

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

SEPTEMBER 2017 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER



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6 Risk Hope: Annual Conference 2017

By the numbers, 7

Business, 8

Elections, 12

It gives you hope, 14

Worship, 15

Reflection, 16

18 A tale of two translators

by Jan Fischer Bachman

20 The Old Main cupola

by Nevin Dulabaum

departments

2 FROM THE PUBLISHER

3 IN TOUCH

22 BIBLE STUDY

24 MEDIA REVIEW

25 NEWSLINE DIGEST

27 LETTERS

30 TURNING POINTS

32 POTLUCK

Cover photo by Glenn Riegel

You're invited



Do you have a favorite dessert tradition or memory? Brethren Press invites you to submit it for consideration for *Inglenook Desserts*, a new cookbook coming next year. Send it by Oct. 4 to www.brethren.org/inglenookmemory.

Correction: The scripture reference in the July/August "From the publisher" column should have been Matthew 22:36-39.

Fireworks are illegal in Illinois but not in Indiana, which makes for lots of interstate commerce. It also makes for an odd phenomenon familiar to anyone forced to travel the expressways around Chicago: nonstop billboards advertising Crazy Kaplans Fireworks. The signs number in the hundreds, sometimes planted so close together that you can see half a dozen at the same time. It's not hard to tell when Independence Day is coming up.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Some Brethren have conflicting feelings about the Fourth of July. Annual Conference often falls over the holiday, and it's not unusual to hear someone joke, "Is it okay for us to go watch the fireworks?" It's usually not a serious question, but reminds us of our historical unease with displays of patriotism and militarism. It calls attention to the tension between good old-fashioned community celebrating and the glorifying of "bombs bursting in air."

I didn't expect to hear that question this year, since Annual Conference ended July 2. But Grand Rapids surprised us by celebrating the Fourth of July on the first of July, presumably because Saturday is better for a downtown festival than Tuesday. The flashing lights and noise got an even earlier start, when the crew wetting down the roof of the convention center accidentally set off the fire alarms—resulting in some amazingly well-timed theatrical effects during Donna Ritchey Martin's Saturday evening sermon.

The next day, after Annual Conference, I encountered several of the leaders from Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) at Song and Story Fest, held not too far from Grand Rapids at Camp Brethren Heights. Markus Gamache told us he couldn't remain outside for the fireworks display—in fact, he couldn't sleep that night. The sound reminded him too much of the attacks by Boko Haram. He couldn't stop thinking of the crowd of women and children that he housed in his home, and how they would instinctively run into the woods when they heard anything that sounded like gunfire. A car back-firing would put soldiers on high alert, he said.

We might not be inclined to forsake the thrill of fireworks, but we can remember this: that being able to enjoy the show probably means that we have not been witnesses to war. For that we can be filled with gratitude, compassion, and a commitment to bring an end to deadly things that explode in the night sky.

Wendy McFadden

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Quilters meet a need

When your passion meets a need, great things happen for the kingdom,” former pastor Burt Wolf once challenged the West Charleston congregation in Tipp City, Ohio. Passion and need met a few years ago, after Bill and Elaine Mercurio established Michael’s House. The organization is an advocacy center for child victims of abuse, named in honor of their son who died unexpectedly at age 37.

It was Elaine’s vision that each child who came to the center for treatment would receive a soft, comforting home-made quilt. Her friend Sonia Ewald, a member of the church, approached some women who had been looking for a new way to serve and show the love of Christ in the community. Thus, the Quilting Group was born.

The Quilting Group receives donations of fabric, which the quilters use to design and create colorful quilt tops backed with coordinating fleece. To date, the group has

made and donated more than 1,000 quilts.

The project has grown and, in addition to Michael’s House, quilts also go to other care facilities, nursing homes, veterans’ centers, hospice organizations, and individual requests. Fleece arm and quilted shoulder warmers for dialysis patients recently were added to the ministry. These patients often become chilled during the treatment.

To raise money to buy fleece, the group has collaborated with Latin American members of the congregation to sponsor a Fiesta for Fleece. On the day before the event, Imelda Diaz and Eduvina Bacon demonstrated how to make tamales—and let the group join the assembly line to construct them. The next day, the fiesta provided a tasty meal and international camaraderie. —Lois Anderson

Peace cranes for Pentecost

The origami paper cranes that hang in the sanctuary at La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren changed color for Pentecost this year. The cranes had been white for some time, but on Pentecost Sunday morning they were suddenly red, yellow, and orange.

“The intent of the Pentecost arrangement is to convey a flurry of action/chaos,” said Eric Davis, who took this photo. “There are approximately 340 cranes displayed. Year-round we have them on display as a commitment to peace.”—Maurice Flora



Eric Davis

Making a difference for the climate

I may be a kid, but I can still make a difference! That's the attitude of my daughter, Emily Yohn, an eight-year-old at Stone Church of the Brethren in Huntingdon, Pa., who is lobbying for action on climate change.

She and her friend Adelyn Yoder have created their own club, Kids Care Climate Change, that meets at Stone Church, and works closely with the local chapter of the Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL). The club works to educate other kids about climate change, has written letters to representatives, and staffs tables at local festivals to educate and collect constituent comment forms.

"Kids can do so many things about climate change," Emily says. "At the top of the list is convincing people we need to act now!"

Emily first learned about climate change from my work with CCL, a non-partisan organization working to build the political will to pass national carbon fee and dividend legislation. This plan would place a fee on fossil fuels at the source (whether it is a well, a mine, or the port of entry), with 100 percent of the net fees sent to American households on an equal basis. There is also a border adjustment so that the US remains globally competitive. Economic models show that the plan would create jobs and increase the GDP, in addition to reducing harmful emissions.

Once Emily learned about climate change, she knew that she needed to act. "I learned about it and I thought, wow, this is actually happening, I want to make a difference," she said. "God wants us to help people, and this is one way to do that."

In June, she was one of the youngest attendees of the CCL international conference in Washington, D.C., which included two days of conference followed by a lobbying day. Emily and I took part in three lobbying meetings at the offices of a senator and two representatives from



Pennsylvania. Everyone who attended the conference was assigned to different lobbying teams, and everyone in the team had a role to play, such as taking notes, keeping track of the time, thanking the representative, or explaining our plan. Emily had the opportunity to introduce herself, explain why she is concerned about climate change, and deliver the constituent comment forms.

"I was nervous before the first meeting, but not after that," described Emily, "and now I am even more motivated to act!"

For my part, I am glad my daughter is being exposed to the CCL approach, which is concerned with building relationships. Every meeting involves appreciation, gratitude, and respect, seeking to find common ground and have an open dialogue. The core CCL values align well with my values as a member of the Church of the Brethren. —Sharon Yohn

Circle letter completes its rounds

A noble institution died on July 5. It was a "circle letter" that began in 1950. The participants were people who, in the years on both sides of 1950, had lived in the Alexander Mack apartment building at Bethany Theological Seminary when the school was located on Van Buren Street in Chicago, Ill.

The participants were Ralph and

Mabel Anderson, Floyd and Alta Bantz, Ervin and Ethel Block, Walter and Fran Bowman, Byron and Virginia Dell, Glenn and Margaret Garner, Norman and Lois Harsh, Joseph and Peggy Mason, Robert and Joyce Mays, and Jesse and Wilma Robertson. When some of the original participants died, and their spouses remarried, the circle letter gained new con-

tributors.

The letter faithfully made its circle, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly. There were no drop-outs except those caused by death or debilitating illness.

Now that the original addresses have dwindled to three, the *Nunc Dimittis* has been chanted: "Lord let us now depart in peace" (Luke 1:29).

—Floyd E. Bantz

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.

Peace group renews

On May 13, nineteen members of three Church of the Brethren districts along with several Quakers gathered to renew their commitment to Jesus' way of peace and love in these troubled times. The meeting was held in Union Bridge, Md., at the home of Ruth Aukerman, wife of the late Dale Aukerman, Brethren peace

activist, theologian, and author.

The Tri-District Brethren Peace Fellowship (Atlantic Northeast, Southern Pennsylvania, and Mid-Atlantic Districts) had not met for several years, but felt an urgency to once again gather and invite others for deep sharing, prayer, singing, good food, and fellow-



ship. The time together was concluded with communion and a new sense of urgency to continue the work of Jesus—peacefully, simply, together. —Jean Moyer



Egretious Studios / Jack Beck Brunk

Columbia City opens addition

Sunday, June 4, was the first time Columbia City (Ind.) Church of the Brethren met in the new addition to the original Washington St. building. The 3,727-square-foot addition doubles the size of the church, and makes it handicapped accessible for the first time.

“Here we are,” pastor Dennis Beckner said as he addressed church members. “Somebody said in 1961 that this was a temporary space. Here we have made it a permanent space.”

The process started in 1961, as discussions to grow the congregation. As time progressed and attendance fluctuated, the plans changed. “I’ve been on several building committees,” said Bill Brumbaugh, a member of the current building committee. “We went through many plans over the years. At one point, we made a design with a firm in Elkhart. We finally decided that we don’t want to move.”

“We did a full series of home meetings where we weighed the choice [of what direction to go],” said Theresa Ladd. “Being part of the community here was important. [Members] felt like they wanted to continue being a neighborhood church.”

Ladd, by profession an architect, designed the layout that eventually became the addition but downplays her role in the process. “It was a professional and emotional role because of my ties to the church,” she said. “It felt like building a home.”

Already, the church is using the space to better serve the needs of the congregation and the community. Some of the first activities scheduled were vacation Bible school, a graduation open house, and a wedding reception.

The church broke ground on the addition in May 2016, and construction began last August. Building committee members Rex Johnson, Duane Lambert, Mike Hoppe, Pam Hoppe, Kathy Bills, Wayne Engdahl, Bill Brumbaugh, and Theresa Ladd met weekly throughout the planning, building, and moving-in processes. —Tyler Roebuck (reprinted with permission from INIWhitley County, a KPC Media newspaper, <https://inwhitleycounty.com>)

A peace-full 150th

Ivester Church of the Brethren in Grundy Center, Iowa, which has spent 150 years serving God and the community, held a celebration weekend filled with songs, food, fellowship, and a fascinating look back through the lens of a cemetery walk. On that Sunday, the celebration included taking in seven new members by transfer of letter at worship.

The church had observed the Lenten season with a series of videos by John Dear, a Jesuit priest, author, and activist for nonviolence who was keynote speaker for the 2016 Ministers' Association event. The congregation gathered on Wednesday evenings for a soup meal followed by the video series *Living Nonviolence*, available through the Peace Bene YouTube channel, and questions pulled from the videos. Participants were encouraged to color the “Stations of the Cross” illustrations from *Illustrated Children's Ministry*, which were used during a Good Friday Stations of the Cross with reflections on each illustration.

