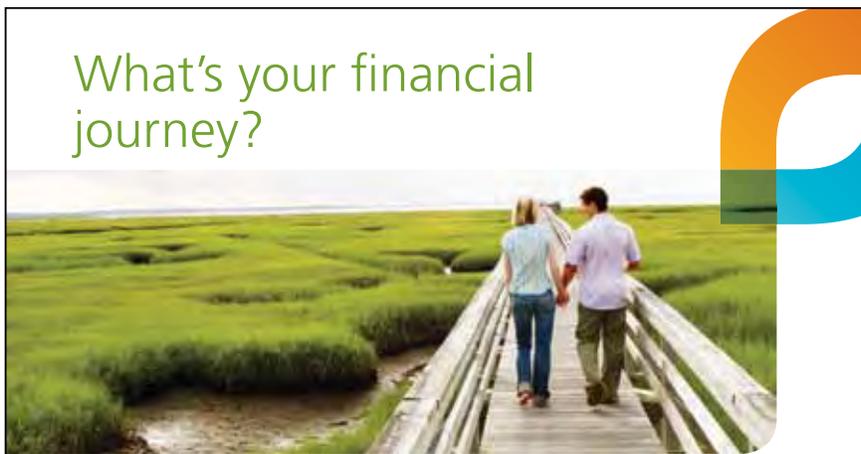
That wonderful place

"Refugee resettlement: Hope, heart, hospitality" is wonderful. I might be a bit partial, but it's wonderful seeing what folks at Hope Church of the Brethren are being led to do. That place is how I was introduced to this denomination in 2001.

Mike and Dorothy Wolf are in the group photo [of members of the Hope church, in the November issue]. Dorothy is the reason I first went to Alaska. During a study group meeting she said she had heard I wasn't going to go [on a Learning Tour with New Community Project], and her expression is why I said, "Yes I am."

Thank you for catching me up with Hope!

William Gay
Monroe, Ind.



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Wedding anniversaries

Baughman, Richard and Joyce, Glenford, Ohio, 67
Berger, Ben and Maxine, Clermont, Fla., 50
Bollinger, James and Geraldine, Ephrata, Pa., 50
Burger, Gene and Betty, Lorida, Fla., 65
Groff, John and Sue, Lancaster, Pa., 50
Harrison, Ronald and Jane, Gettysburg, Pa., 60
Hawkins, Bob and Nancy, Middlebury, Ind., 60
Herr, Paul and Thelma, East Petersburg, Pa., 67
Kover, Virgil and Floy, Lititz, Pa., 67
Orr, Maurice and Freda, Glenford, Ohio, 68
Payne, Maurice and Betty, Knoxville, Md., 65
Raines, Jack, Sr. and Peggy, McGeheysville, Va., 69
Redmond, Dale and Darlene, Quinter, Kan., 65
Rogers, Kenneth and Nancy, Lebanon, Pa., 55
Stokes, Edward and Norma, Lorida, Fla., 55
Wine, Marlin and Lois, Lenexa, Kan., 65
Winters, Bob and Gay, Perysburg, Ohio, 65
Wolford, Virgil and Twila, Dry Fork, W.Va., 70
Yeager, Harold and LaVerne, St. Thomas, Pa., 50

Deaths

Allanson, Elmer Clinton, 91, Churchville, Va., Dec. 24, 2015
Baldeo, Isaac, 80, Cranberry Township, Pa., Nov. 21
Bashore, George W., 83, Bernville, Pa., Aug. 31
Baumgardner, Eunice Emily Zinn, 92, Springfield, Ohio, April 30
Beery, Doris, 67, La Verne, Calif., Oct. 11

