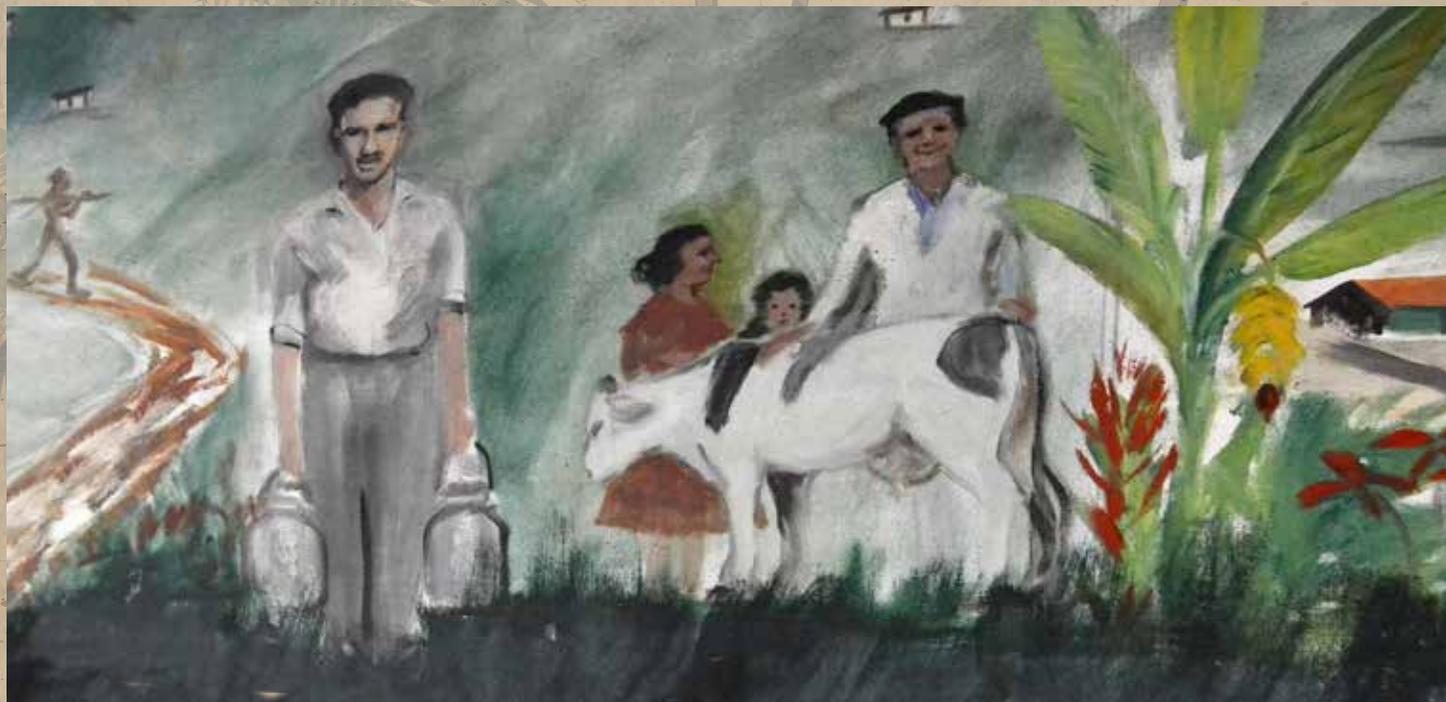


# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

DECEMBER 2019 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



PUERTO RICO CELEBRATES

## 75 years of Heifer

# Voices for Peace

Romans 15:1-6 (MSG)

My dear child, there is a special message God wrote on your heart. It's bubbling up inside, let it spill out. Let your words scatter like seeds to the edges of the earth. Do you hear it? That's the sound of your voice singing an anthem of love in service to others. Hear how it joins with many different voices singing in harmony to the God who calls you together to radically change the world. Now is the time: join the chorus and learn the song. Let God's melody guide you as you go forth in joy with a *voice for peace.*



*"You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself... Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, but humility."*

—Nelson Mandela



Workcamp 2019 photos by Matt DeBall, Lauren Flora, Steve Houser, Emily Tyler, Marissa Witkovsky-Eldred and anonymous



## 2020 Brethren Workcamps

### Junior High Completed 6th - 8th grade

1. June 7-11 .....Rodney, Michigan
2. June 14-18 .....Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
3. June 27-July 1 .....Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
4. July 8-12 .....Brooklyn, New York
5. July 22-26 .....Roanoke, Virginia
6. July 29-August 2 .....South Bend, Indiana

### Senior High Completed 9th grade - age 19

7. June 7-13 .....Miami, Florida
8. June 14-20 .....Boston, Massachusetts
9. June 20-26 .....Cle Elum, Washington
10. June 20-28 .....BRF - Haiti
11. July 5-11 .....Kalamazoo, Michigan
12. July 12-18 .....Palmyra, Pennsylvania
13. July 12-18 .....Waco, Texas
14. July 19-25 .....Santa Ana, California
15. July 26-August 1 .....Knoxville, Tennessee
16. August 3-9 .....Littleton, Colorado

### Intergenerational Completed 6th grade and older

17. July 6-10 .....Keezletown, Virginia

### Adult Ages 18+

18. May 28-June 8 .....Rwanda
19. June 22-25 .....Bethel, Pennsylvania

### We Are Able Ages 16-30

19. June 22-25 .....Bethel, Pennsylvania

Registration Opens:  
January 16, 2020 at 7 p.m.  
(central time)

[www.brethren.org/workcamps](http://www.brethren.org/workcamps)



Church of the Brethren Workcamps



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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

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Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford Web editor: Jan Fischer Bachman  
At-large editor: Walt Wiltschek Design: The Concept Mill

## 6 Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford with contributions from Peggy Reiff Miller

## 11 Friendly and Brethren: Building bridges with China

by Jay Wittmeyer

## 13 Look what the Lord is doing: The church in Rwanda

by Josiah Ludwick

## 16 Continuing the work of Jesus

A photo spread

## 18 The call within the call

by Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm

## 20 A trip summary

by Becky Keister

### departments

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 2 FROM THE PUBLISHER | 25 NEWSLINE DIGEST |
| 3 IN TOUCH           | 27 LETTERS         |
| 5 THE EXCHANGE       | 29 TURNING POINTS  |
| 22 BIBLE STUDY       | 30 2019 INDEX      |
| 24 MEDIA REVIEW      | 32 POTLUCK         |

**on the cover** *A Medford Neher mural telling the Heifer story is displayed at Castañer Hospital*

# Continuing the work of Jesus



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

**This is the way it used to be:** When someone asked about the Church of the Brethren, the answer was a halting, “Well, we’re a little like the Mennonites.” You tried not to say it, but out it came.

But 25 years ago we received something new: “Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.” After years of hand-me-downs, these words fit like a custom garment.

They were indeed our own. While they were “uncovered” and arranged by the insightful people at a communication company called Communicorp (now Crane), all the words were said by individuals at various gatherings across the church. They came from within ourselves. This tagline was

previewed at an insight session at the 1994 Annual Conference, and then introduced to the whole church the following spring.

These words were not intended to be a mission statement or a vision statement. They have simply helped us give voice to who we are. Though we Brethren are different shapes and sizes, we have somehow found this garment to fit us well. Over the years, the tagline has made its way into everyday life, appearing on congregational websites, church walls, home-made T-shirts, chalk drawings on sidewalks.

Last June, in its report of a whole year of district conversations, the Compelling Vision Committee observed that the tagline was one of two key items providing “frameworks for repeated and connected themes” (the other being love feast). From all the table conversations across the church, there were 325 responses that mentioned part or all of the tagline.

What is the work of Jesus? It’s healing and welcoming, saving and serving, going and discipling. It’s love made visible. The tagline is 25 years old, but in a sense it’s as old as the Brethren.

*Wendy McFadden*



Elton Whitman VIII

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courtesy of McPherson College

*McPherson College president Michael Schneider announces a \$1 million gift to the new health care initiative at an event held for alumni and friends at the McPherson Museum.*

# A holistic approach to rural health

**A \$1 million gift will help McPherson (Kan.) College** fund a new community health care initiative, reports the college. The initiative includes 10 \$25,000 scholarships for students committed to community health. The college is partnering with McPherson Hospital, pairing a new enhanced health science degree at the college with a wide variety of hands-on educational opportunities developed through the hospital and opportunities for community outreach programs.

“This is an ambitious project with a goal of improving health in our community and becoming a new model for rural health across the state,” said college president Michael Schneider. “The gift enables us to move forward with the academic aspects of the initiative as well as community outreach opportunities that will provide hands-on experience for student discernment and much-needed services for our community. Although the donor wishes to remain anonymous, the donor is a long-time supporter of McPherson College and advocate of health care initiatives that support our youth, older adults, and those who struggle with mental health challenges.”

The new health care programs are focused on creating health-related career pathways for students while engaging them in the community. Every student will participate in multiple field experiences or rotations, and McPherson health science scholars will be matched with outreach being developed to solve issues in the community. In addition, a needs capacity survey of all the health-related opportunities available for students will be distributed to understand the broad health care needs in the surrounding area.

The release noted that Kansas is among states with the highest numbers of rural hospitals and greatest shortage of health care professionals of all types, according to the National Rural Health Association. Additionally, according to the Kansas Hospital Association, more than 25 percent of the state’s population lives in rural areas.

“We are looking at this from a holistic approach to health care in rural communities,” Schneider said.

The curriculum for the new degree will begin in fall 2020.



Alan Orsini

**Northern Plains District** had a group of 16 volunteers work in Marshalltown, Iowa, the week of Sept. 22-27. Marshalltown was hit by a devastating tornado in July 2018. The group of volunteers partnered with Iowa River Church of the Brethren to find work as well as to provide lunches during the week. They worked for three families who were hard hit, installing new windows, re-siding a home, replacing a driveway, installing a sump pump system, and helping one homeowner finalize repairs to a garage and repair a deck. —Alice Draper

## Celebrating 200 years

**C**hippewa Church of the Brethren in Creston, Ohio, celebrated 200 years on Sunday, Oct. 13. The celebration included worship led by preacher Bill Eley, a carry-in potluck luncheon, historical presentations, and talks by members and friends. Many former members returned for the celebration.

The church dates back to the time when German Baptist Brethren began to move into Milton and Canaan townships early in the 1800s. The first recorded arrival brought the Peter and Sarah Blocher Hoff family into Milton Township from Westmoreland County, Pa., in 1819. However, the early history of the congregation has been obscured by a lack of recording and loss of records. Preachers were shared across a large territory, and in the early days worship and love feast were held in houses and barns.

The first meetinghouse at Beech Grove (now Chippewa) was built in 1868. The earliest surviving official minutes of the congregation date to May 29, 1877, when it had grown large enough to divide into three congregations: Chippewa (Beech Grove), Wooster (Paradise), and Orrville. —**John Shafer**



## Random acts of kindness

**W**oodland Church of the Brethren in Astoria, Ill., showed love and hospitality to a neighboring congregation on World Communion Sunday by washing the windshields of their vehicles while they were in worship. Woodland was inspired by Jesus washing his disciples' feet, showing humble service and love, with the command, "I have set you

an example" (John 13:15).

In Jesus' day people walked everywhere so their feet got very dirty and tired, and to wash them was a sign of hospitality. The windshield is a part of the vehicle that gets dirty, just like people's feet, and needs care so the driver can see the road ahead.

Woodland has plans for other random acts of kindness in the coming weeks. —**Lisa Fike**



**Seven children were born this year** into the congregation at Heidelberg Church of the Brethren in Myerstown, Pa., in Atlantic Northeast District. Here they are posing with their mothers after a Sunday morning service. —**Jean Patches**

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.

“And to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the coasts and islands of the nations.” —Zephaniah 2:11b

# ¡BIENVENIDOS A



In celebration of Heifer's 75th anniversary here are fun facts about Puerto Rico, recipient of the first cattle shipped by Heifer Project. —Walt Wiltschek

**For more than a century**, all Puerto Ricans have been US citizens. Travelers from the US mainland don't need a passport to visit.

**The island** has an area of about 3,500 square miles, approximately the size of Connecticut. It has nearly 300 miles of coastline.

**Epiphany, known as *Día de Reyes*** (Three Kings Day), is a major holiday. The “kings”—the three wise men or magi—bring gifts for children who in turn put out grass for the kings' horses or camels. The day is filled with celebrations.

**Famous Puerto Ricans** include baseball player Roberto Clemente, boxer Héctor Camacho, actor Benicio Del Toro, singer Ricky Martin, actress Rita Moreno, actor Joaquín Phoenix, and actress Roselyn Sánchez.

Arecibo, P.R., is home to the **world's largest radio telescope**. It monitors asteroids in space.

**Puerto Rico became its own district** of the Church of the Brethren in 2015, separating from Atlantic Southeast District, and currently is home to seven Church of the Brethren congregations.

**The first 17 cows** to be shipped by Heifer Project (now Heifer International) traveled to Puerto Rico in 1944. [Learn more on pages 6-10.] Dairy farming has since become a major part of Puerto Rico's agricultural economy, but it was hard-hit—like much of the island—by Hurricane Maria in 2017.

**The lone tropical rainforest** managed by the US Forest Service is found in eastern Puerto Rico: *El Yunque*. It's known for its biodiversity.

More than **90 percent** of Puerto Ricans identify as Christian, mostly Roman Catholic.

Puerto Rico is known for its *coquis*, **tiny tree frogs** that make a distinct sound.

Sources: Heifer International, www.brethren.org, NPR, IslandsofPuertoRico.com, the Wilderness Society, tripsavvy.com, DiscoverPuertoRico.com. WelcometoPuertoRico.org.

# 'Pass the baton and continue on'

## Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
with contributions from Peggy Reiff Miller

**P**uerto Rico was the destination of the first shipment of animals by the Church of the Brethren's Heifer Project in 1944. The 17 heifers—female cows pregnant with their first calf—left Mobile, Ala., on June 7 and arrived in San Juan, P.R., on July 22, 1944. Of the 17, 16 survived the voyage and were distributed across the island to large families need-

ing to provide food for their children. The next year, 1945, the mountain village of Castañer received part of Heifer's second shipment of cattle to Puerto Rico. The small herd in Castañer quickly became a staple for the community, providing milk for a new hospital and for a unit of Civilian Public Service

(CPS) conscientious objectors who were doing their alternative service there during World War II. The "Martin G. Brumbaugh Reconstruction Unit" had started a subunit in Castañer because of the dire need for medical services in the area, and CPSers took on the task of caring for the cattle.



courtesy of Heifer International

Left: Faith, the first heifer donated with her donor, Virgil Mock (left), and Claire Stine, who raised her. Below: Faith in her new home in Puerto Rico.

### A Heifer timeline

**1937-38** – Dan West, a Church of the Brethren staff member, went to Spain to work with the American Friends Service Committee during the Spanish Civil War. He saw children dying from a shortage of powdered milk and the idea came: send "not a cup, but a cow."

**1942** – West submitted a proposal to neighbors in northern Indiana: ship cows to Europe to restock farms so milk would be available for children. A volunteer committee was formed

to promote "Heifers for Relief." In April 1942, Heifers for Relief was officially recognized by the Northern Indiana Brethren Men's Work. Farmers began raising heifers to donate. Congregations, Sunday school groups, school children, and others began collecting money to purchase and ship cows.

