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MESSENGER

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DEATH ROW SUPPORT PROJECT





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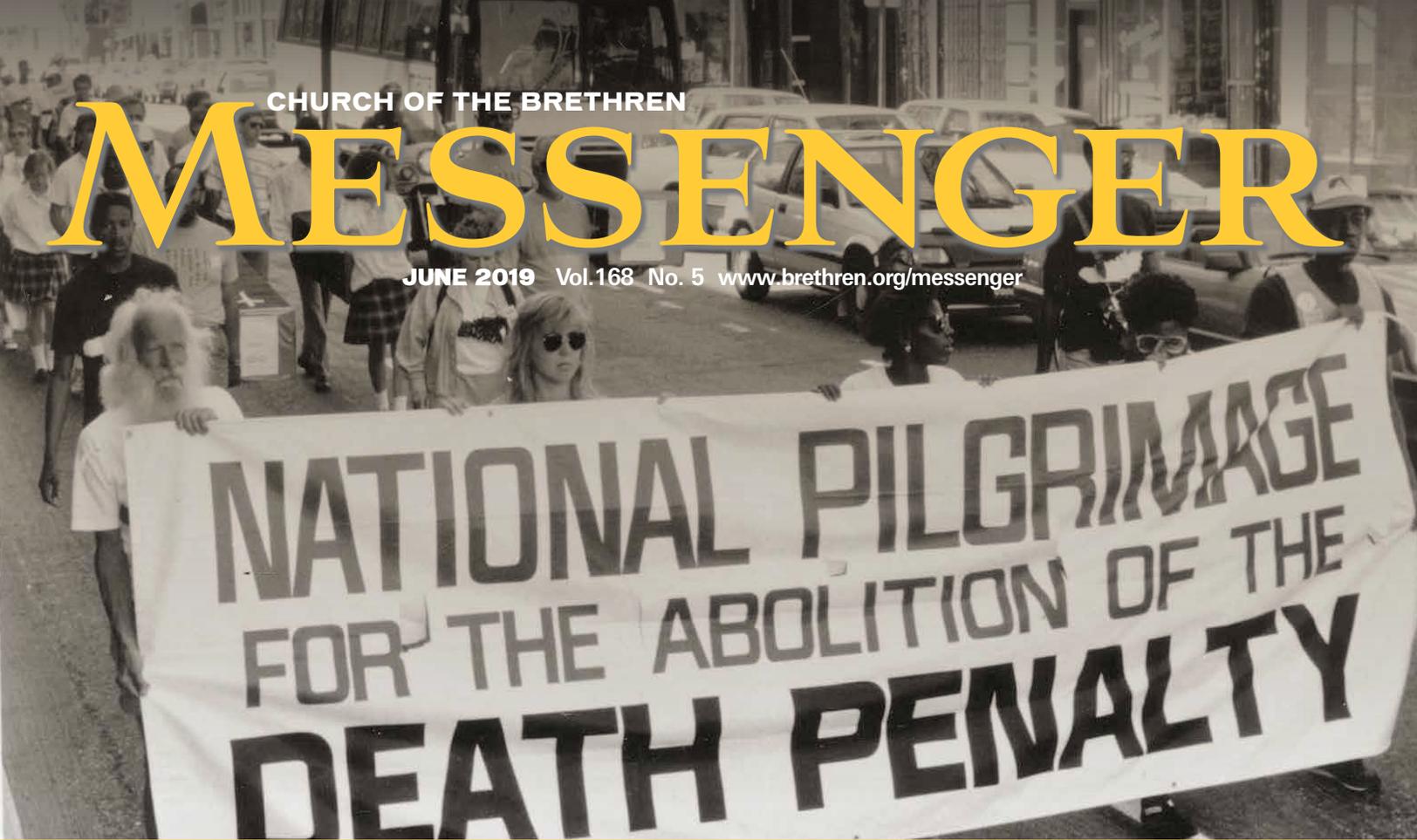
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NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE
FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE
DEATH PENALTY

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Brethren educators:

Where have you seen your vocation as an educator intersect unexpectedly with your faith? For possible use in a future issue, submit a brief response of up to 100 words. Send to messenger@brethren.org by July 1.

In living color

When my congregation planned a six-week series on white privilege, we leaders didn't know what to expect.

Perhaps 15 people would attend, I figured. After all, six 90-minute sessions on a dark school night is a big commitment, even if the topic weren't a difficult one. As we got closer to the first evening and only a few had signed up, I lowered my expectations: maybe 10.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

How astonishing, then, to find a group so large that we had to move into the fellowship hall and make a big double circle of chairs. With about 40 people every week, we ended up with some 60 total who attended one or all of the sessions. Most surprising was that close to a third were people we didn't know—people from the community who had learned about the series from social media or word of mouth.

And, while the purpose of the series was for a predominantly white congregation to do its own hard work, about nine of the visitors were people of color. One African American man was the father of a woman shot and killed one year earlier by a white policeman in our city. This father attended every session, and his generous spirit enriched our time together.

As the group examined ways that whiteness is the norm in our society, the conversation was thoughtful and vulnerable. Some black participants shared their experiences with daily realities such as health care and schools. Some white participants realized how few people of color they knew, and told the group they were asking themselves why. Some folks took that question seriously and got together later with new friends for coffee or lunch.

In a time when it's easy to be discouraged, I see hope in dozens of people showing up week after week to engage in a "brave conversation," to use the words of pastor Katie Shaw Thompson, with whom I co-led this series. I am heartened.

Come on in. Pull up a chair. We'll make the circle bigger.

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A journey that no one should have to bear

On April 20, 1999, Tom and Linda Mauser joined a club that no one wants to join: the parents of a child victimized by gun violence. Their son, Daniel Mauser, was a victim of the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colo.

The journey is one that no one should have to bear. And it is not over. At the 20th anniversary of Columbine, 14 news outlets came to Littleton to interview families of the victims willing to participate. One early article coming out of those interviews, with more to be printed and broadcast on the anniversary, was titled, “Columbine Families Gather to Tell Stories Nearly 20 Years After,” published by the *Colorado Sentinel* on March 23.

Tom Mauser’s advocacy for sensible gun laws was driven by a special question from his son two weeks before the tragedy. Based on something he heard in a conversation, Daniel asked his dad if he was aware there were loopholes in the Brady Bill, a law that requires passing a background check before buying a gun. Two weeks later, Daniel was killed with a gun purchased through one of those loopholes—the gun show loophole.

Mauser took a one-year leave of absence from his job to lobby the state legislature to pass stron-

ger gun laws. When they failed to do so, he led the effort to offer Colorado voters a ballot initiative to close that gun show loophole. Colorado voters passed that initiative in 2000 by a vote of 70 percent to 30 percent.

Since then, he has continued working to pass sensible gun laws and educate others about sensible solutions. He has testified numerous times at hearings at the State Capitol and speaks at rallies and churches. That included accepting an invitation to speak at Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren, where he became a member.

Are there concerned people of faith in your congregation or community who want to promote a different response to gun violence than just “thoughts and prayers”? Presentations from speakers’ bureaus or from the Internet can be offered (see the listing of gun violence prevention organizations in many states at <https://ceasefireusa.org/affiliates>).

While many churches are not willing to take on this issue (Mauser was even uninvited from a presentation when the pastor experienced “push back” from opponents), Brethren may agree that something must be done and offer “another way of living” that has passed on peacemaking for more than 300 years.

—Gail Erisman Valeta and Tom Mauser

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.



From Sri Lanka with love

Earl and Vivian Ziegler received an unexpected letter from Sri Lanka, in an envelope that arrived late last year. In a “News Out of the Past” article in the *Lititz (Pa.) Record Express*, the couple reported their surprise at opening the envelope to discover a thank you from now 17-year-old Steephon, who had received a Christmas package from them back in 2004, when he was a young child.

The Zieglers pack boxes for Samaritan’s Purse every year, for distribution to families and children in need through its Operation Christmas Child. The 14-year delay of the thank you, the paper reported, was because Steephon’s family had “misplaced the letter containing the Ziegler’s return address, only to discover it this year [2018]. On a whim, he wrote to thank them.”

Barrier-free grant program

The Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADN) announces a new barrier-free grant program that offers financial assistance to congregations for projects that facilitate barrier-free community life. This is one of several ways that the network is a partner with congregations to create mutual awareness, caring support, and accessibility education. Grants range from \$100 to \$500. Contact 574-343-1362, 877-214-9838, or adnet@adnetonline.org.



Jay Wittmeyer

Fifteen growing years

This season marks the 15th year of the Polo (Ill.) Growing Project supported by partner churches in Polo, Dixon, Tinley Park, and Elgin. Over the years, earnings of \$466,000 have been invested in agricultural programs in several countries, most recently Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Polo venture is one of 165 growing projects across the US under the aegis of Growing Hope Globally, formerly Foods Resource Bank. The ecumenical agency will commemorate its 20th anniversary with a Summer Celebration July 25-27 at Conrad, Iowa, where a cluster of churches including Ivester Church of the Brethren formed one of the earliest growing projects. —Howard Royer

Seventy years of ministering

April 1 was the 70-year mark for Edward Kerschensteiner’s ministry career, celebrated with a recognition day at Boise (Idaho) Valley Church of the Brethren on March 31.

His lengthy experience as a Church of the Brethren minister began in the Hostetler congregation in Western Pennsylvania District, where he was licensed just before high school graduation and was mentored by pastor J. Ewing Jones. Together they served three churches, preaching twice on Sunday morning and evening.

Since then, he has continued to minister throughout a varied career that has included many other jobs to supplement his income: work in a saw mill and a coal mine operation,

several years at Sears, doing maintenance while at McPherson (Kan.) College, serving as a night clerk for the Illinois State Police, substitute teaching in a junior high school, serving on a school board, mowing lawns.

In a letter to MESSENGER he reported that his personal ledgers reveal he has preached for 6,615 worship services as of Dec. 30, 2018.





“Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable.” -2 Timothy 4:2a

Church membership: A changing landscape

“It is clear, then, that the nature of Americans’ orientation to religion is changing, with fewer religious Americans finding membership in a church or other faith institution to be a necessary part of their religious experience,” writes Jeffrey M. Jones, for Gallup.

Here are some numbers illustrating that change. Note that this survey addresses church membership, while some other recent polls have analyzed religious affiliation.

42 Percentage of millennials (born 1980-2000) who said they were members.

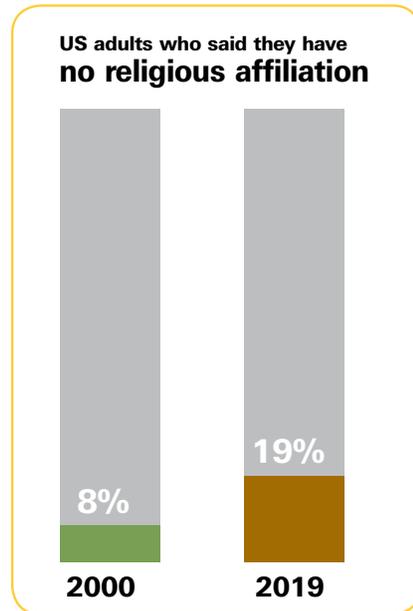
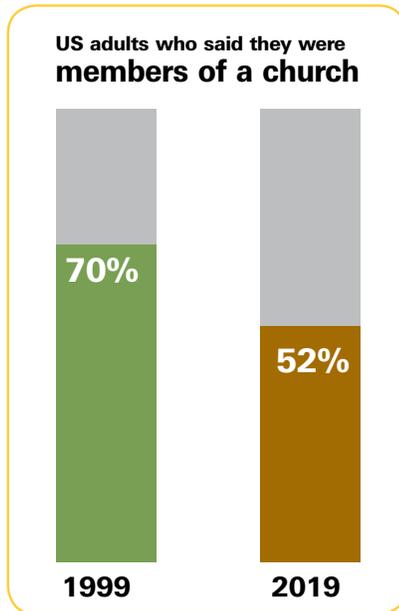
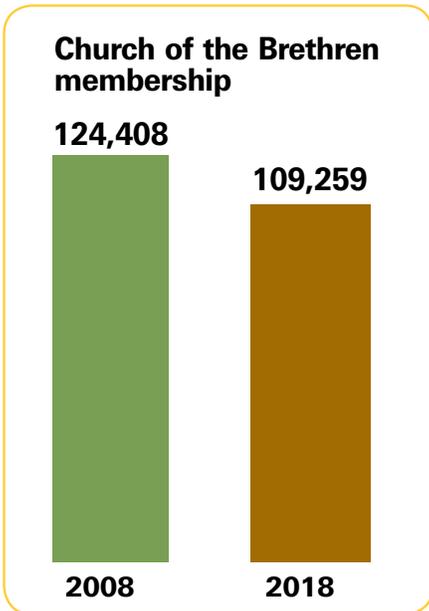
15 Percentage decline of non-Hispanic whites who said they were members.

