

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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GARDENING FOR THE
earth & soul



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Lot's Wife and the Necessity of Turning Back

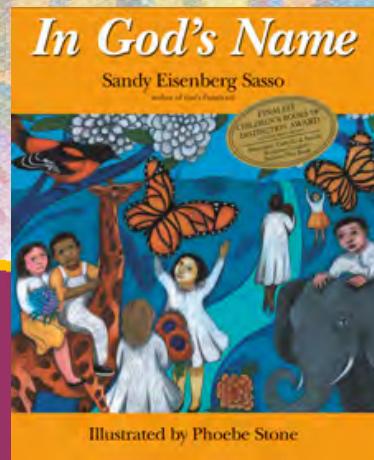


Sandy Eisenberg Sasso is the best-selling author of *In God's Name*, *God's Paintbrush*, *Creation's First Light*, and other books. The recipient of many awards, Rabbi Sandy has recently retired from the full-time rabbinate and now directs the Religion, Spirituality and Arts Initiative at Butler University in Indianapolis.



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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER



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Young plants are prepared at Capstone, a community garden in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward. Photo by David Young

above

People at work in one of the community gardens founded by Martin Hutchison, pastor of Community of Joy Church of the Brethren in Salisbury, Md.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hutchison

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

During a season in Ecuador as a college-aged “summer missionary,” I gained 10 pounds. The culprit was delicious fresh-baked bread from the open-air market, which tasted so much better than the plastic-wrapped stuff from the supermarket back home. I ate a generous portion every day.

I recognize now that it wasn’t just the absence of preservatives that gave the bread its flavor. Back then the wheat in that part of the country was still locally grown. Today, farming is more efficient but far less diverse, and most of Ecuador’s wheat is imported from North America.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

The same thing is true of corn in Mexico, the birthplace of all corn grown around the world. Maize was domesticated 7-10,000 years ago by indigenous people in what is now the state of Oaxaca.

When I learned recently of a man who is trying to preserve the centuries-old varieties of heirloom corn by creating a market for it in the US, I was ready to head off immediately in search of tortillas made from that kind of masa. In a world of mass-produced tacos, he says, we don’t know what we’re missing.

I wonder if, at our best, Brethren are like small-scale farmers. We are more about relationship than quick success. We value tastiness and nutrition over profit. We see the potential in a seed.

Small-scale farming isn’t easy, that’s true. The slow food movement isn’t too much of a threat to the fast-food industry. Likewise, the slow church movement isn’t about to overtake the American church. But we’re used to being small in size and large in influence.

Large in influence? Our influence may not seem noteworthy, but it outstretches our numerical size in multiple ways—organizations planted by the Brethren and now bearing fruit for others, education in Nigeria and Haiti, commitment to peace recognized by the Selective Service. We can see the evidence of faith like a mustard seed.

“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

Wendy McFadden

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What's for lunch?

The Fellowship Team of Northview Church of the Brethren in Indianapolis, Ind., hosted a “Rice and Beans Lunch” in March. Leading up to the event, questions were shared about basic food resources around the world, food rations in refugee camps, and US portion sizes. On the day of the lunch, answers were posted on bulletin boards in the fellowship hall, along with fun food facts and photographs.

At the lunch, members ate dishes with rice and beans as the primary ingredients, including Gallo Pinto, refried beans, and Horchata from Central America, as well as dishes more typical of potlucks in North America. Participants were encouraged to take just one cup of food, from any combination of dishes, their first time through the line. Then they assessed how full they felt before going back for more, if they wished. Discussion topics included family favorites that use very basic ingredients, and world food traditions experienced during travel or living abroad.

The meal has made Northview more aware of the food situation around the world, and the congregation is considering how future rice and bean meals may encourage support for others in need.—*Ramona Thornburg*

‘We can pray’

“With so much going on in the world it can be a very scary and depressing time, but what can we do?” asked a group of women at Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind. “We can pray,” was the answer.

The women are gathering every other week to sit in complete silence for one half hour. It is a time to pray for the world, not for personal prayers. If members of the group have something personal to share, they talk before or after the silence.

At National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) in 2014, John Paul Lederach—professor of International Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame—said that when his students feel overwhelmed with the complexity of a seemingly impossible conflict he goes to the blackboard and writes, “Don’t think of words, but see a picture. The hardest challenge of peacebuilding is to see the essence. If you do nothing else, take time to get a picture, an image. . . . Then you can see more of the whole.”

In prayer, the women can picture the sun as God’s love pouring down all over the globe—God’s love bathing the world in warmth. Another mental picture envisions a frozen creek with a stream flowing along underneath the ice. Even though one cannot see God’s love, it always is flowing. One can picture the refugee children crying, and being held and lifted into God’s light and love through caregivers playing a game with them, singing a song, or drawing—and see the tears turn to laughter. There are limitless possibilities. Prayer is potent.—*Dorothy Fry Mason*



Celebrating God's faithfulness

The end of 2016 brought an exciting blessing to Western Pennsylvania District—a new book called *Our Stories: A Testimony to God's Faithfulness*. This 380-page daily devotional was written by Church of the Brethren members and friends with ties to the district and Camp Harmony. More than 170 people contributed stories, devotions, poems, and prayers. Readers will find a story about a youth pastor’s experience in running the Boston Marathon; learn about a couple’s determination to revive Thanksgiving dinner; hear a woman’s story of coping with suicide—and every devotion points to Jesus. For a copy, call the Western Pennsylvania District office at 866-279-2181.—*Abby Shaffer*

Planting seeds in common ground

Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., lived out its mission to be a beacon to the community when it hosted a luncheon for those who desired discussion about how to live together in a spirit of hope during times of discord. The 40 participants represented diversity in political and theological differences, ages spanning nine decades, and cultures from at least five countries.

Church of the Brethren minister Kimberly Koczan-Flory of Wisdom's Well Spiritual Guidance, and Steve Vachon, co-creator of Be Love Community, facilitated small group discus-

sion, followed by community building exercises of movement and song. Personal testimonies, probing questions, and poignant analogies caused the gathering to explore possibilities of unity. Questions included, "How can we build bridges while others are erecting walls?" and, "Where can we find common ground?"

This effort takes "long, hard work," said participant Caitlin Divine. It is a process, noted leader Koczan-Flory. It is like gardening. Eventually, a compost pile evolves into enriched soil where seedlings gain nourishment and grow. It takes time, patience, a listening heart, and

an open mind.

"We need more conversations like this," commented Liz Scott, "because when we truly learn to listen, we begin to understand what drives the other person." Tablemate Dorothy Junovyak agreed and added, "Today has meant that we need to strive to be the best that we can be. . . . We need to build community and adhere to [loving] principles."

According to Joseph Divine, the day's take-away was "to remember that we are not alone. Those who are willing to invest in the community and in others will create meaningful relationships." —Cheryl M. Thomas

Alternatives to violence

You have to not only not hit back, you have to not want to hit back!" This was one of the statements made at the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshop hosted by Jacksonville (Fla.) Church of the Brethren. The speaker was paraphrasing instructor Jim Lawson, who actually said, "You have to do more than just not hit back. You have to have

no desire to hit back. You have to love that person who's hitting you. You're going to love him."

Jacksonville Church of the Brethren prayerfully desired to be of service to the surrounding community, and an opportunity presented itself to do just that when the church was asked to host the AVP workshop on March 3-5.

AVP is an international volunteer program conducting experiential and practical workshops in conflict resolution and nonviolence. Started by the Quakers in response to a request from an inmate group in Green Haven Prison in New York State, participants soon realized that all segments of society would benefit from the AVP model in dealing with all forms of conflict, including domestic abuse, family turmoil, anger, strained relationships, and inner turmoil.

The workshop experience was rated a great success by both participants and facilitators. A sense of strong community developed as participants learned skills in dealing with conflict and gained insights into developing a safer environment.

Churches can find out more about AVP and the possibility of hosting a workshop at www.avpusa.org.

—Mary Mueller



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.

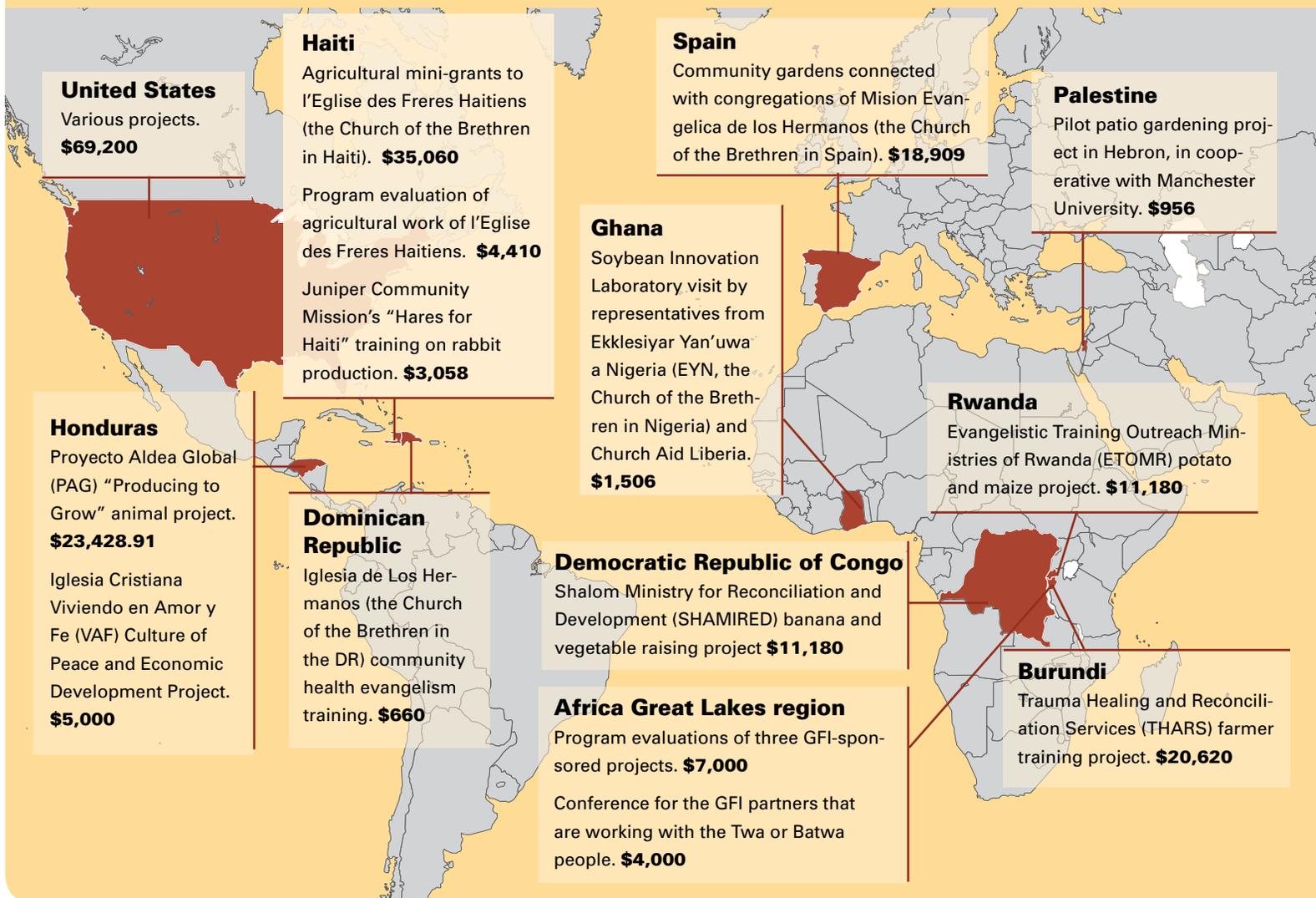


“... In many cases the church is one of the only functioning institutions in many rural communities.”

