Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery
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Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery

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Pressing on

I was standing in line at one of the houses featured on this year’s Historic Elgin House Tour. The first docent, the one warming up the crowd before we entered the front door, offered a few words about the neighborhood. Pointing out a nearby building that once was the residence of David C. Cook, founder of the well-known Christian publishing company headquartered for many years in Elgin, Ill., he provided some explanations as to why there are so many churches in this city.

Then our guide posed a trivia question: What other Christian publishing company is located in Elgin? Assuming no one would know, he quickly gave the answer: “Brethren Press.”

I was surprised by the unexpected Q & A, but he was even more surprised when I said, “I’m the publisher!”

It was 120 years ago that the Brethren Publishing House moved to Elgin, which was two years after it was given to the denomination by D. L. Miller and other leaders. When employees relocated from Mount Morris, Ill., to Elgin, they immediately began a congregation, which first met for worship Oct. 2, 1899, in a corner room of the new building. Thus the 120-year history of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren is tied directly to the history of Brethren Press.

The periodical that became MESSENGER magazine was also part of the decades of publishing energy that produced the publishing house. The magazine’s immediate predecessor was the Gospel Messenger, established in 1883—though its lineage goes all the way back to 1851, when Henry Kurtz published the first periodical for the Brethren.

That’s the history. But those curious and creative leaders who long ago published the church’s first magazines and books and Sunday school materials were not trying to make history—they were pressing on toward the future.

That might seem like the province of the young, but at National Older Adult Conference I heard a similar focus on the future. In countless conversations, people told me of their appreciation for MESSENGER. They were saying so not because of its storied history, but because it reminds us who the Church of the Brethren is today and can be tomorrow. Together we are publishing abroad the church’s prophetic word, oneness of spirit, and common calling as followers of Christ. We are pressing on toward “God’s upward call in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 CEB).

Wendy McFadden
Publisher

Wendy McFadden
Backpack blessing

Bremer (Ind.) Church of the Brethren held a “Back to School Blessing” during worship on Aug. 4. Close to 40 backpacks were brought to the altar, where a blessing was prayed over them. Each bag then had a tag attached to it that read, “This is a Blessed Backpack! 2019.”

On the back of the tags was the following prayer: “As you go on your way, may God go with you throughout the day. May He go before you to show you the way; May He go behind you to encourage you; Beside you to befriend you; Above you to watch over you; And within you to give you peace. So as you go on your way, may God go with you each and every day in each and every way. Amen.”

School teachers, administrators, bus drivers, and support staff were called to the front and prayed over also. It was an exciting day for the children and an opportunity to start the school year out right. —Jill Balmer

Celebrating survivors

Madison Avenue Church of the Brethren in York, Pa., celebrated Survivor Sunday in June. It offered the congregation a way to thank God for helping them through many tough times. The concept started as a recognition for two people marking 20 years of being cancer free. It grew into Survivor Sunday as the realization dawned that everyone has survived something.

Announcements for Survivor Sunday began following the Easter season. In May, the congregation made signs on different colors of paper that read, “By the grace of God I have survived...” or “With Jesus by my side, I am surviving...” These signs were distributed during services and were available in the vestibule. Congregants were encouraged to anonymously share the experiences they had survived or were currently undergoing. The signs were posted in the social hall.

Pastor Keith Hollenberg delivered the sermon on Survivor Sunday. A catered meal followed, complemented by some “famous” chili that was brought in so no one had to cook. Lively conversation regarding overcoming life’s challenges occurred during the leisurely meal. People were encouraged to sit beside someone they didn’t know well. After the meal, attendees were given the opportunity to witness about their survival. It was moving to hear normally private congregants open up and share how Jesus helped them get through some terrible situations. Many confirmed that their church family was instrumental in emotional recovery.

As a result of Survivor Sunday, the church has a list of topics to address with small group study. As always occurs with fellowship experiences, we learned to know each other better and strengthened ties because we have shared some of our deepest hurts, scary times, and the joy of feeling Jesus in our lives. It was truly a celebration of God’s grace. —Carol Kauffman

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.
Hosting for the climate

Ivester Church of the Brethren in Grundy Center, Iowa, hosted an event with Ed Fallon, former Democratic gubernatorial candidate and state representative. Fallon has written a book about his march from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., with some 50 people bringing attention to the environmental crisis.

According to the Grundy Register, Fallon said, “We want people to wake up and realize (that) climate change is not an issue. . . . It’s a crisis.” At the event at the Kling Memorial Library in Grundy Center he signed copies of his book Marcher, Walker, Pilgrim: A Memoir from the Great March for Climate Action.

Rockin’ the library

Rockin’ the Lot, a benefit music festival held by Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren at its large parking area on Route 36, has “come full circle” according to a report from Middle Pennsylvania District. The event raises funds for various causes and this summer chose the Hollidaysburg Area Public Library because of a library fundraising effort launched by Keith and Janet Eldred.

The Eldred family, including sons Ethan and Emmett, helped produce the festival during its first five years. Then they stepped aside because of Janet’s diagnosis of early-stage dementia. Eventually, their response became “a moonshot goal” to raise $1 million for the library through Keith’s debut novel, the report said. A presentation about the project called “This is RED” was held at the church in July, with advance copies of the novel, Rubrum. Find out more at www.thisis.red.

CROP turns 50

CROP Hunger Walk is celebrating “50 years of walking, 50 years of ending hunger together.” The organization is making new resources available for this fall’s CROP Walks at www.resources.crophungerwalk.org/50th-anniversary.

Concerned about family separations

Onekama (Mich.) Church of the Brethren adopted a “Statement on Family Separations at the US Southern Border” at a council meeting on July 28. “These people are desperately seeking protection from violence, persecution, and extreme poverty in their home communities across Central America,” the statement says. “We are horrified by the reports of children being taken away from their parents based on a policy of intentional cruel treatment of asylum seekers and other refugees in order to discourage others who may try to seek asylum and safety in our country.”

The statement cites the scripture texts Deuteronomy 24:17, Isaiah 58:6-7, Hebrews 13:1-3, Matthew 7:12, Ephesians 2:14 and 4:32. It also cites a report released July 8 by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights about conditions in which migrants and refugees are held in detention in the US, noting that several UN bodies have found the detention of migrant children may constitute cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment prohibited by international law.

“We . . . condemn this cruel and inhuman travesty,” the statement concludes. “We challenge other churches and individuals to make similar declarations. We will push for immigration policies that affirm family unity and human dignity. We also seek ways to live out our faith by supporting refugees perhaps by offering resettlement support, family reunification in our community, and financial assistance. The challenge is enormous! Join us in meeting that challenge in whatever ways you are able.”
For more than five centuries, the Doctrine of Discovery and the international laws based upon it have legalized the theft of land, labor and resources from Indigenous peoples across the world and systematically denied their human rights.

The Doctrine of Discovery originated with the Christian church and was based on Christian Scripture, including the Great Commission, the divine mandate to rule based on Romans 13, and the narrative of a covenantal people justified in taking possession of land as described in the Exodus story.

Today, Indigenous people in our country and abroad are among the most vulnerable on the planet due to this systemic injustice. But outside of Indigenous people and scholars, few people are aware of the Doctrine of Discovery.

These pages are from an exhibit designed by Ken Gingerich of Mennonite Central Committee. With MCC’s permission, this has been adapted by Monica McFadden to include Church of the Brethren history. A joint project of Intercultural Ministries and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, the display is available as a traveling exhibit. Contact rrowan@brethren.org.

We [therefore] weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso — to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit ...

From *The Bull Romanus Pontifex* issued by Pope Nicholas V, January 8, 1455
Europeans begin exploring the waters and inlets of the North American continent as early as the 12th century. As they come into contact with Indigenous populations, they also introduce diseases where there was no immunity. Indigenous populations begin to drop precipitously, and the extermination of tens of millions of people helps create an illusion that the newly available lands were nearly empty of human inhabitants.

Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas in 1492 feeds a frenzy of 16th century exploration, exploitation and conquest based on the pronouncement by Pope Nicholas V giving rights of control and ownership to those who got there first. This same pronouncement sanctions the enslavement of African people by Europeans. The first enslaved Africans arrive in Hispaniola in 1501 soon after the Papal Bull of 1493 gives all of the “New World” to Spain. The use of slave labor is necessary, in part, due to the extermination of local Indigenous populations from violence and disease.

In effect, the Doctrine of Discovery declares war against all non-Christians throughout the world, sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories. Today, we would call this Papal decree a “mandate for terrorism.”

(from Robert Francis, "Two Kinds of Beings: The Doctrine of Discovery")
The Pueblo revolt of 1680

After the Spanish establish a colony in New Mexico's Rio Grande valley in 1598, they seize Indigenous land and crops and force them to labor in settlement fields and in weaving shops. The Indigenous people are denied religious freedom, and some are executed for practicing their spiritual religion.

The pueblos are independent villages with several distinct languages. Occasionally an uprising against the Spanish begins in one pueblo, but it is squashed before it can spread to neighboring pueblos. Leaders are hanged, others enslaved.

