The background of the cover is a night sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person is seen sitting on a large rock, looking out over a landscape of rolling hills under the starry sky.

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

MAY 2019 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

MAY 2019 Vol.168 No. 4 www.brethren.org/messenger

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At-large editor: Walt Wiltschek Design: The Concept Mill

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The poetry of God

In a recent presentation to the Bridgewater (Va.) College Forum for Brethren Studies, Scott Holland suggested that publishing might well be regarded as poetry. Church publishers often say that we are both



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

business and ministry, but I like the idea that publishing is also poetry.

For a people who believe that in the beginning was the Word, surely this is true. The Brethren are a practical people, but why not be practical poets?

We can be poetic when we grow faith: Could it be that following Jesus is more poetic than linear, more parable than final exam? Immersed in the imagination of Jesus' countercultural stories, we can grow faith that is durable enough to serve us in a world that will be different tomorrow than it is today. That is a worthy aim for our weekly worship services and Sunday schools.

We can be poetic about food: Brethren of different theological stripes have an easier time eating together than voting together. That means there's something profound about the Inglenook cookbook treasure in our Brethren attic. Meal time is part of our New Testament faith and practice; the potluck is both love feast and messianic feast. Let's claim that mystery and metaphor as part of our Brethren identity. Let's sit together at the table that sustains us.

We can be poetic when we face the future: Holland asked us to ponder the idea of the "coming church." What does that mean? Who are the Brethren in this uncertain time? Without answering, he finished his remarks with a line from Ralph Waldo Emerson—words that came from this fuller quote: "Whilst we converse with what is above us, we do not grow old, but young. . . . Old age ought not creep on a human mind. In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; *the coming only is sacred.* . . ."

Emerson continues: "People *wish* to be settled; only as far as they are *unsettled* is there any hope for them."

There's no question that the church is *unsettled*, so that must mean there's hope for us. In this restlessness, we can be inspired by God's poetic Word: "What has come into being was life, and the life was the light of all people" (John 1:3-4).

How to reach us

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Subscription rates:

- \$17.50 individual rate
- \$32 for 2 years
- \$14.50 gift rate
- \$14.50 church club rate
- \$27 for 2 years
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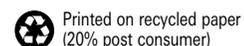
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MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.



Printed on recycled paper
(20% post consumer)



Christina Singh



Christina Singh

Above all, be blessed

When I was called as pastor of Freeport (Ill.) Church of the Brethren in April 2016, I started going around the neighborhood visiting people and inviting them to come to our church. It was then that I realized the extent of poverty and hopelessness that surrounded our church.

At first, with the help of the church family, I started collecting food and giving it to the needy families around us. Then one of our board members brought a picture of a “blessing box” being used by another church. She was excited about it and got us all excited too. The stewards commission got the job of putting together our blessing box.

With God’s help it turned out to be a beautiful blessing to our church as well as our community. We installed the box last year in April and blessed it. The following words are painted on it: “Take what you need, leave what you can. Above all be blessed!”

Since we installed the blessing box, innumerable families have been blessed and we have been blessed in return. —Christina Singh

Two centuries of living

Vernon and Angela (Sollenberger) Stinebaugh of Lancaster, Pa., both celebrated their 100th birthdays early this year. Angela, born in Johnstown, Pa., turned 100 on March 4. Vernon, born in Walton, Ind., reached his century mark April 4. They have been members of Manchester Church of the Brethren, South Whitley Church of the Brethren, York First Church of the Brethren, and, for the past nine years, Mountville Church of the Brethren.

Vernon was a professor of music

education, symphony conductor, and violin instructor at Manchester University for 31 years. He was a professor of music at Grace College for an additional 10 years. Ordained in 1953, he was called to pastor South Whitley Church of the Brethren at two different times. In his spare time, he was first-chair violinist in the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. Angela, a Manchester University alumna, taught elementary music in North Manchester for 35 years and often accompanied her husband on piano. —Becky Fuchs



Courtesy of Woodcrest Villa & Mennonite Home

Pennsylvania State Senator Ryan Aument presented a proclamation to Vernon and Angela Stinebaugh.

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.





Diane Mason



Diane Mason

T-shirts into diapers

Judy Mill of Lewiston Church of the Brethren got Northern Plains District started on a project to sew donated t-shirts into diapers. Thousands of diapers have been made out of “recycled” T-shirts by people throughout the district over the last five or six years.*

Initially, the diapers made by the district were sent to a Catholic orphanage in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, through a group in Rochester, Minn. One day, one of the women sewing them said, “Wouldn’t it be fun to take the diapers to Haiti and put them on the babies?” So after contacting the Midwives for Haiti booth at Annual Conference in 2013, in 2014 three women from Fairview Church of the Brethren—Vickie Mason, Sarah Mason, and Diane Mason—traveled to Haiti with 850 diapers. The next year 1,080 diapers were shipped to Kayla Alphonse in Miami, Fla., who sent them to Haiti via cargo shipment. Last year, three Fairview members—Carrie Johnson, Sarah Mason, and Diane Mason—returned to Haiti taking 1,300 diapers including some made at Ivester Church of the Brethren and some at English River Church of the Brethren.

At National Youth Conference (NYC) last year, Mill and Lynn Mundt of Lewiston and Emily Penner and Diane Mason from Fairview sewed diapers while youth cut out the T-shirts. In three days, 240 diapers were com-

pleted, and Alphonse took them with her after NYC. T-shirts and cut-out diapers that didn’t get sewn during NYC were brought back to Northern Plains District. Lewiston took some, as did Fairview and Ivester, and boxes were at district conference for congregations to take home and sew. Diane Mason brought home the rest and cut and sewed them—since NYC she has sewn more than 1,500 diapers. Since October 2018, some 950 diapers have been given to Midwives for Haiti and 640 diapers have been given to the Haiti Medical Project.

Midwives for Haiti (<https://midwivesforhaiti.org>) was started by Nadine Brunk Eads, at that time from Richmond (Va.) Church of the Brethren. In 2014, the organization used diapers to encourage mothers to bring their babies into clinics for checkups, and each mother received one diaper. In 2018, the project began creating baby packs that four mobile clinics take to mothers. These packs include a diaper, washrag, soap, and squeeze bulb for cleaning infant noses.

Midwives for Haiti trains midwives to work in remote regions of Haiti. These midwives deliver more than 200 babies each month—so even if each baby gets only one diaper, they need a lot of them. —Diane Mason

**Diaper pattern and sewing instructions are posted at MESSENGER Online, www.brethren.org/messenger.*

Project collects ‘calling stories’

The Office of Ministry has launched a “Calling Stories” project to collect videos of pastors sharing glimpses into their calls to ministry. Each two-minute video is available to view or download for use in personal discernment, Sunday school, and district ministry commissions. Videos are at www.brethren.org/callstory. Contact Dana Cassell at dcassell@brethren.org.

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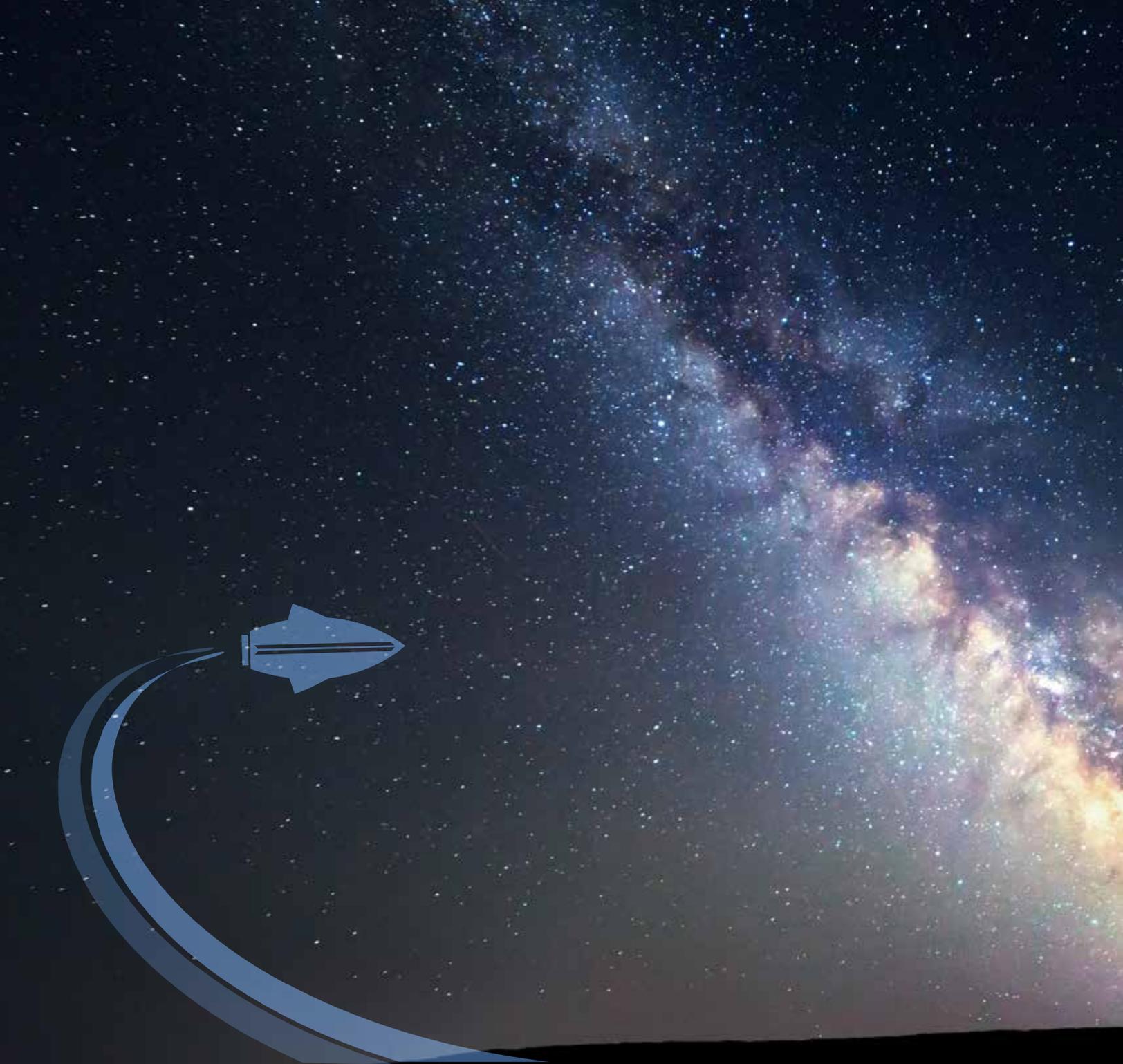
by **Steven Schweitzer**

The interest in science fiction in North American culture may be at an all-time high, and sci-fi has a deep reach and impact on that culture. So as the church strives to find ways to connect theology and culture, sci-fi seems a fruitful path.

The genre tends to ask deep philosophical, theological, and ethical questions explicitly. People of faith can connect with these concerns and engage in questions that the wider

culture is actually asking. The themes include the nature of humanity; experience of the divine; relationships between nature, humanity, and the divine; the role of culture; perceptions of reality; the problem of evil; redemptive violence; use and abuse of technology; function of mythology and ritual; the concept of *shalom* and the creation of alternative futures; and a quest for meaning.