—From a summary of the 2016 evaluation of the agriculture work of l’Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti), which is supported by the Global Food Initiative. Last year was the fourth of a five-year post-earthquake community development plan to serve 19 communities across Haiti. As of the end of 2016, this effort has received \$171,000 from the GFI.

The Global Food Initiative in 2016

With total allocations of **\$216,187.98**, the Church of the Brethren’s Global Food Initiative covered a lot of ground last year. This map shows the countries and the projects that benefited from GFI allocations. For more information go to www.brethren.org/gfi.





GARDENING FOR THE *earth* soul AND

by Heather Dean and Tom Benevento

Think back to a place from your childhood—your backyard, a woodlot, a park, or a playground. Close your eyes and visualize that place in the richest detail possible. The specificity of your memory will surprise you.

I vividly remember my grandparents' yard—the ant hill, the catalpa tree, the lilacs and grape arbor, the sand pile by the shed where violets grew, the vegetable garden on the edge of the railroad track,

the rhubarb patch. Day in and day out, I poked, climbed, rolled, uprooted, tasted, and smelled until I knew that land intimately. In June I helped Grandma pick cherries for pie; in August we harvested Concord grapes. On fall mornings I peeled apples with my grandpa and then snuggled against his flannel shirt. My memories of that land and the people who populated it intertwine.

As an adult, I carry those people and that place

In gardening we can regain our sense of wholeness with the earth and learn to see the beauty in the peculiarities of each place and person. As we garden, we can make connections with gardeners and farmers from around the world and gain sensitivity to their struggle for livelihood. Ultimately, as we garden we participate in the work of co-creation, recognizing God's abundant grace that sustains and renews us.—Tom Benevento

Drawings by Tom Benevento





David Young

with me, even as I create new bonds with other people and other places. In 1992, when I was working in Guatemalan refugee camps in southern Mexico, Aurelio, an older Jacaltec man, broke into tears as he told me of his homeland. He told me of wading in the river to collect snails from the stones, of tasting the sour wild plums that his daughters collected, of walking through the fields with his grandfather in March when the coffee flowers gave off their scent of lemon and honey. He longed viscerally for his homeland.

Although I have never suffered the devastating violence that he experienced during the Guatemalan genocide, I connected with him profoundly at that moment because we share a deep spiritual bond between land and people: love of our home, love of the earth and those who populate it.

Yet, sadly, we live in a world that does not value that bond. In some cases, governments and armies have brutally removed indigenous people like Aurelio from the land. But often the displacement is more subtle, occurring over decades, as large corporations and developers gradually obliterate the quirks and beauty of our landscapes. They have bulldozed stands of beech trees and filled in precious wetland to make room for cloned houses, strip malls, and parking lots to accommodate those who have been displaced from small towns across the country.



Seeds as storytellers

Take a seed in the palm of your hand. A dried bean from the kitchen will do, or an orange seed or an almond. It weighs almost nothing and is so common that we hardly give it a second glance. And yet life lies densely coiled within. Without seeds our human species would not exist.

Seeds are storytellers. Their genes tell tales of their ancestors—how they evolved, what the soil was like, whether it was sandy or clayey, whether there were torrential rains or there was drought. Each seed carries the memory of how its ancestors survived and adapted—deep roots or shallow, early bloom or late, climbing or bushy.

Seeds also carry human history. The plump kernels on a corn cob are as much a product of human intervention as nature. The original corn plants sprouted from kernels no larger than a grass seed, and our human ancestors chose the largest, sowed and harvested them, selected the best and sowed again in a chain of millennia.

Thus, each kernel of corn traces back not only to its own ancestors but also to ours. When we eat fresh corn, we can reflect on the hands of our human ancestors who selected the seed. Neither human hand nor seed would exist without the other. We create the seed and the seed creates us. Reflect on this as you touch the seed in your palm. Reflect on it as you grow your garden.—Heather Dean

Here in the palm of your hand is a hazelnut,

A small thing, round like a ball.

It is all that is made; it is made by Love.

See in this little thing three truths:

God made it; God loves it; God keeps it.

In these truths stay and grow.

—Julian of Norwich





Before starting to work, he went off to the side in the corn patch, took off his straw hat and sank his knees into the soft soil. I could hear him whispering a prayer through the leaves of the corn. . . . The whole process of working the field picking corn was not so much a job to be done and over with; it was a sacred moment.—Tom Benevento

And meanwhile, in those same nearly abandoned towns, agribusiness pushes farmers to grow chemical monocrops without considering what might best enhance a particular place or how those actions affect the inhabitants (human and nonhuman) of the land. As a society we have forced the land to conform to our perceived needs rather than taking the time to learn the peculiarities of each acre and adapting our actions accordingly. We have lost the vision of belonging to the land. We shuffle from coast to coast, never quite satisfied with being present where we are. Our memory of the bond between people and land has begun to evaporate.

Yet I believe that many people (perhaps most)

The importance of knowing the territory

by Jeff Boshart

In the opening scene of the *The Music Man*, a group of traveling salesmen find themselves on a train. As they speak, the subject turns to the unscrupulous Harold Hill—one of their own. Interestingly, the knock on Hill is not that he's a cheat or a liar (which we learn that he is), but that he "doesn't know the territory."

The lyrics of this musical number express how the world is changing, but also the belief that, if one knows the territory, these changes need not be an obstacle to the all

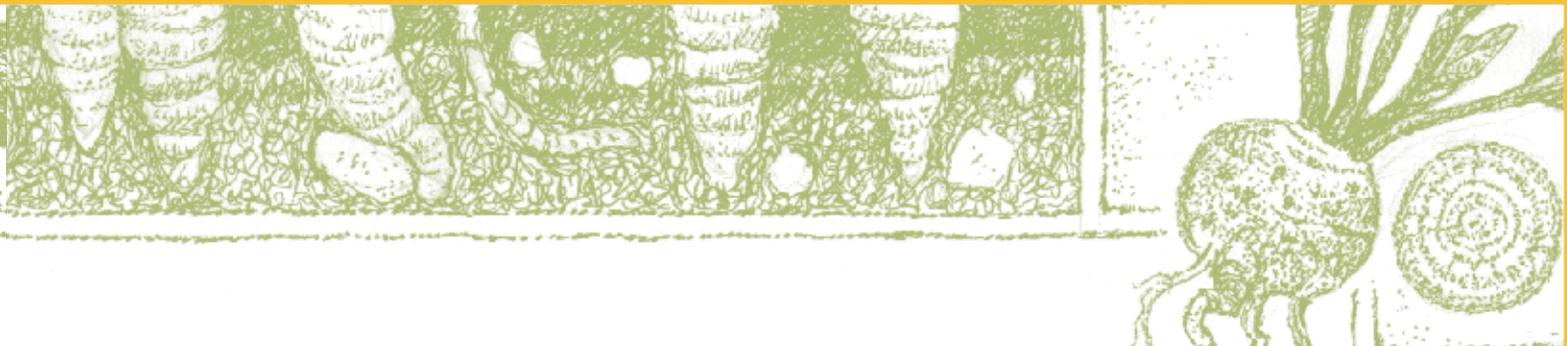
important sale. When it comes to feeding the world's hungry, I'd like to draw some parallels.

There is much to celebrate as we take a look back on what's been accomplished in recent decades. The United Nations reports that the number of hungry people has declined from 1 billion down to 795 million in 25 years, despite steady population growth. If these rates continue, some speculate that the end of hunger is near.

Other figures are more sobering. The United Nations has issued warnings of famine conditions in four regions: northern Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen.

Overall in Africa, more than one in three people remain hungry. Two out of every five hungry people on the planet live in countries that are experiencing political turmoil, such as Syria. The 2015 El Niño-influenced drought caused crop failures from Central America to Ethiopia. Closer to home, the United States Department of Agriculture reports that approximately 20 percent of all American households are facing food insecurity.

Hunger is everywhere. While visiting with community gardeners in Mount Morris, Ill., I learned that in this town of 3,000 people surrounded by extremely pro-



wish that things could be different. We long for a connection to the earth and to each other, yet the seemingly unstoppable political and economic forces can overwhelm us. These feelings of powerlessness in the face of ecological devastation and social disintegration are real, but we can overcome them in order to create the alternative world we envision. To build a new reality, we must join with other people, talk about our worst fears, share our dreams of a different future, and take collective action.

The possibilities for enhancing our local environment are infinite—picking up trash in the park, lobbying for public transportation rather than highway construction, educating our children to love



Martin Hutchison

ductive farmland, the local food bank serves 500 individuals each month. My wife, Peggy, produces vegetables for the farmers' market in our small town of Fort Atkinson, Wis. (pop. 12,000). Among her customers are mothers shopping with WIC checks—mothers whose children go to school with our kids.

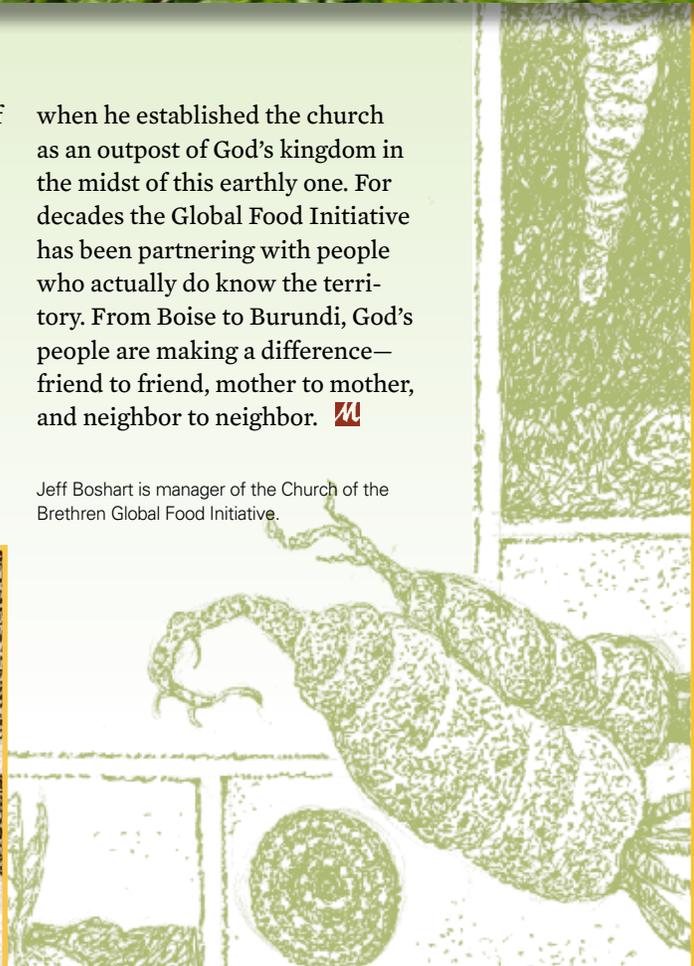
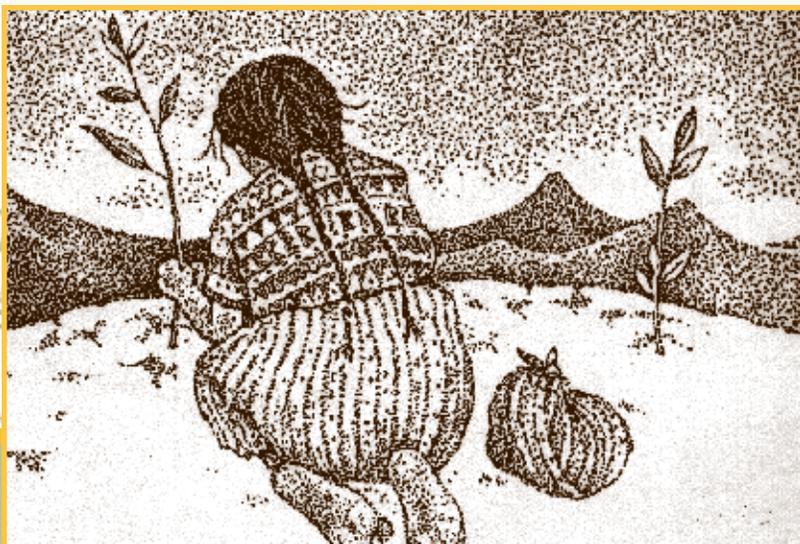
Hunger today is difficult to see, but everywhere at the same time. If I were to come up with a

strategy for addressing this type of hunger, it would be relational, involve small groups of people seeking out the hungry hidden in plain sight, address underlying causes, and most certainly, knowing the territory. Let's see, small groups of committed people, seeking to be relational, looking for the lost, hmmm . . . that sounds an awful lot like the church.

