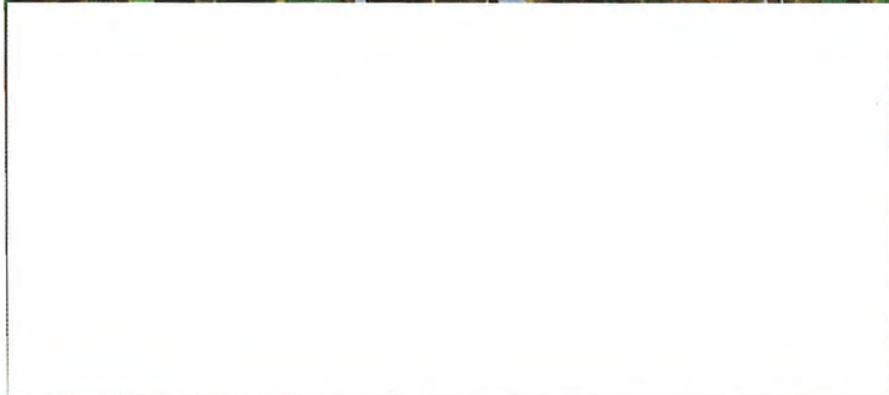


Church of the Brethren

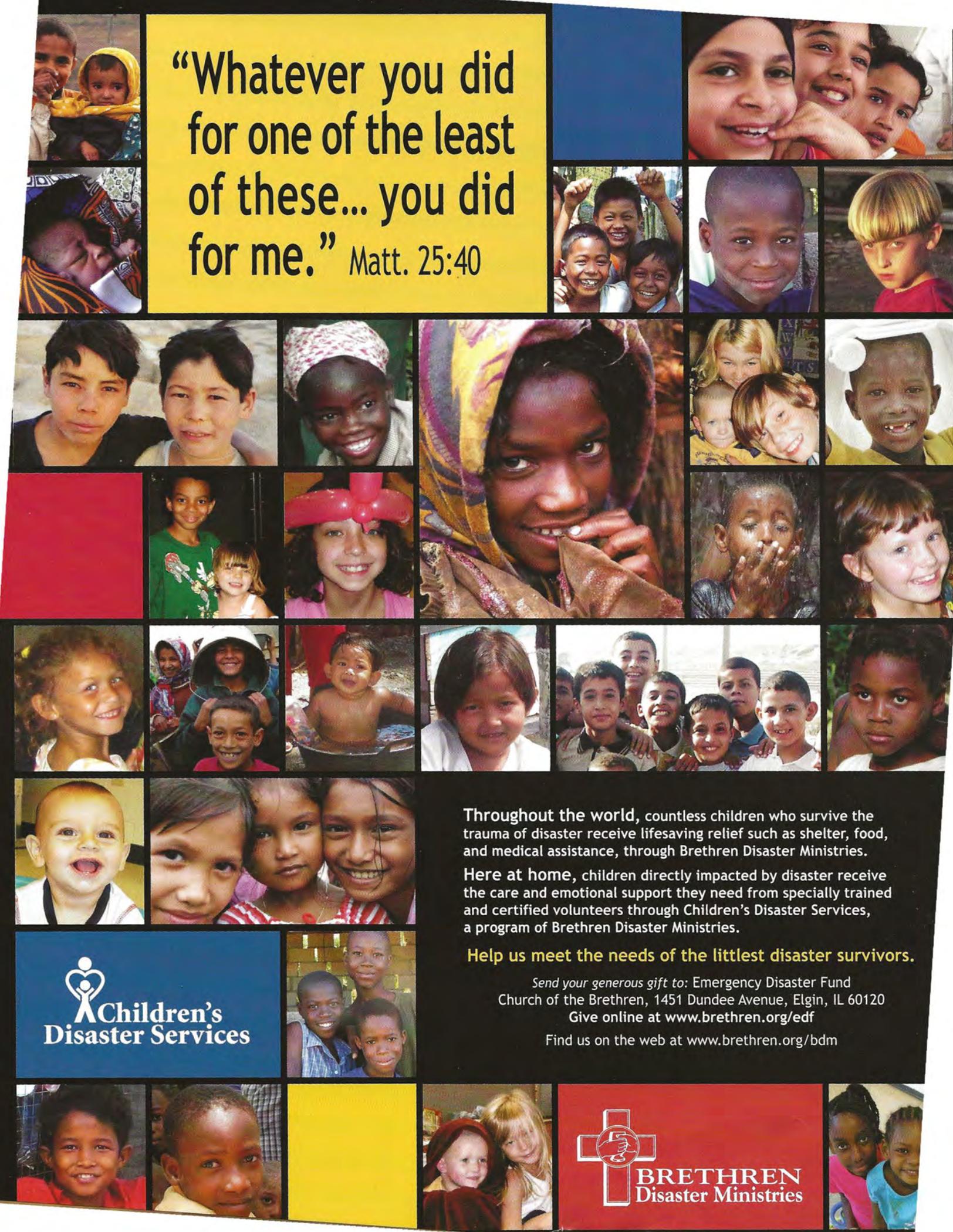
MESSENGER

JULY/AUGUST 2012 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

WHY OUR ROOTS IN THE LAND STILL MATTER



“Whatever you did
for one of the least
of these... you did
for me.” Matt. 25:40



Throughout the world, countless children who survive the trauma of disaster receive lifesaving relief such as shelter, food, and medical assistance, through Brethren Disaster Ministries.

Here at home, children directly impacted by disaster receive the care and emotional support they need from specially trained and certified volunteers through Children's Disaster Services, a program of Brethren Disaster Ministries.

Help us meet the needs of the littlest disaster survivors.

Send your generous gift to: Emergency Disaster Fund
Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120
Give online at www.brethren.org/edf

Find us on the web at www.brethren.org/bdm

**Children's
Disaster Services**



**BRETHREN
Disaster Ministries**

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

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

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8 Why our roots in the land still matter

“Many of the theological principles the Church of the Brethren holds today have been shaped by our connection to the land through the eyes of faith,” says Jonathan Stauffer, advocacy assistant for the Church of the Brethren and National Council of Churches. “While we as a church have done much to alleviate hunger and poverty, there are unresolved problems and challenges with agriculture itself that affect the well-being of humanity and creation. We cannot be agents in mitigating world hunger without remembering the realities that an effective agriculture practice requires.”

13 Church planting takes root

New and creative ways of planting churches were explored recently at a conference hosted by Bethany Seminary. As this collection of vignettes from News Services director Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford reveals, there is no cookie-cutter/one-size-fits-all approach to growing churches. Rather, innovation, adaptability to local needs, and openness to the direction of the Holy Spirit all are important ingredients for successfully launching new congregations.

18 Are we in good hands?

In spite of the rigorous debate afoot in the United States regarding whether “Obamacare” is right for the country, few seem to question the need for *some* kind of insurance. Not so fast, says Joshua Brockway, as he takes another look at how those in the early church went about caring for one another. “The [modern insurance] system is based on the best of social networks without any of the responsibility demanded in true social support. Such a practice should sting our Christian sensibilities. When we read of Jesus’ compassionate ministry it is clear that healing and faith are relational categories.”

DEPARTMENTS

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Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

ONTHECOVER Every five years, Congress considers the choices Americans make with food and agricultural policy through a large piece of legislation known as the Farm Bill. The last Farm Bill was completed in 2008 which means that this year is again time for determining revisions that will begin in 2013. In this issue’s cover story, Brethren are reminded of their historical agricultural roots, and encouraged to consider ways to continue to be good stewards of the land and its resources.

It had seemed like a good idea at the time. Even though the Milwaukee airport was twice as far as O'Hare, I was saving quite a bit of money. But now I was short on sleep and the 5 a.m. departure time didn't seem like such a good deal.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

But one thing made it worthwhile. As I put on my belt and shoes and collected my resealable bag of "three-and-a-half-ounces-or-less-size containers" (oh, that compound adjective hurts my ears every time I hear it over the loudspeaker), I looked up and saw this sign at the end of the TSA conveyor belt: "Recombobulation Area." Yes, I think Mitchell International Airport is now my favorite airport!

It's easy to feel discombobulated when we're half-dressed, short on dignity, and at the mercy of gruff people in uniforms. How nice to have a designated space in which to recombobulate.

And what a wonderful world it would be if there were many more recombobulation areas. There could be recombobulation areas for people who are working too hard. And for those who don't have work. For special-needs children. And for their tired parents. For people suffering from illness or injury, or who have had to make a move, or who are experienced with grief. There could even be recombobulation areas for people in the middle of a chaos that's the good kind. There isn't anybody who couldn't benefit from a little recombobulating.

In fact, the need is so high that perhaps congregations all across the country should consider becoming recombobulation areas. Visitors would discover that they'd entered a place where they could pull themselves together, find their dignity, and be at the mercy of a loving God. There would be an opportunity to slow down and prepare for the journey ahead. There would be time for calm and discernment.

We could be that sort of oasis for each other—and for the other travelers alongside us who are seeking security in an uncertain world.

Wendy McFadden

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Opera legend surprises participants at Ankeny love feast

The Ankeny (Iowa) Church of the Brethren hosted a special guest at love feast this spring. Right before the service started, Iowa opera legend Simon Estes and his wife, Ovida, along with two of Ovida's sisters, a brother-in-law and a niece, unexpectedly entered the church basement. They took part in the traditional meal and footwashing, and then, at the request of member Vernon Merkey, Simon graciously agreed to sing "Precious Lord" as participants listened, transfixed by the opera singer's incredible voice. Never before at an Ankeny love feast had applause been heard, but it erupted spontaneously when Estes finished singing.



Iowa opera legend Simon Estes with Ankeny interim pastor Dan Sanford at the Ankeny (Iowa) Church of the Brethren's love feast this spring.

Ovida (Stong) attended the Stover Memorial Church of the Brethren in Des Moines, Iowa, many years ago, and attended Camp Pine Lake at the same time as Rhonda (Reynolds) Bingman. The two enjoyed catching up following the service. "Unless you attend love feast," said Bingman, "you never know what you might miss!"

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

"... We should continually try to establish a vision that welcomes all. Instead of praying, 'God, help us change others,' Our prayer should be, 'God, change me! Put me in the movement where God is working.'"

—Mike Huffaker, pastor of Osage Church of the Brethren, McCune, Kan.

BY THE NUMBERS

44,000

Number of units of blood needed for transfusions daily in the US. Annual Conference officials are hoping Conference participants in St. Louis will roll up their sleeves this summer to help fill that need.

Large group prepares for licensing to the ministry in Haiti

In late May, Church of the Brethren leaders from the US and Haiti interviewed a large group of people preparing for licensing to the ministry, to serve in Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti).

Nineteen men and women were interviewed by Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service for the Church of the Brethren; Mary Jo Flory-Steury, executive director of Ministry and the denomination's associate general secretary; Ludovic St. Fleur, coordinator of the Haiti mission and pastor of Eglise des Freres Haitiens in Miami, Fla.; and members of the National Committee of the Haitian Church of the Brethren including pastors Ives Jean, Jean Bily Telfort, and Freny Elie.

The interviews took place in Croix des Bouquets,

a neighborhood of the capital city Port-au-Prince, at the Ministry Center of the Haitian Church of the Brethren. Ilexene Alphonse, who helps staff the Ministry Center, served as translator.

Interview questions related to the candidate's family and background, education, spiritual journey, role in the local church, and understanding of Brethren beliefs and practices, reported Wittmeyer. Each of the 19 individuals interviewed identifies with a specific member of the National Committee as a mentor and spiritual leader and came with a recommendation for licensing from that member of the National Committee.

"Each was deemed to be uniquely prepared to receive the set-apart status that licensing denotes and to be empowered to serve the denomination in this capacity," Wittmeyer said. "Each individual has demonstrated a strong commitment to the local church and to the denomination. They have been very active in local churches and serving as the backbone of the denomination."

Those interviewed are already active in leading worship, starting preaching points, ministry with children, outreach activities, and other ministries in their communities. The group is now expected to examine their calling and work toward ordination. Some are already qualified for ordination according to national requirements, and one of the candidates is ordained in a different denomination.

In 2009, a similar process occurred, when 10 people were interviewed for licensing in Haiti. Of that group, seven have served the Haitian church on its National Committee since then.

The 19 people interviewed in May include 4 women and 15 men, and come from congregations located in various areas of Haiti including Bohoc, Cap Haitian, Gonaïves, Grand Bois, Leogâne, Morne Boulage, as well as the Croix des Bouquets and Delmas neighborhoods in the Port-au-Prince area, and other smaller towns and villages.



Wendy McWhorter

Laferriere is just one of the Brethren congregations that are part of Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti). In May, a group of 19 Haitian Brethren leaders were interviewed for licensing to the ministry, and will be working toward ordination.

Lewistown Church of the Brethren springs into action

On April 15, the Lewistown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren sponsored another way to "Spring into Action" and support Heifer International. In partnership with the local Hoss's restaurant, 20 percent of money spent that day by those identifying themselves as eating for Heifer Fund was sent to the program. Invitations

were sent to all local Brethren churches and to the community at large as a way to "help end hunger and poverty and care for the earth."

The drive was sponsored in memory of Elmer Norton, who would have been 90 years old this spring. Norton once met Heifer Project founder Dan West and

had great respect for the values of Heifer International, which empowers struggling people to work to provide for their own needs and then to pass on the gift to others. As Mother Teresa once said, people did a small thing but with great love, and the joint effort resulted in a check to Heifer International of \$350.

LANDMARKS & LAURELS

The **Virден (Ill.) Church of the Brethren** will celebrate their 100th anniversary with a Homecoming on July 22. Previous pastors, whether full, part-time, or interim are invited to attend and participate. Contact the Virден Church of the Brethren at 334 W. Dean St., Virден, IL. 62690, or call (217) 965-3422 or e-mail vcotb@royell.net.

Blissville Church of the Brethren in Plymouth, Ind., celebrated its centennial June 10. Eldon Morehouse, who served as pastor at the church during the 1960s, was the keynote speaker. Following a meal there was a time of remembrance, beginning with prepared statements by Opal Pence Nees, who served as pastor in the 1950s.

West Marva District held its Women's Spring Rally on May 9 at Oak Park Church of the Brethren in Oakland, Md. Attendance was 89, with 23 churches represented, according to the district newsletter. A love offering received during the event resulted in \$2,472 for Church World Service to assist in preparing clean-up buckets for areas affected by disasters. The group also sent 374 hygiene kits, 21 school kits, and one baby layette to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., for disaster relief, and collected \$110 to purchase blankets for those in need. Another \$678 was donated for shipping expenses.

