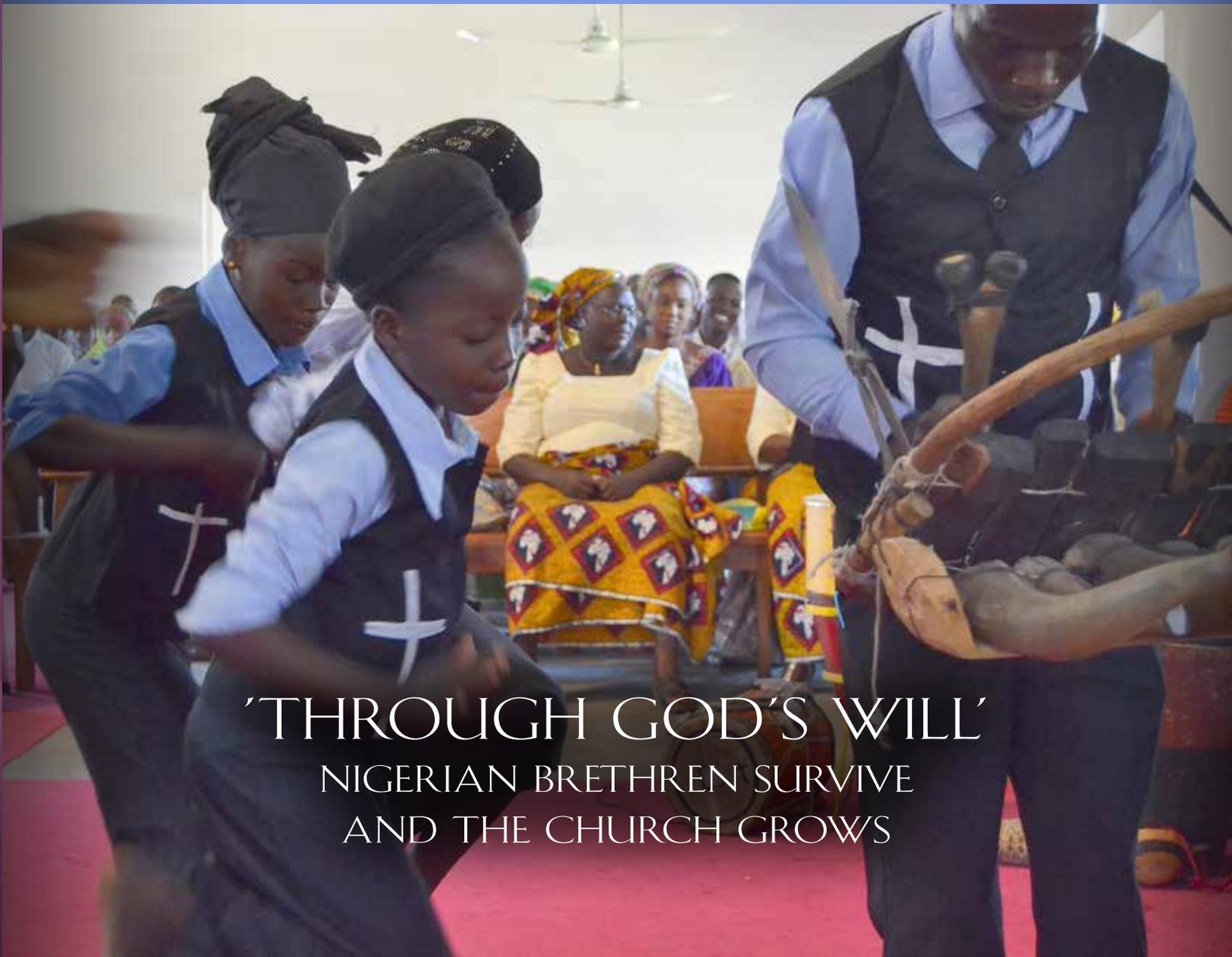


CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



'THROUGH GOD'S WILL'
NIGERIAN BRETHREN SURVIVE
AND THE CHURCH GROWS

More than we can imagine

Now to God be the glory, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. Ephesians 3:20

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HOUR
OF SHARING

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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A gospel team dances at Yola Town, a congregation of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria. Above: Residents of an EYN camp for displaced people bring in the harvest. Photos by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Threatened by the weak

While Christmas is often regarded as a holiday for children, the aftermath of the story is decidedly not.

Most of us would rather not include the epilogue—the part where Herod kills all the baby boys in Bethlehem in order to eliminate the one who is a threat.

“Before the Prince of Peace had learned to walk and talk,” says theologian Tom Wright, “he was a homeless refugee with a price on his head.”

Why would Herod be threatened by a baby? “As his power had increased, so had his paranoia—a not unfamiliar progression, as dictators around the world have shown from that day to this,” says Wright.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Nobody knows how many innocents were massacred in Bethlehem. Some say 3,000; others say 64,000—or even 144,000. A few say the town was so small that it is more likely that the number was only 6 or 7. Traditional liturgies call it 14,000.

It happens that 14,000 is also the number of unaccompanied immigrant children currently in US government custody (a figure reported in late November by the Department of Health and Human Services). Being held in custody is not the same as the plight suffered by the babes of Bethlehem, of course. But many churches—especially Orthodox and Catholic ones—observe Holy Innocents Day as a time to remember all children who suffer. Children the world over are fleeing violence and seeking asylum.

The situation in Yemen is particularly brutal: 85,000 children under the age of five are said to have starved to death between April 2015 and October 2018, according to Save the Children, and 5 million face famine.

This slow death is surely a slaughter of innocents. If we are appalled by Herod in Matthew’s Gospel, then we should also be appalled by the Herods of our day. In the age-old clash between the weak and the powerful, the powerful are somehow threatened by the weak. As spoken in a Greek Orthodox liturgy, “Herod was troubled and mowed down the children like wheat; for he lamented that his power would soon be destroyed.”

We are followers of the baby who escaped from Bethlehem and found refuge in a foreign country. That tells us whose power is worth trusting.

Wendy McFadden

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Annville gives disaster survivors a start on recovery

Somewhere in the world, 250 victims of a disaster will have a head start on rebuilding their lives, thanks to Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. However, the church has good reason to believe their project ultimately will help many more people.

In late 2018, 50 volunteers from the church and Lebanon Valley College packed 250 emergency clean-up buckets for Church World Service (CWS).

“These buckets are going to people who are experiencing one of the worst times in their lives, and we pray that our love and Jesus’ love is felt by those who receive these buckets, and that they use them to help start cleaning up and putting the pieces of their lives back together again,” said pastor Paul Liepelt.

Contents of the CWS clean-up buckets are very specific. Each resealable, five-gallon bucket is filled with a specified number of scouring pads, sponges, scrub brushes, reusable cleaning towels, liquid laundry detergent, liquid disinfectant dish soap, household cleaner, clothespins, clothesline, dust masks, waterproof dishwashing gloves, work gloves, large heavy-duty trash bags, and insect repellent.

According to Merv Wampler, who along with Russ Bucher, Bonnie Wampler, and Terry Allwein organized the project, cost to fill a bucket is around \$75. He noted that thanks to five major donors and businesses in the community, the church was able to package them for around \$30 each. Funds were contributed by church members and organizations. The buckets were transported by church volunteers to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., for distribution to disaster areas.

“We couldn’t have done 250 buckets without our major donors,” Wampler said. “People gave money and several businesses stepped forward. Things just snowballed.”

“The thing is, it’s just a bucket,” he added. “We take for

courtesy of Paul Liepelt



From left, Annville Church of the Brethren volunteers Ken Rodkey, Velma Gingrich, Caroline Figueroa, Tony Figueroa, and Gail Tice pack clean-up buckets.

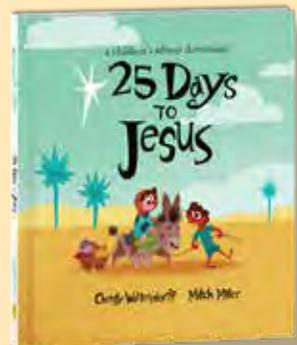
granted when we want to do a cleaning project that we have the materials to do it, but when people who have lived through a disaster come back to their homes, they often don’t have anything. A bucket of cleaning supplies may not sound like a lot, but it is a start on rebuilding their lives . . . and it shows there are people who care.”

Liepelt issued a challenge to three other Church of the Brethren congregations to undertake their own “Fill 250 Buckets” initiative. “We called out the McPherson, Ephrata, and Elizabethtown congregations, and within 24 hours, I heard back from all three that they accepted the challenge,” he said. “Two other churches who saw the challenge also said they are interested. We hope that when they complete their challenges, they each also call out three other churches . . . until it spreads across the United States.”

Inmates give 25 days to Jesus for Christmas

The chaplain of a correctional center in Pennsylvania called Brethren Press wondering about a quantity discount for *25 Day to Jesus*, the children’s Advent devotional by Christy Waltersdorff and Mitch Miller. He heard about the book from a Brethren colleague and thought it would be a

good option for a special project. Each year, he said, inmates pool money they earn through their work programs to purchase gifts for children in the community. The books were purchased at the end of November, to become Christmas gifts for 24 children.



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.

McPherson celebrates four centenarians

These days, it is not uncommon to celebrate 100 years of life. But McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren celebrated a quartet of 100th birthdays in a single year in 2018. Members Miriam Hoover, Gladys Naylor, and Hazel Snell were born Brethren, and Jeannette Stump found it “as easy as pie” to move into the Brethren faith.

All were widowed, and their life experiences were varied, but they shared a common theme of service. Hazel and Art Snell were life-time deacons and gifted musicians and served local congregations in California and Kansas. Jeannette and Harley Stump served in pastorates in the central plains of Texas and Oklahoma, culminating in a professorship at McPherson College. Gladys and

Kurtis Naylor served the church in Ecuador, the World Council of Churches in Europe, and US congregations. Miriam and Wilbur Hoover pastored churches and served as district executive in the Midwest and Central Plains.

They also shared a common residence in recent years. Hazel Snell passed away in mid-November at the Cedars Retirement Community, where the other three women continue to live. As Hoover was preparing to move from independent living to assisted living this past year, she asked one of her pastors about having a “house dedication” in her “new digs.”

Pastor Kathy Whitacre focused a September sermon on the theme of learning from the perseverance of these centenarians who have served and continue to serve their church.



courtesy of Barbara Wise Lewczak



Ankeny marks 150 years of ministry

Ankeny (Iowa) Church of the Brethren celebrated its 150th anniversary Sept. 29-30, 2018, with the theme “150 Years and Our Story Is Still Unfolding.”

Barbra Davis preached on “The Cornerstone” from Ephesians 2:17-22 and Keith Funk preached on “The Priority of Jesus” from Matthew 6: 33-34. Many former pastors sent messages and memories, and several were present to share during the service, reported pastor Barbara Wise Lewczak.

“Some of the special features were a slide show of photos from the past, several photo albums and other memorabilia, a hymn sing, a choir including present and past members and guests, and a children’s time led by Natalie and Krystal Bellis, with a history of the Ankeny Church of the Brethren written by the children of the congregation many years ago. It was a precious way to hear the history shared,” Wise Lewczak said.

A memory book was prepared by Dee Reynolds and daughters Rhonda Bingman and Terri Hansen, and presented to all attendees.

Strawser receives volunteerism award

John Strawser, board chair at Pitsburg (Ohio) Church of the Brethren, received the 2018 Community Service Volunteerism award at the Ohio State Grange Banquet and State Convention, according to *The Early Bird* of Darke County. In addition to his service at the church, Strawser works regularly with the State of the Heart Health Care Veteran Recognition Program.



The Early Bird/Bluebag Media



‘THROUGH GOD’S WILL’

Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria survives and grows

stories and photos by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

A visit to Nigeria took me home again, to the land of my birth. From Nov. 1 to 19 I accompanied Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer on a visit to Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

Among Wittmeyer’s goals for the trip were strengthening relationships and bringing encouragement to the Nigerian Brethren. Mine were two-fold; I wanted a better understanding of EYN, but also to reconnect with the place where I grew up as the child of Church of the Brethren mission workers.

