

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

APRIL 2019 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



The  
holiness  
of creation



## The gift of the Spirit

Photo by Glenn Riegel

“He breathed on them and said,  
‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”  
~John 20:22

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

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Glenn Riegel

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Cover photo by Glenn Riegel

## The Lord's day

**M**y go-to meal when I don't have leftovers to bring for lunch is an order of spring rolls from a nearby Vietnamese restaurant. The two spring rolls come in plastic wrap, with a small plastic container of peanut sauce on the side.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

Since everything is already in plastic, I ask them to skip the Styrofoam takeout container. The first time, the cashier was confused. I assured her that I could carry the package of spring rolls and the container of peanut sauce in my hands. Nevertheless, the order came out from the kitchen in a plastic bag—which I decided was better than Styrofoam and maybe the best I could expect.

But I persisted. On another trip, I figured I could beat the system by bringing my own bag. When I got back to the office, I discovered that they had placed the spring rolls and the peanut sauce in a plastic box inside my paper bag. Sigh.

Finally, the other day, when I walked into the restaurant, the cashier saw me and said, "One order of spring rolls with no box, right?" Success!

Here in the US we can choose to forget about single-use disposable containers once they're thrown away. But what if you and I had to keep all our garbage in our houses and backyards—forever? What happens where there's no system for trash removal?

When traveling in places such as Guatemala and Indonesia, I've noticed that lots of food is packaged in single-serve packages. The size is convenient, both for selling in food stalls and for purchasing by people who don't have a lot of money. But all these empty chip bags and water bottles get heaped in a vacant lot in the middle of town or end up clogging rivers. There's no "away" to throw them.

In a place considered to be among the top snorkeling areas in the world, the shiny fish I saw turned out to be plastic wrappers: We were swimming in trash. Someone high up the food chain is making money, but someone else is paying the price.

The psalmist tells us that this planet is not ours: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1). As the world focuses special attention this month on the earth, how can we come to see Earth Day, and every day, as the Lord's day?

*Wendy McFadden*

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## Remembering another candlelight service

**A** candlelight ceremony during worship Feb. 3 at Mountain View Fellowship in McGaheysville, Va., brought back memories for Adela See of another candlelight service when she was a child. The church lit candles to represent sharing the light of Jesus to help take away the darkness in the world. Pastor Wayne Pence mentioned the Catholic Candlemas service celebrated on Feb. 2 to remember the day baby Jesus was presented at the temple.

A powerful memory of the time she was 10 years old in Guatemala City and her mother sent her to the store to buy a candle so they could celebrate Candlemas “came back to me,” See said.

Her mother had forgotten to buy a candle to observe Candlemas. It wasn’t until around 10 in the evening that they remembered. Her mother asked See to go to the store. It was closed, but she knocked and the grocer was kind enough to open the door for her. She brought the candle home and her mother lit it and placed it the middle of the floor, leaving it burning while they all went to bed.

At around 3 the next morning, there was a 7.5 magnitude earthquake and all the electricity went out. Because the candle was still burning, See and her mother were able to grab her five-year-old brother and two-year-old sister and escape into the street. The next day they discovered that adobe bricks had fallen on the beds where they had been sleeping. Their home had been destroyed. Some people on their street had died from falling bricks. “Without that candle, we might have been killed,” she said.

Fearing earthquakes, the family slept in the street for two months. Later they moved to a settlement where they lived in a tent for a year. There was no school for the children after the earthquake, but about 18 months later some people from the US built a temporary school. It wasn’t until See moved to Virginia that she found out it was built by Brethren Disaster Ministries. She had married David See, a Brethren Volunteer Service worker in Honduras and Guatemala, and he had been asked to speak about the Honduras project at a church in Pennsylvania. One of their hosts, a woman, mentioned she had been with the team that built the school. “It was so good to meet someone who had helped us,” See said.

See was the last person to light her candle at Mountain View on Feb. 3. It was a special moment when she shared how God watched over her family. —Sharon Poff



Sharon Poff

### An alternative spring break

**A group of Bridgewater (Va.) College students** and a faculty member put on tool belts and picked up hammers as they spent spring break volunteering with Habitat for Humanity’s Collegiate Challenge Spring Break 2019.

The college said the group wanted “an alternative way to spend their spring break—in lieu of the traditional

beach scene—and 10 students opted for working with Habitat for Humanity in West Melbourne, Fla.” The students were accompanied by Jason Ybarra, assistant professor of physics. Jenna M. Walmer, a senior global studies major from Mount Joy, Pa., served as



student leader. The Bridgewater Campus Chapter, established in 1995, is one of nearly 700 campus chapters of Habitat worldwide. This is the 22nd year that Bridgewater students have used spring break to work on various Habitat projects.

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.



## Groundhog Day at Cabool

**G**roundhog Day was a highlight at Cabool (Mo.) Church of the Brethren this year, not only because the groundhog predicted an early spring but because of community spirit and support.

The church has hosted the community's Groundhog Breakfast for the last three years, serving "ground hog" (pork sausage) gravy and biscuits, scrambled eggs, homemade cinnamon rolls, and beverages. Proceeds have gone to the church's Boomerang Bag project, which provides non-perishable food items to school children who do not have adequate nutrition on weekends.

But this year, after Cabool suffered a

major loss when a locally owned company shut down after 42 years and more than 60 employees suddenly lost their jobs, the congregation decided the breakfast would support the recently unemployed. Local media were enlisted to spread the word. Invitations were mailed to the former employees. Social media postings were shared widely. Some businesses donated supplies. A local author brought in copies of her book to sign, with all money going to the cause.

Another church canceled its monthly breakfast and asked members to come to the Groundhog Breakfast instead.

For three hours, the church's fellowship hall was filled with people, at times



Myron Jackson

standing room only. More than 270 were served and more than \$3,600 was raised. A not-so-big church made a big difference in its community. —Myron Jackson



## Sharing love with the Senate

**O**n Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, Church of the Brethren minister Eddie H. Edmonds of Martinsburg, W.Va., gave the opening prayer for the US Senate. His prayer was televised on C-SPAN.

"Our prayer is that you will equip, empower, and encourage each individual senator as they work to answer the call to serve the people of this great nation," he prayed, in part. "Their decisions impact the lives of not only those they serve but also people the world over. Help them to remember those who have little, need much, and are challenged each day of their lives. Give each senator strength to make wise decisions and the courage to stand up in the face of adversity, doing the right thing, first time and every time, putting others first in each decision rendered."

## Germantown launches tricentennial celebration

**Germantown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** has started a five-year celebration of its 300th anniversary. The congregation in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia is considered the "mother church" of the denomination as the first Brethren congregation established in the Americas.

The year 1719 is recorded in the *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* as the date of the start of the congregation, and is recorded in the *Brethren Encyclopedia* as the year Brethren first settled in Germantown. Official formation of the congregation happened in 1723, when Brethren baptisms were held Christmas Day in the Wissahickon River.

As part of its anniversary celebration, the congregation hopes to call the denomination to refocus energy on urban ministry. An informal kick-off for the celebration occurred Sunday, March 3, when Atlantic Northeast District executive minister Pete Kontra delivered the sermon, and Office of Ministry director Nancy Sollenberger Heishman was present to worship with the church.



**“He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’”**—Mark 8:34



# Lenten learnings

**The season of Lent this year began** on March 6 (Ash Wednesday) and continues through much of April. Test your knowledge of this period of reflection in the Christian church that leads us to Good Friday and Easter:

1. **How many days are officially part of the season of Lent?**  
a. 36   b. 40   c. 50   d. 62
2. **In about what year did the Catholic Church begin the observance of Lent?**  
a. 325   b. 550   c. 1000   d. 1500   e. 1919
3. **The word “Lent” comes from a Middle English word that meant what?**  
a. Ashes   b. Quiet   c. Ritual   d. Springtime

4. **“Fat Tuesday” or “Mardi Gras” came about as a final celebration before the period of fasting began. New Orleans holds the largest Mardi Gras celebration in the US. Which US city holds the second-largest Mardi Gras festival?**  
a. Mobile, Ala.   b. Atlanta  
c. Easton, Md.   d. Boston
5. **What is the liturgical color for the season of Lent?**  
a. Orange   b. Green   c. Yellow   d. Violet
6. **In a 2014 study, what percentage of adults surveyed said they were giving up something for Lent?**  
a. 5   b. 43   c. 88   d. 99

**Answers:**

1. b. While the season spans 46 days, Sundays are not included in the count. Lent was 36 days when it first started as an observance, but was later lengthened to include Ash Wednesday.
2. a. The observance of Lent was inaugurated during the Council of Nicaea. It has since spread to many church traditions.
3. d. It derived from the Middle English word “lente.”
4. a. Mobile holds the nation’s second-largest Mardi Gras event. It was also the first city in the nation to hold such a celebration, going back to 1703.
5. d. Violet/purple is the official liturgical color for the Lenten season. It’s also the traditional color for Advent, another season of preparation and reflection.
6. c. 88 percent of those surveyed said they were giving up some item of food for Lent. The number one thing being given up: chocolate.

Sources: *The Fact Site, Andrew Krehbiel, and church sources*

THE NATURAL WORLD IS NOT ONLY GOD'S DWELLING PLACE, BUT IT IS ALSO OUR HOME FOR AS LONG AS WE AND OUR DESCENDANTS LIVE.

# An earthly temple

Doug Bradley

by Elizabeth Bay, Alexander Bache, and Kimberly Koczan-Flory



Glenn Riegel

**E**aster is a time for God's love to triumph over human power, plans, and limits.

We travel with Jesus over the palms, into the garden, and on to the cross.

And we go with him as he visits the temple. There, he finds a place where prayer and connection with God have been usurped by money and extortion. In the temple, Jesus directly challenges the deals and trades and clears the space to refocus on God.