Fred and Nancy Swartz presented with humanitarian service award

Long-time Church of the Brethren pastor and leader Fred Swartz and his wife, Nancy, have been awarded the 2012 Bridgewater HealthCare Foundation Humanitarian Service Award. The two were recognized in May at BHC's annual Founder's Day Celebration for more than 50 years of philanthropic activity while residents of communities in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.

"We are honored to name Rev. Fred and Mrs. Nancy Clements Swartz as the recipients of this award, recognizing their lifetime achievements and contributions of time and talents to church and community, and for their dedication to their faith," said Bridgewater Retirement Community president Rodney D. Alderfer as he recognized the Swartzes at the 47th Annual Founder's Day celebration. More than 200 donors, staff, and guests gathered in the retirement community's Houff Center for the event.

After Fred graduated from Bethany Theological Seminary in 1961, he and Nancy were called to plant a new church in the Hollins section of Roanoke County, Va. In eight years the church grew from zero to 140 members and had built parsonage and church structures. While Fred performed pastoral services of preaching, visiting, and administration, Nancy helped establish the education and women's ministries for the fledgling congregation.

The following eight years were spent in Harrisburg, Pa., where Fred was called to pastor First Church of the Brethren. In addition to maintaining a congregation of



more than 250 members, Swartz headed a staff that provided guidance and education for inner-city youth and adults.

Both Fred and Nancy took part in disaster relief ministries in response to the Harrisburg and Johnstown floods during the 1970s. Fred, along with several other pastors in the Harrisburg area, provided spiritual leadership for the defendants in the Harrisburg Eight trials, as well as reconciliation efforts in the area. Nancy, a certified elementary school teacher, was an educational assistant for the Susquehanna Township Schools.

In 1977 Fred and Nancy and their two daughters moved to Elgin, Ill., where Fred was named congregational resources editor and book editor of the Church of the

Brethren, and Nancy taught third grade. After seven years on the denominational staff, Fred was called as pastor of Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren. The membership of the congregation grew 10 percent each year, and a \$2,250,000 addition was built, doubling the sanctuary space and erecting a new fellowship and athletic facility.

Retiring from the Manassas Church and pastoral ministry in 2003, Fred and Nancy moved to Bridgewater Retirement Community where they have continued their philanthropic efforts.

In retirement, both Fred and Nancy have held key volunteer positions for the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. Fred has been the Conference Secretary for 10 years, a service that will be ending in August, and Nancy has been a head teller for the Conference for 29 years.

Upon receiving the BRC Humanitarian Award, Fred told the assembled guests, "Humanity does not exist without people helping and serving one another. Humanitarian service is evident throughout Bridgewater Retirement Community, which requires a cadre of caregivers whose activity carries a far greater value than the monetary compensation they receive. And any successful non-profit institution depends upon its volunteers, who not only add to the service provided, but also contribute expertise that complements that of the staff. The heroes are not only the Swartzes but the people at every table in this room."

Stones that strengthen us

During my years as a district executive, I treasured the opportunity to serve the wider church family. While not always easy, the ministry was seldom boring. I had the joy of working with a multitude of persons who loved the church, its heritage, beliefs, and practices, and who provided a significant ministry of volunteerism for district and denominational ministries.

But I also experienced firsthand the erosion in loyalty to the Church of the Brethren and its historic values and practices. I witnessed painful church divisions over issues of leadership. I experienced the darker side of the church when persons clashed and became polarized over theology, social issues, finances, and even worship styles.

Nevertheless, while many people are cynical about the state of the church at present, I am more positive. Yet I wonder—what are the avenues of hope that would guide our denomination into new adventures in faithful living, providing strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, as the beloved hymn suggests?



JOE DETRICK

I am reminded of something that happened during my years growing

up on a dairy farm in West Central Wisconsin. Of all the farm chores that I remember, the one I disliked most was picking stones. Each year the spring frost brought a new crop of stones to the surface. Our whole family spent hours

for essential farm buildings. Those stumbling stones became building blocks.

When I think about the present state of the church, I can't help but think of those years on the farm. I saw the task of gathering and moving rocks as tedious and unnecessary, but Dad saw something more than just a pile of rocks. In much the same way, I think God must have bigger and better plans for the church. Repeatedly in Scripture, God takes that which is regarded as inconvenient, unclean, sinful, unworthy, broken, a stumbling block, and transforms it into something beautiful, precious, and holy. As Jeremiah (29:11) says, we have a future with hope.

As the church continues to struggle with present-day issues, do we reject these "stones" that the cultural frost nudges to the surface and relegate them to the rock pile outside the church? Or, do we welcome these "stones" as an essential part of the conversations that surround the formation of our faith, bound and strengthened by the unifying "cement" of the Spirit?

Two questions to ponder: How can we conduct ourselves in our churches, districts, and at Annual Conference in ways that display our best understanding of what the New Testament would expect from us as members of a community of faith? How do we "hold one another in love and fellowship" as we wrestle with the weighty stone-like issues of the day? These are important questions because the answers will determine how we worship together, how we serve one another and welcome those whom God sends to us, and how we do business together at all levels of the church. The

AS THE CHURCH CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE WITH PRESENT-DAY ISSUES, DO WE REJECT THESE "STONES" THAT THE CULTURAL FROST NUDGES TO THE SURFACE AND RELEGATE THEM TO THE ROCK PILE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?

picking up fist-sized rocks and small boulders, filling a wagon. We emptied each load onto a large rock pile at the edge of the field. These stones were a real nuisance, but when I complained about the drudgery of the task, Dad would firmly say that someday he would need the rocks for other useful things. Dad had a bigger vision.

Sometime later, we went back to the rock pile, reloaded the stones and hauled them back to the barnyard. We mixed these rocks with cement, gravel, and rebar to form a solid foundation for a 40-foot silo, a garage, corn-crib, and two pole barns. The stones that I had rejected as being worthless and a nuisance became an important recycled ingredient in forming the foundation and support system

apostle Paul says it best: "Let us then pursue the things that make for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19).

As we go forward in faith, confident that when sisters and brothers gather at church settings for worship and deliberations, how we treat one another in moments of both gentle agreement and vigorous challenge will illustrate the extent to which we are guided by God's Spirit. What may seem to be stones or issues of inconvenience may become stones that strengthen and bond us Brethren together. **W**

Joe Detrick recently completed 13 years as district executive for the Church of the Brethren's Southern Pennsylvania District. He previously served 16 years in pastoral ministry, and five years as coordinator for Brethren Volunteer Service orientation. He lives in Loganville, Pa., with his wife, Venona.

“If you are a leader, expect sabotage.”

—Edwin H. Friedman, author of *Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*

“I think every person sings the song of God, and that every different, diverse idea is part of the language of God.”

—Singer/songwriter Rickie Lee Jones, from an interview about her album, *The Sermon on Exposition Boulevard*

“For the sake of our planet, a conversation that needs to be heard is the one between generations, between elders and young people around the world—and those who are in between.”

—Desmond Tutu, winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, and Anglican archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, in “For the future of our planet, a dialogue between the generations,” in *The Huffington Post*

“Perhaps, then, what the ladies of Wisteria Lane offer the faithful is the reality that loving one’s neighbor is challenging because it demands giving of your whole person. It requires sharing what you have with another—sharing time, emotions, stories, money, secrets, fears, and vulnerabilities.”

—Author Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio, writing on CNN.com about the spiritual lessons learned in ABC’s *Desperate Housewives*

“What we are proposing and proclaiming here is not just theological rhetoric. For many people, these issues are now a matter of life and death.”

—Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, in a message sent to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) Rio+20

“Think about it. We don’t trust the state with our taxes, and we’re going to trust the state to say who lives or dies?”

—Death penalty activist Joseph Ingle, quoted in *The Huntsville Times*

“Being a Christian so often involves such boorish and meanspirited behavior that I marvel that any of my Mormon colleagues are so eager to join the fold.”

—Rhodes College professor David V. Mason, writing in *The New York Times* on why he’s happy to be labeled a Mormon, not a Christian

➔ **Among all likely voters**, regardless of their faith inclinations, the most influential issues are health care (75 percent), tax policy (62 percent), employment policies and strategies (54 percent), and plans regarding the nation’s dependence on foreign oil (52 percent). An analysis of reactions to the dozen issues posed to respondents of the recent Barna Group survey shows that the areas least likely to impact people’s choice are candidate positions on gay marriage (31 percent), environmental policy (30 percent), and abortion (29 percent).

➔ **For the fifth straight year, total membership in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) declined.** Membership fell nearly one percentage point to just less than 16 million members. Baptisms and the number of churches rose slightly—by 0.70 percent and 0.08 percent, respectively. Baptisms hit a 60-year low for the denomination, though still totaled more than 330,000. The denomination planted almost 1,000 new churches, of which 50 percent were non-Anglo; however, the net gain of 37 churches was one of the lowest totals in 40 years.

➔ Representatives of the National Council of Churches called for **protection of the**

Bristol Bay Watershed May 31 at a public hearing in Seattle. Following a recent trip to Washington, D.C. by senior religious leaders to educate elected officials about the importance of Bristol Bay, testimonies from the group reiterated the need to prevent large-scale development in the Bay, which would threaten jobs, the health of creation, and Alaskan Native culture.

➔ **More than two dozen faculty members have resigned** from Shorter University, a Baptist school in Georgia, after it required them to sign a “personal lifestyle statement” that condemns homosexuality, premarital sex, and public drinking. An online campaign called “Save Our Shorter” says that the lifestyle pledge, adopted in the fall of 2011 along with a statement of faith, has led to dozens of resignations. University president Donald Dowless on May 18 confirmed that 36 faculty have resigned and at least 25 cited disagreement with either the personal lifestyle statement or the faith statement. The school usually has about 100 full-time faculty.



JUST FOR FUN: SEQUENCE

CONFERENCE CALL Annual Conference comes to St. Louis, Missouri, this summer, visiting the city for the first time since 1988. Put the Annual Conference host cities below in order from least recent to most recent (for cities that have hosted multiple times, use the most recent Conference). Answers are printed below.

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Kansas City, Mo. | Long Beach, Calif. |
| Phoenix, Ariz. | Portland, Ore. |
| Richmond, Va. | Indianapolis, Ind. |
| Pittsburgh, Pa. | Charleston, W.Va. |
| Roanoke, Va. | Ocean Grove, N.J. |
| Orlando, Fla. | Charlotte, N.C. |

ANSWERS: Ocean Grove, N.J. (1988); Roanoke, Va. (1974); Phoenix, Ariz. (1985); Portland, Ore. (1991); Indianapolis, Ind. (1983); Charlotte, N.C. (1995—last headed there again next summer); Long Beach, Calif. (1997); Orlando, Fla. (1998); Kansas City, Mo. (2000); Charleston, W.Va. (2004); Richmond, Va. (2008); Pittsburgh, Pa. (2010).



WHY OUR ROOTS IN THE LAND STILL MATTER

by Jonathan Stauffer

Since our beginnings as a denomination, the Church of the Brethren has been involved with agriculture. Our heritage through the farming profession has shaped close ties between our faith and the stewardship of our communities and creation. Our past connections and faith convictions continue to define us as a denomination and how we respond to the world's needs. Even as more members live in or commute to cities for work, the church has been at the forefront of collaborations to alleviate hunger both at home and abroad.

However, upcoming challenges of feeding the world currently put industrial-scale farming at odds with independent farmers and ecologically sound methods. These challenges are linked to unresolved problems facing rural communities in the United States. If the Church of the Brethren desires to deal with these challenges, it is vital that we understand what

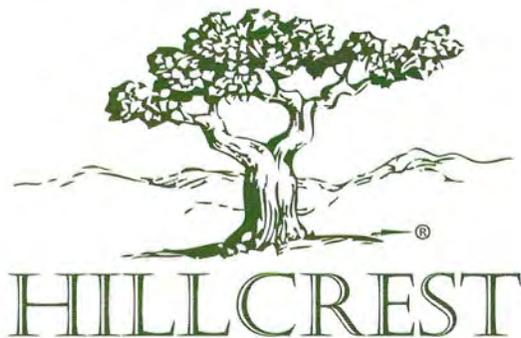
is at stake and embody the theological principles informed by our agricultural heritage in order to envision bold, new ways of serving together as a body of Christ.

Brethren heritage in agriculture

According to Leon C. Neher, writer of the *Brethren Encyclopedia* article on "Agriculture," it was during the 19th century that the Brethren most developed a sense of their connection to agriculture as part of their beliefs and practice. They understood that following Jesus and love of neighbor also meant meeting the physical needs from whatever resources they had been entrusted from God. From their study of scripture and demands of physical labor on the land, Brethren developed principles to serve God in the stewardship of natural resources and meet world's need.

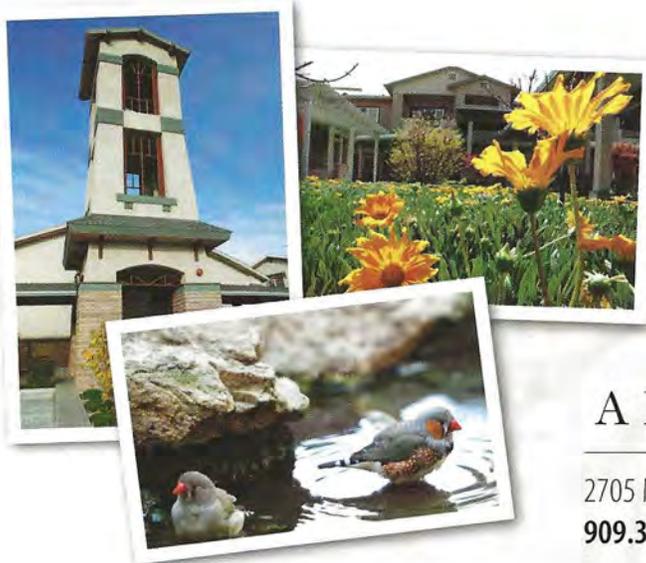
The Brethren relationship to the land in light of our theol-

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A Remarkable Brethren Community

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



Remarkable Residents



{ Residents Jerry & Berkley Davis }

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



{ Resident Shantilal Bhagat }

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



{ Chaplain Tom Hostetler }

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

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BRETHREN MUTUAL AID SHARE FUND

The Share Fund's mission is to offer financial support to help meet the special needs of individuals and families in the Church and in Church communities.