The EYN leadership—president Joel Billi, vice president Anthony Ndamsai, and general secretary Daniel Mbayá—

welcomed us, and staff liaison Markus Gamache hosted us. We spent several days at the EYN headquarters in Kwarhi. Church staff for education, community development, agriculture, health care, disaster relief, women’s ministry, communications, micro-finance, and more met with us. We made day trips to nearby places like Garkida—former headquarters of the Church of the Brethren Mission, and the village where I was born. We toured Kulp Theological Seminary and a new EYN office complex. I observed the annual meeting of the Female Theologians Association.

We visited 10 congregations, 4 camps for displaced people, and several schools. Pastors told us stories of their



Musicians in the praise band at EYN Maiduguri #1.

churches. Community leaders described the work to return and rebuild in places where violence has taken a large toll.

In Jos we met Brethren Volunteer Service worker Judy Minnich Stout, who is helping improve English skills of prospective Bethany Seminary students at the EYN Tech Center. We stayed in the guesthouse at Boulder Hill, the compound where my parents were houseparents for Hillcrest School high schoolers, and I visited my alma mater. The Gamaches invited us for dinner at their home—the place my parents last lived in Nigeria, the same house I helped my father pack up when he moved back to California in 1987. The china hutch was still in its place, displaying Janada Gamache’s beautiful set of serving bowls.

We attended the “autonomy” celebration of full congregational status for the EYN church at the Gurku Interfaith IDP Camp that was founded by Markus Gamache. Wittmeyer preached for the service.

On the last afternoon, we met with US ambassador W. Stuart Symington. Our delegation included EYN president Billi and general secretary Mbaya. It was an important new connection between EYN and US diplomats.

What did I learn? That EYN is a large and complex African denomination straddling many divides while working hard to be true to Jesus Christ, all while enduring a national crisis.

A quick guide to EYN structure

A church may begin as a preaching point or an off-shoot from an established congregation, and is first called a local church board (LCB). In this way, some congregations become “mother” churches many times over.

Once an LCB grows to 150 members and is strong enough financially, it gains full congregational status as a local church council (LCC).

Five or six LCCs may group together to form a district church council (DCC) with a district secretary appointed by the denomination.

The General Church Council (GCC) is EYN’s annual conference. Its annual meeting is the Majalisa.

EYN is forging ahead while holding on to aspects of traditional culture that may be under threat in the 21st century. In worship services, I heard Christian lyrics set to traditional tunes and saw gospel teams perform tribal dances. In a country with more than 500 languages, we met EYN ministers who are translating the Bible into languages spoken in two small areas of the northeast. During the same trip, I was surprised to hear stories of Christians in Nigeria engaging in polygamy.

EYN values its Brethren heritage and the mission effort that founded it, and is hanging on to Anabaptist understandings of Christian discipleship while under pressure from other theological influences. Those include Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. EYN leaders are committed to the peace witness, but some church members question pacifism in the face of violent attacks and other Nigerian Christians advocate for retaliation.

EYN seeks new ways to work at widespread problems in Nigeria, while struggling with a lack of political influence. Its micro-finance bank is one attempt to address an economy in which a population explosion and unemployment reinforce the cycle of poverty. Congregations are encouraged to start schools as an answer to deteriorating public education. Theological Education by Extension offers women an entrée but the denomination still does not ordain them. New churches are planted even as established congregations struggle to rebuild. The Disaster Ministry, Women’s Ministry, and Integrated Community-Based Development Program are among EYN departments working with people and communities affected by the violence, but the needs are overwhelming.

Nigerian Brethren constantly asked me to thank the Church of the Brethren for its support. Their theological conviction, however, is that EYN’s survival is “through God’s will.”

My response must be, “Thanks be to God.”



The new church under construction at EYN Michika #1.



People carry loads across the river on foot, and cars are pushed through the water on the road from Uba to Michika on market day. The main bridge was still in ruins after government bombing of the area during the Boko Haram insurgent takeover.

Leading the church through loss

When Joel S. Billi became president of EYN in 2016, the Boko Haram insurgency was beginning to wane. People were returning home to face their losses, including EYN staff displaced from the church headquarters and pastors and congregations who had fled their communities. Families had lost loved ones. Churches, homes, and businesses had been destroyed. Almost everyone had experienced trauma.

In November 2018, two years later, trauma and crisis continued. Boko Haram was attacking and even controlling some northeast areas, and extremist elements among the Fulani cattle herders were carrying out deadly attacks in the central belt.

“The life of a Nigerian today is not worth that of a chicken,” Billi said. It is time for Christians in Nigeria to band together to ask the government to end the violence. Some 1,300 or more soldiers were killed from July to October 2018. Four of the 55 church districts were not functioning because their areas were too dangerous.

Nigerian Brethren have seen little or no benefit from the government’s claim to be rebuilding the northeast, Billi said. Borno State aid helped rebuild 15 EYN churches destroyed by the insurgency. Many more churches received no government aid. State-run facilities like hospitals received little help either. Bridges and roads across the area remained in ruins.

The insurgency drastically cut giving, with many Nigerian Brethren displaced, lacking access to income from farms or employment. Returning congregations face the cost of

rebuilding their churches. Many people are homeless, and poverty is rampant. Billi expressed gratitude to the US church for its gifts. “Thanks be to God for the Church of the Brethren, which has stood by EYN,” he said.

The giving to Nigeria by American Brethren has been “unprecedented,” Billi said, with more than \$4 million donated. That amounts to Naira 1.5 billion. “For such an amount of money to be gathered up in such a short time, less than five years!” he exclaimed. “It has gone a long way and has touched people’s lives.”

Billi listed successes of the Nigeria Crisis Response, a joint effort of EYN and the Church of the Brethren funded by this giving: support for camps for displaced people, medical care, trauma healing, and more. One specific EYN Disaster Ministry program is to rebuild homes, with priority given to widows and the aged.

The task of rebuilding churches has been helped by Global Mission and Service grants to EYN congregations, also funded by American donors. As of Nov. 2018, 40 EYN congregations each received \$5,000, totaling \$200,000.

Some congregations sent representatives to EYN headquarters to express their gratitude with letters and small gifts.

Billi’s next priority is evangelism. The persecution of the church has resulted in growth



“WE SHOULD EMBRACE EACH OTHER AS WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD TO SERVE GOD.” —EYN president Joel S. Billi

for EYN, which has been expanding into new areas. “People have fled and have taken the church with them,” he said. “Not too long from now, EYN’s presence will be felt in all of Nigeria.”

EYN has celebrated the “autonomy” or full congregational status of an unprecedented number of churches in the last two years. Before the crisis, EYN welcomed seven or eight new churches each year, but in 2017 23 were organized. As of November, more than 20 had been organized in 2018, as



A classroom at the EYN camp for displaced people near Masaka.

well as 2 new districts. In early December, EYN inaugurated a Lagos district. This is significant because Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria, far from EYN’s established territory.

Another success is growth of Theological Education by Extension (TEE), which Billi said has become the largest institution within EYN. He thanked the Church of the Brethren for its annual grant in support.

TEE “has become an apparatus of accommodating women,” being 80 to 85 percent women, Billi said. “We pray God will open our eyes to discover other ways to bring women on board so that they too can be up and doing. We have tasted now the years that women have contributed greatly to the church. Without women, EYN would not be what it is today.”

Despite the recent growth, some church members are looking for more. EYN membership is very enthusiastic about evangelism and “some are saying we are slow in church planting; we should move faster.”

Billi celebrates the growth with mixed feelings, because he does not want the daughter church to surpass its parent. He has observed that “the Church of the Brethren is shrinking,” and that its unity is threatened by theological differences.

“I always pray that the Church of the Brethren remain as an entity, that EYN remain as an entity. We want to grow a formidable partnership. We want the Church of the Brethren to be a peace church, to influence all the denominations and attract people to join us.

“We should embrace each other as workers in the vineyard to serve God.”

Profile: Kulp Theological Seminary

Location: Kwarhi, near EYN headquarters.

Student population: 238 men and women, including 196 seminary students and 42 students in the school for pastors’ wives.



Dauda Gava, provost of Kulp Theological Seminary

Leadership: Provost Dauda Gava leads a staff of 57 including more than 20 academic staff.

Degrees and areas of study: Seminary students may earn a diploma (3-year program) or a bachelor’s degree (4-year program) in areas such as Bible, church growth and evangelism, Christian education, peace and conflict resolution, and more.

Support: KTS receives funding from student fees, the denomination, and other partners such as Mission 21 and the Church of the Brethren.

Challenges:

- A need for professors with doctorates to teach the master’s degree program, and for teachers of Islamic studies.
- Expectation that graduates serve as EYN pastors. More graduate than there

are paid positions in the denomination. Women face an additional lack of employment opportunities because EYN does not ordain them nor hire them as pastors. Female graduates may teach in Bible schools and work with Theological Education by Extension.

- A project to improve on-campus living quarters for students and staff.
- Difficulties with the water system.
- Not enough farmland to accommodate all students.

Successes:

- Accreditation through affiliation with the University of Jos.
- Improvements to the library, which is in the process of cataloging books donated by American Brethren.

To learn more about the word of God

To teach people the Bible” is how Yamtikarya Mshelia, director of Theological Education by Extension, describes TEE. The program educates lay-people, something like a Bible college without a campus. The 2,200 students live everywhere from the large southern cities of Lagos and Port Harcourt to northern cities such as Kano and Kaduna, and across the northeast where most EYN churches are located.

Mshelia emphasized that TEE takes students at all levels of proficiency. Some already hold higher degrees, are professionals, or are government workers who simply “want to learn more about the word of God,” she said. “Then we have women learning to read and write.”

Students who complete basic, advanced, and post-advanced TEE earn a certificate. Those who complete the next level up earn a diploma in theology.

It is “a lively and interesting program,” Mshelia said. “It helps people who cannot afford seminary. Sometimes they will go into the pastoral vocation.”

Students are provided books and materials to read. There are class leaders and a supervisor in each church district. Throughout the semester, student groups meet every other week. During these class sessions, groups of students numbering not more than 10 discuss what they have been reading. At the end of the semester, they take an exam.

Challenges include funding, and recovery from the setbacks caused by the violence. Some students cannot even afford books, Mshelia said, frustrated that the program cannot help every prospective student. The TEE office in Mubi still shows damage from the Boko Haram occupation and military bombardment.



Yamtikarya Mshelia

Mshelia has earned an impressive number of theological degrees, and her enthusiasm for biblical study shows. She holds a bachelor of divinity from the Theological College of

Northern Nigeria; a master of arts in theology from Bethany Seminary; a doctor of ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary; a certificate in ecumenical studies from the Bossey Institute of the World Council of Churches. She has studied at the Pan African Institute of Development in Cameroon. She was director of TEE from 2000 to 2006 and again starting in 2017. She also coordinates the EYN Female Theologians Association, a professional association of women with theological training or degrees.



The Gospel Team at EYN Yola Town performs a traditional Kamwe (Higi) dance during Sunday morning worship.

Church services in EYN are like a combination of worship, concert, and town hall. They feature a sermon, scripture reading, and prayer, but also community announcements, music and dance performances, perhaps even a wedding. A service may last four or more hours. Announcements may take half an hour. Offerings may take longer than that.

There is a standard mix of music groups: the church choir and praise band, the youth/young adult Gospel Team, local chapters of denominational groups such as ZME Women’s Fellowship. Each may dress in coordinated outfits of branded cloth.

Congregations may offer more than one Sunday service: a Hausa service, an English service, a combined service in which leaders switch fluently between the two, and/or a service in the local language.



Members of the ZME Women’s Fellowship choir follow along in their Bibles during worship at EYN Gurku.

Igniting hope through micro-finance

EYN inaugurated a micro-finance bank in February 2018, and Paul Gadzama served on the technical committee that worked to produce its “blue print.” He thinks of it as having “mid-wived the birth of a bank.”

Paul and Becky Gadzama are known for the Education Must Continue Initiative that has helped Chibok schoolgirls and others affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. They have started two schools for primary- and secondary-age students, in Yola and in Lassa, and are among those encouraging EYN churches to start schools.

The technical committee worked to understand the business environment and the community to be served. It crafted the bank’s purpose, mission, and vision, and made sure it fulfilled stringent conditions set by the Central Bank of Nigeria including a minimum capital base and a qualified board of directors.

The committee found investors and organized a shareholder meeting. That meeting elected directors, who were vetted by the Central Bank. A follow-up step was recruitment and hiring of management staff. The technical committee disbanded, but Gadzama’s work was not done—he was elected to the board.