13 Percentage decline of college graduates who said they were members.

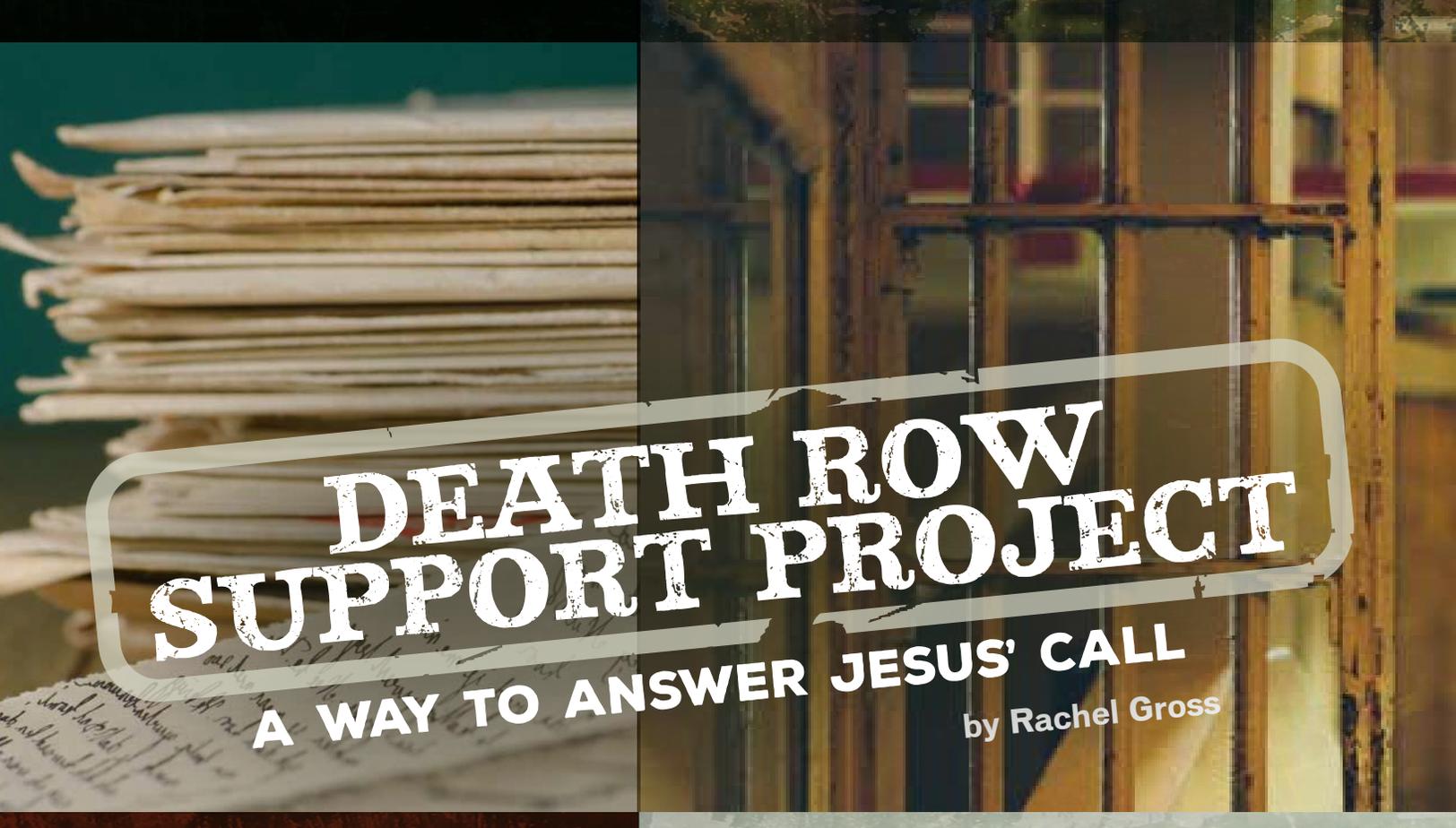
75 Percentage of people born 1945 or earlier who said they were members.

23 Percentage decline of Hispanics who said they were members.

18 Percentage decline of college nongraduates who said they were members.



Sources: “The Hollowing Out of American Religion,” Religion News Service; “US Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Jeffrey M. Jones, Gallup; *Church of the Brethren Yearbook*



DEATH ROW SUPPORT PROJECT

A WAY TO ANSWER JESUS' CALL
by Rachel Gross

From a small card file to a database with **12,000 records:** a lot has changed since the Death Row Support Project (DRSP) began in 1978.

With “only” 400 persons sentenced to death at that time, it didn’t seem too challenging to find willing Church of the Brethren members to write to them. Bob and Rachel Gross, who conceived the idea of DRSP, saw the project as a way to answer Jesus’ call to visit those in prison, as well as helping those outside prison walls to see past the sensational headlines that often accompany a murder conviction. Additionally, based on his own time in

prison (due to having returned his draft card in 1970), Bob had observed that people who received mail were treated better by prison staff.

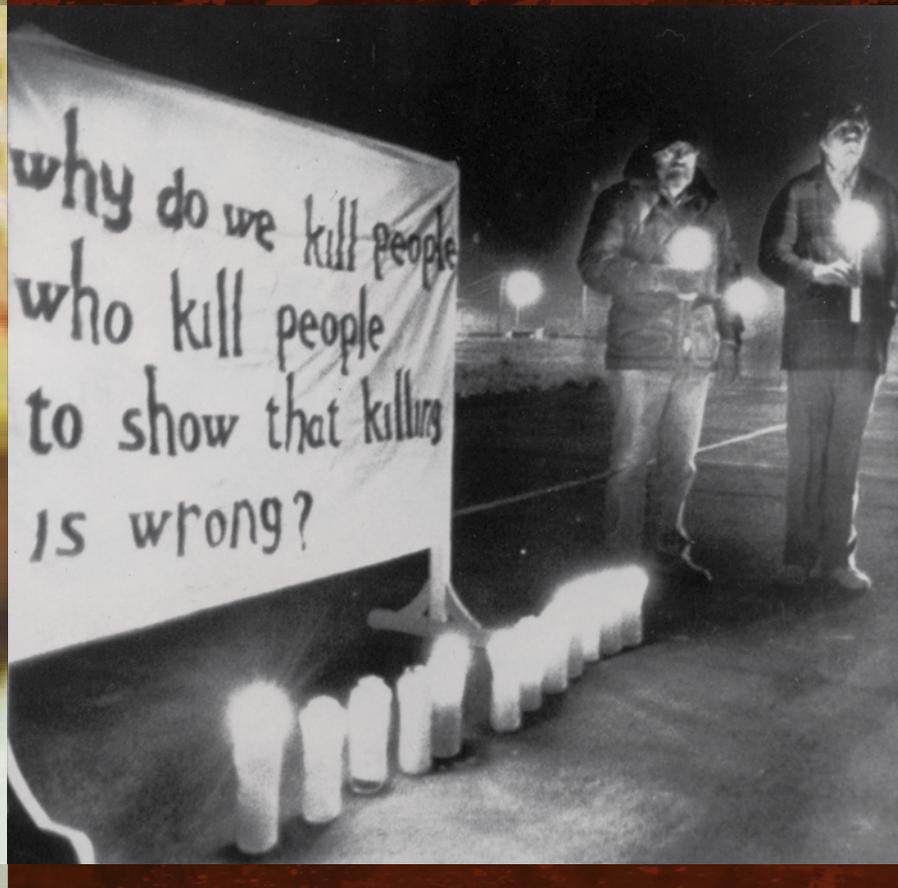
With the support of the Church of the Brethren Washington office, Bob and Rachel obtained a list of everyone on death row, put a notice in *MESSENGER* inviting people to participate, and began assigning pen pals, providing guidelines for writing.

In 1976, after a four-year hiatus in use of the death penalty, the Supreme Court gave the go-ahead for states to once again sentence people to death. For the next several years,

HOW INDIVIDUALS AND CONGREGATIONS ARE INVOLVED



- More than 250 Church of the Brethren members have requested a pen pal from DRSP.
- Manchester University students regularly send holiday and birthday cards to people on death row.
- Brenda Skipwith of Fraternity Church of the Brethren is recruiting members of her congregation to send quarterly food packages to friends of her pen pal on North Carolina’s death row. [See what Brenda wrote about visiting her pen pal on p. 10.]
- Through his pen pal relationship with a member of Manchester Church of the Brethren in Indiana, Raymond Johnson (on death row in Oklahoma) has been welcomed as a member of that congregation.
- An “equipping session” at this summer’s Annual Conference in Greensboro, N.C., will offer more information about the DRSP, with Brenda Skipwith as one of the speakers. The session is on Thursday, July 4, at 12:30 p.m.



Messenger file photo

the anti-death penalty movement focused primarily on legal appeals, with hopes that newly written laws would be struck down. There were also legislative efforts in some states, attempting to remove the death penalty as an option.

During this time, the abolition movement did not place high value on individual personal correspondence with those on death row. Moving into the 1980s, more people were sentenced to death (from 137 in 1977 to 301 in 1986), and as executions became more frequent (peaking at 98 in the year 1999), abolitionists realized that supportive relationships were one of few mercies people awaiting execution might receive.

These relationships nurture life—even on death row. People have testified on behalf of their pen pals at re-sentencing hearings, in at least two cases resulting in a life sentence rather than a death sentence. People sentenced to death are less likely to give up their appeals if they have significant relationships with persons on the outside.

In 1989, Church of the Brethren pastor Dale Aukerman traveled to Alabama to witness the execution of the person he had been writing for eight years, and who he believed was innocent of the crime for which he was sentenced. After the execution, Aukerman wrote an opinion piece that was published in the *Washington Post*. The piece was accompanied by a *Post* editorial decrying the use of the death penalty.

From 1978 onward, DRSP director Rachel Gross had been steadily assigning pen pals to anyone on death row who wrote requesting one. She had long since publicized DRSP

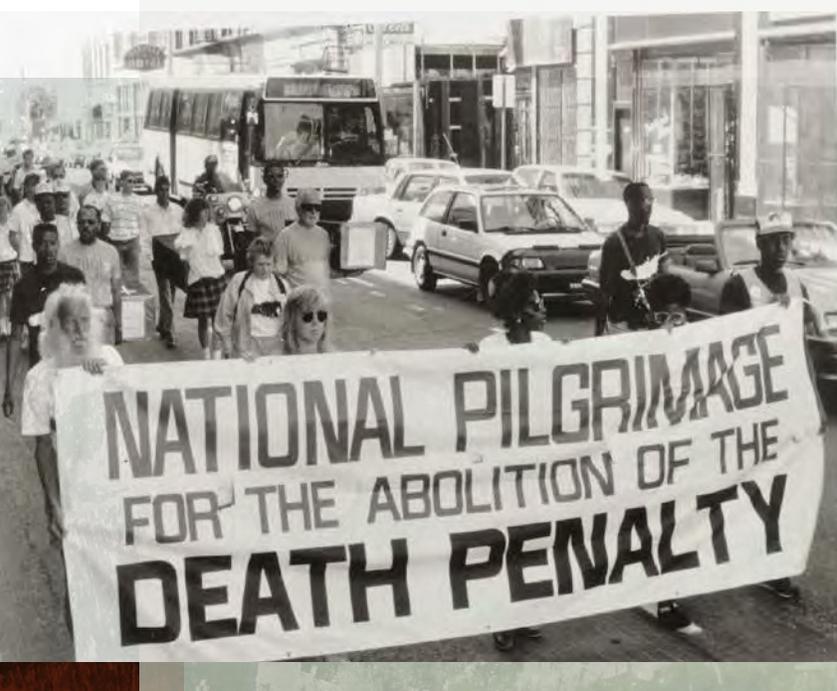
beyond the Church of the Brethren, following the pattern of many other Brethren projects that have become ecumenical. By the year 2000, more than 2,500 people had been assigned a pen pal on death row, and the US death row population had reached its zenith with 3,593 people sitting in prisons in 38 different states.

The most dramatic change for DRSP came in 2012 when the project fully entered the digital age by establishing a web and social media presence. That opened the door to involvement from many people outside the US, particularly in the United Kingdom where there is both curiosity and great concern about the use of the death penalty in the US. In the last several years, more than half of those signing up to write to someone on death row are from the UK. This increase in participation has enabled DRSP to assign a pen pal to almost every person on death row, which currently numbers about 2,700 people.