**June 1942** – Heifers for Relief was approved in principle as a

program of the Brethren Service Committee. In January 1943 it was officially adopted as Heifer Project.

**June 7, 1944** – The first heifers for shipment were collected at a stockyard in Nappanee, Ind., and sent by train to Mobile, Ala.

**July 14, 1944** – 17 heifers left Mobile, Ala., on the S.S. *William D. Bloxham*, bound for Puerto Rico. They were accom-

panied by Wayne Hostetler, Heifer's first "seagoing cowboy."

**July 22, 1944** – 16 surviving heifers and 4 new calves arrived in San Juan, P.R. The animals were distributed in several municipalities by the Farm Security Administration (FSA). A Guernsey named Faith—the first heifer donated to the project by Virgil Mock in response to an appeal to Indiana farmers by West, and who was fed and cared for



courtesy of the Wayne Hostetler family



*Left: Angel Perez Rodriguez with male calf born to Heifer Project cow in Castañer, 1946. Right: General secretary David Steele at the presentation of a calf to an agriculture student during the 75th anniversary events.*

The initial success in Puerto Rico emboldened church leaders to expand Heifer Project into a large effort to ship animals to war-ravaged Europe and Asia after World War II. In subsequent decades the project became an independent nonprofit, Heifer International, which reports that it has helped bring



more than 34 million families out of poverty over its 75 years. So it was natural that Castañer and the Church of the Brethren's Puerto Rico District would host a celebration. As people gathered in the town's central plaza on Oct. 5, 2019, speakers remembered the way Heifer has kept on giving to Castañer and to Puerto Rico. Heifer founder Dan West's seminal idea of "passing on the gift" of farm animals to

people affected by war and poverty continued to inspire. "We felicitate and congratulate everyone who took their time and planted so that others could harvest," said Roberto Pagán, mayor of the Lares municipality that includes Castañer Hospital and Castañer Church of the Brethren. "It's like a relay race. You pass the baton and continue on." Along with Pagán, many other leaders were present. Heifer vice president

by Claire Stine until she could be sent overseas—was given to the Meliton Lind Lopez family of Barrio Ward Mediana, east of San Juan. She supplied milk for 12 children who had never tasted milk before.

**April 29, 1945** – A dedication service for the second Heifer shipment of 50 cattle for Puerto Rico, held at the York (Pa.) County Fairgrounds, was attended by 700 people.

**May 19, 1945** – The 50 cattle left New York for Puerto Rico on the S.S. *James A. Wetmore*.

Small herds of 6 heifers and 1 bull went to CPS subunits at Castañer and La Plata. Farmers with the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration received 11 heifers, and 25 cattle were distributed around the island by the FSA. Over the next 15 years, Heifer Project made 24 shipments of animals to Puerto Rico including cattle, goats, poultry, pigs, and rabbits.

**1945** – Roger and Olive Roop were among the many people who supported Heifer Project, offering their farm near Union

Bridge, Md., as a gathering place for cattle. Daughter Patricia Roop Hollinger remembers that 3,600 head of cattle were gathered at their farm to be sent to the port of Baltimore for shipment through 1948.

**1945** – "Seagoing cowboys" took the first shipment of Heifer animals to post-war Europe. Heifer made an agreement with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) to recruit livestock attendants if UNRRA provided cattle trans-

portation to Europe. Over the years, thousands of Brethren and others volunteered as seagoing cowboys. (Other people and places in the first wave of Heifer shipments included sharecroppers in the southern US, and farmers in Mexico.)

**1946** – Benjamin Bushong, a dairy farmer from Lancaster, Pa., was elected the first fulltime executive secretary of Heifer Project by an interfaith committee representing the Brethren Service Committee, Northern Baptist Convention (American Baptist Churches), Evangelical

# HOSPITAL CASTAÑER

GRACIAS SEÑOR POR ESTE REGALO DE VIDA



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Jesús Pizarro attended with members of his family. The hospital was represented by executive director Domingo Monroig and its board. Puerto Rico District was represented by executive José Calleja Otero, Castañer pastor Jaime Díaz, disaster coordinator José Acevedo, the district board, and a majority of pastors from the seven congregations. The Church of the Brethren sent general secretary David Steele,

Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer—who sits on the Heifer International board—and associate executive Roy Winter, and News Services director Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford. Global Mission and Service helped cover expenses of the celebration. The planning committee included Acevedo as chair, Otero, Díaz, Monroig, and Arecibo Church of the Brethren pastor Lorens Crespo.

## Celebrating community

People gathered mid-morning at Castañer Church of the Brethren and toured the adjacent hospital. Luncheons were held at the hospital and church. A historical marker was dedicated near the site of the first corral for Heifer cattle. In the afternoon, the ceremony in the plaza was open to the whole community. Among highlights was a resolution by the Puerto



Estimote K. Souders

and Reformed Church (United Church of Christ), Mennonite Central Committee, Rural Life Association, and Catholic Rural Life Conference.

**1947** – The first shipment after UNRRA disbanded was 25 bulls sent to Japan, followed by a couple thousand goats and additional shipments over the next several years. China received 713 dairy cows.

**1948** – Ecuador received heifers, sheep, and goats.

**1951** – Executive director Thurl Metzger succeeded Bushong. Heifer began to shift

its efforts to impoverished and developing areas around the world as countries affected by World War II began to recover, and began to introduce a wider variety of animals better suited for local environments. In the 1950s the concept of “passing on the gift” took hold, with recipients promising to pass on the first healthy female offspring of their animals to another family.

**1952** – Heifer began placing more than 216,000 hatching eggs in Korea.

**1953** – Heifer Project incorporated as an independent nonprofit. President Eisenhower donated one of his prize bulls for the American Farm School in Greece.

**1955** – Cross-breeding in India quadrupled milk production for millions of cows.

**1956** – Heifers were sent to Russia to express American friendship during the Cold War.

**1957** – The 10,000th heifer was shipped to Germany.

**1960s** – Heifer began to transition from shipping animals internationally to purchasing and redistributing local or regional livestock. It also began

working with the Prentiss (Miss.) Institute, an African-American junior college, in a partnership last-

ing 30 years. A first shipment of 15 heifers was distributed to black families in Prentiss. When the second shipment arrived, the institute asked for help distributing the animals to white farmers because the African-American community felt called to support others in need.

**1961** – The first alternative gift catalogue was distributed.

**1962** – Heifer entered into its first contracts with the Peace Corps, in Ecuador and Bolivia.

**April 8, 1964** – A memorial shipment in honor of President John F. Kennedy arrived in Bolivia.

**1967** – Heifer’s 1,000,000th chick went to Egypt.

**1970s** – Women were identified as a common component for success, with an effort to increase opportunities for women by providing resources including training on gender



Wynne Zook

Rican Senate recognizing Heifer International and its role on the island.

Wittmeyer spoke on behalf of the Church of the Brethren, noting Puerto Rico's part in "giving birth to one of the most respected and efficient organizations in the world today." He urged, "Let us continue to work hard together until no child is sick or hungry or suffering."

Steele presented a gift to Castañer Hospital of \$100,000 from the estate of the late Chester and Virginia Poister of Hemet, Calif. The Poisters, who were Church of the Brethren members, dedicated this sum to help the hospital's mission to serve the community, from the proceeds of the sale of their citrus ranch in the Pomona Valley of California. Virginia Poister's sister, Maxine Alice Dull, was trustee for their estate until her death. The denomina-

tion was entrusted with transferring the gift to the hospital.

"Community is so important in the church," said Steele, noting that the hospital "is a place where community comes together. This is an example of a community loving one another and taking care of each other."

A local family brought a young bull calf to be given to Erick Yadiel Rivera, who is studying agriculture at Castañer High School. A release from the planning committee described him as a "humble youth with Christian principles." His family is among those who have received aid from Brethren Disaster Ministries to repair their home following Hurricane Maria.

Music by the group Brazos de Oro included an original song written for the occasion. Cake was served as people



lingered in the plaza, enjoying music and conversation. A threatening thunderstorm moved away without disturbing the celebration.

### Puerto Rico pride

"I am very proud as a Puerto Rican that the first [Heifer] project was here," said Pizarro. Heifer International includes and serves people from many different religions, he said, "but we share with the Church of the Brethren the sense of empathy . . . the sense of social justice."

"Today is a very special day for me,"

equality and schooling for girls. Heifer also began to identify the role of environmental factors in its success, and began to emphasize environmental needs. The US distribution network was consolidated by the purchase of several large farms as livestock centers.

**1971** – Offices moved from St. Louis, Mo., to Little Rock, Ark. The Heifer Ranch was begun on 1,200 acres in Perryville, Ark.

**1973** – The name changed to Heifer Project International.

**1978** – The Korean Ministry of Agriculture estimated that half the chickens in Korea were descended from Heifer hatching eggs supplied after the Korean War.

**1980s** – Caring for the Earth became a central, intentional focus. Heifer introduced its global projects to "agroecology," sustainable farming that centers on food production

while protecting environmental resources. Participants began using methods such as terracing and zero-grazing pens. Other emphases included new animal husbandry techniques, boosting economies and markets at a community level, and seeking outside partnerships for funding.

**1986** – President Reagan's Commission on Volunteerism presented Heifer with the Volunteer Action Award.

**1990s** – Heifer began the "12 Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development," principles such as accountability, full participation, sharing, and caring to guide families and communities into self-reliance. It began a project to aid the Navajo Nation and its sheep farmers in improving commercial wool quality and diversification of herds.

**1990** – Heifer held the Women in Livestock Development

Conference. President Bush gave Heifer the Presidential End Hunger Award. The Heifer International Foundation was established.

**2000s** – Heifer hit the milestone of serving 50 million people around the world.

**2002** – A ceremony in China celebrated the 3,000,000th animal.

**2004** – Heifer International received the world's largest humanitarian award from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

**2008** – The East Africa Dairy Development project launched.

**2010s** – Heifer transitioned to large-scale projects serving more than 1,000 families, emphasizing access to capital, connection of small-scale farmers to markets where they could sell products for fair prices, and value chains in each country, with the goal of help-



ing families achieve a living income. Heifer aligned its goals with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

**2010** – Jo Luck, Heifer president, was co-laureate of the World Food Prize. Pierre Ferrari was named chief executive officer.

**Oct. 5, 2019** – Castañer, P.R., hosted a celebration of Heifer's 75th anniversary.

Sources: "The Heifer Project: The Puerto Rico Story" and other research by Peggy Reiff Miller; The Brethren Encyclopedia; "Heifer's History: 75 Years of Empowerment" at [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org); Patricia Roop Hollinger.



said Elizabeth Cruz, who spoke at the dedication of the historical marker. She is a nurse and secretary of the hospital board. As a child she remembers being sent by her grandmother to the hospital with empty bottles to be filled with fresh milk for her family. Even as a young girl she saw what the hospital was doing for people and decided to become a nurse.

Cruz and others emphasized the importance of Heifer for Castañer and Puerto Rico, and the need for younger

generations to be taught this history. She hopes the anniversary will encourage participants “to have at the bottom of your heart this special recognition, that our kids and grandkids remember.”

Said Peggy Reiff Miller, who attended as the leading Heifer historian: “Puerto Rico will always loom large in Heifer Project’s history and legacy.” 

*For more photos of the celebration go to [www.bluemelon.com/churchofthebrethren/puertoricohostsheifers75thanniversary](http://www.bluemelon.com/churchofthebrethren/puertoricohostsheifers75thanniversary).*

## Darlin’, do you really need them?

by Jan West Schrock

**I** was 10 years old. I ran to my father’s office with a pair of spankin’ new, shiny brown shoes, just purchased during our weekly trip to town. My father, who didn’t seem to mind being interrupted, looked at me, not my shoes, and said, “Janey, darlin’, do you really need them?”

At first it hurt because I wanted him to share my joy and the beauty of those new shoes. But, I rallied. (He taught me that also.) I explained that my feet had grown, my toes were “butt up against” the front of my shoes, and mother said it was time to get a new pair. She was good at keeping track of our needs in our simple home.

It was then that he looked at the shoes, affirmed the purchase, took my shoes in his big hands, and felt the new soft leather. Whew! Difficult lesson. Mutual understanding. We may have enjoyed a hard-earned moment. It was not easy, likely for both of us. I am certain it was difficult for him to ask the question.

The teaching from our Church of the Brethren heritage, like the Quakers, was to strive to live a simple life with few belongings. From our beginnings, we were steeped in serving others. We took seriously the mandate to “live simply so that others may simply live.” It was not a coincidence that the idea for Heifer International grew out of this context.

Growing up, I often heard him speak and share his values. He said, “If a person has more than three pairs of shoes in their closet, someone is doing without.” That was before the time of specialized shoes: running shoes, golf shoes, cross training shoes, summer and winter shoes, sandals, comfort sandals, ergonomically proportioned support shoes for high arches. Shoes for Arkansas, California, Maine. Gardening shoes. Whoa! What’s happened? What’s gone

wrong? What do I want? What do I need? Whose shoes am I wearing? To be honest, haven’t we had enough?

The voluntary simplicity movement is beckoning to us. Our culture has us choking on too many things and too little time to enjoy our life, our families, our children, and our grandchildren because we are running too fast and working too hard to accumulate. From infancy, we learn that gaining and gathering are marks of success. We tend to notice change and growth when we “add to.” We are convinced that our well-being is tied to gaining things. In reality, our well-being is denied because we become slaves to things.

We are seldom taught to “let go” and ask the difficult questions about what we really need. Many discover that they don’t miss what they let go of and give away. Downsizing is perhaps the most difficult task in these times. I know many who are asking the question, inching their way, finding joy in a more focused lifestyle, and making fewer daily choices.

In the last decade, Heifer has paved the way for an alternative to traditional Christmas giving. Congregations and individuals have discovered the joy of honoring a friend with a gift of a goat or a flock of geese sent to a needy family. With our giving, we have come to know the deep joy in sharing in order that others may live in dignity. Heifer has beamed this path for thousands of holiday shoppers.

Now it is time to examine our instinct for consuming things and where it has brought us. It is time to give our closets and shelves a critical look. It’s time to look in the mirror and to lead the conversations around our tables asking, “Darlin’, do we really need this?” 

*Jan West Schrock, senior advisor for Heifer International, is the daughter of founder Dan West. She was director of Brethren Volunteer Service 1987-1995.*



courtesy of Jay Wittmeyer

# Friendly and Brethren

## BUILDING BRIDGES WITH CHINA

by Jay Wittmeyer

**W**elcome to China. For the international traveler arriving into the capital, China is easy. Getting through the airport, onto local trains and subways, checking into hotels, ordering food, visiting sites, and just being around, China makes the international traveler feel welcome, even special. Historically, of course, that was not always the case.

China's friendly welcome is not a huge surprise—many countries warmly receive dollar-wielding tourists—but what is a surprise is the genuinely unique reception the Brethren received in Shanxi Province, west of Beijing, in the region of the church's mission activities off and on from 1908 to 1949.

“Welcome” is perhaps not quite the right word, but the fact that the local community remembers the work of the Brethren and goes to some considerable effort to maintain that legacy, even enshrine it, sets out an unexpected welcome mat.

