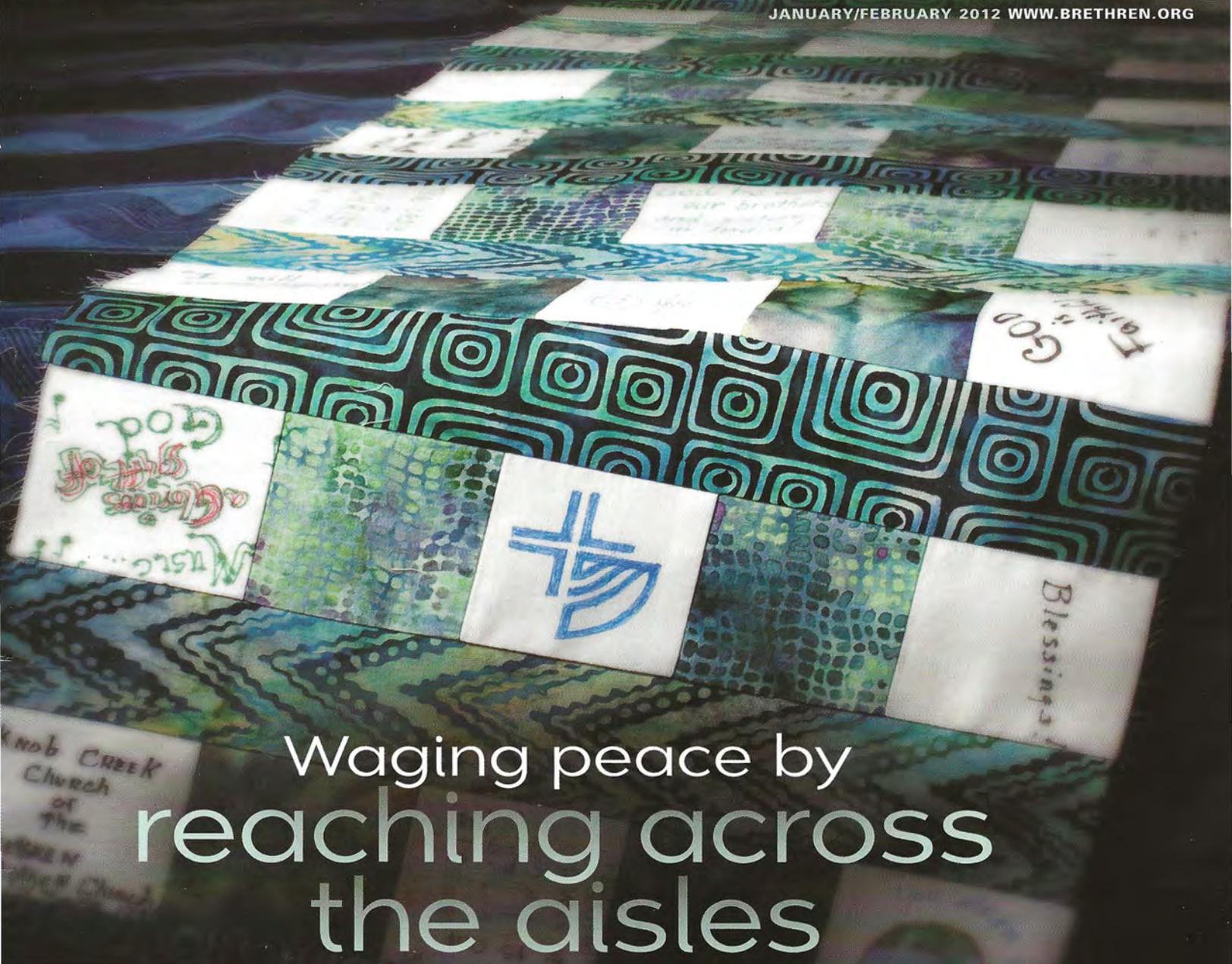


Church of the Brethren

MESSENGER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Waging peace by
reaching across
the aisles

Suggested date: March 18, 2012



SHARING BRINGS JOY TO US. TO OTHERS. TO GOD.

For many years, members of the Church of the Brethren have changed lives with their gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing. By joining your resources with those of brothers and sisters across the church, you share God's love, bringing joy to God's children through the many ministries of the Church of the Brethren. Create more joy in the world with your generous gift to One Great Hour of Sharing.



Church of the Brethren

1451 Dundee Avenue Elgin, IL 60120 www.brethren.org/oghs



“... publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works” (Psa. 26:7b KJV).

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

Editor: Randy Miller Publisher: Wendy McFadden News: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford Subscriptions: Diane Stroyeck Design: The Concept Mill



Igor Sparano/WCC

ONTHECOVER Brethren from around the denomination participated in stitching together nine quilts last year, one of which is shown on the cover. Volunteers quilted them in time for Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich., last year, where they were put on display. This quilt was stitched together by Carol Bowman and later quilted by Marian Gillin, both of the Sunnyslope Church of the Brethren in Wenatchee, Wash. The quilts are being distributed to each of the international Brethren bodies as reminders of the love that binds us together, despite our differences. Cover photo by Ben Green.

8 Waging peace by reaching across the aisles

National Council of Churches director Michael Kinnamon is a fan—of us! “I love the Church of the Brethren!” he exclaims. “You have made a tremendous witness for 303 years! I thank God for the intensity of your fellowship, for the global breadth of your mission, and for your emphasis on costly discipleship.” Sometimes, in the midst of our own internal struggles, it may be difficult for us to remember the unique voice we have. Kinnamon adds, “You have gifts that others in the body need, including a willingness to bear violence rather than inflict it and to stay at the table even in the face of human disagreement.”

12 Grassroots peacebuilding in the Congo

When Jay Wittmeyer preached an impromptu sermon based on Matthew 18 to villagers in rural Congo, they took him seriously. The day after he spoke, members of the Bafulero tribe approached him and asked for his assistance in reconciling with the Pygmies, with whom they had long been locked in bloody conflict. It proved to be the spark which ignited reconciliation efforts being carried out today by congregations calling themselves the Church of the Brethren, Congo.

16 Bethany Seminary: both seedbed and threshing floor

While some may think of it only as a pastor-mill tucked away in rural Indiana, Bethany Theological Seminary is far more. Bethany president Ruthann Johansen views it more as a “seedbed for rigorous study of scripture and contemporary human struggles to live according to God’s call.” Its relevance, she contends, extends well beyond preparing pastors for set-apart ministry. The seminary sees the challenges facing the church—and the world—less as problems and more as opportunities to be met with rigorous study and exploration of practical solutions to compelling issues.

DEPARTMENTS

- 2 From the Publisher
- 3 In Touch
- 6 Reflections
- 7 The Buzz
- 20 News
- 25 Youth Life
- 26 Media Review
- 27 Letters
- 31 Turning Points
- 32 Editorial



Jay Wittmeyer



Bethany Theological Seminary

For most people, one million is a pretty big number. Big enough to be noticed. That's why it shows up in the titles of hundreds of movies, books, and television shows. Two months ago it caught the attention of a clerk when a customer tried to check out using a \$1 million bill.

Sure, a million is small potatoes in the context of computer bytes, world population, and the federal budget. But it's very big compared to the typical Walmart purchase. Or membership in the Church of the Brethren.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

That's why it was startling to peruse the statistics behind the Church of the Brethren Facebook page and see this new metric: The page has more than one million unique friends of fans. In other words, if you add up all the Facebook friends of the Church of the Brethren's 4,283 Facebook fans, and subtract the duplicates, they total more than one million people (1,050,928 to be exact).

And these are the friends of just the church's Facebook fans. If we assume the rest of the church's membership also has an average of 245 acquaintances ("friend" might be an overstatement in the world outside social media), our modestly sized denomination theoretically has connections to some 30 million people. That's more than the population of 49 states

(all but California), and it's one-tenth the population of the entire country.

Seriously, how could we possibly feel small anymore?

"To what should I compare the kingdom of God?" Jesus asks. "It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Luke 13:20-21).

Rise up! Live big. The divine Baker has work for us to do.

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

dstroyeck@brethren.org
Phone: 847-742-5100 ext. 247
Fax: 847-742-6103

Advertising:

messengerads@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039
Fax: 847-742-1407

Editorial:

messenger@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039
Fax: 847-742-6103

Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate
- \$32 for 2 years
\$14.50 gift rate
\$14.50 church club rate
- \$27 for 2 years
\$ 1.25 student (per month)

If you move, clip address label and send with new address to MESSENGER Subscriptions, at the above address. Allow at least five weeks for address change.

Connect electronically: For a free subscription to Newline, the Church of the Brethren e-mail news report, write cobnews@brethren.org.

Visit MESSENGER online at www.brethren.org/messenger.

A free study guide for each issue of MESSENGER is available at this site, along with other information.

MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © January 2012, Church of the Brethren.

MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

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



Printed on recycled paper
(20% post consumer)

Small congregation puts on big medieval production

On the first weekend of every December, Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in suburban Harrisburg, Pa., transforms itself from a modest, one-story building constructed in the early 1960s to a great 1300s English manor house. Members of the congregation become lords, ladies, servants, actors, musicians, choir members, instrumentalists, and hosts to an annual "Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival."

About two-thirds of Ridgeway's congregation—which has around 80 worshippers on Sunday mornings—have some part in the festival. Months of planning and work go into the production, from costume design, set construction, decorations, building and acquiring props, and preparation of food, to the many other tasks and details necessary to make this a truly unique celebration. Musicians and actors begin rehearsal during the summer months and continue working right up until the week of the production.

The festival takes its name from an ancient legend about a scholar who was studying a book of Aristotle while walking through the forest. Suddenly, he was confronted by an angry, wild boar. The scholar rammed his metal book down the boar's throat and killed him. That night, the boar's head, finely dressed and garnished, was carried to the dining room accompanied by carolers. The boar has long been a symbol of evil, and the serving of the head represented the triumph of good over evil. Eventually, this triumph was manifested in the birth of the Christ Child as Savior of all creation.

The Yule Log, lit from the previous year's embers, representing the warmth of family fireside and the continuance of human life and concern, has from the earliest times symbolized the rekindling of love.

Since its inception in 2006, the festival at Ridgeway has attracted more than 150 people each night of its two-night performance. Over the years, the audience has increasingly come from the community and neighboring churches. A free-will offering each night is designated for an outreach endeavor. —*Barb Myers*



Chris and Sharon Roof portray Mary and Joseph during the annual "Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival" at Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa.



Angels Kara Bidgood Enders and Eliana Roof, along with sheep Ada Hickey, watch over the manger as other children portray the donkey and the cow.

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.



YOU SAID IT

"When we allow God to work through us as the church, we live into the reality that God creates."

—Jordan Blevins, advocacy officer and ecumenical peace coordinator for the Church of the Brethren and National Council of Churches, and Young Adult Steering Committee member, writing in *The Bridge*

BY THE NUMBERS

925

Number, in millions, of people around the world suffering from hunger, according to the United Nations Food Program

Amazing 'hunger & poverty' outreach

Thanks to a generous, giving congregation, the Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, through the efforts of its Outreach Ministry Team and the Hunger & Poverty group, were able to make significant contributions toward ending hunger

build five houses.

Several years ago, the church began encouraging members to contribute a modest 2 cents per meal to help those in need. By 2011, 2 cents multiplied to \$6,210, one-third of which goes to the Lancaster County Food Bank, and two-thirds goes to the Global Food Crisis Fund.

Hunger & Poverty, as part of the Outreach Ministry Team, for the third year made the congregation aware of the plight of the more than 1,000 homeless children in Lancaster City. The Lancaster congregation gave \$10,195 to purchase 475 school uniforms and countless school supplies for needy children in the Lancaster School District.

The church's efforts continued into the Christmas season. Their junior church program called Praise Kidz, planned through the children's giving to buy One Ton of food for the local food bank of the Lancaster County Council of Churches. Through the "helping hands" of parents, halfway through the program, the amount for Two Tons of food could be collected.

The church usually ends the year with the "Angel Tree," receiving names of children from the Lancaster County Council of Churches with their needs for clothing and wishes for toys. Members buy these items and wrap them with the child's name, then deliver the items for distribution before Christmas.

Despite the economic downturn, the Lancaster Church of the Brethren has met and surpassed its goal of extravagant generosity.



Members of Lancaster Church of the Brethren presenting the check to build five homes in Haiti

and homelessness through non-budgeted giving in 2011.

Last February, members of the Outreach Ministry Team challenged the congregation to raise enough money to build one house in earthquake-damaged Haiti. Within four weeks of that invitation, \$32,600 was raised—enough to

Tour-de-Dunker group honors Dawn Baker Burket

Dawn Baker Burket was honored in October at the Memorial Church of the Brethren in Martinsburg, Pa., for her many years of dedication to the Tour-de-Dunker bicycle group. The Tour-de-Dunker was started in 1997 as a ministry for cyclists to ride to all 55 churches in the Middle Pennsylvania District, while raising funds for Camp Blue Diamond and the district. Dawn was responsible for organizing the rides, and making arrangements with each church for a brief presentation/dedication

during their worship services, and for providing food and drink for the riders. Also, Dawn drove the sag (support) wagon faithfully, and was there for any rider in need of assistance.

—Lou Ann Hileman



Dawn Baker Burket, (center, holding flowers) was honored in October for coordinating the Tour-de-Dunker cycling visits to churches in the Middle Pennsylvania District.

Dunkard's Grocery

The Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren Kid's Rap group opened a grocery store called "Dunkard's Grocery" in an effort to help feed the hungry. Following the worship service on Nov. 13, members of the congregation could purchase grocery items from the store for a dollar, and then give the groceries back as a donation for the local food pantry for Thanksgiving. Dunkard's Grocery opened and closed in one day and sold out of everything. The service project offered the congregation an opportunity to support those in need, and the children an opportunity to serve others.



A donkey for the pastor

Be careful what you wish for. It just might come true, as the saying goes. As pastor Tony Price and his wife, Geneva, discovered at a pastor appreciation ceremony recently, it did.