*"Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall*



*be called a house of prayer for all the nations”? But you have made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:15-22).*

Jesus is calling the people to keep the temple sacred, most certainly during high holy days but also far beyond that time and place. He expands the notion of Yahweh presiding primarily from the holy of holies in the inner sanctum of the temple to being divine feet and hands that walk on the earth and calm the waters. He welcomes the Holy Spirit, the wind of God’s presence, to be with us always and everywhere. And so God’s people are to turn away from greed and all that detracts from devotion to God.

What of today? In this critical moment of responding to a changing climate, exacerbated by human activity, we too must heed Jesus’ call to turn from greed and consumption and care for the sacred space of God’s creation. The natural world is not only God’s dwelling place, but it is also our home for as long as we and our descendants live.

According to Genesis 1, because God created the world and called it good, all of creation is holy. Dominion over that creation comes with the command that we also treat it as holy. We are not here to desecrate (de-create) carelessly, in hopes of hastening Christ’s return. Instead, we are charged by God to be caregivers and responsibility-takers for the earth’s wellbeing.

When Jesus cleanses the temple, he puts the holy above the profitable. With this understanding of what Jesus conceives as holy and sacred space, we see that God’s protection encompasses the whole world. This is not just so that our



Glenn Riegel

own temples are pure, but so that “the least of these” are treated with the greatest compassion.

Jesus demands that human greed not besmirch hallowed ground. God’s domain must be exempt from activities that cause suffering for the sake of hoarding wealth. Today, instead of tables Jesus might be overturning the equipment of industries that desecrate the earth and harm human health.

## The Brethren Creation Care Network

**A**s Earth Day, April 22, approaches, the Brethren Creation Care Network wants to consider Jesus’ life as exemplifying an ethos of creation care. As Brethren who participate in feetwashing because Jesus commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me,” and because the point of the Brethren Creation Care Network is to contextualize our changing climate and stewardship of the earth in terms of Brethren values and beliefs, let us contemplate how Jesus’ life tells us to engage in these troubling times. We are Brethren, and by Jesus we are called to service and action for God’s will on

earth (Matthew 6:10).

The Brethren Creation Care Network (BCCN) has met regularly since the 2018 Annual Conference adopted the “Creation Care” statement. The informal committee aims to connect people to resources on a variety of creation care issues. Leaders are Duane Deardorff, chair, Durham, N.C.; Elizabeth Bay, La Verne, Calif.; Kimberly Koczan-Flory, Fort Wayne, Ind.; Jonathan Stauffer, Polo, Ill.; and Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in Washington, D.C., serving as denominational staff.

Additionally, 30 people are committed to being a resource for congrega-



Paul Stocksdale

tions looking to reduce their carbon footprint and live more lightly on the land. Find the creation care webpage, a hub for information and resources, at [www.brethren.org/creationcare](http://www.brethren.org/creationcare).

**“GOD GAVE US A BOUNTIFUL GARDEN, BUT WE HAVE TURNED IT INTO A POLLUTED WASTELAND OF DEBRIS, DESOLATION, AND FILTH.”**

**—POPE FRANCIS**



Glenn Riegel

## Revisit the MESSENGER series

In a Messenger series in 2015 (January/February, April, June, September, November), Sharon Yohn and Laura (Ranck) White wrote about the seriousness of the realities of climate change and the moral underpinnings of our call to action. These pieces are worth revisiting.

With recent weather events like the polar vortex in the Midwest, hurricanes, and the raging wildfire in Paradise, Calif., it no longer feels necessary to persuade. The realities of change are upon us, and it is in Jesus we find our way to respond.



Paul Stockdale

The earth, which God created and called good, is being treated like a commodity, often with no concern for consequence. Is that not like the money changers in the temple? In a culture that makes decisions based on profit and cost rather than what is the best choice for humanity and the stewardship of the earth, Jesus would release the doves, dump tainted money on the floor, and compel us to return our focus to God.

The cleansing of the temple is so important that it appears in all four Gospels. In Matthew and Mark, the story is interestingly intertwined with the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree. The cursing of the fig tree can be interpreted as an acknowledgement that the nation of Israel had lost its connection to God. In this intertwining of the two stories, an empire-wide fixation on wealth and status is set alongside a lost focus on love, compassion, and community. We are like a withering fig tree.

However, new shoots grow.

- At the 2018 Annual Conference, we Brethren committed ourselves to care for neighbors and act as peacemakers by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.
- Bethany Theological Seminary has received a grant from the American Association for the Advancement of Science to

help seminarians consider the intersection of science and theology, particularly as clergy, and to apply their education to practical applications in congregational settings.

- The Office of Peacebuilding and Policy is partnering with faith groups like Creation Justice Ministries, which advocate for responsible environmental policies.

- This year's Christian Citizenship Seminar theme on global violence is related to creation care, since many conflicts stem from resource challenges caused by extreme weather and related human migration.

Creation care is not an "us versus them" issue. In fact, caring for God's creation in this critical time is not even an "issue," but rather a necessary faith response for all who are Christ-followers.

We who live in the United States are especially charged with reducing our fossil fuel consumption and re-imagining our economy because we are by far the largest consumers per capita. Let us Brethren lead the way for all to live more fully in God's love by living more simply.

Jesus often calls his followers to let go of worldly possessions and stay focused on God: "It is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than a rich man to get into heaven" (Matthew 19:24). "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). "Give away everything you have and follow me" (Mark 10:21). "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 6:20).

When we ground ourselves in Jesus' life, we discern where we have been led astray by seeking money and status at the expense of safe and clean practices. When we ground ourselves in Jesus' example, we see when our institutions and organizations contribute to environmental destruction and misuse natural resources. When we ground ourselves in Jesus' love, we stop seeking happiness in the things a power-driven world offers and return to God's comfort and grace by building healthy relationships.

As we add our food scraps to the compost pile, let us pray for nurture and nourishment for all. As we turn off the light

when leaving a room, let us pray for God's light in the world. May the small action of adjusting the thermostat be a moment when we pray for the wellbeing of all God's creation. Together we can keep our world a holy place of prayer and praise. **W**

Elizabeth Bay, Alexander Bache, and Kimberly Koczan-Flory are members of the Brethren Creation Care Network.



*By creating a raised-bed garden, the Polo (Ill.) Church of the Brethren decreases the amount of land they mow. Members of the surrounding community volunteer their time, and produce is donated to the local food pantry.*

## Action steps for congregations

**T**he following actions have been taken at one congregation in Northern Indiana District, saving 4,500 kilowatt hours per year in 2016 compared to previous comparable years, and shifting \$4,000 into ministries to serve the poor and share our faith.

*Change incandescent, halogen, and compact fluorescent bulbs to LED bulbs.* Switching from compact fluorescent to LED bulbs represents an energy savings of 44 percent. Prices of LED bulbs have dropped dramatically in recent years. A local energy provider may have low-cost or incentive programs to make the switch.

*Install motion sensors on light switches to reduce energy use.*

*Get an energy audit through a local company or New Community Project ([http://newcommunityproject.org/cong\\_resources.shtml](http://newcommunityproject.org/cong_resources.shtml)). An energy audit can suggest ways to reduce energy usage with changes inside the church building and with landscaping changes outside the building.*

*Extend the congregation's sanctuary into the outdoors.* This may be done by creating natural spaces around the church building for prayer, appreciation of the beauty of God's creation, opportunities for shade, and refuges for birds and other animals. Planting shade trees native to the region can reduce water and fuel usage and may reduce the excess heat and possibility of flooding caused by built structures and paved lots.



Glenn Siegel



# A spring in the desert

Alan Levine



Walt Wiltschek

## PAPAGO BUTTES PUTS PRIORITY ON CREATION CARE

by Walt Wiltschek

**A**lmost 15 years have passed since the Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren opened its doors in the southwest corner of Scottsdale, Ariz. When the congregation made that move from northeast Phoenix, it cast a vision of a church facility that would be a model for environmental stewardship.

A decade and a half later, that vision for a green church continues to ripen.

“I believe strongly that we are put here to care for what God has given us, that we are caretakers of this earth and need to work at that,” says Papago Buttes member Jim Walters, who spearheaded the environmental emphasis. “All the earth sings God’s praises, not just the people. It’s just a passion for me.”

That passion permeates the church, with dozens of initiatives through the church property focusing on creation care. Locally sourced and/or recycled materials were used wherever possible—even pews from the congregation’s former building were turned into countertops and bookshelves. The parking lot is gravel rather than paved asphalt so that less heat is

**“ALL THE EARTH SINGS GOD’S PRAISES, NOT JUST THE PEOPLE.  
IT’S JUST A PASSION FOR ME.” – PAPAGO BUTTES MEMBER JIM WALTERS**

absorbed. The inside floors are simple painted concrete. Plates and cups are washed and re-used. Air conditioning is minimized by the poured-concrete form design and by capturing cooler night air from outside. The list goes on.

Members and visitors are encouraged to linger after worship or other events, too, rather than rush back into their cars. The winding pathways and two-building design with open gathering areas in between focus attention on the gathered community rather than the parking lot. Native landscaping with a unique drip irrigation system fills the space in between.

A local newspaper article published soon after the building’s construction said, “There’s an instant message of a different place” when people enter the property.

“We hoped it would be somewhat of a draw to be friendly to creation,” Walters says. “I mean, why shouldn’t a church building be eco-friendly, and showing care for creation?”

Papago Buttes was the first non-residential structure built in Scottsdale after the city introduced a Green Building program, which added some extra hoops to the construction process but brought some added attention and helped make the church an inspiration for other projects.

It also became a base for a “Crawdad Camp” that Walters—a retired instructional technology professor—created. The camp invited people into Arizona’s river habitats to help remove invasive crayfish that were causing population loss of native species such as frogs and some turtles.

