

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

DECEMBER 2017 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

Pilgrimage  
Seeking our true home



# Loving God Loving People

2018 Brethren Workcamps

1 John 4:19-21



"I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least."

—Dorothy Day



"We, though, are going to love— love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first. If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: **Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.**"

—1 John 4:19-21 (The Message)



## 2018 Workcamp Schedule

### Junior High *Completed 6th grade to 8th grade*

1. June 10-14 – Camp Harmony, Hooversville, PA
2. June 17-21 – Harrisburg, PA
3. June 27-July 1 – Brooklyn, NY
4. July 9-13 – Cincinnati, OH
5. July 15-19 – Kansas City, KS
6. July 29-August 2 – Washington, D.C.

### Senior High *Completed 9th grade to age 19*

7. June 17-25 – BRF – Dominican Republic

### Intergenerational *Completed 6th grade and older*

8. August 4-11 – BRF – Lewiston, ME

### Young Adult *Ages 18-35*

9. May 31-June 10 – Burundi
10. June 11-14 – We Are Able Assistants – Elgin, IL

### We Are Able *Ages 16-30*

10. June 11-14 – Elgin, IL



[www.brethren.org/workcamps](http://www.brethren.org/workcamps)

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- 6 Pilgrimage: Seeking our true home**  
by Wendy McFadden
- 10 A birth, not a babyfest**  
by John L. Bell
- 13 Soul singer**  
by Willard Dulabaum
- 14 Saving the turkey for later**  
by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford
- 15 Keeping alert**  
by Kendra Harbeck
- 16 'Aiki! Aiki! Aiki!'**  
Views from a workcamp in Nigeria  
by Peggy Gish and Dana McNeil

## departments

- 2** FROM THE PUBLISHER  
**3** IN TOUCH  
**5** THE EXCHANGE  
**20** MEDIA REVIEW  
**22** BIBLE STUDY  
**24** REFLECTIONS  
**25** NEWSLINE DIGEST  
**27** LETTERS  
**29** TURNING POINTS  
**30** 2017 INDEX  
**32** POTLUCK

## on the cover

The Abbey Church at Iona, Scotland.

Cover photo by Wendy McFadden

**W**hat would be the opposite of living generously? You might think that it's living selfishly, but I wonder if it is living in fear.

People who live in fear live pinched lives—hoarding possessions in fear that they will lose them, protecting borders in fear that their way of life will be taken, staying away from people who are different in fear of being in danger. It might sound as if I am talking about other people, but surely I can recognize myself. Maybe we all have a version of these fears. Some of our fears are well-founded, but some have been stoked by people who don't have our best interests at heart.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

The wise and wonderful writer Marilynne Robinson says she has two things to say about fear: First, contemporary America is full of fear. And second, fear is not a Christian habit of mind (*The Givenness of Things*, p.125).

We know she is right. We know we are surrounded by elements working overtime to make sure we are always afraid. We also know that the Bible tells us over and over, "Do not be afraid." But it's easy to think of those admonitions as Bible words that angels said thousands of years ago, and fill our minds instead with the many truly scary things around us.

During the weeks when so many people lost their homes through earthquake, water, wind, and fire, I remembered a story from years ago. The story was written after the 1989 earthquake in northern California. Like many victims of natural disasters, the author lost everything she owned. But over time something began to happen: Friends began bringing her the things that she had given them. They gave her photos and recipes and books and other fragments of her life. Soon she realized that the only things she now owned were the things she had once given away.

We could call this the Parable of Living Generously. The way to step out of fear is to open our hands and let go. If we hold our possessions lightly, we will find it easier to live generously. And to paraphrase scripture, we are generous because God first was generous toward us.

*Wendy McFadden*

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# ‘The rain, it just wouldn’t stop’

**D**orothy Brown had been through a lot in 89 years: the tragic death of her son, the loss of her beloved husband, and more storms than she could count. When Hurricane Joaquin arrived nearly two years ago, however, it was different. “The rain, it just wouldn’t stop,” she said.

Through the weekend of Oct. 1, 2015, she watched the waters seep slowly through the weeds and grass, inching closer and closer to her home. When it was over, both Brown and her home had survived. Yet, as time passed, it became more and more obvious that considerable damage had been done.

The little yellow house had been theirs since 1974, and her husband had kept it in immaculate shape. He surrounded it with a brick façade so that few knew it was, in fact, a mobile home. But as the months after Joaquin passed, the roof over part of the house collapsed, the floors began to shift, and the bathroom floor seemed spongy.

It was nearly a year after Joaquin that Lavada Smith, a disaster case manager with Lutheran Services Carolinas, came into her life, bringing with her—just a few at a time—hundreds of volunteers from all over the country.

Brown went to stay with her daughter while volunteers from Brethren Disaster Ministries and others began stabilizing her home. Repairs were led by Kim Gingerich, long-term project leader for Brethren Disaster Ministries. “She is such a grateful and joyful person,” Gingerich said of Brown. “It was an honor to be able to serve her.”

The people who worked on her home were from all over the country and from many denominations including Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and more. Brown was moved to tears when about 20 volunteers joined her for worship at her church, Zion Chapel Baptist, the Sunday before the project was completed. “I can’t thank them enough,” Brown said. —Katie Scarvey,

Lutheran Services Carolinas



*About 40 volunteers and family joined with Dorothy Brown to celebrate the restoration of her home.*

## A hair-raisingly fun day

**Spring Run Church of the Brethren in McVeytown, Pa.,** has been making apple butter for more than 30 years as a fall fundraiser. About 15 years ago, an auction was added to the festivities called “Fun Day.”

This year, choir director Tim Dunmire decided to create extra interest and excitement. About three weeks before the event, he told the congregation that if they could raise \$500, he would let them shave off his hair at the auction. When asked the Sunday before Fun Day if he would consider allowing his beard to be shaved, for another \$100, he agreed.

“Before” pictures were posted on the church’s

Facebook page, garnering quite a bit of interest. The day of the auction, the original “reserve” amount for the shave was surpassed almost instantly, and the bidding continued, almost doubling the amount. Two more checks arrived in the church’s post office box the week after the auction.

The total amount? \$2,095. That’s one hair-raisingly expensive haircut! Proceeds will go to outreach ministries. —Jo Ann Rhodes and Kate Gandy



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

## Blessing of the ‘fur babies’

**To go along with a sermon titled “Creation: The Animals,”** pastor Erik Brummett of Live Oak (Calif.) Church of the Brethren encouraged the congregation to bring their “fur babies” or pictures to put on the worship table. The service was moved inside because of wind, but the casual worship and all the animals made for a delightful day. Each pet was given its own blessing at the end of the service. —Terry Kauk



## Dunkard Cemetery restored

**T**wo small monuments were all that remained of an almost unknown cemetery located in a wheat field southeast of Amherst, Colo.—until last spring. Spurred by a call from Jean Gray to Tommy Thompson, a restoration project was set in motion.

Gray, former publisher of the *Haxtun-Fleming Herald*, was researching history of Haxtun (Colo.) Church of the Brethren for its 100-year celebration. Through her research, Gray found information about the Dunkard Cemetery and called Thompson, wondering if he knew anything about it. Thompson, who served as Phillips County commissioner and previously owned Thompson Mortuary, indeed knew of the cemetery.

According to Gray’s research, the early Colorado Brethren first met to organize a congregation northeast of Holyoke in June 1886. There appears to be no record of a church building, but the two monuments remain as proof a cemetery existed.



courtesy of Holyoke Enterprise

A brief history of the Dunkard church and cemetery published in the 1993 edition of *Phillips County History* notes that John Fisher recorded the sale of one acre of land to the Dunkard Church and congregation in September 1899. The cemetery is located a quarter mile north of County Road 30 on County Road 55 near Amherst. Fulschers have owned the ground since 1945. They always knew there was a cemetery there and were careful to farm around it, said Mary Fulscher.

After the conversation with Gray, Thompson contacted Larry Poos to ask him for help in restoring the cemetery. Poos agreed, and earlier this year the preservation project began. Poos and Thompson had talked about restoring the cemetery when they were county commissioners together in the late 1980s but just didn’t get around to it. “Dunkard was a bigger job than we

first thought,” said Poos. “When we started, there was 18 inches of dirt that had blown in over 115 years.”

While searching the area, they located a cement corner of a burial plot. After digging out the dirt, they discovered the entire plot of the Elder family. Julia Elder and four of her children were buried in the plot with the one-foot-high foundation around it. According to obituaries, three of the Elder family died from typhoid fever within a few months of each other. The Elder family graves were found marked by four little pieces of cement buried under the dirt, said Poos. The fifth family member was found using grave divining.

“We were two-thirds done with the project when we found out about grave divining,” said Poos. A family member suggested to search for the graves using divining.

The last known person to be buried in the cemetery was in 1901, said Poos. “There were six graves that we know of when we started, but after divining we found 31 unmarked graves,” he added. The new boundaries doubled the size of the cemetery.

The restoration was completed in September and a new monument has been constructed recognizing the Dunkard Cemetery. The public is welcome to visit, being mindful of when crops are in the field. —Kelley Sullivan, The Holyoke Enterprise



courtesy of Holyoke Enterprise

**Those gathered to see the completed restoration of Dunkard Cemetery: (from left) Wilbur Kipp, Larry Poos, Jeanette Poos, Jean Gray, Sharon Thompson, Tommy Thompson, Mary Fulscher, and Ken Frantz.**



**“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. . . .”** —James 1:17

You look for peace on earth?  
 Then stop by that stable where parents watch;  
 And scan the circle of love they form  
 With shepherds and sages, oxen and cattle;  
 And look for the child in the center,  
 With God in his heart.

—Kenneth I. Morse, poet and hymnwriter and a MESSENGER editor from the 1950s through the '70s. This poem was published in *Listen to the Sunrise* (Brethren Press, 1982).

## ‘The gift I remember’

The youth member of the Annual Conference volunteer news team—Allie Dulabaum—spent some of her time in Grand Rapids doing mini interviews of Conferencegoers. In one series of interviews, she asked about memorable gifts:



**“The gift I remember is a playhouse that my dad made for me and my sisters. It was so exciting, the way that he had it in the carport and we unveiled it on Christmas day. Then we got really excited, and got to play in it. My dad made it, which was really special.”** —Bekah Houff



**“This past Christmas my son bought me a tie with his own money, and that was pretty memorable.”** —Dewey Williard



**“My parents didn’t have a lot of money, [but they] paid for a trip for me, a spring break trip with the college to go down to the Sonoran Desert and be with the biology team and explore there. I know it was a sacrifice for them, but it was really special for me.”** —Jeff Lennard



**“I remember specifically asking my parents for a sweater that I really, really liked, but also one that I kind of needed, for where I was living at the time. It was really cold there. My dad had said, ‘Well, we’ll try, but we’re not sure.’ I got home for Christmas that year, and there was the sweater. . . . It was my parents showing their love for me.”** —Nadine Monn



# Pilgrimage

## Seeking our true home

words and photos by Wendy McFadden



**It takes a long time to travel to Iona**, even if you live in the U.K. First you must get yourself to the harbor town of Oban, on the west coast of Scotland. From there you take a ferry to the Isle of Mull. Then a bus around the island on a one-lane road. And finally a small ferry across the sound that separates Mull and Iona.

For many people, traveling there is a pilgrimage. It's not just that Iona is remote. It's also the centuries of religious meaning: St. Columba, exiled from Ireland, arrived in 563 and is credited with spreading Christianity throughout that region. During the Medieval period, the Benedictines built the abbey and a priory. More recently, the abbey was rebuilt and the ecumenical Iona Community formed. When you dwell on the island of Iona, you are surrounded by saints.

You also are immersed in themes that are rooted in Celtic Christianity and influenced by additional layers of spiritual



## CUP

O God of body and soul

bless this cup of wine  
of sweet communion  
and saving life

and bless this bread  
that carries us to  
a hungry world

O God of body and soul

bless this cup of tea  
the sweet communion  
of life together

and bless these scones  
one for me  
and one to share

meaning: the omnipresence of God, the trinity, unity of worship and work, community, the goodness of humanity, celebration of God's creation, simple living, justice, and the church as both ancient foundation and agent for change.

For those living in contemporary America, it's hard to fathom how ancient that church is. The abbey dates from the 13th century, but is built on the grounds of the original monastery of the 6th century. Today's visitors can see rocky markers from centuries ago, the ruins of the nunnery, and the high crosses of St. Martin and St. John. The massive abbey church is a solid stone structure that has seen centuries of worshippers.

Today there are places where ivy grows in the mortar between the stones—both a threat to the structure and a symbol of change. Like the building, the community there today carries some of the traditions of the past but also

reflects the changes of today. Visitors staying in the abbey live in community with people from different countries. They eat simple fare at long tables in the refectory. They worship together both morning and evening. They take part in daily chores. Work and worship are inseparable.

Rome's influence was delayed in this part of the world, so Christianity took on a different character in the "Celtic fringe" of Europe. This down-to-earth spirituality is sturdy, taking on the complexion of the rocky shores of northern Britain.

We Brethren, whose faith is also of a practical bent, might find values that we share with these Celtic cousins. But we could also learn from them. Like almost everyone in the fast-paced world of today, we could stand to learn more about dwelling so closely to God.

The ancient Celts had a prayer for everything, from lighting the fire in the morning to greeting the moon at night.



## CLEAN

O God  
of blue gloves and pink gloves  
of clean and not yet clean  
of the rhythm of shared work

Give us  
the clarity of spotless mirrors  
the freshness of just-scrubbed floors  
the bracing air of windows pushed high

That we may  
reflect your light  
sweep away the world's wrongs  
and welcome the wind of the Spirit



McFadden traveled to Scotland with a Bethany Theological Seminary class on Celtic Christianity and the changing church, led by Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm. The group spent a week at Iona for a seminar on “Change without Decay,” led by John L. Bell, Graham Maule, and Jo Love, of the Wild Goose Resource Group. They also spent time in Edinburgh and on Holy Island of Lindisfarne, in northeast England.

Often there was a trinitarian rhythm to their prayers. The prayer might be spoken under one’s breath, an extension of the very movement that gives life. In their attentiveness, they wove together the physical world of home and farm with the spiritual world of God’s care and blessing. If you want to find the definition of praying without ceasing, you couldn’t do much better than to immerse yourself in Celtic Christianity.

How could we translate this to our own lives? In the morning we could breathe a prayer of gratitude for the sun that awakens us, for water flowing from the tap, for the electricity that makes our coffee so easily. Though we are not venturing onto the sea in a tiny boat, the coracle that took St. Columba to Iona, we can breathe a prayer of gratitude for safe arrival as we take off a bicycle helmet or unfasten a seatbelt.

Even if we’re not tending sheep on a windswept cliff, we can ask God to be present with us in every step of our work and every task on the to-do list. We can see ourselves as belonging to one another, as members of the community. And in the evening, we can express gratitude for the blessing of another day and the welcome rest of night.