At the Brethren Mutual Aid Inc., we strive to practice a strong relational style of service based on the teachings of the Church. As part of that Christian commitment, we created The Brethren Mutual Aid Share Fund, and we want to spread the word about how, working together with our insured congregations, we can use this resource to help people in need.

The Share Fund is a non-profit corporation established by the Brethren Mutual Aid Inc. to provide financial assistance to Brethren-related congregations in their caring and sharing ministries. It is funded by a combination of the profits from the Brethren Mutual Aid Agency and contributions by other individuals and organizations.

Since the Share Fund's inception, it has provided over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in matching funds to assist Brethren individuals and families in crisis. Together we can offer help and hope to those in need.

Brethren

MUTUAL AID AGENCY

For more information on the Brethren Mutual Aid Share Fund Inc. contact us at:

800-255-1243

3094 Jeep Road, Abilene KS 67410-6064

MAABRETHREN.COM

MANY OF THE THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES THE DENOMINATION HOLDS TODAY HAVE BEEN SHAPED BY OUR CONNECTION TO THE LAND THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH. WHILE WE AS A CHURCH HAVE DONE MUCH TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER AND POVERTY, THERE ARE UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES WITHIN AGRICULTURE ITSELF THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF HUMANITY AND CREATION.



Photo: Shutterstock.com

ogy has also cultivated in us a sense of stewardship. Farmers were accustomed to working with the natural cycle of the seasons, and the right balance of nutrients in the soil through techniques such as crop rotation. Such a relationship to the growing process connected them with understanding of God's role as creator and sustainer of the world, and the harvest as part of God's provision.

By the early 1900s the majority of Brethren were still farmers, but the growing share of other occupations held by Brethren—such as education and medicine—brought more diversity to Brethren concerns of hunger and reconciliation. The

convictions to follow Christ and care for neighbor guided the Brethren to respond actively through international missions. In addition to evangelism and medicine, programs would include teaching agricultural practices among the local community. Missions in China, India, Nigeria, and Ecuador each included schools for Bible studies and farming techniques. (See "Agricultural Missions" in the *Brethren Encyclopedia*.)

Agriculture continues as an integral part of missions in the denomination today. The Global Food Crisis Fund provides grants for growing projects, and local economic development to communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Foods Resource Bank, an ecumenical partner organization, forms community partnerships between many rural and urban congregations including those within the Church of the Brethren. Global Mission and Service continues to serve communities in 15 different countries within the continents of North America, Asia, and Africa.

Part of the church's denominational work continues to support local and fair farming initiatives around the world. An example of this is an ongoing partnership with the National Farm Workers Ministries to advocate for just policy toward immigrant farm workers. Many of these partnerships include cultivating agricultural practices to ensure "food sovereignty" among local communities. Several ongoing initiatives have been featured in past *MESSANGER* articles: Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Pygmy and Bafulero tribes in Jan/Feb 2012).

The changing face of agriculture

While we as a church have done a lot to alleviate hunger and poverty, there are unresolved problems and challenges within agriculture itself that affect the well-being of humanity and creation. We cannot be an agent in mitigating world hunger without remembering the realities that an effective agriculture practice requires.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford



Joel Brumbaugh-Coyford

Farm Bill action

Many issues facing agriculture and rural communities are addressed by the federal government through the Farm Bill. Every five years, Congress considers the choices Americans make with food and agricultural policy through a large piece of legislation known as the Farm Bill. Its 15 titles cover a vast survey of items including nutrition and food assistance, trade regulations, renewable energy, rural economic development, conservation of natural resources, and risk management of farm operations. The last Farm Bill was completed in 2008 which means that this year is again time for determining revisions that will begin in 2013. However with the looming debt debate and the presidential elections, it is unclear if a new Farm Bill will pass before expiration at the end of September.

Rural congregations and the Church of the Brethren as a whole have a unique perspective to share with our representatives on being good stewards of our resources and supporting rural communities. Consider sending a message to your Congressional members to support faithful principles in the 2012 Farm Bill. The action alert can be found at www.brethren.org/farmbill.

Rising food demand continues to be a major challenge that many people in the agriculture industry, government, and humanitarian organizations are seeking to address. According to the United Nations 2010 World Populations Prospects report, the world's population is expected to increase to around 9 billion by 2050. Most of this growth will happen in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Current experts estimate that food production will need to increase within a range of 50-100 percent, and are exploring ways to increase yields in local regions while also maintaining the delicate balance of the natural environment.

As city populations have grown and fewer people are farming, our society has become more reliant on corporate-scale farm operations to supply a majority of our food sources, and less on small, independent farmers. Our government subsidies favor commodities (corn, soybeans, cotton, etc.) over healthier options of specialized crops (fruits and vegetables). The lack of adequate nutrition puts people at a health risk that is especially critical to impoverished families.

The trend toward larger, industrial farms continues around the world, putting a larger share of the earth's resources into fewer hands. Recently developed countries like China and Saudi Arabia are purchasing large tracts of land in Asia and Africa for industrialized practices, squeezing out the local small and mid-sized farmer. The "land grab" is a continuation of what has already been experienced in the United States with the farm crisis, but the loss is more tragic to families that in some cases have farmed their land for hundreds of years. Therefore, perhaps the best place to begin understanding how to adequately respond to these problems is to see what has happened within our own fields.

Real communities in crisis

Our relationship with agriculture in the United States has changed within the last two generations. By the middle of the 20th century, several factors promoted agricultural trends in the US toward larger acreage and increases in production. New technologies, such as the tractor, replaced animal power

**GIVEN THAT MANY CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
CONGREGATIONS RESIDE IN RURAL AREAS,
HOW COULD WE AS A DENOMINATION CONTINUE
TO HELP ADDRESS THESE COMMUNITY NEEDS?**



Cheryl Barmstrong - Olyfind

to pull larger equipment, and a typical farmer could manage more land. An increasing global population meant rising food demand and the need for greater productivity. Many industrial farm practices developed in the United States used chemical applications and bioengineering to increase yields, often leaving ecological processes as a secondary concern.

Conditions that allowed for substantial growth in agriculture also created problems in subsequent years. Those who could not compete with larger farms often were faced with the decision to get big, consolidate with other farmers, or get out. Industrial-scale farm practices also required more financial input than previous farming systems. Farmers would take out loans or buy on credit, often at high interest rates, to purchase more acreage or machinery in order to keep up with competitors. If a crop was not at least as profitable as their input investment, farmers would go further into debt. Too much debt forced many farmers to go bankrupt and lose property. Due to bankruptcies and other economic factors, the National Agriculture Statistics Service from the US Department of Agriculture indicated that farm populations had decreased from 30 million to 20 million between 1940 and 1965.

As the number of farmers continued to decrease in the 1970s, the Church of the Brethren began to examine the reasons for the decline and seek ways to mitigate its impacts. In 1974, a study called "This Land: Ours for a Season" and a General Board statement "Church and Agriculture" were offered to Annual Conference. The landmark report noted that more than two-thirds of Brethren congregations

resided in rural areas at that time, called for a renewal of environmental stewardship, and highlighted recommendations that would establish fair economic conditions for all farm sizes.

The farm crisis came into full swing in the early 1980s as many farmers, including those who were Brethren members, could not manage enough income to pay off their mounting debts. By 1985, Annual Conference passed a resolution called "Rural Community in Crisis" to reaffirm denominational support for farm communities facing the crisis and call for an end to speculative practices that favor non-farm investors. Shantilal Bhagat, a General Board staff member at the time, helped farmers in the Church of the Brethren and in other denominations understand the crisis through educational resources such as *The Family Farm, Can It Be Saved?*

The impact on rural communities due to industrial agriculture, and the resulting farm crisis of the 1980s, are in many ways still present today. According to a report based on 2010 census results by the Center for Rural Affairs, many rural communities in the Great Plains and Midwest have a smaller percentage of population in the 20-44 age range when compared with urban populations, but have similar percentages for youth under age 20 and slightly higher for older adults, respectively. This "book-ending" trend creates unique economic impacts in rural regions due to the lack of young, working-age adults. As a result, rural local governments have a harder time raising resources for education and health care services that many young and older residents need. As the population in rural communities tends to decrease and age, challenges arise in how to address eroding community facilities and growing poverty.

Given that many Church of the Brethren congregations reside in rural areas, how could we as a denomination



Courtesy of Global Food Crisis Fund



IN LIGHT OF OUR RURAL HERITAGE, GLOBAL CHANGES IN AGRICULTURE, AND OUR ONGOING RURAL ISSUES AT HOME, THE CHURCH NEEDS TO RECONSIDER ITS CONNECTION WITH AGRICULTURE.

continue to help address these community needs? The conclusion of the 1985 Annual Conference Resolution may be worthy of further reflection:

“The Church is called to action in rural America—action based both on its biblical understandings of land and liberation, and on its understandings of the socio-economic and political realities of life today. Our response to the present situation calls for sensitivity to the moral significance of the crisis—a crisis that not only involves the food necessary for life and the land and water needed to produce that food, but the way of life of the people who make the land productive, in this generation and for future generations.”

Together envisioning a Brethren response

In light of our rural heritage, global changes in agriculture, and our ongoing rural issues at home, the church needs to reconsider its connection with agriculture. While the majority of Brethren today may not be farmers, we still embody the same theological understanding of caring for our neighbor and God’s creation. Our resources now consist of the choices we make as consumers, through the support in our local communities and our global community.

As consumers, supporting small-scale farms provides a possible response from our faith heritage that honors sustainable practices and supports local communities. The growing number of community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms is an example of a return to local farming initiatives. These operations allow for smaller management cost with diverse produce options that market to consumers who can either choose to volunteer a work-share, or agree to pay for a share. Other local food initiatives are gaining public interest in many cities provided through US Department of Agriculture programs like the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) which supports funding for farmers to become produce suppliers for farmers’ markets and local schools.

We can also each participate at the community level. Community gardens have been formed for the purposes of providing not only sources for food, but also as ministries for healing and wholeness. The Brethren Press book *Gardening for the Earth and Soul* by Heather Dean and Tom Benevento is a good resource for churches and community groups to explore this response further. The Christian Community

Development Association (CCDA) has been working to address the cycles of poverty in the US through both urban neighborhoods and rural villages by developing an asset-based approach in revitalizing community needs.

At the global level, we can be aware of ongoing partnerships that are promoting food sovereignty and innovative approaches to local sustainable agriculture. As mentioned previously, the work of Global Mission and Service has drawn from our farming legacy, and support for this should be continued. Each of us can learn more about the goals of proper nutrition in food aid and food sovereignty through the UN “Right to Food” initiative (www.srfood.org). We can encourage innovative developments like the “Renewing Earth and Its People” fund, founded by Brethren John and Janet Doran, which provides grants to organizations that expand the development of sustainable agriculture and the Earth’s resources.

Most important, younger generations are increasingly less connected to food sources and the insights that can be gained from interacting with God’s creation. Continuing support of camp programs and community gardens will enrich young people’s awareness of environmental diversity, and broaden their food and energy choices as a part of their spiritual development. By learning about God’s creation and being better stewards of it, they can have a deeper spiritual connection to the Creator and join with Jesus in continuing the stewardship of all life.

Many of the theological principles the denomination holds today have been shaped by our connection to the land through the eyes of faith. While we as a church have done much to alleviate hunger and poverty, there are unresolved problems and challenges within agriculture itself that affect the well-being of humanity and creation. We cannot be agents in mitigating world hunger without remembering the realities that an effective agriculture practice requires. Our principles of justice and reconciliation can guide us to advocate for changes in working conditions for migrant farm workers, increased diversity of farm ownership, and revitalization of rural communities. Our principles of stewardship call us to protect the soil, water, and air that everyone relies upon. May our partnership with God and our fellowship in Christ continue to be attentive to the work of the land and the needs of our global community. 

Jonathan Stauffer is advocacy assistant for the Church of the Brethren and the National Council of Churches in Washington, D.C.



Some 120 people gathered at this year's New Church Planting Conference on the theme, "Plant Generously, Reap Bountifully."

Church
planting
takes

root

story and photos by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

On May 16-19 about 120 people—including seminary and academy students—gathered at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind., for the 2012 New Church Planting Conference. The event is held every other year, sponsored by the New Church Development Advisory Committee and Congregational Life Ministries. The following verbal snapshots are provided by News Services director Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, who attended the event.—Ed



RENACER AIMS AT NEW HISPANIC BRETHREN CONGREGATIONS

Renacer, a movement aimed at creating new Hispanic congregations within the Church of the Brethren, and at raising up new Hispanic Brethren leadership, is the brainchild of Daniel D'Oleo.

Meaning "reborn" or "born again" in Spanish, Renacer began with a new church plant started in Leola, Pa., in Atlantic Northeast District. After D'Oleo was hired to do Hispanic ministry in Virlina District a few years later, a second Renacer was started in Roanoke, Va. Since then a third Renacer has begun in Floyd, Va.

Renacer Leola is now pastored by Wilfredo Muñoz,



and Renacer Floyd is pastored by Raul and Lidia González, while Renacer Roanoke is pastored by D'Oleo and his wife, Oris.

The Renacer strategy begins with small groups, house churches, and preaching points, D'Oleo explained in an interview he gave during the New Church Planting Conference. Renacer Floyd, for example, is in an area of rural Virginia where there is a low population of Spanish speakers, so the pastors are involving others from nearby areas by starting house churches and preaching points in the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg.

Renacer also has been greatly helped along by the generosity of existing congregations of Brethren, such as Conestoga Church of the Brethren which provided space and opened its doors to Renacer Leola.

"I'm very very excited" about Renacer, D'Oleo said. "It humbles me to be part of something that is so huge.

"We didn't know exactly what it was" when Renacer started, he added. Leadership training, for example, is one of the pieces that has come to be part of the Renacer vision more recently. More leaders means more opportunities, and more churches, D'Oleo pointed out.

"We need to raise up a new generation of leaders in the Hispanic community," he said, noting that "the only way is

from within" the existing church. One reason for emphasizing home-grown leaders, he added, is a need to change the culture of Hispanic church leadership in general. Other Hispanic Christian traditions tend to have a strong "one leader" model, that means a congregation dies after a pastor moves on, he said. He characterized that as old-style and unhealthy. "It's not working, and it's not Brethren," he said.

Other reasons to seek new leaders from within the Church of the Brethren and to emphasize Brethren leadership training—SeBAH-CoB Spanish language ministry training program of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the Mennonite Education Agency, Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education office, for example—is to work on theological consistency and unity across the denomination, D'Oleo said. "All of the members of Renacer will be Church of the Brethren," he said. "This is a movement from within."