The camp pulled in another Papago Buttes member, Laura Miller, who then became involved with local conservation groups focused on birds and butterflies. She led the congregation to plant milkweed and become a monarch butterfly waystation, and some of those conservation groups now use the church as their meeting place, as well.

“Way back when we were going to build the building one of the things we talked about a lot was that the building shouldn’t sit unused six days a week,” Miller says. “When the Central Arizona Butterfly Association lost their meeting place, I checked with our church to see if we could open up our fellowship room to this group, and they agreed. From there, we started hosting the Audubon Society and a couple of other things as word gets around that we have a nice place to meet.”

In addition to attracting migrating

Walt Wiltschek




monarchs, the church planted a general butterfly garden that sees a peak season each fall. Miller says it can “get pretty fluttery” in a good year.

While not every church might be buoyed by butterflies, Miller hopes that other congregations might find their own way to become involved with creation care and environmental stewardship.

“I think caring for creation is something all of us, all churches, are called to do,” Miller says. “I’m happy to be part of a church that’s supportive of these other groups that try to help with nature. Not only do they talk about things, these other groups are involved in conservation to a great extent. I’m very happy the church helps with that.”

Walters nicely summed up the motivation for the efforts

of the congregation—which bills itself as “A Spring of the Water of Life”— in an interview with the *East Valley Tribune* back in 2008. The words still ring strong for the congregation today.

“Simple living is kind of one of those deep Brethren values,” Walters told the paper. “Part of simple living is to live in harmony with everybody else and with nature. . . . part of showing the love of God is to care for creation.” 



Walt Wiltschek



Don Shankster

*A worship service with a new church started by Brethren staff in the village of Pacidi, South Sudan.*

# Discovery in South Sudan

by Carolyn Schrock

## **felt excitement as the plane approached**

**Torit.** It was a beautiful rainy season morning in South Sudan. The green of the trees and grass signaled that the rains had come and hope was building for a good harvest in a few months.

My husband, Roger, and I were beginning a two-and-a-half month adventure with Global Mission and Service work in Torit. The plan was that we would assist with food security efforts and encourage the Church of the Brethren staff there. We had lived and worked in Torit in the early 1990s, establishing the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC). It was thrilling to think we could return to a familiar place.

It turned out to be a summer of discovery.

I looked forward to residing at the Church of the Brethren Peace Center located five kilometers outside of town. During a 2015 visit I had experienced the peacefulness of that center with its large trees, refreshing breezes, and flitting birds, and I looked forward to life in that spot again. But upon disembarking from the plane we were told there was insecurity in the area of the Peace Center and we would need to choose a hotel or guest house in town as our home base. Even though the Peace Center had been secure a few weeks earlier, things had changed quickly. What a disappointing discovery. I remem-

bered from my previous years in Sudan, however, to trust the local people, with their ears to the ground, to know about security issues and to let them guide us to a safe location.

It was the beginning of a summer of hard work in the hot sun, joy at renewing relationships with people we had known in the past and getting to know new people, and the blessing of knowing God was with us as the Spirit guided us through sickness and health, discouragement and success.

South Sudan is the newest country in Africa, birthed in 2013 after 60-plus years of war and insecurity. For four gen-



Don Shankster

*The American visitors participate in a trauma healing workshop with about 45 South Sudanese people.*

*Utong James, a staff member at the Peace Center, leads peace-making efforts.*



Carolyn Schrock

## HOW EXCITING TO DISCOVER THAT BRETHREN PEACEBUILDING METHODS ARE STILL BRINGING ABOUT MORE PEACEFUL SITUATIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN.

erations the people have experienced displacement from their homes, seeking safer parts of the country or moving across borders to refugee camps in neighboring countries. Such disruption has caused destruction of societal norms

and the ability to plant and harvest crops and maintain cattle herds, bringing poverty and hunger as a result.

Our planned focus was to assist with gardening and orchard projects that would improve and expand the food resources available locally. We were able to start a demonstration and seed propagation garden and assist the Peace Center efforts with fruit tree nurseries and sugar cane and sweet potato plots. With

*Carolyn Schrock preaching.*



Roger Schrock

drought in the middle of the growing season and unusual flooding in other areas, we discovered that climate change is setting in, confusing the normal ways of planting and harvesting and making local food security difficult.

As we got reacquainted with the town and those in the English-language congregation of the Africa Inland Church (AIC), we were proud to discover that some of the work the Church of the Brethren had been instrumental in starting back in the 1980s and 1990s was still thriving.

I discovered that each Saturday morning at 11 a.m., students of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) met at the AIC church for instruction and discussion of their weekly assignments. This is theological training that helps equip people to become pastors and church leaders. Ken and Elsie Holderread, former Church of the Brethren staff, had provided initial leadership for TEE in the metropolitan area of Khartoum, Sudan, in the 1980s. At that time it was impossible for them to work in the south of Sudan because of the war. It was thrilling to see that appropriate theological training has not been stopped by the problems of violence and displacement.

## The class of 2019 by J. Roger Schrock

**K**nown as “the class of 2019,” six Brethren spent Feb. 14-26 in South Sudan visiting the work of Global Mission and Service. They were hosted by Athanasus Ungang, Church of the Brethren staff member who lives in Torit and directs the Church of the Brethren Peace Center.

This experiential journey engaged participants in a trauma healing workshop with 45 people, worship with a new congregation in the village of Pacidi, and meetings with leadership to learn about the work of the Africa Inland Church—the Church of the Brethren partner church in South Sudan. The group also struggled with

the lack of infrastructure like roads, schools, and health care facilities.

The interactions focused not only on the struggles in South Sudan but also celebrated signs of hope—the political peace that seems to be emerging for the nation, plans for leadership development and theological education, and the belief that a better day is coming for the people.

This variety of experiences and encounters makes it difficult to summarize the group’s journey. It is easy to contrast the poverty of South Sudan with the affluence of the US, the struggle to survive versus the ease of daily living, and the lack of infrastructure ver-



Photo courtesy of Don Shankster

*“Class of 2019” participants were (front row from left) Phil Stover, Ann Stover, Karen Shankster; (back from left) Roger Schrock, Athanasus Ungang, Judy Frederick, and Don Shankster.*

sus the availability of anything one wants or needs. However, that does not capture what the people of South Sudan taught the class of 2019: “God is good! All the time, God is good!”

WHAT A DISCOVERY TO KNOW WHAT WAS BEHIND THAT ATTACK SO LONG AGO, TO BE ABLE TO MEET THE MAN WHO INSTIGATED IT, AND TO SEE HIM NOW AS A FRIEND.



Carolyn Schrock


Roger Schrock with a farmer in Torit.

Another former Church of the Brethren effort in South Sudan continues in the peacemaking work of the Interchurch Committees (ICC). The late Phil and Louise Rieman, who worked in Sudan in the 1990s, began an NSCC program called People to People Peace. Today that peace-building work is carried out on both sides of the Nile River. In Magwi County there has been much violence against civilians by soldiers and opposition forces. The Torit ICC has been hard at work to calm that violence using the principles created in People to People Peace. Through a series of week-long meetings, Utong James—a staff member at the

Church of the Brethren Peace Center—has been one of the team that has successfully convinced hundreds of soldiers that the trauma they cause is harming their own families and people. Soldiers have been convinced to put down their arms and return to civilian life. Utong James and Athanasus Ungang, director of the Peace Center, also have worked with the Torit ICC in other areas around the town to successfully build peace in local communities. How exciting to discover that Brethren peacebuilding methods are still bringing about more peaceful situations in South Sudan. Hope for a peaceful future is greater now, in late 2018, than in earlier months.

Renewing old relationships and building new ones were among the wonderful discoveries. While many of the people we knew from past decades in South Sudan were killed during the years of war, or died of disease or old age, we were blessed to reunite in Juba with several friends or former NSCC staff who now work in the South Sudan Council of Churches, other church bodies, government positions, or local organizations.

One of our most amazing new relationships was with a man named James. While in the capital city he sought us out to identify himself as one of the men who had attacked our Land Rover in December 1983 near Mayom, Upper Nile Province. “They” had been told that the local chief would be riding in our Land Rover that Sunday afternoon so they attacked, killing two people and injuring three others with gun shots, then burning the vehicle. They had been misinformed because the chief actually had not been present. James wanted us to know that they had nothing against us or the work we were doing in community development and church planting. Instead, they were trying to change the government. After 35 years he was able to explain to us what had been burdening his heart. What a discovery to know what was behind that attack so long ago, to be able to meet the man who instigated it, and to see him now as a friend.

In the 1980s and 1990s we experienced God’s presence in Sudan. It was a pleasure to discover God’s continuing presence with our sisters and brothers in the new country of South Sudan. 



Carolyn and J. Roger Schrock were Church of the Brethren mission workers in the area that is now South Sudan for several years in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980, they were invited by the Sudan Council of Churches to develop a Primary Health Care Program in the Sudd region with the Nuer and Dinka peoples, and continued that work for about four years. They returned in 1990 when Roger was invited by the New Sudan Council of Churches to serve as its first executive secretary. They lived in Torit until fighting forced them to move to Kenya, where they continued to work for the NSCC until 1996.



# Feet

by Jan Orndorff

I see the spotless toes  
Peeking out from the folds of the robe,  
Clean and relaxed from the ministry  
Of an unnamed servant.

I see Mary sitting at those feet  
Eyes on Jesus' face,  
Pausing the less important chores,  
Choosing "the better way" instead.

I see those feet on another day,  
This time caked with dust and grit  
Ignored by Simon's negligence  
To the task of his guest's comfort.

I see another Mary there  
Uncorking the flask of nard,  
Washing his feet with perfume and hair  
And rinsing them with loving tears.

I see Jesus' feet another day,  
Calloused, grimy heels emerging  
From under his robe  
As he kneels to wash the disciples' feet.