This decade has seen many ups and downs in the struggle to end the use of the death penalty. Seven states have legislatively abolished the death penalty and there are many states where it is rarely used. Executions in 2016 were the lowest since 1991 and death sentencing also has slowed. At the same time, some states are working hard to find more ways to kill people, and many prosecutors continue to see the death penalty as an essential tool.

Many believe the US death penalty is on its last legs. Church of the Brethren members can certainly help bring its final demise.

Just as “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit”



(1 Corinthians 12:4), there are many ways to be involved. In addition to the examples listed on p. 6, consider these:

- Invite SueZann Bosler to your congregation to tell the story of how she helped to get the man who murdered her father off death row.
- Adopt a person on death row as a congregation or a Sunday school class, taking turns to write letters and providing small amounts of financial support.
- Gather a group to watch the film *Dead Man Walking*. Study guides are available from Rachel Gross.
- If you are in a state with the death penalty, find out what efforts are being made to abolish it and how you can support those efforts. 

Rachel Gross is director of the Death Row Support Project. She would be glad to hear from you. Contact her at drsp@brethren.org and find more stories and information at www.brethren.org/drsp.

He became our friend

by Pam Warner Franklin

Ronald Bell, C-02401. A name. A number. Thirty-nine years ago, he became our friend.

In the spring of 1980, taking the name of a death row inmate to correspond with seemed like the right thing to do. While I was sure that I opposed the death penalty, I had given very little thought to the politics of it, and even less to the people it involved, but I jumped in.

It took a few months for me to get up the courage to write. I didn't know what to say. What do you talk about with someone who has been convicted of taking someone else's life? It was uncomfortable and a little scary to contemplate.

Finally, I took my pen in hand and wrote a cheery note, explaining how I had gotten his name and introducing him to our family, telling a little about each of us: Phil and me and our children. I asked a few questions about where he was from and his family. I shared that I hoped that he felt the comfort and presence of God who promises to never leave us or forsake us. I signed the letter from

each of the five of us.

We got a response right away. Many years later, during a visit, I told Ronnie how uneasy and awkward I felt writing to him the first time. He laughed loudly and said, "How do you think I felt about writing back to this weird white lady with all the children?"

He asked us to visit. We took our children and traveled to San Quentin, 100 miles away. At that time visiting was on a telephone with a Plexiglas panel in between us. It, too, was awkward, each of us taking turns to talk, but, somehow it was okay.

After a couple of visits we were allowed "contact" visits. These were still in the general prison visiting area but in a six-foot by eight-foot cage containing a table and chairs. They brought Ronnie into the room in leg chains and handcuffs, released him from his bonds, and locked him into the cage with us. By now he was a great friend to the children and they had lots of things to tell him. Phil and Ronnie had discovered that they were almost

the same age and had Giants baseball interest in common.

Eventually the condemned prisoners got a visiting room of their own. No more cages, freedom to move around a little, and snack machines! Ronnie kept up with the events of our lives, never missed a birthday, and kept a steady stream of letters coming our way. We all wrote to him and sent quarterly packages of treats he was allowed.

Ten years ago, we started noticing some paranoia in his letters and conversations. He succumbed to early-onset dementia and was moved to a mental infirmary, where we were not allowed to visit. He died there this past March.

Ronnie was one of the few men on California's death row who claimed innocence of the crime for which he was charged. We will never know the truth of those events, but we know the truth of love and affection and friendship. Those things were Ronnie to us. 

Pam Warner Franklin is a member of Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.

'I want people to understand what I learned'

AN INTERVIEW WITH SUEZANN BOSLER

by Bob Gross

SueZann Bosler's father, Bill Bosler, was pastor of Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren when he was murdered in 1986. SueZann and Bill were the only ones at home when they were attacked in the church parsonage by an intruder. Bill was stabbed 24 times. When she tried to help him, SueZann was herself stabbed in the back and head and nearly died.

His Christian faith led Bill Bosler to oppose capital punishment, and he had once told SueZann that if he were ever murdered he would not want his killer to receive the death penalty. On her father's behalf, SueZann worked for 10-and-a-half years to spare the life of his murderer, James Campbell. This put her at odds with Florida prosecutors and judges, who at one point threatened her with six months in jail if she revealed her anti-death penalty beliefs to the jury. Finally, in 1997, her efforts were successful and Campbell's death sentence was commuted to life in prison.

Did you have an opportunity at any point to speak to James Campbell directly?

Yes. It was at a court hearing about five years after the attack, and I was on the witness stand. I looked at him, and he looked back at me, and I said, "I forgive you." Although I had spoken of forgiveness many times before, that was the moment when it became real in my heart. I felt it deep within, and a great weight was lifted from my shoulders.

Have you continued to speak out against the death penalty in the years since?

Absolutely—in fact, I've had the chance to speak against the death penalty in Europe, Africa, and across the United States. I've spoken to church groups, school classes, and

community groups. I'm part of an organization called Journey of Hope—from Violence to Healing, which is made up of murder victim family members like me who bear witness that the death penalty is wrong, and does not bring closure for victim's families.

I want people to understand what I learned from this whole experience. I hope they see that I could not cooperate with the state in sentencing James Campbell to death. I do not want to be a part of taking a human life.

What sustains you in this difficult work? How do you keep going?

My friends at Miami First Church of the Brethren joined with me to stand for life. Along with my family, they were my support group and helped me keep going. In fact, through most of the court appearances, we were the only ones who sat on the defendant's side of the courtroom, to

I HOPE THEY SEE THAT I COULD NOT COOPERATE WITH THE STATE IN SENTENCING JAMES CAMPBELL TO DEATH. I DO NOT WANT TO BE A PART OF TAKING A HUMAN LIFE.

show our support for James Campbell.

I am also inspired by the people I meet in my travels, especially those who have suffered violence and who have chosen reconciliation in response.

I have come to the conclusion that this is my life's work—this is why I did not die when we were attacked. Whenever I speak to a group, I always end with a line from my father's favorite hymn: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." I look around the room, and say, "Let it begin with us." ❧

Bob Gross is serving as volunteer staff for the Journey of Hope. To invite SueZann Bosler or another speaker from Journey of Hope, email info@journeyofhope.org.

Visiting with John

by Brenda Skipwith

When I got word that I had been approved for a visit with my pen pal, John, at North Carolina Central Prison in Raleigh, I began to prepare. The plate and screws put in my broken arm to keep the bone straight were metal and I needed a letter from my doctor stating that the metal was put in during surgery. I picked out what I would wear for the visit because the prison rules are very strict. I prayed a lot.

The day of my visit, I arrived on the prison grounds after a beautiful drive. First, I had to go to a particular building and show my driver's license and they made a copy of the letter from my doctor. I went on to the next building to pass through a security check, where my shoes had to come off and I stepped through a metal detector. Then I had to wait until the detention officers were ready to see me. In that room, I got on the elevator to the second floor where I turned in my visitor pass and told them who I was there to see. They told me which room to go to. Mine was number seven.

In room seven, there was John on the other side of the scratched Plexiglas. I was so happy to see and meet him for the first time after about a year and a half of writing every week. We had to talk through a grate at the bottom of the Plexiglas. I read lips a lot to understand what a person is saying and the scratches on the Plexiglas and the grate did not make it easy for me to understand John.

We asked each other how we were, then I talked about

something I would have written to him about: my 4-year-old granddaughter's birthday party. That broke the ice, and John did a lot of the talking after that. He talked about his upcoming appearance in court, after which he hoped to have a DNA swab done. Always he tells me he is not guilty of the crimes of which he is accused.

I prayed for John. We put our hands up on the Plexiglas like we were holding hands during the prayer. I prayed very awkwardly. I wished I had done a more perfect prayer, but it was a heart-felt prayer.

Then we talked some more, about sports, books, and television shows. He began to tell me about prison life. He spoke about the way the guards treat him. I listened and tried my best to be understanding of this that was so important to him. I asked him if they would do anything to acknowledge his birthday. The answer was a sad "No." They had stopped all special holiday meals and birthday celebrations for the men on death row. It made me happy to do the things I can afford to do to make John's life more pleasant.

Our two-hour visit had come to an end. I put up two hands against the Plexiglas as if giving him a hug. He put two hands up also.

I thank God for letting me see and talk to my pen pal. 

Brenda Skipwith is a member of Fraternity Church of the Brethren in Winston-Salem, N.C. Her pastor, Paul Stutzman, drove her to this visit with John, and offered a calming presence for the trip.

Words from Annual Conference TO SEEK AND SAVE

Jesus Christ came with a message of redemption and compassion for life, while the death penalty carries a message of condemnation and death.

From Cain, who was marked as being under God's protection; to Moses, whom God called to lead the Israelites out of bondage; to King David, whose heart was renewed, and whose life cast the vision of the future

messiah; to Paul, who carried the great mysteries of the gospel to the Gentiles, the message is always that of hope and light even in the most desperate among us. Each of these—Cain, Moses, David, and Paul—committed murder, and through each, God's kingdom was advanced. It is a very human story which is graced by the inspiration of God's loving call to justice, reconciliation, peace,

repentance, faith, hope, redemption, new life, grace, mercy, and forgiveness seventy-times-seven. This is still God's call today. Our mission is still to seek and save. It is not to search and destroy.

—1987 Annual Conference Statement on the Death Penalty, which reaffirmed earlier statements in 1957, 1959, and 1975. Read the full statement at www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1987deathpenalty.



You deserve love

by Claire Flowers

The You Deserve Love project based out of Good Shepherd Church of the Brethren in Blacksburg, Va., successfully met a goal of sending more than 2,700 postcards declaring “You Deserve Love” to inmates on death row. The postcards displayed the art of my 4-year-old son, Otto Waggener.

Good Shepherd Church received correspondence from 375 inmates on death row as a response to the Valentine’s Day mailing. Responses were overwhelmingly filled with expressions of gratitude, love, and curiosity about the senders. Of those 375 inmates, 9 sent multiple letters including Easter greeting cards. Two inmates scheduled to be executed this year responded to the mailing.

I spent several weeks reading, categorizing, and organizing mail in order to prioritize and formulate appropriate responses. More than 200 of the inmates directly requested to continue correspondence as pen pals. About a third of those requests included complex issues to factor into further correspondence including, but not limited to, language and writing barriers, significant mental health concerns, and lack of appropriate legal assistance. Some need particular support from people fluent in their native languages (Spanish, Vietnamese) or from people with some experience in mental health care.

I am working with mentors from On Earth Peace, the Death Row Support Project, and the Good Shepherd congregation to determine how to respond to particularly complex requests. I am connecting with prisoner-run

newsletters in order to answer some frequently asked questions posed in inmate correspondence, such as “Who are you?” and “Why did you send this?”

You Deserve Love participants believe that prisoners

need access to supportive social contact because they receive little to none in prison. The prison environment is intentionally designed to be abusive every step of the way. By propagating the cycle of violence rather than interrupting it, we undermine everyone’s security including prison staff. Systemized abuse is not justice, it is torture.

In my letter to inmate newsletters, I shared the following words to summarize the project’s intended focus:

We wanted to tell you that you deserve to be loved in case no one has ever said those words to you.

We believe with all our hearts that people who can control their behavior should. Our justice system should not

be harming people even if they have committed a crime. That is not justice.

We hope that in our lifetime we see new models of truly life-giving justice emerge in our nation. Know that on the outside it is a time of social change and individuals are becoming more and more aware of widespread injustice in our nation. Changes may be slow but they are inevitable.

Until then, all peace, warm thoughts, and good memories possible be yours. 

Claire Flowers is a member of Good Shepherd Church of the Brethren in Blacksburg, Va., and project organizer for You Deserve Love.



The Sun Does Shine

The subtitle of this book, *How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row*, is both a warning and a testimony to redemption. I use the word *warning* because when you see the words “death row” you should know that if you decide to open the book, you will encounter someone who had been sentenced to be executed by the state, in this case, the state of Alabama.

Anthony Ray Hinton was convicted of murder in 1985. He lived on death row, in solitary confinement, for almost



KEN GIBBLE

30 years. For that entire period, he insisted that he was innocent. Finally, with the help of many people, including Bryan Stevenson, who wrote the foreword to the book and whose work and writings on the theme of criminal justice have received well-deserved acclaim, Hinton’s death sentence was overturned and he was released from prison. As he recounts his experience, devastating to both

himself and his loved ones, he will take you on a journey that is almost impossible to read without weeping.

That journey includes the author’s stunned disbelief at the lies told about him during his trial, his understandable anger, spiritual despair, amazing hope, and, finally, as the subtitle states, life and freedom.