“It’s a poor person’s bank,” he explained, intended to

EYN has started a new “central payment” system, in part to facilitate pastoral salaries. Each congregation is required to send 35 percent of its income to the headquarters. EYN then pays pastors directly, and also funds staff salaries and denominational programming. The system may be understood as a step toward equity for pastors and congregations in disparate situations because of the violence.

serve “basically the poorest of the poor.” “Minimum wage in Nigeria is Naira 18,000 . . . about \$50 a month. The poorest of the poor are below that. They are at the mercy of nature.”

Many clients are subsistence farmers and craftspeople who barely make an income, can feed their families only once or twice a day, are unable to pay for education for their children, and cannot afford medical care. Clients also come from among those who are a step up, living in rural areas, semi-employed, doing a lot of farming and trading.

Micro-loans “can break the cycle of poverty,” Gadzama said. Small amounts of money help people purchase just enough of what they need to generate income. For example, a subsistence farmer may get a loan to purchase fertilizer in hopes of increasing crop yield. The term allowed to pay back the loan may be enough time to plant and fertilize a crop, bring in an increased harvest, and sell some for cash. Then,



Women dance down the aisle as they bring gifts from the harvest to the new EYN church at Gurku Interfaith Camp for displaced people.

ideally, the farmer pays back the bank and has a small amount of new income for family needs.

The bank gives loans to people who have been assessed as able to repay over time. However, it encourages formation of cooperatives, which serve as security and guarantors for people who might not be approved for loans. EYN congregations are facilitating formation of cooperatives. Becky Gadzama heads the Economic Empowerment Committee of a church in Jos, which has helped create five such cooperatives. All have benefited by taking loans from the bank and have started repayments.

The bank is intended to generate income for its investors, Paul Gadzama emphasized. “Do good with your money and make money while you do,” he told investor prospects. While many investors are well-to-do, others are less affluent church members who have seen an opportunity for their small investments to do good too.

Gadzama expects the bank to do well as a business and as a church ministry. “We will invest at a good return. The business environment is not too friendly, but if you understand it you can do a lot.”

The bank will increase the spiritual capital of EYN, he added. “People’s hope in God has been ignited.”

There is hand-wringing about inroads Pentecostalism is making in Nigeria. Young adults are attracted by the loud music, frenzied worship, and public prophesying. Others are lured by the prosperity gospel, promises of wealth from unethical preachers who tell people they have to give money in order to get a better job, bigger house, new car—or even new wife. These are the same kinds of promises that Boko Haram dangles before prospective recruits, one EYN leader pointed out.



Living on a time bomb

Maiduguri is living on a time bomb,” said a member of the church committee at EYN Maiduguri #1.

It was too risky for Americans to drive to Maiduguri, so we flew from Abuja. All seemed peaceful in the city limits—but Maiduguri is a garrison town heavily guarded by Nigerian military and an air force base. Soldiers, police, and vigilantes carried military-style rifles around the city. Even two guards patrolling the courtyard of our hotel gave us a friendly welcome with their rifles casually flung over their shoulders.

Like most churches and other institutions in northeast Nigeria, EYN Maiduguri #1 is surrounded by high walls topped with razor wire. On Sundays, worshipers line up at the large metal gate to be searched and have their bags examined for weapons. Cars are checked before allowed in. There is an army outpost across the road, with soldiers on guard behind sandbag barricades.

Go two or three kilometers out of the city and you will find Boko Haram, said pastor Joseph Tizhe Kwaha. A professor at the University of Maiduguri offered to take Jay Wittmeyer to see Boko Haram for himself. They could drive two kilometers off the university campus and be in insurgent-held territory, he said. (Wittmeyer declined the offer.)

Kwaha shared his grief at the death of a church member who, a few weeks previously, was murdered while working outside the city. Two weeks before our visit, Boko Haram slaughtered some 50 people in the area. Just a few days before, they attacked a camp for IDPs (internally displaced

Middle-aged and older Nigerians are nostalgic for the way things were, before what everyone calls “the crisis.” Not all that long ago, Muslims and Christians lived side-by-side. They grew up as friends, went to school together, attended each other’s weddings.

What happened to us? they wonder. How could Nigeria have come to this?

people), killing eight. The camp housed both Muslims and Christians, but Boko Haram attacked indiscriminately. They don’t care who they kill, Kwaha said. Such attacks continue on a regular basis, but the media may not report them—or the death toll among Nigerian soldiers.

Kwaha arrived in Maiduguri two years ago with personal experience of Boko Haram. He was pastoring in Mubi when insurgents overran that area, and he and his family fled. After he was reassigned to Maiduguri, his wife, Victoria, had a hard time sleeping because of the sounds of shooting and bombing.

Kwaha’s job is to oversee the large congregation’s extensive work—still considered EYN’s largest despite having been destroyed in 2009 and rebuilt, and having lost members over intervening, difficult years. In addition to worship services, Bible studies, and small groups, the church supports displaced people, has an AIDS clinic in partnership with international organizations, and sponsors a school. As lead pastor, Kwaha preaches and does weddings, child dedications, and marriage counseling, assigns the duties of assistant pastors, and sets their schedules. Victoria Kwaha is a leader for the women’s groups.

The church and EYN’s Disaster Ministry are supporting IDP camps, the closest just around the corner from the church. The walled compound is filled with rows of shacks built from various materials including UNHCR tarpaulins sent by the

Top EYN leaders are elected by the Majalisa and serve as executive staff. After completing his term of service, the president retires and is ineligible to serve in another position.

Pastors are assigned to congregations by the denomination and reassigned at least every five years. Denominational staff and district secretaries may be reassigned as well.

Every fall, EYN leadership announces reassignments. Those pastors and staff have just a couple of months to move. A pastor from a rural setting may be reassigned to a large city; staff may become district secretaries. Making reassignments is one of the most important discernment tasks for EYN leaders, and publication of the list is highly anticipated.

Assignment to certain congregations may indicate a pastor is moving toward consideration for top leadership. This seems true for EYN Maiduguri #1, which has seen several pastors become president or general secretary.



Pastor Kwaha leads the congregation at EYN Maiduguri #1.

United Nations. More than 400 people live there, about 85 percent EYN members. Most are from hard-hit areas like Gwoza, Ngoshe, Barawa, Bama—places considered “no go,” where people cannot return because conditions are too dangerous.

Some people in the camp have been displaced since 2013, including camp chairman John Gwama. His family fled the Boko Haram takeover of Gwoza on foot. Their daughter was slaughtered, he said. His wife ended up in Cameroon. He reached Maiduguri with two of their children. He and his wife were separated for more than a year before she could rejoin him.

More Nigeria stories and photos

Messenger Online features more stories from Nigeria at www.brethren.org/messenger. A photo album is at www.bluemelon.com/churchofthebrethren/globalmissiontriptonigeria-november2018.

After 31 years

Stepping off the plane, I breathed Nigerian air and sank into the comfort of homecoming, despite being in a militarized zone. *(Had my first close-up look at an AK-47.)*

Remembering things my taste buds had forgotten, how much I like *jollof* rice and the taste of palm oil, I wished someone would serve *kosai* for breakfast. *(They never did.)*

Beginning to distinguish phrases in Hausa, I tried speaking a few words but people laughed. *(My accent must be terrible.)*

Swaddled in Nigerian graciousness and hospitality, I felt empowered to make attempts at re-entering the culture. *(I expect that was awkward for my hosts, too.)*

Steeling myself to hear the stories of people who have suffered more than I can imagine, I was unprepared to feel shame that the first time I cried was for my own loss. *(We visited the last house my parents lived in before my mother died.)*

Knowing that women in Nigeria struggle for basic rights, I was nevertheless hit hard with a new realization that seg-

The camp receives no help from the government, Gwama said. Their aid comes from international organizations like the United Nations, the EYN Disaster Ministry, the Church of the Brethren, and various EYN congregations. The camp has a source of water. UNICEF provided toilets, but camp leaders have trouble getting the organization to maintain them. Pressing concerns include access to jobs and livelihoods. Most of the IDPs are farmers but they can't go out of the city to farm and raise food for themselves—it is just too risky. Their greatest need, however, is to go home again. The camp chairman does not understand why the government cannot regain control of Boko Haram-held areas and allow that to happen.

Maiduguri #1 is distributing food in the camps, assigning pastors to them, and paying the pastors' salaries, Kwaha said. The church has started projects to help with the lack of employment, including a project for widows and orphans and a micro-loan project.

A difficulty for Kwaha and other EYN pastors is that practically every church member has experienced trauma—even the pastors themselves. Sometimes people come to church and “cannot receive the gospel” because of their trauma. Kwaha has seen women in tears during communion and foot-washing because they are missing family members. Some people are still separated from their families. Some families have been displaced to other parts of the country or to Cameroon, where thousands of EYN members are still in refugee camps. In response, Maiduguri #1 has hosted trauma healing workshops and has started a trauma counseling committee of 15 women and men who have received training for the work.

“Our ministry is holistic: preach the word of God, meet the people's needs, physical and otherwise,” Kwaha said, adding, “The Lord has been helping us. . . . You cannot sit still, you have to do something—gradually, despite the fact that the trauma is still there.” 



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford at the hospital where she was born.

ments of the country think women are property. *(I have seldom been so angry.)*

Leaving Nigeria on an overnight flight, I was surprised by tears that fell through the darkness. *(My thoughts were with the young child—homeless? orphaned?—I had seen sleeping in the dirt on the side of a road.)*

I will build this world from love

At Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren, our congregation's tagline says that we are "seeking justice, wholeness, and community through the gospel of Jesus." For us, this involves knowing and loving our neighbors of all religions. Our calling is to do this at all times, and *especially* when our neighbors (Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, or other religions) are feeling targeted or vulnerable to violence and hate.

On Saturday, Nov. 3, I joined Hill Havurah for their Shabbat service, just a few blocks from the US Capitol building and from my congregation, where I pastor. Accompanied by Jacob Crouse, our music leader at



JENNIFER HOSLER

Washington City, I joined this Jewish congregation for their prayers, songs, and Torah readings. We sat with them, our heads bowed in mourning, in a moment of silence for the 11 lives lost in Pittsburgh exactly one week before, to the minute. Hill Havurah's worship space was overflowing, and they had to bring more chairs. Several allies and

neighbors like me and Jacob had joined, along with some Jewish residents of Capitol Hill who did not regularly attend Shabbat services but needed to that day.

The day of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting, I texted Hill Havurah's rabbi to say that I was so sorry to hear of the tragedy. I asked if there was anything my church could do to help their congregation feel safer on Sunday (since I knew they held their Hebrew school/Jewish education program then, as it used to be held in our church building) or on any other day. After sundown on Saturday, their rabbi texted back, thanking me for my concern, saying that it was meaningful and that she would consider what they might need.

On Tuesday, she said it would be meaningful if local clergy could join her congregation for their Shabbat prayers (*Shabbat* is "Sabbath" in Hebrew). I committed to being there in solidarity. That Saturday, loving my neighbor looked

like leaving my infant son with my husband and a bottle (Saturdays are a special non-daycare time for us to be together), biking to their worship space, and joining them for two hours of songs, chanted prayers, and Torah readings.

The service was both heavy with grief and beautiful. It had similarities to a Christian service: songs and prayers read aloud together, followed by the opening of the Torah scroll, readings from the day's assigned passages, a sermon by the rabbi, and a closing blessing of the bread and grape juice. One of the most poignant pieces was a song, written by another rabbi after another tragedy. New York Rabbi Menachem Creditor penned *Olam Chesed Yibaneh* when his daughter was born shortly after 9/11. It's beautiful and biblical (based on Psalm 89): "I will build this world from love . . . You must build this world from love . . . If we build this world from love . . . then God will build this world from love."

Standing with our neighbors facing anti-Semitism (or Islamophobia, or other prejudice) is important to me because I'm committed to taking the words of Jesus seriously. Jesus calls me to love all my neighbors (Matthew 22:34-40). The "Vision for Ecumenism in the 21st Century" paper, passed by the 2018 Annual Conference and which I had the privilege to co-write, calls for Brethren to engage in endeavors both ecumenical (with other Christian traditions) and interfaith (with other religions). Doing so is important: As we love others, people see the love of Christ Jesus in us. We can't assume that people know we love our neighbors, that we are against anti-Semitism or Islamophobia.

