



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

APRIL 2018 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

The times
we're in



*"The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoice" (Psalm 126:3).*

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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On the cover

How does a peace church deal with the national epidemic of gun violence? In this issue, see how individuals and congregations are responding to the times we're in.

Doing well, thank you

This issue of MESSENGER represents a bold idea from one of our districts. About a year ago Southern Ohio asked us to collaborate on a joint venture: They would produce a professionally designed newsletter, bind it into the center of extra copies of MESSENGER magazine, and send the combined package to everyone in their district.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Of course, we said yes immediately, inspired by their enthusiasm and their vision for working together. In a time when some folks are eyeing their neighbors suspiciously, we were heartened by their desire for increased connections within their district and beyond.

Leadership in Southern Ohio like the idea of wrapping their district news in the denominational magazine. They believe this is a plus for the visibility of their information to members of the district—as well as a hearty promotion for MESSENGER. They plan to do this twice a year, and can imagine it serving as a model for other districts. If you're not in Southern Ohio, your magazine looks just like usual. But to those 1,500 readers who are

receiving the special Southern Ohio edition, welcome to the MESSENGER family!

A few weeks ago, readers in Virginia told me, "This is what a denominational magazine should be!" What makes for a really good denominational magazine? Bible studies that are a lamp to our feet. Inspiring articles about ways individuals and congregations are living out their faith. Essays that grapple with serious issues, and responses from people who are respectful and thoughtful, whether or not they agree with what they've read. Words and images that strengthen Brethren identity. Articles that hold us together, but aren't afraid to raise difficult matters that seem to push us apart.

The editorial team is grateful for excellent writers (whose numbers have increased significantly in recent years). We're also pleased to welcome former editor Walt Wiltschek, who is spending a few hours a week as MESSENGER's at-large editor. He recently became pastor at Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren, but finds time to help shoulder the editorial load.

Most important for a strong magazine is you. We can tell that our subscribers love the church and want it to thrive. You can thank yourselves that MESSENGER is doing so well.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy McFadden".

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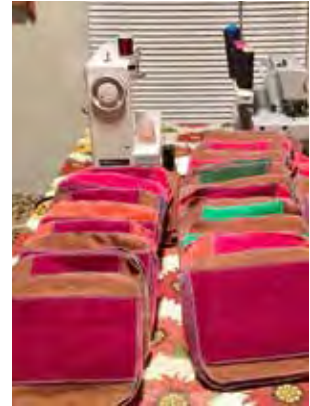
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Shenandoah sews for girls in Ghana

Lisa Bowers and Teresa Richard, twins and members of Community Mission Church of the Brethren in Woodstock, Va., planned a trip to Ghana in February to take 1,200 shields and 6,000 liners for girls to use during their monthly cycles.



For nine months, the two have coordinated a sewing project with Shenandoah District congregations to make the washable shields and liners that will give girls needed protection, enabling them to attend school with no monthly interruption. The Ghana Health Service and Education Coordinators have joined with US non-profit Healthy Villages, Inc., to organize this project in remote Ghanaian villages.



Many sewers and sergers were needed to accomplish the task. With the help of Ragtime Fabrics in Harrisonburg, Va., and members from several Churches of the Brethren including Antioch, Bridgewater, Sunrise, and Wakeman's Grove, they were able to meet their goal to supply reusable sanitary kits for 600 girls.

The success of this project led those involved to that place in the kingdom where the common, greater good unites God's children in service, fellowship, and love. —Alice Lee Hopkins

Serving with the Rohingya

Charlene Gilbert of Pleasant Valley Church of the Brethren in Jonesborough, Tenn., in Southeastern District, spent nearly a month in Bangladesh working in a surgical unit serving Rohingya refugees through Samaritan's Purse. As a retired nurse, she has kept busy doing medical mission work around the world over the past several years. She has worked in places such as Haiti, Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, and other African nations.

In Bangladesh, she saw first-hand

the deplorable conditions Muslim refugees from Burma are facing. She has a heart for the Muslim people, having worked at a mobile medical unit just outside Mosul, Iraq, for several weeks when the fighting against ISIS was at its height. Conditions there were equally horrific.

She makes it clear to the people she serves that she serves in the name of Christ and out of a deep love for them, regardless of which side they are on.

—Gary Benesh



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.



Faith Community reaches milestone

The record shows that regular worship experience has been offered at Cross Keys Village—The Brethren Home Community in New Oxford, Pa., throughout its 108 years of existence, regardless of the setting. When the “Church of the Brethren Home” moved into the former Cross Keys Hotel in 1952, room was provided for a small chapel, but it also served as a space for drying laundry.

More recently, in the 1990s, some villagers expressed the wish that a congregation be established within

the community. After much planning, the Faith Community was established and recognized as a fellowship at Southern Pennsylvania District Conference in 1992. At the 1993 Annual Conference in Indianapolis, the Faith Community was recognized as a Church of the Brethren congregation.

Intervening years have been a time of growth for the Faith Community, culminating in the dedication of a new worship space in the Nicarry Meetinghouse in 2000. This past November, the Faith Community

celebrated its 25th anniversary. Warren Eshbach, former district executive and a former chaplain, was the guest speaker . . . as he had been at the beginning, back in 1992.

The Faith Community participates in many areas of outreach, with the church’s budget as evidence. Recently, the Faith Community supported the Adams County Department of Aging by boxing up non-perishable food and household items for seniors who are in need. During November, the Faith Community collected monetary donations to purchase items for the boxes.

Nanty Glo’s angels

Nanty Glo (Pa.) Church of the Brethren is rather small in number, but rich in spirit and giving. Looking for a project that would allow them to reach out into the community and beyond, they found that one way of doing this is to collect spare change each Sunday. But Pastor Linda Beachley wanted to get others involved beyond congregational life. She decided to share an idea for a craft activity.

One Sunday she brought along an “angel” made from an old hymnal, purchased at an auction in Northern Plains District a number of years ago. The people who stayed after church to learn about the craft activity decided to meet again and begin making angels for themselves.

The Holy Spirit had other plans, however. One of the group posted a picture of a completed angel on Facebook and something amazing happened. People began calling to order an angel for a Christmas gift. “It had to be the

Spirit moving to get such a positive response to this project,” Beachley says.

Thirty angels were made, and those that were sold raised \$575. The money was used to help two families in the community at Christmastime, providing furniture, household items, and gift cards. —Ronald Beachley



“The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding God established the heavens; by God’s knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down.”

—Proverbs 3:19-20



Care for creation A Christian confession

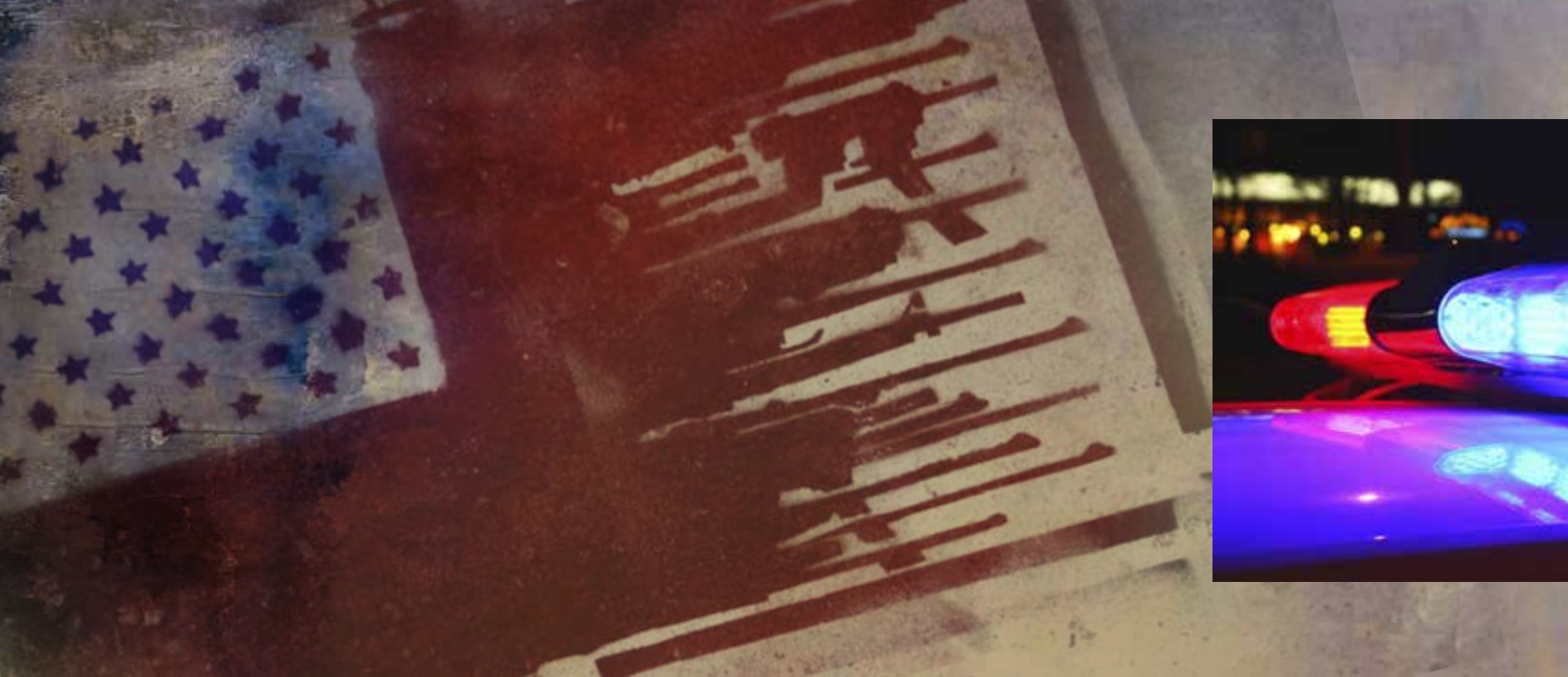
- 1.** God, Creator of heaven and earth and all earth’s creatures, looks lovingly upon all the works of creation and pronounces them good.
- 2.** God, our Deliverer, acts to protect, restore, and redeem the earth and all its creatures from sinful human pride and greed that seeks unwarranted mastery over the natural and social orders.
- 3.** God in Jesus Christ reunites all things and calls humans back from sinful human sloth and carelessness to the role of the steward, the responsible servant, who as God’s representative cares for creation, for all life, both animate and inanimate.
- 4.** God our Creator-Deliverer acts in the ecological-social crisis of our time, demonstrating today the same divine love shown on the cross of Christ. As a covenant people, we are called to increase our stewardship, in relation both to nature and to the political economy, to a level in keeping with the peril and promise with which God confronts us in this crisis.
- 5.** All creation belongs to God (Psalm 24). God, not humanity, is the source, the center, the depth and height of all creation. The whole creation is ordered to the glory of God (Revelation 1:8). Human beings, both individually and collectively, have no right to systematically abuse or dispose of nature for their own ends.
- 6.** Even amid human violation and devastation, God is at work renewing creation. One important way is through humans who join God in reconciling and restoring the earth to its new creation.
- 7.** Human dominion in God’s image is not mastery, control, and possession, but a stewardship of love for and service of this world in God’s name. Such stewardship respects the integrity of natural systems and lives within the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption.

