

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

JUNE 2017 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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The Old Main Building
at the Brethren Service
Center, New Windsor, Md.

Photo by Phil Grout.

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HONORS MESSENGER has received two awards from the Associated Church Press.

The first is an award of excellence for publisher Wendy McFadden's online essay "A playlist of mercy and hope" (<http://www.brethren.org/messenger/articles/2016/playlist-of-mercy-and-hope.html>). The judges wrote, "Outstanding personal experience writing—clear, emotionally resonant, and engaging. A true pleasure to read."

The second award is an honorable mention for redesign of the MESSENGER website. The previous site—a few informational pages—was transformed into the new MESSENGER Online, which features several articles from each month's print edition, as well as a few online-only articles. The redesign was carried out by Russ Otto, website designer, and Jan Fischer Bachman, website producer.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Wednesday evenings I'm at the local synagogue for Hebrew class. It's rather humbling for a group of middle-aged adults to sound out letters in one room while the children down the hall are reading from the Torah. We're sort of like kindergartners—except 5-year-olds are faster learners.

But I like showing up week after week to try to learn a new language. I like feeling at home when I walk into the synagogue. I like the way the rabbi greets me by name when I pass her on my way to class.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

It's particularly satisfying when we faltering students discover that the letters we've sounded out form a word we already know, such as *shalom* or *Shema*. And when we learn roots whose meanings can be identified in a number of other words, adding richness beyond dictionary definitions.

Rudimentary as this learning is, studying Hebrew gets me a little closer to the biblical text. It also gets me to exploring the ancient rabbinical practice of *midrash*, a method of interpreting scripture by asking questions and looking for what is not stated in the story. Revelation is understood to be a sacred and ongoing process, says

Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso in *Midrash: Reading the Bible with Question Marks*.

She describes this process as a conversation with God. "The first letter of the first word of the first commandment" is *aleph* "and it is silent—or, more precisely, it is the very beginning of sound. You open your mouth ready to speak. That is the *aleph*. Revelation here is not understood as containing specific content but as the very beginning of a conversation with God, a conversation in which we are all called to participate."

Last fall I had the opportunity to hear Rabbi Sasso lead a workshop at the Writing Colloquium at Earlham School of Religion. I had long admired her eloquent children's books and her work in the area of children and spirituality. Now I could hear in person her fluid explorations into difficult biblical texts such as the binding of Isaac and the fate of Lot's wife. If I lived in Indianapolis, I would want to be in one of her seminars.

But you don't have to go to Indianapolis to hear her. You only have to go to Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, where she will be the speaker at the annual Brethren Press/Messenger Dinner and will sign books in the bookstore. The challenge will be trying to decide which of her many books to read first.

Wendy McFadden

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A new concept of service

Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren has long been involved in service to others. However, the Vital Ministry Journey (VMJ) has created a new concept of service for the congregation.

As a part of the VMJ study, the church recently held a community forum attended by more than 125 people. The hour-and-a-half forum featured a panel of five people very involved in the community: the imam from the Islamic Center of Modesto, which is building a new mosque nearby; a Modesto councilman; the executive director of Family Promise; the sheriff and coroner of Stanislaus County; and the congregation's moderator, who also chairs a neighborhood organization, Woodland West Community Neighborhood, which serves the area around the church.

Attending the forum were another city council member, a member of the county board of supervisors, people from other denominations, and many people from the community.

Each panelist was asked four questions having to do with their work, what concerns they have about the community, and how they think churches can work to make it a better place to live. The panelists answered the questions with caring and knowledge.

The forum was very well received. The congregation was challenged to continue to facilitate opportunities to promote healthy dialogue among diverse communities. Members of the church heard over and over again: "Do this again," "You really brought us together," "Please hold a meeting quarterly." One of the speakers on the panel, a Sikh and a Modesto city councilman, said he has never felt so safe speaking at a meeting in the community.

This concept of playing a leadership role in the community had not been considered by the congregation. The church heard a new message: we are involved in service to our community and



our world, but now we are being challenged to become a leader in providing a comfortable and safe environment for people from many different backgrounds to meet, talk, and share. This new concept has been very invigorating and exciting.

Since the forum, the church has been involved in other community events that tie directly to this new mission. The VMJ team and the witness commission have helped sponsor an open house and lunch at the Islamic Center, and are helping with a "First Stanislaus County Prayer Dinner" planned by the Stanislaus County Interfaith Council. The prayer dinner will be hosted by the church and will include even more diverse groups than the forum.

Exactly how this new role for the Modesto Church will play out as the months go by is uncertain, but at this time it feels like a logical next step in the congregation's long history of serving others.—Felton Daniels, chair of the Vital Ministry Journey team at Modesto Church of the Brethren

Frances Townsend



Root River resurrection

While Frances Townsend was at the closing service for Root River Church of the Brethren in Minnesota, where she formerly served as pastor, she dug up some of the resurrection lilies growing on the property. "Some went to a member of Hands of Christ fellowship in Rochester, Minn.," she reports. "That group was started from Root River. And some of the lilies are now planted by the peace poles at Marilla Church of the Brethren and Onekama Church of the Brethren in Michigan." The lilies, she writes, are "symbolic of the former congregation's continued spread and influence in the world."

Cindy Asiala (at front) was among the people helping to replant the Root River resurrection lilies at Marilla Church of the Brethren.

South Waterloo hosts Habitat volunteers

Ten students from the State University of New York in Oswego were guests at South Waterloo Church of the Brethren from March 11-17. They worked for a week at a Habitat for Humanity house on Angeles Street in Waterloo, Iowa, painting walls and finishing flooring details. This is the third year that col-



lege students have spent spring break working on Habitat houses and staying at the South Waterloo Church.

Church members invited the students to lunch on the Sunday they arrived, and invited them to join in playing volleyball that evening. The Witness Commission provided a meal later in the week, and there was some good conversation and music. In their spare time, the students played volleyball and ping pong, prepared their own meals, and got to know each other—some had not met prior to signing up for the work week. They also visited the John Deere museum. Two are interested in returning to Iowa to ride with RAGBRAI—Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa.

As a final gesture of their appreciation, the students donated \$100 to use “in any capacity that will benefit the church community.” —Barbara Miller

Sacrificial giving for Lent at Hanover

Hanover (Pa.) Church of the Brethren takes seriously the idea of giving up something for the season of Lent. At the Ash Wednesday service, it was suggested that for whatever church members gave up, they should attach an amount for each time they went without that item. The money would go for the Heifer International “Haiti Reach” project for clean water in Haiti.

Some of the items that were sacrificed: Oreo McFlurry treats, desserts, television watching. Each person made his or her sacrifice personal, and the church related that sacrifice to what Christ sacrificed for us on the cross. The amount raised for the clean water project came to \$735.—Gerry Godfrey pastors the Hanover Church

Andy and Terry Murray at Chiques fundraiser

Chiques Church of the Brethren in Atlantic Northeast District hosted a third annual fundraising dinner on April 22 to benefit the Nigeria Crisis Fund and the Haiti Medical Project. The menu was slow-roasted pulled pork with all the trim-



mings and homemade desserts, both made by church members.

The event was well attended by members of numerous congregations in the district and by the local community, with about 400 people served in the Family Life Center plus an additional 150 take-out meals.

The evening’s activities included a silent auction featuring theme baskets, arts, and crafts, donated by Sunday school classes and individuals. A concert was given by Andy and Terry Murray following the meal and auction. Their music and uplifting stories were reminiscent of Brethren heroes. The performance was enjoyed by multiple generations, with many singing along with the Murrays. It was a “mountain top experience” topping off an evening of food, fellowship, and entertainment.

Appreciation was felt for the many volunteers who made the event possible, and for the very generous people who attended. Gifts totaled about \$48,000 and will be equally divided between Nigeria and Haiti. —Sandy Brubaker

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.



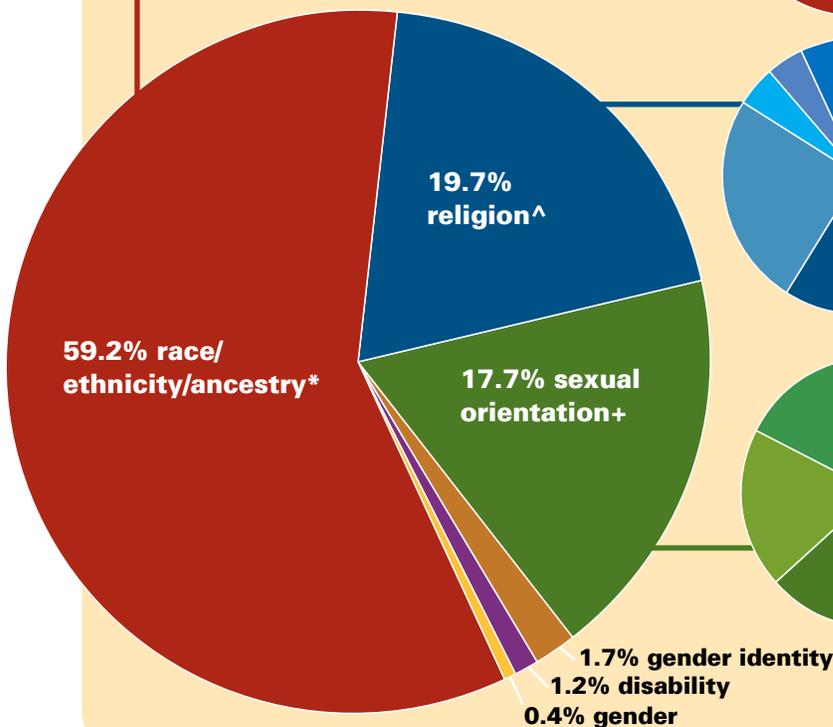
“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven” —Matthew 5:44-45

War on Christianity?

This year is the 100th anniversary of the United States entering World War I. The word “war” is also used by some to describe cultural and demographic changes that are uncomfortable, as in “culture wars” and “the war on Christianity.” Is there truly a war on Christianity? The figures below show who is experiencing hate crimes in the US.

Christians should be careful about overuse of the word. Calling it a “war” risks minimizing or trivializing the true persecution faced by Christians in countries like Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, and other areas in recent years.

In 2015, US hate crime victims were targeted because of the following:



***The top three groups targeted because of race and ethnicity were:**

- 52.2% Black/African American
- 18.7% White
- 9.3% Hispanic/Latino

^Those targeted because of religion were:

- 52.1% Jewish
- 21.9% Muslim
- 4.3% Catholic
- 4.1% varying religions
- 3.6% Eastern Orthodox
- 3.4% Protestant

With smaller numbers of Mormon, Hindu, Sikh, Jehovah’s Witness, Buddhist, atheist, and other. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, anti-Muslim groups tripled from 2015 to 2016.

+Those targeted because of sexual orientation were:

- 62.2% gay (male)
- 19.6% mixed group (GLBT)
- 13.5% lesbian
- 2.8% bisexual
- 1.9% heterosexual

Figures come from the most recent FBI hate crime data, released in November 2016.

“Christians in the US are facing constant attacks in the media, where they are portrayed as bigoted, racist, sexist, and closeminded.”

—International Christian Concern 2016 “Hall of Shame” report

“While religious liberty is worth protecting, it is not our ultimate goal. Our true goal is perseverance and faithfulness in showing forth the kingdom of God.”

—K. A. Ellis, ambassador for International Christian Response



Conscientious objectors at Camp Taylor.



Barracks at Camp Taylor in Kentucky.

The Brethren in WORLD WAR I

by Diane Mason

Despite the rumblings in Europe, no one on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean was ready for the Great War. President Woodrow Wilson originally hoped to avoid war by seeking the establishment of an international peace organization.

Brethren, Mennonites, and Quakers were not prepared either. They had published little about their peace positions since the Civil War. In the previous 30 years, Brethren had applied “individual conscience” to choices of dressing in the garb, attending public schools, and other Brethren distinctives. World War I was the first time Brethren were permitted to respond to the draft with “individual conscience” rather than fearing excommunication from the church should they choose military service.