I see their feet in Jesus' hands  
Thomas, Peter, Judas, the rest  
Doubter, Denier, Betrayer,  
Those who hours before argued  
about their greatness.

I see each pair of feet come clean,  
As Christ lives the parable he taught,  
Of the wheat and the tares  
Still growing and becoming together.


I see nothing of what follows next  
Scripture grows silent.  
Did Jesus wash his own feet,  
Or did one of the disciples  
step up to the task?



Detail of Mural at Notre Dame de France, London by Jean Cocteau (1889 - 1963)

I see Christ's feet on the cross  
Iron piercing the tender flesh  
Blood flowing over the rest  
Cleansing and serving us again.

I see Christ's feet through Mary's  
eyes once more,  
Drenched in the dew of the  
morning garden  
Never needing to be cleansed again  
As he prepares to ascend to the  
throne of heaven.

I see the line of pre-washed feet,  
Waiting to serve and be served  
by each other,  
And I wonder if love feast is  
still our way of life,  
And if we truly do remember. 

Jan Orndorff is pastor of Sugar Grove Church of the Brethren, Wardensville, W.Va.

# WILL IT BLEND?

Among the many quirky videos on YouTube is a series “Will it blend?” The series demonstrates the power of a particular blender by trying to blend glow sticks, golf balls, light bulbs, a crowbar, an Amazon Echo, an iPhoneX, and a lot more.

MESSENGER tries our own version of “Will it blend?” by mixing two Church of the Brethren congregations or one congregation and a company to yield a hypothetical new congregation. (Well, a few results are real congregations. See if you can spot them.)

Our apologies to those congregations that we tossed into the blender. More apologies to those that didn't get chosen. If we made any mistakes, we were probably just a little mixed up.

—Wendy McFadden and Walt Wiltschek



Paint Creek church  
+ Blue Ball church  
= Paint Ball Church of the Brethren

Blue River church  
+ Yellow Creek church  
= Green Tree Church of the Brethren

Prices Creek church + Free Spring church  
= The Price is Right Church of the Brethren

Happy Corner church  
+ McDonalds  
= Happy Meal Church of the Brethren

Paradise church +  
Hades church  
= Eternity Church of the Brethren

Lower Claar church  
+ Upper Claar church  
= Center Church of the Brethren

Empire church  
+ Star Wars  
= The Empire Strikes Back Church of the Brethren

Rock church  
+ Endless Caverns  
= Spelunking Church of the Brethren

We couldn't fit everything on two pages! Find more from our blender at [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger).

Shady Grove church + Sunrise church  
= Partly Cloudy Church of the Brethren

Spruce Run church  
+ Better Homes & Gardens  
= Spruced-up Church of the Brethren

Mack Memorial church + UPS  
= Mack Truck Church of the Brethren

Ten Mile church  
+ Four Mile church  
= Long Run Church of the Brethren

Bean Settlement church + Campbell's  
= Pork and Beans Church of the Brethren

Spring Creek church + Summerdean church  
+ Upper Fall Creek church  
+ Winter Park church  
= Four Seasons Church of the Brethren

Guernsey church + Geiger church  
= Milkshake Church of the Brethren

Eden church + Snake Spring church  
= Paradise Lost Church of the Brethren

Big Sky church + Constellation church  
= Lone Star Church of the Brethren

Live Oak church + Brooklyn First church  
= Live from New York Church of the Brethren



# It starts with love

## Confessions of an aging peace activist

by Peggy Faw Gish

**I**n late June 2018, 19-year-old Dunya Rasheed, with about 30 children and other teens, went to harvest nuts on a mountainside belonging to their Kurdish Iraqi village. From a recently constructed Turkish military base, well inside Iraqi territory, Turkish soldiers shot a rocket directly into the group, killing Dunya.

When our group of volunteers with Christian Peacemaker Teams arrived, her family members were in shock and grief. They wept as they told us about Dunya. We sat around the floor of their sitting room, feeling their pain. We couldn't change what happened, or fix it, but we wanted to find some way to help. Could we accompany them to speak out? Could we advocate for them?

At the time, all we could do was be present and care about them in their fear, vulnerability, and feelings of helplessness—one of the hardest things we do in our peacemaking work. In our second visit, a month and a half later, the family asked us to help them approach the Turkish Consulate with their grievances and requests.

Why were we there in the first place?

I first arrived in Iraq in October 2002, appalled by the threats the US administration was making of war and destruction, and knowing that I needed to make a strong statement against war and for the way of peace. I stayed on during the start of the war and invasion of Iraq, following a strong sense of God's calling for people of goodwill and peace to be there with the people suffering war. I and other peacemakers found ways to help and people who were receptive and needed support. There was truth to be told in the midst of the lies about what was really happening as a

consequence of the war.

But let's go back even more.

It started with love. I was not exceptionally courageous, strong, or loving. As I walked into the midst of a people who felt helpless after years of deprivation under economic sanctions, and then were threatened with further devastation of their society, I saw that on my own I did not have the necessary strength. The only thing I could do was open my heart and pray for love, ability, and guidance. In my weakness and imperfections, God gave me the love I needed.

I have no corner on this source of strength and vision. Our Brethren history is rich with examples, and countless Brethren today are quietly putting love into action. Most of us have plenty of challenges in our own lives to consume our thoughts and actions, but whenever we receive the love God wants to give, something happens in our hearts and "there is a whole new world."

Love melts the protective walls we put around ourselves. It changes us and opens our eyes to the pain of those outside our comfortable circles—not only those suffering from war and oppression in countries where our own country has invaded or forced oppressive policies, but also those in our own society, caught in drugs or other paralyzing traps, or those marginalized or damaged by bigotry, hate, poverty, and unjust structures that deny the chance to thrive. They become real people to us, part of our family. We stop blaming, denouncing, or demonizing the victims of violence, and we find the time and strength to walk alongside them.

Love empowers us, compels us to find a way to act, allowing us to do what we previously thought was impossible. Love



Courtesy of Peggy Faw Gish

is the root of compassionate actions such as peacemaking, providing disaster relief, friendship and accompaniment, and doing the difficult work of transforming unjust social structures that kill the body and spirit. Love demands we get angry at injustice and callous killing of innocent people for the interests of the rich and powerful. Sometimes love demands we nonviolently disrupt or refuse to cooperate with evil. Love is a gift we all can receive.

I was appalled at how officials in the Turkish government could bomb civilian agricultural villages, kill and injure people like Dunya, push families out of their ancestral areas, and then justify it as “fighting terrorism.” It didn’t make sense that the Iraqi Kurdish government turned a blind eye to the attacks, not caring about their own people. One could see political interests and power-seeking of governments and political leaders behind these acts. Unfortunately, such actions are committed by our own government and in our own communities here in the US too.

Sometimes it’s fear that holds us back—fear of harm or death, inadequacy, loss of our own economic or physical security or status. We may feel weak, imperfect, unqualified, or discouraged. When we open ourselves to the pain, fears, and despair of others, we also can be hurt or experience trauma. Like many others, I have felt discouraged after 15 years of being present in Iraq, trying to be a light in the midst of violence and oppressive government structures, but not seeing more basic change. And it’s been hard, after years of working for peace and justice at home, to see forces of darkness gain footholds in my own society.

As I write this, I am still dealing with the pain and grief I took in last summer, and I am taking in God’s grace for my own healing. I’ve been able to reach out to my handicapped neighbor and to speak out publicly against bigotry and injustice here at home, but I have trouble looking at the images of starving children in Yemen and the violence in Syria. There are times when we become overloaded emotionally or physically and need to withdraw from the fray, as Jesus did, to replenish our spirits.

### **The power of love**

One of the most important, life-changing things I’ve learned in my work is how powerful love really is—that the biblical teachings are really true! Love does help us conquer our fears. Even though there are times when we feel weak, if we venture out in love and faith we find ourselves being replenished, strengthened, and healed by the living water.



Courtesy of Peggy Faw Gish

*Peggy Faw Gish and other CPT team members talk to children at Zharawa IDP Camp in Northern Iraq.*

If we seek it, God’s Spirit can take our fear, weakness, or numbness, and rekindle new strength and vision.

I have found that even though being present with the pain of others is difficult and sometimes traumatizing, I am given an extra measure of joy and strength when I do it. I receive love from those who appear the weakest. I feel closer to God at those times, more in touch with my faith and my calling.

You don’t need to look far to find suffering and injustice. How to respond out of love is obviously not the same for each person, yet there is something everyone can do according to their circumstances, abilities, and gifts.

As I get older, I realize that I can’t do the same things I was able to do even 10 years ago. The time will come when I won’t be able to be as active in this work. Will I still respond out of love and work for peace? I would like to trust that I will. I hope I will still share what I have learned with the younger generation and support and enable them to act. Even when I can’t respond physically, I hope I will choose not to turn away. My caring, my weeping, and my prayers will be no less important. 🙏

Peggy Faw Gish is a Church of the Brethren member and organic vegetable farmer from Athens, Ohio. She has been active in peace and justice work all of her adult life. Since October 2002, she has spent time in Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams.

**I HAVE FOUND THAT EVEN THOUGH BEING PRESENT WITH THE PAIN OF OTHERS IS DIFFICULT AND SOMETIMES TRAUMATIZING, I AM GIVEN AN EXTRA MEASURE OF JOY AND STRENGTH WHEN I DO IT. I RECEIVE LOVE FROM THOSE WHO APPEAR THE WEAKEST. I FEEL CLOSER TO GOD AT THOSE TIMES, MORE IN TOUCH WITH MY FAITH AND MY CALLING.**



# So many changes!

**How the new tax code affects you, your pastor, and your congregation**

**by Deb Oskin**

**T**he far-reaching **Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)** of 2017 contains the largest changes to the tax code since the Tax Reform Act of 1986. This legislation affects donors, pastors, even congregations.