Beery, Galen, 78, La Verne, Calif., Oct. 11
Blizzard, Eunice, 78, Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 15, 2015
Blizzard, Richard, 79, Harrisonburg, Va., Aug. 21
Blosser, Orlo Warren, Jr., 85, Salem, Va., Aug. 28
Bomberger, Bruce, 72, Leola, Pa., Sept. 1
Brogan, Margaret Ann, 75, Salem, Va., Oct. 22
Brougher, Elizabeth, 94, Somerset, Pa., Oct. 9
Bryant, Irene, 96, Waynesboro, Va., Nov. 21
Cale, Henry H., 81, Harrisonburg, Va., Oct. 1
Claire, Cameron, infant, Roaring Spring, Pa., Aug. 25
Conner, Carroll, 88, Rockville, Md., Nov. 4
Croson, Phyllis Louise Blubaugh, 87, St. Petersburg, Fla., July 5
Crouse, Ruth, 87, Newville, Pa., Oct. 18
Detwiler, Drucilla, 84, Holidaysburg, Pa., Oct. 11
DiBenedetto, Anthony, 81, Philadelphia, Pa., Nov. 25
Diehl, Margaret Ann (Peggy), 62, Brookes Mills, Pa., Oct. 13
Fisher, Russell W. (Bob), 74, Boonsboro, Md., Oct. 21
Flory, Merrill Clair, 94, New Carlisle, Ohio, March 24
Frock, Paul H., 89, Westminster, Md., Nov. 5
Gift, Kenneth, 77, Waynesboro, Pa., May 6
Gindlesperger, Terry, 66, Johnstown, Pa., Oct. 26
Glick, Jean Racer, 87, Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 28
Graber, Allen R., 69, North Webster, Ind., Feb. 16
Grove, Theresa Jeannette, 92, Lake City, Iowa, Sept. 16
Heatwole, Margie Minnick (Til), 84, Harrisonburg, Va., Jan. 25
Heisey, Linda F., 71, Bernville, Pa., Sept. 5
Hendricks, Gerald, 98, Bryan, Ohio, Sept. 30
Hoffert, Lois Nadine Metsker, 93, Winona, Minn., Aug. 28
Holland, Florida (Joy), 86, South Charleston, Ohio, Oct. 4
Hoover, Martha JoAnne, 94, Glenford, Ohio, Oct. 22
Hosler, Galen W., 93, Lan-

caster, Pa., Sept. 12
Hovis, Tina M., 51, Martinsburg, W.Va., Aug. 16
Hubble, James Whitham, 84, Strang, Neb., Sept. 18
Jarboe, Velvyn Lahman, 88, Quinter, Kan., Oct. 31
Kauffman, Stewart, 97, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 6
Keeney, Orwin E., 82, Frystown, Pa., Sept. 15
Kelly, James L., 76, Clovis, N.M., Nov. 14
Klahr, Martha A., 97, Bethel, Pa., Sept. 20
Leake, Deborah Gale, 54, Harrisonburg, Va., May 11
Lingle, Jean R., 85, Bethel, Pa., Aug. 1
Long, Mary Katherine Rubush, 80, McGeheysville, Va., May 24
Long, Wilbert Lester, 91, Harrisonburg, Va., Jan. 21
Macklin, Jerry D., 81, Mount Morris, Ill., Oct. 28
Manges, Florence M. Lehman, 97, Windber, Pa., Sept. 1
Mason, Franklin Carl, 91, Shelbyville, Mo., Aug. 5
Meredith, Carolyn Royce Bevers, 79, Lawrenceville, Ill., Nov. 21
Miley, Galen W., 92, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 7
Miller, Ethel Morgan, 97, Martinsburg, Pa., Sept. 28
Miller, Robert G., Sr., 78, Bethel, Pa., June 25
Mongan, Fay Ellen, 68, Brownsville, Md., Oct. 19
Moore, Doris L., 88, Cedar Falls, Iowa, Nov. 11
Mort, Lloyd H., 92, Somerset, Pa., Feb. 4
Moser, Raymond Leon, 90, Brunswick, Md., Sept. 6
Mumma, Luke Richwine, 84, Lorida, Fla., Nov. 16
Nelson, Malissa Carrie (Kay), 59, Nokesville, Va., Sept. 7
Nogle, M. Louise Dffenbacher, 92, Quincy, Pa., Jan. 11
Painter, Neil H., 80, Staunton, Va., Nov. 24
Ripley, Elizabeth Travis Shaffer, 94, Johnston, Iowa, Nov. 23
Sager, William, 89, Harrisonburg, Va., June 11
Sayers, G. William, 96, North Manchester, Ind., June 15
Schwenk, Thomas R., 66,

