



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

APRIL 2017 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

## *Mystery & metaphor*

*God as poet of the world*

Looking out at the waves coming in  
Crashing as ending at the edge of land  
Waves traveling many miles  
From distant shores  
Waves traveling upon a vast world that is not known  
Carrying with them the secrets found within  
Wondering where the wave began  
What was found on its travels  
Wanting to ask for the answer  
It is coming closer  
The wave crests then ceases to be  
Before its last breath  
It utters something  
Something that I have waited to hear  
The answer to the riddle  
I close my eyes and listen  
The wave whispers its secret as it dies  
Shhhh

—John Sgro



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# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Poem by John Sgro, pastor of Oakland Church of the Brethren, Bradford, Ohio. Photograph by Daniel Sallai.

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## You're invited

Readers are invited to submit short essays (under 500 words) on the Annual Conference theme "Risk Hope." You can interpret the assignment however you wish. Several essays will be selected to appear in the July/August issue. Send submissions by e-mail to [messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org). Please include a one-sentence bio typical of the author id's that appear in Messenger. The deadline is May 1.

# FROM THE PUBLISHER

**H**omemade grape juice is better than bottled, Darlene Riley figures, so she makes enough for every congregation in her district to take home for love feast. Her family has a small vineyard, and she's been bringing the communion juice to Missouri/Arkansas District Conference for at least four years.

At the end of the last growing season, it happened that Eldon Coffman preached at her congregation, New Hope Church of the Brethren in Wynne, Ark. Riley asked him to say a blessing over the grapes that would be made into communion juice. After the service and a fellowship meal, he and everyone else pitched in to stem the fruit. And then, shortly before district conference, Brother Eldon, a long-time saint of the district, passed away—bringing particular poignancy to that year's sharing of the juice.



**WENDY MCFADDEN**  
PUBLISHER

At district conference there's other fruit too. Riley brings Opal Andrews' canned peaches along with preserves made by two friends from the local farmers' market. The proceeds from those jars are donated to the global mission work of the Church of the Brethren—meaning that those Arkansas peaches travel very far indeed.

At love feast, can you taste the sun and wind of the vineyard? The labors of the generous gardener?

The sweet blessing of the hands of the helpers? Can you feel the connection between Arkansas and Venezuela, between Haiti and Nigeria? Can you see the vine that connects us all? Can you drink in this mystic sweet communion?

During holy week, as you prepare for the mystery of resurrection, immerse your senses in these words from Brethren poet Ken Morse (*Hymnal Supplement*, no. 1068):

In seeking, in silence we wait and we listen,  
while joining our hands as our thoughts move in prayer.  
We watch for the mystery that fills us with wonder;  
we know God has promised to be with us here.

Together we follow the movement of music;  
together our hearts are alerted to joy.  
The warmth of our sharing, the touch of our caring  
will strengthen the faith that no fear can destroy.

While taking the bread and the cup overflowing,  
we sit at a table that circles the earth.  
We drink from the springs that sustain and renew us  
where God offers wholeness and quenches our thirst.

*Wendy McFadden*

## How to reach us

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*Pleasant Chapel pastor Valarie Kline (right) with guests from Armenia.*

## Feeding the world, one step at a time

**H**ow does one begin to alleviate the hunger pains of starving children across the world? One northern Indiana church has set the example by raising more than \$155,000 since 2007, partnering with another congregation and Foods Resource Bank (FRB).

The first step was taken in 2007 when Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren in Ashley, Ind., met with an FRB spokesperson and Peace United Church of Christ in Fort Wayne, Ind. Seven years later, a John Deere Foundation grant further fueled efforts to sustain a joint “growing project.”

The partnership between an urban/suburban church and a rural church works smoothly. Annually, the former raises money for planting materials, while the latter plants acreage, referred to as “sweat equity.” Bounty received at harvest time is funneled through FRB.

Pleasant Chapel pastor Valarie Kline says, “Not only does the work we do help others, it creates an incredible partnership between our two very different churches. We have created our own community together and come together to worship, celebrate the harvest, and share in fellowship meals. Our project together has assisted in providing food security in Zambia, Kenya, North Korea, Bolivia, Guatemala, Uganda, Mozambique, Central African Republic, and Kenya.”

A final step is celebration. When a summer parade runs through the Hudson-Ashley area, Pleasant Chapel’s horse-drawn wagon hauls enthusiastic parishioners and a proudly displayed FRB sign. Later in the fall, the two churches hold their Annual Harvest Celebration with corn husking, “trunk or treating,” and an antique farm equipment display. The buffet potluck keeps participants mindful of blessings that they experience, and that those whom they support lack. *-Cheryl Thomas*



## Welcoming the new year

**Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** hosted a New Year’s Day celebration for Karen refugees from Myanmar (Burma) on Jan. 7. More than 350 people attended, celebrat-



ing with traditional dances, songs, and food.

As well as local Lancaster County families, others attended from Allentown and Philadelphia, Pa., and two families came from Virginia and Connecticut. The Warwick community alone has more than 100 members of the Karen community.

The festive occasion held in the church’s Family Life Center was augmented by a half moon arrangement of many red balloons and flowers. A letter from the president of the international Karen community organization was read in both Karen and English. A five-member band from Minnesota, named SALT, entertained throughout the day.

Honored during the celebration were the older men and women, whom the Karen culture reveres, and the recent Karen 2016 graduates from local high schools. Both groups were presented with gifts. *-Earl Ziegler*



## Fellowship along the way

**When Mount Wilson (Pa.) Church of the Brethren planned a trip** to a Brethren Disaster Ministries workcamp in Detroit, Mich., organizers called the Northern Ohio District office to ask if a congregation along the route would be willing to let the group use

their building for an overnight Saturday stay.

The district disaster coordinator put them in touch with pastor Paul Bausman of Eastwood Church of the Brethren in Akron. That congregation not only said yes, but fed the 12 travelers a delicious meal. Host families

took groups to stay in their homes, and after worship the next morning the congregation sent them off well fed.

The disaster volunteers enjoyed good fellowship with kindred spirits, and their understanding of church is greater for experiencing Eastwood's hospitality. —Jen Buck

## Had the world remembered

**A**mong family artifacts I have discovered a pin evidently given to a family member when the Church of the Brethren was raising funds to assist those affected by the Armenian genocide. It has a star on a blue field with the words, "SAVE The Starving in Bible Lands," and was provided by the Armenian Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief in 1917. This family raised turkeys to sell and donated the proceeds for Armenian relief.

In the 1970s, '80s, and '90s my wife, Linda, and I became acquainted with Elizabeth Caraman Payne, one of the refugees from Armenia who was assisted by the relief effort. She was reared as a Christian in Armenia, where her father and mother were killed by the Turks. She be-



came a refugee and worked in a nursing facility that cared for wounded soldiers. While there, she discovered that one of her patients had been responsible for killing her father. Her autobiography, *Daughter of the Euphrates*, described her early life and how she wrestled with forgiving the one who had killed her father. After World War I, she came as a refugee to the United States, became a US citizen, studied in New York City, married, and raised a family.

It was a great honor to meet Elizabeth and to have her visit in our home. At a church program, she mentioned her Armenian background and an older attendee shared her memories of assisting with the Armenian relief effort. Elizabeth testified that she saw her role as returning the gift, as the scripture reads in Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back."

At retirement Elizabeth and her husband, William, came to live in Bridgewater Retirement Community. After I became pastor in Bridgewater in 1989, she enlisted my assistance in leading a service to remember the Armenian Holocaust, an event nearly 30 years before the Jewish Holocaust. Elizabeth was convinced that had the world remembered the Armenian Holocaust, the Jewish Holocaust might have been averted. —Robert E. Alley

Robert E. Alley is a past moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference and an ordained minister living near Harrisonburg, Va.

## Bags to bench

**Pleasant Valley Church of the Brethren in Floyd, Va.,** is getting media coverage for recycling more than 500 pounds of plastic, and turning it into a free composite bench for the church playground. The church worked on the project with a company called Trex, according to a report from WSLs Channel 10. Church members collected more than 40,000 plastic bags in six months.

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.



Chris Bowman

## *Citrus sunsets*

by **Mary Sue Rosenberger**

Last night, it was a big  
South Texas orange sunset  
that dripped sweet rays of fading light  
onto the waiting horizon.  
Tonight, a celestial smoothie  
of grapefruit pink  
and lemon yellow  
splashed across the sky  
until Night  
—sipping steadily—  
swallowed it all into darkness!

Maker of sunsets,  
with what wondrous flavors  
will you feast our eyes  
tomorrow night?

Mary Sue Rosenberger is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and a former chaplain in a retirement community. She writes poetry and participates on the ministry team for Living Stream Church of the Brethren.

# From theo-logics to theopoetics

by Scott Holland

**T**he brothers Thornton and Amos Wilder were 20th-century American writers.

Many remember Thornton Wilder as the great novelist and playwright. However, his brother Amos also wrote as a distinguished theologian and biblical scholar.

The brothers asked a question many other Christians who cared about the writing life also pondered about the language of faith: Since the Bible is filled with inviting stories, songs, parables, prayers, and poems, why is the expression of so much contemporary theology inscribed in such

dense, doctrinal, and juridical vocabularies?

With this question in view, Amos Wilder proposed an alternative style of religious and spiritual expression more consistent with the historic language of faith and declared, “Before the message, the vision; before the sermon, the hymn; before the prose, the poem. The discursive categories of theology as well as the traditional images of sermon and prayer require a theopoetic.” Wilder became one of the leaders of the theopoetics movement of the 1960s, and today the movement has blossomed—with many pastors, theologians, poets, and spiritual seekers drawn to this creative way of

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**WE DO OUR BEST THEOLOGY IN THE FACE OF THIS MYSTERY WHEN WE RECOGNIZE THAT EACH BELIEVER AND SEEKER OCCUPIES A PLACE IN THE MYSTERY THAT NO ONE ELSE INHABITS.**





naming themselves and rendering God's name in history.

What is theopoetics? It is not merely poetry about God, as a literal rendering of the term might suggest. Neither is it a call for all spiritual writing to be composed in rhyming or free verse, although that might be lovely indeed. Reaching back to the ancient Greek *poiesis*, which means “to make” or “to artfully construct,” those drawn to this genre of writing emphasize the inventive, intuitive, and imaginative possibilities of representing both humanity and divinity in their writing—remembering that “God is the poet of the world,” as several theologians have proclaimed. It is a call to manifest the artful spirit of the Creator as those created in that divine image seek to write about God, world, self, and others.

Further, following the lead of the Wilder brothers, we theopets tend to resist the temptation to capture God in logical propositions and instead favor poetic metaphor as a more expansive and inclusive language of spiritual revelation. This leads us to see mystery, metaphor, and meaning-making as marks of the best spiritual composition.