That was the experience this summer for a young adult workcamp hosted by Yangquan Friendly Hospital. Brethren mission workers at the hospital, Eric Miller and Ruoxia Li,

led the workcamp. They work at the hospital's You'ai Care Center social service department. They pointed out that the hospital itself is named after the Brethren. The term “friendly” and “brethren” are interchangeable in Chinese. They showed us a stone on the grounds dedicated to the late Mary Jo Flory-Steury, whose parents were missionaries to China and who visited in 2010 for a centennial celebration. We poured a beer on the marker, which is the custom of respect for tombstones.

Staff of the hospital were delighted to have us visit and showed every effort to make our trip special. We were housed in Chinese homes with families. Staff put together an outdoor barbecue one night and the head of medicine did the cooking. They held a dumpling-making party and let us make handmade noodles to serve to patients. They then joined us in our work on the hospital grounds to get sweaty and covered in paint. The staff even gave each workcamper a special Chinese name and wrote a Bible verse in Chinese calligraphy on a large scroll to give to each participant.

Since Chinese does not use an alphabet, it does not readi-

THE FACT THAT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY REMEMBERS THE WORK OF THE BRETHREN AND GOES TO SOME CONSIDERABLE EFFORT TO MAINTAIN THAT LEGACY, EVEN ENSHRINE IT, SETS OUT AN UNEXPECTED WELCOME MAT.

ly adopt foreign words. Sounds are associated with characters that bear meaning, a logo-syllabic system. In China, we were told, there is a list of 100 Chinese last names, and each participant was given a suitable name from that list. My last name is Wittmeyer, so there were three options for names beginning with the “w” sound. I was given Wang meaning king. With my first name Jay, my full name became Wang Jian Qiao, the characters for king, construct, and bridge. Our hosts thought hard about that name and felt it fit me and my work. Our visit was about bridge building.

Of course we also visited the original hospital in downtown Ping Ting, which Church of the Brethren physician and mission worker Dr. Frank Crumpacker opened in 1910. Although the building has received numerous renovations and now specializes in traditional Chinese medicine, there is a marble bust of another Brethren medical mission worker, Dr. Darryl Parker, in the hallway. The staff were delighted to receive us and took photo after photo with us.

Parker is remembered in other ways. One day our group traveled into the mountainous Zuoquan County to visit a massive three-story museum of granite and marble dedicated to the Chinese Red Army’s fight against the imperial forces of Japan. The museum has thousands of artifacts and weapons, maps and photographs. Of all the displays, one photograph in particular jumped out for us, with its odd juxtaposition to the scene after scene of bayonet-wielding comrades. It is picture of two Brethren missionaries, Parker and Howard Sollenberger, with a Chinese friend. In a museum dedicated to Chinese nationalism, the early days of Mao Zedong, and a deep suspicion of anything foreign, especially Western, hangs this beautiful photograph of Brethren. How did this photo make the cut?

Once Parker and Sollenberger left China at the onset of World War II, they made their way to Puerto Rico as part of the beginnings of the Brethren work in Castañer, serving with the Civilian Public Service (CPS) Unit 43 along with another church member, George Mason. They returned to China after the war, Parker to do medical work and Sollenberger to expand the Heifer Project. Alongside the photo of Parker and Sollenberger is an exhibition of Sollenberger’s photographs. He would later become the



*Two early Brethren missionaries, Darryl Parker and Howard Sollenberger, with a Chinese friend, are the only westerners pictured in a museum in Zuoquan County.*

director of the Foreign Service Institute.

The county, formerly called Liao County, was the location of a large church that the Brethren built in the county seat in 1923. It stands to this day and is in the process of being turned into a national heritage site. The Brethren had a small church in the countryside, which General Zuoquan

used as his residence in 1938 after the American Brethren left the country. The county changed its name in honor of Zuoquan. We visited the Zuoquan residence, where it was odd for me to think of a Chinese communist general residing in a Brethren missionary home.

There are no Church of the Brethren congregations in China these days, but there is still a remnant of Christians who can trace their heritage to the Brethren. Our team visited the main church in Ping Ting started by Crumpacker in 1910, now a Chinese United Church. We disrupted a prayer meeting of some 10 people kneeling up front and praying. I was deeply moved to see these Chinese Christians praying and praising the Savior, knowing that the early Brethren mission workers had sacrificed so much to bring the light of the gospel to this area, and knowing how hard this group of Christians fought to maintain their faith through the upheavals of the revolution.

Many of the staff serving in the You’Ai Care Center are Christians. Our workcamp joined them in spending time with patients, serving meals, interacting with the mentally ill, singing for cancer-treatment patients, and visitations. Hospital staff joined us in our devotions and singing and prayer.

Most workcamps are measured by sweat, spilled paint, and cleaned flowerbeds. By that measure we did our fair share.

Workcamps often are more about the workcampers—our fellowship, our engagement, our learning, our need to serve in some useful manner—than they are about the people being served, perhaps with little interaction between the two.

This workcamp was profoundly different. We were received and welcomed, not as grunts to grind, but as respected and honored guests representing a people who modeled a different way of believing. We came as bridges to that past, to carry on that legacy, and to be a witness for Christ. 

Jay Wittmeyer is executive director of Global Mission and Service for the Church of the Brethren.



# Look what the Lord is doing

## THE CHURCH IN RWANDA

by Josiah Ludwick

**In case you haven't heard, the Church of the Brethren is alive and active** in a beautiful little East African country called Rwanda. For those who have only heard of this country through the horrific history of genocide 25 years ago, let me try to give you a glimpse of the amazing work the Lord is doing in a country that now has an eternal place in my heart.

I thank the office of Global Mission and Service for making it possible for me and my family to spend a little less than a year in Rwanda. We formed relationships with wonderful people, experienced God in a very different way, and enjoyed an incredible new culture along the way.

### Beginnings

The story of the Brethren in Rwanda starts several years ago when a Rwandan pastor from the Friends (Quaker) tradition attended Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, Ind., on the same campus as the Church of the Brethren's Bethany Theological Seminary. It was natural that Etienne Nsanzimana would rub shoulders with

some members of the Church of the Brethren here in the US. At the time he was sensing a particular burden for an indigenous people group of his home country, the Batwa, but unfortunately was being encouraged to use his efforts elsewhere.

The Brethren, however, were supportive of Nsanzimana's vision to reach this largely unreached group of people, while also planting churches in the western province of Rwanda. In four-plus years, four congregations have been planted in Rubavu District: Gisenyi, Mudende, Gasiza, and Humure. These faith communities are truly thriving with active pastors, deacons, choirs, worship teams, and children's ministries. In addition, they are educating and empowering



emerging leaders and providing food and clothing to people in local hospitals and prisons.

### Distinctives

Rwanda is a largely Christian nation, at roughly 97 percent of the population, so it's important to know what makes the Rwandan Brethren different. Something that sets them apart from many other churches is their

THESE FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE TRULY THRIVING. . . IN ADDITION, THEY ARE EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING EMERGING LEADERS AND PROVIDING FOOD AND CLOTHING TO PEOPLE IN LOCAL HOSPITALS AND PRISONS.

focus on not simply being a group that meets to worship on a Sunday, but being a part of each others' lives throughout the week. They have weekly prayer and fasting, meet in each other's homes, have active visitation ministries, worship and choir practices, and youth gatherings.

Another distinctive is that the Rwandan Brethren aren't simply inwardly focused. They have active ministries to serve the hungry, orphans, and widows, and visit the sick and imprisoned. Their philosophy is something we here in America may strive for, as they pursue not just those who



Joshiah and Christine Ludwick

are active in their congregations but also those who may one day join them, as well as the least, the last, and the lost.

Yet another distinctive is the focus on Brethren beliefs and practices. The presence of the prosperity gospel is evident in many African countries (and here in the US, if we are honest) but in Rwanda the Church of the Brethren congregations cling to the Brethren principles of simplicity, humility, and service. Where others would seek a pastoral position for the prestige and paycheck, their pastors truly embody servant leadership. They are not paid but instead are bi-vocational, with supporting jobs like farmer, auto mechanic, and carpenter. They serve using their respective gifts and are often the ones cleaning up and doing menial tasks alongside other attendees.

## Congregations

Each of the four congregations has its own culture.

Gisenyi will one day be the headquarters of the Church of the Brethren denomination in Rwanda. Pastored by Nsanzimana, this congregation is a "town church" with more professionals than the other congregations. It has three choirs and a worship team that would rival any in the United States.

Gasiza is the oldest congregation. Pastored by a carpenter, it is in a rural village surrounded by cows and potato fields. The congregation has an exuberant children's choir, and worship music is primarily provided by an electric bass. Over the years it has benefitted from the support of Chiques Church of the Brethren in Manheim, Pa.

Humure is the furthest church from any town and easily the poorest congregation. Pastor Hatageka Emmanuel is a young, aspiring leader who recently received his bachelor's degree in theology in Uganda. This congregation has seen significant growth since Emmanuel has been in place there. It was able to purchase a building through support from Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren in Southern Pennsylvania District.

Mudende is the first church that took on a special mission of reaching the indigenous Batwa or Twa people. The Twa typically are outcast in Rwandan society, but pastor Dusabimana Samson and Nsanzimana have made great strides toward integrating the Twa into the congregation. Rwanda's first ever Batwa choir, other mixed choirs, and a deacon body that is also mixed accentuate the strides this congregation has made toward inclusion.

Two anecdotes about the Mudende church's impact:

Batwa usually are educated only through primary school because their families can't afford school fees. Instead of going to school, young people will stay home and try to get money however they can. The group of young Batwa at the Mudende church were so well included that they decided to make education a priority. In a country where it is incredibly rare for a Batwa to attend secondary school, three young men from this congregation have graduated and are now enrolled in university. This likely will lead to generational change, as Batwa youngsters look up to these men as an example of what they may one day achieve.

The Twa village that has become a big part of the Mudende congregation has felt loved and has seen the church support and invest in their community. Some of these stories have been published in the newsletter of the Global Food Initiative, which has contributed funding for the church's work with the Twa. There was a true kingdom moment when this Twa village went to another village up the road and shared the gospel with them. They told the other village about the Brethren, these "peculiar people" who love them and include them. As a result, this new village of close to 50 people has started to attend the Humure congregation. This is not ministry to the Batwa, or ministry with them, but has become ministry through the Batwa.



Joshiah and Christine Ludwick



Josiah and Christine Ludwick

## Our year

So often Westerners have the wrong idea about mission, thinking that we are the ones who have the right ideas and know what to do. Instead, Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer instructed us to just go, live with the people, form relationships, and do our best to be Brethren in this new context. It was such a blessing to be sent to Rwanda without much of an assignment. Although it was initially difficult to comprehend that there wasn't a specific task to be accomplished, it ended up being the right idea. It gave us the freedom to just be, to really know the people, and to learn how we could be of assistance.

One of the big challenges we heard about early and often was the presence of intrusive government regulation in the country. Church buildings must meet certain specifications governing building materials, latrines, parking lots, and accessible properties, among others. Pastors must be trained at a theology school, and it is rumored that soon this will be upgraded to having a bachelor's degree. Some of these regulations are legitimate for safety, but others are quite unnecessary. Few people in villages drive cars and university education is very hard to come by. To this day, the Rwandan government continues to close hundreds of churches almost weekly, citing poor buildings and facilities as well as the lack of pastoral training as the main reasons.

## About Rwanda

Rwanda is a very small country, roughly the same square mileage as the state of Massachusetts.

Even though it is largely rural, and most people live in village conditions, Rwanda is in the top 25 nations in the world for population density.

Almost all of Rwanda—90 percent—speaks the language Kinyarwanda, one of the hardest languages to learn in the world. A big reason for this difficulty is that very few people outside of Rwanda speak it. It is hard to find a ranking of world languages that even lists Kinyarwanda.

Largely due to the genocide, Rwanda is a very young country with a median age of 19.

When we arrived in Rwanda, three of the four churches were at risk of being closed because they were not meeting government specifications for buildings and facilities. I just love our church's response to this need. Where many would come with a hand stretched out, asking for help, the Rwandan Brethren churches got together and raised money on their own. I thought their goal of \$2,000 was a pipe dream, but they showed up with all of their friends, gave sacrificially, and exceeded their goal by \$500. We were so moved by their sacrifice that we decided to share their story, asking churches in the US to support them with matching funds and special offerings. The result was truly humbling as many agreed to lend their support. With the \$25,000 raised, we were able to get two of the church buildings ready for inspection. We are hopeful that the headquarters site in Gisenyi will begin construction this coming year.



Patrick Nkurukiyimana

In addition to improving church buildings, we were able to help build the true church—the many believers with whom God has blessed the churches in Rwanda. With the book *Brethren Beliefs and Practices*, written by Galen Hackman for the Nigerian church and recently translated into Kinyarwanda, we taught leaders from each church about key Brethren beliefs and practices. We explored everything from the Church of the Brethren's Anabaptist and Pietist roots to our peace position, from “the priesthood of all believers” to our focus on service and simplicity. The church leaders then took copies of the book back to their congregations so that all will understand why we do what we do and why we believe what we believe. This culminated around Easter as we celebrated the first-ever love feast and the second and third Brethren baptisms in Rwanda—truly an amazing experience!

Our brothers and sisters in Rwanda need our prayers and support. Educating the next leaders, getting the headquarters in Gisenyi built, and gaining official government status as a recognized denomination will take much time, effort, and financial resources. It is my prayer that we continue to uphold these brothers and sisters both with prayer and our financial support. 

Josiah and Christine Ludwick worked in Rwanda, taking their young children Rachel and Asher with them, from mid-2018 to mid-2019. They have returned to Pennsylvania where they are members of Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren.