An African American, Hinton grew up in a large, economically poor family. He was arrested and accused of taking the lives of two men. Despite the testimonies of people who insisted he could not have been at the scene of his alleged crimes, and despite his voluntarily taking and passing a lie detector test (which the court would not allow to be admitted), a jury found him guilty. The judge announced that he was condemned to “suffer death by electrocution.”

How does a writer condense 30 years of imprisonment for a crime he did not commit into the pages of a book?

Hinton begins this nearly impossible task by stating that pain and tragedy and injustice happen to us all and that “it’s what you choose to do” after such happenings that matters most. What he chose to do was to insist on his innocence and to insist as well that he would not give up hope even as years passed and the shadow of his impending execution loomed over him.

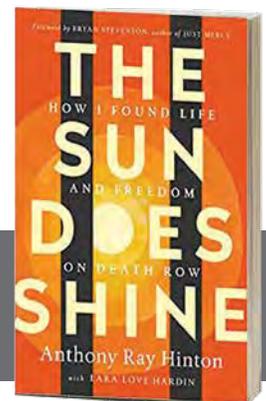
Reared by a mother who taught him about God’s love in both her words and her actions, he found his faith tested by his situation. There were periods during which his prayers seemed pointless; he sometimes felt that he had been abandoned by God.

But many of his prayers were made on behalf of his fellow prisoners on death row, especially when they were taken from their cells, led down the hallway to the room where they were strapped into a chair, and the lights flickered as electric charges were diverted into their bodies. More than 30 such executions took place during his incarceration. His friendships with many of the men who were executed, most of whom were guilty of the crimes they were charged with, called forth from him compassion for them and a conviction that the death penalty must be eradicated from our justice system.

The 1987 Church of the Brethren statement on the death penalty begins: “Annual Conference declared the Church of the Brethren’s opposition to the death penalty in 1957, 1959, and 1975. . . . These actions have delineated an understanding of God’s will for us which upholds the sanctity of human life and personality, opposes the use of capital punishment and encourages Brethren to work for the abolition of the death penalty.”

The Sun Does Shine is a timely reminder that our efforts are still vitally needed. 

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



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row*. **Author:** Anthony Ray Hinton. **Publisher:** St. Martin’s Press, 2018. Available from Brethren Press.

The myth of redemptive violence

It now appears that the slaughter in Sri Lanka of Christians worshipping on Easter Sunday

was carried out in retaliation for an earlier slaughter in New Zealand of Muslims who were themselves in the midst of worship. Extremists carried out both massacres, but we should not view these as isolated incidents. Attacks on houses of worship have become all too common.

The cycle of violence is also known as the Myth of Redemptive Violence. For example, Dylann Roof, the murderer who killed those engaged in Bible study at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, said he murdered black people because he believed they raped white women daily. Timothy McVeigh asserted his bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was in retaliation for various attacks and raids carried out by federal agents over the years.

The drums of war and violence are beating once again. Frank Gaffney, president of Save the Persecuted Christians,



JIM WINKLER

and a longtime purveyor of Islamophobia, is demanding the US government use the tools at its disposal to punish those who attack Christians. There are those who would love nothing more than a “holy war” to cleanse the world of people they refuse to accept.

I confess that when I was growing up, I was a true believer in the Myth of Redemptive Violence. It was no mere myth for me; it was an article of faith. I relied upon my belief in redemptive violence continually in my relationships with my younger brother and sister. My violence toward my siblings was physical and emotional, and in my mind, it was always justified as retaliation for some real or imagined slight. My violence was carried out simply to right the wrongs I had been subjected to.

I don't mean to be trite or flippant when I say this. I think there are genuine parallels. As the theologian Walter Wink pointed out so brilliantly in his powerful trilogy (*Naming the Powers, Unmasking the Powers, and Engaging the Powers*), young children are indoctrinated into the Myth of Redemptive Violence through cartoons.

As a boy, my favorite cartoon hero was Mighty Mouse. In each episode, Mighty Mouse saves the day from the bad guys and rescues fellow mice who have been harmed. Never are any lessons learned, never are relationships made whole. Each episode stands alone as a satisfying

EACH EPISODE STANDS ALONE AS A SATISFYING EXAMPLE OF EVIL INTENT AND ACTIONS DEFEATED BY A MYTHIC HERO COMING TO THE RESCUE.

example of evil intent and actions defeated by a mythic hero coming to the rescue.

These same “lessons” are imparted through spy thrillers, westerns, and war movies. They are deeply embedded in our worldview. Entire wars have been fought based on the Myth of Redemptive Violence. Remember the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 in which, supposedly, a North Vietnamese attack was carried out against an American warship? In retaliation, the United States killed as many as two million Vietnamese and lost tens of thousands of its own soldiers in a war of folly.

My parents enrolled me in first grade when I was five years old. I was thus among the smallest children at school. I reluctantly set my faith in redemptive violence aside for eminently practical reasons—fear of being beaten up being chief among them. This experience began to create doubts in my mind as I learned that kindness, negotiation, persuasion, and forgiveness—which I utilized out of necessity—could often work wonders.

The Myth of Redemptive Violence is a favorite tool of the bully and the coward. It is no wonder that attacks have been carried out on houses of worship because people gathered there are not anticipating violence and because, ultimately, their faith teaches that violence is wrong. Equally, it is wrong to retaliate. What is proper is for a criminal investigation to be made and for those responsible for acts of violence to be held accountable.

The Myth of Redemptive Violence is part of a mental superstructure that holds us in captivity and prevents us from becoming the people God intends us to be. We must disenthral ourselves from such myths to advance the *kin-dom* of God. ❧

Jim Winkler is general secretary of the National Council of Churches.



What is Pietism?

by Jeff Bach

What is Pietism, one of the historical building blocks of the Church of the Brethren? To put it simply, Pietism is a renewal movement within Protestantism with the goal of improving the spiritual life of the church through better familiarity with the Bible, more godly living, and a deeper devotional life. The Church of the Brethren was born out of the ferment of both Anabaptism and Pietism, but the latter is less well known.



Philip Jakob Spener

Pietism's roots

Philip Jakob Spener is often credited as the formal founder of Pietism, as he introduced small group meetings for devotion in his congregation in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1670, at the request of a member,

Johann Jakob Schütz. Pietists who stayed within the established churches (Lutheran and Reformed) constitute “church Pietism.”

But Schütz withdrew from the church, believing it to be too flawed to renew, and formed his own group. Pietists who left the churches represent Radical Pietism, due to their harsher criticism of the institutional churches and their more urgent expectation of the end times.

Pietists looked not outwardly, to external, objective doctrinal propositions, but inwardly, for a personal, subjective spiritual awareness as the source of faith. Pietism was not entirely an individualistic movement, however, as it depended on small groups to form the gathered fellowship, helping believers find and practice faith.

In 1675 Spener wrote a treatise, *Pious Desires (Pia Desideria)*. He laid out a six-point program that summarizes the main goals of Pietism. His agenda proposed to 1) use the Bible more extensively in home reading and preaching; 2) practice actively the priesthood of all believers among

TO PUT IT SIMPLY, **PIETISM IS A RENEWAL MOVEMENT** WITHIN PROTESTANTISM WITH THE GOAL OF IMPROVING THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH THROUGH BETTER FAMILIARITY WITH THE BIBLE, MORE GODLY LIVING, AND A DEEPER DEVOTIONAL LIFE.

the members; 3) practice Christian faith in devotional life and moral behavior, not just knowledge of doctrine; 4) avoid bickering about doctrine; 5) improve ministerial training in schools to make ministers into examples of faith and godly living; 6) improve preaching to build up believers' spiritual lives.

Service alongside spirituality

Spener's spiritual agenda took institutional form when August Hermann Francke arrived in Halle, Germany, in 1692 to take a pastorate and a position to teach theology at the University of Halle.

Francke soon launched social reforms that included schools for girls and boys, an orphanage, a publishing house, a pharmaceutical enterprise, and other endeavors that became known as the Francke Institutions. As the university sent Lutheran ministers around the world, Pietism became the first form of Protestantism to engage in intentional missions.

Francke also brought attention to repentance and spiritual rebirth. When asked to preach on John 20:31 in 1687, he realized that he had no personal faith, despite his theological education. He prayed through the night before the sermon and broke through to an assurance of forgiveness and sense of spiritual rebirth.

Some observers claim that the subjective, inward faith of Pietism is mere emotional sentimentality, lacking concern for the well-being of people in the real world. But Francke's life and work demonstrate that Pietists combined a subjective awareness of faith *with* service to people in need.

End times and ecstasies

Both church Pietism and Radical Pietism were concerned about the end times and the final judgment. Spener held a gentler hope of better times coming for the church. He anticipated that the church would prepare for the last days

by improving personal faith and carrying out ministries like those of the Francke Institutions. Radical Pietists foresaw more gruesome and urgent end times.

Expectations of the end reached a high point from 1697 to 1700. Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hohenau (later a friend of Brethren founder Alexander Mack) preached in Berleburg in Wittgenstein that Christ would return at Easter in 1700. Ecstasies such as spiritual laughter and spiritual stupors erupted in his services.

Although the prediction failed, speculations about the end times continued for decades. And Berleburg remained an important center for Radical Pietist activity, thanks to the toleration of Count Casimir. Johann Friedrich Haug and others created the eight-volume Berleburg Bible, which was filled with Radical Pietist commentary. It was published between 1726 and 1742 and was popular among Radical Pietists.

Radical Pietism evidenced a broad diversity of beliefs. For example, some Radical Pietists took up the views of the mystic Jacob Boehme, who died in 1624. Johann Georg Gichtel published Boehme's works in 1682. Boehme believed that God is androgynous, possessing female and male aspects in perfect balance. The female aspect is the Heavenly Virgin Sophia. God created Adam with both gender aspects, but Adam lost the female part when he desired his own will; spiritual rebirth through Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Sophia would restore the balance. Specifically, Gichtel believed that Adam lost the balance through sexual desire. Spiritual rebirth would conquer sexual desire, leading to a life of celibacy.



August Hermann Francke



Eleanora Petersen

Restoration and inspiration

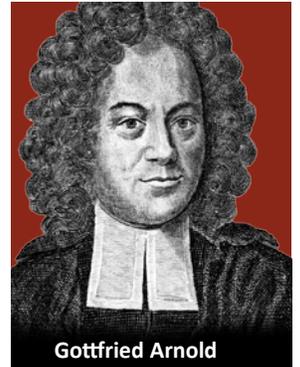
In England, Jane Lead popularized Boehme's writings through her group, the Philadelphian Society. She also formulated the doctrine of universal restoration—the belief that at some future time, God would reconcile all sinners, even the devil and the demons, to fellowship with God

following a time of punishment after death. Alexander Mack held a milder version of this belief. Lead's doctrine spread among German speakers through Johanna Eleanora (von Merlau) Petersen and her husband, Johann Wilhelm Petersen, who claimed to discover this view after her in 1694.

Some Radical Pietists sought direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Such direct revelations were central to the Community of True Inspiration, formed by Eberhard Ludwig Gruber and Friedrich Rock in Himbach in 1714. They believed that the Spirit spoke through "instruments," people who received the messages, which were as valuable as scripture. The Inspirationists came to America in 1844, forming a communal society that settled the Amana villages in Iowa in 1855.

Gottfried Arnold, briefly a professor of church history, held Boehme's views about God and Sophia, but found his source for renewal in ancient Christianity. In 1696 he wrote

The First Love: That Is, a True Portrait of the First Christians. He portrayed the earliest Christians as the most faithful for their mutual love and refusal to link church and government. Arnold described practices in the early church such as baptism upon confession of faith, love meals along with communion, anointing for healing, peace, refusing oaths, and practicing church discipline.



Gottfried Arnold

Brethren beginnings

The early Brethren used these practices outlined by Arnold as models for their church, thereby avoiding the excesses of private revelations and heterodox (nonconforming) beliefs.

A vision that propels an appeal to Radical Pietism

by Jonathan Emmons

What if Radical Pietism could anchor a vision for the Church of the Brethren and guide our denomination into a period of restoration and reformation?

What if . . .

What if our Radical Pietist heritage actually holds the theological tools and provides the spiritual insights to draw us into reconciliation and vibrant communion?

What if the Radical Pietist approach to scripture is actually *more* faithful than the conservative notion of biblical inerrancy and literalism *and* the progressive notion of historical-critical study and scholarship?

What if the Radical Pietist understanding of the inner Word is a position not captured by either the conservative appeal to legalism or the progressive notion of conscience?

