

Church of the Brethren

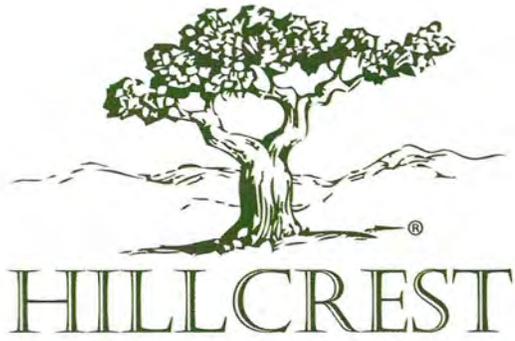
MESSENGER

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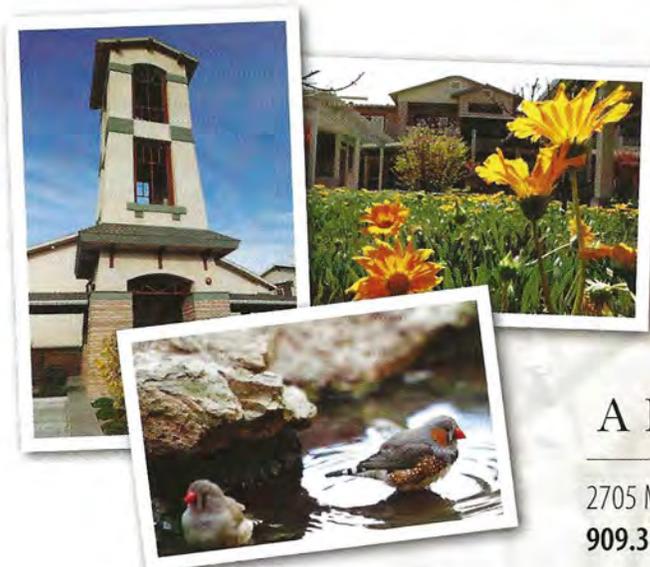
The Divine Servant and the politicization of religion

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Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

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ONTHECOVER The cover artwork is a woodcut entitled *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples*. Created in 1509, by the famous German engraver and printer Albrecht Dürer.

8 The divine servant and the politicization of religion

"Jesus taught, lived among, and would be crucified by religious and political leaders who would not accept his conviction that love supersedes religious legalism and its social and political systems," says Larry Ulrich, reflecting upon the cultural and religious dynamics at work during Jesus' ministry, as well as in our own 300-year Brethren history. A review of the past may provide insight and guidance for today since, as Ulrich points out, "Our current society and church continue the identical struggle."

13 God's masterpiece

Kay M. Bowman provides a poetic reflection on Nahum 1: 12, "Although I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more."

14 Ripe for harvest—Brethren work for peace bears fruit

Being a voice for peacemaking is nothing new for the Church of the Brethren, given its long history as one of the three historic peace churches. But just because peace has been part of our history doesn't mean it's a thing of the past. In a recent interview with News Services director Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, general secretary Stan Noffsinger discusses ways the Church of the Brethren is remaining a current and relevant voice for peace, as well as a historic one.

18 Unity is not enforced but nurtured

It's not so much what you believe, it's that you get together to talk things over. *That's* the glue that keeps us together. "Invoking the New Testament as our creed presses us as Brethren to recall that church united in Christ includes different communities," Joshua Brockway reminds us. "The unified church is made up of the congregations in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi. They are one, not because of their beliefs, but because of their shared connection to Christ."

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Last year at the beginning of Lent I happened to be in Chicago for a conference. I was reminded that it was Ash Wednesday when we headed into an "L" station and encountered two robed Episcopal priests offering ashes to those who wanted to pause for this rite before rushing onto the train.

We were a group of Brethren and Mennonites, assembled for the annual Gather 'Round curriculum writers conference. Despite our low-church preferences, we were gladdened by this liturgical interruption—church taken into the streets of the city.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

The city can also interrupt the church. "When we pray, the outside world intrudes," writes Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford in this year's Lenten devotional, *A Community of Love*.

"How do the spiritual disciplines—fasting and prayer, confession and repentance, sharing resources with people in need—affect daily life?" she asks. "How does God want me to behave? Who has God made me to be, in this complicated world? As I join with other believers, how may we together search for God's will?"

Good questions to ponder as we make our way through Lent. In this season we can engage in what one writer calls spiritual spring cleaning. Just as the seasons of the natural world order our physical lives, the seasons of the church year

can give shape to our spiritual selves.

For a non-liturgical church, the Church of the Brethren does a reasonable job of paying attention to these cycles. In fact, this year's Lenten devotional sold out several weeks before Ash Wednesday. Fortunately, this year was also the launch of an electronic version, a timely innovation in this 10th year of the devotionals.

Another recent innovation is a companion blog (www.brethren.org/pray) with daily prayers and questions to build on the devotional. This blog, along with a guide to pray the Psalms through Lent, is a contribution from the church's spiritual life office.

Whatever your devotional life during Lent, know that you are accompanied by thousands of other Brethren. "God is in it with us, and through Jesus Christ we are all in it together"—in our quiet prayer closets, and also in the noisy chaos of the rest of life.

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

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Peace Pole dedication reminds Brethren of their heritage

The Trinity Church of the Brethren in Sidney, Ohio, was blessed on New Year's Day by the donation of a peace pole, given by Fumio and Kyoko Arakawa. The Arakawas are from Japan but living in Sidney, through Honda. Kyoko is studying English with Susan Driver, wife of Trinity Church pastor Brent Driver.

A peace pole is a four-sided pole which has the phrase "may peace prevail on earth" written in a different language on each side. Peace poles were first created by Masahisa Goy in 1955 in Japan. The World Peace Prayer Society began distributing peace poles around the world in 1983, and since then there have been approximately 100,000 peace poles placed in over 180 countries. Kyoko has been active in promoting world peace through the World Peace Prayer Society since the first World Peace Prayer and Flag Ceremony in Los Angeles in 1986. Her husband, Fumio, became active shortly after that.

Along with the Quakers and the Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren has a 300-year history of being a peace church. Part of the basis for its position stems from the Hebrew word "shalom," which has to do with health, unity, wholeness, and the well-being of all creation. The church takes literally Jesus' statement, "Blessed are the peacemakers," and has sought throughout its history to work for a fair and just peace for all people. Key elements in the peace stance have been involvement in service and relief efforts in war-torn countries.

When Kyoko learned that the Church of the Brethren promotes peace and that their peace pole had been destroyed several years ago, she and her husband wanted to give the church this gift. The dedication ceremony consisted of praying for peace for all of the countries of the world by name, as Kyoko showed flags from each one, with the congregation responding by saying, "May peace prevail on earth."



Left to right: Trinity Church of the Brethren pastor Brent Driver, Susan Driver, Tyler Rabbani (the Drivers' grandson), Kyoko Arakawa, Fumio Arakawa

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

"Thank you for answering God's call when you came to our rescue. Thank you for saying yes. Jesus will never take what you did for granted."

—Ilexene Alphonse, manager of the Ministry Center and Guesthouse of Eglise des Freres Haitiens, where he serves as a program volunteer for the Church of the Brethren's Global Mission and Service program, in a letter to the Church of the Brethren in the US

BYTHE NUMBERS

735,776

Dollars Brethren Benefit Trust's members and clients provided in loans to projects serving at-risk communities in 2011 through BBT's Community Development Investment Fund



Children from the Snake Spring Valley (Pa.) Church of the Brethren closed the symbolic door to their ark on Christmas Sunday. After saving quarters for three years, the children were able to purchase a \$5,000 ark of animals through Heifer International. Row one: Terri Shaffer, Nickolas Shaffer, Lauren Duvall, Katie Waltower, Layna Dibert, Riley Vent. Row two: Emma Dibert, Tristan Crawford, Jacob Greenawalt, Carter Frederick held by Andrea Hershberger, pastor Janet Sell, Addie Shaffer held by Lisa Duvall. Row three: Kyle Duvall, Joshua Greenawalt, Zachary Vent.

Children help pass on the gift

Children's story time during morning worship at the Snake Spring Valley Church of the Brethren, near Everett, Pa., always begins with a strange sound—the clinking of quarters being dropped into a tall plastic tube.

Starting around 1996 and for the next 12 years, the children had dropped enough coins into the quarter tube to raise \$3,644. The money was then sent to Heifer International, where animals are donated or purchased and sent to families in need around the world.

It was during a visit in 1994 to Heifer Ranch near Little Rock, Ark., where the organization's headquarters are located, that a couple from the church on their way to Annual Conference in Wichita, Kan., discovered the quarter tube in the gift shop. Thinking it would be

a great way to introduce a simple way to collect donations for such an important cause—helping to end poverty and hunger in the world, one quarter at a time—the tube soon became part of children's story.

During those 12 years, the children regularly sent their donations for a variety of animals, including ducks, geese, chicks, rabbits, bees, goats, a pig, sheep, llamas, water buffalo, and three heifers. When leaving their pews to go up for their story, it was not unusual to see members of the congregation slipping quarters into their hands.

In January of 2008, the children and pastor Janet Sell talked about what animal to buy next, and voted to purchase a whole ark of animals. For three years, ending this past December, the quarter tube was filled and emptied many times, until the needed \$5,000 had been collected. The ark consisted of a pair each of cows, sheep, camels, oxen, water buffalos, pigs, llamas, bee hives, goats, donkeys, two trios of ducks, rabbits and guinea pigs, and two flocks of geese and chicks. Through an anonymous donor, that gift of \$5,000 was matched, doubling their contribution to Heifer International to \$10,000.

To track their progress in reaching such a large goal, a member of the church, Mereta Imes, created a large poster of an ark with open windows and cutouts of the animals needed. When enough money had been collected for each pair of animals, their pictures were placed in the windows.

When the children were congratulated for having done so well to fill the ark so that all the windows had been filled, pastor Janet asked the children who had made their ark poster. One child's immediate response was, "Noah!"

The children learned that it takes a lot of quarters to equal \$5,000—that's 20,000 quarters, or 500 rolls! Stacked one on top of another, it would reach 115 feet in height. Or, laid side-by-side in a straight row, three-tenths of a mile.

Whether hearing a story from the Bible or a lesson about everyday life, the children at the Snake Spring



For several years the Waynesboro (Pa.) Church of the Brethren has served as a Head Start location, and their church includes class members and their families during food drives. Late last year, the church held a Christmas Stocking project where they provided 30 families each with a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, a grocery gift card, a book, a stuffed animal, a card game, and a family game. The group of "elves" pictured here gathered to wrap the gifts, stuff the stockings, and pack food boxes.

REMEMBERED

James C. (Jim) Carlisle, 88, died Feb. 6. He was a long-term volunteer for the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. His wife, Helen Carlisle, who survives him, is a former computer operations manager at the center. Carlisle was a member of Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren. His varied career began as a farmer and included work at the New Windsor Creamery, employment with Southern States Carroll Petroleum and S.L. Tevis and Son, Inc., and 18 years at the Carroll County Board of Education as a school bus driver. He served two terms on the New Windsor Town Council, 1977-85, and a term as mayor 1989-93. While mayor, he was instrumental in building New Windsor Middle School, and Carlisle Drive at Springdale Village was named in his honor.

Ruth Ellen Early, 94, the Church of the Brethren's first Washington representative and a former director of Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services, died Dec. 17 in Richmond, Mo. She was born Nov. 1, 1917, in Hardin, Mo., to Jesse and Maggie (Mason) Early. She first became an employee of the Church of the Brethren as regional representative for the western area, centered in McPherson, Kan. She then moved to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., to direct the refugee settlement program for several years. She was involved in peace work that saw the beginning of what is today On Earth Peace. Moving to Washington, D.C., she returned to school at the American University where she also worked in the field of international relations, then took a position with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, became the first woman to serve as associate director of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors, and followed that appointment with her service as first Washington representative for the denomination. She opened the Washington office on Capitol Hill on Jan. 1, 1962, in response to an action of Annual Conference asking for the establishment of a church office in the nation's capital.

LANDMARKS AND LAURELS

Two Church of the Brethren members have co-authored *Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: Improving English and Understanding US Cultural Patterns* (Univ. of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor). **Darla K. Bowman Deardorff** of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C., is executive director of the association of International Education Administrators based at Duke University. **Kay M. Bowman** of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren is a retired minister's wife, speaker, author, and writer for more than 50 years. Their book introduces students who are new to the US to deeper levels of American culture.