The adventure of faith invites us to enter and explore holy mystery. God is tender love, yet God is also awesome mystery. The medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart has taught us to pray, “Oh God beyond the God I name.” The transcendent God is always beyond the God we seek to define, name, and represent in finite human vocabularies.

Thus, in worship we freely and poetically sing “God of Many Names” from our Brethren hymnal and render God as the womb and birth of time, the rabbi of the poor, the God of Jewish faith, the God of Jesus Christ, and the web and loom of love. When the hymn ends, worshipers don't pause and debate which metaphor is most correct. All of these rich images together express and reveal the mystery of God.

We do our best theology in the face of this mystery when we recognize that each believer and seeker occupies a place in the mystery that no one else inhabits; therefore we must listen to and learn from one another's stories, poems, songs, and confessions, expecting to discover traces of the divine mystery there.

God may in fact be beyond the God we name, but every preacher and poet knows that language matters. To name is to know and to remember. We must take great care in our naming of the world because the world often becomes just what we signify, terribly broken or wonderfully blessed.

## What you must never forget

by Ken Gipple

What they never tell you  
in the classes at seminary  
is that every Sunday morning  
when you stand up to preach  
you will be looking into  
the faces of suffering.

It will take some time  
but one day you will  
know. If you have listened  
mightily, you will have been  
touched by unutterable pain.

You will carry it with you  
as you open the Book, as  
you plan what you will  
say and how to say it.  
You will learn there are  
so many sorrows,  
so many sorrows.

The poet Dana Gioia explains it like this: “The world does not need words./it articulates itself in sunlight, leaves and shadows./The stones on the path are no less real for lying uncatalogued and uncounted.” Gioia continues, “Yet the stones remain less real to those who cannot name them,/

**WHEN WE SPEAK OF GOD, LOVE, BEAUTY, TRUTH, GOODNESS, AND MATTERS OF ULTIMATE CONCERN, WE OFTEN TURN TO METAPHOR BECAUSE OF AN EXPANSIVE AND INCLUSIVE MEANING FOUND THERE.**

or read the mute syllables graven in silica./To see a red stone is less than seeing it as jasper. . . .”

In this poem, “Words,” Gioia identifies the paradox of language quite well. If this is true in our efforts to accurately represent and name the sensuous living world around us, the naming of things divine, transcendent, spiritual, and ineffable is even more challenging. The style and substance of theopoetics as a kind of writing is most at home in the linguistic world of metaphor.

If we think back to our grammar school lessons on metaphor, we remember that metaphor is representing one thing in terms of another. The arm of a chair is a very familiar metaphor. We all get it, and most of us spend little time philosophically pondering the relationship of a chair’s arm to a human arm. It’s a metaphor, a language game, a homely and utilitarian image. It’s not literal, but is true nevertheless. Is it really an arm? Well, yes and no. Therefore, all metaphors represent reality by first declaring, “It is,” and then whispering, “But it is not.”

When we recite a beloved psalm and affirm, “The Lord is my shepherd,” we are within the realm of metaphorical theology or theopoetics. Not only does the creative use of

metaphor provide us with many names with which to name the God beyond the God we name; it also creates more hospitable linguistic space for difference and diversity in the human community.

In my experience with conflict transformation, if in a community of great plurality one stands and presents a straight-up bald theological or doctrinal declaration, it is likely to either provoke a fiery counter argument or simply shut down further communication and conversation. However, if one instead offers a poem, parable, story, or song to open a genuine exploration, it would be unusual for one to protest in response, “I really disagree with that poem! It is dead wrong.” One might instead say, “That poem doesn’t really speak to me,” or “I don’t get it,” or perhaps even, “I would offer a different poem or story.”

A poetic response in the presence of difference and diversity is more than artful dodging. It is acknowledging that meaning is made, explained, and negotiated in a world of mystery and metaphor.

There is a welcome surplus or excess of meaning in all metaphors. When we speak of God, love, beauty, truth, goodness, and matters of ultimate concern, we often turn to metaphor because of an expansive and inclusive meaning found there. It is a meaning that cannot easily be reduced to a roster of propositions, a folder of denominational statements, or a book of doctrines. Propositional declarations about the mystery of God and the mystery of being human too often shut down the authentic spiritual journey of meaning-making by substituting rule-based moralities, churchly decrees, and inherited traditions of God-talk.

This is, however, not to suggest that there are not living resources in the texts, traditions, and experiences of the historic Christian faith to inspire and enable us to dwell poetically upon the earth. There indeed are! Jesus was a poet and prophet. Alexander Mack Jr. and Gottfried Arnold wrote some of their best theology in poetic verse. It is instead to remind pastors and parishioners alike, “Before the message, the vision; before the sermon, the hymn; before the prose, the poem.” 

Scott Holland is the Slabaugh Professor of Theology and Culture and Director of Peace Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary.

**Bethany Theological Seminary offers a new graduate certificate in “Theopoetics and the Theological Imagination.”** Students may fold the one-year certificate into a full MA or MDiv degree. They must take five courses with titles such as Theopoetics, Narrative Theology, the Theological Imagination, and the Ministry of Writing. Courses are offered in a variety of formats, from weekly campus classes to weekend intensives to online offerings. Learn more at [bethanyseminary.edu/academic-programs/graduate-certificates](http://bethanyseminary.edu/academic-programs/graduate-certificates).



# Remembering who we are

by LaDonna Sanders Nkosi

born a beloved child of God  
before i even knew so  
before i was even thought of  
before the foundations of the world

i, a baby girl, just above the toddling age  
sank my bare tippy toes  
in deep plush red carpets

i stepped my feet on deep plush red carpets  
and step by step passed ornate thrones  
and seats of gold and crimson

i dragged the plushness of my  
yellow and gold calico baby blanket  
down the aisle

stepping on deep red carpets  
the harps played  
and trumpets sounded

as I stepped up  
one  
two  
three  
to the throne of grace

and all glory shone  
from the seat of the throne  
as i climbed up on the lap  
of the Creator  
and God whispered in my ear  
saying

“before you are born  
know that i know you  
and before i put you in the womb  
know that i have set you apart  
i appoint you as a prophet to the nations”

“fear not for i have redeemed you  
i have called you by name  
you are mine  
when you pass through the waters  
i will be with you

when you go through the floods  
they will not overtake you  
when you walk through fire  
you will not be burned”

“at times you may forget,  
but it is me who knit you together  
in your mother’s womb  
at times you may forget  
but you are fearfully and wonderfully made”

born a beloved child of God  
before you even knew so  
before you were even thought of  
before the foundations of the world

you, a baby boy, a baby girl  
just above the toddling age  
sank your bare tippy toes  
in deep plush red carpets

you stepped your feet on deep plush red carpets  
and step by step passed ornate thrones  
and seats of gold and crimson

you dragged the plushness of your favorite baby blanket  
down the aisle  
stepping on deep red carpets  
the harps played and trumpets sounded

as you stepped up  
one  
two  
three  
to the throne of grace

and all glory shone from the seat of the throne  
as you climbed up on the lap of the Creator

and God whispered in your ear

Remember?

This is “Remembering Who We Are”

LaDonna Sanders Nkosi is a global pastor and public poet and is founder of The Gathering Chicago, a community of prayer and global local service based in Hyde Park, Chicago. <http://TheGatheringChicago.org>

# A kind of poetry

by Ken Gible

**W**hat do pastors do? The obvious things, of course: preach sermons, pray prayers, baptize, visit the sick, officiate at weddings, comfort the grieving, and more. Much more.

Some of those “mores” are things that pastors may not even be aware they are doing. Or, to say it another way, it will take time, sometimes a long time, to realize that much more is going on than simply doing what people expect a pastor to do.

In his book, *The Pastor as Minor Poet*, M. Craig Barnes explored why and how a pastor can live out the calling of what he called pastor/poet. As he put it:

When we begin with our identity in Christ and the pastoral call to assist others in becoming fully alive in him, we are freed from the drudgery of be-

ing managers and service providers to pursue something much more creative—being poets of the soul (p. 13).

The pastor/poet, Barnes wrote, draws his or her primary raw material from reflections on pastoral work: a hospital visit to a dying parishioner, a counseling session with a woman who is afraid her husband is going to leave the marriage, a conversation with a troublesome church member who is constantly seeking attention and affirmation.

Any pastor will recognize the wrenching decisions that need to be made in such situations—what to do or not do, what to say or not say—and the second-guessing about one’s decisions that is sure to follow.

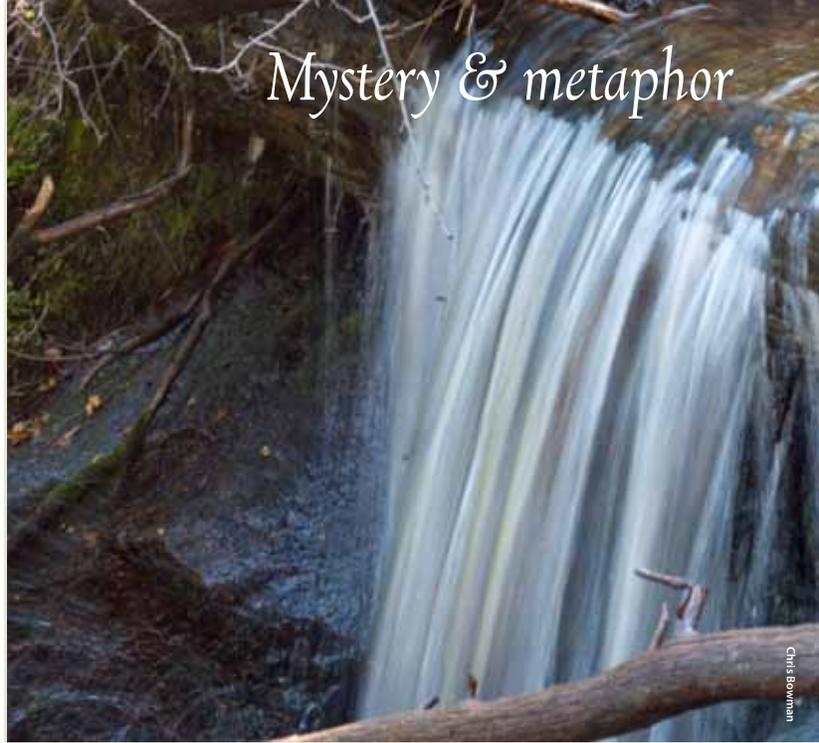
In my experience as a pastor, such recognition happened only over a significant length of time. It happened as I lis-



## Harry and Gertie by Ken Gible

Invariably  
at least once a year  
she would ask:  
When Jesus said to the thief  
today you will be with me  
in Paradise  
what did he mean?  
Invariably  
I would tell her:  
I don't know.  
Invariably  
she would say:  
That's one we must hang  
up on a hook till we get  
to heaven.  
We'll find out then.

There was the afternoon  
I stopped to see them  
and we drank coffee  
from old cups  
and he said suddenly:  
You know, pastor,  
we pray for you every  
morning.  
I almost wept.  
Still do when I remember.  
Invariably.