And what if the Brethren values we all hold so dear—simplicity, peace-making, humility, community, forbearance—are sturdy vessels already equipped to carry the fruits of our largely forgotten heritage into a world desperate to see, hear, and embody it?

I urge us to rediscover the spiritual depths of our heritage, to reinvest in a Radical Pietist spirituality that provides a rich foundation for the deeply transformational nature of the Christian life—a life guided by something more profound than mere obedience to scripture, a life not

defined by prevailing social and cultural trends.

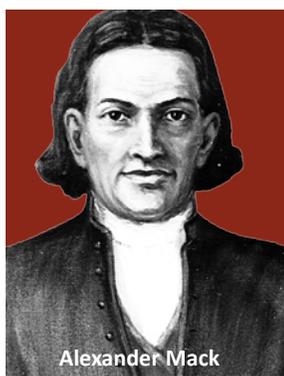
I urge us to draw our Radical Pietist heritage out of denominational obscurity, to find our truest and most transformational voice, that we might discover new avenues for flourishing, new models for revitalization, new opportunities for healing and wholeness among us, and new ways to carry our unique vision into God's world. 

Jonathan Emmons lives in Greensboro, N.C. In 2017 he completed a two-year program at Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, N.M., fueling a renewed interest in the Brethren heritage of Pietism and its potential for reframing some of the issues of the church. He has served as organist for Annual Conference and National Older Adult Conference.

BRETHREN THUS DO NOT REPRESENT A DYNAMIC TENSION BETWEEN ANABAPTISM AND PIETISM AS OPPOSITES. INSTEAD . . . THE BRETHREN FORMED IN THE **OVERLAP OF ANABAPTISM AND PIETISM.**

The Brethren did not believe in continuing revelation that surpasses the Bible, but in the possibility of new, more faithful understandings of the scripture.

Some Brethren writers have seen Pietism as the exact opposite of Anabaptism, the reform movement of the 1500s. They see the Brethren decision to form as a church



Alexander Mack

as evidence of the ordered, gathered church characteristic of Anabaptism. Such writers often see in Pietism the opposite side, with individualistic spirituality and the personal “conscience” preferred over the gathered church.

But this dualism is false polarization. Many Pietists, including Francke, called for more discipline within the church. Both Pietism and

Anabaptism stressed godly, moral living to express outwardly one’s inward faith. Both movements stressed the importance of the Bible. Early Anabaptists also emphasized prayer. Brethren thus do not represent a dynamic tension between Anabaptism and Pietism as opposites. Instead, Marcus Meier showed in his book *The Origin of the Schwarzenau Brethren* (2008) that the Brethren formed in the overlap of Anabaptism and Pietism.

In addition to its historical influences, Pietism has continued to receive some attention in our own era, as well. For example, Chris Gehrz and Mark Pattie in 2017 wrote a book titled *The Pietist Option: Hope for the Renewal of Christianity*. So while the heyday of

Pietism ended in the 18th century, renewed interest shows that Pietism has not disappeared entirely. 



Jeff Bach is director of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies and associate professor of religious studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College. He is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren.

The Moravian angle

One Pietist group that is a story unto itself is the Moravians. In 1727 Nikolaus Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf oversaw the renewal of the old Moravian Church, descended from the efforts of Jan Hus. The last few Moravians of that era were living on his estate when this spiritual renewal broke forth.

Zinzendorf, who had lived at Halle and was educated there, infused many Pietist elements into the renewed Moravian Church. These included a deep devotion to Christ and his wounds, a strong sense of mutual love, and a highly organized pattern of grouping members by gender and marital status for mutual edification and discipline. These groups he called “choirs,” which were not for singing but for spiritual enrichment.

The Moravians were pacifists in principle, practiced the holy kiss, and held a love feast that was a devotional service, not a communion service. Music and hymnody were very important in Moravian spirituality. The Moravians were zealous evangelists, spreading their faith internationally.*

The Moravians impressed a young Anglican clergyman, John Wesley, during his brief ministry in Savannah, Ga., and later when he joined them in Bible study meetings in London in 1738. Here he felt his heart “strangely warmed,” marking his conversion experience.

John and Charles Wesley introduced a system of small groups (classes and bands) into the Church of England, creating Methodist societies. This strategy of Pietism reinforced Wesley’s strong emphasis on the necessity of giving a personal testimony of one’s individual assurance of faith. This personal assurance and Wesley’s promotion of sanctification marked the uniquely Wesleyan strain of Pietism. From this influence the River Brethren (Brethren in Christ) formed in Lancaster County, Pa., in the 1780s. —Jeff Bach

*More than 1 million Moravians exist in the world today, with the largest concentration in eastern Africa. The Moravian Church in North America can be found in 13 states and two Canadian provinces, with regional headquarters in Bethlehem, Pa., and Winston-Salem, N.C.



To start seeing recovery

Brethren Disaster Ministries at work in Puerto Rico

by Carrie Miller

Driving into Castañer, it is hard to imagine that less than two years ago the same trees that are now green and blooming were completely bare. In my first week on the island I sat in a car with pastor Lillian Reyes from Iglesia de Los Hermanos y Centro Familiar, the Church of the Brethren in Bayamón, as we drove into the mountains. She exclaimed at how amazed everyone was to see that the once-stripped vegetation had bounced back.

“To see leaves on the trees again is a symbol of hope for us,” she told me. “It is such an inspiration.”

I watched the passing landscape, the orange blossoms on the *flamboyán* trees, and the tropical flora that I had never seen before. I could not picture it looking as locals described it after Hurricane Maria: as though a wild fire had swept through.

We weaved through the mountain roads, passing fields of coffee, citrus, plantains, root vegetables, and bananas, until finally reaching the valley located in the central west part of the island in which the community of Castañer lies.

Brethren Disaster Ministries decided to establish a rebuilding project in Puerto Rico in August 2018. Castañer Church of the Brethren graciously offered their housing facil-

ities as a base for volunteers. After having an initial team prepare the volunteer facilities, groups have been coming every two weeks to be part of the rebuilding program.

With the help of the Recovery Committee of Puerto Rico District of the Church of the Brethren, Brethren Disaster Ministries is able to work to repair and rebuild homes as well as provide materials for those homeowners who are doing the repairs themselves.

Now, nearly two years after the hurricanes, the long-term work is just beginning. That is not to say that nothing has happened in the last two years. The island’s government and nonprofit sector, alongside churches and community members, have worked tirelessly to try to meet the needs of a population that already was struggling pre-Hurricane Maria.

Puerto Rico had the worst debt crisis in US history. Poverty rates are on average 45 percent—more than twice as high as Mississippi’s 21 percent, the poorest state in the United States. In the mountains of Puerto Rico, the poverty rate tends to be even higher, and is a number that continues to grow because those who fled the area after the hurricanes were the more financially stable people. Those who stay often do not have the option to leave.

WE HAVE SEEN SO MUCH PROGRESS IN A YEAR AND A HALF, BUT THERE IS **SO MUCH MORE TO BE DONE.**

Yes, there is lots to be done

As the project leader of the rebuilding site, I am approached by many people who ask, “So is there still a lot of work to be done?” In short, yes.

Anyone who is working in disaster relief on Puerto Rico after hurricanes Irma and Maria will tell you that it has not been a typical response. Like other disasters, the aftermath was devastating for residents. However, unlike most disasters there was very limited communication and ability to respond in the wake of Hurricane Maria. About 95 percent of all cell towers were out of service and only 400 miles of the island’s 16,700 miles of roads were passable. Only 12 of the 78 police stations were able to relay 911 calls.

Many Puerto Ricans waited weeks to receive any initial help, and waited months to receive electricity and water. The slow response to both emergency situations and long-term needs resulted in a death toll of 2,975 according to the Puerto Rican government, although independent studies have showed that this number is likely more than 4,000 people.

When I arrived in August 2018, 11 months after Hurricane Maria, Castañer and surrounding communities had just begun to receive electricity, and water outages were happening at least twice a week. The situation was even more severe in a small farming community called Río Prieto, where most of our cases were located. Many of the people in this community have inherited their homes from family and did not have any proper land deeds to be able to receive initial help from FEMA. Because of the lack of communication, many did not know that after being turned down, there was a second opportunity to apply with alternative options of documentation for land ownership.

Over a year out from the disaster, this means that homes still have blue tarps on them. About a third of homeowners tell a similar story of losing their entire metal roof during the storm and having to hike down into the valleys to search for the metal sheets and bring them back to the house to try to repair their roof as best they could. One house, which didn’t have any nails, had cinder blocks on top of the low-pitched roof to hold down the metal. Rotting wood and mold are now growing concerns as unfixed roofs continue to allow water to leak in. This aggravates health problems and increases the amount of work that is needed for each home.

‘So excited to be in our home again’

With the help of local volunteer case workers and district disaster coordinator José Acevedo, through the Recovery Committee, we are able to identify cases with the most urgent need for repairs. One such case was that of homeowner Joel Arroyo Ostolaza. With three generations living in one house—

Ostolaza and his wife, their daughter, and her two small children—the family faced critical living conditions, with mold and severe leaking. They even had to move their beds at night depending on where the roof was leaking the most.

After a couple of weeks of work, our team was able to not just restore their home, but also connect them with other partner organizations or community members to receive further help, such as new appliances.

Many of our volunteers said that one of their favorite experiences while working on the house was sharing a warm, homemade lunch made by Ostolaza’s mother, Anna, every day. Others said a highlight was working right alongside the homeowner to rebuild the roof.

“We are so, so excited to be in our home again,” Ostolaza said, a few days after our group had finished working on the house.

No one is working alone

What is most amazing about the effort here is that no one is working alone. It takes case managers, the Recovery Committee, Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteers and leadership, FEMA, partner organizations, the community, the local church, and the family to complete repairs and rebuilding projects like the Ostolazas’. With leadership from the seven Church of the Brethren congregations in the district and José Acevedo, communities like Río Prieto are able to start seeing recovery.

We have seen so much progress in a year and a half, but there is so much more to be done. In the island’s recovery plan after Hurricane Maria, an estimated 166,000 residential structures needed to be rebuilt. Organizations that use FEMA’s program VALOR to receive building materials, like Brethren Disaster Ministries, collectively have been able to repair around 3,400 homes as of April 2019. I am reminded every day that even though we may not see the end of those numbers, we do see family after family placed back in a safe home and on the road to a new normal.

Like the vegetation, the people of Puerto Rico are resilient. Sometimes it is hard to remember that they endured so much trauma and loss. I am so proud to be walking alongside them as a part of Brethren Disaster Ministries, and to be sharing with others in the effort to help restore homes and create more resilient communities. 

Carrie Miller is Puerto Rico disaster project leader for Brethren Disaster Ministries.



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THEY SHOULD CALL IT C-P-Tea

HOW CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS BUILDS PEACE IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

by Victoria Bateman

Bachtyar Ali's book *I Stared at the Night of the City* gave me my first impressions of the city of Sulaymaniyah. The book, the first Kurdish-language novel to be translated into English, is written in vivid language that reflects the intense appreciation for poetry that is common in Kurdish culture. It describes a complicated city that is haunted by its past, yet full of hope.

I had sought out the book in preparation for traveling to the region with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). CPT was founded by Christian groups, including the Church of the Brethren, in the mid-1980s, and operates teams in Colombia, Palestine, Iraqi Kurdistan, Canada, and Lesvos. Each CPT program works alongside local partners on a variety of peacebuilding efforts, including trainings, accompaniment programs, and direct action.

Each year, these programs organize two-week trips for delegates to meet with their local civil society partners and to learn more about their human rights work. The expectation is that delegates will use these experiences and connections to advocate in their own communities and with their own governments once they return home.

I flew into Sulaymaniyah in early March, excited to finally see the work of CPT on the ground. In some ways, the trip was exactly what Ali's book had prepared me for—long bus rides over snowy mountains covered in goats, stories of conflict served with an excessive amount of dolmas, and smoke-filled tea houses packed with men. The partner visits, conversations, and learning opportunities, however, provided insights possible only with a CPT delegation.

Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region. While technically part of Iraq, the area is controlled by the

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan dominate the north and south of the region, respectively, and the political conversation around the establishment of a Kurdish nation reached fever pitch in 2015, as the KRG called a referendum on independence.

The tension between the Kurdish-dominated north and the rest of Iraq has set the stage for violence and oppression in the past. The Al-Anfal genocide was perpetrated by the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. During this time, the regime relocated Arab families into primarily Kurdish areas, destroyed Kurdish villages, and killed Kurds. In 1988, the city of Halabja was chemically attacked. We saw the mass graves that serve as a reminder of the genocide.