# Continuing the work



Walt Wiltzschek



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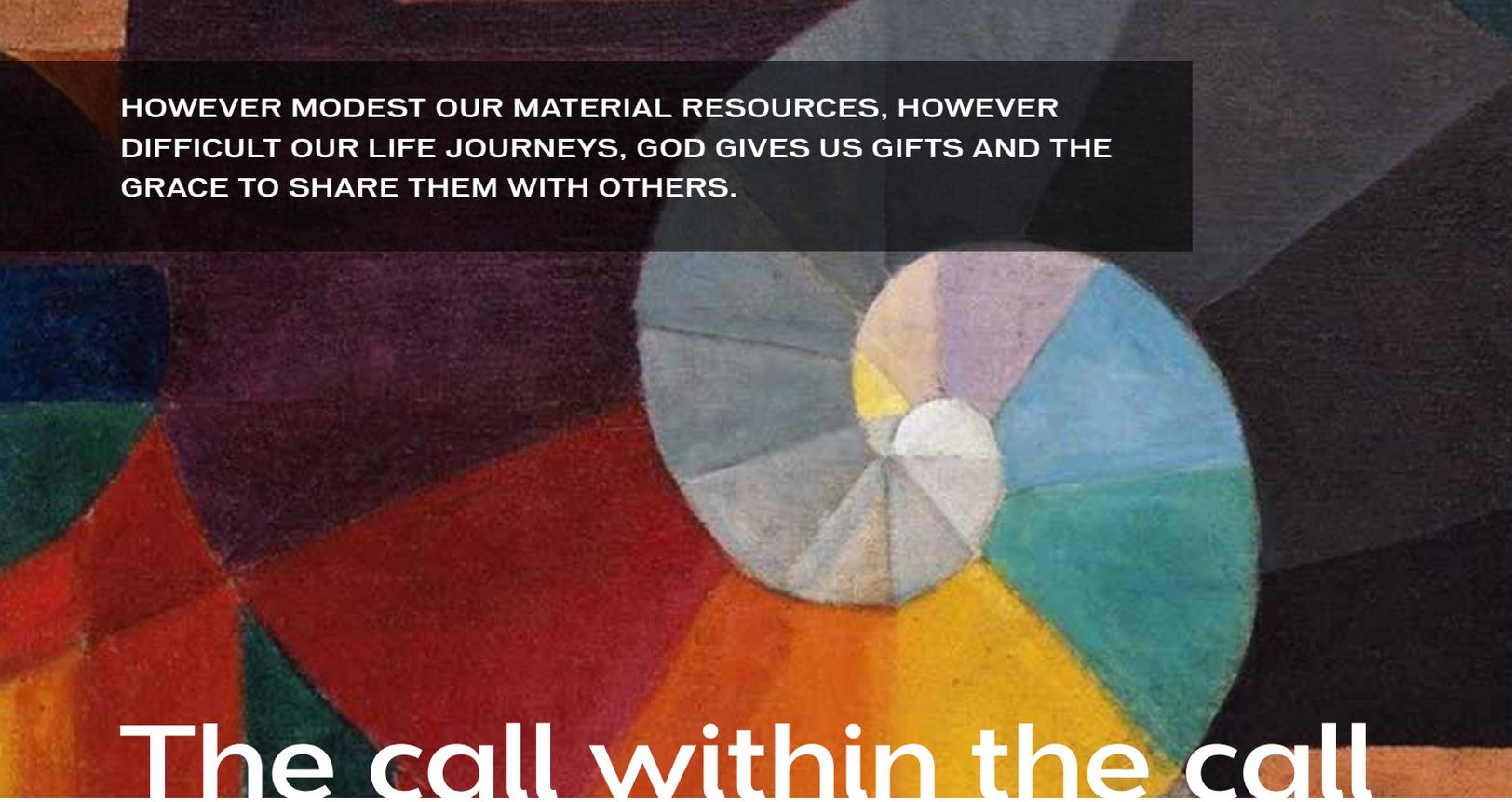
Glenn Riegel

Becky Ulfom Naugle

# *Simply. Together.*



Church of the Brethren



HOWEVER MODEST OUR MATERIAL RESOURCES, HOWEVER DIFFICULT OUR LIFE JOURNEYS, GOD GIVES US GIFTS AND THE GRACE TO SHARE THEM WITH OTHERS.

# The call within the call

by Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm

**T**hose of us who have been baptized as members of the body of Christ have responded to a call. It could have come from a friend or family member, a church community, a Bible study that convicts our hearts, an inner urge that compels us into the water. In whatever way we heard the call of God in our lives, baptism is central (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The call to baptism and Christian discipleship is closely related to other calls, both in the church and in our professional lives (1 Corinthians 12:4-13). Those around us may call forth specific gifts that they see within us—gifts such as music, prophetic witness, financial management, raising children, scientific inquiry, wood working, writing, computer programming, construction, praying, gardening. The gift may be serving as therapist, spiritual director, pastor, teacher, deacon, lawyer, Bible study leader, or another vocation that offers service to Christ, the church, and the world.

But these are not the only callings that we must listen and respond to. Indeed, there are deeper layers of discernment to

be explored if we are to be faithful and creative members of the body of Christ. Especially in times of crisis—when the church is undergoing radical changes and we ourselves are challenged by personal and socio-political struggles within and around us—we need to be aware of “the call within the call.”

That is, we need to understand as faithfully as possible the particular gifts with which we are blessed and the particular creative endeavors to which we are called. However modest our material resources, however difficult our life journeys, God gives us gifts and the grace to share them with others. God not only calls us to follow but provides the Holy Spirit to guide us into deeper understanding and new truths (John 16:12-15).

God gives each of us seeds of interest that call for our further development. God also gives us concerns and passions that call for our attention—first in our own lives, and then in the world around us. Danger arises when our interests and passions are unexamined—when we are not honest with who we are, what our difficulties are, what we do and do not know, and when we assert ourselves

beyond our ability.

To identify the call of God that runs beneath, through, and beyond our baptismal call and the professional callings we pursue, we may begin by recalling the ways God has spoken to us at the time of our baptism.

For me, baptism was a difficult step in my spiritual journey. At the age of 19, I rightly sensed that, in making a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, I would not know where God would lead or how my life would unfold. I stepped into the water because I recognized a God who understands and loves all the world. I recognized a God whose suffering embraces and redeems the suffering of others. I recognized a wise and loving God whose integrity insists on our compassionate response to a blessed and broken world (John 13).

I recognized this because the stories I heard as a child, the family I grew up with, and the circumstances of my childhood in Detroit (especially during the race riots of the 1960s) impressed on me the importance of three pursuits above all others: love, wisdom, and integrity.

Together these three constitute for me “the call within the call.” They are what God has asked me to develop in myself and to cultivate with others. They are what I listen *for* and *to*. A genuine sense of love is selfless giving for the good of another, relational empathy, and a compassionate response to others. Wisdom is careful listening for that of God among us, looking beneath superficial appearances, seeking knowledge as well as understanding, embracing paradox, and venturing more deeply into life’s struggles. Integrity is honesty, transparency, and vulnerability in leadership; the integration of words and deeds; truth-telling and truth-living.

These three—love, wisdom, integrity—are basic to my life in Christ and I recognize them as the call within the call of every ministry that God and the church have asked me to fulfill.

Just as powerfully, God has also reminded me to resist and redress two egregious sins that plague the church: arrogance and ignorance. Whether leaders or members, we do tremendous damage—even violence—to ourselves and the communities we serve when we do not seek greater knowledge and understanding but instead settle for the appearance of these, when we think we know what is best without consulting with others, when we talk our way into leadership positions before understanding what we are doing.

Arrogance and ignorance are dangers to the church’s growth, transformation, and vitality. They are the basis of abusive relationships and corruption. Arrogance and ignorance are ultimately founded on our fears and insecurities. When we lack the inner security of knowing that we are beloved, we become bullies and need the constant attention of others. We become bullies when we favor showmanship over substance, assumptions over understanding, popularity over servanthood, prestige over true wisdom, or when we assume that ours is a more faithful perspective than that of our neighbors.

We see this behavior in people who believe they are called to be pastors yet resist participating in the educational programs of the church. We see it in

populist leaders who cater to society’s fears and the adoration of crowds. We see it in people tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14) by the whims and pressures of an anxious culture and in members who do not recognize the gifts and wisdom of others, speak disparagingly of neighbors, and contribute little to the well-being of the church.

Thankfully, ours is a loving and wise God who seeks the well-being of creation. Ours is a God who calls us to be people of integrity—people whose

hearts, souls, minds, and strength are given to love God and our neighbors.

And thankfully, you, too, are given a deeper calling that moves beneath, through, and beyond all that you are and all that you do. It is this call within the call that opens the way for the newness of life promised in Romans 6:4—and that awaits our response. 

Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm is Brightbill professor of preaching and worship at Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Ind.



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# A TRIP SUMMARY

(WARNING: CONTAINS POLITICAL CONTENT)

by Becky Keister

**I** am a summarizer. A big picture person. I see the forest, not the trees.

So naturally, since coming back from an international trip of 10-plus days in the setting of my all-time favorite book (the Bible), I am trying to find one big takeaway.

This is surprisingly difficult; I can't tell you my single favorite part or place. I mean, how can you compare the small settlement where Jesus lived during his ministry *to* the most complete Roman ruins in the world *to* a stunning mountain fortress-palace *to* the Temple Mount *to* the ascent to Jerusalem *to* the carved city of Petra? It's like a 27-way tie for epic.

Coming back to the modern world (I feel like I just spent 10 days in the ancient world—the ancient world that has 50-seater buses with wifi), the strongest reaction I have is how incredibly small it all is. Israel is the size of New Jersey and it rarely took longer than an hour to go anywhere.

In the past tense, this land possessed and roamed by the Hebrews was in a tiny corner of the world, full of tiny deserts (Judean), tiny seas (Galilee, Dead Sea), little mountains (honestly, they are hills, Bible. *Hills.*), beautiful valleys (Jordan, Jezreel), and everything in between. In history, it was a no-man's land between great civilizations. It was the home of tribal kingdoms of little significance to greater world events (except the Phoenicians . . . modern alphabet, much?).

Yet God chose this area, this fly-over territory, this rest stop in trans-regional trade, to be the home of a tribe of people to whom he made himself intimately known. This tribe of people didn't really have aspirations of expansion

beyond the territory they felt God had given them. They should have been swallowed up and digested by any of the empires that ruled in the area (Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans). They rarely had the political power to influence others.

And then into this small group of people in this tiny place, God sent himself. He sent himself, not as a son of a king or a rich warlord, but as the son of a peasant. He was born into a no-name family in a no-name region in the remote corner of the largest empire the world had ever known. He grew to be a teacher. A wandering preacher.

He did not even conform to the values and standards of the small society around him: he elevated women, he advocated for the oppressed *and* the oppressors, he spoke grace and forgiveness for the hopeless sinner without judgment. His harshest words were for those in local power who enslaved society with a litmus test of rules while not caring for the condition of their own hearts. And he died before he made it to his mid-thirties.

Jesus worked entirely outside of the Roman power structure that seemed to be the sexiest (and fastest) way to change. His words, his actions, his selflessness and grace, his sacrifice were so profound that from this no-name place in this no-name region, he changed the trajectory of humankind.

He did not sell his soul for political power. He did not care about the emperor or the puppet king that the Romans used to keep control over the province. He didn't defend them. He didn't condemn them. He had much better things to do. In fact, in the days before his death, as he entered



Jerusalem and looked over the city, he merely wept at its coming destruction; he did not raise an army to stop it.

[Warning: I am about to step up on a jumbo-sized soapbox. You can avoid eye contact and just speed-walk to the next page if you are feeling especially conflict-avoidant today.]

I've been thinking for quite a while (even before these three years of political nonsense) about the appropriate level of concern that people who follow Jesus should have for the governments that rule over us. And I've come to something resembling a conclusion.

Christians, friends: I cannot sit by and watch us crave political power. I cannot sit and watch us think that somehow by "saving America" and its government from people who believe differently about Jesus that we are carrying out God's plan. More directly, I cannot sit here and watch us bend over backward to defend the cruel, harsh, and un-Christlike words of a president just because we fear that to actually disapprove or hold him accountable would give the "other side" political ammunition. I don't want to be allied with any man/woman/child who uses such tactics to advance political power, no matter how good the cause.

Friends, Christians: Please. Please stop placing your trust in flawed human political structures to fix what ails the world. Place your trust in God. Please stop justifying less than Christ-modeling actions by comparing our own methods to others' slightly badder tactics. We aren't called to settle for being "better than"; we are called to just sit in holiness as only God can provide, irrespective of how others behave.

Jesus is our standard. He is our goal. I see an uncomfortable number of good, wonderful Christ-followers lowering the standard so that their political goals are met. *No*. Jesus didn't concern himself with politics. Neither should we.

We *can* hope for an America that makes the world a better place; we *can* vote in a way that, for example, protects unborn babies, welcomes the refugee, defends the defenseless. But we should not narrow our spiritual goals to having the political power to make these things happen, especially if achieving these policies means endorsing attitudes that do not portray Christ's love to all.

Jesus transforms us, he changes us, he wants something so much better and more than the checklist of political goals. If you nostalgically long for the relative purity of the early church, as many of us do, remember that it did not benefit from governmental assistance; it was more often in government crosshairs. God chose to place his son in a location where he had no political power. Little privilege. No platform. And he used that position, a defenseless position that did not change through the first 300 years of Christian history, to *change the world*.

Christians, friends: Stop doing mental gymnastics to find a way to support clearly questionable behavior in hopes of some future political benefit. We are God's people. He is our king. No one else deserves our allegiance or imitation.

We all reserve the right to be frustrated by what we see in our country, no matter which section of the spectrum we color. I am the last person to ask anyone to stop caring about the political dynamics of our nation. I just ask us to always check our priorities.

We cannot serve two masters. The problem with using the kingdom of America to try to serve the kingdom of God is that we begin to think they are the same thing. We begin to think that God *needs* America to do his thing. Breaking news: he doesn't.

I hate how preachy all this sounds. If you want, you can chalk up my thoughts to being too young (yes, please), too detached, or too naive. But after what I've seen, I felt it was time to express some political commentary publicly. Love it or hate it, we can respect each other as creations of the Most High, fully and deeply loved, and as people who are trying to navigate life and its endless complexities.

... And that's what I learned on my trip. 🙏

Becky Keister, a member of Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren in Mifflinburg, Pa., is a high school social studies teacher at an international school in Penang, Malaysia. This article was first posted last March on her blog at [beckysthoughts-blog.wordpress.com](http://beckysthoughts-blog.wordpress.com).

LOVE IT OR HATE IT, WE CAN RESPECT EACH OTHER AS CREATIONS OF THE MOST HIGH, FULLY AND DEEPLY LOVED, AND AS PEOPLE WHO ARE TRYING TO NAVIGATE LIFE AND ITS ENDLESS COMPLEXITIES.

# We're all children of God?

by Tim Harvey

**T**he misquotes and mistranslations of the Bible we've studied in this year's "Say what?" series have led us in some interesting and unexpected directions. We've considered ancient fables, revised hymn lyrics, and Brethren history alongside scripture. I would be surprised, though, if anyone has gotten upset by these discussions.

This article could change that.

The phrase "children of God" is often used as a general description of all people. I typically hear it in statements like, "We should help them. After all, we're all children of God." But is this correct? Is everyone a child of God?

The biblical answer here is simple: no. Not everyone is a "child of God" as the Bible uses the term. The phrase "children (or sons) of God" is part of a large and rich group of New Testament terms that describe people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. It is synonymous with some other familiar terms, like saying someone is "saved" or "redeemed."

This answer, though, can be difficult to hear. I suspect it's because saying someone is not a child of God feels like we are denying their fundamental worth. The issue, however, simply turns out to be a case where modern usage is different from biblical usage. What did New Testament authors intend with the phrase "children of God"?

## Becoming children of God

Imagine what it might have been like to have the privilege of writing one of the Gospels or epistles in the New

Testament. What language would you use to describe what you had experienced?

Both John and Paul liked the term "children/sons of God." It is a phrase that describes our faith not by what we do but by what we have become. Just as children share both a nature, relationship, and certain rights that come from being born to human parents, John and Paul want people to understand that becoming a child of God means we receive a nature, relationship, and an inheritance from God. That inheritance is eternal life and all its benefits—a life that begins now and continues for eternity.

This phrase is one that would have been familiar to those who heard it, because other religious traditions of that day understood faith in familial terms as well. People who grew up in Greco-Roman culture would have known Zeus as "father" of all persons. Others might have known of religious groups that designated certain special people as "children of God." Those who came to Christianity from the Jewish tradition were told that they were no longer slaves (to sin and the law) but now had the privileges of children through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine how this language would be received by a person who had no biological family to count on. Jesus told his disciples that faith in him might create divisions in their family. For such people, finding sisters and brothers who were also children of God would be a significant gain.