The idea of a pilgrimage to Iona or any other holy place might give the impression that the importance is in the arrival or the completion. But the Celtic concept of *peregrinatio* is a word and concept found nowhere else in Christendom, says Esther De Waal. In *peregrinatio* there is no destination or goal. Rather, those who seek this sort of pilgrimage are “ready to go wherever the Spirit might take them,” seeing themselves as “guests of the world.” She explains that “what they are seeking is the place of their resurrection, the resurrected self, the true self in Christ, which is for all of us our true home” (*The Celtic Way of Prayer*).

Being a pilgrim does not require an island, a “thin place” far away—though surely a journey there opens us to new ways of hearing and seeing. Being a pilgrim is a way of being in the world, weaving together sacred and secular, physical and spiritual. It is about listening for God. Celtic spirituality holds together the mystical tradition of John and the faithful action of Peter, says J. Philip Newell. One is about openness to God’s light; the other “enshrines the light of truth” within the walls of the church.

“These ways of seeing can combine to create a spirituality that is simultaneously well-rooted in a specific tradition and open to God in the whole of life,” says Newell. “Together they can provide access to the ancient treasury of the house of faith, while at the same time equipping us to discern God’s presence in all life” (*Listening for the Heartbeat of God*).

At evening prayers in the abbey church at Iona, the sun streams through the west window, setting every worshiper ablaze with light. The sunlight reaches all the way to the far end of the nave, where the cross flashes gold just before the sun sets. The house of faith is stone and light. 



## PEREGRINATIO

When you are guests of the world  
you are never home and  
you are always home  
you are restless and  
you are grounded  
you are alone and  
you are not alone  
you are seeking and  
you are finding  
you are leaving and  
you are arriving  
you are dying and  
you are rising  
you are blessing and  
you are blessed





# A birth, not a babyfest

by John L. Bell

**C**hristmas is about old people. That is the gospel truth. It is consonant with the foundation story at the beginning of the Hebrew scriptures in which God calls a retired couple, Abraham and Sarah, to be the progenitors of the Hebrew race. It is as if God's vocation for the elderly is that they should be the midwives of the new thing that God is doing—an expectation and accolade sadly avoided in many churches in favor of labeling older people as resistant and reactionary.

When we deal with Christmas, we deal with two very different stories about Jesus. The one is based on the extended

narratives at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The second has to do with a seasonal cultural activity based loosely on Jesus' birth, but with accretions which have gradually taken on the status of primary elements and have substituted a trite festival of sentimentality for the deep mystery of the incarnation.

If one asks who is responsible for the displacement of the true significance of Christmas, no small blame has to be attributed to that phalanx of hymnwriters and music publishers who in the heady days of Victoria's reign began to word-paint the pastiche.

**HERE IS THE MEASURE OF GOD'S AFFECTION FOR THE EARTH AND ITS PEOPLE, THAT HE SHOULD EXPRESS SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANKIND BY TAKING ON THE RISK OF BIRTH IN ORDER TO SECURE THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.**

Add to "Silent Night" the text of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and there is reason to suspect a total absence of noise, a hush in the world in expectation of the birth of the Messiah: "How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given."

Poets and wordsmiths throughout history have gradually persuaded Christendom that the incarnation of God was a silent affair, with the whole of the natural order as well as humanity observing a solemn pause in routine activity until the cry of the child in the manger indicated the coming of God into the world.

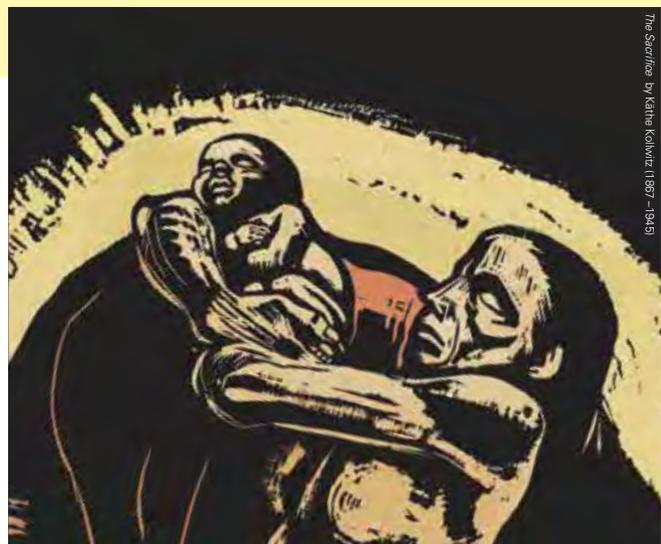
That in itself, however, is contradicted by other fond carols which suggest that not even the trauma of birth was registered by the lungs of the Christ-child. Hence "Away in a Manger" informs us, "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes."

Physical art does not come to our aid, but inevitably represents in the media of paint or stone an inexpressive baby born into a world of pastoral bliss.

Would it ruin our celebration of Christmas if this traditional depiction of noiseless bliss were deconstructed? Perhaps it would do us good.

There is nothing in the Bible, either in the prophetic literature or in the birth narratives, that suggests things were quiet. Quite the opposite. The context in which Mary and Joseph arrive at Bethlehem is, allegedly, that of a census which required men to return to their birthplace along with their families for the purposes of registration. If this was indeed the situation, and if Bethlehem's hotel accommodation was as full as reported, then the one thing which would be present in abundance would be noise.

The supposed silence has to have its cover blown, for the simple reason that in order that the birth of Christ



The Sacrifice by Kaine Kaminetz (1897 - 1915)

might be as natural as any birth it was important that it was surrounded by the din of the world and not silence. No one knew that the Messiah was being born, with the exception of the only two individuals recorded as being present in the birthing room, namely Mary and Joseph.

The only silence which can justifiably be celebrated in the carols or nativity tableaux is that of God's anonymity. God chose to enter the world when it was unprepared to receive him, when neither the civic nor religious establishments had a clue as to what was happening, and when the only visitors immediately summoned to celebrate the event (the shepherds) were people of no standing. It had to be a busy world so that nobody would know that God was slipping in among us.

Here is the measure of God's affection for the earth and its people, that he should express solidarity with humankind by taking on the risk of birth in order to secure the salvation of the world. And in the total absence of any publicity regarding the birth of Jesus, a pattern is set which will not be broken for thirty years.

**B**UT THIS LITTLE BOY HAD GOT IT ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. HE WOULD HAVE KNOWN THE CHRISTMAS STORY, BUT FELT THAT SOMETHING ELSE WAS NEEDED . . . **THE OFFER OF FRIENDSHIP TO A NEW BABY.**

Range through the popular Victorian carols (as distinct from their older forebears) and other questionable accretions become evident—like the tradition of the shepherds bringing a lamb. It may be alluded to in Christina Rossetti’s poem “In the Bleak Midwinter,” but it has no place in scripture. Indeed, from a common-sense angle, what would the Holy Family do with a lamb except perhaps kill it and eat it? (Oh, not in the peaceful stable surely!)

And what about the animals—none of whom are given a mention by Matthew and Luke—who gather round the crib, breathing onto the baby? Had first-century Jews no understanding of elementary hygiene and baby-care?

There is in the Hebrew scriptures what at one time would have been considered a proof-text for the presence of animals in the cave or stable or cattle shed where Jesus was born. The verse in question reads, “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s stall” (Isaiah 1:3).

This, however, is a poetic allusion, not a prophecy in search of literal fulfillment.

**T**he degree to which the babyfest wins over the incarnation in popular imagination

was clearly exhibited when the council of churches in the beautiful English town of Malvern asked if I would adjudicate a carol competition. It had three qualifying age groups: primary school, secondary school, and adult. Submissions all had to be set to the Welsh tune “Suo Gan.”

Having agreed to judge the entries, I received in due course a large package with three folders enclosing the submissions of each age group. I waited until I had a long train journey from London to Glasgow before beginning the project. By the time we had reached Crewe, I felt like asking if anyone in the compartment had antidepressants. Every carol, from that of the youngest child to the oldest adult, was full of the fond clichés and tired images from the Victorian barrel of Christmas hymnody. And I was supposed to select a first, second, and third prize-winner in each category and an over-

all winner!

In a wholly disconsolate state, I was about to return the three folders to the postal package in which they had come, when I found a slim envelope I had previously overlooked. It was labeled Misfits, and contained a small number of items which, in one way or another, did not fulfill the criteria of the competition.

Among them was this poem:

Father God, I love you  
and your little Jesus.  
I would like to kiss him  
and give him a cuddle.  
I would share all my toys,  
and play lots of games with him.  
Bob the Builder we could play;  
we would be the best of mates.

I said to myself, “That’s it. That’s the only one which will be given a prize.”

I then turned over the poem to find on the reverse that it was written by Master Isaac Hutchings, age three and a half. But this little boy had got it absolutely right. He would have known the Christmas story, but felt that something else was needed . . . the offer of *friendship* to a new baby.

I will continue to sing Christmas carols, even those which are biblically unverifiable, because at Christmas God entered into solidarity with fallible and misguided humanity, and that should be a corrective to any temptation to demur. But I will still look for songs which owe more to biblical truth than to fantasy, and I will occasionally enjoy sending up the babyfest. ❗

John L. Bell is an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland and a member of the Iona Community. A co-founder of the Wild Goose Resource Group, he is a preacher, hymnwriter, composer, lecturer, and broadcaster. This article is excerpted from “A Birth, Not a Babyfest,” a chapter in his book *Ten Things They Never Told Me about Jesus* (Wild Goose Publications, 2009), and is reprinted with permission of GIA Publications in Chicago.



**M**OST CONVINCING OF ALL WERE THE MEMORABLE STRAINS OF THE FAMILIAR CAROL MELTING AWAY THE TENSION AND HELPING SANTA SEND HIS PASSENGERS OFF MORE THAN EVER IN THE MOOD FOR CHRISTMAS.

# Soul singer

by Willard Dulabaum

**A**s a public transit bus driver in a small city outside of Chicago, I was assigned each year to dress up as Santa for a week before Christmas. Passengers were delighted to be given a free ride and candy cane, and to see Santa at the wheel.

On one of those days, my schoolteacher wife and graduate student daughter—both on vacation—decided to have some fun of their own. Dressed up as an elderly woman and man, they boarded in laughable fashion with him nudging her rump onto the kneeling bus. The old man soon asked, “Does this bus go to Kmart?” Told “No,” he proceeded to throw a tantrum: “I got on the wrong bus!” The couple got to fussing rather loudly.

Completely to our surprise, a young African American woman sitting across the aisle began singing a soul version of “Silent Night” that rose above the commotion, noticeably changing the mood on the bus.

Then the old man resumed his fussing. When he received a candy cane from Santa, he reacted in a raspy rant, “Go ahead,

rot my teeth!” As if on signal, our soulful caroler launched into another stanza of “Silent Night,” commanding the attention of all who were on the bus.

By the time the young singer boarded her next bus at the station, her new driver had learned of this incident and knew that the culprit couple was actually Santa’s family, doing this in fun. But the driver could not persuade the young woman of the innocence of it all, so convincing had been the couple’s act.

Yet most convincing of all were the memorable strains of the familiar carol melting away the tension and helping Santa send his passengers off more than ever in the mood for Christmas. Coincidentally, the daughter/alias old man was not only a theater major, but also a trained mediator skilled in conflict resolution, which gave her a special appreciation for what the soul singer accomplished on that bus. 

Willard Dulabaum, now retired, is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.



Dani Valender / flickr.com

# *Saving the turkey for later*

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**T**he turkey arrived on our doorstep one Christmas morning, a holiday gift from our neighbors. It was the early 1980s and my family was living in Nigeria, where my parents worked for the Church of the Brethren mission.

We heard the call of “Salaam” (“Peace” in English) through the screen door. My mother was in the kitchen, preparing the coffee cake and spiced hot tea that was our family tradition for Christmas breakfast. The rest of us—my father, my brother, and I—were enjoying another family tradition, poking and prodding each package under the tree to guess what was inside.

When we answered the door, our neighbors proudly presented their gift, wished us “Merry Christmas,” and rushed home to their own family celebration.

There was just one problem, from our point of view: the turkey was alive and well!

It was a large and beautiful bird, for a Nigerian turkey, and represented an expensive and very generous gift. The turkey’s feet and beak were firmly tied with twine but, fearful and indignant, it was still quite a handful. It got dropped on the concrete floor of our front porch, and we all stood there, wondering what to do.

Our Nigerian neighbors obviously expected us to immediately slaughter the bird and prepare it for Christmas dinner. However, such a bloody task was not on my mother’s to-do list for Christmas day—although as a long-term missionary

she was fully capable of it, and had cut off the heads of many chickens over the years. My father was never the one to deal with such matters, his domestic contributions being usually mechanical or electrical, constructing or fixing things. My brother and I had never done anything more with the chickens than feed them and collect the eggs.

So we saved the turkey for later. We put it in the wire pen where the chickens lived. It would be a temporary arrangement, we thought, until we could figure out some other time to have our turkey dinner.

The turkey turned out to be quite a meek character. It was bullied by the chickens, who chased and pecked at it. I remember my mother deciding it was not very intelligent when—one day after rainy season started—she found it standing out in the downpour, letting water collect in its beak. Somehow, the thought of moving under the shelter of the coop hadn’t seemed to cross its small mind.

The bird became a fixture in our lives, and I honestly can’t say when it finally met its fate and became turkey dinner. In my memory, that silly bird is alive and well, and still being chased around the chicken coop.

In the bright memories I carry from childhood, Nigeria is a place of neighborliness, and friendly greetings of “Salaam,” wishing peace to all.

I wonder, sometimes, if that Nigeria is somehow still alive and well—perhaps in God’s imagination, as it is in mine. 

***I* IN THE BRIGHT MEMORIES I CARRY FROM CHILDHOOD, NIGERIA IS A PLACE OF NEIGHBORLINESS, AND FRIENDLY GREETINGS OF “SALAAM,” WISHING PEACE TO ALL.**

*M*AY WE KEEP ALERT AND FIND  
THE COURAGE TO LIVE GENEROUSLY,  
ON ANY DAY, AT ANY HOUR.

# Keeping alert

by Kendra Harbeck

MadFishDigital/flickr.com



**K**eeep alert. Stay ready. For you know neither the day, nor the hour. Variations on these phrases can be found in one of Jesus' "kingdom of heaven" parables, about the 10 bridesmaids, some of whom did not keep their lamps and themselves prepared and missed the arrival of the bridegroom.

These phrases were also what popped into my head the night of Sept. 4, as I frantically tried to scrub my shower floor and clean the refrigerator shelves, chastising myself for not having done these and many other chores sooner. Chastising myself for not being ready.

You see, this was the night before my husband, Josh, and I would become officially "open" for a foster child placement. And our licensing worker had led us to believe that as soon as the business day opened on Sept. 5, we would almost certainly get one or more calls for teenagers needing a home right away. It was stressful as I went to bed that night, because our home, and we, just did not feel ready.

The next morning, I began a whole new practice of vigilance with my phone, carrying it with me everywhere I went. I was alert all day, just waiting for a call. When no calls came by evening, I began a new practice of keeping my phone on throughout the night, remaining alert—even having trouble sleeping because of the anticipation of a call.

We did not get any calls that first night. Or the second day. Or the third day. Or the ones after that.