While I'd love to think that all Christians are peacemaking, love-all-our-neighbors folk, I know that in reality that is not the case. Therefore, we need to step out of our comfort zones and reach out to neighbors of other religions, in times of both calm and crisis. In doing so, our acts of love demonstrate the peace and reconciliation of the Jesus whom we follow. 

Jennifer Hosler is a pastor at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren and a full-time Ph.D. student in community psychology.

AS WE LOVE OTHERS, PEOPLE SEE THE LOVE OF CHRIST JESUS IN US. WE CAN'T ASSUME THAT PEOPLE KNOW WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS, **THAT WE ARE AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM OR ISLAMOPHOBIA.**

How BV Sers

grow



by Caitlin O'Quinn



Growth can come at any point in our lives. God gives us the tools we need to grow, but we must decide to use them.

I am currently volunteering in Japan on an organic farm called the Asian Rural Institute. My experience here so far is like the growth of a plant.

The first thing a plant needs is to be sown into good soil. If the plant is sown in an area that is bad for growth, then it will die within a few days and the planter will never see its beauty. This is the same for us. If we spend our lives only in toxic environments where we are unhappy, then we will get sick more easily and not enjoy the world as much as we could.

I personally relate to this because I went from being stressed in college to being happy working hard daily. The schedule here starts every day at 6:30

a.m. and we end around 6:30 p.m. Most people would see this as being stressful, but I have found the work to be very rewarding. I have helped plant in the fields and then a week later I have been able to see the sprouts popping up. It gives me a lot of joy to know that I helped grow the food that we eat.

The next step is to be watered. If a plant does not receive water, it will wither. We also need to be watered. This happens by reading scripture, by praying, or through fellowship with others. Here at ARI, fellowship is a major part of the lifestyle. We eat together, worship together, and live together. This can really help a person grow because we are challenged to live closely with people from completely different cultures than our own. It gives us a new view on how to think about the world and God.

Service Sunday

is observed every year in the Church of the Brethren on the first Sunday of February. Find worship resources at www.brethren.org/servicesunday.

Through Brethren Volunteer Service and other ministries, the Church of the Brethren provides many opportunities for faith-filled service and challenges members to engage in a week of service each year and a year of service in one's lifetime. To learn more about ways to serve, go to www.brethren.org/volunteer.



Judith Blaik, Good Samaritan Services, Ephrata, Pa.



Andrew Bollinger, Heifer Ranch, Perryville, Ark.

So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.

—2 Peter 1:5-8 The Message



Frieden Gresh, Lea Herres, Tyrese Taylor, Abode Services, Fremont, Calif.

The third step is for the plant to be fertilized. At ARI we use a type of fertilizer called bokashi. This fertilizer does not use any chemicals. I think the plants grow better with this natural kind of fertilization. We are fertilized through our beliefs and actions in Christ. If we trust God in everything we do and know that God will lead us to where we need to be, then growth can become the best part of our lives.

If we do not grow, then we cannot spread God's love. Growth is good. We just need to trust God's timing. 

Caitlin O'Quinn, a member of Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 319, is serving at the Asian Rural Institute in Tochigi-ken, Japan.



Destinee Wells, Community Home Repair Projects of Arizona



Katinka Kalusche, Roanoke, Va.

Matilde Thomas, Horton's Kids, Washington, D.C.



Inspired by 2 Peter 1:5-8

You, dear one, hold a faith-seed specially designed to sprout in the rich soil of your heart. If you cultivate it, that faith will take root in your understanding of God and bloom as it intertwines with your life and living. If you pay attention—if you water and fertilize—its leaves of love will unfurl and branch out to bear fruit in service and connected community. And while it might look different from season to season, today there's no time to waste: It's time to dig in—to take what you've been given and grow.

How Marilyn Monroe helped the Brethren influence the Peace Corps

An interview with Don Murray

by Bill Kostlevy

Bus Stop trailer (1956) Trailer screenshot, public domain, wikipedia.org

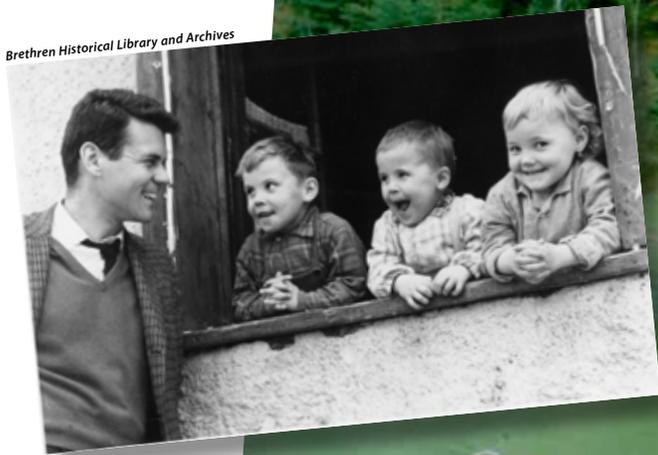


The story of Church of the Brethren influence in the creation of the Peace Corps has always intrigued me. Did Brethren Service really provide the model for the Peace Corps?

Then I had the opportunity to interview Don Murray—a conscientious objector to war, distinguished actor, and former Brethren Service worker (1953-1955). After earning CO status, he checked with the Friends (who didn't have a program at the time) and the Mennonites before deciding Brethren Service was the best fit for him. He served in Germany, among refugees in Naples, Italy, and later in Sardinia with both Brethren Service and the Congregational Church. In Sardinia, he organized the Homeless European Land Program (HELP), which built homes and established several businesses that provided both community and employment for refugee families.

For Murray, Brethren Service was a transforming experience. As he tells the story, the Peace Corps was the product of an impromptu speech he made in Hibbing, Minn., in 1956. Fresh off co-starring with Marilyn Monroe in *Bus Stop*, Murray was asked to introduce Democratic vice presidential candidate Estes Kefauver at a campaign rally. When Kefauver's plane was delayed, Murray was asked to entertain the audience with stories from Hollywood.

"The master of ceremonies came to me and whispered, 'Senator Kefauver's plane is late. We need you to make a speech to stall for time.'" Murray



ABOUT DON MURRAY

Don Murray is a distinguished actor who served in Brethren Service during the Korean War in the 1950s. He was born in Hollywood, Calif., on July 31, 1929, and grew up in New York. He appeared in movies including *Bus Stop*, with Marilyn Monroe (for which he received a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination), *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, and *Peggy Sue Got Married*, and in television shows including *Knots Landing*, *The Outcasts*, and *Twin Peaks*. He also directed a 1970 film version of the book *The Cross and the Switchblade*, starring Erik Estrada and Pat Boone. Murray and his wife, Betty, live in California.

recalled. “I said, ‘A speech? What about?’ He said, ‘Talk about Hollywood. That’s what they want to hear.’ So I said, ‘How long?’ He said, ‘I’ll let you know.’

“So they introduced me, but they still hadn’t told me how long. So I whispered very loudly to the fellow, ‘How long?’ And he says, ‘Half an hour.’ Well, I had made one movie, and then moved right back to New York. I didn’t even live in Hollywood. I had no idea about what Hollywood was really like. So I couldn’t talk about Hollywood for five minutes, much less half an hour. So I ignored that totally and told them about Brethren Service and what we did in Europe, and then my service, also, in Italy, with the Congregational Christian Service Committee.”

Among those in the audience was Minnesota senator and later Vice President Hubert Humphrey. A devoted Christian and Methodist, Humphrey was moved by the story and arranged an interview for Murray with President Dwight Eisenhower. Although not enacted during the Eisenhower administration, Humphrey’s plan—or as Humphrey called it, “Murray’s plan”—was subsequently introduced in Congress. It was this legislation that laid the groundwork for the Peace Corps to be created by President John F. Kennedy in 1961.

“So, this all came out by accident,” Murray said. “If I had done this movie—a Western movie—without Marilyn Monroe, nobody would have invited me because it was her name that

was famous. But I found very quickly that the name Marilyn Monroe opened doors everywhere. I mean, in Rome, we could get through in places where politicians couldn’t get in. . . . We’d go and start talking about refugees. They’d say, ‘Oh, yes, that’s very interesting. Now what’s it like to kiss Marilyn Monroe?’ So I was using Marilyn Monroe’s name constantly, because that was opening doors for us.”

Today, Murray—who became a member of the Church of the Brethren and was baptized by Brethren minister (and Olympic athlete) Bob Richards—says he considers his time in Brethren Service as one of the most meaningful experiences in his life, and he remains deeply committed to the values he learned from his church. He was blessed with many Brethren friends and mentors, including Dan West, Harold Row, Dale Aukerman, Ken Kreider, and Don Miller.

While there may not be evidence for some of our Brethren myths, it is inspiring to know that there is for this one. Don Murray’s story is a reminder of the power of the faith and actions of all who are willing to serve the world in the spirit of our Savior. 

Bill Kostlevy is director of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives. His full interview with Don Murray can be heard at <https://soundcloud.com/user-645413236>. For more on Murray and the Brethren Service story, read *A Cup of Cold Water: The Story of Brethren Service*, by J. Kenneth Kreider, available from Brethren Press.

ABOUT BHLA

Location: Elgin, Ill., in the lower level of the Church of the Brethren General Offices. **Staff:** Bill Kostlevy, director, and intern Madeline McKeever. **Brethren Historical Committee members:** Terry Barkley (chair), Jeff Bach, Dawne Dewey, Kelley Brenneman, Bill Kostlevy (ex officio). **Mission:** Tasked with the assignment of collecting and preserving the historical record of the Brethren experience, BHLA is the repository for the official agencies of the Church of the Brethren and much more. It is committed to preserving the documentary evidence for a movement that has left a deep impact wherever its members have been. BHLA also provides a centralized center for Brethren research. **Website:** www.brethren.org/bhla.



The 175-mile journey

Westernport project shows blessings of church partnerships

by Walt Wiltschek

For years, Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren in Mifflinburg, Pa. carried out a cross-cultural mission outreach with a Navajo community in Arizona. They led Bible school, did construction projects, and connected with the community in a variety of ways. It was meaningful work with important relationships.

Over time, though, the costs of the cross-country trip became prohibitive. Paying for flights, rental vehicles, hotel rooms, food, and more added up. They typically took a team of about 20 people to the site, so the growing expenses had exponential effects.

Buffalo Valley wanted to continue a mission outreach, but they decided to look for an opportunity within driving range of their central Pennsylvania location. They settled on something in Virginia or West Virginia as a first choice. They contacted Kendal

Elmore, then the district executive for West Marva District, and he quickly put them in touch with Westernport (Md.) Church of the Brethren.

The Buffalo Valley group didn't know much about Westernport, a small town located in far western Maryland just across the north branch of the Potomac River from West Virginia. So pastor Eric Reamer and several members traveled there to assess the situation.

"We wanted to make sure there was a need," mission team leader Vicki Bastian says. "We didn't want to just come down to do Bible school and not much else. We met and talked for quite a while, and it was very evident this was where our church needed to be. We developed a very strong relationship and have never looked back."

While Westernport is located only about 175 miles southwest of Mifflinburg, it was a world apart in

many ways. The town of about 1,800 people was hit hard by factory closures over the past two decades, leaving few opportunities. Poverty rose, opioid addictions and other drug and alcohol use soared, and many families were shattered, with frequent reports of abuse and neglect.

The Westernport congregation did its best to address the needs of its community, but it was a church with about 40 to 45 people in worship each week, many of them elderly. They had tried a summer day camp for local children, but with limited resources they weren't able to advertise or grow it as they wanted.

Then came the call from Buffalo Valley. And a partnership was born.

That was nearly five years ago. Starting in the summer of 2014 and each July since, a team from Buffalo Valley—27 of them this year, including 9 youth—makes that 175-mile journey.

They worship with the Westernport congregation on Sunday morning, and then most of them provide a full-day program for kids Monday to Friday, starting at 8:30 a.m. and wrapping up about 4 p.m. A project crew of three others does repair and maintenance work around the community.

It took a year or two for the program to hit its stride, but over time it took off. The day camp averaged 100 students a day this summer, ranging in age from kindergarteners to youth. Vans provide door-to-door transportation for those who need it. Parents are invited to a Friday afternoon program.