—From “Creation: Called to Care,” a statement of the 1991 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference



**Earth Day
is April 22**

“Creation is good in and of itself as God’s intention and work. This applies to all the beings, animate and inanimate, made by God. The world of sea and forest, desert and field with myriad creatures became, after all, the very ground of the incarnation of the Word.”



No easy answers

An interview with a Brethren police officer

by Tim Harvey

Ronald Robinson is a member of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., where he and his wife, Stephanie, attend with their son, Rex. The congregation recently called Ronald and Stephanie to serve as deacons. Growing up in both Prince Georges County, Md., and inner-city Baltimore, Robinson is a 2007 graduate of Bridgewater College and has been a police officer with the Roanoke City Police Department for 10 years.

MESSANGER asked Tim Harvey to interview Robinson for his perspective on matters involving race, police shootings, and Black Lives Matter. While arranging this interview, the Parkland (Fla.) school shooting occurred. Robinson has served as a school resource officer, and that became a relevant part of the story as well.



Mike Stevens

MESSANGER Your background is a significant part of your story—including why you became a police officer, and how you view many of our discussions about race. What events from your childhood were most significant for you?

ROBINSON I was surrounded by many significant role models who helped me form a healthy perception of myself. My mom was a huge force in my life, and taught me so much about how to be a loving parent through the way she loved me. She sacrificed much so that I could achieve the goals in my life.

My dad essentially abandoned us

when I was nine, but his best friend stepped into our lives and made sure I had a strong, positive male presence in my life. He was a successful black man, and took me places that boys like to go—basketball games and football practice, to name a few—and helped me fill out all my college applications.

In high school, my Sunday school teacher was Brother Don Montgomery. He made sure I was in church every Sunday, telling the church bus driver to “wait for this kid.” Don was also a successful black man, and his intentional efforts to know me convinced me that I could be, too.

While working at Camp Bethel, I saw Salem DARE officers interacting



WE PROTECT LIFE. EVEN IF IT MEANS LAYING DOWN MY LIFE, I AM NOT ALLOWED TO DO NOTHING WHILE OTHERS ARE BEING KILLED.

with youth from different backgrounds in significant ways, and it made me realize that I had many of these same skills and interests. This is what turned me on to becoming a police officer. It would be outdoors, and would involve working with and investing in other people.

Was your neighborhood safe?

■ Looking back, it probably wasn't as safe as I might prefer, now that I'm a parent, but we didn't live in fear. Mom let us play outside relatively unsupervised, but we also knew to go inside if a stranger appeared. It was just what we knew to be normal.

How were the police perceived in your neighborhood? Did you fear them?

■ They were not perceived well, but I did not personally fear them. Our reality meant that my mother gave me "the talk" on a number of occasions—where black parents talk to their kids about how to interact with the police. I didn't even realize that this was just a "black thing"—it's what everybody did: Always keep your hands visible. Show respect. Don't make any sudden movements. Say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir." Don't say any-

thing unless you are specifically asked. This was an ongoing thing.

My mother didn't have "the talk" with me because she feared I might be killed—or if she did, she didn't present it that way. She just knew that, as a black kid living in a high crime community, I was a target. I might be hassled by police for no reason; yet if I escalated the encounter and became "disorderly" I might go to jail.

I assume you, as a police officer, have studied deadly encounters like these. What do you learn from them?

■ One significant lesson is that the initial headline shapes the later narrative. One of these shootings happens, and the headlines read, "White police officer shoots unarmed black male," and then people retreat into their predetermined opinions and assume there is nothing more to the story.

Of course, it's much more complicated than that. In some of these cases—like Philando Castile—the police officers are clearly in the wrong. They shot, even though the people were doing exactly what they had just been told to do.

But in other cases, there are different issues that lead to a shooting—issues that are not immediately obvious. A closer examination reveals that skin color was not a factor in any way, and mitigating circumstances exonerate the officer. But it's not popular to say that because it's already been framed as "white police officer kills black male."

In those times when the responding officer was in the wrong, many want the officer prosecuted. Would you agree?

■ That is a terribly difficult question. Police officers are unique in that we are allowed to use firearms on citizens—even deadly force. And even though we are trained in numerous techniques to either de-escalate the situation or use minimal force, we cannot be prosecuted for using the amount of force necessary to make the arrest.

There are no easy answers to these situations. We spend a lot of time in training, but there are no perfect people. Shootings are always tragic, and we should seek to avoid them. But we don't want our cops second-guessing themselves in a moment of crisis, either.

THEY HAVE MISSED THE FACT THAT OUR EXPERIENCES OF LIFE—AND ESPECIALLY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE POLICE—ARE DIFFERENT BASED ON WHERE WE LIVE.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged from shootings like these. What are your thoughts about BLM?

■ The significant thing about BLM to me is that it is a unified movement among black people; historically, that is a very rare thing. And to the degree that it has brought attention to the difficult relationships between police and poor, black neighborhoods, I'm glad for it.

Unfortunately, there has been a degree of hooliganism from some who have attached themselves to BLM. But we also saw this by white people after the Eagles won the Super Bowl. But somehow that's "different," even though it's really not. We don't define other events by the bad behavior of fringe participants. Why do we judge Black Lives Matter by these standards?

What have white Americans missed in BLM?

■ They have missed the fact that our experiences of life—and especially

relationships with the police—are different based on where we live. But because we live in different neighborhoods, and tend to only engage on social media with people like us, it doesn't occur to many middle- and upper-class white people that other persons have to worry about the police in the places they live, or have "the talk" with their children.

Let's change directions and talk about the recent school shooting in Parkland, Fla. You've served as a school resource officer (SRO). What do you see here?

■ The one thing I know to be true is that an SRO's two primary jobs are to know the kids and de-escalate any conflict. These are the best ways to reduce any kind of conflict in our schools.

During my training, my training officer stood at the front door of the school each morning, watching kids enter the building, and talking with

them. If he saw someone that looked like they were upset or having a difficult time, he would pull them out of class later that morning and ask how they were doing.

At this point (late February), it looks like two of the biggest problems with the Parkland shooting were that everyone missed some very obvious signs that this kid was in trouble and that the SRO stayed outside instead of engaging the shooter. As a police officer, that is an unforgivable black mark on this officer's career. Ever since Columbine, standard procedure for situations like these is to enter the building and engage the shooter. We protect life. Even if it means laying down my life, I am not allowed to do nothing while others are being killed.

Some are saying we need to arm teachers. Are we better off if we arm everybody?

■ The Trayvon Martin story gives us one answer to that, doesn't it?

Stranger or neighbor?

by Tim Harvey

I was surrounded by guns.

Only in this case, they were equipped with safety locks and were displayed on rows and rows of tables at a gun show.

Following the Las Vegas and Sutherland Springs mass shootings in late 2017, the peace and justice committee at Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., wanted to learn more about the guns involved in the shootings, and

(hopefully) more about people's attitudes toward guns in general. So we decided to visit a gun show.

Overhearing a conversation between a gun dealer and a young woman who was purchasing a holster for her new gun, I listened as the dealer explained how different holsters allowed for quick access based on the various styles of clothes the woman might be wearing.

This conversation made me won-

der: Had this woman—or someone she knew—been a victim of violence? Why did she feel the need for a concealed weapon? Does she fear a particular person, an unsafe neighborhood, or an unknown stranger? Could she pull the trigger and kill someone?

The tragic and too-frequent reports of mass shootings in schools, churches, and workplaces generate both fear and the all-too-predictable chorus of tired arguments.

Carrying a gun made George Zimmerman respond in a way that was not necessary. Who is to say that a teacher might not do the same—become fearful in a school situation and use their gun to respond?

We also need to be careful to not criminalize rule-breaking—discipline issues might creep into criminal issues. If a student is suspended and then refuses to leave the building, do we really want to charge them with disorderly conduct? Who de-escalates that situation?

It is also true that people have a very hard time keeping secrets, and if we know the people around us, then we can often find out what is going on and perhaps step in to do something about it.

We also need to distinguish between the “illusion of peace” and “actual peace.” We can install metal detectors, or arm everyone, and we might feel like there is peace. But is that really peace? Unfortunately, if people want to cause harm, they will find a way.

So much of our political discourse is paralyzed between “conservative” and “liberal” viewpoints. As we reflect on all of these things, what is something you have learned that people with a conservative view point might find hard to hear?

■ No one is coming to get your guns. That was a huge rallying cry for people when President Obama was in office. But step back from that a minute—who would be the ones to come get your guns? Police officers? Do we really think law enforcement officers are going to go door to door and confiscate weapons? It’s a ridiculous thought, at face value.

Okay, now the other side—what might those with a liberal view point find hard to hear?

■ Police are not supposed to be arrested for shooting people. It is written into the code of Virginia that I cannot be

charged with assault if I am doing my job correctly. People often don’t know that, and they may not like to hear it, but consider it this way: If I respond to a call and encounter a person holding a knife, I have to respond quickly. If they won’t put the knife down at my verbal command, I could use pepper spray, my Tazer, or my gun. But what if I opt for a lesser amount of force, and they harm themselves, or someone else? Or what if I hesitate among my options and they cause harm?

Our imperfect system functions as it was created to. That also is not easy to hear. What is easy is to sit back at a distance and think we know what a police officer should do in a tense moment. In such moments, I see my job as trusting my training, seeing others as human beings, and trying to de-escalate every situation as much as is possible in the moment. **W**

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

THE TRAGIC AND TOO-FREQUENT REPORTS OF MASS SHOOTINGS IN SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, AND WORKPLACES GENERATE BOTH FEAR AND THE ALL-TOO-PREDICTABLE CHORUS OF TIRED ARGUMENTS.

*The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.
We need to ban guns.
We need better mental health laws.
We need God back in our schools.*

Sentiments like these are a frustrating combination of anger, hurt, partial truth, and an unhelpful attempt at a one-size-fits-all solution. After a few days the anger recedes . . . until the next shooting

www.flickr.com / Fabrice Florin



IF OUR FIRST RESPONSE TO THE STRANGER IS LOVE INSTEAD OF FEAR, A WHOLE HOST OF POSSIBILITIES EMERGES.

happens, and the cycle repeats.

Is there no other way out of this impasse?

Brethren have long sought to shape our attitudes and actions around scripture, not popular sentiment. Is carrying a gun for personal protection and the potential defense of others consistent with maintaining a distinctly Christian identity? In an age where

even some Brethren pastors have begun carrying guns for personal protection, how might our faith shape us on this matter?