The church replaced a more than 20-year-old Peace Pole at the front of the meetinghouse, the week prior to its 150th anniversary celebration. The pole has four placards with the phrase “May peace prevail on earth” in English, Korean, Spanish, and Arabic. The directions of the signs point north, south, east, and west, and represent sending out peace in every direction. The dimension pointing to the ground and to the sky is representative of sending praise for the peace given to us, and the peace we receive when we return to the soil. —Paul Shaver

Risk & Hope

—Hebrews 10:23

AC 2017



Clarin Riegel



Lesch Hollenberg



Donna Parcel



Laura Brown

Regina Holmes



**“But I will hope continually,
and will praise you yet more and more.
My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.
I will come praising the mighty deeds of the
Lord God, I will praise your righteousness,
yours alone” — Psalm 71:14-16**

The 2017 Annual Conference . . . by the numbers

1 percent increase in the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors for 2018, at the recommendation of the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee.

1 new location announced for upcoming Annual Conferences: Greensboro, N.C., on June 30-July 4, 2021. Other previously announced Conference dates and locations: July 4-8, 2018, in Cincinnati, Ohio; July 3-7, 2019, in San Diego, Calif.; July 1-5, 2020, in Grand Rapids, Mich.

2 new fellowships received: Lost and Found Church in Michigan District, and the WildWood Gathering in Pacific Northwest District.

3 new congregations received: Iglesia de Cristo Sion Church of the Brethren in Pacific Southwest District, Common Spirit Church of the Brethren in Michigan District, and Church in Drive Church of the Brethren in Michigan District.

4 local ministries in Grand Rapids supported by Conferencegoers as part of the Witness to the Host City: the Refugee Education Center, Bethany Christian Services, the Well House, and Mel Trotter Ministries.

17:10.4 photo finish time clocked by Galen Fitzkee, first male runner in the BBT 5K Fitness Challenge sponsored by Brethren

Benefit Trust. He was joined at the finish line by Rieth Ritchey Moore, first female runner; Bev Anspaugh, first female walker; and Stafford Frederick, first male walker.

190 pints of blood collected during the 2-day Conference Blood Drive, exceeding the goal of 160 pints.

\$1,140 in cash and checks, plus donations of backpacks and other items, given in support of the Refugee Education Center.

\$1,280 in cash and checks, plus office supplies, bed sheets, and comforters, given in support of refugee families who are served by Bethany Christian Services.

2,329 people registered, including 672 delegates and 1,657 nondelegates.

\$2,755 in online donations from viewers of the Annual Conference webcasts. In addition, 3 churches each sent in \$100 by check in support of the webcasts.

3,773 views of a Snapchat filter created for the Annual Conference in Grand Rapids. The filter was used in 134 total snaps, which could represent many

different users or several users using the filter multiple times.

6,822 “views” of Conference webcasts from Wednesday evening, June 28, through 5 p.m. on Saturday, July 1, including 2,454 views of worship and 4,368 views of business sessions.

\$11,250 raised for hunger relief by the annual Quilt Auction sponsored by the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren.

\$55,280 -plus received in offerings during worship, including \$7,277 to provide copies of *Shine On: A Story Bible* to congregations not yet using the Shine Sunday school curriculum jointly produced by Brethren Press and MennoMedia; \$7,442 to the Core Ministries Fund to support an initiative of Congregational Life Ministries called “Renaissance 2017-2020” focused on congregational vitality and church planting; \$11,654 for the church’s ministries in Haiti; \$13,377 for the Nigeria Crisis Response; and \$15,535 to support the Core Ministries of the denomination. 

The volunteer news team that made this Annual Conference coverage possible included Laura Brown, Allie Dulabaum, Karen Garrett, Keith Hollenberg, Regina Holmes, Donna Parcell, Frank Ramirez, Glenn Riegel, Frances Townsend. Denominational staff who contributed to the Conference coverage included Jan Fischer Bachman, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, and Russ Otto. Wendy McFadden, publisher.



Regina Holmes

On Earth Peace retains agency status, as delegates navigate arduous agenda

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and Frances Townsend

A vote made while addressing 10 recommendations from the Review and Evaluation Committee decided that On Earth Peace retains its status as an agency of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. The delegate body did not adopt the committee’s recommendation “that On Earth Peace no longer remain an agency of the Church of the Brethren.”

The recommendation did not attain the two-thirds majority vote required, with 56.9 percent of the vote.

“The vote means that On Earth Peace remains an agency of the Church of the Brethren,” announced Annual Conference moderator Carol Scheppard. Assisting her at the head table were moderator-elect Samuel Sarpiya and Conference secretary James Beckwith.

Review and Evaluation Committee

As happens in the 5th year of each decade, in 2015 a committee to review and evaluate the organization and structure of the Church of the Brethren was charged with carrying out a study and bringing report to this year’s Conference. In 2016, Annual Conference increased the

On Earth Peace timeline by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

1974 M. R. Zigler, a peace advocate and ecumenical leader who is retired from the Church of the Brethren staff, holds a dinner to discuss renewing and strengthening the peace witness of the church. The gathering of 27 people at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., is the genesis of the On Earth Peace Conference, later known as the On Earth Peace Assembly (OEPA).

1976 OEPA affiliates with the World Ministries Commission (WMC) of the Church of the Brethren General Board.

1980 Zigler begins a term of volunteer service at the Brethren Service Center, working on programs to revitalize the peace witness and reconnect Brethren bodies. He establishes the Brethren World Peace Academy and a peace bookstore, seeking

to align projects with the denominational program but raising funds independently.

1981 OEPA is incorporated as an independent body related to the Church of the Brethren, with offices at the Brethren Service Center where On Earth Peace Assemblies are held three times a year.

1983 Annual Conference recognizes OEPA as a “body of the Church of

the Brethren contributing to the peace program of the General Board” to be included in the budgeting process and reporting to Annual Conference, with the right to raise funds. The OEPA executive reports to both the WMC executive and the OEPA board. The Conference’s assumption, stated in the minutes: “There is one peace program of the Church of the Brethren General Board in two locations—both incorporated,

committee's task with the referrals of two queries about the agency status of On Earth Peace, from West Marva District and Southeastern District.

In its report, the Review and Evaluation Committee brought five recommendations regarding On Earth Peace—Recommendations 6 through 10—following Recommendations 1 through 5 directed to the Mission and Ministry Board.

The Conference referred Recommendation 1 to the Program Feasibility Study Committee, and adopted Recommendations 2 through 5, which means that the Mission and Ministry Board is directed to consider the recommendations and report back. Final passage of any bylaws changes will be done by a future Conference.

Recommendation 1 would add to the duties of the denomination's Leadership Team, which includes the Annual Conference officers, general secretary, and a representative of the Council of District Executives. The recommendation is for the Leadership Team to hold a gathering of denominational leaders every three to five years for coordination of efforts in program planning and shared vision. The Program Feasibility Study Committee will determine the costs of such a gathering. The Program Feasibility Study Committee includes Brethren Benefit Trust president Nevin Dulabaum, Bethany Seminary president Jeff Carter, Church of the Brethren CFO and treasurer Brian Bultman, On Earth

Peace executive director Bill Scheurer, and Standing Committee members Belita Mitchell and Larry Dentler.

Recommendation 2 would give the Leadership Team further responsibility for implementation of denominational vision, emphasizing a unified vision among denomination, districts, and congregations.

Recommendation 3 would amend bylaws to give the Leadership Team general oversight of Annual Conference, including employing and supervising the Conference director and authority over the Conference budget, in consultation with relevant persons including the treasurer. Currently, the Conference director is hired by the general



Regina Holmes

one in Illinois and one in Maryland. The overall peace objective of the church is being served by both units and supported by Brethren with a zeal for peace.”

1987 The Review and Evaluation Committee observes that through mutual planning by the director of Denominational Peace Witness and OEPA director, the peace ministry increases in vitality. Programs include

youth peace academies, peace retreats for pastors, a library of peace resources, and conferences to promote understanding between those who participated in the military and conscientious objectors. ■ OEPA and the General Board affirm a five-year understanding.

1990 The General Board transfers the Ministry of Reconciliation (MoR) to OEPA. Annual Conference moderators soon

begin a practice of inviting MoR to provide observers for business sessions.

1994 The General Board eliminates the OEPA program coordinator as a salaried position, because of financial constraints.

1998 Annual Conference approves a request from OEPA to become a Conference agency. Some elements of the plan: a third of the OEPA board to be elected

by the Conference, OEPA to prepare an annual report and audit for the Conference, OEPA to accept requests for program initiatives from the Conference. OEPA commits to “providing ministry that is within the scope of Annual Conference directives and congruent with articulated values of the Church of the Brethren” and to “work faithfully in partnership with the Annual Conference and other Annual Conference affiliated agencies to serve the entire denomination.”

secretary, and the budget is approved by the Mission and Ministry Board.

Recommendation 4 would add a district executive as a full voting member on the Leadership Team. The committee's suggestion is that this be the same district executive who serves ex officio on the Mission and Ministry Board.

Recommendation 5 is to appoint a study committee to assess stewardship of the property at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill.

Recommendation 6, "that On Earth Peace no longer remain an agency of the Church of the Brethren," was char-



Green Regal

acterized as an answer to the query from West Marva District. It failed to gain the two-thirds majority vote required.

When Recommendation 6 failed, Recommendation 8—to return the Southeastern District query—was ruled to have been answered.

Recommendation 7 also failed, by a simple majority vote. It recommended "that all congregations, districts, denominational, and agency staff find ways to involve the work of On Earth peace in the ongoing mission and ministry of the Church of the Brethren."

Recommendation 9, which was adopted, asks that all congregations "examine their financial contributions to both district and denominational ministries, and bring their giving into compliance with the Congregational Ethics Polity." Congregations that feel they cannot comply are instructed to be in conversation with their districts, in accordance with a 2004 statement on "Congregational Disagreements with Annual Conference Decisions."

Recommendation 10 failed by a slim margin in a simple majority vote. It recommended that the Standing Committee of district delegates rescind a statement it made in 2014 rejecting On Earth Peace's Statement of Inclusion.

In advance of the vote on Recommendation 10, the delegates were presented with the following response from this



Regina Holmes

2000 Tom Hurst completes 10 years as executive director; Bob Gross and Barb Sayler begin as co-executive directors.

2007 Barb Sayler resigns as co-executive director, but continues on staff for another year as coordinator of communications; Gross becomes executive director. ■ Around 2007, On Earth Peace begins promoting the World Council of Churches initiative to observe Sept. 21

as the International Day of Prayer for Peace.

2008 Although Annual Conference strongly encourages it, On Earth Peace declines to join the merger of the Association of Brethren Caregivers and the General Board that creates the Mission and Ministry Board. ■ On Earth Peace adopts Agape-Satyagraha, a program to teach nonviolence and Christian peacemaking to youth. The program was started in 2001 by Gerald

Rhoades, director of Brethren Community Ministry in Harrisburg, Pa., in response to school shootings.

2011 The On Earth Peace board issues a "Statement of Inclusion" responding to an incident in which a death threat is received by a gay person attending Annual Conference: "We are troubled by attitudes and actions in the church, which exclude persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation,

ethnicity, or any other aspect of human identity. We believe God calls the church to welcome all persons into full participation in the life of the faith community."

2012 Bill Scheurer is hired as executive director. Gross is named director of development. ■ The moderator asks MoR to expand its Annual Conference role, making trained volunteers available to assist throughout the event. This arrangement continues

year's Standing Committee: "Standing Committee humbly receives the chastisement of the Review and Evaluation Committee in Recommendation #10 of their report. We apologize for the misunderstanding and hurt caused by our 2014 response to On Earth Peace's 'Statement of Inclusion.' The church welcomes all persons to participate in its life. Standing Committee's comments were meant to be more narrowly focused on the implications of the On Earth Peace statement that were inconsistent with Annual Conference decisions."