Often linked with speculative fiction or utopian and dys-



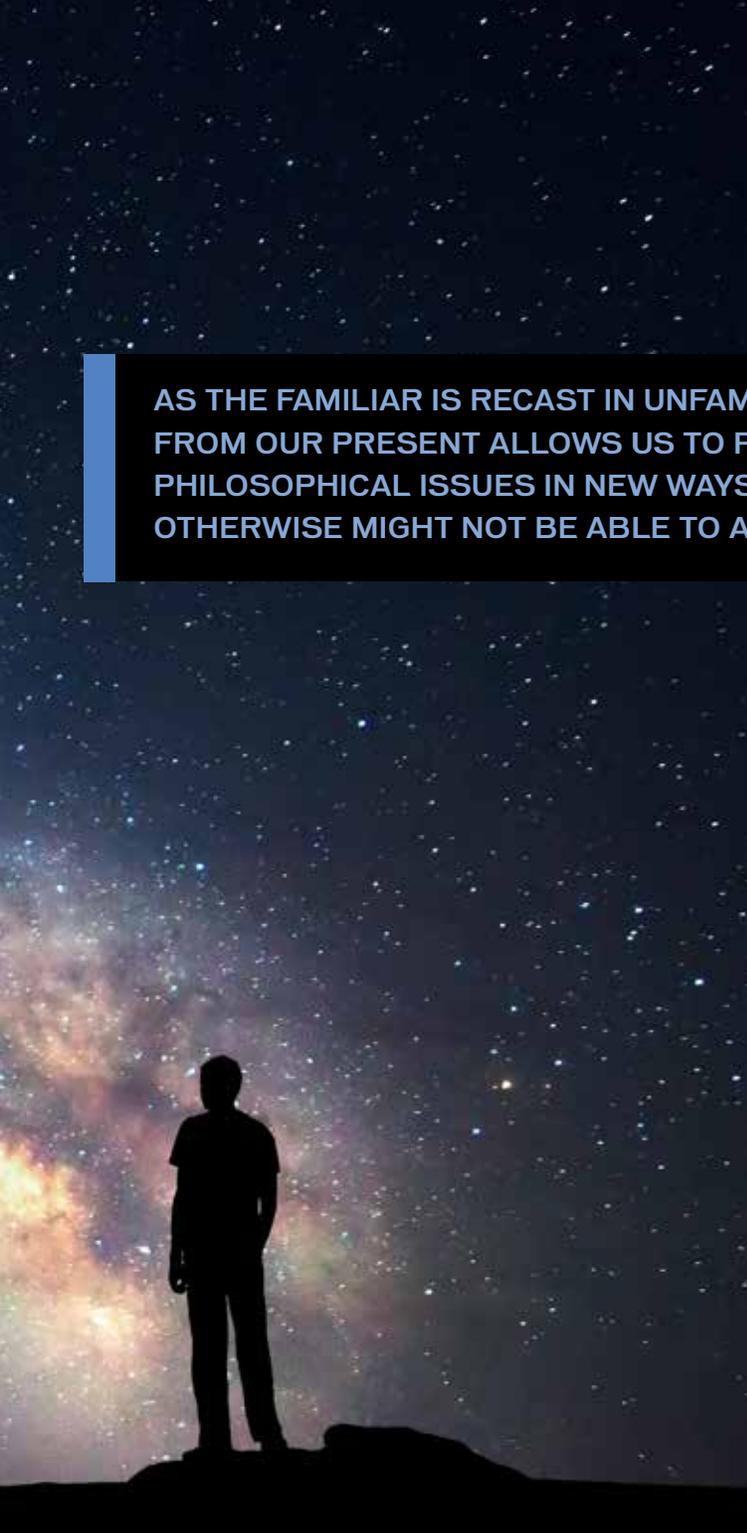
topian constructs, the genre of sci-fi is able to call into question our perception of the present, to ask questions, and to imagine alternative ways of viewing reality. As the familiar is recast in unfamiliar ways, this estrangement from our present allows us to probe theological and philosophical issues in new ways or to ask questions that we otherwise might not be able to ask.

Here are three widely popular sci-fi series that illustrate how paying attention to the theology that is present in the culture around us can provide such points of connection. (Warning: spoilers follow!)

Star Wars

The original three *Star Wars* films, set “a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away,” tell the story of the struggle of the Rebel Alliance against the Galactic Empire. Presented in largely dualistic categories in the original trilogy, the Alliance and Empire reflect the classic conflict of good versus evil.

The films also employ the stereotypical “hero’s journey” (via influential ideas from Joseph Campbell) on the road to personal discovery. While it could be rightly claimed that the original three films [*Episodes IV-VI*] of *Star Wars* are the



AS THE FAMILIAR IS RECAST IN UNFAMILIAR WAYS, THIS ESTRANGEMENT FROM OUR PRESENT ALLOWS US TO PROBE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN NEW WAYS OR TO ASK QUESTIONS THAT WE OTHERWISE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO ASK.

“adventures of Luke Skywalker,” the addition of the three “prequel” films [*Episodes I-III*] makes the six films a larger narrative that could be described as the rise, fall, and redemption of Anakin Skywalker.

Star Wars is famous for its Jedi, a religious order similar to Christian and Buddhist monks, committed to the “ways of the Force.” The Force is described as “an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, binds the galaxy together” (*Episode IV*). In *Episode I*, the presence of the Force is explained as occurring through “midichlorians” residing within blood, and can show up in simple blood



test. The mystical nature of the Force is thus given a scientific, biological explanation. This Force can be manipulated by the Jedi, using it to gain knowledge of both present and future, move objects, and even exert mind control.

While the Force appears to be more passive and to some degree utilitarian in *Episodes I-VI*, the more recent films (*The Force Awakens*, *Rogue One*, *The Last Jedi*) present a more active role. For example, in *Episodes VII* and *VIII* the Force awakens the woman Rey and seems to be actively engaged in how events unfold. The Force is also said to have a “will” (*Episodes I, VII, and VIII*).

This active role for the Force is clear in *Rogue One*, when we see a Guardian (not a Jedi and not Force-sensitive) praying to the Force to open a prison cell. This is the first example of prayers being offered to the Force, with the expectation that the Force will intervene in response.

The Jedi connect with the Force through training exercises, meditation, and a commitment to ascetic lifestyles, especially the suppression of passions. In contrast, the Force-sensitive Sith believe that power is the true nature of the Force, most commonly manifested through fear and conflict and attained by opening up oneself to anger, hate, and passion. These characteristics represent the “dark side” of the Force.

The arc of Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader ends in redemption in *Episode VI*, after the Emperor attempts to turn Luke Skywalker to the “dark side.” Rather than give into his hate, kill his father, and join the Emperor, Luke is willing to sacrifice himself. As the Emperor attempts to kill Luke, Darth Vader intervenes, killing the Emperor, but also causing his own death. While not explicit, it seems that Vader/Anakin’s love for his son is the motivating factor.

When Luke says he has to save Vader, his dying father (now restored as Anakin) states, “You already have.” This story of individual salvation and resistance to using violence is repeated in *Episode VIII*, when Luke willingly sacrifices



OVER THE SHOW'S LENGTHY RUN, THE DOCTOR TRAVELS THE UNIVERSE, TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF IT AND UNDERSTAND WHY GOOD SEEMS TO PREVAIL IN THE FACE OF EVIL.

himself nonviolently, allowing the surviving members of the Resistance to escape from the First Order as Rey uses the Force to rescue them.

Star Wars provides a wealth of material to discuss: self-sacrifice, friendship, redemptive violence, nonviolence, fate/destiny and free will, life/existence after death, gender, race, theology [of the Force], epistemology, dualism, asceticism, and the struggle between good and evil.

Star Trek

The *Star Trek* franchise is set in the future of our reality. First airing on TV from 1966 to 1969, *Star Trek: The Original Series* established a timeline that subsequent series have followed: Earth is decimated by a Eugenics War in the 1990s and World War III in the mid-21st century. Humanity struggles until 2063, when an extraterrestrial race, the Vulcans, visits Earth, bringing humanity hope for something beyond themselves.

Humanity is instrumental in formation of the United Federation of Planets—an intergalactic version of the United Nations—consisting of hundreds of species and planets with the goal of living in peace and exploring the universe, although threats of violence and oppression remain both within and without the Federation. How this promising future for humanity unfolds is recounted across 10 films and six TV series, set in the 22nd to 24th centuries (not including the three most recent films set in the alternative “Kelvin timeline,” with its much less utopian view of the Federation and our future).

Star Trek: The Original Series presented a future in which humanity was able to mature and (mostly) move beyond its tendencies toward war, injustice, and selfishness, valuing instead exploration, knowledge, basic rights, and social harmony. Creator Gene Roddenberry was intentional in depicting a starship crew that included leadership roles for an African American woman, a Japanese man, and a Russian man. While we may rightly critique some aspects of this now, this vision of humanity is remarkable in its historical context.

The show also explicitly included political and social commentary. Roddenberry took a particularly humanist approach to morality, ethics, and the role of religion. This skepticism, relativism, and marginalization of religion in *Star Trek* play out clearly (false gods are repeatedly revealed to be imposters, and religion is typically viewed as something that humanity has abandoned as it has matured).

However, each series is not uniform in this depiction.

Within the franchise, other species easily serve as the “other” and work at helping humanity define itself. For example, the Vulcans tend to be more logical, scientific, and concerned with self-control, especially of one’s emotions. Klingons are warriors, committed to “honor” and service of the Klingon Empire. Ferengi illustrate the excesses of capitalism. The Borg (a blending of cybernetic and organic life) depict the dangers of dependence on technology, collectivism, and loss of individuality. The role of non-humans as “mirrors” helping to explore “what it means to human” can be seen in the android Data from *The Next Generation* (whose quest is explicitly to become more human) and the holographic Doctor in *Voyager* (who “grows beyond his programming”).

In addition to exploring what humanity could become at its best, *Star Trek* addresses issues such as self-sacrifice, the tension between the “needs of the one/few and the many,” friendship, loyalty, duty, pacifism and war, pluralism, and the benefits and dangers of different economic systems. The various series also address the complexities of race, gender, and sexuality.

Doctor Who

Doctor Who is a British time-travel sci-fi show that aired for 26 seasons (1963-1989) before it was relaunched in 2005. The “new Who” just completed its 11th series (as opposed to “seasons,” which refers to the original run). Series 12 will air in 2020. The new series maintains continuity with the original “classic Who.”

The main character is the Doctor. This humanoid is a member of the race known as the Time Lords from the planet Gallifrey, who are able to travel across space and time using the technology of the TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension in Space)—itself a sentient being. The TARDIS is “bigger-on-the-inside,” which is both a running joke and a philosophical statement about the nature of reality used throughout the show.

“The Doctor” is the title chosen by this individual, revealing the character’s chief qualities: savior, healer, and exceptionally intelligent. The Time Lords are mortal, but are able to regenerate into a new body when facing death. The ability to regenerate into a new body, but retain previous memories, raises questions about identity and the nature of individuality (what makes me, me).



It is typical to refer to the various incarnations of the Doctor by number. The original run saw Doctors 1-8. The “new Who” reflects Doctors 9-13. We learn retroactively of the existence of the Doctor’s greatest secret, the “War Doctor,” who existed between Doctors 8 and 9 and plays an important role in the overall plot, explaining many of the Doctor’s internal struggles by actions taken during the Time War—an event leaving the Doctor with PTSD and survivor’s guilt when we first encounter the character again in the first episode of “new Who” in Series 1.

Over the show’s lengthy run, the Doctor travels the universe, trying to make sense of it and understand why good seems to prevail in the face of evil. A recurring theme is the insatiable curiosity of humanity, which the Doctor finds admirable. In addition, the Doctor is drawn toward the ordinary and bringing out the extraordinary from individuals who may not recognize their inherent worth. The Doctor usually is aware of social injustice and acts to assist those being harmed or disenfranchised.

The Doctor most often does not travel alone. The “companions” who travel on the TARDIS with the Doctor are typically humans and often female. These individuals usually bring out the Doctor’s best instincts and even serve as the Doctor’s conscience. In fact, it is often the relationship and loyalty between the Doctor and the companions that lie at the center of why the Doctor takes particular actions or not.

The Doctor refuses to carry a weapon and abhors violence and war. He does, however, use a tool, the “sonic screwdriver,” which can open doors, manipulate computer systems, and “change the polarity”—a running joke in the show. Thus, *Doctor Who* is one of the few sci-fi shows to promote nonviolence and diplomacy as the preferred options in conflict. This is most poignantly conveyed in the

famous and extended “war speech” made by the Doctor in “The Zygon Inversion.”

Repeatedly, the Doctor depends on wits, wisdom, and creativity rather than force and fear. The Doctor is clever and compassionate, always striving to find ways to show mercy and forgiveness, to offer redemption and new possibilities. One of my favorite exchanges, from “Extremis,” nicely summarizes the show’s values:

Executioner: “You are unarmed?”

The Doctor: “Always.”

Executioner: “You are alone?”

The Doctor: “Often.”