Without gradual preparations, President Wilson resorted to a strong draft law to quickly raise an army. Men ages 18-45 were conscripted. The government intended that conscientious objectors (COs) could establish their status after induction, where they were immediately subject to military law. The government assumed all COs would accept noncombatant military service as cooks and medics. Some did, even though they saw it as a compromise. Other

CO inductees would not wear the uniform nor follow any military orders.

Conscientious objectors found no sympathy within the military and many were mistreated. Some officers tried flattery, then shame, then threats, and some cajoled COs with promises of dropped court-martial charges if they would cooperate. Long prison sentences were designed to discourage others from following the conscientious objectors’ example.

A war hysteria led to the passage of the Espionage Act on June 15, 1917, and the Sedition Act on May 16, 1918. The first allowed a postmaster to confiscate “treasonable or seditious” mail, such as the *Mennonite Gospel Herald* periodical. The second criminalized speaking out against purchase of Liberty (war) Bonds, which resulted in charges against Brethren pastors J. A. Robinson of Iowa and David Gerdes of Illinois.

Between the enacting of these two laws, the Brethren met in a special conference in Goshen, Ind., to clarify what advice should be given to the church’s young men. Members of Standing Committee, the Peace Committee, and ministers who had visited military camps, drafted a statement that affirmed loyal citizenship while also asserting the church’s traditional peace stand.

The paper was hand-delivered to secretaries of President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Baker was married to a woman whose grandfather was an active member of Coventry Church of the Brethren in Pennsylvania. He gave orders that conscientious objectors were not to be treated cruelly, but as the fortitude of the conscientious objectors became apparent, he became impatient and the number of court-martial cases increased (Bowman, 221, 224).

A courteous letter of reply from President Wilson was published in the *Gospel Messenger* of March 2, 1918. However, one line of the paper stated, "We further urge our brethren not to enlist," to which Third Assistant to War Kepple objected. He charged the Brethren with a "clear cut case" of treason under the Espionage Act.

Asking for 48 hours to respond, and after a "long season of prayer," the Central Service Committee replied. They reminded Kepple that the Goshen Statement included a profession of loyalty to the government and clarified that it was intended to help church members express the church's stand when they were called before a draft board.

The case was heard by four Advocates General. One, Judge Goff, received the Central Service Committee for a one-hour discussion and succeeded in swaying the other three judges to drop the charges.

An article in the *Gospel Messenger* was published immediately, instructing the Goshen Statement should no longer be used if the church would avoid further trouble.

Excerpts from the Goshen Statement

"... The word and authority of God, however, must be final and supreme over all. And when the demands of men and of Governments conflict with the Word of God, we are then bound by the latter, regardless of consequences. 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you [magistrates] rather than unto God, judge ye' (Acts 4:19). 'But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)..."

"We are petitioning the Government to give our drafted brethren such industrial noncombatant service as will contribute constructively to the necessity, health and comfort of hungering, suffering humanity, either here or elsewhere.

"We further urge our brethren not to enlist in any service which would, in any way, compromise our time-honored position in relation to war; also that they refrain from wearing the military uniform. The tenets of the church forbid military drilling, or learning the art or arts of war, or doing anything which contributes to the destruction of human life or property..."

William Kantor Collected Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection



**Above and left:
Conscientious
objectors at a
prison camp at Fort
Douglas, Utah.**

“FAR RATHER WOULD I SEE MY BOY SHOT DOWN BEFORE MY EYES, BECAUSE HE IS TRUE TO HIS FAITH, THAN TO SEE HIM GO WHERE HE WOULD SHOOT SOME OTHER MOTHER’S SON, AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL BECAUSE HE IS A MURDERER.” Nora Berkebile, Bellefontaine, Ohio [“Military Training in the Schools,” *The Gospel Messenger*, January 26, 1918, 52.]

The outcome was that when at last the denomination did make a definitive statement to guide young Brethren, the leaders of the church allowed the government to intimidate them into recalling it. At the same time that Brethren leaders continued to admonish draftees to “stand firm,” they themselves did not exemplify the stand.

Four hundred fifty conscientious objectors were court-martialed during World War I. Those on trial were seldom represented by counsel. In addition, the Brethren and Mennonite COs refused to take an oath or enter a plea.

Some were told that they were no longer citizens, so First Amendment rights did not apply to them. By contrast Maurice Hess, who later taught at McPherson College in Kansas, documented his defense during court-martial proceedings at Camp Funston.

The charges brought against the COs were never for their beliefs, but for disobeying a specific military order such as wearing a uniform or drilling with a weapon. Brethren Alfred Echroth testified that wearing a uniform “would advertise militarism, the very thing we oppose.” These charges

THE GOSHEN DECISION

by Frank Ramirez

It was over 35 years ago that an old man named Joe Ferrainolo, a Pennsylvanian who wintered in Los Angeles where I pastored, told me his World War I story. As a 10-year-old immigrant from Italy slaving away in New York City, he escaped by riding a train as far as his ticket would take him. He then walked out into the Pennsylvania darkness until he saw a light shining over the doorway of Brethren farmers who took him in, fed him, and raised him.

Adopting the Brethren values of his new family, he refused to serve in the military when America entered the European War in 1917. He told about spending time as a prisoner in a camp before being sent to work for a cruel farmer who treated him badly. But like many Brethren during that era, despite his suffering he stood his ground.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for the Brethren leadership of that era.

It is sometimes forgotten that in the lead-up to the First World War a large proportion of Americans were against that bloody and pointless contest between European powers. Following America’s entrance into the war, however, the conflict was remythologized into a Holy War against demonic powers. Brethren, Mennonites, and Friends who

were drafted were persecuted, tortured, and even killed because they refused to take up arms.

Worst of all, Brethren were failed by their leadership. A special Annual Meeting was held in January 1918, in Goshen, Ind. A strong statement outlined the biblical Brethren beliefs on war with a refusal to participate in any way.

The government of the United States countered with a threat to arrest Brethren leaders unless they repudiated the statement. The response of the Brethren leaders who signed the Goshen Statement was to repudiate the statement.

J. M. Henry, one of those threatened with arrest, emphasized that official Brethren documents “express love and loyalty to our Government.” In the official history of the Church of the Brethren in Maryland, he wrote how he and others in the Central Service Peace Committee begged government authorities to reconsider their threat. Henry further wrote, without a sense of irony, that with leadership safe “the Church of the Brethren was saved from the impending tragedy,” “the church which the peaceful saint, Alexander Mack, had founded, for which Christopher Sower had been persecuted, and for which John J. Bowman and John Kline had suffered martyrdom in times of war” (*History of the Brethren in Maryland*, 531-532).

World War I enlistment posters.



were viewed equivalently to desertion by a combat soldier.

After conviction, the government denied conscientious objectors were incarcerated, since none were tried on that charge. Sentences ranged from three years to life for disobeyed military orders. Seventeen were sentenced to death, but the sentence was never carried out. Among the Brethren, 14 from the Church of the Brethren were sent to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, as were 9 from the Old German Baptist Brethren. Two Church of the Brethren men were sent to Alcatraz in California.

The late Brethren historian Donald F. Durnbaugh drily noted, "Later commentators have provided more critical comment, concluding that the historic peace position of the church had been seriously weakened by the abrupt withdrawal of the Goshen Statement" (*Fruit of the Vine*, 425).

Meanwhile, though church leaders may have saved themselves from prison, Brethren continued to suffer. "Some Brethren were beaten, others threatened with lynching, and many had their homes and church buildings splashed with yellow paint, to publicize their supposed cowardice" (*Fruit of the Vine*, 427).

Nevertheless, the disorganized and incoherent response of Brethren leaders led to groundbreaking work by individuals like M. R. Zigler, Dan West, and Rufus D. Bowman, who laid the groundwork for a cooperative plan between government and the peace churches for constructive alternative service. Conscientious objectors who served as smoke jumpers, medical guinea pigs (in the now famous Starvation Experiment), and many other endeavors, displayed their heroism during World War II without firing a shot. 

Frank Ramirez is lead pastor at Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.

Letter from President Woodrow Wilson to H. C. Early, *The Gospel Messenger*, March 2, 1918:

My dear Sir:

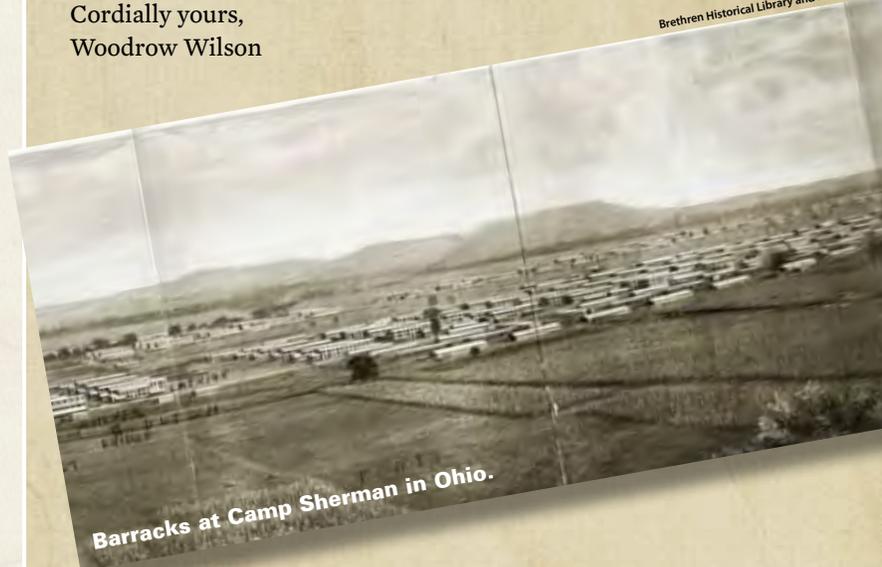
I have received the memorial of the Church of the Brethren, with regard to the assignment of members of that church, now in the military service, to noncombatant occupations, in agriculture and other constructive pursuits. The Secretary of War has presented to the Congress for its approval, a bill which will authorize the War Department to furlough, without pay, men in the military service. Should the Congress enact this legislation, it will then be possible, under its provisions, to assign, by conditional furlough, men whose conscientious scruples can not otherwise be met, to civilian occupations of the general sort which you indicate. At the same time, the Secretary of War is endeavoring to broaden the list of noncombatant occupations directly associated with the activities of the Army, and tells me that he hopes soon to have prepared, for presentation to me, such a list. When this is done, it may well be that the members of your church will find service which they can render without invasion of their beliefs, and I trust that every effort will be made by your members, so that this difficult question can finally be settled in a way consistent at once with the sentiments of those involved and the best interests of the Government.

Cordially yours,
Woodrow Wilson

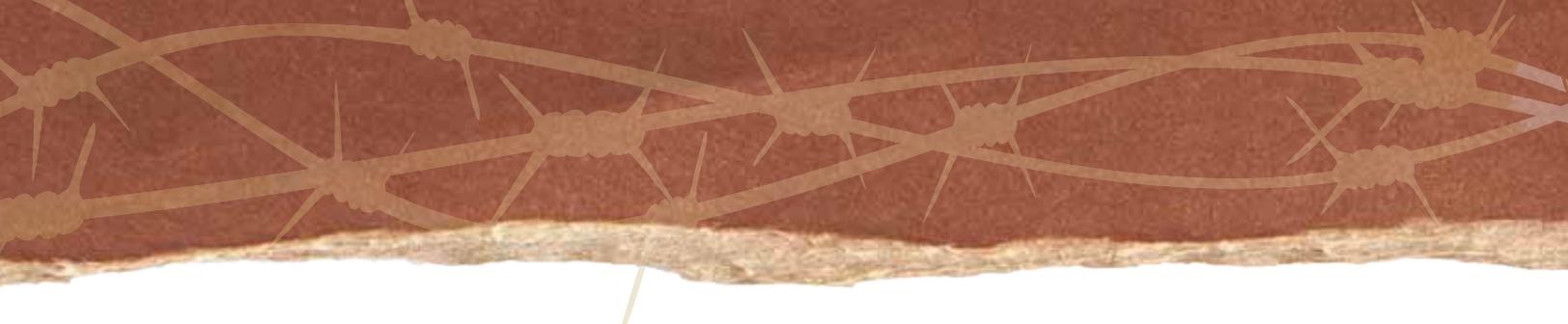


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Brethren Historical Library and Archives



Barracks at Camp Sherman in Ohio.