Asked about the possibility of Renacer not being welcomed by other Hispanic Brethren, D'Oleo responded, "This is not a competition." Spanish-speaking church leaders in the denomination do not experience the territorial boundaries evidenced sometimes by Anglo leaders, he said. For Hispanic Brethren, more really is merrier. Renacer, he hopes, may be one tool to help bring together existing Hispanic congregations in a common purpose.

What's next for Renacer? A national advisory board is in the works. And D'Oleo has been in conversation about next steps with general secretary Stan Noffsinger and Congregational Life Ministries executive Jonathan Shively, as well as the two districts that have Renacer congregations and others such as Brethren World Mission.

"We want the blessing of the denomination," D'Oleo said. "We want the support of Congregational Life Ministries. We're looking for the blessing and support of all of the district executives. The only concern is how to cross district boundaries." He reports that other districts beyond Atlantic Northeast and Virginia have shown interest in welcoming the Renacer movement as they feel led by the spirit to reach the Hispanic community.

D'Oleo thanks a number of church leaders for their assistance with the Renacer ministry: "I thank Jeff Boshart, Ruben Deoleo, Fausto Carrasco, David Shumate, Joel Peña, Mayra and Livorio Calix, Lidia and Raul González, and Allan Miller for all their prayers and contribution to the ministry. I ask the church in general to support us with your prayers.

"It's for the sake of the Kingdom," he said. "There's so much we can do for each other."



Above: Daniel D'Oleo is a moving force behind the new Renacer Church of the Brethren congregations. Renacer means "reborn" or "born again" in Spanish. Left: Conestoga Church of the Brethren gave meeting space and support and encouragement to help start the new Renacer congregation in Leola, Pa.



New church planters received blessing, prayer, and a laying on of hands during the New Church Planting Conference.

MICHIGAN CAMPUS MINISTRY GROWS NEW CHURCHES

Nate Polzin's involvement in campus ministry began in 1996, when New Life Church of the Brethren in Mount Pleasant, Mich., hired him part-time to start a ministry with students at a nearby university.

New Life was the church Polzin grew up in, "a real typical Church of the Brethren—small, in the cornfields, family based, mostly older with a few young adults," he remembers. But the congregation had the insight and foresight to invest energy and money in what he describes as a "huge mission field that's in our backyard."

The result was a new movement called Standing in the Gap, described as "nondenominational campus ministry that is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren." Now, 16 years later, Standing in the Gap has started new campus ministry groups at two more Michigan campuses, Saginaw Valley University and Ferris State University. It has a foundation that supports and supervises the ministry in parallel structure to the district. And it has an



Standing in the Gap is a campus ministry started by New Life Church of the Brethren in Mount Pleasant, Mich.

ambitious goal to start groups in all of the 12 towns that have Division I and Division II schools in the state.

A second result: new church plants. Since Polzin started Standing in the Gap, alongside it have emerged the Church in Drive Fellowship in Saginaw, and the Lost and Found Church, a less-than-one-year-old church start in Big Rapids, Mich., led by Jake Davis.

A third result: renewal for the mother church at New Life in Mount Pleasant. The young adults who came to the church through the campus ministry "loved the community," Polzin said. Several stayed in the congregation, got married, started families, and now the church has some 40 children in attendance who were not there 16 years ago, and a vital children's ministry.

The growth and vitality of the New Life Church are "spiritual dividends and practical dividends for the congregation that other churches are noticing," Polzin said. When the church put resources into campus ministry, they saw God start to do amazing things, he added.

"Dividends" also come from the space that has been made in Michigan District for both older churches and new plants. Polzin, who also is serving as interim district executive on a part-time basis, says, "maybe this is both and, instead of either/or."

COMMON SPIRIT MINNEAPOLIS BIRTHS NEW HOUSE CHURCHES

"Retro Yet Relevant"—the title of Kim Hill Smith's workshop on house churches—may say it all. The model has been familiar to Brethren for more than 300 years. Actually, house churches have been in use by Christians since Paul and other apostles first spread the faith across the Roman Empire by encouraging churches based in households.

Yet the house church is experiencing a resurgence across the US today, among a wide variety of Christian groups, Smith told her workshop.

A founding member of Common Spirit Fellowship Church of the Brethren in Minneapolis, Minn., Smith told the story of how her house church began, and how it gained fellowship status. The story is not without drama, but she spoke calmly and frankly of the conflict Common Spirit overcame with some in Northern Plains District who disagree with its welcome of all people regardless of sexual orientation.

Smith noted that Common Spirit mimics a style of church that was the norm for Brethren for much of their early history. For the first 50 years after Brethren moved from Europe to Pennsylvania, they did not build meetinghouses. Then, in the 19th century, they did not build meetinghouses until they



were sure permanent meeting space was really needed.

Reluctance to build meetinghouses stemmed in part, Smith said, from fear of losing informality and intimacy in worship. Some Brethren homes of the time were constructed as both living and worship places, with walls that could be removed to make more space for church meetings. It was in the last quarter of the 19th century that Brethren started building churches in earnest, and the big church building boom came only in the mid-20th century.

Common Spirit has found the house church to be economical (no building expenses or rent as meetings rotate between the homes of members, no salaried leadership, and no need for funding from the district), environmentally friendly (no extra utility usage), family friendly and productive of a strong community (members take turns leading worship, with children included in everything, meetings held on Sunday afternoons after children's nap time, followed by a simple potluck).

The steps that led to the creation of Common Spirit included "inspiration"—"someone had a vision" for the group, Smith said—followed by "inquiry" that included getting contact information for the Brethren living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul urban area who had no local Church of the Brethren congregation with which to worship, and a time of "invitation" as a core group talked with others who might be interested.

For three years starting in 2002, Common Spirit met once a month as a small group of eight people. For Smith, there is a delightful echo of the first eight Brethren who were baptized in the Eder River. "You never know what a vision and a couple of conversations will do," she said.

Now, 10 years later, Common Spirit has gained fellowship status after having been accepted as a project by the district,

Kim Hill Smith presents a workshop on house churches for the New Church Planting Conference. She is a founding member of Common Spirit, a Church of the Brethren house church fellowship in Minneapolis.

and in 2010 was welcomed into the denomination by Annual Conference. It has grown to include 20-some people.

With growth has come a new question: if the group is too large to easily meet in a home, should it divide and start another house church? "We really do want to be a house church," Smith said, adding that they have no ambition to become anything more than a fellowship, or to grow to congregation size.

In the meantime, two more house churches have picked up the Common Spirit model, and even its name: Common Spirit Manchester in North Manchester, Ind., and Common Spirit Grand Rapids in Michigan. News of the Grand Rapids group took Smith by surprise when one of its leaders attended her workshop.

Her response? Both appreciation and a statement of openness to other ways of doing church. "I don't think everybody needs to do our model," she said. "This is just one."



ATLANTIC NORTHEAST MAKES CHURCH PLANTING A PRIORITY

An Atlantic Northeast District display at the New Church Planting Conference illustrated a wide range of styles and models for new church plants.

The district's current group of 12 church starts includes Brethren Revival Fellowship-related free ministry groups, a Renacer congregation, other Spanish-speaking fellowships led by pastors who have emigrated from the Caribbean, one urban congregation of Arabic speakers with an Egyptian-born pastor in New York City, another urban congregation of Haitian Brethren in Boston, and an arts-based model of missional churches, among others.

In an interview held during the conference, Don Mitchell, director of Church Development and Evangelism, talked about the strategy and process that have led to such variety of new Brethren in the Northeast.

"First of all, you know that church planting is messy," he said. "The district's role is to partner. We walk alongside and we do the David Shumate formula 3Ps," he added, referring to a formula taught by Virlina District





An Atlantic Northeast District display celebrates the 12 new church plants in the district, which represent the variety of new church planting across the denomination as well. The district boasts new plants in the free ministry mode in a cooperative venture with both Southern Pennsylvania District and the Brethren Revival Fellowship, new Hispanic congregations led by pastors who have immigrated from the Caribbean, new urban plants in cities like Boston and New York, and arts-based groups with a family feel, among others.

executive David Shumate: prayer, presence, and presents.

“We pray for them (church planters),” Mitchell said. “We have presence, which means I go, other members of the district go” to visit new church plants. “And then we give presents.” Among the gifts the district offers to new church plants are leadership training, coaching, and education in Brethren heritage and core values.

At least one of the new church starts in the free ministry mode is a product of partnership with Southern Pennsylvania District. With support from both districts, a number of families picked up and moved to Maine, creating what Mitchell called an “old style Brethren” church plant. “You talk about stepping out in faith,” he commented admiringly.

He attributes some of the district’s success to the fact that there are areas of the Northeast with little Brethren population, and many unchurched people, and so the field of opportunity is wide open.

The effort is not just seizing an opportunity, it is very intentional. “We are trying to create a culture of church planting” in the district, Mitchell said. For example, each year the district sends church planters to a church planting event. Those events include the Church of the Brethren’s New Church Planting Conference on a biennial basis, or in alternate years the Exponential conference held in Florida. The Exponential conference is the largest church planting gathering in the US.

The district is involved with SeBAH-CoB to give theological training to Hispanic leaders. Seminario Biblico Anabautista Hispano (SeBAH) is a Spanish language ministry training program that is a partnership of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the Mennonite Education Agency’s Hispanic Pastoral and Leadership Education office. Two Church of the Brethren districts—Atlantic Northeast and Pacific Southwest—have cohorts participating in SeBAH. A third cohort in Puerto Rico which would include Brethren and Mennonites is being planned. A lot of the momentum for the involvement of the Brethren in SeBAH came from Atlantic Northeast District.

District executive Craig Smith works closely with church planters and leaders of new church starts in terms of licensing and ministry formation, and visits the

new groups frequently.

The response of the district has been good, and financial support for the work of new church development has been strong.

The funding of new church starts is a partnership endeavor, Mitchell emphasized. The expectation is for church plants to match district funding and become self sustaining within three to five years. The Commission on Church Development and Evangelism can revisit this expectation if necessary and extend more assistance to a plant if it seems mutually helpful.

The district sets up a steering committee for each of its new plants, and places great emphasis on assessment



Mike Chong Perkinson (shown here) and Tom Johnston were the keynote speakers for the conference on new church planting. The two are founders and senior developer and executive director, respectively, of the Praxis Center for Church Development. Their work entails training and coaching church planters and serving as consultants for church revitalization.

of church planters. They may be asked to undergo an intimidating set of psychological testing, personality and work style assessments, and a consideration of personal life and family relationships.

The real key to the district’s emphasis and success with church planting, however, is the district executive, from Mitchell’s point of view. “Our district executive is committed, and devoted to church planting, multiplication, and of course making disciples.” ❏



Are we in good hands?

by Joshua Brockway

It is no secret that the recent debates about health care have been heated and acrimonious. The fact that the Affordable Health Care Act received a six hours of hearings before the Supreme Court should tell us that there is much to discuss.

But I am not so much concerned about the discussion of legislation or policy. Rather, the realities of our insurance system present the church with an interesting look into the ways we are shaped by our economic practices. We have come to accept the practices of the insurance industry as ones that define our relational practices. In more simple terms, we prefer the anonymity of insurance over the deep relational work of being the church. Mutuality asks too much of us, both in giving and in receiving.

All insurance policies function on the principle of socialized risk. The idea is to gather money from a pool of customers in

diverse categories of age and health conditions. It is this range that helps distribute the risk across the pool of customers. For example, if my dad and I were in the pool together we would pay the same premium, yet I would not be expected to use the full amount of my contributions because of my age. The assumption—based on huge algorithms and statistics—is that my dad would use more cash than he contributes. The total payouts would, in a perfect pool, not exceed the money collected from each customer. Yet some would pay in more

HEALING IS NOT PRIVATIZED GAIN, NOR IS IT THE PRODUCT OF ANONYMOUS SOCIALIZED RISK. SHARING IS THE ROOT OF COMPASSION—A SHARING OF SUFFERING AND WANT.

than they use while others would withdraw more than they contribute. The risk is distributed, or socialized.

The whole insurance industry is based on the anonymity of socialized risk. We never fully know who is in the pool and we never know who is withdrawing funds. What is more, we barely

know the full extent of need. A person's needs are concealed in a series of identification numbers and balance sheets. This principle of socialized risk seeks to privatize any benefit. Each person is hidden along with his or her need. The system is based on the best of social networks without any of the responsibility demanded in true social support. All relationships are collapsed into the financial algorithms of the system.

Such a practice should sting our Christian sensibilities. When we read of Jesus' compassionate ministry it is clear that healing and faith are relational categories. The hemorrhaging woman touched the hem of his robe (Luke 4:43-48). The blind man was healed with spit, dirt, and a touch of Jesus' hand (John 9:6-7). The multitude was fed by the giving of real food and the public giving of thanks (Mark 6:41-44). Even the centurion whose son lay ill sent someone to encounter Jesus and tell him the family's story (John 4:46-54). These acts are not done in isolation. Healing is not privatized gain, nor is it the product of anonymous socialized risk. Sharing is the root of compassion—a sharing of suffering and want.

Luke tells us in the book of Acts about a couple in the church who tried to socialize the risk and privatize gain. Ananias and Sapphira, forever known for their deceit and death in shame, tried to have all the benefits of the Christian community without assuming any of the risks (Acts 5:1-11). By keeping a portion of the capital from the sale of their land, Ananias prefigured much of the individualism of our current economic system. Instead of risking the hard work of true community he hedged his bets by giving only part of the proceeds to the common treasury. His effort to privatize the gain subverted the sharing described earlier in the idyllic portrait of the first church: for they would "distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:15).

The practices of modern insurance have shaped us into a people who value the maxim of anonymous social risk. Today we assume that our needs are private matters, yet we expect the help of others. We want assistance, primarily in the form of money, without having to ask or without having anyone know we are struggling. The prospect of naming our needs in the presence of others, even those closest to us, is simply too humbling. We would rather submit to anonymous systems of exchange than submit to the requirements of true community.

Our discomfort with the rite of footwashing reveals the problem. When we speak of the practice as service, it is rather easy to wash another's feet. By tying the towel around our waist, we say to the other, "Here let me help you." Yet, when we are seated and waiting for someone to wash our own feet, the discomfort rises. We would rather not reveal how dirty we are. We don't want someone else to stoop before us. To say we need help runs counter to every social value we pick up in our wider lives. Our unease with washing feet is not about serving others, but with the mutuality of receiving service from a sister or brother.