## Putting our faith into words

"Children of God" is not the only phrase used to describe

NO EAR MAY HEAR HIS COMING, BUT IN THIS WORLD OF SIN,  
WHERE MEEK SOULS WILL RECEIVE HIM STILL THE DEAR CHRIST ENTERS IN.

Everything this hymn mentions losing were things the early Brethren actually lost. These personal experiences of suffering for Jesus continue to shape our thinking to this day. Brethren are interested in a faith that has practical expression in our lives and an impact on the suffering of others. We've long understood that our walk should match our talk.

### Reclaiming "children of God"

So what will we do with the phrase "children of God"? The Advent season provides an excellent opportunity to ponder this. If your congregation is like mine, there will be extra opportunities to express our faith by doing something for others: helping a family in need, Christmas caroling to shut-ins, contributing to the Church of the Brethren Advent Offering. These are very legitimate, very Brethren ways of practicing our faith.

But might we also ponder how we can claim the metaphor "child of God" in our own lives? A different hymn might help us here. Maybe sometime this month you'll sing the hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" with your congregation. If you do, pay special attention to verse 3:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of the  
heav'ns.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him still the dear  
Christ enters in.

(*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 191)

Notice that this hymn doesn't give us anything to do. All of the action is on God's side of the relationship. God has imparted the blessings of the heavens to you and me; the babe in the manger whom we worship has entered our hearts through faith. This is a gift: you are a child of God. You didn't earn it; you can't do anything but receive it. How does it feel?

Think about that this Christmas season and rejoice that you are a child of God. 

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

### For further reading

*Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Vol. 2*, by James McClendon (Abingdon Press). McClendon's work is a deep look at core theological doctrines from an Anabaptist perspective.

new life in Christ. The New Testament authors found a wide range of language to describe the spiritual transformation that was happening all around them. As with the phrase "children of God," they borrowed words people already understood, and applied them to life in Christ.

In his book *Doctrine*, theologian James McClendon gives an excellent overview of how salvation language emerged. He notes that writers borrowed words from Jewish law and religious tradition (justify, sanctify), medicine (heal), rescue (save), familial relationships (adopt, wed, children of God, friend), and various life processes and activities (born, reborn, follow, take up your cross).

If the phrase "children of God" sounds a bit uncomfortable, it might be because Brethren have tended to prefer words like "following Jesus" and "carrying our cross" to describe our discipleship. Being a faith tradition that experienced persecution in its early years, Brethren have long understood that following Jesus could mean walking away from both family and community in some very measurable, very costly ways. Alexander Mack talked about this in his hymn "Count Well the Cost":

"Count well the cost," Christ Jesus says, "when  
you lay the foundation."

Are you resolved, though all seem lost, to risk  
your reputation,  
your self, your wealth, for Christ the Lord  
as you now give your solemn word?

(*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, 437)

# The God Who Sees

**I**f you begin reading this book, as I did, with a simple curiosity about what the Bible has to say on the subject of immigration, you will not get what you expected. Instead, you will be welcomed into the life of a woman who tells you the story of her journey of faith, a journey inextricably linked to her family's experience as immigrants from Guatemala to the United States.

As the subtitle to the book suggests, Karen Gonzalez includes holy scripture as an essential ingredient to her "journey to belong." In each chapter featuring a Bible character, she begins by summarizing the scripture account.



KEN GIBBLE

In chapter one, "Naomi and Ruth: A Blessed Alliance," she reminds us that both Naomi and Ruth were migrants. Naomi moved to Moab with her husband and their two sons to escape the effects of famine in their homeland. Much later, she returned to Judah, bringing with her Ruth, her daughter-in-law, a Moabite immigrant. Their story has a happy ending, primarily, as Gonzalez points

out, because Ruth's immigrant experience was far different from what immigrants to the US encounter today. She explains some of the impediments that immigrants must face whether they are seeking asylum or attempting to come to this country for economic reasons.

Subsequent chapters draw on the stories of Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Joseph, and the Syro-Phoenician woman who, though not an immigrant, is a foreigner who comes to Jesus and asks for healing for her daughter. The final chapter, "The Holy Family: Our Refugee Savior and a Love with No Limits," draws on Matthew's account of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus and their sojourn in Egypt.

Interspersed with the Bible character chapters are compelling stories of the author's personal experience that draw on the themes of baptism, communion, confirmation, anointing, and reconciliation.

In her retelling of the difficulties faced by the characters in the Bible, the author gives us her take on how God was at work in their stories. Along the way, they deal with loss, alienation, and the struggle to find a resolution to their loneliness, the reality of being treated as "the other." In telling her own story, Gonzalez gives us a glimpse into the

**IN TELLING HER OWN STORY, GONZALEZ GIVES US A GLIMPSE INTO THE CHALLENGES FACED TODAY BY PEOPLE WHO MOVE OR ATTEMPT TO MOVE TO A DIFFERENT COUNTRY.**

challenges faced today by people who move or attempt to move to a different country.

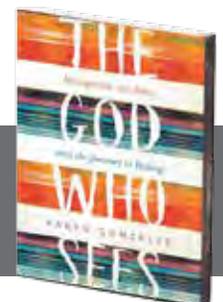
*The God Who Sees* addresses an issue that has become increasingly relevant and politically divisive in our country. I was struck by how little I know about the obstacles that are encountered by people coming to this country. My ignorance is shared by many in our congregations. Gonzalez's book provides an excellent resource for a youth or adult Sunday school class. It includes 13 pages of discussion questions suitable for use by individual readers or leaders of a church discussion group.

Also included is a section of "Ideas for Reflection and Action." Among the questions she asks: "Where did you learn your views on immigration?" and "Do you have any relationships with immigrants?"

Rarely has a book addressed primarily to Christians been more timely than this one. The words from Leviticus 19:33-34 appear as a commandment regarding "strangers" or, in some English translations, "foreigners." When I encountered these verses in Gonzalez's book, I was surprised to see she used the word "immigrants." But then I realized how appropriate that word choice was. The people of God are commanded: "Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself. . . ."

*The God Who Sees* can help us take that commandment to heart. 

Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, lives in Camp Hill, Pa.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong.* **Author:** Karen Gonzalez, **Publisher:** Herald Press, 2019. Available from Brethren Press.

## Mission and Ministry Board approves 2020 budget

**T**he 2020 budget for denominational ministries was the main item at fall meetings of the Mission and Ministry Board on Oct. 17-21 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. Meetings were led by chair Patrick Starkey with chair-elect Carl Fike and general secretary David Steele.

The board approved a total 2020 budget for all denominational ministries of \$8,527,880 income and \$8,584,200 expense, resulting in an anticipated net expense of \$56,320. The decision included budgets for the six major ministry areas of the Church of the Brethren: Core Ministries, Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Conference Office, Global Food Initiative, and Material Resources.

The Core Ministries budget of \$4,969,000 income and expense represents a cut of almost \$180,000 compared to 2019 budgeted expenses. Core Ministries include the General Secretary's office, Global Mission and Service, Ministry Office, Discipleship Ministries, Brethren Volunteer Service, workcamps, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, communications, Brethren Historical Library and Archives, and finance, among others. Sources of income include giving from congregations and individuals.

A years-long downward trend in giving from congregations is expected to continue. Mission Advancement staff shared about their work to engage more closely and frequently with donors.

There was good news about the denomination's investments and asset balance in financial reporting for 2019. Net assets as of Sept. 30 were at their highest level in five years, at more than \$38 million, having grown by about \$5 million since 2015. These assets include invested funds with and without donor restrictions, real property, and cash.

### In other business

The board approved a revision of the funding formula for grants from the Brethren Faith in Action Fund, routine updates to financial policies, and 2024 meeting dates. Also affirmed was a staff decision to remake the National Youth Conference Fund into a Youth and Young Adult Conference Fund in order to help finance a wider variety of events.

John Hoffman was named an at-large board member beginning in 2020. Currently he is filling a one-year uncompleted term on the board.

The board received a presentation from "Plains to the Pacific," a small think tank-style group that was initiated by former General Board staff. Plains to the Pacific is closing out its work.

Time was spent on a question raised during compelling vision conversations: what is the next "big idea" for the Church of the Brethren? Table groups brainstormed responses, contributing to the work of formulating a new strategic plan for the board. Leadership will assess the relationship of a strategic plan with the compelling vision statement expected to come to Annual Conference for approval in 2020.



Cheryl Bunnings-Carford

## Annual Conference 2020 logo is released

### The logo for the 2020

**Conference** has been released, illustrating the theme "God's Adventurous Future." The logo is by calligrapher Timothy Botts, who more than 20 years ago created a design for the Church of the Brethren tagline "Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together."

"Our future is not uneventful; it is marked by rigorous peaks, rushing

currents, and deep valleys," said Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday. "But it's wise to be expectant, even hope-full, for God moves among us, calling us beyond our bewilderment and discord."

Munday is writing a quarterly pastoral letter on the theme titled "Trail Thoughts: Trekking Toward God's Adventurous Future," available at [www.brethren.org/ac/2020/moderator](http://www.brethren.org/ac/2020/moderator).



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## Compelling vision conversations

### A report on data from the compelling vision

conversations at Annual Conference 2019 is available at [www.brethren.org/compellingvision](http://www.brethren.org/compellingvision).

“We want to express our gratitude to all who participated in the compelling vision conversations at Annual Conference for your prayerful and thoughtful engagement,” said Rhonda Pittman Gingrich. “The conversations were deep and rich. What a sacred honor and blessing it has been to read through the data generated by those conversations and in doing so to be given a glimpse into the hearts, minds, and souls of our brothers and sisters across the denomination. While differences remain, it is clear we all share an abiding love for Jesus Christ and the church and a genuine desire to live as faithful and passionate disciples in a turbulent world.”

Pittman Gingrich helped lead the compelling vision conversations at the 2019 Conference and is part of the ongoing Compelling Vision Team that is expected to bring a recommendation to the 2020 Conference.

## Nursing students receive scholarship

**Five nursing students have received** the Church of the Brethren Nursing Scholarship for 2019. Made possible by the Health Education and Research Endowment, the scholarship is available to members of the Church of the Brethren enrolled in LPN, RN, or nursing graduate programs. Scholarships of up to \$2,000 for RN and graduate nurse candidates, and up to \$1,000 for LPN candidates are awarded.

Recipients are **Peter Barlow** of Montezuma Church of the Brethren in Dayton, Va.; **Lauren Becker** of Chiques Church of the Brethren in Manheim, Pa.; **Rebecca Bender** of Heidelberg Church of the Brethren in Myerstown, Pa.; **Krista Panone** of Nokesville (Va.) Church of the Brethren; and **Amanda Wampler** of Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

See [www.brethren.org/congregationallife/nursingscholarships.html](http://www.brethren.org/congregationallife/nursingscholarships.html).



## Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 324

*Front row, from left:* **Anjelica “Jeli” Mora** of Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren is serving with Alderson (W.Va.) Hospitality House; **Amanda Orndorff**, Sugar Grove Church of the Brethren in Wardensville, W.Va., is at Quaker Cottage, Belfast, N. Ireland; **Emily Bowdle**, Denton (Md.) Church of the Brethren, is at Camp Myrtlewood, Myrtle Point, Ore.

*Middle row:* **Nolan McBride**, Union Center Church of the Brethren, Nappanee, Ind., is with the Church of the Brethren Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Elgin, Ill.; **Antonia “Toni” Egner**, Frankfurt, Germany, is with Sisters of the Road, Portland, Ore.; **Liana Smith**, Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, is with the Church of the Brethren Workcamp Ministry, Elgin, Ill.; **Jana Christ**, Bottrop, Germany, is at Gould Farm, Monterey, Mass.; **Catharina “Cathi” Iwan**, Kelkheim, Germany, is at Abode, Fremont, Calif.; **Kara Miller**, Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, is with the Workcamp Ministry.

*Back row:* **Maja von Werder**, Ahrensburg, Germany, is at Abode; **Hannah Nyce**, Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, is at L’Arche Kilkenny Community, Callan, County Kilkenny, Republic of Ireland; **Colin Keiper**, Indian Creek Church of the Brethren, Harleysville, Pa., is at IncredABLE, Richhill, N. Ireland; **Jasmin Sprengel**, Hamburg, Germany, is with Human Solutions, Portland, Ore.

## Youth Peace Travel Team program ends

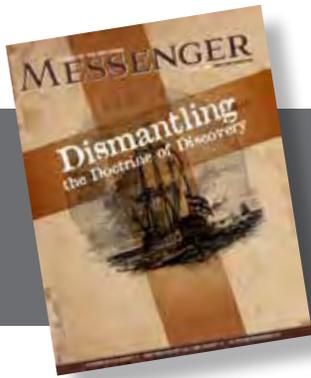
**The end of the Youth Peace Travel Team** program has been announced by the cooperating sponsors: the Church of the Brethren Youth and Young Adult Ministry and Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, On Earth Peace, Bethany Seminary, and the Outdoor Ministries Association.

“This way of doing peace education seems to be becoming less effective,” the statement said, in part. “One of the ways

the denomination has expressed its commitment to peace education for youth and young adults over the last 30 years has been through the Youth Peace Travel Team. Between 1991 and 2016, a team of three or four young adults has been fielded every summer. Yet for the last three years, the number of program applicants has dwindled. For two of those years, one young adult took on the work of peace education as the Youth Peace Advocate.

The other year, there was neither a team nor an individual to fill the position.”

The sponsors will “seek more effective ways to encourage peace education” and are “committed to the Church of the Brethren’s call to build peace and form disciples of Jesus as peacemakers.” They encouraged young adults interested in peace work to apply for internships through Ministry Summer Service and On Earth Peace.



THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE OCTOBER FOCUS ON “DISMANTLING THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY.” KNOWING THIS HISTORY IS CRITICAL TO A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT EVENTS.

### Critical history

Thank you to all who contributed to the October focus on “Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery.” Knowing this history is critical to a deeper understanding of current events in the US, as well as in other parts of the world.

With an awareness of our Brethren ancestors’ complicity in taking land from native peoples, I think it would be appropriate to give at least part, if not

all, of the income from the sale of property adjacent to the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., to the descendants of whichever peoples originally inhabited the land in that vicinity.

**Rachel Gross**  
North Manchester, Ind.

### The real question

Dear Brethren, I’m 95 years old and this is my first submission to “Letters,”

and very likely my only one.

Are the words of John 3:16 so very familiar we miss their significance? Verse 17 should be as familiar: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”

How big is “the world”? There are no exclusions; all are loved by this awesome God we worship. Whosoever will believe, have faith, and trust in the Son will be blessed with life, both now



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# Speak peace



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and beyond this earthly space. The purpose of the Son's coming was not to condemn but to bring into relationship with him those who will permit him to do so.

There have been times when my judgment or condemnation of others has hindered the work of the Holy Spirit. It took me awhile to discover that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings conviction and conversion. My calling is to care about, respect, listen to, and walk with the other so that we know Christ more deeply, his forgiveness, and his renewing salvation.