“ WE FURTHER URGE OUR BRETHREN NOT TO ENLIST IN ANY SERVICE WHICH WOULD, IN ANY WAY, COMPROMISE OUR TIME-HONORED POSITION IN RELATION TO WAR; ALSO THAT THEY REFRAIN FROM WEARING THE MILITARY UNIFORM.” Original Goshen Statement

“ A MAN IS ENTITLED TO HIS OPINION AND TO THE EXERCISE OF HIS OWN CONSCIENCE, BUT HE IS NOT ALWAYS AT LIBERTY TO GIVE UTTERANCE TO OR EXPLOITING HIS OPINION OR TO URGE HIS CONSCIENCE ON THE ATTENTION OF OTHERS. ”

Retraction of the Goshen Statement

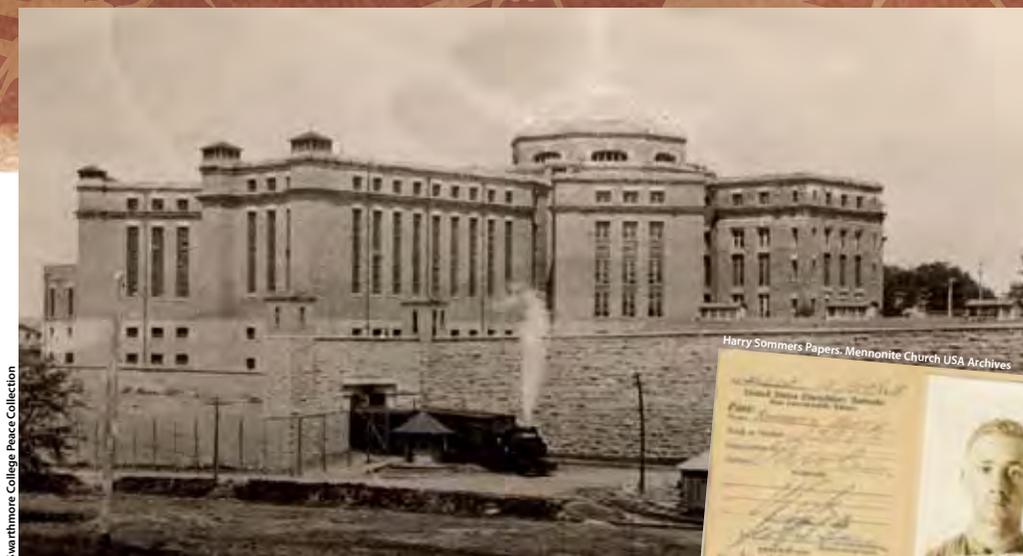
Retraction of the Goshen Statement, published in *The Gospel Messenger*

“All persons in Camp and those going should have the regular church certificate [obtained from the draft boards], instead of this one. No use or display of the Goshen paper in its present form should be made, and the regular church certificate should be substituted therefore. If the paper should again be brought to the attention of the War Department, trouble again may arise. Conditions are becoming more tense every day and condition have changed much since the Goshen Conference. We must all know that the world is at war and that the United States are a part of the world. A man is entitled to his opinion and to the exercise of his own conscience, but he is not always at liberty to give utterance to or exploiting his opinion or to urge his conscience on the attention of others. The government is disposed especially to emphasize this fact, when that exploiting can, in any sense, be construed as affecting the raising or disciplining of armies or the raising of means for the support of the Government. It is the word ‘urge’ [in the second paragraph of text in the ‘Other Provisions’ section] to which the authorities object—the giving of advice to others that would interfere with their enlisting or taking the uniform. . . . Our Brethren should take account of all these facts and govern themselves accordingly, in their utterances. It will have to be understood by persons going to Camps that they should be settled and established in their own views, and in their personal consciences and choice, that it may not be necessary to convey advice to them.”

Prison experiences varied, from having friendly guards to undergoing brutal torture. Molokan Russian conscientious objector prisoners were routinely beaten, sometimes so “bestly that even authorities were shocked.” Philip Grosser, John Burger, and unnamed prisoners at Fort Riley in Kansas were beaten while tied with ropes around their necks. Duane Swift was shackled in half-inch irons while moving rocks from one place to another. At Fort Jay in New York, COs were stretched and chained to their cell doors for nine-hour periods with only bread and water to sustain them, and scrubbed with brooms until their skin came off. Sass and Swartzendruber were “baptized” in the latrine of Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia. At Alcatraz, COs were confined in solitary cells with bread and water diets, and only sometimes with a blanket to come between the cold cement floor and their bodies while sleeping.

Interestingly, the CO casualties in prison were nearly equal to the military casualties: 3.8 percent of the 450 COs died in prison, and 4.1 percent of the 2,810,296 active duty soldiers were killed in battle. The COs who died in prison were Charles Bolly, Frank Burde, Reuben Eash, Julius Firestone, Daniel Flory, Henry Franz, Ernest Geliert, Joseph Hofer, Michael Hofer, Hohannes Klassen, Van Skedine, Walter Sprunger, Daniel Teuscher, Mark Thomas, Ernest Wells, John Wolfe, and Daniel Yoder.

Often repeated stories recount the experience of two Hutterite brothers, Joseph and Michael Hofer, who refused to wear a uniform and were sentenced to the dungeon of Alcatraz. After four months of brutal treatment there, they were transferred to Fort Leavenworth. Arriving around midnight, they were marched through the city to the



Swarthmore College Peace Collection



Harry Sommers Papers, Mennonite Church USA Archives

Swarthmore College Peace Collection

Among the Brethren, 14 from the Church of the Brethren were sent to Fort Leavenworth (above). Work pass for Harry Sommers, a CO who was incarcerated at Leavenworth (right), and solitary confinement cell (far right).

prison, where they were again chained to their cell doors. Within days, they contracted pneumonia and died. The body of the first brother, Joseph, was presented to his wife clad in the military uniform he refused to wear in life.

This event set off a prison strike at Fort Leavenworth. On his own initiative, Fort Leavenworth Warden Rice took the prisoners' demands to Washington, D.C. When he returned, more than 60 percent of the conscientious objectors received reduced sentences and a third were released immediately.

After the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, the government continued to try to break the will of the COs. Some still remained in dark cells day and night, forbidden to read, write, or talk, and still sleeping on cement floors, chained to cell doors, and subsisting on a diet of bread and water despite orders to cease this treatment.

The conscientious objectors of this period "exhibited true courage and heroism in the face of torture, mistreatment, and social isolation." Even if the CO position was not

accepted, it did make the United States government take notice at a time when it was in the height of its power and glory. The government would need to negotiate with men possessed of scruples against fighting. Avenues for conscientious objectors to provide "works of mercy" and other tasks of importance would be necessary in the future.

Brethren learned the need to educate their youth in conscientious objection from the World War I experience. Over the next several decades, the Brethren benefitted from the leadership of M. R. Zigler, Rufus D. Bowman, Dan West, and C. Ray Keim, who took an active role in addressing youth. Brethren also recognized the importance of greater cooperation with the other peace churches. 

Diane Mason is a member of the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board and is on the pastoral team of Fairview Church of the Brethren in Northern Plains District. She is a retired college math teacher. A fuller version of this article can be found in "Conscientious Objection in the American 20th Century" (www.academia.edu/11829799/Conscientious_Objection_in_the_American_20th_Century).

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This place

by Jim Benedict

Earle Fike, Jr., well known pastor and teacher in the Church of the Brethren, was not only a gifted preacher, he was gifted as well at coming up with snappy titles for his sermons. One of my favorites was for a sermon based on the text in Genesis concerning the call of Abraham, where the patriarch is told,

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” Fike’s crafty little title for that sermon was, “God Is Two-Thirds Go.”

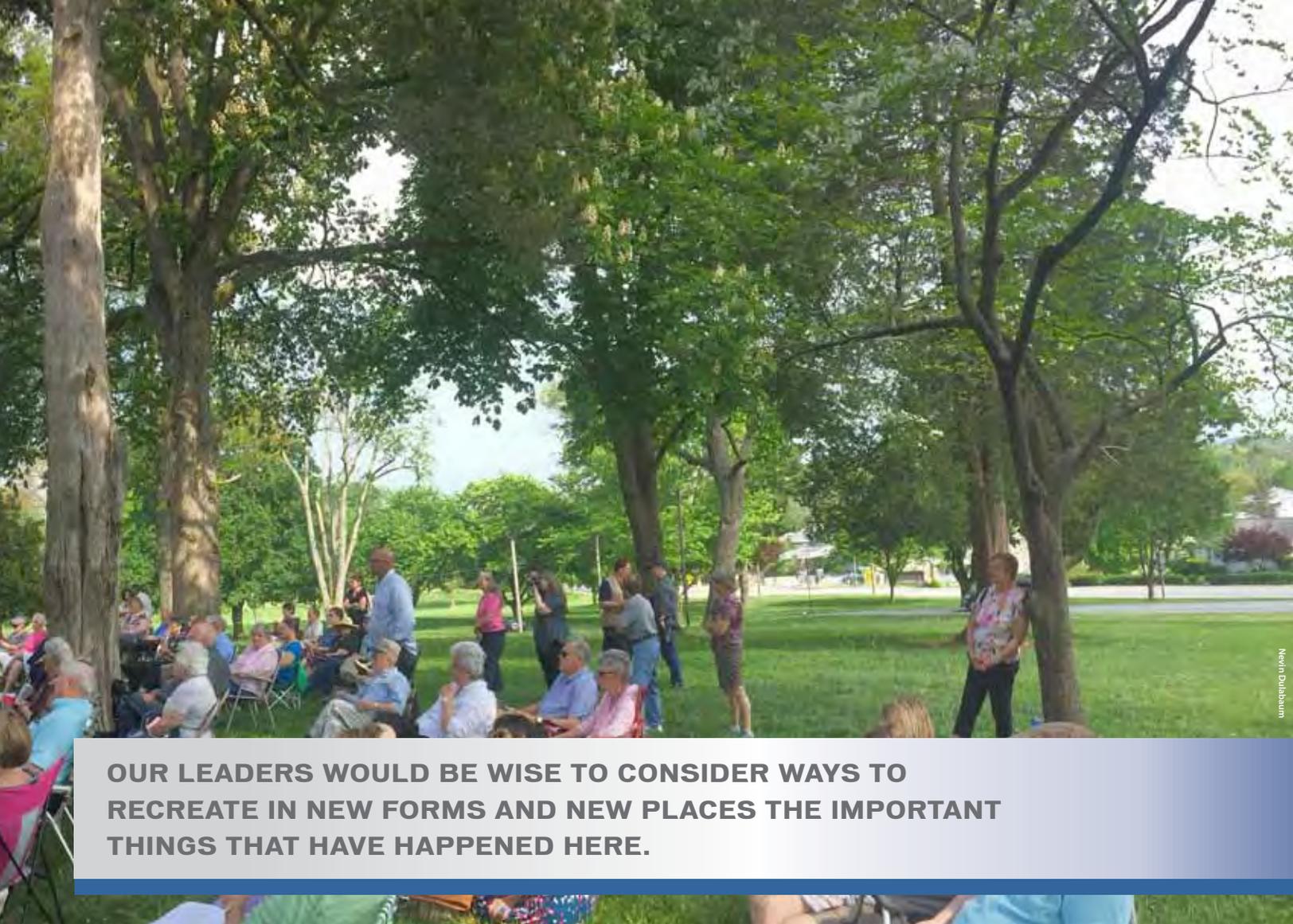
It’s true—in scripture God always is giving his people orders to go here or there, from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses, Joshua, and Ruth, to Jonah and various other prophets, to Jesus and the Apostles. The implication is plain: if you want to be serious about your faith, you’d be wise not to get too attached to particular places. And yet we do.