This is often the case of playing church. It is too easy to

OUR LIVES ARE JUST BUSINESS AS USUAL, IN ALL MEANINGS OF THE WORD BUSINESS. IT IS AS IF EASTER HAD NEVER HAPPENED OR OUR BAPTISM HAS HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THE WAYS WE LIVE, MOVE, AND HAVE OUR BEING.

dismiss the portrait of the first Christians in Acts as fanciful or unrealistic. We are more comfortable with the standards of socialized risk and privatized gain as the *modus operandi* of being the church; the values of individualism trump any vision or practice of mutuality. What is more, we prefer that the community not place any expectations or demands on our way of life. So we develop stewardship drives concealing our finances so that others might not question how we live outside of our Sunday gatherings.

Our lives are just business as usual, in all meanings of the word business. It is as if Easter had never happened or our baptism has had little effect on the ways we live, move, and have our being. We assume that the markets are just the way things are, and live without questioning our economic and social interactions.

But as we see in the book of Acts, the resurrection changed everything. Language and cultural barriers were overcome. Economic stratification was eliminated and needs were met. We often forget that resurrection changed how we live and how we interact with one another. When we continue the practices of cultures that have yet to know the resurrected Christ, we continue to shape our actions, hearts, and minds in ways contrary to the very resurrection we proclaim on Sunday.

Insurance, and the anonymity of socialized risk, continually subverts the Easter vision that has defined the Christian faith. In accepting the terms of inequality or theories of individual freedom in the debates about health care policy, we as the church have set aside the post-Easter vision of community. We have forgotten that the practices and values of Christ's body counter the very principles of anonymity and socialized risk.

Inequality exists as people isolate themselves one from another, expecting support without compassion. When the so-called boundaries of individual freedom are overcome through mutuality, the community cannot help but take care of one another in body and in spirit. **AM**

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

New Windsor Conference Center closed as of June 4

The New Windsor Conference Center on the campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., ceased operation as of June 4. The decision to cease Conference Center operations was made by the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board at its fall 2011 meeting. The board determined that "operating the New Windsor Conference Center is not in alignment with the directional goals of our strategic plan and not financially sustainable."

The board's decision is not about the Brethren Service Center property as a whole nor the ministries that continue there, including Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children's Disaster Services, Material Resources, On Earth Peace, SERRV, IMA World Health, and the Mid-Atlantic District Office.

The center is making provisions to meet continuing needs to provide hospitality for volunteers



Randy Miller

who serve at the Material Resources program, IMA World Health, and SERRV. The center will transition Zigler Hall to become the Zigler Hospitality Center, initially keeping open several guest rooms and the kitchen and dining facilities to accommodate volunteer groups as needed. Cori Hahn will serve as hospitality coordinator and Walter Trail will manage the kitchen and dining facilities. Other possible uses for the buildings of Old Main and Windsor Hall are being explored.

Wendy McFadden



Brethren Press's Jeff Lennard (right) chats with Brian McLaren about Gather 'Round at the conference on Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity. The conference was held May 7-10 in Washington, D.C., with co-sponsorship from the Gather 'Round curriculum.

Gather 'Round co-sponsors conference on children and youth

An innovative conference on ministry with children and youth drew well over 400 people from across North America and from several other countries. The conference, called "Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity," was held May 7-10 in Washington, D.C. Keynote speakers included Brian McLaren, John Westerhoff, Almeda Wright, and Ivy Beckwith. Some 55 others made short presentations and led workshops.

One of the co-sponsors was Gather 'Round, the Sunday school curriculum co-published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. Staff members Anna Speicher and Rose Stutzman led a workshop on "Sunday School that Doesn't Have All the Answers." At the Gather 'Round booth, all preview packs were taken before the conference ended.

Speicher was gratified by the interest shown by participants. "People are hungry for the Anabaptist-Pietist message of our curriculum," she observed.

Those attending represented a range of Christian churches and organizations, including the Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Church USA.

"A gathering like Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity gives ministers and leaders a chance to share their experiences, explore emerging trends, and seek ways to minister faithfully in changing times," said Josh Brockway, director of spiritual life and discipleship for the Church of the Brethren.

Grants are given for new disaster projects

Two grants have been given from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to start new Brethren Disaster Ministries project sites in New York State and Alabama.

An allocation of \$30,000 from the EDF will aid recovery efforts in Prattsville, N.Y., following flash flooding caused by Hurricane Irene in August 2011. On July 1, Brethren Disaster Ministries opened a repair and rebuilding project in Prattsville, in one of the lowest income regions of New York State. Many residents of the nearly 300 flooded homes were uninsured or elderly. This grant provides the opportunity for volunteers to assist in repairing and rebuilding homes for qualified individuals and families.

An EDF grant of \$30,000 for tornado recovery work in Town Creek, Ala., follows the April 2011 "Super Outbreak" of tornadoes that claimed 346 lives in 21 states. Brethren Disaster Ministries has been present in Alabama since November 2011, and will move its operations from the town of Arab to Town Creek on July 1. Working closely with a long-term recovery group in the area, the ministry will continue to repair and rebuild homes for qualifying families

still in need of permanent housing.

In other recent grants, the EDF has given \$27,000 to a Church World Service (CWS) appeal for the Sahel region of northern Africa. The appeal follows unusually low rainfall, low crop production, food insecurity, and political strife and violence, which have resulted in a complex humanitarian crisis affecting more than 15 million people. The initial EDF grant toward this appeal—\$8,000 given in May—was based on the relatively small size of the initial CWS appeal. Since then, CWS has indicated a much greater need. The grant supports the work of CWS and partner agency ChristianAid in providing food, seeds, and other emergency assistance to more than 83,000 people in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal.

In related news, the Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) also has announced a grant to a Rural Development Program in Nigeria. The GFCF has given a grant of \$10,000 (or 1.5 million Nigerian naira) to support the Rural Development Program of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The head of the program requested the grant to help purchase improved seed.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

July 6-7 Ministers Association Pre-Annual Conference Continuing Ed. Event, St. Louis, Mo.

July 7 Mission and Ministry Board meeting, St. Louis, Mo.

July 7-11 Annual Conference, St. Louis, Mo.

July 27-29 Northern Ohio District Conference, Ashland, Ohio

July 27-29 Southeastern District Conference, Mars Hill, N.C.

July 27-29 Western Plains District Conference, McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren and McPherson College

Aug. 2-4 Southern Plains District Conference, Falfurrias (Texas) Church of the Brethren

Aug. 3-5 Northern Plains District Conference, Cedar Rapids (Iowa) First Church of the Brethren

Aug. 17-18 Michigan District Conference, Camp Brethren Heights, Rodney, Mich.

Aug. 19-28 Brethren Volunteer Service/Brethren Revival Fellowship unit orientation, Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, Md.



Tahya Wellet Etawantaw, 30, finds it difficult to feed her five daughters even one meal a day in Tin'Akoff village, Burkina Faso, part of the area struggling in the Sahel region of northern Africa.

Church staff involved in prayer service for Syria

On June 12, an ecumenical prayer service for peace in Syria took place with involvement from Church of the Brethren staff. The program was initiated and organized by Nathan Hosler, advocacy officer for the Church of the Brethren and ecumenical peace coordinator for the National Council of Churches (NCC), in collaboration with Father Fady Abdulhad, a Syrian priest ministering in Alexandria, Va.

About 70 people met at Saint Aphraim Church of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch to pray and fellowship together. His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim planned the order of worship and led in prayers and a sermon. The joint service was organized in response to the ongoing and intensifying violence in Syria. While the leaders of the church wished to avoid a particular political stand, it was agreed that the group should come together in prayer.

Sermons by the Archbishop and Hosler focused on the need to pray and our call as Christians to work for peace. Emphasis was placed on the call to end violence and standing in solidarity across church or religious



Jonathan Stauffer

Church of the Brethren advocacy and peace witness staff Nathan Hosler initiated and was one of the preachers for the ecumenical peace prayer service for Syria, held the evening of June 12.

lines. In addition to a number of chanted prayers and songs in Syriac, Arabic, and English, Gwen Miller from Washington City Church of the Brethren led a hymn, "Move in Our Midst."

On Earth Peace announces new executive director

The On Earth Peace board of directors has announced the selection of **Bill Scheurer** as its new executive director. Scheurer will take over the role as previous executive director Bob Gross moves to other responsibilities within the organization. The selection was made after an extensive national search and selection process.

"We are very pleased to announce this appointment," said Madalyn Metzger, On Earth Peace board chair. "Bill brings exceptional abilities and professional experiences to advance the mission and ministry of On Earth Peace in the years ahead."

Scheurer's resume includes over 35 years of experience and success in both the corporate and nonprofit arenas. Previously, he served as interim executive director of Beyond War, founded a number of successful start-up technology companies, and worked as an investment attorney.

His peacebuilding activities include serving as a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation national council, running as a peace candidate for the United States Congress (establishing a new peace party ballot status), and serving as co-coordinator of the Peace Garden Project and as editor of the Peace Majority Report. He holds a bachelor's degree in

Religious Studies and a J.D. degree from the University at Buffalo. He resides in Lindenhurst, Ill.

"The Church of the Brethren and the other historic peace churches are longtime beacons in my life and calling, both as a peacebuilder and a follower of

Jesus," said Scheurer. "I am deeply grateful for the call from On Earth Peace to become part of this vital ministry for advancing justice and building peace in our communities and around the world."

To the On Earth Peace community he said, "Words cannot say how much it means to me to receive this calling from On Earth Peace. As with faith, I hope to show my gratitude by my

works. The entire arc of my life has bent toward such a ministry, and yet there is no calling without community. You have given me community, and with it the ministry that has been calling me for years. I rejoice and give thanks! Peace be with you."



Nigerian Brethren among those killed in attacks

A congregation of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) was one of those attacked in early June by Islamist extremists. At least one EYN member was killed and several more injured.

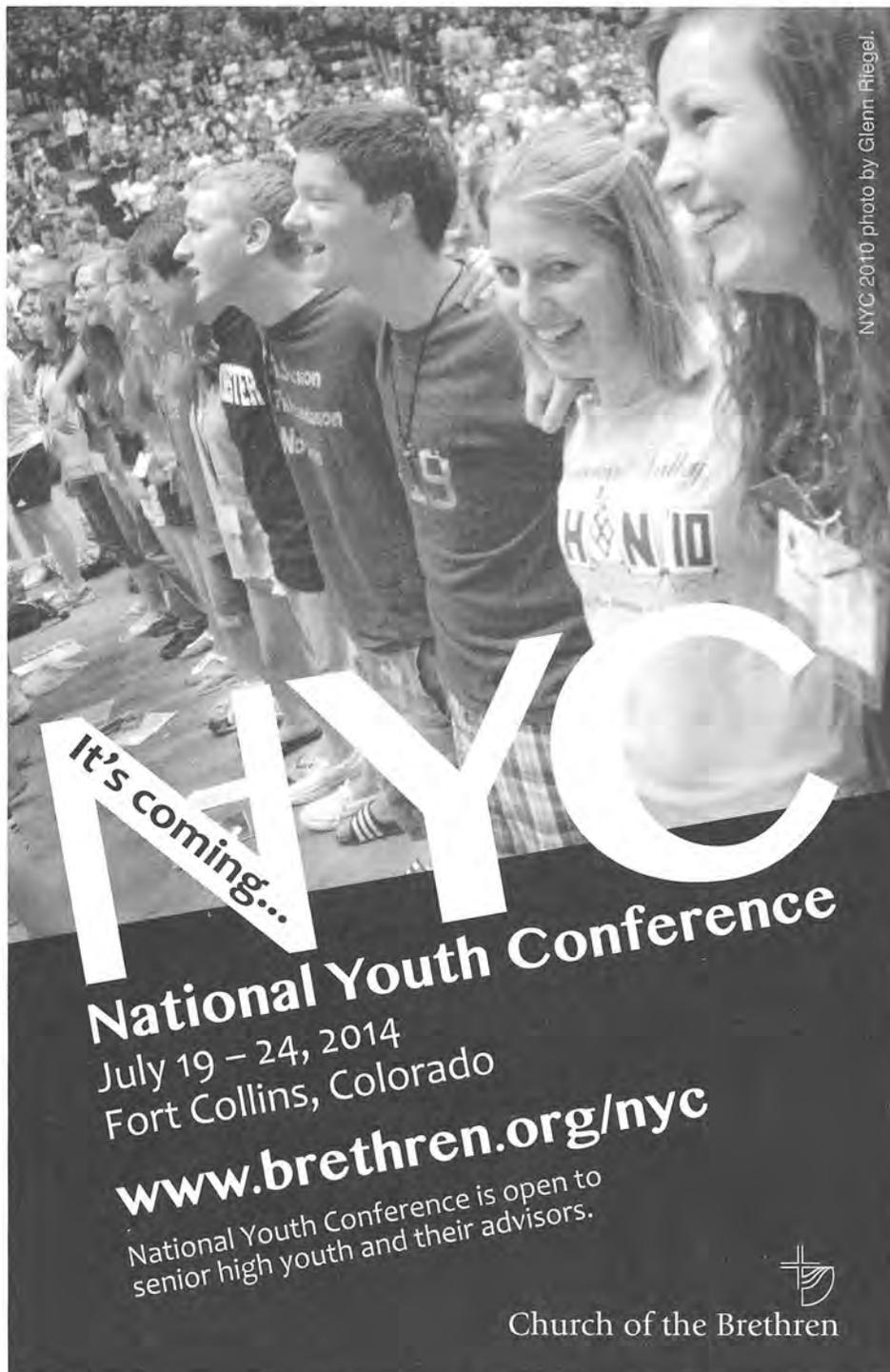
Nigerian church leaders have been requesting prayer for the situation in their country, where the Boko Haram sect has been targeting churches as well as government facilities and police stations with terrorist-type violence.

Two attacks were made against churches on Sunday, June 10. In Biu, a city in northeast Nigeria, gunmen opened fire at the Church of the Brethren, killing at least one person, and injuring others. Also attacked the same day was Christ Chosen Church of God in Jos, a city in central Nigeria. The second attack was carried out by a suicide car bomber who was killed along with four other people. Some 40 people

were injured in the Jos incident.