A generous view of the other

Because so much of the discussion of gun violence involves the fear of being hurt or killed by an unknown stranger, one approach to answering this

question is to consider how the Bible teaches us to view the *other*—that person who is unknown to us, or is not part of our family, tribe, or group.

The Old Testament books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are helpful to us here. This section of the Bible is notoriously difficult—arcane laws, strange customs, and pages of tabernacle dimensions

Children and violence

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference adopted this resolution on “Children and Violence” in 1999.

The Church of the Brethren is deeply concerned by the increased frequency and severity of school-related violence due to a lethal mix of factors, including:

- the pervasiveness of violence and violent images in our culture;
- our own passive acceptance of this culture of violence;
- the ease with which young people can acquire firearms;
- and our nation’s readiness to resort to violence in the foreign and domestic arenas.

In light of these disturbing realities, we recommit ourselves to our heritage of nonviolence as modeled by the life and teachings of Jesus and our mission of continuing this vital work.

We call on congregations to teach peace and pursue it within their fellowship, and to take the lead in advocating for peace within their communities, nation, and world. We also encourage congregations to actively approach school

boards and other appropriate public policy agencies to request the establishment of school-based curricular instruction in conflict resolution, peace education, anger control, and the tolerance of others.

We call our members, especially the youth of the church, to turn away from the culture of violence in its many manifestations in our society and to live as people of peace. We encourage members, young and old, to refrain from playing violent video games of any kind, listening to music that promotes violence or hatred, or viewing movies or television shows where violence is glorified or sanitized.

In particular we reaffirm the 1978 Annual Conference Statement “Violence and the Use of Firearms” in its call for elimination of all weapons used for human destruction. In addition we call for more effective gun control legislation, especially legislation that would protect our children from gun-related violence, and encourage our members to actively support such legislation.

In a society and world saturated with violence and violent images, we recommit ourselves to the challenge of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:21 to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” **W**



complicate our reading and relegate it to an oft-skimmed section. But when we step back and consider the forest and not just the trees, interesting patterns emerge.

One is an attitude of openness and grace toward the vulnerable members of the community, including the alien and the stranger: the poor are allowed to glean in the field, slaves and servants get a day off on the sabbath, laws are not to be biased against the outsider. The book of Ruth shows how this approach to the other can work.

The basis of this openness comes from the people's own experience as aliens and strangers in Egypt. For perhaps the first time in human history, a god had chosen the side of the weak and vulnerable, bringing these people out of slavery into freedom. But as the people began to settle down, build homes, families, and acquire wealth, they might be tempted to forget their past. So God reminds them: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." Be gracious toward the other.

This is a challenging command, especially considering the people's circumstances when given these instructions. They are still in the wilderness, living at or near subsistence level. Under these circumstances, strangers pose a very real risk. They're potential competitors for limited resources. They may seek to do harm and take what we have by force. Self-preservation is the natural inclination. There is no compelling reason to be gracious and welcoming to strangers.

And yet the overall admonition

remains—even when there are compelling reasons to fear the other, God's people are to make room for them, as God once made room for us.

Might turning strangers into friends be one solution to reducing violence?

Faithful hospitality or idolatrous fear?

We should not be naïve; violence does occur. The strangers of our day do sometimes burst into our homes, schools, churches, and workplaces to cause harm. Trusting our own ability to protect ourselves and our loved ones with a gun might seem prudent, even tempting. If the "other" thinks we have a gun, we might be safer.

But this is ultimately a "tiger by the tail" argument. We hope that more guns will make us safer, but can we ever be sure? Numerous studies show that, overall, more people having more guns leads to more violence, not less. Abusers use guns to intimidate their partners. People shoot at their difficult neighbors rather than trying harder to talk about their disagreements. Sometimes children play with a gun they find in the home and accidentally shoot their friends.

It is difficult to believe we will really be safer if we must first evaluate the other as a potential threat instead of a potential friend. And if we do go down this road, there may be no returning.

Thankfully, our faith gives us different options. We can follow the example of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy and be generous toward

the other. In the New Testament, this takes the form of hospitality. In a world that is increasingly filled with *xenophobia* (stranger fear), Christians are to practice *philoxenia* (stranger love). In being open to a relationship with the stranger, Jesus-followers willingly accept some of the potential risk the stranger might represent, in the belief that in our openness we might find a friend.

If our first response to the stranger is love instead of fear, a whole host of possibilities emerges. We can invite neighbors to a picnic in our back yard, be a friend to the student who seems to have no friends, confront the bullies in our schools and workplaces, speak up for the vulnerable, put down our phones and strike up a conversation with the people around us, partner with a congregation across town that is different from ours to learn what life is like in their neighborhood.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be salt and light. Our communities are likely not as violent as we might suspect, yet are not without risk. How might Brethren influence the communities surrounding our homes and church buildings if we armed ourselves with hospitality, sought to turn strangers into friends, and demonstrated a trust in God that overcomes fear with hopefulness and grace? What changes need to happen in our hearts?

In the face of changing attitudes toward guns and the "other," these are some of the questions the peace and justice group in my congregation seeks to answer. ❧



Baxter Stapleton

Music for the times we're in

An interview with Shawn Kirchner by Walt Wiltschek

Prominent Brethren musician Shawn Kirchner—Swan Family Composer in Residence for the Los Angeles Master Chorale—recently composed a piece titled “Eye for Eye,” drawing on Mahatma Gandhi’s quote “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.” It was featured in a “Put Your Guns Down” concert by Tonality, a choral group based in Los Angeles—initially in October 2017, and then in a reprise concert this past January. Those who have heard Kirchner’s piece described it as “beautiful,” “moving,” “haunting,” and “powerful.” Kirchner was in the midst of several composition projects when MESSENGER caught up with him to ask about the piece.



MESSENGER Where did the inspiration for “Eye for Eye” come from?

KIRCHNER I was looking for an anthem for church and couldn’t really find the perfect thing. We were looking for something relating to a scripture in the Gospels that says your eye is the lamp of the body, and when it is light the whole body is light, and if it is not light, how deep is the darkness (from Matthew 6:22-23). I thought, “There needs to be a song about this.” But I didn’t succeed in writing an anthem at that time—I had a verse that was

decent, but the chorus didn’t work out.

But eventually the whole song was just there. It kind of emerged. It didn’t come out of a specific shooting; it just came out of everything that’s out of control. The main part of the piece is Gandhi’s text, “An eye for an eye ends up making the whole world blind.” But “ends up” isn’t very poetic, so in my piece it’s “Eye for eye and the world goes blind.”

Earlier I had written “Rain Come Down,” which came out of the Columbine shootings, a year after my mom’s death, so this isn’t the only piece I’ve done on this theme.

How did your personal background and beliefs influence its creation?

■ I was a peace studies major at Manchester University and I was born and bred Brethren, but I went into professional music. In all honesty, professional music outside the church was not something that I felt my Brethren elders imagined or encouraged—at least that’s how I saw it at the time. So for me this is a “full-circle” kind of thing where my peace studies and Brethren background combined with my love of choral music to produce something for the times. I had so many

IT'S NOT ABOUT MUSIC BEING AN ESCAPE. IT'S ABOUT MUSIC BEING A WAY TO ENTER MORE DEEPLY INTO THESE ISSUES WE NEED TO ADDRESS.

mixed feelings about not studying music in college. But when I see how all these things have met up on the other side I'm really happy about it.

How did you become connected with Tonicity?

■ The "Put Your Guns Down" concert has been such a cool thing. I have been involved with Tonicity, a newly formed choir in Los Angeles which is intentionally focused on the intersection between music and social change and social justice. The founder of Tonicity, Alex Blake, had an association with the Los Angeles Master Chorale. He's being mentored by our conductor, and he's a doctoral student at USC.

Tonicity is an awesome group and very diverse. All the singers come from different backgrounds and want to build a new unity together. They're really amazing people. They've been doing concerts on different themes, and this one was such an amazing concert. They actually reprised it due to popular demand. People are like, "We need to hear this."

Probably the most moving thing in this concert was called the "Seven Last Words of the Unarmed." It's a choral setting of the last things remembered to be said by people who were killed in those police shootings. One was incredibly poignant, this beautiful ballad in the middle of the piece. All it is is,

"Mom, I'm going to college." Also in the concerts they include personal stories.

It's not about music being an escape. It's about music being a way to enter more deeply into these issues we need to address. There is a church in downtown Los Angeles that has started singing this song every time there's a shooting, and unfortunately they're getting to know the song very well.


Why does it feel important for your music to have a social component like this?

■ You know, the reality is I can't help it, because I think when you're an artist you're responding to the times you're living in. You're taking in the breath of the times, and that's what your breath is. Every single one of my pieces in the past year has been a response to the times we're in.

I recently was asked to write for the California high school all-state young men's choir, and I wrote a piece called "Man of Truth." Right now all we're talking about in the news is lies. We're in a time when we ask, "Does your word mean anything anymore?" I just had to respond and write a piece for young men about a way of being a truthful person. I can't help it. I just feel if you're awake and experiencing what's going on, if you're a creative person, your creative outlet is going to reflect the times.

Do you have plans to follow up on "Eye for Eye" with any other pieces?

■ Not at the moment. But the piece that I just finished, "Songs of Ascent" it's kind of like my magnum opus or something—it's really about conflict and resolution. I just wrote four new movements to highlight themes of estrangement and reconciliation, which again I feel is really my Brethren background. I feel proud for being part of a people who for 300 years have been focused on the need for reconciliation. It's part of who I am, so it just kind of seeps out.

When you're a musician it feels strange: The piece is sung, and then it's over, and it disappears. It makes you wonder, "What's the level I'm working at?" But I think all the levels are important. It's not the same as getting a bill passed, but it all feels important. We have to be working at all levels. If you don't have music about something, people will wonder, "Doesn't anyone care about this?" I really do think that songs show the trend lines. The inspiration leads the movement. 

Shawn Kirchner lives in the Los Angeles area and is a member of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, where he serves as pianist and organist. His compositions are performed around the country and internationally. He also sings with a variety of groups. His completed "Songs of Ascent" will open the Los Angeles Master Chorale's season this fall.

Learn more at www.shawnkirchner.com and www.ourtonicity.org.

Gun violence up close

by Walt Wiltschek

We cannot be silent or uninvolved when someone else is being harmed,” says Ann Van Dyke, a member of inner-city Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren. “We just can’t do it. We are called to be agents of God’s love.”

Van Dyke and others at Harrisburg First have seen the effects of gun violence up close. More than 110 people have been shot and killed in Pennsylvania’s capital city (population 48,900) in the past decade. The church has sought to respond through Heeding God’s Call to End Gun Violence, a multi-faith movement.