“People are really pleased with how this has developed,” Westernport pastor Diane May says. “There’s no way we could do this on our own.”

She says each day includes a “typical vacation Bible school schedule” in the morning, with games and swimming and other activities in the afternoon. The kids enjoy that, but she says many of them seem to be most excited by the hot meals that some of the Buffalo Valley crew cooks up each day, along with snacks and a take-home food bag.



“The second year, children were standing in line for breakfast,” May says. “Some of the children who had been at day camp the previous year were talking to some of the newcomers. They asked if they had been to day camp before. When the newcomers said no, one of the kids said, ‘It’s amazing, they have food all day and you get to eat as much as you want.’ I was shocked. I thought the pool or the games would have been the highlight, but for many of the kids it was having something substantial to eat. Although that was four years ago now, I have never forgotten it.”

Those basic needs struck Bastian, too.

“It’s such a depressed, poverty-stricken area,” Bastian says. “The kids get there, and they say as soon as they get in that this is what they look forward to all year. They ask, ‘When are you coming back?’ They’re hungry physically, and they’re hungry spiritually.”

Children are given Bibles if they want them, and a slide show takes place during Westernport’s worship service the Sunday after the day camp. Thus far, though, the program hasn’t really translated to new members coming on Sundays. May said that required some adjustment of thinking for her congregation, which initially saw it as a way to get new families into the church.

“The mentality of our congregation had to change,” she says. “We came to see it not as a pathway to getting people into church but a mission field of these kids. We plant seeds and hope they come to bloom at some point in their lives. When you start looking at it with a different perspective, that changes things. We keep them in prayer, and we hope it will make a difference to them.”

It has certainly made a difference for the two congregations. May has traveled up to Buffalo Valley on



several occasions, and Buffalo Valley members have sometimes come down to Westernport to do one-day events in the spring and the fall, as well, and they keep in touch through the year. The cross-district partnership has each singing the other’s praises, and it has provided positive energy in both places.

Bastian says plans are already under way for this coming summer, and she hopes to keep it going for a long, long time.

“It’s an exhausting week—I’m not going to lie—but it’s very fulfilling, and something we hope to continue,” Bastian says. “It fulfills what (Westernport) would like to do but can’t. I think God definitely directed us to where we needed to be.”

She and May both commend the model of congregational partnership to carry out the work of Jesus, drawing on the resources and contexts of each for mutual benefit.

“I really encourage bigger churches to get involved with smaller ones like ours,” May says. “Nothing against mission in other countries, but we have a huge mission field right here in the US. It’s possible to be a blessing just a few hours from your home by helping a small congregation reach out and share God’s love in their community.” 

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

by Rhonda Pittman Gingrich

Since the birth of the Church of the Brethren, differing theological perspectives, passionate experiences, and unbelievable opportunities have stretched our faith in Christ and our unity as a church. In those moments of struggle, we have needed to pause, to pray, to study, to reflect, to converse, to attend to the leading of God's Spirit. Our aim has been to seek the mind of Christ, together, to maintain the unity of the body while stepping boldly into the future as Christ's disciples.

Today we find ourselves at a similar juncture.

The 2017 Annual Conference affirmed a report from the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives on "The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts Regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts."

What is a word cloud?

A word cloud is a visual representation of a body of text or a data set. The more frequently a word appears in the text or data, the larger it appears in the word cloud. It is not a perfect representation because the programs that generate word clouds focus on individual words rather than phrases. Therefore, if a word appears in more than one phrase, the incidences are combined. This also means that the words of a phrase appear separately in a word cloud. Nevertheless, word clouds can still offer a first glimpse into our data and help us identify patterns.

This report recognized the need for the church to find a way forward from the division that has affected our vitality for so many years, concluding with this assertion: "To stay on the journey together, it is also crucial that the church discern the compelling vision that this body of Christ is called to pursue."

This statement was seen as an invitation to trust in God's Spirit and engage in a process to discern what God is calling us to do together. The fervent hope is that our commitment to one another and to serving our God as the body of Christ might be renewed through this shared journey and a sense of shared mission. As Eugene Peterson says in his paraphrase of Proverbs 29:18: "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what (God) reveals, they are most blessed."

The church began this journey of intentional discernment and envisioning at last year's Annual Conference. The questions for reflection and conversation were designed to give a snapshot of who we are, what we share, and what we find compelling.

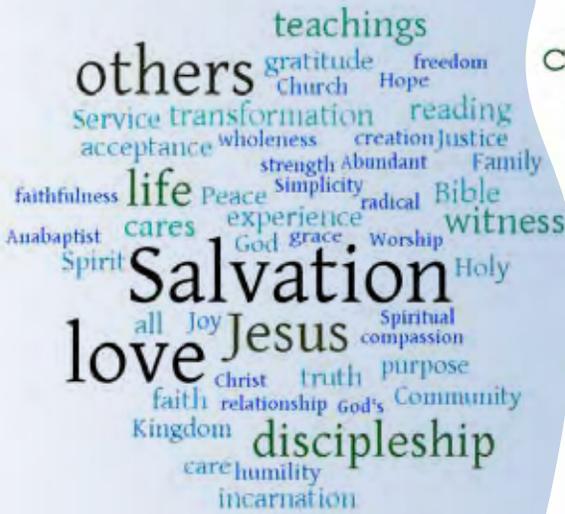
What compels you to follow Jesus?

This was the first question asked. A similar question (what excites you about following Jesus?) was asked at National Youth Conference and National Young Adult Conference. The process team recorded the responses verbatim and identified keywords that reflected the concepts articulated. Multiple keywords could be selected for each response.

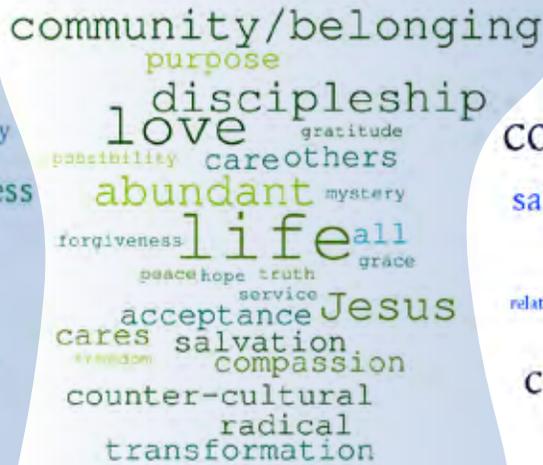
A series of word clouds and lists of the top 10 responses (both created from the keyword analysis) highlight interesting

Word clouds What compels you to follow Jesus?

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
all participants



YOUNG ADULTS (from both Annual Conference and NYAC)



YOUTH (from both Annual Conference and NYC)



differences between younger participants (from Annual Conference and from NYC and NYAC) and the full age range of Annual Conference participants, observations that become clear with a deep dive into the responses.

For young people, the walk of faith is deeply rooted in and shaped by relationship—relationship with God/Jesus and relationships with others (both within and outside their community). The keyword phrase “Jesus’ care for me” was expressed in terms of consistent acceptance and companionship. Further, for young people the walk of faith is less about propositional belief than how God’s love is experienced and expressed in life. This is affirmed by their focus on purpose and transformation as well.

While some of this is consistent with developmental theory—youth and young adults are naturally seeking acceptance and belonging, meaning and purpose, community and relationship—these are also scriptural components of a vibrant life of faith. Recognizing that young people have much to offer us as the present and future body of Christ *and* that the church sometimes falls short in terms of faith formation, two questions merit further reflection: 1) As we seek God’s will for the church as we move into the future, are there aspects of our faith we want to be more intentional about nurturing in our young people? 2) How can the faith of young people inform our understanding of God’s call to us as the body of Christ now and for the future?

Top 10 responses What compels you to follow Jesus?

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
all participants

1. Salvation
2. Jesus’ love for us
3. Discipleship
4. Jesus’ love for others
5. Life of Jesus
6. Teachings of Jesus
7. Jesus’ care for me
8. The call to witness to others
9. Transformation
10. Bible reading

YOUNG ADULTS (from both Annual Conference and NYAC)

1. Jesus’ love for us
2. Community/belonging
3. Discipleship
4. Life of Jesus
5. Transformation
6. God’s acceptance of all/
Jesus’ love for others
7. Salvation
8. Jesus’ care for me
9. The call to care for others
10. Purpose/countercultural

YOUTH (from both Annual Conference and NYC)

1. Jesus’ love for us
2. Community/ belonging
3. Purpose
4. Jesus’ care for me
5. Salvation
6. Discipleship
7. Transformation
8. Witness to others
9. God’s acceptance of all/
Jesus’ love for others
10. Possibility (adventure)

What does salvation mean?

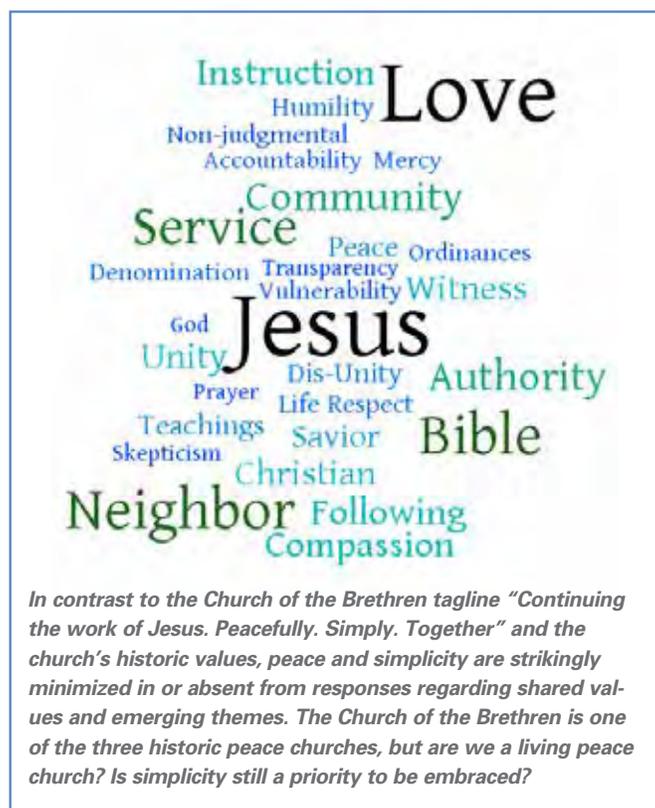
In analyzing the verbatim responses to some questions, we used a set of keywords to help us categorize responses. Among participants at Annual Conference, “salvation” was the top response to this question: What compels you to follow Jesus? However, that keyword was used to capture a variety of language and great breadth and depth of understanding.

Some used the word “salvation,” while others spoke of “unconditional love,” “forgiveness” instead of condemnation, unmerited and abundant “grace and mercy,” “sacrifice,” the promise of “eternal life” and/or the fear of hell, “repentance,” “healing,” “cleansing,” “rescue,” “redemption” particularly in relation to justice, “reconciliation” with God and others, “restoration,” “transformation,” “conversion,” “new creation,” “God’s Shalom,” “the peace that passes all understanding,” “the Way, the Truth, the Life,” the “blessed good news of God’s love demonstrated to a sinner like me.”

For some, salvation was clearly a personal experience, using “me” and “my” language: “Jesus’ love for me,” “Jesus died for me,” Jesus is the “provider of my salvation,” “my Lord,” “my boss.” Others spoke of it in a wider way: “Jesus died for all sinners,” “Jesus’ (overwhelming) love for all people (and all things),” “Jesus’ acceptance/inclusion of all,” “the poor,” “the despised,” “the sinners,” “the outcast,” “the hurting,” “the lost,” “Jesus met anyone where they were and offered what he could.”

For some, the focus was on the afterlife, expressed in terms of both the reward of eternal life and the avoidance of the consequences of hell. For others, salvation was intimately connected to discipleship as people expressed a desire to “live as Christ lived” in an expression of gratitude for God’s gift: “to follow Christ’s example,” to walk in his “ways”/ “footsteps,” “to be obedient to God’s word” to live a life of “service to Jesus,” to “bear witness to/embody God’s love,” to “nurture others in faith,” to “make disciples,” “to reach out in love in an ever-increasing circle to the marginalized of society,” to “live as if His kingdom has come.” In this, they found a sense of calling to work for the kingdom of God in the here and now, a sense of “hope, purpose, and direction” that was “central to daily choices and behavior,” “countercultural,” and “life-giving.”