That first week, we were very disciplined in spending each evening on a project to further ready our home—putting in a bedframe, replacing the smoke detector, organizing the hall closet. That first week, I also remained disciplined in my cell phone vigilance.

But in the following weeks, it got harder to stay ready. I just didn't feel like scrubbing that shower floor every night.

I also grew less and less alert with my phone. And so, when

we received our first call at the end of September, for a foster situation that matched what we'd most been hoping for, I missed it. I'd had my phone on silent and in my bag, and when we called back 43 minutes later, the agency had already found a home for the children. Why hadn't I stayed alert?

This experience of being constantly on call has seemed to me like a parable for a way of living. A mindset and a lifestyle of being ready to give of ourselves, in whatever form that may be, whenever the occasion arises, even if at a moment's notice. It's about keeping alert so that we notice when we are called to fill a need, so that the chance to be generous or compassionate doesn't pass us by. It's about being willing to say yes when we can think of so many reasons to say no.

We can't always say yes. Later, Josh and I had another placement call that I did answer, but to which we said no. This brought guilt, but that's okay. In God's invitation to generous living, we are not asked to meet every need, and we can only ask for God's wisdom in discernment. The good news is that there will always be another call to serve.

I feel that living generously is about trying to live courageously. Josh and I will never feel fully prepared or qualified for whatever child or children we take on, but we are trying our best to stay alert and ready for the call that God (and the Department of Child and Family Services) will send our way.

All of us may never feel as financially prepared as we'd like to be or have as much time as we feel we need or have a home that seems tidy enough to offer hospitality. But if we live in that fear, things will not change, and we will miss our chances to help bring about the kingdom of heaven. So may we keep alert and find the courage to live generously, on any day, at any hour. 

Kendra Harbeck is manager of the Church of the Brethren's office of Global Mission and Service.



# ‘Aiki! Aiki! Aiki!’

## VIEWS FROM A WORKCAMP IN NIGERIA

Dana McNeil

by Peggy Gish and Dana McNeil

### OUT OF THE CRISIS, REBUILDING AND RENEWAL

**A**iki! Aik! Aiki!” men called out from time to time. “Work! work! work!” in the Hausa language. Under a hot sun, a continuous line of men carried cement blocks up a wooden ramp, with nailed-on rungs, to the second floor of a new office building for the staff of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The building is part of the EYN church headquarters in

Kwarhi, Adamawa State. On the second floor, groups of men mixed up mortar, and laid block to form the walls and doorways of the new building.

This was the first week of a two-week workcamp from Aug. 17 to Sept. 3, co-sponsored by EYN and the Church of the Brethren. About 17 to 20 Nigerian men came each week, from various EYN churches, to help with the building. Three of us represented the Church of the Brethren in the US, and were welcomed warmly: Jon Ogburn, Dana McNeil, and Peggy Gish.

The construction of the building was started in 2014, before Boko Haram looted and damaged the EYN

headquarters. The EYN staff and other people from the area fled, and EYN temporarily based its headquarters in the city of Jos in central Nigeria, and the construction stopped. This was the second workcamp to work on the building since the EYN staff returned to Kwarhi in 2016.

When asked why they came to the workcamp, the Nigerian men, who had taken time off from their jobs at home, gave answers such as the following: “This is a way I can serve God.” “When people drive by, I want them to see a church whose headquarters show the dedication and support of its people.” “After Boko Haram’s attempt to destroy



Dana Mitchell



Peggy Gish

the church, we want to rebuild and make it strong.”

The camaraderie and festive mood of the group attracted a number of boys and girls—children of EYN staff and others living nearby—who joined in the work. They filled metal dishpans with sand and carried them up to the second floor to be mixed with concrete. Two of the older boys proudly found that they could carry half blocks on their heads or shoulders. There were moments when the children, and sometimes adults, erupted into play. Suddenly the children would be flying paper airplanes around the site or playing impromptu games.

As the workcamp went on, there were more playful moments among the men—joking around, working to music, or tossing plastic water bags that burst. During a break, young men spontaneously formed a percussion band and sang together. Another time, the Hausa words to the hymns “Holy, Holy, Holy” or “Count Your Blessings” could be heard through the building.

Long after the workcamp partici-

pants are back home again, we expect the impact of this work to continue. It will extend farther than the almost 5,000 cement blocks that were trucked in and mortared in place. Forged together in these two weeks were ongoing friendships across tribes and cultures, increased dedication to the church, and joy at serving the church. The work will not only strengthen EYN as a church, but stand as a symbol of hope—as out of the crisis EYN rebuilds and is renewed. —Peggy Gish

## HOW DOES ONE MEASURE THE BLESSINGS OF GOD?

**C**oming home from a trip where I saw so many new things, I realized it wasn’t about sightseeing. I worked on a building project, but it wasn’t really about buildings. I attempted to bring love and encouragement, but I felt like

I gave so little and received so much.

How does one measure, reflect on, or understand the blessings of God? How does one reflect on, understand, and put into words the experiences of



Dana Mitchell

**FORGED TOGETHER IN THESE TWO WEEKS WERE ONGOING FRIENDSHIPS ACROSS TRIBES AND CULTURES, INCREASED DEDICATION TO THE CHURCH, AND JOY AT SERVING THE CHURCH.**



Dana McNeil

life that cannot be put into words, but must be felt to be understood?

My heart still breaks for what the people of northeast Nigeria have had to endure under the constant threat of Boko Haram, but my heart sees with different eyes now. Yes, these folk have gone through a great deal of suffering, but they are not despondent. They are filled with hope, trust in God, zeal to share Jesus, and the energy and the determination to follow Jesus into a better future for their children, their communities, and their nation. They are committed to seeing these struggles in the light of opportunity that will reveal the glory of God in their midst.

We worshiped with our brothers and sisters at the EYN Giima Church in the city of Mubi. What a joy-filled time of worship and celebration of what God is doing among them. This congregation was worshipping in a shelter because their church building was destroyed in

the Boko Haram attack on Mubi. The only part of the original church still standing was the high tower, with a cross that can be seen from across the town—a testimony that the light of Christ is still shining in this place and will not be overcome by the darkness.

A pastor of a church in Uba that had been destroyed by Boko Haram helped

us understand how the congregation is seeing the blessing of God in the midst of struggles. He told us that the people are connecting in a way that they never had before to the stories of the Old Testament. He expressed how they are living these Old Testament stories, and understanding what it is like to completely depend on God. I saw the light shining in the darkness when I visited and worshiped with these people.

I am inspired by two statements that I heard at the workcamp, from a pastor named Papa, and from one of the senior carpenters named Jacob. Jacob told us that we were building something that would last not for a decade or two, but for a hundred years as a testimony of our faith to those who seek to kill and destroy. Our work would ultimately give hope to many future generations of Christians. What an inspiration to see our calling to serve, every day, as a testimony that will last past these few moments to shine the light of Christ for all of eternity. It reminded me of the faith described in Hebrews 11, where the faithful lived into the truth of God's promises as if they had already been revealed, even though they had not yet seen them come to fruition.

Papa's statement came on the last day of the workcamp. He called us to work as if this was the last day we ever had to work for Jesus. What an idea, what an awesome responsibility, and what an amazing privilege. Every con-



crete block we carried, we carried for Jesus. Every shovel full of sand was for Jesus. Every person we encouraged, we did for Jesus. What a concept of living for Jesus—taking every ordinary moment of our lives and making it a moment of worship, a moment of devotion to our savior, a moment of testimony to his glory.

These Nigerian brothers and sisters in Christ inspire me to see everything as an opportunity to grow in my walk with Jesus, and give my best for his glory. They inspire me to live beyond myself for a future that I may never witness. How do they inspire you?

—Dana McNeil 

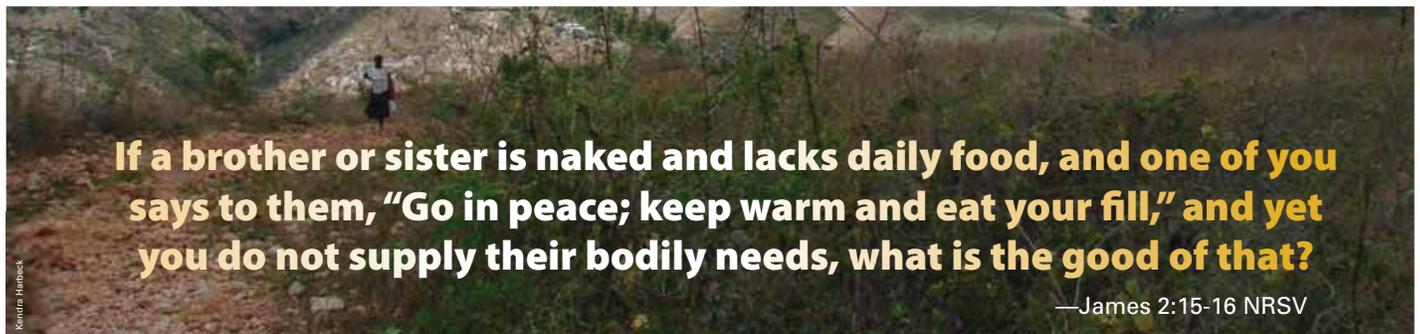
A series of Nigeria workcamps are rebuilding churches and other EYN structures that have been destroyed in the insurgent violence in northeast Nigeria. The next Nigeria workcamp is scheduled for January 2018. To participate in a Nigeria workcamp, contact Kendra Harbeck in the Global Mission and Service Office, at [kharbeck@brethren.org](mailto:kharbeck@brethren.org). For more about the Nigeria Crisis Response of the Church of the Brethren and EYN, go to [www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis](http://www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis).



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**If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?**

—James 2:15-16 NRSV



## GLOBAL FOOD INITIATIVE

To contribute, write your check to Global Food Initiative and send to Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin IL 60120. Or give online by visiting [www.brethren.org/gfi](http://www.brethren.org/gfi).

# Conscientious living

## Two books about peacemakers

### Cascade Locks Camp No. 21 was the largest of the Civilian Public

**Service camps** run by the Church of the Brethren during World War II. *Refusing War, Affirming Peace*, by Jeffrey Kovac is a detailed history of the camp that was located in the forests of Oregon. It also is a fascinating look at the lives of the young conscientious objectors (COs) assigned there.

The camp existed from Nov. 27, 1941, through July 31, 1946, at an old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) site. Kovac's father-in-law, Charlie Davis, was one of the 560 men who spent time at Cascade Locks. In total, about 12,000 men did alternative service at about 150 CPS sites across the country. Billed as "work of national importance under civilian direction," the CPS program was made up of work sites administered primarily by the historic peace churches under the guidance of Selective Service.

Kovac tells how church leaders worked with the government to arrange alternative service after COs were jailed during World War I. He reports forthrightly on the struggle of church leaders to walk a line between honoring conscientious objection and preserving the rights of COs, and cooperating with government officials in order to maintain the program.

A lengthy bibliography reveals the extent of Kovac's research. An appendix lists the men who were at the camp. MESSENGER readers are likely to find familiar names there.

But this is more than a history illustrated with anecdotes and photographs. Kovac makes an ambitious attempt to shift the typical conversation about "the good war" to acknowledge the contribution of dissenters. With this point of view, events at Cascade Locks gain significance. The reader becomes aware of how effective CPS was in developing and deepening the understanding of pacifism among the COs, church, and wider society. At this CPS camp, young men who spent their days doing hard manual labor for the forest service, also spent many evening hours debating what it means to oppose war.

Cascade Locks was intellectually active. Not only were the Brethren leaders who ran it—notably founding director Mark Schrock, a minister from rural Indiana—open to a range of religious backgrounds and philosophies, they aimed to create a unique community of pacifists. They also encouraged creativity and the arts. This was enhanced by the personal gifts of COs who were artists, musicians, actors, writers, photographers. Kovac notes that the formative nature

of CPS came, in part, from the way it placed young farm boys with limited education in the same camps with university graduates and professionals.

The influence of artists is noted throughout the book. For example, an old CCC building was renovated by architects and artists who created a library, reading room, periodical room, music room, classrooms, and an office for the camp newspaper, which was written and published by COs. They also renovated the CCC chapel, opening up a floor-to-ceiling window that faced the mountains and dividing it into four parts with a gold cross. (For some of the more prominent men, Kovac provides brief resumes of what they went on to accomplish after the war.)

Education was also a key factor at the camp. After it became clear that the war—and CPS—was going to go on for much longer than anyone had thought, Brethren CPS administrators began offering special schools at various camps: School of Fine Arts, School of Cooperative Living, School of Food Management, School of Race Relations. The School of Pacifist Living was offered at Cascade Locks, led by Dan West.

The book doesn't downplay the

### ABOUT THE BOOKS

Title: *Refusing War, Affirming Peace: A History of Civilian Public Service Camp No. 21 at Cascade Locks*. Author: Jeffrey Kovac. Publisher: Oregon State University Press. Publication date: 2009.

Title: *Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist*. Author: David Hartsough, with Joyce Hollyday. Publisher: PM Press. Publication date: 2014.



weaknesses of CPS, the daily struggles of the COs, and conflicts that arose, but argues that, at its best Civilian Public Service succeeded in creating a unique and valuable community. —Cheryl

Brumbaugh-Cayford

**W**aging Peace, by David Hartsough, with Joyce Hollyday,

is the autobiography of a Quaker who has dedicated his life to ending war through nonviolent direct action.

During his childhood, Hartsough and his Quaker peace activists parents lived in a commune that often hosted other peace activists and civil rights leaders, and he got to meet them and hear their advocacy of nonviolent action. At age 15, he met Martin Luther King Jr., who made a big impression.

He was in high school when he organized his first demonstration to protest weapons of war at the Nike missile site. He graduated from Howard University and studied international relations at Columbia. With Howard students, he participated in some of the earliest sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters, buses, and schools. He spent a year at a university in Germany—the Berlin wall went up while he was there. Everywhere he went—Gaza, Kosovo, the Soviet Union, South and Central America—he talked peace, nonviolence, and encouragement.

Hartsough felt great sorrow for the victims of war, but small successes allowed him to maintain hope. In the 1970s, for example, when seven Navy men jumped ship to show solidarity with his “peace navy” of rowboats and canoes trying to block a munitions-carrying warship, it was a success. War did not end, but little successes added up, like the drops of rain that form rivers.

—Marie Ingerman 

Marie Ingerman grew up in Waterford (Calif.) Church of the Brethren and did a term of Brethren Volunteer Service working with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. After marrying her husband, a Quaker, she joined the Society of Friends.