The delegates' discussion of Recommendation 10 included many requests for clarification of its meaning and its relationship to the response from this year's Standing Committee. The officers explained that a vote against Recommendation 10 would mean this year's Standing Committee response is sufficient, while a vote for Recommendation 10 would ask next year's Standing Committee to do further work.

'Authority' document

During consideration of a document titled "The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts," delegates adopted the following recommendation from the Leadership Team and Council of District Executives (CODE): "That this statement of clarification about our current polity and standard practice be received as the answer to our assignment and that the church turn its attention to the framing of a compelling vision for how we will continue the work of Jesus together."

The action received the document as the answer to the concerns of last year's query on "Same Sex Weddings."

Presenting the document and recommendation were general secretary David Steele and CODE chair Colleen Michael, along with other district executives.

The district executives represent the breadth of the denomination, yet are able to work together congenially with a good connection to people in the pews, Steele and Michael said during their presentations. They focused their remarks on CODE's qualifications for emphasizing a commitment to community, but acknowledged that the document has gener-



through 2016. ■ Standing Committee issues "A Way Forward" statement that says, in part, "trust in leadership has been broken" by three events—one being the On Earth Peace "Statement of Inclusion."

2013 Standing Committee holds a session with Scheurer to talk about the "Statement of Inclusion." Standing Committee decides to send a second delegation to meet with the On Earth Peace board.

2014 On Earth Peace celebrates its 40th anniversary. Gross completes 20 years on staff. ■ On Earth Peace announces an Anti-Racism Transformation Team and begins to co-sponsor "Stop Recruiting Kids."

■ Standing Committee holds a conversation with Scheurer and the On Earth Peace board chair. Two delegations have reported good conversations with the On Earth Peace board and staff, but no resolution of the conflict over the "Statement of Inclusion."

Standing Committee issues this statement: "Standing Committee does not support the 2011 Statement of Inclusion of On Earth Peace as an agency of the church, but we will continue to commit ourselves to walk in love together in the face of differing interpretations of scripture and Annual Conference statements and decisions."

2016 Two queries about the agency status of On Earth Peace are referred

to the Review and Evaluation Committee.

2017 A Review and Evaluation Committee recommendation "that On Earth Peace no longer remain an agency of the Church of the Brethren" fails to gain the required two-thirds majority vote, and On Earth Peace retains its agency status. [ZZ](#)

Sources: *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, Newsline, Annual Conference minutes, the On Earth Peace website.

ated some disagreement.

Presenters expressed hope that with guidance from the Leadership Team and CODE, and through focused work over the next few years, the denomination may be able to formulate a “compelling vision” to move beyond internal disagreements. It was announced that the Leadership Team will explore how to develop a process for departure from the denomination for congregations that cannot accept the vision.

Church of the Brethren structure relies on voluntary covenantal relationships, Steele said, yet Brethren over the years have made decisions of conscience contrary to Annual Conference decisions. He cited examples such as joining secret societies like the Masons, and even carrying concealed weapons—which he said is being done by some pastors.

Michael emphasized district authority over ministerial credentials, and the autonomy of districts to respect each other’s credentialing decisions as well as their ability to respect each minister’s individual conscience.



Laura Brown

Keister to serve as moderator-elect

Annual Conference delegates chose Donita J. Keister of Mifflinburg, Pa., as moderator-elect. She will serve as moderator of the 2019 Annual Conference in San Diego.

Keister is associate pastor of Buffalo Grove Church of the Brethren in Southern Pennsylvania District. She just concluded a term on the denomination’s Mission and Ministry Board, where she was a member of the executive committee.

She has been a teacher, choir director, and ministry leader. In her district, she has been a member of the program and arrangements committee and ethics assessment team, and has been a Training in Ministry (TRIM) coordinator. Previously she owned a baking business.

More election results

• **Annual Conference Secretary:** James M.

Beckwith of Annville Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District.

• **Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee:** Jan Glass King of Bedford Church of the Brethren, Middle Pennsylvania District

• **Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1:** Colin W. Scott of Mechanicsburg Church of the Brethren, Southern Pennsylvania District;

Area 2: Christina Singh of Freeport Church of the Brethren, Illinois and Wisconsin District

• **Bethany Theological Seminary Trustee, colleges:** Celia Cook-Huffman of Stone Church of the Brethren, Middle Pennsylvania District;

clergy: Paul Brubaker of Middle Creek Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District

• **Brethren Benefit Trust Board:** Sara Huston Brenneman of Harrisburg

First Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District

• **On Earth Peace Board:** Cheryl Thomas of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren, Northern Indiana District

• **Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee:** Daniel L. Rudy of Roanoke Ninth Street Church of the Brethren, Virginia District

In separate elections, the Standing Committee chose the following:

• **World Council of Churches delegates:** Liz Bidgood Enders, delegate; Glenn Bollinger, alternate.

In board-elected and constituency-elected directors and trustees:

• **Mission and Ministry Board:** Lois Grove of Peace Church of the Brethren, Northern Plains District; and Dava C. Hensley of Roanoke

First Church of the Brethren, Virginia District

• **Bethany Seminary Board of Trustees:** Christina Bucher of Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District;

and Michele Firebaugh of Freeport Church of the Brethren, Illinois and Wisconsin District

• **On Earth Peace Board:** Melisa Grandison of McPherson Church of the Brethren, Western Plains District;

Erin Gratz of La Verne Church of the Brethren, Pacific Southwest District;

and Cynthia L. Weber-Han of York Center Church of the Brethren, Illinois and Wisconsin District

• **Brethren Benefit Trust Board:** Ron Gebhardt of University Baptist and Brethren Church, Middle Pennsylvania District; and Kevin Kessler of Canton Church of the Brethren, Illinois and Wisconsin District

The presenters led off with several changes to the original document. Among them was a new endnote 17, “This is a standard practice established by the Council of District Executives,” which was added to the following sentence: “The officiating of same sex weddings by credentialed clergy shall be handled in the same way as any other report of ministerial conduct: if a district executive minister receives a report based on direct knowledge that a minister has performed a same gender marriage, the information shall be reported to the district’s credentialing body as a matter of ministerial conduct.”

Asked about the implication and intent of the word “disorganize” with regard to congregations, Steele told one hearing that the disorganization of a congregation is carried out by a district when the congregation is no longer viable, and usually at the congregation’s request. Another reason for disorganization is if there are legal issues with the congregation. Disorganization is not a tool to dismiss a congregation from the district or denomination, he stated.

Some asked for clarification of the difference between “conduct” and “misconduct,” saying there should be disclosure of what types of ministerial conduct are referenced. The FAQ sheet for the document stated: “Reports of ministerial misconduct must be processed by the district ethics committee, whereas reports of ministerial conduct are to be processed through the district’s credentialing body.”

When asked about how and when district executives established a practice of sharing information about ministers who perform same-sex marriages, Michael told the delegate body that the practice was first discussed about a year and a half ago, in the fall of 2015. It is simply an agreement among the district executives, and not part of denominational polity.

The last sentence of the “Accountability of Ministers” section, stating that districts respect the ministry credentialing decisions of other districts, also was discussed. Questioners wanted to know if all credentials given by one district are respected by every other district, and whether the word “respect” implies acceptance of all decisions by districts. “We’ll respect the decision but we’re not obligated to follow,” Michael told the Conference.

Developing a process for congregations to leave the denomination raised concerns for at least one questioner, who pointed out some individuals in those congregations may not want to leave the denomination, and any process would need to care for members who are in the minority.

The decision to seek a “compelling vision” is necessary to move the denomination forward, Steele told one hearing, but also is something that may result in a split. “How do we



move beyond the conversation about same-gender marriage?” he asked. He answered the question by saying the church needs to find something to gather around. He quoted one of the district executives as saying that if the church is going to split, it would be better to split over beliefs and values and vision.

On Earth Peace recommendations

On Earth Peace brought two recommendations, “Polity for Agencies” and “Patient Hope in Matters of Conscience.”

On Earth Peace brought “Polity for Agencies” in order to highlight the lack of polity clarifying the relationship of agencies to Annual Conference, and lack of framework to resolve conflicts with agencies. “Polity for Agencies” was returned by the delegate body, but the concern of the recommendation was accepted. The Leadership Team was tasked with updating current polity, including the definition of an Annual Conference agency, the process to become an agency, the process for dealing with conflicts with agencies, and the process for reviewing agency status if conflicts cannot be

Nominations invited

The Nominating Committee is seeking nominations for the 2018 Annual Conference ballot. For a list of positions and information on how to nominate, go to www.brethren.org/ac/nominations.

resolved. The Leadership Team’s proposal will be brought back to Annual Conference for consideration.

The Conference voted not to delay other items of business, as called for in “Patient Hope in Matters of Conscience,” but to receive the insights of the document. The Conference asked the Mission and Ministry Board in consultation with On Earth Peace and other experts to provide resources to better implement the 2008 Annual Conference resolution, “Urging Forbearance,” in the life of the church.

Postponed

At the end of the time allotted for business, three items were referred to the 2018 Annual Conference: “Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st Century,” “Brethren Values Investing,” and “Polity for Electing Brethren Benefit Trust Board Directors.” Two committees—the Creation Care Study Committee and the Vitality and Viability Study Committee—requested another year to complete their work. 



‘It gives you hope’

by Allie Dulabaum

The youth member of the Annual Conference volunteer news team—Allie Dulabaum—spent some of her time in Grand Rapids doing mini interviews of Conference-goers, asking why they attend Annual Conference and what they think is the best part.



Why do you come to Annual Conference?

“I come to support, first of all, Church of the Brethren ministries, and then to meet old and new friends. . . . I need to meet the people and greet the people and enjoy what they are doing and tell them what I am doing.”

Anet Satvedi, who has attended Annual Conferences since 1972



“The gathering is important because we don’t get to meet often, so when we come here, we see one another and we continue to share the same love Christ has for us with one another, and get ideas and get business going. It gives you hope that there’s a better tomorrow.

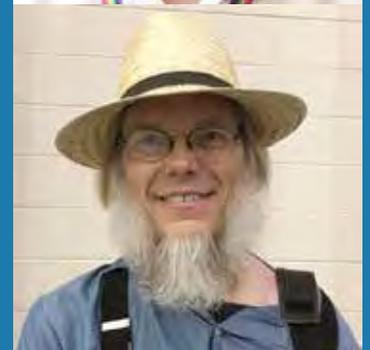
Founa Augustin Badet, who served on the Program and Arrangements Committee for the Conference

What is the best part of Annual Conference?

“Being able to come and share with others and to be able to connect with people that I haven’t seen for a while—or just being part of the business and watching the church in action.” —Beverly Petry

“The relationships, seeing people that you have a history with, but also then meeting new folks and making connections, new and old.” —Joel Kline

“Mainly to see old friends and make new ones.” —Tom Wagner



Worship



“Worship God alone. Take care of each other.”

—Carol A. Scheppard



“Their biggest problem in Corinth, their diversity, was also their greatest gift.”