It has been several years now since the farm where I grew up was bought by a developer, but it still hurts a little when I go back to visit my dad and see the hulking industrial building where the south pasture used to be and the old cornfield now filled with a neat row of two-story houses. I sometimes try to imagine an alternate history, in which I had come into enough wealth to buy the farm myself and somehow preserve it, just the way I remember it. But, of course, that didn’t happen. I was one of those called to go, in my case, into the ministry in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland.

Brethren, on the whole, have done a pretty good job at maintaining a healthy detachment from particular places. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that the first



Kevin Dalabaum



Neeraj Datta/Summa

OUR LEADERS WOULD BE WISE TO CONSIDER WAYS TO RECREATE IN NEW FORMS AND NEW PLACES THE IMPORTANT THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED HERE.

Brethren were refugees, many of them driven from one place to another in search of the opportunity to practice their faith without interference. Whatever the reason, Brethren have never been the kind of folks who put much effort into building monuments, museums, or shrines. The buildings where we meet for worship are merely meeting-houses, not cathedrals or temples; functional spaces, not architectural marvels meant to inspire awe or allegiance.

And then there is this place, the Brethren Service Center. We have to be honest—we’ve grown attached to it. It would be hard not to be impressed with its buildings and park-like campus set on rolling hills. But the real reason we’ve grown attached is because of what has happened here. Here the Brethren created something—several things, actually—that expressed our deepest sense of who God has called us to be. Here, Brethren of very different theological perspectives have come together and worked side-by-side, learning to know and trust one another. Here, hundreds of Brethren young people have come of age, formed their sense of adult identity, made life-long friends, and even met their future spouses. SERRV, Heifer International, Church World Service, refugee resettlement, and disaster ministries all have

been housed here, at one time or another, providing opportunities for people to work for causes that made a positive difference in the world. No wonder we’ve grown attached.

Now, we can see that it may no longer be feasible to keep this place, that an era has come to an end. We know, as scripture tells us, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” And yet, with the poet Robert Frost, we may reply:

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

Treason is too strong a word, of course, but there is regret and sadness. And many of us will find it hard to suppress the urge to imagine alternate histories that would have allowed us to hold on to this place. But we must be careful not to let our imaginations, memories, and love for this place keep us from seeing the opportunities that we still have to serve God. We must continue to listen for God’s

call, and be ready to get up and go when we hear it.

We Brethren don't have temples, but the Jews in the time of Jesus certainly did. The great temple in Jerusalem was spectacular, and represented to many the divine power and blessing the Jews received as the chosen people of God. If ever a people were attached to buildings, it was then. So imagine how the disciples and others must have reacted when Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." To the faithful Jew, it was outrageous to even suggest such a thing. Indeed, it may have been part of what got Jesus crucified.

Another, equally telling, indication that Jesus was less attached to particular places than most of his contemporaries comes from the story of his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. At one point in their conversation, the woman challenged Jesus, saying, "Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain (Mount Gerezim), but you Jews say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus

replied, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . The hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him."

Ultimately, neither here nor there matters; worship in spirit and truth matters. That is not to say that it is wrong to love a particular place, or to treasure the time we spend there. It is only to say that it is wrong to think that what has happened in one place cannot happen in other places. And if the truth be told, for many of us that is our real concern as we bid farewell to this place: where and how and when will the important things that happened here happen again? Where and when and how will our Brethren genius for creating ministries to respond to practical human needs find expression? Where will Brethren of different perspectives be brought together to get to know and trust each other? Where and when will Brethren young people have the opportunity they once had here to come together, sort

Transformation: A brief history of the Brethren Service Center by Miller Davis

Transformation kept coming into my mind as a focus for not only the changes to the physical plant but also the lives of countless people who have been involved in the work of the Brethren Service Center.

Old Main was the first building on campus, opened in 1850 as an institution of higher learning under several owners including the Church of the Brethren, and known as Blue Ridge College. After being purchased for the Brethren Service Center in 1944, Old Main served as the main offices for Brethren programs, Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) training, the maintenance shop, and the heating plant for its two sister buildings. After major renovations in the 1970s, Old Main joined Zigler Hall as part of the New Windsor Conference Center, housed the International Gift Shop, and provided living accommodations for volunteers. The gift shop was later moved to the SERRV Building and offices of Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA) were relocated to the lower level and first floor.

Becker Hall was the men's dormitory for Blue Ridge College. As part of the Brethren Service Center it was used as housing for staff and volunteers, overflow lodging for BVSers in training, and a library for the campus. Finally it was converted into an apartment building.

Windsor Hall was built as the women's dormitory for Blue Ridge College. It may have been the first location for processing donated clothing at the Brethren Service Center, but not for long. It housed conference guests before Zigler Hall was built. On the lower level were a kitchen and dining room. Over the years, Windsor Hall provided meeting rooms for BVS

training, hosted orientation for Polish Agricultural Exchangees, provided housing for refugees waiting for their sponsorships to be completed, served as a safe house for domestic violence victims, and was the first location of the On Earth Peace office. It provided meeting space for weekly worship services, wedding receptions, and General Board meetings.

The Blue Ridge Building was the gymnasium for Blue Ridge College. Once it became part of the Brethren Service Center, it was the location for the processing and storing of relief goods including donated clothing, bedding, health and school kits, soap, seeds, shoes—whatever was being collected. The cut garment department cut thousands of yards of flannel for layettes. An early version of the International Gift Shop was in this building. Later, the gym was transformed into a multipurpose room and the warehouse space was converted into offices for Church of the Brethren programs, Heifer International, CROP, IMA, On Earth Peace, and Mid-Atlantic District. It also provided space for a tour room,



Paul Grant

out their adult identity, and make life-long friends?

I do not know, but those who grieve would be wise to remember that there was a time before this place was ours, before there was such a thing as the Brethren Service Center, and no one but God knew that there ever would be such a place. Our leaders would be wise to consider ways to recreate in new forms and new places the important things that have happened here. And we can all remember, and give thanks, that our God is consistent in his mercy and love but unpredictable in his methods, always surprising us and making a way where there seems to be no way.

Thus, as Paul writes, “We grieve, but not as those who have no hope.” Our hope is in God—Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit—who moves in our midst and calls us to move together with each other and with God into a future we cannot yet see. 

Jim Benedict is pastor of Union Bridge Church of the Brethren. He gave this message for the worship service that marked the closing of the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., on April 30.



Nevin Dulabaum



Courtesy of Brethren Service Center

a canning center, BVS training, and a maintenance shop.

The SERRV Building was built as a cinder block recreation building for volunteers and the community. The basement was the first location for IMA shipments, with two additions being added before the distribution center was built on the lower campus to accommodate the growth of IMA. At one time, part of the building was used as the maintenance shop, with the remainder used by SERRV. To provide needed office space for SERRV, the building was expanded, a second floor was constructed for offices, and an additional warehouse was added.

Zigler Hall was built in the late

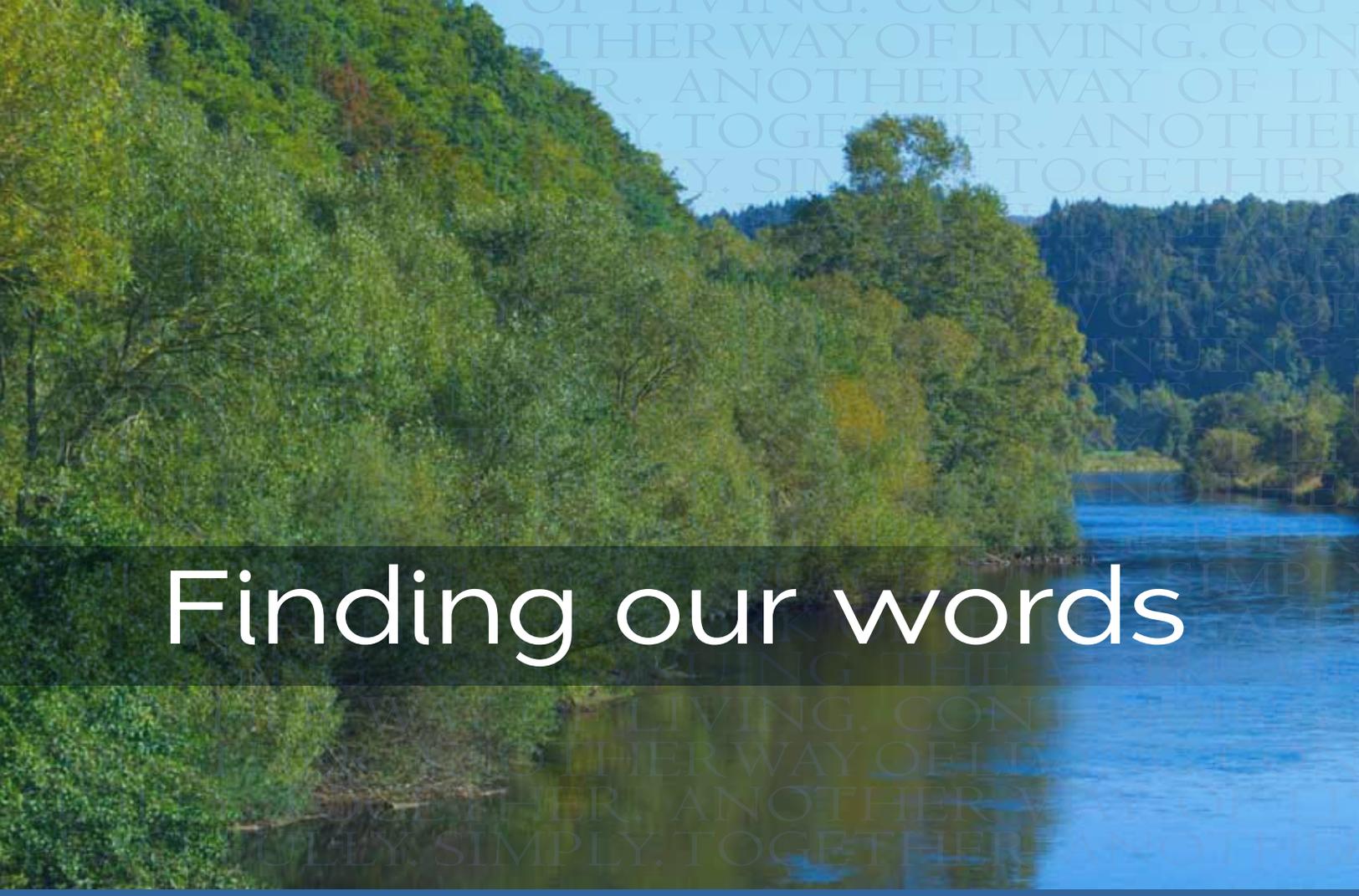
1960s to provide more adequate food service preparation and dining facilities. Named in honor of Church of the Brethren leader and On Earth Peace founder M. R. Zigler, it expanded the opportunity to meet the needs of guests coming to the center. With Old Main and Windsor, it became the New Windsor Conference Center and offered a variety of options to groups looking for space to hold a retreat. It also was an improved location for the International Gift Shop. Conference participants, tour groups, volunteers, employees, refugees, and dignitaries from around the world all have broken bread in the Zigler dining room. For many years, food for Meals on Wheels was prepared in the kitchen, and local organizations utilized the dining room for banquets.

But the Brethren Service Center is also about the transformed lives of people who lived and worked in these buildings: Young men and women who arrived without any knowledge of Brethren service, and left with a determination to receive additional education and with a very different view

of the world. Refugees who learned English as a second language while waiting to be resettled. Polish Agricultural Exchanges who learned more about the Church of the Brethren and were oriented to their projects. Conscientious objectors who wanted to become truck drivers or carpenters, and were given opportunities to learn these trades as they fulfilled alternative service obligations. The hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been changed by the relief goods shipped from the Brethren Service Center, and those who have benefited from the work of volunteers who have responded to disasters.