I believe Jesus had this in mind

when he established the church as an outpost of God's kingdom in the midst of this earthly one. For decades the Global Food Initiative has been partnering with people who actually do know the territory. From Boise to Burundi, God's people are making a difference—friend to friend, mother to mother, and neighbor to neighbor.

Jeff Boshart is manager of the Church of the Brethren Global Food Initiative.





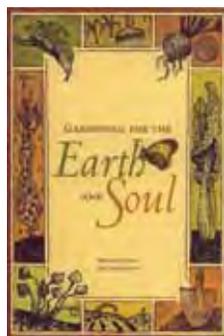
and respect the land, restoring native wetland and forests, participating in local planning meetings. I believe that sustainable organic gardening is at the forefront of such efforts.

As I have formed friendships with other gardeners in a community gardening project, I learned that people create gardens for many reasons. Some wish to eat local organic produce to avoid the tasteless cardboard tomatoes produced by agribusiness. Others see a connection between gardening and peacemaking: By growing our own food, we reduce fossil consumption to avoid petroleum wars in distant places.

Some people garden to preserve green space and make their neighborhoods more beautiful and livable. Others long for a greater spiritual connection to the earth, or they want to create native wildlife habitat or reduce chemical pesticides in the environment to protect their own

health and the health of their children. And nearly all gardeners derive deep pleasure from the garden itself—the smell of earth, seeds unfurled in spring, the tang of late summer tomatoes, dew on collard greens in the fall.

Gardening is not an end in itself. Rather, the act of planting, growing, and harvesting binds us to each other and to a particular place on this earth. It cultivates community-building and nonjudgmental attentiveness to the land. When we work together to create a garden, we strengthen our friendships and relations with our families and increase our capacity to join together for a common goal. When we plant and grow our crops, we become part of the land and its people. 



These articles are excerpted from *Gardening for the Earth and Soul*, by Heather Dean and Tom Benevento (Brethren Press).

The spiral herb garden

To build an herb spiral, construct a mound of soil about 3 feet high with a circular base 4-5 feet in diameter. If possible, pile good fertile soil at the base and use slightly poorer sandy soil for the upper layers. Then place medium-sized stones to fashion a spiraled terrace that curves around the mound.

The spiraling effect creates many small niches to accommodate the preferences of various kinds of herbs.

Sun-loving herbs that require less moisture, such as sage, thyme, rosemary, oregano, and lavender, grow best at the top; they will produce more of their aromatic oils if grown in a slightly poorer soil. The lower levels of the spiral can lodge plants that require more moisture or prefer slight shade, like mint, lemon balm, parsley, cilantro, dill, and chamomile.

One or two of each plant will yield enough for the whole family.



Alternatively, community gardeners can collectively build several spirals and allow everyone to harvest them freely.

Grace versus merit

Can God be manipulated?

Most of us would answer, “No, of course not!” However, our beliefs and actions speak otherwise. “If I am faithful in tithing, God will increase my wages.”



MARCOS INHAUSER

“If I have been faithful, I will not be sick.”

“God gave me the job because I fasted three days.”

“That natural disaster shows God’s judgment.”

These statements illustrate a *theology of merit*: people receive from God what they deserve. The theology of merit can also be described as synergic justice. The word “synergic” comes from the Greek “syn” + “erga,” which means joint work or cooperation.

People who do good receive blessings. People practicing evil receive punishment from God. Those who suffer must be indolent or insufficiently devout.

Following this idea to its logical and practical conclusion, God is not omnipotent (all-powerful). Our actions force God

Worship services transform into stages for performances by narcissistic people, who go to church to show how good they are. They long to sing solos, pray aloud, bear witness, tell of their blessings—anything to be the center of attention. They cackle about how much God is blessing them because of their great worthiness. Each “testimony” tries to outdo the last, “proving” that the person deserves God’s blessings.

What is the alternative to the theology of merit? The *theology of grace*.

Grace is the spontaneous act of God.

Grace amazes us, because we cannot *ever* predict it: no one can say when grace will manifest.

John’s words define grace: the wind blows, you do not know where it comes from, nor where it is going.

Grace does not ask for permission, retribution, or even gratitude.

It does more than we imagine or ask.

Grace is not an answer to prayers made. Grace comes when it is least expected.

Grace toys with the parameters of human justice, seeming illogical to us.

Grace tramples.

THERE IS NO WELL SO DEEP THAT GRACE CANNOT REACH INTO IT. THERE IS NO DARKNESS TOO MURKY FOR GRACE TO ILLUMINATE.

to reciprocate. God becomes predictable, only responding to what we do. Consequently, God can be manipulated by our good or bad deeds.

Salvation no longer depends on God, nor on Christ, but on works done to deserve it. It ceases to be a gift and becomes payment for good behavior.

The final judgment in this theology turns into the weighing of good and bad deeds. God ceases to be a savior and becomes a judge, trading love for condemnation.

A theology of merit promotes selfishness: “I am good and therefore God blesses me.”

It promotes competition and boasting: “I pray every day”; “I’ve read the whole Bible X times”; “I never missed a church event”; “God will answer me, because I believe in him and my faith is very great.”

Grace does not need “rock stars of the gospel world” to manifest, although God can use them if he wants. Grace covers the mouths of presumptuous preachers! It destroys those who claim to speak for God.

Chaos changes to order, conflict to harmony, crisis to abundance.

There is no well so deep that grace cannot reach into it. There is no darkness too murky for grace to illuminate.

Grace exalts the humble, the orphan, the widow, the sick. Grace visits people who are bed-ridden, terminally ill.

Grace is the amazing act of God, far beyond our understanding. 

Marcos Inhauser and his wife, Suely, serve as national directors of the Church of the Brethren in Brazil.

A Connecticut Yankee in the Church of the Brethren's court

by Walt Wiltschek

A Connecticut-born single woman who cheers for the Boston Red Sox, grew up in the Congregational Church, attended a Presbyterian seminary, and became a consummate academic is this year's Church of the Brethren Annual Conference moderator.

Who would have thought?

Ask moderator Carol Scheppard and she'll tell you that the path of life, with all its decisions, generally unfolds as it should—sometimes in surprising fashion.

"You do the best you can and you don't worry too much about it," Scheppard says. "I think often we ask God, 'Which way should I go?' And God's answer is 'I don't care!' You're often choosing between good and another good. The path will wind you around differently, but you might end up right where you wanted.

"When you think the road forks, it doesn't. You just don't know."

Paul Grout, Scheppard's long-time pastor at now-closed Genesis Church of the Brethren in Putney, Vt., says Schep-

pard once delivered a notable sermon on that very theme at the church. "She often preached while I was traveling. I think people appreciated my teaching and preaching, but people never seemed disappointed when I was away and she was preaching and teaching," Grout says with a laugh. "But the most remembered sermon that she gave was about coming to Ys in the road. Focusing on the path taken is less important than the faith and integrity with which you choose any path."

Scheppard's path may have unfolded differently, however, if not for an index card and a magic marker.

She grew up in a blue-collar family in Thompson, Conn., a small town nestled in the northeastern corner of the state near Massachusetts and Rhode Island. She attended Wesleyan University, majoring in anthropology, before taking a job in special education at the Landmark School, a boarding school northeast of Boston that served children with dyslexia.

Seven years into her work there, the school purchased a defunct college campus in Putney, Vt., and opened



Courtesy of Bridgewater College



Jack Amick / flickr.com

Annual Conference 2017 will take place in Grand Rapids, Mich., on June 28–July 2 at the DeVos Place, with some events at the adjacent Amway Grand Plaza Hotel.

Moderator Carol Scheppard will lead the Conference, assisted by moderator-elect Samuel Sarpiya and Conference secretary James Beckwith.

Serving on the Program and Arrangements Committee this year are Founa Inola Augustin-Badet, Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, and John Shafer. Chris Douglas is the Conference director.

In addition to business sessions for the delegate body, Annual Conference offers all attendees many opportunities for spiritual enrichment,

continuing education, and family-oriented activities. This year's Conference offers the usual plethora of worship services, age group programming, mutual help groups, insight sessions, meal events, exhibit hall, blood drive, quilt auction, and more. Detailed information and online registration are at www.brethren.org/ac.

SOME OF IT WILL BE HARD WORK, BUT I HOPE WE LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR A WAY FORWARD THAT MIGHT NOT BE WHAT WE THOUGHT GOING IN. THE LAST THING WE WANT TO HAPPEN IS TO HAVE THE JESUS TRAIN LEAVE THE STATION WITH ALL OF US STILL ON THE PLATFORM BICKERING. —Carol Scheppard

Landmark College. Scheppard moved to work at the new institution. She was collecting her mail at the local post office box one day when she found an index card with the marker-written message that said, “Come worship with us at Genesis Church of the Brethren.”

She had been seeking a church, so she went and found a worship community in an old house with folding chairs. Grout’s message and the welcome there impressed her, so she joined a membership class that was taking place. The rest is history.

“Paul took me to breakfast the next morning,” Scheppard recalls, “and by the next morning he had me in all kinds of leadership roles. It was love at first sight. The congregation was dedicated to one another and to Christ’s call and how you gather around the text and try to live your life correctly. It was amazing.”

The feeling was mutual.

“She was incredibly loved at Genesis,” Grout says. “She is such a deep thinker who remains kind of blue-collar in her own way, even though her work and life remain in

such an intellectual framework. Her humor is so sharp, and her compassion is sharp, too. She relates so well to so many people. She’s a remarkable person.”

Scheppard moved on from Vermont after a few years (although she has kept in close contact), pursuing graduate programs in religious studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and the University of Pennsylvania. Her



Scheppard visited an orphanage in Bolivia during a service trip that she took with her congregation, Lebanon Church of the Brethren in Mt. Sidney, Va.

Nine business items

Delegates will address four items of new business . . .

- “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”

. . . and five items of unfinished business

- A report and recommendations from the Review and Evaluation Committee
- “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”
- An interim report from the Vitality and Viability Committee, with a request for an additional year to bring a final report
- An interim report from a study committee on “Creation Care,” with a request for another year to complete the work

Full text business items are at www.brethren.org/ac/2017/business.



Meal events: From Lot's Wife to Venezuela

A variety of special meal events are planned, with most requiring the purchase of a ticket. Online sales of tickets end June 5, but tickets may be purchased onsite while quantities last.

The meal events range from the Brethren Press/MESSENGER Dinner with author Sandy Eisenberg Sasso speaking on the topic "Lot's Wife and the Necessity of Turning Back," to a Clergy Women's Breakfast with speaker Karoline Lewis on the topic "Biblical Perspectives on the Femininity of Power"; from the Global Mission and Service Dinner with Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace, to the Brethren World Mission Breakfast where Joel Peña will present "A Venezuela Church of the Brethren in Sight"; from the Open Table Mix and Mingle (free, no ticket required), to the Brethren Revival Fellowship Dinner and Luncheon (get tickets at the BRF booth in the exhibit hall).

The six Church of the Brethren-related colleges and universities are sponsoring meals, and Bethany Theological Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership are holding a joint luncheon.

Find a detailed schedule of meal events at www.brethren.org/ac/2017/activities.

studies focused on the Irish history of biblical exegesis and particularly on the Psalms.

After graduating with her doctorate in 1997, she spent a year as an adjunct at Villanova University, then took a position teaching in the Philosophy and Religion Department at Bridgewater (Va.) College, where she later became academic dean.