Bethel, Pa., Aug. 3
Shock, Roger, 78, Defiance, Ohio, Oct. 31
Shoup, Ronald P., 76, Polk, Ohio, Nov. 19
Smith, Debbie Stem, 60, Hampstead, Md., Sept. 11
Stoops, S. L. (Ted), 92, Waynesboro, Pa., March 8
Stover, Virginia C., 96, Waynesboro, Pa., Sept. 26
Thompson, Clarence, Jr. (Bud), 96, Independence, Mo., Sept. 29
Thrasher, Walter Lee, 82, Ormond Beach, Fla., Aug. 23
Walters, Marjorie R., 85, Roaring Spring, Pa., March 11
Ward, Bonnie Jane Martin, 86, McPherson, Kan., Oct. 7
Wean, Earl, Jr., 74, Shepherdstown, W.Va., March 23
Wine, Lynetta Rae, 64, Wauweta, Neb., April 12
Wiseman, James A., 90, McPherson, Kan., Oct. 6

Ordained

Cooper, Ryan C., Shen. Dist. (Emmanuel, Mount Solon, Va.), Nov. 13
Haranzo, Angelia F., Virgina Dist. (Vinton, Roanoke, Va.), Nov. 13
Hunt, Tina, N. Ohio Dist. (Ashland, First, Ohio), Nov. 6
Keister, Donita, S. Pa. Dist. (Buffalo Valley, Mifflinburg, Pa.), July 7
Marszalek, Cheryl A., W. Pa. Dist. (Monroeville, Pa.), Dec. 4
Ocker, Carl, S. Pa. Dist. (Upton, Greencastle, Pa.), Oct. 18
Puffenbarger, Kathy W., Shen. Dist. (Briery Branch, Dayton, Va.), Oct. 9
Sheaffer, Timothy, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Midway, Lebanon, Pa.), Oct. 9
Stauffer, Jeffrey, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Blue Ball, Pa.), Oct. 23
Witkovsky, Kim, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Huntingdon Stone, Pa.), Oct. 23

Licensed

Anders, Tom, N. Ind. Dist. (Plymouth, Ind.), Aug. 28
Gendy, Joseph, Atl. N. E.

Dist. (Light of the Gospel, Staten Island, N.Y.), Nov. 12
Gutierrez, Petra Ivis, Southeastern Dist. (Ministerio Uncion Apostolica, Sevierville, Tenn.), Oct. 18
Hollenberg, Robert Eugene, N. Ind. Dist. (Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.), Oct. 9
Miller, Robert Scot, Mich. Dist. (Common Spirit, Wyoming, Mich.), Nov. 27
Prejean, Matthew Leo, S. Plains Dist. (Roanoke, La.), Aug. 31, 2014
Slusher, Jessica, Virgina Dist. (Bethany, Boones Mill, Va.), Oct. 16
Vargas, Gumecindo, S. Plains Dist. (Falfurrias, Texas), Oct. 30
Young, David Allen, S. Plains Dist. (Roanoke, La.), Aug. 31, 2014

Placements

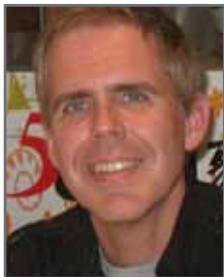
Bayse, Ray M., pastor, Ferum, Va., Oct. 1
Eley, William, from interim to pastor, Chippewa, Ohio, Oct. 16
Garrett, Dean A., from interim to pastor, Emmanuel, Huber Heights, Ohio, Sept. 11
Griffith, C. Randy, pastor, Erwin, Johnson City, Tenn., Nov. 12
Iseman, Kelly Anne, pastor, Crystal, Stanton, Mich., Nov. 27
Kenney, Mike, pastor, Welty, Smithburg, Md., Oct. 16
King, Janice Glass, from interim to pastor, Bedford, Pa., Nov. 1
Lenker, Allen C., from associate pastor to pastor, Roanoke, Summerdean, Va., Dec. 1
Sheaffer, Timothy, from pastor of visitation and Christian education to associate pastor, Midway, Lebanon, Pa., Sept. 21
Thacker, Robert, from pastor, Dunnings Creek, New Paris, Pa., to pastor, Purchase Line, Clymer, Pa., Nov. 27
Turner, Ted M., Jr., pastor, Topeco, Floyd, Va., Oct. 16

A matter of perspective

In the memoir book *Life Work*, author Don Hall tells a story about a New England man who every year heads to the market with an ox-drawn cart filled with all of the extra things his family has produced during the year—maple sugar, wool, potatoes, and the like. When he gets there, he sells not only all the products but also the cart. And the ox.