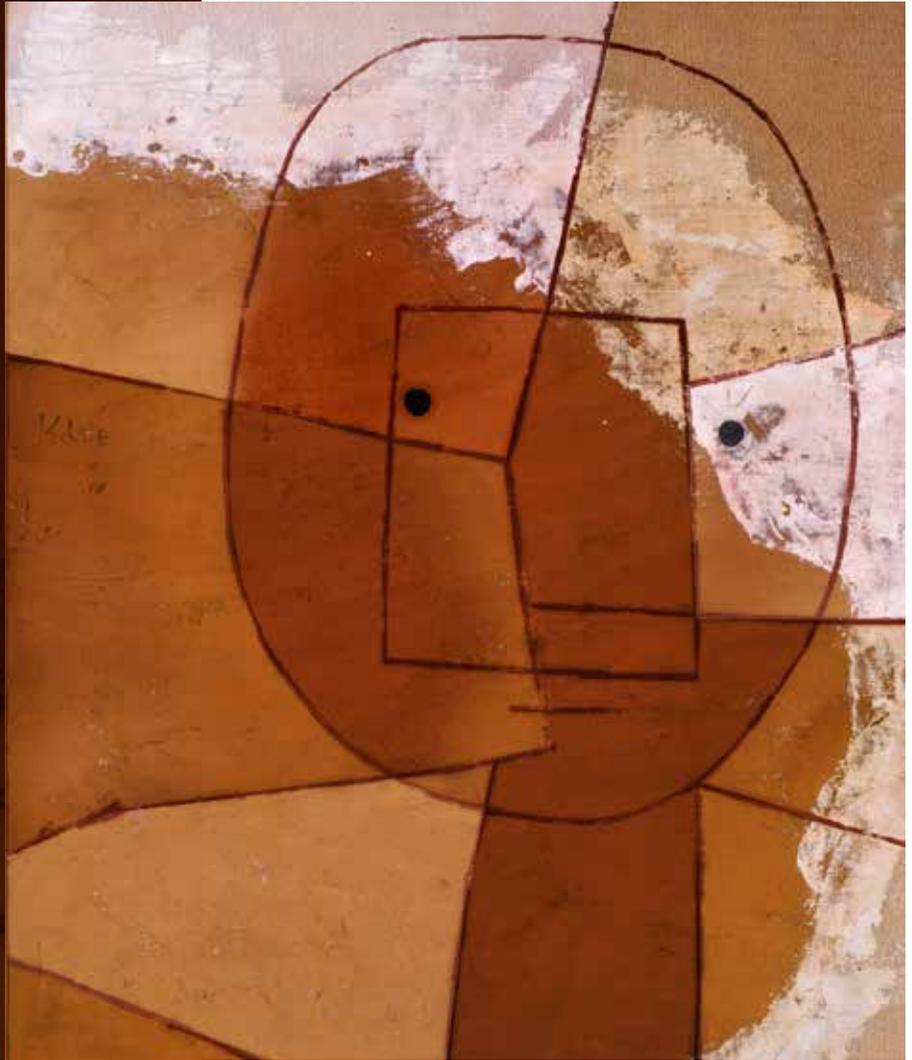
Executioner: “You are the one who should be afraid.”

The Doctor: “Never.”

The final words of the Twelfth Doctor before regeneration reiterate key theological principles that are reinforced across numerous episodes: “Never be cruel, never be cowardly. . . . Hate is always foolish and love is always wise. . . . Always try to be nice, but never fail to be kind. . . . Laugh hard; run fast; be kind” (“Twice Upon a Time”). As the show continues its run, now with its first female Doctor, it will be interesting to see how these themes recur and what new ethical and social issues it will engage.

Sci-fi is fun, but it’s also serious, dealing with real questions and provoking deep thinking about answers. We should pay attention. So, “May the Force be with you,” “Live long and prosper,” and remember, “We’re all stories in the end. Just make it a good one, eh?” 

Steve Schweitzer is academic dean and professor at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind., where he regularly teaches a course on “Science Fiction and Theology.” He has led insight sessions and workshops on this topic, and is currently working on a book for Brethren Press. He and his family attend Cedar Grove Church of the Brethren in New Paris, Ohio.



Choosing to be black and Brethren

by Eric Bishop

This is an interesting time in my life. My mind and my heart and my soul are in a conflicting battle. On many days I question my place and affiliation within the Church of the Brethren.

The struggle is real. It is not over polity or policy or some theological difference. It is about where my faith and spiritual needs meet my need to find my place in our current societal climate, and it is about where my peace and justice needs are met. That is just part of living in the complexity of being black and Brethren. This internal wrestling is about who I am, who God created me, and my place within this family of faith.

It was nearly 26 years ago that my roots were planted in the church as I was baptized at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill. Highland Avenue was my formal

BEING BLACK AND BRETHREN IS NOT A CHOICE. EACH IS ROOTED IN MY ENTIRE BEING, AND THEY CANNOT BE SEGREGATED. BECAUSE OF THAT, THERE IS AN INTERNAL CONFLICT. WHICH DO I SERVE, IF I CANNOT SERVE BOTH?

introduction to the Church of the Brethren. I took my membership classes there and I was dunked three times there.

My initial introduction to the Church of the Brethren, however, was as a student at the University of La Verne in southern California. That introduction was not overt but rather the subtle influence of many Brethren faculty and staff whose deeds, attitudes, and actions demonstrated their faith.

My introduction to the wider church came through the “Brethren name game” after I joined the denominational staff as news director and managing editor of MESSENGER and attended my first Annual Conference a month later. Long-time members tried to determine if they knew my lineage and my relations. It was amusing and interesting as people described themselves through their generational status, fourth generation Brethren, related to this line of Millers and Davises, or that line of Florys. In time, I started to help people out by describing myself in two ways: I am first-generation Brethren and I was born Brethren, but just had to discover it.

So the idea of no longer officially being affiliated with the Church of the Brethren is daunting and scary. My journey with the church has been smooth in some ways and challenging in others. In my research before joining the denominational staff I found out about the Church of the Brethren’s anti-war and peace stances. I learned that many from this church stood alongside the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. You can see the Church of the Brethren signs in pictures of the March on Washington in 1963. And this church was a staunch opponent of slavery, for which I am personally grateful, and it was an ally for the right side of the Civil War. You can understand how and why I feel the Church of the Brethren and I have shared core values.

To be black and Brethren isn’t oxymoronic but there is a juxtaposition of incongruities. I cannot speak for the masses because I am just one black man, and the African-American experience is not collectively uniform. Different perspectives play into the conversation. To go a level deeper, the incongruities are influenced by whether I am urban black,

rural black, or suburban black. That background forms the framework for my sense of justice, war, equality, equity, peace, and racism.

Deuteronomy speaks directly to what we face today as it spoke to the judges about not distorting justice and instructed the people to pursue justice in the name of the God. How much simpler could it be? The scripture talks about not accepting bribes. We think of bribes as monetary, but I would add that there can be bribes of the heart and soul. Justice can be perverted and distorted by the way in which the judges wield power against those whom they consider not worthy. In my case, I see those “not worthy” people as being people who look like me, or who are vulnerable, or who do not conform to society’s expectations for what is deemed acceptable.

What has been difficult is that my church has been silent when I am at war with society. The consistent injustices occurring against black and brown people are not solely individual cases that don’t impact us as a faith community. These injustices are about the destruction of humanity. Similarly, my being black and Brethren aren’t separate identities. I cannot undo my blackness. It is how I was born, it is how I identify myself, and it will always be how society identifies me on first approach. And whether I have an official affiliation with the church or not, I cannot undo my Brethrenness. I believe in peace and I believe in justice. They are synonymous to me. I always think of us not only as a peace church but as a justice church—like when we marched in solidarity with Dr. King, stood against the war in Vietnam, or decried financial discrimination when, as a denomination, we said no to redlining.

The struggle is real, for even in my Brethrenness I am Trayvon Martin, I am Eric Gardner, I am Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, and Tamir Rice, and Walter Scott, and I am Sandra Bland. All the judges in our society do not sit on a bench in a black robe and dole out their definition of justice, but instead they sit in cars with badges, and they sit behind desks as prosecutors and persecutors. I can neither hide my blackness nor my Brethrenness. When given the chance, my

WHAT HAS BEEN DIFFICULT IS THAT MY CHURCH HAS BEEN SILENT WHEN I AM AT WAR WITH SOCIETY. THE CONSISTENT INJUSTICES OCCURRING AGAINST BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE ARE NOT SOLELY INDIVIDUAL CASES THAT DON'T IMPACT US AS A FAITH COMMUNITY.

love for humanity in all of its forms, my love of peace, and my love of justice exude.

During a recent return to the church where I was baptized, I was reminded that I can walk into a space and make myself welcome. I wish that were true everywhere. But there is a constant reminder for black Americans and people of color that we live in a country built by us, but not for us. The very laws and proclamations that should protect us are either used against us or ignored when it comes to working for us. When we exercise our free speech rights, we are told to shut up and dribble, or to stand and be patriotic. When search and seizure laws are adjusted in the wars on crimes and drugs, it places the poor at a greater disadvantage.

Being black and Brethren means that in this struggle I am segregated from my true self because the Brethren half of me does not know how to engage. My resolve to be part of a peace church, a justice church, a church that has stood on the right sides of history, is met with emptiness—not because I think my church does not want to engage but because it is scared and it is unaware of how to engage. The whiteness of my church manifests paralysis in the face of social conflicts that require an engagement or understanding of the very neighbors it ignores.

As a church we talk about diversity and we are eager to open our arms to it. Largely those arms are open for international diversity, however, and slow to engage diversity when it is in the same city or only a few miles away. Why is this? Why is it easier for us Brethren to join the struggle for the oppressed who live halfway around the world, but not necessarily for those who live next door? Some might say that it's because "checkbox Christianity" is so much easier on the conscience than the struggle for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Austin Channing Brown in her book *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* writes about where reconciliation fits within the white church and blackness. She says reconciliation is about "diverting power and attention to the oppressed, toward the powerless. It's not enough to dabble at diversity and inclusion while leaving the existing authority structure in place. Reconciliation demands more." She adds that reconciliation is the pursuit of the impossible; reconciliation is what Jesus does. "Reconciliation is ministry

that belongs to Jesus." Because it was Jesus who left the comfort of heaven and put on flesh, experiencing the beauty and the brutality of being human, and who died on a cross and rose from the grave to make a way for all humanity to be joined in the union with God.

Our church has dabbled in reconciliation. In 1991, Annual Conference adopted a report on Brethren and black Americans. This was in response to a query that tried to call the church to a new sense of responsibility to confront the racist attitudes that existed within our denomination and in society as a whole. The church tried again in 2007 when it adopted the "Separate No More" statement, trying to answer the question of how we move toward becoming more intercultural. Changes toward acceptance, diversification, and multiculturalism are not easy. They are hard and they have to be intentional. In the 1991 report the committee identified "racism as a critical factor in our understanding of why the Church of the Brethren has not attracted more black Americans and why we have been slow in responding to their concerns."

Often, individual members of the denomination may not know what church statements are out there or where the church stands on certain issues. Those conversations may not happen locally. There may not be knowledge in the local church that in 1991 it was recommended that congregations become informed about the condition of life for black Americans and other people of color in their communities, and when inequities are discovered that they make strong commitments of time and financial resources to local organizations to work on these issues. Our largely white church members may not know that they also are called to stand in solidarity with black Americans and other victims of racial hate by speaking out against overt expressions of racially motivated violence and offering assistance to its victims. These and many other recommendations and observations come to a church that stands for peace and justice but maybe does not know how to act out that process. Why then does an arm of the church committed to peace and justice, namely On Earth Peace, get vilified when it stands with Black Lives Matter? Is it not following what the church has called it to do?

I was asked how an individual or a church may engage and be an ally when the congregation doesn't have a person of color in it. My answer is to be active, to be engaged in the discussion, to know the issues surrounding the absence of peace

and justice, to reach out and ask those in the struggle to share and lead, and not to be afraid.

But the work of reconciliation is not just about my white Brethren. James Baldwin said in his essay “The Negro in American Culture” that “to be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won’t destroy you. Part of the rage is this: it isn’t only what is happening to you, but it’s what’s happening all around you all of the time, in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, the indifference and ignorance of most white people in this country.”

To realize that Baldwin penned that in 1961 and that it is just as true today, if not more so, is incredible, scary, and frustrating. To be in the midst of all that is going on with the social justice struggle of black people specifically, and people of color in general, is to live in rage, disbelief, and frustration. Whether it is the death of those named above and others, or the treatment of our poorest in Flint, Mich., or the dehumanizing of brown immigrants—to witness my church that is rooted in peace and justice say nothing, is to be in rage.