The small organization grew out of a 2009 event in Philadelphia organized by the historic peace churches as a witness against illegal gun sales. Belita Mitchell, now in her 15th year as pastor at Harrisburg First, was among those attending. It resonated with her experience.

“A 17-year-old was shot to death on a corner near the church soon after we moved (to Harrisburg),” Mitchell says. “I said to myself, ‘That doesn’t make sense.’ There has to be something we can do. It’s something we can all come together on because we value the sanctity of life.”

The church established a weekly prayer vigil, and after the 2009 event it connected with other faith communities in the area to form a more comprehensive response. Today, the work of Heeding God’s Call includes education, advocacy, support and resourcing, community organizing, and networking. Its work is carried out by a paid executive director, Bryan Miller, whose efforts are supported by a board of directors and a group of dedicated volunteers.

Events have included peace witness gatherings at the



Belita Mitchell and Ann Van Dyke

Pennsylvania Capitol, interfaith services on the International Day of Prayer for Peace, legislative lobbying, and partnerships with groups such as Mom’s Demand Action for Sensible Gun Legislation. A Gun

Violence Awareness Day is planned for June 24.

Perhaps their most vivid witness, though, is the “Moving Memorial to the Lost”—a display of empty T-shirts each painted with the name of a local gun violence victim.

“We hear the news and it’s just a clip, but it represents the life of an individual and extends to the family and to the community,” Mitchell says. “It’s a real personal issue in addition to a legislative problem with the ease of these guns being in our streets.”

Van Dyke keeps track of all the names to be remembered, a too-long list, for the shirts of the memorial.

“It makes me sigh just to talk about it,” says Van Dyke, who retired after years working for the state in civil rights enforcement related to hate violence. “To me it’s a real ministry—a public statement and also a ministry to the loved ones of those who have been lost.”

While the immediacy of the issue has been raised again recently with mass shootings in Las Vegas, Texas, Florida, and elsewhere, Mitchell notes that for many people of color gun violence is an everyday reality they can’t escape. And throughout the country it remains a pervasive problem.

She and Van Dyke have seen glimmers of hope in the public outcry since the Parkland massacre, with the issue perhaps reaching a tipping point as students speak out.

“It takes the courage and outrage of someone who is willing to stand up in front of the cameras and say enough is enough and we want to see it changed,” Mitchell says. But she also wonders where the message of the historic peace churches—and specifically the Brethren voice—is in all this.

“I haven’t seen or heard any outcry from our denomination,” she says. “What would it look like if we could become a beloved community? Where is our voice?” Regardless of who else steps up to address the issue, though, Harrisburg First and the larger Heeding God’s Call movement will continue their unwavering work as a matter of faith.

“We get frustrated,” Van Dyke says. “We get mad. But we don’t feel defeated.”

Walt Wiltschek is pastor of Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren and at-large editor for MESSENGER. For more information on Heeding God’s Call, visit www.heedingharrisburg.org.

“WE CANNOT BE SILENT OR UNINVOLVED WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS BEING HARMED, WE JUST CAN’T DO IT. WE ARE CALLED TO BE AGENTS OF GOD’S LOVE.” —Ann Van Dyke

Speak and live

Poetry opens up the interior of gun violence

Two statements from very different poets set the agenda for *Bullets into Bells: Poets and Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*, a unique anthology of poetry and reflections on guns. “If you speak, you die. If you keep quiet, you die. So, speak and die,” wrote Algerian poet and journalist Tahar Djaout, who in 1993 was shot and killed by a fundamentalist group. Wallace Stevens



CHERYL BRUMBAUGH-CAYFORD

describes poetry as “a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.”

The staggering, unimaginable reality in the United States is cited in the book: our nation suffers more than 30,000 shooting deaths annually, including suicides, accidents, and assaults. In this anthology, 54 poets respond to this reality by—in essence—asserting, “speak and live.”

The times necessitate moving beyond debate about guns into a new territory of nuance, perhaps accessible only through poetry and other creative arts. Poets and artists are the doorkeepers who usher us into the interior of this national horror.

The book is constructed as a litany. Each poem is echoed by a short reflection written by the “citizens” referred to in the book’s subtitle. They aren’t just any citizens, however. They are survivors of shootings, family of people who died in shootings, gun control activists and other peacemakers—even people who are related to shooters.

It makes for a truly disturbing, unsettling reading experience. Raw language and graphic imagery bring to life the stark reality of gun violence, and what it does to people. Readers should prepare for a deeply emotional and personal reaction, feeling with and for victims, survivors, even shooters . . . because that’s the point. Unless Americans tap into the physical and emotional and spiritual realities of the shootings, gun violence will be allowed to continue and

untold more lives will be lost.

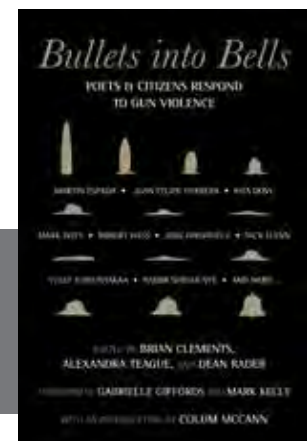
One of the editors, Brian Clements, lives in Newtown, Conn., and is married to a teacher who survived the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. His poem is a litany of its own. The number 22 helps him remember people he has encountered at various times in his life, people who carried .22 pistols, or threatened him with one, or shot themselves or others. One stanza is about his best friend from sixth and seventh grade, who committed suicide at age 22. The last stanza recounts his wife’s experience at Sandy Hook.

*... a Bushmaster .223, hundreds of rounds of ammunition,
and a shotgun in the car. Rather than turn right,
toward my wife’s classroom where she pulled
two kids into her room from the hallway,
he turned to the left. . . .*

A poem by Reginald Dwayne Betts, “When I Think of Tamir Rice While Driving,” is paired with a response by the mother of 12-year-old Tamir, who was shot by police while playing with a toy gun in a public park. “When I lost Tamir, I lost a piece of myself,” Samaria Rice writes. “American police terrorism was created to control the black and brown people of slavery. This remains vivid today. We need change across this country and accountability for our loved ones whose lives have been stolen by American terrorism.”

“Who will govern the government when they continue to murder American citizens?” is her question. It deserves a serious answer from our nation’s leaders—and, really, from all of us.

Here is her answer: “I am not afraid of the leadership that I have come into upon the death of my son. I am not afraid to create change and to be a part of change.”



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Bullets into Bells: Poets and Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*. **Editors:** Brian Clements, Alexandra Teague, and Dean Rader. **Publisher:** Beacon Press. **Publication date:** 2017. Available from Brethren Press.



Musical MARCH MADNESS!

TOP OF THE KEY

This may be as close as dancing-challenged Brethren get to “The Big Dance,” as the annual NCAA men’s basketball tournament is often called. In the basketball version, teams face off in a single-elimination bracket to determine a national champion. In our version, hymns replace hoops, with 64 best-loved tunes going one-on-one in the quest to be crowned (with many crowns).

In full disclosure, the idea for this came from the Presbyterians. A congregation in Kansas did a show-down like this last spring, and it seemed like a fun idea to transport into the Anabaptist world. So we stole it. The field of hymns was created by looking at surveys of favorite hymns done by various groups and adding in some uniquely Brethren favorites. Seasonal favorites (Christmas and Easter, etc.) were not included. Some seeding was done to try to separate likely top vote-getters into different brackets.

This version of Musical March Madness features the voting of MESSENGER staff members, but feel free to tip off with the first round of 64 and try it in your own congregation! It might just put an extra bounce in your step this spring.

1	Amazing Grace	Amazing Grace	Amazing Grace	Amazing Grace
2	Blest Be the Tie That Binds	Amazing Grace	Amazing Grace	
3	To God Be the Glory	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	Amazing Grace	
4	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty		
5	All Things Bright and Beautiful	All Things Bright and Beautiful	All Things Bright and Beautiful	All Things Bright and Beautiful
6	Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise	All Things Bright and Beautiful	All Things Bright and Beautiful	
7	Just As I Am	Trust and Obey	Trust and Obey	
8	Trust and Obey	Trust and Obey		
9	O Healing River	O Healing River	O Healing River	O Healing River
10	Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing	O Healing River	O Healing River	
11	Leaning on the Everlasting Arms	Have Thine Own Way, Lord	Have Thine Own Way, Lord	
12	Have Thine Own Way, Lord	Have Thine Own Way, Lord		
13	Crown Him with Many Crowns	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	When Peace Like a River
14	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	
15	As I Went Down to River to Pray	When Peace Like a River	When Peace Like a River	
16	When Peace Like a River	When Peace Like a River		
17	In the Bulb There Is a Flower	Take My Life	For the Beauty of the Earth	For the Beauty of the Earth
18	Take My Life	Take My Life	For the Beauty of the Earth	
19	For the Beauty of the Earth	For the Beauty of the Earth	For the Beauty of the Earth	
20	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	For the Beauty of the Earth		
21	Come Thou Fount	Come Thou Fount	Come Thou Fount	Come Thou Fount
22	For Christ and the Church	Come Thou Fount	Come Thou Fount	
23	Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me	Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me	Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me	
24	'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus	Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me		
25	Sweet Hour of Prayer	Sweet Hour of Prayer	Sweet Hour of Prayer	Here I Am, Lord
26	Nearer My God to Thee	Sweet Hour of Prayer	Sweet Hour of Prayer	
27	Here I Am, Lord	Here I Am, Lord	Here I Am, Lord	
28	Great Is the Lord	Here I Am, Lord		
29	Shall We Gather at the River	Shall We Gather at the River	Shall We Gather at the River	Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee
30	When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	Shall We Gather at the River	Shall We Gather at the River	
31	Just a Closer Walk with Thee	Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee	Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee	
32	Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee	Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee		



Champion MOVE IN OUR MIDST

When
Peace Like
a River

Move in
Our Midst

When
Peace Like
a River

Move in
Our Midst

Joyful,
Joyful We
Adore
Thee

Will You
Let Me Be
Your
Servant

Praise God from Whom (118)	How Great Thou Art	How Great Thou Art	33
	Fairest Lord Jesus	Holy, Holy, Holy	34
Praise God from Whom (118)	Great Is Thy Faithfulness	Fairest Lord Jesus	35
	Praise God from Whom (118)	Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us	36
		Great Is Thy Faithfulness	Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Move in Our Midst	Praise God from Whom (118)	What a Friend We Have in Jesus	38
		Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah	39
Move in Our Midst	Here in This Place	Praise God from Whom (118)	40
		Here in This Place	41
Move in Our Midst	As the Deer	Precious Lord, Take My Hand	42
		Rock of Ages	43
Move in Our Midst	The Church's One Foundation	As the Deer	44
		The Church's One Foundation	45
Move in Our Midst	Move in Our Midst	My Hope Is Built	46
		Morning Has Broken	47
Brethren, We Have Met to Worship	Brethren, We Have Met to Worship	Move in Our Midst	48
		Brethren, We Have Met to Worship	49
Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord	Wonderful Grace of Jesus	Blessed Assurance	50
		Wonderful Grace of Jesus	51
Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord	Guide My Feet	Christian, Let Your Burning Light	52
		For We Are Strangers No More	53
Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord	Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord	Guide My Feet	54
		Help Us to Help Each Other, Lord	55
I Sing the Mighty Power of God	I Sing the Mighty Power of God	Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord	56
		I Sing the Mighty Power of God	57
Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	You Shall Go Out with Joy	There Are Many Gifts	57
		I Sing the Mighty Power of God	58
Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	Be Thou My Vision	You Shall Go Out with Joy	59
		Joys Are Flowing like a Fountain	60
Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	Be Thou My Vision	61
		Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus	62
Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing	63
		Will You Let Me Be Your Servant	64



Can we live together?