Violent conflict is still affecting the lives of Kurds in Iraq, especially in the

PEACEMAKING IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS THAT INVOLVES THE HARD WORK OF CHANGING SYSTEMS, PARTNERING ACROSS DIFFERENCES, AND CHALLENGING OPPRESSIONS. IT IS STANDING IN **SOLIDARITY WITH PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD AS THEY ALSO DO THIS WORK.**

border regions near Iran and Turkey. The governments of Iran and Turkey, as they fight against armed Kurdish groups like the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), are bombing in Iraqi areas. The bombings result in civilian deaths, and keep villagers out of their fields and orchards. In 2017, CPT released a report on the civilian impacts of the cross-border bombings. In 2018, CPT reported the death of Dunya Rasheed after she was killed by a Turkish shelling.

These reports came out of earlier trips to the field and conversations with villagers in affected areas. Our delegation participated in similar dialogues. In Sidakan, we ate a delicious Kurdish meal in the home of CPT's partner Kak Rashad, as he shared with us the impact that bombings from Iran and Turkey have on local communities. He reports that villages near Barmiza are bombed every day, and many villagers have fled. Villagers must get permission from their local party structures—who then get permission from Turkish bases—to harvest sumac or nuts from the mountains. If they are unable to get this permission, they must either risk death to harvest their crops, or abandon their agricultural produce.

The next day, Kak Rashad's concerns were echoed by another partner in the small village of Dupre. Kak Abdal spoke about the challenges of being forced to relocate from impacted villages: "If Kurds don't help each other, everyone will be evicted." The family says that each village loses \$60,000 annually due to lost agricultural products that are destroyed by bombings or are not able to be harvested due to security concerns.

Christian Peacemaker Teams also



partners with local human rights defenders who face threats due to their work. In Akre, a city about an hour and a half north of Mosul, we visited with journalist Sherwan Sherwani, who had just been released from prison. Our team sat in a circle outside of his house, drinking small cups of coffee as he recounted his ordeal. He had been arrested while on his way to a peaceful gathering in Duhok, organized in reaction to civilian deaths caused by Turkish airstrikes. He was charged with threatening national security.

"They consider party security to be national security," said Sherwani, as he detailed how his journalistic work and activism has resulted in threats on his life, forced exposure of his sources, and arrest.

Human rights concerns aren't the only challenges faced by residents of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in rural villages. Aqlima, a woman who lives in Dupre, said, "We are on oceans of oil but don't have kerosene to heat the house." With Turkish goods flooding the market, a lack of jobs for young people, and corruption in the government, humanitarian concerns are just as pressing as human rights concerns, she said.

The partners that we met, from Sherwan Sherwani to Kak Rashad and his family, have important stories to share.

That's where CPT comes in. With International NGO status, the organization can amplify the efforts and stories of their local partners to a larger audience. They make space for these local activists to do good work by using their privilege as an international NGO to get them meetings with government officials, spreading their messages through international media outlets, and reaching out to foreign governments. CPT members can also use their presence to provide safety for those threatened by security services. For example, they stayed at the house of civil society activist Awat Hassan when he was being threatened by the Kurdish intelligence service.

As Albert Einstein noted, peace is not merely the absence of war, but also the presence of justice. Peacemaking is an active process that involves the hard work of changing systems, partnering across differences, and challenging oppressions. It is standing in solidarity with people around the world as they also do this work. By joining a CPT delegation, I was able to see firsthand how this work is done in Iraqi Kurdistan—one conversation over tea at a time. 

Victoria Bateman is an associate in the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service.



God won't give you more than you can handle?

by Tim Harvey

On the Sunday that Gil joined the Oak Grove congregation, he shared a moving testimony of his faith in Jesus. Members of our church family have come to know Gil as a man of deep faith and joyful spirit, and also as someone whose chronic illnesses have left him with significant vision and mobility challenges.

But the congregation had never heard Gil reflect on how his faith has been strengthened by his health struggles. “I am glad for the illnesses and challenges that I have, and I would not trade them,” he said in his testimony. “Without them, I would not know Jesus the way I do.”

I was struck that he did not in say, “God did not give me more than I could handle.” I often hear this phrase from people who are nearly overwhelmed by their struggles. It’s a phrase that never quite rings true. What does it mean to “handle” suffering? What do we think “not handling” things would look like? Of all the topics in this *Say What?* series of

Bible studies, I have the most contempt for this overused (and misused) phrase. It is an almost useless expression.

Saying “God won’t give us more than we can handle” misinterprets the Bible on two counts. To help us untangle this double knot, we will focus on Paul’s description of both suffering and temptation in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Suffering is a regular part of this life

Suffering is part of human existence. People get sick, and sometimes they die unexpectedly. Accidents happen. A job loss creates financial stress. Tragically, these difficult circumstances can even pile up all at once. Challenges can come from people who oppose our commitment to the gospel; the persecution experienced by the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria has caused major suffering over recent years.

The biblical authors were not immune to suffering. In his two letters to the Christians in Corinth, Paul used his own

OUR LIFE IN CHRIST IS INEXTRICABLY CONNECTED TO OUR LIFE WITH ONE ANOTHER. THIS CERTAINLY INCLUDES THE WAY WE SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN TIMES OF ILLNESS. . . . BUT IT OUGHT TO ALSO INCLUDE THE WAY WE HELP ONE ANOTHER WHEN REMAINING FAITHFUL TO JESUS BECOMES DIFFICULT.

experiences of suffering to instruct the Corinthians about the Christian life. Some of his suffering came from what were likely health issues; Paul described one challenge as “a messenger of Satan to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) that quite possibly affected his physical appearance and maybe even his ability to speak. Some of Paul’s critics noted that “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Corinthians 10:10).

In between these two passages, Paul described the physical suffering he endured for the gospel, noting that he had received the “forty lashes minus one,” been “beaten with rods,” “received a stoning,” and was constantly in danger (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

But these difficulties did not defeat Paul. Even as he described how much he suffered for the gospel, Paul testified that God’s grace was sufficient for him, so much so that he was willing to “boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul had friends who assisted him, churches that prayed for him, and a God who promised to save him.

And so do we. What was so moving about Gil’s testimony was how he has come to see his sufferings as Paul understood his own. Gil knows his faith is secure in Christ Jesus; and he has a loving wife and church family that help with his physical limitations, even as he helps the Oak Grove congregation as an active participant in congregational life.

Perhaps we can say that people have learned to “handle” their difficulties. But how much better is it to acknowledge that in the midst of our suffering—however difficult it may be—we are not alone. One of the most significant witnesses of the church is to support us and point us to Jesus in our darkest days, knowing that our faith can also be strengthened by our sufferings.

For further reading

Donald Durnbaugh’s *Fruit of the Vine* (Brethren Press) is an excellent resource for how Brethren historically navigated faithful living when commitment to Christ came into conflict with the attitudes and beliefs of the culture around them.

J. Heinrich Arnold’s *Freedom from Sinful Thoughts* (Plough Publishing) gives helpful insight into remaining faithful when tempted by sin.

Tested beyond our strength

As with most of the articles in this Bible study series, we think we’re quoting scripture when we really aren’t. In this case, the phrase we think applies to suffering actually describes situations that tempt us to sin.

It is this circumstance that Paul addressed when he wrote, “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Context is everything; spiritual temptations are the issue here, not the various illnesses, difficulties, or persecutions that might come our way.

The Corinthians were a lot like us—they were surrounded by lifestyle options that their culture said were acceptable but their faith said were not. Paul reminded them that they were not the first in God’s family to experience spiritual temptation. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, he cited some of Israel’s less-than-stellar history when the people decided to turn back to a former way of life because it seemed easier and more pleasing in the moment. The people were punished severely for choices that demonstrated a lack of faith in God.

But our experience can be different. After affirming in verse 13 that God will provide a means to endure spiritual temptation, Paul described in verses 14-17 what those means are: the bread and the cup of communion! We need not yield to temptation because we have shared in the blood of Christ that provides for our salvation. We are not alone in our temptation because we have shared in the bread, the body of Christ of which we are a part.

It is significant that the old Brethren refused to separate the bread and cup of communion from the full love feast. If nothing else, sharing the bread and cup along with a period of spiritual examination, feetwashing, and a meal forces us to recognize that our life in Christ is inextricably connected to our life with one another. This certainly includes the way we support one another in times of illness and other struggles. But it ought to also include the way we help one another when remaining faithful to Jesus becomes difficult and other options appear more attractive.

I’d love to think we’d stop saying “God won’t give us more than we can handle” because the phrase simply misses the point of our life together. God has given us one another and our shared faith in Jesus to navigate both the struggles and the temptations of life. Those are strong enough to see us through. 

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



Hector's son Josue with his grandson when he was little.

Why do they come to the border?

The experience of a Guatemalan immigrant family

by Jan Futrell

A few weeks ago, a brokenhearted Hector*, my family's close friend from Guatemala, called to tell us that gang members had killed his 38-year-old son, Josue. Both of Hector's children are now dead and two of his three stepsons also have been killed by gangs in Guatemala.

As these tragedies pile on for this cross-border family, I ask so many questions that confront all of us in this time of struggle about immigration policy in the US. Sometimes we wonder, "What compels young men and women and even mothers with young children to make the harrowing journey to our southern border, only to be imprisoned in the US?" In recent days, this latest chapter in the story of my Guatemalan friends has shifted my questioning to: "How is it that some try to stay? How could they not try to come to

possible safety in the north?"

Josue lived in Guatemala so I had never met him but had watched him grow up through the stories that his father told. Hector has been part of our extended family since he fled to the US in 1989 when his life was threatened during the 30-year war in Guatemala. He found his way to central Kentucky and a sanctuary group in which I was active.

Against great odds, Hector was granted political asylum by the US government and has overcome trauma, addiction, and every kind of challenge in his life here in the US. Now a small-business owner and, along with his wife Paula, a valued member of their community in Indiana, Hector still calls me *Mamacita* and stays in close touch.

He and Paula are part of the ranks of immigrants who work so hard to make a living in the US. They send as much of their

** First names of Hector and his family are used at his request. He has read and approved this telling of their story.*

income as possible back to their struggling families back home in order to stay connected to the ones they miss and to make a way for them to remain in their home communities.

A violent legacy

I first got to know Central American immigrants in the mid-1980s when many were fleeing north to avoid violent civil conflict. Throughout the region, nongovernmental organizations, segments of the Roman Catholic church, other religious organizations, and armed insurgents were waging struggles against oppressive governments. Then, as now, the US government and multinational corporations provided significant financial, political, and military support for those governments.

That was a frightening time for Central American citizens. Young men in particular were drawn into the wars on both sides. It was a destructive time for their fertile lands as well.

Post-war legacies have created great fear and threat for all the people of Central America. Current realities include the presence of massive amounts of military weaponry, loss of arable land, the concentration of large numbers of young people in the cities, and war refugees returning from the US bringing their US-based gang connections back with them. Whole cities and regions are controlled by extremely violent gangs. Sometimes I am amazed that anyone but a small, insulated elite group can find a way to stay and survive in such a reality. Much could be said about the roots of today's realities and the part that the US has played in it.

The family's story

When Hector and Paula each found their own way to the US, their children remained in Guatemala to be raised by their aunt with support from their parents here. Their family is among the cross-border families who know each other through mail, email, and texting. Family was the link to the homeland that Hector deeply missed.

Josue was working as a cab driver and his wife, Axa, was a cosmetologist. They were making a decent living for themselves and their two children. Their family was moving up into the middle class, able to buy a small house, send their children to a private school, and even put aside money for them to attend university.

Hector's hope for his son and grandchildren to do well seemed to be coming true. At the same time, the danger to his family living in Guatemala City was a constant worry. Much

of Guatemala City is controlled by highly organized gangs who enforce their control through violence and by spreading fear among vulnerable people. For safety, Josue's children, ages 9 and 17, had to stay inside in the evenings. In order to be allowed to operate his taxi, Josue had to make a payment to a gang contact every week at specified time and place.

As the payment time neared on a day in late February, Josue was caught in a traffic jam. He called the contact to let him know that he was coming but would be late through no fault of his own. When he arrived, the collector was no longer anywhere to be found.

The next morning, two young men ages 18 and 15 stopped Josue's taxi and shot and killed him and his passenger. Both victims worked as taxi drivers. The family thinks that they may have objected to the latest in the demands for holiday bonus payments to the gang, thus further sealing their fate. The message from the gang: "We are in charge! We will enforce even the most random orders from the gang."

And the gang was not done yet. Later that day, they posted a warning on the door of Josue's house. The note instructed his grieving wife, Axa, to leave her home by the next day, taking only the family's clothing, or she and her children would be the next to die. In great fear, Axa left her job, her house, and all their belongings, and fled to her mother's rural home, a place of great poverty.