As a church, we have long believed that “all war is sin.” But where do we stand on the war on terrorism—the war against Arabs, Christian or Muslim? Or the war on crime and drugs—fought against men of color who have experienced a whole generation being removed from their community through incarceration? Or the war on poverty—which has seen more Americans go into poverty than out of it in the last two decades? Where is our Brethren voice? Where is our systemic call for justice?

Being black and Brethren is not a choice. Each is rooted in my entire being, and they cannot be segregated. Because of that, there is an internal conflict. Which do I serve, if I cannot serve both?

We have been reminded in the scripture, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the children of God.” May the Church of the Brethren remember its identity as the children of God. 🙏

Eric Bishop of La Verne Church of the Brethren is an educator in southern California. He is vice president of student services for Chaffey Community College, an adjunct professor at the University of La Verne, and an instructor for leadership courses in the doctoral program at San Diego State University.

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It can be the church at its best Pondering the possibilities of Annual Conference with Chris Douglas

by Walt Wiltschek

In March, Bridgewater (Va.) College hosted a **symposium** titled “The Status of Brethren Organizations: Demise and Momentum.” It examined the trajectory of four Brethren institutions—Annual Conference, Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Press, and the Mission and Ministry Board. Bridgewater professor and former Annual Conference moderator Carol Scheppard gave the Annual Conference analysis, calling her presentation “Annual Conference at a Crossroads” (see sidebar). Following that event, MESSENGER interviewed Conference director Chris Douglas for her take on the annual meeting and where it’s headed as an institution.

Is it ever daunting to steward a centuries-old institution?

I really love that word—I do think it’s stewardship. There is, I think, a sacred ground about our meeting together annually. To be able to be a part of that is kind of a profound experience. When I’m meeting with convention and visitors bureau people and I say, “This is our 233rd Conference” or whatever, they are awed by that. I say, “Oh, that’s just the ones we recorded! There are probably some earlier we don’t even have minutes of.” The organizations they’re dealing with normally are 20, 30, maybe 50 years old. To have a tradition as long as Annual Conference is so rare for them that they’re kind of awed by the fact that as a church we’ve met together all those years. Even during Civil War times when we had churches in the North and South they still found ways to gather together in the midst of all that difficulty. Perhaps because of that difficulty it’s even more important to be together. So it is daunting, but it’s also a privilege.

What are the favorite parts of your work?

I love logistics, and in some ways the logistical part of Annual Conference is like putting together this enormous jigsaw puzzle because there are all these pieces you have to kind of fit in somewhere, and I love that. I also really love the people who are a part of it because every year I work very closely with a different moderator, a different Program and Arrangements Committee, different preachers, district volunteers, and so on. It’s just a joy to see the kinds of gifts that people share with the denomination through Annual Conference because everybody is a volunteer who does it because they love Christ and they love the church.

What are the biggest strengths Annual Conference has going for it today?

Back in 2012, when we had the church revitalization paper come to Annual Conference, they had done a lot of surveying in the denomination and asked questions about what’s most important to you at Conference. The thing that people said first was the relationships. It was an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of community and relationship. That was really primary for people. The second thing was worship. That was interesting to me, because I think those really are our greatest strengths at Annual Conference.

What weaknesses have you seen?

I think the extreme polarization that characterizes our culture and American society today has really seeped into the church. Sometimes we begin to imitate the culture around us in terms of our polarization and tending to see people with different opin-

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Glenn Riegel



ions as the enemy. I know it's always tempting to look back on the past with rose-colored glasses, but one of the examples I've given sometimes is one of my early Annual Conference experiences back in the '70s. Bethany had come with a proposal to sell some of their land in Oak Brook [Ill.], probably 20 years before it was actually sold. It was a very hotly contested issue. I watched during the debate—I was up in the bleachers looking down on

the business floor. There were two men; one of them was arguing very strongly against it, and the other was speaking on the floor very strongly in favor of it. And they were actually responding to each other's speeches. It was very contentious. But after business ended, both of those men went immediately to seek the other one out, and they embraced and stood there talking for a long time. I thought to myself, "Wow, isn't this great to be part of

Patterns and puddles

Annual Conference (originally called Annual Meeting) dates to at least 1742, when the first recorded gathering was held in Coventry, Pa. Details after that are fuzzy until the late 1770s. At least 232 such meetings have taken place.

During that time, Brethren went from meeting at churches or private farms or campgrounds to meeting in modern convention centers and occasionally on university campuses. The time of year, length of the meeting, business structure, and other details have changed as well.

In looking back on the history of Annual Conference for a symposium at Bridgewater College, though, professor Carol Scheppard (herself the Annual Conference moderator in 2017) found some common threads that have persisted through the centuries. Among those are the "round-about paths" that Brethren typically

have taken in arriving at decisions.

She described the pattern as follows: "Annual Conference holds fast to the existing prohibition in response to repeated queries, but it stops short of making the prohibition a test of membership; then, after holding for a few decades, Annual Conference ultimately allows the innovation. This pattern would repeat multiple times for multiple issues throughout the 19th and 20th centuries." So the recurrence of similar issues at Annual Conference year after year today should not be a surprise, she says.

"People in the church have done this over and over and over again," she says. "This is what Brethren do. . . . There are a lot of things we get worked up about as if it's the first time it ever happened, when it's really a repeated pattern of behavior."

Scheppard also raised the challenge of "puddles of authority" in the denomination, a phrase she says was likely

first introduced by former Bethany Theological Seminary professor Grady Snyder. Annual Conference, districts, the Mission and Ministry Board, and others have levels of authority in the church, but "how or even if authority flows from one 'puddle' to another is anyone's guess," she says in the paper.

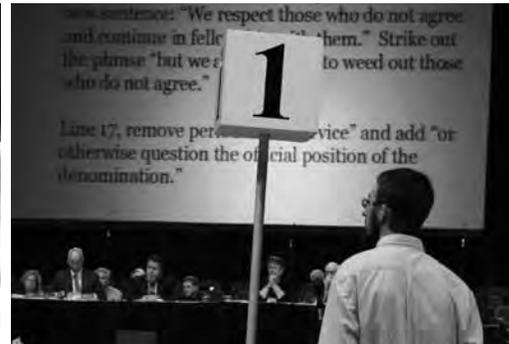
"There's no power flow," Scheppard said later. "In other places, ultimately there's a chain of command. But in the Church of the Brethren there's no such thing. Claims are made that Annual Conference is in control of all the polity and that sort of thing, but there are functional ways in which that doesn't work effectively and efficiently. There's no central channel."

Put together, Scheppard says that Annual Conference today "stands at a crossroads, assessing what of its rich legacy remains essential and relevant for the journey ahead, and what of its vestiges need to be shed to make way for new possibilities." —Walt Wiltchek

Ken Wenger



Regina Holmes



a church that can have such strong differences of opinion about an issue, but the relationship isn't severed in that." That's what I long for today. I fear that we're acculturating into the norms around us in a way that does not serve us well as a church.

The other weakness, I would say, is the query model.

Nobody brings a query about things that aren't contentious. The very nature of how we do business focuses the majority of our time together on the things we're most divided about. Imagine doing that in a marriage! At Annual Conference we have this precious time together as a church family, as the body of Christ, and to use most of it to talk about the things we disagree about doesn't feel to me like it builds up the body. I think it needs a different way of being together—a way of being together that can both affirm our unity, because there's so much we do hold in common with one another, as well as some significant painful things that we have strong disagreement with. I feel pretty passionately about wanting to find another way of gathering together that builds up the body of Christ, and I'm not convinced the query process is what's going to get us there.

What might be the alternatives?

I'm intrigued by the model that the American Baptist Churches USA went to. They moved from taking current event issues and having a denominational statement about those, to saying middle judicatories [districts] are welcome to make any statement they want, but as a denomination that's not how we're going to spend our time together. Congregations elect delegates, but they come to what they call a missions conference. It's all about what the American Baptist Churches are doing both in their ministries in the US and in mission in other countries. That enables delegates to go back to their congregations and say, "These are the things we're doing."

I think it would be good for us to hear what some of our most conservative churches are doing in their ministries—and the same way for progressive churches. I think to hear a lot of stories about ways that people are seeking to build the body of Christ could be really therapeutic for us. We would have to ask the pragmatic question: Do people care about those things enough that they would still send delegates? I'd love for us to give it a try, and I think not doing business as usual this summer gives us a

chance to try out what it looks like for us to come together and not have queries that we're fighting about. Rather, we're having conversations around tables about what do we understand God is calling us to do and to be as the Church of the Brethren. I can't wait to see how that works for us.

Is the current model sustainable given the changes in the denomination's demographics and other trends? If so, what changes do you see happening to keep it vital?

It's imperative for us to think about what we really want Annual Conference to be in the life of the church. To assume that people are going to keep coming to Annual Conference just to fight with each other isn't healthy or realistic. It's scary, frankly, to think of doing something different. When we first talked about changing this summer's format, one of the questions that came up in Program and Arrangements Committee was, "Will congregations still send delegates?" It remains to be seen, although one month in on registration we're actually running a little ahead of where we were last year at this time. So I'm hopeful the answer is yes, that people are willing to come together in a new way.

If you were making your one-minute "elevator speech" to someone about why they should attend Annual Conference, what would it be?

There are moments at Annual Conference when I think the church is at its best. During the era when Howard Royer was in charge of the General Board Live Report, we saw this amazing, hour-long presentation of videos of the church in mission around the world, and drama skits of ministries that were happening around the US, and just powerful stories one after the other. And then at the close we all stood and sang "This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior. . . ." I just sort of dissolved into tears because I was looking around the room and thinking, "This church, this body of people, is my story. My song. I belong to those people, and they belong to me, and we all belong to Christ." I think Annual Conference has the potential to have those kinds of moments for people. The reason to come to Annual Conference is for glimpses of how God is calling us as a body to love Christ and serve the world. 

Seeking the perfect recipe

Unique gifts for a unique Annual Conference

by Angie Mountain



It is difficult to imagine an Annual Conference

moderator more steeped in Brethren culture, history, and tradition than Donita Keister.

The daughter of a Church of the Brethren pastor and a lifelong participant in central Pennsylvania's Chiques, Mount Olivet, and Buffalo Valley congregations, Keister's long involvement in the denomination includes summers at Camp Eder, a year of Brethren Volunteer Service, four years on the Mission and Ministry Board, and serving as a pastor herself, among many other experiences.

Despite this rich immersion in the church, the time she has spent visiting congregations and districts since being elected moderator-elect in 2017 has afforded her an even deeper understanding of the denomination.

"I really see a common thread of what it means to be Brethren," Keister says. "It's hard to articulate what that is, but no matter who we are on the theological spectrum, there is a particular commonality about what it means to be Brethren. I definitely sense that as I'm with folks. Maybe it's simply a common love for wanting to be Brethren."

Keister's term as moderator has been shaped by the compelling vision process, a churchwide attempt to connect with members, gather information, and seek a way forward for the denomination. As someone who enjoys the process of conducting business, Keister admits this unusual focus for 2019 first came as a bit of a disappointment.

She does wonder, at times, what her experience might have been if she had been called to serve in a more traditional year. But Keister's background in the church and in her former bakery business, as well as a natural tendency to attack new challenges through logic and straightforward planning, uniquely equip her for the task she has been given.

Keister specialized in baking wedding cakes for many years, hard work that requires patience and persistence as well as careful attention to detail. She also learned to accept that after hours of painstaking craftsmanship, her work would be only temporary.

"As a wedding cake baker, I know that the cake I just meticulously decorated as a showpiece will be cut up and

“IT’S HARD TO ARTICULATE WHAT THAT IS, BUT NO MATTER WHO WE ARE ON THE THEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM, THERE IS A PARTICULAR COMMONALITY ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BRETHERN. I DEFINITELY SENSE THAT AS I’M WITH FOLKS.”

consumed,” she says. “I couldn’t get too emotionally attached to my work, but yet I needed to put all of myself into it so it was my best. I think I learned how to give my best without making it about me.

“When a bride and groom came with this picture of something I never did before, I would always say, ‘Sure, I’d be happy to do that.’ And so tackling this thing that neither I nor the denomination as a whole had ever done before felt very much the same way. You just dig in, figure out a right process,

and go with it, trusting that God will give you, and all involved, everything you need all along the way. It turns out that the compelling vision process has been an incredible blessing to me.”