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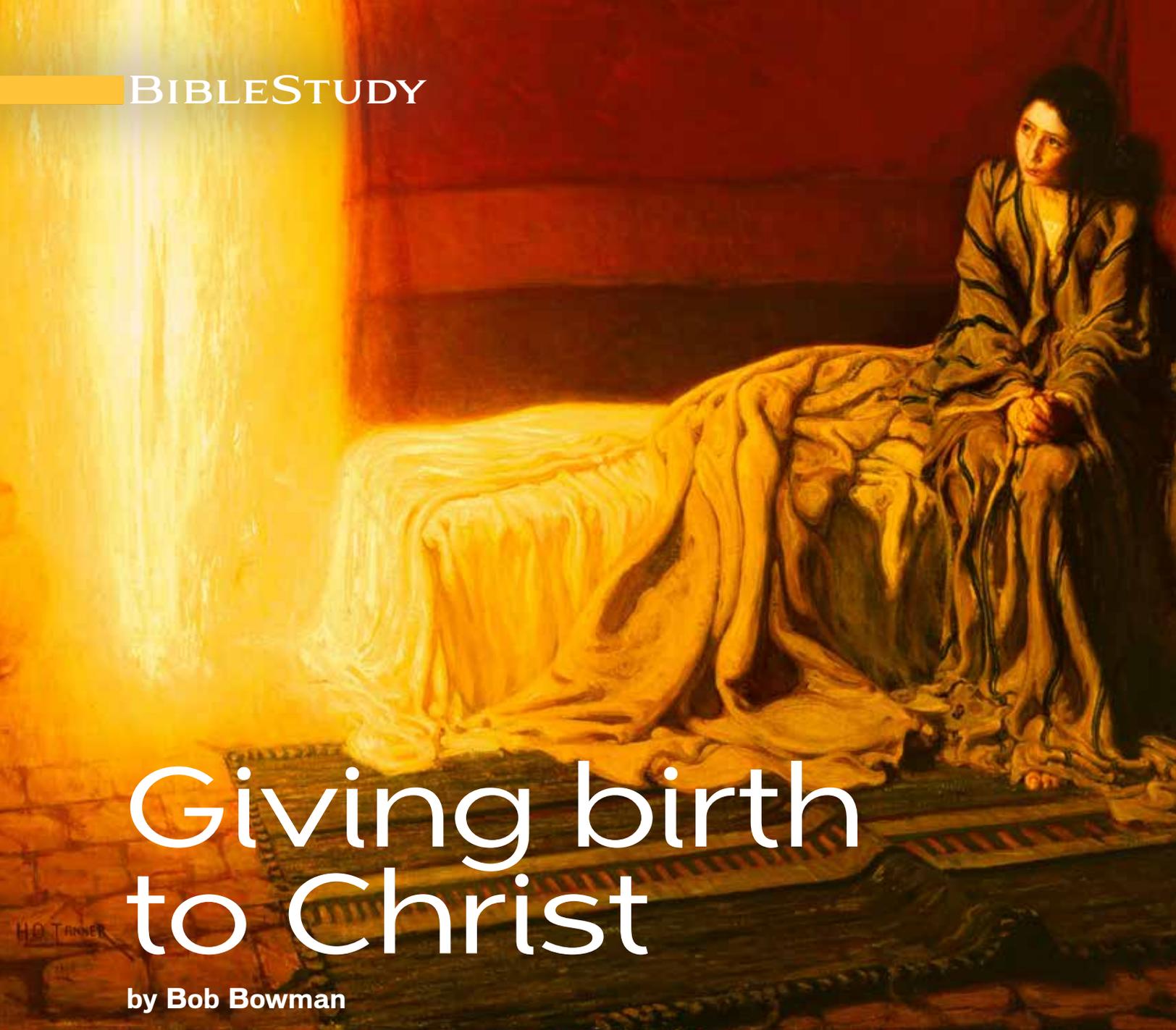


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# Giving birth to Christ

by Bob Bowman

**T**he scene in Luke 1:26-38 is Christmas-card-perfect. Young Mary and the angel Gabriel. The conversation between them leaves a commentator a bit puzzled about details, but the main picture is clear.

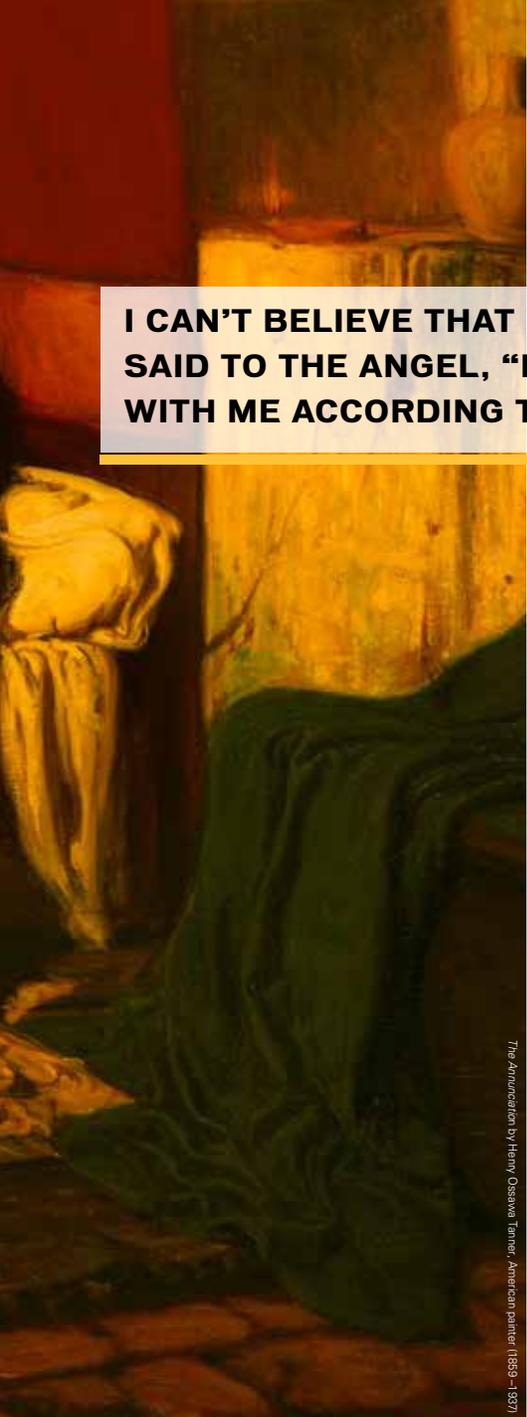
Gabriel's greeting to Mary is strange and ambiguous: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." That phrase, "favored one," is the ambiguous part. It has a variety of meanings in the original language. It is obvious to Christian readers that Gabriel is greet-

ing Mary with the utmost respect. It is, as one commentator observed, almost as if the angel might have thought himself unworthy to speak to her. Yet "favored one" could be translated, "full of grace" or "graceful lady" or even "beautiful lady." It is no wonder that scripture says Mary "was greatly perplexed by his words."

While Mary was being greatly perplexed, Gabriel reassured her and announced that Mary will have a special baby. That caused Mary even more wonder, "How can this be?"

I can't believe that Mary fully understood it, yet in the end she said to the angel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." Her words take my breath away. Sometimes I think that is the most precious line in the New Testament.

Perhaps it is the innocence or, rather, the naivete of her response. Little did she know what it would cost to be the mother of the Christ. After all, according to modern estimates, she was only about 15 years old.



**I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT MARY FULLY UNDERSTOOD IT, YET IN THE END SHE SAID TO THE ANGEL, "HERE AM I, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD. LET IT BE WITH ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD."**

with me according to your word."

It reminds me of my baptism. Brethren have believed that baptism is for those who make an adult decision. We would not change the definition of baptism, but we have often changed the definition of adult. I was not even adolescent when I entered the waters of baptism. I was young but I had made my own decision based on all the knowledge and wisdom that a pre-teen could muster. I was unaware of how little I knew myself and how much less I knew about God.

One does not have to know the whole journey before one takes the first step. Still we wonder at Mary's response. What did Mary hear? Gabriel spoke of Mary having a baby who would be called son of the Most High and who would inherit the throne of Israel. What did Mary think her baby would be like as a king?

Mary may not have been all that naive! One of the first things she did after learning of her announced pregnancy was to visit her cousin Elizabeth. It was there that we find Mary's wonderful poem called the Magnificat (Luke 1:47-55). In it she praises God for having done great things for her. And when she spelled out what those "great things" were, what did she say? "He has scattered the proud, he has brought down the powerful . . . and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry . . . and sent the rich away empty."

Mary was aware that the kingdom of God would involve an overturning of values and priorities both in individuals and in societies. She was also

aware that it would begin with her.

It is only a whimsy, but sometimes I imagine that Gabriel had made this offer to many young women throughout the centuries and Mary was the first one to say yes. Thinking that makes me wonder if I have ever ignored an incognito angel who offered me a role to play in God's drama.

Thinking about the beauty of Mary's response, however, can leave me in past history. I can be just an admiring bystander of Mary's drama.

What if the message of Gabriel to Mary is not addressed to her only, but to every soul that longs for God? What if the call to bear the Christ in our bodies, to be pregnant with Christ, comes to each of us? What does it matter that it happened to Mary if it does not happen to me? As Meister Eckhart once said, "What good is it that Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago if he is not also born in me?"

We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born. Paul urges this. In one translation of 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul admonishes his readers to "glorify and bear God in your body." In Galatians 4:19, Paul speaks to "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." In Colossians 1:27, Paul talks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Mary offered herself to allow unconditional love to be incarnated into the world. Dare we offer any less? 

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

What if Gabriel had been more forthcoming about this baby? What if he had continued with a prophecy like that of Simeon, who said to Mary in the temple, "This child . . . will be opposed . . . and a sword will enter your own soul too" (Luke 2:34f). Perhaps Gabriel could have warned her in the words of Winston Churchill, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." In that case, Mary's response would be, more than ever, the response of willing faith: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be

The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Turner, American painter (1859-1927)

# I pledge allegiance

**S**ometimes what happens in the world of sports becomes front-page news. Case in point, the recent controversy about football players kneeling instead of standing when the national anthem is played before a game. Though the kneeling is a protest against racism, critics decry their lack of patriotism.



KEN GIBBLE

The US president used a crude profanity to describe them.

The usual definition of the word “patriotism” is “love of country.”

Americans express that love in many ways: singing patriotic songs, displaying flags, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Many learned to say the pledge without paying much attention to what they were saying.

As a youngster, I never considered its implications until I learned that a Mennonite friend was forbidden by his parents to say it.

“Why don’t his parents want him to say the Pledge of Allegiance?” I asked my dad.

Court ruled in 1940 that states were justified in requiring all students to participate, regardless of religious convictions, but that decision was reversed in 1941.

In 1954, when I was in junior high school, the phrase “under God” was added. We stumbled over the new phrase for a few weeks. I stumble over it still, but for a different reason. The phrase “one nation, under God” seems to me to be misguided piety. There is also a subtle implication that the words “under God” mean that God is on *our* side whenever we disagree with other nations.

The people of ancient Israel made the same error. God is on our side, they assumed. After all, we are more just and good and religious than anyone else. But the Hebrew prophets shouted, No! All nations were under God. The prophet Isaiah declared on God’s behalf: “I am coming to gather all nations and tongues” (Isaiah 66:18).

Jesus carried the prophets’ message a step further. A good religious person asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” (Luke 13:23). Jesus’ response must have made his listeners wince. It isn’t the ones who think they’ve got it made who’ll be first in the kingdom. At the kingdom feast, the tables are

**I’M TROUBLED THAT ANY INSTITUTION, INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT OF MY COUNTRY, WOULD INSIST ON MY ALLEGIANCE IF IT WOULD BE IN CONFLICT WITH MY PRIMARY ALLEGIANCE TO GOD.**

“Well,” he explained, “they believe it’s wrong to give allegiance to anyone except the Lord.” I couldn’t comprehend that until some years later.

I consider myself a patriot. I loved my country when I was a boy and I still do. But I’m troubled that any institution, including the government of my country, would insist on my allegiance if it would be in conflict with my primary allegiance to God.

The Pledge of Allegiance originated in the administration of Benjamin Harrison when patriotic exercises were encouraged in schools to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ “discovery” of America. It first appeared, with two slight differences in wording from the present form, in an 1892 periodical, *Youth’s Companion*. The pledge soon spread throughout the public school system. Many states made daily recitation mandatory. Children of religious minorities who refused sometimes were expelled from school. The Supreme

turned. Tax collectors and prostitutes are invited in ahead of the highbrow religious leaders (Matthew 21:31). Not only that, said Jesus, people will come from east and west and north and south and will eat in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:29). He would no doubt say the same to Americans who suppose that “under God” in the pledge points to divine favor for our country above any other country.

Of what use, then, is the Pledge of Allegiance? At its best it serves as an ideal to be achieved—that of freedom and equal treatment for all and unity of purpose.

I do love my country. When I am invited to recite the pledge, I stand and say what I can in good conscience. I say something like this: “I pledge allegiance to the values of freedom and justice for all in the United States of America.”

That’s the best I can do. 

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

## Board adopts vision for a global church

**T**he Mission and Ministry Board adopted a “Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren” and recommended it to Annual Conference, at its meeting Oct. 20-23 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. The meeting was led by chair Connie Burk Davis, assisted by chair-elect Patrick Starkey and general secretary David Steele.

The board also adopted a 2018 budget, approved two large allocations from the Emergency Disaster Fund, and acted on Review and Evaluation Committee recommendations referred by Annual Conference, among other business.

The board spent a short time hearing a delegation from the “Moorefield gathering,” a meeting of “concerned Brethren” that was hosted at Moorefield Church of the Brethren in West Marva District earlier this year. The board discussed the presentation in closed sessions, and later issued a letter to the group.

### Vision for a global church

The new mission philosophy paper was presented by Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service. It has been in process for some time. The Mission Advisory Committee has been involved in its development, among other groups, and leaders of Church of the Brethren denominations in several countries have been consulted.

Impetus has come from a disconnect between polity and practice, Wittmeyer said, citing a mandate for a global Church of the Brethren in Annual Conference statements made in 1981, 1989, and 1998. The denominational polity currently in force calls for international districts, but in practice, independent denominations have grown up in various countries.

The heart of the vision is found in a section of the paper titled “Becoming a global church,” representing a significant shift in understanding of mission relationships:

“The Church of the Brethren in the United States envisions a Global Church of the Brethren as a union of autonomous bodies, a spiritual community bound together by a common passion to be followers of Christ, a common New Testament theology of peace and service, and a common commitment to be in relationship with one another. Consistent with the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, no one regional or national church will be regarded as the authority over other bodies. No one Brethren body in the Global Church of the Brethren, including the ‘mother’ church in the United States, will presume to have the mind of Christ for its sister churches. . . . Decisions regarding the role and responsibilities of the Global Church of the

Brethren, including the acceptance of new Brethren bodies into this fellowship, will be made in mutual consultation with existing national Church of the Brethren bodies.”

### Disaster grants

A second EDF grant of \$75,000 for disaster relief in the Caribbean was approved, following a previous grant of \$25,000. Much of the money will be used for hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico, in a collaboration between Brethren Disaster Ministries and Puerto Rico District, with some going to Haiti. An allocation of \$400,000 continues support of the Nigeria Crisis Response.

### Budget for 2018

The budget was presented by treasurer Brian Bultman and assistant treasurer Ed Woolf. The board approved a balanced budget of \$5,192,000 for Core Ministries, and a “grand total budget” of \$8,809,160 anticipated income, \$8,824,280 anticipated expense, for all the denominational ministries including Core Ministries, Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Global Food Initiative, Material Resources, and Conference Office.