Valley Church of the Brethren are also learning about giving, sharing, and caring for others who are less fortunate. Their gift of quarters is being passed on to improve the lives of countless families and children, helping to change the world "two by two," and joining a tradition that has been underway for nearly six decades.—**Doris Dibert**



Zachary Vent, 8, of Snake Spring Valley (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, drops a quarter in the collection tube for his offering for Heifer International.

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Church of the Brethren

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Provoking one another to love

The season of Lent is upon us when we are invited to intentionally focus on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, when Jesus intentionally turned his face toward God and the radical life-changing events that were to come. During Lent, we often are encouraged to give up something or turn away from the things of this world as we make the journey with Jesus toward the cross and God's ultimate victory over sin and death through Christ's resurrection. This year, however, I have been praying and pondering about the state of the church and wondering: What if during Lent, together, we would turn our face toward the cross and empty tomb?



MARY JO
FLORY-STEURY

The Mission and Ministry Board selected Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider how to *provoke* one another to love and good deeds," as the scripture focus for the Congregational Vitality directional goal of the Strategic Plan. It occurs to me that these words might serve as a guide for us in our life together as a community of faith during our Lenten journey.

Provoke. It's a curious word used in the context of this scripture passage. The Greek word is *paroxysms*, translated in Hebrews as provoke. Elsewhere it can

(Heb. 10:21), let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22), let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, (Heb. 10:23), and let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). These are incredibly powerful images, concluding with the invitation to "consider how to provoke one another."

Provoke? Really? This is a word used in the Old Testament when the divine patience wears thin. Proverbs advises one who has entered into a foolish contract with a neighbor to go to the neighbor and pester him until he finally relents and cancels the contract (Prov. 6:3). Luke uses the word to describe Paul in Acts 17 when he enters Athens and sees all of these idols which the pagans have before them and says, "Paul's spirit was provoked" (Acts 17:16).

Merriam Webster defines provoke as "to arouse to a feeling or action, to incite to anger, to call forth as a feeling or action, to stir up purposely." Interestingly, provoke comes from the Latin, *provocare*, meaning to call out. Hence, the preacher challenges us to provoke one another to love and good deeds. Now there's an awesome vocation!

I wonder what God might do in our midst this Lenten season and beyond if we were to take to heart the message of the Hebrews preacher—to provoke, to pester, to call out, to stir up one another to love and good deeds? We are surely well versed at the concept of provoking one

I WONDER WHAT GOD MIGHT DO IN OUR MIDST THIS LENTEN SEASON AND BEYOND IF WE WERE TO TAKE TO HEART THE MESSAGE OF THE HEBREWS PREACHER—TO PROVOKE, TO PESTER, TO CALL OUT, TO STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS?

be translated as stir up. Most importantly, as far as I can discover, this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is related to encouragement. The so-called letter to the Hebrews is not really a letter at all. It is an early Christian sermon. In this message the preacher uses every possible image, every possible argument, to grab our attention and move us. *Since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus* (Heb. 10:19), *since we have a great high priest*

another to feelings of anger. Dare we risk loving and trusting one another enough to provoke one another to love and good deeds?

That is the Lenten invitation, to journey toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, mindful of Jesus' great sacrifice for us, and willing to risk our all for the one who gave his all. **W**

Mary Jo Flory-Steury is associate general secretary for the Church of the Brethren.

“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

—Albert Einstein

“May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.”

—Traditional Franciscan benediction

“The world needs anger. The world often continues to allow evil because it isn’t angry enough.”

—Fr. Bede Jarrett OP (1881-1934), a Prior Provincial of the English Dominicans, and founder of Blackfriars, Oxford

“We’ve domesticated Jesus. He is no longer an untamed lion, like Aslan. We’ve created an image of him that is very comfortable and civilized, like a little poodle with a rhinestone collar and painted nails.”

—Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J., author of *Dead Man Walking*, speaking in Claremont, Calif., in February

“Most religions have somewhat bloody scriptures, and the worst thing we can do is forget they are there.”

—Pennsylvania State University professor Philip Jenkins, speaking recently at Baylor University about how Christians should consider violent verses in the Bible before labeling Islam as violent.

“When messages and information are plentiful, silence becomes essential if we are to distinguish what is important from what is insignificant or secondary.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, in his annual message for the World Day of Social Communications on Jan. 24

“To come in and create chaos for no reason whatsoever, other than to just take away from the joy of the holidays for other people, is shallow and an improper thing to do.”

—Rabbi Eli Levitansky of Santa Monica, Calif., speaking to *The New York Times* after a group of atheists scooped up the majority of spots in a city park that had filled with Nativity scenes for Christmas

➔ UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on all countries to press ahead toward realizing the vision of a **nuclear-weapon-free world**, and especially on those who have not yet endorsed the global treaty that bans nuclear tests to do so without delay. “We have a legal and moral obligation to rid our world of nuclear tests and nuclear weapons,” Ban said in his remarks on the 15th anniversary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). “When we put an end to nuclear tests, we get closer to eliminating all nuclear weapons. A world free of nuclear weapons will be safer and more prosperous.”

➔ The trustees of Lifeway Christian Resources unanimously voted to continue selling **2011 New International Version (NIV) Bibles** in its chain of bookstores, even though the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at its annual convention last June asked the publishing organization not to do so. *Christianity Today* reported that the SBC passed the resolution criticizing the NIV update as an “inaccurate translation of God’s inspired Scripture,” largely because the

translation avoids using male terms in passages where context suggests that both genders are intended (except where the pronoun in question has messianic allusions).

➔ **One of the world’s most recent ecumenical entities**, the Global Christian Forum (GCF), met in late January with Vatican officials, affirming a desire to continue to journey together in the search for Christian unity. In his first GCF committee meeting since becoming secretary of the organization on Jan. 1, Larry Miller said the invitation to meet in Rome by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and subsequent conversations indicated “a consolidation of the shared commitment to build bridges between all churches.” The GCF brings together the broadest range of Christian communions, traditions, and organizations, reflecting all the streams of global Christianity. This includes the World Council of Churches, The World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and the Catholic Church through its Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.



JUST FOR FUN: SCRAMBLE

FLOWER POWER It’s March, which brings the start of spring and the earth re-awakening. To celebrate the season, unscramble the names of the 12 types of flowers listed below.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| FOLDFAID | CALLI | PLUIT |
| ONEPY | PANDASNOGR | GRIMLOAD |
| APEINUT | ITLOVE | EMUGRAIN |
| GOULLSAID | CHINYHAT | WOLFNUSE |

ANSWERS: Daffodil, Lilac, Tulip, Peony, Snapdragon, Marigold, Petunia, Violet, Geranium, Gladiolus, Hyacinth, Sunflower.

The Divine Servant

and the politicization of religion

by Larry Ulrich



From the startling moment when Jesus knelt before his disciples right up to the 21st century, the act of feetwashing has enabled us to remember and rededicate ourselves to the ministry of the Divine Servant. The humble servanthood of Jesus ripples through all Christian denominations in varying modes to allow us to relive the symbolic act and to rediscover his message of radical love—love of God and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22: 36-40). Servant love is the life path for the followers of Jesus.

Because of this message, Jesus became a serious threat to Judaism's competing groups. He challenged the purity codes and the crazy piety of the Pharisees, the constant waffling of the Sadducees to compromise their faith and maintain their wealth and positions, the rebellious violence of the Zealots, and the avoidance of real-life struggles by the Essenes, who fled into the desert.

Jesus taught, lived among, and would be crucified by religious and political leaders who would not accept his conviction that love supersedes religious legalism and its rigid social and political systems. Our current society and church continue the identical struggle.

Jesus didn't want his disciples to imitate a ritual. Washing one another's feet offers a symbolic way for us to remember the servant love he instilled in his disciples and calls us to live every day. Jesus recognized the humanity of each of them and accepted them as they were, not as he would like them to be and not as they would like to be. Behind their public masks of discipleship, Jesus touched the imperfect individual personalities of his followers.

In one of his *Peanuts* cartoons, Charles Shultz drew a sketch of Snoopy lying on the peak of his doghouse (how does he do that?). When Linus says that he envies Snoopy because the dog always seems so relaxed, Snoopy's inaudible reply is, "I'm glad I give that impression. Unfortunately, on the inside I'm a raging turmoil!"

Concerned about the turmoil in the Church of the Brethren, Annual Conference moderator Tim Harvey sent a letter to the church in December calling us to step back from our increasing disagreements and damaging behaviors. He reaffirmed the Brethren expectation to live peacefully, simply, and together as we continue the work of Jesus.

Turmoil thrives because we aren't living peacefully or simply, and certainly not living well together. Being in community

means more than sharing common interests or a common heritage. We aren't just a gathering of people. Community means being "together with and for" one another.

From our beginnings as a church, struggling to determine how to live together has been a constant predicament. This struggle not only blocks us from continuing the work of Jesus with our brothers and sisters, but it keeps us from fully loving and serving the massive number of people suffering injustices in our society.

In 1794, Daniel Letterman wrote about the "dilemma of disunity" to Alexander Mack, Jr. "Growing diversity, both within and between congregations, provoked hard feelings, innuendo, acrimonious debate, accusations of unfaithfulness, and 'disownings.'" This description sounds so contemporary because we are experiencing similar disunity again. We call each other "brothers" and "sisters," but if we are a family, we've become a very dysfunctional one again. We act like we don't believe that we are interdependent and need one another. "In Christ, we are one body. . ." (I Cor. 12: 12-31) is Paul's vision of the church, with each person needing and relating with every other person, just as the parts of the human body function together.

In *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety: Strengthening or Straining the Bonds of Community*, Nadine Pence Frantz wrote about Brethren cohesion. "This unity was seen not only as a practical matter of church polity, it was a mark itself of being obedient to Christ and the scripture."

WE AREN'T JUST A GATHERING OF PEOPLE. COMMUNITY MEANS BEING "TOGETHER WITH AND FOR" ONE ANOTHER.

Regenerating and maintaining unity is our dilemma. *The Brethren Encyclopedia* references 21 schisms from the original Schwarzenau (German Baptist) Brethren through 1880. And they have continued. The most recent split was in the Old Order German Baptist Brethren, presumably over using computers, but the issue-behind-the-issue was about the membership of their Standing Committee consisting only of ministers, not lay persons. Every Brethren schism has been over authoritarianism, which is a pietistic issue. Attacks on whomever may be in positions of leadership occur because leaders of the dissenting group want themselves to be the presiding authorities. "We" are better than "them."



Propaganda is used to demean and demonize others while promoting the superiority and moral rightness of the antagonists. The current organization and personnel of the church are described as inadequate or misdirected. Vindictive degradation of church leaders personally and professionally accompanies the divisive and destructive purposes.

Persons reacting to the self-righteous claims of dissenters often feel manipulated and controlled. Fol-

JESUS RECOGNIZED THE HUMANITY OF EACH OF THEM AND ACCEPTED THEM AS THEY WERE, NOT AS HE WOULD LIKE THEM TO BE AND NOT AS THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE. BEHIND THEIR PUBLIC MASKS OF DISCIPLESHIP, JESUS TOUCHED THE IMPERFECT INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITIES OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

We seem to have developed a “schism pattern,” where conservative groups break away from the main membership. (The 1883 Holsinger split was supposedly about progressive issues, but it quickly became the very conservative Brethren Church.) Having a schism an average of every 12 years, we are barely better than most American marriages, which end in divorce after only eight years. Those in the “middle church,” the majority of the Brethren, are left to contend with insults and injuries.

But our contemporary church struggles don't fit our previous schism dynamics. At this point, neo-conservatives aren't talking about separation from the Church of the Brethren. Instead, their goal appears to be controlling the church and reshaping it to fit their vision. These tactics risk fracturing the Brethren once again.

Schisms don't occur overnight. They build over long periods of anticipation and preparation. Tactics employed by political groups in secular society are being used within the church today. One of these is to aggressively generate conflict and confrontation. The other is the encouragement of passive-aggressive withholding of verbal, financial, and even prayerful support from the leadership and programs of the denomination to make their tasks even harder.

lowers of dissenting groups are exploited and expected to concede agreement and allegiance in carrying out designated tasks, and to offer unquestioning compliance with various theological interpretations. Common respect and the willingness to appreciate the faithfulness in others are progressively diminished.

A Palestinian Jew from Nazareth, Jesus was well aware of the religious dynamics of his era. All Jews were taught “covenant theology” with the belief that Yahweh had chosen them to play a unique role in the history of the world. Pharisees sought to live a life of spiritual purity by meticulously following the *torah* (Jewish law). Their emphasis on the purity codes of the law resulted in rigid legalism and became a pretext for religiosity and hypocrisy. Pharisees could make any other Jew feel guilty by asking how that person practiced the purity codes of 600 written laws and 6,000 oral laws. Purity criteria inculcate rigid, non-empathetic, and exploitive behaviors.