Keister’s name appeared on the ballot for moderator after some of those she served with on the Mission and Ministry Board recognized her leadership qualities and submitted her for consideration. After praying about the decision with her husband, Brian, they found a peace about her agreeing to serve.

Annual Conference 2019 at a glance

The 233rd recorded Annual Conference will be held July 3-7 at the Sheraton/Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, N.C.

Theme:

“Proclaim Christ; Reclaim Passion”
(2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Leadership:

Moderator Donita Keister, assisted by moderator-elect Paul Munday and Conference secretary Jim Beckwith. Program and Arrangements Committee elected members: Emily Shonk Edwards of Nellysford, Va.; Jan King of Martinsburg, Pa.; and John Shafer of Oakton, Va. Chris Douglas is Conference director.

Worship and preachers:

July 3, 6:45 p.m., moderator
Donita Keister

July 4, 8:30 a.m., Brethren Press publisher
Wendy McFadden

July 4, 6:45 p.m., *Jonathan Prater*, pastor of Mount Zion Church of the Brethren, Linville, Va.

July 5, 8:30 a.m., *Joel Peña*, pastor of Alpha and Omega Church of the Brethren, Lancaster, Pa.

July 5, 6:45 p.m., *Tim and Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey*, pastors of Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren

July 6, 8:30 a.m., *Christina Singh*, pastor of Freeport (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

July 6, 6:30 p.m., *Jeremy Ashworth*, pastor of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren, Peoria, Ariz.

July 7, 8:30 a.m., *Tim Harvey*, pastor of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren, Roanoke, Va.

Business: Compelling vision conversations will be the main focus, alongside elections and reports. Each day, business sessions will include morning worship and afternoon Bible study.

Special events:

A bus trip to the *Civil Rights Museum* in Greensboro will leave the convention center at 9 a.m., July 4. An extra fee is charged.

Blackwood Brothers Quartet concert July 3 at 8:30 p.m. is free to registered Conference attendees. Others may purchase a ticket for \$50.

Jonathan Emmons organ recital is July 5 at 11:30 a.m.

Friends with the Weather concert is July 5 at 8:30 p.m.

Love feast will be held July 6 at about 2:30 p.m., near the close of the afternoon business.

Pre-Conference:

Ministers Association event with David C. Olsen on “Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence” is July 2-3 at the Koury Convention Center. Olsen is an adjunct professor with the Sage Colleges and executive director of Samaritan Counseling Center. www.brethren.org/sustaining

Dikaïos and Discipleship Pre-Conference Pilgrimage is July 2-3 sponsored by Intercultural Ministries. It starts in Greensboro and includes an overnight stay in Cherokee, N.C., and visits to the Museum of the Cherokee and Oconaluftee Living Village. www.brethren.org/congregationallife/dikaïos

Annual Conference 2019 also includes insight sessions, catered meal events, activities for all ages, and more. For detailed schedule, fee, and ticket information, and more see www.brethren.org/ac.

—Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Having taken that first step, Keister's need for solid plans sprang into action. Preparing both for the possible disappointment of not being elected, as well as for the work ahead if she was, Keister started praying about a possible theme. "I thought, 'Proclaim Christ, Reclaim . . . something,'" she recalls. "I toyed with 'purpose,' 'vision.'" But then she talked with Conference secretary Jim Beckwith who "was encouraging me around the word 'passion,'" she says. "It really solidified my decision. [Passion] speaks more about our spirit toward Christ; purpose points more to a program than what is happening with our spirit. The other emphasis that I felt called to bring was that of transformation and reconciliation and 2 Corinthians 5 [v. 17-18] was the logical text: 'In Christ, there is a new creation.'"

A fulltime associate pastor for children and pastoral care at Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren in Mifflinburg, Pa., Keister sought the blessing of the church's leadership team before allowing her name to be submitted. She has served the congregation in part-time and fulltime roles for 12 years, and has been active in the church along with her husband since their marriage in 1981.

The people at Buffalo Valley have offered incredible support, she says, and they seem to view this as their way to contribute to the denomination. Others have stepped up to offer support and guidance as well, including 2018 moderator Samuel Sarpiya, Beckwith, Conference director Chris Douglas, Keister's co-pastors Eric Reamer and Eric Kauffman, moderator-elect Paul Munday, and general secretary David Steele.

Her family continues to play an important role. Along with the constant backing of her husband, Keister will enjoy the presence of all five of her adult daughters at Annual Conference. The quintet—Rebecca, Danielle, Mary, Jamie, and Nicole—will sing during worship Wednesday night when Keister offers the sermon. Keister is also grandma to three little boys, with another infant expected to arrive before Annual Conference, and a foster grandchild or two.

Having a larger sense of family comes naturally to Keister, the middle of three daughters born to John and Ruby (Kipp) Shenk. She grew up with two foster brothers who joined the family when she was about 5 years old and the boys a few years older. Although one left their home as a teen, the other remains connected to the family.

Becoming a foster family speaks to her father's heart for ministry, says Keister. He was raised in the Chiques congregation in Manheim, Pa., and her mother grew up at Mount Olivet Church of the Brethren in Newport, Pa. About 10 years after their marriage, John felt compelled to take his young family to a church that really needed one—a smaller congrega-



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

tion that could use an extra hand. He was soon called into bi-vocational ministry by their new church home, and he continued for about 20 years.

One way his family became involved in ministry with him was through music. It was always John's dream to be part of a Southern-style singing group, Keister remembers, and so they became the Shenk Family Singers. They started out singing a cappella, but Keister learned to play piano by ear and became the group's accompanist. She also plays guitar and has found that talent useful in her own ministry.

Along with music, Keister has enjoyed sewing and drawing. She made clothes for her dolls as a child, and now uses her skills to make costumes for musicals at Mifflinburg High School. She also served for 12 years on the local school board.

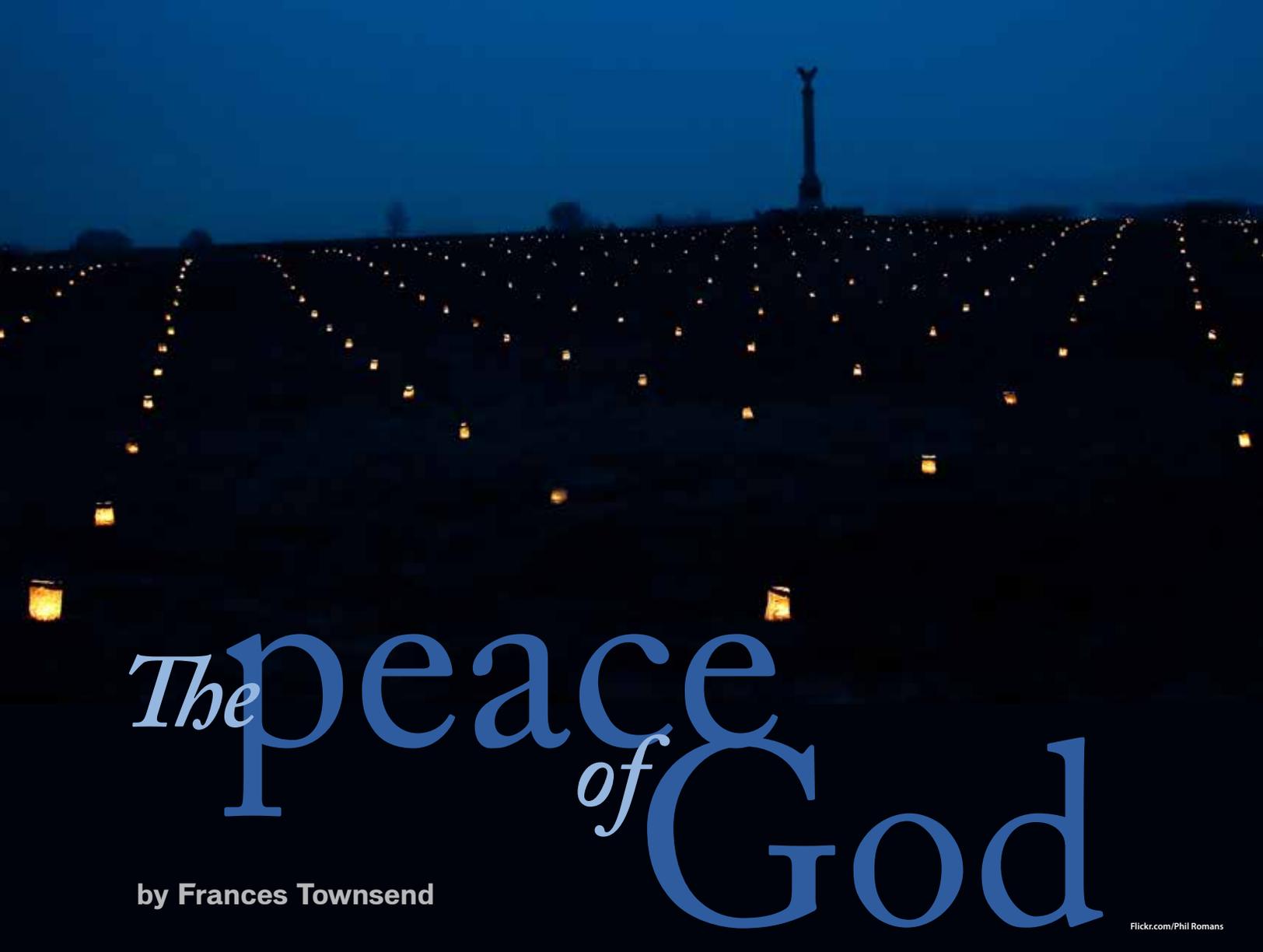
Within the Church of the Brethren, Keister's desire to contribute has led her to serve on Southern Pennsylvania District's program and arrangements committee and ethics assessment team. She has presented insight sessions on children's and family ministry at Annual Conference and helps out just about anywhere she's needed in her home congregation.

Wanting to see the church be successful in its mission to carry out its calling from God is part of what motivates Keister as moderator, and through the compelling vision process she has witnessed that desire in others. "People that are coming—whether to a district conference, a district event, or a compelling vision conversation—they're coming because they're invested, and because they care. They want to find this way forward. That is very inspiring to me. They're coming, and they're going back to their congregations, and they're like yeast in these congregations."

Keister likens the situation in the church to a couple experiencing brokenness in their relationship. Whenever a couple comes to a pastor and wants their marriage to be better, she says, then there is hope. But if even one of them is just looking for a reason to leave, then you know the marriage is probably over.

"In the church I see us, overall, wanting it to be better," she says. "So that gives me hope."

Angie Mountain is a member of Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, where she is ministries coordinator and a Sunday school teacher for high school youth.



The Peace of God

by Frances Townsend

Flickr.com/Phil Romans

During the Civil War, the single bloodiest battle was at Antietam on Sept. 17, 1862. About 3,650 men died that day. The vast majority on both sides were Christian.

Was heaven divided between Union and Confederate or did those souls enter heaven together? Were the dead still enemies? Did Jesus have to hold them apart as they warred, even in the heavenly realm? Did they still wave their respective flags and recall how many enemies they had killed? Or was all of that swept away as unimportant when they saw God?

The God we worship, who is in all and above all, created and loves the whole universe—not just our country. We put flags over the caskets of military veterans, but how much does that matter after death? We can be very sure that life in eternity will outlast every nation under the sun.

Brethren have been pacifists from our beginning, holding that killing is not what Jesus asks of us. Being pacifist is sometimes dangerous. In *Fruit of the Vine*, historian Donald Durnbaugh writes of Brethren settlers in Missouri and

Kansas who were driven out of the area by pro-slavery zealots. They were robbed, their crops burned, and sometimes worse things happened to them.

One story Durnbaugh told was of Quantrill's Raiders, a Confederate band that attacked Lawrence, Kan., doing terrible damage and killing a lot of people. On their way back south, through Missouri, they terrorized Brethren settlers. An elder named Abraham Rothrock tried to talk the raiders out of destroying his homestead, but one of them threw him into the cellar and shot him three times, saying, "That's the way we treat all damned old preachers!" Then they set fire to his house.