## **First, the forms**

Gone are all the forms we know and love: the 1040EZ, the 1040A, and the “long form” 1040. The new 1040 consists of two half-page forms (the

“postcard”) and six attached schedules. Basically, the long form 1040 has been separated out from two pages to eight. Since the IRS kept the same line numbers on the expanded schedules, it’s easy to see that this is exactly what they did.

The Form 1040 “postcard” has six attached schedules including Schedule 1: Additional Income and Adjustments to Income, Schedule 2: Tax, Schedule 3: Nonrefundable Credits, Schedule 4: Other Taxes,

Schedule 5: Other Payments and Refundable Credits, and Schedule 6: Foreign Address and 3rd Party Designee. Most American taxpayers won’t need this last schedule.

That’s just the changes in the appearance of the forms. The substance has changed quite a bit as well.

## **Second, deductions**

How do deductions work and what do they do? To put it simply, deductions reduce income dollar-for-dollar, before income tax is calculated. These deductions have been changed extensively.

This article with several charts is posted at [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger).



The most well-known deduction is the *personal exemption*, which in 2017 reduced taxable income by \$4,050 per person listed on the tax return. This deduction has been eliminated completely by the TCJA.

Another well-known deduction is the *standard deduction*, which has been greatly increased for 2018. This deduction is used by taxpayers who do not use Schedule A to itemize their deductions.

Since the goal of deductions is to reduce taxable income (thus reducing income tax), the larger deduction (whether the standard deduction or itemized deductions) should always be used.

The *tuition and fees deduction*, an education-related deduction, has not been renewed for 2018.

Changes have been made to the

*moving expenses deduction*. Only members of the US Armed Forces can deduct their moving expenses. For all other employees, employer reimbursements or direct payments for moving are now taxable income to the employee. For pastors, this means both income tax and self-employment taxes must be paid on the cost of a move.

The *qualified business income deduction* is a new deduction available for sole proprietors, partnerships, s-corporations, trusts, and estates. Very simply put, it permits business owners to deduct up to 20 percent of their qualified business income, in addition to other business expenses. It is a complicated calculation that even professional tax software doesn't always get right. That's because it interacts with the rest of the tax return by including limits and phaseouts based on the total tax-

able income on the return (including the spouse's income, if applicable). It also imposes further restrictions on claiming the deduction on a set of businesses listed as "specified service trades or businesses."

The *alimony deduction* has changed depending on when the divorce was finalized or the divorce decree was modified. Everything remains the same if a divorce was finalized (or a divorce decree was modified) before Jan. 1, 2019. Alimony paid is still deductible, and alimony received is still included in taxable income. However, if a divorce was finalized (or a divorce decree was modified) after Dec. 31, 2018, alimony no longer appears on the tax return. Alimony paid will no longer be deductible, and alimony received will no longer be included in income.

On Schedule A, *itemized deduc-*

**THE FAR-REACHING TAX CUTS AND JOBS ACT CONTAINS THE LARGEST CHANGES TO THE TAX CODE SINCE THE TAX REFORM ACT OF 1986.**

tions also have significantly changed. Here is a review of this form, section by section:

**Medical expenses.** Medical expenses have a threshold of 7.5 percent of adjusted gross income (AGI) before any expenses can be deducted. For example, if you have an AGI of \$10,000 and medical expenses of \$1,000, the

first 7.5 percent (\$750) cannot be deducted. Only the expenses above the threshold can be deducted. This threshold is actually down from 10 percent for 2018 and 2019, after which the threshold will return to 10 percent.

**State and local taxes (SALT).** This section, which includes state and local income taxes, sales taxes, real estate

taxes, personal property taxes, and other taxes, is now limited to a total of \$10,000. Homeowners in high-tax states will feel this limitation.

**Mortgage interest.** Deductible mortgage interest is limited to home acquisition debt up to \$750,000, lowered from \$1,000,000.

**Charitable contributions.** Donations can now be claimed up to 60 percent of the donor's AGI, which is an increase from 50 percent of AGI.

**Casualty and theft losses.** These losses have been severely limited. Casualty and theft loss claims can be deducted only if the claims were caused by a presidentially declared disaster. Deductions are no longer allowed for individual events like fire or theft.

**Job expenses and certain miscellaneous deductions.** This section has been deleted in full. These deductions included unreimbursed employee expenses (including books, supplies, business mileage, business-related education); the cost of tax preparation (software, paying a professional, etc.); safety deposit box rentals; investment management fees and other investment expenses (books, courses, etc.).

In an important note, pastors are still able to deduct their unreimbursed business expenses against their self-employment income using IRS Publication 517, Clergy Worksheet 3, line 6.

Form 2106, "Employee Business Expenses," still exists. Before the TCJA, this form was used for unreimbursed expenses subject to a threshold of 2 percent of AGI. Now this form is used for miscellaneous business expenses not subject to the 2 percent AGI threshold. Only certain employees qualify to use this form: Armed Forces reservists, qualified performing artists, fee-basis state or local government officials, and disabled employees with impairment-related work expenses.

### Third, credits

While deductions are terrific, credits are even better! Credits reduce income tax,

**strong and courageous**

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Photo Credit: Glenn Riegel



BRACKETS ARE PROGRESSIVE, RATHER THAN FLAT. THIS MEANS THAT DIFFERENT TAX RATES APPLY TO TAXABLE INCOME AS IT IS “STACKED” TO GET TO A TAXPAYER’S FINAL “MARGINAL TAX BRACKET.”

dollar-for-dollar. Credits come in two types: non-refundable and refundable. Non-refundable credits reduce income taxes due dollar-for-dollar, but only until income taxes due equal \$0. For example, if income tax owed is \$300, and the taxpayer has a non-refundable credit of \$1,000, the non-refundable credit is only worth \$300. The remaining \$700 credit is lost.

Refundable credits also reduce income taxes due dollar-for-dollar, but they are not limited. Once refundable credits have reduced income taxes due to \$0, the remainder of the credit is used to reduce other taxes (for example, self-employment taxes) or to increase a refund.

The *child tax credit* can be used for dependent children who have not yet turned 17 years old at the end of the tax year. This credit has both a non-refundable and a refundable portion. It has been increased to \$2,000 per dependent child, with \$1,400 of that amount as a refundable credit.

The *dependent tax credit* is a new credit that can be used for dependents who are older than 16 years old at the end of the year, and other specified relatives. This non-refundable credit is worth \$500 per dependent.

#### Fourth, taxes

Here are some things to know about *tax brackets*. Brackets are applied to “taxable income,” not “total income.” Brackets are progressive, rather than flat. This means that different tax rates apply to taxable income as it is “stacked” to get to a taxpayer’s final “marginal tax bracket.”

Each bracket is added together to reach the taxable income. Here is an example of how to calculate total

income tax due for a single person with taxable income of \$50,000:

1. Find the bracket for taxable income of \$50,000 (22 percent).
2. Calculate the amount of tax due in the 22 percent bracket: \$50,000 (taxable income) minus \$38,701 (the bottom end of the bracket) equals \$11,299 of taxable income for that bracket.
3. Multiply taxable income for that bracket (\$11,299) by the bracket percent (22 percent) to find a tax of \$2,486 for that 22 percent bracket.
4. Add the 22 percent bracket tax to the total taxes from all lower brackets.
5. Thus, the total income tax owed on \$50,000 is \$6,940 (the total of \$2,486 plus \$3,501 plus \$953).

#### Finally, tax penalties


For taxpayers without health insurance, the individual shared responsibility payment has changed. Starting Jan. 1, 2019, taxpayers without health insurance will no longer pay a penalty.

For taxpayers with children in school, distributions from 529 tuition plans can now be used for tuition and

fees for private primary and secondary schools. The maximum tax-free distribution from these plans is limited to \$10,000 per beneficiary per year.

#### And now for something completely different . . .

The biggest change for congregations and other nonprofits is the new Nonprofit Parking Tax, which became effective Jan. 1, 2018. The IRS issued a “safe harbor” method in December 2018: (1) Nonprofit employers must allocate a portion of total parking expenses to reserved employee parking. (2) If more than 50 percent of the rest of the parking facility is used by the general public, then no expenses related to the unreserved parking spaces are subject to the tax.

Basically, this means that if a church or other nonprofit does not have reserved spaces for employee parking, it will not be subject to the nonprofit parking tax. 

Deb Oskin, EA, NTPI Fellow, is a member of Living Peace Church of the Brethren, Columbus, Ohio. She operates an independent tax service specializing in clergy taxes and leads the annual Clergy Tax Seminar offered by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.





# God helps those who help themselves?

by Tim Harvey

**W**hat do you get when you combine an erroneous belief about God, an ancient fable, an old theological heresy, and the lyrics to a favorite hymn? In this case, a MESSENGER Bible study with enough intrigue to fill two issues!

## 'Bootstrapism' or sound theology?

The saying "God helps those who help themselves" was made popular by its inclusion in a 1736 edition of Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*. It turns out, however, that the phrase is much older, first appearing in Aesop's fable "Hercules and the Waggoner." In this fable, a wagon is hopelessly stuck in the mud. Appealing to Hercules for assistance, the waggoner is told, "Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods help them that help themselves."

With a background like this, how is it that people are inclined to believe this saying represents Christian doctrine? Perhaps it is because of our American cultural context, where we've been taught to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Stories of the underdog succeeding through the sweat of the

brow and good luck are always popular.

Do we really believe that God relates to us in this way? There are times when I am inclined to think that we do. Have you ever faced a particular disappointment and thought, "If I only had more faith, then God would have brought about a different outcome"? Or have you ever heard someone say, "The reason our church isn't growing is because we're not faithful enough"?

Statements like these come dangerously close to the idea that we earn God's favor through our own behavior. The Bible, however, tells a different story. At heart, the issue concerns human nature and God's grace: are people naturally good or bad? Romans 5:12-17 brings this question sharply into focus. But first, let's consider some Christian history.

