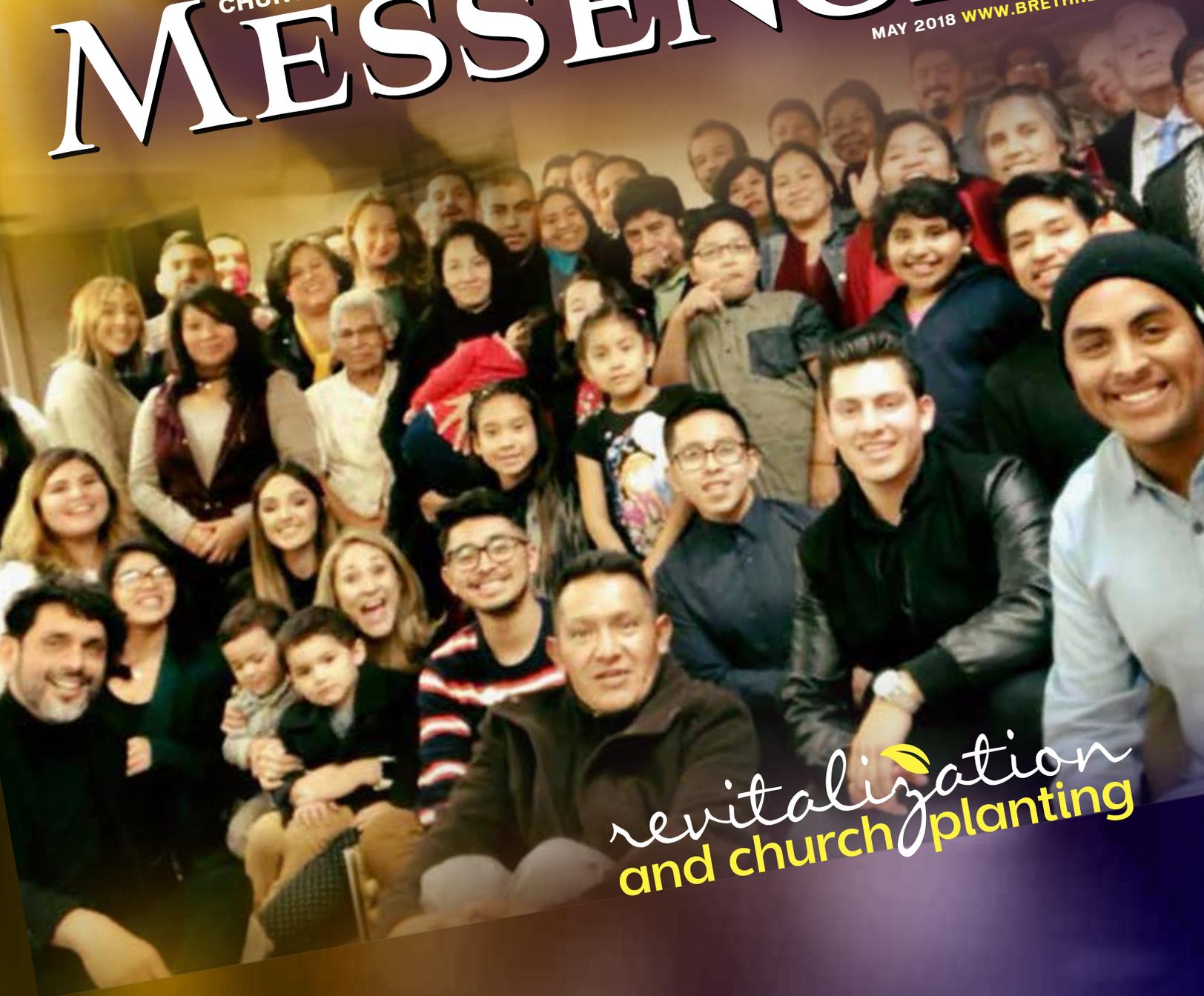


# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

MAY 2018 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)



*revitalization*  
and church **planting**



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# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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## On the cover

Members of Príncipe de Paz Church of the Brethren in Santa Ana, Calif., one of the congregations whose stories are told in a feature section on revitalization and church planting. Above, musicians lead in worship at Príncipe de Paz. Photos by Jess Hoffert.

## The antisocial network

**L**ast year two of us on the MESSENGER editorial team led a workshop on fake news. While listing tips on how to be safer online, I mentioned the tactics of Cambridge Analytica. Don't take any of those quizzes on Facebook, I said.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

That was a shock to many of the people in the room. Those quizzes seem like harmless fun. Who wouldn't want to learn more about their psychological traits?

In late 2016, Cambridge Analytica was beginning to make news for its shadow marketing to individuals. From just a few data points about an individual, the company was able to extrapolate a lot of information. From there, the company could target the individual with "dark posts," online ads customized to manipulate and influence the recipient. For example, a person marked by neuroticism would be sent an ad with a threatening image.

What surprised me was the way this then little-known company had managed to influence major political activities in both the US and the UK. What didn't surprise me was the source of the valuable data: Facebook.

Facebook knows what you searched for on the Internet, how long your phone conversations were, and what 10 albums changed your life. It knows everything you've told it, everything your friends have told it, and everything you didn't tell it directly but unwittingly allowed it to know. Using Facebook is free, which means the valuable product being sold is us.

What about the Church of the Brethren Facebook page? Whatever questions there may be about Facebook, you can be sure that the church's use of the social network is for good. The communication team posts on Facebook to report news, share articles, lift up prayers, observe key days in the church year, and generally keep the church family connected. We don't have the time or inclination to go looking for questionable information about our readers.

But a few things we do know: The stories that got the most engagement in recent weeks were about school shootings and the church's response. Readers also celebrated news of the release of kidnapped girls in Nigeria. And over the last few months, the most popular post by far was the Christmas message on Dec. 24, which reached more than 23,000 people and garnered 2,232 likes, comments, and shares.

That is, this social networking tool can still be a channel for good news. But let's be wise as serpents. Let's be newly aware that collective naivete about our online activities has serious consequences in the real world.



## How to reach us

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Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appears in stained glass at Chicago First Church of the Brethren.*

## The last march

**O**n April 4, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., First Church of the Brethren in Chicago hosted “The Last March,” an event focusing on the last year of King’s life. Partner organizations were the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago and McCormick Theological Seminary.

For some months in 1967, the congregation hosted the Civil Rights leader when he was fighting for open housing in Chicago. The April 4 event engaged artists, clergy, scholars, and members of the community in contemplative reflection on King’s life and work during that last year before his death. Explained an announcement: “Memories of Dr. King tend to neglect his challenges of justice he articulated toward the end of his life.”



Courtesy of Ulea Madaki

## Congratulations to EYN!

Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, observed a landmark 95th anniversary on its Founder’s Day this year. This photo of a cake for the occasion was submitted by Ulea Madaki. EYN traces its beginnings to March 1923, when Church of the Brethren mission workers H. Stover Kulp and Albert Helser settled in the village of Garkida in northeast Nigeria.

## Church organist still playing at 100

**O**n March 11, Wilmington (Del.) Church of the Brethren celebrated the 100th birthday of church organist Frances Haas. She was asked to be the temporary organist and choir director in 1977, and that “temporary” position has lasted 41 years.

At an early age, Haas knew God had gifted her with the love of music. She insisted she needed a piano to pursue her

childhood dream. A piano arrived at her home and she taught herself to play “Silent Night,” and played it over and over until her father signed her up for 25-cent piano lessons. Through the years, she has loved playing the piano and organ, directing the church choir, and teaching students.

During the worship service celebrating her birthday, Haas picked her favorite hymns and listened as church pianist

David Scott played “Precious Lord” in her honor. Following worship, she talked about her childhood, love of music, and love for her church family. She was presented with a book of birthday greetings, a certificate for her 41 years of service, a tote bag to carry her music, and an embroidered throw blanket. A birthday lunch included cake. “I’ve enjoyed every minute of my birthday celebration,” Haas said. —Jody Olkowski



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.





# When God makes you leap, walls fall

by Jess Hoffert

*Cuando le canto la tierra se estremece  
Cuando le adoro se rompen las cadenas  
Los muros caerán  
When I sing, the earth shakes  
When I love you, the chains break  
The walls will fall*

—From the song “Los muros caerán”  
by Miel San Marcos

**A good sermon moves us spiritually. A once-in-a-lifetime sermon moves us across the country.**

I experienced the latter on the campus of Indiana’s Manchester

University in 2016. Richard Zapata, an Ecuadoran pastor at Príncipe de Paz Church of the Brethren in Santa Ana, Calif., was one of the guest speakers at National Young Adult Conference.

His message began with a photo of his family projected on the screen: his Mexican wife and co-pastor Becky, their 20-something daughters Estefany and Gaby, a son-in-law Rafael, and their grandchildren Nathaniel (Nano) and Naason (Nono). They all live together in Anaheim, about 20 minutes from their church.

Richard began to talk about his





*Adriana, who attends Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren, prepares a bag of food for a neighbor in need at the food pantry.*



*One of the highlights of the week is lunch with Servando, one of the church elders who Jess now refers to as abuelito (grandpa).*

church with infectious love and enthusiasm. He shared that services are entirely in Spanish. Members come from a handful of Spanish-speaking countries including Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, turning potlucks into boldly flavored and occasionally spicy multicultural feasts. But there was one problem his church was facing: it was growing too quickly. Services in the sanctuary were (and still are) standing room only. The church's location in the heart of a residential area made street parking a nightmare.

This did not sound like the Church of the Brethren I knew. I grew up in the parsonage of Lewiston Church of the Brethren, set among cornfields in southeast Minnesota. Our potlucks, while absolutely delicious, sometimes ended up being five variations of pasta with a couple fluff salads and an apple

pie. And we never had an issue with overcrowding. Rather, like many Brethren churches, the Lewiston congregation and Stover Memorial Church of the Brethren in Des Moines, Iowa (which I've attended for the past 10 years), have been in discernment about their future for years, largely due to their dwindling membership.

So when Richard ended his sermon with a generous invitation to come and serve his church, and in return have housing and meals covered, I instantly heard God saying, "Go."

That nudge turned into a push over the subsequent 18 months, and it manifested itself in a myriad of ways. A close friend received a life-threatening cancer diagnosis, reminding me that tomorrow is never promised. While I had been working my dream job of writing for travel magazines for the past six years, I reached a point where

it was time to give back more tangibly to the world. And my biological clock was sounding the "I think it's time for you to settle down and find someone to start a family with" alarm, so if I was going to make the leap to southern California, now was the time.

On Jan. 5, my 29th birthday, I packed up my Honda Civic with clothes, a few mementos of home, and my two cats, and we embarked on a cross-country journey to Santa Ana, where I plan to spend the next six months of my life.

### **Landing on love**

There was something absolutely terrifying and beautifully freeing about taking a leap like this. I had some idea that I would be helping with youth ministry and communications work while serving at Principe de Paz, but I had no idea what my room

**NOTHING COULD HAVE PREPARED ME FOR THE LOVE I WAS GOING TO FEEL HERE. GRACIAS A DIÓS, INDEED.**



Jess and cat Max travel to California.

at the church would look like, how I was going to handle the language barrier (I took some Spanish in high school but I'm far from fluent), and what kind of structure my days would have. The planner in me did not like this feeling one bit. The adventurer in me was pumped.