With John the Baptist as his mentor, Jesus respected the Jewish *torah*, but he was renowned for preaching compassion, forgiveness, and love. His ministries were profoundly people-oriented. More than a Jewish teacher (*rabbi*), he also was experienced as a prophet,

miracle-worker, healer, defender of the poor and oppressed, and the founder of a new faith movement.

Robert Putnam (Harvard) and David Campbell (Notre Dame) in *Amazing Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* provide a widely praised study showing that religion does more to unite us than divide us as a society, and that it is the polarization of these times that causes divisions within Christianity and other world religions.

The authors explain that prior to World War II, America was a religiously moderate nation, where one's religion didn't indicate one's politics. The 1960s brought sharp social changes and lifestyle experimentation, and many Americans began moving away from organized religion. A second shock came in the 1970s and 1980s, with a strong reaction by religious conservatives becoming political activists. The third shock came in the 1990s and 2000s with a marked increase in the number of persons claiming no religious affiliation or membership, but who still consider themselves as spiritual and having humanistic values.

Over the same five decades, American ecumenism increased, waned, and began evolving into the development of stronger interfaith relationships between believers in the major world religious traditions. The moral capacities and cooperation by these believers of the world religions hold the possibility of challenging and changing various global crises of poverty, hunger, violence, war, environmental destruction, etc. Increasingly, younger adults are moving away from what they see as hypocrisy and religiosity in every faith tradition.

Putnam and Campbell came to the conclusion that what has been described as a "religionization of politics" parallels a "politicization of religion." Every Christian denomination has seen an increase of both neo-conservative and neo-progressive absolutists, but the majority of the denominational members are in the middle of this spectrum. The "middle church" makes up more than 60 percent in the various denominations, including the Church of the Brethren. The politicization of religion describes the development and maintenance of "over-against" faith positions, methods of governing, and relationships.

The Divine Servant knew about raging turmoil hiding behind the masks of his disciples. Their masks—and ours—cover fear and insecurity. Our fear converts almost instantly into anger, where we choose to face or flee whatever makes us afraid. While initially fear converts into anger as an involuntary emotional reaction, anger solidifies into the



JESUS ACCEPTED AND LOVED OTHERS WITH THE COURAGE TO SACRIFICE HIS LIFE FOR THEM. HE CHALLENGED HIS FOLLOWERS TO SHARE LOVE IN ALL SITUATIONS.

learned, chosen, and conditioned patterns of hatred and prejudice, including religious prejudice.

The symptoms of religious prejudice aren't subtle. Its public tactics of manipulation, coercion, misrepresentation, and domination are visible in prejudicial choices and conduct. Wayne Oates and other pastoral theologians who have studied personality types in church dynamics recognize that prejudice is always accompanied by self-centeredness, self-aggrandizement, and self-righteousness.

We should have learned from the Civil Rights struggle that changing prejudicial attitudes isn't achieved by polite rational discussions. Meeting prejudicial behavior with silent avoidance only allows, condones, and even encourages more prejudice and hatred. When Jesus told the parable of the plank and the speck, he was specifically talking about the religious manipulators, who look for the faults in others and ignore the larger faults in themselves. (Matt. 7:3)

Bearing the futility of efforts to restore relationships, with the Psalmist we cry ". . . I groan because of the turmoil in my heart" (Psa. 38:8). Our peacemaking heritage should lead us to quickly reach out to one another and focus on healing the Church of the Brethren, but our fears and resentments have erected roadblocks of animosity. Countering today's polarization and politicization of religion requires building responsive and responsible relationships. We can continue to focus on our differences, or we can learn to relate to each other in new ways.

Diana Eck, founder and director of the Pluralism Project of Harvard University, offers an alternative process for dialoguing: pluralism. She describes the components of pluralism:

- First, pluralism isn't just recognizing diversity, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given. It's an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.
- Second, pluralism doesn't just mean tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and believers in other religious traditions to know anything about one another. Tolerance doesn't remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, and the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence.
- Third, pluralism doesn't mean simplifying the views of others, but *the encounter of commitments*. It doesn't require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind. Pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship with one another.

- Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue doesn't mean everyone at the table will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with *one's commitments*.

Lent is a time of prayerful spiritual reflection and renewal. It was never intended to be easy. Jesus accepted and loved others with the courage to sacrifice his life for them. He challenged his followers to share love in all situations. He rejected the rigid purity codes, which divided believers and placed them in opposition to each other.

The Divine Servant called and calls us to live our commitments, find meaning and purpose in the body of the church, heal divisions that block loving one another, and always, always place *loving others as ourselves* as our life standard of discipleship. **W**

Larry Ulrich is a member of the York Center (Ill.) Church of the Brethren and an affiliate of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University.

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God's masterpiece

Poem by Kay M. Bowman

Michael Foley Photography/Creative Commons



Although I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more. —Nahum 1:12

Born in the sculptor's hand,
The masterpiece stood alone,
Enduring a thousand blows
As its shape took form in stone.

Each blow made it sharper,
Clearer, if you will,
Till the image became distinct,
And none its place could fill.

And aren't I like that, too, Lord,
In your Master Sculptor's hand?
Enduring blows one by one
In the image you have planned?

That I be glorified in Christ
And reflect his glory back
That others may see his likeness
And help them stay on track.

The trials will serve their purpose
In who you want me to be,
A person of worth and beauty
In the things I cannot see.

As the next blow is received
By your Master Sculptor's hand,
May I remember I am your masterpiece
In the image you have planned.

Kay M. Bowman is a writer and inspirational speaker living in Harrisonburg, Va. She and her husband, Harold, served almost 40 years in pastoral ministry in Church of the Brethren congregations from coast to coast. A writer for more than 55 years, she was editor of church newsletters for 12 years and wrote her first book at age 12.

Hands holding one of the glass lamps that were given to church leaders by Pope Benedict XVI at the peace gathering in Assisi.



Photographic Service L'Osservatore Romano

Ripe for harvest

Brethren work for peace bears fruit

An interview with general secretary Stan Noffsinger

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

“A FRANCISCAN MONK HANDED ME THE LAMP,” NOFFSINGER REMEMBERED. “HE LOOKED ME SQUARE IN THE EYE AND SAID, ‘THIS IS GOD’S LIGHT FOR YOU TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE WHOLE WORLD. MAY THIS LIGHT SHINE IN YOUR EVERY DEED.’”

Lending the heart of who we are” to other people of faith is how general secretary Stan Noffsinger describes Brethren work for peace these days.

In reality, Brethren have been peacemakers since the beginning of the movement, when Alexander Mack’s small Bible study group began meeting around the Word more than 300 years ago. In the 20th century the Brethren ramped up their peace efforts, with high points that are easily identified: Brethren Service in a devastated Europe, establishment of Brethren Volunteer Service, participation in the founding of the World Council of Churches and CROP and Church World Service, the witness of conscientious objectors during the world wars and Vietnam.

Since the close of the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) results of Brethren work for peace is becoming evident, said Noffsinger in a recent interview. Envision a new emphasis on peace emerging among different Christian traditions as ripe fruit hanging from the branches of the global ecumenical tree.

‘Peace is being redefined’

“The fruit really began to be evident when we went to Jamaica for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation,” Noffsinger said. The convocation was sponsored by the World Council of Churches, which includes some 350 Christian communions around the world. The gathering expressed “a passion, a desire, perhaps a new optic on the teachings of Jesus, that is

calling on Christians everywhere to seek a life of nonviolence,” Noffsinger said.

Part of the work of the Decade to Overcome Violence, and the basis document for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, was an “Ecumenical Call to Just Peace.” The paper comes to the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly in 2013 for discussion and possible adoption.

A common definition of peace for Christians came out of the Vietnam era of resistance and protest against a particular war, Noffsinger said. Now the world Christian community is in the process of both broadening and clarifying what peace means for followers of Jesus. The new definition that is emerging is “more clearly focusing on replacing the fight or flight tendencies of human beings with that of Christ.”

Brethren also may too narrowly define peace as being against war. “That isn’t the only focus of being a peace church,” Noffsinger emphasized. The shift in the global Christian community to new thinking about the possibilities of just peace, challenges Brethren to become a Living Peace Church not just a historic one. Noffsinger calls it a

One face of the struggle for peace in the 21st century. During the opening service of last year’s International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica, an interpretive dancer helped the group visualize what “just peace” might mean. She repeatedly dipped a cloth in a basin of water and wrung it out high over her head, allowing the water—symbolic of the new life given by Christ—run down over her body. It was an apt metaphor for both the struggle and the joy of working for God’s shalom and Christ’s peace in a complicated world.



Stan Noffsinger shaking hands with Pope Benedict XVI at the gathering in Assisi, Italy.



Photographic Services L'Observatore Romano

“coming together of mind and spirit that is refocusing our energy back toward the nonviolent engagement that Christ calls us to.”

Signs of the times

There are a variety of signs that Brethren work for peace is bearing fruit. “To have global Christian communions acknowledge that war has never yielded a sustainable solution to conflict,” is one key sign, in Noffsinger’s point of view. He hopes the Church of the Brethren too will seize this shift in thinking as an opportunity—both to recommit to peace, and to redefine that commitment.

Another sign is the extent to which the Brethren witness continues to reach far beyond the denomination. “I can remember Judy Mills Reimer (former general secretary) saying over and over that the Brethren have undue influence in the world for our size. I would roll my eyes, but she wasn’t wrong!” he commented.

In his experience, others in the broader Christian and interfaith communities are watching the Brethren, and what we do, with great interest. They may have a better understanding of the unique gifts we have to share, than we do ourselves.

There are many concrete examples of others wanting Brethren input on peace, and Noffsinger quickly rattles off several:

- When a resolution on Afghanistan came to the National Council of Churches, Brethren representatives were called on to make dramatic revisions to the document. Similarly, when the concept of “Responsibility to Protect” came before an ecumenical body for consideration, Brethren were among those who helped clarify the issues involved.
- Recently, NCC leaders have heralded peace church positions on a wide variety of issues. The church’s advo-

cacy and peace witness staff position based in Washington, D.C., is a groundbreaking joint placement with the NCC.

- Brethren leaders were invited to a meeting with the controversial head of state of Iran, when he visited the United States a couple of years ago, at a time when other Christian denominations were unwilling to participate.

- New Brethren connections are being built with theologians and peacemakers from evangelical and Pentecostal traditions.

- Leaders of another church denomination are requesting consultation with Brethren leaders, to talk about what it means to become a peace church.

Noffsinger gives equal credit to the other two Historic Peace Churches for what he sees as great strides in the Christian understanding of peace. “The Mennonites and Friends are called to share in their spheres of influence from that same strength,” he said. “We’re not doing it all, but I think the three of us get unusual attention given our relatively small size.”

Next steps for peace

What are the next steps? Noffsinger is focused on the discussion of just peace by the World Council of Churches, and its possible outcomes. He doesn’t seem concerned by the possibility that the “Ecumenical Call to Just Peace” may not be adopted by the world body of Christians. Even having the discussion will be worthwhile. Getting the global church to discuss such a statement “is what it’s all about,” he said.

The development of a study guide on the “Ecumenical Call to Just Peace” will be a key element of the discussion, and Noffsinger invites Brethren to take part in the study process and give their feedback.

But the place where he really wants to see next steps

THIS KIND OF PEACE WORK "IS NOT THE WORK OF A DENOMINATION, OR A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION. IT IS THE WORK OF AN INDIVIDUAL WHO SAYS—AT THE RIGHT PLACE AND THE RIGHT TIME—THAT THERE IS ANOTHER WAY OF LIVING."

for peace among Brethren is at home, in our own communities, and on a personal level. The model he points to is Brethren pastor and church planter Samuel Sarpiya, who spoke out in his community of Rockford, Ill., when the area was wracked by a violent incident potentially setting police and the African-American community against each other.

This kind of peace work "is not the work of a denomination, or a national organization. It is the work of an individual who says—at the right place and the right time—that there is another way of living."

Or the model of a pastor who attended a Historic Peace Church gathering in Indonesia, where peacemaking may play a critical role in difficult intercultural relationships. He told the story of his congregation happening to control a well that supplied water to many non-Christian neighbors. When his congregation began to experience oppression from the surrounding community, the church decided to keep the well running and the water flowing. Opinions in the community were turned around by the decision of Christians to share an important resource with all.