In 1675, the Spanish arrest forty-seven medicine men from the pueblos and try them for witchcraft. Four are publicly hanged; the other forty-three are whipped and imprisoned. Among them is Popé, a medicine man from San Juan. The forty-three are eventually released, but the damage has been done and the anger runs deep. Popé recruits leaders in other pueblos to plan the overthrow of the Spanish.

In August of 1680, the Pueblo people attack northern settlements. Spanish settlers flee to the governor's enclosure at Santa Fe. They are surrounded, and after a few days' siege, the settlers retreat to the south.

Although the Indigenous people kill 400 Spaniards and succeed in driving the rest of the colonists out of the Rio Grande country, they do not continue their confederation. As a consequence, the Spanish are eventually able to re-establish their authority. By 1692, they reoccupy Santa Fe, but they do not return to their authoritarian ways. The continuation of Indigenous traditions is somewhat tolerated. Pueblo people are able to maintain a great deal of their traditional ways because of the respect they won in the 1680 rebellion.

— Adapted from Encyclopedia.com

Massachusetts Bay Colonies

Indigenous tribes, some of whom suffer from the onslaught of European diseases, also develop a hostile, violent, and deeply distrustful relationship with the Puritans. The Puritans abduct some of the Indigenous people to ship to England. In 1633, a law is passed to require that Indigenous people would only receive "allotments" and "plantations" if they "civilized" themselves by becoming Puritans and accepting English customs of agriculture and living.

—www.quaqua.org/pilgrim.htm

The first Africans to reach the English colonies arrive in Virginia in 1619, brought by Dutch traders who had seized them from a captured Spanish slave ship. The Spanish usually baptize slaves in Africa before embarking them. Since English law considers baptized Christians exempt from slavery, these Africans are treated as indentured servants, joining about 1,000 English indentured servants already in the colony.

The transformation of the status of Africans from indentured servitude, which was temporary, to slavery, which they could not leave or escape, happens gradually. By 1705, the Virginia slave codes define as slaves those people imported from nations that were not Christian — an idea drawn from the Doctrine of Discovery. Indigenous people sold to colonists by other tribes or captured by Europeans during village raids are also defined as slaves. This code serves as a model for the other colonies.

From the 1705 Virginia Slave Codes:

“All servants imported and brought into the Country...who were not Christians in their native Country...shall be accounted and be slaves. All Negro, mulatto and Indian slaves within this dominion...shall be held to be real estate. If any slave resist his master...correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction...the master shall be free of all punishment...as if such accident never happened.”
From the time of the American Revolution, the U.S. made treaties with Indigenous nations as sovereign nation to sovereign nation. While Indigenous nations understand treaties to be sacred agreements witnessed by Creator, the U.S. repeatedly breaks and violates treaties as their desire to acquire more land increases. In all, over 500 treaties are made with Indigenous tribes. All 500 treaties are changed, nullified or broken. The result is an ever-increasing land base for the U.S. as tribes are pushed further and further west. Each time a treaty is broken, land is taken and tribes are forced out, while white Europeans follow shortly to settle the land.

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**Attack on the Conestoga**  
*Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*

In the aftermath of the French and Indian War, the frontier of Pennsylvania remains unsettled. A new wave of Scots-Irish immigrants encroaches on Indigenous people’s land in the backcountry. These settlers claim that Indigenous people often raid their homes, killing men, women and children. Reverend John Elder, who is the parson at Paxtang and Derry (near Harrisburg), becomes a leader of the settlers. Elder helps organize the settlers into a mounted militia known as the “Paxton boys.” Although there have been no attacks in the area, the Paxton Boys claim that the Conestoga secretly provides aid and intelligence to the hostiles. On December 14, 1763, more than fifty Paxton Boys march on Conestoga homes near Conestoga Town (now Millersville), murder six, and burn their cabins. The colonial government holds an inquest and determines that the killings are murder. Governor John Penn offers a reward for the capture of the Paxton Boys. The remaining sixteen Conestoga are placed in protective custody in Lancaster but the Paxton Boys break in on December 27, 1763. They kill and scalp six adults and eight children. The attackers were never identified.

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**1700’s**

Migration of Brethren

Beginning with a few scattered Brethren at Germantown, PA, in 1723, the church has spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Mexican border. The initial impetus to establish new congregations beyond Germantown came from a revival spirit in the early 1720s. Daughter congregations were established at Coventry and Conestoga in what became Chester and Lancaster Cos., respectively. Although Germantown is the “mother church,” the Conestoga area became the first of a number of significant geographic locations where Brethren would settle in large numbers, then disperse. M.G. Brumbaugh listed over 460 members who joined the Conestoga congregation between 1724 and 1799. Many of these same family names may be found over and over again in the migration of Brethren westward.

—Brethren Encyclopedia, “Migration”

**The Incident at Northkill**  
*Berk County, Pennsylvania*

The Northkill Amish settlement is established in 1740. As the first identifiable Amish community in the United States, it is the foundation of Amish settlement in the Americas.

During the French and Indian War, local Lenape tribes under the command of three French scouts attack the Jacob Hochstetter homestead on September 19, 1757. According to tradition, Jacob tells his sons they can not use guns to protect the family. Three members of the family are killed; three are taken captive, including Jacob. Jacob escapes after several months, but the two boys are held for several years, finally released after a peace treaty between the Indigenous tribes and the British Army.

The “Hochstetter massacre” is one of the most commonly told stories among Amish families and their descendants, with Jacob often cited as an exemplar of the faith for his commitment to nonviolence even under attack. However, this story is often not placed within its larger historical context of white colonization and settlement of Indigenous lands. Through repeated retellings, the story also plays into the dominant culture perception of Indigenous Peoples as “wild people” and “savages.”

**Broken Treaties**

From the time of the American Revolution, the U.S. made treaties with Indigenous nations as sovereign nation to sovereign nation. While Indigenous nations understand treaties to be sacred agreements witnessed by Creator, the U.S. repeatedly breaks and violates treaties as their desire to acquire more land increases. In all, over 500 treaties are made with Indigenous tribes. All 500 treaties are changed, nullified or broken. The result is an ever-increasing land base for the U.S. as tribes are pushed further and further west. Each time a treaty is broken, land is taken and tribes are forced out, while white Europeans follow shortly to settle the land.

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**The Proclamation of 1763**

... issued by King George, tells the colonies that they no longer have the “right of discovery” to Indigenous lands west of Appalachia. Only the British crown could thereafter negotiate treaties and buy or sell those lands. This Proclamation deeply upsets the colonies, who want access to these lands. In the Declaration of Independence, this royal Proclamation is cited in the long list of justifications for why the colonies declare independence from English control. Following the defeat of the British during the Revolutionary War, the Treaty of Paris (1783) gives these Indigenous lands to the new U.S. Government.
1830-1850: Removal Era

The Indian Removal Act is passed by Congress in 1830, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. This Act gives power to the U.S. government to make treaties with Native nations that force them to give up their lands in exchange for land west of the Mississippi. These treaties, on the surface, speak to a voluntary exchange and removal of nations. However, in reality, most of these treaties are made forcefully, by withholding food — through the decimation of food sources, such as the buffalo — and through violence, including warfare. As Native American lands are “cleared,” white settlers — including Amish, Mennonites, and Brethren — stream into these lands.

In other words, Indigenous nations were subject to the ultimate authority of the first nation of Christendom to claim possession of Indigenous peoples’ lands.

In 1823, the Christian Doctrine of Discovery is quietly adopted into U.S. law by the Supreme Court in the celebrated case, Johnson v. McIntosh. Writing for a unanimous court, Chief Justice John Marshall observes that Christian European nations have assumed “ultimate dominion” over the lands of America during the Age of Discovery, and that — upon “discovery” — the Indigenous peoples had lost “their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations,” and only retained a right of “occupancy” in their lands. In other words, Indigenous nations were subject to the ultimate authority of the first nation of Christendom to claim possession of Indigenous peoples’ lands.

According to Marshall, the United States — upon winning its independence in 1776 — became a successor nation to the right of “discovery” and acquired the power of “dominion” from Great Britain.

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia

In 1828, the state of Georgia passes a series of laws stripping local Cherokees of their rights and also authorizing Cherokee removal from their lands. In defense, the Cherokee cite treaties that they had negotiated with the U.S., guaranteeing them both the land and independence. After failed negotiations with President Andrew Jackson and Congress, the Cherokee seek an injunction against Georgia to prevent its carrying out these laws.

The Supreme Court rules that it lacks jurisdiction to hear the case and can not resolve it, since the Cherokee, though sometimes viewed as an independent nation, are also dependent people on the U.S. nation that envelops them. Because the Constitution only authorizes the Supreme Court to hear cases brought by “foreign nations,” not “Indian nations,” the Court rules is not authorized to entertain this case and dismisses it.


Colonization of the West

Cheap land, railroad propaganda, and dreams for new beginnings attract Brethren to Kansas Territory. In 1855, Jacob Ulrich moves to Kansas and helps organize the Cottonwood congregation near Emporia. Following the Civil War, an influx of Brethren into southeast Kansas takes place.