Cedar Grove Church of the Brethren in New Paris, Ohio, has around 250 members and is located in the heart of farm country in the middle of a cornfield in Darke County, Ohio, near the Indiana/Ohio state line. Members claim it takes a person who loves country living to really appreciate the setting.

Tony and Geneva Price came to Cedar Grove with their three daughters from suburban North Canton, Ohio, almost two years ago. Geneva had always dreamed of living on a farm and hoped that somehow answering this call might result in the fulfillment of that dream. Even as they accepted this call to the ministry, Tony warned her that that would probably never happen—most parsonages do not come with acreage. But Cedar Grove's parsonage happens to sit smack in the middle of 34 acres: part tillable ground, part pasture.

So, last summer, daughter Emma joined a local 4-H club where she raised a goat for a project and won the light-weight division at the Darke County Fair. But it's not just a goat that awaits them

as they pull into their driveway. Their little pasture also has a sheep and a llama (there temporarily as a church member uses the land). As they got more acquainted with the neighborhood, they fell in love with the miniature donkeys in another member's pastures, and both Tony and Geneva casually remarked that they would really like to have a donkey someday.

What better way for a congregation to show its appreciation? In October, the



Cedar Grove Church of the Brethren presented their pastor, Tony Price, and his family with a donkey in October.

church presented Tony, Geneva, and their daughters with a donkey of their very own.

After giving them the donkey, one of the members remarked, "Now you can't go anywhere else. No one will want you once you've told them you have three kids, a dog, and a donkey!"

REMEMBERED

Former district executive **S. Earl Mitchell** (101) passed away Nov. 29 at his home in Slidell, La. He was born in Boones Mill, Va., on Jan. 30, 1910, the son of Martha and Zion Mitchell. He was married to the late Vera Woodie Mitchell. He graduated from Bridgewater (Va.) College, and Bethany Theological Seminary, and was awarded a doctor of divinity degree by Bridgewater in 1958. He served a number of congregations in Virginia, Maryland, and Illinois as pastor following ordination in 1927 and advancement to the eldership in 1933 by the Middle Maryland District. He was a district executive for a predecessor of Mid-Atlantic District (1948-51) and director of Church Relations at Bridgewater College during the 1980s.

LANDMARKS AND LAURELS

The Haitian Church of the Brethren recently celebrated the opening of a new church: the New Church in Jerusalem, Canaan. "There were about 150 people attending. Two people accepted Christ as their personal Savior for the very first time," reported Ilexene Alphonse, manager of the church's guesthouse/headquarters building near Port-au-Prince. "Canaan is a new community. People from all over Port-au-Prince moved there after the 2010 earthquake. Brethren Disaster Ministries built 14 house there for 14 families."

Continuing the work of Jesus

[Given the turmoil that enveloped much of Annual Conference last year, we thought it might be helpful to get a sense of how we as a denomination are doing now, six months out. Who better to do that than Annual Conference moderator Tim Harvey, who has been visiting districts and congregations across the United States? Following are some of his observations. —Ed.]

“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47, NRSV).

These verses from Acts have always been a source of inspiration to me. Sandwiched between two magnificent outpourings of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost and the healing of a



TIM HARVEY

man “lame from birth”), they describe what the early church did “when no one was looking.” These verses describe no great evangelist trips or organized outreach to alleviate human suffering. There is neither sermon to build up the saints nor confrontation to convict the sinner. These verses simply describe a group of Christians doing the things Christians do: eating together, giving thanks and praise to God, and being a blessing to the world around them. Along the way,

those who do not know Jesus find the behavior and character of these people appealing, for in taking a longer look at the Jesus reflected in these believers’ lives, many are being saved. Fueled by the Holy Spirit, the church expands through the faithful efforts of regular people.

Serving as moderator this fall has been a blessing beyond my expectations. Since becoming moderator, I’ve traveled to NOAC (National Older Adult Conference), visited

- A congregation in Indiana opening a coffee shop, creating opportunities to talk about Jesus with those who are not yet following him.
- Several congregations serving in partnership with the local public schools, understanding that a source of regular meals and a good education in childhood has a significant impact on someone’s later life.
- A new church in Virginia finding significant interaction and transformation among young adults in their community.
- Members of a church in Kansas who volunteered to mow someone’s yard while the husband was deployed in Afghanistan. Several years and many acres of mowing later, the family is in church and the children have been baptized.

You’ll forgive me for saying this, but none of the stories I’ve heard this fall have been very spectacular. In my estimation, they’ve been something much better: they’ve been **faithful**. They describe regular Brethren folk committed to *continuing the work of Jesus* in fairly regular ways, not unlike the church described in Acts. As such, these stories can be a source of inspiration to us all, because I can easily imagine any of us can hear these particular stories and say, “You know, I could do that. Our church may be small (or large, or young, or old, or whatever), but we can imagine serving God in that way.” And in that, I am incredibly encouraged about the Brethren.

So what’s next? I do have a number of trips yet this winter and spring—invitations to preach in congregations and eventually delegate briefings in May and June. In February,

IN THESE VISITS AND CONVERSATIONS, I HAVE BEEN LISTENING CAREFULLY TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR CONGREGATIONS.

seven district conferences, preached in five different congregations and Bethany Seminary chapel, and attended three sets of denominational meetings. Everyone should have the opportunity to see the Church of the Brethren from Virginia to California, and places in between. You’ve been most gracious hosts.

In these visits and conversations, I have been listening carefully to what is going on in our congregations. You might say I’ve been on a mission of my own, looking for stories of Brethren congregations *continuing the work of Jesus* in their local setting. Here is some of what I’ve heard:

- A small congregation in Missouri adding an addition to their church building (there’s a group that understands *hope*); another beginning a tape ministry with their pastor’s sermons.

I plan to travel to Spain to visit a new congregation of Brethren there. Between now and Annual Conference in St. Louis (July 7-11), I would be delighted with your help. Would you take these questions to your Sunday school class or leadership team meeting and discuss them?

1. In what ways is our congregation *continuing the work of Jesus*?
2. How are we being changed by it?
3. How can the Annual Conference help us do this even better?

Feel free to send your responses to me at: moderator@brethren.org.

Thank you for the blessings of your congregations and for your continued prayers for the Annual Conference. 

QUOTE WORTHY

“There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”

—Singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen, from his song *Anthem*

“You’ve got to know what it means, as a Protestant outsider, to hear all of you singing in harmony. You all are pretty incredible people. And you are at your best when you support one another.”

—Terry Scott, second-year Bethany Seminary student, speaking to the Mission and Ministry board meeting in October

“When progressive Brethren and Brethren Revival Fellowship young adults spend an evening together playing games and building friendships, why don’t we go from here?”

—From the “Youth Peace Travel Team Response to the 2011 Annual Conference”

“He was no ordinary child. He was the manifestation of God’s love. And every year we celebrate his birth because the story of Jesus Christ changed the world. For me, and for millions of Americans, his story has filled our hearts and inspired our lives.”

—President Obama, discussing the birth of Jesus during remarks Sunday, Dec., 11, at the “Christmas in Washington” event in Washington, D.C.

“The woman at the well was fortunate she encountered Jesus that day instead of some of our evangelical brethren.”

—Liberty University President Jerry Falwell, Jr., in an email message that was part of a back-and-forth discussion among evangelicals about whether thrice-married GOP presidential candidate Newt Gingrich should be forgiven for past moral failings, quoted by CNN.com

“If we have love, disagreement will do us no harm. If we do not have love, agreement will do us no good.”

—Kurtis Friend Naylor, former Church of the Brethren pastor, quoted by Annual Conference moderator Tim Harvey in his 2011 Advent letter to the denomination

“We are normally blinded about our own blindness. We’re generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments. We exaggerate how knowable the world is.”

—Psychologist and Nobel-winning economist Daniel Kahneman in *Time* magazine Nov. 28, on why people don’t make rational choices

CULTUREVIEW

➔ There are 2.18 billion Christians of all ages in more than 200 countries around the world, according to a new comprehensive demographic report published by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life. This represents nearly a third of the estimated 6.9 billion 2010 global population. Christians are so geographically widespread that no single continent or region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity.

➔ **The death of Osama bin Laden**—which spurred discussions among people of faith on issues of forgiveness, peace, justice, and retribution—was voted the No. 1 Religion Story of 2011 by the nation’s leading religion journalists. The 2011 survey of Religion Newswriters Association (RNA) members marks the 30th year the professional organization of religion beat specialists has conducted the poll.

➔ “To date, measures adopted by governments and international institutions in response to the current economic crisis have been palliative and short-sighted at best, and at worst ineffective and unjust,” said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit. “There is a need for a new discussion on morality and ethics in respect of the financial systems.” Tveit was speaking at a meeting, where the WCC along with World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Council of World Mission members from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Europe got together to plan for a conference on proposing a criteria and framework for “new financial and economic architecture.” The meeting took place Dec. 12-14 at the John Knox Conference Center in Geneva, Switzerland.



JUST FOR FUN: WORD FIND

In the puzzle below, find these 11 words and places associated with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday is observed in January. Words can be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, backwards or forwards.

ATLANTA JUSTICE MARCH WASHINGTON
NONVIOLENCE DREAM CIVIL RIGHTS BAPTIST
MONTGOMERY CHICAGO VIETNAM

N W A S H I U N I T R O
M O N T G O M E R Y G L
E E N O T G N I H S A W
C B T V F R E E M D C O
I A M R I N H A A G I M
T P V D R O E T U M H A
S T H G I R L I V I C N
U I M A D A J E O R V T
J S M A N N C E N H E E
S T T T M A R C H C E I
R M A O N D U M E N E V

Waging peace by reaching across the aisles

by Michael Kinnamon

Love the Church of the Brethren! You have made a tremendous witness for 303 years! I

thank God for the intensity of your fellowship, for the global breadth of your mission, and for your emphasis on costly discipleship. I thank God for current leaders like my brother, Stan Noffsinger, and for future leaders like my NCC colleague, Jordan Blevins. And I thank God for your ecumenical witness.

I realize, however, that not all members of the Church of the Brethren are aware of this ecumenical witness—or supportive of it. So let me argue the case for it by suggesting that the ecumenical movement is essentially a movement of peace. Or, to put it the other way around, a peace church should be inherently ecumenical. In this brief article, I want to elaborate on these statements, starting with the example of Sri Lanka—a nation whose 25-year civil war ended in 2009 with an awful spasm of violence.

The island of Sri Lanka has two major ethnic groups: the Sinhalese majority (mostly Buddhists) and the Tamil minority (mostly Hindus). Some within the Tamil community were fighting for a separate homeland, and upwards

of 80,000 persons (mostly civilians) died during the two and a half decades of almost constant warfare.

I was last in Sri Lanka in 2003 when, during a period of ceasefire, I was able to fly to Jaffna, center of the Tamil community on the island's northern coast. The town was pretty well bombed out. The old Dutch fort was completely gone, as were the large "downtown" churches where famous leaders such as D.T. Niles used to preach. I also visited congregations outside Jaffna where fighting had been heavy during government offensives in 1995 and 2000, including one small village where 300 persons had died and the pastor and his family had survived by hiding in a tiny closet next to the stone fireplace—while most of their parsonage was blown away. Much of the damage was done by US-made cluster bombs. Everywhere there were signs warning of mines.

The Christian community in Sri Lanka is, by Asian standards, quite large—perhaps 6 percent of the population. And the Christians are the only religious group that includes both Tamils and Sinhalese, which means that the Christian community should have been a significant,



Ray Sorenson/NCC

SUCH UNITY IS NOT OUR ACHIEVEMENT; IT IS THE GIFT OF OUR GRACIOUS GOD WHO, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, HAS MADE US ALL ONE AND BROKEN DOWN THE DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY.



World Council of Churches

forceful witness for peace—except that this 6 percent is divided into Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, the Church of South India, Baptists (of various varieties), Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and a host of evangelical and Pentecostal groups (imported, usually, from the US).

D.T. Niles had helped start a church union effort in the 1940s, but it had stalled. And so in 1981, while I was on the staff of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I organized an international conference of united and uniting churches in Sri Lanka with the hope that this would give new momentum to the effort. But, of course, the civil war blew that away, as well.

I will never forget the conversation I had with one Sri Lankan church leader during our 1981 conference. “Are you able,” I asked him, “to encourage government officials to work for reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhalese?” “We try,” he said. “But they usually just laugh. They want to know how we Christians think we can contribute to national reconciliation when we can’t even overcome the church divisions inherited from the colonizers.”

In this country, where our divisions seem relatively benign, we forget, as a friend from Northern Ireland once put it, that “a divided church costs lives.” But others have certainly known it. The modern ecumenical movement really began amid the debris of World War I, which was, in effect, a Christian civil war: Protestant Britain, Roman

Catholic France, and Orthodox Russia aligned against Protestant Germany, Roman Catholic Austria-Hungary, and Orthodox Bulgaria, with no platform for bringing the churches together for dialogue and common witness.

A generation later, the World Council of Churches, the major institutional expression of the ecumenical movement, was decisively shaped by World War II. The 1937 Oxford Conference on Church and Society, a meeting that called for the establishment of the WCC, also made this seminal decla-

IN THIS COUNTRY, WHERE OUR DIVISIONS SEEM RELATIVELY BENIGN, WE FORGET, AS A FRIEND FROM NORTHERN IRELAND ONCE PUT IT, THAT “A DIVIDED CHURCH COSTS LIVES.”

ration: “If war breaks out, then pre-eminently the church must, manifestly, be the church, still united as the one body of Christ though the nations wherein it is planted fight each other. . . . The fellowship of prayer must, at all costs, remain unbroken.” Willem Visser’t Hooft, the Council’s first general secretary, called these sentences “the charter of the ecumenical movement” and incorporated them into the letter inviting the churches to become a council.

The movement was further defined by the Cold War, by the fact that, even at the height of nuclear tensions, the iron curtain did not prevent regular contact between

**WE ARE CALLED IN
SCRIPTURE TO BE A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT
OF WHAT GOD INTENDS
FOR ALL CREATION, AND
THE FACT THAT THE
CHURCH IS SO VISIBLY
BROKEN IS, THEREFORE,
NOTHING LESS THAN A
DENIAL OF THE GOSPEL.**



Young adults at the World Council of Churches General Assembly.