With the death of their husband and father, the family became part of the large numbers of forcibly internally displaced citizens in Guatemala. Neighbors reported that gang members moved into the house that evening. Hector's mother told him that the neighborhoods are dotted with houses that have been claimed by the gangs, bringing ever greater fear to all who live nearby. The family was dependent on help from family and friends in the US to raise the \$300 to reclaim Josue's body from the morgue for burial. For lack of money to buy another burial plot, they had to dig up the coffin of the aunt who raised him in order to bury them in the same gravesite.

When distant relatives speculated about taking revenge for the killing, Hector told all that the violence could stop with them, that they would not be part of the problem.

To the surprise of the family, arrests were made, and the incident appeared in the local news. The word from the police was that the 18-year-old gang enforcer had a record that would keep him in jail for a long time. Based on past

WITH THE DEATH OF THEIR HUSBAND AND FATHER, THE FAMILY BECAME PART OF THE LARGE NUMBERS OF FORCIBLY INTERNALLY DISPLACED CITIZENS IN GUATEMALA. NEIGHBORS REPORTED THAT GANG MEMBERS MOVED INTO THE HOUSE THAT EVENING.

AS THE GRIEVING HECTOR AND PAULA SEE IT, **ALL THEY CAN DO NOW IS TO TRY TO GIVE THEIR GRANDCHILDREN A CHANCE.** THEIR STORY DIFFERS ONLY IN THE DETAILS FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER FOLK IN GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, AND EL SALVADOR.



experience, expectations were that the juvenile offender would be out on the street in a matter of days.

Axa is now afraid to send her son to school for fear that gang members will target him. Jason is a senior in high school who was planning to use their college fund to continue his education. Hector is trying to provide a computer and money for Internet service so that his grandson can complete his classes online. Jason's younger sister, Hilary, remains in school for now.

Hector and Paula can barely pay their own bills but will add these recent needs to their list of family responsibilities. The death of Josue and displacement of Axa and her children is the latest tragedy Paula and Hector have faced. They also are helping to support the family of Paula's son, Freddy, who was killed by gang members in 2015 as he drove a bus. His offense was not having enough money to pay the gang because his bus had been in the repair shop for a few days.

As the grieving Hector and Paula see it, all they can do now is to try to give their grandchildren a chance. Their story differs only in the details from the experience of other folk in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

More on Central America

For more information about the situation in what is known as the northern triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) see the website of the Latin American Working Group, particularly the organization's paper of recommendations for US engagement at www.lawg.org/centamrecs19.

Why do they come?

Place yourself in the position of having to choose to flee to a distant hope, or to stay at home and endure daily struggle and fear for yourself and your children. Why should anyone have to make that choice? The refugees and immigrants I know did not want to leave their homes and families. But many feel that the only hope that they have is to trust that caring North Americans will give them a chance to live safely and make a basic living.

This hope is still possible for those who survive the arduous journey to claim refugee status. Our congregations, denomination, and individual church members can join other organizations to provide needed support.

But Hector's story and that of other immigrants and refugees raise important questions:

- What is at the base of the web in which both young gang members and other community members are trapped?
- Do US dollars spent on walls and immigrant prisons and military weapons in Central America solve any of the systemic problems originating in our long-intertwined histories?
- Do deportations and ending US aid to Central American countries, including aid that is supporting anti-corruption and anti-poverty programs, exacerbate the problems in these countries?
- Do our actions and inaction as North Americans push more migrants to run for their lives to the US border?
- How can we as church members and US citizens work with Central Americans here and in their home countries to make deep, lasting changes that bring hope and genuine security for all?

Keeping hope alive

The miracle is that so many of these children of God keep any hope alive, and even try to stay in their homelands and improve their lives.

Jesus taught that we honor him when we both respond to the needs of the poor and hungry, and when we welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:33-46).

Martin Luther King Jr.'s words also ring true in this situation: "Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be." 

Jan Futrell is a member of Lower Miami Church of the Brethren in southern Ohio. The congregation has joined Hector and his family in prayer during this difficult time.

Emergency Disaster Fund supports Africa cyclone relief

Emergency Disaster Fund grants support relief efforts in southern Africa following Cyclone Idai. Two large grants have gone to longterm partner organizations: \$40,000 to ACT Alliance, and \$30,000 jointly to IMA World Health and Lutheran World Relief.

The allocation to IMA World Health and Lutheran World Relief supports the Chipinge and Chimanimani regions of Zimbabwe, providing funding for temporary shelters, distribution of relief kits, and water filters. In Mozambique, the organizations are sending school kits to support safe spaces for children living in temporary camps.

The grant to ACT Alliance supports its country-level organizing bodies in the affected nations. A combination of local and international organizations will implement a comprehensive response supporting basic human needs of water, food, shelter, and sanitation for the most vulnerable people.

Also, a grant of \$45,000 will continue the Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding project in the Carolinas, aiding homeowners recovering from hurricanes Matthew and Florence. The grant will enable recovery efforts to continue in North and South Carolina through the summer as a double site, and then as a single site through at least April 2020.



Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteers from Bethany Church of the Brethren in Northern Indiana District, and volunteers from Pacific Southwest District enjoy spending time with a homeowner (center, in black) and her daughter, and their dog, while working on her Hurricane Matthew-damaged house in the Carolinas.

Church renews agreement with Selective Service

The Church of the Brethren has renewed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Selective Service System, the federal department responsible for the nation's preparation for a military draft and draft registration. Selective Service has worked with the historic peace churches to plan for alternative service for conscientious objectors in the event of a draft.

The renewed MOU was signed by general secretary David A. Steele and Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer on March 4. The previous MOU was signed in 2010.

The denomination has a long-standing agreement with Selective Service as

a result of work by the historic peace churches (Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, and Quakers). Brethren Volunteer Service is recognized as an agency through which conscientious objectors may do alternative service.

In the event of a draft, conscientious objectors would make a claim for such classification, likely on a case-by-case basis. Church members would provide documentation demonstrating an objection to serving in the military, how they arrived at that belief, and how that belief has influenced their life. Denominational staff recommend that, at the time of registering with the Selective Service, young people file a "statement of conscience" with the

Church of the Brethren to be kept in case it is required.

"By signing this MOU with Selective Service and by maintaining the Brethren Volunteer Service program, the Church of the Brethren demonstrates that it is committed to its historical position as a peace church," said Wittmeyer. "While membership in the church does not guarantee a drafted individual would qualify for alternative service, we do believe it makes a strong case to demonstrate one's belief in nonresistance."

Find the *Call of Conscience* curriculum with instructions for the statement of conscience at www.brethren.org/CO.



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On Earth Peace adopts new values, vision, and mission

On Earth Peace at a board meeting on April 4-6 approved a new set of core values and new vision and mission statements. For more effective governance, a major board reorganization plan was affirmed.

The new set of core values:

- **Jesus-centered spirituality.** *We follow Jesus into the work of justice and peace. We share in spiritual practices and develop faith resources to help undergird our programs.*

- **Positive peace.** *We learn, teach and practice dynamic forms of peacemaking which see conflict as an important tool to meet needs, address injustice, correct imbalances of power, and seek healing and reconciliation.*

- **Anti-racism/anti-oppression.** *We commit to name and undo barriers to participation in our programs based on identi-*

ty, and to work for full inclusion and equity for all who wish to join in our work. We commit to the long-term transformation of On Earth Peace, the church, and society.

- **Intergenerational leadership.** *We nurture peacemakers and leaders, and honor the wisdom, skill, and experience of all generations.*

- **Beloved community.** *We commit to raising the levels of relationships until justice and peace prevail, and all people attain their full human potential.*

The new vision statement:

A world in Beloved Community, liberated from oppression, violence, and war.

The new mission statement:

We develop and walk with leaders and communities who work for justice and peace.

The new organizational design calls for a board of 8 to 10 members that will function with a structure of 3 committees: executive committee, resource management committee, and board governance and development committee. The Anti-Racism Transformation Team will continue to function, with its integration into the structure of the organization more clearly defined.



New degree at Bethany

In fall 2019, Bethany Theological Seminary will offer its first new graduate degree in 50 years—the Master of Arts: Theopoetics and Writing. The MATW is the only degree available in theopoetics. In 2016, Bethany launched the specialized graduate certificate in theopoetics and theological imagination, also the first of its kind.

The new degree, which is a collaboration with the seminary’s neighbor on the campus in Richmond, Ind.—Earlham School of Religion—is a major feature of the comprehensive curriculum revision that faculty have been undertaking. Bethany’s newly revised master of divinity was launched in fall 2018, and the revised master of arts will be offered in fall 2019. The certificate in theology and science was launched this academic year, and the certificate in biblical peacemaking will be offered in fall 2019.

Personnel notes

Gimbiya Kettering resigned as director of Intercultural Ministries on May 31, after serving in the position since Jan. 7, 2013. She was on the staff of Discipleship Ministries and worked closely with the Intercultural Ministries Advisory Committee. She focused the work on the Annual Conference mandates in the 2007 statement “Separate No More: Becoming a Multi-Ethnic Church.” With her leadership the ministry continued the Revelation 7:9 Award, initiated the Dikaios and Discipleship study tours focused on racial justice, worked on “Continuing Together” conversations including a Native American Heritage Month project with the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, led workshops in vari-

ous settings, and contributed articles to MESSENGER. Going forward, Discipleship Ministries will be “partnering with the Intercultural Ministries Advisory Committee to envision the strategy and staffing needed to live into the vision of Revelation 7:9,” said co-coordinator Joshua Brockway.

Jason and Nicole Hoover on April 30 concluded their work with Global Mission and Service as church liaison officers with Iglesia de los Hermanos (the Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic). They began in the DR on Aug. 1, 2016. The couple, along with children Ethan and Miriam, are remaining in the DR to work with Solid Rock International.

Letting go for Lent

Wendy McFadden’s writing is always inspirational but the publisher’s column on “Letting go” just went straight in and made a difference instantly. Thank you for that! I was struggling with Lent this year. I appreciate you putting it into words . . . it renewed my zeal to acknowledge the next 40 days.

Rachel Kauffman
Nappanee, Ind.

Particularly meaningful

The column that Wendy McFadden writes for MESSENGER each month is always the first thing I read in the publication. The one about letting go was particularly meaningful to me, and I will share it with a dear friend

who is grieving about letting go of some valuable pieces of furniture and other household goods as she down-sizes and moves to smaller quarters. Thank you so much, Wendy, for your wisdom each month.

Harriet B. Kaylor
Huntingdon, Pa.

More for the blender

About the entry “Ten Mile church + Four Mile church” in “Will it blend?” in April, here is some more information on the Four Mile Church. It is on Nine Mile Road, and is named for Four Mile Creek. Now does that inspire another connection?

Four Mile Church was the first Brethren church in then Indiana Territory, founded in 1809. It was the

fifth church north of the Ohio River. It was at the far west edge of the original Dayton settlement. A rural church in today’s economy, our attendance is normally in the single digits, but we are still here!

Merle C. Rummel
Richmond, Ind.

Thrilled

We at Maple Ridge Bruderhof are very thrilled by the long and detailed article about Nigeria in the January MESSENGER for many reasons, including the fact that many of our older members have had strong connections with the Brethren and some were born in Nigeria to Brethren missionaries—Royers, Mows, Bloughs, Snaveleys,

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Warehams, etc. You give such a great survey of the current situation there, we are very impressed and interested.

One thing that straightaway impresses us, apart from the wonderful spread and increase of the Brethren there, partly caused by the persecution,

is the great desire to remain non-resistant. A great witness to be sure.

As you may know, we tried to start a Bruderhof in Aqua Ibom State, Nigeria, but were not successful, though it was a great experience for our whole movement, getting us in touch with another

very different culture.

More recently, we have had excellent contact with the Heifer Project historian Peggy Reiff Miller, who has been here and thrilled us all with her wonderful research and interest in this great outreach program. Many of our older members did Heifer trips with livestock after the last world war and were very happy to meet her.

Martin Johnson
Ulster Park, N.Y.

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A must-read

The March issue of MESSENGER has a must-read article on page 12. Written by Pam Reist after her trip to Nigeria, it is about our brother Markus Gamache. Get it and read it.

Maurice Flora
Claremont, Calif.

Once upon a time there was a church



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Fine work

Many thanks for your continued fine work getting the news out to us. MESSENGER has been a welcome publication in my home for 71 years. In fact, my youngest sister once posed nude on the cover. Of course, she was only about 3 months old.

Claude Simmons
Churchville, Va.