Ours is a time of diversity when we're divided into tribes. There are people in our society who are angry, apathetic, confused, or distracted. Many are hurting, lost, shut out, searching. Some turn to violence. Many are plagued by materialism, interested only in self. Others feel sophisticated and above the rest.

Is this the time for the church to be consumed with who is "in" and who is "out"? Isn't this the real question for today's church: What is it that keeps us from being a fellowship where we and others experience that awesome power of God that truly renews, transforms, and fulfills our lives? We must see life through his purpose, and see people and the earth through his eyes, with a winsomeness about us that honors Christ and that the Holy Spirit may bless.

**J. Richard Gottshall**  
 Roanoke, Va.

### Interesting reading

The July/August issue was very interesting reading. Celebrating 75 years of Heifer Project brought back memories and I am excited about encouraging the people of my congregation to read all about it—the older ones for memories and the younger ones to learn the history of times past.

Having been a member of Union Bridge Church of the Brethren and friends with Roger and Olive Roop for many years, I remember the heifers they took care of on their farm until time for shipping. They played a major role in that vision.

**Mary Louise Dotterer**  
 Union Bridge, Md.

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## Finding common ground

I can find common ground with the author of "Finding Common Ground on Climate." I value the earth and want to take care of it. I want to use the minimum amount of its resources. Instead of buying new, I buy used when possible. I repair the old car instead of buying a new one. I use wood (a renewable fuel) to heat our house. On numerous occasions our power company told me that I was the lowest user of electricity of 100 houses in my area.

Of the five listed actions, it seemed

hypocritical to put "Reduce your own negative impact" last. In fact, the whole list seems to be reversed. When a person has his/her own act together, then the community and congregation will be educated. Actions speak louder than words.

Trusting government and organizations to solve earth's problems is a poor substitute for trusting God. The Lord created the earth (Psalm 121:2, Psalm 24:1) and cares about his property. The Lord will destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18).

Christians are the seasoning and

preservative of the earth. Individually, we are God's stewards of his earth. Jesus said of his disciples that we are the salt of the earth. He continued by saying that salt which is not salty is no good and should be cast out.

"The heavens shall pass away . . . the earth also. . . Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Peter 3:10-11). Will you be saved?

**Ben Haldeman**

Greencastle, Pa.

## TURNINGPOINTS

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

### Centenarians

**Prendergast**, Alice Jean, 103, Huntingdon, Pa., Oct. 13

### New members

**Bethany**, Farmington, Del.: Dana Lewis, Gary Lewis, Joseph Lewis, Kimberly Lewis, Nicholas Lewis

**Bremen**, Ind.: Ashley Griswold

**Brownsville**, Knoxville, Md.: Aly Snodderly, Robert Snodderly, Tanya Snodderly

**Fairview**, Cordova, Md.: Butch Butler, Tim Cannon, Phil Dulin, Sandra Evans, Michael Harman, Julian V. Hutchison, Lane M. Hutchison, Julie Jenkins, TJ Jenkins, Margaret Kerslake, Richard

Kerslake, Lindsay Lister, Finn McGuckin, Kandence McGuckin, Joshua McNeal, Bodey A. Richardson, Dottie Rizo, Donna A. Stevens

**Garbers**, Harrisonburg, Va.: Madison Koontz, Melody Metzinger

**Garden City**, Kan.: Joy Lingenfelter, Bryce Orlich, Juan Ramirez

**Heidelberg**, Myerstown, Pa.: Heidi Brubaker, Kerry Brubaker, Zachery Burkholder, Danielle Martin

**Keyser**, W.Va.: Gabriel Pezzanite

**Middle Creek**, Lititz, Pa.: Michael Lasky, David Minnich, Karen Minnich, Darel Seibert, Jennifer Seibert, John Seibert, Katelyn Seibert, Mark Seibert, Matthew Seibert, Megan Wagner

**Pottstown**, Pa.: Sandy Cooper, Mika Geary

**Somerset**, Pa.: Doris Lindeman

**South Waterloo**, Waterloo, Iowa: Caleb Kerkove, Elle Mills, Zach Mills

**Williamson Road**, Roanoke, Va.: Eunice May, Janice May

### Wedding anniversaries

**Brown**, Jerry and Donna, New Oxford, Pa., 50

**Heck**, Elvin and Linda, Lititz, Pa., 50

**Payne**, Maurice and Betty, Knoxville, Md., 68

**Pippenger**, Edward and Marietta, Nappanee, Ind., 55

**Rehn**, Frank and Ila Jane, Johnstown, Pa., 69

**Royer**, Larry and Patricia, Boyertown, Pa., 55

**Sine**, Donald and Thelma, Maurertown, Va., 72

**Smith**, Roy and Kathleen, Roanoke, Va., 50

**Wenger**, J. Calvin and Shirley, Manheim, Pa., 65

**Wilkerson**, Lawrence and Audrey, Roanoke, Va., 66

**Yingling**, Wayne and Nancy, Spring Grove, Pa., 50

### Deaths

**Becker**, Raymond, 99, Troy, Ohio, Sept. 22

**Berwager**, John Clinton, 85, East Berlin, Pa., Aug. 31

**Bowe**, George Forrest (Frosty), 91, Roanoke, Va., June 11

**Chapman**, James Raleigh, 82, Inwood, W.Va., Sept. 8

**Clay**, Mary Jean McNeill, 90, Keyser, W.Va., Aug. 14

**Cosner**, John Newton, 77, Modesto, Calif., Sept. 27

**Davis**, Wilbur A. (Bill), Jr., 91, Cedar Falls, Iowa, Sept. 21

**Deal**, Lawrence E., 79, La Verne, Calif., Sept. 12

**Edwards**, Mary Margaret Bowman, 98, Union Bridge, Md., Oct. 13

**Gift**, Ruth V. Fike, 96, Keyser, W.Va., Sept. 25

**Hostetter**, Dorothy Smith, 90, Hanover, Pa., Sept. 25

**Hutchison**, Regenia Lillian Blizzard, 79, Cordova, Md., July 26

**Lewis**, Nancy Caroline (EE) Harshman, 88, Myersville, Md., Sept. 25

**Marburger**, George Ludwig, 85, Bremen, Ind., Aug. 8

**Oberleas**, Chester (Gene), 91, Bremen, Ind., Aug. 10

**Patrick**, Rose Mary, 85, Lafayette, Ind., Oct. 18

**Quackenbos**, Arthur H., 85, Pottstown, Pa., Feb. 5

**Reid**, Virgil Floyd, 85, Fort Defiance, Va., Sept. 13

**Robertston**, Lauranna Lee Elick, 75, Fishersville, Va., Oct. 3

**Smith**, Linda K. Mort, 68,

Somerset, Pa., Sept. 27

**Theen**, Rolf H. W., 81, Lafayette, Ind., Oct. 16

**Wagstaff**, Donald E., 85, Piqua, Ohio, Sept. 18

**Wampler**, Shirley Anne, 83, Richmond, Va., Sept. 15

**Weaver**, James B., 79, Saint Charles, Ill., Oct. 25.

**Welborn**, Jeffery Lynn, 70, Bremen, Ind., June 22

**Wilson**, Norma Ferrebee, 96, Keyser, W.Va., Sept. 13

**Wolfe**, Gary D., 78, Harrisburg, Pa., Sept. 14

### Licensed

**Harris**, B. Scott, Shen. Dist. (Greenmount, Rockingham, Va.), Sept. 15

**Reimold**, Josiah, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.), Sept. 15

### Placements

**Harris**, B. Scott, pastor, Greenmount, Rockingham, Va., Sept. 15

**Shelly**, Christopher, from youth director to pastor, Lampeter, Pa., Oct. 1

**Vandermark**, James, pastor, Bethany, New Paris, Ind., Oct. 1

**Zeck**, Rebecca, from interim pastor to pastor, Bedford, Pa., Sept. 30

Listed here are articles, editorials, columns, and opinion letters that have appeared in MESSENGER in 2019. Numbers following listings indicate month and page, with 1/2 and 7/8 representing the combined January/February and July/August issues.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

A tale of two tables ..... 9-9  
Annual Conference 2020 logo is released ..... 12-25  
Anticipating Annual Conference ..... 3-22  
Compelling vision conversations: A report on data ..... 12-26  
Compelling Vision Process Team issues report ..... 10-26  
Compelling vision: We have put our hearts on the table ..... 9-6  
Conference focuses on compelling vision conversations ..... 9-5  
Detrick and Sollenberger top ballot for moderator ..... 4-28  
Dikaiois pilgrimage will visit Cherokee ..... 4-28  
Hope for the future (compelling vision) ..... 1/2-20  
It can be the church at its best: Interview with Chris Douglas ..... 5-14  
Move in our midst: Love feast at Annual Conference ..... 9-12  
Standing Committee revises appeals process ..... 9-27  
The Exchange ..... 9-4  
Unique gifts for Conference: Interview with Donita Keister ..... 5-17

## ARTS AND MUSIC

An earthly temple ..... 4-6  
Connecting through song: Faithful Friends Chorus ..... 5-24  
The uncommon music man: Ken Medema ..... 7/8-18

## AUTHORS

**Bach, Jeff**  
What is Pietism? ..... 6-14  
**Bache, Alexander, Elizabeth Bay, and Kimberly Koczan-Flory**  
An earthly temple ..... 4-6  
**Bair, Melanie**  
Teaching as ministry: Kids make everything better ..... 11-12  
**Banaszak, David**  
Why I'll always be Brethren ... 1/2-32  
**Bateman, Victoria**  
A remarkable collaboration for peace ..... 11-18  
They should call it C-P-Tea ..... 6-20  
**Bay, Elizabeth, Alexander Bache, and Kimberly Koczan-Flory**  
An earthly temple ..... 4-6  
**Bishop, Eric**  
Choosing to be black and Brethren ..... 5-10  
**Boardman, Kim**  
Teaching as ministry: I am in ministry ..... 11-10  
**Boshart, Jeff**  
How holy ground: Agriculture and climate change ..... 9-20  
**Brockway, Joshua**  
*How the Body of Christ Talks* ... 9-26  
**Brumbaugh-Cayford, Cheryl**  
Conference focuses on vision ..... 9-5  
Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria thrives and grows ..... 1/2-5  
NOAC 2019: More than a senior moment ..... 11-6  
No time for denial ..... 9-32  
Not the first conversations in the church ..... 9-10  
Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer ..... 12-6  
The story of ND9 ..... 9-9  
Together in DC ..... 10-15  
**Bucher, Christina**  
What is the best translation of the Bible? ..... 7/8-26  
**Carothers, Shawn**  
Teaching as ministry: A passing prayer ..... 11-11  
**Cassell, Dana**  
Part-time pastor, full-time church ..... 10-16  
**Clary, Erika**  
Dear younger me ..... 4-26  
**Clem, Richard E.**  
The story of Nancy Campbell ... 9-22  
**Emmons, Jonathan**  
A vision that propels: Radical Pietism ..... 6-16

**Finet, Angela**  
Moving toward gratitude ..... 11-32  
**Fischer Bachman, Jan**  
Connecting through song: Faithful Friends Chorus ..... 5-24  
Crossing the bridge: BVS in Mostar ..... 3-6  
Teaching as ministry: The park is her classroom ..... 11-14  
The fall ..... 3-32  
**Flory, Kristin**  
Crossing the bridge: BVS in Mostar ..... 3-6  
**Flowers, Claire**  
You deserve love ..... 6-11  
**Futrell, Jan**  
Why do they come? ..... 6-24  
**Gibble, Ken**  
*The Sun Does Shine* ..... 6-12  
*The God Who Sees* ..... 12-24  
The woman who anointed Jesus' feet ..... 11-23  
**Gingerich, Ken, with Monica McFadden**  
Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery ..... 10-5  
**Gish, Peggy Faw**  
It starts with love ..... 4-18  
**Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley**  
Where is Christianity headed? ..... 3-14  
**Gross, Bob**  
I want people to understand: SueZann Bosler ..... 6-9  
**Gross, Rachel**  
Death Row Support Project ..... 6-7  
**Harvey, Tim**  
A church where you will be comfortable ..... 1/2-24  
Do numbers matter? ..... 10-22  
Don't pray for patience? ..... 11-20  
God helps those who help themselves? ..... 4-24  
God won't give you more than you can handle? ..... 6-22  
It's not my place to judge? ..... 3-24  
Money is the root of evil? ..... 9-24  
We once were lost ..... 5-22  
We're all children of God? ..... 12-22  
Where two or three are gathered ..... 7/8-24  
**Hawk, Kris**  
Comfort or Christ ..... 6-32  
**Hileman, Leah J.**  
Something hopeful is happening ..... 10-24  
**Hollenberg-Duffey, Audrey**  
When all is not calm and bright ..... 12-32  
**Hoover, Rufus M., with Cheryl L. Weber**  
Seven hundred horses and a ship to Greece ..... 7/8-10  
**Hosler, Jennifer**  
I will build it with love ..... 1/2-13  
**Keister, Becky**  
Trip summary (Israel Palestine) ..... 12-20  
**Keister, Donita**  
Anticipating Annual Conference ..... 3-22  
**Kettering, Gimbiya**  
As the deer pants for the water ..... 5-32  
**Koczan-Flory, Kimberly, Elizabeth Bay, and Alexander Bache**  
An earthly temple ..... 4-6  
**Kostlevy, Bill**  
How Marilyn Monroe helped: Interview with Don Murray .. 1/2-16  
The Hollinger family: A Brethren memoir ..... 11-27  
**Kragt, Caleb**  
When the new feels natural ..... 7/8-16  
**Ludwick, Josiah**  
Look what the Lord is doing: Church in Rwanda ..... 12-13  
**Mason, Diane**  
Teaching as ministry: A God of second chances ..... 11-13  
**McElvany, Scot**  
Parade of consequence: BVS in Mostar ..... 3-8  
**McFadden, Monica**  
The church and Native American boarding schools ..... 11-15  
**McFadden, Monica, with Ken Gingerich**  
Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery ..... 10-5  
**McFadden, Wendy**  
Creation and the cross ..... 9-14  
From the publisher ..... 1/2-2, 3-2, 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 7/8-2, 9-2, 10-2, 11-2, 12-2  
**Miller, Carrie**  
To start seeing recovery: Puerto Rico ..... 6-18