Brethren and the winds of change

Can the members of the Church of the Brethren continue to live together? That question is more real now than at any other time in recent decades. Several groups are organizing meetings and structures based on their views of scripture and theology. Some people are saying the church would be better off if we divided. Others say it's essential that, as a peace church, we figure out how to stay together.


We've stayed together a pretty long time, all things considered. While a few congregations have split off over the years, the last major division was the formation of the Dunkard Brethren in 1926. Before that was the schism of 1883, which divided the Church of the Brethren and a group called the Progressives—now known as the Brethren Church.

While the long-ago divisions were based in theological differences, *The Brethren Encyclopedia* points out that there are usually social issues underlying the schisms. “While defections within the larger Brethren church may appear

to be linked with single issues, schisms tend to occur when Brethren become differentiated along multiple social and theological lines.” Some of the social factors can be geography, age, occupation, and education.

What pushes the factions of a church into schism? Not just the differences in social and theological issues, says the encyclopedia, but differences “in their exposures to the winds of change.”

So, where are we today, more than 90 years after the last split in the Church of the Brethren? Should we stay together? If so, how?

MESSANGER invites readers to send us thoughtful reflections on this topic. Submissions may be as brief as one line but no longer than 500 words. Please send them to messenger@brethren.org. All will be considered for possible publication in print or online editions of MESSANGER magazine. 

—The editors



When our church is broken

by Duane Grady

About 20 years ago, our daughter fell and broke her arm on a hiking trail in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where we had stopped on our way to Annual Conference. I will never forget my immediate emotional reaction of wanting to snap the bones back into place. I didn't want her arm to be broken and was eager to put things right. Fortunately, my thinking got the better of my emotions and, instead of doing more harm than good, we rushed her off to seek proper medical care.

This memory has added meaning for me as I hear the calls for separating and dividing up the church into smaller and smaller bits. I understand the emotional desire to be with people who look, act, and think like us, but this is the wrong remedy. I understand how difficult it can be to listen and worship with people whose ideas and attitudes appear to be radically divergent from what I hold dear, and yet the scriptures call us to do this hard thing.

The second chapter of Ephesians is not a historical account of how the early church acted like Christians. It is a living invitation to overcome our



own divisions and points of separation. Simply put, we cannot live out the fullness of the gospel without relating to others whose life experience and grounding in faith does not mirror our own. We need the other.


Throughout its history, the Church of the Brethren has been afraid of outsiders. This is the primary reason we remain a less racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse community than God wishes us to be. Throughout our history God has sent us prophets to help transform us, but too often we have chosen to ignore or discourage them. For decades we have wondered why our numbers shrink, but we haven't critiqued our lack of willingness to accept the people God was sending to us. Whenever we feel that we would be better off without "those" people, we fall short of the glory of God.

Within our denomination are leaders and churches who speak fluently about the need for repentance, holy redemption, and the destructive nature of sin. And within our denomination are leaders and churches who are gifted in the holy work of welcoming, including, and restoring people. For us to remain the church that God calls us to be, we need both groups—and we need to stop making each oth-

er's tasks more difficult through our words and actions.

My home life would be much easier if I got to make all the decisions without considering anyone else. But if this were the case, my home life would suffer because sometimes my ideas are stupid. Sometimes my ideas are self-centered and short-sighted. There has yet to be a time when our collective ideas did not make for a better, more spiritual, and more Holy Spirit-filled life together.

If we are lucky, God will continue to send people our way. Unless we learn to embrace those who are different, this will do us no earthly or heavenly good. A first step would be to stop imagining that we will be better off if we separate or organize ourselves into like-minded cliques. Desiring to be held accountable by none other than our own beliefs is far from the New Testament.

Our church is broken, but trying to fix things our own way is not in our best interest. The New Testament tells us how to move forward together. Now is a good time to do more than just read about it. 

Duane Grady is pastor of Cedar Lake Church of the Brethren in Auburn, Ind. He is a member of the Annual Conference Standing Committee, representing Northern Indiana District.

I UNDERSTAND THE EMOTIONAL DESIRE TO BE WITH PEOPLE WHO LOOK, ACT, AND THINK LIKE US, BUT THIS IS THE WRONG REMEDY.



“The Parents” woodcut by Kathe Kollwitz, 1922

Why?

by James Benedict

One warm summer night in 1985, a group of teenagers in a suburb of Chicago were looking for mischief to get into. Wandering around their neighborhood, they spotted a post and mailbox which, instead of being firmly planted in the ground, was stuck in an old milk can filled with cement. For reasons that were never clear, they decided to move it from its place on the curb to the middle of the road. There it lay on its side and cars had to swerve around it.

Until one didn't. The driver didn't see it and struck it at full speed. The impact launched the car into the air and it came down just in time to land on a van coming from the opposite direction. That van contained a man, a woman, and their two children—a teenaged boy and a preteen girl. The car that struck the milk can landed on the driver's side of the van, crushing and instantly killing the husband and daughter, while leaving the mother and son with just scratches and horrific emotional trauma.

The teenaged boy was a member of my youth group at

the time. I was working part-time at a church while going to seminary, and this was my first exposure as a pastor to sudden, senseless tragedy. I have had other exposures since, and while each incident is different in several ways, there is a common thread: the question, “Why?”

When death comes suddenly and out of season, we find ourselves in a land of shadows, a land of abrupt and unexpected darkness. Pain and anguish are our portion, and it seems so unfair. If we lift our voices in protest, it is understandable and acceptable. What has happened is unfair, and a life (or lives) ended far too soon. There is no getting around that.

By lifting our voices in protest, we join a long tradition, going back into the scriptures themselves. Job, who protested, was judged more righteous than his friends who offered excuses and explanations. In the psalms we hear, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” and “O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?”

WHEN DEATH COMES SUDDENLY AND OUT OF SEASON, WE FIND OURSELVES IN A LAND OF SHADOWS, A LAND OF ABRUPT AND UNEXPECTED DARKNESS. PAIN AND ANGUISH ARE OUR PORTION, AND IT SEEMS SO UNFAIR.

Asking “Why?” as a means of protest—as a way of expressing the pain we feel—is important. It is part of the process that will allow us to heal. But we must be careful about expecting a satisfactory answer. “Why?” is a question both theologians and ordinary folks have pondered for a long time and, to my knowledge, none have come up with a good enough answer. The question, “Why?” is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. People have pounded away at it for centuries without making much of a dent.


Even as we ask the question, we know deep down that an answer is not what we really want. What we really want is to have back the ones we have lost. Every one of us would likely accept a lifetime without an answer to the question in exchange for a few more years, or months, or weeks, or even a single day with those who are gone.

That is why the gospel does not promise an explanation; it promises resurrection. It promises that death only interrupts a life; it does not end a life forever. The gospel does not give good reasons; it gives good hope. It does not try to justify evil; it proclaims God’s ultimate triumph over evil in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Christians in the city of Thessalonika, to whom the Apostle Paul wrote, were concerned about some whom they had loved who had died. The absence of those who had died was almost too much to take, and the prospect of never seeing them again was breaking the hearts of those who remained. So Paul wrote to remind them of the greater plan of God:

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

It is important to notice in this description that the resurrection is not an individual event, in which each of us are raised one at a time and taken to some private paradise. Resurrection, as Paul describes it, is a coming together, a kind of reunion. Resurrection as a reunion is what is promised in the gospel, and it is the gospel that we are called to proclaim in the face of tragedy. The world as we know it is broken, but God who created the world is more than able to recreate it, setting right what is wrong, making whole what is incomplete. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has conquered death, and through faith in him we receive a share in that resurrection.

There is a new world coming, where all God’s people will be together, fully alive, full of love, full of joy. It will be a great reunion, and those who have died in faith will be there. This is God’s promise. This is our comfort and our hope. 

James Benedict is an interim minister at Frederick Church of the Brethren, following his retirement last year after 20 years of pastoring Union Bridge Church of the Brethren. Both congregations are in Maryland.



Turtledove fraktur drawing from Ephrata Cloister manuscript, Quill and ink, ca. 1745, used by permission of Clarke E. Hess

Winter is past

by **Christina Bucher**

Whether or not you watch HBO's *Game of Thrones* or read the books on which it is based, it is hard to ignore the cultural impact of that series, in which the Stark family has as its motto the phrase "Winter is coming." The words communicate a

Take a listen

You can find this music on YouTube and at Hymnary.org:

- ❁ William Billings, "I Am the Rose of Sharon"
- ❁ William Walker, "Hark, Don't You Hear the Turtledove!"
- ❁ Healey Willan, "Rise Up, My Love, My Fair One"

warning to be prepared for the worst, because the worst will happen.

By contrast, we encounter in Song of Solomon 2:10-13 a message of hope and optimism about the future: "Winter is past."

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.

The Bible's love poetry

Some people are shocked to find love poetry in the Bible, because they expect to read in the Scriptures only what they consider "holy" or "sacred." But the Song of Solomon (also titled "Song of Songs") is included in our sacred scriptures, tucked in between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah, and its inclusion in the Bible importantly affirms human sexual love. Although at face value these poems describe the human experience of love, some interpreters relate the Song of Solomon to the divine-human encounter.

I happen to think that both views are appropriate and that we can interpret this book on two distinct, but interrelated, levels. With this book we have within the Bible a celebration of

human sexuality. This is especially important because sexuality has been denigrated at various times in the history of Christianity. We can call this a “level one” approach to the book.

Without denying this important perspective, we can also see a “level two” approach, which recognizes that the human experience of love and desire gives us language for talking about our relationship with God. Because our identity as sexual beings is a gift from God, we can speak of our relationship with God through the language of sexual desire. These two levels support each other.

The poetic portion found in Song 2:10-13 expresses a lover’s desire for a beloved. At level one, these are two anonymous individuals who love each other and want to be together. A level two approach views the dialogue of the Song of Solomon as a conversation between divine and human figures. Traditionally, Christianity views the male as either God or Jesus and the female as either an individual seeker or the body of believers (the church).