World Council of Churches

churches. The Russian Orthodox Church, as an example, joined the World Council of Churches at its assembly in 1961, on the very eve of the Cuban missile crisis. "This," said the assembly delegates, "is a dramatic confirmation of our faith that God is holding his family together in spite of sin and complicity, and is a sign of hope for the world." Another expression of this was the church-to-church visits to what was then the Soviet Union, organized by the National Council of Churches (NCC) in the 1980s, in which some members of the Church of the Brethren participated.

I hope this is enough to make the point that the ecumenical movement has historically been a movement for peace. Part of the point is sociological: Divisions in the body of Christ often exacerbate political conflicts and hinder effective peacemaking—which must be undertaken ecumenically. The Brethren response to war makes as little sense as the Presbyterian response to climate change. Such issues are too large to be tackled in denominational isolation.

The real point, however, is theological. God's gift of reconciliation is for the *world*; but the *church*, in the words of the apostle Paul, is entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19), and it delivers that message not just by what it says or even by what it does, but by what it *is*. We are called in scripture to be a demonstration project of what God intends for all creation, and the fact that the church is so visibly broken is, therefore, nothing less than a denial of the gospel. The great Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder put it even more bluntly: "Where the church is divided, the gospel is not true in that place."

I obviously don't mean to suggest that ecumenical bodies such as the National Council of Churches have adopted pacifist positions. The churches do not have a common mind about whether or not war is ever justified. But over the past 65 years, the churches that make up the WCC and NCC have expressed a number of shared convictions regarding war and peace. I will name the three that I think are most important—and, given our historic divide on this question, quite astonishing.

- In the words of the WCC's First Assembly (1948), "War is contrary to the will of God." Yes, most churches still think war may at times be a necessary evil—but it is, in the words of the Council, "inherently evil," which means that

Christians should never identify violence against others with the will of God or countenance such rhetoric when used by the governments. To put it another way, “crusade” is ruled out as a legitimate Christian position. God’s purpose is shalom. No one should ever go to war in the name of God. Some ecumenical studies have gone further. The report of a conference sponsored by the Faith and Order Commission of the NCC, published as “The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking,” suggests, in line with your historic witness, that peacemaking is a fifth mark of the church.

- There are some forms of violence, in the words of the WCC’s Central Committee (echoed in the NCC), “in which Christians may not participate and which churches must condemn”—including the conquest of one people by another, any form of torture, and the killing on non-combatants. This last point about non-combatants paved the way for the broad ecumenical denunciation of nuclear weapons. The production and deployment of such weapons, as well as their use, said the WCC’s assembly in 1983, are “a crime against humanity”—an emphasis we are now recovering at the National Council.
- Peace is inseparable from justice. The WCC assembly in 1975 stressed that peace is foundational to justice since “militarization distorts social and economic priorities,” taking the greatest toll on the poor. Other assemblies have argued that justice is foundational to peace. The basic point, I take it, is to call the churches to proactive peacemaking. In 2009, as you well know, we need to be working for peace in 2029 by addressing those issues—the growing gap between rich and poor, the increasing threat to the environment, the spread of diseases—that will likely make for the future conflict. This posture has been affirmed by both councils.

You understand why it is so important to reclaim this history. Radical peacemaking is usually associated with one segment of the Christian community: the Historic Peace Churches. “Another peace protest? It must be those Quakers and Mennonites and Brethren!” What I am stressing, however, is that radical, costly, insistent peacemaking is not simply *your* witness. Peace is, increasingly, the message of the church ecumenical. If you want your witness



Glenn Ringel

Michael Kinnamon was the keynote speaker for the Ecumenical Luncheon at the 2009 Annual Conference, sponsored by the denomination’s Committee on Interchurch Relations (CIR). At the time serving as National Council of Churches general secretary, Kinnamon (at center) poses with CIR members (from left) Paul W. Roth, Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger, Carolyn Schrock, and Melissa Troyer.

to be most effective and faithful, work for unity as well.

When I was a seminary professor, I used to tell my students that the ecumenical movement is out to change our grammar. “Brethren” is a wonderful adjective (although a bit sexist!) but an idolatrous noun. The noun that defines us is *Christian*. We are Brethren Christians and Disciples Christians and Catholic Christians and Methodist Christians—related at a level far deeper than denomination. In the same way, we are Cuban Christians and Tanzanian Christians and Sri Lankan Christians—related at a level far deeper than nationality. Such unity is not our achievement; it is the gift of our gracious God who, through Jesus Christ, has made us all one and broken down the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14). If we would actually be what we are (the one body of Christ), it would be our greatest witness to peace.

None of this, of course, denies the importance of your *particular* gifts. You have gifts that others in the body need, including a willingness to bear violence rather than inflict it and to stay at the table even in the face of human disagreement. But others who bear the name of Christ have gifts that *you* need. Without one another, the followers of Christ are deeply impoverished. And, ironic as it may sound, this is very Good News! 

Michael Kinnamon has been general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ since 2007. He was with the Brethren at the 2009 Annual Conference, where he spoke at the Ecumenical Luncheon and briefly addressed the delegate body.



Georges Bani Bibenga facilitates a conflict transformation training program in Uvira, DRC, for 24 participants representing NGOs, Christian churches, and the Muslim community. The training was organized by Shalom Ministry for Reconciliation and Development (L'Eglise des Frères du Congo) and the Quaker Peace Network and funded by the Church of the Brethren.

Grassroots peacebuilding in the Congo

story and photos by Jay Wittmeyer

[For five years, a group calling themselves Brethren in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been actively engaged in a peacebuilding program titled SHAMIREDE (Shalom Ministry in Reconciliation and Development). Initially funded by the UN Development Program, the endeavor more recently is being supported by the Church of the Brethren, and also works in collaboration with the Quaker Peace Network. Two displaced groups, the Pygmy and Bafulero, have been engaged in an overtly violent conflict for a number of years. In recent months the conflict escalated, with people killed, villages burned, and many families displaced. The source of the conflict has been a degrading of hunting-gathering resources for the Pygmies, and the slow creep of the Bafulero into Pygmy regions for slash-and-burn agriculture. Both groups have recognized the need for mediation, which the Congolese Brethren are working at by visiting communities in the mountains to carry mediation forward. Families are

beginning to trust the process and want to return to their home areas. A GFCF grant of \$2,500 supports reconciliation, and also is helping restart agriculture and get farming back on track. -Ed.]

You must go to the Congo," R. Jan Thompson, my predecessor, said. "Those believers have shown earnest interest in the Church of the Brethren and deserve a visit. I promised them a visit but could not make it. You need to go."

The connections seemed tenuous. I was told that the group of which he spoke had found the Brethren on the Internet while searching for a source for Bibles. The more they read about the Church of the Brethren the more interested they became, particularly with regard to our peace stance. They contacted Global Mission and Service and we

sent them literature on Brethren identity and theology, which prompted deeper interest and more conversation.

Still, I was skeptical. Mission agencies are regularly contacted by individuals from around the globe who troll the Internet trying to establish relationships and secure funding for their various ministries or programs. Nonetheless, I joined the conversation and began to hear their story.

Once regional warfare broke out in the 1990s in Burundi, Rwanda, and eastern Congo, this small group of Christians from South Kivu province boarded boats and sailed across Lake Tanganyika to take refuge in Tanzania. Years in refugee camps waiting out the horrific brutality stirred in them a great passion to work for peace. Having received training in conflict transformation, Lubungo Ron, upon returning to Kivu after the war, began Shalom Ministry in Reconciliation and Development (SHAMIREDE). Initially funded with grants from the United Nations Development Program, SHAMIREDE began conducting workshops on peacebuilding and nonviolence.

"We have heard the gospel and know the gospel," Ron explained, "but it is only through the Brethren that we understood it as a gospel of peace."

While I was still reluctant—cyber-missions being an atypical methodology for Brethren to share the gospel—Ron's passion for peace stirred my interest in at least exploring a possible missional relationship to help grow their small movement. Furthermore, even if a sister-church relationship would not emerge between these Congolese and the Church of the Brethren, I was still keenly interested in learning more about SHAMIREDE's faith-based peace efforts, and possibly exploring a partnership.

Global Mission and Service regularly supports projects for food security, community health, disaster relief, and economic development, but it has been somewhat limited in grassroots peacebuilding, and if any region needs peacebuilding it is the DRC. Labeled the "rape capital of the world" by the United Nations, eastern Congo has a disturbingly high rate of sexual and gender-based violence (15,000 in 2010), human rights abuses, and inter-ethnic violence. Various rebel groups operate throughout the region, and the Congolese army conducts military campaigns against them. All sides target civilians, who are arbitrarily arrested, looted, raped, killed, and pressed into forced labor and military service, especially young men and boys. This is a region where it is not uncommon to find stone tablets planted along roadsides, commemorating massacres: 600 deaths, 300 deaths, etc.

In early 2010, while on a trip to Africa, I decided to tack on a quick visit to Bujumbura, Burundi—the nearest access point to South Kivu by air—to meet church leaders and to do a preliminary assessment. I must admit, with haunting images of Hutu-Tutsi machete warfare in my



Stone markers placed along roadsides commemorate massacres of the past. This stone in the District of Fizi marks the deaths of 600 people on Dec. 30, 1998.

mind, I was too apprehensive to venture into the hills of eastern Congo on my first visit with people I did not know.

Respectably dressed and clean, but obviously poor—and strangers themselves in Bujumbura—Lubungo Ron and four other Congolese Brethren met me at the Bujumbura Airport. We spent two days together during which time they shared their extraordinary story, and talked about their peace work and their Brethren beliefs and practices. Knowing that the Evangelical Friends have a presence in Burundi, I encouraged them to get to know the Friends, with whom they might find common ground for fellowship and work.

They informed me that they registered their group of five churches as the *Eglise des Frères Au Congo*—Church of the Brethren, Congo. Needless to say, I was taken back. Since the UN had stopped funding SHAMIREDE, I decided to fund some peace workshops and we parted company, planning to think and pray about our relationship, and to perhaps visit again one day in South Kivu.

In the fall of 2011, I returned for a second visit, this time being comfortable traveling with the Congolese Brethren



Local children of *L'Eglise des Frères du Congo* congregation in Ngovi, South Kivu



Abandelwa Saidi, pastor of the Ngovi congregation, calls a community church service to order at L'Eglise des Frères du Congo.

In the morning, a few tables and chairs were carried to a nearby mango tree in preparation for the service. The speakers were placed in the corners of the clearing and wires were run to microphone stands. The center area was kept clear for dancing. The speakers began to blare out to the village, inviting everyone to the service, and I contemplated the word the Lord would have for us that morning. Though not a particularly gifted preacher, and certainly not a camp-meeting revivalist, I still wanted to redeem the time and preach as powerful a message as I could muster.

We began at 9:30 as 500 people packed under the shade of a tree and some nearby bushes. As is typical of

THE CONGOLESE BRETHERN ARE LEARNING THAT THEY CAN PROVIDE THAT SAFE PLACE AND MEDIATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE WARRING GROUPS. THEY ARE LEARNING THAT BEING A LIVING PEACE CHURCH MEANS ACTIVELY RECONCILING PEOPLE TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER.

into the remote regions of the DRC, first to Uvira, South Kivu, and then south to Ngovi. I had three objectives for this trip. The first was to observe a peacebuilding workshop conducted jointly by SHAMIREDE and the Quaker Peace Network in preparation for the DRC elections, and funded by Global Mission and Service. The second was to visit the main church of the Congolese Brethren, to meet all the key leaders and pastors, to fellowship together and to learn about each other. The third purpose was to continue to explain about the Church of the Brethren and explore further a missional relationship.

Bumping south along the beautiful western shoreline of Lake Tanganyika, we arrived late in the small community of Ngovi, parked our rented car and sat for tea. Out came a kettle of hot water, a package of powdered milk, a bag of sugar and plastic cups. "I waited patiently as others began to make up their drinks. "Is there tea," I asked? "Oh, no, we don't usually have tea; we just drink the sweetened milk." Supper, consisting of thinned-out tomato paste on rice, was then served and we began to discuss our agenda. Tomorrow will begin with a church service and then we will visit the rest of the village and climb the hill up to the actual church. "Brother Jay, you will preach." As I saw the generator being filled with fuel and the large speakers being unloaded from a van, I knew what to expect—an open-air campaign.

Alyongola Rajabu, representing the displaced pygmies, joins a preliminary mediation session to discuss ongoing issues of conflict with the Bafulero.

Africa, the service was full of singing and dancing to the accompaniment of local drums. A frantic clapping accompanied songs, which sounded to my untrained ear like people clapping as loudly and as quickly as they could for about a minute. Only after some time did I realize there was actually a subtle pattern to the clapping, but I could not duplicate it. Nor could I maintain the pace.

After introductions of the various village officials—several being Muslim—along with the leaders of the church, I was introduced and asked to preach. I brought greetings and thanked them for the opportunity to be in their midst. I gave a little background on myself and the Church of the Brethren, then began to preach from the Gospel of Matthew.

As I spoke, I was reminded of a poster that hung in my guestroom there. It read: "Stop Child Soldiers." This region had endured some of the most horrific Christian-on-



Christian violence since WWII. Who could even fathom the blood spilled in these regions over the past 15 years, let alone the eerie likelihood that some in the audience might have participated in the bloodshed?

"Blessed are the peacemakers," I read, "for they shall be called the children of God." I went on to describe what Jesus meant by peacebuilding, focusing on two statements. "You have heard it said 'Do not kill,' but I say 'Do not be angry with your brother or sister or you will liable of judgment,'" and "'If someone has something against you, go to that person before you give your offering at the altar.'" I asked if anyone had anger in his/her heart, and preached on the need for reconciliation, for face-to-face dialogue, for righting of wrongs. After more singing, picture-taking, and shaking of hands, the meeting closed; the make-shift hall was disassembled.