Rothrock was not dead, and his neighbors pulled him out. While he was recuperating, a neighboring Baptist minister assumed that the horrible experience might make Rothrock back down from his pacifist principles. He asked, "Mr. Rothrock, what would you do if you had those men in your power now?" The elder replied, "I would convert every one of them." The Baptist minister said, "Well, that beats my religion."



Flickr.com/Phil Remans

In December, Antietam battlefield is lit with luminaries representing each individual killed. The Dunker church (left) was in the midst of the battle and was used as a hospital for Confederate troops.

ON MEMORIAL DAY, WE REMEMBER THOSE WHO WENT OFF TO WAR AND NEVER CAME HOME AGAIN, BUT WE MAY IMAGINE THEM ASCENDING TO HEAVEN HAND-IN-HAND WITH THOSE WHO WERE THEIR ENEMIES.

Killing an enemy takes away that person's chance of being saved and healed by God, so this is about more than just avoiding the stain on one's own soul. We do not have to debate whether killing someone in war is a violation of the commandment against murder because this is not just about whether that is a sin. This is also about all the people who may be harmed in war, and about how God is working through their lives.

Of the nations of the world, which are the greatest allies of the United States? And who have been our bitterest enemies? Today's enemies become tomorrow's respected friends. Maybe this is a reason Jesus said to pray for our enemies.

If countries we count as enemies today may become our good friends tomorrow, wouldn't it be better, cheaper, and less damaging to the world to start treating them as friends now? Or, at least, can we refrain from regarding our enemies as subhuman and undeserving of respect?

Respect and honor

Generation after generation, in every culture in the world, societies have taught that warriors gain honor—so boys growing up in small towns in central Michigan, where I live, may not see other paths to honor open to them and they go into the military. At every high school graduation, young people joining the military are singled out for attention and bragged about by their communities.

But what did Jesus say about the path to honor? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." And Paul wrote that the most important gift of the Holy Spirit is love. It is our secret superpower that can change the world. Christians can take that love, which comes from God, and use it to bring healing, even to those who happen to be thought of as our enemies today. Love is not just a fuzzy feeling, but is honor and respect for others.

There are healers of society who make the world a better place and avert wars. There are people who bring God's will to bear in various situations and calm things down. You and I may be alive right now because of some quiet diplo-

mat who worked behind the scenes to avert a war. We may be the unknowing beneficiaries of quiet moves to pour life and love into conflict situations.

Sometimes we find out about such people and give them a Nobel Peace Prize. But those people and events are just a tiny fraction of all that goes on to sustain life on Earth. God knows about each peacemaker, though, and, if there is no glory and honor in this life for these real heroes, God can make good any needed reward.

What do you suppose a history book would be like written from God's perspective? What people and events would get written up? Whose lives would turn out to have made an impact? What wars that were never fought would get prominent placement? God's history book is full of turning points and stories of valor entirely invisible to us.

God's perspective

Imagine that book of history from God's eternal perspective, the perspective of Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'"

The stories in that book might be about the unknown people who kept the guns from being drawn. It might lift up diplomats, doctors, preachers, Sunday school teachers, nurses and aides—everybody who tries to make life a little better for someone else. It might lift up everyone who, because of their faith, tries to help others find that same faith in God and Jesus. It would be the story of every person who bends history in the direction of peace and healing.

On Memorial Day, we remember those who went off to war and never came home again, but we may imagine them ascending to heaven hand-in-hand with those who were their enemies. We honor these dead by doing all in our power to make for peace, so that fewer of our children go to war. 

Frances Townsend pastors two congregations in Michigan, Onekama Church of the Brethren and Marilla Church of the Brethren.



Flickr.com/Rob Donnelly

We once were lost

by Tim Harvey

Last month's Bible study column began our study "God helps those who help themselves," and it revealed an old theological debate: Do human beings need to be reborn, or do we simply need to be improved? Our study of both Romans 5:12-17 and church history led us to the conclusion that this popular statement does not reflect correct teaching; when it comes to our salvation, sin leaves us unable to help ourselves.

Our study continues this month in conversation with both Brethren theology and a popular hymn, before moving to some final thoughts.

Brethren theology

Dale Brown addresses sin and salvation in his book *Another Way of Believing*, noting that the question of original sin is not one that Brethren have extensively debated. When pressed on this, many Anabaptists and Pietists simply adopted the position defended by Augustine in the fourth century.

William Beahm (long ago dean and professor of theology at Bethany Biblical Seminary) was one Brethren writer who did address these topics. In his book *Studies in Christian*

Belief, Beahm describes the difference between *sin* (something inherent to our identity) and *sins* (actions that are offensive to God), ultimately affirming the position outlined by Augustine:

"Sin is a problem at the center of the self, not merely of specific external acts. Tinkering with these acts is ineffective unless and until the heart is changed" (135).

But if this discussion sounds unfamiliar to Brethren, it might be because we have spent much more time defining faith in terms of *following Jesus*—focusing our thoughts on issues after "the heart is changed." Brethren love taglines like "For the glory of God and our neighbor's good" and "Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together."

Interestingly, our taglines show that we are concerned with the same questions of spiritual transformation and ethical behavior that prompted Pelagius (a theologian who was declared a heretic in AD 418) to begin thinking about the nature of salvation. Even though we reject Pelagius' conclusions, these are necessary questions to consider.

THESE SPECIFIC LIFE EXPERIENCES—AND THE TRANSFORMATION THAT FOLLOWED—GREATLY INFORMED THE LYRICS OF “AMAZING GRACE,” INCLUDING THE **UNAVOIDABLE SPIRITUAL CONDITION IMPLIED IN THE WORD “WRETCH.”**

What about our own souls?

Our practical natures might tempt us to remain somewhat uninspired by technical sounding theological questions. But it is helpful to remember that we are called to love God with our minds. Since theological statements on human nature are all around us—especially in our hymns—it is good to ponder these topics.

One such hymn is “Amazing Grace.” Congregations that use the 1951 “red hymnal” are familiar with the phrase “Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a man like me.” Those who use the current “blue hymnal” sing the hymn’s original lyrics: “Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”

The 1951 hymnal committee’s revision of the first line is a significant theological choice, one that changes the hymn’s meaning. Never minding the red hymnal’s non-inclusive language (something we weren’t thinking much about in 1951), what is the difference between “a man (or woman) like me” and “a wretch like me”?

For the hymn’s author, John Newton, the difference was stark. As a young man who served on both merchant and slave ships, Newton had a reputation for being an offensively crude man in settings where crude behavior was the norm. His own journals describe his mistreatment of the slaves he transported, strongly implying in his own words that rape was part of this mistreatment.

Life on a ship in those days was filled with personal danger as well, and Newton had several near-death experiences while on board. Furthermore, the times he spent in captivity were severe; John Newton was well acquainted with great suffering and hunger.

These specific life experiences—and the transformation that followed—greatly informed the lyrics of “Amazing Grace,” including the unavoidable spiritual condition implied in the word “wretch.” A problem with the phrase “a man like me” is that it leaves the issue of our spiritual state to our own opinion and ultimately moves toward the Pelagianism the church ultimately rejected: “I might not be perfect, but I’m not *that* bad, either.”

Resources

Both theology texts mentioned here, William Beahm’s *Studies in Christian Belief* and Dale Brown’s *Another Way of Living*, give good treatment to basic theological topics from a Brethren perspective. Brown’s is available from Brethren Press. Beahm’s book, however, may be difficult to find.

Ultimately, this is the danger with the statement “God helps those who help themselves” and why a seemingly harmless statement masks such bad theology. It lulls us into a false sense of believing that we don’t need to depend on God for spiritual transformation and can instead will our way into a right relationship with God.

Implications for living

But what of the idea that I raised at the end of last month’s column—are people basically good?

Each of us can attest to a basic kindness and dignity in the people around us. Many community groups—not only churches—are involved in “helping your neighbor” types of outreach. People shovel snow and set out the trash for elderly neighbors. Strangers stop to assist when our car breaks down on the side of the road. Examples like these and many more do attest to a basic goodness in people.

But the more “wretched” side of humanity is there. In recent years, our culture’s veneer of decency has been removed, revealing troubling things we might otherwise have ignored. Drug companies hid evidence of the powerful addictive nature of opioids, causing thousands of persons to become desperately addicted. Black Lives Matter advocates point out how life is different in their neighborhoods, forcing others to realize the challenges and dangers in police encounters with black individuals. Politicians increasingly use racially motivated language to create fear about entire groups of people, even when statistics show the specific accusations are not warranted. Debates about abortion rage, seeming to either minimize the love by which God creates and nurtures human life or ignore those who must bear the consequences of pregnancy, depending on who is making the argument.

While I am regularly humbled by displays of kindness and decency all around, I do not believe that such displays negate the spiritual brokenness that exists within each of us, a brokenness that corrupts our relationships with God, our neighbor, and creation. The idea that “God helps those who help themselves” sounds wonderful. But in the end I believe we are too biased in our own favor to ultimately get at the root of our separation from God, and we must rely on the gift of grace found in Jesus.

I have no doubt that Brethren will continue giving good attention to what life in Christ looks like. But along the way we should not lose sight of the fact that we once were lost, but now are found; blind, but now we see. 

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

Connecting through song

Forgetful Friends Chorus

by Jan Fischer Bachman

What were the songs of your childhood? Which music brings back instant memories of family trips, the feel of humid nights, the smell of smoky campfires? What hymns did you hear over and over?

Music can be a powerful tool for people with dementia. Those with Alzheimer's disease may have trouble with words, whether spoken or written, but music uses different pathways in the brain than language. Memory

Forgetful Friends online

See videos of a Forgetful Friends performance at www.brethren.org/messenger.

loss strikes "last in, first out," the brain failing to register new information, while quickly serving up memories from years past. These factors combine to mean that even someone who can no longer carry on a conversation may still accurately sing every word of an old, treasured song.

Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren and the Alzheimer's Association have sponsored the Forgetful Friends Chorus since 2016. About 25 people, some with dementia, their care partners, and friends, rehearse every other week and sing together at venues around the area. In 2018, the group performed at the Walk to End Alzheimer's Disease, the Northern Virginia Dementia Care

Consortium Caregivers Conference, several retirement communities and assisted living facilities, Nathan's Dairy Bar, and a celebration of life service for a former member.

Recently at HarborChase of Prince William Commons, in Woodbridge, Va., 15 singers milled around a large lobby, admiring the silk flower arrangements, large square paintings, and geometrically carved wooden pillars. They helped each other tie on cheerful purple scarves with white polka dots (women) and purple bow ties (men): purple for Alzheimer's awareness.

"Look how cute her scarf is. I tied it!" one member commented several times. "Does mine look okay?"

"Hi!" a friendly singer offered. "Did I already say that?" (Yes).

"I like your skirt! Did I already say that?" (Yes).

As they waited for director Susan Dommer and accompanist Linda Hollinger to finalize the stage setup, propping a keyboard up with a pillow, chorus members sang through some of their numbers.

"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you!" A couple leaned in and pointed to each other while singing.

"See?" another member whispered. "I told you to watch those two sing together!"

Genuine affection warmed hearts.



Jan Fischer Bachman

Joy, excitement, and enthusiasm filled the room.

Moving through a locked door into the memory care unit, the group sang songs from the early- and mid-1900s: “Bill Bailey,” “Rocking Around the Clock,” “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling,” “Daisy (Bicycle Built for Two)” with an original verse created by the chorus. Occasionally a caregiver leaned over to help someone turn a page.

Residents tapped their feet, swayed, and sang along—and so did the nursing staff accompanying them.

At the end of the performance, the chorus spread out to warmly greet audience members.

As longtime Manassas Church of the Brethren member Zenella Radford says about the chorus, “It’s exciting and fun. I like to talk to people!”

The difficulty of living with someone becoming increasingly lost shows up in small ways and in longer conversations. After the performance, one member talked about meeting his wife in a college choir. “She was the best singer in her year,” he said. “Now she can’t remember anything. Tomorrow she won’t remember this happened.”

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 5.7 million Americans were living with Alzheimer’s disease in 2018, with 80 percent receiving care at home. Informal or unpaid caregiving can bring high levels of depression and anxiety, as well as poor health and economic hardships for caregivers. Forgetful Friends Chorus exists for caregivers as well as those with dementia. It provides opportunities to socialize, make friends, find acceptance, sing, and serve others. It provides moments of connection, bringing



joy to singers and audience alike.