Winter is past

The setting for this love poem is springtime. As April approaches in Pennsylvania, where I live, we eagerly anticipate the end of winter’s snow, sleet, and ice. We look for signs of spring—crocus and snowdrops, which sometimes sprout up through a layer of snow.

By contrast, in the eastern Mediterranean region where our passage originates, there are only two main seasons: winter and summer. Winter is

a rainy season, and summer is dry. To say that “winter is past” in the Mediterranean means that the rainy season has ended. The description in the Song of Solomon holds meaning no matter which “winter” we are talking about. Following winter is a season of beauty, fruitfulness, and abundance.

This passage captured the attention of our Anabaptist forbears, who related these verses to new life and the flowering of a new age for the people of God. The Dutch Anabaptist Dirk Philips (1504-1568) describes the ending of winter as an experience of God’s grace, when he writes, “The land has become fruitful in faith and the knowledge of God; the plants of the Lord sprout forth.” Reflecting on this passage in light of Dirk Philips, we might ask ourselves, “Where does our world demonstrate faith and knowledge of God? Where do we see crocuses springing up through the snow?”

Composers have set the words of this passage to music. The Anglo-Canadian musician Healey Willan (1880-1968) based his song “Rise Up, My Love, My Fair One,” on this section of the Song of Solomon. The colonial American composer William Billings (1746-1800) weaves together the language of Song of Solomon, chapter 2, in the anthem “I Am the Rose of Sharon.”

The voice of the turtledove


The “voice of the turtledove” (v. 12) signals change. English versions vary on how they translate the Hebrew word *tor*, which refers to a migratory dove that appears in the eastern

Mediterranean region in mid-April. Some (the New International Version, for example) simply call the bird a “dove,” but others (such as the New Revised Standard Version) specify that this bird is a “turtledove.” (The King James Version famously has “turtle,” a now archaic term for a turtledove.) Devotional writers use the term “turtledove” to symbolize faithful love, because turtledoves mate for life.

In “Hark! Don’t You Hear the Turtledove,” a song by 19th century Baptist musician William Walker (1809-1875), the turtledove symbolizes the redeeming love of God: “O Zion, hear the turtledove, the token of your Saviour’s love!”

My Elizabethtown College colleague Jeff Bach has written about turtledove symbolism in the 18th century Ephrata (Pa.) religious community (*Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata*). Pairs of turtledoves appear in the Ephrata art known as *fraktur* (as in the image accompanying this Bible study). In this art, pairs of turtledoves symbolize the love that binds Christ and his followers.

As readers of the Bible, we often want precise meanings for everything we encounter in the Scriptures, but poems often elude the precision we seek. Rather, they elicit emotional responses, and they have the power to call forth from our souls new poems, songs, and art.

Winter is past! The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land! 

Christina Bucher is professor of religion at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College.

To learn more

In *Lamentations; The Song of Songs* (Herald Press, 2015), Wilma Ann Bailey and Christina Bucher discuss ways the Song of Songs (an alternate title for Song of Solomon) has influenced Christian spirituality through hymns and devotional writing. This volume, part of the Believers Church Commentary Series, is available from Brethren Press. In an insight session at Annual Conference on Friday, July 6, the two authors will focus on the intersection of faith and the human experiences of desire, love, loss, and mourning, which can be found in those two books of the Bible.

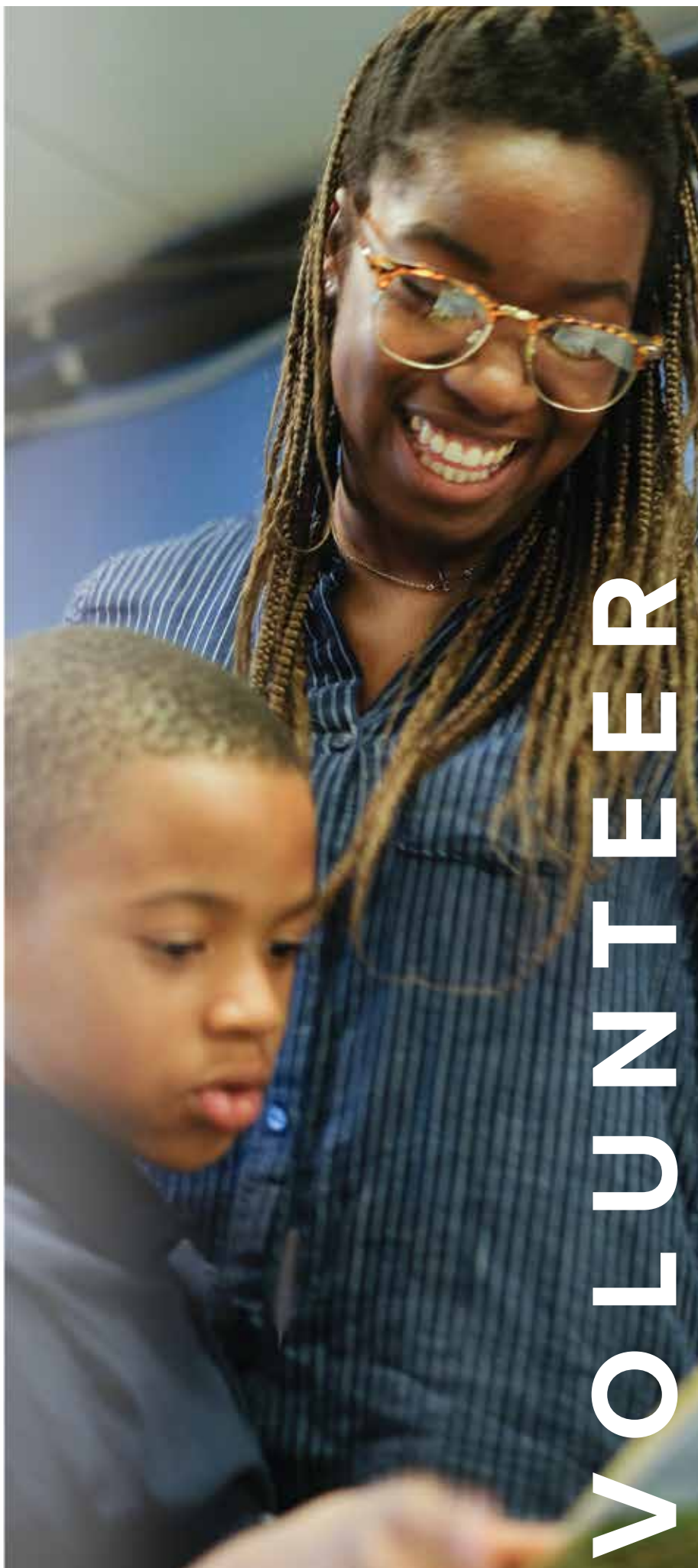


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VOLUNTEER

‘Compelling vision’ process to be central at Annual Conferences next two years

Annual Conference in 2017 called the Leadership Team

of the denomination, along with the Council of District Executives, to develop a process through which the church will engage in conversations leading to a “compelling vision” for the church’s life together.

A Compelling Vision Working Group has been formed, comprising general secretary David Steele, 2018 Annual Conference moderator Samuel Sarpiya, 2019 moderator Donita Keister, Conference director Chris Douglas, and two district executives chosen by the council, Colleen Michael and John Janzi. The 2020 moderator will join this group following this year’s Annual Conference.

This working group has set in place a process by which the church will be led through a time of envisioning beginning with Annual Conference 2018 and continuing through the 2019 Conference. The process is intended to move beyond conversations, debates, and official statements to living out

the steps that will move the denomination forward “with vision and purpose as we proclaim and serve Christ together.”

A Compelling Vision Process Team of seven individuals from across the denomination, with Sarpiya, Keister, and Douglas, will work during Annual Conference 2018 and 2019 and also alongside district gatherings to engage the church in conversations that will generate themes leading to a vision with a distinctive direction for the Church of the Brethren. During the 2018 Conference, one full business session and a portion of a second will be structured to begin the envisioning process. Following the 2018 Conference, district gatherings will provide input to the development of a denominational vision statement. Annual Conference 2019 will be primarily dedicated, including most of the business sessions, to the development of a compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren.

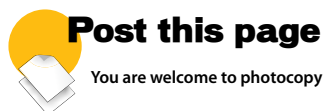
The Leadership Team and Council of District Executives are encourag-

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



ing all congregations “to be present in these conversations bringing your unique contributions and sharing in the hard work of discovering God’s plan for how we will continue to be the body of Christ in this broken world.”

“Confessing Jesus Christ as teacher, redeemer, and Lord, we desire to serve him by proclaiming, professing, and walking in his way together bringing his peace to our broken world. Join us in reclaiming a new passion for Christ and helping set a course for our future as the Church of the Brethren serving him in our communities and in the world!” —GUIDING STATEMENT FROM COMPELLING VISION WORKING GROUP



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Paul Munday and Pam Reist top AC ballot

Topping the ballot for the 2018 Annual Conference

are two nominees for moderator-elect: Paul Munday and Pam Reist.

Munday is an ordained minister who is retired from a long-term pastorate at Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren, and previously served on the denominational staff in the areas of evangelism and church growth. Reist is an ordained minister and pastor at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren who has



Paul Munday



Pam Reist



served on the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board, where she was a member of the executive committee.

Following are additional nominees, listed by position:

Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee: Emily Shonk Edwards of Nellysford, Va.; Del Keeney of Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Jeremy Driver of Harrisonburg, Va.; Deb Oskin of Columbus, Ohio.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 2: LaDonna Sanders Nkosi of Chicago,

Ill.; Paul Schrock of Indianapolis, Ind.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 3: Sue Ann Overman of Morgantown, W. Va.; Carol Yeazell of Asheville, N.C.

Bethany Seminary board of trustees, representing clergy: Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey of Hagerstown, Md.; Brandy Fix Liepelt of Annville, Pa.

Bethany Seminary board of trustees, representing laity: Ronald D. Flory of Cedar Falls, Iowa; Louis Harrell (incumbent) of Manassas, Va.

Brethren Benefit Trust board of directors: Nancy L. Bowman of Fishersville, Va.; Shelley Kontra of Lancaster, Pa.

On Earth Peace board: Jennifer Keeney Scarr of Trotwood, Ohio; Naomi Sollenberger of New Enterprise, Pa.

For more information about Annual Conference go to www.brethren.org/ac.

Personnel notes

Roxanne Aguirre started Jan. 16 as part-time coordinator of Spanish-language ministry training at the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, working from her home in California. Aguirre holds a master's degree in marriage and family therapy from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and a bachelor's in psychology from California State University Fresno.