Chris Bowman

tened, not simply for facts or information, but for the worries, the hopes, the sorrows, the joys, that came from the mouths and the hearts of the people I was in ministry with.

At some point—it took years—I came to understand that these heartfelt expressions were a kind of poetry, a pouring forth of all that it means to be human. I knew that I was privileged to hear things that were spoken to few others. I began to realize that much of what was said to me as a pastor was a holy exchange.

I also realized that I was given more than I gave. As I listened and watched, I saw how people struggled with disappointment, how they dealt with anger and loss, how they failed and succeeded, how they found peace and comfort and joy. In the stories their lives told, I heard echoes of the stories in the Bible, in its poetry, especially in the book of Psalms, where we find everything from an overflowing of lament to boisterous outbursts of praise.

In all of it, the people in the congregations I pastored were helping me, often unwittingly, to understand what it means to be a person living in the tension between heartache and happiness, between doubt and faith. I want to underscore that word “unwittingly,” because neither they nor I realized it was happening at the time. It was only later, sometimes weeks or months or years later, that I began to understand what was happening in those interchanges. The struggles, the questions, and, not infrequently, the confessions of faith I heard spoke powerfully to me. I, who had come in the guise of minister, discovered that ministry was a two-way street, not just occasionally, but constantly.

Here are several of the stories, the “poetry,” I was privileged to hear in the lives of the people I served. Where appropriate, I have changed names or situations to preserve confidentiality. And, yes, I have drawn on “poetic license” to a greater or lesser degree in my reflections. Nevertheless, they are as “true” as I can make them. They come from my modest attempt to uncover the holy that so often inhabits the commonplace of human interchange. And they are my effort to express deep appreciation for the people I came to know and love in the churches I served. 

Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, writes from Camp Hill, Pa. These poems will be part of a forthcoming book from Brethren Press.

## Secret by Ken Gible

It's about my uncle, she says.  
He's dying, you know.  
He's ninety-one.  
It's time I told somebody.  
She reaches into her purse  
and pulls out a photo,  
yellowed, edges curled.  
A man is smiling at the camera,  
his arm around a girl's shoulder.  
Her face is frozen, expressionless.

It started when I was thirteen, she says.  
I stopped crying about it years ago,  
but now. . . .

She stops. Then starts again.  
When you do the funeral  
you'll want to talk about  
all the good things he's done.  
And you should.  
But I wanted you to know  
what . . . what no one else knows,  
not even my husband,  
and why you will not  
see me weeping.



Gemma Stiles

## *When the call comes*

by Ken Gibble

When the call comes  
you will hear yourself say  
what people say at such times:

“her suffering is over now”

“he always said he wanted to go with his boots on”

“she lived a good life”

and part of you,  
most of you,  
believes it.

But the rest of you  
wants to carry  
protest signs  
around God’s headquarters  
and chant slogans  
of indignation  
and rage.

## *For a tired pastor*

by Ken Gibble

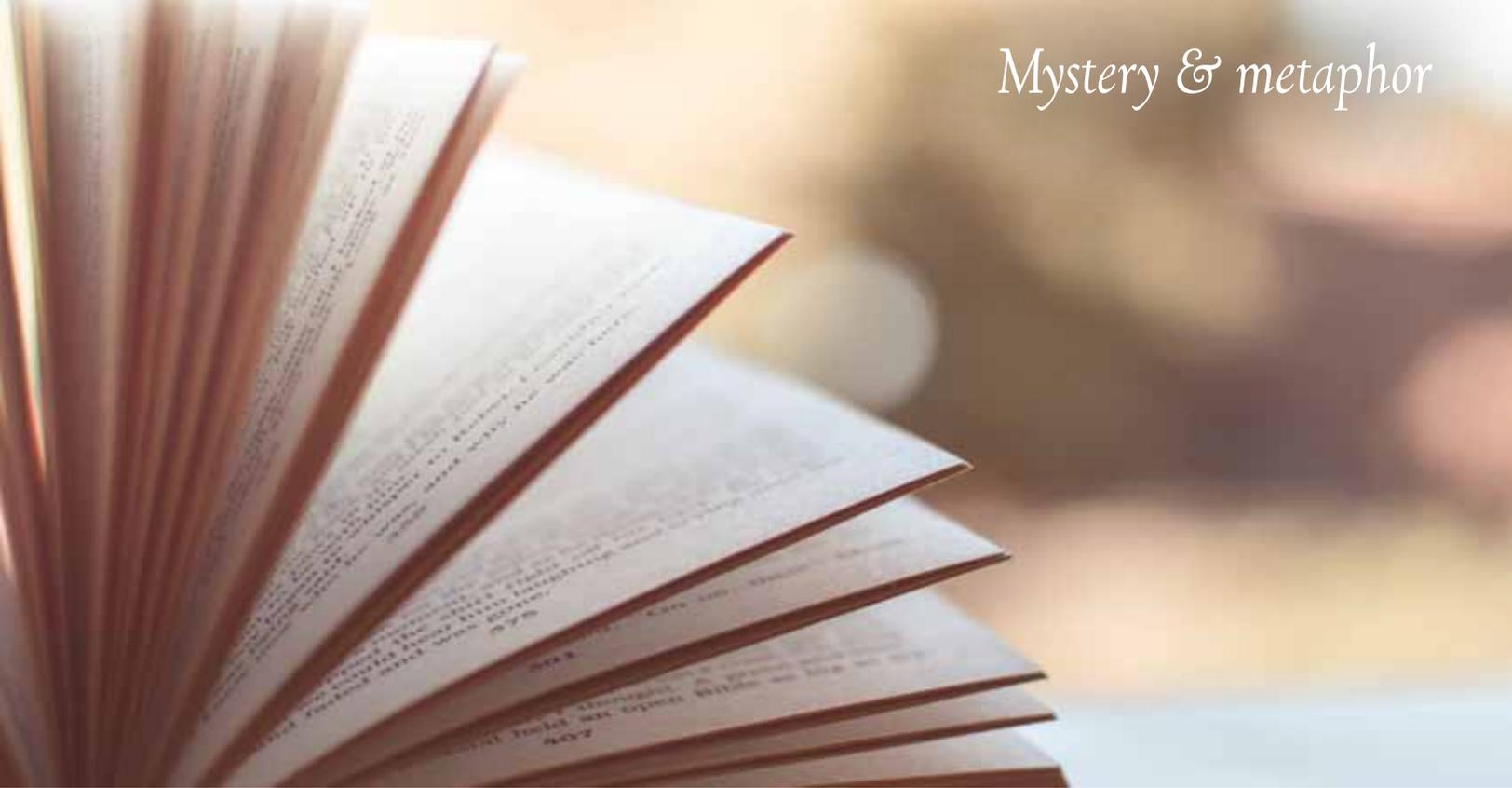
If you have space for a garden,  
make one. It needn’t be huge,  
a few rows of beans will suffice,  
or, if you prefer flowers, plant  
some marigolds, petunias, zinnias.

Yes, weeds will grow in your garden.  
Which is the whole point.  
You’ll need to get out there  
to hoe them out or, even better,  
just bend down and pull them up.

When you’ve finished,  
you can stand back and see  
the result of your efforts—  
a clean, weed-free garden plot.

It will be the antidote  
to the question that  
all too often nags at you,  
namely, what have I accomplished?  
Add up meetings attended,  
visits made, sermons preached,  
has any of it made a difference?  
The answer will not be apparent,  
at least not in the moment,  
maybe not for years.

In the meantime  
go get a spading fork.  
Make a garden.



## Ode to an old book

by Brooks Eisenbise

What a common thing, a book  
a block of text cast in the pulp and framed  
by two covers, two cloth-covered doors  
(one way in, one way out)  
the title reveals little, the pages know  
how to keep secrets  
swallow them  
like gum

Still, I crack it awake  
fingers like chisels, like earthquakes,  
and it opens begrudgingly, mumbling  
as the covers slowly separate, creaking  
crackling and popping like a candy  
wrapper or my knuckles or  
a wildfire  
spitting dust as I run  
my fingers over the pages  
soft, sharp, imprinting the words  
into my palms like worry lines

How many fingers have been here?  
How many hands am I holding?

I move into its spine  
I breathe, and it breathes back,  
filling the space between  
my ears with smoke and mildew  
and expired memories  
a scent I could burn like a candle  
and extinguish just to see  
the smoke  
dance

Someday, I will be only  
an old book, misplaced,  
brittle and yellowing  
full of forgotten  
words and coffee stains  
shut shut shut  
and I will be exploded open  
and I will be held close to your chest  
and the scent of me will waft like  
the dancing smoke of a long-burned flame

Brooks Eisenbise is studying art and design at the University of Michigan. She is a member of Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind.



# Coffee with Dylan Thomas

by Wendy McFadden

*Surely it is presumptuous to question Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," perhaps the most well-known villanelle ever. Nevertheless, this poem (a villanelle that echoes the phrasing and word choice of Thomas' famous poem) imagines a conversation about life and death.*

Why rage against the dying of the light,  
As if this light were more than just a day?  
What frightens you about the dark of night?

What makes you think that it is brave to fight,  
As if the goal of living is to stay?  
Why rage against the dying of the light?

Would gentleness betray your human might?  
Have you with eyesight earthbound lost your way?  
What frightens you about the dark of night?

Can you imagine fiercer rays of bright,  
A world with every shadow kept at bay?  
Why rage against the dying of this light?

Could wild ones find their wings in sun-filled flight  
And blazing song and fiery dance replay?  
What frightens you about the dark of night?

What do you see at death's mysterious height?  
God urge you on with loving tears, I pray.  
Why rage against the dying of the light?  
What frightens you about the dark, good night?

# The stories we tell

by Anna Lisa Gross

**A** few months before I turned three, my family moved from Philadelphia to a seven-acre farm in Indiana to live communally with some other simple Brethren. We shared the farmhouse until we could spread out into two houses, a trailer, a big old barn, sharing the land with chickens and cats, worms and bees, and veggies and berries . . . and an old windmill—tall and sturdy amid hundred-year-old buildings, the scaffolding outlasting blades or function.

Except one. I would climb to the top of that windmill, look around while my stomach flipped, then climb back down. I don't remember the first time I climbed up. I don't remember that my dad followed me up to protect me. I wouldn't have believed this if there weren't photographic evidence. I thought that windmill was my private playground.

Physically, I was a bold kid—climbing not just windmills, but trees too, wrestling, doing flips off the bed or through the banister.

Socially, I was timid. One of my earliest memories is eating at a restaurant with my extended family and playing with the ice and straw in my water glass—novelty items that I never enjoyed at home. My aunt scolded me (reasonably, I'm sure). I hid under the table for the rest of dinner.

I've always known myself to be accommodating,

insecure, and inclined to give in or hide to escape trouble as quickly as possible. But the people who know me as an adult would never guess.