Noffsinger wants to see yet more fruits of peace in coming years. He wants Brethren "to raise awareness within our churches so more and more of us will have the courage to stand up at our school boards, at our town hall meetings, to call for Christ's nonviolent reconciliation of people with people and people with God.

"While we may not have time each to become experts at peace and reconciliation, we each have opportunities to bear witness to our enemy. It's time to begin saying what we are as a people: as followers of Jesus we are a people of peace and reconciliation. We need that point of unity within ourselves and in our outreach to the community at large."

The light of peace

His personal clarity about the crucial nature of peace for Christians came during an interfaith gathering called by the Roman Catholic Church in Assisi, Italy, late last year. He attended as an all-expenses-paid guest of the Vatican, whose strong support for the gathering sent a signal of the importance Pope Benedict XVI places on peace. Noffsinger represented the worldwide Brethren movement, in his role as a member of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions.

Faith leaders gathering in Assisi were asked not just to represent their communities, but also to make a personal commitment. Following is the statement each was invited to speak:

Violence never again!

War never again!

Terrorism never again!

In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth Justice and Peace, Forgiveness and Life, Love!

Each also received a beautiful oil lamp as a gift from the Vatican. "A Franciscan monk handed me the lamp," Noffsinger remembered. "He looked me square in the eye and said, 'This is God's light for you to bear witness to the whole world. May this light shine in your every deed.'

"I would love to have one of these magnificent globes to hand to every member of the Church of the Brethren, and to say the same words to them. It was a holy moment when indeed the Christ light was present, clear, personal. By receiving it I committed myself to that light, the light of God's shalom and Christ's peace." ❏

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford is director of News Services for the Church of the Brethren.

Unity is not enforced but nurtured

by Joshua Brockway

Situated between John's record of Jesus' teachings and the fast-paced narrative of his death and resurrection, is Jesus' farewell prayer.

Often called the High Priestly Prayer, John records Christ's intercessions for his followers. Among these wishes is a notable and often cited petition: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (John 17:20-21).

Many theologians have invoked this section of Jesus' prayer in the debates of their times. Any difference of belief or practice was perceived as direct challenge to this desire for unity made clear in Jesus' prayer. One thing is wrong with such proclamations of schism: They all assume unity is based on belief. As Jesus makes clear, the oneness of his followers is a result of their relationship to one another and to himself. "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22).

Those of us who follow Jesus today seem to have forgotten the relational aspect of this petition. We have come to assume unity is something we achieve or protect, while ignoring the fact that unity is given to us by our connections to Christ. Instead, we have erected institutions to safeguard our unity, creating hierarchies or interest groups, and in so doing thinking that we are maintaining "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

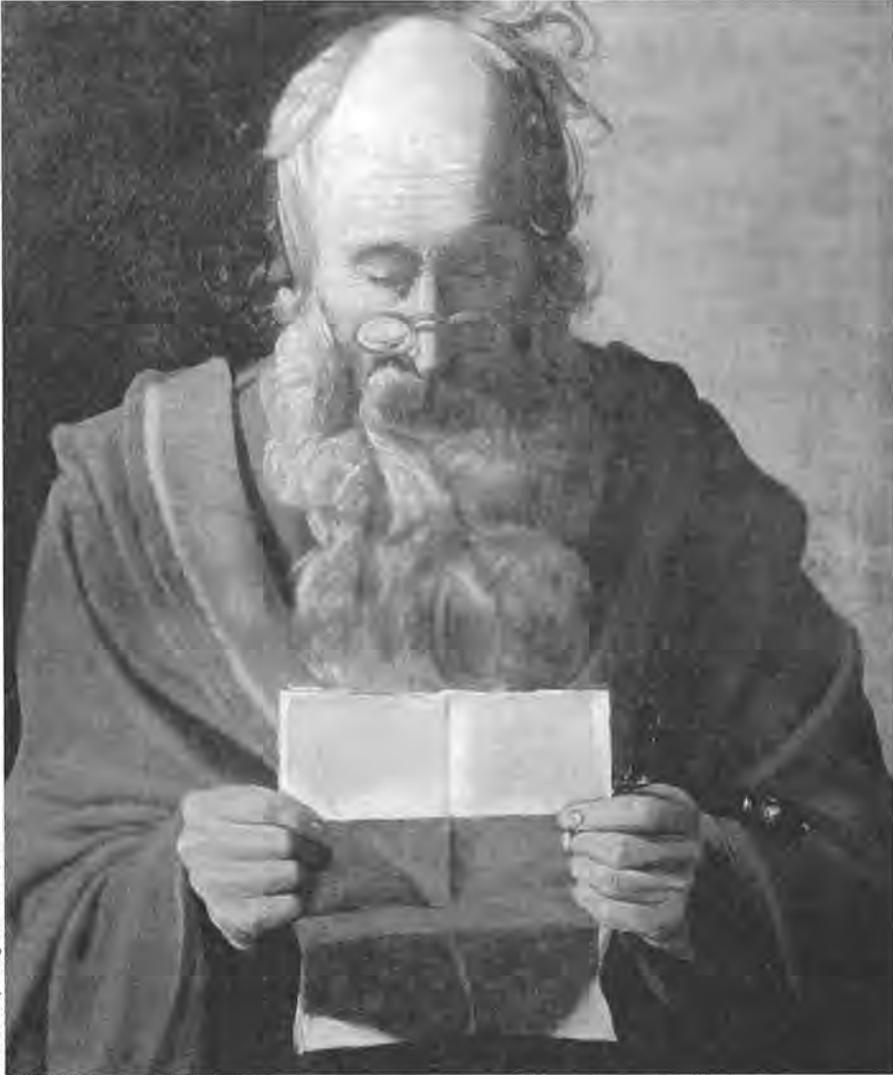
Unfortunately, we have strayed far from the very texts we proclaim as our creed. Just pages from Jesus' prayer in John we encounter 21 letters which were shared among the first Christians. Each of these letters reveals congregations

as diverse and numerous as the cities of the Roman world. Though the theology worked out by Paul runs through each of the letters, the circumstances of each community shape his pastoral response. For instance, the practical concerns of Rome are drastically different from those of Philippi. If we were to outline the two letters side by side, it would be clear that the Roman church had to confront the hubris of identity, whether Jew or Gentile. Yet the wealthy city of Philippi and her Christian community had to confront the use of its resources. What is more, it is plain to any reader that the Philippian Christians had succeeded, whereas the congregation of Rome had some hard work yet to do.

Once these texts were set apart as scripture, it became too easy to ignore the circumstances that led to their creation. Instead of reading them as examples of the first Christians keeping connected, we now approach the letters as doctrinal documents. Such a reading places an emphasis on *beliefs* as the unifying factor, rather than relationship building. By doing this, the contextualizing elements—such as the standard greeting or the personal asides at the end—become simply proof texts. We think we need only read the letters and discern the right doctrine and we will be made one. Nothing could be farther from reality. Rather, these letters reveal the relational work of unity. Though Paul is clear that understanding the Christ event is important, his letters demonstrate the practices of conversation and interaction that are central to staying together amid great diversity.

Invoking the New Testament as our creed presses us as Brethren to recall that church united in Christ includes different communities. The unified church is made up of the

ONCE THESE TEXTS WERE SET APART AS SCRIPTURE, IT BECAME TOO EASY TO IGNORE THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THEIR CREATION. INSTEAD OF READING THEM AS EXAMPLES OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS KEEPING CONNECTED, WE NOW APPROACH THE LETTERS AS DOCTRINAL DOCUMENTS. SUCH A READING PLACES AN EMPHASIS ON BELIEFS AS THE UNIFYING FACTOR, RATHER THAN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING.



congregations in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi. They are one, not because of their beliefs, but because of their shared connection to Jesus Christ.

Our spiritual ancestors recognized this reality of unity. For the early Brethren, staying connected was the way to live into Jesus' prayer. Whether it was through the networks developed by church growth, or through intentional practices such as the Annual Meeting and the seasons of love feast, the Brethren found ways to visit different communities of Brethren and practice their ordinances. Most historians mark the first baptism in 1723 as the establishment of the Brethren in North America. Such an event, however, was not a celebration of a single congregation, but of all the Brethren in the region. The sharing of ordinances extended into the sharing of love feast across congregational lines. It was not uncommon for clusters of congregations to schedule their celebration of the feast so that neighboring sisters and brothers could attend. The effect was something like a season of love feasts.

Even when communities of Brethren were separated by miles, congregations shared leadership. For instance, when a community was about to celebrate love feast, another congregation would send its elders to lead the gathering. Of course, a congregation would appreciate the new voices and ideas, but this practice also spread perspectives and insights around the country. Though we might have a renewal or revival service today and invite a leader to speak, this

sharing of elders often bridged geographic and ideological differences. In one notable example, it was this kind of sharing around the ordinance that revealed different modes of washing feet around the denomination.

Differences such as these often surface within the minutes of Annual Conference. It may be easy to dismiss the questions presented at each gathering as silly quibbles over inane details, but the very practice of meeting together regularly is a significant way to keep working toward unity among Jesus' followers. Just as the love feast served as an opportunity to hear the scriptures and interpret them in the light of current events and ideas, the Annual Meeting allowed the Brethren the

opportunity to discern together appropriate practices and beliefs for the time. This is especially the case for one of the first recorded assemblies, in 1742. In light of the work of Count Zinzendorf and his desire to unify German Protestants in North America, the Brethren gathered together to discern an appropriate action as one community.

In *Portrait of a People*, a survey of the Church of the Brethren as it turned 300, author Carl Bowman observed that the more a person attended Annual Conference the more they identified with core beliefs of the Brethren. Though correlation is rarely proved, it is worth noting that the more people interact with their sisters and brothers of the denomination, the more they share in belief and practice. Or, as Bowman notes, Annual Conference is one of the thickeners to our shared life (pp. 32-35). This unity is not something enforced through creeds, but rather is nurtured in interaction with different sisters and brothers and in the sharing of worship.

Our Brethren ancestors developed very intentional ways of conversation and discernment, thus living into unity. Today, when we assume unity is best seen in our affinity groups, we ignore the fact that unity emerges from our shared life together. As Carl Bowman so eloquently puts it: "Relationships are the reservoirs of commitment, and values are transformed in conversation with others" (p. 32).²⁴

Joshua Brockway is director of spiritual life and discipleship for the Church of the Brethren.

Brethren mark second anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake

On Jan. 12, the Church of the Brethren in Haiti spent time in fasting and prayer, remembering the earthquake that devastated the Caribbean island nation in early 2010. Jan. 12 was the second anniversary of the earthquake.

The powerful 7.0 earthquake hit at 4:53 p.m. on a weekday afternoon. Its epicenter was Léogâne, a town 15 miles from the capital city of Port-au-Prince. It caused the deaths of some 250,000 people. Numerous aftershocks, as well as the aftereffects of injuries, illness, homelessness, lack of sanitation, and other privations caused yet more deaths in the days and weeks that followed.

More than 1 million people in Port-au-Prince and surroundings areas were left without shelter. Rubble filled the streets. Tent cities and encampments sprang up. A cholera outbreak many months after the earthquake was linked to a continued widespread lack of shelter, sanitation facilities, and clean water. Now, two years later, many Haitians still struggle to regain

homes and employment.

Since the earthquake, the Church of the Brethren has been heavily involved in disaster response in Haiti. The collaborative response combines efforts of Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Global Mission and Service program with Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti).

At first, Brethren focused on immediate needs: food and water, medical care, temporary housing, and those suffering psychological trauma. Building of permanent homes for earthquake survivors then started, and longer-term needs of Brethren congregations and their communities began to be addressed.

The effort has included building a new Ministry Center and Guesthouse complex for Eglise des Freres Haitiens in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood Croix des Bouquets. Work groups from the US also have been traveling to Haiti to help.

In these two years, the Emergency Disaster Fund has expended \$1 million in grants for Haiti, supporting both Church of the Brethren and ecumenical disaster response.

Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) director Roy Winter (left) and Miami pastor Ludovic St. Fleur (standing at center) along with BDM Haiti coordinator Jeff Boshart visited Haitian Brethren shortly after the devastating earthquake of Jan. 12, 2010.



Brethren in Haiti, 2010-2011

This overview of work and achievements of the Brethren in Haiti 2010-2011 was compiled by Klebert Exceus, who has led the Brethren Disaster Ministries building projects there. It was translated from French with the help of Jeff Boshart, Haiti coordinator for BDM. Brethren Disaster Ministries director Roy Winter has contributed information on strategic partnerships in Haiti.

All disaster-related relief and response programs were funded by Brethren Disaster Ministries via the Emergency Disaster Fund, including support for strategic partnerships and much of the agricultural work, except where it is noted that the Global Food Crisis Fund supported the project.