—Donna Ritchey Martin



“If you’re about to quit ministry because of the pressures of this strange world, I’ve got news for you, . . . you can’t.”

—Jose Calleja Otero



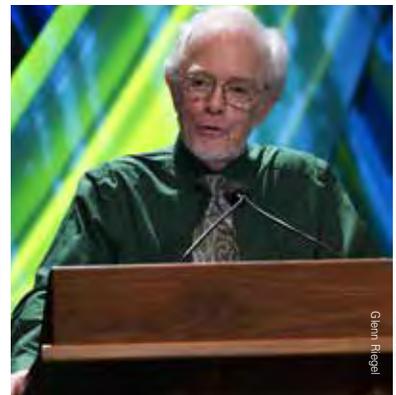
“Would you risk the comfort and security of the life you know . . . to just blindly follow God?”

—Matthew Fike



“Tell the world about the hope you have within you. . . . Tell the world about Jesus. Can I get a witness?”

—Michaela Alphonse



“As I look out over this Conference, I see old friends and new friends and well-loved irritants. . . . I would go to King Ahasuerus for you.”

—Bob Bowman, Bible study leader



Under the safety net in Grand Rapids

by Gary Benesh

I t was an out-of-nowhere impulse—I just had to spend the night on the streets with the homeless folks we had been seeing in Grand Rapids. Something seemed incongruent. A church group proclaiming the virtues of simple living was staying in expensive lodgings, while across the street were people sleeping in the park and along the river.

Actually, this compulsion was a work in progress dating back to my first Annual Conference in Wichita, Kan., many years ago. I went with others from the congregation I attended at the time. We were approached by a beggar, and one of our group lectured about how we could not give him money that we knew he would spend on alcohol. Not supporting someone in a destructive habit seemed right, but something inside me made a mental note: “Sounds right, feels wrong.”

A few years later, when I taught my first high school social studies class, I invited a guest speaker on alcoholism. He explained how for some alcoholics on the street, getting that next drink is a matter of life and death. Sudden withdrawal can cause DTs and death. I witnessed this the next year, when a lifelong alcoholic was put in a nursing home and experienced sudden withdrawal from alcohol. He almost died before doctors figured out what was going on.

The “don’t make eye contact” advice about walking near beggars and street people also seemed to make sense.

Looking them in the eye may indicate a willingness to be taken advantage of. If you give to one, where does it stop? But when I was at Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio, I wondered, “Why not stop and actually have a conversation with the person, and listen to their story?” Over that week, I met some of the most interesting people, and felt very comfortable talking to them.

In Grand Rapids this year, I walked around a gazebo-like shelter in a park, where three men were sitting. I issued a warm greeting as I walked by, and was almost on my way when the impulse hit. I just had to turn around and engage the men.

One man had a long beard, similar to the old-time Brethren type. I found out that he went by the name Waldo.

When he learned I was with a church conference, he told me one of the attendees of a church conference the previous week had lectured him about the evils of drinking.

I asked what he did when it got extremely cold. Could he go to a shelter? He said that occasionally he would, but preferred not to. He had a friend in a trailer park where he could “crash” in emergency situations. He usually slept on the sidewalk under the Interstate bridge.

A few years ago, he spent three months in jail for non-payment of traffic tickets. He did not complain as he got free

IT WAS THEN THAT I REALIZED MY LITTLE GAME WOULD NOT IN ANY WAY MAKE ME AT ONE WITH THEM. I KNEW THAT MY RULES ALLOWED ME TO DROP OUT OF THE GAME AT ANY POINT, AND RETURN TO MY MOTEL.

room and board. He figured it cost the town more to put him up for three months than the money he would have paid for the tickets, which of course he did not have.

I found he had been on disability. I struggle with giving disability to those who could possibly work. However, who would hire him? I asked myself. Would I, if I were a boss and had other good applicants?

At no point did he ask for money or food.

I departed after a while, but later that day dropped off hamburgers and fries for him and his friends. They were most gracious.

The next day, when I brought some more food for Waldo and his friends, I asked, “How would it be if I camped out with you tonight?” His answer caught me off guard. He did not answer directly but explained that a veteran who had heart trouble, and who was told by a doctor that he could die at any time, wanted to sleep in Waldo’s area. Waldo was trying to get rid of him out of fear that he would die there. I took this as a no, and spent the night at the motel.

Conversation the next evening got interesting. One of Waldo’s friends told me his favorite Bible verse was 2 Corinthians 5:17, and then quoted it perfectly. He also told me that his favorite book of the Bible was Job, and gave me a good summary of the book. He explained how his father had died suddenly when he was 16. He went through a time when he was mad at God. He then had to live with his mother, who was an alcoholic. He knew she loved him, but she could not care for him. After many years, he concluded that you can’t blame God for your trials. I asked him where he spent his nights, and he told me he went to the Trotter House. One of the service projects for Conferencegoers was at Mel Trotter Ministries.

That night, the compulsion set in again. “No is not an acceptable answer,” I heard. “You have to spend the night on the street.” I told my wife, and she gave her usual response: “Do what you think you have to do.” Interpretation: “I think it’s crazy, but I know you’re going to do it anyhow.”

Actually, I had no worry of being bothered by any of the street people. I departed with my game plan, pillows, a comforter, and a lawn chair. My wife said the lawn chair was cheating, but I replied that Waldo had all kinds of things on the cart he toted around. As it turns out, I didn’t use it anyhow.

I walked by the gazebo and people were already asleep

there, but no one who looked familiar. I hated to intrude. I went by the statue where many stayed, but those folk did not seem to be ready to settle in for the night. I decided to go along the river path, where my wife had seen some make-shift camp sites. There was no one there. Perhaps they just stayed there during the day and went to shelters at night. I finally decided to slip in with the gazebo group. I quietly claimed my space without stirring them.

It was then that I realized my little game would not in any way make me at one with them. I knew that my rules allowed me to drop out of the game at any point, and return to my motel. If I did make it through the night, I would have time to take a little nap and shower before returning to the “real” business of the church. It was a beautiful summer evening—no thunder storms, no freezing temperatures. Mine was simply a camping out venture that happened to include homeless people.

The concrete was indeed hard, and I have never been able to get a good night’s sleep on hard ground. However, I must have been quite tired and I did manage to get some intermittent sleep.

In the morning, I felt embarrassed at having imposed upon the group. They got up at around six. They went to a nearby park restroom. I started collecting my items and was ready to leave as they returned. My greeting was a simple, “The concrete is indeed hard, isn’t it?” They politely agreed, and I left.

On my last day in Grand Rapids, I had to hunt for Waldo. The park staff had fenced everything off for the evening fireworks display. I finally found Waldo under the bridge. I asked his plans for the day. He had to walk across town to pick up a few items, and then was going to find a spot in the park to listen to the music and watch the fireworks.

I brought Waldo one final meal, and had prayer with him. I told him that our Conference would be back in three years. He said he would be there.

I will remember him, because he was a big part of this Conference for me. However, for him I was simply another passerby—perhaps a welcome guest, perhaps merely an intrusion into the daily routine of life on the streets. ❧

Gary Benesh attended Annual Conference as a Standing Committee delegate representing Southeastern District. He is an ordained minister and pastor of Friendship Church of the Brethren in North Wilkesboro, N.C.



Nohemi Flores (left) and Cesia Salcedo.

A tale of two translators

by Jan Fischer Bachman

It started with an acquaintance.

“Some friends told the pastors Gonzalez about me, and they contacted me by telephone,” said Cesia Salcedo, speaking in Spanish. “We connected with a call and began to speak. . . . The pastors had a dinner, where we ate everything down to the tiniest bones of the chickens!” Salcedo laughed. “It was a delicious meal. The pastor got out his guitar and we started singing. When he heard me sing, he said, ‘That woman has a voice-and-a-half!’ I began going to the church [Iglesia Renacer in Floyd, Va.] that Sunday and still do to this day.”

“We got to know brother Gilbert Romero,” explained Nohemi Flores, in an interview done in Spanish, “and he invited us to come to an event they were doing, with the district executive. At the time, I was in high school and graduating. We give thanks to God that we found the Church of the Brethren.”

Both women served as translators at Annual Conference this year, widening the Church of the Brethren welcome by making business and worship accessible to Spanish speakers.

Cesia Salcedo was born in Panama, one of 43 million immigrants living in the US as of 2015. While that seems like a large number, immigrants today make up about the same percentage (13.5 percent) as in 1900 (13.6 percent).

Nohemi Flores was born in the US to parents from Bolivia and Mexico, “a good mix,” she says. Not an immigrant, she is one of 56.6 million Hispanics in the US (as of July 2015), of whom 65 percent are native-born Americans, 60 percent are 33 years old or younger, and over two-thirds say they speak only English at home or speak it “very well.” Hispanics make up almost 18 percent of the US total population, up from 4.5 percent in 1970.

Around the world, Christianity has shifted from being primarily found in Europe (70 percent of all Christians in 1900) to flourishing in many places, with 25 percent in Latin America, 24 percent in Africa, 23 percent in Europe, and 16 percent in Asia in 2016. The same trend may be seen in the fact that Nigerian Brethren (members of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, or EYN) far outnumber the membership of the Church of the Brethren in the US and Puerto Rico.

Hispanic, Latino, or Chicano?

First quantified in the 1970 US census, “Hispanic” refers to someone with roots in a Spanish-speaking country.

“Latino” or “Latina” refer to people from Latin American countries. A woman from Brazil is Latina but not Hispanic, since Brazilians speak Portuguese. (In Spanish, “o” endings are masculine and “a” endings are feminine.)

Hispanic or Latino people can be any race.

“Chicano” or “Chicana” refers to a person of Mexican ancestry living in the United States.

These terms carry heavy baggage, both positive and negative, so notice—or ask—people’s preferences.



“THE UNDERSTANDING, THE LOVE,” SAID SALCEDO. “WE HISPANICS WORSHIP GOD *VIVAMENTE*. IN THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN, THEY GAVE US THE CHANCE TO PRAISE GOD THAT WAY—*VIVAMENTE!*”

Within the US, the Church of the Brethren does not maintain statistics on the race or ethnic background of members—or even primary languages used by congregations. In a US denomination that does keep track of these figures, the Southern Baptist Convention, African-American, Latino, and Asian congregations increased from 5 percent of the total in 1990 to 20 percent in 2012.

“Many of our recent church plants have Spanish-language worship services,” says Gimbiya Kettering, director of Intercultural Ministries for the Church of the Brethren, “and we are seeing more individuals who identify as Latino/Latina joining the denomination around the country.”

What makes the Church of the Brethren appealing?

“The understanding, the love,” said Salcedo. “We Hispanics worship God *vivamente*. In the Church of the Brethren, they gave us the chance to praise God that way—*vivamente!* Every time someone visits, they say, ‘The music is really loud!’ But they welcomed us, all.”

Vivamente does not have an exact English translation. It means “in a lively manner,” but also vividly, acutely, deeply, intensely. It compares to loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength—not to mention, with enthusiastic singing!

While their current involvement came from an acquaintance, an invitation, and a welcome, both women traced the hand of God in their involvement in the church.