After nearly 2,000 miles of driving through the plains of Nebraska, snow globe mountain scenes in Colorado, Martian-like terrain in Utah and Arizona, and a quick photo op at the

“Welcome to Las Vegas” sign (much to the chagrin of my cat Max), we made it. It was twilight when I parked the car at the church, and Daniel Lopez, one of the church elders who helps with cleaning, opened the gate for me and co-pastor Becky.

She led me through the industrial-lit hallway of the educational building next to the church, unlocking the door to my new home. It was freshly painted bright green with white trim. New lights were installed in what was formerly the pastor's office. Chairs, a table topped with a starter kit of snacks, and a mini-fridge sat in a corner. A few men carried in a dresser drawer a few minutes after I started unpacking my bags. My bed was perfectly made with fresh blankets and a towel neatly placed in the corner. This was home.

The feeling of being welcomed so warmly as a stranger overwhelmed me. And I continue to feel like I'm living the Orange County edition of *Eat. Pray. Love.* each day that I'm here. One of the neighbors brings me tama-

les some mornings. Another makes me enchiladas. Some Sundays, an elderly woman hands me a container of *frijoles* (beans) or potatoes (*patatas*). She calls me *hermano misionero* (brother missionary) and I refer to her as *querida hermana* (dear sister).

Servando, a former Mexican soccer referee who is now in charge of security at the church, has become my caring *abuelito* (grandfather) who checks on me almost daily and takes me out for a weekly lunch at a Mexican grocery store or his favorite fast-food Chinese joint. We navigate our Spanglish together and share a few jokes over each meal. Before I can finish saying “*gracias*” for all he does, he kindly interrupts me, pointing into the air with his index finger and saying, “*Gracias a Diós*” (thanks be to God). Nothing could have prepared me for the love I was going to feel here. *Gracias a Diós*, indeed.

## Planting new seeds

The building that houses Iglesia Príncipe de Paz was initially the home of First Church of the Brethren, an Anglo congregation, started in 1924. In the 1980s, as the surrounding neighborhood evolved with more Hispanic residents, the church was forced to evolve to stay alive, and hired its first Hispanic ministers, Mario and Olga Serrano, in 1990.

Richard's father, who came from a Baptist background, served the church from 2003 to 2005 before he passed away due to cancer. His wife, Mercedes, continued as a pastor until 2008. Richard and Becky took over the pastoral reins in 2009, and they serve as part-time ministers today, along with an impressive roster of lay leaders, deacons, and board members.

Richard's messages at Tuesday evening Bible studies and Sunday morning services center on the grace of God,

## So much has been provided

So much has been provided for me here, and I haven't done much beyond introducing myself to the congregation at this point. It's all been so humbling and I've sometimes felt unworthy, but the experience has helped me find deeper meaning in the Ecclesiastes 3 scripture, “To every thing there is a season. . .” Here it is with a personal SoCal twist:

*To every thing there is a season.  
A time to give and a time to receive.  
A time to eat tenderloins and a time to eat tamales.  
A time to pray and a time to be prayed for.  
A time to have a plan and a time to go with the flow.  
A time to rest and a time to rock.  
A time to be home and a time to explore.  
A time to listen and a time to speak.  
A time to sit and a time to leap.*

This is my season to leap. I'm blessed to have been given a warm bed to land on and call home.

—from Jess Hoffert's “Bridges of Orange County” blog



*Jess with Servando and Raul.*

reminding members that God loves them unconditionally and that the ultimate price has been paid for their sins.

They didn't always have this focus. Up until five years ago, messages focused more on obeying God's law and following his rules. But when Richard's daughters came of age and started to feel like church was a place of judgment and division rather than compassion and unity, something changed within him. He took a long, hard look at his messages and began to study the concept of grace, eventually working it into his sermons.

Some members accused his new sermons of being too soft. A few even stopped attending. But on the flip side, an influx of younger people joined the church, and today it's not unusual for there to be 50 youth ranging from kindergarten through high school among the 200 or so attendees on a regular Sunday.

*Richard shares the message at a Sunday service.*



## Food free

"Food, free! Food, free!" shouted Areli and Ramón as we lugged large aluminum foil baking pans filled with spaghetti along a bike trail and to our serving spot in the heart of this colorful jungle of temporary shelters. After a couple minutes, people started emerging from their tents in the shadow of the Anaheim Angels baseball stadium, graciously accepting styrofoam containers filled with pasta and meatballs. One man took an extra portion for his girlfriend and came back with a box of freshly baked cinnamon-sugar chips for us to enjoy. It was a perfect glimpse of humanity for me: a poor church family taking the time to dig deep and prepare a meal so the hungry could be fed, and in turn, a couple down on their luck sharing what they could as a sign of their gratitude.

There's no easy solution to completely solving homelessness, and my heart hurts with a lack of answers. But I do know this: I want to hold onto that perfect little glimpse of humanity I witnessed. Love can grow in the most unlikely settings, and I pray that somehow, during these six months, I'm planting seeds so it can thrive in the hearts of those who need it most.

*—from Jess Hoffert's "Bridges of Orange County" blog*

Richard sees himself as a planter as much as he considers himself a pastor. In light of recent church closures in Pacific Southwest District, Richard has been dreaming of ways to plant new Hispanic Brethren congregations in the same areas where churches

have shuttered, many of which are in spots that have grown far more diverse in the past few years. One dream already has come to fruition: a new Príncipe de Paz congregation in the city of Los Banos, about four hours north of Santa Ana. While just a few

**RICHARD HAS BEEN DREAMING OF WAYS TO PLANT NEW HISPANIC BRETHERN CONGREGATIONS IN THE SAME AREAS WHERE CHURCHES HAVE SHUTTERED.**

months old, the congregation has around 30 regular attendees.

In addition to providing financial and spiritual support to its new sister congregation, Príncipe de Paz in Santa Ana puts a significant emphasis on mission work, feeding more than 450 homeless each month, donating funds to missions in three Latin American countries, and housing a food pantry that provides thousands of pounds of free food to community members every year. And they do all of this with a total annual church budget of less than \$80,000.

It's all thanks to the infectious spirit of volunteerism that this church has, especially in pastor Becky, who donates countless hours beyond her part-time status to prepping church meals and ministering to women and children (her other passion besides cooking). She's a force of love to be reckoned with, and in tandem with her husband's vision, there's every reason to believe that Príncipe de Paz will only continue to grow.

## Los muros caerán

When I spoke in front of the church for the first time (in Spanish with Richard's help), I shared that my mantra for these next six months is to be a bridge instead of a wall. "We have too many walls in our world today," I said, with an audible murmur of agreement from the congregation, "and I want to discover ways in which, together, we can take them down, ultimately making this world a more peaceful, loving place as God intended it to be."

When I spoke those words, I had no idea how this mantra would manifest itself. I've worked on a variety of projects so far, helping 21 of the church's youth raise funds to attend National Youth Conference, starting a small youth choir and teaching them songs learned around the campfire at Camp

Pine Lake in Iowa, leading Sunday school classes for elementary-age kids, and helping Richard with some communications work. Ultimately, I'm planning to produce a short documentary film about the church and share it with the wider denomination. As far as me being a bridge, I feel that the supports are in place. Now comes the challenging task of making sure the bridge stays well maintained for the future.

One thing I do know is that this experience has broken down personal walls for me. During one of the church's spirited Sunday services, the eight-piece praise band composed of young adults performed a song called "Los muros caerán" by Miel San Marcos. I had heard the song at church before, but I didn't realize how powerful the lyrics were—or how much they applied to my time here—until that morning. It started when one member of the church began freely jumping and spinning around during the song, forcing the girls who do tambourine praise dancing to move out of the way. Another woman joined the dancing, and then another. Before I knew it, I was witnessing my first mini-mosh pit of church ladies.

Daniel, the quiet church elder who first welcomed me when I arrived, slowly raised his hands during the song and his hands began to tremble. The ushers swiftly grabbed boxes of tissues and passed them to weeping worshippers. Up to this time, I had seen some pretty powerful reactions to praise singing, but nothing like this. I Google translated the song lyrics as the music continued to play, and almost instantly, my tears joined the others flowing in the sanctuary that morning. These are the lyrics: "When I sing, the earth shakes. When I love you, the chains break. The walls will fall."

In any other circumstance, those words wouldn't have made me cry. But



*Pastors Richard and Becky wearing shirts from Iowa, where Jess lived earlier.*

surrounded by 150-plus Hispanic worshippers, many who have encountered countless barriers to get where they are today, and many who continue to face obstacles in their paths to citizenship, and others who are young Dreamers praying that they won't be split from the only family they know—they hit me like a freight train.

Pastor Richard and I have had discussions about the fear that lies beneath the surface of this congregation. It's an absolutely justified fear given the current conversations in our government. It's a concern I now share more deeply than ever, because I am a part of this family now. Every day I'm here, I take a moment to thank Richard for the invitation to join this family, to thank God for the nudges to take the leap, and to thank this congregation for letting me in and allowing me to experience what's on the other side of the wall. **✠**

Jess Hoffert is a travel writer and former travel magazine editor, and has served as communications staff for Northern Plains District. Find his blog at [www.orangebridges.com](http://www.orangebridges.com).

# Viva Las Brethren!

## Brethren make their first foray into Vegas

by Walt Wiltschek

### **I**t all started with a dream.

Luz Román felt God calling her to start a church in Las Vegas, the sprawling southern Nevada city best known as a gambling mecca.

Román, originally from the Dominican Republic, encountered the Church of the Brethren after she moved to Pennsylvania in the late 1990s and began attending the Alfa y Omega congregation in Lancaster. In 2005 she moved to Boston, where she joined a church of another denomination and eventually became part of its ministerial leadership.

Before leaving for Boston, though, Román said she had a vision—in a decade she was supposed to go to southern Nevada and plant the Church of the Brethren there. She appreciated the way Brethren lived out their faith and their acceptance and support of female leadership.

“More than 10 years ago I heard the voice of God,” Román said, in Spanish. “He told me that he had a plan for me to have a ministry in Las Vegas.”

She stepped out in faith and made the move, and contacted Rubén Deoleo, her former pastor at Alfa y Omega, to ask what she needed to do. He connected her with Daniel D’Oleo of the Brethren-related Renacer Hispanic Ministry, who in turn reached out to the denomination’s Pacific Southwest District because of



*Luz Román is starting a Brethren group in the sprawling city of Las Vegas.*

its geographic proximity.

The group began meeting last fall in a small room in an apartment complex, then moved to a rented room in a house. Pacific Southwest District executive Russ Matteson and Los Angeles-area pastor Gilbert Romero visited the group in early December and again in March.

Matteson says the Spanish-speaking worship was crowded, with about 30 people—including 10 or 11 children—in a space of about 125 square feet, but it was energetic and passionate. Those attending represented a variety of countries, mostly in

Central America, and most were working-class people who support Las Vegas’ dominant entertainment industry behind the scenes. The owner of the home where they are meeting also has begun attending.

Despite the space constraints, Román says she has felt blessed, especially through “being able to talk about the Word with a group of people who are willing to take part in the work.” Several people, she adds, “have already given their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.”

The group meets regularly on Monday nights for Bible study and on

**BEFORE LEAVING FOR BOSTON, THOUGH, ROMÁN SAID SHE HAD A VISION—IN A DECADE SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO GO TO SOUTHERN NEVADA AND PLANT THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN THERE.**



**Luz Román with a member of the Las Vegas group.**

Friday nights and Sunday afternoons for worship. Once a month, Sunday is a fiesta day, with good food and fellowship after worship.