The next transformation of this upper campus will happen as it is passed to new owners. We trust that God will continue to bless what happens here and at the lower campus of the Brethren Service Center, where Brethren Disaster Ministries, Material Resources, On Earth Peace, and SERRV will continue their work. 

Miller Davis is former manager of Emergency Response and Service Ministries for the Church of the Brethren.



Finding our words

When a denominational board member recently posted a photo on Instagram depicting a page about the Brethren infirmities of passivity and low self-esteem, his Instagram followers exclaimed about the timeliness of the analysis and wondered what the book was. The book was *Reflections on Brethren Image and Identity*, and the publication date was 1995.

The bad news is that the things that plagued the Church of the Brethren then still plague us today. The book's diagnosis seems as relevant today as it did more than two decades ago.

The good news is that the book's conclusion is also still relevant.

The book was the reflection paper written by Communicorp, the communication organization that proposed the taglines that we've been using in the Church of the Brethren.

While Crane (as the company is now known) identified

our low self-esteem, Patti Crane and Ginger Pyron also identified our gifts. They focused especially on the idea of replenishment: "To those who have fished all night and caught nothing, what can Brethren offer? Exactly what Jesus offered, and what the Brethren themselves have been offering for many years: another way—along with the replenishing nourishment and joyful discipleship that accompany it."

Now, two decades later, the words "Another way of living" are coming back around. Our thoughtful guides at Crane would be the first to say that taglines won't save the church. They would also say that they did not write the taglines—rather, every word emerged as a refrain from multiple Brethren during times of listening all across the denomination. They simply "uncovered" our own words describing who we are.

To show that, Crane provided some of the words and themes they heard. —Wendy McFadden

“WE LIVE OUR FAITH. WE FOLLOW JESUS, TRY TO LIVE AS JESUS DID. THAT’S OUR WITNESS.”



“FOR US, BEING TOGETHER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING RIGHT. WE GATHER TOGETHER AROUND THE WORD TO FIND OUT HOW WE SHOULD LIVE.”

“We’ve been reading through the Bible, noticing how Jesus did things. He even broke laws to minister to people’s needs.”

“Our witness isn’t to stand on street corners and ask, ‘Are you saved?’ It’s to follow Jesus as an example, to live as Jesus did.”

“A presentation of the Brethren should include references to peace—that’s the absolute best of our tradition.”

“I always tell people, we’re one of the three historic peace churches.”

“Peace, justice, and service.”

“Peace and brotherhood.”

“Peace and service.”

“I think our peace position is strong and unique—it would draw lots of people.”

“When I try to define the Brethren, I latch onto this denomination’s simplicity.”

“My one message about the Brethren? Simplicity and acceptance.”

“The idea of simple living is important to me. My conscience still wears plain clothing.”

“Our worship isn’t pretentious. We have a number of college-age kids who come to church in their old jeans and sloppy shirts—that’s a current form of Brethren ‘plain dress.’”

“To say it is one thing; to live it is another. That’s what simple living means.”

“What I love about this church is the friendship, community, togetherness. Whenever there’s a problem

somewhere, people say, ‘We’ll help.’ And then everybody rolls up their shirt sleeves and does something.”

“One family. That’s the genius of who the Brethren are. How can we umbrella our differences and still be together as a family?”

“For us, being together is more important than being right. We gather together around the Word to find out how we should live.”

“How would I define us? We’re an egalitarian community gathered together to try to be people of God.”

“An extremely important thing with us is that we decide things together. Every voice counts.”

After all their listening, our guides described us this way:

“The Church of the Brethren, continuing its centuries-old tradition, stands in clear contrast to—not in competition with—other Protestant denominations.

“The Church of the Brethren distinguishes itself not as an abstract way of believing, but as a way of living, conveyed from one person to another.

“The Church of the Brethren patterns its daily living after the life of Jesus—a life of humble service and unconditional love.

“As a compassionate alternative in a world of increasing violence, complexity, and alienation, the Brethren way of living incorporates peace, simplicity, and togetherness.

“In sum, the Church of the Brethren offers another way of living, one that, like cold water to a thirsty soul, leads to replenishment—in all senses of the word.” 

Is there a future for the Church of the Brethren?

by Galen L. Miller

Many people, not finding in the institutional Christian church what they need in order to cope in today's world, are leaving it. In fact, they have been leaving it steadily since the middle of the 20th century.

The extent of this exodus can be illustrated by our own Church of the Brethren statistics, for we have not been immune. Our peak membership was somewhat over 203,000 in 1963. According to the 2015 Church of the Brethren *Yearbook*, our membership for 2014 had dropped to 114,465. That is a 44 percent loss in 51 years—more than 89,000 members. But perhaps even more telling is the fact that, on average, only 50,265 of our members were in church for worship on any given Sunday in 2014.

Retired Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong calls those who've departed "exiles from the church." These exiles recognize that we are living in a scientific and technological age. In that context, notions of a God walking on the earth in the form of a human being, or requiring the death of an innocent man as a blood sacrifice so that he could accept the humans that he himself created, are simply not plausible. Nor are the

that we have fulfilled the mission for which we were called into being and, in a celebratory spirit of achievement, with dignity and intentionality, close our doors and join the ranks of some other denomination. There is a lot to be said for this option, especially as we consider the stewardship of time, energy, and financial resources involved in maintaining ourselves as a distinct denomination.

But there is a third option that recaptures the basic message of Jesus. Which is to say that Jesus had the remarkable insight that for the human family to thrive it would have to learn to live together within the framework of love, compassion, and social justice. Within this framework, all people and all nations are equal and are focusing on the total wellbeing of the neighbor. If you want a rationale for Jesus' crucifixion, here it is. The power elite of Rome and Israel saw Jesus' message as such a threat to their power and control that they collaborated and killed him.

Then, tragically, as Jesus' followers rubbed shoulders more and more with the Roman Empire, they gradually became institutionalized until, in the 4th century, Emperor Constantine completed the "fall of the church" by naming

MOVE AWAY FROM ITS EMPHASIS ON DOGMA, DOCTRINE, AND CREEDS AND FOCUS ON JESUS' MESSAGE OF LOVE, COMPASSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

suggestions that Jesus could violate natural law and literally walk on water, still storms, heal even congenital illness, or walk out of a burial tomb. In other words, these "exiles" find the doctrines, creeds, and dogmas of the institutional Christian church to be untenable in this scientific, technological, and informational age. And so, they are leaving.

What does the future hold for the Church of the Brethren in the face of this steady decline?

Unfortunately, the easiest response—and the one we seem to be following—is to do nothing. In which case, we will simply continue the declining process until forced to close our doors and sell our property—a rather ignominious ending for a once vital church.

A second option would be to acknowledge the impact our denomination has had on the church at large, especially in terms of peace and justice issues. We could then declare

Christianity as the official religion of the state. As I have sometimes said, "Jesus came proclaiming love, compassion, and justice as the way for human family to thrive, but what we got was the church."

The third option for the Church of the Brethren, then, would be for it to institute the very much needed reformation of the larger church by challenging it to move away from its emphasis on dogma, doctrine, and creeds and instead to focus on Jesus' message of love, compassion, and social justice. If the Church of the Brethren would issue this call intentionally, vigorously, and prophetically, not only would there be the possibility of renewal of the larger church, but it would revive a struggling Church of the Brethren as well. It might also be attractive to present and future "exiles." 

Galen L. Miller is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor and former district executive of the church's Pacific Northwest District

Crazy for kids

Manchester youth campaign to enlarge an early learning center

by Tyler Roebuck

A new building will open for the Manchester Early Learning Center (MELC) this summer, thanks to the youth group at Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind.

MELC was started in the 1970s by a group of members from the Manchester Church along with people from the community, as a small daycare center. It was devoted to providing childcare to families in the community, and primarily to children of parents who worked in the industrial park. The project sought to meet the growing need in the community, and, while MELC has not grown much in size since then, the need certainly has.

The Manchester Church youth group saw this problem and decided to act. “It was the Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2013,” remembers Jim Chinworth, associate pastor. “We had this conversation about ‘how might we engage the local community,’ and ‘what act of service could we



Courtesy of MELC Crazy for our Kids Campaign

do—where do we see real need,’ and we got to talking about how a new space was needed for [the MELC] and what would it look like to be the catalyst for raising the funds.”

With gentle guidance from Chinworth and other leaders, the youth energetically and enthusiastically took the initiative to research early childhood development and the logistics of raising money for a new building, and invited the director and assistant director of MELC to their youth room. They had worked together to create a nine-point proposal “of why this would matter for our community,” Chinworth explained.

This certainly gained the attention of the MELC staff, although the idea had been talked about for a number of years. While it was risky to consider partnering with high school youth, the center decided to invite the youth group to its next board meeting in February 2014. The youth were given the green light, and they began the long and difficult journey to raise funds in what was called the Crazy for Our Kids Campaign.

“We had a small group of four who guided the process and were the core people,” Chinworth says. “They were the face of the public speaking. We did a number of presentations, but like most fundraising efforts it turned into gathering names, lots of phone calls, making visits, asking



people for money, but more importantly, asking people to partner with us in this vision.”

Two of the youth, junior Nathan Self and sophomore Konrad Borgmann, recall their involvement, struggles, and growth along the way. “I helped make a lot of phone calls,” Self says. “We asked about the interest people had, and would sometimes set up a meeting. We would usually meet the person with either Jim or Pam [Hoover, a youth advisor at Manchester], do most of the talking with them, and if they had any other questions Jim or Pam would help answer those.”

For Borgmann, part of the fun has been working with the youth group. “This is a really good group of kids,” he says, “and working with Jim and some other adults, it has been fun to see what you can come up with as you work together. This is a really big goal.

“It’s important that we have a larger building for the kids,” he adds. “Early childhood learning and development is so important in a child’s growth and can shape their young adulthood as well.”

Both youth agree that the hardest job throughout the process was calling and visiting with donors. Borgmann says that the nervousness of meeting with people was difficult, “actually going into someone’s home, sometimes unsure if I would have all the information or the answers.”

“It’s easier if you get someone you know or someone in the church that is receptive,” Self explains. A few people “just said no and weren’t interested at all, which is unfortunate but you can understand.”

As the campaign continued, the youth encountered new struggles, mostly involving the logistics and legalities of constructing an educational building. Then came a decision to increase the size of the facility in mid-campaign.

“We adjusted the whole floor plan to accommodate 102 enrollees, which changed the final figure significantly. That was a big decision,” Chinworth says. The group had to ask,



“Do we go with it? Because we are going to have to raise a fair amount of extra money. It seemed worth it because as we kept going along, the need kept increasing.”

At the start of the campaign in 2014, MELC had a waiting list of around 25 children and the facility could accommodate only 48. By summer 2015, the waiting list had increased to 100, and has continued rising to its current number of over 200.

The added costs led to a lengthened process of raising funds, and sustaining energy proved to be one of the challenges along the way. “As you get removed from the initial energy and youth graduate out . . . getting to a place where the new youth are oriented [and] want to keep it going was a bit of a hurdle,” Chinworth says.

The new Manchester Early Learning Center is scheduled to open its doors in June, and the youth are thrilled to see the progress and results of their work. Also important are the relationships they have formed throughout the process.

“There’s definitely a deeper connection with the people in the youth group and with Jim,” Self says. “Having called some of the people in the church and meeting with them gives you a deeper connection with the church community.”

Borgmann adds that he has “grown relationships within the church with people I’ve talked to and visited. Occasionally those people will come back and ask how the project is doing, and it’s fun to tell them about the progress.”

“For me it was an application of faith, helping the people who are at the early learning center and knowing that you’re giving them a place to learn better,” Self says. “Some of the families who cannot afford as much still have an opportunity to grow.” 