All of the church building was made possible through special donations from congregations and individuals to the Emerging Global Mission Fund.

2010 Distributions:

- Seed distribution in 20 areas of the country
- Support (through the Global Food Crisis Fund) for an agricultural program in Bombadopolis distributing goats
- Water filters in more than 15 areas of the country to combat cholera
- Distributions of food in Port-au-Prince during six months following the earthquake for around 300 families
- Household kits to more than 500 beneficiaries across the country
- Distributed cases of canned chicken in more than 12 areas of the country after the earthquake; approximately 5,000 cases



Idrak Din of the Rural Service Center in Ankleshwar area of Gujarat State, India, displays a pump for drip irrigation provided by the area government to farmers. The Rural Service Center provides help in accessing such government aid, among other work. The Rural Service Center recently received a grant of \$8,000 from the Global Food Crisis Fund.

GFCF gives grants to Rural Service Center, Brethren group in Congo

Recent grants from the Church of the Brethren's Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) have gone to the Rural Service Center in India and an agricultural development project of Brethren congregations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

A grant of \$8,000 has gone to the Rural Service Center for its work in tribal and small-holder communities in the Ankleshwar area of Gujarat State, India. The money will support center operations that link small farm operators to resources such as soil testing, biogas development, animal vaccination, and greenhouse produce.

The Rural Service Center is an extension program begun by the Church of the Brethren in the late 1950s. This support for the center allows the church to stay actively involved in a region of India that is fast becoming a modernized breadbasket, according to the GFCF grant request. Within range of Mumbai, the area has an insatiable appetite for food, energy, and technology. While agribusinesses may flourish, smallholder farmers find the complexities of technology and capitalization overwhelming. The suicide rate of Indian farmers is among the highest in the world, the grant request said.

"For an Indian family to lose land that it has possessed for generations is devastating," said Jay Wittmeyer of the church's Global Mission and Service program. "A Global Food Crisis Fund grant of \$8,000 enables the Rural Service Center to help vulnerable farm families navigate the tumultuous times of globalization."

A grant of \$2,500 supports reconciliation and agriculture work in the DRC. A cluster of Brethren congregations in the Congo are working at mediation with displaced Pygmy and Bafulero communities. The funds will help enable displaced people to return home and restart agriculture, with reconciliation work remaining the prime focus.

For more about the Global Food Crisis Fund go to www.brethren.org/gfcf.

Built:

- Built temporary homes for around 50 families
- A community cistern and a water retention pond on the island of La Tortue (Tortuga) with support from the Global Food Crisis Fund
- A security wall around land purchased for a Ministry Center

Supported:

- The Paul Lochard School in the Delmas neighborhood of Port-au-Prince for one year by paying teachers, providing food, and temporary classrooms
- Three other schools in Haiti: Ecole Evangelique de la Nouvelle Alliance de St. Louis du Nord, Ecole des Freres de

La Tortue aux Plaines, and Ecole des Freres de Grand Bois Cornillon

- Mobile health clinics in six locations after the earthquake (now continuing in more than five areas of the country)

Purchased:

- A Nissan Frontier pick-up truck for transportation
- Land in Croix des Bouquets for a Ministry Center, guesthouse, and church offices

2011 Built:

- 50 homes, 45 square meters, following anti-seismic standards
- Guesthouse built on the

Ministry Center land to receive volunteers

- 5 churches (supported through the Emerging Global Mission Fund): Eglise des Freres de Gonaives, Eglise des Freres de Saut d'eau, Eglise des Freres de La Feriere, Eglise des Freres de Pignon, Eglise des Freres de Morne Boulage
- 5 church shelters (supported through the Emerging Global Mission Fund): La Premiere Eglise des Freres de Delmas, Eglise des Freres de Tom Gateau, Eglise des Freres de Marin, Eglise des Freres de Croix des Bouquets, Eglise des Freres de Canaan
- Currently around 23 churches or preaching points in Haiti

Supported:

- Financing for a micro-loan program for those families who could not find land upon which to build a permanent home, and paid rent for one year for those families
- Supported other agricultural programs in 12 different areas
- Created 500 jobs through all of these activities
- Provided civic, social, and Christian education for over 500 children in Port-au-Prince (through vacation Bible school)
- Supported other organizations working in Haiti (including IMA World Health and Church World Service)
- Sent groups of mission volunteers to work in the country

Devotion leaders announced for 2012 Annual Conference

Moderator Tim Harvey has announced leaders of the devotional times that will start the Monday and Tuesday business sessions at the 2012 Annual Conference. The Conference takes place in St. Louis, Mo., on July 7-11.

Morning devotions begin at 8:30 a.m. and will be led on Monday, July 9, by Wallace Cole, an interim district executive minister in Southeastern District; and on Tuesday, July 10, by Pamela Reist, a member of the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board and a pastor at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

Afternoon devotions will be led July 9 by Jonathan A. Prater, a new church planter in Shenandoah District and pastor of Mount Zion Church of the Brethren in Linville, Va.; and on July 10 by Becky Ullom, the Church of the Brethren's director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

Time set aside for devotional thoughts or Bible study

reflections also will include hymns and prayers, and will address the daily themes of the Conference.

In related news, the Conference Office has unveiled a new website design at www.brethren.org/ac, where the information packet for the 2012 Annual Conference is now available to download. Postcards giving the web address have been sent to each Church of the Brethren congregation. Unlike in years past, this year the information packet will not be distributed on disk but will be made available solely via the Annual Conference website.

The information packet provides basic information about the 2012 Conference with sections on the theme, schedule, location and facilities, fees, hotel information, age group

activities, Conference choir, and more.

Registration for the Conference is open online at the same website where the information packet is posted: www.brethren.org/ac.



PERSONNEL CHANGES

Jordan Blevins has resigned as advocacy officer and ecumenical peace coordinator for the Church of the Brethren and the National Council of Churches (NCC), effective March 1. He has served the Church of the Brethren, seconded to the NCC, since July 1, 2010, giving the denomination a new kind of witness and presence in Washington, D.C., and giving staff support to the peace witness of the NCC. Previously, he served in the NCC's Eco-Justice Program and Domestic Poverty Initiative.

Nathan and Jennifer Hosler have concluded their term of service as Church of the Brethren mission workers in Nigeria, returning to the United States in mid-December last year. They served as peace and reconciliation workers and as peace educators at Kulp Bible College, the ministry training school of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), as seconded staff serving under EYN leadership.

Gimbiya Kettering concluded her service as communications coordinator for On Earth Peace as of December last year. On Earth Peace closed the position of communications coordinator as of Dec. 31, 2011. She began employment with On Earth Peace in August 2007, and has edited print and electronic newslet-

ters, in addition to producing annual reports to constituents and coordinating the organization's participation at Annual Conference.

James S. Replogle concluded his service on the staff of On Earth Peace on Dec. 31, 2011. He was called in October 2010 to the temporary role of operations director, to assist the organization with strategic planning and transition.

Randi Rowan started Jan. 2 as program assistant for Congregational Life Ministries, at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill. Previously she was office coordinator for the director of Health Professions at Wheaton (Ill.) College, and has worked with the Evangelical Alliance Mission's US office in Wheaton.

Howard E. Royer has retired as manager of the Global Food Crisis Fund as of the end of 2011. He had completed eight years as GFCF manager, serving three-quarter time on a contract/volunteer basis. Also ending its work is the GFCF Grant Review Panel composed of three former international mission workers: Shantilal Bhagat of La Verne, Calif.; Peggy Boshart of Fort Atkinson, Wis.; and Ralph Royer of Claypool, Ind. The three served as volunteers. Howard Royer previously served on the denominational staff for 50 consecutive years from 1953-2003, starting out as a 1-W

conscientious objector and volunteer in stewardship. He then filled successive roles as youth editor, news director, editor of MESSENGER, coordinator of a salvation and justice program, and director of interpretation.

Athanasus Ungang and **Jillian Foerster** have begun work in South Sudan. Both have been placed with ecumenical partners, with sponsorship from the denomination's Global Mission and Service program. Ungang started in September 2011 as a program volunteer with the Africa Inland Church (AIC), a Sudanese church denomination where former Brethren mission worker Michael Wagner also was placed. Ungang is an ordained minister in the AIC, who became connected with the Church of the Brethren when he was translator for the late Phil and Louise Rieman while they were mission workers in Sudan. Since then he and his family emigrated to the US, where he worked for the state of South Dakota on immigrant placement. His wife and children continue to live in the US. Foerster is working with RECONCILE International as an administrative associate, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service. She is a member of Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic, Va., and holds a degree in international relations with a minor in economics.



On Earth Peace board chair Madalyn Metzger looks on as executive Bob Gross reports to Annual Conference in Grand Rapids.

On Earth Peace executive Bob Gross to move into new role at agency

On Earth Peace is launching a search for a new executive director. Bob Gross, who has served as director of On Earth Peace since October 2000, will be moving to another role in the organization.

"We have been planning for this transition for the past two years," said Gross, "and we look forward to strengthening our staff team with the addition of a new organizational leader. As our ministries grow in scope and depth, it is time for fresh leadership, and I look forward to a new set of responsibilities."

His tenure with On Earth Peace has included notable service to the denomination in the area of mediation work and training, including mediation work in India during conflict over former mission properties there, and most recently facilitating a special session of the Mission and Ministry Board as a part of denomination-wide conversations on sexuality, as the Church of the Brethren was

preparing for the 2011 Annual Conference.

He also has led several delegations to Israel and Palestine in cooperation with Christian Peacemaker Teams, but during the last delegation in January 2010 was detained by Israeli airport security and refused entry to the country, presumably because of his peacemaking work with Palestinian partners.

Gross has engaged in peacemaking work in a number of areas throughout his life, starting with his witness as a conscientious objector and draft resister. He and his family are part of a longstanding simple living community and farm near North Manchester, Ind., where his wife, Rachel Gross, leads the Death Row Support Project originally formed by concerned Church of the Brethren members in 1978.

On Earth Peace plans to have a new director on board this spring, and to introduce the new staff leader at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in St. Louis in July.

Brethren Mennonite Council is accepted as a BVS project site

The Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests (BMC) has been accepted as a placement site for Brethren Volunteer Service volunteers.

The group has applied on a regular basis for several years. During that time there have been Brethren volunteers who have worked at the BMC office in Minneapolis, but they have served through other volunteer organizations.

BVS currently lists more than 100 volunteer opportunities with projects and organizations that meet human needs, work for peace, advocate justice, and care for creation. Projects are located across the United States and in a number of other countries in Europe, Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. The program was begun as an initiative of young adults at the 1948 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren.

For more about BVS go to www.brethren.org/bvs/about.html.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

March 2 World Day of Prayer

March 9-10 Children's Disaster Services training, St. Clairsville, Ohio, and concurrently in Richland, Wash.

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

March 16-17 Children's Disaster Services training, New Carlisle (Ohio) Church of the Brethren, with concurrent trainings also in Snellville, Ga., and South Haven, Minn.

March 17 Deacon Training, West Charleston Church of the Brethren, Tipp City, Ohio

March 18 One Great Hour of Sharing offering emphasis

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

March 23-24 Children's Disaster Services training, Cerro Gordo (Ill.) Church of the Brethren and Dallas Center (Iowa) Church of the Brethren

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

April 6 Good Friday

April 8 Easter

April 11-13 Fellowship of Brethren Homes Forum, Cross Keys Village-the Brethren Home Community, New Oxford, Pa.

April 13-14 Bethany Seminary Presidential Forum, Richmond, Ind.

Client investments enable Brethren Benefit Trust to take a stand against human trafficking

Putting the spotlight on global slavery and trafficking—that is what retirement contributions and congregational investments through Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) have helped achieve through the agency's socially responsible investing initiatives.

BBT signed on to a January letter urging the US Congress to require large companies to enact policies and auditing procedures that can expose and eliminate human mistreatment in their global supply chains.

"BBT represents the denomina-

tion's positions, as established by Annual Conference actions, through its socially responsible investing activities," said Steve Mason, director of BBT's socially responsible investing initiatives. "Our members and clients have a voice, and today that voice is urging Congress and large companies to take significant action against trafficking and slavery."

Through its relationship with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, an interfaith corporate advocacy organization, BBT has signed

on to the letter, which is addressed to House of Representatives speaker John Boehner and majority leader Eric Cantor. It urges Republican leadership to place the Business Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act (HR 2759) at the top of the Financial Services Committee's agenda. This bill requires companies with a minimum of \$100 million in gross receipts to report their organization's efforts to address trafficking and slavery to the Securities Exchange Commission and on their websites.