This diversity suggests the importance of not assuming that any *one* definition of a cherished faith theme is the complete definition. Rather, in community we discover there are multiple layers of biblical meaning related to the foundation stones of life in Jesus. Our compelling vision process models this approach, encouraging us to seek the full counsel of God, in scripture, in community.



Shared values and emerging themes

When asked to reflect on the values they thought all might share and the themes they heard emerging, participants echoed Christopher Sauer’s motto: “For the glory of God and my neighbor’s good.” Among the top responses regarding shared values were love of/faith in Jesus, love of neighbor, service, compassion, Christian witness, community, authority of the Bible, and peace. Among the top responses regarding emerging themes were love of/following Jesus, love of neighbor, service, compassion, community, Christian witness, and authority/instruction of the Bible.

These responses shaped the conversations currently taking place in districts. Participants have been asked to reflect on 1) the characteristics of a church that is making a difference in people’s lives and in the world; 2) the intersection of the needs in our communities, our passion for outreach, and the scriptures that undergird our mission and outreach; and 3) the blessings and struggles of our life together and the scripture passages that might unite us.

Identifying our priorities and how we better live into those priorities with strength and purpose is an important part of this process. As we continue this journey together, we may need to wrestle with questions around our historic priorities: Are there historic priorities that should be let go? Are there historic priorities with which we should re-engage?

A church where you will be comfortable

by Tim Harvey

Sooner or later every pastor will have a conversation with someone who has decided to leave the church. On the surface, the reasons for this decision seem quite varied. It might be that the parents of a teen believe their child will be more comfortable in a church with a larger youth group. There will be others who aren't comfortable with the Brethren belief that all war is sin. Occasionally, someone is hurt by another person's actions, and would rather leave the church than trust the Matthew 18 process of reconciliation.

These very different-sounding reasons, however, have at least one thing in common: the person making the choice to leave isn't completely comfortable with an aspect of congregational life and has decided to find someplace else to worship instead of working out the issue with the current congregation.

Situations like these are to be expected and are not necessarily a poor reflection of the congregation. But what is the best way to proceed when they arise? Historically, Brethren have made faith commitments based on obedience to Jesus, not on what seems most comfortable in the moment. In those times when our commitment to Christ and the church is more challenging than we initially expected, should we seek out a different congregation where we will feel more comfortable?

For the hand great possessions, by George Frederic Watts, 1894

LIKE THE RICH YOUNG MAN, OUR RESISTANCE TO BEING UNCOMFORTABLE CAN GET IN THE WAY OF SEEING THE KINGDOM OF GOD REVEALED IN OUR LIVES.

Let's examine that question in conversation with the story of the rich young man from Matthew 19:16-22.

Our possessions and eternal life

Jesus' conversation with the rich young man is part of a larger section of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus explains various demands of discipleship (19:1-20:34). Topics include marriage, divorce, and celibacy; wealth and salvation; and personal status versus servanthood. Comparing Jesus' teaching on these aspects of discipleship with attitudes that are popular in our culture might lead us to suspect that "comfort" isn't exactly what Jesus has in mind for Christians.

The conversation begins with a question that sounds remarkably modern: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Notice that the question reduces salvation to something that we can do, a once and done thing so that we can get on with the rest of our lives. Could it be that there have been other times when this man's wealth has enabled him to do "good deeds" in order to gain something, and he feels this will enable him to secure eternal life now?

Jesus' response points the man to the expectations any Jewish person of the day would have had: follow the Law (as represented in the Ten Commandments) and love your neighbor as yourself. It's almost as if Jesus has already identified the man's real problem and says to him, "If all you want is a list, here it is."

But the young man decides to press the point (v. 20), and his follow-up question opens the door for Jesus to speak to the heart of the matter. Jesus' answer moves the conversation about discipleship from the ways the young man might find comfortable to the one area that—at least in his life—is keeping him from true discipleship: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor . . . then come, follow me."

It's important that we understand what Jesus means with the word "perfect," because it often causes confusion to modern readers. We tend to define "perfect" as "without mistake." It might remind us of things like tests we took in school, and how we were regularly disappointed in our less-

than-perfect scores. We already know we aren't perfect, so do we have any chance at eternal life?

Thankfully, the Greek word for "perfect" (*telos*) conveys a different meaning. It refers to reaching a goal or achieving some intended purpose. Continuing the school analogy, *telos* has more to do with receiving our diploma than earning a perfect score on all our tests. Jesus invites the young man to learn how full his life can be if he will trust something other than his great wealth. Leaving his possessions behind so that he can follow Jesus is the way forward.

In this case, Jesus can't address eternal life without addressing the man's wealth. Jesus does not give everyone this particular instruction; for this man the attachment to wealth is the spiritual issue that must be resolved. But this isn't comfortable, and the young man walks away from Jesus.

Comfort or calling?

I've heard quite a few sermons on this text—and preached a few as well—that examine it from the notion of giving up wealth. This makes good sense; this is what Jesus says, and even if we don't consider ourselves wealthy, we can certainly imagine how our lives would change if we sold all our possessions. It is not a comfortable thought, by any measure.

But what if we consider the text from the perspective of those who would have gained by the young man's generosity? How might life have changed for the unnamed "poor" if the young man had chosen to trust Jesus? And what lessons of faith does the young man never learn because he chooses what is certainly a more comfortable path? In what ways does he miss seeing the kingdom of God revealed in his own life?

Bringing that question into our own lives, what do we miss when we allow our own sense of comfort to control our faith decisions? How many people who leave a church for one with a larger youth group miss being the reason that the next family with teenagers stayed? How many people who leave when they are offended by another's actions miss experiencing Jesus' promised reconciliation? Like the rich young man, our resistance to being uncomfortable can get in the way of seeing the kingdom of God revealed in our lives.

At our best, we Brethren measure our faith as a response to call, not comfort. Responding to call invites us to see our lives as an ongoing conversation between Jesus, scripture, our congregation, and our life circumstances. It is the opposite decision than that of the rich young man, who preferred a manageable list of spiritual requirements that required only as much as he felt comfortable giving.

In the end, it may be that the most important words Jesus shares with the rich young man are not "sell your possessions" but "come, follow me." Whatever faith decisions are before us, are we choosing comfort or call? 

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

Say what?

This year's Bible study series takes a look at scripture texts and other ideas about our faith that are commonly misquoted, misunderstood, or applied incorrectly. My own list of potential topics for this column is long enough to fill out more than a year of articles. But if you have an example that you think fits in with this topic, I'd love to hear from you. Send suggestions to me at pastortim@oakgrovecob.org.

The girls we pray for

It is the rare Church of the Brethren congregation that hasn't heard of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) or the Chibok girls, many of them from EYN families, who were abducted from their boarding school by the militant group Boko Haram on April 14, 2014. Brethren congregations were each given the name of a Chibok girl, Christian and Muslim alike, for whom to pray. As we lifted our Chibok girls up in prayer, we could only wonder what they were experiencing.



PEGGY REIFF MILLER

Now, through *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*, we have our answer. Nigerian writer and journalist Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani has given a gift to the Brethren.

Dedicated to raising awareness of the plight of children affected by war, Nwaubani and Italian journalist Viviana Mazza interviewed numerous girls who had escaped and their parents. Nwaubani also traveled to Chibok to learn what she could there.

"Despite the challenges," Mazza says, "we followed developments closely every day for years, getting to know the parents and hoping for the girls' return." They learned of the daily life in the villages, the hopes and aspirations of the girls, and the trauma they experienced. And together, through Nwaubani's fictional story and Mazza's nonfiction afterword that includes stories of some of the actual girls and families, as well as mention of the Church of the Brethren, they have woven together this wonderful book that gives flesh and blood to the news reports we've all been reading.

The story is told from the point of view of an unnamed character whose dream of what education can do for her is interrupted. In a *Publisher's Weekly* interview, Nwaubani says, "I wanted my protagonist to represent every single one of the thousands of girls who have been kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists," not only the more famous Chibok girls. Each one "had a life and a future that was brutally snatched from her by Boko Haram."

Although written for young adults, *Buried Beneath the*

Baobab Tree will also appeal to older readers. The short chapters, some as short as one or two sentences, move the story along quickly. One chapter introduces the baobab tree as the "Tree of Life" with its many uses from food, to medicine, to a gathering place. Mentioned throughout the book, the tree takes on new significance near the end.

Nwaubani seamlessly weaves in details that give the reader a picture of life in a Nigerian village—from the pile of fresh green leaves the teacher uses to wipe chalk off the blackboard to "the plastic cover for the deep hole in the ground" that is the toilet, hidden behind a corrugated iron partition. The book is "very African," says Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service for the Church of the Brethren, who travels often to Nigeria.

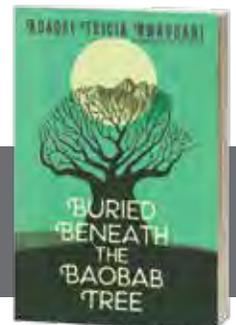
Chapters titled "The Voice on Papa's Radio" anchor the story in time, with BBC Hausa news reports on topics ranging from the inane (Disney's top-grossing animated film *Frozen*) to the frightening (Boko Haram attacks, which get increasingly closer to home).

I have to admit, this is a book I was not looking forward to reading. I expected it to be heavy, which it is in places. But it is well written and a fast read with a satisfying conclusion. I am grateful to have read it. The book gives us not only an inside look at life in a Nigerian village, but also an inside look at Boko Haram. We see Christians and Muslims living peacefully in the same village and the effect Boko Haram has on both traditions.

With the author's skillful use of the tremendous amount of research that went into the book, we can be assured of the story's accuracy. "I was careful," Nwaubani says, "to not include any information in the story that did not exist in the actual narratives I'd heard from victims. So, everything you read in the book . . . represents reality. Sticking to the facts while still keeping the plot interesting was the most challenging aspect of writing *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*."

Well done, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. Thank you for this wonderful gift. 

Peggy Reiff Miller is a writer and historian living in Englewood, Ohio. Author of *The Seagoing Cowboy*, she is currently working on a book about the first decade of Heifer Project.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*. **Author:** Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. **Publisher:** Katherine Tegen Books (an imprint of HarperCollins), September 2018. Available from Brethren Press.

Fire destroys Paradise church

The Camp Fire in northern California's Butte County overran the town of Paradise and other smaller communities on Nov. 8, 2018. Lost in the fire were all of the buildings on the property of Paradise Community Church of the Brethren, including the main church facility and sanctuary, the parsonage, a youth building, and two rental cottages.

All of the people who are a part of the congregation evacuated safely and are living with relatives in other parts of northern California. The membership was very small, as was that of the Rock Fellowship, which had been renting space from the church and sharing

in worship and ministry for some years.

In the face of this devastation, the congregation has let the district know that it will not continue in ministry.

The Pacific Southwest District conference held in La Verne, Calif., shortly after the fire swept through Paradise—a town of about 26,000 people located 15 miles east of Chico—opened with a time of prayer for the congregation and those fighting the fires. Rains over the Thanksgiving weekend helped firefighters reach 100 percent containment and extinguish the fire. Joel Price, district stewards chair, and district executive Russ Matteson visited pastor Melvin Campbell and his wife, Jane, on Nov. 28.



Several Children's Disaster Services (CDS) teams have traveled to California to provide care in two locations beginning Nov. 16. Volunteers at the Chico site reported serving as many as 70 children per day.

The district is receiving donations to provide direct support to the pastor and members of the Paradise congregation as they seek to recover. Checks can be sent to Pacific Southwest District of the Church of the Brethren, P.O. Box 219, La Verne, CA 91750 (note "Paradise Fire" in the memo line). Donations for the CDS response and the planning for a Brethren Disaster Ministries long-term response may be sent to the Emergency Disaster Fund, Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 (note "Camp Fire Response").

Workcamp office announces 2019 schedule

The Church of the Brethren Workcamp Ministry has released dates and locations for the 2019 summer workcamps. A total of 18 workcamps will be offered for junior high, senior high, young adult, and "We Are Able" participants.

The six junior high sites are in Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Senior high workcamps will take place in 10 locations from coast to coast, including Oregon, Idaho, Colorado, Tennessee, and Massachusetts. Young adults may choose to travel to China, or to assist in Elgin, Ill., with the "We Are Able" workcamp for youth

and young adults with intellectual disabilities.