CLASSIFIEDS

Farm for sale Lorida, Florida. Very private, but walking distance to Palms Estates retirement community, Lake Istopoga, Lorida Church of the Brethren, Post Office and only 15 miles from Sebring. Private ranch home with 10 acres. Single story, wheel chair accessible, brick ranch with new metal roof and hurricane shutters. 3 bed 2 bath. Open kitchen/living area. Includes a huge great room and large sun room, lots of storage. Double carport, plus large detached shop with bedroom, rough bath and kitchenette. Fully fenced with 25-year-old citrus grove. Pump house, irrigation, and 2 wells. Contact Micah 1-434-327-3657

Take a break

I enjoy reading the MESSENGER and try to do so every month. Having recently returned from Lumberton, N.C., where I assisted Brethren Disaster Ministries with repairs to hurricane-damaged homes, I read with interest your story about the Bridgewater College students and professor who “put on tool belts and picked up hammers as they spent spring break . . . working with Habitat

for Humanity in West Melbourne, Fla.” It is wonderful what those students did and what their chapter has done for 22 years.

In the group from South Central Indiana District that went to Lumberton, we enjoyed the company (and hard work) of a Purdue University student. Nathan Hess is a member of Beavercreek (Ohio) Church of the Brethren. He also was seeking an alternative way to spend spring break. I

think he found one. He sure was a blessing to us and the Brethren Disaster Ministries projects that week.

I encourage Bridgewater College and all the other Brethren colleges to get involved with Brethren Disaster Ministries during their breaks—winter, spring, and summer. The disaster ministries staff are great, and the food, fellowship, and opportunities are plentiful.

Tom Brown
Lafayette, Ind.

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

Roop, Lois, 103, North Manchester, Ind., May 5

New members

Evergreen, Stanardsville, Va.: Aubree Robinson, Susan Schultz

Faith Community, New Oxford, Pa.: Dan Koerner, Judy Koerner

First, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mark Anthony Beniquez, David Michael Irizarry, Olivia Sage Quijano

Franklin Grove, Ill.: Robin Rittle

Freeport, Ill.: Becky Appelman, Tom Appelman

Geiger, Friedens, Pa.: Irene Leslie, Lydia Price

Green Hill, Salem, Va.: Sylvia Lemon

McPherson, Kan.: Beverly Minnich, Dale Minnich, Ann Stover, Phil Stover, Carol Ward, Marty Ward

New Covenant, Gotha, Fla.: Cindy Davis, Marcus Harden, Carol Leddy, Peter Leddy, Mace Miller, Mary

Ann Miller, Heather Palmer, Michael Palmer, Justin Raymer, Nicole Whittaker, Jane Williams

Pleasant Chapel, Ashley, Ind.: Darrell Boyce, Connie Sholl

Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.: Cory Buterbaugh, Jessica Buterbaugh, Amanda Helfrich, Emma Janelle Musser, Grant Clayton Musser

Uniontown, Pa.: Elizabeth Dunham, Henry Dunham

Wedding anniversaries

Barber, Robert and Karen, Lancaster, Pa., 55

Cummings, Ronald D. and June Irene, Weyers Cave, Va., 60

Edwards, Russell and Carol, Virden, Ill., 55

Hart, Richard and Linda, La Verne, Calif., 60

Heisey, Walter and Peggy, Newmanstown, Pa., 50

Kline, Adam and Shirley, Myerstown, Pa., 65

Miller, Glenn and Joyce, Somerset, Pa., 55

Oltman, Berwyn and Kathryn, Ocoee, Fla., 65

Scheumann, Wayne and Sandi, Nappanee, Ind., 50

Deaths

Bachman, Wesley J., 81, Virden, Ill., Sept. 20

Barnum, Mildred Irene, 88, Midland, Mich., Feb. 12

Bishop, Joan L. Carl, 80,

Manheim, Pa., March 31

Bollinger, Glenn E., 77, Ephrata, Pa., Jan. 7

Brown, Noble, 91, Lawrenceville, Ill., March 7

Cline, William Elton, 95, Fort Defiance, Va., March 18

Collins, Isaac William, 80, Check, Va., Nov. 21

Cressler, Lynn S., 91, Brighton, Mich., Dec. 17

Dailey, Paul E., 97, New Carlisle, Ind., Feb. 12

Davis, Eva, 98, La Verne, Calif., April 4

Deck, Arnold, 87, Beckley, W.Va., Nov. 23

Ellis, John H., 84, Spring City, Pa., April 11

Flaten, Janet Flory, 65, Bridgewater, Va., April 11

Graber, Eleanor (Jean), 85, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 23

Hager, J. Richard, 60, Smock, Pa., Jan. 15

Harmon, Edward Thomas, 92, Christiansburg, Va., Nov. 11

Hershey, Arlene G. Hess, 94, Lititz, Pa., Jan. 31

Hise, Ada Mae Lavender, 87, Waynesboro, Va., April 8

Janney, Patra Ellen Moss, 86, Crab Orchard, W.Va., Feb. 21

Keeney, Naomi Kulp, 86, Palmyra, Pa., April 5

Krantz, Suzanna, 74, Arvada, Colo., March 11

Kreps, George Milton, 87, Frederick, Md., April 2

Langdon, Esther (Lorraine) Smith, 86, Myersville, Md., March 22

Mangus, Galen, 93, Lakeville, Ind., March 12

McRoberts, Daniel Joseph, 78, Caledonia, Mich., March 23

Mellott, Patrick Leonard, 79, Free Union, Va., March 2

Myers, Robert Logan, 80, Fayetteville, W.Va., Nov. 10

Nicholson, Tom, 88, Saint Cloud, Fla., March 3

Price, Bessie Martin, 80, Botetourt, Va., Dec. 17

Priser, Marjorie E. Smith, 84, Bremen, Ind., Feb. 23

Richwine, Albert E., 97, Palmyra, Pa., March 14

Rotz, Margaret Horst, 92, Chambersburg, Pa., March 30

Slusher, Lois Bowman, 95, Floyd, Va., Nov. 13

Smith, Ben N., Jr., 88, Plymouth, Ind., April 7

Stevens, Jacob Jay, 79, Elgin, Ill., April 3

Stockslager, Catharine Elizabeth Troup, 106, Hagerstown, Md., April 1

Tyree, Violet Thornhill, 94, Roanoke, Va., Nov. 14

Willard, Mary Louise Roderick, 98, Frederick, Md., March 18

Wilson, Ellen M., 80, Elkhart, Ind., Dec. 30

Wise, Jack Theodore, II, 65, Springfield, Ill., March 19

Ordained

Hosler, Jennifer, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Washington City, Washington, D.C.), March 17

Hosler, Nathan, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Washington City, Washington, D.C.),

March 17

Smith, Susan, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Celebration of Christ, Saint Petersburg, Fla.), March 24

Commissioned

Augustin-Badet, Founa, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Eglise des Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), March 24

Pierre, Henry, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Eglise des Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), March 24

Licensed

Etter, Cody, N. Ohio Dist. (Dupont, Ohio), April 14

Placements

Dolan, Kenneth, interim pastor, Leake's Chapel, Stanley, Va., April 1

Estep, Charles, associate pastor, Calvary, Winchester, Va., March 10

Heinlein, Christopher, from pastor, New Enterprise, Pa., to interim pastor, Maple Spring, Hollsopple, Pa., April 1

Martino, Jonathan, associate pastor, Calvary, Winchester, Va., March 10

Smith, Susan, outreach pastor, Celebration of Christ, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Feb. 25

Tuttle, Mary Beth, from team pastor to lead pastor, Holmesville, Neb., March 20

Comfort or Christ

When I was a home care administrator, I hired a number of people. Annie was one of those. Annie was a college-age student whose longing in life was to become a ballerina. Her mother, a nurse, had insisted that Annie needed some real-life experience and pressured her into taking this job as a home health aide.

It was not a good fit. Home health aides were expected to take a blood pressure on each patient at every visit. Even after weeks of training and many opportunities to practice, Annie could never get an accurate blood pressure.

One day, she came into my office, flopped down in the chair across from my desk, and blurted out, “I just don’t get it.” She pointed to her arm and said, “You can hardly feel a



KRIS HAWK

pulse here.” Pointing to her neck she said, “I can feel a really good pulse here.” And then grabbing her arm, she exclaimed, “Why does everybody make me take a blood pressure here!”

As I placed my hands around my own neck to simulate a blood pressure cuff, I gently said, “Because, Annie, if you put the blood pressure

cuff around here people might get upset.”

It was an “aha” moment for Annie. “Oh, I never thought of that.”

Welcome to the church. How did we get to the place where the strongest motivation is our own comfort and the alleviation of our own anxiety and fear, and where we are willing to choke the life out of our brothers and sisters in the process? As we follow a Master who laid down his life for us, who commanded us to die to self, how do we end up choking each other with our selfishness?

E. Stanley Jones said, “We are inoculating the world with a mild form of Christianity, so that it is now practically immune against the real thing.” When the way we treat each other within the church demonstrates to the world that there is nothing different here, how can we make dis-

ciples? We have taken the life-transforming power of Jesus and linked it in people’s minds to a life-draining existence. We demonstrate that our own comfort takes priority above all else. People are immune to the words we speak unless those words are part of a witness of love that walks patiently alongside hurting people.

I’m wondering if it looks a little like this. When I was a pastor of visitation, I visited Jo every month. She had been an important part of our congregation for 40 years, but could no longer get to church. Although she was a member of the choir and active in so many ways, I had never met her husband, who “wasn’t a religious person.”

The first time I visited, Sam let me in as he went to sit on the porch. He did not return to the house until my car was backing out of the driveway. Each month we chatted a bit more at the door and, after a number of visits, Sam surprised me by remaining in the kitchen as I went into the living room to visit Jo. More months passed, and one day Sam followed me into the living room and sat at the far end.

Then one day (it still brings me great joy to remember that day), when I asked Jo if we could pray together, Sam stood up, holding out his hands to join our little circle, and asked, “How can I get in on this?” From that day forward, Sam was an integral part of the visit and especially of the prayer time together. I visited Sam and Jo through the time of her death and then continued to visit and pray with Sam until he also passed away. It is a relationship I will always cherish.

What would it be like to shift our focus away from the anxiety and fear that causes us to choke others? What would it be like to take Jesus seriously and “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”? What would it be like to live together in such a way that others ask, “How can I get in on this?” 

Kris Hawk is district executive minister of Northern Ohio District in the Church of the Brethren.

PEOPLE ARE IMMUNE TO THE WORDS WE SPEAK UNLESS THOSE WORDS ARE PART OF A WITNESS OF LOVE THAT **WALKS PATIENTLY ALONGSIDE HURTING PEOPLE.**

*"Praise the Lord!
I will give thanks to the
Lord with my whole heart."*

Psalm 111:1

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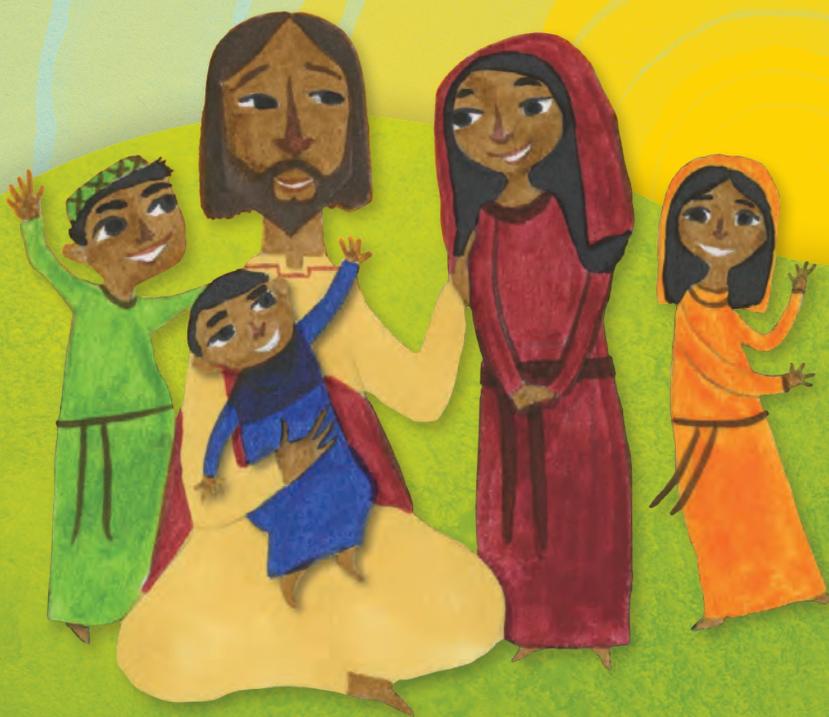
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