“My mother has been a pastor in Panama for many years and my grandfather was a church planter, too,” Salcedo said. “I know what it is to work hard in ministry, to leave practically everything, and sometimes find oneself without anything, but to continue on because of the love God has for us and the loving kindness and the work that he gives us.”

Salcedo sings at church, works in Christian education and children’s ministry, serves as a deacon, preaches when the pastors are away, and is preparing for a pastorate.

“My mother, above all, taught me to serve—to serve God, and also to serve people. This is something that the

brothers and sisters in the Church of the Brethren value greatly,” she said.

Flores’ family started out in the Brethren Church, where they learned about footwashing when she was just a baby. The congregation’s pastor was called to work elsewhere, so the church closed and the members scattered. Her family went to a Baptist church, a Pentecostal church, and a Church of the Christ before they came to the Church of the Brethren. She vividly remembers the words of then-district executive Bryan Boyer: “He asked, ‘How do you continue on in your church even when problems arise?’ and he said that we should continue even though it costs us, or even when there are problems.”

Her parents, David and Rita Flores, certainly have done that as pastors of Cristo de Sion Church of the Brethren in Pomona, Calif., since 2007. They have continued their theological education through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. This year, with their congregation they became the first students to enter the new Spanish-language track of the Education for a Shared Ministry (EFSM) program, from which they hope to graduate in 2018.

Flores has served as a translator for three different Annual Conferences. Salcedo has translated for everything from committee meetings to district events—and now, for the first time, Annual Conference. She served as the emcee of the Hispanic luncheon at this year’s Conference, with warmth and humor presenting upcoming programs and encouraging Spanish speakers to get involved and stay connected within the denomination.

Coming from the two coasts, Flores and Salcedo had to learn to coordinate translation work with each other. Salcedo explained, “She hadn’t worked with a person like me and I hadn’t worked with a person like her. So the two of us are learning from each other. We are growing; she guides me, I guide her.”

“Thank God for all of this!” Salcedo said. “I feel like I’ve grown a lot in a few days. I’m very, very happy.”

“There is nothing difficult when God is there,” Flores concluded. 

Jan Fischer Bachman is MESSENGER web editor. She has lived and worked in Mexico and the Dominican Republic.



The Old Main cupola

Story and photos by Nevin Dulabaum



I am passionate about Brethren history, which is why I wanted to make it to the cupola of the Old Main building on the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., before the closing worship service on April 30.

I first learned of the special place the cupola holds in Brethren history in the late 1990s, when I was on campus and invited to take an excursion up to what—in reality—is Old Main’s sixth floor.

Take the elevator up to the fourth floor. Walk down the hall between a meeting room and some small apartments. Arrive at one of two attic doors that are evident from their outline in the ceiling, one on each end of the hallway. Pull down the stairs, climb up, turn on the light, and the unfin-



I IMAGINED THE PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN IN THIS SPOT BECAUSE OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO SERVICE, MAKING THEIR WAY TO THE CUPOLA TO ENJOY THE VIEW, AND LEAVING THEIR SIGNATURES ON THE WALL.

ished, dusty, dirty attic is revealed. There is a series of planks to follow to the cupola. Step over a few pipes, and a bend here and there in the walkway. Don't touch anything or the dust will stick to your hands and clothes. Make it to the cupola staircase, walk up—and history unfolds.

Three sides of the cupola are wood walls, and on those walls is graffiti, signatures of people who have made the trek up to the cupola, dating to the 1920s. Some signatures obviously predate the ownership of the building by the Church of the Brethren. The signatures of Brethren are relatively obvious because many are accompanied by the signers' Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) orientation unit number. For more than six decades, some BVS orientation units were held at the Brethren Service Center. One win-

dow frame features a signature from the 85th BVS unit, and one from the 307th BVS unit, a time span from October 1969 to October 2014.

On this last visit to the cupola, I gazed over the various signatures. I imagined the people who had been in this spot because of their commitment to service, making their way to the cupola to enjoy the view, and leaving their signatures on the wall.

As I left the cupola, I realized I would regret not taking one last action. I went back down to the fourth floor, found a pen, and returned to the cupola to add my name among all of the others. 

Nevin Dulabaum is president of Brethren Benefit Trust.



Walking on water

by Bob Bowman

Why did Peter jump out of the boat?

He jumped out of the boat just because Jesus asked him to. You can read the story in Matthew 14.

Peter would always do things like that. He was impulsive. He was also blustery, confident, energetic, and in-your-face. But he had a heart of gold. In fact, we like him better for his traits. He was always eager to jump forward and try something. And he often fell flat on his face.

Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter said he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. That was fine, but, when Jesus began to explain the nature of his messianic mission, Peter tried to talk him out of it so forcefully that Jesus compared him to Satan. At that last supper, Jesus said he would be betrayed. Peter immediately blurted out that he would never do such a thing; he would die first. But that same night, three times he denied ever knowing Jesus. Later, when Jesus asked him to pray with him before the arrest, Peter promptly fell asleep and left Jesus to pray alone.

Yes, Peter would fall flat on his

face. But when he fell, he always fell in the front line. Sure, he was blustery, but he was willing. When Jesus said, “Come,” Peter jumped right overboard completely ignoring the fathoms of water beneath his feet. It was just like the cartoon coyote running off a cliff and not falling until he suddenly looks down and sees he is running on thin air. Peter looked down and, quite naturally, started to sink.

But Peter would do something like that. If Jesus said, “Jump,” Peter would not hesitate to jump. On the Sea of Galilee, Jesus said, “Come,” and Peter went, not counting the cost.

I’m painfully aware that I am no Peter. I would not have been the first one out of the boat. I’d want to see if someone else would try it first. If I were to identify myself with a disciple, it probably would be with someone like Bartholomew or Thaddaeus.

You will notice that they never jumped out of a boat to try walking on water. In fact, you can search the Gospels all you want and never find anything memorable about them. They weren’t flashy. They never asked impertinent questions, as did

James and John. They didn’t fetch Greeks to meet Jesus like Philip and Andrew. They never made wild promises like Peter. Bartholomew and Thaddaeus were like me. But, despite the apparent timidity, they were part of the Twelve. They stayed with Jesus.

I read Mark 10:32: “They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.” When I read this, I understand it. They were afraid, but they still followed. I have committed myself to following Jesus, but I am not Peter. I am aware of the voice of Jesus saying, “Come!” But I’m also aware that it is not entirely safe to walk on water.

Jesus has asked us to follow him. I believe he lived a life of utter truthfulness and unlimited love. I believe he lived a life of simplicity, compassion, and peace. I believe he completely renounced violence, pride, and security. And I believe he wants me to follow him. But I also believe that it is not entirely safe.

In Philippians 2:3-8, Paul urges us to “have this mind among yourselves which

EVEN IF IT WERE IMPOSSIBLE TO WALK ON WATER, WHEN JESUS CALLED, PETER WOULD GET OUT OF THE BOAT AND TRY.

you have in Christ Jesus.” And Paul describes that “mind of Jesus” by saying that Jesus “emptied himself” and that he “took the form of a servant.” “He humbled himself,” says Paul. But the sad truth is if you followed that advice when filling out applications for a position, or going to a job interview, then you’re just walking on water! If your job is in sales, you will lose the sale.

Do the qualities of humility, simplicity, and nonconformity work in our world? Is it not a paradox to be successful in life and also to be an imitator of Jesus?

When Jesus asks me to be a peace-

maker, or feed the hungry, or welcome the stranger, sometimes he is asking me to walk on water. When Jesus asks me to stand up for values that are in conflict with our culture, it’s like walking on water.

One thing I believe is that I cannot follow Jesus on those more radical qualities of his life. Or, more accurately, I cannot follow alone. I desperately need to walk side by side with other Christians who are seeking to walk the way of Jesus on the roads of this world.

Peter did not hesitate when Jesus called him. Even if it were impossible

to walk on water, when Jesus called, Peter would get out of the boat and try. He was unsuccessful, of course. He started to sink and he would certainly have drowned if Jesus had not reached out his hand and held him.

I wonder if, perhaps, there was one way in which Peter could have walked firmly all the way to the side of Jesus, water or no water. That is if the rest of us in that boat had gotten out and walked with him. 

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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Thinking carefully about adoption

must confess that I was wary of a book on how the Christian concept of adoption “speaks powerfully to our broken world.” I have read too many books and articles on the complicated realities of adoption, and how sometimes Christians are part of the problem.

But Kelley Nikondeha’s theologically rich book quickly won me over. Nikondeha writes as an adoptee, the wife of a Burundian man, and the mother of two adopted Burundian children. Her family’s bicultural and biracial identity gives her an expansive view, and her nuanced outlook is free of easy answers and sentimentality. She effortlessly braids together her own experience, the adoption stories she finds in the biblical narrative, and a theology that is both poetic and practical.



WENDY MCFADDEN

The stories of her two children are different: Her son, Justin, was relinquished by his birth mother for unknown reasons. The birth parents of her daughter, Emily, died of AIDS—her mother in childbirth and her father shortly after. Perhaps because of her own experience with adoption, Nikondeha is able to sit quietly with each of them in their sudden moments of grief and let them come up with their own questions and words.

She acknowledges moments when she doesn’t have any words of her own. After answering her daughter’s question about the crucifixion of Jesus, she discovers she has no answer when Emily asks why God didn’t resurrect her mother.

When turning to the biblical text, Nikondeha does cite the well-known adoption passages from Galatians and Romans, but notes that our contemporary understanding of adoption is an anachronism. The groups hearing those words for the first time would have been familiar with the Roman concept of adoption—the securing of heirs for inheritance and lineage, especially by emperors. What’s significant for them and for us is that Paul stretches the adoption metaphor “beyond

power and politics to point to family connection.”

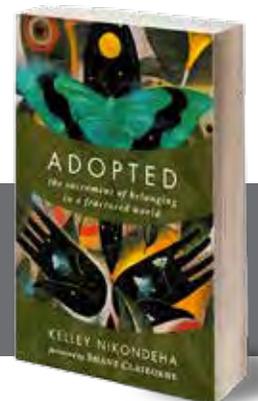
The author spends more time dwelling in the narrative parts of the Bible: stories of Jochebed, the relinquishing mother of Moses; Pharaoh’s daughter, adoptive mother; Ruth and Naomi; and Joseph, adoptive father of Jesus. For her, Jesus is the Adopted One, and the Father is the Relinquishing One. Furthermore, the relationship embodied in the Trinity is itself an image of reciprocity and mutual adoption.

Nikondeha’s exploration of theological concepts such as redemption are multilayered and thoughtful, unlike some writers whose too-easy references can border on the messianic. She also raises the justice issues surrounding adoption—recognizing, for example, that “from Jochebed to my own mother, injustice corners many women and pushes them to let go of their children.” Adoption is “repair work,” she points out, and “we must care about preventing any injustice this side of heaven that creates the need” for this repair work.

“Repair” and “redeem” are two of the chapter titles, all of which are laden with meaning for those who have experienced adoption. For example, almost any adopted person can imagine what will be in a chapter titled “Return.” The author writes about more than the longing for a birth narrative, however. She deftly weaves together religious repatriation, the Holocaust and the Nakba (the displacement of Palestinians), American slavery, and Isaiah’s dream of God’s holy mountain.