"Carol began her career at the college as an engaging professor of religion who amused her students with creative illustrations and challenged them with high expectations," chaplain Robbie Miller says. "After being appointed vice president and dean for academic affairs, Carol provided able leadership to a dynamic and rapidly expanding faculty.

"Through it all," Miller says, "Carol's love for the Church of the Brethren has always been at the core of who she is and how she teaches, leads, and serves."

Her skills with the biblical text have been evident this year, as she has examined Annual Conference theme "Risk Hope" by digging into scripture texts with monthly reflections that have appeared in Newsline and other publications around the denomination.

Pre-Conference events

Three Congregational Care and Vitality Workshops are offered by Congregational Life Ministries on June 28, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. "Growing in Faith, Faithful in Service: Deacon Ministry 101" will be led by Stan Dueck, director for Transforming Practices. "Becoming a Listening and Discerning Congregation" will be led by Debbie Eisenbise, director of Intergenerational Ministries. "Conflict Transformation 101" will be led by Josh Brockway, director for Spiritual Life and Discipleship. Register at www.brethren.org/ACtraining. Cost is \$15 per person, with an additional \$10

for ministers wishing to earn .3 continuing education credit.

The Brethren Ministers' Association Pre-Annual Conference Continuing Education Event on June 27-28 will feature guest speaker Lillian Daniel on the topic "Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don't Belong to." Author of the book by the same title, Daniel is from First Congregational Church in Dubuque, Iowa, and has taught preaching at a number of schools, including Chicago Theological Seminary, the University of Chicago Divinity School, and her alma mater, Yale Divinity School. Three sessions will be offered:

"Four Types of Nones" on June 27, 6-9 p.m.; "Spirituality Without Stereotypes" on June 28, 9-11:45 a.m.; and "Religion Without Ranting" on June 28, 1-3:45 p.m. Register at www.brethren.org/sustaining or request a registration form from MinistersAssociation@brethren.org.

Training in Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation is offered by On Earth Peace on June 28 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The training will provide an introduction to the philosophy and methodology of Martin Luther King Jr. Cost is \$60, with .7 continuing education credit available to ministers for an additional \$10.

While visiting Nigeria, the moderator met with a group of women theologians from Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

“She has an exemplary knowledge of scripture, both the Old and New Testament,” Grout says. “And she has the wisdom to apply the knowledge well in her life. That’s been very meaningful for people.”

The “Risk Hope” theme has been a personal mantra of sorts for Scheppard. She settled on it for the Conference theme after doing a Bible study at her home church, Lebanon Church of the Brethren in Mount Sidney, Va. They were reading through Isaiah and encountered the stories of the Hebrew people in exile with the promise that “a remnant shall return”—a message that resonated with today’s difficult times for the church and the world.

“It’s that notion that in the face of all evidence God’s will shall be done,” Scheppard says. “All that ridiculous hope in the face of everything to the contrary—it clicked. It speaks to different people in different ways, and that’s a good thing.”

Scheppard says she has enjoyed visiting churches around the country this year, along with a trip to the church in Nigeria and a service trip to Bolivia. At each stop she has spent time hearing people’s stories and learning about the struggles and challenges people and congregations face.

She has her own hopes for Annual Conference this summer, which takes place with a heavy agenda June 28–July 2 in Grand Rapids, Mich: that delegates will find a way to work together, that Brethren will truly treat one another as brothers and sisters, and “that our business is conducted as worship,” she says.

“I hope we come together and work together for good,” Scheppard says. “Some of it will be hard work, but I hope we listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit for a way forward that might not be what we thought going in. The last thing we want to happen is to have the Jesus train leave the station with all of us still on the platform bickering.”

Scheppard has been on sabbatical from Bridgewater this year, but she plans to return to the classroom this fall after her term as moderator is done. She’ll also be able to spend more time on her two-acre “farmette” in nearby Mount Sidney, which she shares with her “rescue mission” of two cats, two goats, a miniature horse, some koi, and a fluffy Great Pyrenees.

She has missed those spots at times this year, but it’s all been worthwhile as her winding path has continued to unfold.

“All my Brethren experiences have been community-based,” Scheppard says. “We’re accountable to one another, and we take care of one another. To be allowed the privilege of being part of all these various communities this year has been very special. We find that being the church family is living with and loving the people who show up—even when they’re loud-mouthed Yankees!” 

Walt Wiltschek, a former editor of MESSENGER, is news editor for Mennonite Church USA. He is a member of Linville Creek Church of the Brethren in Broadway, Va.

Returning this year: Jubilee afternoon

The Conference schedule will include a “jubilee break” on Friday afternoon, inspired by the call for jubilee or a time of liberty and freedom found in Leviticus 25:10-12. “It was in that spirit of celebrating God’s blessing and mercy and of returning to right relationship with God and with each other that Annual Conference instituted its first Jubilee afternoon last year in Greensboro,” explains moderator Carol Scheppard. “The plan rose in response to concerns voiced by brothers and sisters from across the denomination. They worried that the heavy focus on contentious issues during business sessions would eventually erode the effectiveness of Annual Conference in meeting its

own mission statement.” This year’s Jubilee Afternoon will include, among other things, special musical performances by Ken Medema and Jonathan Emmons; opportunities to visit the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, the Frederick Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park (with a special exhibit by the famed artist Ai Weiwei), and the Grand Rapids Art Museum; equipping workshops; special programming in the exhibit hall; and service projects benefitting greater Grand Rapids.



Josh May / flickr.com

‘Witness to the Host City’: Aiding refugees and the homeless

Four ministries in the Grand Rapids area are the beneficiaries of the “Witness to the Host City” this year: Bethany Christian Services, the Refugee Education Center, Well House, and Mel Trotter Ministries.

Conferencegoers and their congregations are invited to collect donations for Bethany Christian Services and the Refugee Education Center, both of which serve the refugee community. Jubilee Afternoon service projects will take volunteers to the Well House, an urban garden project for the homeless, and to Mel Trotter Ministries, a shelter that also offers food for the homeless, with volunteers who do not want to go offsite staying at the convention center to sort and box donations.

Find donation items listed at the “Witness to the Host City” link at www.brethren.org/ac/2017/activities.



Another way of living

by David Steele

Twenty-five years ago I was at the Oak Brook campus of Bethany Theological Seminary in the home of Bob and Nancy Faus. I remember the warm embrace of their hospitality and deep sense of belonging. That evening they offered formative words of wisdom as they shared the importance of relationship in pastoral ministry, relationship that comes through visitation, presence, and listening.

Later Bob captured the spirit of that conversation in these words: be a lover and historian in your ministry. He went on to say: you will have many good ideas as you begin your ministry, but write them down, put them in a file, and spend that first year learning to know the people you have been called to serve. Love them. After a year, see how many ideas in that file are still of merit.

Bob's and Nancy's words have served me well. When you become the lover and historian of the people you serve, or serve alongside, relationship becomes central. Relationship builds trust and diminishes barriers, allowing the Spirit to guide and ministry to flourish. With relationship, assumptions are transformed, opening the door to another way of living.

These last six months I have been working to be a lover and historian through listening sessions in districts as well

as with staff. I have had 22 listening sessions in 9 districts with the goal of getting to 23 of the 24 districts by my first-year anniversary. (Puerto Rico will likely be next winter during district conference there.) In addition, I will attend the Young Adult Conference and schedule meetings with Hispanic groups and leadership. I believe these connections are essential to our life together as we listen for the hopes, passions, intersections, and barriers of those we serve. I also hope that building or rebuilding relationships will go a long way to dispel some of the assumptions that people in the pews have about "Elgin," the denominational staff, and the ministry we do on their behalf.

I also have adopted a lover-history mode with my work with staff. From small cluster meetings to one-on-one conversations, I have been learning to know the staff, their roles, and their hopes, passions, and gifts. I came with my own assumptions, perceptions, and past experiences, so building and rebuilding these relationships as general secretary has been important and will open the door to another way of living—and working—together.

One of the more pressing conversations to come is property stewardship. This was part of my vision coming in and grows out of a desire to be better stewards of the General Offices property in Elgin, Ill.—how do we repurpose our space

for other rental and/or ministry uses? Another question that I believe must help shape that conversation is, how do we become and provide a more visible ministry presence in our community?

As I work toward a more team-based approach, a foundational component is the Guiding Team, an expansion and renaming of the executive forum. In late February, the program staff gathered in retreat. My hope for that time was to begin to create a greater awareness of the intersections of our ministries. Internally, how do we see beyond our program areas in our planning and draw on the gifts and passions of others? How are we connecting with districts and drawing on their counsel and wisdom? And, more significantly, how are we attending to the ministry needs in the pew? Recognizing some of the assumptions and perceptions that many have of denominational staff and our ministries, we worked to address a core question: How do we lead and provide ministries that connect with people in the pews, generating a transformational spirit that revitalizes the church?

will likely continue to be one of my greatest challenges, sorting through all of the static and offering a faithful response to the gospel and call to another way of living.

Late last year, I became fixated on the Church of the Brethren tag lines and their invitation. I wanted to reacquaint myself with the study that led to the formation of our two tag lines: “Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together” and “Another way of living.” I had forgotten that Brethren Press published the report. I was delighted to discover there are copies left in the warehouse. Written some 20 years ago, the report still seems relevant today. In many ways we haven’t moved very far.

When are we going to quit tripping over ourselves wanting to make each other in our own image? I find myself wondering if churches and leadership are trying so hard to be a prophetic voice that they are missing the opportunity to be the church. Yes, we need to continue the work of Jesus, but is it time to invite the church back to another way of living?

FOR ME, “ANOTHER WAY OF LIVING” IS NOT ONLY A CALL TO RECLAIM OUR DISTINCTIVE BRETHREN VALUES, BUT ALSO A CALL TO A RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP OF JESUS THAT LOOKS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD AROUND US.

The result was identifying goals that staff would work on together: marketing and communication, empowering new leadership, and intercultural and racism awareness. The Guiding Team will begin to put a framework to the data and conversation related to these goals.

It is a privilege to work alongside a gifted and committed staff. It is clear each one gives above and beyond. They have been patient with a new style of leadership and incredibly supportive.

Our nation has elected a new president, and it has been a challenge to navigate the political will of those calling on me to speak out and be prophetic. Of course, they want me to be a prophet as long as it aligns with their agenda. In this politically charged climate anything that I write, say, or sign is filtered through the political biases that we each carry. Regardless of how carefully I choose or write my words or represent the church, some are sure to feel like I am aligning myself with a particular political agenda. This

Realize that we hold an inexhaustible cup of cold water, water that can assuage the need of a thirsty world.

We possess the cup, we are the cup, we know what it contains, and—because we’ve experienced firsthand its wonderful promise—we can pass it on. If we can accept and live this single metaphor, we and our work cannot fail and will not end. (Communicorp Report, adapted)

We have neglected being and passing on the cup of cold water. For me, “Another way of living” is not only a call to reclaim our distinctive Brethren values, but also a call to a radical discipleship of Jesus that looks very different from the world around us. It is not about our positions around an issue or doctrine, but the transformation that comes from modeling our lives a different way—the way of Jesus. 

David A. Steele is the general secretary of the Church of the Brethren. This is adapted from a report he gave to the denomination’s Mission and Ministry Board in March.

WHAT ARE LISTENING SESSIONS? Listening sessions began in September 2017. The purpose of these sessions is two-fold: 1) to provide opportunities for members of the Church of the Brethren to meet David Steele, the new general secretary, and 2) to allow David Steele to carefully listen to hopes for and concerns about denominational ministries. As of March 31, listening sessions have been held in 12 districts. There are plans to visit all domestic districts by Fall 2017 and Puerto Rico District during its district conference in February 2018. —Matt DeBall, coordinator of donor communications for the Church of the Brethren



Please help them

Reflection of a Latino Brethren

by Daniel D'Oleo

The result of the presidential election and the politics in regard to immigration issues have impacted America in so many ways. Being a Latino pastor in a country where the Latino population reaches close to 60 million people gives me the opportunity to not only share the gospel in Spanish, but also to be concerned with the issues that affect my community.