Matteson says the district's church planting task force has decided to support this new effort and recommended it to the district's executive board as a

project of Pacific Southwest. They are currently working to secure a more suitable meeting space for the group.

"We feel good enough about the early signs there to do this," Matteson says. "I'm excited by the possibilities. These are blessings from God, and we're being invited to come along and join what God is doing through these people. We're asking, 'How do we become a part of it?' and that's an exciting place to be in. You can't say, 'Wait. Stop. We're not ready yet.' So we're moving, and we're trusting God."

Already, five of Pacific Southwest's 25 congregations worship in Spanish, and Matteson says one or two more Spanish-speaking church projects could begin in the next year. To include Las Vegas, Pacific Southwest is seeking to expand its boundaries (currently comprising California and

Arizona) to include Nevada—which currently has no Brethren activity. That proposal will come to district conference later this year and likely to the Standing Committee of Annual Conference in 2019.

As for Román, her vision is clear. "We want to continue to spread the good news of salvation to the city of Las Vegas and surrounding cities," she says. "And in the future we also want to help grow more churches and to train youth and adults in discipleship, evangelism, and missionary programs that produce transformed people and preach the doctrine of the Church of the Brethren."

### Bluegrass Brethren

The Southwest isn't the only place reflecting some new Brethren geography. Southern Ohio District has pro-

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Courtesy of Russ Matteson

**Gilbert Romero, far left, and district executive Russ Matteson, fourth from right, visit members of the Las Vegas group.**

posed changing its name to “Southern Ohio/Kentucky” pending approval by Standing Committee prior to Annual Conference in July (which, appropri-

ately, is being held in Cincinnati—a city that sits on the Ohio-Kentucky border). Southern Ohio’s district conference already has approved the change.

“We have several congregations in Kentucky, but their inclusion was never reflected in the name, so we are correcting that oversight,” Southern Ohio District executive David Shelter said.

According to *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* data, the district currently has three congregations in the Bluegrass State: Constance Church of the Brethren in Hebron, not far from Cincinnati, and two congregations in southeastern Kentucky: Flat Creek/Mud Lick in Big Creek, and Rock House near Hatfield.

In addition, Shetler said the district is exploring a new church plant in the area of Lexington, the state’s second-largest city and home to the University of Kentucky. **W**

Walt Wiltschek is pastor of Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren and an at-large editor for Messenger.



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# Disaster recovery in Puerto Rico

**B**rethren Disaster Ministries is working with Puerto Rico District following last year's hurricanes. Roy Winter, associate executive director of Brethren Disaster Ministries and Global Mission and Service, attended the Puerto Rico District conference in January and held meetings with church leaders. Here are components of the response:

- **Funding through the Emergency Disaster Fund and district giving.** EDF allocations total \$300,000, with giving from churches and districts totaling more than \$48,000. This funding is helping the district carry out church-based relief and provides for long-term recovery plans in cooperation with Brethren Disaster Ministries.



Flooding after Hurricane Maria

Anfrea Victoria



Medical clinic provided by Castañer Hospital

Jose Callejo Otero

## Behind the headlines Understanding Puerto Rico in 2018

by Ellis J. Shenk

**F**or many Brethren over the years, Puerto Rico was a place where family members, friends, or congregation members served in the mountain village of Castañer.

That's because of the Church of the Brethren's long history in Puerto Rico, which began in 1942 with a Civilian

Public Service unit. Later the Brethren Service Commission ran medical and agricultural projects. The first Heifer Project shipment went to Puerto Rico in 1944, and the first Brethren congregation began in Castañer in 1948, 70 years ago. Today Puerto Rico is its own district in the Church of the Brethren.

But in recent years, Puerto Rico has made world news with reports that seem to go from bad to worse. The latest and worst are the accounts of damage that Hurricane Maria caused as it hit the island last September.

In 2016 the headlines were about a disaster of a different sort—a mounting

• **A focus on the island's poorest residents**, who were disproportionately affected and who have fewest resources to rebuild. Many live in rural communities and mountainous areas.

• **Aid to the 34 Brethren families whose homes have been damaged**, and to other damaged homes in communities around the district churches. Each of the seven congregations has completed assessments and has organized disaster assistance in their communities.

• **A container shipment of disaster relief goods** including canned chicken, water filters, tarpaulins, tools, generators, and solar lights at a total value of \$31,658.

• **Volunteer work trips and rebuilding workcamps.** Two have been held, organized by volunteers with Caimito Church of the Brethren, and funded with \$10,700 for building materials and volunteer support. Brethren Disaster Ministries provided a trained project leader.

• **A Puerto Rico District Recovery Committee**, Puerto Rico-based response coordinator, and related staff. This group is doing case management, funding approvals, volunteer management, and volunteer-based home repair and construction. Brethren Disaster Ministries is providing training, response guidelines, support with trained volunteers as needed, and coordination of volunteers from outside Puerto Rico.



Jose Callejo Otero

Food distribution by Rio Prieto Church of the Brethren



Jose Callejo Otero

Volunteer at the medical clinic



Roy Winter



Roy Winter

debt larger than 65 percent of annual gross domestic product. Part of the solution was to lay off teachers and close schools. The government system of health centers in each of the municipalities also was dismantled. The financial situation was so dire that the US Congress stepped in, passing the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management,

and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) and creating a Fiscal Oversight Management Board to make major financial decisions.

**How did this happen?**

Puerto Rico has never directed its own affairs. After Europeans arrived in 1493, Puerto Rico became a Spanish

colony. Then in the 1898 Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War, Spain relinquished sovereignty over Cuba and ceded Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States.

Like Guam, Puerto Rico remains an unincorporated territory of the United States. That means there are no plans

**THE FIRST HEIFER PROJECT SHIPMENT WENT TO PUERTO RICO IN 1944, AND THE FIRST BRETHREN CONGREGATION BEGAN IN CASTAÑER IN 1948.**

## MONTHS OF WAKING UP EVERY DAY TO THE REALITY THAT WATER, ELECTRICITY, AND PHONE ARE NOT AVAILABLE BECOMES AN ENERGY-SAPPING AND DISORIENTING EXPERIENCE.

for statehood, and laws written for states may not apply. Though Puerto Rico's executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government operate as in states, some predefined issues can be decided only by Congress and authorities in Washington. In those respects, Puerto Rico remains a "colony" of the United States.

Puerto Rico and the United States have repeatedly updated the definitions of their relationship. As it currently stands, those born in Puerto Rico are US citizens. Voters in Puerto Rico may take part in presidential primary elections, but not in presidential elections. Puerto Rican voters elect a single, non-voting representative to the House of Representatives, called the resident commissioner.

Americans do not think of their country as a colonial power. Yet, for Puerto Rico that is, in effect, the case. Though Puerto Ricans have the right to choose whether they become an independent country, US state, or remain in a commonwealth relationship with the United States, economically their choices are limited. Major economic policy is made in Washington, and Puerto Rico has even less power there than US states do.

From the mid-1930s, a special tax deduction was introduced to encourage companies to do business in Puerto Rico. There was a surge in the manufacturing sector, but this provision was phased out from 1996 to 2006. Employment and government income decreased at an alarming rate.

Puerto Rico also had been allowed to issue triple tax deduction bonds (with interest exempt from taxes by federal, state, or local governments). These became popular in bond markets. But too often they were used to finance current and past debt. Over the long haul,

this only compounded debt issues.

When Puerto Rico filed for bankruptcy in 2016, the matter went to court. A Supreme Court decision made clear that Puerto Rico is not sovereign, and that normal bankruptcy laws therefore could not be used by Puerto Rico. A later filing for bankruptcy was done under the special provisions of PROMESA.

For almost a century, Puerto Rico has been saddled with another economic burden. The Jones Act of 1920 requires that all goods transported by water between US ports be carried on US-flag ships, constructed in the US, owned by US citizens, and crewed by US citizens and US permanent residents. For Puerto Rico, which imports more than half of its food and virtually all its energy, this represents a considerable expense. (Fortunately, this law was waived after Hurricane Maria.)

Until Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933, little had been done to improve the life and livelihood of Puerto Ricans. Governor Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal brought Civilian Conservation Corps camps to Puerto Rico during the depths of the Great Depression and later developed programs that trained farm laborers and gave them a house of their own and small plots of land to grow food to help sustain their families.

Governor Tugwell also formed the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) by nationalizing the island's private utilities. Before Hurricane Maria, however, PREPA filed for bankruptcy. This bankruptcy has been incorporated into the broader bankruptcy case of Puerto Rico. But with the massive repair and possible modernization of the electric grid underway, it is not clear who will speak for the Puerto Rican people.

### **Weather, climate, and Maria**

Puerto Ricans have always paid close attention to warnings about tropical storms and hurricanes. Heavy rains in mountain terrain create rapid rises in stream levels and threaten roads, bridges, and houses. Electric and telephone lines strung through forested areas are at risk. Storm winds make play out of ripping off corrugated roofing from cheaper constructions. And roads through the hills are subject to landslides. Over generations, Puerto Ricans have come to acknowledge the great power of such storms.

But the unique strength of Maria hints that a warmer climate could promise more powerful and more frequent storms. In places where the Category 5 storm hit, trees were stripped of their leaves, and banana and plantain plants were flattened. Puerto Rico's losses are in the billions of dollars. Major projects like restoring the electric grid have not been completed. Months of waking up every day to the reality that water, electricity, and phone are not available becomes an energy-sapping and disorienting experience. There is no way around that, and the human spirit has limits. Reports indicate an increase in suicides and calls for help, as well as increased services by agencies responding to the need.

Nevertheless, the people of Puerto Rico have always proven themselves resilient. Like people everywhere, they have self-giving loyalty to family and neighbors. They are discovering the many things that they can do for and with each other. *Mañana can be better. There is still a reserve of hope.* 

Ellis J. Shenk, of Bel Air, Md., served as administrator for Church of the Brethren work in Castañer from 1967 to 1976. He lived there with his wife, Carolyn (who had been a nurse there from 1955 to 1957) and their five children.



Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred

*A peace pole is planted in front of the United Methodist building.*

## POLICY AND

# prayer

by Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred

**T**he sign in front of the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., is arguably the most influential church sign in the United States. Standing in the shadow of the Supreme Court and pointed directly at the Capitol Building right across Constitution Avenue, this sign is seen by many of the most powerful people in the nation. Members of Congress and their staff, Supreme Court justices, members of the media, and officials in the president's administration walk past it regularly. It serves as a public witness, lifting up the faith dimensions of policy.

The only non-federally owned building on Capitol Hill, the United Methodist building is home to the advocacy ministries of several Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and, of course, the United Methodist Church. The Church of the Brethren's peace witness once resided there, too.

Dozens more interfaith advocacy organizations also operate there, from the National Council of Churches, to Church World Service, to the Islamic Society of North America and Churches for Middle East Peace. Each of

these offices is driven by the shared understanding that witnessing for peace and justice is part of a full and faithful relationship with God.

"We view the physical presence of this building as a ministry and as a witness to Washington, D.C., to the world, and to lawmakers," says Tricia Bruckbauer, director of communications for the United Methodist Church's office for Church and Society. "Throughout its history, this building has served as a staging ground for numerous movements for justice and peace, and the General Board for Church and Society of the United Methodist Church sees the offering of this space to those causes as a ministry."