## Church history and a popular heresy

Christianity was mostly a persecuted, minority faith until the fourth century when it became an official religion of the Roman Empire. The change in status helped attract affluent Roman citizens in large numbers for the first time. Suddenly,

## AT HEART, THE ISSUE CONCERNS HUMAN NATURE AND GOD'S GRACE: ARE PEOPLE NATURALLY GOOD OR BAD?

church leaders were wrestling with the nature of discipleship.

Pelagius was a British monk who served Christians like these in Rome. While his name would eventually be given to two heretical viewpoints (Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism), Pelagius believed quite strongly that people's faith ought to show clearly in their behavior.

Pelagius also was concerned about the doctrine of total depravity, that people's sinful nature leaves them unable to participate in their own salvation. This idea concerned Pelagius; if humans are hopelessly lost in sin, why would people in his congregation even bother trying to follow the ethical teachings of the New Testament? Pelagius concluded that God's grace was abundant enough that humans could fulfill God's commands without sinning. While he never said it quite this way, the implication was that God will help those who help themselves.

St. Augustine, the famous bishop of Hippo, strongly opposed these ideas. Augustine faithfully led the church of north Africa through times of intense persecution, including helping the church decide how to respond to Christians who abandoned their faith under threat of persecution but then wanted to rejoin the church when it became safer. Quite possibly because of his more difficult pastoral context, Augustine arrived at the conclusion that humans could do nothing on their own to fulfill God's commands; all hope for salvation lies on God's side of the relationship.

Augustine and Pelagius defended their own views—and attacked the other—through letters and sermons for several years. Ultimately, Augustine's views were upheld by the Council of Carthage in 418. Pelagianism was declared to be heresy.

### A challenging scripture

Romans 5:12-17 is one of Paul's more theologically complex passages. One question to keep in mind when considering the text is this: do human beings need to be improved or do we need to be born anew?

Pelagius took the former view, understanding the phrase "all have sinned" in verse 12 to refer to individual sinful acts. Sins are acts that people choose to do, and that with a bit of care they could choose not to do. He concluded that if people could just stop sinning—or possibly never sin in the first place—then our own righteousness would assist God in our salvation. The ethical behavior the New Testament expects would be counted as faithful work on the human side of our relationship with God. People would, in effect, be "helping themselves," making it possible for God to help us.

### For further reading

Study of this topic is aided by textbooks of systematic theology and commentaries on the book of Romans. I found these helpful:


- *Romans: God's Good News for the World* by John Stott (InterVarsity Press, 1994)
- *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* by James W. McClendon Jr. (Baylor University Press, Second Edition, 2012)
- *Christian Theology* by Millard J. Erickson (Baker Academic, Third Edition, 2013)

Augustine strongly disagreed, believing that people need to be born anew. Considering the broader context of Romans 5, Augustine noted Paul's words in verse 15 that "the many died through the one man's trespass." All of humanity is guilty through Adam's sin, but all persons have the possibility of being made new through "the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ." Commenting on this verse, Martyn Lloyd-Jones described human relationship with sin and grace in this way: "Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you have done nothing, you are declared to be righteous."

### There's more to come . . .

Understanding this popular little phrase has led us on quite a journey—and there's still much to say, including how the Brethren have historically viewed sin, grace, and salvation. That will need to wait until next month. Between now and then, I invite you to consider these questions:

1. I was raised to believe that people are basically good and, given the opportunity, will do the right thing. Larger societal issues such as racism, gun violence, and other assaults on human life cause me to question what I was taught. What do you think? Does your observation of human behavior lead you to believe that people simply need improvement (as Pelagius believed) or do we need to be born anew (as Augustine believed)?

2. Take a look at the first verse of "Amazing Grace" in the Church of the Brethren hymnal published in 1951 and in the current hymnal published in 1992. The words are not the same. How do the different lyrics affect the meaning of the hymn? 

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



# Dear younger me

by Erika Clary

**If you could go back in time, what would you change?** That time you introduced everyone else on your team at the county academic team tournament but forgot to introduce yourself? The time when you weren't accepted to the honors college at your top school? Or maybe when your relative passed away so your cousin had to move schools and you thought you had lost all your friends?


All of these things happened to me. I'm not trying to make anyone feel bad for me; instead, I'm trying to be real with you. These things happen, and I'm sure many of you have a few things that come to mind for you, too. I know it isn't possible to go back in time, but there sure are times that I wish I could warn my younger self of struggles that I would have to endure.

I find it fascinating that in thinking about the possibility of time travel, the first things that come to mind are the things that we would change rather than all of the amazing things we have been blessed with. I think that might be human nature. But recently I have been trying to change that mindset. I have a multitude of blessings to be thankful for rather than wallowing over all of my struggles. While we look back and see our struggles before our blessings, God most likely sees it the other way around.

So how can we change our thinking? For me, the key is in reflecting on how I grew from the struggles that I had to endure. Earlier I mentioned being denied entrance into the honors college at my top school. Obviously this was not the

best news I ever received. But as much as it hurt, it couldn't have come at a better time. I was struggling to decide which college to attend, so I had been praying about it. After being denied into the honors college at what I thought was my top school, I was asked by Bridgewater College to join the honors program and given a scholarship to do so. As many people say, "When one door closes, another door opens." Looking back on the situation, rather than seeing the hurt and pain from being denied, instead I see one of the reasons why I decided to attend the college that I now love.

I understand that what I've said doesn't make the challenges we face any easier. But it does help us think about the ways that we are being shaped into a better and stronger person instead of solely thinking about how we would change what we endured. I think Isaiah 43:18-19 summarizes it best: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Next time that you are faced with hardship, I pray that when you look back later you will seek the serenity that you found in the midst of the struggle instead of wishing the situation had been different. 

Erika Clary is a sophomore at Bridgewater (Va.) College majoring in mathematics and computer science. She is a member of Brownsville Church of the Brethren, Knoxville, Md.

## Letter opposes drone strikes, Brethren invited to rally

**T**he Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in February signed an interfaith letter about CIA drone strikes. The letter from 25 faith-based organizations asked Congress to end the CIA's use of armed drones to carry out lethal attacks.

"There must be transparency and accountability regarding the use of lethal force undertaken on our behalf," the letter said, in part. "The CIA's program of drone strikes has expanded in the past two years to include strikes in Libya and Afghanistan. This is in addition to the CIA's long-term program of carrying out strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and pos-

sibly other countries. . . . By refusing to acknowledge most of its strikes, the CIA prevents civilian victims from receiving justice and conveys moral responsibility for killing on to an American people who have never been informed about this secret war, nor had their members of Congress vote on it."

The office invites Brethren to a rally against drone warfare on May 3 in Washington, D.C. The rally will call for an end to CIA drone strikes and for General Atomics, the company responsible for development of Predator and Reaper drones, to sign the "Future of Life" pledge on lethal autonomous weapons.

## GFI visits Brethren-founded groups in Ecuador



Jeff Boshart

wheat, alfalfa, and corn. FBU is seeking those with farming or gardening experience to spend time working on the farm and in community programs. Contact [JBoshart@brethren.org](mailto:JBoshart@brethren.org).

In Llano Grande, Boshart was greeted warmly by elders who remember the US mission and asked about many mission workers by name. These elders were educated in the Brethren school and remain fiercely proud of the formation they received in both school and church many years ago. Although the church is now United Methodist, Brethren values of service, peacemaking, and concern for the most vulnerable members of society have become embedded in the community. In parting, the elders sent their greetings and hopes for more news and communication from old friends.

A photo album is at [www.bluemel.com/churchofthebrethren/globalfoodinitiativeecuadorvisit](http://www.bluemel.com/churchofthebrethren/globalfoodinitiativeecuadorvisit).

### Although Church of the Brethren mission work in Ecuador ended in the 1970s,

the name lives on in Fundación Brethren y Unida (FBU, Brethren and United Foundation) and Unidad Educativa "Brethren" (Brethren Educational Unit). FBU is a non-governmental organization in Picalqui, about an hour north of the capital Quito, focused on environmental education for youth and teaching organic food production to women's groups. Unidad Educativa "Brethren" is in Llano Grande, in the greater Quito metropolitan area.

In 2017, Dale Minnich, a former Brethren mission worker in Ecuador and the first executive director of FBU, revisited Ecuador and the Global Food Initiative (GFI) began collaborating with

FBU. Two GFI grants supported FBU work with women and youth. This January, GFI manager Jeff Boshart visited to see FBU's work and attend a meeting as a newly appointed board member.

FBU is repairing and upgrading its facilities to attract more international volunteers and visitors. Boshart observed a cooking class and made several field visits. One morning was spent hiking near Lagunas de Mojanda, a crater lake in a protected biological reserve. Although deforestation is extreme in the area, the road to the lake was lined with more than 500,000 native trees planted over 15 years by school children with direction from FBU.

FBU maintains a tree nursery, a small dairy herd of 12 cows, plots of blackberries, tree tomatoes (tomarillo), and vegetables. Larger fields produce



Jeff Boshart

## Detrick and Sollenberger top ballot for moderator

**T**opping the ballot for the 2019 Annual Conference are nominees for moderator-elect **Joe A. Detrick** of Seven Valleys, Pa., an ordained minister and retired district executive; and **David Sollenberger** of Annville, Pa., a videographer who has documented Brethren conferences and ministries.

### Other positions and nominees:

*Program and Arrangements Committee:* **Carol Higgs Elmore**, Salem, Va.; **Seth Hendricks**, North Manchester, Ind.

*Mission and Ministry Board, Area 4:* **Jess Hoffert**, Inver Grove Heights, Minn.; **J. Roger Schrock**, McPherson, Kan.; *Area 5:* **Lauren Seganos Cohen**, Pasadena, Calif.; **Don Morrison**, Nampa, Idaho.