The letter reads, "Given trends in globalization and growing concerns regarding working conditions, labor issues, human trafficking, and slavery, investors and other stakeholders will increasingly call for greater disclosure from companies related to their supply chains. We therefore strongly encourage the Republican House leadership to support investors, companies, workers, and consumers by moving this important legislation forward in an expeditious manner."

Signing on to this letter is another step in BBT's efforts to represent its members and clients by bringing human rights matters to the attention of the US government and publicly traded companies. In 2011, BBT's work with energy company ConocoPhillips helped to persuade the company to review its Human Rights Position to address the rights of indigenous peoples occupying areas in which ConocoPhillips does business. An August 2010 letter from BBT to President Barack Obama urged the US government to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For more information visit brethren-benefittrust.org/socially-responsible-investing or contact Mason at 800-746-1505 ext. 369 or smason@cobbt.org.

Brian Solem is publications coordinator for Brethren Benefit Trust.

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"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."—Matthew 7:24

Youth and young adult activities planned for AC 2012

A wide range of activities are on tap for youth at Annual Conference in St. Louis this summer, including the following:

"New Fire: Youth and Young Adults and the Ecumenical Movement"

is the presentation by Jennifer Leath slated for the Ecumenical Luncheon on July 10. Leath is an ordained minister and itinerant elder in the First Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and a doctoral candidate at Yale University in African-American studies and religious studies with an emphasis in religious ethics. She serves as co-moderator of the Joint Consultative Group between the World Council of Churches and the Pentecostal churches, and is a member of the WCC youth commission. Tickets are \$17. For further information, go to www.cobannualconference.org/StLouis/EcumenicalLuncheon.pdf.

On Earth Peace is sponsoring a Peace Vigil and Drum Circle

to close out the young adult experience of the Conference. The event is to "bring God's Shalom and Christ's peace in a quiet, peaceful, spiritual event in downtown St. Louis." Young adults are invited to bring their voices, prayers, stringed instruments, and drums when they gather at 10 p.m. on July 10.

Also sponsored by On Earth Peace are a number of insight sessions including "The Vision of On Earth Peace: A Conversation with the New Executive Director" (to be named prior to Conference); "The Science of Sexuality" led by McPherson (Kan.) College natural science professor and church deacon Jonathan Frye; "Welcome

Matters: Understanding and Managing Social Change" led by Carol Wise of the Brethren and Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests; and "From Marine Sergeant to Conscientious Objector" featuring CO and former Marine Corey Gray, among others. The Step Up! program for youth and young adults is the focus of the On Earth Peace Breakfast on July 10. Breakfast tickets cost \$16. Find the On Earth Peace event flier at www.cobannualconference.org/StLouis/EventsOnEarthPeace.pdf.

Justin Hollenberg



Above: Youth small group discussion at the 2008 Annual Conference. Below: A gathering of drummers at the 2006 Annual Conference.

Young adults and singles/night owls will join together for a nighttime by flashlight experience of the City Museum of St. Louis on July 7. This "Night at the Museum" is offered at a greatly reduced entrance fee of only \$6 per person. "Housed in the 600,000 square foot former Shoe Company, the museum is an eclectic mixture of playground, fun-house, surrealistic pavilion, and architectural marvel," says the flier. See the Information Packet at www.brethren.org/ac.

Junior high youth will have a unique opportunity to spend the morning of

July 10 at St. Louis' Old Courthouse learning about the Dred Scott case and 19th century slavery, and considering the issues of modern-day slavery and human trafficking. The daily rate for July 10 is \$35. The cost to attend junior high activities for the entire Conference is \$85, which includes a visit to the Gateway Arch, a Mississippi River cruise, and the St. Louis Zoo, among other events. Other groups planning to visit St. Louis' Gateway Arch include the middlers (grades 3-5) and senior high. See the Information Packet at www.brethren.org/ac for more age-group activities and fees.



BITS&PIECES

Work at WCC conference in Crete

Young Christians are invited to apply to the World Council of Churches Stewards Program for a learning experience at the WCC Central Committee meeting, Aug. 23-Sept. 7 in Crete. Applicants must be age 18-30. During the meetings stewards will work in the areas of worship, conference room, documentation, press office, sound, and other administrative and support tasks. Before the meetings, stewards follow an ecumenical learning program which exposes them to key issues of the ecumenical movement. The last phase of the program focuses on designing projects that stewards will implement back home. Send in completed application forms to the WCC youth desk no later than March 15. Brethren who apply are requested to copy Becky Ullom, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, at bullom@brethren.org. More information is at www.oikoumene.org

An uncommon book of common prayer

If the original Brethren weren't precisely Protestant (we weren't protesting anything—we were trying to *be* something) that doesn't mean we didn't react against a few things. One of them was extreme formalism in worship.

Liturgy in particular. Nineteenth-century Brethren theologian Peter Nead thought we ought to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day. But the idea that worship in general, and prayers in particular, should be scripted was foreign to Brethren.



FRANK RAMIREZ

Even so, I can heartily recommend *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. The authors (Shane Claiborne, Enuma Okoro, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove) have demonstrated a faith that is more about doing than talking, which is a comfortable place for Brethren. They invite us through a program of prayer to "enter a counter-

intuitive story," to step away from a culture based on commercialism, power, and violence, into something eternal, God's time, distinct from calendar and chronometer.

Wilson-Hartgrove is a prolific author who spoke at the 2011 National Older Adult Conference of the Church of the Brethren. He is a self-identified "new monastic" who lives with his family and several others in an intentional community in what might be charitably described as an underserved section of Durham, N.C. His great awakening came when as a journalist he was invited to be part of a Christian Peacemaker Team in Iraq before and during the start of the second Iraq War. He has remained dedicated to simple living and radical discipleship ever since.

Brethren youth were wowed by Shane Claiborne, founder of The Simple Way, an inner-city community in Philadelphia, at the 2010 National Youth Conference. Enuma Okoro is a writer, artist, and editorial consultant in Raleigh, N.C.

Daily morning prayers weave traditional language of the ages with quotations and stories about disciples of all eras, from Augustine and St. Patrick and St. Francis to Isidore the

Farmer (1070-1130) who did not found an order, nor write a book, but tilled the land and, despite his poverty, showed great hospitality and generosity to all. Saints such as Dorothy Day, John Wesley, Martin Luther King, Henri Nouwen, Julia Ward Howe, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, and Oscar Romero are quoted and celebrated.

The authors also include commemorations of martyrs and special days worthy of remembrance. On Sept. 11, for instance, we are reminded not only of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but also the 1973 murder of Salvador Allende, president of Chile, overthrown in a CIA-backed coup. Sept. 15 recalls the racist bombing of a church in Birmingham during the Civil Rights era that led to the death of four school girls. May 16 is the date when Denmark became the first European country to ban the importation of slaves (1792) and was also the date when Dirk Willems was burned at the stake. (The authors note that Willems was Anabaptist, a category that "includes Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish.")

The hymns that accompany prayer include "We Shall Not Be Moved," "Steal Away to Jesus," "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence," "Nothin' but the Blood," the doxology, "Amazing Grace," and many others from radically different traditions.

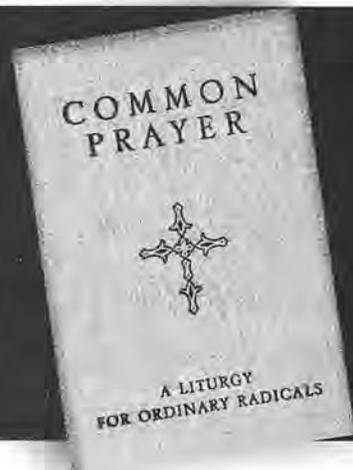
The mid-day prayers are the same every day, encouraging eventual memorization. Evening prayer follows a one-week cycle. Those who follow this plan of prayer will daily recite the fruits of the Spirit text by Paul in Galatians, pray daily the prayer of St. Francis as well as the Beatitudes, and prevent Peter Nead from spinning in his grave by praying the Lord's Prayer three times each day!

As one who has spent decades quietly reacting against formalism in worship and prayer, I find this book to be a challenging, enlarging, and satisfying way to praise God, from whom all blessings flow, in the company of Christians I admire, for the glory of God and my neighbor's good. **W**

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. **Authors:** Shane Claiborne, Enuma Okoro, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. **List price:** \$24.99, hardcover. **Pages:** 592. **Publisher:** Zondervan (Nov. 16, 2010). *Common Prayer* helps today's diverse church pray together across traditions and denominations. With an ear to the particulars of how various liturgical traditions pray, and using an advisory team of liturgy experts, the authors have created a tapestry of prayer that celebrates the best of each tradition. The book also includes a unique songbook composed of music and classic lyrics to over 50 songs from various traditions, including African spirituals, traditional hymns, Mennonite gathering songs, and Taize chants. "I see this text as a healthy injection of ancient wisdom into the postmodern church," says Gregory Soderberg. "This book breathes a freshness and a vitality that are missing from the more traditional churches that have never abandoned the historic liturgies."



A question I could not answer

When we lived in Bangladesh, a young Muslim man would stop in to talk with me about all sorts of things that could make his country a better place. Very early into his visits I began to talk about the biggest influence on my thinking, the teachings of Jesus Christ. Immediately his interest soared. Although his English was limited, I gave him a small comic book about the life of Jesus. Every time we met thereafter, he would pull the book from his back pocket and ask questions about certain sections of it. Then one day he asked a question I could not answer. However, maybe you can. The question was, "Why, if Jeshu (Jesus) tells us to love each other, are there so many divisions among the Christians?"

Carolyn Shenk
Bel Air, Md.

Changing the dangerous climate

I recently talked with a young woman in our denomination who spoke enthusiastically about Annual Conference because she felt that knowing where we stood opened the door to new directions and conversations. Then her eyes filled with tears. "I know what they might do to me, but if I don't speak up, what else matters? If not at church, where else would I?" My heart broke as I realized she was committed to risk being killed in order to speak up for God's inclusive love.

If we want to change this dangerous climate in our denomination, we each need to ask: Am I contributing to this culture with my good intentions, ridicule, or aggression? We all need to practice matching what we say with

what we mean and do. We need leaders to create safe spaces, interrupt hate language, work toward win/win solutions, and facilitate healing. We need participants to speak up for themselves without putting others down while supporting courageous leadership. We all need training. It won't be easy, but it can be done. It will open us to God's transforming presence as we renew our

call to continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, and together.

Reba Herder
Claremont, Calif.

Courageous common-sense

The 1983 paper, "Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective," offers the Church of the Brethren seven caring,

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The opinions expressed in "Letters" are not necessarily those of MESSENGER. Readers should receive them in the same way as when differing views are expressed in face-to-face conversation.

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collaborative, and grace-filled ways to demonstrate Christ-like love for our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) sisters and brothers in Christ. The 2011 Annual Conference amendment to that paper calls upon the Church to “engage in deeper conversations beyond the query process” when it comes to matters of sexuality. There are many ways for the church to engage in

deeper conversations. All of them require LGBTQ Christians to have a full and equal voice in those conversations.

The Brethren/Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests is by far the best organization within the Church of the Brethren to speak to the needs, wants, concerns, thoughts, and prayers of LGBTQ Christians. Therefore, I strongly affirm the courageous decision of

Programs and Arrangements Committee of Annual Conference to allow BMC to have booth space at the 2012 Annual Conference as one means to further the conversations in the church beyond the query process.

This decision is not only courageous, it is also common sense. Would we not expect a full and equal voice for women if we were talking about issues related to sexism; for older adults on an older adult issue; for persons of non-white ethnicity on a multicultural issue? Denying a full and equal voice for LGBTQ Christians does not deepen the conversation, but stifles it. Denying a full and equal voice for LGBTQ Christians means that any conversation on human sexuality is not serious or faithful, and not a real conversation at all.

Brian Flory
Fort Wayne, Ind.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



I am not a label

Thanks for the reminder that God loves us. And thanks for the story about dog-human love (January-February MESSENGER editorial). I love and receive love from my four-legged friends, too.

However, I feel I must respond to your remark about your dog that “she wheezes and gasps like an asthmatic without an inhaler.” The description surprised me, to put it mildly. I read this and felt excluded. I felt set apart from those deserving of a place in the sun, those who have no need to carry an inhaler.

I am not a label, nor am I the butt of a tragic analogy. I am not an asthmatic. I am a person who sometimes has breathing challenges. I am not a vegetarian. I am a person who chooses to not eat animals. I am not a pacifist. I am a person who believes that killing people, for any reason, is wrong.