EYN leadership reported that the attack in Biu was carried out by five gunmen who came and surrounded the church, and started shooting indiscriminately. An alert watchman closed the gate to the church, but the gunmen then

began shooting into the church through the walls. At the time there were about 400 people in the church service, including children. One woman was killed and a number of people were injured, but of the injured only two church members sustained major injuries.



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BBT board approves new funds for BFI clients and charts a course for Brethren Pension Plan

Returning the Brethren Pension Plan's Retirement Benefits Fund to fully funded status and approving five new tactical fund options for Brethren Foundation's organizational clients were the primary focuses of the Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) Board of Directors meeting on April 21-22.

The board also spent time approving lists of defense-related companies that will be kept out of BBT investments, evaluating the performance of the board, receiving an unqualified opinion from the organization's auditor, and recognizing departing and nominated board members during the weekend-long meeting. But the Pension Plan's Retirement Benefits Fund (RBF) was the primary focus of the board's attention.

"Many pension plans across the country have experienced hardships in recent years," said Nevin Dulabaum, president of BBT. "We're not immune to those challenges. But we are steadfastly working to strengthen the RBF so that it can meet its obligations for the lifetimes of all current and future annuitants."

The two-day assembly was preceded by several meetings of the board and its committees. A board conference call was held on Feb. 26, which allowed BBT board and staff members to review departmental reports and routine business. The Governance

Committee met with Dulabaum in Lancaster, Pa., on April 12; the Property and Compliance task team met in Elgin on April 19; and the board's Investment, Budget and Audit Review, and Governance Committees each met in Elgin on April 20.

Since the recent economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 left the Pension Plan's RBF at 68.5 percent funded as of Dec. 31, 2008, BBT's highest priority has



BBT Investment Committee Chairman Harry Rhodes and Board Chairwoman Karen O. Crim share a light moment during the April Investment Committee meeting in Elgin.

been to return that fund—which pays out all Pension Plan annuitants' monthly benefits—to fully funded status.

Scott Douglas, director of Employee Benefits, led the board through reports from three studies that analyzed key components of Brethren Pension Plan. Although they were separate studies, their goals were the same: to provide information that will help safeguard the Brethren Pension Plan and the RBF for years to come.

One study was reviewed ahead of the full board meeting by the Investment Committee; prepared by investment consulting firm Marquette Associates, the study examined different economic and investment scenarios for returning the RBF to fully funded status. Based on these projections, it could take a decade or more to achieve this goal. Factors that contribute to the RBF's funding status include the fluctuations of the investment.

Another study examined the mortality assumptions that BBT uses in its calculations of annuity payments. Human resources consulting firm Aon Hewitt put together a review of BBT's current mortality assumptions and concluded that while the mortality table BBT uses is on target, it would be appropriate to switch to a different table in the future. The report made several other suggestions that the board's Pension Plan task force will review at its next meeting.

A study commissioned each year by BBT examined the funded status of the RBF. The report indicated that as of Dec. 31, 2011, the RBF was 78 percent funded—meaning that for each dollar it must pay out to annuitants, it has 78 cents available. This is a 10 percent increase over its low, but it indicates that the task force's work is not complete.

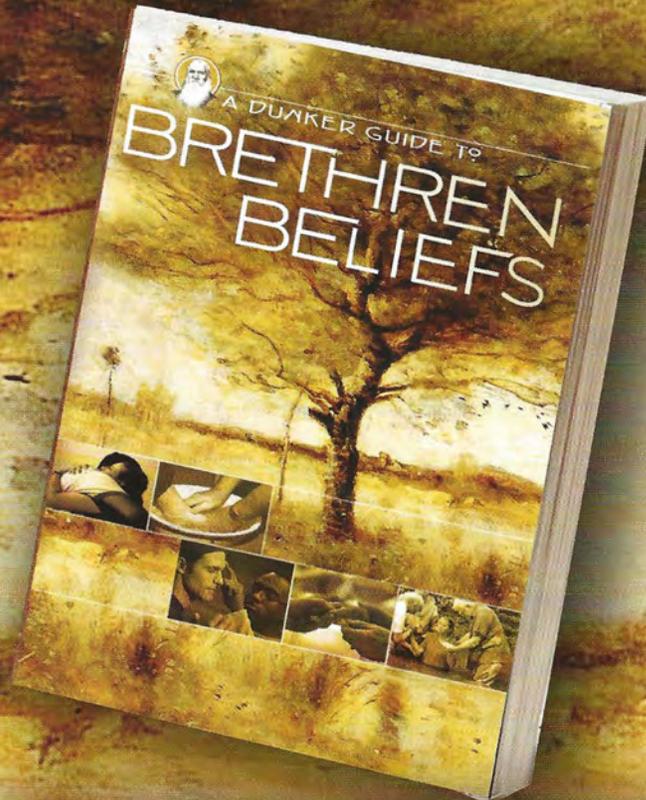
To honor the Church of the Brethren's historic peace stance, BBT creates two lists each year of US Department of Defense contractors that either earned 10 percent or more of their income from defense contracts or hold one of the top 25 defense contracts issued to publicly traded companies. Companies that fall into these categories in the Department of Defense's previous fiscal year are then prohibited from being included in any of BBT's or BFI's actively managed portfolios.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

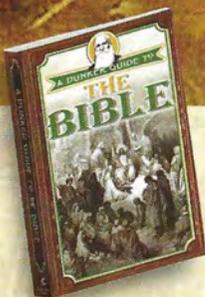
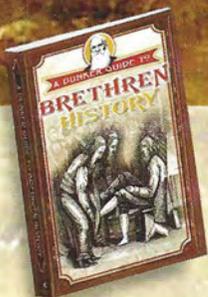
Shawn Flory Replogle has accepted the position of district youth coordinator for Western Plains District. The announcement in the district newsletter was made by the Congregational Resourcing Fulfillment Vision Team. He began his work in March participating with the planning team for Regional Youth Conference. Replogle served as moderator of the 2010 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren.



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MSS interns begin a summer of service to the church

The 2012 class of Ministry Summer Service interns held their orientation June 1-6 at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill. The mentors for each intern joined the orientation for the last two days of the event.

Below is a list of interns and mentors, as well as the ministry settings in which they will serve for 10 weeks this summer:



The Ministry Summer Service (MSS) interns for 2012: (from left) Sarah Neher, Kyle Riege, Jamie Frye, Hunter Keith, Laura Whitman, Molly Walmer, Lucas Kauffman, and Katie Furrow

Jamie Frye of McPherson, Kan., will be mentored by Ginny Haney, pastor of Mount Morris (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, and Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service for the Church of the Brethren.

Lucas Kauffman of Goshen, Ind., will be mentored by Larry Fourman, pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.

Sarah Neher of Rochester, Minn., will focus on workcamps and be mentored by Becky Ullom, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Church of the Brethren.

Laura Whitman of Ono, Pa., will be mentored by Dennis Lohr, lead pastor of Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

The Youth Peace Travel Team of **Katie Furrow** of Boones Mill, Va.; **Hunter Keith** of Kokomo, Ind.; **Kyle Riege** of Wakarusa, Ind.; and **Molly Walmer** of Myerstown, Pa., will be mentored by a group of leaders

including denominational staff. Their mentors include Ullom along with Dan McFadden, director of Brethren Volunteer Service; Marie Benner-Rhodes of the On Earth Peace staff; and Margo Royer Miller, Outdoor Ministries Association representative. The Youth Peace Travel Team provides peace education at Brethren camps and gatherings.

For more about the Church of the Brethren's Ministry Summer Service program go to www.brethren.org/yya/mss.

Powerhouse youth conference slated for November

A date has been set for the next Powerhouse regional youth conference to be hosted by Manchester University. The weekend of worship, workshops, music, food, and fun is scheduled for Nov. 10-11 in North Manchester, Ind., for senior high youth and adult advisors. For more go to www.manchester.edu/powerhouse or call the Campus Ministry/Religious Life office at 260-982-5243 or 260-982-5243.

G. Allen Bowers, Jr., a licensed minister in the Antioch Church of the Brethren in Woodstock, Va., graduated from Virginia Tech on May 12 with the highest grade point average in the College of Engineering. Bowers tied for the highest GPA in the entire university graduating class of 4,400 students. Bowers was a youth speaker at the 2006 Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference. He has been awarded a National Science Foundation Fellowship to continue his graduate work at Virginia Tech in geothermal applications in bridge and road work, which he hopes to use on the mission field. He has already participated in two mission trips to Haiti.



Strengthening faith through a different lens

Acrowded room full of children and teens, their parents, and judges; microphones, computer monitors, and video cameras; the chance to win a highly prestigious award. You'd think it was a national spelling bee or some kind of academic decathlon, but you'd be wrong . . . sort of.



RYAN HARRISON

Each year during the month-long Muslim holiday of Ramadan, more than 100 children ranging in age from 7 to 17 travel from all over the world to Cairo, where they compete against each other, calling on their knowledge of the 6,236 verses, 540 paragraphs, and 114 chapters of the Koran. Many of the musings, emotions, challenges, setbacks, and triumphs of three of the competition's most memorable partici-

pants—each only 10 years of age—are captured in film director/producer Greg Barker's masterful work *Koran by Heart*.

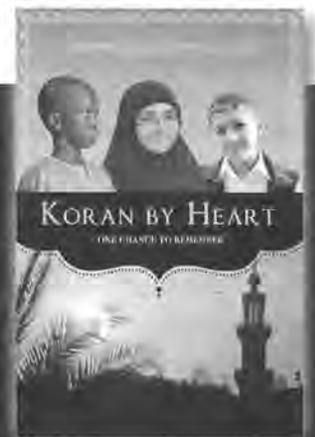
As the documentary takes you through a rich and diverse landscape that includes the Maldives, Senegal, Tajikistan, and other countries, a revelation slowly dawns. Although the faces, stories, and settings change, the sounds of Koranic recitation do not. Rather, you realize that this sacred practice of chanting represents the firm foundation that undergirds *all* of it—the culture, the competition, the relationships, the entire religious worldview—holding (if not tying) the narrative together with a beautifully complex oral tradition that stretches back thousands of years.

I teach a course in the music of world religions at the University of La Verne in La Verne, Calif. When we explore Islam, most of my students (who are primarily Christian) don't

know what to make of it initially. They invariably come to the subject with preconceptions, most of which aren't helpful to academic dialogue, let alone open-hearted learning. All the same, I have yet to have a student engage with the material without coming out on the other side feeling a deep, new-found respect for followers of Islam and for the dedication and faithfulness that accompany wholehearted devotion. When these same students take the extracurricular step of viewing *Koran by Heart*, this response is amplified significantly.

I have also introduced this film to my congregation, where it was screened as part of a semi-annual film-and-discussion event. Brethren are Christian, however. Why would *Koran by Heart* be of interest to this body of followers of Christ? What messages might it have for us?

One of the things that my students have taught me over the years is that investigating and learning about non-Christian religions can have a faith-fortifying effect. This is particularly true for those who come to such an endeavor with doubt, skepticism, or apprehension. More than a few times, students who had previously confided in me their fear of "cheating" on their Christian faith by studying Islam have returned to me at the course's end to tell me that their hearts had been opened and their own faith had been deepened. I like to think that what is happening in them is some kind of spiritual awakening where the boundaries between religious "right" and "wrong" are blurred by the fundamental truth that we are all children of God, worshiping in ways that connect us with sources of hope, strength, and love. *Koran by Heart* gives us the opportunity to relax our religious boundaries and to experience a kind of permeability that allows us to see these deeper, interreligious truths that connect us in unseen but powerful ways.



ABOUT THE MOVIE

Title: *Koran by Heart*. **HBO premiere:** August 1, 2011. **Running time:** 77 minutes. **Director:** Greg Barker. **Editor:** Langdon Page. **Produced by:** John Battsek and Julie Goldman.

According to Mottopictures.com: "*Koran by Heart* is a film about the intense competition at the world's oldest Koran memorization contest, when the best and brightest kids from 70 countries across the Islamic world gather each year during Ramadan in Cairo, Egypt, to see who can recite the Koran with the greatest accuracy, passion, and beauty. Just 10 years old, the main characters are remarkable, talented boys and girls from remote and volatile parts of the Islamic world—their future hanging in the balance amidst the controversies and divisions that engulf as their religion. *Koran by Heart* is a coming of age story about Muslim kids in modern times." And, from Ian Hollander, writing in muslimmatters.org: "Following these talented youngsters from their intense preparation regimens through the rigorous rounds of the tournament, director Greg Barker creates both an inspirational competition film and an engaging survey of the unique experiences of Muslim children throughout the world, using the cultural crossroads of the international competition to examine the issues facing of the next generation of Muslims."