Nikondeha’s book isn’t a how-to on adoption. In fact, she says the typical starting question of “Should we adopt?” is not scripturally informed. “In the biblical narratives, from Moses to Ruth, the question we see asked is different: How might we best contribute to God’s shalom initiative?”

Her lyrical book is a gift to people who are adopted, people who have adopted, and all Christians who want to think more carefully about the meaning of adoption and the nature of God. 



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World*. **Author:** Kelley Nikondeha.

Publisher: Eerdmans. **Publication date:** August 2017. Available from Brethren Press.

Mission and Ministry Board approves 2018 budget

The Mission and Ministry Board approved a \$5,192,000 budget parameter for the denomination's Core Ministries in 2018, the same as the current 2017 budget. In pre-Annual Conference meetings in Grand Rapids, Mich., the board also heard a report on the sale of the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., among other business.

Giving from congregations and individuals is projected to provide \$2,585,000 toward the Core Ministries budget in 2018. A quasi-endowment created with a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the Brethren Service Center upper campus will provide up to \$512,000. The rest of the support for the budget is projected to come from draws on savings and other funds, such as bequests.

In March, the board had allocated percentages of the anticipated property sale to several funds. A designated fund for upkeep of the historic Brethren property at Germantown, Pa.—where the denomination owns the church, parsonage, and cemetery—receives \$100,000 to help support major work at this site. Thirty percent of the remainder of the sale proceeds, totaling \$1,584,809, is being put into a new Brethren Faith in Action Fund. Seventy percent, or \$3,692,697, is going into the quasi-endowment fund. The lower campus of the property in New Windsor continues as the Brethren Service Center.

In other business

The board gave staff permission to explore hiring a consulting firm to conduct a feasibility study to determine if and how to

launch a major fundraising effort.

Two congregations received citations from the Disabilities Ministry, and director Debbie Eisenbise welcomed them to the Open Roof Fellowship: Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren and York Center Church of the Brethren, both in Illinois and Wisconsin District.

Don and Belita Mitchell received the Revelation 7:9 Award from the Intercultural Ministry, in recognition of their time, passion, and energy to make the Church of the

Brethren an intercultural church. Most recently, they have offered intercultural leadership in Atlantic Northeast District.

International guests were introduced from Church of the Brethren bodies in the Great Lakes region of Africa, Haiti, India, Nigeria, Spain, and the Dominican Republic.

The board thanked three members who completed their terms of service: Don Fitzkee, who has been serving as chair, J. Trent Smith, and Donita Keister.

In a reorganization meeting, the board chose new members for its executive committee: Carl Fike, Jonathan Prater, and Dennis Webb. They will serve with chair Connie Burk Davis and chair-elect Patrick Starkey.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

Raising awareness on Capitol Hill for the crisis in Nigeria

One week after attending Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich., on July 10 leaders of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) attended meetings in Washington, D.C., organized by the Office of Public Witness.

Meetings included conversations with the US Institute of Peace, US Department of State, and 21st Century

Wilberforce, a partner in work on Nigeria focusing on international religious freedom. EYN members were able to share extensively on their experiences during the years of crisis in their country, and advocate for an appropriate response from US leaders.

The Office of Public Witness along with the Nigeria Working Group organized a briefing for policy makers and

their staff, to provide knowledge on local solutions, US policy, and interfaith organizing for Nigeria. A variety of congressional offices attended, representing 12 House representatives and 5 Senate offices, along with humanitarian and advocacy groups.

Panelists included Roy Winter, associate executive director of Global Mission and Service and Brethren Disaster Ministries, and speakers from Search for Common Ground, Oxfam International, and Mennonite Central Committee. The standing-room-only briefing, held in a room in the Russell Senate Building intended for 40 people, was attended by at least 64.



Courtesy of Office of Public Witness

Emergency Disaster Fund supports work in S. Sudan, DRC, S. Carolina

Brethren Disaster Ministries has directed grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to support rebuilding following flooding around Columbia, S.C., the mission in South Sudan, and the Shalom Ministry for Reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

South Carolina: An allocation of \$45,000 supports Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding near Columbia, following flooding in October 2015. Brethren Disaster Ministries first worked in the area through a partnership with the United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as part of the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative. That site closed in October 2016. To continue the work, a Brethren Disaster Ministries project opened in the same area at the beginning of October 2016. Brethren Disaster Ministries has been awarded \$175,000 in grant money from United Way of the Midlands for construction materials needed for the rebuilding work. The project is anticipated to be completed by the fall.

South Sudan: Civil war has forced more than 3 million people to flee their homes, nearly 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, and a famine was declared in February in parts of the country, affecting mostly internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities. A grant of \$10,000 will provide \$5,000 to assist the Ifoti community with emergency food and supplies, and \$5,000 for initial repairs and replacement of supplies at the Church of the Brethren Peace Center.

Democratic Republic of Congo: A grant of \$5,000 assists families displaced by violence, working with Shalom Ministry for Reconciliation and Development. Increased



armed conflict was reported in the eastern DRC in early July. The ministry is assisting a growing number of displaced families, and this initial grant will assist in providing emergency food and household supplies to displaced families from North Kivu villages. Additional grants to support a larger response are anticipated.

For more about the Emergency Disaster Fund go to www.brethren.org/edf.

CDS serves in New York, California

Children's Disaster Services volunteers have responded following flooding in New York state and wildfires in California. In New York, CDS volunteers carried out a two-day deployment in response to flooding in the Utica area. CDS provided three volunteers, who assisted a total of seven children. In California, the American Red Cross asked CDS to work in shelters set up for wildfire evacuees close to Mariposa. The initial request was for teams to support 6 shelters with a population of 450 people. For more about CDS go to www.brethren.org/cds.



Personnel notes

Haley Steinhilber of Fort Wayne, Ind., is the 2017-18 intern in the Brethren Historical Library and Archives at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. She graduated in January from Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind., with a bachelor's degree in history and a minor in French. Previously, she worked at the Fort Wayne History Center.

Victoria (Tori) Bateman of Indian Creek Church of the Brethren in

Harleysville, Pa., has joined the Office of Public Witness as a Policy and Peacebuilding associate through Brethren Volunteer Service. She graduated from Messiah College with a degree in Politics and International Relations in December 2016.

Six interns served in Ministry Summer Service this year: **Brooks Eisenbise** of Kalamazoo, Mich., served at Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the

Brethren; **Laura Hay** of Modesto, Calif., served at Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren; **Cassie Imhoff** of Sterling, Ohio, served at Camp Mardela near Denton, Md.; **Nolan McBride** of Elkhart, Ind., served at Camp Mack near Milford, Ind.; **Monica McFadden** of Elgin, Ill., served at the Office of Public Witness; **Kaylie Penner** of Huntingdon, Pa., served at Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.



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On Earth Peace does good work

As I leave Annual Conference 2017, I wonder about the delegate vote concerning including On Earth Peace as an agency of the Church of the Brethren. I wonder if those who opposed know about all the good work that On Earth Peace is doing?

In this world of violence, to the extreme, we need to hear the teachings of Jesus as never before—teachings which our beloved Church of the Brethren is founded on. I think Jesus is weeping as he did as he looked over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), and would say to our world and to our church: “Oh that you would know the things that would make for peace.”

On Earth Peace is asking us to “Risk Hope” and embrace the 1986 Church of the Brethren statement, “We declare our hope is in making the connection between God as revealed in Jesus

Christ and the problems that trouble our age.”

On Earth Peace is working with youth and adults, camps, workshops, and retreats. Some programs include Kingian Nonviolence, Peace Day, Agape-Satyagraha Training, the Stop Recruiting Kids Campaign, and Racial Justice organizing. Their Ministry of Reconciliation program inspires and empowers and equips people to engage in conflict faithfully and healthily, for example through Matthew 18 workshops.

One program that is training youth in skills for nonviolent interpersonal conflict transformation and nonviolent social change is Agape-Satyagraha Training. Youth ages 11-18 go through five levels of skill training: understanding conflict escalation, anger management, de-escalating conflict, negotiation and mediation, and community social change. How desperately all these skills are needed today! So that

no more youth are shot, no more people are killed in road rage, there are no more deaths because anger has escalated out of control.

If we take the teachings of Jesus seriously, we will not allow On Earth Peace to dangle on a weak thread as an agency of the church, but we will fully support this organization with our prayers and monies, and receive their invitation to contact them for information about their multi-faceted work in peacemaking.

I quote our moderator Carol Scheppard: “Some of it will be hard work, but I hope we listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit for a way forward that might not be what we thought going in. The last thing we want to happen is to have the Jesus train”—and I would add peace train—“leave the station with all of us on the platform bickering.”

Sarah Markey
York, Pa.

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Who is a heretic?

I enjoy reading MESSENGER. A reflection by Galen Miller in the June issue referred to a book written by John Shelby Spong. It reminded me of something I wrote in 1991, when one of my jobs as a librarian was processing the new books, labeling and putting covers on them.

I processed a new book entitled *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* by Bishop John Spong. I took it home and read it. So much of it agreed with what I had come to believe. When I put it on the shelf so others could read this wonderful book, one of the town's leading pastors was looking for something new to read. I suggested the book I was holding. He said, quite firmly, "He's a heretic," and turned around and walked away.

Wondering what a heretic is, I looked it up. Webster says that a heretic

is a church member who holds beliefs opposed to the official church doctrine.

I've heard it said many times, the Church of the Brethren has no creed. We take the New Testament as our guide. So that set my mind at rest about being a heretic. However, I keep my thoughts mostly to myself. I know that Jesus has always been my guiding light.

Ellen Boos
Plymouth, Ind.