I hope I've expressed my concern to your editorial in a way that can be accepted in love, just as it was given.

Debbi Reed-Savory
Brattleboro, Vt.

I felt I knew better than God

For more than 90 years I have been a regular reader of MESSENGER. (I will soon celebrate my 100th birthday.) Over

ASK SOMEONE WHO HAS TRAVELED WITH US!

2012 TOURS

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)

ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR PHIL WAGLER (April 16-25)

MYSTERY TOUR (April 17-26)

LANDS of the BIBLE with PASTORS SEBASTIAN and CAREY MEADOWS-HELMER (April 28 - May 7)

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 1-15)

EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS MARKETS (December 9-15)

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)

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these years I have learned much of what God is teaching me. But some of what God was teaching me I refused to learn—I felt I knew better than God. Let me illustrate.

My sister, who is a few years younger than I am, was born left-handed. I was determined that she must be like the rest of us: right-handed. The school teacher agreed with me: “We’ll make her right-handed.” But our mother was firm. “God made her left-handed,” she said. “Why should we think we know better than God?” (I might add that my left-handed sister was a straight-A student and became a master teacher.)

In my rural Virginia area there were four strong Brethren congregations within five miles of my home. I knew most of the people in these churches, which included quite a few bachelors and “old maids.” All of us lived together as children of God, living as God made us. Fortunately for them and us, there was never a feeling that “we must make them like the rest of us.”



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Mt. Wilson Church of the Brethren,
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2012 Annual Conference Insight Sessions

**Keeping Our Children Safe:
Our Congregational and
Community Response**

Sunday, 9:00 pm

**Crossing Generations: Connecting
Across Age (Mentoring)**

Monday, 9:00 pm

Video Games: Cracking the Code?

Tuesday, 12:30 pm

Deaconing Children and Youth

Tuesday, 9:00 pm



Church of the Brethren

**Keeping
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And in their churches they served in leadership positions like the rest of us.
 Our national health organizations have for years stated that about one in 10 people in our world are born homosexual. And I believe that loving and caring people would do well not to try to "make over" what God has done. I am convinced that every true child of God endeavors to treat every other child of God as brother and sister. And Jesus was firm: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Olden D. Mitchell
 North Manchester, Ind.

Thank you

As I have read through my November MESSENGER, many articles and issues made me want to thank you for the way you dealt with them. That editorial on grace is so greatly needed. Thanks for serving as editor, and may God's Spirit be with you in this work.

Mary A. Kinsey
 Mount Morris, Ill.

Also offended

Regarding Lois Duble's letter in the January/February MESSENGER, I too am very offended by the Program and Arrangements Committee for allowing booth space to BMC (Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests) for the 2012 Annual Conference. How many people need to express being offended before this decision can be reversed?

Don Bruner
 Somerset, Pa.

Follow the Word, but show love

After reading the recent issue of MESSENGER, I have questions. It seems there are many assumptions being displayed. One is that folks cannot disagree and still be polite and civil. Is it possible that folks can disagree and still love one other?

Our church family considers the decision made by our leaders to be accurate and in line with the Bible. Does that mean we hate those who don't agree with us? The same Word tells us we cannot do that.

On the other hand, we are not to support things that the same Word tells us God is not pleased with. Do we consider the Word to be our guide for following Jesus? If we do, then is sexual immorality a sin or not? If it is, then we need to decide how we will respond. Is the Word our guide for knowing Jesus enough to be obedient to him?

No matter how you cut it, someone is really wrong. The Word of God must be our guide for being obedient to Jesus. When any board, any body, or any individual places themselves above the Word, they will ultimately find themselves under that Word. Both parties cannot be correct, both parties cannot walk together on the journey that is ahead.

The time has come for us to agree to disagree and move on. It is apparent that neither side will change. I grieve for those tossed to and fro on this issue. We are dealing with people's lives here, and love must be shown to both sides. But in the end, the written, known Word of God must be obeyed and lived out. My prayer is that the Spirit of God extends grace to all as they make their own decisions.

Jim Powers
 Osceola, Mo.

CLASSIFIED ADS

TRAVEL WITH A CHRISTIAN GROUP. Rose Bowl Parade and Hawaii (Dec 31, 2012-Jan 13, 2013). Central Europe, including Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw, Krakow, Auschwitz concentration camp (September 5-16, 2012). For information please write to J. Kenneth Kreider, 1300 Bear Creek Road, Elizabethtown, PA 17022 or email kreiderk@etown.edu.

PEACE COMMUNITY CHURCH of the Brethren, Windsor, Colorado, is seeking part-time, bi-vocational leadership. The small forty year old congregation is working to enhance current lay leadership and build new community ministries through the addition of a pastor/ministry coordinator position. Located in the heart of the desirable and dynamic front range of the Rocky Mountains, Windsor is ripe for growing ministries rich in witness for peace, justice and healing. Professional opportunities abound. Send inquiries to: windsorcob@lpbroadband.net.

PROJECT MANAGER needed to develop new Sunday school curriculum for children and youth to be published by MennoMedia and Brethren Press. Responsibilities also include project oversight, staff recruitment and supervision. Must have experience or education in theology, Christian education, or publishing. Full-time, salaried position for the length of the project, projected to be three to five years. Preference given to candidates who can work out of a MennoMedia or Mennonite Church office. Submit applications to searchcommittee@mennomedia.org.

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8059 ext. 206; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

- Allison Prairie,** Lawrenceville, Ill.: Kaitlynn Kessinger, Kourtney Gosnell
- Chiques,** Manheim, Pa.: Aaron Brandt, Megan Swope
- Copper Hill,** Va.: Kathy Dobbins Mellor, Bethany Rae Goff, Melissa Wilson
- Everett,** Pa.: Peggy Gates, Charlotte Bowersock, Eleanor Fix, Dorothy Henry, Ruth Puckett
- Eversole,** New Lebanon, Ohio: Sandra Brorsen, Danielle Foster, Danielle Kneisley, Sarah Stapleton
- Fellowship,** Martinsburg, W.Va.: Hazel Doig, Dennis Mathews, Nicholas Chapman, Dawn Walls
- Florin,** Mount Joy, Pa.: Randall Fiske
- Freeburg,** Paris, Ohio: Azure Zellers, Dillon English, Mark Dickerhoof, Sheridan Rummel, Dean Rummel, Dwaine Brugger, Darlene Brugger, Jon Wills, Stephanie Wills
- Garden City,** Kan.: Steve Coulter, Josh Daniels, Angee Kiesel
- Grossnickle,** Myersville, Md.: Leah Ellis, Emily Delauter, Ellie Grossnickle, Alexa Kehlbeck, Derrell Brown, Angela Cornell, Fred Rudman, Wanda Rudman, Samuel Rudman, Katie Rudman
- Hollidaysburg,** Pa.: Alyssa Bert, Beth Neely, Tom Neely, Bobbie Gail Smith, Bryan Beckel, Abigail Beckel, Thomas Furlong, Angel Geist, Wayne Loose, Paulette Loose, Kathryn Padula, Anna Welch, Christine Hershberger, Harry Miller, Sarah Miller, Cindy Wright, George Wright
- Knob Creek,** Johnson City, Tenn.: Donna Osborne, Novice Snyder
- Locust Grove,** New Castle, Ind.: James Gettinger, Wayne Gettinger
- Longmeadow,** Hagerstown, Md.: Dustin Barker, Glenn Barker, Charlene Barnes, Paul Leatherman, IV, Walter Leatherman
- Lorida,** Fla.: Jeanne Finch
- McPherson,** Kan.: Dan Masterson, Carolyn Masterson
- Middle Creek,** Lititz, Pa.: Michael Minnich, Margaret Minnich, Grant Forney, Leah Graybill, Bradford Myer, Michael Wagner, Reese Kline, Abigail Wenger
- Midland,** Va.: Tom Hadler, Joi Hadler, Pete Early