The Osage nation moves to Missouri per an 1825 treaty, after the 1808 treaty is broken. By the late 1860s, pressure from the large numbers of white settlers to the area and the railroad executives who desire land rights results in Congress passing a new Indian Appropriations bill in 1870 that opens the entire Osage Diminished Reservation to settlement at a price of $1.25 per acre. The Osage are forced to accept the terms and move to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. On July 21, 1870, the city of Wichita was founded. And on one sad day in late September, the Osage, full of lament, depart their home in Kansas against their will. One year later in 1871, the first Swiss Mennonites begin settling Marion and McPherson Counties, a day’s journey north of the former Osage reserve. In 1873 and 1874, the railroad brings thousands of Dutch-Prussian Mennonites from Russia to settle on land bought from the Santa Fe Railroad throughout central Kansas.

In the late 19th century, colonization becomes a planned method of starting new churches in the West. Advertising that appears in various Brethren periodicals appeals to eastern families who hope to own their own farms. Often, Brethren leaders work closely with land grant railroads and land companies to attract new settlers.

—Karin Kaufman Wall, from the presentation “People of the Land,” with additions from the Brethren Encyclopedia (“Migration of Brethren,” “Kansas,” and “Colonization”)
1887-1934: Assimilation Era

By the late 1870s, the U.S. government begins to shift its policy toward Indigenous peoples to one of assimilation. Many consider the Indigenous way of life and collective use of land to be communist and backwards. They also regard the individual ownership of private property as an essential part of civilization that will give Indigenous people a reason to stay in one place, cultivate land, disregard the cohesiveness of the tribe, and adopt the habits, practices and interests of the American settler population. Furthermore, many believe that Indigenous people have too much land and are eager to see these lands opened up for settlement as well as for railroads, mining, forestry and other industries.

Under the 1887 Allotment Act (Dawes Act), every Indigenous man 18 years or older is allotted 160 acres of land. After all Indigenous men are designated land, the rest is opened up for white settlement. Land the U.S. government allows Indigenous people to occupy is reduced by approximately 2/3 by 1934. Of the land that remains unsettled, about 1/3 is unfit for most profitable uses, being desert or semi-desert land.

Another strategy for assimilating Native peoples into white European culture is through education in boarding schools. In 1879, Captain Richard Henry Pratt founds the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania by removing 84 Lakota children from their families in the Dakotas. His principle “kill the Indian and save the man” becomes a model for a new government policy. By 1900, thousands of children are attending close to 150 boarding schools throughout the U.S. The schools seek to strip children of their culture and remove them from the influence of their family and nation. Survivors often look back on their experiences as abusive and traumatic. Many are still dealing with the traumas, and these traumas continue to affect their children and grandchildren.

1900’s

Oklahoma Land Runs

In 1890, the Oklahoma Territory was organized, which consisted of land taken away from many tribes (such as the Osage, Cherokee, Pawnee, and Iowa) who had been violently removed from their land further east. After being forcibly relocated to Oklahoma, their land was once again wrested away from them in order to be opened up to white settlers. During the Land Run of 1889, and for the next couple decades, white settlers rushed into this newly available land. The year the territory was organized in 1890, Brethren leaders from Kansas began establishing congregations in Logan and Payne Counties. In the next 20 years, more than 30 congregations were organized in the territory.

—Brethren Encyclopedia, Indian Country Today, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History

Lybrook Mission, New Mexico

One of the most influential persons in getting the Church of the Brethren to establish work among Native Americans was Edna Phillips Sutton of La Verne, California. As a small child in Nebraska, she remembered feeling guilty because the land on which they lived had been taken from the Indians. She knew the Dakota Indians were taken from their land and forced to live on a reservation. Mrs. Sutton wrote letters and talked to anyone who would listen for at least seven or eight years before the General Brotherhood Board authorized Charles Zunkel, the executive secretary of the Ministry and Home Missions Commission, to make a study of the need of the Dine’ë (Navajo). She personally donated or was directly responsible for a large part of the original $7,000 purchase of the Lybrook, NM, property.

In 1949, Mrs. LeRoy Hanagarne (Mr. Hanagarne was Diné and Mrs. Hanagarne was a graduate of McPherson College) wrote to her home church, the Clovis, New Mexico, Church of the Brethren, and requested that something be done for the Dine’ë people. The request was forwarded to the districts of Oklahoma and Colorado. On January 19-21, 1951, Mr. and Mrs. Hanagarne hosted the committee from Oklahoma and Colorado districts which investigated the possibility of work among the Dine’ë.

After travel and investigation to determine the most advantageous place for the mission, the authorization to purchase the Lybrook property and begin work came from the March 1953 Board meeting.

—Adapted from Brethren Life & Thought

Brethren Volunteer Service Workers in Boarding Schools

The Church of the Brethren did not have any Native American boarding schools of its own, but it sought to work with Native Americans through connections with the National Council of Churches’ programming. The Church of the Brethren placed BVSers at Native American boarding schools and community centers, beginning with the Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah, and later including the Phoenix Indian School in Arizona. This BVS work at the boarding schools occurred during the termination era, further explained on the next panel.

In 1957, Marie Fortney, one of the BVSers at the Phoenix Indian School, wrote in the Gospel Messenger about her work:

“Many of the students have had little or no religious instruction before attending school. Some tribal religions are strange and hard to penetrate. Sue Begay and Johnny Blueyes will need much religious instruction to stick with them whether they choose to return to the reservation after school or go to the white working world following graduation. Here we have this opportunity, because at school we can place Christianity and religious instruction into their curriculum. The adjustments they must make are many. Usually they change quickly from bright beads, feathers, and tribal dress to the typical ‘paleface’ attire, or from long stringy hair to crew cuts and well-curlered shiny black hair, or from fried bread and beans to meat and potatoes, from hogan, tepees, and cliff dwellings to dormitories.”

—Adapted from Brethren Life & Thought

—Brethren Encyclopedia, Indian Country Today, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History

About terminology The term “Navajo” was a name that other tribes called this nation, which was then adopted by settlers. “Diné” is how members of the tribe originally referred to themselves and it means “The People” in their native language. Both names are used today, but there are many who prefer Diné. Diné refers to an individual, while Dine’é refers to the whole nation or people.
In 1953, Congress adopts an official policy of “termination,” declaring that the goal is to “as rapidly as possible to make Indians within the territorial limits of the U.S. subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the U.S.” In addition to ending the tribal rights as sovereign nations, the policy terminates federal support of most of the health care and education programs and police and fire fighting departments available on reservations.

From 1953-1964, 109 tribes are terminated, and federal responsibility and jurisdiction is turned over to state governments. Approximately 2.5 million acres of trust land is removed from protected status. The lands are sold to non-Indigenous people, and the tribes lose official recognition by the U.S. government. Among the tribes that lose federal recognition—essentially legislated out of existence—are the Lumbees, who have over 58,000 members living in North Carolina.

In 1992, Brethren youth who attended that year’s Christian Citizenship Seminar with the theme, “Through the eyes of Native Americans,” called for a “new updated action statement that will show our support for Native Americans.” At the 1992 Annual Conference, Ben Wilson and Ethelene Wilson, members of the Tok’ahookaadi’ fellowship at Lybrook, N.M., reiterated the call for such a statement, and the General Board began the development of a policy statement to be brought to the 1993 Annual Conference. The 1994 statement “A Tribe of Many Feathers” is the result of this push.

When Terry Rambler, the chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, woke up Wednesday in Washington, D.C., it was to learn that Congress was deciding to give away a large part of his ancestral homeland to a foreign mining company.

Rambler came to the nation’s capital for the White House Tribal Nations Conference, an event described in a press announcement as an opportunity to engage the president, cabinet officials and the White House Council on Native American Affairs “on key issues facing tribes including respecting tribal sovereignty and upholding treaty and trust responsibilities,” among other things.

Rambler felt things got off to an unfortunate, if familiar, start when he learned that the House and Senate Armed Services Committee had decided to use the lame-duck session of Congress and the National Defense Authorization Act to give 2,400 acres of the Tonto National Forest in Arizona to a subsidiary of the Australian-English mining giant Rio Tinto.

See www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/03/ndaa-land-deals_n_6264362.html for more details

Repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery

In a first-of-its-kind action in the Christian world, the national Episcopal Church passes a landmark resolution at its July 2009 General Convention repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and urging the U.S. government to endorse the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The resolution renounces the doctrine “as fundamentally opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent rights that individuals and peoples have received from God,” and resolved to eliminate the doctrine within the church’s contemporary politics, programs and structures, and urged the U.S. government to do the same. It also encourages all Episcopal churches to support Indigenous peoples in their ongoing efforts for their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights as peoples to be respected.

Since then, other faith communities have also made statements to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and to commit to ongoing education, examination of church history, review of current programs and actions in solidarity with Indigenous peoples.

This list includes the Anglican Church of Canada, the World Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, several meetings of the Religious Society of Friends, and various Catholic groups.

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At the end of June, I had the opportunity to direct the Church of the Brethren senior high workcamp serving at Lybrook Community Ministries in northwestern New Mexico. Lybrook began as a Church of the Brethren mission in 1952 and is now incorporated as a stand-alone nonprofit, along with a congregation, Tók’ahookaadí Church of the Brethren.