Before moving to the Indiana countryside where I could climb windmills to celebrate my newly acquired walking skills, in Philadelphia I expressed my physical freedom by running into the busy street outside our Germantown apartment—not once, but over and over. My parents panicked and tried spanking to teach my barely verbal brain the danger of toddling into traffic. But I just did it more. They gave up on spanking pretty fast.

My grandma told my parents they needed to keep spanking me. But when I was five, I crossed the country road that ran between her house and barn. This was against the rules, so when she found me she said, "If you do that again, I'll spank you." I told her, "If you spank me, I'll do it again." My grandma was a smart woman, and quickly ate her words of parenting advice.

I don't know how to jibe my five-year-old self hiding under the dinner table with the one defying my grandma. When I think back on these stories I feel like they must be about two different girls.

Working as a hospital chaplain for the first time brought the shy girl out of me again—I was intimidated by the lingo, the lab coats, the hierarchy, the haughtiness.

**WE PUT ON STORIES LIKE CLOTHES—WE WEAR THEM AND THEY SHAPE US.  
... WEAR CLOTHES WORTHY OF BEING GOD'S TEMPLE, WEAR CLOTHES OF  
KINDNESS, AND TELL STORIES OF LOVE.**

## WHAT STORIES DOES GOD ASK YOU TO TELL? WHAT STORIES CAN WE TELL THAT HELP US BECOME THE CHURCH GOD CALLS US TO BE?

I came to recognize the disconnect between my hospital self and my familiar self as the same gap between the girl hiding under the table and the girl telling grandma what's what. I decided to be more strategic about how I tell the story of who I am. That starts with getting smart about how I tell the story of who I've been. All of this shapes the story of who I'm becoming.

We have a wealth of stories in scripture, and the ways we share these stories shape who we understand ourselves to be as people of faith. We read in 1 Corinthians that our own bodies, our very beings, are God's temple, filled with God's Holy Spirit. Scripture is full of stories and statements that teach us we are blessed, beloved.

But plenty of people read the same Bible and tell stories of being wretched and terrible—and you can find it all in scripture. There are seeds for all sorts of stories in our scriptures, so we should be serious about the stories we choose to tell.

I'm not talking about *truth*, necessarily; just because something is true doesn't mean we will talk about it. My family's favorite stories are either funny or poignant. We either laugh, or get a little teary. There are an infinite number of true stories we could tell, but we tell these particular ones because they serve us coming together. By laughing together at Uncle Gary losing those two toes, or getting a lump in our throats about what Grandma used to say, we get closer as a family.

As a church family, we also have an infinite number of stories that we *could* tell, stories that are true. But true isn't enough. Which are the stories that serve us? That serve our coming closer to each other, and closer to God?

Jesus says the greatest command is to love God, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we aren't loving ourselves well, we won't be loving our neighbors well either. Jesus also challenges us to love even our enemies,



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to give even to people who are taking from us.

Who is our neighbor? Who is our enemy? In the midst of our nation's turmoil, we choose which stories to tell. What stories can you tell of Syrian or Iraqi people? Do you know anyone from Iraq? If you had to come up with a story right now, would it be some vague summary of people from the nightly news, maybe some villagers fending off the Islamic State armies, maybe some people trying to cause terror around the world? The images that come to our minds shape our opinions about deportation, visas, walls, sanctuary.

On that communal farm of simple-living Brethren where I grew up, one of my neighbors, someone I started out sharing a farmhouse with as a three-year-old, is Cliff Kindy. He has worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams for 30 years. He's lived all over the world with communities who are as serious and organized about peace as soldiers are about war.

Cliff lived in Iraq during the US Operation Iraqi Freedom. Remember Shock and Awe in 2003?

Nine days into this undeclared war, the US had already dropped over 8,000 bombs on Iraq. All the Americans in Cliff's group were kicked out of the country, and a car caravan was speeding them toward the Jordanian border. A tire blew—maybe they hit shrapnel. The car flipped over and over. Cliff's skull fractured, and his head split open. It looked as if he and a Mennonite pastor from Seattle might die at the side of the road. Who would stop to help them, these bleeding, battered foreigners, enemies, at the side of this road?

The first passing vehicle stopped to help the Americans. Three Iraqi men picked up the Mennonite pastor and carried him to their truck. They got Cliff and the others in as well. They drove to the nearest hospital, in Rutba. It was a smoldering mess, bombed by the Americans three days before.

Injured people were lined up at the makeshift clinic. There was no running water and no electricity. It was understaffed by doctors and nurses who had had no sleep or food. Yet the people waiting in line sent Cliff and the Mennonite pastor to the front.

With dozens of stitches across his head, Cliff survived and continues to tell this story. Because when their friends asked the doctor, "How can we pay you for saving our friends' lives?" the doctor said, "You don't owe us anything.

Please just tell the world what has happened in Rutba."

When you catch yourself commenting on "those Muslims" or "those immigrants" or "those refugees" or "those liberals" or "those conservatives," remember who you are, and whose you are. You do not belong to CNN. You are not Fox News' beloved. You may be grateful to live in the US, but you do not belong to this country. You were shaped by it, but God is the one who created you, who blesses you, who designed you with love and fills you with the Holy Spirit.

What stories does *God* ask you to tell? What stories can we tell that help us become the church God calls us to be? Which stories will bring us closer to the abundant life Jesus offers?

We get to do this with Jesus' stories in our hearts and minds. Jesus, who waded in the water with weirdos and broke bread with beggars and turned over tables at the temple. Jesus, who witnessed and felt pain, who was denied welcome, given welcome, and shared welcome. Jesus, who didn't stop at this, but demanded that the world change, that we change. "Pick up your mat and walk," he said.

How will we tell the Church of the Brethren story of healing, of changing culture and institutions? How are we picking up our own mats to walk, whole and holy, in this ever-struggling world?

We put on stories like clothes—we wear them and they shape us. Jesus keeps telling us to love our enemies, but Paul says we still have battles. He writes to the Ephesians, "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness. . . . Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:12-15).

Take the shield of faith! Take the helmet of healing!

Beloved, God's blessed, chosen, beloved creations, put on stories like clothes, stories of compassion, forgiveness, kind strangers. Your own body is God's temple and filled with the Holy Spirit. Wear clothes worthy of being God's temple, wear clothes of kindness, and tell stories of love. 

Anna Lisa Gross is interim pastor at Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.



Esther Bubley/Library of Congress

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# A remnant remains

by James E. Washington Sr.

*“So I ask you, has God rejected his people? Absolutely not!”  
(Romans 11:1a, CEB).*

**I** am a 73-year-old African American man who grew up in east Texas. When I became old enough to make sense out of what life means, it was the early 1950s. It didn’t take long for me to learn what my place was in life, if I wanted to work and live.

I vividly remember the instruction of my mother, who would say, “When you go out, smile and say, Yes ma’am, and, Yes sir.” Then she would say, “This doesn’t mean that they (white people) are more important or better than you. It just means you are being polite.”

But I knew it meant more than that. When my mom was working for an older white woman, and I was working for her as well, the lady offered me food left over from their dinner a day or so ago. As she went to get it, my mom told me to smile and say thank you and to take it, even if I didn’t want it. Later my mother told me that had I not taken the food, not only would I not have a job but she might have been fired.

I lived in an era when racism was overt, meaning that

it was legal and even popular to openly call black people whatever names you desired, and to treat them any way you wanted. If a black person showed any sign of disapproval for being called names or being treated badly, it was legal for white people to take the black person and do whatever they wanted to.

In my early teens, it was illegal for me to go into a restaurant and order a hamburger. I had to go to the back door in the alley by the garbage can and ring a bell, and the cook would come out and see what I wanted. He would fix you a burger the way he wanted to, if he had time—that is, if he was not busy waiting on white people in front. If he was busy, he would tell you to come back another time, or maybe another day.

One day I was on my way to the movies and stopped by to get a burger, but the cook was so rude to me that I don’t remember what I did the rest of the day. Did I go to the movies? or back home? To this day, I don’t remember.

We couldn’t drink out of the water fountains in the downtown because they were all marked for whites only. We had to go into the alley and drink out of a faucet that was usually by a garbage can. There was only one downtown bathroom, if it could be called that, for all of the blacks to use, and there was never any toilet paper. You can

**LIKE ELIJAH, I WONDER IF I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT WHO SEES THE INJUSTICE IN THE WORLD AND IS SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT IT. GOD REMINDS ME THAT I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE.**

imagine what condition it was in.

But my mother kept me and my brother grounded in the Word of God. She would say, “I want you to be strong. A strong person is someone who learns to love people who may not love them back.”

She was quoting Jesus in Matthew 5:46: “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” I didn’t know it then, but the reward that we would get for loving unlovable people was not something that someone would give us; it was something that we gave to ourselves. It is called character.

**T**hen came the 1960s, a time in history that was a problem for white people in the South, but brought hope to black people. Martin Luther King Jr. started a movement, of which I was a part. Black people were standing up and openly saying, “I have the same right to live the way I want to live, just as white people.”

I remember the 1960s as a difficult time to be a young black man living in the South. It was very difficult seeing some of my friends being locked up just because they were black and wanted to be treated like people, not animals. Some of them were killed. Yet I tried to hold onto that love my mother taught me. I watched as my brother became bitter, and I had to defend myself to him as to why I was not bitter. It wasn’t easy. Many times, I had to pray and ask God to forgive me when bitterness tried to invade my thinking. There were times when it seemed that hate had overcome me.

I didn’t know it then, but I know now that God demands that our sense of life becomes bigger than just us. As Paul puts it, “It is not I that live, but Christ that lives in me.”

By the late 1980s it seemed that things got better. The lifestyle of blacks in the South seemed to improve. We were not being called n--- on a daily basis, but we knew people whispered it under their breath. But we could live with that—after all, you can’t keep people from being who they really are. Only God can do that.

People white and black thought racism had gone away and was no longer a problem. It was in the mid-1990s that I discovered racism hadn’t gone very far—it had only changed. Now it showed itself in a different way. Earlier

it was overt, or open, but now it was covert, secretive, and hidden. Even in the 1990s I knew that there were towns that I could not drive through at night. Whenever I went to a Church of the Brethren district board meeting, there was a town I would drive several miles to go around on my way back home.

In the mid-1990s the General Board of the Church of the Brethren called me to be part of an anti-racism awareness team. I quickly said yes, but all the time I was thinking, “What can they tell me that I don’t already know?” After I was trained, my eyes were opened to a wealth of information about racism—not so much about the impact and the pain of racism that I already knew, but about the whys and hows of it all. That’s when I became a lifelong advocate of racial equality.

The greatest eye-opener for me was to find out that racism isn’t really about race at all, it is about color. All of us, black and white, have in our family backgrounds many races. If we are honest, we will admit that almost all of us in America are the product of interracial relationships.