My heart feels for those who are facing the uncertainty of their current immigration status. Moreover, I am writing from the bottom of my heart to present a plea for my brothers and sisters who at this time are concerned with their future and the future of their children. My intention here is to beseech my own denomination to intentionally reach out and help the Latino community in the United States.

The Church of the Brethren is known for the size of its heart in regard to social issues, humanitarian concern, and humane relief. It is in our DNA to respond to injustice, be concerned with people in need, and help those without a

voice. Since we have the heart for those who are suffering, it will come naturally that we as a church respond to the current situation with the love of Christ to the many families affected by deportations. It seems to me that we have been silent on this issue, thus losing the opportunity to preach the gospel of love in the language we know best: helping others in need.

We have helped people in other countries during hurricanes, tsunamis, and arson, yet it seems we have failed to see and respond to needs of the Latinos in our own backyard. For instance, "The Obama administration deported 414,481 unauthorized immigrants in fiscal year 2014. . . . A total 2.4 million were deported under the administration from fiscal 2009 to 2014, including a record 435,000 in 2013," according to a Pew Research Center analysis of the data.

The question is this: are we as a church ready to see this reality not as a political issue, but as an opportunity to minister to those who are in need? Are we ready to be

ARE WE AS A CHURCH READY TO SEE THIS REALITY NOT AS A POLITICAL ISSUE, BUT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MINISTER TO THOSE WHO ARE IN NEED?

THAT IS WHEN A NINE-YEAR-OLD BOY WITH A HONDURAN UNDOCUMENTED MOTHER SAID TO ME, “PASTOR, MY MOTHER TOLD ME THAT IF SHE WAS DEPORTED I SHOULD GO AND LIVE WITH YOU. CAN WE?”

intentional in reaching out to the largest minority group in this country? Are we ready to establish an office, focused to deal with the social and spiritual issues of the Latino community? Could our congregations make a meaningful presence in our communities by providing a welcoming space? Can our congregations become a part of a social/spiritual movement in which the gospel of Christ is taught with a serving love that breaks all language barriers?

Here is an example of what I have been experiencing: A couple of weeks ago I picked up six of the kids who normally come to our Wednesday night program. The difference this time was that the conversation among them became a bit intense due to the current immigration news we have been experiencing. I noticed that the conversation among them became more and more political as they discussed the future of their parents, if they were to be deported.

That is when a nine-year-old boy with a Honduran undocumented mother said to me, “Pastor, my mother told me that if she was deported I should go and live with you. Can we?” At the exact moment, his little sister also asked the same question: “Pastor, will you let us stay with you?” My immediate response was, “But of course!”

As the days passed I began to reflect on what had happened. I pondered, what is the true role of the church toward those with whom we minister? Where do we draw the line? Are we only interested in their eternal future or are we also concerned for the struggles they are experiencing?

As an immigrant myself, having had four different visas and having had to wait almost 25 years in this country before becoming a US citizen, my heart feels for those who may never have that privilege—no matter how long they wait. I can honestly say that my denomination played an important part in helping me get the legal documents needed to establish my life and make my future in this country. I am not only an immigrant, I am also the product of what a loving church can do for those who struggle with a broken immigration system.

After more than 20 years of being a Latino pastor in this country, I see the need for our denomination to do more. We can be united in a nation-wide program to assist members of our Latino congregations in this country. We

can create venues in which we support Latino immigrant families left behind without their bread winners. We can redirect money invested in failing programs to nurture social outreach programs sponsored by our Latino congregations. My plea is for those whom we are pastoring and who are afraid of even driving to church or being in large gatherings. So, let us:

- Find ways to provide free immigration consultation for Latino immigrants in our communities.
- Partner with Latino Church of the Brethren congregations in their efforts responding to Latino social needs.
- Open the doors of our congregations for Latino community events such as quinceañeras, baby showers, birthday parties, etc. (This will extend our love and show that we are concerned more about people than our buildings.)
- Challenge the members of our congregations to know and be friends with the Latinos in their neighborhoods.
- Find volunteers in our congregations who would teach English classes, tutor, or even provide interpretation for Spanish speakers.
- Do a congregational “Latino small business support day”: gather 20 to 40 people from a congregation and go to a Latino grocery store and purchase something all at the same time.
- Adopt a family. Find out how possible it would be for a congregation to adopt and support a single Latino mother. Some mothers are now the sole bread winners for their families, because their husbands have been deported and they are left with the children.

I believe our denomination has huge potential to minister to the immediate needs of the Latino community in this country. We must be sensitive to what is happening around us and in our congregations. Please listen to the plea of a Latino Brethren. Let us help our brother and sisters.

I am a Latino Brethren and this is my reflection! 

Daniel D’Oleo is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and a leader and pastor in the Renacer movement of Latino congregations.

Feeding a multitude

by Bob Bowman

Why is the story of Jesus feeding a multitude so important? It is the only miracle of Jesus that shows up in all four Gospels. In fact, it shows up six times in four Gospels because Matthew and Mark have both a feeding of five thousand and a feeding of four thousand.

Any story repeated so many times must be important. But what makes it so? This is the kind of question that biblical commentators love. Their answers are many. Some say the story is to remind us of the banquet of heaven. It is the story of the eucharist, the holy communion, and it anticipates the breaking of bread at the last supper. It is about sharing, say others. It is proof that Jesus is of God.

There is probably an element of truth in all the suggestions from the commentators, but five elements of the story speak to me. The first is the comment that the crowd was like “sheep without a shepherd.” Several Old Testament texts use the metaphor of the shepherd to refer to the king. It is possible that this is a political statement, a criticism of political economics that had led to much of the land in Galilee being owned by the wealthy in Jerusalem while the tenant farmers of Galilee were hungry.

A second is that the first response of Jesus was to teach. Mark says it simply: “[H]e saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). One is tempted to believe that the deepest hunger of the crowd was the hunger of the mind for knowledge and of the soul for meaning. Perhaps the meal of bread and fish was really a symbol of the deeper feeding held in the teaching of Jesus.

The crowd, we are told, was over five thousand people. Quite probably the folks at the edges of a crowd that large would have difficulty hearing; yet they stayed. The teaching session must have been long because it lasted past meal time; yet they stayed. Surely the hunger for the message of Jesus was stronger than the hunger for food.

A third thing I notice is that the whole crowd was invited to the meal. We are told that certain sects of the Jews were very particular about their eating partners, yet this ragtag and motley group was invited to the Lord’s table with no discrimination whatsoever. Rich and poor, sinner and saint, victim and bully, all were welcome to the food Jesus offered.

And they all ate together. I like to think that Jesus invited them to eat together so they could discuss what they heard in his teaching. Was there some healing in the act of eating together? Did they recognize that their hungers were shared? Was there a new recognition of the importance of community?

A fourth surprise was the realization that Jesus did not feed the crowd. His disciples did. From the very first, this was the work of the disciples. It was the disciples who recognized that Jesus had been teaching quite a long time. Far too polite to suggest he end his message, the disciple subtly suggested, “This is a remote area, and it is now a very late hour. Why not send them away so that they may go to the countryside and villages and buy something to eat?”

Jesus’ response was direct, “You give them something to eat.” What does Jesus expect of disciples? Was Jesus trying to teach them to have compassion for the crowd as he did?

The disciples were stunned. “Should we go and buy enough food to feed five thousand?” If we back up to the

WAS THERE SOME HEALING IN THE ACT OF EATING TOGETHER? DID THEY RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR HUNGERS WERE SHARED? WAS THERE A NEW RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY?

preceding stories in chapter 6 of Mark, we see that the disciples had just returned from a mission. When they set out on that mission, Jesus told them to carry no money, no food, and no extra clothing. Now they have returned from the mission penniless and weary. They were just as poor and hungry as the multitude. Their suggestion about buying food only called attention to its impossibility.

Jesus did not let them off the hook. He continued assuming that the disciples should feed the crowd. "How much food do you have?" asked Jesus. "Check and see." The disciples were able to come up with only five loaves and a couple of fish. But Jesus still did not offer to take responsibility. He told the disciples to seat the crowd and hand out the food. The only action attributed to Jesus in this story is that he blessed the food before it was distributed.

We are left wondering how five pita bread loaves and a

couple of fish could feed five thousand. What is made clear, however, is that the feeding was done by the disciples and that Jesus blessed the meal.

Finally, we are told that everyone ate until they were satisfied and 12 baskets of leftovers were gathered. When we eat with Jesus there is more than enough to go around.

The story stops here, but I can imagine after it was over the disciples said to each other, "I didn't think we could do it."

Like the disciples on that day, there are times when I think more is asked of me than I can handle. I feel I do not have enough resources. I think I can't do it. Maybe I can't. But it is amazing what can happen to five loaves and a couple of fish offered in compassion and blessed by the spirit of Jesus. 

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

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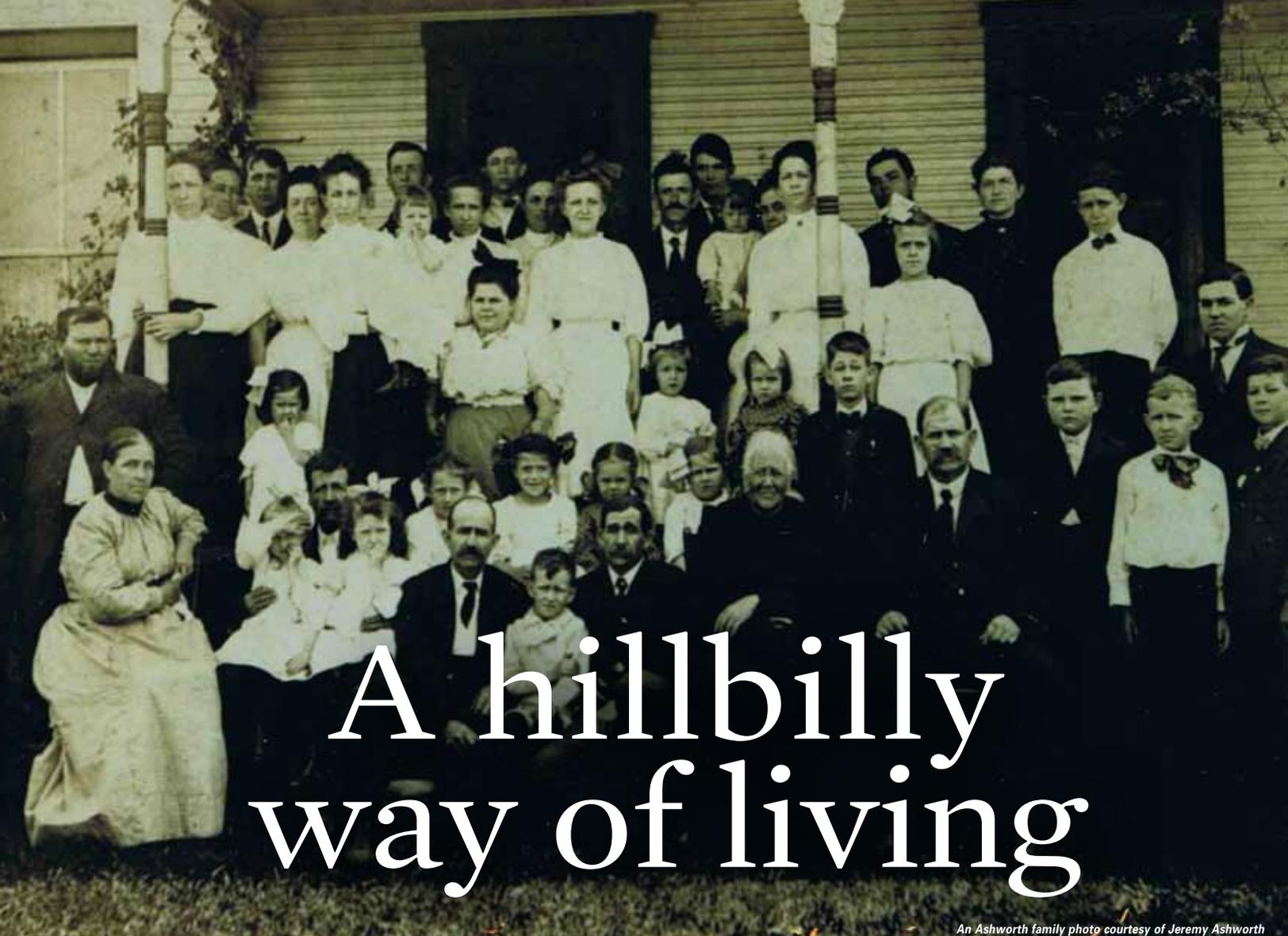
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An Ashworth family photo courtesy of Jeremy Ashworth

A hillbilly way of living

by Jeremy Ashworth and Dana Cassell



JEREMY ASHWORTH

My wife and I have lived and ministered in three regions of the United States:

The Midwest, the Northwest, and the Southwest. These are deeply different contexts and cultures, characterized by cornfields, Cascadia, and cactus. But we've been surprised to find a common thread among them. I call it the "Hillbilly Diaspora."