He goes home with the money he's made, buys a new ox, builds a new cart, and starts all over again. Hall calls it "human life compared to a perennial plant that dies to rise again."

Hall says some people love the story because it exemplifies sinking your whole self into what you do and illustrates the cycle of life. You do something well, and then you start over with a clean slate. Other people, he says, think the story is rather discouraging. Why on earth does the man go back and do everything over again? It's a circle. He never gets ahead.



WALT WILTSCHKEK

Then Hall says: "Temperament, temperament. Each human division reads the same story; each responds from an opposite place."

That passage resonated with me as I thought about recent events—a bitter election with sharply drawn lines, worldwide concerns about whom to believe and whom to trust, and a church that seems to be deeply divided even as people on all sides try to authentically live out their faith.

One friend, in the week after the election, posted on Facebook this cultural observation that stuck with me: "We just snapped a high-res, HD, no-filter selfie." Many of us may look around at the surrounding landscape and not like what we see. And certainly the background in one person's "snapshot" can look very different from another's. But we are all part of the story.

Back in October I had the chance to be part of The Gathering, an annual event that Western Plains District has been holding for a dozen years as part of its district transformation initiative. People from across the district come together in beautiful Salina, Kan., for a weekend at a conference center just off I-70. It's like a district conference without the business sessions. They come together simply to worship, to learn, to eat (of course), to sing, to enjoy each other's company, and to share stories.

I've been to the event three times now, and I always come away impressed—and refreshed. I'm sure that Western Plains still has its issues, but a good spirit permeates that event from start to finish, year to year. They have found a different way of relating to one another as Christians, as Brethren, as neighbors. It seems at least some of the transformation they seek has come to pass.

"For me," says Ken Frantz, chair of the district's Transformation Vision Team, "it is always a place to touch base given our broad geography and the distances between churches. I think most would agree that it allows us to be family in the

WE WILL NEVER SEE EYE TO EYE ON EVERYTHING. PERHAPS, THOUGH, WE CAN DO LESS "EYE FOR AN EYE."

We're seeing the same stories play out. We're responding very differently. Age, race, gender, economics, geography, education, religion, experience, and any number of other things are all potential fault lines.

It has always been so, to varying degrees. Recently I visited a Brethren congregation celebrating its 150th anniversary year, and they read some minutes from a late 19th-century congregational meeting. At issue was whether the then-young congregation should get a piano. It seems innocuous enough now, and some members were very much in favor of it. Others, however, did not want the church "going the way of the honky-tonk devil," according to the minutes.

In something of a paradox, our globe has grown increasingly interconnected and woven together, yet we have more and more difficulty finding a common narrative. The multiplicity of news outlets (and "news" outlets) allows us to very narrowly tailor our world while excluding any other viewpoints.

way that our camps also allow—a sanctuary of sorts and a time of renewal for many."

This year's Gathering focused on the theme "You Are Loved." The brochure said, "Gather with us for a transforming experience for you personally and for your congregation. How shall we 'Pass on' the Love of God today?"

Perhaps there are ways we can do more of that type of connecting around our denomination. It brings to life Jesus' perennial command to love God and love our neighbors. It creates and deepens relationships. And who couldn't use a bit more transformation?

We will never see eye to eye on everything. Perhaps, though, we can do less "eye for an eye." And maybe take a breath, start fresh, and begin writing a new story—together. 

Walt Wiltschek is news editor for Mennonite Church USA Executive Board, and is a former editor of MESSENGER.

Risk Hope

—HEBREWS 10:23

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June 28-July 2, 2017
Grand Rapids, MI



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—Deirdre Moyer (Eden, NC)



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- Concert by Ken Medema!
- Jubilee Afternoon Friday, June 30 with:
 - Ice Cream Social
 - Service Projects
 - Tours to Meijer Gardens, Ford Museum, Art Museum
 - Mini-concerts in exhibit area
- \$114 hotel rate at Amway Grand Hotel and Courtyard by Marriott includes free self-parking and complimentary wi-fi!
- Amazing singing and worship with 2,500 Brethren!
- Fellowship with sisters and brothers in Christ across the country!

"I think Conference was a very holy place this year and the business was handled in a very God-like way."

—Mike Martin (Elkhart, IN)

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AC 2016 photos by Laura Brown, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford, Regina Holmes, Keith Hollenberg and Glenn Riegel.



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