Bultman and Woolf shared background information, including the transfer of \$510,000 from the Brethren Service Center Quasi-Endowment to the Core Ministries. This represents a portion of the proceeds of the sale of the upper campus property in New Windsor, Md. It continues a 2016 board-approved budgetary “bridge” in anticipation of a fund-raising campaign being considered for the near future.

### Assigned tasks

The board acted on recommendations referred by Annual Conference, when the Conference adopted recommendations from the Review and Evaluation Committee. Most require changes to the bylaws of the Church of the Brethren. The board’s proposed changes will come to the 2018 Conference, along with additional changes to terminology. In addition, a Stewardship of Property Working Group has been formed to create a process for a study of the General Offices property. It includes board members Carl Fike, chair, Colin Scott, David Stauffer, and Steele.

Davis led a brainstorming session seeking strategies for “Living Together as Christ Calls,” continuing another assigned task. A working group will process the brainstorming and bring a proposal to the board in March. It includes board members Lois Grove, Diane Mason, Jonathan Prater, and a staff member to be named.

## Puerto Rican Brethren engage with Brethren Disaster Ministries

**T**he Puerto Rican churches are an inspiring example of being the church in a crisis," reports Brethren Disaster Ministries associate executive Roy Winter. "While burdened with many hardships, the Puerto Rican Brethren are coming together, supporting each other, and reaching out to their communities."

In mid-October, Winter joined Puerto Rico District executive José Otero on a visit to six of the seven Churches of the Brethren in Puerto Rico, their pastors, the district board chair, and families who suffered major damage in the hurricanes.

About 20 homes of Brethren members, some from each congregation, received major damage. Other homes in communities around the churches suffered a wide range of damage or were destroyed. Through district leadership, a disaster response program is being built around each congregation, doing needs assessments and organizing to provide disaster assistance in the communities and churches. Specific needs of families are being addressed by each church's leadership, and funding is being sought for a part-time staff person for the response in Puerto Rico.

At Río Prieto Church of the Brethren a drinking water station is being developed for families without access to safe



water. Periodic food distributions also are planned. In Caimito (Río Piedras) at Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera and community center, work teams from the US will repair homes, the center, and volunteer housing. Teams are being organized by a long-term Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteer. A work-camp is planned for Jan. 13-20, led by Shirley Baker.

Brethren Disaster Ministries expects to establish other work teams when the Puerto Rican church leadership feels this is helpful. To volunteer, contact Terry Goodger at [tgoodger@brethren.org](mailto:tgoodger@brethren.org) or 410-635-8730. To support the work in Puerto Rico, give at [www.brethren.org/edf](http://www.brethren.org/edf).

## Church rebuilding in Nigeria

**The Church of the Brethren has provided a second large grant to Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria** (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) to support church rebuilding. A first installment went to EYN in March. Out of this second grant of \$109,000, 20 churches will receive grants of \$5,000 each.

EYN leaders selected the churches to receive grants "after careful consideration and prayers . . . taking into account safety of the returnees and

general peace of the areas," reported Daniel Mbaya, EYN general secretary. News of the grants "have ignited our spirits," he said. "As a church, we remain grateful to . . . all sisters and brothers of the Church of the Brethren for this kind of support."

The two primary mechanisms to support the church's work in Nigeria are the Nigeria Crisis Fund for humanitarian relief and the Church Rebuilding Fund. Find links to both at [www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis](http://www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis).

## Personnel notes

**Traci Rabenstein** has assumed leadership of the Church of the Brethren Donor Relations team. **John Hipps** has concluded his work as director of Donor Relations, a position he held since September 2012. Rabenstein will work out of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., and her home in Enola, Pa. She began as Congregational Support representative in Donor Relations in October 2016.

**Fatima Kurth** has been hired as accountant/bookkeeper for Brethren Benefit Trust. She has more than 13 years of accounting/bookkeeping experience and is completing a bachelor's degree in accounting.



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“...AN APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE TO ALL OF US TO LOOK AT OUR OWN ACTIONS, AS WELL AS TO BE MORE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF OTHERS.” ”

**Timely articles**

The October MESSENGER is another stellar issue—thank you! I’m grateful for the timely articles on the issue of immigration: Jan Fischer Bachman’s piece is an appropriate challenge to all of us to look at our own actions, as well as to be more understanding of the motivations of others. Brian Bachman gives a needed historical perspective to immigration in the US. And the story of West Charleston



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# NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE 2018

JULY 21 - 26 IN FORT COLLINS, COLORADO



*"It has truly been a life changing experience"*  
— Alysha, NYC 2014



NYC 2014 photos by Nevin Dulabaum and Glenn Riegel.

  
**BOUND TOGETHER:**  
*Clothed in Christ*  
COLOSSIANS 3:12-15

REGISTRATION OPENS JAN. 18, 2018 AT 6 P.M. CENTRAL  
[www.brethren.org/nyc](http://www.brethren.org/nyc)

Church of the Brethren's journey with an undocumented member personalizes the issue in a helpful way.

As usual, I enjoyed reading the issue cover to cover. Ken Frantz's metaphor comparing outdated ideas to outdated cords made me chuckle, and I hope it will help me be open to change!

**Rachel Gross**  
North Manchester, Ind.

## Return to civil discourse

Reading "Addressing Islamophobia" caused me to stop and think. Why is everyone who questions Islam now labeled Islamophobic, and a person who questions the life of a homosexual individual is immediately called homophobic? Seems even the MESSENGER has been caught up in the excitement of name calling designed to stifle any civil discourse. Could we possibly return to being at least civil in our discourse?

**Leroy Keeney**  
York, Pa.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**Wanted:** Person experienced with either Montessori education or Children's Disaster Services and who is willing to live in central Nigeria for a few months to encourage and guide untrained Nigerian teachers at Montessori for Peace, an interfaith Montessori preschool. Must be open-minded, flexible, and respectful of all people. Contact [MontessoriForPeaceInNigeria@gmail.com](mailto:MontessoriForPeaceInNigeria@gmail.com) to express interest, to learn details, and to initiate a discussion about possibilities.

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**Well presented**

Brian Bachman's article about immigration in the October issue, "Wait, Not Them!" was remarkably well presented. It deserves a wider audience in the cur-

rent public debate over illegals now in this country, and many more immigrants who seek to find hope and happiness in the US. I do believe, however, that a country has the right to regulate those permitted to come here and seek

citizenship (that dreaded word, quotas), rather than the troubling view I am left with that says, in so many words, "You all come now."

**Ron Keener**  
Chambersburg, Pa.

## TURNINGPOINTS

Send information for *Turning Points* to Diane Stroyeck, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039, ext. 327; dstroyeck@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

**New members**

**Ambler, Pa.:** Kristin Brycki, Andrea Castaneda, Chris Porcelli, Tom Shaw  
**Cedar Creek, Citronelle, Ala.:** Cliff Gray, Robin Gray, DJ Landrum, Maree Landrum, Ruth Martin  
**Chambersburg, Pa.:** Linda Brandt, Nancy Rodgers, Terry Rodgers  
**First Central, Kansas City, Kan.:** Kelsey Hodge  
**Green Hill, Salem, Va.:** Dorothy Carroll, Roger Carroll  
**Lancaster, Pa.:** James Landis  
**Oakland, Bradford, Ohio:** Maddie Shepard, Noah Vanhorn  
**Osage, McCune, Kan.:** Kelsey Lee, Patricia Simonsick, Robert Simonsick  
**Paradise, Smithville, Ohio:** Sherry Vaught, Terry Vaught  
**Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.:** Tyler Boland, David Gerhart, Jim Heisey, Marsha Heisey, Janet Myers, Josiah Nderitu, Benjamin Sheppard  
**Waynesboro, Pa.:** Kayla Baker, Jean Berklite, Mark Spanger  
**Wyomissing, Pa.:** Margaret Bauer, Abi Young

**Wedding anniversaries**

**Brown, Maurice and Jane Phyllis, Glen Arm, Md.,** 66  
**Eller, Douglas and Janice, Portland, Ore.,** 50  
**France, Ron and Peggy, Lake Odessa, Mich.,** 50  
**Halt, Elmer and Joyce, North Liberty, Ind.,** 70  
**Huff, Jim and Colleen, McCune, Kan.,** 50  
**Oakes, Robert and Alice, Rohrersville, Md.,** 65  
**Silverthorn, Jerry and Candy, Rossville, Ind.,** 50  
**Zook, Kenneth and Marlene, Harrisburg, Pa.,** 50

**Deaths**

**Adams, Betty L. Stocker, 89, Albuquerque, N.M.,** Dec. 25, 2016  
**Bashore, Lee, Sr., 86, Lebanon, Pa.,** July 11  
**Bates, Margaret L., 90, Lancaster, Pa.,** Sept. 29  
**Baum, Mary Lavonne Hileman, 87, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio,** Sept. 15  
**Benedict, Winnifred, 93, Sebring, Fla.,** Sept. 5  
**Berger, David, 75, Lititz, Pa.,** Aug. 26  
**Bever, Olive, 95, North Manchester, Ind.,** May 27  
**Bowman, Anna Kathryn, 90, Palmyra, Pa.,** Sept. 30  
**Brubaker, Orlena Stauffer, 92, Lititz, Pa.,** Sept. 22  
**Brubaker, Wilbur G., 81, Pittsburg, Kan.,** March 9  
**Brumbaugh, Wilfred, 76, Roaring Spring, Pa.,** Sept. 23  
**Byer, June, 96, Dixon, Ill.,** Sept. 5

**Caprio, Carolyn Smith, 93, Sebring, Fla.,** Sept. 13  
**Clouse, Jesse, 87, Sebring, Fla.,** Aug. 28  
**Crumpacker, Betty L. Bamman, 85, Yukon, Okla.,** May 21  
**Eichhorn, Belinda Jane Brown, 63, Glen Arm, Md.,** Sept. 10  
**Esworthy, George Frank, 80, Berkeley Springs, W.Va.,** Sept. 19  
**Fisher, Blanche R. Ducharme, 96, Flat Rock, Ill.,** June 20  
**Givler, Phyllis, 90, Carlisle, Pa.,** Oct. 17  
**Graham, Joseph (Buddy), 76, Inwood, W.Va.,** Oct. 17  
**Harman, Esther Leatherman, 102, New Oxford, Pa.,** Sept. 14  
**Hockenberry, Leta Marshall, 89, Mount Joy, Pa.,** July 8  
**Hollinger, Helen Stutzman, 84, Mechanicsburg, Pa.,** Oct. 9  
**Hornish, Tim, 64, Defiance, Ohio,** Aug. 26  
**Hurt, Frank, 77, Defiance, Ohio,** Oct. 12  
**Irvin, Joe, 76, Sterling, Ohio,** Dec. 8, 2016  
**Jewell, Fern Irene Watkins, 97, Olathe, Kan.,** Sept. 28  
**Jones, Carl Douglas, 88, Ferrum, Va.,** Sept. 28  
**Keith, S. Kathleen, 84, Roaring Spring, Pa.,** Sept. 19  
**Kettering, Marlin, 85, Lebanon, Pa.,** Dec. 5, 2016  
**Kinnaman, Kenneth, 77, Frederick, Md.,** Sept. 5  
**Kroh, Charlotte Larue, 85, New Oxford, Pa.,** Aug. 29

**Landes, Wallace, 65, Palmyra, Pa.,** Sept. 21  
**Ledford, Gary H., 86, Cherokee, Kan.,** April 17  
**Liskey, Edwin, 62, Myerstown, Pa.,** Sept. 29  
**Madeira, Ronald, 79, Carlisle, Pa.,** Sept. 21  
**McCann, Lorena Hall, 85, Charlottesville, Va.,** Oct. 2  
**McGolerick, Gertrude Lavinia Harshman, 92, Frederick, Md.,** Sept. 8  
**Meredith, Joseph, 82, Lawrenceville, Ill.,** Sept. 27  
**Miller, John, 82, Lebanon, Pa.,** Sept. 16  
**Miller, Preston, 78, Burlington, W.Va.,** June 10  
**Miller, William O., 87, Bradford, Ohio,** Sept. 30  
**Pote, Grace, 97, Martinsburg, Pa.,** Sept. 5  
**Rolston, Wilma, 85, Indianapolis, Ind.,** Oct. 5  
**Shirley, Alan, 65, Keyser, W.Va.,** Aug. 5  
**Shockey, Betty Cable, 91, Carlinville, Ill.,** Oct. 4  
**Simpson, Jean Elizabeth, 91, New Oxford, Pa.,** Sept. 23  
**Smail, Mary Katherine Markle, 74, Greensburg, Pa.,** Sept. 28  
**Steinour, Rodney, 79, New Oxford, Pa.,** July 17  
**Weaver, Jay, 84, Lancaster, Pa.,** Sept. 1  
**Wells, Forest O., 90, Virginia Beach, Va.,** Sept. 24

**Commissioned**

**Stout, Jeffrey, Southeastern Dist. (Knob Creek, Johnson City, Tenn.),** Oct. 1

**Licensed**

**Durst, Dennis, W. Marva Dist. (Cherry Grove, Grantsville, Md.),** Sept. 24  
**Durst, Rodney, W. Marva Dist. (Cherry Grove, Grantsville, Md.),** Sept. 24  
**Ellifritz, John, W. Marva Dist. (Harness Run, Burlington, W.Va.),** Sept. 10

**Placements**

**Dees, Andrew, pastor, Winter Park, Fla.,** Sept. 1  
**Ellifritz, John, pastor, Harness Run, Burlington, W.Va.,** Sept. 10  
**Ernst, Irvin E., pastor, Hostetler, Meyersdale, Pa.,** Sept. 24  
**Marszalek, Cheryl A., associate pastor, Uniontown, Pa.,** Sept. 17  
**Martin, Derrill J., from pastor, Drexel Hill, Pa., to pastor, Parker Ford, Pottstown, Pa.,** Oct. 1  
**Moore, Edwin E. Jr., from interim pastor to pastor, Uniontown, Pa.,** Sept. 17  
**O'Donnell, Rodney, from interim pastor to pastor, Green Tree, Oaks, Pa.,** Sept. 10  
**Simonsick, Robert H., from pastor, Cedar Creek, Citronelle, Ala., to pastor, Osage, McCune, Kan.,** Sept. 29  
**Stout, Jeffrey, pastor, Knob Creek, Johnson City, Tenn.,** Oct. 1

**Ordained**

**Finkbiner, Daniel, N. Ind. Dist. (Beacon Heights, Fort Wayne, Ind.),** Aug. 27

# 2017 INDEX

Listed on these pages are articles, editorials, columns, and opinion letters that have appeared in MESSENGER during 2017. Numbers following the listings indicate month and page number, with 1/2 and 7/8 representing the combined January/February and July/August issues.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

AC business items available  
 online..... 4-27  
 A Connecticut Yankee ..... 5-12  
 Annual Conference 2017 ..... 5-12  
 From the publisher ..... 6-2  
 A view from the delegate's table ..... 9-32  
 A tale of two translators ..... 9-18  
 Risk Hope reflection ..... 9-16  
 On Earth Peace retains agency status ..... 9-8  
 From the publisher ..... 9-2  
 Preachers announced ..... 10-28  
 Leadership Team issues statement ..... 11-26