White people and black people feel that they have a right to live the way they want to live, and both are right. The problem is, if that involves not allowing other people to live the way they feel they have a right to, then the way you want to live is wrong.

I think we all agree that hate is a sin, and it seems to me that racism is a sin. What do we do with this problem of sin? If hate and racism are sin, then they are a cancer growing in humanity that needs to be cut out so that the body might be saved.

The shame is, there are many in the church today who are racist. Sometimes I feel that there is no hope for us if we keep believing and living the way we do. I read Romans 11:1-5 and, like Elijah, I wonder if I am the only one left who sees the injustice in the world and is saying something about it. God reminds me that I am not the only one, there are many more who are praying and believing that somehow God will bring things out all right.

Somebody say, “Amen!” 

James E. Washington Sr. is an ordained minister serving at Lake Breeze Church of the Brethren in Sheffield Lake, Ohio, as interim pastor. He also is CEO of Washington and Brady Residential Services in Cleveland.

*Planting seeds  
in Palestine.*

# Thorns infest the ground no more

Church-supported agriculture programs open up opportunities

by Robert Shank

**T**horns still infest the fields in many countries and in many ways—through drought, salinity of soils, submergence of fields, and cooler, shorter growing seasons. All these are exacerbated by political unrest and lack of incentives to produce crops.

Many students of agriculture throughout the world are fascinated by the science but think that farming is just “Hoe! Hoe! Hoe!” However, through the use of Google images and YouTube videos we have found great pleasure in teaching technology that ensures “thorns shall no longer infest the land,” and friendships grow instead.

Church of the Brethren-supported programs in North Korea, Palestine, and Cuba are opening these new opportunities because of multi-dimensional assistance measures.

## Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

In the DPRK (North Korea), six years of Brethren-supported lab/field selection at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) have led to a salt-tolerant soybean variety that appears promising in on-farm trials.

Since the North Korean diet is deficient in protein, the government is giving new attention to soybeans. Also in trials is a submergence-tolerant rice that can still produce

after up to two weeks of being under water in river deltas and land reclaimed from the sea. Even though the people are accustomed to sticky rice, and the new variety is long-grain because of its Bangladesh origin, professor Kim at PUST says, “They are hungry and will eat it.”

Graduate students and seniors are working on drought-tolerant and rain-fed rices that require less water, with plans to search for sources of genes for cold tolerance in 2017.

New corn hybrids, raspberry/strawberry plants, and



*Dr. Song from China with PUST students in North Korea.*

introduced sweet potato varieties are among the crops students and staff are developing and multiplying by tissue culture in a new facility funded by Brethren grants.

Still, the more important crop may be the 80 undergrads and 15 graduate students who are getting instruction from international and local staff. Since our mission at PUST is now in its sixth year, some classes are being taught in English by professors who were graduate students and stayed on as permanent researchers and teachers. Thinking we Westerners eventually may be replaced, DPRK professors say, “No. Lecturing in English is more difficult than just conversation.” Some teachers are Korean-American and Korean-Canadian, among other backgrounds.

In the spring semester, I will teach agriculture biotechnology, while a professor from Auburn University in Alabama will teach plant physiology, and one from Columbia will teach human genetics in the Agriculture Department.

We pass through Beijing, China, coming and going to PUST, and have befriended researchers in Chinese universities. I challenged the China Agriculture University corn breeder to “be a good neighbor” and help the program in the DPRK. So last November he came to PUST for a week to present a workshop on Bt, a soil bacteria producing a protein enzyme conferring insect resistance when transferred into corn. He advises 27 students and invited two of our staff to come to his lab for eight weeks. He was a good model for our students to imagine what they could become within 10 years.

China already has its own GMO cotton and says it will have Bt corn with governmental approval by 2020. GMO corn from the United States and from China is likely to reach the DPRK market, both as grain and seed.

## Palestine

Through a peace studies student at Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind., seeds and supplies have enabled 30 to 50 children in Palestine to plant, care for, and harvest garden beds.

This project addresses a variety of issues that have arisen due to the multitude of hardships, restrictions, and complications in Palestine. The area has seen a stark increase in the number of families who are “food insecure” and often do not have ready access to fresh produce.

The fun of working and watching one’s own efforts produce results is a small but gratifying compensation for the many restraints imposed by the political situation in Israel and Palestine. Saved seeds and new funding for 2017 will support the continued success of the program.

The Wi’am Center for Conflict Transformation serves as the local partner in order to reach the community and



**Robert Shank (fifth from left) with a group at the University of Havana Agriculture College in Cuba.**

promote the growth of this program. Goals for this upcoming year include reaching a larger number of community members (including 80 to 120 children) and facilitating the development of patio gardens within the community. The program also will incorporate a children’s summer camp conducted by an environmental science student at Manchester University.

## Cuba

A new endeavor has been that of sharing technology and experiences with professionals in Cuban universities. Having met Cuban professors in the DPRK, we were invited to come to Cuba where I lectured at the University of Havana Agriculture College. Five staff and about 20 graduate students participated in the lecture about genetic mapping of quantitative traits and its use for DNA marker assisted breeding.

Cuban staff have proudly developed cropping systems that utilize no fertilizer or chemical pesticides, including the popular food potatoes. Corn tortillas are not so popular since corn requires nitrogen fertilizer, which the Cubans cannot afford.

The warm reception by the Cuban people and the hopes for continued progress in relationships there indicate a potential for additional interactions. As a monolith on the University of Havana agriculture campus reads, “What is important is that the university truly be a promise of hope for its community.”

Already, exploratory endeavors are developing in supplying educational textbooks in English, laboratory supplies, and assistance to small farmers. Anyone interested in volunteering to provide presentations of professional topics in Cuba may contact me at [drarroz903@gmail.com](mailto:drarroz903@gmail.com). 

Robert and Linda Shank are in their sixth year of teaching at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), with sponsorship from the Global Mission and Service program of the Church of the Brethren. Robert is dean of the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Linda is an English instructor.

# The Disturbances

*Nigeria: Time has no meaning—The sun shines, but all is dark.*

*I am tears, heart shattered, spiritually confused—NO stunned and petrified.*

*How can men form mobs or gangs to kill the innocent so violently?*

*Last night I heard you dying amidst thunderous mobs, gun shots, terrified screams, and machete whacks in tall grass.*

*Forgive me for not knowing what to do, but cry and pray in the dark.*

—1966 journal entry by Ruth Keeney, senior at Hillcrest School, Jos, Nigeria

## What happened during the fall of 1966 in northern Nigeria?

Why has the story remained unknown for so long—50 years? These are the questions for which the filmmakers of *The Disturbances* sought answers.

In early 2015 Robert Parham, executive editor of EthicsDaily.com and of its



RUTH KEENEY TRYON

parent organization, the Baptist Center for Ethics, contacted me to see if I would agree to be interviewed and share artifacts about events that had occurred in Jos, Nigeria, during

my senior year in high school. “Yes,” I said. I was honored.

He explained that as a seventh grade student at Hillcrest in 1966 he had “fragmentary childhood memories”

but “knew that something awful had happened and that members of one tribe had formed gangs and mobs which had hunted and butchered members of another tribe.” Parham wished to uncover the story that he believed “deserves a place in the histories of human atrocities and the chronicles of Christian history.”

Parham (researcher/writer) and Cliff Vaughn (researcher/videographer) dedicated two years to extensive research involving books and articles, eye witness interviews and phone calls, e-mail and social media correspondence, and the collection of nearly 2,500 artifacts (memos, photographs and slides, diary entries, and home movies). They not only gained insight into the history and causes of the 1966 Igbo genocide, but also discovered that “the untold story” provided an inspirational view of missionary courage and commitment to the Christian calling.

*The Disturbances* brings to life the genocide of Igbo people in northern Nigeria in 1966, an event that was fueled by tribal hatreds and a series of government coups. The documentary describes how “thousands of people, mostly Igbos and easterners,” were brutally hunted down and slaughtered by gangs and mobs armed with machetes, rocks, and clubs. Businesses and homes were looted, burned, or vandalized. Sections of the city of Jos looked like a war zone. Students and faculty at Hillcrest School, a Christian school run by an ecumenical coalition of mission organizations including the Church of the Brethren Mission, recalled hearing angry mobs and

the cries of those fleeing for their lives or killed. Bodies were seen in streets, alleys, and gardens. Looted goods were stripped from the dead or carried away from destroyed property.

“There was wholesale slaughtering going on. . . Homes and businesses were being looted, cars were torched. . . They were digging mass graves on the other side of the city because so many had been killed,” said Lutheran faculty member Carl Eisman.

*The Disturbances* also illustrates how lives were saved through the courage, Christian commitment, and humanitarian responses of the ecumenical missionary community, Hillcrest high school students, and Nigerian Christian leaders during horrific circumstances. The provision of sanctuary and food, medical care, and a means to escape from the north (despite uncertainty and danger) are captured in the missionary stories.

The Cowleys, the Baptist high school principal and his wife, hid Igbo students and faculty in an empty mission house that was kept locked “until we could determine what to do next. We told them to keep the blinds drawn, to be quiet . . . and we would feed them.”

Church of the Brethren Hillcrest School principal Paul Weaver found ways to hide Igbo staff in an attic or building rafters until he could provide a safe escape.

Lutheran high school students were evacuated from their hostel (dormitory) before an Igbo carpenter was hidden in the hot water heater closet, and Igbo staff

### ABOUT THE FILM

Title: *The Disturbances*. Running time: 75 minutes. Release date: Fall 2016. Producers: Robert Parham and Cliff Vaughn, the Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn. A calendar of public screenings and information to purchase the documentary on DVD is at [www.thedisturbances.com](http://www.thedisturbances.com). (Note: Robert Parham passed away in early March 2017.)



members were hidden in a storage room and a crawl space. “We provided them with food . . . water . . . and tried to make them as comfortable as we could,” said Eisman.

One missionary described assisting “blood-soaked men pleading for protection on their hands and knees while spontaneously reciting the Lord’s Prayer.”

Buzz Bowers, a houseparent for the Church of the Brethren hostel, reported that the Jos police “made their station [outside yard] into a hospital site and a refugee place where Igbo could come in.” Surrounded by a high mesh fence and protected by armed police at two large gates, the number of refugees grew from 100 to thousands. Overwhelmed by the number and intense needs, police sent out “a plea for . . . food . . . clothing . . . medical supplies.” Missionaries and Hillcrest students answered the call.

“I will never see anything like I saw today. I saw cuts right to the bone and skull, punctured hands, fingers just hanging and broken, and dead people,” wrote Hillcrest student John Price in a diary entry.

“We were told to help with whatever you could,” said Carrie Robison, in an interview for the documentary. She was a Hillcrest student at the time. “They [the wounded] were lying on the ground. They were in great pain and agony. We spent a lot of time just trying to clean wounds so medical personnel could stitch them up.”