But after lunch, a delegation of 10 adults approached me to discuss my sermon. "We are Bafulero," they explained, "and we need assistance." They went on to explain that they were part of a group of 2,500 families that were displaced out of the mountains and are now living on the outskirts of Ngovi, which welcomed and treated them well. They told the story of how they were living peacefully on the mountain with nearby Pygmies, and employed them to work fields and watch livestock so that the Pygmies could earn food. But at a certain point the Pygmies turned violent and began burning fields and houses and killing livestock. Some Bafulero were tired of losing fields and animals to the Pygmies and took up arms to fight them. Many were killed. That is what forced everyone to flee. "We recognize our problems with the Pygmies," they said, "but we cannot go to them. We are afraid that they will kill us if we try to go to them."

The next morning a group of Pygmies, who were also at the service, came to meet with members of the Ngovi Church of the Brethren and me. "We were at the service yesterday," they said, "and you spoke about the need for reconciliation before going to the altar and making an offering. We recognize the need for reconciliation with the Bafulero." They went on to explain that the Bafulero exploited them and forced them to watch their cattle. "We do not have enough time to go hunting into the forest for rats and other animals," they said. "We need to be made right with the Bafulero so we can return to the mountains where we can find food." The Pygmies claimed that 500 Pygmy families were displaced because of the fighting with the Bafulero. And they were starving. It had been days since they had eaten, they said, and they were obviously weak and deteriorating. I gave the small sum of funds I could spare—just \$200—and the Congolese Brethren purchased dried fish and cassava to distribute to the Pygmies for food.

The Pygmy communities in South Kivu are Twa Pygmy, who are not short in stature. Historically, the Twa were hunters/gatherers, but because of deforestation and slash-and-burn agriculture, they have been forced to live



Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service (third from right), stands with leaders of the L'Eglise des Frères du Congo in front of the thatch and brick Ngovi Church building.

interdependently with Bantu farming communities around them. To subsist, they hunt bush meat to sell to agriculture populations, and serve as farm hands; some families maintain their own fields. Obviously, the conflict between the Pygmy and Bafulero is complex, interconnected, and systemic. But there is also a spiritual component to it, which both groups have begun to recognize. There must be reconciliation before they can work at long-term solutions. But just to sit together and work at peace requires a third party to provide a safe space, to ensure one's personal well-being. The Congolese Brethren are learning that they can provide that safe place and mediate dialogue between the warring groups. They are learning that being a living peace church means actively reconciling people to God and to each other.

Since my most recent visit, and at great risk to their own safety, the Congolese Brethren have made several trips into the mountains, accompanied by leaders from their respective groups, to speak with the Pygmies in the hills and to speak with the Bafulero about working at peace and allowing those that have been displaced to return and begin farming again. The Global Food Crisis Fund grant of \$2,500 has helped, too, and will go toward the purchase of seeds and fertilizers to encourage individuals to return and begin restoring their fields. These are small steps toward reconciliation and restoration, but they are positive steps, and people are beginning to trickle out of Ngovi and into the hills again.

The Iglesia des Frères Au Congo continues to operate SHAMIREDE workshops on peacebuilding, nonviolence, and good governance. It also continues to be a witness for peace in a region that has known the gospel, but until recently not truly embraced the gospel of peace. As Global Mission and Service fellowships with this small group of Christians and explores what the future might hold, we are thankful that we have been able to be partners with them in spreading the gospel of Christ in this bleak region. 

Jay Wittmeyer is executive director of Global Mission and Service (previously Global Mission Partnerships) for the Church of the Brethren



Bethany Theological Seminary

Bethany Theological Seminary

Both seedbed and threshing floor

by Ruthann Knechel Johansen

Those of us in the Church of the Brethren are called by our denominational mission to continue the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.

Yet a spirit of lament hovers around those words these days because we recognize our brokenness, confusion, and division over many things. We may even wonder if so diverse a group of people as the Brethren can even *be* one denomination.

Declining membership and finances, staff lay-offs, closing

nationalism, political or churchly power, and prosperity and size as accepted measures of success in our churches.

Although divisions in the church pose serious challenges for denominations, these conditions are exactly the ones that those of us at Bethany Theological Seminary embrace as opportunities.

At its best, Bethany must continue to be a place for aspiring clergy to develop professional ministry skills and a path to

THE FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF OUR SEMINARY IS TO AWAKEN THE IMAGINATION AND PASSION REQUIRED FOR LIVING IN GOD'S REIGN ALREADY REVEALED AND STILL AWAITED.

of congregations, the temptation to want unity to be uniform, individual or local interests that weaken our commitment to the good of the whole, questions of inclusion and exclusion based on biblical interpretation or sexual orientation, and fears of the church's death threaten and demoralize us. Seeking security in uncertain times, we live in tension with cultural values such as consumerism, militarism,

institutional credentials. Simultaneously, however, it must extend opportunities to a wider audience. It must be the seedbed for rigorous study of scripture and con-

temporary human struggles to live according to God's call. It must provide fertile spiritual and intellectual ground on which to test and debate conflicting biblical interpretations, theological doctrines, ethics, and politics. And it must consistently point with imagination and courage toward the new heaven and the new earth proclaimed in John's apocalyptic vision in Revelation 21 and 22 of the tree of life planted by the river of

life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Our church and society need the educational resources of a faithful, courageous, and visionary seminary. The fundamental purpose of our seminary is to awaken the imagination and passion required for living in God's reign already revealed and still awaited. With this purpose, the seminary educates students and church members about the Bible, including understanding the languages in which Jesus spoke and the scriptures as they were originally written so that we may understand them more deeply. Our studies examine the state of the church and the world in relation to the biblical witness and values, and the history of Christianity amid other streams of history and religion. We integrate and apply the teachings of the New Testament to contemporary challenges as well as develop theological, psychological, philosophical, and sociological insight and practical ministering skills. Such education is vital for those preparing for pastoral ministry, but it is not exclusively for clergy-to-be; it is basic for lay people as well, and essential for all believers seeking to continue the work of Jesus and embody the image of God in which human beings have been created.

As a book of education, the Bible teaches us how to be God's people and kin to one another. In troubled times and in a fractured denomination, Bethany offers an Incarnational education which engages our whole being, thereby making it possible for each of us to attend to the deeper meaning of scripture, to be less vulnerable to glib platitudes and distortions of it, and to be more capable of applying it in contemporary contexts. Incarnational education encourages a transformation of our minds, hearts, bodies, and spirits.

Since I became president of Bethany in 2007, we have articulated a mission of Incarnational education for God's shalom and Christ's peace. I have found inspiration particularly in Jesus' lessons, parables, and actions and in the story of Ruth for illustrating what Incarnational education means, and for demonstrating how ancient narratives, when deeply understood, can lead us to the future. Jesus was a teacher. He is called rabbi, knows scripture and religious law, and offers lessons in parables to all who will hear. Ruth teaches by example. From a position of powerlessness as a woman and a Moabite foreigner, she is more faithful to the God of Israel than many Israelites. From the margins, she educates through *hesed* (compassion), risking with courage.

Together, these texts and others inspire and guide Bethany's educational leadership for our denomination. As an educational resource, Bethany 1) calls the church not simply to continue the *work* of Jesus but to abide in the spirit and faith in which Jesus lived and performed his teaching, healing, and reconciling ministries; 2) clarifies what the living spirit and work of Jesus mean in our times; 3) helps us to be faithful to Brethren core values—arising from God's shalom and Christ's peace—that actually continue the work

of Jesus and assist us in relinquishing false values that attempt to take over our personal lives and churches; and 4) leads us to reimagine the shape of the church and ministries for the world in the 21st century.

"Wherever you go, I go" (Ruth 1:16)

The call to continue the work of Jesus abiding in the presence and spirit of God when we are discouraged and divided reminds us of the dilemma faced by Job-like Naomi trying to survive famine in Moabite enemy territory after losing her husband and two sons. When the famine is over and Naomi returns to Bethlehem, Ruth chooses to follow Naomi and trusts Naomi's Yahweh,



Bethany Theological Seminary

BETHANY OFFERS AN INCARNATIONAL EDUCATION WHICH ENGAGES OUR WHOLE BEING, THEREBY MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR EACH OF US TO ATTEND TO THE DEEPER MEANING OF SCRIPTURE.

rather than return to her own Moabite people as does her sister Orpah. Ruth crosses ethnic, national, and racial borders and transgresses social custom in order to be faithful to the spirit of compassion (*hesed*) that abides within her. As a non-Hebrew in a Hebrew village and barley field, she risks, trusts, and receives protection and the gift of grain. Ruth chooses to treat strangers as family in perplexing and prophetic ways: by being inclusive, she invites others to be so as well, and in so doing she extends the range of one's family to encompass King David and Jesus.

In the parables about the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, Jesus illustrates how seminary and church may continue the work and spirit of Jesus. If we go where both narratives lead, group boundaries and expectations are crossed. The Samaritan reaches across religious, class, and political boundaries that a priest and a Levite were unwilling to cross. And expectations for justifiable resentment on the part of a father are dissolved by a spirit of forgiveness and welcome. In Matthew 25, Jesus makes even clearer what continuing the spirit of the work of Jesus means with his disclosure that when his followers feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit those in prison, they are feeding, clothing, and visiting him. And then in Matthew 28 he commissions his disciples to go and baptize nations into the spirit he has made clear in the Sermon on Mount and in his counsel about feeding and clothing those in need. This is not a colonial or imperial spirit. It is compassionate servanthood.

“Abide in my love” (John 15:10)

The Bethany community’s commitment to clarify what living in the spirit and work of Jesus mean in this time requires us to understand the thorny issues that confront the 21st century church, just as similar issues confronted Romans in the first century. Though clearly taking 21st century form, such issues affected our scriptural and Brethren movement forebears. Today’s sizeable list includes our struggles with racism and immigration, joblessness, poverty, and hunger. War, which has ravaged societies throughout history, now can be waged endlessly because of military technologies that have changed the nature of war. And soaring military expenditures in the United



Bethany Theological Seminary

EXCEEDING JOY AND GLADNESS ARISE FROM LIVING WITH AWARENESS THAT THE INSPIRATION OF ONE’S OWN LIFE IS ANIMATED BY THE CREATOR’S BREATH AND THEREFORE UNITED WITH ALL LIFE.

States contribute to global poverty. Health issues like AIDS and inadequate health care threaten human communities. Lack of concern about how our values and behavior affect the environment threatens all life forms. Religion itself confounds and challenges us when market-driven churches and fundamentalisms in any religious tradition turn it into ideology and use it to advance national and global political agendas.

We gain insight into how Jesus himself confronted the political and religious issues surrounding him in the Beatitudes and John’s Gospel. In chapter 15, Jesus extends his relationship with God to those who are listening by strongly inviting them to abide in his love as he himself has “kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”

Love that regards one’s neighbor as oneself and lays down one’s life for others is the foundation from which to address the tough issues we face.

Jesus prepares for grounding in love—a foundation stone at Bethany—when he returns, following his baptism and sojourn in the wilderness, to preach his Sermon on the Mount. If read with the aid of an Aramaic translation of the Greek in the New Testament—the language in which he presumably spoke—the Beatitudes prepare the soil for our transformation and capacity to abide in and continue the work of love. Jesus blesses the poor in spirit, those who know their life source to be the breath of the Creator and find their home in the holy breath. Those who mourn convey a sense of deep longing that finds comfort in receiving that for which they have longed by abiding in love. The meek are the gentle and the humble, those who have softened what is rigid within. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness possess an inner and outer sense of justice; they seek peace between the warring parts of themselves and build peace in the world around them. The merciful are those from whom divine love springs as if from the bones and wombs of their being. Jesus blesses the pure in heart for their consistent, centered focus on God’s passionate life that animates all living forms. He blesses the peacemakers for their ability to till the ground, plant, and labor in order to bring forth the fruits of shalom, including justice, righteousness, and compassion. The Beatitude on persecution acknowledges that the life spirit Jesus announces for the world may be

unappreciated and even rejected by the world, which can lead one to abide ever more fully in God’s love. Exceeding joy and gladness arise from living with awareness that the inspiration of one’s own life is animated by the Creator’s breath and therefore united with all life.

Again the scriptures clarify how to address contemporary issues we face in church and society. By not doing what was safe and expected, Ruth’s actions not only surprise, they also surpass the commitment of many men and women in Bethlehem. The story reveals compassion and courage that inspire inclusion and protection, for when Boaz observes the nobility of Ruth’s action, he welcomes this foreigner in the barley field and orders that she be protected. Moving in the heart of a woman and outsider, Ruth’s story discloses God’s activity through ordinary men and women, even in pain and loss.

“My peace I give you” (John 14:27)

As the Church of the Brethren’s only seminary, Bethany takes seriously the call to assist church members and non-



Bethany Theological Seminary

members alike to be faithful to Brethren core values arising from God's shalom and Christ's peace, and to relinquish false values that our culture embraces. In his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus distinguishes between the lure of false values for relevance, authority, and power offered by the tempter and Jesus' reliance on God's way of love. Repeatedly, the interests of the Sadducees

challenge Jesus, and the Pharisees test him for violating religious law. Throughout his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus distinguishes between legalism with "you have heard that it was said" and the way of love: "but I say to you." Humility, service, simplicity, justice, mercy, inclusive identity, peace, and salvation are the heart habits extended by Jesus toward Samaritans and Gentiles, toward the infirmed, the poor, and the excluded, toward women and children, as he calls the powerful, the suspicious, and the fearful to relinquish false values.

The story of Ruth is filled with a clash of values from beginning to end. In ignoring the tradition of returning to her own people when her husband is dead, Ruth serves her mother-in-law and opens the way to a new community. By crossing borders and, following Naomi's direction to challenge prevailing social custom by going in secret to the threshing party, Ruth initiates a new Yahweh-respecting branch of the family line and anticipates a yet wider community to receive the Incarnation of Jesus. Boaz and the next of kin also face a clash of values when Boaz offers a parcel of land that belonged to Elimelech, which Naomi now wishes to sell to the next of kin, and contrives to include Ruth with the land. However, when the next of kin agrees to redeem it but learns that Ruth goes with the land, he refuses lest he impair his own inheritance. Then, perhaps even to his own disadvantage, Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife and preserves and extends a family line.