A senior at Manchester University, Tyler Roebuck is a former MESSENGER intern and Ministry Summer Service worker.



The Manchester Church youth group receives the “Group Spirit of the Community Award” from the North Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

Saving Christianity

No matter where one stands on the American political spectrum, we can all agree that anxiety is running high.

Conservative commentator Rod Dreher has offered a way through these anxious days with his new book *The Benedict Option: Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*.

Following the lead of ethical theorist Alistair MacIntyre, Dreher says that what is needed is a new and different Saint Benedict. Christians, he says, need to pull together into



JOSHUA BROCKWAY

formative communities to wait out the coming Dark Ages of American culture.

Dreher tells a pessimistic story of American society. Pointing to the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, he says that conservative Christians have clearly lost the culture wars. What is more, Dreher warns that religious liberties will come under increasing scrutiny by politicians of all stripes.

Even morally conservative politicians will erode such liberties under economic pressure.

Conceding these culture wars for Dreher is not so much about denial or a rallying cry to redouble efforts. Rather, it's simply an emerging reality. This new reality is the result of a centuries-long process begun with the Reformation and the rise of the Enlightenment. In the second chapter, Dreher tells the story of religious decline from the 15th century on. Though Luther and Descartes never set out to undermine religious authority, the result of the collective shifts is such that religion has become a matter for individuals and not a society. Church has become a collection of individuals rather than a community.

The Benedict Option, based on the importance of the Rule of Saint Benedict in the 6th century, is a way for contemporary Christians to imagine and live into their faith within a dominant culture that is not of their own making. Historians have long said that Benedictine monasteries were the lifeboat for Christian culture in the so-called Dark Ages. For Dreher, Christian communities now must form tight bonds while not withdrawing from the world, so that these communities can save Christianity again.

Much of Dreher's argument sounds familiar to the Brethren, who have tried to maintain our identity as disciples over

the centuries. Practices such as forming close community bonds around the church, cultivating a strong, mutually supportive work ethic, and even living as marginalized people all resonate with our tradition.

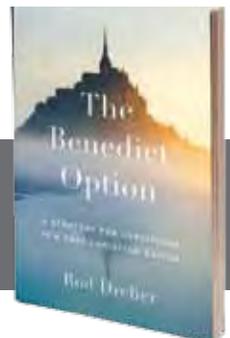
One thing plagues Dreher's work, however, even for all the wisdom he has gleaned from the Benedictine tradition. He is clearly a culture warrior at heart. His story is one of impending doom. In fact, the assertion of a new Dark Ages assumes the very logic of the Enlightenment itself, which saw the days of the Middle Ages as a decline in civility. Proper civilization, for Dreher, is when the church is at the top of the social ladder. Though he implores Christians to welcome the coming days of societal conflict, he believes the dominant culture should be Christian.

But scripture tells us that it is God who is redeeming the world, not the church. History has shown that when the church views itself as the top of the cultural and political hierarchy few things go well, for society or the church. Rather, as Jesus said, the faithful are like yeast in the bread, small in comparison but significant in results. Or like a lamp on a stand—insignificant in the vast darkness, but shining nonetheless.

Christians have been practicing a kind of Benedict Option long before Dreher coined the concept. Groups like Rutba House in Durham or the Simple Way in Philadelphia have formed thick, yet porous Christian community for well over a decade. Englewood Christian Church in Indianapolis has done so even longer. Each of these communities has done this without nostalgia for a time when the church dominated American culture, and without longing for a day when the church will once again define society. These communities and many more have developed practices of patient witness to the coming reign of God.

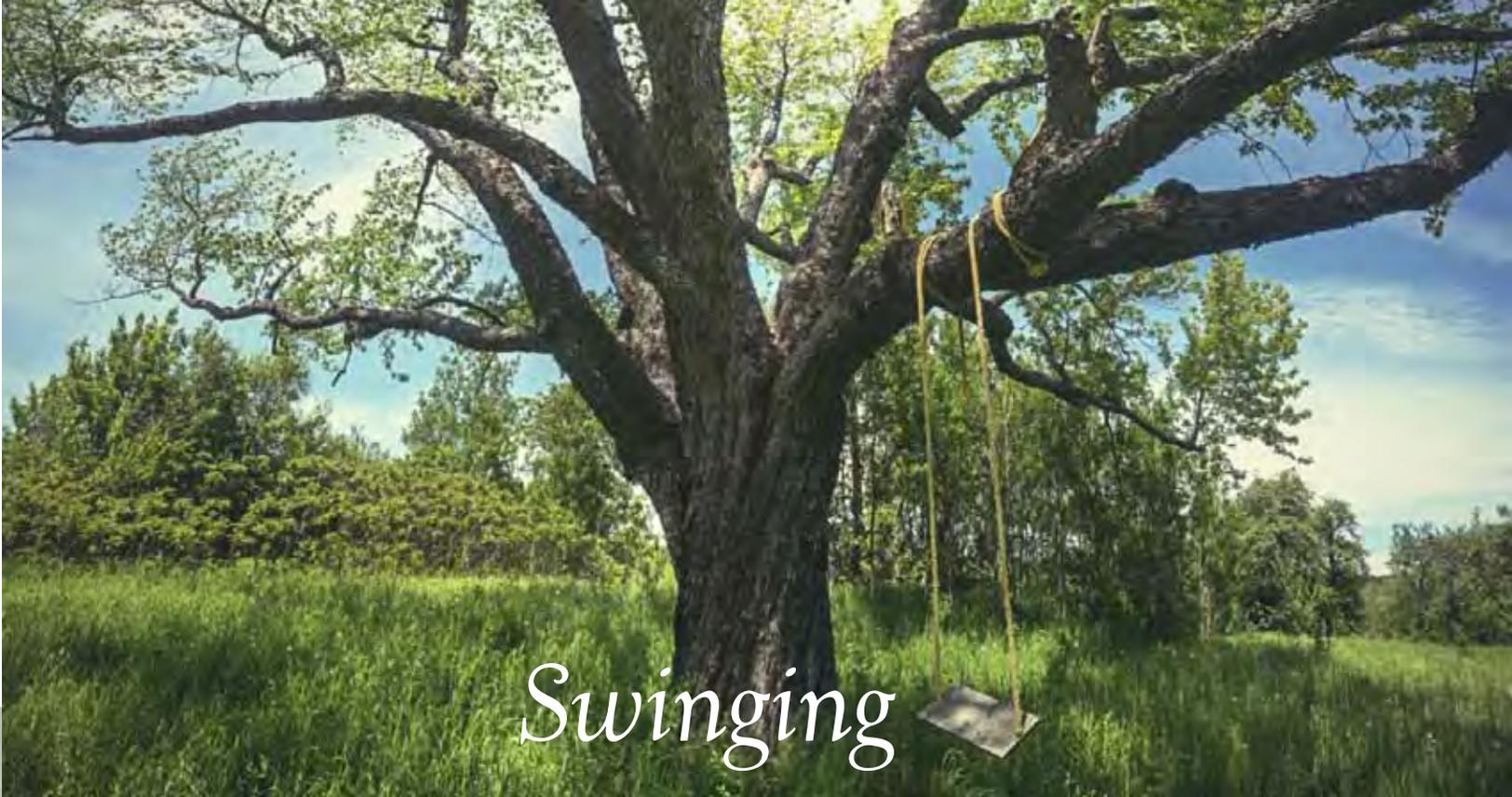
That is what Benedict himself set out to do. He was not building a kind of lifeboat for civilization, but a community of disciples "clothed in faith and the performance of good works" with the gospel for their guide who "deserve to see [God] who has called us to his kingdom" (from *Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict*). 

Joshua Brockway is director of spiritual life and discipleship for the Church of the Brethren.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. **Author:** Rod Dreher. **Publisher:** Sentinel (2017).

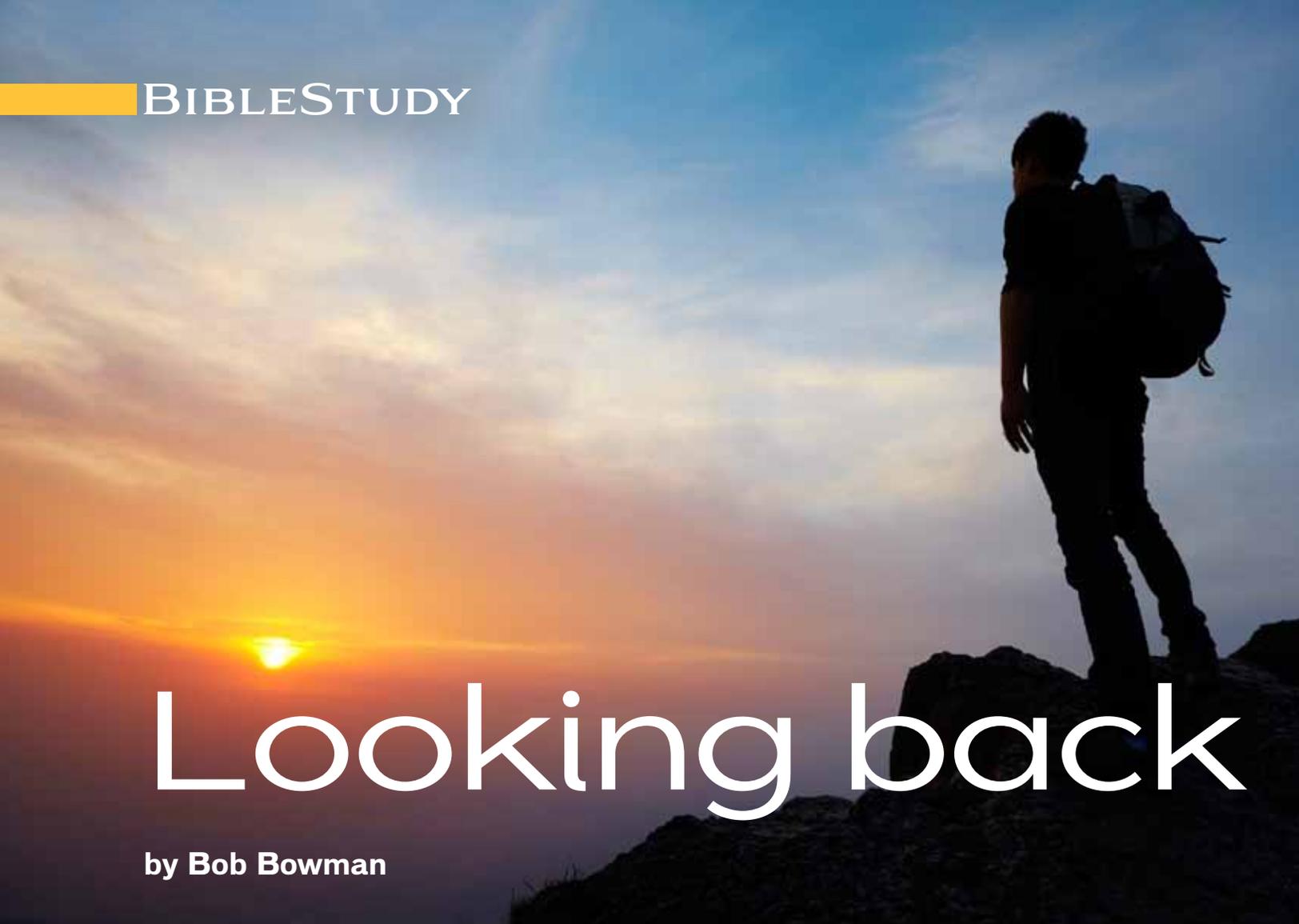


Swinging

by Ruthann Knechel Johansen

I left the rope swing many years ago
and only this Sunday after-birth
half a century later,
toss off the patent
shoes and smile, the petticoated
beauty preserved in stained glass edifice
to ride again
the sanctuary slats of nature.
Four decades I sought holy
manna in academy,
knave and text forgetful of the
ropes that once suspended me
from tree to gravity.
But this morning I ate directly from the vine—
raspberries shared with feathered communicants—
three in honor of familiar tradition
 plus one
plucked deep within the holy bush
grateful for the return to swing.