“It’s so much fun when the audience members sing along,” director Susan Dommer says. “I know this could grow even more. We go to nursing homes and people are like, ‘We would love to do this!’”

When Forgetful Friends Chorus began, it was one of just four choruses in the US for individuals with dementia. Connie Young, the operations director—or, as Dommer says, “our ‘roadie’ and manager”—first ran across the Giving Voice Chorus in Minnesota, which provided information to help Forgetful Friends get started. Since that time, the number of similar groups has grown to more than 70, as people recognize the valuable role the choruses play.

A recent article from Religion News Service on dementia and religion posed the poignant question, “What if I forget about God?”

The article quoted geropsychologist Benjamin Mast: “If you ask a person who’s been deeply affected by Alzheimer’s about something that hap-

pened yesterday, you’re going to their weakness in terms of memory. But if we can engage them, for example, in the context of faith services with older songs and hymns that they’ve known for many years, we’re meeting them where they’re strong.”

*Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.*

—Isaiah 49:15-16

No matter how much we forget, God remembers us.

Manassas Church of the Brethren, through the Forgetful Friends Chorus, provides an oasis of meaningful connection, a place to be remembered, and loved, and appreciated. 

Want to start a chorus?

Giving Voice Chorus offers a toolkit at www.givingvoicechorus.org/start-chorus.

Forgetful Friends director Susan Dommer recommends getting in touch with the local branch of the Alzheimer’s Association. Go to www.alz.org and look for “Your Chapter” to find out if there is already a group in the area or if the local representative knows of people who would be interested in joining.

Memory Cafés are additional places to find potential members. These are dementia-friendly gatherings, often held monthly. Search online to see if any are nearby.

MANASSAS CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN, THROUGH THE FORGETFUL FRIENDS CHORUS, PROVIDES AN OASIS OF MEANINGFUL CONNECTION, A PLACE TO BE REMEMBERED, AND LOVED, AND APPRECIATED.

Coming to live

Reflections of a retirement community chaplain

“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be healthy and flourishing” (Psalm 92:14, KJV).

What is it about nursing homes that makes us so uncomfortable? I think about this often because I work at one. My first real job was working in housekeeping; later I was a receptionist in a retirement community in Pennsylvania. These days I’m an ordained pastor serving as a chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy Senior Living Community in Boonsboro, Md.



TWYLA ROWE

People ask me sometimes what I do as chaplain. They expect me to say that I do a lot of funerals, but I really only do a few. Many of our residents have their own pastors who are called upon to do their funerals. I guess people assume I do a lot of death-bed spiritual care and funerals because they believe that people go to nursing homes to wait to die. But, you see, despite what society thinks about retirement communities—particularly the nursing care section of a facility—people don’t come here to die. Older adults come here to live, and they just happen to be living here when they die.

So while my service does involve providing spiritual care for the sick and dying, it mostly entails helping people who want to grow a deeper faith. There are others who for one reason or another lost touch with God and seek to reconnect with their faith. Through one-on-one conversations they tell me their stories, and we explore how to connect their walk with Christ in the past with this new path they are on in their older years.

What people usually discover is that God’s not finished with them yet. God continues to use them in helping to build God’s kingdom, but now they are using different skills in a new location and impacting the lives of family, new friends, and staff.

Nurturing faith also happens as we worship together twice a week in our beautiful chapel. Those with physical limitations who are unable to come to the chapel are blessed as they are included in worship by listening to services that are broadcast throughout the facility.

Other opportunities for spiritual growth include meeting for devotions and Bible study, celebrating monthly communion, and special occasions like love feast, Good Friday, and Christmas candlelight services. Trying something totally new, such as joining the bell choir and making heavenly music for worship, brings joy to even the most tired souls.

Not everyone who moves into a nursing home comes with any church or faith background, and some come feeling depressed and hopeless about their circumstances. Living in a nursing home was not a part of their life plan. Fortunately, by the grace of God and through the love of other residents and caregivers, some people discover a faith in Jesus for the first time in their lives. I’ve even been privileged to baptize one of these residents.

No, people do not move to senior living communities to die. This is a misconception that, I believe, emerges from our fear of growing old. Older adults definitely come to senior living facilities to live—to enjoy life and rise above their limitations as best they can. They look for meaning and purpose, and some find it as they pursue a richer relationship with God. 

Twyla Rowe lives in Westminster, Md., and serves as chaplain at Fahrney-Keedy Senior Living Facility in Boonsboro, Md.

OLDER ADULTS DEFINITELY COME TO SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES TO LIVE—
TO ENJOY LIFE AND RISE ABOVE THEIR LIMITATIONS AS BEST THEY CAN.

Denomination offers vacant land for sale in Elgin

The Church of the Brethren denomination has retained the services of A. Rick Scardino of Lee & Associates for the purpose of selling excess vacant land at its address at 1451 Dundee Avenue (State Route 25) in Elgin, Ill.

The Church of the Brethren is not selling its General Offices and warehouse building nor the land immediately surrounding the building. Approximately 12 acres of vacant land is for sale east of the General Offices, bordered by I-90 on the north. The vacant land is zoned general industrial.



Board opts not to change delegate numbers



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coykend

decision in order to seek more information about practical outcomes. In March, the board reviewed scenarios for Standing Committee and the Conference based on total eligibility of congregations and actual delegate attendance in 2018. Charts showed potential delegate numbers and percentage shares of representation grouped by district and areas of the denomination.

Moderator Donita Keister spoke about the intent of the recommendation, to increase participation and vitality at Annual Conference by encouraging more people to attend. The proposal would be a way to increase numbers at the Conference even as the average size of congregations is decreasing. If each congregation actually sent its allotted delegates, overall effect of the proposal would have been to increase the delegate body by about 50 percent.

After viewing the scenarios showing an increase in the percentage share of representation by larger districts and Area 1 at the expense of other areas and smaller districts, discussion centered on concerns about detrimental effects for small congregations and Brethren in the west.

The Mission and Ministry Board turned down a recommendation from the denomination's Leadership Team to change delegate representation at Annual Conference, during its spring meeting March 8-11. The recommendation had potential to increase the number of delegates that some larger congregations could send to the Conference and the number of delegates some larger districts could appoint to Standing Committee

The recommendation would have changed denominational bylaws for district delegations to Standing Committee from a ratio of 1 delegate for every 5,000 members of a district, to 1 delegate for every 4,000 mem-

bers; and for delegate representation at Annual Conference from a ratio of 1 delegate for every 200 members of a congregation, to 1 delegate for every 100 members.

The Leadership Team made up of the Conference officers, general secretary, and a representative of the Council of District Executives initiated the proposal in early 2018 and brought it to Conference that year. However, it was withdrawn from Conference consideration because proposals to amend the bylaws must come through a query or as a recommendation from the Mission and Ministry Board.

The board received the recommendation last fall but postponed a



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Housing allowance is upheld by appeals court

The housing allowance provision providing ordained ministers, including pastors and retirees, with a tax benefit for their housing expenses is constitutional. That decision was announced March 15 by the Seventh Circuit Appeals Court in Chicago.

The case was heard by the appeals court last Oct. 24. It originally was heard by Wisconsin District Court Judge Barbara Crabb, who ruled in favor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation that the housing allowance was unconstitutional. However, in its 29-page ruling, the Seventh Circuit Appeals Court cited a number of court cases and actions by Congress. “We conclude (Internal Revenue Code, Chapter 1, Section 107 that describes the housing allowance) is constitutional. The judgment of the district court is REVERSED.”

“Although FFRF can appeal this decision and ask that the US Supreme Court hear this case, the decision by the Chicago appeals court is a major victory for pastors, regardless of denominational affiliation,” said Nevin Dulabaum, president of Brethren Benefit Trust.



Three Brethren Volunteer Service workers have completed the first BVS “fast track” orientation, allowing for quicker filling of openings at projects and earlier placement of volunteers. **Cory** (Smithtown, N.Y.) and **Mycal Alwais** of Community of Joy Church of the Brethren in Salisbury, Md., are serving with incredABLE in Richhill, Northern Ireland. **Alyssa Parker** of Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren is serving with Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren.



Disaster programs respond to floods

Hheavy snowstorms this spring led to extreme flooding in the midwest and plains states. Disaster response coordinators from Western Plains and Northern Plains Districts reported no known damage to Church of the Brethren buildings or member homes as of mid-April.

In early April, Material Resources made shipments to Nebraska on behalf of Church World Service: 600 blankets, 150 school kits, 540 hygiene kits, 540 tubes of toothpaste, and 350 cleanup buckets were shipped to Omaha; 360 hygiene kits, 360 tubes of toothpaste, and 360 cleanup buckets went to Fremont.

On April 5-6, Children’s Disaster Services sent a team to care for children at the Multi Agency Resource Center in Valley, Neb. Additional deployments were expected as flood waters receded.

Brethren Disaster Ministries is planning to support long-term recovery and home repairs in some of the affected communities.

Personnel notes

Amy Beery resigned April 30 as program director of youth engagement at Bethany Seminary. She began employment in July 2016 as an admissions counselor and was named to her current position on Nov. 1, 2017. Beery graduated from Bethany in 2013 with a master of divinity and an emphasis in youth and young adult ministry.

Debbie Butcher began March 25 as employee benefits specialist at Brethren Benefit Trust. She comes to BBT after working for 24 years at a publishing company, providing customer service.

Stanley J. Noffsinger began in early March as chief executive officer of Timbercrest Senior Living Community in North Manchester, Ind. He is a former general secretary of the Church of the Brethren (2003-2016) and director of the Office of the General Secretariat for the World Council of Churches

(2016-2018). Previously he was executive director of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. (1999-2003). He is a graduate of Manchester University.

Dan Poole has been named assistant professor of Ministry Formation at Bethany Seminary, beginning July 1. He began employment in August 2007 as coordinator of Ministry Formation and in July 2018 was named visiting instructor of Ministry Formation. He also was advancement associate 2009-2014 and has held the title of director of Educational Technology since 2014. Poole holds degrees from Manchester University, Bethany Seminary, and Columbia Theological Seminary.

Vita Olmsted resigned April 1 after a little more than a year as director of Information Technology for the Church of the Brethren, to accept another position.

A faithful reader

My aunt, Bernice Keppler, passed away Feb. 25. She had been a resident of Timbercrest Senior Living Community for many years. She always enjoyed reading the articles in MESSENGER, and read it from cover to cover. She was still reading at 107!

Anita Miller
North Manchester, Ind.

Delightful memories

Thank you for the delightful "Highlights and the Brethren" by Peggy Reiff Miller. Long before I knew the Church of the Brethren existed, I enjoyed reading *Highlights* as a child. I believe I found the magazine at my doctor's office and enjoyed it so much that we got a subscription. I have fond memories of Goofus and Gallant and the challenges to find objects in pictures. It does not sur-

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- 1 JOHN 3:18

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LETTERS

prise me that the magazine was started by Brethren.

Ann Carol Nash
South Bend, Ind.

Reasons to love the church

David Banaszak's "Potluck" mirrored my own reasons for loving the Church of the Brethren. My wife, children, and I joined the church 20 years ago. Before then, we had never even heard of the

Church of the Brethren.

So many churches claim to be the "right" church, to the exclusion of all others. I would never say the Brethren are "right" but we sure have the right idea!

Ken George
Marydel, Md.

Terrific service

What a terrific service you have provided! Giving thanks for Deb Oskin

and for the information she offered in "So many changes! How the new tax code affects you."

Emily Mumma
Lorida, Fla.

Gratitude

On occasion, seeing a letter to the editor, or reading a movie review, or enjoying an article, I will email or call someone who has contributed material to MESSENGER and I will thank them. I don't do that often enough.

This is a note of gratitude. I am grateful for the publisher's "Letting go" column. I will use those thoughts during Lent as a part of my early morning quietness and eventual journaling. Point-by-point I will think about and reflect on "What shall we let go of?" It was very thoughtful and inspiring.

Ralph McFadden
Elgin, Ill.

Butterflies mean redemption

It was comforting to read about the butterfly garden introduced by Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren in Arizona, in "A spring in the desert." My wife, Linda, and I lived for 13 years in the Phoenix area before we moved to southern Pennsylvania. She passed away five years ago.