To view the schedule, which includes dates, locations, costs, and descriptions, visit www.brethren.org/workcamps/schedule. Registration will open on Jan. 17 at 8 p.m. (Eastern time). All youth and young adults in the denomination are encouraged to attend. For questions or to request a brochure, contact cobworkcamps@brethren.org.



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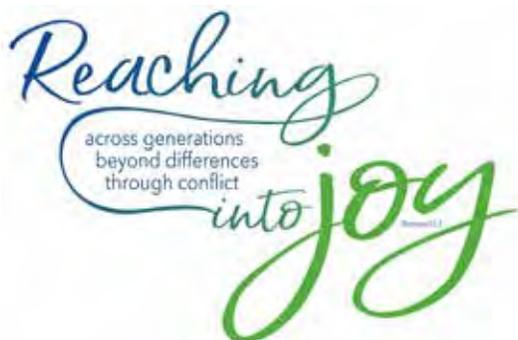
You are welcome to photocopy this page. For more Newsline stories and to subscribe to Newsline's free email news service go to www.brethren.org/news

NOAC committee unveils 2019 logo

Planners of the 2019 National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) have unveiled the logo for the event, highlighting the theme, “Reaching . . . across generations, beyond differences, through conflict . . . into joy” (Romans 15:7). The flowing blue and green logo was designed by Brethren graphic artist Debbie Noffsinger.

The conference will take place Sept. 2-6 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center near Waynesville, N.C. The NOAC web page, www.brethren.org/NOAC, will go live with 2019 information in January. Registration opens in April.

Christy Waltersdorff, pastor of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., is serving as NOAC coordinator this year. Serving with her on the planning team are Rex Miller, Pat Roberts, Karen Dillon, Glenn Bollinger, Paula Ziegler Ulrich, and Church of the Brethren staff members Stan Dueck and Josh Brockway.



Representatives of SVMC’s various partners share in a “ritual of blessing,” combining small containers of soil into a pot that will hold a peace lily at SVMC’s office, located at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College.

SVMC celebrates its silver anniversary

With a festive banquet meal and worship, the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC) celebrated its 25th anniversary Nov. 3, 2018, at Chambersburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

About 85 people attended the event, spanning the 5 districts served by SVMC—Atlantic Northeast, Southern Pennsylvania, Middle Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, and Mid-Atlantic—along with denominational staff.

SVMC, which began as the Susquehanna Valley Satellite with two district partners in 1993, was created to provide quality Brethren ministry education in the area of the country with the denomination’s highest population. To date, it has served more than 2,900 students in continuing education, TRIM and ACTS ministry training programs, and graduate courses.

Many changes and additions have occurred over the past quarter-century, but SVMC director Donna Rhodes said the organization’s mission “is as strong today as it was 25 years ago.” That strength, she said, is due in large part to the healthy partnerships that SVMC has nurtured with its partners, especially the cooperating districts, Bethany Theological Seminary, and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

Bethany dean Steven Schweitzer served as featured speaker for the evening’s worship, drawing from the anniversary theme, “Growing in Knowledge, Rooted in Christ.”

Yearbook changes process for collecting congregational information

A November letter from the Yearbook Office informed Church of the Brethren congregations that changes are forthcoming in the way directory and statistical data will be collected. No Form B was mailed this past fall, but instead will be combined into a later mailing. This is the first step, and further changes will be made over the course of a couple of years. More details and instructions will be

sent to congregations and districts in early 2019.

The end goal is to reduce the collection of information from multiple forms and mailings to a single mailing to be sent out early each year. There will be an online option for congregations to submit their information—something many have asked for—but a paper option will still be offered.

“We appreciate the time and effort

you put into completing these forms each year—a vital way for the church to stay connected,” said *Yearbook* specialist Jim Miner. “Form B and other forms are used to collect directory and statistical information from congregations. Much of it is published in the annual *Church of the Brethren Yearbook*.”

For questions and more information contact yearbook@brethren.org or 800-323-8039 ext. 320.

“WHILE WE HONOR THE HUMANITY OF MILITARY VETERANS, HELPING TO TEND THEIR WOUNDS OF SPIRIT AND BODY, IT IS TIMELY TO RENEW OUR DEDICATION TO PEACE AND FIND CREATIVE, ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO END VIOLENCE.

Especially uplifting

Thank you for an especially uplifting November MESSENGER. It was good to read several reflections on Armistice Day from the perspective of pacifists. Cover-to-cover, an inspiring issue!

Diane Mason
Moulton, Iowa

The path less traveled

Jay Wittmeyer's article on Remembrance Day was deeply moving, well written, and respectful, and packed a punch in its message. Tying together the many interpretations of the day, represented by how it has been variously named, highlighted the way cultural and national agendas are framed and passed on.

The cause that St. Martin espoused 1,700 years ago, following the path of Jesus' way of nonviolence, always has been the path less traveled by the dominant culture. It is good to read about the legacy of others who also gave sacrificially, demonstrating their faith in nonresistant and nonviolent ways.

While we honor the humanity of military veterans, helping to tend their wounds of spirit and body, it is timely to renew our dedication to peace and find creative, alternative ways to end violence.

Don Parker
Oberlin, Ohio

It is worth remembering

I was grateful for Jay Wittmeyer's piece on Remembrance Day. The distinction between that and Veterans Day changes the scope and meaning for me. The rest of the article on St. Martin was helpful also, reminding us that the witness of

the pacifists of the early church belong to all of us, since all Christian movements claim that history. Each denomination may lay claim to a peace position.

It may be of interest to note that there are even earlier records of someone other than Martin of Tours leaving the military to lay claim to Christ as the Prince of Peace. In the year 298, Marcellus, a centurion in a Roman battalion, laid down his sword in order to serve Jesus Christ, and laid down his life as a martyr in order to be faithful, saying, "It is not fitting that a Christian,

who fights for Christ his Lord, should fight for the armies of this world."

It happens that the relics (bones) of Marcellus are in the high altar of the Basilica of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. Each year, the Feast of St. Marcellus is observed on Oct. 30 by the Center for Peace and Nonviolence. Events include a play about the trial of St. Marcellus, a peace walk, an ecumenical and interfaith common meal, a worship service in the basilica, and a lecture on peace by a noted scholar. The activities are shared by people of all faith traditions in the area including

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Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Quaker, Catholic, Universalist/Unitarian, Baptist, Methodist, and others. The worship service has featured choirs of both Manchester University and Goshen College.

It is worth remembering these early examples of conscientious objection to war because they remind us that the entire church of Christ was pacifist until the time of Constantine.

Tom Hostetler
La Verne, Calif.

Emphasis and amputation

I believe that most members of the Church of the Brethren have a firm belief in biblical authority, but each has a different interpretation of the scripture based on unique, God-given personality and life experience. Each of us has favorite passages of scripture that have formed the foundation of our hope and

faith. We have unique emphases in interpretation. Some place emphasis on the historical context in which the scripture was originally written (“Text without context is pretext”). Others place emphasis on the present, Spirit-led reading of the text. Probably both are needed. We all have favorite scriptural themes: peace, grace, purity, salvation.

The problem arises when one attempts to force an interpretation onto believers as the only true interpretation. Is this a form of egotism or pride? Is it based on the need to build influence and a following?

Paul teaches that the church is Christ’s body. Therefore, isn’t any attempt to exclude people or congregations because of different interpretations of scripture a punitive amputation of the body of Christ? Are efforts to leave the denomination over differences just a way of saying, “This arm no longer needs the body”? Is this desire or

attempt to dismember the body of Christ . . . sin?

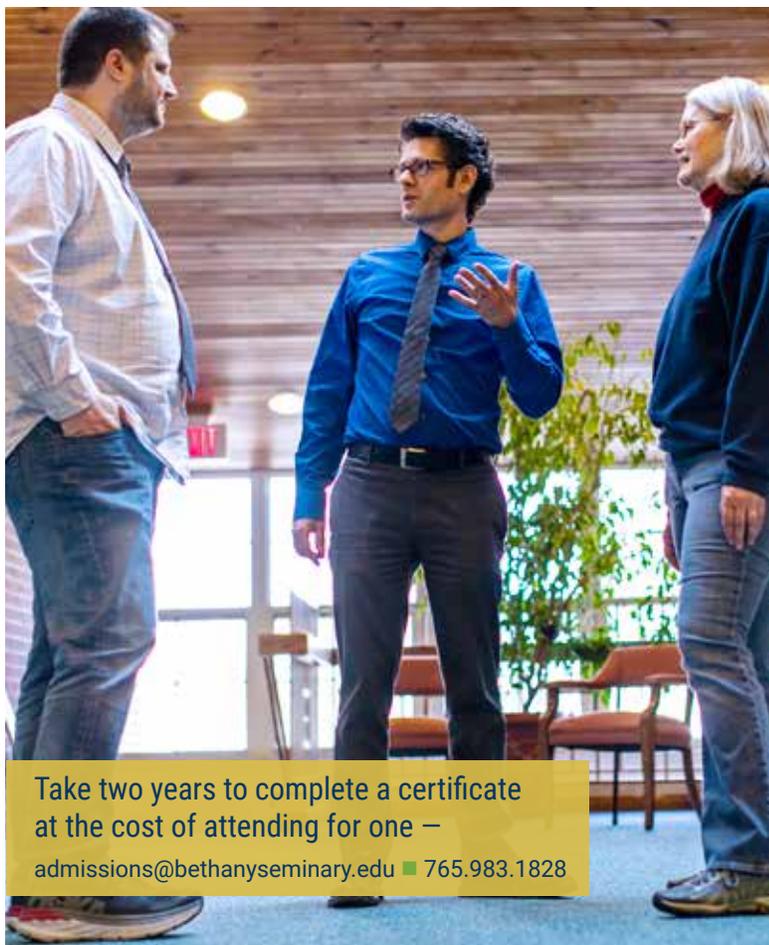
The church will grow if we in openness, honesty, and humility focus on areas where we agree, and then from that firm foundation share different meanings and interpretations of scripture. The diversity of personal stories and opinions can enrich our lives together if we stop worshiping the idol of unified interpretation or a shared emphasis.

Jim Weaver
St. Charles, Ill.

From cover to cover

I received the December MESSENGER just yesterday. I haven’t been able to put it down since. It is wonderful from cover to cover, even the Christmas card on the very last page. I want to simply say thank you, thank you, thank you.

Warren Eshbach
Dover, Pa.