There are many more faith-based advocacy organizations in D.C. than could ever fit into one building, including the Church of the Brethren's own peace witness and my employer, the Friends Committee on National Legislation. But the United Methodist Building, where Martin Luther King Jr. finalized plans for the March on Washington, is a powerful and tangible reminder of God's presence and movement during the legislative and political process, even when the legislation that Congress ultimately writes falls short of God's vision for equity, peace, and justice for all. It's



**This sign at the United Methodist building appeared on Sen. Cory Booker's Instagram feed. It reads, "Protest is our prayer in action. End gun violence now!"**

a reminder, also, of the many people who serve the church and God by bearing witness for the public interest.

The faith-based advocacy community doesn't often bathe in the limelight that illuminates so many other corners of Washington, D.C. But whenever I walk past this building and its prophetic sign, I'm reminded of their presence and their work, and I'm full of hope.

### **Fifty years of witness in Washington**

The Church of the Brethren's witness in Washington grew from its historic status as a peace church. While the denomination admonishes its members not to participate in war personally, Brethren have also long engaged in advocacy and witness against war. In 1962, the Church of the Brethren first sponsored an official representative in Washington to witness for peace and justice by communicating the denomination's perspective on important policy issues.

Since 2012, Nate Hosler has led the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy (formerly the Office of Public Witness). Working with finite time and resources in a frenetic political environment, Hosler must identify the issues on which his office can make a difference as it seeks to represent the perspective of the Church of the Brethren.

The office draws its policy directives from Annual Conference statements. But that leaves a vast array of possible issues. In its 300 years, the Church of the Brethren has issued plenty of statements. According to Hosler, "The other piece comes from asking a strategic question: Where do we have a particular voice or value-add? Some of this is denominational, some of this is personal, and some of it comes by recognizing the issues where we see ecumenical groups coalescing, building momentum, or leaving gaps."

Hosler chose to work on peacebuilding in Nigeria because it matches those criteria. "We have long, historic ties to Nigeria. We participated in a congressional briefing on Nigeria a few years ago, and an NGO partner said, 'We've

been working in Nigeria since 2010.' Then when it was my turn to speak, I said, 'We've been in Nigeria since the 1920s.' Most of the NGOs that we work with didn't even exist when we started working in the areas affected by Boko Haram today. At the same time, there's not a lot of action. So there's some space to work, there's a need, and we have a unique value-add." Hosler also lived and worked in Nigeria, giving him the expertise to be an effective advocate on that issue.

Another focus issue for the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy is the military's use of drones. The Church of the Brethren was the first denomination to issue a statement condemning drone warfare, giving the church's peace witness in Washington a unique platform on that issue. In recent years, as he observed the ecumenical community emphasizing racial justice, Hosler has incorporated more advocacy on systemic racism into the office's Going to the Garden initiative on hunger and food-related justice.

### **Ice cream and manure**

Last August, I moved to D.C. to begin working for the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). FCNL is a Quaker-based public interest lobbying organization that advocates for peace and social justice across a dozen legislative programs. I still struggle to say that I work for a *lobbying* organization because that word carries a lot of baggage. Soon after moving here, I had to open a new bank account. When they bank teller asked my occupation and I responded "lobbyist," her eye-roll could have knocked down a small city. Her look said, "Oh, you're one of *those* people."

Often, people react with the same skepticism and wariness to the whole concept of faith-based lobbying. It's understandable. Tony Campolo once quipped that "mixing religion and politics is like mixing ice cream and manure. It doesn't do much to the manure, but it sure does ruin the ice cream." We've all seen how faith can be manipulated, distorted, and weaponized by politics.

For some, lobbying from a faith perspective is just asking for faith to get muddied by partisan polarization. Hosler considers this with great care when he selects issues on which to focus. Just because there's an Annual Conference policy about an issue doesn't mean that the whole denomination agrees, especially when that issue evokes deep partisan divides.

"On some issues where I've felt that there's a fair amount of partisan divide and there's a lot of ecumenical work already happening, and I didn't think we had a whole lot of specifics to add, I've decided that this just isn't where we're going to invest a lot of energy," Hosler says.

But sometimes, the Church of the Brethren's historic witness is too distinctive or the moment is too electric for

**“WHERE DO WE HAVE A PARTICULAR VOICE OR VALUE-ADD? SOME OF THIS IS DENOMINATIONAL, SOME OF THIS IS PERSONAL, AND SOME OF IT COMES BY RECOGNIZING THE ISSUES WHERE WE SEE ECUMENICAL GROUPS COALESCING, BUILDING MOMENTUM, OR LEAVING GAPS.”**

the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy to remain quiet.

“We don’t soften our voice, but we try to address some of the concerns,” Hosler says. “On gun violence, one partisan end calls for gun control and the other says we should be focusing on better mental health care, and our policy says something about both. We should be controlling access to guns, but we should also be doing the pastoral work to ensure that people with mental illness are cared for. We try to address the breadth of the concern through the breadth that is conveyed in our Annual Conference statement, hopefully in a theologically robust way.”

Others aren’t concerned about partisanship; they’re concerned about power. Concentrated power can harm the powerless, often through violence or oppression. How can people of faith appropriately collect and leverage power through lobbying? Isn’t it better to stick to direct service?

Hosler responds, “Both as the Church of the Brethren and as the broader church, we have a historic and longstanding commitment to serving and peacemaking. I see advocacy simply as an extension of that. If we’re willing to go out of our way to figure out how to feed people, it seems shortsighted to me to not also ask why people are hungry in the first place and seek to address that.”

Hosler cautions that the church must not amass power

#### ***The Friends Committee on National Legislation building.***



Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred

that it can use to impose change for its own benefit. “The subtitle of our office is ‘A Witness of the Church of the Brethren.’ Bearing witness is different than seeking to coerce change.” He says, “One of the reasons that our advocacy is different than the stereotypical notion of lobbying is that nothing that we work on has any direct benefit for us or the people who pay for our work.”

Unmoored from seeking personal gain, the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy and faith-based advocacy agencies can pursue the public interest, striving faithfully and ethically to realize God’s vision for peace with justice.

#### **Policy and prayer**

At FCNL we emphasize the power and moral clarity that prayerfulness can instill in our work. Prayer fills the deep spiritual reservoir from which we draw the energy and inspiration to lobby. But over past months, the notion of prayer in policy has come under serious scrutiny, and understandably so. Perhaps the most serious challenge to faith-based advocacy isn’t the concern about polarization or power, but prayer.

In the wake of tragic instances of gun violence, the rote invocation of “thoughts and prayers” has proven inadequate. Fed up, many people dismiss out of hand the very mention of prayer: “We don’t need thoughts and prayers; we need action,” goes the chorus, in a thousand variations.

Agencies like the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy show that prayer and policy can supplement one another rather than compete. “As a church, we are people who gather to pray and serve our community,” says Hosler. It’s not appropriate to say, “Well, now we can’t pray anymore; we need to get around to acting,” he explains. And it’s also not appropriate to say, “Well, we should just pray and count that as good.”

“As a church we are constituted around the act of gathering to worship, and we are constituted around the act of gathering to serve our neighbor. When there’s violence, we are already gathered to pray, and then we go out to address it.” 

Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred is a member of Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and attends Washington City Church of the Brethren in Washington, D.C. He is a Young Fellow at the Friends Committee on National Legislation. He also runs [DunkerPunks.com](http://DunkerPunks.com) and is a host of the [Dunker Punks Podcast](http://Dunker Punks Podcast).



# Soy to the world!

*A soybean is small—just a couple of centimeters across—but it can have a major impact in addressing world hunger. In the Church of the Brethren, that impact is coming via the Global Food Initiative (GFI) and its work with the Soybean Value Chain in Nigeria.*

*GFI manager Jeff Boshart oversees a collaboration between a steering committee from Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), which leads the soybean project in Africa, and the US-based Feed the Future Soybean Innovation Lab. The project also has sponsorship from the Nigeria Crisis Response. It aims to raise awareness of the crop and to develop a framework that can benefit farmers and surrounding communities in a sustainable way.*

## What is the background of this project?

**BOSHART** During a visit to Nigeria in May 2016, I met with various church and lay leaders in EYN. I asked one question at every stop of my tour: Is the leadership of EYN ready to think about things like agricultural or economic

development or is it too soon given the ongoing security concerns and relief work? The answer was a resounding, “Yes! The time has come.”

EYN membership and leaders are overwhelmingly farmers. Even professionals living in far-away cities still have family land that is being farmed. Further, due to the Nigerian economy’s dependence on crude oil, the Nigerian government is pushing for diversification of its economy and has begun focusing on the agriculture sector. It was clear that agricultural development was already on the minds of many in Nigeria, long before my visit.

## Why soybeans? And what is a value chain?

■ Shortly before my visit to Nigeria, I was introduced to Dennis Thompson, recently retired from the University of Illinois, who was lending his talents to a project called the Soybean Innovation Lab (<http://soybeaninnovationlab.illinois.edu>). Dr. Thompson gave me an invitation to travel with



him to Ghana to see the work of the lab firsthand. I extended this invitation to EYN, and a team of agricultural experts and church leaders met us in Ghana in October 2016.

Soybeans are not new to EYN farmers. A women's soybean program in the 1990s focused on increasing protein consumption at the household level. Women learned to grow and process soybeans, but when they tried to produce a cash crop, they found there was no market. The price was too low to become a profitable enterprise. Things have changed in Nigeria. Today there is increased demand due to the rise of large poultry operations.

A value chain includes quality seed, sustainable farming practices, improved harvesting technologies, reliable grain storage methods, access to markets, and decent prices for farmers. A family with only a small field would not have access to the full value chain. That is where EYN's Soybean Value Chain team comes in. With EYN's leadership supporting their efforts, the team members have provided trainings to nearly 100,000 farmers. The team formed groups of farmers in church districts, provided quality seed, and sent extension staff to support farmers throughout the growing season. They now are marketing the soybeans on behalf of the estimated 10,000 farmers who participated in the first year of this project.

### Why not focus on crops that are native to Nigeria?

■ Very few of the crops grown by any farmer in the world are native. Corn, rice, and peanuts are important crops in Nigeria, and none of them are native. There are some important native crops such as cow peas, millet, and bambara groundnut. Nigerian farmers rarely plant only one crop due to yearly weather and pest fluctuations. Soybeans are likely to add one more viable option for the typical farm family.



### Will chemical fertilizers be needed to grow the soybeans?

■ In most cases the answer is yes. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are used widely in Nigeria and are readily available in the market. Extension staff provide training in the proper use of fertilizers and pesticides, however dependency on chemical inputs concerns them. Staff have begun mulch-based farming trials using cover crops and "green manures."

### Are these soybeans GMOs?

■ No. The varieties used in this project come from traditional plant breeding work at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Kano, Nigeria.

### Is this a case of Americans telling people from another country what to do?

■ No. EYN has assembled a talented team of business people, government agriculture workers, and a researcher from the institute in Kano to work with its agriculture staff in guiding the project. The GFI role is to suggest options, but not to direct. I believe all involved with this project would say that God is in charge and has brought these pieces together for a purpose.

Soybeans are not a magic solution, but have the potential to contribute to peace and decrease poverty and malnutrition. As with all GFI projects, I am careful to listen first, ask questions, make plans together with local partners, and seek to stay attuned to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we continue together. 





## The gift of diversity

by Howard Miller

**Can the members of the Church of the Brethren continue to live together?** My answer is yes, with some big ifs:

If we learn to appreciate the beautiful diversity God has given us in this world.

If we respect and grow in our understanding of the value each individual brings to the table.

If we let go of self-righteous judgment and let God be the righteous judge.