The mission sits at the edge of the Navajo Nation, serving the Dine people, as they prefer to be known. The Navajo Nation spans an area the size of West Virginia in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. It is a strong and proud tribal government, but Lybrook is in the frayed and tattered Eastern Navajo Agency, a checkerboard of tribal, government, and private land. The area is neglected by the tribal and federal and state governments, and only comes under the eye of private industry for what they can extract and exploit from the land and its people.

For example, the land is dotted by oil wells and fracking sites that seem at least as frequent as homes. We'd occasionally pass residents, but mostly we would pass huge tankers bringing water and chemicals in and taking oil, natural gas, and contaminated fracking water out. Those tankers, pressured to work quickly, are known to run cars off the roads. In the muddy times of the year, when the roads are toughest to traverse, they put crude chains around their huge tires for traction, which rip up the roads and make them utterly impassible for locals.

Unemployment is tremendously high, and one of the few available sources of income is leasing out your property to drillers. This exposes you and your family to risks and nuisances: increased truck activity and road damage, constant noise, damage to the integrity of the ground from the violent process of fracking, contaminated water, and exposure to methane leaking into the air. Recently, the community moved their elementary school, after a fracking site sprang up just a few hundred yards away soon after another local fracking site exploded.

Understandably, many people decline to take the money. In that case, the drillers simply set up shop next door and drill horizontally, sapping up the natural resources without the consent of the residents. How? When the government created the reservation and allotted land to the Dine to return to their ancestral grounds, they retained the mineral rights of the land: everything below the soil belongs to the government, which it leases to the oil companies with impunity. They stole the desert land of the Dine people, and even when they gave it back, they kept the one piece of economic value to the land, so they could lease it out to oil companies that poison their water, sully their air, shatter their foundations, and tear up their roads.

The Lybrook mission heeds God’s call to be with people at the...
LIKE HER LIFE STORY, THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE WAS A TESTIMONY OF GOD’S ABILITY TO SCRATCH OUT LIFE AND BEAUTY IN EVEN THE HARSHEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES. GOD HAS ALWAYS CALLED ON THE CHURCH TO BE FLOWERS IN THE DESERT, TO BRING BEAUTY INTO BARREN PLACES.

margins. The mission connects people with water, solar electrici-
ty, outhouses, jobs and, increasingly, undertakes environ-
mental justice advocacy, inspired by the exploitation of oil
and gas companies.

But the most inspiring and effective servants and
activists always come from the community itself. Marlene
Thomas is the one social worker employed by the Eastern
Navajo Agency to work with the residents of three com-

munities near Lybrook, which together span an area
roughly the size of Rhode Island. Thomas is one of the
most remarkable people I’ve ever met: she knows just
about everyone in the area by name. It’s like she’s on a
single-minded mission to hunt down every stranger in
her community until they are strangers no more, but
friends and neighbors.

For most people, she is the sole lifeline connecting them
to their own tribal government. She is their conduit for ser-
vices and resources to which they are entitled but seldom
receive, and usually don’t even realize exist. She spends her
days crisscrossing dusty, torn-up dirt roads that bear no
street signs, but which she distinguishes by even the most
subtle of landmarks: a stack of tires, an abandoned car, a yip-
ning dog that likes to race along as you drive past.

You’d have to experience these roads for yourself to
even start to understand just what a remarkable labor of
love and sacrifice Thomas’s ministry is. It’s like driving a
boat on rough, choppy water, that feeling of being tossed
side to side. You wobble and fishtail as your tires bounce
out of one groove or rut or hole and into another. And we
were there in the dry season. Just imagine what those
roads become in the winter and during the rainy season of
late summer and early autumn, especially with those drill-
ing trucks and their chains.

The gravel roads are even worse: they have those same
holes and ruts and grooves, but they have the added quality
of feeling like you are driving on the rumble strip of a
highway the entire journey. When you finally reach your
destination, your whole body is numb and tingly.

And while Thomas is employed by the Navajo Nation to
serve her community, much of that ultimately comes out of
her own pocket: from the wear and tear and annual
replacement of her vehicles, down to essential services
that fall outside of her official purview, like medical sup-
plies and medicine that she buys herself and gives to her
neighbors. All of which she has done, by the way, while
undergoing treatment for a terminal cancer diagnosis that
is now miraculously in remission. It is hard living out on
the reservation, and it can only be endured thanks to the
sturdy, persistent love of people like Thomas.

She spoke to us one night about the source of that love,
which is her faith and love for Jesus. She was raised in a
divided family. Her father was a traditional Navajo believer
and her mother was a converted Christian. She seldom saw
her dad, who worked in the Pacific Northwest for the rail-
road company.

Like many Dine boys and girls, Thomas was plucked
from her home and brought to a missionary boarding school
where she was forced to live separate from her mother during the school year. She and her classmates were punished for speaking Navajo and had much of their culture scrubbed from them by force and manipulation. It was during those heavy, lonely days and nights when she turned to Jesus, who she had learned in school would never leave her side, no matter how alone she felt.

I was disturbed when she shared this story. I didn’t doubt the depth and sincerity of her faith—how could I when I saw with how much love and beauty it had flowered within her in service to her community. Rather, I couldn’t shake my discomfit knowing that seed of faith had been planted through cruelty, manipulation, and isolation. That the people who told her that Jesus would comfort her in her loneliness were the exact same people who had made her so lonely to begin with. And that it had worked.

It’s still something I’m grappling with. I can’t believe—I refuse to believe—that God sanctions the separation of loving and caring families under any circumstances. I know that God does not smile upon cruelty and abuse, even when—especially when—they are tools for making new Christians. Our scripture reminds us that love—perfect, refined love, the love we must feel for God and for one another—is free from fear and compulsion. That if it comes from that place, it’s not love at all. Not born out of force, but nurtured and grown in a ready, willing, and open heart.

What I can believe is that God is at work for the better, even when God’s people have strayed so far out of line. That God came to Marlene not because she was forced into belief, but that God rushed in to fill the cracks of her broken heart. After all, that’s what God does. God was most evident during our workcamp in the startling beauty that can spring up in the most barren and desolate of places.

Unexpected vistas stretching for miles, revealing rippled, charismatic land that once was the floor of an ocean. Heaps and crags of rocks in a variety of shapes and colors crimsons and roses, yellows, white, black. The sun rose and set over the land with a spectrum and saturation of color that I’ve never seen back east.

We were surprised by the teeming life that we found in a land we believed to be too severe to thrive. Lizards, rattlesnakes, and coyotes, semi-wild horses and huge flocks of sheep. Cicadas that clicked like the pattering of rain, not like the obnoxious whirring, wailing cicadas that I’m used to in Pennsylvania. And the plant life—dark green scrubbish brush, cacti just coming into bloom, red-hued cedars, proud, stub-born junipers. And especially the wildflowers, shocks of color whose beauty was a stark contrast with the wide, dusty land behind them.

Most of all the people we met: A woman we knew only as Grandma who could scarcely contain in her 90-year-old body the excitement and gratitude she felt when we dug and built for her a simple outhouse. Dorothy and Rhonda, a mother and daughter duo who teased me mercilessly for my feeble attempts at making frybread. And especially Marlene Thomas, who holds her entire community in her hands, and out of whom flows a loving, sacrificial ministry of staggering proportion. Who stands defiant of the theft of her own childhood, defiant of the centuries-long legacy of oppression and exploitation working against her to drag her community down, defiant of the hopelessness and distrust harbored by so many whom she serves. Who weeps, because so great is the fierce emotion behind the powerful love she feels for God.

Like her life story, the whole experience was a testimony of God’s ability to scratch out life and beauty in even the harshest of circumstances. God has always called on the church to be flowers in the desert, to bring beauty into barren places. We know that the literal deserts of the earth are growing rapidly because of the ravages of our exploits on the environment. So too does the spiritual desert covering our world grow day by day, as we pump into the air the toxins of hatred and bigotry and violence, as through our own actions as the church, we turn away people thirsty for the flowing love of God, as through our inaction and indifference and complicity the parched reaches of injustice and oppression extend.

And still, God calls upon us to be flowers in the desert. That’s our model of countercultural love. To be that shock of beauty set against desolation. To be that spring of life that pushes through packed, dry earth and stands up tall against the blistering air and battering winds.

Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred recently completed a year in Brethren Volunteer Service working as assistant in the Youth and Young Adult Ministry office and is now studying at Yale Law School.
A few days before our workcamp I saw this sign at a train station: “You are not alone.” Then I read this on the wall of the Capital Area Food Bank: “Together we can solve hunger.” “Together” is an antidote to “alone,” I realized, and a key solution to pressing problems.

There were only 11 people in our workcamp so we were together most of the week in Washington, D.C. Five high schoolers, three adult advisors, three Brethren Volunteer Service workers, including both of this summer's workcamp coordinators. Washington City Church of the Brethren let us sleep on the floor. For showers we walked to Brethren House.