Through study, teaching, scholarship, spiritual formation, and spiritual disciplines, the seminary assists church leaders and members to understand that the peace promised as Jesus departed from his disciples following his resurrection arises from the freedom of abiding in courageous love. The freedom of love permits and requires vigilant and joyful examination of temptations such as turning religion into ideology for political purposes, not appreciating the gift of the mind in matters of faith and devotion to Christ, de-valuing education for our church leaders, or confusing conformity on all beliefs with church unity because we fail to understand that unity resides in seeing my neighbor and myself, even my enemy and myself, as one in God's creation.

"Go . . . Do not be afraid"
(Matthew 28:10)

To reimagine the shape of the church and ministries for the world, students and faculty at Bethany constitute an open faith community, to which all church members and others are welcome, where we regard questions about the vitality and relevance of the church as opportunities for explor-

ing new and varied forms of ministry. Animated by faith and imagination while refusing to languish in lament about dying forms of congregational life, we work with young adults and second-career older adults who hunger for, foresee, and prepare for new church starts, for coffee house or storefront churches, for bi-vocational ways to minister while combining other employment as teachers, accountants, or social workers, or for creating intentional communities sensitive to environmental sustainability. Committed to the well-being, care, and protection of all persons, Bethany reimagines ministries for the world by enlarging theological education opportunities for year- or semester-long study, weekend intensives, and on-line courses for people from other professions or career paths.

Like the metaphor of seeds and seedbeds that fill the parables of Jesus, the seminary provides rich, tillable soil and nurture for education that supports the flourishing of God's shalom—justice, righteousness, compassion, and peace—and extends Christ's blessing of peace with his benediction "Do not be afraid." Calls and commissioning throughout the Bible are accompanied by the assurance that we need not be afraid. Our divisions, judgmentalism, and exclusions abide in fear and not in the reality of God's love that unites us in our rich varieties and saves us from our separations.

Like the threshing floor where mature crops are harvested and where Ruth ventured boldly in the dark of night to entreat Boaz, the seminary is a place of hard work, but it is also where all are invited to glean in respect and protection. Planting, tending, pruning, and harvesting depend on the participation of the divine, and similar expectations for divine encounters occur regularly in the seminary.

Finally, the seedbed and threshing floor open spaces in which the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and his acts of commissioning move beyond the past and lead us to the future where our seeds and the leaves of our trees may contribute to the healing of the nations. **W**

Ruthann Knechel Johansen is president of Bethany Theological Seminary, in Richmond, Ind.

Committee announces decisions regarding 2012 Annual Conference

At a fall meeting, the Program and Arrangements Committee of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference made a number of decisions—including approval of all applications for booth space in the exhibit hall at the 2012 Conference. Among applicants was the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests (BMC).

Other decisions announced by Conference moderator Tim Harvey include a new set-up for business sessions that will seat delegates at round tables, a “Continuing the Work of Jesus Wall,” a service project to benefit the city of St. Louis, naming of Robert Neff as Sunday school leader, and a new logo illustrating the theme, “Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.”

The Program and Arrangements Committee, which includes the three Annual Conference officers, three elected members, and the Conference director as an ex officio member, made its decision to grant BMC booth space as part of an

evaluation of the 30-plus applications from church-related groups requesting space in the exhibit hall, Harvey said in a telephone interview.

The decision on BMC’s application “was based on the decision of the 2011 Annual Conference,” he said, referring to the 2011 delegate body’s action that “reaffirmed the entire 1983 Statement on Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective, and voted to continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process.”

Harvey specifically cited the delegates’ reaffirmation of the entire 1983 paper, which includes instruction to the church to challenge fear, hatred, and harassment of homosexual persons, and decision to continue conversation in venues outside the query process that brings items of business to the Conference.

“It is the belief of Program and Arrangements Committee that conversation and understanding of the ministries represented in the exhibit hall does take place and is affirmed as a value of the exhibit hall,” Harvey said.

He added that, as moderator, he hopes to help the church figure out “a better way to talk with each other.” The decision to seat delegates at round tables is another step in that direction. “I’m pretty excited about it,” Harvey said.

The 2012 Annual Conference takes place in St. Louis, Mo., July 7-11. For more about the Conference go to www.brethren.org/ac.



Continuing
the work
of Jesus

Bethany Seminary trustees address school’s role in church leadership

During a semiannual meeting on Oct. 28-30, 2011, the Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees devoted time to consideration and discussion of Bethany’s role in leadership for the Church of the Brethren.

The board strongly reaffirmed Bethany’s mission and vision to “equip intellectual and spiritual leaders with an incarnational education for ministering, proclaiming, and living out God’s shalom and Christ’s peace in the church and world.”

Consensus formed around the desire for Bethany to serve as a

place for the study of and dialogue about theological, cultural, and individual diversity.

Additional key themes included how to communicate this call effectively to the church and society through word and deed and the importance of proactively responding to opportunities that arise from challenges.

The board expressed appreciation for Bethany’s efforts to embrace intellectual and spiritual hospitality for individuals of various backgrounds and theological viewpoints, both in the classroom

and in campus community life. They affirmed Bethany’s actions to foster respectful conversation on difficult and controversial questions, seeking the mind of Christ together as directed by Standing Committee of district delegates to Annual Conference.

Four new trustees were welcomed: D. Miller Davis of Westminster, Md., representing laity; Gregory Geisert of Keezletown, Va., at large; Dave McFadden of N. Manchester, Ind., at large; and Katherine Melhorn of Wichita, Kan., representing laity.



FEMA/David Fine

Clara Nelson



A Church of the Brethren workcamper helps out at the Brethren Disaster Ministries project site in Brentwood, Tenn., where homes have been rebuilt and repaired following the 2010 flooding in the Nashville area.

EDF announces grants, new disaster project to start doing rebuilding in Alabama

The Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) has made a number of grants. One is funding start-up of a new Brethren Disaster Ministries project site in northeast Alabama, in the area of Arab.

An EDF allocation of \$30,000 provides funding to start a disaster rebuilding site in Arab, struck by a tornado during the "2011 Super Outbreak." The largest and most destructive tornado outbreak ever recorded on April 25-28 spawned 336 tornadoes in 21 states, claiming 346 lives. The tornado in the Arab area was an EF4 (winds up to 200 miles per hour) and was on the ground for 50 miles. Brethren Disaster Ministries will repair and rebuild homes, working closely with a local long-term recovery group.

An EDF grant of \$30,000 continues support for a Tennessee flood recovery project of Brethren Disaster Ministries in Cheatham County and surrounding areas. A \$19,000 grant continues support for a related project site in Brentwood, Tenn.

In May 2010, floods caused widespread damage to Nashville and surrounding counties. Thousands were left homeless. In January, Brethren Disaster Ministries established a project in Ashland City, Tenn., to serve flood-affected residents in Cheatham County. This project is expected to continue through early spring.

An EDF grant of \$25,000 has been given following heavy rains, flooding, and landslides in Central America. The grant supports partners in El Salvador and Honduras who are providing emergency aid and helping with long-term recovery for the most vulnerable displaced families.

An EDF grant of \$3,000 completes funding for the work of Children's Disaster Services in Joplin following the EF5 tornado that devastated the town on May 22. The CDS response in Joplin, where teams of volunteers worked in FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers as well as with the American Red Cross, over-spent its initial grant.

For more about the work of the Emergency Disaster Fund go to www.brethren.org/edf.

Clara Nelson



A volunteer at work on one of the homes rebuilt by Brethren Disaster Ministries following flooding in Tennessee.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

Jan. 29-Feb.17 Brethren Volunteer Service Winter Unit Orientation, Ithiel Camp and Retreat Center, Gotha, Fla.

Feb. 22 Ash Wednesday, Lent begins

March 10-12 Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board meeting, Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, Md.

March 23-26 Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Washington, D.C.

March 24-25 Children's Disaster Services Volunteer Workshop, La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

April 6 Good Friday

April 8 Easter

April 14-19 Christian Citizenship Seminar, New York City and Washington, D.C.

April 23-May 4 Brethren Volunteer Service Older Adult Unit Orientation, Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, Md.

Brethren statement presented at meeting on torture

Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger was one of several officials of faith-based groups in a meeting with members of the Obama administration to discuss the issue of torture. The meeting Dec. 13 in Washington, D.C., followed up on a letter to the administration from the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) urging that the US sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

Noffsinger was one of those presenting during the meeting (to see the full text of his report, visit brethren.org/news). The interfaith group also included Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, and representatives of several Christian denominations and Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh groups. Representing NRCAT was executive director Richard L. Killmer alongside the organization's president and two staff members.

Sixty-six American religious leaders including Noffsinger have signed on to the NRCAT letter calling for the United States to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). Titled "Join the Treaty: The US Should Act to Prevent Torture Everywhere," the letter opens with the statement, "Torture



Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger (left) joined National Council of Churches general secretary Michael Kinnamon (right) at an outdoor vigil in Washington, D.C., in December calling on Congress to remember struggling people in the federal budget. The two also were part of a meeting with members of the Obama administration to discuss the issue of torture, organized by NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are contrary to our common religious belief in the fundamental dignity of each human being. We call upon the US government, once a leader in the effort to end the use of torture, to reclaim that role by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture."

The letter proposes that the country take steps against the use of torture by providing independent oversight of conditions in detention facilities such as prisons and police stations. "We believe that if the US joins OPCAT and provides robust oversight of its places of detention, it will be significantly more difficult for cases of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment to occur within the US. Ratifying OPCAT would also enhance our government's effectiveness in urging other countries to end their use of torture," the letter says.

LEARN MORE For more about NRCAT go to www.tortureisamoralissue.org or www.nrcat.org.

For the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference statement of 2010, "Resolution Against Torture," go to www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/ResolutionAgainstTortureFinal.pdf.

For the Action Alert from the witness ministry of the Church of the Brethren that includes a link for voicing support for the NRCAT letter, go to http://cob.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em_id=14601.0&div_id=16101.

Northeast Nigeria again experiences violence, EYN church burned

Northeast Nigeria again suffered terrorist-type violence in early November. On Nov. 4, 2011, attacks blamed on the Boko Haram sect began targeting government facilities like police stations and a military base, along with shops, churches, and mosques. The Red Cross said at least 100 people were killed.

"Pray for peace and safety in Nigeria," said a note of condolence from Jay Wittmeyer, executive director

of the Church of the Brethren's Global Mission and Service office. "Our condolences to the family of Jinatu Libra Wamdeo, general secretary of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria, whose wife's brother was killed at a road block on his way home from work in Sokoto State." At least one church of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) was burned.

US Brethren serving in Nigeria at the time were Carol Smith and

Nathan and Jennifer Hosler. In addition, videographer David Sollenberger was in Nigeria documenting peace activities when the new wave of violence broke out.

Boko Haram is a Muslim militant group with the goal to establish a state based on Sharia or Islamic law in northern Nigeria.

For more about the work of the church in Nigeria go to www.brethren.org/partners/nigeria.



BBT/Patrice Nightingale

The Brethren Benefit Trust board held its fall meeting at the Village at Morrisons Cove in Martinsburg, Pa.

Enhancing, restructuring, safeguarding ministries focus of Brethren Benefit Trust fall meeting

New capabilities for Brethren Pension Plan members, a restructuring of Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) as an organization, and the creation of a reserve fund for Brethren Foundation Charitable Gift Annuities were three of the main outcomes from the BBT board's fall meeting held Nov. 18-19, 2011, in Martinsburg, Pa.

Each of these items will be implemented as a result of the board approving staff's proposed 2012 budget.

"The respective changes that are on their way will allow the Brethren Pension Plan to better serve its retirees and current plan members, as well as to be more competitive at bringing in new members," said Nevin Dulabaum, BBT president. "The changes will also reduce BBT's overall expenses as we seek to maintain our effectiveness . . . and will provide Brethren Foundation protection from future liabilities. While change is never easy, I am confident that these proposals will serve the organization well."

With the slight downsizing in operations in insurance, and with the closing of the Church of the Brethren Credit Union this past June, BBT found itself with administrative support expenses that could be reduced. Thus, five BBT positions were eliminated effective Dec. 16. A sixth position previously announced—a chief operating officer—will not be filled. The equivalent of a seventh position is being eliminated from BBT consulting fees.

The five BBT employees ending their responsibilities with

the organization include **Cindy Benthusen**, general office services representative, who began her employment on April 17, 2000. **Cindy Bravos** began in BBT's Communications department on May 3, 2007, when she was hired as Congregational Contact Network coordinator. More recently, she has served as marketing coordinator. **Willie Hisey Pierson** began as director of Insurance Services on Sept. 21, 2010, and has helped increase the number of client groups serviced by that ministry. **Lauryn Klotzbach** served as production coordinator since June 1, 2004, and played a key role in developing the look of BBT's marketing materials and publications. **Diana Seymour** joined the insurance team on Jan. 4, 2010, to help grow that ministry's medical and ancillary business. Although these staff members completed their duties in mid-December, they will receive salary and benefits through March 31 and also will receive consulting services to assist them in finding employment.

Additionally, in the restructuring process, **Randy Yoder** ended his employment with BBT on Dec. 31, 2011, but maintains a role with BBT as an individual contractor selling Long-Term Care insurance. **Patrice Nightingale** shifted to the manager of production position effective Jan. 1, to reflect the changing level of demand on the Communications department. Also on Jan. 1, **Scott Douglas** became director of Employee Benefits and provides leadership for insurance services in addition to continuing to provide oversight for the Pension Plan.

Brethren Revival Fellowship general meeting

About 75 Brethren from several states and seven districts attended the annual meeting of the Brethren Revival Fellowship (BRF) on Sept. 10 with the theme "Identifying our Loyalty in Turbulent Times." Ken Leininger, of the Cocalico Church of the Brethren in Denver, Pa., recounted from Christian and Brethren history incidents of turbulence through which faithful believers

have passed, with the understanding that God brought the church through those times. Julian Rittenhouse, an ordained minister in the Pocahontas congregation, Shenandoah district, preached on "Affirming our loyalty for the future" to remind attendees of God's faithful promises, no matter what happens to a particular denomination or fellowship.