Tammy Glenn began March 1 as executive director of finance and administration at Bethany Seminary. As controller, she will oversee financial planning and accounting operations and will manage

seminary investments in consultation with a consultant firm. Additional responsibilities include overseeing human resources, buildings and grounds, and Bethany housing. She will serve as treasurer for the board of trustees, enabling her to act in legal capacities for the seminary. Previously, she has been controller for the city of Richmond, Ind., among other work for area organizations.

John M. Loop began Jan. 8 as CEO of Timbercrest Retirement Community in North Manchester, Ind. He is a former administrator of Asbury Methodist Village in

Gaithersburg, Md., and holds degrees from Ohio State University and Valparaiso University. He succeeds David Lawrenz, who retired after 45 years at Timbercrest.

Amy Gall Ritchie is resigning as director of student development and alumni/ae relations for Bethany Theological Seminary, effective May 15. She has worked there since August 2003. Her work for Bethany has included leading spiritual direction as part of ministry formation, helping with a research project interviewing congregations to better prepare students for ministry, and, in

2016, serving as interim director of admissions and student services. She is a graduate of Bethany and Columbia Theological Seminary.

Beth Sollenberger is serving quarter-time as interim district executive for Michigan District, while she continues as executive for South/Central Indiana District.

Rick Villalobos started Jan. 29 as production coordinator for Brethren Benefit Trust. He holds a bachelor's in communications with a minor in graphic design from DePaul University.

No longer strangers

by Emmy Goering

McPherson College in Kansas excels at providing amazing yet attainable travel opportunities for its students. Just a few weeks ago, I was one of seven students who traveled to the African country of Rwanda with professor Herb Smith as part of our interterm class.

We met several times prior to the trip to learn about the country we'd be visiting, and I was shocked by its violent history. In 1994, just 24 years ago, Rwanda found itself in the midst of a genocide. About 800,000 people were murdered in the span of only 100 days. This racially fueled rampage left Rwanda a completely different country.

We left McPherson at 4 a.m. to catch a flight from Wichita, Kan., to Washington, D.C., where we spent the night. The next day was another early morning and a 14-hour flight to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. From there, we flew four more hours to Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. Although we spent a lot of time getting to our destination, the experience proved to be more than worth the effort.

On our first full day in Kigali, we visited a memorial museum dedicated to the genocide victims and telling their stories. The sheer number of people who were killed was hard to fathom. As I looked at pictures and learned more about them, I felt overwhelmed by the many tragedies. The horror had occurred so recently that many of the people working in the museum had been affected by the genocide, having lost friends and family members. Perhaps some of the people we passed on the streets were among those doing the killing.

One of our drivers shared his story from the genocide. As a young boy, he had come home from school one afternoon to find his family missing. He knew that to survive he'd have to leave. So he struck out on his own. He eventually fled to the Republic of the Congo and found safety there. The 800,000 who died weren't so lucky.

On a lighter note, one of my favorite experiences was our visit to Akagera National Park along the border with Tanzania. It is a refuge for protected species of the savannah such as zebras, giraffes, elephants, and baboons. More

than 12,000 large mammals and 482 bird species roam free in central Africa's largest protected wetland. I had hoped we would see some of the wildlife up close, but I could never have imagined just how close we'd be. In fact, I have some photos of a young elephant practicing his charge technique with the vehicle in front of us. It was remarkable!

This trip wasn't all about sightseeing, however. Rwanda is quickly making a name for itself for educational advancements, and it was exciting to be a small part of this effort. Our group spent three days with Rwandans at varying levels of English proficiency. We met with university students and highly educated adults who needed practice with pronunciation and conversational English skills. We spent time just speaking English with students, practicing certain words and common phrases as well as reading aloud.

On the last day of the class, we produced a deck of cards and the students giggled with excitement. They quickly picked up our instructions, and we laughed together over several silly games of Go Fish. Their enjoyment of this little glimpse of Western culture gave me a new perspective. In those moments, our differences of culture, background, and understandings transformed into a new, shared reality.

Although our return trip was just as long, Rwanda no longer seems so far away. 

Emmy Goering, a student at McPherson College, recently spent a year of Brethren Volunteer Service working as peacebuilding and policy associate at the Church of the Brethren Office of Public Witness in Washington, DC.





“ANOTHER THOUGHTFUL ISSUE. KUDOS TO JONATHAN EMMONS FOR CHALLENGING US WITH HIS THOUGHTS IN “LEAVE YOUR CAVES, O PEOPLE OF GOD.””

Made by God

The letters from Galen Miller and Myron Jackson in the March MESSENGER are right on in my opinion. I have spent a lot of time researching the medical aspects of homosexuality, and if you look, you will find that homosexuals are just

normal people.

I have a niece and nephew who are homosexual and they are normal. They have just chosen a same sex person to share their most intimate selves. It may or may not be sexual, but that is for them to decide, not me. I do know that they were made by God just like a heterosexual. They

deserve the same love, compassion, and yes, rights as I have.

Allen Clague
Rockingham, Va

Thank you

I want to thank you for “Pilgrimage: Seeking Our True Home” in the

Brethren Prayer & Worship Summit
April 20th - 21st, 2018

Come one! Come All!

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)”

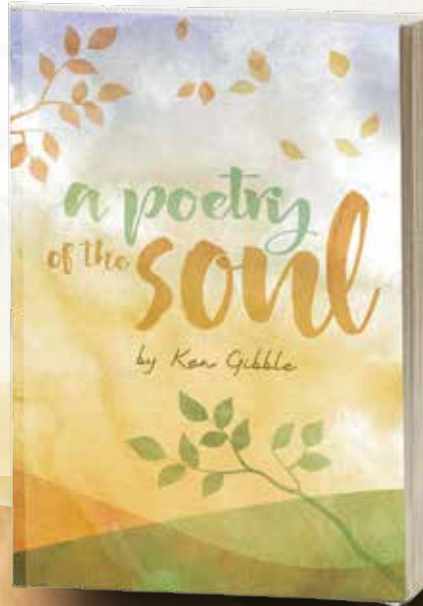
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December MESSENGER. I found it both informative and inspirational. Thank you for including Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting, "The Annunciation." I think it is the most beautiful painting of the annunciation that I have ever seen. Also, thank you for your messages from the publisher. I look forward to them. Thank you for your hard and faithful work.

Jim Eikenberry
Annville, Pa

Thoughtful in March

Another thoughtful issue. Kudos to Jonathan Emmons for challenging us with his thoughts in "Leave Your Caves, O People of God."

Larry Klingler
Somerset, Ohio

From cover to cover

We really enjoy the MESSENGER and read it from cover to cover. Keep up the good work.

Reba and Dean Beery
Huntington, Ind.

About injustice

The theme of the January/February issue seemed to be injustice and how we address it. Probably the most persecuted minority are those who believe in the Christian fundamentals.

Four centuries ago my ancestor, Hans Heinrich Landis (1553-1614), who was an Anabaptist preacher, became a martyr for Jesus Christ. After he was beheaded, the government confiscated the property of his widow and orphans. Their descendants and other oppressed Brethren immigrated to Pennsylvania to be free to obey the holy scriptures

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“ THESE CHRISTIANS REFUSED TO BAKE A WEDDING CAKE FOR A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY THAT THEY COULD NOT WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE PARTICIPATE IN. ”

and serve God with a clear conscience without persecution.

Today the state of Oregon is oppressing Christians who believe the holy scriptures and try to serve God. Although the Oregon Equality Act prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment and their Constitution promises religious liberty and free speech, Aaron and Melissa Klein have lost their employment due to their sexual orientation. They believe that marriage

is only between a man and a woman and they will not participate in any perversion of it. These Christians refused to bake a wedding cake for a religious ceremony that they could not with a clear conscience participate in. As a result, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries ordered the couple to pay \$135,000 in damages for emotional distress to those who bullied them. In addition to losing their business, the Kleins have suffered harassment for their

decision and even received death threats.

Melissa Klein said, “I loved my shop. It meant everything to me and losing it has been so hard for me and my family. We lost everything we loved and worked so hard to build.”

For their financial loss and emotional distress, the Kleins have received nothing. Oregon has committed a crime by violating their civil rights.

Ben Haldeman
Greencastle, Pa.

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New members

Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.:

Selena Collazo-Guevara, Bekah Houff, Carter Kruse, Sierra Royer, Kylie Witmer

Indian Creek, Harleysville, Pa.:

Lamont Edwards, Natasha Edwards
Ligonier, Pa.: Michelle Clark, Celeste Olszewski

Linville Creek, Broadway, Va.:

Gretchyn Germoth, Jeff Orebaugh

Midland, Va.:

Charlene Hill, Erin Olinger

Mohican, West Salem, Ohio:

Connie Delozier, David Delozier, Jack Donley, Jennifer Donley, Philip Eberly, Sarah Fraser, Kyle Hinton, Ben Kunkel, Brennon Kunkel, Lily Kunkel, Renee Kunkel, Schuyler Kunkel, Cole Marley, Diane Marley, Gabe Nichelson, Lydia Palmer, Jerard Reeves, Paula Reeves, Bethanie Schaefer, Carole Winkler, David Winkler, Ava Workinger

Plumcreek, Shelocla, Pa.:

Toni Parsley, Steve Wilhoit

Plymouth, Ind.:

Ryan Bernard, Dorothy Eads, Judy Matz, Phil Matz

Ridgely, Md.:

Lisa Calloway, Rebecca Keubler

Sunnyside, New Creek, W.Va.:

Luther Riggelman

Wedding anniversaries

Anderson, Donald and Lucinda, Falfurrias, Texas, 55

Baughman, Dan and Carolyn, Culver, Ind., 50

Bixler, Don and Wilma Jean, Goshen, Ind., 55

Cripe, Farrell and Frances, Goshen, Ind., 65

Eash, Dale and Judy, Goshen, Ind., 55

Long, Melvin and Linda, Westminster, Md., 60

Ramsbey, Gene and Lynn, North Manchester, Ind., 65

Stansbury, Leighton and Dottie, New Cumberland, Pa., 67

Deaths

Baumgartner, Lois Emleen, 99, Elgin, Ill., Jan. 16

Bixler, Wilma Jean Dishong, 82, Goshen, Ind., Dec. 17

Blair, Peggy Ann, 82, Somerset, Pa., Jan. 28

Bolton, Charles W., 89, Franklin, Pa., Dec. 28

Bolton, Murray M., Jr., 91, Media, Pa., Dec. 16, 2016

Bowman, Jerry L., 79, Glen Arm, Md., Nov. 19

Burger, Virginia E. Burnside, 101, Goshen, Ind., May 3

Buss, Miriam, 100, Bremen, Ind., Feb. 1

Claar, Anna L., 85, Roaring Spring, Pa., Jan. 15

Clark, William, 83, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 7

Cramer, Esther M. Brubaker, 83, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Dec. 30