Our unity does not require uniformity. On my journey from farmer to seminary student to pastor to retirement, my most challenging and rewarding time was as pastor of a Brethren congregation in Columbia, Md., in an interfaith center. There I was among clergy and worshipers who were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. It was there I realized that, rather than seeking the lowest common denominator of faith traditions, I had to be more clear about expressing my own faith tradition and listening to my sisters and brothers as they shared their faith traditions.

My wife was a quilter. The beauty of a quilt is in its diversity—the colors, the patterns, the textures. Just so, God has created this world with a beautiful diversity of people. Let us rejoice in this gift! 

Howard Miller is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor living in Westminster, Md.

## Living up to our name by Ernie Barr

**T**he Church of the Brethren has undergone a number of splits, since the first one by Conrad Beissel in 1728. Virtually all of them have resulted from conservative and progressive wings of the church being at odds regarding customs and doctrinal issues. In short, we have not lived up to our name; we have not been brotherly (or sisterly).

I would point out that we have lived in Christian love with members who chose to serve in the armed forces even though the Brethren Annual Conference of 1935 stated, “All war is sin.” We, as a denomination have also recognized the

Brethren Revival Fellowship even though they have held their own annual conferences. We have allowed persons belonging to groups such as the Women’s Caucus, Voices for an Open Spirit, Open Table Cooperative, and the Brethren-Mennonite Council on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests to function within the present denominational structure. In so doing, we have sought to be true to our name; we have been Brethren.

Now we are faced with the issue of same-sex marriage. Granted, most of us don’t understand that particular orientation, nor do many of us understand

how Christian men and women can serve in the military, but we have not sought to annul the membership of those who have chosen military service.

I plead with the delegates to Annual Conference that we call forth the same brotherly love we have exercised toward some groups and learn to live with the differences of others with whom we disagree. Let us live up to our name and avoid another offensive division within the Church of the Brethren. 

Ernie Barr attends Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind.

IF WE CANNOT OR WILL NOT TRY WITH ALL OUR MIGHT TO MAKE PEACE WITH OUR NEAR NEIGHBORS IN THE CHURCH, OUR PEACE WITNESS IS NOT WORTH MUCH.

## As if we have no tools

by Marty Barlow

**D**uring the past decade I've become increasingly disappointed that the Brethren have fallen into the same polarized categories that characterize our communities and our workplaces. I'd held the naive notion that our deeply held convictions about Jesus, the church, our defining peace witness, and our sense of belonging together as a family would prevent this kind of tribal splintering. However, just like neighbors from other religious traditions (or none at all), we too have joined the ranks of "I'm sure I'm right. I can't believe 'they' are so blind!"

We've become hardened, deadly serious, and self-righteous versions of ourselves—a combination of personal qualities that makes peacemaking difficult. One moment Brethren are engaged in light conversation, but then all too soon the conversation veers into one of the flashpoints that divide us. Suddenly there is no "give" in the conversation and the shift is palpable. We used to enjoy an easy back and forth, teasing with each other across political persuasions. Now all of that has morphed into hardness and seriousness. Self-righteousness typically completes the

third leg of this deadly triangle.

A number of years ago, Desmond Tutu spoke at James Madison University. I felt the joyful after-effects of that evening for weeks. Tutu spoke with openness, affection, humor, and respect, and was kind even when his message was challenging. His love for life and even the strangers surrounding him that night felt personal. Tutu was not hard, he was not overly serious, and he was not self-righteous—and yet what a changemaker he has been in our world.

What disappoints me is not that we as a church have conflict. It is, rather, that we act as if we have no tools for dealing with it. We would be okay if "they" just left, or if "they" just did this or that. What has happened to our identity as a living peace church? If we cannot or will not try with all our might to make peace with our near neighbors in the church, our peace witness is not worth much.

A few months ago, I heard Peter Yarrow (of Peter Paul and Mary) introduce Better Angels, an organization that had renewed his hope in these polarized times. From their website: "The United States is disuniting. . . . We're becoming two Americas,

each angry with the other, and neither trusting the other's basic humanity and good intentions. Today Americans increasingly view their political opponents not only as misguided, but also as bad people whose ways of thinking are both dangerous and incomprehensible."

We could substitute "Church of the Brethren" for "United States" and "churches" for "Americas."

What might it look like if our Leadership Team, Council of District Executives, Mission and Ministry Board, church agencies, Brethren Revival Fellowship, staff, and informal groupings of like-minded leaders committed to the following: 1) reflect on ways that even we, unwittingly, have been part of the problem; 2) learn about and work to understand not just the issues but also our brothers and sisters on all sides; and 3) lead us in a serious effort to find meaningful solutions.

Maybe, if we worked at this in earnest, a "compelling vision" would emerge from those faithful efforts. 

Marty Barlow has served on the former General Board of the Church of the Brethren and has been an official observer during business sessions at Shenandoah District Conference and at Annual Conference. She lives in Harrisonburg, Va.

# Left behind

by Christina Bucher

**Who likes being left behind?** We can all think of examples where we have been left behind. A beloved teacher leaves our school. A pastor retires and moves to Florida. A parent, child, or partner dies, and we are left behind to grieve. In each case, our sorrow results from a sense of loss, of abandonment. How is it, then, that the disciples are *joyful* when Jesus departs, leaving them behind?

## Luke 24:50-53

Among the New Testament Gospels, only Luke narrates Jesus' ascension to heaven. Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus' promise to be with the disciples "to the end of the age" (28:20). Mark 16:19 is likely a later addition to Mark's Gospel, which probably ended at 16:8. The Fourth Gospel distinguishes between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (John 20:17), but lacks an account of the ascension.

In Luke, however, the good news ends with Jesus taking leave of his followers. Jesus and the disciples go to Bethany, where he blesses them and departs, being "taken up into heaven." We might expect weeping, mourning, some act that expresses sorrow at being left behind. Instead, Luke reports that the disciples returned to Jerusalem "with great joy." And "they were continually in the temple blessing God" (24:53).

Fortunately, the author of the Gospel of Luke left behind a second volume, the book known as "The Acts of the Apostles." The beginning of Acts overlaps with the ending of Luke's Gospel. Acts also narrates Jesus' ascension, but provides more detail.

## Acts 1:3-11

According to Acts, Jesus spends 40 days with the disciples before leaving them behind. During these 40 days, Jesus prepares them for his departure. In the Bible, "40 days" often refers to a period of instruction, preparation, or testing. Moses spends 40 days with God on Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 9:9). Jesus is tested in the wilderness for 40 days (Luke 4:1-13).

As a teacher, I compare these periods of preparation to "review days." On



Folio 13v of the Rabula Gospels (Mesopotamia, 6th century AD). Wikipedia.com

## Fast facts about Ascension Day

Ascension Day falls 40 days after Easter Sunday. This year Ascension Day is Thursday, May 10. In the US, some churches hold special Ascension Day services on Thursday or they may celebrate the ascension on the preceding or following Sunday. Amish relax and visit friends and family. In Germany, Ascension Day is a public holiday.

## WE MAY HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND, BUT THIS IS NO OCCASION FOR GRIEF. IT IS TIME TO GET TO WORK.

review days we don't look at new material, but rather we make sure that what we have studied over the course of the semester has taken root. Review days provide opportunities for teachers to answer questions and correct misunderstandings. The disciples have a question for Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Jesus' reply is telling: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:7-8). In other words, the timeline is God's business. The disciples' task is to witness.

What just happened here? Jesus turns the conversation from the question "When will you put things right?" to the assignment "Get ready to be my witnesses." As Tom Wright says in his commentary *Acts for Everyone*, "One day that kingdom will come, fully and finally. In the meantime, we have a job to do."

The first-century disciples aren't the only ones who are assigned a task. As Wright says, "We have a job to do." Along with all the saints who have preceded us, we have been tasked with "witnessing." Brethren theologian Dale W. Brown explains, "Brethren believed that the gifts and fruit of the Spirit were not only for the edification of the church, but also for the good of the world" (*Another Way of Believing*, p. 92).

To bear witness means to testify to what one has seen or heard. We may think of testimony as "speech," but witnessing can take different forms. More than just verbal testimony, witnessing to the risen Lord is "another way of living." Two problems can arise.

First, we may act as if we are in charge, but witnessing does not mean that we are tasked with setting the world aright. As Brown observes, we witness, but the Spirit works. Jesus, not the church, is Lord. Second, we may try to avoid the problems of the world by escaping into our own private religious realms, but witnessing is public and requires participation in the world.

### Why are you looking up?

In Acts 1:11 two men ask, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The illustration accompanying this Bible study is a page from a sixth-century manuscript known as the Rabbula Gospels. The illustration has two registers, relating to the two dimensions of creation, heaven and earth. In the upper register, the heavenly dimension, Jesus stands within a *mandorla*, an almond shape that artists use to depict light and express majesty. The two angels who bear crowns also express the understanding that Jesus now rules both heaven and earth.

Below Jesus is a hybrid creature, a tetramorph, which has its origins in the prophet Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1). The four creatures of the tetramorph later became identified with the New Testament evangelists: Man (or Angel) (Matthew); Lion (Mark); Bull (Luke); and Eagle (John). By using all these motifs, the artist communicates that Jesus enters another dimension, what we call "heaven," and what the Bible refers to as being located "up."

In the lower register, Mary, the mother of Jesus, stands directly

### If you want to know more

N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). An accessible commentary that can be used for individual or group Bible study.

N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008). A New Testament scholar's exploration of the resurrection, ascension, and second coming, and what they mean for the church today.

beneath her son. With her hands upraised, palms up, she stands in a posture of prayer. Neither Luke nor Acts mentions Mary's presence at the ascension, although she is named in Acts as one of the group who gathers in Jerusalem shortly after the ascension (Acts 1:14). In the Rabbula Gospels, she most likely represents the church. Similarly, Paul is included among the apostles, even though he did not become a follower of Jesus until after the ascension.

By placing Mary and Paul in the group on the earthly plain, the artist invites viewers into the picture. We, too, are Jesus' disciples. We, too, are called to witness to the One who reigns. Why do we stand gazing up into the heavens? We may have been left behind, but this is no occasion for grief. It is time to get to work. Peacefully, simply, and joyfully. 

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



Courtesy of Tiffany Dickel

A busload organized by Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren departs for Washington, D.C.

## ‘Proud to be part of my generation’ Brethren at the March for Our Lives

**Y**outh and adults from a number of Church of the Brethren congregations participated in March for Our Lives rallies against gun violence on March 24. The rallies were held in numerous cities across the country. Among those at the rally in Washington, D.C., were youth from Manchester Church of the Brethren in Indiana, led by associate pastor Jim Chinworth, and a bus organized by Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren interim associate pastor Bob Kettering and church administrator Tiffany Dickel.



Jim Chinworth

“My experience at the march was life changing. I was inspired by how powerful and touching each of the speeches were. I was motivated to go because I feel like gun violence is getting out of hand and there needs to be a change. . . . I was completely overwhelmed by the hopeful, optimistic vibes. These vibes will always stay with me and help me persevere in tough times because if they can get through this trauma, I can get through anything.”

—Kelsey Eichenauer, high school junior

“I felt the urge . . . to stand in solidarity with the proponents of change, the students. When Emma González stood on the stage in silence for minutes, at first the crowd seemed uneasy. Then, it settled over the masses like a blanket, and nearly all 800,000 of us were there in that moment, silently and simply being together. The intense emotions were resonating and reverberating around all us, and that silence was the most powerful thing she could have possibly done. . . . I was able to open myself up and remember why I have a positive outlook on the world.”