Ruthann Knechel Johansen is the immediate past president of Bethany Theological Seminary. A member of Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind., she is professor emerita at the University of Notre Dame, where she taught in the Program of Liberal Studies and was a Fellow in the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.



Looking back

by Bob Bowman

Did you ever think that Lot's wife got a bad rap? Google turns up more than a million hits for the phrase "Lot's Wife." Most of those are sermons saying she was a wicked woman and she got what she deserved when she turned into a pillar of salt.

In a way this traditional interpretation makes sense. She was warned not to look back. She looked back. She was disobedient. She suffered the consequences. Most of us find great confidence in believing that the world operates through just laws. God is dependable. If something is wicked, evil consequences will attend it. And nothing is quite as satisfying as the sense of moral superiority that accompanies watching those consequences fall on someone else's head.

The situation is described simply. The Lord warned Lot and his family to leave the city of Sodom because it was going to be destroyed. Angels took the family by the hand and led them out of the city and said, "Run for your life! Don't look back or stop anywhere on the plain, but flee to the hills lest you be consumed" (Genesis 19:17).

But Lot's wife looked back. This is the only thing we know about Lot's wife. We are tantalized by the lack of detail. Did she have a name? She is given no name in the Bible,

but that did not stop folklore from giving her the name in tradition: Edith, or Ado. Was she a native of Sodom or had she married Lot before he moved to Sodom? Was she part of Lot's company when he was rescued by his uncle Abraham in the story found in Genesis 14:12-16?

We would like to meet that ancient sister who became so petrified at the sight of the burning city. What did she feel? What did she think? Did she love her husband, Lot?

Lot's character is more easily discerned by his actions described in Genesis. When his uncle Abraham suggested dividing the grazing land so their herds and flocks would not be in competition, Lot chose the richer and better watered portion for himself rather than deferring to his uncle. When he was urged by the angels to leave Sodom, Lot went to bed and ignored the warning. The next morning he lingered until the angels grabbed him and his family by their hands and forcibly brought them out of the city. When he was told to flee to the mountains, he demurred and said it would be enough to simply move to the neighboring village of Zoar.

Yes, we understand Lot's character. The only thing admirable in his story was his hospitality to visitors.

But we know nothing of Lot's wife except that she looked

EVEN THOSE WHO ARE GROWING AND EVOLVING CAN SOMETIMES STAY ATTACHED TO PARTS OF THEMSELVES THAT THEY NEED TO LEAVE BEHIND.

back. We are not told why she looked back. What did she hope to see? Perhaps one more glimpse of the home where she had raised her children.

Leaving is hard. Over a million refugees have fled from Africa and the Middle East into Europe and America in the past 10 years. How many of them refrained from looking back one more time to the home they were leaving forever? And in how many did the heart within them turn to salt as they bade farewell to all that had been familiar to them, all that home stood for?

Did she look back with compassion for those friends and neighbors caught up in the firestorm that destroyed the city? Did she have more compassion on the residents of Sodom, evil as they were, than her husband Lot who trod onward without a single glance at the suffering behind him?

I'm actually not too surprised that Lot was weak enough

to hide his eyes while his neighbors suffered. I can believe his wife looked from compassion. Did her compassion match that of Abraham who rescued the residents of Sodom in the story in Genesis 14 and pled with God for mercy for them in Genesis 18?

Did she really disobey God's command? It is not really clear that the "don't look back or stop" was a command of the Lord that Lot's wife disobeyed. In fact, it simply may be the kind of advice you would give any refugee running from a city about to go up in a fire storm. Pause for an instant and you will be caught up in the fire, in the explosion. Nahum Sarna, in his commentary on Genesis, suggests that Lot's wife was not punished per se, but that she lingered too long and was overwhelmed by the heavenly fire.

Did Lot look back to see what had become of his wife? Or did his sense of self-preservation and terror make



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THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT REMEMBRANCE AND INTROSPECTION AREN'T VERY IMPORTANT AT THE RIGHT TIME. . . THE CHALLENGE IS TO KNOW WHEN TO DO THAT, AND WHEN NOT TO GET STUCK IN ONE PLACE FOREVER,

him oblivious to his wife's dilemma? I think we have seen enough of Lot's character to believe he did not look back for his wife. And that alone would tell us that it is not always wrong to look back.

Looking back is not always wrong, but perhaps it is always dangerous. In the movie *The Incredibles*, Edna Mode says, "I never look back, darling. It detracts from now." The "now" is most important, but never forget God's word in Revelation: "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come." Our past is in the hands of God. Along with our present life, it becomes raw material as God molds our future.

In *No Apologies: Journey of Life*, Dona Ems writes, "I'm not afraid anymore. I'm leaving all my baggage behind. I'm moving forward. I'm not going back, but I will look back every so often because I will never forget from whence I came."

Perhaps Lot's wife is a symbol of someone who can't let go of the past, someone who only reluctantly moves on from a previous phase of life and is always therefore held back in her spiritual journey.

This is not to say that remembrance and introspection aren't very important at the right time. Rather, we might learn that remembrance and introspection can be paralyzing at the wrong time. Even those who are growing and evolving can sometimes stay attached to parts of themselves that they need to leave behind.

The challenge is to know when to do that, and when not to get stuck in one place forever, like the tragic case of Lot's wife. 

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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EYN confirms release of 82 Chibok schoolgirls

On May 6, president Joel S. Billi of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) confirmed reports of the release of 82 of the Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted by Boko Haram in April 2014. News media reported the girls were released to the Nigerian government in exchange for the government's release of five Boko Haram suspects.

Nigeria Crisis Response staff Roxane Hill reported that "we don't know when and if the girls will be allowed to return to Chibok." She shared a list of the names of the 82 released girls, which was taken from an announcement by the office of the president of Nigeria. However, as of mid-May, the names had not yet been confirmed by EYN leadership.

Concerns remain for the hundreds of other children and adults who have been abducted by Boko Haram in recent years.

In response to queries about how to offer financial support to the released girls and their families, the Nigeria Crisis Fund will receive donations for that purpose. Brethren Disaster Ministries will work with EYN to oversee the use of the donations.

Donations may be made to the Nigeria Crisis Fund, with a note that the gift is made to support the Chibok schoolgirls (1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120). For more about the Nigeria Crisis Response go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis.

Personnel notes

Bob Chase has retired from his long-term leadership of SERRV International, Inc., which had its start as a Church of the Brethren program. Retiring as president and CEO, he has been part of the SERRV team and the global fair trade community for more than 27 years. He will continue on the World Fair Trade Organization Board of Directors and on a part-time basis will oversee SERRV's Loan Fund. The SERRV board appointed **Loreen Epp** as president and CEO effective April 1. Epp, who grew up in Canada, was most recently chief creative strategist for Room Planners, Inc., in New York, and previously held positions at Staples and Levitz Home Furnishings.

Joven Castillo has been hired as technology support specialist for Brethren Benefit Trust. He holds an associate of applied science-information technology degree from Elgin Community College and most recently worked at Frain

Industries in Carol Stream, Ill.

David Lawrenz has announced plans to retire as executive administrator of Timbercrest Senior Living Community in North Manchester, Ind. No date has been set. Lawrenz has been at Timbercrest since 1974 and has served as executive administrator since 1979.

Lynn Phelan of Hoffman Estates, Ill., has begun as an accountant for the Church of the Brethren. She is a graduate of the University of Illinois with a bachelor's of science degree in accountancy.

Tara Shepherd-Bowdel has resigned as regional advancement officer at Bethany Seminary. Since March 2016 she has served the seminary in the eastern US by strengthening relationships with alumni/ae and friends, seeking financial support, and representing the seminary at events. She earned a master of divinity degree from Bethany in 2015.



Pastors of the Chicago-area church plants receiving grants from the Wieand Trust, shown here at the 2016 church planting conference: Jeanne Davies, pastor of Parables Ministry (left), and LaDonna Sanders Nkosi, pastor of The Gathering Chicago (right), and her husband, Sydwell Nkosi.

Wieand Trust gives grants to church plants in Chicago area

Congregational Life Ministries is supporting and overseeing grants from the David J. and Mary Elizabeth Wieand Trust to two church plants in the Chicago area. The trust names Christian work in Chicago as one of three purposes for its grants.

The Gathering Chicago, a community of prayer and global/local service based in Hyde Park, Chicago, led by pastor LaDonna Sanders Nkosi, has received a grant of \$49,500.

Parables Ministry, a community of empowerment and belonging for persons with special needs and their families, is hosted at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill. It received a grant of \$23,372. The ministry is led by pastor Jeanne Davies.

The grants complement district support for the church starts. Congregational Life Ministries staff Stan Dueck and Joshua Brockway have worked with Illinois and Wisconsin District to support, supplement, and encourage the new ministries with intentional conversations around practices and plans for sustainability.

Upper campus of the Brethren Service Center closes

Aworship service on Sunday, April 30, closed the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. Some 125 people gathered on the lawn in front of the Old Main building on a sunny afternoon to remember and celebrate the ministries that have taken place at the campus.

The lower campus continues as the Brethren Service Center and houses office and/or warehouse facilities of Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services, Material Resources, On Earth Peace, and SERRV.

In November 2016, the Church of the Brethren signed a purchase agreement with Shanghai Yulun Education Group for the upper campus of the property in New Windsor, which had been listed for sale since July 2015. The purchaser intends to establish a private school on the property.

Those who led the simple, 40-minute service represented the leadership of the denomination and Annual Conference, Mid-Atlantic District, area congregations, and current and former staff of the center.

Opening and closing the service were Mission and Ministry Board chair Donald Fitzkee and general secretary David Steele, who gave a welcome and introduction, and Annual



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Conference moderator Carol Scheppard, who closed with prayer. Scriptures were read by Gene Hagenberger, executive for Mid-Atlantic District, and Roy Winter, associate executive director of Global Mission and Service and Brethren Disaster Ministries. Miller Davis, former manager of Emergency Response and Service Ministries, reviewed the history of the Brethren Service Center.

Jim Benedict, pastor of Union Bridge Church of the Brethren, gave the message. “We must be careful not to let our imaginations, memories, and love for this place keep us from seeing the opportunities that we still have to serve God,” he said, in part. “We must continue to listen for God’s call, and be ready to get up and go when we hear it.”

Employees end service on closing of Zigler Hospitality Center

With the closing of Zigler Hospitality Center at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., 10 employees end their work with the Church of the Brethren. These employees, along with some long-term volunteers, were recognized at an all-campus luncheon on April 28.

May 5 marked the end of service for the following two employees:

Mary Ann Grossnickle began as manager of Zigler Hospitality Center on Jan. 20, 2015. She had served as interim coordinator of hospitality since Oct. 20, 2014. She oversaw continued expansion of services up to the time the facility closed. She managed the hospitality and kitchen team, and kept the Zigler center close to a break-even budget. In previous work at the Brethren Service Center, she

held a variety of positions with SERRV International from 2006 to 2014.

Connie Bohn had been program assistant for Zigler Hospitality Center since June 29, 2015. Previously, from 1999 to 2012, she was secretary at the New Windsor Conference Center—the predecessor to Zigler. She also had been administrative support assistant at the Heifer International Mid-Atlantic Office 1988-98, when it was located at the Brethren Service Center.

Eight kitchen staff of Zigler Hospitality Center ended employment on April 30:

Janet Comings, head cook, had been employed at the Brethren Service Center since 1982. She had worked for both the New Windsor Conference Center and Zigler Hospitality Center. She began as head cook on Jan. 2, 2013, and led a team

of assistants and volunteer kitchen aides in providing dining services for guests of the center and for volunteer groups.

Cooks **Fay Reese** and **Charlotte Willis** and kitchen assistant **Elena Cutsail** all had served at both the New Windsor Conference Center and Zigler Hospitality Center. Reese had worked at the Brethren Service Center since 2000. Willis had worked there since 2003. Cutsail had been at the center since 2007.