**Mountain, Angie**  
Unique gifts for Conference: Interview with Donita Keister ..... 5-17  
**Murray, Kelsey**  
How BVSers grow ..... 3-26  
**Oh, Bobbie**  
Teaching as ministry: Unexpected intersections ..... 11-12  
**O'Quinn, Caitlin**  
How BVSers grow ..... 1/2-14  
**Orndorff, Jan**  
 ..... 4-15  
**Orput, Philip A.**  
An ode to the grasses ..... 9-17  
**Oskin, Deb**  
So many changes! ..... 4-20  
**Otto-Wilhelm, Dawn**  
The call within the call ..... 12-18  
**Pittman Gingrich, Rhonda**  
Hope for the future ..... 1/2-20  
**Ramirez, Frank**  
NOAC 2019: More than a senior moment ..... 11-6  
**Reiff Miller, Peggy**  
*Highlights and the Brethren* ..... 3-20  
Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer ..... 12-6  
The girls we pray for ..... 1/2-26  
The woman behind the man behind Heifer Project ..... 7/8-5  
**Reist, Pam**  
Markus Gamache ..... 3-12  
**Rodefer, Lynnae**  
Teaching as ministry: Who will tell the story? ..... 11-13  
**Roebuck, Tyler**  
Feeling betrayed ..... 9-9  
Then your light will rise in the darkness ..... 11-22  
**Rowe, Twyla**  
Coming to live: Reflections of retirement chaplain ..... 5-26  
**Schrock, Carolyn**  
Discovery in South Sudan ..... 4-12  
**Schrock, Jan West**  
Darlin', do you really need them? ..... 12-10  
**Schweitzer, Steven**  
Faithful frontier: Theology and science fiction ..... 5-5  
**Skipwith, Brenda**  
Visiting with John ..... 6-10  
**Sollenberger, Beth**  
All of us ..... 7/8-14  
**Sperry, Leslie**  
Stories from the border ..... 3-18  
**Steele, David**  
The whole of the fabric ..... 7/8-23  
**Townsend, Frances**  
Compelling vision: We have put our hearts on the table ..... 9-6  
The peace of God (Memorial Day) ..... 5-20  
**Warner Franklin, Pam**  
He became our friend ..... 6-8  
**Weber, Cheryl L., with Rufus M. Hoover**  
Seven hundred horses and a ship to Greece ..... 7/8-10  
**Witschek, Walt**  
A spring in the desert: Papago Buttes ..... 4-10  
Bienvenidos a Puerto Rico! ..... 12-5  
In the neighborhood ..... 10-20  
It can be the church at its best: Annual Conference ..... 5-14  
NOAC 2019: More than a senior moment ..... 11-6  
The 175-mile journey ..... 1/2-18  
The uncommon music man: Ken Medema ..... 7/8-18  
Yield ahead ..... 10-32  
**Winkler, Jim**  
The myth of redemptive violence ..... 6-13  
**Witkovsky-Eldred, Emmett**  
Flowers in the desert ..... 10-12  
Leading by listening: Interview with David Steele ..... 3-16  
Proclaim all of Christ ..... 7/8-32  
**Wittmeyer, Jay**  
Do we need the Brethren? ..... 4-32  
Friendly and Brethren: Bridges with China ..... 12-11  
**Yohn, Sharon**  
Finding common ground on climate ..... 9-18

## AUTHORS FOR IN TOUCH

Balmer, Jill ..... 10-3  
Brumbaugh-Cayford, Cheryl ..... 11-4  
Dykema, Bobbi ..... 11-3  
Erisman Valeta, Gail ..... 6-3  
Fike, Lisa ..... 12-4  
Fuchs, Becky ..... 5-3

Gross, Anna Lisa ..... 11-4  
Jackson, Myron ..... 4-4  
Kauffman, Carol ..... 10-3  
Krabacher, Pat ..... 3-3  
Mason, Diane ..... 5-4  
Mauser, Tom ..... 6-3  
Patches, Jean ..... 12-4  
Poff, Sharon ..... 4-3  
Royer, Howard ..... 6-4  
Sanford Diehl, Brenda ..... 7/8-3  
Schwartz Evans, Linda ..... 3-4  
Sgro, John ..... 3-4  
Shafer, John ..... 12-4  
Singh, Christina ..... 5-3  
Williams, Jenny ..... 9-3  
Witschek, Walt ..... 7/8-3

## BETHANY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Bethany Seminary's fall semester began ..... 11-26  
Ingils, Nathanael ..... 10-26  
Kwabe, Nyampa ..... 11-26  
New degree at Bethany ..... 6-28  
New theological focus funded by AAAS grant ..... 3-27  
Peace church seminaries form new partnership ..... 11-26  
Poole, Dan ..... 5-28  
Remembering Warren Groff ..... 9-3

## BIBLE

A church where you will be comfortable ..... 1/2-24  
A season for renewal ..... 3-22  
All of us ..... 7/8-14  
An earthly temple ..... 4-6  
Creation and the cross ..... 9-14  
Do numbers matter? ..... 10-22  
Don't pray for patience? ..... 11-20  
God helps those who help themselves? ..... 4-24  
God won't give you more than you can handle? ..... 6-22  
It's not my place to judge? ..... 3-24  
Money is the root of evil? ..... 9-24  
*The God Who Sees* ..... 12-24  
Then your light will rise in the darkness ..... 11-22  
We once were lost ..... 5-22  
We're all children of God? ..... 12-22  
What is the best translation of the Bible? ..... 7/8-26  
Where two or three are gathered ..... 7/8-24

## BOOKS

*Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* ..... 1/2-26  
*How the Body of Christ Talks* ..... 9-26  
Inmates give 25 Days to Jesus ..... 1/2-3  
*The Art of Bible Translation* ..... 7/8-26  
*The God Who Sees* ..... 12-24  
*The Sun Does Shine* ..... 6-12  
*When This Mask of Flesh Is Broken* ..... 11-27

## BRETHREN BENEFIT TRUST

BBT president signs letter about tax code ..... 3-27  
Housing allowance is upheld ..... 5-28  
March, Donna ..... 10-26

## BRETHREN HERITAGE/HISTORY

A vision that propels: Radical Pietism ..... 6-16  
Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery ..... 10-5  
Germantown tricentennial ..... 4-4  
*Highlights and the Brethren* ..... 3-20  
The church and Native American boarding schools ..... 11-15  
The Hollinger family: A Brethren memoir ..... 11-27  
The story of Nancy Campbell ..... 9-22  
We received this print of the Liao Chou Church? ..... 10-4  
What is Pietism? ..... 6-14

## BRETHREN IDENTITY

Choosing to be black and Brethren ..... 5-10  
Continuing the work of Jesus ..... 12-2, 12-16  
Do we need the Brethren? ..... 4-32  
Why I'll always be Brethren ..... 1/2-32

## BRETHREN LIFE & THOUGHT

Price, Tony ..... 11-26

## BRETHREN PRESS

Out of context for 25 years: Frank Ramirez ..... 11-4  
Pressing on ..... 10-2  
Yearbook changes process ..... 1/2-28

## BRETHREN SERVICE CENTER

Brethren Faith in Action Fund grants ..... 3-28, 11-26

## BRETHREN VOLUNTEER SERVICE

BVS Units 322 and 323 ..... 11-25

BVS Unit 324 ..... 12-26  
Church renews agreement with Selective Service ..... 6-27  
Crossing the bridge: BVS in Mostar ..... 3-6  
First 'fast-track' orientation ..... 5-8  
How BVSers grow ..... 1/2-14  
Tyler, Emily ..... 4-28

## CAMPS

Eastern Shore Brethren sesquicentennial (Mardela) ..... 7/8-3  
Swatara ..... 7/8-28

## CHILDREN or CHILD PROTECTION

Backpack blessing ..... 10-3  
Teaching as ministry ..... 11-10  
T-shirts into diapers ..... 5-4

## CHINA

Friendly and Brethren: Bridges with China ..... 12-11  
We received this print of the Liao Chou Church? ..... 10-4

## CHRISTMAS/ADVENT

We're all children of God? ..... 12-22  
When all is not calm and bright ..... 12-32

## CHURCH DIVISION

Leaders issue statement on withdrawal process ..... 7/8-28  
Proclaim all of Christ ..... 7/8-32  
The whole of the fabric ..... 7/8-23

## CLERGY

Clergymen's retreat planned ... 11-25  
Part-time pastor, full-time church ..... 10-16

## COLLEGES

A holistic approach to rural health (McPherson) ..... 12-3  
Alternative spring break (Bridgewater) ..... 4-3  
Dear younger me (Bridgewater) ..... 4-26

## COMPELLING VISION

A tale of two tables ..... 9-9  
Compelling vision conversations: A report on data ..... 12-26  
Compelling Vision Process Team issues report ..... 10-26  
Compelling vision: We have put our hearts on the table ..... 9-6  
Conference focuses on compelling vision ..... 9-5  
Hope for the future ..... 1/2-20  
Not the first conversations in the church ..... 9-10  
Yield ahead ..... 10-32

## CONGREGATIONS

Alpha and Omega (Lancaster, Pa.) ..... 3-28  
Ankeny (Iowa) ..... 1/2-4  
Annville (Pa.) ..... 1/2-3  
Beacon Heights (Fort Wayne, Ind.) ..... 3-18, 3-28  
Boise Valley (Idaho) ..... 6-4  
Bremen (Ind.) ..... 10-3  
Buffalo Valley (Mifflinburg, Pa.) ..... 12-18  
Cabool (Mo.) ..... 4-4  
Central (Roanoke, Va.) ..... 3-3  
Chippewa (Creston, Ohio) ..... 12-4  
Crest Manor (South Bend, Ind.) ..... 11-4  
Eglise des Freres Haitiens (Miami, Fla.) ..... 3-28  
Fairview (Cordova, Md.) ..... 3-4  
First (Springfield, Ill.) ..... 11-3  
Freeport (Ill.) ..... 5-3  
Friendship (North Wilkesboro, N.C.) ..... 3-4  
Germantown (Pa.) ..... 4-4  
Heidelberg (Myerstown, Pa.) ..... 12-4  
Holidaysburg (Pa.) ..... 10-4  
Ivester (Iowa) ..... 10-4  
Lower Miami (Ohio) ..... 6-24  
Luray (Va.) ..... 10-24  
Madison Avenue (York, Pa.) ..... 10-3  
Manassas (Va.) ..... 5-24  
Martinsburg Memorial (Pa.) ..... 3-16  
McPherson (Kan.) ..... 1/2-4  
Mountain View Fellowship (McGaheysville, Va.) ..... 4-3  
Neighborhood (Montgomery, Ill.) ..... 10-20  
New Carlisle (Ohio) ..... 3-3  
Oakland (Gettysburg, Ohio) ..... 3-4  
Onekama (Mich.) ..... 10-4  
Papago Buttes (Scottsdale, Ariz.) ..... 4-10  
Paradise (Calif.) ..... 1/2-27  
Polo (Ill.) ..... 4-3  
Prince of Peace (Littleton, Colo.) ..... 6-3  
Rockford (Ill.) ..... 3-28  
Stone Bridge (Md.) ..... 3-20  
Sunnybrook (Bristol, Tenn.) ..... 3-28  
Tók'ahookaadi (Lybrook, N.M.) ..... 10-12  
Warrensburg (Mo.) ..... 3-3  
Washington City (D.C.) ..... 1/2-13  
West Charleston (Ohio) ..... 7/8-16  
Westport (Md.) ..... 1/2-18  
Woodland (Astoria, Ill.) ..... 12-4  
Will it blend? ..... 4-16

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

- A remarkable collaboration for peace ..... 11-18
- Church renews agreement with Selective Service ..... 6-27
- How Marilyn Monroe helped: Interview with Don Murray .... 1/2-16
- The peace of God (Memorial Day) ..5-20

## CREATION CARE

- A spring in the desert: Papago Buttes.....4-10
- An earthly temple.....4-6
- An ode to the grasses .....9-17
- Creation and the cross .....9-14
- Finding common ground on climate.....9-18
- Holy ground: Agriculture and climate change .....9-20
- Hosting for the climate .....10-4
- No time for denial .....9-32
- The Lord's Day.....4-2

## DEATH ROW

- Death Row Support Project.....6-7
- I want people to understand: SueZann Bosler.....6-9
- The Sun Does Shine*.....6-12

## DISABILITIES

- Barrier-free grant (Anabaptist Disabilities Network) .....6-4
- Something hopeful is happening ..10-24

## DISASTER MINISTRIES

- Annville gives disaster survivors a start.....1/2-3
- Children's Disaster Services at the border .....3-19
- CDS Critical Response Care following shootings .....10-25
- CDS fall trainings.....9-27
- CDS sends teams to Texas.....11-25
- CROP turns 50 .....10-4
- Disaster programs respond to floods.....5-28
- EDF grants go to hurricane relief in Bahamas .....11-25
- EDF supports Africa cyclone relief...6-27
- Fire destroys Paradise church.....1/2-27
- Garage sale aids disaster relief....3-4
- Northern Plains District works in Iowa.....12-3
- Remembering another candlelight service.....4-3
- Stories from the border .....3-19
- To start seeing recovery: Puerto Rico .....6-18

## DISCIPLESHIP

- The call within the call .....12-18

## DISTRICTS

- Action steps (Northern Indiana) ..4-9
- Bienvenidos a Puerto Rico! .....12-5
- Eastern Shore Brethren sesquicentennial (Mid-Atlantic) .....7/8-3
- Leaders issue statement on withdrawal process.....7/8-28
- Northern Plains District works in Iowa.....12-3
- Southern Plains .....10-26
- Pacific Northwest .....10-26
- Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer .....12-6
- Sharing more than a meal (Shenandoah) .....7/8-3
- To start seeing recovery (Puerto Rico).....6-18
- T-shirts into diapers (Northern Plains).....5-4

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- Hoover, Jason and Nicole .....6-28

## ECUADOR

- GFI visits Brethren-founded groups ..4-27

## ECUMENISM

- A remarkable collaboration for peace .....11-18
- Do we need the Brethren? .....4-32
- Where is Christianity headed?...3-14

## FOOD and GARDENING

- Celebrating fruitcake.....3-3
- GFI supports agriculture-related projects .....3-28
- Groundhog Day at Cabool.....4-4
- The Spirit planted a seed .....11-3

## GENERAL OFFICES

- Denomination offers vacant land for sale.....5-27

## GENERAL SECRETARY

- General secretary issues statement after shootings.....10-25
- Leading by listening: Interview with David Steele.....3-16
- The whole of the fabric.....7/8-23

## GLOBAL FOOD INITIATIVE

- Fifteen growing years (Polo Growing Project).....6-4
- GFI supports agriculture-related projects .....3-28
- GFI visits Ecuador .....4-27
- Holy ground: Agriculture and climate change .....9-20

## GLOBAL MISSION

- Castañer hosts Heifer's 75th..7/8-28
- Crossing the bridge: BVS in Mostar ..3-6
- Discovery in South Sudan .....4-12
- Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria thrives and grows .....1/2-5
- Friendly and Brethren: Bridges with China.....12-11
- GFI visits Brethren-founded groups in Ecuador .....4-27
- Gamache, Markus .....3-12
- Harbeck, Kendra .....9-28
- Look what the Lord is doing: Church in Rwanda .....12-13

## GRATITUDE

- Moving toward gratitude.....11-32
- Remembering another candlelight service.....4-3

## GRIEF

- When all is not calm and bright...12-32

## HAITI

- T-shirts into diapers .....5-4

## HEALTH

- A holistic approach to rural health..12-3
- Celebrating survivors .....10-3
- Nursing students receive scholarship.....12-26

## HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

- A letter to the church from Pierre Ferrari .....7/8-11
- Bienvenidos a Puerto Rico! .....12-5
- Castañer hosts Heifer's 75th..7/8-28
- Darlin', do you really need them?...12-10
- Let him eat cake.....7/8-3
- Puerto Rico celebrates 75 years of Heifer .....12-6
- Seven hundred horses and a ship to Greece .....7/8-10
- The woman behind the man behind Heifer Project .....7/8-5

## IMMIGRATION

- Concerned about family separations..10-4
- Stories from the border .....3-18
- The God Who Sees*.....12-24
- Why do they come? .....6-24