—Anna Osborne, high school junior



Courtesy of Jennie Ramirez

A group from Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind., poses at the Washington City church.



Jim Chinworth



Courtesy of Jim Chinworth

A group traveled from Manchester Church of the Brethren in Indiana.

“I felt like this would be a historic event for our country, and I wanted to be part of it. . . . It made me feel proud to be part of my generation. . . . It was inspiring to be surrounded by almost a million people who share the belief that love and peace are more powerful than hate and violence. The march gave me a sense of hope for where the future of our country is headed.”

—Justin Self, high school sophomore

bus received a brochure about the Lancaster Church and a pamphlet on the ‘Biblical Basis of a Peace Witness.’ With a prayer as we started our bus trip, and a snack pack given to each person, provided by a member of our church, we had a very memorable time giving a Christian witness to our concern about gun violence in America.”

—Bob Kettering, interim associate pastor of the Lancaster church

“Everywhere I go I am afraid of a mass shooting occurring. Even during the build-up to the march I was scared of it happening. However, when I got there, the vibe was peaceful and energized. For the first time in a while I felt hopeful for change.”

—Leah Gatchel, high school senior

“Washington City Church of the Brethren extended their hospitality to us for breakfast and restrooms and served as the dropping off place for our bus. The weather was perfect, the crowds orderly and supportive. All the speakers were youth . . . no adults and no politicians. They spoke passionately from their hearts about the need to curb gun violence in America. As the people exited the bus in Washington we gave each of them a palm frond remembering that Palm Sunday was the next day. Each person on the



Courtesy of Tiffany Dickel

# A road map through the valley

**K**ate Bowler had everything going for her. She married her high school sweetheart. She wrote an influential book examining the prosperity gospel, and became an assistant professor at Duke Divinity School. Despite a series of medical difficulties and troubled pregnancies, she finally gave birth to a son. Life was perfect. Then she was diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer.



FRANK RAMIREZ

*Everything Happens for a Reason* is a road map through the valley of the shadow of death. It is gutsy, unsparring, brutally honest, and filled with faith, hope, and love, these three—and without question Bowler teaches us that the greatest of these is, well, you can look it up.

Before all this Bowler says, “I wanted God to make me good and make me faithful, with just a few shining accolades along the way. Anything would do if hardships were only detours on my long life’s journey.” Now her prayer is, “*Oh, God, remember my baby boy. Remember my son and my husband before you return me to ashes. . . . I plead with a God of Maybe, who may or may not let me collect more years. It is a God I love, and a God that breaks my heart.*”

The prosperity gospel she chronicled, which “has a very simple way of explaining why life as it is must be inherently just” and whose “Spiritual laws offer an elegant solution to the problem of unfairness,” was no help to her. Instead Bowler was strengthened because “I grew up surrounded by communities of Mennonites and you’re never alone when you’re with them. Mennonites are people with the land in their blood and a hopeless obsession with simplicity, frugality, pacifism, and Jell-O salads.”

Though not Mennonite herself, Bowler married a

Mennonite. Noting the presence of the *Martyr’s Mirror* in so many homes, “which catalogs the grisly deaths of their ancestors,” she affirms that “the most oddly comforting thing about joining the Mennonite club: they insist that suffering never be done alone.”

Bowler’s journey is intensely personal, and for that reason is all the more universal. We’re all gonna die. Along the way she—and we—meet people with pat answers (from the assertion of a Christian that this is all happening to her because of her sins to the pronouncement of an atheist that her illness proves the universe is without meaning).

That’s why an appendix, titled “Absolutely Never Say This to People Experiencing Terrible Times: A Short List,” is a must-read. Don’t say “God needed an angel” or “It’s going to get better. I promise.”

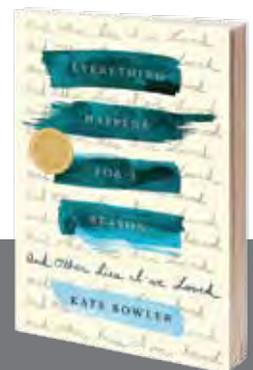
Instead, bring over a meal, ask if you can share a hug, say things like, “You are a beautiful person,” and most of all trust silence.

It’s family, friends, and academic colleagues who offer their tear-stained prayers, their earnest interventions (without which this Canadian would not have qualified for experimental treatments), and most of all their faith-filled love who help Bowler get through this part of the journey.

Throughout the book, Bowler weaves in the church seasons; the arrival of the Christ child in Advent and the sufferings of Jesus in Lent take on deeper significance for her and for us. We are not shielded from fear and suffering, because life is not a package of happy endings with everything tied up neatly with little bows.

There is divine wisdom in this book. My copy is heavily annotated. Mark up yours as well. 

Frank Ramirez is senior pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved.* **Author:** Kate Bowler. **Publisher:** Random House. **Publication date:** 2018. Available from Brethren Press.

# Mission and Ministry Board approves grants, adopts statement to act against gun violence

## **A** large Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) allocation for long-term hurricane recovery in Puerto Rico,

a statement on gun violence, Wieand Trust grants, and new names for some denominational ministries were on the agenda of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board. The board held spring meetings March 9-12 at the General Offices, led by chair Connie Davis and chair-elect Patrick Starkey.

Davis reported as board chair on correspondence leadership has received from a variety of church members since Annual Conference, revealing some troubling aspects that depart from long-standing Brethren beliefs and practices. Her report was followed by presentations by staff about Church of the Brethren structure related to the authority of church leadership, and the significance of the Anabaptist and Pietist heritage.

In-depth conversations were held on race and issues related to international mission. Among numerous

reports, the board received a positive financial year-end review for 2017, initial information from the new “Stewardship of Property 2” group carrying out assessment of stewardship of the General Offices, and an update on work toward a “compelling vision.”

### **‘Lukewarm no more’**

The board adopted a statement on gun violence calling the denomination to repentance and action. The statement was initiated by staff of Global Mission and Service. It quotes from the Bible and previous church statements in its call to recommit to the work of peacemaking, suggesting four action steps for church members, congregations, and ministries.

“Our sister churches pray for us as an American church in a time of violence, as we undergo repeated acts of mass shootings, and they express love and concern for us,” said Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service, explaining some background to the statement. He had recently returned from a trip to the

emerging Brethren body in Venezuela.

Wittmeyer noted the scripture’s call for Christians not to lose their “saltiness.” In Venezuela, that may mean considering how the church may be “salt of the earth” in that country’s economic crisis. Here in the US, he commented, “if we have continued gun violence and we have ready access to guns, and mass shootings, and children are unsafe in schools, don’t we have to ask the question whether the church has lost its saltiness?”

The statement adopted by the board says, in part, “In the wake of repeated mass shootings and the proliferation of gun violence, we are called to remind and recommit ourselves to the work of peacemaking.” It suggests four action steps for church members, congregations, and ministries:

1. Pursue discipleship that is biblical, risk-taking, and confirms the baptismal vows that place Christ before all other loyalties.
2. Refocus on our Church of the Brethren history of peacemaking in order to discern our present ministry of reconciliation.
3. Consider ways in which our personal and institutional decisions—in the economic, social, and community spheres—provide a creative means to decrease the prevalence and ease of access to guns designed to destroy human life.
4. Join with larger efforts to change policies that favor or inadequately oppose access and use of weapons that do not further the incarnate healing of Christ.

Find the full statement at [www.brethren.org/news/2018/lukewarm-no-more-statement-gun-violence.html](http://www.brethren.org/news/2018/lukewarm-no-more-statement-gun-violence.html).

*continued on next page*



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**Board member Luci Landes presents general secretary David Steele with a quiver given by members of EYN. She brought it back from her workcamp experience in Nigeria.**



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*continued from previous page*

## Ministry name changes

Staff reported name changes for three denominational ministries:

- The Office of Public Witness is now the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy: A Witness of the Church of the Brethren.
- Donor Relations and Donor Communications are now Mission Advancement.
- Congregational Life Ministries is now Discipleship Ministries.

Along with a new name, staff of Discipleship Ministries are articulating a new vision adopting a change of strategy for carrying out the work. Three new strategic emphases will connect and inform the work of the team: make and grow disciples, form and develop leaders, and transform communities. These emphases will shape events, resources, and relationships. To facilitate this work, the team will include director-level staff alongside two administrative support staff. Discipleship Ministries will develop a team of contractors who will provide leadership in congregations and districts related to specific ministries such as evangelism, conflict transformation, and Christian education.

## Allocations and grants

An EDF allocation of \$200,000 was approved for work by Brethren Disaster Ministries and Puerto Rico District. The

money will fund long-term recovery on the island, following the 2017 hurricanes.

A Global Food Initiative allocation of \$15,440 was approved to fund expansion of the gardening program of Lybrook Community Ministries in Cuba, N.M. The goal is to expand the gardening program to include more Navajo families in six communities in the area.

The board approved grants from the Wieand Trust for two projects of Illinois and Wisconsin District in the Chicago area: the Parables Community, hosted at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., and the Gathering Chicago, which meets in a high-rise in the Hyde Park neighborhood. The Parables Community will receive \$34,135 for the rest of this year, 2018, and \$46,288 for 2019. The Gathering Chicago will receive \$85,100 for the rest of this year, 2018, and \$87,000 for 2019.

## In other business

- The board approved updates to the denomination's financial policies representing clarifications, changes of nomenclature and titles, or revisions to bring policies up to date with current practice.
- Kelley Brenneman was appointed to the Brethren Historical Committee. She is archivist at the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum, and a member of Agape Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind.

## Personnel notes

**Tara Hornbacker** will retire from Bethany Seminary July 1, after guiding a generation of students through the master of divinity program. She began as assistant professor of ministry formation in 1998 and was given the assignment of reconceiving and reformulating the program. When Bethany launched its Connections distance education program in 2003, Hornbacker adapted the ministry formation program to this new learning environment. Hornbacker completed a master of divinity degree from Earlham School of Religion in 1994 and a doctor

of ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2003. She was granted tenure at Bethany in 2005 and promoted to full professor of ministry formation, missional leadership, and evangelism in 2013. Previously she served nine years as a pastor.

**Terri McDonough** of Lebanon, Ohio, has been hired as financial aid and enrollment assistant at Bethany Seminary. She brings experience in banking as a customer service representative, universal banker, and loan servicer to the position.

## Peacebuilding and Policy director signs letter on militarization of Middle East

**Nathan Hosler, director of the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy,** was one of the ecumenical leaders to sign a letter on the militarization of the Middle East.

Some 15 Christian leaders signed the letter, dated March 14, that was sent to members of Congress.

The letter expressed concern about increasing US arms sales and military aid to Middle Eastern nations, citing a record-high amount of arms sales approved in 2017, doubling that of the previous year.

“Of these approved sales, \$52 billion were to countries in the Middle East,” the letter said, in part. “We know all too well the price that the people—especially civilians—have paid and continue to pay for the ongoing conflicts that are fueled by these arms sales. In Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and Israel, Libya, and elsewhere, thousands of civilians have died with countless more wounded.”

The letter recommended immediate suspension of US arms sales to countries not in compliance with international humanitarian law; full enforcement of existing human rights conditions (“Leahy law”) for US military assistance to recipient governments; strengthening and expansion of end-use monitoring; opposition of the transfer of oversight of the export of small arms and ammunition from the US Munitions List to the less-restrictive Commerce Control List; that the US ratify and fully abide by the terms of the Arms Trade Treaty.