“I saw unbelievable faith and bravery in requests for prayer, scripture, and song or in gasps for breath while in the arms of missionaries and students. I held you, cleaned your wounds with medicated water and tweezers—one maggot at a time. You always whispered “Thank-you,” I wrote in my journal.

Church of the Brethren field secre-

tary Roger Ingold and Sudan United Mission leader Edgar Smith arranged a private meeting with the head of the Nigerian military and gained permission for missionaries to evacuate Igbo via automobiles, trucks, aircraft, and trains—although their safety could not be guaranteed.

Christian Reformed, Baptist, and Assembly of God missionaries told stories of harrowing trips across borders into neighboring countries or into southeastern Nigeria via truck and automobile. Other missionaries described loading refugees into trains, mission planes, and other aircraft.

Why has this story remained unknown for 50 years? There was no single reason. Instead, as Robert

Parham explained, “*The Disturbances* is a story that is both horrifying and inspiring, [tells] of ruin and redemption, blood and boldness, denial and dedication, guilt and goodness,” and we are reminded of “the [human] capacity for planned and executed human evil as well as the potential for calculated and courageous human goodness.” 

Ruth Keeney Tryon, MA-CCC, EdD, lives in eastern Colorado. Daughter of Brethren missionaries Mark and Anita Keeney, she attended Hillcrest School 1957-67. She returned to Nigeria with her husband, Vernon Tryon, who was a bush pilot for the United Methodist Mission 1974-76. She has worked as a speech and language pathologist and is retired from a teaching career that included positions in the University of Northern Colorado’s School of Education and Department of Communication Disorders, and at Morgan Community College.

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# Sarah, my sister

by Bob Bowman

**S**arah, wife of Abraham, had no children. The pain of childlessness in that society was crushing.

Sarah had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarah said to Abraham, “Since I have been prevented from bearing children; go to my slave Hagar. Maybe we shall obtain children by her.” And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah. So Sarah, Abraham’s wife, took Hagar her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abraham as a wife.

Scripture says, “as a wife.” That is important. Not as a concubine. Hebrew has a perfectly good word for concubine but it is not used here. The word is the normal word for wife. Hagar is not just a temporary surrogate womb, but a wife. Ancient law permitted an arrangement for a slave to bear an heir for a childless wife, but it was not expected that a slave would become a wife alongside the first wife.

Writer C. Zavis suggests that Sarah made this offer out of respect for Hagar. Sarah knew what it meant to be simply a “sex object” from her experience in Egypt and, later, with King Abimelech. She was determined that this not happen to Hagar. So Sarah initiated a relationship of caring, of

sisterhood. She treated Hagar no longer as a slave, but an equal. In her generosity, Sarah pushed the boundaries of cultural norms.

This act of Sarah is amazing. It amazes me because it seems so close to the New Testament vision of the kingdom of God where, as Paul says, there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, but all are as one. Perhaps even God was impressed by this act of grace because we read that the Spirit of God promised both Sarah and Hagar that their children would be founders of great nations. The Bible is the story of God’s dealings with Israel, but when we read what God promised to Hagar we are reminded that God has hopes and plans for other people as well. Hagar’s son would not be dismissed from God’s wider family.

However, when Hagar conceived problems arose. Hierarchy does not disappear from our socially constructed psyche just because we take a step that direction. Sarah thought Hagar was becoming arrogant. Hagar perceived that Sarah was turning abusive. Finally Hagar fled, no longer feeling comfortable in that environment.

As Hagar wandered in the desert, broken and lonely,

**SARAH IS MY SISTER. I, TOO, FIND LIFE FALLS SHORT OF MY HIGHEST IDEALS. I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO HAVE MY GOOD INTENTIONS RUN FASTER THAN MY ABILITY TO KEEP UP.**

scripture says that “the angel of the Lord found her.” I find much comfort in the fact that the first time in scripture that an angel of the Lord appeared to someone it was when they were wandering in a desert, broken and lonely.

The angel asked, “Where are you coming from? Where are you going?” Hagar replied, “I am running from my mistress, Sarah.” Calling Sarah her “mistress” is a sign that the dream of equality and sisterhood had crumbled.

Yet God told Hagar to return and not remain alienated from Sarah. Why? Here is a key to this way of reading the story. Hagar must harden her will and return precisely because unjust systems do not disappear from our so-

cially constructed psyches simply by taking one step. Let us suggest that God wanted to give Hagar strength to stay engaged. God sent her back to talk with Sarah, and to try to live the relationship they both had hoped to create.

Living an alternative model in society, suggests Zavis, is hard work. It takes a strong and resilient heart. It takes persistence and a willingness to stand in the fire.

So Hagar returned. And for 14 more years she and Sarah continued working at this new social relationship. But, eventually it failed. Living the kingdom of God is hard when we bump up daily with the realities and limitations of society. The forces of culture, racism, patriarchy, hierarchy,

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## SARAH'S EFFORT ... MIGHT NOT BE JUDGED AS FAILURE, BUT AS AN INSPIRING REACH FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

and empire all wage war against the vision of the kingdom of God. Eventually Hagar and Sarah succumbed to despair.

Sarah failed her own high ideals most miserably. She would not be the first person to find that her generous impulses outran her ability to keep up. She went back to calling Hagar a slave and demanded that Abraham send away both Hagar and her son. The issue this time was inheritance. Sarah did not think the first born of the second wife should take precedence over the first born of the first wife.

Scripture says Abraham was distressed at Sarah's request. It felt wrong to him. Yet God told him not to worry, but to listen, really listen to Sarah. I am surprised that God would side with Sarah. Instead, I expected God to agree with Abraham. Perhaps Sarah, in making her initial generous gesture and living with it so long, had done all she could. No more needed to be asked of her.

Sarah is my sister. I, too, find life falls short of my high-

est ideals. I know what it is to have my good intentions run faster than my ability to keep up. At my baptism I pledged myself to follow the way of Jesus. Even though there are times when I don't have the strength to persevere, I believe in grace and I still think it is important to make the effort, to aim for the ideal, and to attempt the kingdom way.

Perhaps all efforts to live out the goals of Christ's kingdom are temporary. Efforts to establish peace founder. Intentional communities fold. Schemes for correcting social wrongs end up creating new problems. Perhaps every attempt to live the kingdom way is not measured by whether or not it is permanent. Sarah's effort to live as a sister to her former slave might not be judged as failure, but as an inspiring reach for the kingdom of God within our human relationships. 

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

## Young Adult Conference 2017

May 26 - 28, 2017 • Camp Harmony near Hooversville, PA



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Speakers include Emmett Eldred, Dennis Lohr, Wendy McFadden, and Monica Rice.



Photos by Bekah Houff and Kelsey Murray

Register online at [www.brethren.org/yac](http://www.brethren.org/yac)

The registration fee of \$125 includes food, lodging, and programming. BVS scholarships and local church scholarships available by request.



## Intercultural Ministry connects with churches in ‘sanctuary’ jurisdictions

**A** letter from the Intercultural Ministry, signed by director Gimbiya Kettering, is part of a new effort to connect with congregations located in areas considered to be “sanctuary” jurisdictions across the country.

Opening with Matthew 25:34-35, the letter invited prayerful discernment of “how we are called to witness, as members of the Church of the Brethren, how we feel called to stand with those who come to our communities seeking refuge.”

The letter invited congregations to join a denominational conversation about what it means to be a congregation in a sanctuary jurisdiction, to consider how congregations can articulate and act upon their convictions, and to share resources, stories, and experiences with one another.

The letter noted ways Brethren have connected to the biblical vision of sanctuary and safety for those who are endangered, including a post-World War II effort to encourage each congregation to welcome and care for a refugee family, and more recent efforts to support those affected by conflicts in Haiti, South and Central America, and Nigeria.

“We, too, sought sanctuary when the Brethren of the 1700s fled religious persecution in Germany,” the letter noted.

Among foundational statements, the letter referenced Annual Conference documents of 1986, “Making the Connection”; 1983, “Providing Sanctuary for Latin American and Haitian Refugees”; 1982, “Undocumented Persons and Refugees in the United States”; 1979, “Action in the Refugee Crisis of Southeast Asia”; and 1969, “Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience.”

For more information, contact the Intercultural Ministry at 800-323-8039 ext. 387 or [gkettering@brethren.org](mailto:gkettering@brethren.org).

## Nursing scholarships announced

**Six nursing students are recipients** of the Church of the Brethren Nursing Scholarship for 2016. This scholarship, made possible by the Health Education and Research Endowment, is available to church members enrolled in LPN, RN, or nursing graduate programs.

The recipients are Logan Fultz of Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.; Amanda Gible and Cassidy McFadden of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.; Malinda Heisey and Brooke Myer of Chiques Church of the Brethren, Manheim, Pa.; and Abby Maples of Panther Creek Church of the Brethren, Adel, Iowa.

Scholarships of up to \$2,000 for RN and graduate nurse candidates and up to \$1,000 for LPN candidates are awarded to a limited number of applicants each year. Applications for 2017 are due by May 1. [www.brethren.org/congregationallife/nursingscholarships.html](http://www.brethren.org/congregationallife/nursingscholarships.html)



## AC business items available online

**The nine items of new and unfinished business** coming to the 2017 Annual Conference are available online. The Conference will be held in Grand Rapids, Mich., on June 28-July 2 (registration is at [www.brethren.org/ac/2017/registration](http://www.brethren.org/ac/2017/registration)).

### The four new business items:

- “Polity for Agencies: A Recommendation from On Earth Peace”
- “Patient Hope in Matters of Conscience: A Recommendation from On Earth Peace”
- “Brethren Values Investing”
- “Polity for Electing Brethren Benefit Trust Board Directors”

### The five unfinished business items:

- “The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts” responding to “Query: Same Sex Weddings”
- “A Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st Century”
- A report and recommendations from the Review and Evaluation Committee
- An interim report from the Vitality and Viability Committee, with a request for an additional year to bring a final report to the 2018 Conference
- An interim report from a study committee on “Creation Care,” with a request for one more year to complete the work

For links to these business items go to [www.brethren.org/ac/2017/business](http://www.brethren.org/ac/2017/business).



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## Disaster Recovery Support Initiative launches

**W**hen disaster strikes a community, beginning the process of long-term recovery quickly is essential. Yet, it can be a daunting task for local leaders who may not have experience in disaster recovery and may have suffered damage and loss themselves.

The ecumenical Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI) is working to help communities shorten the time between the immediate disaster response and long-term recovery by encouraging, modeling, mentoring, and supporting the development of local Long-term Recovery Groups through the sustained on-site presence of a Disaster Recovery Support Team. DRSI is a joint endeavor of Brethren Disaster Ministries with the disaster ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The initiative builds on the partners' year-long collaboration in Columbia, S.C., responding to flooding that occurred in October 2015. By December 2015, denominational long-term disaster recovery volunteers were on the ground.