We needed those showers after hot summer days working at the Capital Area Food Bank, Marvin Gaye Community Gardens, DC Central Kitchen, and So Others Might Eat. The first three days did not bring us into personal contact with those we were serving. On the fourth day we served breakfast at S.O.M.E.—and they came alive to us. There was the man who called me by name, spotting my volunteer name tag. The woman who said a prayer for our group. The many people who held up their cups for hot coffee and lots of sugar packets. The last client to leave, allowed to linger a moment to take medication—just one example of the staff’s compassion.

It was good to be together with them before we shifted to advocacy that afternoon. We dressed up for meetings at our senators' offices, led by the youth. Training for the advocacy visits was given by Nate Hosler and Monica McFadden of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.

What did it mean? The 10,000 pounds of produce we packed for low-income students and their teachers; thousands of weeds pulled to clean up beds for fall greens; fruit packaged for sale in neighborhoods considered food deserts; youth empowered to lead out in advocacy. What was the most important thing we did?

Here's what the high schoolers think:

“The best part of workcamp was being able to help people I probably would have never had the honor of serving,” said Maya. “This experience allowed me to form a closer relationship to God as it showed me that every person on earth is my brother and sister, and I should always care for them and respect even if I do not know them. . . . Providing them with the opportunity to nourish themselves and their families with blessed food and a sense of support and love from our work.”

“I really enjoyed the DC Central Kitchen,” said Sydney. “Their program had three parts and we were helping with multiple parts. It had the most impact.”

“Working with a group of people that had similar goals,” said Mark, “to accomplish something worthwhile. It felt good to see the fruit of our labor. The most important thing I learned was that things we do actually make a difference. Normally I don’t see a difference, but this time I actually did.”

“I enjoyed the food bank because it was something physical and you could put a number to what you had done. It was easier to put into perspective,” said Chris.

Kayla commented on “the lingering feeling I have about my work not being done. Sure, we did some good work and helped those who need our help. But I am in no way ‘over’ service. If our nation’s capital is struggling with food insecurity, then imagine the rest of the country, and the rest of the world.”

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Together in DC
Is your pastor multivocational? In the Church of the Brethren, there’s a very good chance that your answer is “yes.”

According to a January 2019 survey of district executives, fewer than one quarter of all Church of the Brethren pastors do full-time congregational work for full-time pay. The majority—77 percent—are working in part-time or less than fully compensated roles. A brand new, grant-funded program aims to offer support and resources to these multivocational ministers.

But what, exactly, is multivocational ministry? The term “bivocational pastor,” meaning someone who serves part-time as a pastor in addition to another paid job, might be more familiar. Many pastors do serve bivocationally: there are pastors who also work as teachers, farmers, lawyers, chaplains, and government employees.

But multivocational pastors don’t necessarily have a second job, which is why the term “bivocational” doesn’t quite fit this group. Some multivocational pastors work in part-time congregational roles while also living out their callings as partners and parents, or caring for their aging parents. Some pastors work part-time in congregational roles even though they have officially retired, some serve in part-time positions without additional income, others serve as volunteer ministers or as part of a pastoral team. There are pastors who intentionally work in part-time congregational roles in order to share their time and energy volunteering in local and international mission.

In our denomination, “multivocational” ministry covers an impressive range of situations, and it is the norm—not the exception. That fact might make some folks wring their hands with worry about the decline of the Church of the Brethren, but this kind of creative pastoral leadership has deep historical and theological roots in our tradition.

True to our roots
In fact, for the first 200 years of our tradition’s existence, paid, professional, full-time ministry was antithetical to Brethren practice. Congregations used what we call today the “plural non-salaried” or “free” ministry. Some congregations have continued to practice this kind of ministry straight through to the present. A group of elders leads the church and performs pastoral functions. When one elder becomes unable to lead any longer, the congregation calls another member to fill the vacancy. All of these ministers are volunteers who pay their bills and support their families through work outside of the church.

In the early 20th century, the church went through a massive cultural transition. Paid, professional, full-time ministry was the subject of great debate and division. As early as 1845, Brethren were asking whether or not paying ministers was appropriate. A sermon from that year by
Henry Kurtz (quoted in John Kline’s diary) expresses the reluctance of some Brethren to pay pastors:

“I have to say that God never meant for the Gospel to be used as a means for getting water to the preacher’s mill, or grain into his garner. When the Gospel is converted into merchandise, the preacher becomes a merchant, and like all other merchants it becomes his interest to handle his goods in a way that will please his customers, and put them in such shape and procure for them such kinds, whether good, bad, or indifferent, as will suit their fancies and please their tastes. The love of money is a root of all evil, no less in the ministry than anywhere else.

Others argued that, as American life shifted to a more industrial and urban society, it was necessary to change pastoral ministry in order to keep up with the times and provide a relevant witness to the modern world. Queries were brought to the annual church gathering. In 1856, Annual Meeting discerned that payment for ministerial services was “against the gospel,” and definitively prohibited.

Despite the official prohibition, congregations continued to pay their pastors in various forms, sometimes offering “love gifts,” other times compensating them with a set monthly or yearly amount. In 1891, Tobias T. Myers of Philadelphia became the first salaried pastor in the denomination. Queries continued to flow through Annual Meeting, and the change in practice eventually led to a change in polity. In 1911, Annual Meeting finally allowed congregations to pay ministerial salaries.

It didn’t take long for the church to do a complete about-face regarding its position on professional pastors. In 1921, the church created the General Ministerial Board, explicitly to “promote the growing trend for each congregation to have its own professionally trained and salaried pastor.” In 1939, the General Brotherhood Board encouraged every congregation with over 200 members to hire a full-time, seminary-trained, salaried minister.

History reminds us that the practice of every congregation employing a full-time, seminary-trained, salaried minister was a fairly recent adaptation in the life of the Church of the Brethren. We might even call it an interesting experiment that lasted approximately two generations before proving unsustainable for the life of our congregations.

Even though congregations do usually compensate their pastors today, we seem to have returned to our historical roots of more creative and collaborative pastoral ministry. What does creative and collaborative ministry look like?

Today, it looks like married couples filling a single pastoral position together. It looks like teams of ministers sharing the work of preaching and pastoral care. Creative, collaborative ministry looks like pastors whose contracts include preaching three Sundays of the month, with the congregation inviting a member to preach on the fourth. It looks like pastors who serve in a congregation for 10 months of the year, then
serving in international mission while congregational leaders fill pastoral roles during the other two.

Multivocational ministry looks different in different contexts, and pastoral work today looks different than it did a century ago. But creative, collaborative ministry in the Church of the Brethren has deep historical roots and is creating a vibrant, hopeful future for many of our congregations. Multivocational ministry is a gift to the church: it allows pastors to be deeply invested in communities as well as congregations, invites and involves the whole church in ministry, and demands that our theology of a priesthood of all believers be put into practice.

What we learned

It was with this belief—that multivocational ministry is an asset and gift to the church—that a working group composed of staff from the Church of the Brethren, Bethany Theological Seminary, and the Council of District Executives, as well as representatives from the Ministers’ Association, submitted a grant proposal to support multivocational ministry. In October 2018, the grant was approved and the Thriving in Ministry: Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program was born.

Because the program was designed to be created around the immediate needs of multivocational ministers themselves, the first step was to conduct a large-scale, professional survey of all the multivocational pastors in the denomination. Crane Metamarketing of Atlanta conducted the survey, using both qualitative and quantitative measures. Some of the results were to be expected (multivocational pastors are often serving small, rural, older congregations), but others were not (despite an assumption that multivocational ministers feel especially isolated, survey results found that these pastors are more deeply invested in their families and communities than full-time pastors might be).

Multivocational pastors represent a wide range of pastoral demographics, congregational dynamics, and ministry roles.

The survey attempted to get a picture of who these pastors are, demographically. The results revealed that 76 percent of respondents were age 55 or older and 87 percent are married. Thirty-three percent of multivocational pastors are female, and 77 percent are male. Interestingly, over 12 percent of pastors responding to the survey do not have access to fast Internet connections, making the question of accessing support and resources usually designed for full-time pastors even more complicated.

Where do they earn the rest of their income? Twenty-two percent of respondents have full-time jobs outside of pastoral ministry, and 23 percent have additional part-time jobs. Eleven percent of these pastors have multiple part-time jobs in addition to their ministry work. Thirty-four percent have a spouse whose income supports their family; 6 percent have no other income.

Most revealing, however, was the most common answer to the question about supplemental income. Thirty-nine percent reported that they supplemented their earnings with retirement income, underscoring how many multivocational pastors are old enough to be retired.

Also interesting is the picture of congregational life reported in the survey. Most multivocational pastors are ministering to small, older congregations. Fewer than one in three reported average attendance higher than 50, and more than half said their congregation was “mostly middle-aged and elderly members with very few teens or children.” English was the predominant language spoken in these congregations, but responses also included Spanish, Haitian Kreyol, Chinese Mandarin, Kiswahili, Chinese Cantonese, and Navajo. Sixty percent of these congregations are in rural areas, while the rest are evenly split between urban and suburban.

The survey asked multivocational pastors to name the joys and challenges of their work, and to share what kind of support and resources would be valuable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common answer to this question was “financial support.” Making ends meet as a multivocational, part-time pastor is difficult, and respondents made this clear.