Deatrlick, Sharyn Blosser, 70, Sherwood, Ohio, Jan. 9

Desper, Meryl F., 86, Stuarts Draft, Va., Nov. 17, 2016

Dipert, Douglas, 65, Walkerton, Ind., May 12

Dunbar, Robert Lowell, 82, Adrian, Mich., Jan. 10

Durham, James D., 81, Wooster, Ohio, Aug. 12

Ebersole, Adin R., 88, Chambersburg, Pa., Jan. 19

Edwards, Betty Bowersox, 92, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 14

Etter, Doris Jean, 81, Chambersburg, Pa., Jan. 13

Fillmore, Pauline Ruth Fagerstone, 90, Live Oak, Calif., Jan. 9

Fleming, Mabel M., 77, Shelocla, Pa., Jan. 13

Flory, Raymond, 84, Lawrence, Kan., Feb. 22, 2017

Frick, Kevin Glenn, 58, Bremen, Ind., Dec. 11

Funkhouser, Judy Annette, 65, Warrenton, Va., Feb. 24, 2017

Gamble, Rhoda C. Becker, 98, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 23

Gass, Harold Lee, 88, Hartville, Mo., Jan. 29

Goodrich, Opal Hester, 98, Prairie City, Iowa, Jan. 27

Guyton, Patricia Rebecca Harshman, 82, Burkittsville, Md., Oct. 16

Harsh, Rose Ina L., 88, Eglon, W.Va., April 21, 2017

Heisey, Dennis, 73, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 16

Hess, Marilyn Shupp, 87, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 29

Holmgren, Everett C. (Sam), 86, Plymouth, Ind., April 24, 2017

Hoover, Betty Jean Williams, 93, Martinsburg, Pa., Jan. 9

Judy, Jesse Troy, 93, Eglon, W.Va., Jan. 8

Kendall, James Lloyd, 81, Smithfield, Pa., Oct. 1

Kesner, Richard Lee, 82, Keyser, W.Va., Nov. 10

Kintner, Emery Berton, 94, Merrillville, Ind., Jan. 16

Kulp, Erma L. Weaver, 99, Goshen, Ind., July 18

Landis, Richard, 89, Lititz, Pa., Jan. 26

Leatherman, Howard G., 84, Oregon, Ohio, Jan. 27

Mast, Rhonda Lee Holderman, 77, Corvallis, Ore., Feb. 21, 2017

May, Erma Ritchie, 88, Broadway, Va., Oct. 3

McCan, Virgil, 86, Plymouth, Ind., Feb. 22, 2017

Moore, Frances Devan, 76, Uniontown, Pa., Dec. 20

Moser, Glenn Elmer, 83, Middletown, Md., Dec. 4

Moser, Naomi F. Schroyer, 95, Frederick, Md., Oct. 17

Munson, Loren E., 88, Dixon, Ill., Feb. 3

Nair, Naomi E. (Patsy), 84, Eglon, W.Va., June 4

Perry, Rodney B., 52, Staunton, Va., Aug. 29

Petry, Johanna (Joby) Stangland, 79, Walkerton, Ind., May 19

Rainey, Albert Gerald, 90, Timberville, Va., May 30

Riegsecker, Ellen Miller, 89, Goshen, Ind., Oct. 6

Roller, Lucile Ritchie, 76, Timberville, Va., Sept. 16

Rotruck, Dewey Vance, 97, Keyser, W.Va., Dec. 12

Russell, George F., 69, Defiance, Ohio, Dec. 10

Schick, Marjorie Ann, 83, Lawrence, Kan., Jan. 4

Schulz, Robert, 90, Burbank, Ohio, May 21

Shaffer, Daniel L., Sr., 72, Westminster, Md., Nov. 30

Silvers, Peggy Jane Caruthers, 80, Lawrence, Kan., Dec. 2

Snead, Dorothy Jane, 91, New Oxford, Pa., Nov. 4

Snowberger, Devona M. Miner, 78, Waynesboro, Pa., Feb. 4

Spitzer, Danny, 78, Broadway, Va., Jan. 24, 2017

Strausbaugh, Ronald W., 86, New Oxford, Pa., Nov. 14

Srite, Jane Arlene Brandenburg, 83, Rohrerstown, Md., June 6

Stultz, Owen Glennard, 90, Roanoke, Va., Jan. 16

Sullender, William W., 82, Stuarts Draft, Va., Jan. 15

Tate, Mary E., 82, Lawrence, Kan., Nov. 12

Teets, Charles Curtis, 68, Eglon, W.Va., May 17

Teets, David L., 92, Eglon, W.Va., Nov. 17

Thomas, Myron, 91, Chico, Calif., Jan. 23

Tisdale, Thomas Clinton, 78, Stuarts Draft, Va., June 1

Townsend, Wilma N., 97, Lake Odessa, Mich., Feb. 1

Weed, Lucille Lantz, 97, Mount Airy, Md., Jan. 18

Winters, Jesse M., 94, Eglon, W.Va., Aug. 18

Wolfe, Catherine L. Gordon, 96, Frederick, Md., Jan. 9

Wyland, Beverly A., 66, East Freedom, Pa., Feb. 8

Yoder, John, 89, Goshen, Ind., May 4

Zehner, Dale, 74, Plymouth, Ind., April 26, 2017

Ordained

Brock, Sie, Jr., S. Ohio Dist. (Stonelick, Pleasant Plain, Ohio), Jan. 7

Crissman, Jason, W. Pa. Dist. (Berkey, Windber, Pa.), Feb. 4

Estep, Audrey, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Stevens Hill Community, Elizabethtown, Pa.), Jan. 21

Ishman, Daniel R., W. Pa. Dist. (Center Hill, Kittanning, Pa.), Jan. 28

Kragt, Caleb, N. Ind. Dist. (Rock Run, Goshen, Ind.), Dec. 31

Lattimer, Benjamin, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.), Sept. 17

Miller, R. Scot, Mich. Dist. (Common Spirit, Wyoming, Mich.), Nov. 26

Moyer, Clay, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Hatfield, Pa.), Jan. 14

Licensed

Barth, Jason W., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Mountain View, Bunker Hill, W.Va.), Jan. 14

Schrag, Pamela, W. Plains Dist. (Newton, Kan.), Feb. 18

Placements

Kragt, Caleb, co-pastor, West Charleston, Tipp City, Ohio, Jan. 1

Lattimer, Benjamin, co-pastor, Stone, Huntingdon, Pa., Jan. 15

Lattimer, Cindy, from associate pastor, Lancaster, Pa, to co-pastor, Stone, Huntingdon, Pa., Jan. 15

McLearn-Montz, Alan, from interim pastor, Ottumwa, Iowa, to pastor, Bakersfield, Calif., Jan. 15

We don't need another hero

have an appreciation for the writings of Vernard Eller, long-time professor of religion at the University of La Verne in southern California, primarily because his views are cutting edge and sometimes cutting. I never knew him personally, but I



KEVIN KESSLER

gather from his books that he was a person comfortable in his own skin, even if what he said or wrote stirred thoughts and emotions in others.

Recently I read Eller's *Towering Babble: God's People Without God's Word*. I have a hunch that this book raised some eyebrows back in 1983. Eller told the church rather directly that it was losing its grounding in theology. In his mind, the church

seemed to be moving in the direction of anthropology. In other words, the church was becoming more human-centered than God-centered.

Eller wrote: "Above all, at the heart of our faith, we dare not allow the glorifying of the human to encroach our glorifying of God." And then he proposed a minimum core theology consisting of eight points. Point 5 rose to the surface for me. It says: "Human ego-assertiveness, any desire to look heroic in the sight of God, is sin."

Many people have suggested reasons for our current state of uncertainty about denominational unity: We don't agree on the authority and understanding of scripture. Matters of human sexuality become lines in the sand. Conservatism or progressivism is the problem. Various



forms of theology take us in different directions.

Is one of these the reason for our disunity? Is it all of the above and more? Could it be something different?

Eller gives me pause. Could his point 5 be a reason that has not been given attention in our 21st century dilemma? Is heroism a factor in our present situation? In efforts to keep the church "pure" or to offer a prophetic voice or to find the solution to our problems, are we wanting to emerge as the hero who once and for all brings about a way forward on which we can all agree?

Could it be we have not found the way forward yet because our approach is too anthropological (heroic) rather than theological (God)? Are we expecting the solutions to come from us rather than from the mind of Christ?

Thank you, Vernard Eller, for decades-old thoughts that have relevance for our situation today. 🙏

Kevin Kessler is district executive for Illinois and Wisconsin District.

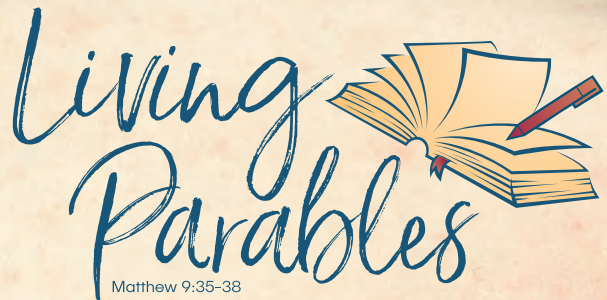
COULD IT BE WE HAVE NOT FOUND THE WAY FORWARD YET BECAUSE OUR APPROACH IS TOO ANTHROPOLOGICAL (HEROIC) RATHER THAN THEOLOGICAL (GOD)? ARE WE EXPECTING THE SOLUTIONS TO COME FROM US RATHER THAN FROM THE MIND OF CHRIST?

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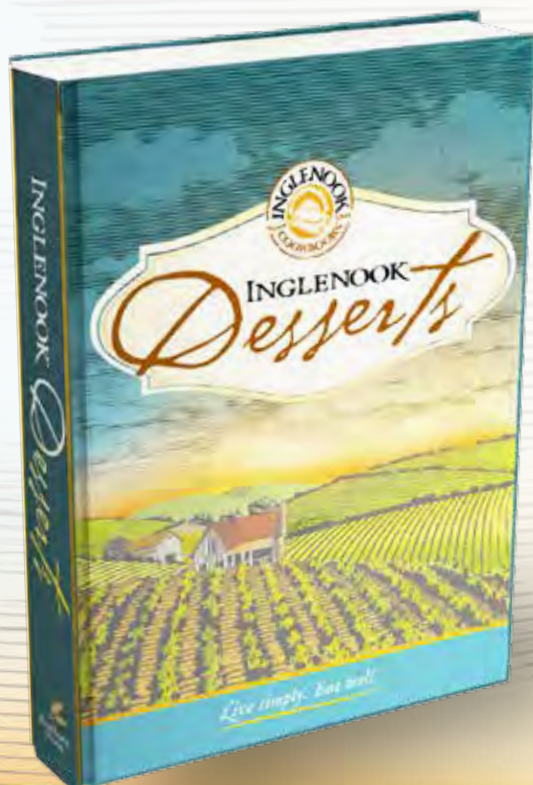
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