*Bethany Seminary board* representing Brethren colleges: **Kurt DeGoede**, Mount Joy, Pa.; **Monica Rice**, McPherson, Kan.

*Brethren Benefit Trust board:* **Audrey Myer**, Elizabethtown, Pa.; **Derrick Petry**, Beavercreek, Ohio.

*On Earth Peace board:* **Catherine K. Carson**, Fairfax, Va.; **Carla L. Gillespie**, Tipp City, Ohio.

Elections will be held during Annual Conference July 3-7 in Greensboro, N.C. For more information and to register go to [www.brethren.org/ac](http://www.brethren.org/ac).



Joe A. Detrick



David Sollenberger

## Dikaiois pilgrimage will visit Cherokee

### Intercultural Ministries offers a Dikaiois and Discipleship

Pre-Conference Pilgrimage on July 2-3. The bus trip will start in Greensboro, N.C., make an overnight stay in Cherokee, and visit the Museum of the Cherokee and Oconaluftee Living Village.

Themes for the tour include righteousness and justice, a history of faith, land and lament, and doctrine of discovery. An announcement described Cherokee as “a place that is at once a sacred homeland for the Cherokee tribe, a place of modern cultural rebirth, and a tourist destination . . . where layers of history and a modern American dream collide. Join us on a scripture-inspired tour of a region to reflect on how our values—and those of our ancestors—have shaped the lives of Native Americans.”

For more information and to register go to [www.brethren.org/dikaiois](http://www.brethren.org/dikaiois).

## Personnel notes

**Dana Cassell** is managing Thriving in Ministry, a grant-funded initiative of the Office of Ministry offering support for multivocational pastors. She started half-time on Jan. 7 while continuing to pastor Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C. Three-fourths of Brethren pastors are multivocational. Recognizing one challenge for them is less time and availability to travel for education, conferences, and fellowship with other pastors, Thriving in Ministry will offer resources and support in their own context.

**Shannon McNeil** began March 4 as a Mission Advancement advocate working out of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. She and Nancy Timbrook McCrickard are a team of advocates working at relationship-building with donors. She most recently was manager of human resources and constituent

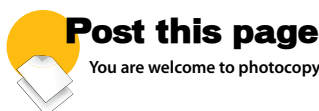
affairs in the Office of the Governor, in Chicago. She holds degrees from Bridgewater (Va.) College and the University of Chicago. She is a member of Neighborhood Church of the Brethren in Montgomery, Ill.

**Emily Tyler** started as director of Brethren Volunteer Service on Feb. 4. She continues to work out of the General Offices where she had coordinated BVS recruitment and Workcamp Ministry since June 27, 2012. In 2006, as a BVSer, she co-coordinated National Youth Conference and Young Adult Conference. As coordinator of the Workcamp Ministry she supervised BVSErs each year as the ministry offered workcamps for junior and senior highs, young adults, multi-generational groups, and We Are Able.

**Steve Van Houten** started March 6 as interim coordinator of the

Workcamp Ministry, working out of the General Offices. He coordinated the ministry July 2006 through January 2008 after serving as temporary coordinator beginning January 2005. He is retired as senior pastor of Pine Creek (Ind.) Church of the Brethren.

**National Youth Cabinet** members have been named for 2019-2020: **Eric Finet**, Nokesville congregation, Mid-Atlantic District; **Grace VanAsselt**, McPherson, Western Plains District; **Lucas Musselman**, Oak Grove, Virginia District; **Madison Creps**, Mechanicburg, Southern Pennsylvania District; **Rachel Johnson**, Mechanic Grove, Atlantic Northeast District; **Tristen Craighead**, Manassas, Mid-Atlantic District; adult advisors **Leslie Lake**, Illinois and Wisconsin District, and **Dennis Beckner**, Northern Indiana District.



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## Growing roots in Nigeria

I am currently serving in Brethren Volunteer Service in Jos, Nigeria. BVS has been sending service workers here for at least 50 years, if not longer.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and Jay Wittmeyer came through Jos on their way around the country visiting Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Brumbaugh-Cayford's photos and articles in the January/February issue are excellent and truly reflect church life here.

My perspective will be slightly different since I plan to be here for two years. My roots will grow slightly deeper and people will get to know me somewhat better. As a teacher and tutor I am in a unique position to benefit from the knowledge and varied experiences of my students.

Some of my students are professionals—pastors, lawyers, actors, and so on—and they are teaching me about local culture in ways one could never learn in a

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After you register you will be able to go to the Lake J housing reservations website to make your lodging reservations.

If you are unable to register online, please call the Discipleship Ministries Office (800-323-8039 ext. 302) for assistance.

National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) is an event for folks over fifty who want to worship, learn, reflect, pray, serve, rest, and fellowship in a beautiful setting.

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book. I am teaching them German, French, and English at various levels. In addition, I teach beginning French at two different primary schools. Among my students are prospective Bethany Seminary students who need to improve their English proficiency before embarking on graduate studies.

I want to thank the Church of the Brethren for sponsoring my time here and I welcome any communication that comes my way. My blog may be found at [www.fraumadame.wordpress.com](http://www.fraumadame.wordpress.com).

**Judy Minnich Stout**  
Jos, Nigeria

**Christian caring and pacifism**

I appreciated the November 2018 article by Joshua Brockway about the change in Brethren attitudes toward pacifism during World War II. I turned 18 in 1958, registered as a conscientious objector, and was fully convinced that Christians had no business being in an army or shooting any one. Sixty years later I still almost believe that.

Brockway’s statement regarding historians being tempted to tell the story after the outcome has been decided is exactly where I am in my own thought process. Hitler’s scapegoating, confinement, and killing of Jews during World War II has me questioning my own pacifistic beliefs. Without outright military victory, would that atrocity have been stopped? And if by some unforeseen chance the German onslaught ended without military intervention, how long would that have taken? How many Jews and others would have been horribly mistreated and killed before it ended?

In 1958, I was comfortable in my belief that Christians should not go to war for any reason. Today, I still believe war is not the answer except possibly in very extreme cases such as the situation with Germany in World War II. That causes me to wonder about the role of a caring Christian. The question of how we deal with the world around us as Christians and pacifists raises many moral, ethical, and faith questions that I personally am having more trouble answering today



than I used to.

Although there no longer is a military draft, there are still many reasons for a strong, consistent emphasis on the subject of peace by Brethren. Our youth need to hear about options for themselves beyond the military. There should be a continuing emphasis by the church as well as readily available curriculum on our historic peace stand and the concept of pacifism.

**Felton Daniels**  
Modesto, Calif.

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## TURNINGPOINTS

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### New members

**Linville Creek**, Broadway, Va.: Adam Beahm, Brittany Beahm, Donna Clinedinst, Becca Hardesty, Jamie Hinegardner, Amelia Hotchkiss, Patricia Kidd, Sandra Mangold, Baylan Nagy, Karen Natchie, Laurin Newman, Collin Rhodes, Marshall Rhodes, Alan Zigler, Terry Zigler  
**Maple Grove**, Ashland, Ohio: Heidi Clark, Andrew Cuffman, Shannon Cuffman, Alexa Keck, Morgan Stutzman  
**Maple Spring**, Hollsopple, Pa.: Rachael Hoge, Travis Kane, William Shroyer  
**Poplar Ridge**, Defiance, Ohio: Addison Hornish  
**Somerset**, Pa.: Barbara Barto, Ronald Barto, Roger Kalaha, Sharon Kalaha, Amy Peterman  
**Springfield**, Ill.: Tim Bender, Bobbi Dykema

### Wedding anniversaries

**Bechtel**, Doug and Brenda, Reading, Pa., 50  
**Catanzaro**, Joe and Judy, Delaware Water Gap, Pa., 50

**Evans**, Tom and Rose, Reading, Pa., 76  
**Kercher**, Bob and Hilda, Reading, Pa., 71  
**Massena**, Charles and Lois, West Lawn, Pa., 60  
**Mishler**, Ray and Ruth, Boswell, Pa., 65  
**Pettit**, Bob and Barb, West Brandywine, Pa., 55  
**Pletcher**, Richard and Susan, Nappanee, Ind., 55  
**Riley**, Robert and Carolyn, Uniontown, Ohio, 60  
**Robinson**, Don and Eleanor, Lititz, Pa., 67  
**Shaulis**, Harold and Nancy, Somerset, Pa., 60  
**Shifflet**, Kenneth and Anne, Harrisonburg, Va., 65  
**Stansbury**, Leighton and Dorothy, Harrisburg, Pa., 68  
**Stevens**, Gary and Orpha, Manheim, Pa., 50  
**Stutzman**, Clifford and Sally, Hollsopple, Pa., 69  
**Thomas**, Clifford and Marie, Nappanee, Ind., 60

### Deaths

**Alger**, Roger Lee, Sr., 73, Edinburg, Va., Nov. 3  
**Anderson**, Fern N., 85, Lewistown, Pa., Jan. 31  
**Byers**, Earl Thomas, 81, Green Creek, N.C., Jan. 6  
**DeFrates**, June L. Robson, 93, Springfield, Ill., Jan. 10  
**Denlinger**, Eldon R., 89, Union, Ohio, Jan. 20  
**Detwiler**, Chester Lamar, 100, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 12  
**DeVore**, Ralph E., Jr., 83, Williamsport, Md., Jan. 12  
**Eckert**, Lester Lee, 85, Dillsburg, Pa., Jan. 12, 2018