Other common answers: opportunities to connect with other multivocational pastors, continuing education
leadership development, community outreach, congregational care, and creative worship planning will share education and professional development through online platforms, offered during time frames that are accessible to part-time pastors.

The third piece of the program will be online affinity groups—places for multivocational pastors to connect with one another for mutual sharing and support, offering a safe space for pastoral fellowship and understanding. These groups might be organized around a shared topic of interest, or they may simply be groups of pastors looking for general support.

An advisory committee plans to invite multivocational pastors to begin participating in the program by the beginning of 2020. It is exciting to think about all the creative and collaborative ways that pastors and congregations are working together in mutual ministry, and to connect today’s practices to our own historical roots. This new program offers an opportunity for all of us to learn, together, the best ways to continue calling, supporting, equipping, and sustaining the pastoral leaders our congregations need to thrive.

So, is your pastor multivocational? It’s very likely that your answer is yes. Now, isn’t that exciting? 🎉

Dana Cassell is Thriving in Ministry program manager and pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C.

**What comes next**

This new program, informed by the results of the survey and continuing conversations with multivocational pastors and their congregations, will provide support and resources to pastors in their own contexts. One challenge for these pastors is that their multiple vocational commitments make scheduling, meeting, and travel especially hard. Part-time pastors are often unable to take advantage of district or denominational gatherings or resources because they cannot take vacation time from their second job, can’t afford the travel, or simply don’t have time to add one more event into a week’s schedule. The Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program will address this particular challenge.

When a pastor joins the program, a “circuit rider” will schedule an in-person visit. Circuit riders will be regionally based, traveling to visit pastors in their own areas. The circuit rider will get to know the pastor, the congregation, and the local context. Pastors will share their personal joys and challenges, and together the pastor and circuit rider will identify resources that might be helpful for both the pastor and their congregation.

The Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program will offer a host of resources on the topics that multivocational pastors name as valuable. Experts on congregational experiences offered in times and places accessible to pastors with full-time jobs outside their ministry work, and a clear call to educate and offer resources for congregations in how to support their multivocational pastors.

Multivocational pastors, by and large, love their work and their congregations. But they are clear in their responses to this survey and in informal conversations that, in order for a pastor’s position to be part-time, a congregation must take responsibility for ministry, too. The working group heard stories from pastors about congregations who expect them to do everything a full-time pastor would be expected to do, just for much less money.

Some pastors asked for resources to help train congregational leaders to be better equipped to provide care for people in crisis. Others wondered if there were resources to help congregations be more active in worship planning and leadership. Overwhelmingly, multivocational pastors are saying that in order to make part-time pastoral ministry work, congregations must be deeply invested in a mutuality of ministry, sharing the load and clearly defining who is responsible for what.

One multivocational part-time pastor in Virginia offered a summary of this need: in order to hire a part-time pastor, she said, you have to have a full-time congregation. In other words, a congregation that calls a part-time pastor must already be fully invested and active in the work of the church, willing to care for one another, help plan and lead worship, and tend to the administrative details of congregational life. This reflection led to the name of the new program: Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church.
When “neighborhood” is in the name of your church, it implies you’re going to be connected to the surrounding community. And for Neighborhood Church of the Brethren near Montgomery, Ill., it’s an expectation they take seriously.

“It really is a neighborhood church,” long-time member Sid Simmons says. “We’ve done a lot.”

That commitment has been part of the congregation from the start. It began in the summer of 1955, when developer Don Dise—a Church of the Brethren member from Chicago—purchased more than 700 acres of Boulder Hill Stock Farms to build a self-contained, forward-thinking community as the Chicago suburbs spread westward. Construction started on the first homes in 1956, and the growth continued.

Dise envisioned space for a church in the midst of the new “Boulder Hill” community, and donated land for that purpose (along with land for an elementary school next door). The Church of the Brethren investigated the possibility of establishing the church there, and a few months later the Illinois Council of Churches granted the Brethren that responsibility.

Kenneth Yingst was called as the first pastor in early 1957, and he kept the ecumenical background of the project at the forefront as he began the work of church planting, making calls and ringing doorbells to gauge residents’ interest.

“The church envisioned would be unique,” Yingst wrote in the Gospel Messenger. “It would be a community-serving church. It would recognize the religious backgrounds and Christian traditions out of which community families had
come—and there were many. At the same time families would respect the background of other families and that of the church.”

A meeting of 26 people took place in September 1957, and the first worship service was held in temporary space the next month, with worship attendance soon averaging about 75. The name Boulder Hill Neighborhood Church of the Brethren was chosen for the new church, with an early booklet explaining that the “neighborhood” name also recalled Jesus’ admonition in Luke 10 to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Our Lord set no limits in his answer to the question, ‘Who is my neighbor,’” the booklet said. “‘Neighborhood’ by his definition would not be limited to a locality, to a particular race, or religious tradition. ‘Neighborhood’ becomes an inclusive term that knows no bounds.”

The first group of charter members was officially received the following Easter Sunday, the church moved to a permanent building on Boulder Hill Pass in September 1961, and its community ministry kept blossoming. New opportunities presented themselves as schools, businesses, and other organizations opened in the unique fledgling community, which today remains unincorporated and numbers about 9,000 people.

“It’s a very rich history,” says Bob Hamlin, a lifetime Neighborhood member and a licensed clinical social worker who operates a counseling office in the church. “They envisioned having the church be the center of this subdivision community. And to this day we have a lot of community involvement. The church is used extensively during the week by different organizations, and we have a long history of doing that, too.”

That list of organizations includes nearly a dozen Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon groups, Boy Scout and Cub Scout troops, the Lamplighters barbershop chorus, a Christian Youth Theater group that draws more than 100 children and youth, a police Neighborhood Watch meeting, Way of Christ support groups, and a home schooling organization, plus softball teams that play on the adjacent lot. The church also operated a nursery school and day care for many years and hosted a teen center in the past.

“Many groups and organizations either make a donation to use our facility . . . or are given access to the building gratis,” Simmons and fellow member Jim Henderson wrote in a report earlier this year. “We all should be proud that Neighborhood Church is well-known for its community outreach.”

All that doesn’t include the church’s own events, such as weekly Bible studies, a women’s fellowship group, Vacation Bible School, and other special events, like this month’s chili supper and community meals at Christmas.

“I’m amazed to see for a small congregation how much God is using us to connect with our community,” pastor Purvi Satvedi says. “The church just believes that God has blessed us in that area to reach out in whatever way they can to help those needs. . . . They just want to help.”

Satvedi’s only wish is that more of those community members would become involved in the worship and spiritual life of the congregation, which these days numbers about 35 to 40 people on a Sunday morning and has mostly older members.

“That’s what I’m praying for,” Satvedi says, “and that’s what we’re searching for with God’s direction.”

In the meantime, Neighborhood will continue faithfully serving its neighborhood, carrying out the meeting-place ministry that has been woven into its purpose from the beginning.

“That vision (of serving the community) was always there,” Hamlin says. “And while maybe it didn’t come out the way the founding people envisioned it, it did come out. A lot of people in the community know about our church. Even if they’re not attending, they’re aware of the services and programs offered here.”
The topic for this month’s Bible study was submitted by a Messenger subscriber who asks: “Is a small church an unsuccessful church?”

While this isn’t a “catch phrase” or an “almost correct” Bible quotation that has been addressed in prior “Say what?” columns, questions about church decline are frequently asked at all levels of our denomination, from local congregations to Annual Conference, to the pages of Messenger. In an era where membership decline, pastoral shortages, and challenging finances are an increasing reality, questions of “success” are often asked, even if they might not be the correct question. Should more people be joining our churches? And if they’re not, why not?

These questions are more complex than one article can handle. We can, however, identify some places to begin the conversation.

Reflections from the end of ministry

The letter of 2 Timothy likely contains Paul’s last recorded words in the New Testament. In this letter, it’s easy to sense that Paul understands his life and ministry are nearing an end. Stuck in a Roman prison, he is lonely, weary, and cold. But even in these difficult circumstances, this letter is filled with advice Timothy needs to serve the church of Ephesus.

Near the end of the letter Paul makes a particularly intriguing comment. He writes, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (4:7). How could Paul claim that he’d fulfilled the task God gave to him when there were still millions of people who had not yet heard the gospel? Because he had spent years planting churches and calling pastors to lead them. At the end of his life, Paul could hand his mantle of leadership to people like Timothy with a clean conscience, knowing that ministry would continue through the local church.

If we are serious about wrestling with whether our church is “successful” or not, we must begin by reaffirming that the local congregation is the primary vehicle for the making disciples. But the affluence of our age works against this effort in at least two ways. First, there are many demands on our time that pull us away from regular worship. It wasn’t too long ago that regular church attendance meant attending 45 Sundays per year. Some sources say that, today, regular attendance is just under two Sundays per month. That’s quite a difference.

Second, easy communication makes it possible to supplement (or substitute) regular church participation with resources from megachurches, celebrity pastors, and parachurch organizations. We can pick and choose from many options to find a style and a theology we find most comfortable. But however good these resources are, they can never
take the place of long-term, face-to-face relationships in congregational mission and ministry.

Congregational life isn’t always easy, and it’s rarely flashy. But it is the primary means for making disciples. Perhaps discussions of congregational “success” ought to begin here.