Enthusiastic about the church

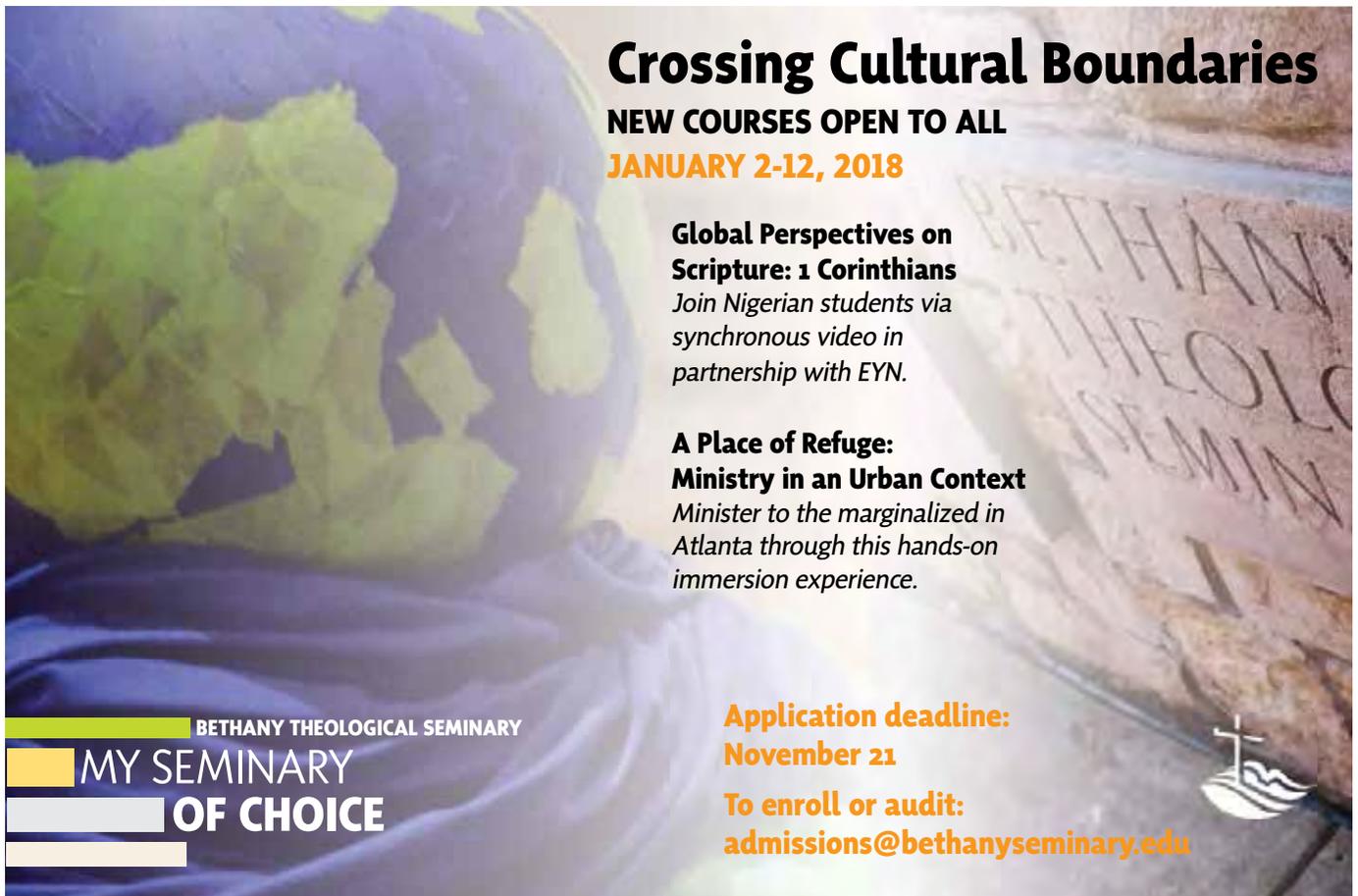
As we approached Annual Conference, I couldn't help but be inspired and hopeful for the future. I am absolutely giddy when Conference time comes around (well, relatively). While not everyone shares my enthusiasm for the state of the Church of the Brethren, I believe God is doing something powerful in our midst!

Unfortunately, too many people

approach Conference as a battle of us vs. them. This, however, is not the mindset we need to do the work of the church. I believe that positive change can only come when we put aside our differences and instead celebrate our commonalities.

This is how it is for our congregation, indeed, in our district. We celebrate our commonalities and set aside our differences for the sake of the larger body and in fact, for Christ, who is the head. This is evident at summer camp and at district conference. We get together and worship God in whatever setting we find ourselves.

God loves us all! That is one thing we can all agree on. This is the hope that I take with me to Annual Conference, and it is my hope that all will catch this mind-boggling concept. Let God take control of who you love and reach out to. When we see the world the way that Christ does, we will



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"Happy are people who show mercy,
because they will receive mercy"
(Matthew 5:7, CEB).

Paul Shaver
Grundy Center, Iowa

Each person must choose

Thank you for Diane Mason's "The Brethren in World War I." She deals with the fundamental subject of war, on which each person must make a choice. I remember John Howard Yoder's book *What Would You Do?* and wonder if it is acceptable to have different answers at different times.

In the US, there seems to be widespread acceptance of an unconditional patriotism and uncritical support for military action. Yet if asked, many of the most outspoken supporters were not in the military nor did they even attempt to enlist.

Do followers of Jesus/Yeshua regard him as an example, a teacher, or savior—or all three? This ultimately goes to one's core values, and what core values one shares with others. And was Jesus always nonresistant? Was it consistent with nonresistance, when he overturned the tables and seats in the Temple area? Or was his response only to make a point, as in a parable? But does that make the response acceptable?

Charles Thomas
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Artful Bible study

Thank you for providing such excellent resources in MESSENGER and on the Church of the Brethren website, and in Newline. I have particularly appreciated the Bible studies of Bob Bowman who, in full disclosure, is my father.

I especially appreciate the artful way he shares this biblical wisdom without sinking to shaming those whose oar is pulling from the other side of the boat—a tool too quickly employed in hyper-politicized, zero-sum worldviews. Not only does his style allow personal and corporate dignity for those willing to hear a

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LETTERS

soul-stretching invitation, it also recognizes our unity of purpose beyond superficial name-calling.

The July/August Bible study again offered insight for those with ears to hear. Along with traditional interpretations of Jacob's awakening cry, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I, I did not know it," Bowman suggested that the sleep from which Jacob awakened may have been more than physical.

Then he acknowledged our avoidance of such awakenings, warning, "If we should become aware [awake], we might find God in more places than we assume." And with this he opened the door to a spiritual inventory that promises more light than heat in our discussions, and more devotion than debate within our discernment. Would that we heed such a wake-up call.

There are other avenues to explore in the Jacob story, of course. We could justifiably chastise ourselves for systems of injustice that will not provide our homeless sisters and brothers even a stone for a pillow, for example. But much of life is learning to balance the count and the impact of our words.

Please continue to provide such outstanding pastoral voices from within our midst, who can not only teach us biblical substance but also model a familial style.

Chris Bowman
Manassas, Va.

CLASSIFIEDS

We at Brethren Press would like to thank all the volunteers who helped us out at Annual Conference. To all of you who helped, from unloading the books to helping customers, to tearing it all down at the end, we are grateful for and humbled by your generosity. Thanks to each and every one of the Brethren Press bookstore volunteers.

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/muted-voices or email questions abolton@cofchrist.org

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

Bear Creek, Accident, Md.: Jacob Rush, Morgan Rush, Andy Schmidt, Lori Schmidt
Bedford, Pa.: Susan Martin
Bremen, Ind.: Flora Fugate, Matthew Kuhns, Emily Yoder
Chambersburg, Pa.: Mackenzie Miller, Brennan Murray, Luke Presco, Courtney Proulx, Madison Proulx
Ephrata, Pa.: Connie Ditzler, Emily Ditzler, Mark Ditzler, Amy Martin, Reid Martin, Brian Messler, Curt Rathman, Jennifer Rathman, Peg Schannauer
Faith Community, New Oxford, Pa.: Marjorie Lauver, Dorothy Snead, Roman Strausbaugh, Kim Witkovsky, Jan Zimmerman
Freeport, Ill.: Dave Hartog, Jennifer Omarrah
Gettysburg, Pa.: Jordyn Browning, Gerald Fluke, Caden Rothaupt
Green Hill, Salem, Va.: Richard Camper, Sylvia Camper
Harrisburg, First, Pa.: Kevin Frysinger, Mary Etta Herrington, Pauline Mehaffie Martinez, Oluremi Senake, Karmah Tokyo, Aaron White
Lititz, Pa.: Courtney Richie, David Richie, Jean Taylor, Tom Taylor
Manassas, Va.: Clark Cox, Deanna Gage, Elise

Gage, Jessica Gage, Tim Gage
Maple Grove, Ashland, Ohio: Dwaine Clinker, Roger Stroup, Sue Stroup, Emily Stutzman
McPherson, Kan.: Hannah Kirchner, Beth Versaw, Scott Versaw
Mohler, Ephrata, Pa.: John Grote, Kenneth Martin, Andy Newhall, Kim Newhall
Mount Hermon, Bassett, Va.: Kelly Azzara, Amber Scott
Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va.: Debi Fitzgerald, John Kiser, Mildred Kiser, Debbie Wells
Nokesville, Va.: Katlyn Keesler
Oakton, Vienna, Va.: Hannah Seidel
Palmyra, Pa.: Jamie Walmer
Pound River, Clintwood, Va.: Anthony Edwards, Victoria Edwards, Madison O'Quinn, Isaiah Romans, Adrianna Roth, Sandi Turner
Sipesville, Pa.: Carol Fisher, Mae Jean Kimmel, Alice Mangus, John Mangus, Linda McVicker, Neil McVicker
Somerset, Pa.: Calvin Hoover, Cindy Hoover
Waynesboro, Pa.: Lori Kennell, Joy Shatzer

Wedding anniversaries

Anstine, Harold and Mable, Hartville, Ohio, 70
Bittinger, Emmert and Esther, Bridgewater, Va., 70
Bollinger, Glenn and Edna, Ephrata, Pa., 55
Bucher, Wilbur and Annette, Lancaster, Pa., 69
Bunch, John and Zemora, Muncie, Ind., 60
Clay, Roger and Patty, Hartville, Ohio, 60
Cline, Bill and Mary, Waynesboro, Va., 67
Coleman, Edward and Doris, Orlando, Fla., 68
Gingrich, Samuel and Mildred, Palmyra, Pa., 66
Good, Monroe and Ada, Lancaster, Pa., 72
Hamer, John and Esther, North Manchester, Ind., 65
Heck, Jim and Jeanne, Lancaster, Pa., 55
Herr, John and Theresa, Lancaster, Pa., 67
Kline, Ronald and Suzanne, Lancaster, Pa., 60
Lanning, Jerry and Carol, Bremen, Ind., 50
Lautzenhiser, Glenn and Glennis, Hartville, Ohio, 65
Layman, Rodney and Mary Catherine, Fincastle, Va., 50
Loving, Burl and Marie, Garden City, Kan., 70
Markley, Leland and Deanna, Goshen, Ind., 70
Martin, John and Audrey, Lancaster, Pa., 55
Miller, Lowell and Peggy, Bridgewater, Va., 70
Miller, Myron and Sandy, Elkhart, Ind., 55
Moody, Howard and Francine, Carlisle, Pa., 50
Mostoller, Richard and Janet, Hollsopple, Pa., 55
Mueller, Harold and Romy, Modesto, Calif., 60
Nantz, John and Joyce, Harrisburg, Pa., 60
Nicodemus, Ron and Jan, Osceola, Ind., 55
Nolt, David and Ruth, Stevens, Pa., 50
Phillippy, R. Curtis and Fern, Rehrersburg, Pa., 65
Robertson, Jesse and Wilma, Bridgewater, Va., 70
Rohr, Robert and Fern, Staunton, Va., 71
Rose, Carole and Clair, Boswell, Pa., 55
Saylor, Sterling and Bertha, Westminster, Md., 50
Schechter, Joseph and Ferne, La Verne, Calif., 60

Senft, Merle and Lorraine, York, Pa., 60
Shaffer, John and Patsy, Jerome, Pa., 60
Shoemaker, Don and Norma, Staunton, Va., 65
Simmons, Vernon and Cleo, Staunton, Va., 71
Smith, Phillip and Leslie, Palmyra, Pa., 50
Smoker, Earl and Vera, Ephrata, Pa., 67
Snyder, Robert and Rita, Uniontown, Ohio, 55
Starkey, Duward and Helen, Roanoke, Va., 55
Wampler, Fred and Dorris, Bridgewater, Va., 70
Weisel, Ronald and Esther, Hartville, Ohio, 55
Winegard, Shirdon and Edith, Roanoke, Va., 60
Zimmerman, Harvey and Mae, Bethel, Pa., 65
Zimmerman, Roy and Kathryn, Lancaster, Pa., 60