By "diaspora" I mean a smattering and scattering of people from another place, folks who are not natives in any sense. And I don't use "Hillbilly" as a dirty word. I mean it as a genuine description of an actual culture: white people of largely Scots-Irish descent who moved from the hills of Appalachia to the factories of the Midwest, and who now find themselves struggling in the post-industrial rust belt. Growing up in the farm-and-factory country of southern Ohio, these hillbillies are, in a sense, my people.



DANA CASSELL

Like Brother Jeremy, I grew up in Appalachia—

specifically, the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia. My "hillbilly" roots run back a few generations, too: My maternal grandparents grew up in eastern Kentucky coal country; my dad's mom spent most of her childhood in Virginia after being born in southern Ohio.

Holler-born and mountain-bred, my people are redneck through and through. Legend has it that four of my grandpa's cousins were killed in separate, mysterious, moonshine-related accidents. If that's not redneck street cred, I don't know what is.

Jeremy: In my West Coast sojourns, I have been surprised, even alarmed, to find that displaced hillbillies disguise themselves as locals. The nature-loving, high-tech banker in Seattle? Hillbilly. The white protester in Portland, Ore.? Hillbilly.

Pictured in this photo provided by Dana Cassell are relatives of her great-grandfather Belcher.



LEGEND HAS IT THAT FOUR OF MY GRANDPA'S COUSINS WERE KILLED IN SEPARATE, MYSTERIOUS, MOONSHINE-RELATED ACCIDENTS. IF THAT'S NOT REDNECK STREET CRED, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS.

I met a friendly, flamboyant, overly accessorized male peacock in Los Angeles. He had appeared on reality TV and was a living caricature of southern California. Not only was he a hillbilly from the same part of the country as me, he knew a thing or two about the Church of the Brethren (“I’m from Ohio, after all,” he said).

These and many more grew up within an hour’s drive of my childhood home. My new neighbors out west were actually my old neighbors back east; I just didn’t know it.

So a guy named J. D. Vance wrote a book called *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. My wife bought me this book in part because Vance fits my description of a displaced hillbilly. In many ways he embodies a bicultural reality: He grew up in Middletown, Ohio, and is now a high-powered West Coast lawyer.

Dana: I’ve lived in the deep South, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Midwest. That probably means I’m part of the hillbilly diaspora that Vance describes so vividly. But I live in North Carolina, now, as close to home as I’ve come in my adult life. The return has been a relief. Finally, here I am back in the midst of not only the topography and twang but also the slower pace and the unspoken codes of honor and integrity that signal “home” and “safety” to my spirit and psyche.

Jeremy: This sounds like a tangent but it’s not: Years ago I had a life-changing experience with Ruby Payne’s book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. My takeaway from Payne’s work is that social class is not just about how much money you have, it’s also about the kind of culture you belong to. The lower, middle, and upper classes don’t just have different amounts of money, they live in different worlds with different codes of conduct and different unwritten rules. Hillbillies don’t golf.

So if Payne’s book lays out a framework for understanding, Vance’s book is a first-person account from inside that framework. He recognizes rural-to-rust belt Appalachian poverty as a culture, a way of living in the world.

Dana: Reading Vance’s memoir about the hillbilly way of living in the world struck immediate chords of recognition for me. I recognized the arc of my life in the arc of his: School took him away from home and life carried him ever farther; school also carried me across the state and life took me around the continent. I recognized my family in his family: He calls his grandmother “Mamaw”; I call my grandmother “Mamaw.”

Jeremy: I should clarify that I do not have the hillbilly pedigree that Vance does. Plenty of German Brethren and English Quakers contribute to my cultural origin, and I offer with genuine empathy that Vance’s violent upbringing could have benefited from a little peacemaking.

My own idyllic childhood was infinitely happier and healthier than what Vance describes, thank God, and thanks to my parents and extended family, including my “Mamaw.” But when a *New York Times* bestseller so accurately describes the actual locations, idioms, unconscious mindsets, and social scenarios I grew up around, it’s more than informative, it’s a little unnerving.

Dana: *Hillbilly Elegy* has been touted as one of the Best Books To read To Understand People Who Voted Differently Than You in the 2016 election. That list also includes *White Trash: The 400 Year Untold Story of Class in America*, by Nancy Isenberg, and Ta-Nehisi Coates’ memoir of growing up black in America, *Between the World and Me*.

Vance’s book is described as a representative, palatable summary of the mindset of all those white Appalachian Americans that many of my non-Appalachian American friends have fretted over, insulted, blamed, and condemned since November.

To be fair, Vance’s characterization of the stubborn, loyal, hardy, closed-mouth, and myopic Scots-Irish Appalachian perspective felt, at times, exactly right to me. As he wrote about his family and his hometown, I heard—actually heard, echoing around in my head—the voices of my great aunts in Pikeville, Ky., and Columbus, Ohio. I remembered the people of my home church in Roanoke, Va. Several kids that went to elementary school with me in Botetourt, Va., flashed through my mind. If you’re reading the book in order to encounter a perspective you never even knew existed, you’ll get a decent overview.

Still, the memoir left me not just dissatisfied, but actively angry. Vance, like me, left Appalachia. And, moreover, he left for an Ivy League education, a top-grossing career, and a house on the West Coast, as far from home as he could get. When he wrote the book, he was still a member of the hillbilly diaspora, attempting to step into the national discourse in the role of translator, interpreter, a bona fide



I WISH THAT I LIVED IN A COUNTRY FULL OF PEOPLE WILLING TO LISTEN TO THE UNEDITED, UNREFINED INTEGRITY OF THOSE HILLBILLIES WITHOUT AN IVY LEAGUE EDUCATION

rags-to-riches success story, here in his khakis and boat shoes, to tell us how it really is in fly-over country.

Jeremy: I'm not suggesting that Vance's book is gospel. I am saying that I had an unexpected personal response to his personal story. I wasn't comforted; I was a little bit rattled. Because at least in a regional sense, Vance was my neighbor. And I didn't know it.

Dana: Maybe interpreters and translators are what we need, these days, to help us hear one another across so many lines that divide us. Maybe having someone remind us who our neighbors are—or were—is just the push we need. But I wish that those lists of books to read if you're trying to understand had included a memoir written by one of my Appalachian kin immersed in the present-day realities of Appalachia.

I wish that I lived in a country full of people willing to listen to the unedited, unrefined integrity of those hillbillies without an Ivy League education or a spate of *New York Times* editorials to their name. I wish that we could somehow muster the compassion to listen and believe even those people who seem as far removed from us as J. D. Vance was from his roots.

Interestingly, on the morning I sat down to write this review, the *New York Times* published another op-ed by Vance. It turns out, he is moving home to Ohio. He is tired, it seems, of working as a translator from afar.

In his own words: “[T]he more difficult truth is that people naturally trust the people they know—their friend sharing a story on Facebook—more than strangers who work for faraway institutions. And when we're surrounded by polarized, ideologically homogeneous crowds, whether online or off, it becomes easier to believe bizarre things about them.”

Jeremy: Now I know that hillbillies are everywhere. I was reading Vance's book in my kitchen as the refrigerator repairman was fixing our icemaker. Out of nowhere, he shared that he moved to Phoenix from Dayton, Ohio, years ago. Before that, his family lived in Kentucky.

I have a friend who is the pastor of a dynamic, multi-ethnic church in the Seattle area. He's a hillbilly from Marietta, Ohio. You can catch him on the Trinity Broadcast Network. He speaks English and fluent Spanish with a just-north-of-Kentucky twang.

I know another pastor of one of the hippest churches in the heart of Hollywood. He hails from the same hillbilly country of southern Ohio.

I find myself part of an odd, invisible tribe that extends even to my own congregation, Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren in suburban Phoenix. One family in the church, of Scots-Irish descent, also grew up in southern Ohio. They moved to Phoenix years ago because one of them had a nasty lung disease, and they thought the warm weather might help. I have family members, still in Ohio, with the same lung disease.

Dana: I agree with Vance on this count: It is easy to believe bizarre things about the people we do not know. His book, and Brother Jeremy's reflections, remind me that it's possible to be deeply connected to people we'd never suspect to have anything in common with.

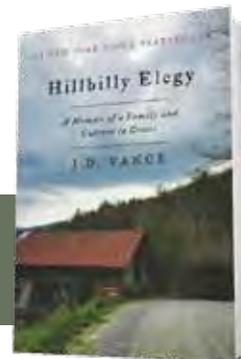
Still, I wonder how we might forgo those dual-culture translators and begin listening with humility directly to the people we can't seem to understand. Instead of relying on an Appalachian transplant to interpret Appalachia for us, perhaps we might choose to listen and believe those people living as hillbillies right here and right now.

This principle might serve us well across the board, really. Instead of trusting the news or social media to shape our opinions of conservatives or liberals, refugees, or gun-owners, perhaps we might seek out an actual, living, breathing human being who fits into one of those categories in real time and learn to know them.

Jeremy: It's a strange and wonderful time to be alive, and to be in Christian ministry. As a believer and a husband and a father and a pastor (and a displaced hillbilly) in a diverse suburban context, I know that part of my ministry is to recognize and respect differences without being held captive by them.

I am not always sure how best to love and serve faithfully in the mist of fragile, hostile, and polarizing times. But I do know this, beautifully summarized by Derek Webb, “The gospel has no target demographic.” 

Jeremy Ashworth is pastor of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren in Peoria, Ariz. Dana Cassell is pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C.



ABOUT THE BOOK Title: *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. Author: J. D. Vance. Publisher: Harper, 2016.

Mission and Ministry Board approves new areas of global mission

Fledgling mission projects in two areas of the world—Venezuela and the Africa Great Lakes region—were formally approved by the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board in March.

The Africa Great Lakes project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi, follows nine years of conversation and a number of visits by Global Mission and Service executive Jay Witmeyer and other Brethren from the US. The Church of the Brethren has funded agricultural projects, disaster relief efforts, scholarship programs, and church construction in the region. The Brethren also have sponsored a tri-nation Batwa Pygmy conference and ministries in reconciliation and trauma healing.

The Venezuela project began with connections in the Dominican Republic. Since a first visit in 2015, several meetings with American Hispanic leaders and with Alexandre Gonçalves from the Brazilian Church of the Brethren have been held. At a meeting last fall, more than 200 individuals from 64 churches participated. The ministry has focused on teaching and preaching.

The board engaged in a first reading of “Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren,” a document that works at clarifying a global structure of “autonomous Brethren groups in different areas of the world.”