## INTERCULTURAL

- As the deer pants for the water. 5-32
- Choosing to be black and Brethren..5-10
- Dikaiois pilgrimage will visit Cherokee.....4-28
- Flowers in the desert.....10-12
- Kettering Gimbiya.....6-28
- Sankofa journey worship exchange..3-3
- When the new feels natural...7/8-16
- Where is Christianity headed?...3-14

## INTERFAITH

- I will build this world .....1/2-13
- Markus Gamache .....3-12

## ISRAEL/PALESTINE

- Trip summary .....12-20

## LENT/EASTER

- Feet .....4-15
- Lenten learnings.....4-5
- Letting go .....3-2

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- Barlow, Marty .....11-30
- Barr, Ernie.....10-28
- Bauer, Gary .....11-28
- Behm, Ronald J. ....7/8-31
- Benson, Waneta.....11-28
- Brown, Tom .....6-31
- Daniels, Felton.....4-30
- Dotterer, Mary Louise.....12-28
- Dykema, Bobbi.....10-27
- Eller, Jan.....10-27
- Eshbach, Warren .....1/2-30
- Flora, Maurice.....6-30
- Fretz, Lester C. ....10-30
- George, Ken .....5-30
- Gottshall, J. Richard.....12-27
- Gross, Rachel.....3-31, 12-27
- Haldeman, Ben .....12-29
- Hostetler, Tom .....1/2-29
- Johnson, Martin and Burgel ..6-29, 10-30

- Kauffman, Rachel .....6-29
- Kaylor, Harriet .....6-29
- Keener, Ronald E. ....5-30
- Mason, Diane .....1/2-29
- McFadden, Ralph .....5-30
- Miller, Anita .....5-29
- Mumma, Emily .....5-30
- Nash, Ann Carol.....5-29
- Neuman-Lee, Jeff.....11-29
- Parker, Don .....1/2-29
- Pence, Wayne.....3-30
- Radcliff, David .....10-28
- Reamer, Eric.....11-30
- Reish, Todd.....9-31
- Roop Hollinger, Patricia .....9-29
- Rosborough, Mary Varner9-30, 11-28
- Rummel, Merle .....6-29
- Runyon, Summer.....10-27
- Schrock, Jan West.....11-20
- Simmons, Claude .....6-30, 7/8-29
- Stout, Judy Minnich .....4-29
- Stroup, Janet.....3-30
- Thomas, Charles.....3-29
- Vaughn, Lucile.....3-30
- Wampler, Guy.....10-30
- Weaver, Jim .....1/2-30
- Ziegler, Don .....7/8-29

## LOVE FEAST

- Move in our midst: Love feast at Annual Conference .....9-12
- No time for denial .....9-32
- Random acts of kindness .....12-4

## MESSENGER

- Pressing on .....10-2

## MINISTRY

- Aguirre, Roxanne Gaxiola.....10-26
- Cassell, Dana .....4-28
- Clergywomen's retreat planned...11-25
- Ministerial ethics training uses new workbook .....7/8-27
- Part-time pastor, full-time church..10-16
- SVMC celebrates silver anniversary .....1/2-28

## MISSION AND MINISTRY BOARD

- Board approves 2020 budget...12-25
- Board approves budget parameter .....9-28
- Board opts not to change delegate numbers .....5-27
- Leading by listening .....3-16

## NIGERIA

- Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria thrives and grows .....1/2-5
- Markus Gamache.....3-12

## OLDER ADULTS

- Coming to live: Reflections of retirement chaplain .....5-26
- Connecting through song: Faithful Friends Chorus.....5-24
- NOAC 2019: More than a senior moment .....11-6
- NOAC by the numbers.....11-5
- NOAC committee unveils 2019 logo .....1/2-28
- Pleasant Hill Village declares bankruptcy.....10-25
- Still preaching .....3-4

## ON EARTH PEACE

- OEP adopts new values, vision, mission.....6-28

## PEACE

- Discovery in South Sudan .....4-12
- General secretary issues statement after shootings.....10-25
- It starts with love.....4-18
- Journey that no one should have (Columbine).....6-3
- Letter opposes drone strikes...4-27
- Parade of consequences .....3-8
- Reaching for social justice .....3-3
- Rededicated to peace.....11-4
- Seminar seeks creative solutions to violence .....7/8-27
- The myth of redemptive violence...6-13
- The peace of God (Memorial Day)..5-20
- They should call it C-P-Tea.....6-20
- 'Voices for Peace' to be 2020 workcamp theme.....11-25
- What can we do? .....9-2
- Youth Peace Travel Team program ends .....12-26

## PEOPLE

- Aguirre, Roxanne Gaxiola.....10-26
- Balmer, Rick and Sarah .....7/8-28
- Barras, Stephanie .....3-10
- Beckner, Dennis.....4-28
- Beery, Amy .....5-28
- Benesh, Gary.....3-4
- Billi, Joel S. ....1/2-7
- Blocksome, Rebecca .....3-7

- Bosler, SueZann.....6-9
- Botts, Timothy .....12-25
- Brown, Laura.....11-14
- Brumbaugh, Glenn.....10-26
- Bultman, Brian .....9-28
- Butcher, Debbie .....5-28
- Campbell, Nancy .....9-22
- Cassell, Dana .....4-28
- Chacón, Gabriella Carillo .....9-28
- Coale, Francie .....7/8-28
- Collins, Morris.....3-3
- Ćorić, Tina .....3-6
- Courtright, Tim.....7/8-28
- Craighead, Tristen .....4-28
- Creps, Madison .....4-28
- Crouse, Jerry .....3-3
- Detrick, Joe A. ....4-28
- Douglas, Chris .....5-14
- Dulabaum, Nevin .....3-27
- Edmonds, Eddie H. ....4-4
- Fernandez, Fabiola .....7/8-28
- Ferrari, Pierre .....7/8-11
- Finet, Eric.....4-28
- Flora, Lauren.....10-26
- Flory, Kristin .....3-6
- Gadzama, Paul.....1/2-10
- Gamache, Markus .....3-12
- Gava, Dauda .....1/2-8
- Goletiani, Monica Honn.....3-6
- Groff, Warren F. ....9-3
- Hampton, Katie.....3-9
- Harbeck, Kendra .....9-28
- Higgs, Dylan .....9-28
- Hoover, Jason and Nicole .....6-28
- Hutchison, John Earl .....3-4
- Inglis, Nathanael .....10-26
- Johnson, Rachel .....4-28
- Keister, Donita .....5-17
- Kerschensteiner, Edward.....6-4
- Kettering, Gimbiya .....6-28
- Kilbourne, Michelle .....11-26
- Knight, Todd .....11-26
- Koehn, Elsie .....10-26
- Kwabe, Nyampa .....11-26
- Kwaha, Joseph Tizhe .....1/2-11
- Lake, Leslie .....4-28
- March, Donna .....10-26
- Mason, Carol.....10-26
- Mattern, Allison .....7/8-28
- Mausser, Tom.....6-3
- Medema, Ken .....7/8-18
- McNeil, Shannon .....4-28
- Michael, J. Colleen .....10-26
- Miller, Kara .....10-26
- Minnich, Dale .....4-27
- Monroe, Marilyn .....1/2-16
- Mshelia, Yamtikarya .....1/2-9
- Munday, Paul .....12-25
- Murray, Don .....1/2-16
- Musselman, Lucas, .....4-28
- Myers, Caroline.....3-20
- Myers, Gary .....3-20
- Ndawaka, Thomas .....3-12
- Neiman, Rebecca.....3-10
- Noffsinger, Stanley J. ....5-28
- Onfsted, Vita .....5-28
- Petry, Dan .....7/8-2
- Pimentel, Norma .....3-18
- Poole, Dan .....5-28
- Price, Tony .....11-26
- Ramirez, Frank.....11-4
- Roberts, Debbie .....10-26
- See, Adela.....4-3
- Schrock, Carolyn.....4-12
- Schrock, J. Roger .....4-12
- Shultz, Hannah .....9-28
- Smith, Liana.....10-26
- Sollenberger, David.....4-28
- Sosna, Nikifor .....9-28
- Steele, David .....3-16, 7/8-23, 10-25
- Stinebaugh, Vernon and Angela ..5-3
- Strawser, John .....1/2-4
- Teeter, Everett .....7/8-28
- Tyler, Emily .....4-28
- Van Houten, Steve .....4-28, 10-26
- VanAsselt, Grace .....4-28
- Vander Molen, Beverly .....7/8-19
- Vorndran, Zoe.....7/8-28
- Waering, Jennie .....3-3
- West, Dan .....3-20, 7/8-2, 7/8-5, 12-10
- West, Lucille .....7/8-5
- Witkovsky-Eldred, Marissa .....10-26
- Wittmeyer, Jay.....1/2-5
- Ziegler, Earl and Vivian .....6-4

## POETRY

- An ode to the grasses (Philip A. Orput) .....9-17
- Feet (Jan Orndorff) .....4-15
- The poetry of God .....4-28
- The woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Ken Gible).....11-23
- Which cross? (Dan West) .....7/8-7

## PRAYER

- Don't pray for patience? .....11-20

## PUBLIC WITNESS

- General secretary issues statement after shootings.....10-25
- It starts with love.....4-18
- Letter opposes drone strikes.....4-27
- Pastor protests government shutdown .....3-4
- Sharing love with the Senate.....4-4

## RACE

- As the deer pants for the water.....5-32
- Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery .....10-5
- In living color .....6-2
- Remember. Repent. Repair.....11-2
- The church and Native American boarding schools .....11-15
- The story of Nancy Campbell ....9-22
- Worship exchange.....3-3

## RELIGION

- Where is Christianity headed?...3-14
- Church membership: A changing landscape.....6-5

## RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

- A new chapter .....3-26
- Coming to live.....5-26
- Pleasant Hill Village declares bankruptcy .....10-25
- Still preaching .....3-4
- Timbercrest .....5-28

## RWANDA

- Look what the Lord is doing ....12-13

## SIMPLE LIVING

- Letting go .....3-2
- A spring in the desert.....4-10

## SLAVERY

- Remember. Repent. Repair.....11-2

## SOUTH SUDAN

- Discovery in South Sudan .....4-12

## STEWARDSHIP

- Money is the root of evil? .....9-24

## TAXES

- BBT president signs letter about tax code.....3-27
- Housing allowance is upheld ....5-28
- So many changes! .....4-20

## THEOLOGY

- A vision that propels: Radical Pietism .....6-16
- Creation and the cross.....9-14
- Faithful frontier: Theology and science fiction .....5-5
- New theological focus at seminary.3-27
- The myth of redemptive violence...6-13
- We once were lost.....5-22
- What is Pietism? .....6-14

## UNITY

- All of us.....7/8-14
- Comfort or Christ .....6-32
- How the Body of Christ Talks*....9-26
- Not my place to judge?.....3-24
- Proclaim all of Christ.....7/8-32
- Sharing love with the Senate.....4-4
- The fall .....3-32
- The whole of the fabric.....7/8-23
- Where two or three are gathered .....7/8-24
- Yield ahead .....10-32

## WORKCAMPS

- Did you know?.....3-5
- Flowers in the desert.....10-12
- Friendly and Brethren: Bridges with China.....12-11
- Shultz, Hannah .....9-28
- Together in DC .....10-15
- 'Voices for Peace' to be 2020 workcamp theme.....11-25
- Van Houten, Steve .....4-28,10-26
- Workcamp office announces 2019 schedule.....1/2-27

## YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS

- A new chapter .....3-26
- Alternative spring break.....4-3
- Dear younger me .....4-26
- Did you know?.....3-5
- Seminar seeks creative solutions to violence.....7/8-27
- Youth Peace Travel Team program ends .....12-26

# When all is not calm and bright

**It was a beautiful Christmas Eve.** All was calm and bright. The front of the sanctuary was beautifully decorated with poinsettias, lights, and the typical lineup of nativity characters, creating a space that was filled with awe and subdued joy.

All of a sudden, there arose such a clatter. The rickety bench holding Mary and Joseph came crashing to the ground. No one was hurt, but in an instant all were torn away from the tranquility of the nativity scene that had been created.

As a child, I imagined the first Christmas to be a



AUDREY  
HOLLENBERG-DUFFEY

cozy, Currier and Ives-style scene. However, that calm and bright picture I created became rickety in adulthood, eventually failing to hold when I was diagnosed with infertility. An empty womb aches all the more at Christmas time, when everything seems to be about children—pictures with Santa, sugar plums dancing and, oh yeah, baby Jesus. If you want to remind a woman with infertility about her

pain, tell her the story of an unmarried woman who is miraculously and unexpectedly pregnant.

However, as childless Christmases came and went, I found myself strangely consoled by an oft neglected and horrific part of the Christmas story—the part of the story that lurks dangerously just out of view.

King Herod, a paranoid and power-hungry ruler, was so notorious for his violent behavior that, when he was frightened, all of Jerusalem was frightened with him. Unable to find the child born king of the Jews, he did the unthinkable—he murdered all the male children two and under in Bethlehem. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, having already been warned in a dream, had fled to the safety of

Egypt in advance of the slaughter.

This story raises all sorts of heartbreaking questions: What about the other babies? Jesus is *Emmanuel*, meaning *God is with us*, but where is God in the midst of the massacre of infants?

These questions found a home in me: Where was God in my pain? Why was God seemingly valuing life over there, but not here? Why was God’s favor available for some and not others?

When I continued in Matthew’s Gospel, I found a kindred spirit in Rachel, who in Jeremiah gave poetic voice to the lamentations of God’s people conquered by Assyria and Babylon. Likewise, Matthew, reviving the lamenting Rachel, gives voice to those otherwise silent sufferers crying out in Bethlehem. She weeps and wails and refuses to be consoled. While Matthew chose not to include God’s response to Rachel’s distress, in Jeremiah, God’s response is swift and hopeful (see Jeremiah 31:15-16).

Matthew’s inclusion of Jeremiah’s Rachel showed me a God who does not will such violence and pain, but who promises hope in the face of grief. In the fullness of the Christmas story, I found a God who weeps alongside me, while all the while working to establish a new heaven and new earth where there will be no more mourning, crying, and pain (Revelation 21:4). Beyond the fleeting all-is-calm-and-bright nativity scene, I found space for my pain.

If you enter this season burdened by pain and sorrow, there is still good news of great joy. You are not forgotten—God comes to be with you, in the midst of all you carry. You may not be able to sing, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” but I pray you can sing with hopeful confidence, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come.” 

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey co-pastors, with her husband, Tim, Oakton Church of the Brethren in Vienna, Va.

IN THE FULLNESS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY, I FOUND A GOD WHO WEEPS ALONGSIDE ME, WHILE ALL THE WHILE WORKING TO ESTABLISH A NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH WHERE THERE WILL BE NO MORE MOURNING.

A bright starburst with multiple rays emanating from a central point, set against a dark blue night sky filled with smaller, distant stars. Below the sky is a silhouette of a city with various building shapes and windows, rendered in a lighter shade of blue.

*“For to you is born this day  
in the city of David a Savior,  
who is Christ the Lord.”*

*~Luke 2:11, RSV*

Thank you for supporting the Church of the Brethren in 2019.  
May you be filled with the peace of the Savior as  
we celebrate his birth this Christmas.



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