Deaths

Bailey, Alice Virginia, 79, Roanoke, Va., March 8
Bailey, Helen, 92, Palmyra, Pa., Aug. 1, 2016
Barb, Ruby, 95, Palmyra, Pa., July 7, 2016
Barts, Thelma June Stuntz, 96, Bremen, Ind., March 26
Berg, Joseph, 72, Adel, Iowa, May 29
Bhagat, Shantilal, 93, La Verne, Calif., July 7
Bowers, Alfred, 96, Woodstock, Va., July 11
Bucher, Paul, 87, Palmyra, Pa., Sept. 4, 2016
Bucher, Pauline Myers, 90, Palmyra, Pa., April 20
Buck, Jalene King, 85, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 26
Carper, Maggie A. Myer, 97, Lancaster, Pa., May 31
Chrispyn, Larry Allen, 69, San Pablo, Calif., Feb. 19
Cotter, Nena Sue, 34, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 25
DePue, Donald Wayne, 91, Goshen, Ind., Dec. 15

DiMatteo, Athalene, 94, Palmyra, Pa., May 2
Donahay, Esther A., 96, McVeytown, Pa., June 11, 2016
Dunkin, Mary Jane, 94, New Oxford, Pa., June 2
Earhart, Larry D., 88, Lancaster, Pa., May 4
Eisenbise, Janet Jean, 71, Harrisburg, Pa., June 24
Fehring, Martha Irene, 82, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 18
Fritz, Dorothy Walker, 80, Westminster, Md., Jan. 18
Garber, Sue, 79, Manheim, Pa., Feb. 23
Gardner, Orville Leo, 89, Indianapolis, Ind., July 1, 2016
Getz, John, 89, Charlottesville, Va., July 8
Glick-Rieman, Beth, 94, Ellsworth, Maine, May 13
Griffin, Virginia Louise, 85, New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 18
Groff, Harold, Jr., 77, Denver, Pa., April 13
Harvey, Nancy, 55, La Porte City, Iowa, July 8
Harvey, Phyllis Woodbridge, 95, Modesto, Calif., May 19
Hemminger, Mary Cathaleen Rouch, 92, Bremen, Ind., April 26
Hess, John R., 87, Lititz, Pa., May 16
Hess, Melvin B., 69, East Petersburg, Pa., May 25
Hoch, Harold L., 84, Harrisburg, Pa., June 2
Holshouser, Mitchell Wayne, 55, Chesterfield, Va., April 28
Joseph, Linda Lou Watterson, 71, Onekama, Mich., April 10
Kauffman, Fredrick G., 93, Mattawana, Pa., July 18, 2016
Keltner, Margaret Hartsock, 92, Strafford, Mo., June 28
Kline, Harvey S., 96, New Oxford, Pa., June 22
Krahn, Richard, 66, Harrisburg, Pa., June 17
Layman, Marie Webb, 105, Roanoke, Va., April 11

Lease, Gareth Burall, 89, Walkersville, Md., Jan. 27
Lichty, H. Maurice, 100, Nebraska City, Neb., May 30
Light, Florence, 97, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 6
Lutz, Ivan R., 88, Lititz, Pa., May 22
Magers, Eleanora E., 86, Goshen, Ind., May 18
Markey, Marian Schaub, 90, Harrisburg, Pa., June 8
Markey, Melvin G., 84, York, Pa., March 14, 2016
Martin, Robert, Sr., 79, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 3
McKinney, Raymond, 85, Hampstead, Md., May 17
Messinger, Susan, 82, York, Pa., March 9
Miller, Grace A. Goss, 82, Mattawana, Pa., March 14
Miller, Preston Joseph, 78, Burlington, W.Va., June 10
Miller, Reitta, 99, New Oxford, Pa., June 19
Miner, Emmert Lindy, 89, Gettysburg, Pa., March 8
Nenninger, Clarence, 75, Shippensburg, Pa., June 18
O'Polka, Christine Frances, 84, New Oxford, Pa., July 1
Owens, Levina Estelle Ball, 90, Taylors Valley, Va., July 3
Pierce, Scott, 48, Waukeet, Iowa, June 8
Pierson, Ryan L., 48, Onekama, Mich., May 27
Robenstine, Naomi Mohler, 87, Uniontown, Ohio, June 14
Scarbrough, Dale W., 75, South Bend, Ind., May 4
Schmenck, Melba, 86, Lima, Ohio, June 25
Seitz, Viola, 97, Ontario, Canada, April 23
Shellenberger, Betty L., 88, Harrisburg, Pa., June 30
Shuman, Karen, 79, Lebanon, Pa., July 12

Slusher, Frances Garman, 91, Salem, Va., April 21
Smail, Donald L., Jr., 49, Greensburg, Pa., May 29
Smith, Ruth, 94, Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 31
Snyder, William R., 76, Lewistown, Pa., June 4
Sonnie, Sheila H., 76, Greensburg, Pa., May 25
Speck, Jeanette Lee, 67, Martinsburg, Pa., June 18
Stacey, Ronald C., 75, Lewistown, Pa., June 7
Stauffer, Myra Jane, 92, Lancaster, Pa., May 17
Stokes, Ruth R., 91, Harleysville, Pa., May 17
Stubbs, Helen Loretta, 96, Ludington, Mich., Feb. 23
Swallow, Elva, 99, Dallas Center, Iowa, April 20
Sweet, William W., 88, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 19
Theiman, Robert William, 81, Manistee, Mich., March 30
Thomas, Donald E., 85, Boswell, Pa., July 9
Toth, Shawn, 44, Hollsopple, Pa., May 25
Tuck, Delores Bowers, 84, Hartville, Ohio, June 3
Vance, Helen Virginia Newman, 92, Miamisburg, Ohio, May 28
Vardaman, Keith O., 78, Nappanee, Ind., May 11
Wagner, Anna G., 85, Palmyra, Pa., July 14, 2016
Wickens, Nancy Jo Freeman, 81, Charlotte, Mich., May 30
Wickens, Ronald Charles, 82, Pierport, Mich., Feb. 3
Wilkerson, Edgar, 93, Bridgewater, Va., May 18
Wilkerson, Shirley Hope Petcher, 89, Bridgewater, Va., May 22
Witt, Virginia Lynch, 93, Champaign, Ill., July 9

Dist. (Hyndman, Pa.), July 9
Dykema, Roberta Joy, Pac. N. W. Dist. (Whitestone, Tonasket, Wash.), June 11
Reed, Todd A., Virgina Dist. (Cedar Bluff, Boones Mill, Va.), June 11
Wason, Harvey John, Mid. Pa. Dist. (James Creek, Pa.), May 28

Licensed

Arce, Carmen M. Mercado, P. R. Dist. (Rio Prieto Iglesia De Los Hermanos, Lares, P. R.), May 21
Carter, Rita, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.), June 11
Rhodes, Jamie, S. Pa. Dist. (Chambersburg, Pa.), June 4
Rodriguez, Maria, P. R. Dist. (Rio Prieto Iglesia De Los Hermanos, Lares, P. R.), May 21
West, Phyllis Collins, Southeastern Dist. (Melvin Hill, Columbus, N.C.), May 21

Placements

Dodds, James (Sonny), from interim pastor to pastor Keyser, W.Va., June 25
Duffey, Andrew C., from pastor, New Enterprise, Pa., to pastor, Antioch, Rocky Mount, Va., March 15
Puffenbarger, Kathy W., from associate pastor, Briery Branch, Dayton, Va., to pastor, Elk Run, Churchville, Va., July 1
Welch, Dawna, from district youth advisor, Pac. S. W. Dist., to pastor of spiritual formation, La Verne, Calif., July 10

Ordained

Derck, Joy E., W. Pa. Dist. (Plumcreek, Shelocata, Pa.), May 28
Dermer, JoAnn, W. Pa.

A view from the delegate's table

by James Benedict

Many years ago, I came home one day, greeted my wife and kids, and settled into my favorite chair to read the newspaper. My wife interrupted my reading with a question: “Do you notice anything different?” I looked her over—same haircut, the clothes were familiar, including the shoes. I was stumped. Sensing my confusion, she said, “Look around.” Still nothing. Finally, she let me off the hook. “I rearranged the furniture!” she explained. It was at that moment that I realized even the chair I was sitting in had been moved from its former location.

When Annual Conference “rearranged the furniture” several years ago, we all took notice. At first, I was skeptical of the change. How would sitting at round tables with a half dozen or so other delegates, rather than in long rows, make any difference? Besides, because we wouldn’t get to choose which table to sit at, it meant I could no longer sit next to old friends and catch up on what was happening in their lives during the transitions between business items and reports. As I took my place at the table that first year, I fully expected to not like the new arrangement.



in different ways. And while we never voted unanimously as a table, I don’t believe anyone at the table went away thinking the others didn’t care or wouldn’t listen.

It was Winston Churchill who said, “We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.” It really does make a difference how we design the spaces we occupy. Sitting around tables at Conference reminds us of who we are as Brethren. The Church of the Brethren began as a series of conversations in Schwarzenau, as people devoted to the

WE WERE GIVEN TIME TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES AND DISCOVERED THAT OUR OPINIONS SELDOM FIT NEATLY INTO THE “YEA OR NAY” CATEGORIES THAT VOTING ON MOTIONS AND AMENDMENTS SEEMS TO IMPLY.

Gradually, however, I came around. I met people, learned from them, and laughed with them. We were given time to discuss the issues and discovered that our opinions seldom fit neatly into the “yea or nay” categories that voting on motions and amendments seems to imply. While people at the microphones were making speeches aimed at the masses, people at the tables talked and listened to each other in a more natural way. When the results of a vote were not what some at the table hoped for, the others tended to express concern for those who were disappointed.

So count me a converted skeptic. In my opinion, sitting at tables with others who may or may not share our opinions, instead of in long rows next to like-minded friends, has turned out to be a very good thing for Annual Conference. This year, I again met some new people, learned about congregations and districts I had known little about, and came to a better understanding of how the matters we were debating affected the people at my table

Word gathered to discuss what it meant to be faithful followers of Jesus. I’m sure they didn’t always agree, but they did make a commitment to love God and one another. That commitment created a resilience that has allowed the church to continue working on what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus for over 300 years.

In a time when religion and politics seem to be tending toward ever greater polarization, with people clustering together around particular positions or philosophies and hurling insults at those who think differently, it is important that we Brethren attempt to witness to another way—a way of disagreeing without demonizing those with whom we disagree; a way of humility that is open to correction; and a way of love that desires that others be built up, not destroyed. How we sit at Conference is a part of our witness. 

James Benedict recently completed 20 years of service as pastor of Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren. He will be doing consulting in healthcare ethics, writing, and perhaps interim ministry.



let faith
grow

Start
small

Make your congregation a place
where children are welcomed, known,
and loved by God, where Jesus'
good news of peace is proclaimed,
where small and tall learn
together about God's story,
where children are encouraged
to shine.



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Photos left to right by Glenn Riegel, BVS staff, and Jean Bednar.



Church of the Brethren