## AUTHORS

**Asamoah, Angela**  
 Hoping in hope ..... 7/8-14

**Ashworth, Jeremy**  
 A hillbilly way of living ..... 5-22

**Aykazian, Vicken**  
 A voice for the voiceless ..... 1/2-17

**Bachman, Brian**  
 Wait, not them! ..... 10-16

**Barr, Ernie**  
 On the subject of quality and perfection ..... 3-17

**Barras, Stephanie**  
 Dear fellow BVSer... 1/2-21

**Beckner, Deanna**  
 Bursting with joy ..... 11-24

**Bell, John L.**  
 A birth, not a babyfest ..... 12-10

**Benedict, Jim**  
 This place ..... 6-12  
 A view from the delegate's table ..... 9-32

**Benesh, Gary**  
 Risk Hope reflection ..... 9-16

**Benevento, Tom**  
 Gardening for the earth and soul ..... 5-6

**Boshart, Jeff**  
 The importance of knowing the territory ..... 5-8

**Bosserman, Sandy**  
 Hope in relationship ..... 7/8-12  
 Nativities we have known ..... 12-32

**Bowman, Bob**  
 On the way to destruction... 1/2-22  
 The pool of healing ..... 3-22  
 Sarah, my sister ..... 4-24  
 Feeding a multitude ..... 5-20  
 Looking back ..... 6-24  
 "And I did not know it" ..... 7/8-24  
 Walking on water ..... 9-22  
 Kiss the joy as it flies ..... 10-22  
 Coffee with Elijah ..... 11-22  
 Giving birth to Christ ..... 12-22

**Braun, John**  
 Hope in forgiveness ..... 7/8-11

**Brockway, Joshua**  
 Saving Christianity ..... 6-22  
 The Reformation and the Brethren ..... 10-6

**Brubaker, Pamela**  
 Martha Cunningham Dolby ..... 1/2-10

**Brubaker, Sandy**  
 Andy and Terry Murray at Chiques fundraiser ..... 6-4

**Brumbaugh-Cayford, Cheryl**  
 A vision for transformation 1/2-14  
 Service and simplicity ..... 1/2-18  
 On Earth Peace retains agency status ..... 9-8  
 On Earth Peace timeline ..... 9-8  
 Michigan District approves motion from churches ..... 10-24  
 25 years of NOAC ..... 10-10  
 Providing calm and assurance ..... 11-18  
 Saving the turkey for later ..... 12-14  
 Refusing war ..... 12-20

**Cassell, Dana**  
 A hillbilly way of living ..... 5-22  
 When good intentions are not enough ..... 7/8-26

**Davis, Miller**  
 A brief history ..... 6-14

**Dean, Heather**  
 Gardening for the earth and soul ..... 5-6

**D'Oleo, Daniel**  
 Please help them ..... 5-18

**Dulabaum, Allie**  
 "It gives you hope" ..... 9-14  
 Focus on the love ..... 10-5  
 "The gift I remember" ..... 12-5

**Dulabaum, Nevin**  
 The Old Main cupola ..... 9-20

**Dulabaum, Willard**  
 Soul singer ..... 12-13

**Egge, Doris Cline**  
 Salvation is like a seashore journey ..... 3-12

**Eisenbise, Brooks**  
 Ode to an old book ..... 4-13

**Eldred, Emmett**  
 Post-traumatic church syndrome ..... 5-32

**Finet, Angela**  
 Reflections from ordination Sunday ..... 7/8-16

**Fischer Bachman, Jan**  
 "This is how we church!" ..... 3-21  
 Lessons I learned from my dog ..... 4-32  
 But isn't it illegal? ..... 10-14

**Fitzkee, Don**  
 William A. Hayes ..... 1/2-11

**Frantz, Craig**  
 Addressing Islamophobia ..... 10-18

**Frantz, Ken**  
 Connections ..... 10-32

**Garber, Julie**  
 A nonviolent God in a violent world ..... 4-29

**Gibble, Ken**  
 A recipe of hope and encouragement ..... 3-20  
 What you must never forget ..... 4-7  
 A kind of poetry ..... 4-10  
 Our greatest joy ..... 7/8-22  
 I pledge allegiance ..... 12-24

**Gish, Peggy**  
 Views from a workcamp in Nigeria ..... 12-16

**Gross, Anna Lisa**  
 The stories we tell ..... 4-15

**Harbeck, Kendra**  
 Keeping alert ..... 12-15

**Harr, Martha**  
 Rejuvenating a church and community through dignity ..... 10-21

**Harvey, Tim**  
 God's servants, working together ..... 6-32

**Heckman, Marlin**  
 Brethren assistance to Armenians ..... 1/2-16

**Heishman, Irvin**  
 Getting in line ..... 10-12

**Heishman, Tim**  
 An Election Day love feast... 1/2-8  
 Brethren Woods staffs for peace and justice ..... 11-5

**Holland, Scott**  
 From theo-logics to theo-poetics... 4-6

**Ingerman, Marie**  
 Waging peace ..... 12-21

**Inhauser, Marcos**  
 Grace versus merit ..... 5-11

**Johansen, Ruth Knechel**  
 Swinging ..... 6-23

**Kettering, Gimbiya**  
 Thermometer or thermostat? .. 1/2-5

**Kettering-Lane, Denise D.**  
 Katharina and Martin ..... 10-9

**Krabacher, Pat**  
 Love meant we didn't have to know what was coming next ..... 11-21

**Krieg, Lisa**  
 Hope in God's promises ..... 7/8-14

**Landram, Eric**  
 Marking time with God ..... 11-12

**Layman, Ellen K.**  
 From a tithe, a new church grows ..... 3-18

**Lowe, John W. Jr.**  
 Samuel Weir ..... 1/2-9

**Mason, Diane**  
 The Brethren in World War I .. 6-6

**McFadden, Wendy**  
 From the publisher ..... 1/2-2, 3-2, ..... 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 7/8-2, 9-2, ..... 10-2, 11-2, 12-2  
 Coffee with Dylan Thomas ..... 4-14  
 Finding our words ..... 6-16  
 Thinking carefully about adoption ..... 9-24  
 Pilgrimage ..... 12-6

**Miller, Galen**  
 Is there a future for the Church of the Brethren? ..... 6-19

**Miller, R. Scot**  
 Giving a banquet in Flint... 7/8-18

**Miner, Ralph**  
 Camp Emmaus installs new mural ..... 10-3

**Morse, Kenneth**  
 John T. Lewis ..... 1/2-9

**Munday, Paul**  
 Caterpillar soup ..... 3-32  
 Hope in the wilderness... 7/8-13  
 God and guns ..... 11-32

**Nkosi, LaDonna Sanders**  
 Remembering who we are ..... 4-9

**Propes, Richard**  
 Hacksaw Ridge ..... 1/2-24

**Ramirez, Frank**  
 The Goshen Decision ..... 6-8

**Reid, Stephen Breck**  
 Samuel Weir ..... 1/2-9

**Roebuck, Tyler**  
 Crazy for kids ..... 6-20  
 Columbia City opens addition .. 9-5

**Rosenberger, Mary Sue**  
 Citrus sunsets ..... 4-5

**Schwitzer, Steven**  
 Up on a rooftop ..... 3-6

**Shearer, Sarah**  
 A big God in the small spaces... 7/8-17

**Sgro, John**  
 Looking out at the waves ..... cover

**Speicher, Anna**  
 The Underground Railroad ..... 1/2-13

**Steele, David**  
 Another way of living ..... 5-16

**Studebaker, Gary W.**  
 Not silenced in death ..... 7/8-22

**Townsend, Frances**  
 On Earth Peace retains agency status ..... 9-8

**Tryon, Ruth Keeney**  
 The Disturbances ..... 4-22

**Ullom-Minnich, Paul**  
 Lighting a candle of hope ..... 3-24

**Wagner, Tom**  
 Broken hearts ..... 7/8-32

**Washington, James E. Sr.**  
 A remnant remains ..... 4-18

**Weaver, J. Denny**  
 Why did Jesus have to die? ..... 3-9

**Williams, Linda K.**  
 Addressing Islamophobia ..... 10-18

**Wilson, Tom**  
 Witnessing and embodying love... 1/2-12

**Witschek, Walt**  
 Shepherd's Spring celebrates... 1/2-3  
 Belita D. Mitchell ..... 1/2-12  
 A matter of perspective ..... 1/2-32  
 A vital conversation ..... 3-14  
 A Connecticut Yankee ..... 5-12  
 Seminars chart their courses ..... 11-6

**Wittmeyer, Jay**  
 New mission, new methods, new places ..... 7/8-6  
 This is unimportant ..... 11-16  
 When war was outlawed ..... 11-15

## AUTHORS FOR IN TOUCH

Alley, Robert E. .... 4-4  
 Anderson, Lois ..... 9-3  
 Bantz, Floyd E. .... 9-4  
 Berg, B. Jean ..... 3-3  
 Brubaker, Sandy ..... 6-4  
 Buck, Jen ..... 4-4  
 Copenhaver, Gary and Becky ..... 10-3  
 Daniels, Felton ..... 6-3  
 Flora, Maurice ..... 9-3  
 Gandy, Kate ..... 12-3  
 Godfrey, Gerry ..... 6-4  
 Kauk, Terry ..... 12-4  
 Mason, Dorothy Fry ..... 5-3  
 McFadden, Rosanna ..... 11-3  
 Miller, Barbara ..... 6-4  
 Miner, Ralph ..... 10-3  
 Moyer, Jean ..... 9-5  
 Mueller, Mary ..... 5-4  
 Murphy, Susanne ..... 1/2-3  
 Puffenbarger, Shannon ..... 3-4  
 Rhodes, Jo Ann ..... 12-3  
 Robbins, Ed ..... 10-4  
 Scarvey, Katie ..... 12-3  
 Shaffer, Abby ..... 5-3  
 Shaver, Paul ..... 9-5  
 Sloat, Barbara ..... 7/8-4  
 Sullivan, Kelley ..... 12-4  
 Thomas, Cheryl M. .... 4-3, 5-4, 10-4  
 Thornburg, Ramona ..... 5-3  
 Turner, Mary Kay ..... 7/8-3  
 Tuttle, Mary Beth ..... 10-4  
 Wile, Ellen ..... 7/8-3  
 Williams, Staci ..... 3-4  
 Yohn, Sharon ..... 9-4  
 Young, David S. .... 7/8-4  
 Ziegler, Earl ..... 4-3

## BETHANY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

From theo-logics to theo-poetics ..... 4-6  
 Another way of living ..... 5-16  
 Reflections from ordination Sunday... 7/8-16  
 Seminars chart their courses ..... 11-6  
 Pilgrimage ..... 12-6

## BIBLE

On the way to destruction ..... 1/2-22  
 Up on a rooftop ..... 3-6  
 Salvation is like a seashore journey... 3-12  
 On the subject of quality and perfection ..... 3-17  
 The pool of healing ..... 3-22  
 Sarah, my sister ..... 4-24  
 Feeding a multitude ..... 5-20  
 Looking back ..... 6-24  
 When good intentions are not enough ..... 7/8-26  
 "And I did not know it" ..... 7/8-24  
 Hope in the wilderness... 7/8-13  
 From the publisher ..... 7/8-2  
 Thinking carefully about adoption... 9-24  
 Walking on water ..... 9-22  
 Kiss the joy as it flies ..... 10-22  
 Coffee with Elijah ..... 11-22  
 Giving birth to Christ ..... 12-22

## BOOKS

Adopted ..... 9-24  
 The Benedict Option ..... 6-22  
 The Book of Joy ..... 7/8-22  
 Disunity in Christ ..... 6-32  
 The Great Spiritual Migration ..... 3-20  
 Hillbilly Elegy ..... 5-23  
 The Internationalists ..... 11-15  
 Katharina and Martin Luther ..... 10-9  
 Reflections on Brethren Image and Identity ..... 6-16  
 Refusing War, Affirming Peace ..... 12-20  
 Ted Allen Studebaker ..... 7/8-21  
 The Underground Railroad ..... 1/2-13  
 Waging Peace ..... 12-21

## BRETHREN ACADEMY FOR MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP

Clergy Tax Seminar ..... 1/2-26  
 So many reasons to hope ..... 7/8-5

## BRETHREN BENEFIT TRUST

The 2017 Annual Conference ..... 9-7

## BRETHREN HERITAGE/HISTORY

Stories for Black History Month... 1/2-9  
 Brethren assistance to Armenians 1917-1920 ..... 1/2-16  
 From the publisher ..... 3-2  
 Had the world remembered ..... 4-4  
 A remnant remains ..... 4-18  
 The Disturbances ..... 4-22  
 A brief history of the Brethren Service Center ..... 6-14  
 The Brethren in World War I ..... 6-6  
 The Old Main cupola ..... 9-20  
 The Reformation and the Brethren... 10-6  
 The 1,000th cow ..... 11-5  
 Dunkard Cemetery restored ..... 12-4  
 Refusing war ..... 12-20

## BRETHREN HOMES

Londonderry Village ..... 4-28

## BRETHREN IDENTITY

The stories we tell ..... 4-15  
 Finding our words ..... 6-16  
 This place ..... 6-12

## BRETHREN PRESS

Strawberry rhubarb cobbler pie .. 7/8-23

## BRETHREN SERVICE CENTER

Board approves new areas of global mission ..... 5-25  
 Employees end service ..... 6-28  
 Upper Campus closes ..... 6-28  
 A brief history ..... 6-14  
 This place ..... 6-12  
 The Old Main cupola ..... 9-20

## BRETHREN VOLUNTEER SERVICE

From the publisher ..... 1/2-2  
 A year of service ..... 1/2-4  
 Service and simplicity ..... 1/2-18  
 Dear fellow BVSer ..... 1/2-21  
 The Old Main cupola ..... 9-20

## CHRISTMAS/ADVENT

Marking time with God ..... 11-12  
 Nativities we have known ..... 12-32  
 A birth, not a babyfest ..... 12-10  
 Soul singer ..... 12-13  
 Saving the turkey for later ..... 12-14  
 Giving birth to Christ ..... 12-22

## CHURCH PLANTING

From a tithe, a new church ..... 3-18  
 From the publisher ..... 5-2  
 Weand Trust gives grants ..... 6-27

## CLERGY

What you must never forget ..... 4-7

For a tired pastor ..... 4-12  
 Pre-conference events ..... 5-14  
 Reflections from ordination Sunday 7/8-16