## A lesson worth remembering

Thank you to Gimbiya Kettering for her beautiful and challenging reflection, “Have patience, Brother Samuel, have patience,” in the March issue of MESSENGER.

Over 100 years after Samuel Weir’s conversion to the Brethren, novelist William Faulkner echoed a similar call for black patience when he urged the NCAA in 1956 to, “Go slow now. Stop for a time, a moment,” in the pursuit of racial integration in the South. Faulkner counseled moderation, citing the vulnerability of moderate white Southerners and their need for time to catch their breath.

I wonder what the Church of the Brethren would look like today if the solution to the problem of white discomfort with black people had not consistently called for African American members to bear the indignities of disrespect and refusal with patience and understanding. While the “solution” in 1835 regarding the holy kiss, for example, may have assured the unity and comfort of the moderate white church, the scarcity of African American families with long histories in the Church of the Brethren suggests that such prioritizing came with a cost.

It is a lesson that may be worth remembering as the church faces ongoing challenges to its perceptions of purity and acceptability. In response to Faulkner, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. noted, “It is hardly a moral act to encourage others patiently to accept injustice which he himself does not endure.”

**Carol Wise**  
Minneapolis, Minn.

## CLASSIFIEDS

### Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore?

Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Cincinnati, Ohio. If you have interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at [jdeaton@brethren.org](mailto:jdeaton@brethren.org).

**Consignment sales at Annual Conference.** Brethren Press rents space in the Annual Conference Bookstore for individuals and groups to sell items on a consignment basis. Consignment space must be reserved by June 1. For information, contact Brethren Press Consignments at [kstocking@brethren.org](mailto:kstocking@brethren.org).



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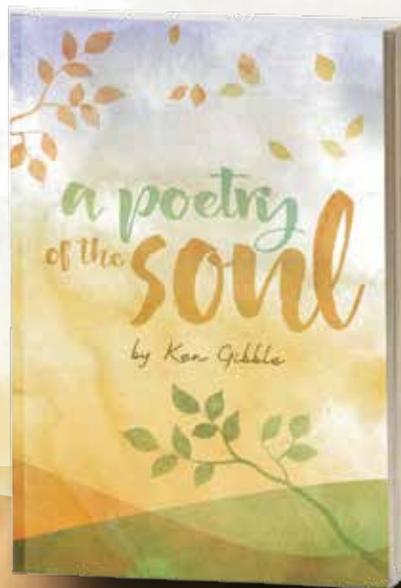


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## Seeking the peace of Christ

I often read MESSENGER with a view toward identifying resources that may be helpful in my classroom discussions at Bethany Theological Seminary, where I am Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship. I especially appreciated the April 2018 issue, which included several timely articles related to gun violence in the US. They provide different perspectives on a volatile issue and, most importantly, do so within the context of considering what our

faith means as followers of Jesus Christ and members of congregations who seek the mind of Christ and the peace of Christ in community. Thank you.

**Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm**  
Richmond, Ind.

## Be careful

Brethren and sisters, be careful of your battle. We are pointing a finger at the LGBTQ community, but remember a pointed finger has three fingers pointing back. The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are full of life guidelines.

Who among us are living true to each one? We are told that one sin is no greater than the other, save one, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Let he/she who is without sin cast the first stone.

Do we really want a divide in our church over one issue, when we are not keeping all of his laws?

**Gale Honeyman**  
Laura, Ohio

## Powerful and timely

What a powerful and timely April issue! Thank you for pulling together

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

## New members

**Bassett**, Va.: Brooke Meade, Patrick Meade  
**Dixon**, Ill.: Larry Berkenpas  
**East Cocalico**, Stevens, Pa.: Connie Sensenig  
**Fairview**, Cordova, Md.: Bruce Dove, Sloan Dove  
**First**, Harrisburg, Pa.: Howard Kramer, Victor Mendez, Mark Pickens  
**Geiger**, Friedens, Pa.: Rick Leer, David Shaulis  
**Harrisonburg**, Va.: Chevy Cale, Kathy Guisewite, Harry Jarrett, Dorothy Miller, Tisha Moore, Brenda Powell, Gary Powell, George Toscano, Helen Wetsel, Merv Wunderlick  
**Little Swatara**, Bethel, Pa.: Lois Bohn, Scott Bohn, Carl Graby  
**Ninth Street**, Roanoke, Va.: Suzy Altice, Sue Belanger, Trish Lawson, Malcolm Mazyck, Patrice Mazyck, Tanner Montgomery  
**Nokesville**, Va.: William

James Armstrong, Zachary Michael Armstrong  
**Oakland**, Bradford, Ohio: Carrie Drees  
**Philadelphia, First**, Wyndmoor, Pa.: Norris Jenkins  
**Somerset**, Pa.: Eugene Balog, Michael Saylor, Trudy Saylor, Craig Smith, Regine Smith, Loretta Tannehill, Joel Zelenske  
**Virden**, Ill.: Desaray Bolton, Dominic Bolton, Samantha Bolton

## Wedding anniversaries

**Berry**, Bill and Judy, Virden, Ill., 50  
**Boleyn**, Lester and Esther, Hagerstown, Md., 60  
**Brown**, Don and Jean, Harrisonburg, Va., 50  
**Claytor**, Dallas and Peggy, Dayton, Va., 67  
**Diehl**, Robert and Charlotte, Farmington, Pa., 70  
**Fletcher**, Robert and Connie, Denton, Md., 50  
**Frazee**, Willard and Betty, Uniontown, Pa., 65  
**Garrison Meade**, Michael and Shirley, Girard, Ill., 50  
**Good**, Carson and Carolyn, Port Republic, Va., 50  
**Hartman**, Bill and Lana, Penn Laird, Va., 50

**Hartman**, Dwight and Connie, Duncansville, Pa., 50  
**Horner**, Mearl and Carol, Davidsville, Pa., 55  
**Keller**, Zane and Connie, Ansonia, Ohio, 55  
**Landes**, Ray and Paige, Bridgewater, Va., 50  
**Mahaney**, Calvin and Betty, Fairplay, Md., 65  
**Nichols**, Wayne and Wilma, Virden, Ill., 55  
**Reese**, Perry and Nancy, Hagerstown, Md., 60  
**Riley**, Galen and Patsy, Gettysburg, Ohio, 50  
**Ruckman**, Mike and Becky, Rockingham, Va., 50  
**Seilhamer**, Larry and Carolyn, Bridgewater, Va., 50  
**Skelton**, Darrell and Kathreen, Virden, Ill., 65  
**Smith**, Edward and Betty, Harrisonburg, Va., 50  
**Snow**, Don and Rachel, Harrisonburg, Va., 60  
**Stone**, Steve and Jane, Lexington, Ky., 50  
**Stump**, Clyde and Jane, Greenville, Ohio, 65  
**Stutzman**, Clifford and Sally, Hollsopple, Pa., 68  
**Swigart**, Leon and Susie, Girard, Ill., 55  
**Wilson**, John and Floretta, Lititz, Pa., 67  
**Wine**, Ray and Ann, Bridgewater, Va., 68  
**Wrightsmen**, Marvin and Helen, Virden, Ill., 55

## Deaths

**Arnold**, Donna, 83, La Verne, Calif., Feb. 1  
**Banks**, Jack, 90, La Habra, Calif., Feb. 27  
**Bassett**, Imogene G., 90, Lima, Ohio, Nov. 3  
**Bense**, William H., Jr., 82, Windber, Pa., Feb. 7  
**Berkebile**, Donald, 81, Hollsopple, Pa., Jan. 16  
**Bickelman**, James, 91, Zephyrhills, Fla., Oct. 3  
**Brown**, Jo Ann Wrightsman, 87, Carlinsville, Ill., Sept. 8  
**Boswell**, Olivia P. Vaughn, 65, Harrisburg, Pa., March 2  
**Bupp**, Nancy C., 69, Modesto, Calif., Jan. 9  
**Byerly**, George E., 95, Lima, Ohio, Jan. 3  
**Byers**, Herbert Francis, 96, Greenville, Ohio, Feb. 4  
**Clack**, Pamela Rae Hopper, 70, Versailles, Ohio, Jan. 8  
**Conn**, Laura E. (Dot), 82, Somerset, Pa., March 7  
**Cornett**, Ellis Paul, 79, Bassett, Va., Sept. 26  
**Crabb**, Mamie Ruth Stucky, 86, Urbandale, Iowa, March 4  
**Cross**, James M., 76, Farmland, Ind., Feb. 17  
**Croushorn**, Kenneth James, 89, Nokesville, Va., Nov. 7  
**Deemer**, E. Jean Eshelman, 95, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 27  
**Deffenbaugh**, Gerald E., 88, Friedens, Pa., March 13  
**Detar**, Donald Milton, 96, Santa Ana, Calif., Feb. 17  
**Dull**, Don S., 84, Gettysburg, Ohio, Dec. 3  
**Farmer**, Joyce R., 91, Virden, Ill., Oct. 29  
**Ferguson**, Marie K., 75, Martinsville, Va., Jan. 30  
**Fisher**, John Richard, 83, Sipesville, Pa., Dec. 27  
**Glass**, Sarah M., 97, Modesto, Calif., Dec. 27  
**Glaze**, Pauline S., 94, Windber, Pa., Dec. 23  
**Gnagy**, Eugene E., 97, Wenatchee, Wash., Feb. 22  
**Gunter**, Carolyn Harshbarger, 83, Richmond, Va., May 23, 2017  
**Hagemann**, Nancy J. Lizer, 85, Mount Morris, Ill., Feb. 19  
**Han**, Samuel Leroy, 68, Rockford, Ill., Feb. 27  
**Harvey**, Martha Lou Sheets, 88, Muncie, Ind., March 28  
**Hoffman**, Pauline Ferne Brant, 100, Sipesville, Pa., June 8  
**Hollinger**, Nancy Girvin, 89, Sebring, Fla., Feb. 26  
**Huenefeld**, Robert, 90, Freeport, Ill., Jan. 28  
**Hunsburger**, Joan W. Strycker, 89, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 6  
**Keagy**, Catherine Louise, 97, Harrisonburg, Va., Sept. 17  
**Kenepp**, Etta Margaret Youtzy, 94, McVeytown, Pa., Feb. 5

so much food for thought on the issue of gun violence in our nation and our communities from the perspectives of police officer Ronald Robinson, composer and musician Shawn Kirchner, and Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren.

I especially appreciated Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford's book review of *Bullets into Bells*. This is one of the most important books I've read in my 70 years of life. I've owned a copy since first learning about the book in *Poets and Writers* magazine earlier this

year. The book's co-editor, Brian Clements, shares his hope that the book will encourage people "who might not otherwise have become involved in this movement to get more involved." And that's me, for one.

I've started buying multiple copies of the book to give to friends and encouraging them to share it widely, especially seeing that their local church, public, and high school libraries have a copy. The possibilities for use of the book are endless. It can be used for discussion groups of peo-

ple with differing views. It can be given to our legislators. With permission, it can be placed in doctor's office waiting rooms.

If a person reads just one poem and response, the wheels of thought will be engaged to, as Brumbaugh-Cayford says, "usher us into the interior of this national horror." Only when we, the unaffected, begin to understand that interior perspective can change happen. Will you join me in this effort?