James F. Myer presented a review of

the 2011 Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich. BRF chair Craig Alan Myers presented an update on BRF's work through the past year. Jordan Keller of the Lewiston (Maine) Church of the Brethren and Ken Leininger were confirmed to continue on the BRF Committee for another five-year term.

The Shiloh Church of the Brethren in Kasson, W. Va., hosted the gathering.



Cheryl Bunnings-Coyford

The Progressive Brethren Gathering on Nov. 11-13, 2011, was hosted by Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., and sponsored by a coalition of progressive groups. Some 170 people attended, with about 30 more in attendance online through live webcasts.

Progressive Brethren Gathering focuses on response to 2011 Annual Conference

With the theme "Pressing On, No Turning Back," the Progressive Brethren Gathering Nov. 11-13, 2011, focused on a response to decisions and events at the 2011 Annual Conference regarding sexuality and women's leadership in the church.

This was the fourth Progressive Brethren Gathering, sponsored jointly by Women's Caucus, Voices for an Open Spirit (VOS), and the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests (BMC). The event was hosted by Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.

In advance of the weekend, organizers had issued an open invitation for "ideas that you think will either sustain us or move us forward as individuals or as a group." Following a presentation by keynote speaker Sharon Welch, nonviolent activist and feminist scholar who is provost and professor of

religion and society at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago, the gathering received presentations of action ideas from several groups and individuals. The ideas were discussed and prioritized in small groups, and then participants were offered the opportunity to commit to do further work on several of the ideas presented.

A new Progressive Brethren Council was announced to be a coordinating body for the informal coalition, which now includes the new "Feast of Love" movement formed through social media since the 2011 Conference and led primarily by young adults. The new council includes two representatives of each of the three original sponsoring groups plus Feast of Love.

Some 170 people attended the gathering, with about 30 more viewing live webcasts. View webcast recordings at www.progressivebrethren.org.

PERSONNELCHANGES

Ilexene Alphonse is serving in Haiti through Brethren Disaster Ministries as a Church of the Brethren program volunteer. He is managing the guesthouse and church headquarters building in the Croix des Bouquets area near Port-au-Prince, and also providing support to the Haitian Church of the Brethren and the wider Global Mission and Service program in Haiti.

Ron Anders retired Nov. 4 from the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., where he had been maintenance

mechanic since September 1989.

Don Knieriem has begun in a new data analyst and registration specialist position with the Church of the Brethren Information Services in Elgin, Ill. He is a member of Wilmington (Del.) Church of the Brethren and has been a Brethren Volunteer Service worker for Brethren Disaster Ministries and a staff volunteer in the BVS office.

Carol Mason, Jim Miller, and Debbie Roberts have accepted appointments as area ministers for Oregon and

Washington District. When the district reduced its executive position to quarter time it also established the area minister positions. Area ministers will work closely with new district executive Colleen Michael.

Tracy Stoddart Primozich began in October as director of admissions at Bethany Theological Seminary. Her responsibilities include designing and implementing a recruitment plan, and working with congregations and districts to identify and call prospective students.



Carol E. Haskins/MLA/Photo

National Youth Cabinet chooses theme for the year

"Bridging the Gap" (Romans 15:5-7) has been chosen as the youth ministry theme for 2012 by the Church of the Brethren's National Youth Cabinet, which held a weekend meeting at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., Dec. 2-4. "Bridging the Gap" also will be the theme for National Youth Sunday on May 6, 2012.

The members of the 2011-12 National Youth Cabinet are **Josh Bollinger** of Beaver Creek Church of the Brethren in Shenandoah District; **Michael Himlie** of Root River Church of the Brethren in Northern Plains District; **Ben Lowman** of Antioch Church of the Brethren in Virginia District; **Kinsey Miller** of Black Rock Church of the Brethren in Southern Pennsylvania District; **Lara Neher** of Ivester Church of the Brethren in Northern Plains District; **Marissa Witkovsky** of Roaring Spring Church of the Brethren in Middle Pennsylvania District; and adult advisors **Amy Messler** of Waynesboro Church of the Brethren in Southern Pennsylvania District, **Michael Novelli** of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Illinois and Wisconsin District, and **Becky Ullom**, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

Bethany Seminary invites youth to explore their call

High school youth are invited to attend Exploring Your Call (EYC) at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind., this summer, June 15-25, 2012. This event provides the opportunity for young people entering their junior or senior year of high school in fall 2012 to explore faith and vocation through classes, congregational involvement, service projects, personal and spiritual enrichment, and recreation.

Russell Haitch, associate professor of Christian education and director of the Institute for Youth and Young Adults at Bethany, oversees EYC. "It's an intense but beautiful program," Haitch said. "Last year, youth studied theology in the classroom, then shadowed pastors and did real-life ministry, then took a trip to Chicago to live in an intentional community and learn about all sorts of non-pastoral vocations. The level of conversation and quality of friendship that developed was really splendid, and I'm excited that equally good things will happen this year."

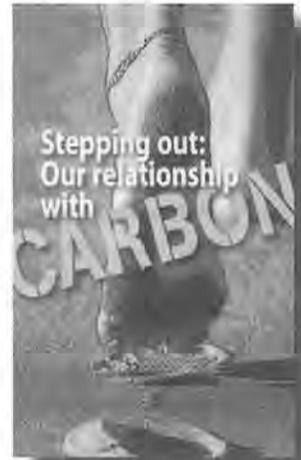
For further information, go to www.bethanyseminary.edu/news/EYC12.

The Church of the Brethren's National Youth Cabinet for 2011-12: (left front to back) Becky Ullom, Marissa Witkovsky, Lara Neher, Michael Himlie; (right, front to back) Ben Lowman, Amy Messler (adult advisor), Michael Novelli (adult advisor), and Josh Bollinger. Not shown: Kinsey Miller.

What's your carbon footprint?

The Church of the Brethren's Christian Citizenship Seminar (CCS) in 2012 will consider carbon footprints and large-scale responses to elevated levels of carbon in the atmosphere, such as carbon labeling. The event for high school youth and adult advisors takes place April 14-19 in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Participants will focus on how individuals and the country might respond to the high level of carbon in today's atmosphere. Rather than debate global warming, participants will explore questions like "How much carbon do everyday tasks, such as driving to school or eating a banana, put into the atmosphere?" "What is our country's carbon footprint?" "How does that footprint compare to other developed countries?" "Are there actions we can encourage our government to implement?"



After a number of educational sessions, CCS participants will visit their legislators to discuss what they have learned and what changes they would like to see in government policy as a result.

Churches sending more than four youth are required to send at least one adult advisor to insure an adequate number of adults. Cost is \$375, which includes lodging for five nights, dinner on the opening evening of the seminar, and transportation from New York to Washington. Each participant should bring additional money for meals, sightseeing, personal expenses, and a few subway or taxi fares.

Visit www.brethren.org/ccs for more information, to download a flyer, or to register.

BITS & PIECES

Jillian Foerster, a Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) worker from Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic, Va., will soon begin as administrative associate at RECONCILE International in Yei, South Sudan. Her placement is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren's Global Mission and Service program. She holds a degree in international relations with a minor in economics.



Cheryl Birmann/Coy/Photo

Something to chew on

Suspend disbelief for a moment and imagine this: a cure (rather than a treatment) for heart disease, cancer, auto-immune disorders, and diabetes. What if this cure was a do-it-yourself treatment that cost less per month than many prescription medicines, and which could not only stop disease in its tracks, but in many cases, reverse it? Would you be interested? I certainly would be, and I am.



RYAN HARRISON

As a holistic and integrative health practitioner, I am keenly aware of some of the most pressing health concerns we face in the United States today. In brief, the Standard American Diet (aptly termed “SAD” in health and wellness circles) and the host of diseases that attend it are at the center of our protracted “war on cancer,” the prevalence of heart disease (the most common cause of death in the US), skyrocketing rates of diabetes (especially in children), and the sobering reality that a whopping two-thirds of us are either clinically overweight or obese. Without a doubt, you know someone who is already dealing with at least one chronic or degenerative disease; you may be on that list, yourself. Well, pull up a chair and let me serve up some hope.

Forks Over Knives offers an all-natural, alternative vision. Viewers feast on the film’s fare through two complementary approaches: science and anecdote. You meet Drs. T. Colin Campbell (a highly regarded nutritional scientist at Cornell University) and Caldwell Esselstyn (a top surgeon at the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic), who detail their groundbreaking research into the relationship between diet and disease. Yet you also meet featured “reality patients” like San’Dera Nation, Joey Aucoin, Evelyn Oswick, and others who, to put it bluntly, were unwitting victims of their own diet and lifestyle choices.

Admittedly, it’s quite a bit easier to spit out (rather than chew and digest) the brain-food that *Forks Over Knives* dishes up. But here it is, in a spoonful: By altering your diet to include markedly fewer foods derived from animal sources and more unprocessed fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, and grains, you can empower your body to heal itself of just about any chronic dis-

ease—heart disease and cancer included.

This may not be news to you. When you see this simple formula in action, however, it can be newly persuasive. And this is where this film excels. For example, you watch San’Dera, Joey, Evelyn, and others shed weight, halt diabetes, reverse markers of heart disease, and outlive cancer, while they also gain energy, reduce dependence on medications (saving hundreds of dollars in the process), and breathe new life into their relationships—all by making different food choices.

You also see Dr. Campbell discuss how he and fellow researchers were able to turn cancer “on and off” simply by adjusting the amount of animal-based protein in a diet. And Dr. Esselstyn introduces you to a group of individuals who became a research project for him after traditional western medicine sent them home to die from irreversible, untreatable coronary artery disease—20 years earlier.

But what will you do with this information? It certainly challenges some cherished cultural food-centered beliefs (“What? I don’t need meat or dairy to get enough protein?”), some of which directly affect many of our family, social, and religious traditions. Like a menu in a foreign language, you may need to spend some time with *Forks Over Knives*. Thankfully, for every bite of admonition, the film also offers palatable solutions flavored with possibility.

Some may suggest that it’s too hard or unpleasant to “eat healthy.” That perhaps it’s too “extreme” to do so. Dr. Esselstyn proposed we reframe our priorities, noting that it is far more extreme to be put under, have your chest cut open, and have a blood vessel taken from your leg and connected to your heart so you can keep eating hamburgers, chili dogs, and BBQ ribs.

Granted, the film’s not-so-clever title is slightly clumsy, but its message is important: you can minimize your risk of “going under the knife” by being more careful about how you use your fork. Given our ubiquitous health crises, this is one meal that, although it may taste a little too much like humble pie, is worth serving to family and friends alike. **🍴**

Ryan Harrison attends the La Verne Church of the Brethren where he started and led monthly Spiritual Cinema Circle gatherings for more than five years. He now teaches Spiritual Cinema at the University of La Verne, and is currently pursuing a PsyD degree at the University of the Rockies.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Title: *Forks Over Knives*. **Rating:** PG. **Creator and executive producer:** Brian Wendel. **Writer and director:** Lee Fulkerson. **Producer:** John Corey. **Co-producer:** Allison Boon. **Running time:** 96 minutes. **DVD release:** August 30, 2011. **Notes:** “Here is a film that could save your life,” says film critic Roger Ebert. “It is a documentary in which Lee Fulkerson enacts a mirror image of the journey taken by Morgan Spurlock in *Supersize Me*. Instead of eating only at McDonald’s for a month and nearly killing himself, he eats a plant-based whole-food diet for six months, gets off all of his cholesterol and blood pressure medications, drops a lot of weight, sleeps better, and has more energy.” And, from Dr. Susan Albers, “In a nutshell, *Forks Over Knives* is about two doctors . . . who are advocating a plant-based diet. . . . Whether you agree or totally disagree with the message of this movie, it may get you to start thinking critically about what you eat and how it impacts your health.”



Accept it and move on

I did not respond sooner because my husband and I were in Taiwan visiting our son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. We just returned, so I am responding and elaborating on my concise statement in the November MESSENGER.

I have read the October MESSENGER and found the articles and letters to the editor to be more diverse. As a delegate to Annual Conference, I was present at all sessions: Bible studies and worship services. At the beginning of each of these, and before voting, we asked the Holy Spirit to guide us and be present among us so we would know the Will of God. The September MESSENGER articles on Annual Conference gave a negative jab that implied that there was a conspiracy within every decision. Was the true conspirator the Holy Spirit? The article by Wendy McFadden made it

sound like the process of nominating from the floor invalidates the nominating committee. However, nominations from the floor are allowed and they must meet certain criteria. It was pointed out that nominations from the floor have occurred before. So was the Holy Spirit at work again? Jesus was the supreme nominating committee when he selected his 12 disciples. But what about Paul, who was called later? Do we give him any less credit for his teachings and preaching than the other 12?

After all of our supplications to the Holy Spirit to guide us and be present among us so we would know the will of God, are we going to continue to refute and question the outcomes of Annual Conference? If so, are we not rejecting the Holy Spirit and the will of God? God's will be done! End of debate! Accept it and move on!

Edith Cooper
Everett, Pa.

AFTER ALL OF OUR SUPPLICATIONS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GUIDE US AND BE PRESENT AMONG US SO WE WOULD KNOW THE WILL OF GOD, ARE WE GOING TO CONTINUE TO REFUTE AND QUESTION THE OUTCOMES OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE?

Joy and Suffering in the Body

Turning Toward Each Other

**Bethany Theological Seminary
Presidential Forum**

April 13-14, 2012



Dr. James Forbes will headline Bethany Seminary's fourth Presidential Forum, which will offer an educational approach to the discussion of the intersection of sexuality and spirituality. Dr. Forbes is senior minister emeritus of the Riverside Church in New York City and president of the Healing of the Nations Foundation.

The forum will also feature panelists representing the fields of medicine, ecclesiology and sexuality, Christian history, religion and psychiatry, and biblical studies.

For more information, please visit www.bethanyseminary.edu or call 800-287-8822.

Artwork *Between Us* reproduced by permission (www.listenforjoy.com), © 2005 by Melanie Weidner.