Board members heard an update on sale of the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., which may be completed in May, and decided how to use expected net proceeds of some \$4 million. Up to \$100,000 will be used for repairs and preservation of the historic Germantown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. “It seems fitting,” they said, to use funds “derived from one hallowed property to support the needs of another property of significance to the Brethren.” Thirty percent will create a Brethren Faith in Action Fund that will provide grants to congregational outreach projects, carrying on “the New Windsor legacy of living out the faith.” Remaining proceeds will be invested to promote the long-term sustainability of denominational ministries. “By replenishing and adding to invested funds we help ensure the vitality of all of our ministries, including service ministries like those associated with New Windsor.”

In other business, a board committee received input for its work on last year’s Annual Conference query, “Living Together as Christ Calls.” The board reviewed a proposed statement on a “Vision for Ecumenism for the 21st Century” that is headed to Annual Conference this summer, and approved the appointment of Terrell Barkley to the Brethren Historical Committee.

Finance staff reported that in 2016 congregational giving to core ministries increased for the first time since 2006, although individual giving was at its lowest total in 10 years. Combined giving to core ministries decreased 2.2 percent.



Courtesy CCEPI

Livelihood training graduation in Nigeria.

Large allocation continues Nigeria Crisis Response

The Mission and Ministry Board has approved release of \$500,000 of the Nigeria crisis funds from the Emergency Disaster Fund to support Nigeria Crisis Response programming through the summer.

The Nigeria Crisis Response is a joint effort with Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The 2017 response continues key ministries in Nigeria but at a reduced level of funding because donations toward the effort fell off significantly in 2016. Program priorities are focused on recovery activities to help families become more self-supporting, now that about 70 percent of EYN members who were displaced by violence and the Boko Haram insurgency have returned home.

Working with partners, program ministries totaling \$690,000 are planned during 2017. EYN continues as the primary partner, and will receive some 70 percent of the response funds. Other partners include the Center for Caring, Empowerment, and Peace Initiatives; Lifeline Compassionate Global Initiative; Favored Sisters Christian Fellowship; and Education Must Continue Initiative.



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Haiti Medical Project has new focus on pure water

The Church of the Brethren has begun addressing the need for pure drinking water in Haiti through the work of the Haiti Medical Project in cooperation with l'Eglise des Freres Haitiens (Church of the Brethren in Haiti). Providing better water often is identified as an urgent priority in the 20 communities where the project currently works.

In 2015, project leaders launched a community development team to work with community leaders on a range of issues—especially pure water, food sustainability, and maternal care. Those working directly with water projects include Vildor Archange, Jean Bily Telfort, and Adias Docteur. Global Food Initiative manager Jeff Boshart offers technical expertise.

Where pure water is a goal, a water committee of community leaders is recruited to work with project staff to assess the need, provide local resources, and lead out in selecting a method to address the need. The focus is to provide an excellent source of water for a sector of the community rather than developing individual household systems.

In many cases the most inexpensive way is to harvest rain water from roof tops, move it via guttering and spouting to a cement cistern, clean and purify the water through a sand bio-filter system, and add moderate chlorination as indicated by water testing. Technical assistance in building and main-



Vildor Archange

taining sand bio-filter systems is being given by faculty and graduate students from the University of Maryland and the University of the District of Columbia.

In some cases the project contracts to have a well drilled. However, in areas near the coast well water tends to have a salty taste that makes it less desirable for human use. Where a well has this problem, the best solution is a reverse osmosis purification system. The community development staff has been enrolled in a water purification course that includes learning to use reverse osmosis.

In 2015-16 the Haiti Medical Project partnered with local communities to install pure water projects in St. Louis du Nord, Acajou, La Tortue, Raymonsaint, Morne Boulage, and the Croix des Bouquets guest house of l'Eglise des Freres. The project invested a total of \$45,218 in these six projects, in addition to the cost of materials, labor, and some financial investment contributed by the communities served.

New projects are in view for 2017-18 as funds become available, with hopes to more than double the pure water systems during the next two years at an estimated cost of \$148,000. Find out more at www.brethren.org/haiti-medical-project.

NYC theme is announced

“Bound Together: Clothed in Christ” (Colossians 3:12-15) is the theme for National Youth Conference 2018. The National Youth Cabinet chose the theme in February at a meeting where the group began planning for the next NYC on July 21-26, 2018, in Fort Collins, Colo. NYC is held every four years for youth who have completed ninth grade through one year of college (or are age equivalent to this range) and their advisors. See www.brethren.org/nyc.

Personnel notes

Nate Polzin has resigned as district executive minister for Michigan District, effective July 7. He will continue to serve and support the district through Annual Conference. On Sept. 1, he will begin serving as pastor of Midland Church of the Brethren and will continue his ministry with the Church in Drive in Saginaw. He has served as the district's executive for the last eight years, beginning as an interim district executive in March 2009.

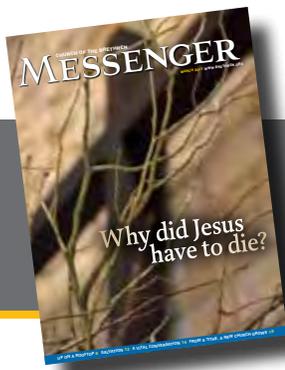
Program assistants **Robin DeYoung** and **Kristen Hoffman** have resigned from Brethren Disaster Ministries. DeYoung has resigned from the Brethren Disaster Ministries domestic rebuilding program, where she has worked since September 2015. She is a recent graduate of McPherson (Kan.) College. Hoffman has resigned from Children's Disaster Services, where she has worked since September 2015. Previously she volunteered in

the Youth and Young Adult Ministry, through Brethren Volunteer Service.

Shamek Cardona has begun as manager of human resources for the Church of the Brethren. She is a graduate of William Rainey Harper College, with plans to complete a bachelor of science in business with a concentration in human resource management. Most recently she worked with Generations at Oakton Pavilion in Des Plaines, Ill.

German Gongora has been promoted to director of Operations for Information Technology for Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT). He was first hired by BBT in September 2011 as programmer analyst and technology support.

Todd Knight has been hired as administrative assistant for institutional advancement at Bethany Theological Seminary. He has a decade of experience in fundraising management, having worked for nonprofit organizations in the area of Richmond, Ind.



THE FATHER DID NOT KILL HIS INNOCENT SON BECAUSE OF WHAT SOMEONE ELSE HAD DONE. RATHER, GOD PERSONALLY CAME TO EARTH INCARNATED IN A HUMAN, AND DIED ON THE CROSS, TO REDEEM HIS CHILDREN

Making sense of the cross

I very much appreciate brother J. Denny Weaver's article, "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?" in the March issue. Making sense of the varied aspects of the cross of Jesus has kept the church busy for the last 2,000 years. Weaver introduces us to one theory of what was accomplished on the cross, which along with the ransom theory (with which the victor theory is often linked) has great meaning and helps us understand the power of Christ's death.

However, it alone does not satisfy all the biblical statements about the nature of the cross. It would seem the satisfaction/substitution theory also has roots in biblical literature and thus dates to a very early time. The Apostle Paul, writing about 55 A.D. (a thou-

sand years before Anselm), says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Perhaps no single theory of the atonement captures the many varied

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shades of what happened on the cross when Jesus died.

It is true, as the five-year-old surmised in Weaver's article, "Parents should never put their child to death on a cross, right?" Such an act seems barbaric. However, when a parent dies for their child, that act seems heroic. The child's thinking in the article reveals a truncated view of the Trinity. The Father did not kill his innocent Son because of what someone else had done. Rather, God personally came to earth incarnated in a human, and died on the cross, to redeem his children (all of us) who were (and are) not innocent. Jesus did not hang on the cross against his will, but went there of his own volition as the second person of the Trinity, fully God and fully man. What an amazing act of love: The Parent dies for the children, and then comes back to life to secure their place in the Kingdom.

As for nonviolent atonement, I don't know. No matter how you define the results of the cross, death by crucifixion is always violent.

Galen Hackman
Akron, Pa.

Food for thought

Many thanks to J. Denny Weaver for sharing wisdom, insights, and food for thought with our denomination. Great appreciation to all who played crucial roles in having his article shared in our beloved MESSENGER. I love it that even more people will be introduced to and learn about restorative justice in this way.

Linda K. Williams
San Diego, Calif.

Through the blood of Christ

I was disappointed in the March MESSENGER article, "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?" Suggesting that is the wrong question is troubling. It is an example of unbalanced theology.

Scripture clearly indicates that it is by his crucifixion and through the shed

blood of Christ that we are justified from our sins (Romans 5:8, 9; 1 Peter 1:18-21). Our salvation results from faith placed solely in the sin-atoning blood of Jesus, not through belief in his resurrection, life, or teaching.

This is important because the resurrection proves God's power to raise not only Christ, but also us from the dead! Without his resurrection, our faith is useless (1 Corinthians 15:14). We look at Jesus' life and teaching to learn how to be more Christ-like, but these do not save us. Blood atonement for our sins is required, and Jesus is the sinless Lamb of God, whose death was decreed by God before creation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Jesus was not forced, did not have his life taken by evil men, but voluntarily gave his life as a "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

I expect to find scriptural truth in a Brethren publication, but that was not the case with this article.

John M. Hess
Lititz, Pa.

A loving, peaceful God

Thank you so much for publishing the excellent article, "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?" My theological struggles with the Southern Baptist Church centered on this very issue—substitutionary atonement—so abhorrent to a loving, peaceful God.

My wife and I will be joining Antioch Church of the Brethren in Rocky Mount, Va., soon, and we have

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Inspiration 2017 Generations

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For information/registration for this professional growth opportunity: call 800-323-8039 x381 or email jdetrick@brethren.org at the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry.

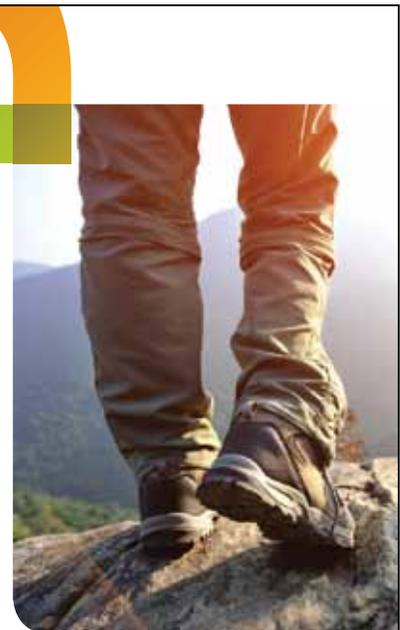
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KEN GIBBLE FOUND A GARDEN TO BE AN ANTIDOTE TO FEELINGS OF FRUSTRATION. I AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

subscribed to MESSENGER. I am so glad MESSENGER has taken a stand on this issue by publishing this article. Please continue to publish pieces like this one.

Rick Bailey
Pickens, S.C.

Nearer God's heart

"One is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth." As I read Ken Gibble's poem in the April MESSENGER, I thought about this little sign which I bought once to stick in the ground near the house.

Gardens always have been an

important part of my life. As a child, I planted the onion sets for my mother's garden. She spent so much time there, planting, hoeing, picking vegetables for canning, and cleaning off debris fall and spring to prepare for planting again.

My mother had a garden for 45 of her 70 years. The garden grew smaller after the family decreased in size; it no longer had to support 8 to 10 people—siblings and others, depending on who else was living with us at the time.

I especially remember the garden of 1952. My father died on May 24 that year; after the weeks of funeral

and business associated with my father's death, my mother was in the garden from 6 a.m. to dark every day but Sunday. I would offer help, but was mostly refused, as my mother hoed away, while sweat (or were they tears?) rolled down her cheeks. It was a few years before I understood that she was hoeing away her grief, which she never shared.

Ken Gibble found a garden to be an antidote to feelings of frustration. I agree wholeheartedly. Following my mother's example, I too have gone to the garden to hoe away my frustrations. Mine weren't related to the team pastor role I share, but with other things in my life.