**A case study from Revelation**

But is “success” really our goal?

Jesus’ words to the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) give us another perspective on this topic. Things were not easy for Christians in this city. It’s probable that these Christians were Jewish converts who had been barred from their local synagogue after their profession of faith in Jesus. It is also likely that their newfound faith led to broken family relationships.

However great these struggles had been for the church in Philadelphia, Jesus seems quite pleased with their faithfulness. His message affirms them for having “kept my word of patient endurance” (v. 10). They are encouraged to “hold fast to what you have” (v. 11), with a promise of being protected from difficulties that are coming.

We would be hard pressed to say that the church in Philadelphia was “successful,” at least by standards of our day. Following Jesus made their life more difficult, not less. But in spite of the difficulties that faithfulness brought, they held fast to one another and to their faith. Can the same be said of us?

Consider again the question submitted for this article: “Is a small church an unsuccessful church?” When seen through the values that our culture finds important, we might be tempted to say “no.” It certainly can seem that way when we compare ourselves to the new church down the road that has several full-time staff members, multiple services, and a youth ministry larger than our entire congregation.

But is bigger really better? What if we reframe the question and look for ways to measure faithfulness? We might then ask ourselves, “Can a small church be a faithful church?” If we consider the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3, the answer is clearly yes. Life was difficult for them, yet they were commended for their commitment to Jesus’ word, not their size.

How might we apply this to our own congregations? In addition to the questions asked along the way, consider these thoughts:

- Many of our questions of success and faithfulness stem from our increasing inability to fund a full-time pastoral program. How has pursuit of this goal helped or hindered our congregation’s mission? What are some other ways we might evaluate our faithfulness?

- Does your congregation look like your neighborhood? How has this changed over the last 50 years?

- Which is likely to bring more people to the church: a prayer meeting or an ice cream social?

In our consumer age, people will often evaluate a congregation based on its ability to “meet our needs.” But Jesus doesn’t offer us more of what we already have; he offers us something we don’t have—another way of living. Not everyone who walks through our doors wants this. Pursuing Jesus with our whole hearts might not enable us to be as “successful” as we hope. But it is the way to be faithful. And faithfulness is something that can be achieved by churches of all sizes.

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

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**For further reading**

I am indebted to the reader who submitted this question for pointing me to Karl Vaters’ blog *Pivot*. Many of his blog entries will be of interest to those seeking to understand how a church can be faithful in our day. Of particular relevance to this article is a blog entry found in the January 23, 2019, issue of *Christianity Today*, “5 Myth-Shattering Reasons We Have To Change Our Thinking About Church Size.”
“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:10-13).

Something exciting, something hopeful. It seems subtle, and it may be easy to miss. I want to shine a light on it so that you will celebrate with me, and you will put your creative caps on and think, “That’s terrific! What’s next?”

That something is hospitality in the form of physical accommodation. In 2016, Luray Church of the Brethren was welcomed into the Open Roof Fellowship of congregations “that have put forth significant effort to establish and grow ministries for and with persons of all abilities.” The idea of “Open Roof” comes from the story in Mark 2 where four men bring their paralyzed friend for healing and lower him through the roof of the house where Jesus is teaching.

We were recognized for making adjustments to our worship services to be more inclusive of differently abled people active in our congregation. Prior to my arrival, the church had installed a chair lift, a wheelchair ramp, and audio listening devices. In 2019, we have taken initiative to create even more welcoming spaces in other parts of the property:

- We sanded, painted, and redecorated the vestibule to include an information table and to make a better, fresh-first impression for our guests.
- We cleaned, organized, and sanitized the nursery to make it a safer, cleaner, up-to-date play space for infants and toddlers.
- We installed screens in the sanctuary to project song lyrics, readings, and announcements in larger type for those who have trouble reading the hymnals and pew Bibles.
- We purchased an accessible picnic table for our pavilion that one can simply slide into without lifting legs over bars.
- We created a paved pathway from the parking lot to the picnic pavilion to improve access for people with mobility challenges.

I believe that numerical growth will not precede spiritual and personal growth, but that as we faithfully leverage ourselves into positions of greater welcome God will send people to us whom we are prepared to welcome. At our recent Family Bible Camp we were visited by a woman and her two young sons. They had a clean, sanitized nursery to play in during class time. We prepared the space, and God sent the right people to use it.

As we work to make our building and grounds easier to access and navigate, that investment will pay dividends in the form of people who feel they are welcomed and included in the life of our congregation. May God be praised for providing the resources to make these adjustments possible.

Now, that’s terrific! What’s next?

Leah Hileman is pastor of Luray (Va.) Church of the Brethren. The Open Roof Fellowship has grown out of the former Open Roof Award, which began acknowledging congregations in 2004. The award was inspired by Mark 2:3-4. See www.brethren.org/openroof.
Church of the Brethren general secretary David Steele issued the following statement after shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, in early August:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more” (Matthew 2:18).

Today, like far too many days before, we are grieving with our country at the news of two horrific mass shootings, one in El Paso, Texas, and the other in Dayton, Ohio. At a time when it is hard to find words to soothe, we turn to the balm that heals us in the scriptures and our commitment to Christ’s peace. In the words of Romans 14:19, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”

We reaffirm the words that Mission and Ministry Board said in last year’s statement, “Lukewarm no more: A call for repentance and action on gun violence”:

“The work of the church is pastoral and public. We must preach the Gospel in word and deed. . . . We have fallen short of discipleship in the way of Jesus, lost sight of Christ’s reconciling work, grown weary in doing good, become numb to shootings, and tolerant of widespread violence in our nation. We call ourselves into greater and more energetic care for all people through direct service, bold peacemaking, and the work of challenging policies that do not lead to well-being and God’s shalom.”

We are in the midst of a crisis, one caused by violent white supremacy fueled by prominent hateful rhetoric. It is such a time as this that requires the bold peacemaking to which our historic pacifist stance calls us. Our 1991 Statement on Peacemaking says, “Just as peace is broken when injustice and unrighteousness reign, so peace is threatened when fear and hostility exercise control.” Fear and hostility provided the foundation for these domestic terror incidents to occur, and it is an act of hope and trust in God to call for peace in the wake of violence.

The statement goes on to say that “in the tradition of Moses to Malachi, prophetic proclamation and action has been a distinctive part of our heritage. The prophetic, whether a word of judgment, a cry of anguish, a symbolic act of resistance or defiance, a confession, or a vision of hope and promise, always presupposes that Yahweh is active in our time.”

If we seek to bring God’s peace to earth as it is in Heaven, we must proclaim the prophetic, this act of resistance to the violence we see around us every day. We believe that Yahweh is active in our time, which calls us to lament and grieve for all those who feel the sting of violence and to seek true justice and peace for a hurting world.
Compelling Vision Process Team issues post-Conference report


Personnel notes

Lauren Flora and Marissa Witkovsky-Eldred completed their service as assistant coordinators in the Workcamp Ministry in August, working through Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). They organized and led workcamp experiences for 256 youth and advisors. Assistant workcamp coordinators for the 2020 season began in August: Kara Miller of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and Liana Smith of Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. In mid-August, Steve Van Houten concluded some five months as interim coordinator of the Workcamp Ministry.

Roxanne Gaxiola Aguirre resigned Aug. 30 as coordinator of Spanish-language ministry training for the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. Aguirre began in January 2018 working with students and liaisons from districts involved in certificate-level ministry training programs for Spanish speakers, Educación para un Ministerio Compartido (EPMC) and Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano de la Iglesia de los Hermanos (SeBAH COB). At this year’s Annual Conference she recognized the first EPMC graduate.

Nathanael Inglis resigned Aug. 20 as assistant professor of theological studies at Bethany Seminary. He began at the seminary in fall 2015, coming to Bethany after completing a doctorate at Fordham University and spending two years of BVS in a Guatemalan indigenous community. His interest in Anabaptist and ecological themes influenced the courses he developed. During his tenure, he was selected to participate in a Science for Seminaries faculty retreat through the American Association for the Advancement of Science and assisted in securing a $75,000 grant from AAAS to help Bethany incorporate scientific topics and themes into its curriculum. Inglis begins this fall as assistant dean of students at Columbia University in New York City.

Elsie Koehn retired in August as district executive minister for Southern Plains District where she had served for more than 10 years, since 2009. Previously she pastored Pleasant Plains Church in Aline, Okla., for some 16 years. She served as moderator for Southern Plains District in 2007-08 and also represented the district on the Standing Committee of Annual Conference.

J. Colleen Michael retired July 31 as Pacific Northwest District executive, a position she held since Jan. 1, 2012. During her tenure she oversaw a name change from Oregon Washington District to Pacific Northwest District; helped the district deal with wildfires; served on the Compelling Vision Working Group; and chaired the Council of District Executives. While on the CODE executive committee she worked with the denomination’s Leadership Team to respond to the 2016 Annual Conference “Query: Same Sex Weddings,” out of which work emerged the compelling vision conversations. An interim team has been appointed by the district:

Debbie Roberts, pastor of Ellisforde Church of the Brethren and adjunct professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethany Seminary;
Glenn Brumbaugh, pastor of Olympic View Church of the Brethren in Seattle, Wash.; and Carol Mason, an area minister.
The poetry of God

I enjoy the publisher’s note in MESSENER every month, written by Wendy McFadden, but the one from May about the poetry of God really touched me. Thank you.