Kitchen assistants **John Frisby**, **Helena Eyer**, **Katherine (Kathi) Blizzard**, and **Robyn Jackson** had been employed solely at Zigler Hospitality Center—Frisby since 2014, Eyer since 2015, and Blizzard and Jackson since 2016.

Two long-term kitchen volunteers also ended their service: **Maria Capusan** and **Mathea Iglich**.



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CLASSIFIEDS

Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore? Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Grand Rapids, Michigan. If you have interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120 or jdeaton@brethren.org.

JOIN US FOR WORSHIP FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE! The Living Stream Church of the Brethren meets online every Sunday at 5:00pm Pacific / 8:00pm Eastern. Each worship is recorded if you want to view later. In our fifth year, our congregation has no building or walls, but includes participants throughout the US and from several other countries. Find out more, login, or see previous services at www.LivingStreamCoB.org. Questions? Email contact@LivingStreamCoB.org.

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



The four Guernsey heifers shown in a photo taken around 1952, with some of the people who helped send them to Europe via Heifer Project: from right, Miriam and Clarence Hartman, their nephew Eugene Hartman, and foster son Jimmy Dodson.

Four Guernsey heifers

Ever since reading (and buying) the book by Peggy Reiff Miller, *The Seagoing Cowboy*, I have wanted to be in touch with her. Then I read the article “Daisy” in the September 2016 MESSENGER. The enclosed picture of four Guernsey heifers was taken prior to their shipment to Europe, through Heifer Project, in the early 1950s. My

parents sent at least two of them, but I am unsure about the others. They were donated by Green Hill Church of the Brethren in Westover, Md.

Loretta Hartman Lohr
Easton, Md.

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MESSENGER. The issues of the past year have been exceptional, and the April one was stunning. Thank you for the light you share and sustenance for the journey together.

Joan Huston
Elizabethtown, Pa.

Giving thanks for **MESSENGER Online**

Giving thanks for the ways you endeavor to keep current with forms which interest the varying generations! Quite a task and

Send letters to messenger@brethren.org or **MESSENGER**, Attn: Letters, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Please include hometown and phone number. Letters should be brief, clear, and respectful of the opinions of others, with strong differences handled in the spirit of Matthew 18. Preference is given to letters that respond directly to items in **MESSENGER**. Anonymous letters will not be considered.

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Saturday, July 1, 2017 @ Grand Rapids, Michigan

Sandy will appear Friday 3-4pm at the Annual Conference bookstore for a special author signing

Lot's Wife and the Necessity of Turning Back

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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.

I applaud you in all those efforts. Also I give thanks for the printed form of the magazine . . . for as long as it survives. I read it cover to cover soon after it arrives and then enjoy re-reading it and sharing it as the opportunity presents itself. Keep up the good work! Blessings as you continue to move forward sharing the "Good News" in various

forms and from differing perspectives.

Emily Mumma
Lorida, Fla.

Good curation

I have been really impressed by the MESSENGER's curation over the past couple months. I have enjoyed the

overarching themes and voices from outside the denomination. Keep it up!

Jesse Winter
Washington, D.C.

Correction: Carol Scheppard's hometown is Thomaston rather than Thompson, Conn., as identified in May (p. 12).

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

Bethany, New Paris, Ind.: Samantha Borkholder, Lawanda Chupp, Hubert Krull, Verne Leininger, Phyllis Leininger, Danny Miller, Brianna Moreland, J. D. Schrock, Angie Schrock
Bush Creek, Monrovia, Md.: Earl Kline, Carolyn Kline
Columbia City, Ind.: David Lambert, Natalie Lambert, Kassidee Nicodemus, Michael Sery, Jennifer Sery, Donna Snyder, Matthew Vanderpool, Kim Walter
Creekside, Elkhart, Ind.: Hassan Dicks, Dawn Jones, Karen Lewallen
East Fairview, Manheim, Pa.: Manny Alzate, Jodi Earhart, Dan Fry, Rochelle Fry, Paul Ganster, Skyler Ganster, Neil Rohrer, Beth Stauffer, Dave Stauffer, Wyatt Stoltzfus

Elm Street, Lima, Ohio: Christina Harkless, Mark Leist
Evergreen, Stanardsville, Va.: O'Ralley Sprouse, Kaitlyn Sprouse
Hagerstown, Md.: Steven Ernst, Donald Harriman II, Jared Harriman, Caleb Platou
Lancaster, Pa.: Jeffery Flint, Carolyn Flint, Ed Moran, J. Lloyd Wert, Beverly Wert
Mohler, Ephrata, Pa.: Helen Painton, Arthur Wise
Mohrsville, Pa.: David Crookshank, Rachael Rohrbach

Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va.: Debi Fitzgerald, Louis Kelley, John Kiser, Mildred Kiser, Dwight Roetto, Rebecca Roetto, Debbie Wells
Oakton, Vienna, Va.: Frederick Brower
Poplar Ridge, Defiance, Ohio: Alec Dunlap, Anastasia Dunno, Tara Lymanstall, Holden Williams
Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.: Marina Sheaffer
Spring Run, McVeytown, Pa.: Jack Ryan

Wedding anniversaries

Bever, Frank and Olive, North Manchester, Ind., 70

Brubaker, John Henry and Orlena, Lititz, Pa., 75
Cummings, Dave and Joann, Greenville, Ohio, 50
Eley, Wilmer and Phyllis, Union City, Ind., 68
Fourman, Garry and Patricia, Arcanum, Ohio, 50
Kurtz, Paul and Mary, Lititz, Pa., 68
Kurtz, Robert and Beatrice, Lititz, Pa., 65
Nelson, Robert and Ferald, Winston-Salem, N.C., 66
Shellhaas, Gordon and Barb, Greenville, Ohio, 60

Deaths

Balsbaugh, Bernice Pauline McFate, 92, Lebanon, Pa., April 1
Bayless, Margaret E. Tracey, 89, Timonium, Md., March 6
Beckner, Dallas Gray, 85, Winston-Salem, N.C., April 4
Colvin, June (Mary Virginia) Grogg, 90, Fishersville, Va., April 18
Crist, Grace, 91, Garden City, Kan., April 14
Eckert, Harold W., 84, Lancaster, Pa., March 5
Eley, Phyllis E., 93, Union City, Ind., March 1
Fisher, Max, 92, Fulks Run, Va., March 8
Flory, Barbara, 71, McPherson, Kan., March 17
Fox, Dallas E., 81, New Paris, Ind., March 15
Hale, A. Chester, Jr., 74, Lovely, Ky., Jan. 10
Harshbarger, Paul, 97, Lewistown, Pa., March 27
Hedrick, Bruce C., 69, Baltimore, Md., Feb. 14
Hissong, John Wendell, 90, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 12
Hoffer, Mildred, 89, Ligonier, Pa., March 20
Hostetler, Keith, 87, Elkhart, Ind., March 25
Huffman, Hazel, 89, Lancaster, Pa., March 17
Loxley, Anita J., 81, Hilton Head Island, S.C., Dec. 3
Mason, Martha Deaton, 94, Shelbyville, Mo., Feb. 8
Myers, Carol, 74, Lima, Ohio, Feb. 5
Norris, Samuel J., 81, Warren, Ind., Feb. 24
Ogden, David, 92, Berlin, Pa., March 22
Propst, Jane Ellen, 93, Bel Air, Md., June 22
Raish, Mildred, 99, Harrisonburg, Va., July 8
Renner, Rosemary Brower, 82, Kerrville, Tex., Dec. 26
Roop, Olive, 103, Bridgewater, Va., April 3
Schlemmer, Mary (Margaret), 83, North Liberty, Ind., March 6
Seesholtz, Charles, 90, Hershey, Pa., April 23
Senter, Martha Lucille McCollum, 94,

Clemmons, N.C., March 27
Smith, Doris Early, 89, Harrisonburg, Va., March 13
Snider, Alice Mae Foreman, 89, Chambersburg, Pa., April 8
Hisson, William Walter (Bud), 88, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 19
Thompson, Charleen, 89, Freeport, Mich., April 20
Tinkel, Paul, 83, Warsaw, Ind., Nov. 7
Trost, Esther L., 86, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, Jan. 16
Unger, Evelyn, 98, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 25
Weaver, E. Mark, 97, Lancaster, Pa., March 29
Weybright, Lola E., 94, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 6
Williams, Earl, 72, Lancaster, Pa., March 21

Ordained

Koontz, Gary Dean, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Snake Spring Valley, Everett, Pa.), March 26
Snyder, Joel William, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Valley Point, Orbisonia, Pa.), Feb. 4

Licensed

Bakfwash, Yakubu, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Dundalk, Md.), Feb. 19
Stone, Laura, S/C Ind. Dist. (Manchester, Ind.), Nov. 14

God's servants, working together

would not have wanted to serve as pastor of the church in Corinth. What an absolute mess. Sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, the wealthy ignoring the needs of the poor, and chaotic worship services were regular features of this congregation.



TIM HARVEY

The pastoral leadership certainly had their hands full.

And yet, this is the same congregation that regularly experienced the spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy, was eager to learn more about heaven, and was willing to share in a weekly offering for the Jerusalem church. Despite deep division, there is no talk of a congregational split. Among all of the

problems, the Holy Spirit is moving.

The ultimate interpretation of the Corinthian Congregational Profile depends on whether one sees the potential of a bright future for mission and ministry or problems to be avoided at all costs.

Many say similar things about the Church of the Brethren. Some are upset at our inability to finally say how we

Forces That Keep Us Apart, Christena Cleveland describes many subtle forces that cause us to be drawn to people who are like us while avoiding those who are different. Part of what drives this behavior is that “over the last century, Western moral standards have drifted further away from traditional Christian and biblical standards” (p. 108).

One way we respond to differences of opinion is to identify those people who think, believe, and act like us. If this were as far as things went, there would likely be few problems. But our fallen human nature won't allow us to stop there. Having identified “our” group, we naturally begin to note those people who are in the “other” group. Those individuals are then held up for correction and ridicule, and are to be avoided at all costs.

None of this is surprising. But the part of Dr. Cleveland's argument that describes the Brethren so well is her analysis that “one possible sign that you have succumbed to self-esteem and identity-fueled divisions is that you're unwilling to admit that *they* have something valuable to teach you” (p. 111). In other words, when we stop believing that we need one another, we have a serious problem.

The entrenchment in our own beliefs and lack of patience for the “other” that has existed among the Breth-

ARE OUR CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES A SOURCE FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE, OR ARE THEY PROBLEMS TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS?

will relate to gay and lesbian sisters and brothers. Some complain about biblical interpretation, and our famous (or notorious) “two column” paper of 1979. But others happily point to the peace witness we maintain in an increasingly violent world. Several churches in the Great Lakes region of Africa recently chose to join the global Brethren movement because of this very witness.

As real as the problems and possibilities are, I want to raise a different issue that is causing us difficulty. Somewhere along the way, we stopped believing that we need one another.

The Corinthians were at a similar place. When their disagreements on Christian doctrine and ethics were keeping them apart, Paul reminded them that they are “God's servants, working together” (1 Corinthians 3:9) before they are anything else. This is not to say that there weren't problems in this congregation—the rest of the letter deals with that. But Paul's instruction and admonition is based on this fact.

In her book *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden*

ren for years has only deepened in the months since the presidential election. That is especially worrisome as we approach what may be another contentious Annual Conference. We would do well to remember Paul's counsel to the Corinthians: We are “God's servants, working together,” before we are conservative or progressive.

We have not yet realized that, while we do have significant theological differences on substantive matters, any positive mission and ministry will require the contributions, gifts, experiences, and perspectives of each one of us. Like the imaginary “Congregational Profile” of the church in Corinth, we have a decision to make about ourselves: Are our current challenges and opportunities a source for a positive future, or are they (and the Christians they represent) problems to be avoided at all costs? The answer to that question may be more significant than we have yet wanted to admit. 

Tim Harvey is pastor of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va.

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