She loved butterflies and had jewelry

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Brethren Press

CLASSIFIEDS

Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore? Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Greensboro, North Carolina. If you have interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at jdeaton@brethren.org.

Consignment sales at Annual Conference. Brethren Press rents space in the Annual Conference Bookstore for individuals or groups to sell items on a consignment basis. Consignment space must be reserved by June 1. For information on consignment sales, contact Karen Stocking at kstocking@brethren.org.

and clothing with the butterfly motif. I honored her with an eight-foot stainless steel sculpture that stands on our property, topped by butterflies taking flight. Butterflies mean redemption and

transformation for people of faith. This summer I am having a butterfly garden planted near the sculpture in the hope of attracting many butterflies to the yard. Linda was a person of grace, style,

charm, and humor. The butterflies will bring so much of all of that to the neighborhood.

Ronald E. Keener
Chambersburg, Pa.

TURNINGPOINTS

Please send information for *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

Miller, Galen, 101, Wenatchee, Wash., Jan. 7
Stinebaugh, Angela Sollenberger, 100, Lancaster, Pa., March 4
Stinebaugh, Vernon H., 100, Lancaster, Pa., April 4
Walbridge, Ellen, 100, Easton, Md., Feb. 26

New members

Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.: James Davison, Anna Weaver Grady
Lincolnshire, Fort Wayne, Ind.: Bethany Mann, Neveah Mann, Raeanne Mann, Rick Mann, Riley Mann
Maple Grove, New Paris, Ind.: Travis Kirkdorffer
Mohican, West Salem, Ohio: Ashley Johnson, Scott Johnson, Matt Lawton, Shelly Lawton, Jeff Somogyi, Micah Somogyi, Brad Tarleton, Kyle Tigert
Summerdean, Roanoke, Va.: Kelli Adams, Reece Beard, Ridge Beard, Eli Bergsten, Kim Bergsten, Denise Cochran, Kelsey Cochran, Bob Coffman, Carolyn Coffman, Debbie Graham, Travis Guilliams, Maddie Lenker, Doris McDonel, Audrey Presley, Don Prillaman, Peggy Randall, Traci Showalter, Eva Stultz, Carrie Vernon, Connor Vernon, Kevin Vernon, Peggy Walker
Warrensburg, Mo.: Don

Guyer, Jackie Guyer, Elise Legeia Ichabod, Clyde Paddock, Mark Pearce, Sonny Short
West Goshen, Goshen, Ind.: Kayleigh Close, Matthew Wagner
Westernport, Md.: Barbara Alexander, Mark Alexander, Sue Riggleman

Wedding anniversaries

Baile, Jim and Wilma, Warrensburg, Mo., 60
Fagan, William and Lorraine, Huntingdon, Pa., 60
Guyer, Don and Jackie, Independence, Mo., 60
Hahn, David and Barbara, Keedysville, Md., 50
Wilson, Jack and Flo, Lititz, Pa., 68
Young, Walt and Pat, Lancaster, Pa., 55

Deaths

Baker, Jane Louise, 86, Fort Wayne, Ind., Feb. 5
Barkdoll, Frank S., 81, Bay Village, Ohio, March 14
Barrows, Virginia M. Pullin, 90, Waterloo, Iowa, Feb. 23
Bell, Ruth B. Jones, 98, Eaton, Ohio, Jan. 19
Brax, Robert Gene, 75, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 7
Breidenbaugh, Norman Paul, 86, Baltimore, Md., Feb. 22
Brinkmeier, Kathleen Diane Fyock, 75, Pearl City, Ill., Feb. 23
Burger, Teresa Lynn Evans, 62, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 10
Coffman, Robert Donald, 88, Daleville, Va., Oct. 4
Cripe, Frances Miller, 84, Goshen, Ind., Aug. 7
Daggett, Walter Wayne, 86, Bridgewater, Va., March 10
Darr, Charles E., 75, Somerset, Pa., Dec. 26
Deardorff, Kenneth (Duane), 93, Ionia,

Mich., Feb. 21
Dennison, Margaret E. Ashby, 91, Westernport, Md., Aug. 18
Elliott, Shirley June Loughlin, 87, East Coventry, Pa., Jan. 20
Fazenbaker, Helen Novella Crites, 83, Swanton, Md., Aug. 3
Ford, Gladys Marie, 87, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 4
Gibbons, Wade M., 86, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 27
Haldeman, Debbie L., 56, Hummelstown, Pa., March 8
Hammond-Chaffin, Patrick, 77, Lafayette, Ind., Aug. 25
Harris, Nellie A., 84, Prairie City, Iowa, Feb. 17
Hart, Dorthy M. Hygema, 96, Warren, Ind., Jan. 9
Hewitt, Nancy M. Trayer, 83, New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 18
Hiatt, Gloria J. Anthes, 95, Modesto, Calif., Feb. 23
Hoover, Lura Sherman, 92, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 13
Kelbaugh, Larry Gene, 77, Boonsboro, Md., Feb. 16
Keppler, Bernice, 107, North Manchester, Ind., Feb. 25
Kiester, Russell W., 98, Filer, Idaho, Feb. 21
Kinsey, Mary Ada Brumbaugh Penner, 92, Mount Morris, Ill., March 1
Kline, Jack, 98, Bremen, Ind., Feb. 7
Koon, Elma J. Hunt, 96, Johnstown, Pa., March 3
Lunger, Juanita A. Maslin, 91, Lititz, Pa., Feb. 11
Lunkley, Charles Wesley, 100, Marion, Ind., March 18
Marsh, Jeremy Wilt, 48, Swanton, Md., March 18, 2018
Miller, Gwendolyn Studebaker, 91, Lititz, Pa., Feb. 22
Miller, James L., 80,

Middlebury, Ind., Feb. 23
Miller, Wanda Johnson, 95, Wenatchee, Wash., Jan. 26
Moyer, Ronald R., 85, Harleysville, Pa., Jan. 1
Myers, Floyd Raymond, 75, Bel Air, Md., Feb. 8
Naff, Lenoria Burger, 85, Rocky Mount, Va., March 9
Nusbaum, Martin D., 76, New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 25
Parlett, Howard Robert, 83, Huntingdon, Pa., Dec. 31
Peters, Carol Ann, 68, Eldora, Iowa, Jan. 11
Reid, Paul R., Sr., 91, Hagerstown, Md., March 5
Renz, Lois R., 98, Mount Morris, Ill., Feb. 12
Schwalm, Anna L., 87, Venice, Fla., May 15, 2018
Shingler, Dianne, 75, Somerset, Pa., Feb. 28
Snively, Duane Eldon, 96, Ionia, Mich., Feb. 18
Snow, Rose Marie Douglas, 85, East Dundee, Ill., Feb. 5
Stultz, Flemma Eileen Getz, 91, Roanoke, Va., May 21, 2018
Swigart, Richard, 81, Palmyra, Pa., March 17
Vanderveer, Charles, 82, Syracuse, Ind., Dec. 17
Walbridge, Marjorie Steward, 96, Easton, Md., March 5
Waldron, Betty Kefauver, 87, Copper Hill, Va., Jan. 27
Waldron, Irvin Hampton, 95, Copper Hill, Va., March 10
Walter, Verna Elizabeth, 96, Salem, Va., Oct. 12
Wildasin, Betty LaMotte, 87, New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 3
Williams, Patricia, 64, Baltimore, Md., Aug. 5
Wymer, Willard Van, 82, Joppa, Md., Dec. 2
Young, Sarah M. Leatherman, 62, Denver, Colo., Feb. 26

Ordained

Bates, Charles (Bob), W. Plains Dist. (Garden City, Kan.), Feb. 24
Dodd, Gabriel, Shen. Dist. (Montezuma, Dayton, Va.), March 10
Lefever-Hoover, Donna, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Annville, Pa.), Feb. 17

Commissioned

Boyd, Harold, Virlina Dist. (Coulson, Hillsville, Va.), Oct. 28
Keib, Stephen, N. Ohio Dist. (Maple Grove, Ashland, Ohio), March 3
Thompson, Johnny, Virlina Dist. (Peters Creek, Roanoke, Va.), March 1

Licensed

Estep, Charles, Shen. Dist. (Calvary, Winchester, Va.), March 11
Martino, Jonathan, Shen. Dist. (Calvary, Winchester, Va.), March 10

Placements

Bell, Amy, pastor, Meadow Branch, Westminster, Md., Jan. 1
Bowers, Dale, from associate pastor to pastor, Community Mission, Woodstock, Va., Jan. 28
Gillespie, Carla, interim pastor, Good Shepherd, Tipp City, Ohio, March 10
Hendricks, Seth, youth and congregational life pastor, Manchester, North Manchester, Ind., Jan. 13
King, Janice, from interim pastor to pastor, Wyomissing, Pa., Feb. 15
Stevens, Glenn, pastor, Saunders Grove, Moneta, Va., Jan. 1
Stover, Paul, Jr., from pastor, Jeters Chapel, Vinton, Va., to pastor, Christiansburg, Va., Jan. 1
Tomson, Jeffrey, pastor, Guernsey, Monticello, Ind., Feb. 10
Woodard, Edward, interim pastor, Eden, N.C., Jan. 1

As the deer pants for the water

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after dikaios: for they shall be filled. —Matthew 5:6 (KJV)

The miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 has always felt accessible to me. The other miracles are so individualized, so specific, so miraculously huge in their scope that I cannot quite believe I would have been the one chosen, the one healed.

It is easier to imagine being one of the crowd. I imagine it like being at a concert or a stadium. One minute I would be listening to Jesus and the next distracted by hunger. Instead of paying attention to what the Son of God is saying, I would be wishing I had brought a snack. Then the bread



GIMBIYA KETTERING

and the fish . . . and there is enough for everyone. I get to break off a little piece of the miracle, pass it to the next person, and it is enough; I am filled.

The Bible repeatedly uses imagery of hunger and thirst. These come as metaphors, as dreams, and miracles. When Moses hits the rock, water gushes forth. Hungry Peter is

told to eat, because what God has made clean shall not be called unclean. During love feast we once again break this bread in remembrance. One of my favorites is Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you.”

After years of singing those lines in praise and worship, I realize that I know very little about deer and water. I have never seen a deer drink. Still that physical instinct, a need to seek after God even when I am exhausted and pushed beyond my limits, seems so right.

Righteousness. In every version of the Sermon on the Mount that I have read, the word has been “righteousness.” The original Greek is *dikaiois*. It can mean righteousness. It also means more than just righteousness. Or at least more than righteousness as we use it today—self-righteous, righteous indignation, a righteous collar.

Join in the pre-Conference Dikaiois Pilgrimage, July 2-3 in Greensboro and Cherokee, N.C. Registration and more information are at www.brethren.org/dikaiois.

Righteousness, with all its legalistic implications, is not something I can seek like water. Too often I have heard righteousness used to condemn those not righteous, that is, people whose culture is different from our own.

In recent years, I have learned that a fuller, more accurate translation of *dikaiois* would stretch to include a sense of rightness—a correct relationship between God and one another. Recently translators have offered the word “justice.”

“Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall be filled.”

This changes everything for me. I know what it means to experience injustice and to long for justice. It is like a thirst or a hunger. The desire for justice has felt like a stab through my stomach as I carefully pull over on what might only be a routine traffic stop. When I first heard the recordings of children taken from their mothers at the border, I felt in my chest how they would have cried for the comfort of nursing. My throat is dry and I am speechless when I hear that people, unable to stop to bury their dead, sang “Amazing Grace” along the Trail of Tears.

When I searched online the water needs of deer, what came up was dozens of hunting websites. Turns out deer need a lot of water, especially when the food they eat gets drier, so hunting around waterholes is a good strategy. This makes sense to me. The thirst for justice makes us vulnerable. As we stand up for others, we are like the deer lowering our guard to drink.

The promise of the beatitude is not for our physical safety. The promise is that God’s love and justice is enough to fill our souls. 

Gimbiya Kettering is director of intercultural ministries for the Church of the Brethren. She is stepping down at the end of the month, after six years in that role.

THE THIRST FOR JUSTICE MAKES US VULNERABLE. AS WE STAND UP FOR OTHERS,
WE ARE LIKE THE DEER LOWERING OUR GUARD TO DRINK.

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Traci Rabenstein
Director



Nancy McCrickard
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Shannon McNeil
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Matt DeBall
Coordinator

See you in Greensboro!

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