Bobbi Dykema
Springfield, Ill.

Record the history

My granny, Norma Mullins, will celebrate her 96th birthday this year and will celebrate 83 years of being a Church of the Brethren member. She subscribes to MESSENER and we enjoy the magazine together.

Granny still drives to church almost every Sunday and Wednesday. We attend Pound River Church of the Brethren in Clintwood, Va. Her father (a Brethren elder) helped build the church back in the 1940s, on land that her uncle provided. Her second great grandpa (a Dunkard preacher) firmly established the first Church of the Brethren in our area of southwest Virginia in the mid-1800s. Her brother, uncles, cousins, and brother-in-law were preachers and/or pastors of our church or the mother church from which our church was a preaching point.

I am working on a heritage project spurred by all the verbal history my Granny has told me. It is important I get this history written down because so much of it hasn’t been recorded.

Summer Runyon
Clintwood, Va.

Terms to excise

Tim Harvey’s article in June, “God Won’t Give You More Than You Can Handle?” struck a chord with me. I’m afraid I’ve used that term in the past, but the article gave a new understanding of its errors.

Another I’d like to see excised is “There but for the grace of God go I.” The implication is that God’s grace is with me but not with the unfortunate person I am observing. Doesn’t God’s grace reside with all of us? The grace of God doesn’t fall only on
those of us who are believers or who are in better circumstances of life. Yes, I might be luckier than someone else, but not because of God’s grace.

Jan Eller
Portland, Ore.

What is more accurate?
I was interested in the article by Tim Harvey in June, and his reaction to the comment he so often hears, “God never gives us more than we can handle.” In serving 25 years as a volunteer chaplain, I wish I had counted the number of times I heard that phrase.

My reaction was usually to listen to the patient’s list of troubles and then ask if they thought that God was the source of those misfortunes. This question was usually followed by a long pause, during which I asked if it might be more accurate to say, “God will provide the strength to handle whatever problems we encounter.”

The latter phrase relieves God of the blame for our problems but does give God credit for the resources to deal with whatever it is that concerns us. It was not always evident whether the patient accepted the alternative statement, but I felt he/she had received food for thought.

Ernie Barr
North Manchester, Ind.

The best way
It’s hard to find fault with Tim Harvey’s assertion (“We Once Were Lost”) that there is much wretchedness in our world and in ourselves. Having just returned from visits to poor communities in Asia and Africa, it’s easy to find much to lament—whether violence against women in South Sudan, genocide in Myanmar, or climate chaos impacting everyone everywhere. And it takes only a glance at our own society to cause deep consternation.

However, I find it hard to square some generalized disparagement of the condition of our souls with Jesus’ own message and actions (although it’s an easier sell in relation to the epistles of Paul). Our Lord generally reserved his condemnation for those in power who constantly condemned and marginalized others (most often taking aim at religious leaders) or for those around him who resisted his call to justice and acceptance (e.g. the rich young ruler, the parable of the two sons).

Jesus’ own way of dealing with our self-centered tendencies or reaching out to those ostracized from society, even if by their own actions, was not by condemnation but by invitation and implicit acceptance (thinking of Zacchaeus, the woman at the well or the one caught in adultery, and “tax collectors and sinners”). And this often bore fruit, as when the Samaritan woman became the first Christian...
evangelist, and diminutive Zacchaeus experienced a big transformation.

The other problem with laying our essential problem at the feet of “spiritual brokenness” is that it absolves us of the very things that Jesus most often warned against—inattention to the needs of others, including economic, racial, and gender justice, and the lure of materialism, which Jesus named as the one thing that can compete with God for our devotion.

This is not to say that it doesn’t take a spiritual transition to move us in a new direction. This is at the core of my work at New Community Project. But this seems best accomplished by encounter with our world and its realities, and the opportunity this presents to respond to God’s call inwardly and outwardly. Indeed, our Lord seemed to think this was the best way to “find” ourselves—and at the same time, a better world for all.

David Radcliff
Blue Ridge, Va.
Wonderful glimpse of Heifer history

Thank you for a fascinating July-August issue, particularly the articles about Heifer International. We join in the congratulations on its 75th anniversary.

What a wonderful glimpse into the very dedicated lives of Dan and Lucy West that Peggy Miller gives. Thank you for that and “700 Horses to Greece.” The copy of Dan’s vivid 1937 letter from Spain to Lucy is so good to read.

As Miller knows, many of our Bruderhof members and their brothers were on early Heifer journeys to Europe. The brother of our now 93-year-old sister, Marlys Blough Swinger, went to Europe to get to Greece as a Brethren missionary, where he met and married his great-hearted Greek wife.

In 1955, as a 19-year-old English Quaker conscientious objector doing service in Greece, I will never forget meeting a dedicated white-haired Brethren couple delivering heifers to Greek villages. The wife's family had emigrated from “beautiful” Siberia many years earlier. One of many vivid memories for a green young man.

It is so good to be in touch with you all again this way.

Martin and Burgel Johnson
Ulster Park, N.Y.

Extremely grateful

My father introduced Heifer Project to Canadian churches, which responded by sending several bred heifers to New Windsor, Md.

In writing my memoirs recently, I remembered meeting Thurl Metzger in February 1952, in New York, when I returned from a trip to Germany as a cattle attendant for Heifer Project.

Doing a Google search for Metzger, an interesting news item came up announcing the dedication of the Metzger Heifer Ranch.

Over the years I have been extremely grateful to him. Because of my youthful age at the time, I was remiss and neglected to contact him after I returned to my home in Canada to express my gratitude for how he graciously helped me.

Lester C. Fretz
Port Colborne, Ontario, Canada

Our earliest formation

For the first time, I am beginning to think that the denomination-wide quest for a “compelling vision” currently encouraged by Annual Conference could have a unifying and fruitful outcome. Thanks for that striking half-page statement by Jonathan Emmons, “A Vision that Propels,” juxtaposed with Jeff Bach’s succinct history of the early Pietists.

Bach includes a description of the version of Pietism practiced by the founders of the Church of the Brethren. If we look back to our earliest formation, we may find inspiration that leads to a revitalized expression of who Brethren are today.

Maybe Jonathan Emmons can become our Jonathan Edwards triggering a new “great awakening” in the church.

Guy Wampler
Lititz, Pa.


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“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”
1 John 3:18
You might have seen them. An inverted triangular shape made of metal, white center bordered by red, with white trim on the edge, three feet per side. In the center a bold word is emblazoned in red: YIELD.

They stand on poles at many on-ramps, merge points, occasional intersections, and other places. The very first one—albeit with a different color and shape—appeared in Tulsa, Okla., in 1950, according to the website RoadTrafficSigns.com. (Yes, there’s even a website for that.) A local constable wanted to improve accountability for right of way at a notoriously dangerous intersection, and it worked.

The humble yield sign joined the national uniform code four years later, and it’s been with us ever since. One traffic signal expert defined their function as follows: “A yield sign tells you that you do not have the right of way... You need to proceed with caution and enter the lane as an opening develops. Drivers in the lane that you are entering have the right of way. In other words, they don’t have to adjust to your movements. You need to adjust to their movements.”

Seven decades after their debut, though, those signs seem to have become something of an endangered species—at least in terms of anyone understanding what they mean. Rather than giving way to oncoming traffic, most cars now approach those merge points seeking to push their way in however possible, as quickly as possible.

It seems emblematic of our culture at large, where giving way or giving ground is seen as a sign of weakness. Instead, people regularly bull their way—literally or figuratively—through those around them, intent only on getting what they want, what’s best for them. And too often, that includes those who claim to follow Christ.

Jesus regularly lifted up the importance of qualities such as meekness and humility and serving others. And the book of James offers this counsel: “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (3:17).

And many of us can likely sing the words of the hymn “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”: “Mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still.” We yield our wills to God’s shaping in our lives, and in turn we adjust our movements to others on that potter’s wheel.

A Webster’s definition of “yield” adds an additional perspective: “To give way; to cease opposition; to be no longer a hindrance or an obstacle.” How are we, in our words and actions, a hindrance to others? How do we fail to yield: to “think a little more of others and a little less of me,” as Glen Campbell once put it?

Our compelling vision process at Annual Conference this year reminded us of the value of listening to one another, and of providing safe space for others to share their perspectives, ideas, and dreams—even if we disagree with them. Compelling Vision Process Team chair Rhonda Pittman Gingrich reminded those participating to “be gentle with one another,” following Jesus’ example.

If the church is to successfully navigate the road ahead, we are going to need to learn the art of yielding, to God and to one another. Our highways will only lead to dead ends if we don’t leave a lane for the Holy Spirit, and we’ll remain stuck in traffic jams and fender benders if we don’t leave room for the various ways that Spirit is heard and experienced.

Proceed with caution, Brethren, at this potentially dangerous intersection. Move ahead boldly, but gently.
Here is your God

“Say to those who are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.’”

~Isaiah 35:4a, NRSV

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