What to do in the winter? Write. It helps to see my frustrations in black and white—typed and catalogued for further reference (or not). Thank you, Ken, for reminding me of gardens; I will plant one soon!

Marilyn Koehler
Udell, Iowa

Awesome

The March MESSENGER is particularly awesome. From Steve Schweitzer's article on biblical interpretation, to nonviolent atonement, to universal restoration. . . . Had me wishing I was in seminary!

Emily Shonk Edwards
Nellysford, Va.

Share the good news

I read with extreme joy and excitement the March MESSENGER. Examples of service, and humble investment of time, tithes, and directed efforts are very simple yet profound ways to share

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and grow our faith.

I often have looked to MESSENGER for examples of exciting ways to grow new vitality within our church. I know Jesus lived his life as an example for us, and died for our sins and short-

comings, but he also has asked us to go out among others and share the good news. This March edition has shown us multiple examples of how to carry out his commission.

Kudos for a job well done. I look for-

ward to future issues to learn of more examples of how we can engage in our communities in meaningful ways to grow our faith and God's church.

Glen R. Daughtry
Mechanicsburg, Pa.

TURNINGPOINTS

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

New members

Chiques, Manheim, Pa.:

Silas Brandt, Linn Fahnestock, Sandy Fahnestock, Jim Grubb, Ricki Grubb, Lynn Sauder, Olivia Spayd, LeRoy Stoltzfus, Pauline Stoltzfus

Elizabethtown, Pa.:

Smith Florial, Kim Florial, Jason Haldeman, Ashley Haldeman, Jules Kalish, David Leiter, Pat Leiter

Frederick, Md.:

Jeremy Dyer, Rikki Arocha Dyer, Randel Edwards, Steve McGillivray, Jennifer Todd, Jesse Todd, Brenton Yost, Savannah Yost

Hanover, Pa.:

Amanda Jacobs Womer

Hartville, Ohio:

Daphne Boston, Tannor Boston, Carina DiMarco, Ranita DiMarco, Josiah DiMarco, David Newman, Vicki Newman, Donald Tolson, Beverly Tolson

HIS Way, Mills River,

N.C.: Samuel Carillo, Zenia Chavez, Patricia Rossi, Alvaro Tadeo

Lebanon, Mount Sidney,

Va.: Adam Ware

Maple Grove, Ashland,

Ohio: Verlin Gregory

McPherson, Kan.:

John Dilley, Joanna Smith

Parker Ford, Pottstown,

Pa.: Dan Fosse, Jess Fosse, Jason Hafer, Natalie Hafer, Damien Volonnino, Gretchen Volonnino

Wedding anniversaries

Asiala, Dennis and Cindy,

Kaleva, Mich., 50

Day, Ed and Sandy,

Jefferson, Md., 55

Derstine, Paul and

Eleanor, Chevy Chase, Md., 50

Diehl, Robert and

Charlotte, Farmington, Pa., 69

Ferguson, Tom and Dot,

Smithsburg, Md., 55

Hess, Gerald and Carol,

Manheim, Pa., 60

Hoffer, Kervin and Ruth,

Bainbridge, Pa., 50

Kinzie, William and

Elizabeth, Midlothian, Va., 60

Masser, Jack and Diane,

Frederick, Md., 60

Racey, Melvin and

Annabel, Woodstock, Va., 60

Rees, Don and Mary,

Tipp City, Ohio, 60

Reese, Samuel and

Mildred, Hagerstown, Md., 70

Singley, Roland and Lila,

Moulton, Iowa, 65

Stauffer, Guy and Ruth,

Manheim, Pa., 72

Thomas, Robert and

Janice, Copemish, Mich., 50

Warrenfeltz, Gene and

Dottie, Frederick, Md., 50

Wilson, John and Floretta,

Lancaster, Pa., 66

Deaths

Beam, Alan, 62, McPherson,

Kan., March 3

Boothe, Mabel Louise

Pendleton, 89, Vinton, Va., Dec. 24

Boyer, Elise, 88,

Frederick, Md., Nov. 26

Brubaker, Wilbur, 83,

Columbia, Pa., Nov. 10

Cashour, Lillian

Nusbaum, 93, Frederick, Md., Nov. 3

Clark, Edward, 75,

Linville, Va., Dec. 7

Claybaugh, A. Louise,

92, Roaring Spring, Pa., Jan. 14

Cole, Todd, 47, Frederick,

Md., July 24

Dearth, Esther, 101,

Brookville, Ohio, Jan. 5

Driver, Helen Wolfe, 99,

Bluffton, Ohio, Aug. 14

Drum, Judy Williams,

75, Middletown, Md., Dec. 18

Erb, Sara Jane Becker,

94, Elizabethtown, Pa., Oct. 28

Fisher, Max W., 92, Fulks

Run, Va., March 8

Gearhart, John, 79,

Myersville, Md., Sept. 4

Gibson, Benjamin, 77,

Charlottesville, Va.,

Nov. 20

Gilliam, Mildred

Dysinger, 100, New Carlisle, Ohio, Feb. 28

Gladfelter, Julia S. Henry,

103, Salunga, Pa.,

March 12

Gleason, Dan, 76,

Bluffton, Ohio, March 28, 2016

Goodling, Betty, 82,

Elizabethtown, Pa.,

Feb. 12

Grooms, JoAnn

Despeaux, 60, Frederick,

Md., Aug. 23

Grossnickle, Pauline,

95, Walkersville, Md.,

Aug. 11

Herbert, Frank, 79, Port

Charlotte, Fla., Feb. 25

Hoffman, Donald, 98,

Winona, Ohio, Jan. 27

Howenstine, Dorothy

Mabel Braid, 95,

Alliance, Ohio, Dec. 18

Huffer, Sandra "Kay," 71,

Frederick, Md., Dec. 6

Kirkpatrick, Emmett

Bruce, 96, Roanoke,

Va., Feb. 21

Leatherman, Erma

Lee Simmons, 78,

Perrysburg, Ohio, Feb. 25

Leekley, Jerry R., 55,

Mount Morris, Ill.,

March 14

Lehman, Alda Mae Ryder,

94, Chambersburg, Pa.,

Jan. 13

Meade, Andrew, 29, New

Lebanon, Ohio, Dec. 30

Moffet, Wilmer, 92,

Topeka, Kan., Feb. 18

Plunkett, Jairus "Jay," 99,

Boones Mill, Va., Feb. 17

Rebok, John A., 100,

Quincy Village, Pa.,

Feb. 5

Rike, Blanche, 104,

Brookville, Ohio, Oct. 29

Risser, Martin, 94,

Elizabethtown, Pa.,

Nov. 5

Shepherd, Brenda, 64,

Vinton, Va., Dec. 26

Shepley, Milby, 77,

Walkersville, Md.,

Oct. 20

Singley, Roland, 83,

Moulton, Iowa,

March 22

Stapleton, Michael, 65,

Topeka, Kan., Aug. 14

Stevens, Versal, 82,

Vinton, Va., Sept. 9

Tennyson, Warren, 92,

Charlottesville, Va.,

Nov. 27

Van Baale, Ida Mae

Buckingham, 97, Hull,

Ga., Feb. 6

Vanas, Donald, 78, Grand

Rapids, Mich., March 1

Willems, Mark, 63,

Hutchinson, Kan.,

Feb. 26

Williams, Rosie, 99,

Moneta, Va., Jan. 16

Wine, Jacob C., 102,

East Petersburg, Pa.,

March 12

Wiseman, Sarah, 96,

McPherson, Kan.,

March 8

Wolf, Roberta L., 77,

North Canton, Ohio,

Jan. 17

Worthington, Ellis E., 83,

Newville, Pa., Feb. 17

Wright, Margaret Likin,

88, Keyser, W.Va.,

Feb. 18

Wright, Norwood Ellis,

86, Fishersville, Va.,

March 13

Zimmerman, Ernest, 89,

Ligonier, Pa., Feb. 13

Ordained

Knically, LaDawn P.,

Shen. Dist. (Beaver

Creek, Bridgewater, Va.),

March 5

McDaniel, Lloyd David,

Virlina Dist. (Bethel,

Arrington, Va.), Feb. 26

Placements

Baker, Paul Maynard,

from pastor, Saunders,

Moneta, Va., to pastor,

Bassett, Va., March 1

Bakfash, Yakubu, pas-

tor, Dundalk, Md.,

Feb. 19

Post-traumatic church syndrome

Recent demographic surveys studying religious affiliation in the US display an alarming trend: fewer and fewer Americans identify as Christians. For instance, a 2015 Pew study concluded that 70.6 percent of Americans identify



EMMETT ELDRED

as Christians, a historic low and a decline of 7.8 percentage points from 2007. During the same time span, the percentage of Americans who claimed no religious affiliation rose by 7.8 points, to 22.8 percent.

Among those with no religious affiliation, only one-third are atheists or agnostics. The rest identify as “nothing in particular.” Nearly half of these believe that religion is important and most believe in God. Yet they don’t attend church or identify with any particular faith. These are the “nones” or “spiritual but not religious,” the fastest-growing religious group in America.

Most “nones” are young: 36 percent of Americans between 18-29 years old have no religious affiliation, and just 53 percent are Christians. The trend is clear: young people

church, and, ultimately, of God. Often, they were judged and bullied by their faith leaders and peers because of their sexual orientation, class, gender, or beliefs. Many more haven’t experienced this personally but leave the church because of the harm it has wrought on their friends and loved ones.

Young people today are more likely to say that the church is **judgmental than loving**. They’re more likely to say that it excludes people rather than accepting them. They believe that Christians are more concerned about appearances and traditions than meaningful questions about spirituality, community, and world events. They think the church is unchristian. Is it surprising that they are leaving the church? If you felt this way, would you stay?

The Church of the Brethren is no stranger to waning church membership, especially among young people. I am optimistic, however, that our values about peace, simplicity, community, and service could attract new young members because these values resonate with millennials. But we can’t take for granted that these positive qualities will attract young people. Our congregations will repel young people when they discriminate, judge, or remain silent on today’s issues of justice, especially on questions of race, environment, war, and poverty.

OUR DISTRUST OF THE CHURCH RUNS FAR DEEPER, AND CAN’T BE ASSUAGED BY TWEAKING THE SUPERFICIAL.

are abandoning the church. But why?

Some argue that young people are leaving because traditional Sunday morning worship doesn’t suit them. They claim that services start too early and are too stuffy. Yet church membership continues to decline, even as churches pilot contemporary worship programs, complete with modern music, comfy seats, and youthful, jean-clad pastors. Additionally, a 2014 Barna Group study showed that nearly 70 percent of millennials say that they prefer traditional worship services to contemporary.

When church leaders assume that young people simply want a “cooler” worship experience, they’re underestimating my generation. Our distrust of the church runs far deeper, and can’t be assuaged by tweaking the superficial. Among the spiritual but not religious is profound ambivalence: they yearn for Christ but fear the church.

Many “nones” grew up in Christian households but suffer from “post-traumatic church syndrome,” when hurtful experiences in their faith upbringing tarnish their perception of the

We in the Church of the Brethren can defy the trend of declining church membership. We must acknowledge the harm that Christian churches have done and actively seek to be a tonic for post-traumatic church syndrome. If we emphasize our beliefs about peace, community, service, and simplicity, we’ll differentiate ourselves as a denomination that resonates with millennial values. If we choose to become welcoming and socially engaged, we’ll truly emulate Christ. If our congregations cultivate spaces of welcome and sanctuary, we can repair broken trust.

Imagine: a church where serving others is an act of worship and promoting peace and justice is liturgy. Where the style in which we gather is less important than the people with whom we gather. Where unhindered welcome and unconditional love are our most important traditions. Where being Christian means being like Christ. Now that’s a church that will attract young people. **W**

Emmett Eldred is the editor of *DunkerPunks.com* and a student at Carnegie Mellon University. He attends Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

"I am the vine; you are the branches." John 15:5



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