## CONGREGATIONS

Agape (Fort Wayne, Ind.) ..... 11-3  
 Akron Springfield (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 Antioch (Rocky Mount, Va.) ..... 5-29  
 Beacon Heights (Fort Wayne, Ind.) ..... 5-4  
 Beaverton (Mich.) ..... 10-24  
 Bridgewater (Va.) ..... 3-4  
 Brook Park Community (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 Canton (Ill.) ..... 10-21  
 Cedar Lake (Ind.) ..... 11-3  
 Chiques (Manheim, Pa.) ..... 6-4  
 Church in Drive (Saginaw, Mich.) ..... 9-7, 10-24  
 Circle of Peace (Phoenix, Ariz.) ..... 5-24  
 Columbia City (Ind.) ..... 9-5  
 Common Spirit (Wyoming, Mich.) ..... 9-7  
 County Line (Pa.) ..... 7/8-4  
 Creekside (Elkhart, Ind.) ..... 11-3  
 Drayton Plains (Waterford, Mich.) ..... 10-24  
 East Nimishillen (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 Easton (Md.) ..... 7/8-3  
 Eden (Canton, Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 First (Flint, Mich.) ..... 7/8-18  
 First (San Diego, Calif.) ..... 10-18  
 The Gathering (Chicago, Ill.) ..... 6-2  
 Gordonsville Chapel (Gordonsville, Va.) ..... 3-18  
 Goshen City (Ind.) ..... 11-3  
 Green Tree (Oaks, Pa.) ..... 7/8-4  
 Hands of Christ Fellowship (Rochester, Minn.) ..... 6-3  
 Hanover (Pa.) ..... 6-4  
 Highland Avenue (Elgin, Ill.) ..... 9-25  
 Holmesville (Neb.) ..... 10-4  
 Hope (Freeport, Mich.) ..... 3-3  
 Iglesia de Cristo Sion (Los Angeles, Calif.) ..... 9-7  
 Ivester (Grundy Center, Iowa) ..... 9-7  
 Jacksonville (Fla.) ..... 5-4  
 Knight's Chapel (Barboursville, Va.) ..... 3-18  
 La Verne (Calif.) ..... 9-3  
 Lincolnshire (Fort Wayne, Ind.) ..... 10-4  
 Litzitz (Pa.) ..... 4-3  
 Live Oak (Calif.) ..... 12-4  
 Living Peace (Plymouth, Mich.) ..... 10-3  
 Lost and Found (Big Rapids, Mich.) ..... 9-7  
 Manchester (North Manchester, Ind.) ..... 5-3, 6-20  
 Marilla (Mich.) ..... 6-3  
 Marion (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 Midland (Mich.) ..... 10-24  
 Modesto (Calif.) ..... 6-3  
 Mount Wilson (Pa.) ..... 4-4  
 Mount Carmel (Scottville, N.C.) ..... 1/2-3  
 New Haven (Middleton, Mich.) ..... 4-2  
 New Hope (Wynn, Ark.) ..... 3-4  
 New Philadelphia First (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 Nokesville (Va.) ..... 7/8-16  
 Nokesville (Indianapolis, Ind.) ..... 5-3  
 Oakton (Vienna, Va.) ..... 3-21  
 Onekama (Mich.) ..... 6-3  
 Parables Ministry (Lombard, Ill.) ..... 6-27  
 Pleasant Chapel (Ashley, Ind.) ..... 4-3, 11-3  
 Pleasant Hill (Pa.) ..... 7/8-4  
 Pleasant Valley (Floyd, Va.) ..... 4-4  
 Rockford Community (Rockford, Ill.) ..... 1/2-14  
 Root River (Minn.) ..... 6-3  
 South Waterloo (Iowa) ..... 6-4  
 Spring Run (McVeytown, Pa.) ..... 12-3  
 Stone (Huntingdon, Pa.) ..... 9-4  
 Sugar Ridge (Custer, Mich.) ..... 10-24  
 Washington City (D.C.) ..... 11-4  
 West Charleston (Ohio) ..... 9-3, 10-13  
 West Shore Fellowship (Harrisburg, Pa.) ..... 10-4  
 West York (Pa.) ..... 7/8-4  
 WildWood Gathering (Olympia, Wash.) ..... 9-7  
 Woodgrove Brethren Christian Parish (Hastings, Mich.) ..... 10-24  
 Woodworth (Ohio) ..... 3-4  
 York Center (Lombard, Ill.) ..... 9-25  
 Zion (Prescott, Mich.) ..... 10-24

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The Brethren in World War I ..... 6-6  
 Refusing war ..... 12-20

## CREATION CARE

Creation Care Study Committee invites responses ..... 1/2-25  
 Making a difference for the climate... 9-4

## DEATH AND DYING

Caterpillar soup ..... 3-32  
 Coffee with Dylan Thomas ..... 4-14  
 Dunkard Cemetery restored ..... 12-4

## DISASTER MINISTRIES

A year of service ..... 1/2-24  
 Lighting a candle of hope ..... 3-24

Disaster Recovery Support Initiative launches .....4-28  
 Nigeria Crisis Response funds more relief and development .....7/8-27  
 Grants support disaster response, food security .....7/8-27  
 So many reasons to hope.....7/8-5  
 CDS serves in New York, California...9-26  
 Emergency Disaster Fund supports work in S. Sudan, DRC, S. Carolina...9-26  
 Hurricanes put CDS teams in Texas and Florida .....10-28  
 Brethren response in Puerto Rico...11-25  
 CDS team serves in Las Vegas .....11-25  
 Love meant we didn't have to know what was coming next .....11-21  
 Providing calm and assurance .....11-18  
 "The rain, it just wouldn't stop" .....12-3  
 Board adopts vision of a global church.....12-25  
 Puerto Rican Brethren engage with Brethren Disaster Ministries .....12-26

**DISTRICTS**  
 Hottle Fund promotes community connections .....3-4  
 From the publisher .....4-2  
 Celebrating God's faithfulness .....5-3  
 Personnel notes .....5-26  
 Canning meat for the hungry .....7/8-3  
 Peace group renews .....9-5  
 Michigan District approves motion from churches .....10-24  
 Puerto Rican Brethren engage with Brethren Disaster Ministries .....12-26

**FILMS**  
 Hacksaw Ridge.....1/2-24  
 The Disturbances .....4-22  
 The Incredibles .....6-24

**FOOD**  
 Church land supports charity .....3-3  
 Feeding the world .....4-3  
 Thorns infest the ground no more...4-20  
 What's for lunch?.....5-3  
 Global Food Initiative in 2016 .....5-5  
 Knowing the territory .....5-8  
 Feeding a multitude .....5-20  
 CCS studies Native American rights and food security .....7/8-28  
 Strawberry rhubarb cobbler pie...7/8-23  
 Canning meat for the hungry .....7/8-3  
 "Laying down" the Brethren Nutrition Program .....11-4

**GARDENING**  
 For a tired pastor.....4-12  
 Thorns infest the ground no more...4-20  
 From the publisher .....5-2  
 Global Food Initiative in 2016 .....5-5  
 Gardening for the earth and soul .....5-6  
 Grants support disaster response, food security .....7/8-27  
 Growth through gardening .....11-3

**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
 General secretary signs letter supporting refugee resettlement .....3-26

**GLOBAL FOOD INITIATIVE**  
 Global Food Initiative in 2016 .....5-5  
 The importance of knowing the territory .....5-8  
 Grants support disaster response, food security .....7/8-27

**GLOBAL MISSION**  
 Thorns infest the ground no more...4-20  
 Board approves new areas of global mission .....5-25  
 Nigeria Crisis Response funds more relief and development .....7/8-27  
 New mission, new methods, new places .....7/8-6  
 So many reasons to hope.....7/8-5  
 Brethren in DR Congo threatened by violence .....11-25  
 Venezuela church gains official recognition .....11-25  
 This is unimportant .....11-16  
 Board adopts vision for a global church.....12-25

**HAITI**  
 Lighting a candle of hope .....3-24  
 Haiti Medical Project .....5-26  
 Chiques fundraiser .....6-4

**HEALTH**  
 The pool of healing .....3-22  
 Nursing scholarships .....4-27

**HEIFER INTERNATIONAL**  
 "You gave me something to eat".....1/2-3  
 Sacrificial giving for Lent .....6-4  
 Blessed to help others.....7/8-4  
 The 1,000th cow .....11-5

**IMMIGRATION**  
 Please help them .....5-18  
 A tale of two translators .....9-18  
 Getting in line .....10-12  
 But isn't it illegal? .....10-14  
 Wait, not them! .....10-16

**INTERCULTURAL MINISTRIES**  
 Thermometer or thermostat? .....1/2-5  
 Addressing Islamophobia .....10-18  
 Intercultural Ministry connects .....4-27  
 A tale of two translators .....9-18

**INTERFAITH**  
 A new concept of service .....6-3  
 Addressing Islamophobia .....10-18

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**  
 Albert, Charles .....11-29  
 Bailey, Rick .....5-30  
 Bohrer, Louise .....10-30  
 Boos, Ellen .....9-28  
 Bowman, Chris .....9-29  
 Brown, Aaron .....10-4  
 Daughtry, Glen R. ....5-30  
 Dell-Haro, Dylan and Laura .....3-29  
 Edwards, Emily Shonk .....5-30  
 Fitzkee, Don .....1/2-28  
 Flora, Mari .....1/2-30  
 Gay, William .....1/2-30  
 Glover, Carol .....3-28  
 Gross, Rachel .....12-27  
 Hackman, Galen .....5-27  
 Haldeman, Ben .....10-29  
 Hess, John M. ....5-29  
 Huston, Joan .....6-30, 11-30  
 Keener, Ron .....12-29  
 Keeney, Leroy .....12-28  
 Kinzie, Bill .....1/2-28  
 Koehler, Marilyn .....5-30  
 Lohr, Loretta Hartman .....6-29  
 Markey, Sarah .....9-27  
 Miller, Karen and Dean .....7/8-30  
 Mumma, Emily .....6-31  
 Price, John E. ....10-29  
 Shaver, Paul .....9-28  
 Short, Denzel .....11-29  
 Smith, Jeanne .....1/2-30  
 Speicher, Anna .....1/2-30  
 Sweitzer, Sharon .....7/8-29  
 Thomas, Charles .....9-29  
 Vroon, Robert .....11-30  
 Williams, Linda K. ....5-28  
 Winter, Jesse .....6-31  
 Young, David S. ....3-29

**LOVE FEAST**  
 An Election Day love feast.....1/2-8  
 From the publisher .....4-2  
 Communion .....10-5  
 Focus on the love .....10-5  
 Cup .....12-7

**MISSION AND MINISTRY BOARD**  
 Board approves new areas of global mission .....5-25  
 Board approves 2018 budget.....9-26  
 Board adopts vision for a global church.....12-25

**NIGERIA**  
 Workcamp in Nigeria .....1/2-25  
 Art for Nigeria .....3-3  
 Worship lifts up Chibok .....3-4  
 The Disturbances .....4-22  
 Large allocation continues .....5-25  
 EYN confirms release of 82 .....6-27  
 Chiques fundraiser .....6-4  
 Nigeria Crisis Response .....7/8-27  
 Raising awareness in Capitol Hill .....9-25  
 From the publisher .....9-2  
 Chibok girls are baptized .....10-28  
 Rebecca Dali receives award .....10-26  
 A global curriculum .....11-10  
 Church rebuilding in Nigeria .....12-26  
 Views from a workcamp .....12-16  
 Saving the turkey for later .....12-14

**OLDER ADULT MINISTRIES**  
 "We can pray" .....5-3  
 25 years of NOAC .....10-10

**OUTDOOR MINISTRIES**  
 Shepherd's Spring .....1/2-3  
 Camp Emmaus .....10-3  
 Brethren Woods .....11-5

**PEACE**  
 Hacksaw Ridge .....1/2-24  
 Why did Jesus have to die? .....3-9  
 The stories we tell .....4-15  
 A nonviolent God .....4-29  
 Alternatives to violence .....5-4  
 Pre-conference events .....5-14  
 Broken hearts .....7/8-32  
 Hope in forgiveness .....7/8-11  
 Hope in relationship .....7/8-12  
 A peace-full 150th .....9-7

Peace cranes for Pentecost .....9-3  
 From the publisher .....9-2  
 God and guns .....11-32  
 From the publisher .....10-2  
 When war was outlawed .....11-15  
 Soul singer .....12-13  
 Refusing war .....12-20  
 Waging peace .....12-21

**PEOPLE**  
 Allali, Lallia .....10-18  
 Alphonse, Michaela .....7/8-28, 9-15  
 Altenor, Georgia .....3-24  
 Amaya, Rudy .....1/2-26  
 Archange, Vildor .....5-26  
 Aukerman, Ruth .....9-7  
 Balayti, Nora .....10-3  
 Banaszak, David F. ....7/8-28  
 Barkley, Terrell .....5-25  
 Bateman, Victoria .....9-26  
 Batten, Elizabeth .....1/2-18  
 Beckner, Deanna .....1/2-18  
 Beckner, Dennis .....9-7  
 Beckwith, James M. ....10-26  
 Beiser, Kevin .....10-19  
 Betts, Jennifer .....7/8-18  
 Benedict, Jim .....6-28  
 Blizard, Katherine .....6-28  
 Bohn, Connie .....6-28  
 Borgmann, Konrad .....6-21  
 Boshart, Jeff .....5-26  
 Bowers, Buzz .....4-23  
 Bowman, Bob .....9-15  
 Boyer, Susan .....10-11  
 Brehm, Deborah .....4-28  
 Brewer, Joe .....10-21  
 Brown, Dorothy .....12-3  
 Brockway, Joshua .....6-27  
 Brumbaugh, Bill .....9-7  
 Buchanan, Missy .....10-11  
 Buck, Hannah .....1/2-26  
 Butzlaff, Paige .....8-28  
 Capusan, Maria .....6-28  
 Cardona, Shamek .....5-26  
 Carr-Pries, Laura .....11-5  
 Carter, Jeff .....11-7  
 Castillo, Joven .....6-27  
 Chandumi, Paul Abraham .....10-28  
 Chase, Bob .....6-27  
 Chastain, Sherry .....7/8-28  
 Chinworth, Jim .....6-20  
 Clary, Erika .....1/2-26  
 Comings, Janet .....6-28  
 Current, Emilie .....1/2-26  
 Cutsail, Elena .....6-28  
 Dali, Rebecca .....10-26  
 Davies, Jeanne .....6-27  
 Davis, Carol .....10-21  
 Davis, Miller .....6-28  
 Deffenbaugh, Emilie .....1/2-26  
 Detrick, Joe .....10-25  
 DeYoung, Robin .....5-26  
 Divine, Caitlin .....5-4  
 Divine, Joseph .....5-4  
 Docteur, Adias .....5-26  
 Dolby, Martha Cunningham .....1/2-10  
 Douglas, Chris .....10-26  
 Dueck, Stan .....3-14, 6-27  
 Dulabum, Haley .....1/2-26  
 Eikler, Torin .....10-25  
 Eisenbise, Brooks .....9-26  
 Eisenbise, Debbie .....10-10  
 Eisman, Carl .....4-22  
 Elmore, Carol .....1/2-26  
 Epp, Loreen .....6-27  
 Eyer, Helen .....6-28  
 Faus, Bob and Nancy .....5-16  
 Ferrainolo, Joe .....6-8  
 Fike, Earle .....6-12  
 Fike, Matthew .....9-15  
 Finet, Angela .....10-28  
 Fitzkee, Donald .....6-28, 9-25  
 Flores, Nohemi .....9-18  
 Franklin, Benjamin .....10-16  
 Frantz, Ken .....1/2-32  
 Frisby, John .....6-28  
 Fritz, Melissa .....11-26  
 Fry-Miller, Kathleen .....10-27, 11-18  
 Gibble, Jay .....10-10  
 Gonçalves, Alexandre .....5-25  
 Gongora, German .....5-26  
 Goering, Emmy .....10-28  
 Goodger, Terry .....7/8-28  
 Grady, Duane .....11-3  
 Gray, Jean .....12-4  
 Grossnickle, Mary Ann .....6-28  
 Gunn, Chasity .....10-28  
 Hagenberger, Gene .....6-28  
 Haldeman-Scarr, Sara .....10-18  
 Haren, Trevor .....1/2-26  
 Hawk, Kris .....7/8-28  
 Hay, Laura .....9-26