In the coming year, the DRSI will seek to build on what was learned in South Carolina to help other communities access, leverage, and account for resources following disasters. Disaster Recovery Support Teams will stay with selected communities for 2-6 months, as needed, to resource the local recovery effort and offer training, mentoring, and assistance.

In disasters where unmet construction needs exist, the team may help recruit work teams to begin repairs in an effort to expedite recovery and model long-term recovery in collaboration with local leadership.

The DRSI has hired two staff to guide this next phase in the project's development:

Rachel Larratt, long-term recovery group formation advisor, has led recovery efforts in Columbia. Her experience includes serving as the chair of an LTRG; forming and running her own community relief foundation; and, as a flood-affected individual, navigating her own recovery process.

Tim Sheaffer, construction management advisor, is a long-term Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteer who has served in recovering communities for eight years, leading rebuild sites and working with local partners. He most recently assisted



Rachel Larratt



Tim Sheaffer

ecumenical recovery support in Columbia, and helped UCC Disaster Ministries and Brethren Disaster Ministries assess next steps in West Virginia.

## Londonderry Village is new name for retirement community

Lebanon Valley Brethren Home in Palmyra, Pa., has changed its public name to Londonderry Village, according to an announcement from president and CEO Jeff Shireman. The legal name of the corporation remains the Lebanon Valley Brethren Home. "Londonderry Village is more appropriately known as a 'doing business as' or DBA name," he said. "Other than the name change, everything else is staying the same. Our mission of service to the elderly, our commitment to providing benevolent care when needed, our affiliation with the Church of the Brethren, our nonprofit status . . . everything will remain exactly as it has been for the past 38 years." See [www.lvbh.org](http://www.lvbh.org).



## Personnel notes

**Deborah Brehm** has resigned as manager of human resources for the Church of the Brethren. Her experience in human resources at the denomination's General Offices began in October 2008 when she started as an intern, and continued as human resources assistant on a temporary basis until she accepted the position of manager.

**Eric Thompson** has resigned as director of operations for Brethren Benefit Trust, to accept a position with the United Methodist Church. He worked for BBT for 16 years, first hired in 2001, as Information Services support technician. He was promoted in 2008.

In 2011, his department grew to two people, providing in-house programming. He is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.

**Jeremiah Thompson** has begun as director of Insurance Operations for BBT. Previously he provided oversight for personnel and payroll administration at Judson University in Elgin, Ill. He holds a bachelor's degree in religion with a Christian ministry concentration from Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, Ill., and a master's degree in business administration from Judson. He also has served a bivocational role as associate pastor of Elgin Church of the Nazarene.

# A nonviolent God in a violent world

**In *God Without Violence*, J. Denny Weaver, professor emeritus at Bluffton University, tackles one of the earliest problems of**

**Christianity:** the all-loving, all-forgiving God has a violent streak. Why does this God, revealed more fully than before in the Prince of Peace, often appear as judge, warrior, and avenger? Even more puzzling, why does God sacrifice his own son in the most grotesque way to somehow save the world from its sins? Weaver sets out to show that, on balance, a characterization of God without violence outweighs all other characterizations in the biblical record.



JULIE GARBER

In his earlier book, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Weaver focuses on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (See “Why did Jesus have to die?” in the March MESSENGER.) In this book he confronts many other challenges to the claim that God is nonviolent. He takes a topical look at Jesus and economics, Jesus on racism, ethnicity, and gender, nonviolence in God’s creation, violence in the biblical narrative, how to read the Bible, how to interpret Revelation and other apocalyptic stories of the Bible, and how the early church tried to articulate an understanding of God in the creeds.

The author is careful not to explain away the presence of violence in the biblical narrative. Instead he develops a helpful image of nonviolence that he calls the “grain of the universe.” As the elongated cells of a piece of wood run generally in one direction, so do the characterizations of God and the actions of God. This grain is predominantly restorative, compassionate, gracious . . . well, nonviolent. Retaliation and vengeance, he reminds us, perpetuate cycles of violence that tell the same old story of human history and say more about human actions than God’s. “Loving enemies and returning good for evil—that is, working with the grain of the universe, changes the situation and reduces violence” (p. 63).

While I immediately recognize and resonate with Weaver’s understanding of nonviolence, I am wary of his claims about God and the Scriptures. The danger is that anyone who attempts to see and define the grain of the universe is really only looking through a glass darkly. While I don’t doubt there is a cohesive pattern in God’s character and God’s deeds, it’s

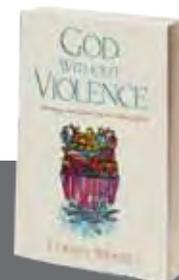
just not clear to me that we can get to it from the Bible. It is just as probable that the biblical story is not linear, but full of mystery, full of uncertainty and competing revelations, and that they are all true. Who can say?

I’m a skeptic because I think it’s our human desire to see patterns in things in order to understand them, and in our eagerness to understand, we often find patterns where there are none. In the absence of a clear grain, we fill in the missing pieces from our own experience and our own context until suddenly the patterns we see are wonderfully evangelical, Pentecostalist, Reformed, Orthodox, Anabaptist, or Pietist. Weaver argues for one cohesive narrative in the Bible, one that is largely nonviolent, but I worry about making these big claims when the smaller ones are more accurate—that the Bible is more like a digest of related stories and experiences of God, a rich array of narratives.

In his chapter on reading the Bible, Weaver urges us to consider the social and political background of the first century people telling and hearing the stories of the Bible. We should do the same for ourselves in the 21st century. Readers from the peace church traditions will find this book immensely helpful in articulating what we already believe. But it’s not because Weaver discovered some overarching truth about the Bible. It’s because our formation in a period of war and persecution and our long tradition of reading the Scriptures as the confirmation of our own story led us here. That doesn’t mean we have manipulated the text or cherry-picked the stories that suit us. It means that this is a true understanding of God—not an understanding of the true God!

Apart from this caution, *God without Violence* is a good resource for study groups and individuals who are interested in sorting out the mysterious and hard-to-understand nature of God. It would be especially useful for Christians whose witness for Christ brings them to a choice between compulsory service to the state through military conscription (or even the paying of military taxes) and obedience to the nonviolent teachings of the Bible. Weaver offers much good reasoning on which to build a Christian peace stance. 

Julie Garber, from Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., is program director of a community foundation. Previously she has directed the Plowshares Grant for Peace Studies at Manchester University and served as editor of Brethren Press.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *God Without Violence: Following a Nonviolent God in a Violent World*. **Author:** J. Denny Weaver. **Publisher:** Cascade Books, 2016.

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Church of the Brethren

### CLASSIFIEDS

**Remembering Muted Voices: Conscience, Dissent, Resistance and Civil Liberties in World War I through today.** Centennial international conference at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, October 19-22, 2017. Share in Brethren, Anabaptist, etc. stories of struggle, conscience and courage in WWI. What can we learn from these examples for acts of conscience today in a troubled world? Earlybird registration by 9/8/2017. More information about program, keynotes, registration, hotels etc.: [theworldwar.org/mutedvoices](http://theworldwar.org/mutedvoices) or email questions [abolton@cofchrist.org](mailto:abolton@cofchrist.org)

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## New members

**Chambersburg, Pa.:** Bill Abbott, Eric Brandt, Faith Brandt, Andrew Brindle, Dawna Brindle, Makenna Brindle, Linda Hawbaker, Ashley Helman, Randy Hockenberry, Kaitlyn Kylor, Kendra McMullen, Rachel Noble, Landen Noble, Joel Nogle, Kathie Nogle, Joel Pyles, Cindy Pyles, Jere Stouffer, Debra Stouffer

**Faith Community, New Oxford, Pa.:** Jim Myers, Bev Myers

**Hempfield, Manheim, Pa.:** Dave Charles, Sue Charles, Alan Shuss, Bonnie Shuss

**Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.:** Ashley Boundurant, Morgan Boundurant, Tucker Hall, Sara Milam, Andrea Stencil, Michael Yopp

**Huntington, Ind.:** Will Stauffer, Katie Stauffer, Mulugeta Wolfe

**Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio:** Ben Drive

**Lebanon, Mount Sidney, Va.:** Becky Michael, Arvetta Waybright

**Linville Creek, Broadway, Va.:** Ina Baker, Jerry Baker, Cassindy Baker-Sours, Kim Butterfield, Evan Butterfield, Anita Caldwell, Tim Heishman, Katie Heishman, Chris Lasam, Christina Lasam, Vic Norris, Kitty Norris, Steve Proctor, Debbie Proctor, Merlin Reish, Martha Reish, Edna Strickler, Walt Wiltschek

**Lititz, Pa.:** Sharon Flaten, Udo Sommerhoff, Janice

Sommerhoff, Walter  
Schload, Levi Ziegler,  
Helen Ziegler

**Memorial**, Martinsburg,  
Pa.: Brenda Dodson,  
Harold Guyer, Linda  
Guyer, Hunter Klotz,  
Alex Klotz, Kyle Klotz,  
Sydney Metzler, Morgan  
Mitchell, Rachael  
Stafford