*When
the storm begins
...to tell Menschen, between Us.*

Already offended

Recently, I read that the Program and Arrangements Committee announced that all who requested booths for 2012 Annual Conference were granted space, including BMC (Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests). The 2011 Annual Conference reaffirmed the "1983

Statement on Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective," which states that the homosexual lifestyle is not an acceptable Christian lifestyle. It was also agreed "that we continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality . . ." Granting booth space to BMC does not invite "deeper conversations;" rather, it approves the *promotion* of the

homosexual lifestyle. Makes me wonder if a group whose purpose was to disseminate information from organizations who assist persons desiring to *leave* the homosexual lifestyle would have received approval as well.

In the fall of 2010, after approval of a booth at 2011 Annual Conference, Program and Arrangements Committee returned the registration fee and rescinded its approval to Brethren for Life, a group whose goal was to inform women regarding choosing life and offer compassionate assistance to those hurting from an abortion. The reason? Some people were "offended" by some of the material available at the BFL booth at 2010 Annual Conference.

Guess what? I am already offended that BMC is being granted free access to promote the homosexual lifestyle at 2012 Annual Conference. Does that mean they will be denied a booth in 2013?

Lois Duble
New Windsor, Md.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



ASK SOMEONE WHO HAS TRAVELED WITH US!

2012 TOURS

- EXPLORE SOUTH AMERICA (March 18-31)
- ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR STEVE LANDIS (April 25-May 4)
- HESSTON COLLEGE TOUR to EUROPE (May 25-June 7)
- GLORY of RUSSIA: MOSCOW and ST. PETERSBURG (July 3-13)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with JOHN RUTH (July 10-23)
- LANDS of the BIBLE: JORDAN and ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR TYLER HARTFORD (July 19-28)
- ALASKA CRUISE TOUR (August 23-September 3)
- TOUR to LITHUANIA (in partnership with LCC International University) (September 12-19)
- MENNONITE STORY in POLAND and UKRAINE (September 18-29)
- SCENIC AUTUMN CRUISE: CANADA and NEW ENGLAND (October 6-16)
- MEDA TOUR to ETHIOPIA and TANZANIA (October 12-24)
- SERVICE TOUR to ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR JAMIE GERBER (October 13-22)
- ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR DOUG KLASSEN (October 17-26)
- ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR KEITH BLANK (November 7-16)
- VIETNAM and SINGAPORE (November 12-26)
- MUSIC and MARKETS: DANUBE CHRISTMAS CRUISE (December 1-9)

2013 TOURS

- AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND (February 1-21)
- CHURCHES and SAFARIS in KENYA and TANZANIA (February 8-20)
- PANAMA CANAL CRUISE (February 26-March 8)
- MEDA in MOROCCO (April 2-12)
- ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR PHIL WAGLER (April 16-25)
- MYSTERY TOUR (April 17-26)
- EXPLORE the WORLD of PAUL with TOM YODER NEUFELD (May 1-17)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with PAUL ZEHR (May 2-15)
- GREAT TREK TOUR with JOHN SHARP (May 7-18)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with JOHN RUTH (June 6-19)
- ICELAND ECO TOUR (June 10-19)
- COLUMBIA BIBLE COLLEGE ANABAPTIST HERITAGE TOUR (July 2-15)
- FOLLOWING the STEPS of MOSES with PASTOR NELSON KRAYBILL (July 22-31)
- THE BRITISH ISLES (England, Scotland and Wales) with DAVID and JOYCE ESHLEMAN (September 13-25)
- BEHIND the VEIL - EXPERIENCING EGYPT (October 17-28)
- CHINA and a YANGTZE RIVER CRUISE (November 1-14)



"Building bridges among Mennonites and other Christians and faiths around the world through custom-designed travel."

CALL 1-800-565-0451 FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO BOOK YOUR TOUR
E-MAIL: office@tourmagination.com WEB: www.tourmagination.com

9 Willow Street
Waterloo, ON N2J 1V6 Canada

Reg. #50014322

2308 Wood Street
Lancaster, PA 17603 USA

I take offense (and I'm not even related)

If I were one of Randy Miller's relatives, I might take issue with his December editorial. I found his comments to be offensive. For me, the comments might more accurately reflect the character of the editor rather than his "no idea how wrong-headed" relatives. I thought we were to have a spirit of tolerance for those we disagree with politically and theologically. Calling your relatives wrongheaded does not seem to be in that spirit. I trust you found something to talk about as you gathered with them for the holidays.

David A. Whitten
Waterloo, Iowa

Best gift to the world

Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* reminds us that grace is, among other things, Christianity's best gift to the world. It is free of charge to people who do not deserve it, and there is no end to what it might pardon. In the front of the same

GRACE IS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, CHRISTIANITY'S BEST GIFT TO THE WORLD. IT IS FREE OF CHARGE TO PEOPLE WHO DO NOT DESERVE IT, AND THERE IS NO END TO WHAT IT MIGHT PARDON.

book, Jim Wallis of Sojourners says of Yancey that he longs for the day when churches won't be regarded as clubs of righteous people or dens of political correctness, but rather as communities of sinners to which *all* other sinners are welcome. Oh, that the Church of the Brethren might extend grace to our LGBT brothers and sisters. I am having a hard time living with the decision

made last summer at Annual Conference. How can we call ourselves followers of Jesus?

Pat Royer
Modesto, Calif.

The elephant is not the bully

I write in response to the letter "the elephant as a bully, sporting a rainbow

Join the Ministers' Association in 2012 for a two-day learning event with

Walter Brueggemann



Truth Speaks to Power

How can the witness of the gospel be uttered and enacted in the midst of a public domain that now features immense concentrations of money, power, and control?

Join us for three sessions exploring biblical narratives that provide models for our own witness today.

COB Ministers' Association Pre-Conference Continuing Education Event

St. Louis, Missouri
July 6-7, 2012

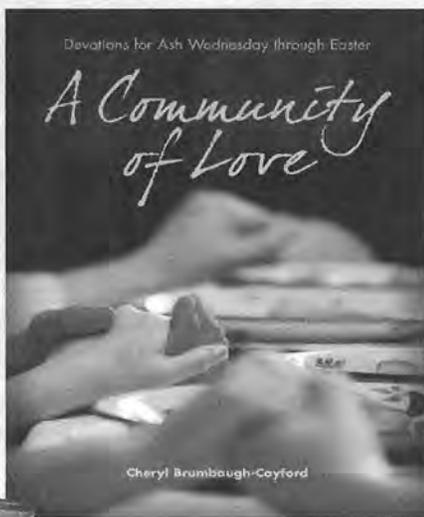


Church of the Brethren

Questions? Contact Chris Zepp at 540-828-3711 or czepp@bwcob.org

Follow me,
two words from Jesus that invite us on a journey
Advent and Lent, two seasons of the year that define the journey

The Brethren Press seasonal devotional series encourages followers to a renewed understanding and deepened commitment to the call of Jesus. Our devotional guides are written by some of the finest authors in the Church of the Brethren. Each year readers will receive over twelve weeks of daily meditations with scripture and prayer to prepare them for Advent and Lent. All this for less than the price of a greeting card.



Becoming a seasonal subscriber is easy and costs only \$4 a year for both booklets. This represents a 20% savings off the retail price. Subscriptions are renewed automatically each year at the discounted rate and bulk quantities can be adjusted with a simple call. Subscribers will be billed once a year and can cancel the program at any time.



Call Brethren Press at 800-441-3712 to start your subscription today.

Experience the depth of our series for yourself and for your congregation. Share the series with family and friends; it is one gift they will truly appreciate.

THE SIMPLE TRUTH IS CHRISTIANS HAVE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES. THAT'S OKAY....WE ARE NOT OF ONE MIND. WE SHOULD HAVE THE COURAGE TO ADMIT THIS AND HAVE FAITH THAT GOD WILL GUIDE US THROUGH THIS STORM.

scarf" printed in the October 2011 MESSENGER. Concerning the issue of homosexuality and the Church of the Brethren, there certainly is a bully in the room, but it's not the elephant. The bullies in the room are the individuals who:

- expect others to accept their interpretations of the scriptures, when in fact the early Brethren refused the idea of a creed and were encouraged to interpret scriptures for themselves;
- amended the 1983 paper on homosexuality to say "homosexuality is an unacceptable lifestyle," when in fact we were not of one mind on this issue in 1983, nor are we today;
- made harassing phone calls and sent threatening e-mails, encouraging congregations who usually do not participate in Annual Conference to attend and vote against this issue, thereby stacking the vote in their favor;
- threatened physical harm to a gay

individual attending Conference. The simple truth is Christians have different interpretations of the scriptures. That's okay. "There are many rooms in [our] father's mansion." People sporting rainbow scarves aren't asking anyone to accept their beliefs. They're simply asking the church to allow each of us to be faithful to our interpretations of the scriptures. We are not of one mind. We should have the courage to admit this and have faith that God will guide us through this storm.

Rolland Kiracofe
Westminister, Md.

I will always be an outsider

As a long-time Lutheran and Episcopalian, I became a member of York Center (Ill.) Church of the Brethren about 10 years ago. After singing in the choir and teaching Sunday school alongside two wonderful partners, and being a sister with others at love feast, I joined. But I will never be a true member.

Read the letters to the editor in the MESSENGER. Each facet of the current believes *it* is the real Brethren church. In fact, they often claim to be The Church. I am so sad that The Church is believed to be solely this beautiful, precious fragment of the Radical Reformation. We do not seem to see our role in the unfolding church that is saving the entire world! Salvation has apparently come to mean being the true Brethren. I hear the passion as members trace their families back to midwestern settlers. They practice the love feast in their own congregation's manner, they make the communion bread with their own five-tined fork, or three-tined fork, or a plain four-tined fork, as if the Christ of God might only be present if these customs are done a certain way.

I know I will always be an outsider in this precious community, even though I rejoice with this congregation in their own Brethren heritage. I will represent them at Annual Conference in St. Louis, and I am determined to have our youth attend Christian Citizenship

Are you pursuing a career in nursing?

Brittany Leftwich feels called to use her gifts of caring and nurturing through a career in nursing. As a Church of the Brethren nursing scholarship recipient, she is now one step closer to her goal of becoming a neonatal nurse.



Throughout nursing school, we have learned just how vital a nurse's role is, not only to the patient, but also to the family. This will give me a way to be an advocate, which, in my opinion, is what nursing is really about. Nurses are such an important part of the health care system, and there is no better support than knowing that the Church of the Brethren stands behind me and promotes nursing.

Brittany

Let the Church of the Brethren stand behind you in your pursuit.

Church of the Brethren



This program is available to members of the Church of the Brethren enrolled in an LPN, RN, or nursing graduate program. Application deadline is April 1. Application materials are available at www.brethren.org/nursingscholarships. For further information, e-mail nminer@brethren.org or call (800) 323-8039, ext. 202.

Seminar in April. As I struggle to drop my own scales of blindness and love all Brethren who write letters to the MESSENGER, I so wish the love of "denomination" or the love of the Bible in one or another fashion might break apart to become the love of one another, as the Anointed of God has died and lives to transform us.

Val Friedel
Huntington, Ind.

Jesus was not a Christian

I read your editorial with interest ["Could Jesus be a Christian, October], but I'm sure you and your friend know that Jesus was not a Christian, and so that did not affect what he did as a Jew. Maybe, regardless of what we might think, Jesus would desire to become a Christian so he could show us the way. So many people today want to make

the Holy Spirit something it isn't, and if you did not receive the Holy Spirit when you were baptized then you may need the wind to blow for you. But there is room for you at the table, and Jesus would be there also for you and the rest of whatever Christian community we serve.

Ray Bayse
Callaway, Va.

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039 ext. 206; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

Blue Ridge, Va.: Betty Dooley

Dixon, Ill.: Marilyn Moats

Faith Community of the

Brethren Home, New

Oxford, Pa.: Gloria Clapper,

Jim Fritz, Julia Fritz

Free Spring, Mifflintown, Pa.:

Elison Ritzman, Tom

Willow, Sally Willow, Mike

Sparks, Jennifer Liner,

Connie Hesford, Christie

Hockenberry

Glade Valley, Walkersville,

Md.: Nicole Smith, James

Smith

Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.:

Stephanie Green, Denise

McOwen, Dennis

McOwen, Wanda Callahan

Heidelberg, Myerstown, Pa.:

Christina Bucher

Henry Fork, Rocky Mount,

Va.: Danielle Poindexter,

Stacey Hall, Jeff Hopkins

Indian Creek, Harleysville,

Pa.: Brian Alderfer, Caleb

Alderfer, Bob Lane, Nate

Seitz

Lewiston, Maine: Valerie

Myer, Quintin Horning

Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Donald

Heilman, Donna Heilman,

Grace Seagrist, Ted

Sievers, Alma Sievers

Mohrsville, Pa.: Elaine

Sparrow, Brett Dougherty,

Kirk Dougherty

Pine Glen, Lewistown, Pa.:

Marty Yantz, Stacy

Flaherty, George Flaherty,

Kylie Wakefield, Wanda

Miller, Emily Berryman,

Billy Boreman, Ellen

Boreman, Jim Hackenberg,

Larry Secrest, Charles

Shank, Sherry Shank, Deb

Renninger, Steve Hooper,

Hershal Cram, Janet Cram,

Delane Woods, Michael

Mohr, Cass Mohr, Harley

Mohr, Doug Snyder,

Christine Snyder, Ruth

Dunmire

Rummel, Windber, Pa.:

Thomas Stone, Jr., Robert

Walter, Dolly Walter

Somerset, Pa.: Logan Flick,

Geraldine Harrington,

Shyanne Koval, Jay Smith,

Lana Smith, Kelsey

Watkins, Christina Yinkey

Spring Branch, Warsaw,

Mo.: Dale Christian,

Barbara Christian

Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.:

Lee Swinsburg, Bonnie

Swinsburg, Brenda Gish

Stover Memorial, Des

Moines, Iowa: Beverly

Hunt

Sunnyside, New Creek,

W.Va.: John Delsignore,

Candra Delsignore, Conner

Delsignore, Ollie Green,

Cheyenne Green, Robert

Brown, Freeda Brown,

Dawn Moomau

Trinity, Sidney, Ohio: Mario

Chalico

Uniontown, Pa.: Brad Cole,

Amber Cole

White Oak, Manheim, Pa.:

Caitlyn Cassel, Cherish

Heagy, Blair Martin, Jordan

Walter, Madison Walter

Woodbury, Pa.: Carol Bowser

Anniversaries

Burger, Gene and Betty,

Lorida, Fla., 60

Fike, J. Rogers and Elizabeth,

Mt. Lake Park, Md., 60

Fogelsanger, Jay and Doris,

Hanover, Pa., 55

Johnson, Dale and Jeanne,

Millbury, Ohio, 60

Neil, John and Ruth,

Rockwood, Pa., 50

Wine, Marlin and Lois,

Overland Park, Kan., 60

Deaths

Ainley, Esther, 96, Waterloo,

Iowa, Oct. 14

Ainley, Larry, 70, Waterloo,

Iowa, Oct. 30

Baer, Harvey Glen, 84,

Somerset, Pa., Oct. 18

Bailey, Sarah R., 96,

Martinsburg, Pa., Oct. 31

Bartlett, Rosa Lee, 84,

Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 12

Beckner, Polly A., 76,

Callaway, Va., Sept. 4

Brubaker, Lowell K., 94, La

Verne, Calif., Nov. 6

Bryant, James M., 74,

Bridgewater, Va., Nov. 11

Bush, Myrenda, 99,

Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 22

Campbell, Theodore, 89,

Harrisonburg, Va., Nov. 15

Clapper, Vernon H., 88, New

Oxford, Pa., Sept. 25

Clark, Martha M., 87, North

Liberty, Ind., Oct. 16

Cripe, Henry, 83, Goshen,

Ind., Aug. 21

Dillon, Eula, 99, Rocky

Mount, Va., Oct. 26

Dunlap, Roy, 86, Staunton,

Va., Aug. 28

Edwards, Ellis James, 61,

Martinsburg, Pa., Oct. 20

Evans, Betty J., 87,

Mechanicsburg, Pa.,

Oct. 30

Ewart, Lewis P., 73,

Martinsburg, Pa., May 24

Fike, Jean K., 81,

Bridgewater, Va., Oct. 24

Fitzgerald, Virginia, 92,

Fishersville, Va., Oct. 24

Forney, Earl E., 81, Annville,

Pa., Oct. 13

France, Cecil Peter, 88,

Bassett, Va., Aug. 18

Graham, Marlin, 71,

Shippensburg, Pa., Sept. 25

Haimbaugh, Clarice Marie,

79, Exeter, Mo., Oct. 9

Harget, Elsa Mae, 86, New

Oxford, Pa., Sept. 27

Hendricks, Doyle M., 88,

Adrian, Mich., Nov. 10

Hoover, Annie, 86,

Woodbury, Pa., Oct. 29

Hoshall, Gladys M., 83, New

Oxford, Pa., Oct. 13

Hulse, Gordan, 77,

Harrisonburg, Va., May 31

Johnson, Ethel Maust, 88,

Somerset, Pa., Oct. 29

Kesselring, Lester E., 71,

Sebring, Fla., Nov. 21

Lamison, Earl J., 86,

Johnstown, Pa., Nov. 9

Laurent, Larry R., 72,

Ashland, Ohio, Sept. 16

Liggett, Maurice, 81, North

Liberty, Ind., Sept. 1

Light, Earl G., 95, Hershey,

Pa., Nov. 2

Long, Ruby, 95, Galveston,

Ind., May 10

Lynde, Howard John, III, 57,

Millersburg, Pa., Nov. 4

Lyon, Robert C., 67, Keyser,

W.Va., Jan. 26, 2011

Maus, Delores, 82,

Harrisonburg, Va., April 11

Maus, George, 85,

Harrisonburg, Va., Oct. 18

McQuiston, Violet, 83,

Kokomo, Ind., Sept. 10

Moon, David Charles, 74,

Oakland, Md., Nov. 20

Moul, Stuart L., 89, New

Oxford, Pa., Nov. 6

Myer, Nora M., 100,

Manheim, Pa., Sept. 25

Myers, Lloyd, 89,

Harrisonburg, Va., May 2

Phillips, Inez, 79, Sidney,

Ohio, March 30

Rhodes, Stanley, 79,

Harrisonburg, Va., June 5

Riley, Bobby Andrew, Sr., 75,

Buchanan, Va., Nov. 18

Rohrer, Dean C., 86,

Greenville, Ohio, Nov. 5

Shenberger, Esther Mae, 90,

Lititz, Pa., Nov. 5

Shenk, Ray F., 63, Manheim,

Pa., Oct. 28

Shisler, Beulah P., 80,

Souderton, Pa., Oct. 26

Shively, Vera, 98, Sidney,

Ohio, Sept. 6

Sonafrank, Mable, 99,

Kokomo, Ind., Sept. 20

Tannreuther, William, 56,

Waterloo, Iowa, Oct. 28

Teets, Goldie, 90, Sidney,

Ohio, Oct. 23

Tilson, Martha T., 84,

Marion, Va., March 10

Ulbricht, Ernest Frederick,

Jr., 87, York, S.C., Oct. 20

Van Benthuyzen, David H.,

82, New Creek, W.Va.,

Oct. 3

Verbit, Mildred H., 91,

Irvine, Calif., Sept. 20

White, Pauline I. Laird, 90,

Bellwood, Pa., Sept. 8

Wolford, E. Bryce, 79,

Harrisburg, Pa., Nov. 4

Wray, Luther Benton, Sr., 89,

Callaway, Va., Oct. 5

Zuercher, Philip Allen, 59,

Elizabethtown, Ky., Oct. 26

Licensings

Irvin, Ian G., S. Pa. Dist.,

(Dry Run, Pa.), Oct. 23

Ordinations

Laird, Timothy J., Mid. Pa.

Dist. (New Enterprise,

Pa.), Nov. 13

Teets, LaDeana, W. Marva Dist.

(Elkins, W.Va.), Nov. 20

Teets, Mark, W. Marva Dist.

(Elkins, W.Va.), Nov. 20

If God were a chiweenie

I have a chiweenie. This is not a medical condition. It's a dog.

Before this mutt came into our home five years ago, I had never heard of a chiweenie. We adopted Ann when she was 9 months old. Her previous owners called her Greenie—Greenie the chiweenie. Right away, we knew that in addition to a leash and collar, this dog needed a new name. One of my son's favorite stories at that time was *Where the Red*



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER Editor

Fern Grows, and Little Ann is one of two hounds who live heroic lives in this tale of a young boy growing up in rural America.

A chiweenie is half dachshund and half chihuahua, and if you've never heard this combination, I can imagine the image now forming in your mind because it's probably the same as the one I had when I first heard of a chiweenie: oversized bat-like ears, beady, bulging eyes, and a body like the slinky dog from *Toy Story*. But we lucked out; we got the best of both breeds. Ann's ears flop over casually, her eyes don't bug out, and her body looks, well, fairly normal, actually.

By and large, she is pretty normal—except when she thinks she's going for a walk. Then she becomes a complete idiot. She is so overcome with intense joy that she cannot

I think God must be like Garmin, in *Everybody Loves Raymond*. (It's okay here to admit how much TV you've been watching.) Garmin, as you may recall, was one of Frank's old lodge buddies. Whenever Garmin would see Ray, he would shout "Hey, Ray's here, Ha! Ha!!" And pump his antique arms in the air. Ray would feign embarrassment, but you knew he felt good that Garmin thought he was something special.

Harry Chapin, the late songwriter who gave us "Cat's in the Cradle" and "Taxi," when asked "What's the best advice you can give parents of young children," replied, "Give them blind love."

Tony Campolo, the author and evangelical sociology professor at Eastern University (and occasional Annual Conference speaker), once said God was like a grandmother who, when asked about her kids, would fish out her wallet (or, today, smart phone), and show off their birthday, graduation, and anniversary photos. God can see nothing but the good in us.

We even have an example from Jesus in his parable about the prodigal son. What did the father do in that story? He embraced his wayward son—never mind what he may have done on the road. The father welcomed him with open arms. "Hey! Ray's here! Ha! Ha!" The father, seeing his son, became a happy idiot, overcome by an overwhelming love.

That—if we are to believe Jesus—is the kind of love God has for us. Overwhelming, unswerving, blind love. Yes, we

THAT—IF WE ARE TO BELIEVE JESUS—IS THE KIND OF LOVE GOD HAS FOR US. OVERWHELMING, UNSWERVING, BLIND LOVE. YES, WE BLOW IT. YES, WE LET HIM DOWN. BUT GOD GIVES US A SECOND CHANCE. AND A THIRD.

contain herself. She wheezes and gasps like an asthmatic without an inhaler. She cannot hold still long enough for us to get her collar around her neck. (This process usually involves duct tape, a forklift, and at least two people who have been working out.) Then, once we get the collar around her neck, she tugs relentlessly for the door, the yard, the street, until we are at last on our way.

I think this must be the kind of unbridled enthusiasm God has for us. In spite of our many foibles, God is there for us with that unwavering grace and mercy we see so often in the Gospels.

blow it. Yes, we let him down. But God gives us a second chance. And a third.

Maybe God even has that kind of love for wayward denominations, whose members sometimes forget how to love one another. There is hope. God has not given up on us. God still has the same unbridled love for us that my jumping, wheezing chiweenie has for a walk. God looks at us and, every time, no matter what, gives the air an arm-pump and shouts, "Hey! The Brethren are here! Ha! Ha!"

If God can look upon us with that kind of blind love, maybe we can begin to look at one another the same way. **AM**

COMING IN MARCH: Reconciliation in urban settings, being a conscientious objector today, Bible study, media review, reflections, letters, and more.



Annual Conference 2012

St. Louis, Missouri

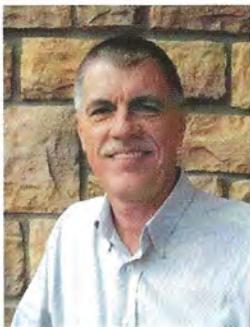
July 7-11, 2012

- Meaningful Worship
- Powerful Music
- Activities for all ages
- Insight Sessions on many topics
- Connecting with other Brethren from across the country



Continuing
the work
of Jesus

Peacefully. Simply. Together.



"Without a doubt, attending Annual Conference is a major financial commitment. But the benefits, I believe, far outweigh the costs. **I consider what I receive from Annual Conference to be priceless, a gift from God.** It is a gift I receive not for the purpose of padding my own spiritual and religious bank account, but rather for building up my abilities and gifts to be a more faithful servant of Christ"

— Illinois/Wisconsin District Executive Kevin Kessler, writing in the district newsletter

See you in St. Louis!

For more information about Annual Conference, visit:
www.brethren.org/ac



Church of the Brethren



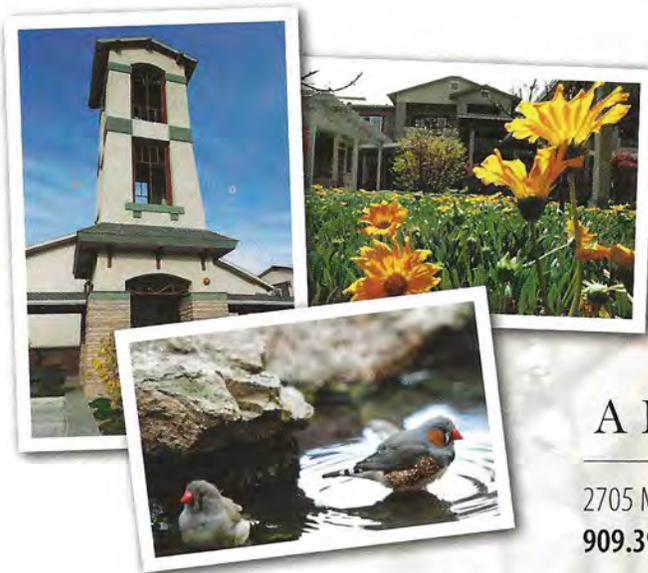
Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.

Love Your Life



A Remarkable Brethren Community

- In following our Brethren roots of Peacefully, Simply, Together
- On-site full-time Chaplain, vesper services
- Three Brethren churches within 5 miles of Hillcrest
- University of La Verne is walking distance from Hillcrest and offers senior audit programs
- The Interfaith Festival, Doctor's Symphony and shuttles to cultural art activities
- Community Gardens
- Great location, campus and weather
- Hillcrest offers all levels of care. You will be welcomed with open arms and enjoy the love and comfort of lifelong friends!



Remarkable Residents



{ Residents Jerry & Berkley Davis }

Jerry and Berkley Davis are very involved at Hillcrest, participating in several aspects of campus life. Jerry heads up Channel 3, the community's in-house television station, while Berkley serves on the management team of the Hillcrest gift shop and assists with the production of "Hillcrest Happenings," the community's resident newsletter. "There is more to do and learn here than one can imagine," says Jerry. "I think we made a good choice in Hillcrest!"



{ Resident Shantilal Bhagat }

"Hillcrest, a model community for retirement: orderly not chaotic, unambiguously secure living with caring residents, friendly responsive associates and staff, top-rated physical facilities for swimming, exercising, dining, nursing and healthcare. You are in experienced hands at Hillcrest, why go anywhere else?"



{ Chaplain Tom Hostetler }

"Hillcrest... what a great place to live and work! As chaplain, I am privileged to participate in the spiritual life of many of the residents and the community as a whole. Opportunities abound for worship at all levels of care; bible studies, phone devotions, sharing and inspiration to meet a variety of needs and expectations. The care for neighbors, the interaction and activity of residents, the desire to learn and grow, and the beautiful facilities and surroundings all work together to make Hillcrest a remarkable place. Come and see!"

A Remarkable Retirement Community®

2705 Mountain View Dr., La Verne, CA 91750
909.392.4375 | www.LivingatHillcrest.org



DSS #191501662
Certificate of Authority #069