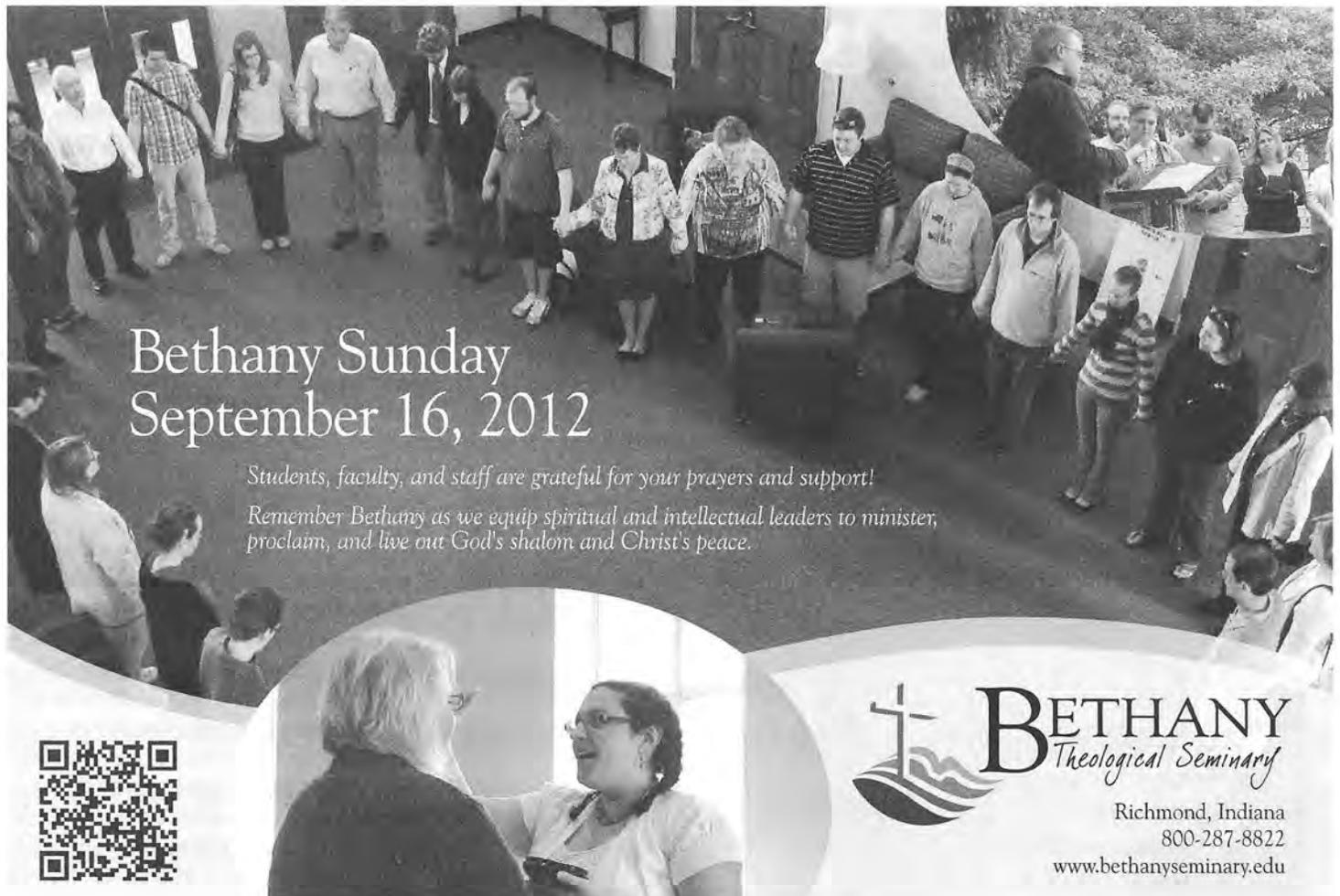
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MORE THAN A FEW TIMES, STUDENTS WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY CONFIDED IN ME THEIR FEAR OF "CHEATING" ON THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH BY STUDYING ISLAM HAVE RETURNED TO ME AT THE COURSE'S END TO TELL ME THAT THEIR HEARTS HAD BEEN OPENED AND THEIR OWN FAITH HAD BEEN DEEPENED.

Perhaps another thing to be learned from *Koran by Heart* is a lesson in gratitude, or humility, or both. You meet young Rifdha, a girl with a true soul-sparkle, a keen intellect, and a desire to expand her horizons and make a positive difference in the world. You also meet her father, a good and decent man who has other, more traditional plans for her future. When you discover that Djamil, a boy who has memorized the entire Koran, doesn't even understand Arabic, it's hard to not respect the years of focus, concentration, and practice that this young Muslim has displayed. And when you learn that Nabiollah, who can recite the Koran from a seemingly photographic memory, has placed Koranic memorization even above learning to read and write his own language, you wonder not only at his parents' aims, but the degree of meaning the Koran must have for this deeply committed child.

Koran by Heart is not a religious film in the sense that it does not preach. The closest it gets to sermonizing is when a well-known and esteemed Muslim scholar dispels many of the harmful misinterpretations that have flooded American airwaves since 9/11. Rather, *Koran by Heart* is a deeply *spiritual* film. It takes you into the experience of some of your Muslim brothers and sisters, emphasizes the degree of commitment and faith that many Christians secretly envy, and helps you reframe the way you think about Islam, the Koran, and how God reveals love and light around the world. 

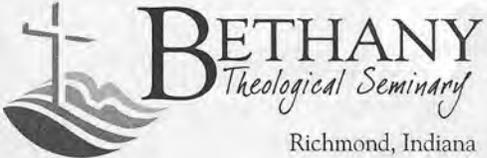
Ryan Harrison attends the La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren where he started and led monthly Spiritual Cinema Circle gatherings for more than five years. He now teaches "Spiritual Cinema" at the University of La Verne, and is currently pursuing a PsyD degree at the University of the Rockies.



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 MENNONITE STORY in POLAND and UKRAINE (September 18-29)
 SCENIC AUTUMN CRUISE: CANADA and NEW ENGLAND (October 6-16)
 MEDA TOUR to ETHIOPIA and TANZANIA (October 12-24)
 SERVICE TOUR to ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR JAMIE GERBER (October 13-22)
 ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR DOUG KLASSEN (October 17-26)
 ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR KEITH BLANK (November 7-16)
 VIETNAM and SINGAPORE (November 12-26)
 MUSIC and MARKETS: DANUBE CHRISTMAS CRUISE (December 1-9)

2013 TOURS

JAMAICA - Its PEOPLE, NATURAL BEAUTY and FRUITS (January 11-20)
 AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND (February 1-21)
 CHURCHES and SAFARIS in KENYA and TANZANIA (February 8-20)
 PANAMA CANAL CRUISE (February 26-March 8)
 MEDA in MOROCCO (April 2-12)
 ISRAEL/PALESTINE with PASTOR PHIL WAGLER (April 16-25)

MYSTERY TOUR (April 17-26)

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)
 HESSTON COLLEGE TOUR to EUROPE (May 24-June 6)
 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)
 RUSSIA and UKRAINE (September 9-21)
 THE BRITISH ISLES (England, Scotland and Wales) with DAVID and JOYCE ESHLEMAN (September 13-25)
 BEHIND the VEIL - EXPERIENCING EGYPT (October 17-28)
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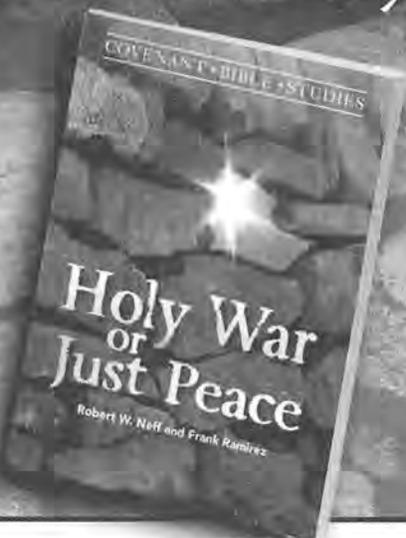
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A clear understanding of the obvious

I have read and reread the Leadership Summit Report in the May 2012 issue of the MESSENGER, and am disappointed by its lack of anything substantive in terms of leadership or progress in dealing with the elephant in the room.

First, the leadership group's conversation "revealed differing perceptions of the intent, impact, and scope of decisions and position statements after 2011 Annual Conference." When persons holding controversial positions move quickly from seeking acceptance to outright advocacy, aren't differing perceptions pretty much inevitable?

Secondly, our leaders are now at least discussing the possibility that the homosexuality issue might cause a "parting of the ways." That possibility would certainly not be a news flash here in Berks County, Pa., where the largest congregations in the ELCA, UCC, and several other denominations began to withdraw a decade or more ago when the laity perceived that, on issues related to homosexuality, leadership's actions were inconsistent with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The report ends with eight observations and four desires, all of which affirm that we are nice church people who feel good about each other, and with which nobody could disagree. In short, my disappointment is that this report indicates that our leaders have a clear understanding of the obvious, but are at best reluctant, and at worst unable, to provide the leadership necessary for us to move forward as we seek to fulfill God's Kingdom.

Carl H. Myers
 Sinking Spring, Pa.

The real issue—fear

I am deeply concerned by the action of the Mission and Ministry Board to withdraw the BMC Kaleidoscope coordinator as a BVS project. The justification for the action was that the position as defined "advocated for homosexuality."

When will the Church of the Brethren finally look at the real issue regarding homosexuality—fear? Fear that ignores the second commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself," or places an "except for" at the end so it becomes "love thy

neighbor as thyself, except for . . ."

I invite every reader to consider the traits of the unconditional love that Jesus taught and lived as compared to the fear that so often takes love's place. Unconditional love is characterized by inclusiveness, is nonjudgmental, loves, and is not defensive or controlling. Fear, on the other hand, sets up an "us vs. them" mentality, is judgmental, controlling, and defensive.

The list could go on and on, but my question is: Where does our own individual view fall when it comes to homosexuality? Will we allow fear to keep us from loving *all* of God's children? Or do we have the courage to come to the table *not* to discuss homosexuality and its rightness or wrongness, but to discuss and dispel the fears that shape our perceptions—the very perceptions that keep the separation, hate, and fear alive?

The Church of the Brethren promotes peacekeeping throughout the world. But there can never be peace when one's house is in such disarray. It is time to come to our own table and take a hard look at the fear that is holding us all captive.

Maxine E. Marak
State College, Pa.

Violations of the New Testament never permitted

I am writing with regard to three letters in the December 2011 issue of MESSENGER. First, the letter submitted by Monty Keeling, of Gainesville, Fla., who writes on the question of homosexuality, and talks about ways one interprets the Bible. He, as a retired pastor and Bethany graduate, should know that the question of homosexuality being between two interpretations is absolute nonsense. In the Brethren history, there was a split between conservatives and progressives, but neither group would accept gay rights. This issue is between conservatives/progressives vs. liberals who want to take the denomination to hell in a hand basket.

If this retired pastor has any sense of balance, he should know that our denomination will definitely go down the drain spiritually when any viola-

Pontius' Puddle



Denominational Deacon Ministry

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www.brethren.org/deacontraining

Saturday, September 29

East Chippewa Church of the Brethren, Orrville, Ohio

Saturday, October 13

Northern Plains District Event, Camp Pine Lake, Eldora, Iowa

Saturday, October 20

Antioch Church of the Brethren, Rocky Mount, Virginia

Saturday and Sunday, October 27-28

"The Gathering", Western Plains District, Salina, Kansas

Saturday, November 10

The Village at Morrisons Cove, Martinsburg, Pennsylvania

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Church of the Brethren

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tions of the New Testament are permitted on any subject. He should know that a New Testament believer never compromises any statements made by Jesus Christ and the apostles. I will, without equivocation, question this pastor ever having the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Walter Mc Sherry, of Spartansburg, S.C., wrote a letter concerning "the real bullies." He is absolutely right on target, and he is a New Testament believer standing steadfast.

Third is the letter by Marcia Wright, of Fort Wayne, Ind., which states: "this door is never closed." She needs to study the New Testament, otherwise she would not be so ignorant of scripture dealing with the issue of homosexuality. She quotes Matthew 7:7, which [says that the Kingdom is] an open door and all are invited in. However, people are invited in by the terms set by Jesus Christ and the apostles, not by Marcia Wright and her unqualified interpretations, which lead to hypocrisy. She states: "This doorway is never closed to those who truly seek to take this journey with a loving, grace-filled God." This statement is true, as stated—on God's terms. God literally destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for homosexuality sins. Marcia Wright needs to re-read the scriptures.

Finally, at the St. Louis Annual Conference, I would like to show a video on the gay lifestyle to the SCN pastors and others listed in the advertisement section of the December 2011 MESSENGER. Perhaps all who signed that letter will be like the US Senators who saw a film on partial-birth abortions. Many of them got sick to their stomachs [after watching the film] and passed a bill against such practice.

D. Robert Clapper
Hollidaysburg, Pa.

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New Members

Agape, Fort Wayne, Ind.: Bradley Imhoff, Orie Imhoff
Bush Creek, Monrovia, Md.: Jessica Nicholson, Amanda Shultz, Joshua Hipkins, Linda Toms
Chiques, Manheim, Pa.: Marianne Fitzkee, Denton Geib, Josiah Heisey, Taylor Miller, Zach Myer, Mike Hess
Coventry, Pottstown, Pa.: Jeanne-Marie Heighton, Daniel James Cushwa, Arthur William LaFrana, Kathleen Marie LaFrana, Christiane Nicole Lenk, Benjamin Josiah Steinmetz
Ephrata, Pa.: Wes Atkins, Matt Huber, Charles Mull, Kimberly Mull, Brock Musser, Cindy Pugh, Barbara Yeakel, Lisa Atkins, Katlin Brown, Adam Gerhart, Lauren Musser, Brandon Smith
Friendship, Linthicum, Md.: Debbie Cavanaugh, David Cavanaugh, Jr., Gregory Simmons, Lessie Simmons, Chelsey Simmons Beauvias, Malina Dicus, John H. Cowger, Jr., Jamie Nykiel
Hanover, Pa.: Richard Godfrey
Harmony, Myersville, Md.: Michael Milner
Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.: Marie McVay, Stacey Cundiff, Heather Radcliff, Jay Radcliff, Pansy Crambitt, Donnie Akers, Heather Akers, Allie Sheesley, Andrew Hall, Mary Jane Jones, Garth Treadway, Gavin Davis, Chloe Coleman,

Christy Hicks, Tammy Hodges, Gary Reynolds, Susan Reynolds
Keyser, W.Va.: Goldie Haggerty, Margaret Roy
Lake Side, Moneta, Va.: Charles Woods, Carlie Woods, John Neff, Linda Neff, Bob Coffman, Carolyn Coffman
Lancaster, Pa.: David Ebersole, Friedlinde Ebersole, Priscilla DeJessa, Eric Snyder, Florence Chillias
Painter Creek, Arcanum, Ohio: David Cummings
Thurmont, Md.: Nicole Delauter, Jennifer Major, Joe Thomas, Erica Wiss

Wedding Anniversaries

Bever, Frank and Olive, North Manchester, Ind., 65
Detwiler, William and Helen, Norristown, Pa., 60
Grossnickle, Richard and Mary Sue, Woodsboro, Md., 55
Hamer, John Leland and Esther Louise Rinehart, Fort Wayne, Ind., 60
Mack, Joe and Barbara, Limerick, Pa., 50
Miller, Howard and Lena, Westminster, Md., 60
Ridgway, Jesse W. and Dorothy, Connellsville, Pa., 60
Shanks, Ernest and Jeannine, Astoria, Ill., 60
Wort, Gene and Mary Jo, Huntertown, Ind., 60

Deaths

Alwine, Lucy Mae, 87, Annville, Pa., May 7
Atkins, Melva Webster, 98, Rocky Mount, Va., March 17
Billington, Charley L., 79, McCune, Kan., May 4
Book, C. George, 72, Paradise, Pa., April 14
Boyer, Louise Morrison, 92, Jefferson, Md., May 18
Brown, Karl Bankard, 91, Mount Airy, Md., April 25