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Centenarians

Bushong, Ruth Heisey, 106, Lititz, Pa., Oct. 10
Hoover, Miriam, 100, McPherson, Kan., Sept. 3
Lester, Norene F., 100, Martinsville, Va., Aug. 30
Naylor, Gladys, 100, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 5, 2018
Smith, Iris, 101, Flowery Branch, Fla., Oct. 17
Snell, Hazel, 100, McPherson, Kan., May 31
Stump, Jeannette, 100, McPherson, Kan., Jan. 13, 2018

New members

Canaan, Gibbon Glade, Pa.: Gregory Fox, Kathlyn Fox, Kyle Fox
Dixon, Ill.: Sophie Berkeley, Larry Berkenpas, Mason Munroe, Tristan Munroe, Natalie Sondgeroth
East Fairview, Manheim, Pa.: Stephanie Balmer, Chad Herneisen, Judith Hiester, Dalton Sauder
Eversole, New Lebanon, Ohio: Kayleigh Hayward, Karen Millikin, Lynn Millikin, Adriana Sheets
Fairview, Cordova, Md.: Chuck Asmussen, Jordan Davis, Lyle Fuller, Lynn Fuller, Michael Patrick, Joshua Tubman, Joe Voshell, Margaret Voshell
Harrisonburg, Va.: Chevy Cale, Mariah Trimble
Heidelberg, Myerstown, Pa.: Beverly Wagner, Samuel Wagner
Lancaster, Pa.: Jeanne Burkins, John Hershey, Nancy Hershey
Lower Miami, Dayton, Ohio: Kathy Reynolds, Mark Reynolds
Mount Morris, Ill.: Ruthie Gilbert, Gloria Hartle, Herman Hartle, Gary Henderson, Ann Millhouse, Julia Nielsen
Myersville, Md.: Glenda Rothrock, Thomas Rothrock

Nappanee, Ind.: Breanna Hershberger, Nathan Hershberger, Jake Kirby, Nancy Kirby, Ivan Kramer, Janalene Kramer, Heather Wilson, Jim Wilson, Pat Wilson
Oakland, Bradford, Ohio: Chelsea Fields, Steven Fields, Jeff Hampton, Emily Schlechty, Kurt Schlechty
Pine Creek, North Liberty, Ind.: Eric Burch, Jeanna Burch, Kaylynn Curley, Alex Dent, Hanna Vinson, Chelsea Whitmer, Lilly Whitmer
Reading, Homeworth, Ohio: Heather Bandy
Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.: Elizabeth Day, Eva Day, Georgia Day, Grace Day, Michelle Day, Steven Day, Lucinda DeShong, Nicholas Dove, Jacob Gesford, Natine Patrick, Addison Sheppard, Olivia Wolfe
Waynesboro, Pa.: Jackie Ridge

Wedding anniversaries

Anders, David and Barbara, Brownsville, Md., 50
Bolt, Kenneth and Esther, Rohrsersville, Md., 65
Cline, Danny and Sandy, Bridgewater, Va., 50
Enberg, Craig and Pam, Portland, Ore., 50
Ferrell, George and Ann, Moneta, Va., 55
Gentry, Mike and Kathy, Oakley, Ill., 50
Herr, Paul and Thelma, East Petersburg, Pa., 69
Lape, Robert E. and Dolores M., Davidsville, Pa., 65
Levin, Andy and Elinor, Portland, Ore., 50
Moyers, Clarence and Elizabeth, Harrisonburg, Va., 65
Payne, Maurice and Betty, Knoxville, Md., 67
Potter, Carl and Carolyn, Warfordsburg, Pa., 50
Rosenberger, Bruce and Mary Sue, Westerville, Ohio, 50
Tresnick, Donald and Linda, Seanor, Pa., 55
Deaths
Adams, Nancy Leap, 86, Harrisonburg, Va., April 2
Baum, Lester Clair, 90, Urbana, Ohio, Sept. 22
Berg, Margaret Cunningham, 88, Hanover, Pa., Nov. 24
Binns, Gordon Faye, 90, Sunfield, Mich., Oct. 27
Boaze, Raleigh S., Jr., 74, Knoxville, Md., Oct. 6
Boppe, Charles Glessner, 84, Waynesboro, Va., Oct. 16
Bowers, Rachael Virginia Smith, 99, Williamsport, Md., Nov. 8
Bricker, Marie Reedy, 91, Mount Crawford, Va., March 30
Burns, Gerald O., 75, Ansonia, Ohio, Sept. 18
Clark, Evelyn Sellers, 84, North Liberty, Ind., Sept. 17
Clatterbuck, Donald Baker, 89, Harrisonburg, Va., June 10
Collins, Isaac William, 80, Check, Va., Nov. 21
Crim, Donna Jean Crabtree, 74, Martinsburg, W.Va., Oct. 14
Dean, Douglas Martin, 85, Bridgewater, Va., May 31
Deck, Arnold L., 87, Crab Orchard, W.Va., Nov. 25
Dennis, Cora Belle Spiker, 84, Gibbon Glade, Pa., Sept. 22
Dickensheets, Walter B., 93, Hanover, Pa., Oct. 30
Dilling, Janet B. Fluke, 71, Roaring Spring, Pa., Sept. 22
Duffey, Peggy Josephine Kight, 83, Hagerstown, Md., Nov. 19
Dyerman, Charles D., 87, Newville, Pa., Oct. 7
Evans, Rhelma J. Martin, 94, Sanborn, Iowa, Jan. 21, 2018
Flanagan, Eleanor Elizabeth Jenkins, 96, Bridgewater, Va., May 9
Frey, Esther E. Meyers, 100, Mount Morris, Ill., Nov. 15
Garst, Wayne Cody, 79, Salem, Va., Oct. 25
Gregg, Twilla Ross, 90, South Bend, Ind., Sept. 9
Gunn, Nelson Edward, 84, Dundalk, Md., Oct. 4
Gunzel, Fred H., Jr., 89, Villa Park, Ill., Nov. 10
Hartman, Clara Belle, 91, Warsaw, Ind., May 22
Holsopple, Gladys R. Brown, 91, Davidsville, Pa., Sept. 27
Hoover, Ruth Elizabeth Stump, 99, Plattsburg, Mo., Oct. 10
Hostetter, Karen (Sue) Shuff, 73, Piqua, Ohio, Sept. 30
Houts, Robert Burton, Jr., 90, Rockingham, Va., April 30
Hughes, Ronald Leroy, 83, Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 27
Hurd, Doris Jean Arnold, 91, South Whitley, Ind., Oct. 14

Kessler, Robert D., 66, Lewistown, Ill., Aug. 25
LaPrade, Julia, 96, Callaway, Va., Sept. 11
Lehner, Verden John, 91, Hartville, Ohio, Oct. 3
Lusk, Wallace A. (Bud), Sr., 89, Mount Airy, Md., June 2
Main, Samuel Leroy, 84, Frederick, Md., Oct. 17
McCormick, Doris J. Files Shade, 85, Martinsburg, W. Va., Nov. 8
Meeks, Sterling Shai, 3, Staunton, Va., Oct. 10
Messick, Doris M. Bricker, 86, Middletown, Pa., Oct. 29
Miles, Richard Lee, 86, Waterloo, Iowa, May 2
Miller, Dean Markey, 83, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 20
Miller, Jackie L., 89, Nappanee, Ind., Oct. 27
Miller, Mary Rebert, 88, Harrisonburg, Va., Feb. 7
Miller, Myron Shipman, 95, Williamsburg, Va., Nov. 3
Miller, Norma Jean Berkey, 86, Elkhart, Ind., Oct. 19
Mostoller, Janet Elaine Mishler, 79, Hollsopple, Pa., Aug. 10
Oakes, Alice Marie, 84, Rohrsersville, Md., Sept. 21
Potter, Jesse Sherman, 79, Boonsboro, Md., Oct. 11
Reeder, Sandra Anne Nesbitt, 79, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 14
Ripple, Ruth E., 107, Johnstown, Pa., Nov. 2
Robertson, Jesse Davis, 94, Bridgewater, Va., March 8
Sayre, John Earle, 92, Bridgewater, Va., Nov. 8
Scarborough, Phylliss C. Gorby, 72, South Bend, Ind., Oct. 27
Sekirka, David Frank, 67, Plymouth, Ind., Oct. 8
Shank, Mary Alice, 105, Greenville, Ohio, Oct. 22
Shelton, Harry Wayne (Peanut), 78, Bassett, Va., Nov. 28
Shoemaker, Anna G., 87, Waynesboro, Va., Oct. 19
Snell, Hazel, 100, McPherson, Kan., Nov. 15
Stanford, Richard J., 82, New Carlisle, Ohio, June 28
Walbridge, Gilbert Clarence, 98, Easton, Md., Aug. 22
Weaver, Aaron I., 81, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 24
Wheaton, Raymond E., 84, Dayton, Ohio, Oct. 16
White, Paul Robert, Sr., 90, Roanoke, Va., Oct. 18
Williams, Charlene Michael, 96, Harrisonburg, Va., June 22
Williams, Sheldon, 84, Mount Morris, Ill., Nov. 3
Witman, Lois Becker, 85, Marietta, Pa., Aug. 28
Young, Esther Almeda Eshelman [Reiboldt Steffy], 107, Hartville, Ohio, Aug. 26
Zalewski, Susan Dean, 71, Addison, Ill., Oct. 25

Ordained

Flores, Jack, Ill. & Wis. Dist. (Highland Ave., Elgin, Ill.), Nov. 25
Shultz, Jonathan, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Alpha & Omega, Lancaster, Pa.), Oct. 14
Zapata, Mercedes, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Principe de Paz, Santa Ana, Calif.), Nov. 18

Commissioned

Mattox, Nathan, Atl. S. E. Dist. (The Rock Bible Church, Middleburg, Fla.), Aug. 18

Licensed

Bennett, Amanda, Pac. S. W. Dist. (La Verne, Calif.), Nov. 4
Breeden, Justin, Southeastern Dist. (French Broad, White Pine, Tenn.), Oct. 28
McKinney, Sidney, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Mount Wilson, Lebanon, Pa.), Nov. 4
Powers, Naomi, Virgina Dist. (Troutville, Va.), Nov. 18
Troxell, Phillip, S/C Ind. Dist. (Peru, Ind.), Oct. 28
Wheeler, Julia, Pac. S. W. Dist. (La Verne, Calif.), Nov. 18

Placements

Beach, Martha, interim pastor, Ligonier, Pa., Nov. 1
Broyles, William, pastor, Germantown Brick, Rocky Mount, Va., Nov. 1
Curran, Philip, pastor, United Christian, Columbia, Md., July 16
Heishman, Katelynn, co-pastor, Prince of Peace, Kettering, Ohio, Oct. 15
Heishman, Timothy, co-pastor, Prince of Peace, Kettering, Ohio, Oct. 15
Maclay, Connie, interim pastor, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Nov. 18
Williams, Staci, associate pastor, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 11

Why I'll always be Brethren

Years ago, God brought together a searching United Methodist (my wife, Linda) and a lapsed Roman Catholic (me). The lapsed Roman Catholic was a graduate of Penn State with a degree in geology and was hired by L. Robert Kimball Engineering in Ebensburg shortly before we were married. The searching United Methodist was hired as the organist for Windber Church of the Brethren outside of Johnstown, Pa.

Choir practice was Thursday evenings, during which I sat in the church parking lot in our 1978 Plymouth Volare



DAVID BANASZAK

station wagon with Skippy, our mutt. Every week the pastor came out and urged me to come in. Eventually I did. A master of divinity degree and a couple of pastorates later, here I am.

Those people at Windber Church of the Brethren surrounded us with a love that we had never felt before anywhere. Our unity was found in the realization that we were all a family

of sinners struggling to become with God's help something better, someone better—someone like Jesus Christ.

When they called us “Brother David” and “Sister Linda,” it wasn't archaic jargon from bygone days. They really meant it! They considered us part of a spiritual family. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

I'll never forget my first love feast. I came away with this strange sense that I had just acted out what I believed. Jesus said we are to be servants to each other, so we washed each other's feet. Jesus said we are bound together in the bonds of Christian love, so we ate together like families do. Jesus said he died in order to make all this possible and he took bread and broke it and said, “Do this in memory of me.” So we shared communion together.

It was the ultimate spiritual unity with a group of believers. It was all there—everything I believed in, neatly packaged. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

The killings at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh threatened to squelch my spirit and hope. But no! The world may be suffocating in a toxic cloud of violence and hatred. Society may be adrift in a sea of immorality and amorality. But in our present culture of bloodshed, if ever there was a time when the world needs to hear Jesus Christ's nonviolent message of love for enemies, the time is ripe and it is now. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

In a culture of mass materialism and consumerism, if ever there was a time when the world needs to hear Jesus' message of simple living and dependence upon God, the time is ripe and it is now. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

In a society where people are dying from loneliness and isolation, divided from meaningful personal contact by technology and apathy and self-centeredness, if ever there was a time when the people of our world need to hear someone call them “brother” or “sister” and really mean it, the time is ripe and it is now. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

If ever there was a time when people need to hear the gospel message of hope in Jesus Christ, the hope that overcomes and cannot be extinguished by the present darkness, the hope so embraced by our Brethren ancestors as they faced persecution and exile, the time is ripe and it is now. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren.

It's the fuel in my tank that keeps me going. Sure, the Church of the Brethren has problems. But our Brethren ancestors had it right. From the Word written in scripture and incarnate in Jesus, they identified what it means to live as Christ lived—yes, in their world some 300 years ago, but also in ours. The spiritual truths they identified are timeless. That's why I became Brethren. That's why I'll always be Brethren. **W**

David Banaszak is executive minister of Middle Pennsylvania District of the Church of the Brethren.

IF EVER THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE WORLD NEEDS TO HEAR JESUS CHRIST'S NONVIOLENT MESSAGE OF LOVE FOR ENEMIES, **THE TIME IS RIPE AND IT IS NOW.**



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Photos courtesy of Blackwood Brothers Quartet, Friends with the Weather and by Glenn Riegel.

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