Hayes, William A. ....1/2-11  
 Heisey, Nancy .....11-11  
 Heishman, Nancy Sollenberger .....10-28  
 Henry, J.M. ....6-8  
 Hipps, John .....12-26  
 Hoffman, Kristen .....5-26  
 Hollenberg, Nathan .....1/2-26  
 Hoover, Jason .....1/2-26  
 Hoover, Nicole .....1/2-26  
 Houff, Bekah .....12-5  
 Houff, Jessie .....1/2-26  
 Hudson, Grant .....10-17  
 Iglich, Mathea .....6-28  
 Imhoff, Cassie .....9-26  
 Jackson, Robyn .....6-28  
 Jantzi, John .....3-19  
 Jay, John .....10-16  
 Jewell, Terry .....3-18  
 Junovyak, Dorothy .....5-4  
 Keister, Donita J. ....3-25, 9-12, 25, 10-26  
 Kessler, Kevin .....10-21  
 Kindy, Cliff .....4-17  
 King, Michael .....11-11  
 Kline, Valerie .....4-3  
 Knight, Todd .....5-26  
 Koczan-Flory, Kimberly .....5-4  
 Kontra, Pete .....11-26  
 Kurth, Fatima .....12-26  
 Ladd, Connor .....1/2-26  
 Ladd, Theresa .....9-7  
 Lawrenz, David .....6-27  
 Lederach, John Paul .....5-3  
 Lennard, Jeff .....12-5  
 Lewis, John T. ....1/2-9  
 Lora-Hammond, Mary .....7/8-28  
 Luther, Martin .....10-6  
 Martin, Donna Ritchey .....9-15  
 McBride, Nolan .....9-26  
 McFadden, Dan .....1/2-18  
 McFadden, Monica .....9-26  
 McFadden, Rosanna Eller .....10-28  
 McFadden, Wendy .....10-11  
 McLearn-Montz, Amanda .....1/2-26  
 McRoberts, Dan .....10-24  
 Messler, Brian .....10-28  
 Miller, Devon .....7/8-28  
 Miller, Peggy Reiff .....10-11  
 Miner, Jim .....1/2-26  
 Mitchell, Belita D. ....1/2-12, 9-25  
 Mitchell, Don .....9-25  
 Monn, Nadine .....12-5  
 Murray, Andy and Terry .....6-4  
 Neher, Renee .....10-26  
 Nishioka, Rodger .....1/2-11  
 Niyonzima, David .....7/8-11  
 Nkosi, LaDonna Sanders .....6-27  
 Noffsinger, Ted .....10-5  
 Otero, Jose Calleja .....9-15, 12-26  
 Painter, Duane .....3-14  
 Parham, Robert .....4-22  
 Payne, Elizabeth Caraman .....4-4  
 Penner, Kaylie .....9-26  
 Phelan, Lynn .....6-27  
 Pickens, Mark .....1/2-26  
 Pierre, Emmerson .....3-24  
 Pinto, Kendra .....7/8-28  
 Polzin, Nate .....5-26  
 Poos, Larry .....12-4  
 Price, John .....4-23  
 Rabenstein, Traci .....5-32  
 Reese, Fay .....6-28  
 Reid, Kathy .....10-11  
 Reid, Steve .....10-11, 11-10  
 Remnant, Kyle .....1/2-26  
 Rhodes, Donna .....10-5  
 Rice, Monica .....10-5  
 Riley, Darlene .....4-2  
 Roberts, Debbie .....11-26  
 Robinson, Grey .....7/8-28  
 Robison, Carrie .....4-23  
 Ron, Lubungo .....7/8-6, 11-28  
 Rudy, Tabitha H. ....7/8-25  
 Salcedo, Cesia .....9-18  
 Sarpiya, Samuel Kefas .....1/2-14, 10-28, 10-26  
 Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg .....6-2  
 Scheppard, Carol .....5-12, 6-28, 9-15  
 Schild, Sandy .....7/8-28  
 Schrock, J. Roger .....3-25  
 Schroeder, Bailey .....1/2-26  
 Schweitzer, Steve .....11-9  
 Scott, Liz .....5-4  
 Self, Nathan .....6-21  
 Shepherd-Bowdel, Tara .....6-27  
 Shetter, David D. ....10-26  
 Smith, J. Trent .....9-25  
 Snyder, Jocelyn .....1/2-18  
 Steele, David .....3-26, 6-28, 10-28  
 Steinhilber, Haley .....9-26  
 Studebaker, Ted .....7/8-22  
 Sweet, Leonard .....10-28  
 Telford, Jean Bily .....5-26

Therrien, Jim and Kim .....7/8-28  
 Thompson, Eric .....4-28  
 Thompson, Jeremiah .....4-28  
 Thompson, Tommy .....12-4  
 Tyler, Emily .....1/2-18  
 Ulom Naugle, Becky .....1/2-26  
 Vachon, Steve .....5-4  
 Vaughn, Cliff .....4-22  
 Wallis, Jim .....10-11  
 Weachter, Shelley .....1/2-18  
 Weir, Samuel .....1/2-9  
 Wenger, William .....10-28  
 Wiest, Kelly .....1/2-26  
 Williams, Linda .....10-18  
 Williard, Dewey .....12-5  
 Willis, Charlotte .....6-28  
 Wilson, Woodrow .....6-9, 6-6  
 Winter, Roy .....6-28, 9-25, 10-27, 11-25, 12-26  
 Wittmeyer, Jay .....5-25  
 Woolman, John .....7/8-32  
 Yohn, Emily .....9-4

**PILGRIMAGE**  
 A big God in the small spaces .....7/8-17  
 Marking time with God .....11-12  
 Pilgrimage .....12-6

**PRAYER**  
 Thermometer or thermostat? .....1/2-5  
 A big God in the small spaces .....7/8-17

**RACISM**  
 Thermometer or thermostat? .....1/2-5  
 Stories for Black History Month .....1/2-9  
 The Underground Railroad .....1/2-13  
 A remnant remains .....4-18  
 When good intentions are not enough .....7/8-26

**REFUGEES**  
 General secretary signs letter .....3-26  
 Witness to the Host City .....5-15  
 Looking back .....6-24

**RENEWAL**  
 Caterpillar soup .....3-32  
 Another way of living .....5-16  
 Is there a future? .....6-19  
 Renewed by trying new things .....7/8-4  
 Connections .....10-32  
 Rejuvenating a church .....10-21

**SEAGOING COWBOYS**  
 Blessed to help others .....7/8-4

**SIMPLE LIVING**  
 From the publisher .....1/2-2  
 The Exchange .....1/2-4  
 Service and simplicity .....1/2-18

**SLAVERY**  
 The Underground Railroad .....1/2-13

**THEOLOGY**  
 Salvation is like .....3-12  
 Why did Jesus have to die? .....3-9  
 From theo-logics to theopoeitics .....4-6  
 Grace versus merit .....5-11  
 The Reformation and the Brethren...10-6

**UNITY**  
 A matter of perspective .....1/2-32  
 The stories we tell .....4-15  
 Lessons I learned from my dog .....4-32  
 Planting seeds .....5-32  
 God's servants, working together .....6-4  
 Broken hearts .....7/8-32  
 Hope in relationship .....7/8-12  
 From the publisher .....7/8-2

**URBAN MINISTRY**  
 A vision for transformation .....1/2-14

**VITAL MINISTRY JOURNEY**  
 A vital conversation .....3-14  
 A new concept of service .....6-3

**WORKCAMP**  
 A year of service .....1/2-4  
 Service and simplicity .....1/2-18  
 Workcamp in Nigeria .....1/2-25  
 So many reasons to hope .....7/8-5  
 Bursting with joy .....11-24  
 Views from a workcamp .....12-16

**YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS**  
 "You gave me something to eat" .....1/2-3  
 Dear fellow BVSer .....1/2-21  
 Young Adult Steering Committee...1/2-26  
 National Youth Cabinet .....1/2-26  
 "This is how we church!" .....3-21  
 National Junior High Conference...3-26  
 Young Adult Conference .....3-26  
 NYC theme is announced .....5-26  
 Post-traumatic church syndrome...5-32  
 Crazy for kids .....6-20  
 CCS studies Native American rights and food security .....7/8-28  
 A big God in the small spaces .....7/8-17  
 So many reasons to hope .....7/8-5  
 Bursting with joy .....11-24

# Nativities we have known

**H**aving witnessed multiple dramatizations of the birth of Jesus, most of us recollect every extreme, from wise eastern visitors attired in beaded satin robes to gentle Mary sporting a quilt grabbed from the nursery at the last moment when her well-pressed blue attire was left at home. Who has not teared up at little angels or rejoiced when a stammering shepherd came through with a substitute line that outranked the script by a country mile?



SANDY BOSSERMAN

Personally, I prefer local nativity productions over extravaganzas from Hollywood or Dollywood any day. There is a greater risk of irreverence in local productions; the crackle of sputtering joints as senior wise ones kneel has dissolved more than one come-to-

Jesus moment. Those times are offset, however, when two camels in wheelchairs, one manned by a brother in chronic back pain, the other by one who lost both legs in Vietnam, roll down center aisle, ruminating about the weight of wise men and their gifts. A script intended for whimsy forces

dozen oversized penguins dancing around the North Pole, may give us pause, but it may also reveal more about our own sentimental Christmas journey than a profaning of the sacred. Since every manner of old and new dollies has been wrapped in swaddle, it will likely take more than Winnie-the-Pooh in the manger to upstage the Christ of God.

If we must make certain the nativity drama is depicted accurately and according to the details of Luke and Matthew, we'd best grab the text, get on down to the planning meeting, and attend the practices (dare I say volunteer for a lead role?). As a pastor, I once challenged the youth troupe that I would wear my "Every Child Needs a Stable Background" sweatshirt to practices, without laundering, until they mastered lines and perfected the production. The gimmick became a source of weekly snarkiness and didn't speed up the perfecting by very much. But, like every depiction of nativity for all time, the less than sterling performance did invite another generation to consider, interpret, and embody the gospel account of Christ's coming. No small thing, this responsibility of the church.

If, however, we yearn more for epiphany than predictability, we might forgo church pageants and cantatas for a year, freeing up time to explore back alley nativities. We

WITH MARK'S SIMPLE SENTENCE ON THE MATTER, NATIVITY MAY EMERGE LESS TAME, PRESENTING CHARACTERS DANGEROUS, MYSTERIOUS, AND UTTERLY AMAZING.

serious reflection when those playing beasts of burden obviously know too much about bearing loads for congregations to miss the point.

It is the season of nativity and the end of the calendar year. Chapter two of Luke's Gospel will pair with chapter two of Matthew's, depicting the nativity of one whose work we Brethren purport to continue, even Jesus, the Christ. On the one hand, this time on the church calendar year is more unfeigned than most. No matter how many times we rail about the need to "put Christ back in Christmas," we must admit that Emmanuel has neither left nor forsaken us, nor has God-with-us ever been boxed in by the quality of birthday celebrations. On the other hand, nativity sometimes involves obsession with image over substance.

Acknowledgement of the uncomfortable truth that the holy dwells with the ordinary could yet make of us an honest people, and perhaps more forbearing as well. The inflated Holy Family in thy neighbor's yard, alongside a

might ignore Matthew, Luke, and even John for one year, and go with Mark: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

That's it. While Mark launches right into the crier in the wilderness, it falls to us to recognize nativity in real time. Perplexed parents, shepherds, wise ones, and over-burdened camels are found among the motley crew of creation. It is for us to move around the figures we meet until we see them as Jesus taught us—lest they be cast as extras instead of lead roles and vice versa. With Mark's simple sentence on the matter, nativity may emerge less tame, presenting characters dangerous, mysterious, and utterly amazing.

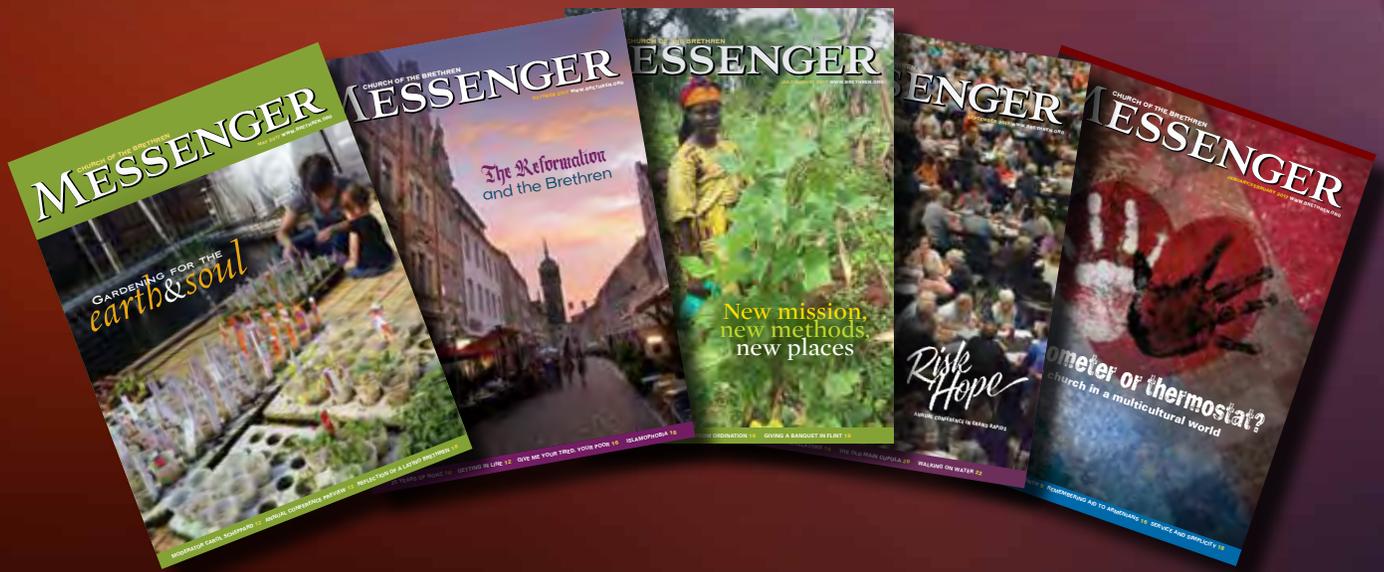
That kind of nativity may first drive us up the wall and finally to our knees, from beginning to beginning, which was likely the point in the first case. **LU**

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

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peace

be with you

—Luke 24:36

Merry Christmas



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