**Myerstown**, Pa.: Michael  
Hughes, Patricia Schott,  
Derek Thomas, Megan  
Thomas, Austin Thomas

**Pleasant Chapel**, Ashley,  
Ind.: Dustin Harmes

**Plumcreek**, Shelocta, Pa.:  
Anna Longwell,  
Rosemary Shroud,  
Matthew Slee, Roxanne  
Wilhoit

**Quakertown, First**, Pa.:  
Annmarie DeMedio,  
Nancy Jenkins, Charles  
Jenkins

**Somerset**, Pa.: Sarah  
Smith

**Spring Creek**, Hershey,  
Pa.: Julie Nderitu,  
Braetan Peters, Micah  
Sheppard

**Stone**, Huntingdon, Pa.:  
Charlie Paterson, Robin  
Paterson

**Union Center**, Nappanee,  
Ind.: Laura Miller, Cally  
Miller, Mark Riege,  
Yvonne Riege

**Waynesboro**, Pa.: Bill  
Kercheval, Nancy  
Kercheval, Larry Mellott,  
Jean Mellott

**West York**, York, Pa.:  
Lillian Grove, Lindsey  
Kemfort, Michael  
Parente, Susan Parente

**Wedding  
anniversaries**

**Bontrager**, Phil and  
Marlene, Nappanee,  
Ind., 50

**Cripe**, Carmon and  
Margaret, Middlebury,  
Ind., 65

**Fervida**, Don and Betty,  
Nappanee, Ind., 50

**Hochstedler**, Lewis and

Marilyn, Nappanee,  
Ind., 60

**Mishler**, Tom and Nancy,  
Nappanee, Ind., 50

**Musch**, Robert and Judith,  
Easton, Md., 50

**Peiffer**, James and  
Blanche, Quakertown,  
Pa., 70

**Price**, Steve and Kathy,  
Nappanee, Ind., 55

**Sailor**, Flawn and Nancy,  
Elkhart, Ind., 55

**Simpson**, Willard and  
Maxine, Franklin Grove,  
Ill., 70

**Smith**, John and Deb, New  
Paris, Ind., 50

**Stansbury**, Leighton  
and Dottie, Harrisburg,  
Pa., 68

**Thomas**, Paul and Polly,  
Waterloo, Ind., 65

**Deaths**

**Ahrns**, Kay Noel, 68,  
Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 28

**Applegate**, Margie, 96,  
Norton, Kan., Jan. 4

**Balsley**, Rickey D., 65,  
Bremen, Ind., Nov. 5

**Batdorf**, Doris Kinsey, 94,  
Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 23

**Beeghly**, Harry, 92,  
Oakland, Md., Jan. 21

**Benson**, Harold E., 89,  
Lawrenceville, Ill.,  
Jan. 19

**Boyce**, Miriam Arlene  
Spahr, 87, York, Pa.,  
Oct. 2

**Brown**, Mildred Marie  
Sager, 91, Nampa,  
Idaho, July 12

**Buckingham**, Samuel, 91,  
Pleasant Hill, Iowa, Jan.  
6

**Burger**, Betty J. Muffley,  
85, Lorida, Fla., Jan. 25

**Carper**, Eugene, 97,  
Mineral Wells, Texas,  
Dec. 25

**Cartwright**, Neil, 92,  
Nampa, Idaho, Dec. 29

**Charls**, Barbara J., 81,  
Prairie City, Iowa,  
Dec. 28

**Conrad**, A. Vernon, 90,  
Reedley, Calif., Dec. 10

**Crow**, Amanda Hays, 89,  
Vandalia, Ill., Jan. 2

**Davis**, Kenneth, 79,  
Garrett, Pa., Feb. 1

**Dudash**, Heather G.  
Meyers, 34, Somerset,  
Pa., Jan. 22

**Duffey**, Ellis George  
(Sonny), Jr., 86, Hagers-  
town, Md., Jan. 12

**Dunafin**, Isabelle E., 93,  
Goshen, Ind., Jan. 19

**Edwards**, John, 81,  
Modesto, Calif., Dec. 17

**Fisher**, Miriam Racop, 82,  
Fort Jones, Calif., Oct. 21

**Foust**, Sandra L., 75,  
Greenville, Ohio, Feb. 2

**Funkhouser**, Matt Wayne,  
57, Broadway, Va.,  
Aug. 7

**Ghrist**, Lorain R., 86,  
Greensburg, Pa., Feb. 18,  
2016

**Gleim**, Elmer Q., 100,  
New Oxford, Pa., Jan. 26

**Haag**, James Vincent, Jr.,  
71, Grottoes, Va., Jan. 15

**Halter**, Isabelle, 83, Walnut  
Bottom, Pa., Jan. 22

**Hamer**, Betty G., 81,  
Friedens, Pa., Feb. 8

**Hawbaker**, Lois Armstrong,  
81, Chambersburg, Pa.,  
Jan. 19

**Helfrick**, Charles E.  
(Bud), 91, Waynesboro,  
Pa., Jan. 31

**Hepler**, Bonnie Jean, 89,  
Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 5

**Hinton**, Emma Jane, 94,  
Martinsburg, Mass.,  
Nov. 30

**Hock**, Alma, 92, Shippens-  
burg, Pa., Jan. 17

**Hornish**, Paul, 76,  
Defiance, Ohio, Jan. 15

**Housour**, Don, 85,  
Nappanee, Ind., Oct. 16

**Huffman**, Gerald Eugene,  
86, Huntington, Ind.,  
Jan. 18

**Jasper**, Adeline, 92,  
Franklin Grove, Ill., April  
8, 2016

**Jasper**, Dale R., 97,  
Franklin Grove, Ill.,  
Jan. 19

**Keiser**, Phil, 60, Sauk  
City, Wis., Oct. 15

**Kesner**, Grace  
Leatherman, 97, Keyser,  
W.Va., Dec. 24

**Kidd**, Annabelle Houpp, 90,  
McVeytown, Pa., Dec. 3

**Kimmel**, Carl, 89,  
Elderton, Pa., Dec. 26

**Lenker**, Charles Eugene,  
93, Staunton, Va.,  
Jan. 29

**Lofthouse**, Betty Jean, 89,  
Dixon, Ill., Jan. 28

**Logan**, Judith E., 72,  
Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 15,  
2016

**Love**, Mary Jane, 83,  
Latrobe, Pa., Oct. 19

**Ludwick**, Edith Mitylene  
Smith, 95, Keyser, W.Va.,  
Jan. 17

**Lymanstall**, John Porter,  
63, Napoleon, Ohio,  
Jan. 24

**Martin**, Gwendolyn S., 83,  
Manheim, Pa., Jan. 27

**Martin**, Lloyd Gene  
(Sonny), 81, Nampa,  
Idaho, Aug. 1

**Meredith**,Carolynn, 79,  
Lawrenceville, Ill.,  
Nov. 21

**Miller**, Gene M., 85,  
Corunna, Ind., Nov. 5

**Miller**, Marjorie Eleanor,  
96, Nappanee, Ind.,  
Nov. 26

**Miller**, Mary C., 98,  
Waynesboro, Pa., Dec. 23

**Milner**, Anna LaVerne  
Bishop, 100, Norcatur,  
Kan., Jan. 15

**Moses**, Shirley Ann Stone,  
81, Brook Park, Ohio,  
Jan. 12

**Neff**, Veloris Frederick, 90,  
Nappanee, Ind., Nov. 4

**Racop**, Steve M., 61, Flat  
Rock, Ill., Aug. 6

**Raynor**, Richard, 88, Star,  
Idaho, Dec. 6

**Reinoehl**, Jean A.  
Shumaker, 85, Ashley,  
Ind., Sept. 28

**Rohrer**, Mary June, 86,  
Harrisonburg, Va.,  
Aug. 29

**Schmidt**, Audrey M., 80,  
Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 20

**Shickel**, Marcel K., 96,  
Harrisonburg, Va.,  
Dec. 31

**Shipe**, Ruth M. Werner,  
88, Auburn, Ind., Jan. 26

**Shirk**, Alice Lucille, 92,

Waterloo, Iowa, Jan. 19

**Shock**, Roger A., 78,  
Defiance, Ohio, Oct. 31

**Smith**, Dorothy L., 95,  
New Paris, Ind., Nov. 1

**Smith**, Robert Ernest, 76,  
Greenville, N.C., Jan. 20

**Swartz**, Frederick T., 84,  
Greensburg, Pa., Oct. 20

**Thomas**, Carol L. Grimm,  
73, Greensburg, Pa.,  
April 9

**Thomas**, Sean M., 50,  
Greensburg, Pa., May 22

**Waldron**, Robert M., 88,  
Butler, Ind., April 1,  
2016

**Weyandt**, Esther M., 78,  
Youngwood, Pa., Aug. 31

**Wine**, Tracy David, 104,  
Bridgewater, Va., Dec. 30

**Wishard**, Elizabeth Turner,  
89, Hagerstown, Md.,  
Jan. 9

**Wyrick**, Ellen Cline, 94,  
Bridgewater, Va., Dec. 22

## Ordained

**Cohen**, Lauren Seganos,  
Mid. Pa. Dist. (Stone,  
Huntingdon, Pa.), Feb. 5

**Scott**, Jeffrey, Mid-Atl.  
Dist. (Westminster, Md.),  
Jan. 29

## Licensed

**Waggy**, Linda, Shen. Dist.  
(Montezuma, Dayton,  
Va.), Jan. 29

**Wink**, William, Atl. N.E.  
Dist. (Mohrsville, Pa.),  
Jan. 29

## Placements

**Dodd**, Paul, from interim  
pastor, Friendship,  
Baltimore, Md., to pas-  
tor, Ridgely, Md., Feb. 5

**Hess**, Stephen R., from  
associate pastor, Lititz,  
Pa., to pastor, East  
Cocalico, Reamstown,  
Pa., Jan. 23

**Roetto**, Dwight D., from  
interim pastor to pastor,  
Mount Vernon,  
Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 16

# Lessons I learned from my dog

**T**hat's the ugliest dog in the world," the plumber said, looking at Tyra, our skinny, scruffy rescue mutt. At six-and-a-half pounds, Tyra lacks the cuddly roundness of most small dogs; she looks like



JAN FISCHER BACHMAN

a tiny version of a larger breed. Her now salt-and-pepper fur sticks out unevenly, and a paralyzed front leg causes her to lurch when she walks. She runs—and jumps—with ease, keeping us alert to what sits on the bar-height kitchen counter, a favorite Tyra noshing spot when we are out. (We learned this upon discovering a pawprint in the butter.)

She might not be the best looking (or behaving) dog, but Tyra has taught me many important spiritual lessons.

These habits that seem disgusting to humans have a helpful function, though; they tell them the health status and stress level of other dogs.

When we notice that something is amiss, do we take time to ask questions? Or do we prefer to pretend that everything is fine? How often do we go beyond surface smiles to find out if people are stressed out or hurting?

Dogs, of course, never repeat what they find out, and neither should we!

**“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).**

When we go to the door for a walk, Tyra gets so excited that she rears up on her hind legs and paws the air. Every day. Five times a day.

The blue sky. A flower. Your cozy bed. A glass of cool water. A delicious meal—or even an average meal. Do you appreciate the blessings around you and thank God for

## WHAT OTHER FAITH LESSONS COULD BE FOUND RIGHT AROUND ME? I SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR THAT FOOD EVERYWHERE I GO—JUST LIKE MY DOG.

**“Greet one another with a kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14).** If I've been gone for a while, Tyra yelps for joy when I return home. How many more people would come to church if we made them feel as welcome as their dogs do?

**“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew. . .” (Matthew 9:9).** At a young age, we learn it's not polite to stare—and soon we don't even notice those around us. Out for a walk, I routinely ignore people on the other side of the street; Tyra stops and takes a good look. Applying my dog's skills, I recently asked a frustrated-looking cashier if everything was okay. He shared his situation, and I offered encouragement. Would it help alleviate the national epidemic of loneliness if we starting really *seeing* people?

**“Do not judge by appearances” (John 7:24).** Dogs sniff highly undesirable things, such as the backsides of other canines and fire hydrants covered with “pee mail.”

them, with enthusiasm?

**“... Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).**

Tyra forgives me even though I give her baths, clip her nails, and take her to the scary vet where shots happen. Why? Because I also feed her, walk her, and pet her, day after day. A solid, caring relationship puts the occasional painful moment—or criticism—into perspective. In a society that values combative language and ridicule, we need to be careful with our sharp words—even on social media.

Jesus used everyday things to make truth understandable: seeds, bread, sheep, lost coins. What other faith lessons could be found right around me? I should be looking for that food everywhere I go—just like my dog. 

Jan Fischer Bachman is the MESSENGER web editor and a junior high advisor for Mid-Atlantic District and Oakton (Va.) Church of the Brethren.

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—HEBREWS 10:23

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