**Frysjinger**, Kevin Wayne, 47, Reading, Pa., Feb. 8  
**Graber**, Vivian Ora Werstler, 93, Hartville, Ohio, Nov. 25  
**Hawk**, Marybelle Hook, 91, Uniontown, Ohio, Nov. 4  
**Johnson**, Otis, 73, Cambridge City, Ind., Oct. 5  
**Keim**, Thomas D., 82, Hollsopple, Pa., Feb. 4  
**Kettering**, Betty Krieger, 83, Polk, Ohio, Jan. 20  
**Kinney**, Sharon Louise, Truax, 73, Walkerton, Ind., Nov. 16  
**Lambert**, Janet Simmons, 77, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 25  
**Livengood**, Helen Abe, 90, Strasburg, Va., Nov. 29  
**May**, James M., Jr., 77, Inverness, Fla., Oct. 24  
**Meek**, Jeanne Whitmer, 94, Charlotte, N.C., Jan. 25  
**Miller**, Daniel J., 42, McVeytown, Pa., Oct. 6  
**Moyers**, Joyce Catherine, 90, Harrisonburg, Va., June 13  
**Murray**, Willis E., 92, Cambridge City, Ind., Dec. 9  
**Myers**, Anna Mary Christian, 58, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 16  
**Owings**, Leslie, 52, Harrisburg, Pa., Jan. 9  
**Patrick**, Martha R., 90, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 9  
**Putnam**, Alba C., 95, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 1  
**Reed**, Larry D., Sr., 66, McVeytown, Pa., Jan. 21  
**Reid**, Jean Anna Smith, 82, Broadway, Va., Jan. 11  
**Renninger**, Ruth, 95, Lewistown, Pa., Jan. 3  
**Riggleman**, Sandra Steele, 66, Edinburg, Va., Jan. 19

**Roberts**, Beau L., 38, Mansfield, Ohio, Jan. 20  
**Ross**, Brenda, 54, Ashland, Ohio, Jan. 23  
**Sebest**, James Jon, 51, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 17  
**Sellers**, Velma Flory, 83, Plymouth, Ind., Jan. 10  
**Showalter**, Clarence H. (Bugs), 83, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 31  
**Showalter**, Marvin Earl, 91, Broadway, Va., Sept. 9  
**Snyder**, Earl, 88, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 14  
**Snyder**, Robert A., 74, Myerstown, Pa., Feb. 13  
**Spitzer**, Patricia Shifflett, 79, Broadway, Va., July 11  
**Wildasin**, Mary Bange, 76, Hanover, Pa., Dec. 18  
**Williams**, Charles Ernest, 80, Des Moines, Iowa, Jan. 17  
**Yinger**, Ray, 80, La Verne, Calif., Dec. 18  
**Ziegler**, Kathryn K. Dubble, 89, Bethel, Pa., Jan. 9  
**Zirk**, Mabel Simmons, 96, Penn Laird, Va., Nov. 18

### Ordained

**Hoffer**, Bethany, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Palmyra, Pa.), Feb. 10  
**Quinn**, Frank (Rod), Virgina Dist. (Blue Ridge, Va.), Jan. 27  
**Roetto**, Dwight, Shen. Dist. (Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va.), Jan. 27

### Licensed

**Beckman**, Teena Marie, W. Marva Dist. (Hanging Rock, Augusta, W.Va.), Jan. 27  
**Carter**, Robert, W. Marva

Dist. (Hanging Rock, Augusta, W.Va.), Jan. 27  
**Combs**, Brenda, W. Marva Dist. (Hanging Rock, Augusta, W.Va.), Jan. 27  
**Weller**, Dawn, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Pipe Creek, Union Bridge, Md.), Feb. 10  
**Zurin**, Kevin, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Hempfield, Manheim, Pa.), Feb. 3

### Placements

**Bell**, David, interim pastor, Walnut, Argos, Ind., Jan. 1  
**Christophel**, Sanford, from interim pastor to co-pastor, Conewago, Hershey, Pa., Jan. 27  
**Clift**, Ryan, co-pastor, Conewago, Hershey, Pa., Jan. 27  
**Cole**, Wallace, team pastor, Friendship, North Wilkesboro, N.C., Jan. 1  
**Hendricks**, David, interim pastor, North Liberty, Ind., Jan. 3  
**Henry**, Rebecca, pastor, Thurmont, Md., Feb. 1  
**Kerkove**, Dave, from pastor, Panther Creek, Adel, Iowa, to pastor, South Waterloo, Waterloo, Iowa, Oct. 1  
**Myers**, Janet, interim minister of Music, First, Harrisburg, Pa., Jan. 31  
**Shaffer**, Abby, associate pastor, Rummel, Windber, Pa., Jan. 1  
**Shively**, Eugene, from pastor, Antioch, Muncie, Ind., to team pastor, Union Grove, Muncie, Ind., Jan. 6  
**Woods**, Thomas, pastor, Living Stone, Cumberland, Md., Feb. 3

# Do we need the Brethren?

**I have been thinking about this question ever since hearing these words** from a staff member of the World Council of Churches, who recently visited the Church of the Brethren General Offices. “We have the voice of Protestant Churches, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and even African Instituted Churches, but we really do not have the voice of the historic peace churches.”

“We really need the Brethren,” he said.

Do we? Do we really need the Brethren? Would Christendom be incomplete without the peculiar niche of understanding the Dunkers bring? What if the Brethren simply went away—had never been born, so to speak, like a George Bailey?



JAY WITTMAYER

Many who come into the denomination from the outside are so delighted to find it. One brother puts it this way: “I did not grow up in the denomination. But I like to say, I was born Brethren; I just didn’t know it.”

Many share this sentiment. They bounce around theologically. Their faith journey takes them here and there and then, boom, they meet the Brethren and the loop is closed; it connects for them. Like homing pigeons, they settle right in.

This is what I have experienced in places like Venezuela, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Haiti. When people hear about core Brethren ideals, a light begins to shine. They sense that this is fundamentally different. It’s as if people outside the United States hunger more for the Brethren than do the Brethren inside the US.

It is not about doctrine, though that is significant. Nor is it about Brethren practices, or even an emphasis on service, all of which are important. It is more a perspective, like an ordering of one’s priorities.

Does South Sudan need the Brethren? Maybe, maybe


not. But even a modest proposal for peace seems like it could help enormously, something like M. R. Zigler’s “Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other.”

While it feels both sectarian and arrogant to suggest that the lowly Church of the Brethren has something to offer this distinct and ancient faith community, in reality it does. In the 1990s, through the ministry of Phil and Louie Reiman, the Church of the Brethren instituted People to People Peace, a program designed to bridge differences across religious and ethnic communities. Like a tiny mustard seed sown decades ago, the program has grown and is bearing much fruit. Brethren resources are small, but Brethren ideas are not small.

What about Nigeria, massive and restive, galloping past 200 million in population and challenged on every side. Does it need the Brethren? Where would it be today without Brethren nonresistance?

For Dan West, it would be inconceivable to imagine a redeemed world without the Brethren. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Heifer Project, it’s worth being reminded of his thinking: “Someday the world will come to see that the Jesus’ way is the only practical way of life. But it must be demonstrated first. If Christians could count the cost first and then decide to pay more than their fair share of it—take up the cross daily—the world will be redeemed sooner, maybe soon enough to prevent another world war.”

In truth, all religion is local. Do we need the Brethren at the truck stop, at the city council, in the food pantry? Every place in the world is local for someone.

“I believe that the little Church of the Brethren has ‘come to the kingdom for such a time as this,’” said West. “If we are determined to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, we shall never destroy the best that has come down to us but will help to fulfill the scripture, ‘Greater things than these shall ye do . . .’ The time may be very short.” 

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

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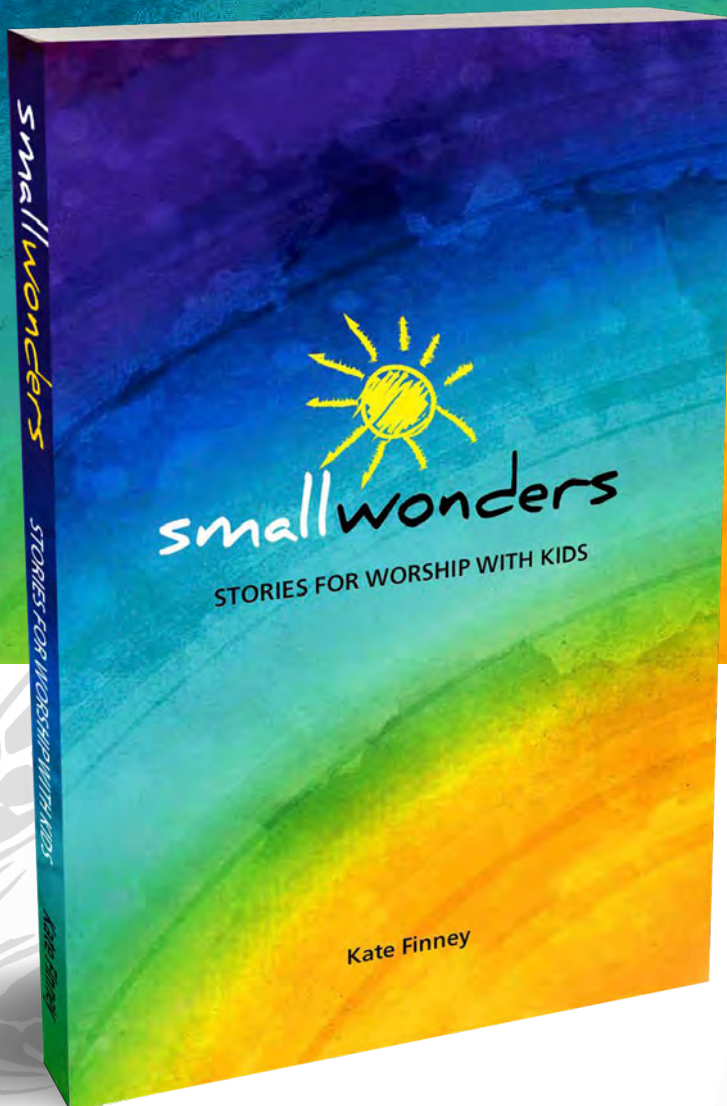
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