**Peggy Reiff Miller**  
Englewood, Ohio

## TURNINGPOINTS

**King**, Gilbert, Jr. (Toby), 85, Harrisonburg, Va., April 30, 2017  
**Krueger**, Jon, 74, Myerstown, Pa., Sept. 1  
**Layman**, Ellen Monger, 95, Dayton, Va., April 21, 2017  
**Leavens**, Phyllis Irene Chambers, 88, Sebring, Fla., Oct. 21  
**Lehman**, Carl H., 82, East Petersburg, Pa., March 10  
**Loker**, Edgar David, Jr., 68, Broadway, Va., May 24, 2017  
**Long**, Janet Louise Turner, 92, Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 11  
**Long**, Millie, 95, Lititz, Pa., March 23  
**Lutz**, Wallace Bradshaw, 78, Woodstock, Va., Feb. 2  
**Martin**, Warren Liskey, 90, Harrisonburg, Va., Sept. 15  
**Martzall**, Kelly Dundore, 58, Lebanon, Pa., Nov. 11  
**Mc Coy**, Talmadge M. (Tom), 88, Somerset, Pa., Feb. 25  
**Mc Griff**, Charlene Louise Fox, 91, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 23  
**Micklus**, Margaret A. (Nan), 94, Virden, Ill., Nov. 14  
**Miller-Byerly**, Gloria Ann, 92, Lima, Ohio, Dec. 25  
**Moss**, Mary Jane Blough, 90, Boswell, Pa., Jan. 8  
**O'Bier**, Norma Hamstead, 86, Seaford, Del., March 8  
**O'Hearn**, Joan M. Detrick,

85, Harrisonburg, Va., May 21, 2017  
**Olwin**, Virginia, 96, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 21  
**Peiffer**, Frank, 96, Sebring, Fla., Dec. 20  
**Raley**, Dorothy, 95, Sipesville, Pa., Feb. 18  
**Rowe**, Edith Bierwerth, 79, Frostproof, Fla., Feb. 18  
**Schwenk**, Bonnie, 56, Bethel, Pa., Dec. 7  
**Shaffer**, Clair A., 72, Sipesville, Pa., June 7  
**Shaffer**, Florence Barnes, 90, Sipesville, Pa., July 11  
**Shickel**, Helen Marie Swestyn, 99, Harrisonburg, Va., June 10  
**Skelton**, Darrell M., 86, Virden, Ill., Dec. 3  
**Smith**, Margaret M. Bachtel, 86, Plymouth, Ind., Feb. 22  
**Spoon**, Daniel L., Sr., 58, Virden, Ill., July 10  
**Stauffer**, Ruth Gibble, 91, Manheim, Pa., March 14  
**Street**, Albert (Pete), 87, Sterling, Va., Feb. 13  
**Swett**, Jennifer Kathryn Ludwick, 52, Fairfax, Va., Feb. 19  
**Swigart**, Marion L. Suloff, 101, Lewistown, Pa., Jan. 28  
**Thomas**, Eugene, 91, Windber, Pa., Jan. 11  
**Thomas**, Wade E., 82, Hollsopple, Pa., Aug. 17  
**Thompson**, Dixie Jo Rhoades, 68, Greenville, Ohio, Nov. 25

**Thompson**, Hubert D., 96, Greenville, Ohio, Oct. 18  
**Thompson**, Irene Warner, 95, Greenville, Ohio, Feb. 27  
**Voss**, Richard R., 68, Mount Morris, Ill., March 1  
**Wampler**, Catherine Flory, 95, Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 7  
**Warren**, Jesse Andrew, 38, Cerro Gordo, Ill., March 12  
**Weatherholtz**, Ida Rebecca Kuykendall, 98, Keyser, W.Va., Feb. 24  
**Weimer**, Carroll Adair, Sr., 85, Nokesville, Va., Feb. 7  
**Weimer**, Mary Burnette Woodward, 83, Nokesville, Va., Jan. 30  
**Winegardner**, Ross D., 86, Howell, Mich., March 3  
**Zimmerman**, Harvey E., 86, Bethel, Pa., Oct. 31

### Ordained

**Anders**, Thomas, N. Ind. Dist. (Plymouth, Ind.), Feb. 25  
**Burkholder**, Ryan, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Ephrata, Pa.), March 11  
**Heilshorn**, Steve, N. Ohio Dist. (Dupont, Ohio), March 18  
**Malone**, Tony, Southeastern Dist. (Trinity, Blountville, Tenn.), Jan. 1  
**Spidel**, Zachary, S. Ohio Dist. (East Dayton, Dayton, Ohio), Feb. 25

### Commissioned

**Oleyar**, Gail, Shen. Dist. (Mountain View, McGaheysville, Va.), March 4

### Licensed

**Colon**, Julio, Atl. S. E. Dist. (La Iglesia de los Hermanos Nuevo Comienzo, St. Cloud, Fla.), Feb. 18  
**Haldeman**, Jason, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Elizabethtown, Pa.), March 11  
**Munson**, Timothy, Shen. Dist. (Grottoes, Va.), Feb. 25  
**Rittenhouse**, Nathan, Shen. Dist. (New Hope, Green Bank, W.Va.), March 11  
**Sanchez**, Lymaris, Atl. S. E. Dist. (La Iglesia de los Hermanos Nuevo Comienzo, St. Cloud, Fla.), Feb. 18  
**Solliday**, Daniel, Shen. Dist. (New Hope, Green Bank, W.Va.), March 11  
**Woods**, Thomas, W. Marva Dist. (Living Stone, Cumberland, Md.), March 4

### Placements

**Castro**, Nertha, pastor, Nuevo Amanecer, Bethlehem, Pa., Jan. 1  
**Dowdy**, Christy, interim pastor, Arlington, Va., Feb. 1  
**Ewing**, Christopher, from

associate pastor to interim pastor, County Line, Harrod, Ohio, March 1  
**Hodges**, Carlton R., interim pastor, Red Hill, Roanoke, Va., Feb. 1  
**Horst**, Wilmer, ministry team, Falling Spring, Hades, Mercersburg, Pa., Jan. 1  
**Leddy**, Peter, pastor, Winter Park, Fla., Feb. 25  
**Lowe**, John W., Jr., interim pastor, Masons Cove, Salem, Va., Feb. 1  
**Miller**, R. Scot, pastor of education and outreach, Common Spirit, Wyoming, Mich., Dec. 1  
**Munson**, Timothy, pastor, Grottoes, Va., Feb. 25  
**Rieman**, Kenneth, from pastor, Oakton, Vienna, Va., to pastor, Prince of Peace, South Bend, Ind., Feb. 1  
**Schrag**, Pamela, pastor, Newton, Kan., Jan. 1  
**Strickler**, Carol, co-interim pastor, Myersville, Md., Feb. 1  
**Strickler**, Duane, co-interim pastor, Myersville, Md., Feb. 1  
**Ulm**, Adam, from youth and young adult pastor, Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa., to pastor, Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa., Jan. 29  
**Yoder**, Randy, interim pastor, Oakton, Vienna, Va., March 10

# We are here

**T**he weather report called for thunderstorms, so I needed a raincoat. Even before I left the house, I knew it was the wrong coat: My raincoat is very, very purple. It didn't feel somber enough or dressy



GIMBIYA KETTERING

enough, but it is the only raincoat I have. I wore jeans and tennis shoes because I was expecting to be standing for several hours.

I thought about you and hoped you would approve. After all, in a sense the invitation was to all of us. I thought about what it means to be there as a representative of the whole church. Of you. What would you wear?

Fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis while speaking out on behalf of the rights of the city's sanitation workers. On April 4, communities around the world held events in memory of his legacy. The National Council of Churches organized ACT to End Racism, an ecumenical gathering in Washington, D.C., to launch a Truth and Racial Justice Initiative. As a member of the NCC, the Church of the Brethren had a special invitation to attend.

When I got to the National Mall, I was even more self-conscious about my purple raincoat. Many people wore tennis shoes, but they were also wearing black coats and white clerical collars. Others wore flowing stoles in the styles of Mayan, Guatemalan, and Kente cloth, some embroidered with multiethnic people holding hands. Some people wore Coptic crosses. Jewish men wore kippot in every color.

Then, I wondered if I should have worn an Anabaptist-style plain dress and prayer covering. I do not own these and have never worn them, but I began to wish I had something to wear that would be distinctively Brethren to mark our presence and participation.

I wove through the crowd, stopping and bending my head as prayers were offered in Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi, Hindi, and English—then moving again until I saw a familiar face. Tori Bateman of the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy smiled as soon as she saw me. Her smile made me feel perfect, forgetting my coat and self-consciousness.

One of the speakers was Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Today, he said, is also Passover—the time when the Jewish community remembers the story of Exodus, when Moses

led his people out of slavery in Egypt. When called by name from the burning bush, Moses answered, *Hineni. Here I am* (Exodus 3:4). Rabbi Pesner asked us to say it with him, *Hineni! Hineni!* To proclaim that each of us is here.

Then Rabbi Pesner taught us *Hineinu. We are here.* Again, I thought of all of you as if you could be there beside me, watching the storm clouds gather. Martin Luther King Jr answered the call to lead. In a time such as this, what is our call?

The April 25, 1968, cover of MESSENGER featured Martin Luther King Jr. and an editorial entitled “Who Was He?” The first answer was, “The Moses of his time.” Of *his* time. Not of *our* time, because maybe we Brethren did not really consider ourselves to be part of the issues King was speaking about. This is worse than wearing the wrong coat. It should have been our time. If oppression hurts both oppressed and oppressor, then Dr. King was called by God, answered *Hineni*, and wanted all of us to answer *Hineinu*.

That issue of MESSENGER provoked more letters from readers than any other. Some were reflective and thoughtful. Some were appreciative and sensitive. But we do not like to talk about the other letters—the angry ones, the hateful ones, the ones that used slurs. There were letters



that insisted that segregation was divine law because black people were created inferior.

This year's Annual Conference moderator, Samuel Sarpiya, told me that, by becoming a representative of the whole church, he now feels a love for the whole church and for the wholeness of the church. Because I too represent and love the whole church, I must remind us of that part of our history. When I think of what it means to represent us all, my love is stretched and I fear it will break my heart.

*Hineinu*, we are here, all of us. My church, I want you to be here with me—repentant and honored. *Hineinu!* 

Gimbiya Kettering is director of intercultural ministries for the Church of the Brethren.



**IN THE NOT SO DISTANT FUTURE,  
IN A SUMMER CAMP  
NOT SO FAR AWAY...**



**CAMPERS WILL BE  
TRANSFORMED  
TO A REALM...**



**BEYOND BELIEF**



**AS THEY  
EXPLORE...**



**THE UNIVERSE  
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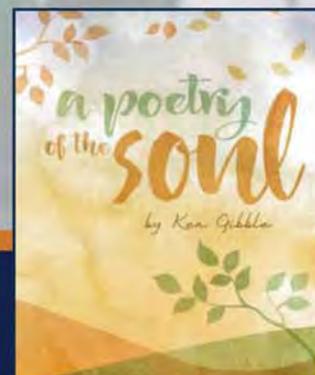


**Scott Holland** is the Slabaugh Professor of Theology and Culture and Director of Peace Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary. He is an expert on theopoetics and theological imagination and a senior contributing editor for *CrossCurrents* journal in New York.



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**Also on Friday:** Join Ken Gibble for a 12:30 insight session on **Poetry: Read it. Write it.** Ken is author of the new book *A Poetry of the Soul*, published by Brethren Press and will appear at the conference bookstore for a Friday afternoon booksigning.

Watch [www.facebook.com/brethrenpress](http://www.facebook.com/brethrenpress) for further details.