- Modesto, Calif.:** Chelsea Feeny, Dana Roy
- Mohler, Ephrata, Pa.:** Brad Ulrich
- Myerstown, Pa.:** Robert Biddle, Sandra Biddle, Kenneth Painter, Christopher Hostetter, Weston Fouch, Sophia Brown, Skylar Liskey
- Oakland, Bradford, Ohio:** John Welch, Galen Riley, Patsy Riley, Jone Judy, Becky Percy, Vananna Apple, Emily Vanhorn
- Petersburg Memorial,** Petersburg, W.Va.: Carole Lewis, Otis Weatherholt, Harold Garber, Rachel Knight, Andrew Cosner, Tyler Cosner, Kaitlyn Lahman
- Poages Mill, Roanoke, Va.:** Michelle Link, Shelton Link, Alexis Link, Will Duff, Amanda Davis, Samantha Taylor, Stephanie Mitchell, Cody Seymour, Betty Chilman
- Prince of Peace, Kettering, Ohio:** Eldon Buckner, Brennan Downs, Aaron Estes, Alex Price, Justin Sowerbrower, Kristie Wilson
- Purchase Line, Clymer, Pa.:** Dan Bush, Carolyn Bush, Angelina Bush, Michaela Bush, Charles Ward, Marian Ward, Marcy Gooderham, Becki Misko, Susan Henry, Richard Wilhelm, Terry Kermes, Carole Kermes, Linda Spencer, Lori Lomman
- Rocky Mount, First, Rocky Mount, Va.:** Mike Wray, Connie Wray, Ethan Berger
- Scalp Level, Windber, Pa.:** Joelle Banjack, Cameron Banjack
- Shiloh, Kasson, W.Va.:** Josh Poling, Samantha Hollins, Justice Price, Justin Carter, Lanette Price
- Smith Mountain Lake Community, Wirtz, Va.:** Dewey Bowman, Becky Bowman, Sandy Wheeler, Anne Godsey, Daniel Naff
- Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.:** Bob McKenzie, Yvonne McKenzie
- Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.:** Madeleine Wilson, Shannon Smoot, Nathan Smoot
- Wilmington, Del.:** Thomas Andrew Drye, John Kilbride
- Anniversaries**
- Anderson, Charles and Wilma, North Manchester, Ind., 65**
- Baughman, Wayne and Joann, Everett, Pa., 55**
- Burket, Edward and Helen, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 70**
- Denlinger, Aaron and Joyce, East Petersburg, Pa., 50**
- Dodd, Jim and Joan, Midland, Va., 50**
- Frederick, Carlyle and Juanita, Goshen, Ind., 65**
- Godfrey, Stanley and Delores, York, Pa., 60**
- Graham, Eddie and Carolyn, Martinsburg, W.Va., 50**
- Grove, Charles and June, South English, Iowa, 65**
- Heffley, Bob and Sylvia, Manheim, Pa., 50**
- Hochstedler, Lewis and Marilyn, Nappanee, Ind., 55**
- Holmes, Franklin and Betty, Tonasket, Wash., 50**
- Holmes, Frederick and Elfreda, Tonasket, Wash., 60**
- Keesece, Morris and Mary Jane, Martinsville, Va., 55**
- Kesler, Roland and Valetta, Quinter, Kan., 60**
- Love, Donald and Barbara, Dallastown, Pa., 60**
- Loving, Burl and Marie, Garden City, Kan., 65**
- Miller, Leon and Carol, Elgin, Ill., 60**
- Negley, John and Beverley, Boonsboro, Md., 50**
- Nichols, Linford and Sarah, Hopewell, Va., 75**
- Peffer, Glenn and Shirley, Carlisle, Pa., 60**
- Price, Steve and Kathy, Nappanee, Ind., 50**
- Ringer, Virgil and Cora, Louisville, Ohio, 65**
- Robinson, Boyd and Patricia, Hagerstown, Md., 50**
- Sailor, Flawn and Nancy, Elkhart, Ind., 50**
- Smallwood, Wayne and Ruth, Knoxville, Md., 50**
- Snell, Art and Hazel, McPherson, Kan., 70**
- Snyder, Robert and Rita, Uniontown, Ohio, 50**
- Sprenkel, Marvin and Willetta, Quinter, Kan., 60**
- Thorne, Gerald and Sybil, Hershey, Pa., 55**
- Williams, George and Margaret, Tonasket, Wash., 60**
- Winters, Bob and Gay, Perrysburg, Ohio, 60**
- Wishon, Raymond and Opal, Holcomb, Kan., 65**
- Deaths**
- Amos, Herbert L., 91, Dayton, Ohio, Dec. 21**
- Anderson, Dorothy L., 91, Seven Valleys, Pa., Oct. 4**
- Anderson, Ernestine Ferguson, 86, Bassett, Va., Dec. 4**
- Bielstein, John C., 76, Fort Washington, Md., Dec. 13**
- Bittner, John W., 90, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 17**
- Bowman, Fairy Alberta Scott, 94, New Carlisle, Ohio, Nov. 27**
- Bowman, Kenneth Lee, 75, Boonsboro, Md., Dec. 19**
- Boyce, Pearl L., 106, North Manchester, Ind., Dec. 11**
- Brumbaugh, Gloria Lucille, 86, Roaring Spring, Pa., Dec. 12**
- Byam, Donna Marie, 85, Oxon Hill, Md., Sept. 4**
- Clark, Dollie B., 89, McPherson, Kan., Nov. 19**
- Condiff, Dorothy D., 76, Wilmington, Del., Jan. 5**
- Coulter, Kenneth, 86, Knoxville, Md., Oct. 19**
- Craighead, Esta Mary, 95, Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 23**
- Crickenberger, Ivy Arlene, 90, Fishersville, Va., Dec. 28**
- Crowl, Harry M., Jr., 90, Keedysville, Md., Oct. 7**
- Dobson, Eva Horner, 94, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 24**
- Early, Ruth E., 94, Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 17**
- Fischer, Mary Jane, 75, Dixon, Ill., Nov. 15**
- Flory, J. Carson, 90, Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 2**
- Geisel, Anne S., 85, Windber, Pa., Dec. 20**
- Godfrey, Dean L., 60, York, Pa., Oct. 27**
- Godfrey, Michelle Lynn, 34, York, Pa., Oct. 1**
- Gortner, Hazel M., 90, Wooster, Ohio, Dec. 5**
- Griffin, Wayne, 96, Quinter, Kan., Jan. 7, 2011**
- Hall, Avery B., 95, Fostoria, Ohio, Oct. 24**
- Hartman, Joan, 81, Inverness, Fla., Dec. 15**
- Haycock, Berchie Lee, 84, Wardsville, W.Va., Dec. 28**
- Helmick, Raymond Allen, 80, Moorefield, W.Va., Dec. 28**
- Hitt, H. Jane, 90, Reading, Pa., Oct. 9**
- Hoover, Eldon Hilkey, 96, Modesto, Calif., Nov. 24**
- Hornberger, Arthur J., 80, Reading, Pa., June 8**
- Hutzell, Nora Lucille, 77, Boonsboro, Md., Dec. 15**
- Hylton, Claude, 78, San Diego, Calif., Dec. 6**
- Jamison, Francis M., 87, Quinter, Kan., Nov. 1**
- Joseph, Steven John, 67, Onkama, Mich., Nov. 25**
- Kaser, Bernice L., 78, Perrysburg, Ohio, Nov. 27**
- Keister, Marilyn S., 79, Mifflinburg, Pa., Nov. 1**
- Kessler, Clinton E., Jr., 69, Greenfield, Ohio, Jan. 1**
- Knepper, Adaline Kendall, 94, Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 8**
- Kreider, Helen B., 98, Englewood, Ohio, Dec. 28**
- Kurtz, Ruth Naomi Smith, 92, North Manchester, Ind., July 24**
- Lehman, Mildred F., 95, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 10**
- Leiboldt, Barbara, 69, Boonsboro, Md., Oct. 26**
- Leonard, Anna Ferne, 88, Everett, Pa., Feb. 25, 2011**
- Lewis, Warren K., 95, Windber, Pa., Jan. 1**
- Major, Bruce, 46, Reading, Pa., Dec. 1**
- McFarren, Eula Lee, 81, Milford, Ind., Dec. 1**
- McKinsey, Joseph E., 81, Loganville, Pa., Dec. 1**
- Menke, Stewart H., 82, Greenville, Ohio, Oct. 15**
- Meushaw, Teresa Anne, 62, Taneytown, Md., Dec. 17**
- Miller, Ruth R., 90, Conrad, Iowa, Dec. 17**
- Mitchell, S. Earl, 101, Slidell, La., Nov. 29**
- Myers, Arlene May, 74, Warrenton, Va., Aug. 5**
- Norton, Vivian, 70, Quinter, Kan., Dec. 31**
- Peters, Jeffrey W., 64, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 11**
- Peterson, Arthur, 87, Wyomissing, Pa., April 30**
- Pickering, David K., 75, Dixon, Ill., Dec. 10**
- Popa, Theodore C., 85, Alliance, Ohio, Sept. 16**
- Press, Lorne, 93, Quinter, Kan., March 14, 2011**
- Rankin, Pearl Ann, 78, Culpeper, Va., Nov. 7**
- Rice, Nancy L., 76, Northwood, Ohio, Nov. 22**
- Richwine, Jane A. Yoder, 84, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 21**
- Risden, Margaret Ann, 72, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 13**
- Ritchey, Portia Beulah, 83, New Oxford, Pa., Nov. 24**
- Sensenig, Harriet G., 92, New Holland, Pa., Dec. 4**
- Sexton, Eileen, 93, Sebring, Fla., Jan. 5**
- Shank, Eileen Smith, 87, Saint Charles, Ill., Nov. 1**
- Shank, Joan K., 69, Trotwood, Ohio, Jan. 7**
- Shaw, Audrey, 73, Upland, Calif., Oct. 18**
- Sink, Nellie Ferguson, 95, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 5**
- Small, Edward L., 65, Lebanon, Pa., Dec. 14**
- Smith, G. Glenn, 83, Boonsboro, Md., Sept. 28**
- Smith, Lee M., 82, Hershey, Pa., Jan. 10**
- Smith, Michael, 42, Everett, Pa., Feb. 19, 2011**
- Snavely, Donald Leo, 85, Sterling, Ill., Dec. 15**
- Snook, Harry Clayton, 90, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 29**
- Spearman, Margaret A., 98, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 8**
- Sproat, Esther Frances, 95, Excelsior Springs, Mo., Dec. 12**
- Stauffer, Robert Henry, 95, Polo, Ill., Jan. 3**
- Stepisianos, Leota, 84, Woodbury, Pa., Dec. 12**
- Studebaker, David, 98, Dayton, Ohio, Dec. 21**
- Stutzman, Alverda G., 82, Nappanee, Ind., Aug. 4**
- Swaisgood, John F., 76, Ashland, Ohio, Dec. 17**
- Thompson, John Raymond, 81, Brunswick, Md., Nov. 30**
- Towler, Aylene Barbour, 84, Sandy Level, Va., Dec. 31**
- Tritt, W. Wayne, 89, Carlisle, Pa., Aug. 29**
- Van Order, Martha L., 67, York, Pa., Aug. 30**
- Wagner, Eugene S., 91, Harrisonburg, Va., Nov. 1**
- Walls, Irvin P., 90, Rockton, Pa., Oct. 31**
- Wampler, Ray E., 88, Grottoes, Va., Jan. 3**
- Wartluft, Emogene, 81, Alliance, Ohio, May 9**
- Weinberg, Cameron David, 20, Mount Airy, Md., Nov. 8**
- Wilson, Susan Kaye, 61, Greenville, Ohio, Oct. 14**
- Young, Marguerite K., 90, McGeheysville, Va., Jan. 4**
- Licensings**
- Bosch, Luis, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Maranatha Multicultural Fellowship, Lancaster, Pa.), Dec. 4**
- Estep, Audrey, Atl. N.E. Dist. (West Green Tree, Elizabethtown, Pa.), Dec. 18**
- Harris, Amber T., Virilina Dist. (Fraternity, Winston-Salem, N.C.), Sept. 25**
- Howell, Gregory M., Virilina Dist. (Topeco, Floyd, Va.), Jan. 1**
- Stauffer, Jeffrey, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Blue Ball, Pa.), Oct. 16**
- Ordinations**
- Brockway, Bonni Jean, Mid. Pa. Dist. (New Enterprise, Pa.), Dec. 7**
- Forry, Christopher A., W. Pa. Dist. (Pike Run, Somerset, Pa.), Nov. 6**
- Frantz, Kenneth D., W. Plains Dist. (Haxtun, Colo.), Nov. 20**
- Gindlesperger, Terry P., W. Pa. Dist. (Pleasant Hill, Johnstown, Pa.), Dec. 11**

No room for violence

Some years back, I visited a church in Harare, Zimbabwe, that some of my World Vision colleagues belonged to. (I worked more than 20 years for that evangelical relief and development organization.) As a visiting guest, I was invited to sit down front during their Sunday morning worship, where close to 1,500 had gathered.

After some announcements and hymns—and introductions of my colleagues and me—a woman began to preach.



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER Editor

She spoke with great urgency about how important it was for Christians to be vigilant in their faith, to be courageous and steadfast. The congregation affirmed her words with fervent “Amens!” and “Preach it, sister.”

She continued. “Ours is a Gospel of struggle! Ours is a Gospel of strife! Ours is a Gospel of violence!”

I wasn’t sure I’d heard her right. But I had.

“The Gospel of our Lord is a Gospel of violence! Our enemy must be vanquished! Our Gospel is a Gospel of violence! God is violence! God is violence!”

She repeated that phrase, each time with greater passion, bringing the crowd to a rapturous frenzy. Many were on their feet, hands raised, shouting their affirmation.

I remained seated. The more she preached, the more uncomfortable I became. My church heroes include John

“dunker” in their titles. I was struck by the level of subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle, violent rhetoric that has crept into the discourse in some of these sites. While acknowledging that they do not officially represent the Church of the Brethren, it’s clear that they believe theirs is the voice of the (wink-wink) *true* church. The blogs I came across are negative and hate-filled, and they represent an element that has crept into the Church of the Brethren in recent years that is divisive and mean-spirited. That spirit is manifested in these blogs, which portray themselves as platforms for dialogue, but which really are platforms for attacking anything that does not conform to their interpretation of scripture.

These blogs are cut from the same cloth as the preacher in Zimbabwe. They bear no resemblance to the new way of living that Jesus spoke of, demonstrated, and exemplified. They exist to incite fear. They want us to view one another with suspicion rather than welcome. They are not patient or kind. They insist on their own way. They are rude. They are irritable and resentful. (See 1 Corinthians 13 for a description of their polar opposite.)

Jesus did not have some litmus-test religion in mind when he spoke to his followers. That’s what the Pharisees were all about, and they often tried to catch Jesus in some violation of Jewish religious law, as those behind these blogs and websites are bent on doing today with anyone who is not in line with their perspective.

It would be neat and tidy if we could clearly define “the

THEY BEAR NO RESEMBLANCE TO THE NEW WAY OF LIVING THAT JESUS SPOKE OF, DEMONSTRATED, AND EXEMPLIFIED. THEY EXIST TO INCITE FEAR. THEY WANT US TO VIEW ONE ANOTHER WITH SUSPICION RATHER THAN WELCOME.

Kline and Ted Studebaker. They were martyred because of their belief in *non*violence. They believed that Jesus (the Prince of Peace, as he is known in some circles) taught that violence in any form was contrary to the will of God. That message did not seem to resonate with those around me. I felt like I was at a pep rally for a holy war. The mood was moving toward mob frenzy. I began looking for an exit.

I was relieved when the service ended. No one seemed concerned that I hadn’t stood and shouted along with everyone else. I was, after all, a visitor—perhaps a bit of an oddity. But I was shaken, and glad to be leaving.

That incident came to mind recently as I was perusing some blogs and websites with the words “Brethren” or

simple standards to which all must adhere in order to be considered true believers.” But then we wouldn’t be the Church of the Brethren, which has no creed but the New Testament, and whose founders left the door open to the Holy Spirit to guide us in interpreting and understanding its meaning for our lives collectively, in a loving community. And no one has the final word on who’s in or who’s out except God, no matter how many followers they may have on their blog.

In the meantime, it’s up to us to treat one another with dignity and respect as we struggle to follow Jesus. And there is no room for violence of any kind on that journey—at least not in the Church of the Brethren in which I grew up. 

COMING IN APRIL: Reconciliation in an impossible situation, being a CO today, Bible study, media review, reflections, letters, and more.

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Things I never thought I'd do:

- 1. Walk along China Beach*
- 2. Visit a Buddhist temple*
- 3. See the body of Ho Chi Minh*
- 4. Crawl through Vietnam War tunnels*
- 5. Spend an hour playing ball with a girl who I couldn't even talk to*
- 6. Hand out bubbles and stickers to street children*
- 7. Have a dance party on the top of a mountain with Vietnamese orphans*

Rustin Dudley '14 became a bigger part of the world when she embarked on a two-week service-learning trip to Vietnam.

She distributed care packages to orphans, renovated facilities, participated in educational and social activities with children and senior citizens and explored the country.

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"You are the salt of the earth."
Matthew 5:13



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—Adam A., hurricane survivor

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