Brown, Michael D., 68, North Manchester, Ind., Aug. 10, 2011
Cantrell, Claude Ernest, 87, Green Creek, N.C., May 8
Cressler, Phyllis Jennadene, 80, DeWitt, Mich., Nov. 24
Crevison, Doris E., 91, Clinton, Ill., April 5
Dascombe, Louise, 97, Linthicum, Md., March 22
Deeter, Mary Rebecca, 93, Severna Park, Md., Nov. 10
Delp, Glenna Lucille Jordan, 91, Kittanning, Pa., May 4
Detwiler, John Ralph, 87, Goshen, Ind., May 12
Diamond, Rick, 51, Johnstown, Pa., April 30
Dohner, Nelson Henry, 83, Lancaster, Pa., April 10
Dwyer, Roberta, 85, Linthicum, Md., April 22
Everhart, Virginia Catherine, 90, Frederick, Md., April 15
Fausnight, Ivan Joseph, 88, Howard, Ohio, Feb. 25
Frye, Trudy E., 60, Claysburg, Pa., April 26
Geib, Marie T., 90, Lancaster, Pa., March 22
Gilbert, J. Edward, 92, North Manchester, Ind., March 25
Gilley, Mary Elizabeth, 75, Bassett, Va., April 19
Harding, Roger Lee, 70, Bowling Green, Ohio, Nov. 14
Hodges, Joyce Elaine King, 69, Boones Mill, Va., May 21
Hollinger, Paul E., 86, Mount Joy, Pa., April 30
Hoover, Helen A., 60, Defiance, Ohio, April 25
Hosler, Alta H., 88, Lancaster, Pa., May 9
Imler, Jane T., 66, Roaring Spring, Pa., April 6
Johnson, Joyce G., 77, Carlisle, Pa., April 13
Keeseey, MaryAnn Reighard, 62, Elizabethtown, Pa., March 2
Klingler, John M., 90, Lima, Ohio, April 21
Knoll, Lola M., 85, Adel, Iowa, Aug. 27

Kurtz, Roy D., 90, Leola, Pa., May 2
Lippy, Shirley A., 76, Frederick, Md., April 16
Long, Inez G., 94, New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 27
Ludwick, Peggy Good, 62, Lebanon, Pa., April 13
McAfee, Kenneth R., 91, New Oxford, Pa., April 1
McKegg, Janet S., 58, West Friendship, Md., March 9
Meddings, Jennie Lou, 78, Havre, Mont., May 15
Metzger, Julia Ann F., 93, North Manchester, Ind., June 19, 2011
Miller, Glenn J., 84, Middlebury, Ind., Dec. 26
Miller, Janet Irene, 80, Fayetteville, Pa., May 17
Miller, Perry K., 97, Waterloo, Iowa, May 14
Miller, Robert G., 76, New Paris, Ind., March 24
Millhimes, Charles E., 80, Gettysburg, Pa., March 29
Moore, Vernice M., 94, Fort Wayne, Ind., Jan. 29
Myer, Audrey A., 80, New Holland, Pa., Sept. 7
Myer, Floyd Leslie, 83, Lancaster, Pa., April 5
Myer, Mark E., 92, Lancaster, Pa., Dec. 27
Myers, Doreen Mae, 86, Elgin, Ill., April 17
Nash, Blanche Daisy, 84, New Oxford, Pa., April 29
Niswander, Ray Emerson, 97, North Manchester, Ind., Aug. 10
Nusbaum, Noble W., 94, Middlebury, Ind., July 25, 2011
Otto, Edna P., 91, Berlin, Pa., June 30, 2011
Reamer, Marie G., 92, Lansing, Mich., April 23
Reimer, James Todd, 42, Roanoke, Va., May 5
Rhoades, Leah G., 100, Greenville, Ohio, Jan. 26
Rhodes, E. Dean, 78, Martinsburg, Pa., April 17
Ritchie, Edna Grace, 96, Lima, Ohio, May 11
Robinson, Earl J., Sr., 103, Silver Spring, Md., March 5

Roop, G. Frederic, 94, North Manchester, Ind., Dec. 21
Rotruck, Helen L., 90, Keyser, W.Va., April 30
Sanger, Alvin C., 75, Cordova, Md., April 16
Saunders, Carolyn, 83, Astoria, Ill., Jan. 30
Schroy, Thomas A., 93, Harrisburg, Pa., March 18
Sell, Mary I., 79, Hanover, Pa., March 10
Shaffer, Edward Russell, 79, Uniontown, Pa., April 2
Shoemaker, Mary Fern, 86, Woodbury, Pa., March 25
Shreckhise, Virginia King, 91, Weyers Cave, Va., Feb. 27
Shuler, Luke M., 83, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 27
Simmons, Mildred, 91, Boswell, Pa., May 4
Sizemore, Norma Ruth Hillsamer, 82, Milltown, Ind., March 4
Smirciak, Richard C., 61, Muncie, Ind., April 23
Smith, Barbara R., 93, North Manchester, Ind., Dec. 22
Smith, Pauline, 81, Cornville, Ariz., Nov. 21
Smith, Ruby Ann, 70, Lebanon, Pa., April 25
Snyder, Helen Marie, 90, Woodbury, Pa., March 24
Stone, Donald T., 92, North Manchester, Ind., July 5, 2011
Stone, Elizabeth, 94, North Manchester, Ind., Aug. 18
Thompson, Richard, 80, Garden City, Kan., March 19
Troup, Thelma M., 101, Boonsboro, Md., May 16
Tubbs, Phyllis, 80, San Dimas, Calif., Feb. 26
Tully, Ruth E., 97, North Manchester, Ind., Sept. 23
Uhrig, Howard N., 87, North Manchester, Ind., Aug. 2
Undutch, Naomi R., 89, Hampstead, Md., April 8
Valentine, H. JoAnne, 85, North Manchester, Ind., Dec. 25

Veno, Francis S., Sr., 81, Uniontown, Pa., March 30
Waas, Lorraine, 58, Milford, Mich., April 6
Wampler, Grace L., 98, Pottstown, Pa., April 16
Warner, Juanita M., 87, Hometown, Ind., Feb. 20
Webb, Lois Hartman, 74, Bel Air, Md., June 1, 2011
Werking, Alma R., 89, Hagerstown, Ind., May 5
Wilfong, Betty Ellen Brown, 69, Bridgewater, Va., April 27
Williams, Rosemary Ann, 87, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 30
Williams, Yvonne M., 83, Lititz, Pa., April 4
Willoughby, Lena, 90, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 25
Wray, Roland W., 100, Modesto, Calif., April 5
Yingling, Donald R., 88, Roaring Spring, Pa., April 2
Young, Dale Ardys, 95, Akron, Ohio, Jan. 24
Zerby, Bertha May, 91, York, Pa., March 15
Zigler, Leah Flora, 94, Bridgewater, Va., May 1

Licensings

Anders, Thomas E., Jr., S/C Ind. Dist. (Logansport, Ind.), March 18
Clemens, Todd, N. Ohio Dist. (Poplar Ridge, Defiance, Ohio), Nov. 6
Cummings, David, S. Ohio Dist. (Painter Creek, Arcanum, Ohio), May 15
Dodd, Annette, N. Ohio Dist. (Painesville, Ohio), Nov. 20
Fillmore, John A., Idaho Dist. (Nampa, Idaho), Feb. 26
Fisher, William R., Virgina Dist. (Christian Church Uniting, Virginia Beach, Va.), March 18
Foster, Dean, N. Ohio Dist. (Black River, Spencer, Ohio), Dec. 16
Francois, Marie Claudine, Atl. SE Dist. (Eglise des

Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), March 25
Haynes, Gary N., Virgina Dist. (Bassett, Va.), Sept. 25, 2011
Marceau, Guillaume, Atl. SE Dist. (Eglise des Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), March 25
McOwen, Dennis, N. Ind. Dist. (Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.), May 20
Paris Millan, Dharma, Atl. SE Dist. (Iglesia de Los Hermanos, Vega Baja, P.R.), Feb. 12
Scott, Jeffrey D., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Westminster, Md.), May 13
Snyder, Joel, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Valley Point, Orbisonia, Pa.), March 18
Stiles, Ian, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Carson Valley, Duncansville, Pa.), April 22
Wildermuth, Howard, S/C Ind. Dist. (Buffalo, Ind.), June 5, 2011

Ordinations

Bollinger, Susan, N. Plains Dist. (Lewiston, Minn.), Dec. 4
Crandall, Jonathan W., S/C Ind. Dist. (Pleasant Dale, Decatur, Ind.), March 4
Emmons, Timothy H., Virgina Dist. (Nineveh, Hardy, Va.), April 29
Guthrie, Thomas G., Pac. SW Dist. (Empire, Modesto, Calif.), March 18
Kelsey, Betty Krady, N. Ind. Dist. (Creekside, Elkhart, Ind.), April 29
Lewczak, Barbara Wise, N. Plains Dist. (Stover Memorial, Des Moines, Iowa), Nov. 6
Mahon, Charles R., Jr., W. Pa. Dist. (Rayman, Friedens, Pa.), March 18
Turner, Ted M., Jr., Virgina Dist. (Shelton, Mount Airy, N.C.), May 6

Placements

Brenneman, Jerry D., from interim to pastor, Osceola, Ind., April 1

Carroll, Donald R., from interim to pastor, North Liberty, Ind., May 6
Cruser, Roger, from interim to pastor, Circleville, Ohio, Dec. 18
Cummings, David, pastor, Painter Creek, Arcanum, Ohio, May 18
Davies, Jeanne, associate pastor, Highland Avenue, Elgin, Ill., April 16
Erisman Valeta, Gail, team pastor, Prince of Peace, Littleton, Colo., April 15
Fillmore, John A., associate pastor, Nampa, Idaho, May 1
Hade, Melvin, team pastor, Brunswick Fellowship, Brunswick, Maine, Dec. 31
McKinney, Larry, pastor, Hammond Avenue, Waterloo, Iowa, April 8
Rittle, Matthew, pastor, Franklin Grove, Ill., May 1
Snyder, Paul R., from interim to pastor, Holsinger, New Enterprise, Pa., April 30
Stiles, Ian, youth pastor, Carson Valley, Duncansville, Pa., Dec. 18
Thompson, Katie Shaw, co-pastor, Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa, March 5
Thompson, Parker, co-pastor, Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa, March 5
Upole, Lisa, pastor, Georges Creek, Lonaconing, Md., May 1
Whitmore, Kevin B., music and worship director, Anderson, Ind., May 1
Zapata, Mercedes, from pastor to associate pastor, Principe de Paz, Santa Ana, Calif., June 1, 2011
Zapata, Rebeca A., from associate pastor to co-pastor, Principe de Paz, Santa Ana, Calif., June 1, 2011
Zapata, Richard W., from associate pastor to co-pastor, Principe de Paz, Santa Ana, Calif., June 1, 2011

Once a porch

I like that my home office was once a porch. And that what is now a built-in bookcase behind my desk was once a window that looked out from our living room onto an expansive patio, and beyond that, citrus groves.

Things change.

Years ago, a friend of mine wrote a song called *Endless Change*, about how change is the only thing that remains constant in life.

I could lament the fact that those days of fragrant wafts of orange blossoms in January are a thing of the past. Those expansive citrus groves are gone, except for a handful of orange trees at a park a few blocks away where a narrow

slice of that era is preserved like an endangered species or a museum exhibit for local school children.

I could get all wistful about how this former porch reminds me of another one from long ago, in the house where my grandparents once slept. They had a bedroom, but they never used it.

They preferred to sleep on their back porch. They had a bed there, and while they slept nothing separated them from the night air, mosquitoes, and

wild critters except a flimsy screen. Even in the dead of winter, when chilling rain fell and temperatures plummeted, they slept there like campers, like refugees. When I was a kid, I didn't question it; it was just what Grandpa and Grandma did.



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER Editor

We could fret and bemoan the way things that once shaped and gave meaning to our lives have changed—or how things in our world may be changing now, shaking our grip on perspectives we've held since childhood. Change—even for the better—can make us uncomfortable and anxious. But it can also bring fresh insights and renewal.

When we read in Genesis about how God created the universe, we find an account of how God set things in motion. Rather than a once-and-done act, the whole process of creation is designed to continue producing life—and change. Much as we may like caterpillars, they will become butterflies. Much as we may cherish newborn chicks, they grow into crowing roosters and pecking hens. And as much as I may yearn for the days when I could tap out an article on my Olympus manual typewriter, it appears Macbook Pros are here to stay. Well, actually, they're here to keep changing and evolving into something newer and better—probably by next month.

God keeps urging us on, it seems. This creation that was set in motion way back when keeps revealing itself to us, surprising us. Or maybe we're simply awakening to what has been here all along. We come across a previously unknown species in the Amazon rain forest and marvel at our discovery of something that may have been on the planet for eons. Or we find new ways of using elements that have been with us for generations—who knew, until Alexander Fleming stumbled across it, that mold had any purpose except to ruin bread and cheese?

GOD KEEPS URGING US ON, IT SEEMS. THIS CREATION THAT WAS SET IN MOTION WAY BACK WHEN KEEPS REVEALING ITSELF TO US, SURPRISING US. OR MAYBE WE'RE SIMPLY **AWAKENING TO WHAT HAS BEEN HERE ALL ALONG.**

Later, when I reflected on it, it seemed a little odd. Today, I admire their willingness to do as they pleased despite what the neighbors may have thought (although most of their neighbors at that time were a good half mile away).

Things have changed since then. Grandpa and Grandma have passed on. New people are living in their old house. The beautiful flower garden that Grandma so carefully tended, last time I saw it, had gone to seed and weed. And—although I haven't been inside the place to check this out—I'm guessing that the current occupants are sleeping in the bedroom, not the porch.

Some decades back, Malcolm Boyd wrote a book titled *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* Turning that question on its head, we might also ask if we're running with God. Are we staying in step with the ever-changing creation God set in motion long ago? Are we open to things God hopes we'll see?

God's creative Spirit continues to move among us and, if we are open to it, perhaps we will discover new ways of relating. Maybe one day we will "discover" something that has been part of God's hope for us all along—that we will see the light of God in each other, and treat one another accordingly.

It may be too much to hope for. But then, things change. **W**

COMING IN SEPTEMBER: The Ethiopian eunuch, Annual Conference review, Bible study, media review, reflections, letters, and more.



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– Bethany Clark '11, religion major and great-granddaughter of Ray Petersime, who provided the funds to build Manchester's Petersime Chapel in the early 1960s.

Bethany came to Manchester to major in social work, but she felt a call to ministry. She changed her major to religion and found professors who “were challenging and unafraid to push me. They really cared about my future and were always around for help and conversation.” She also found student groups who helped her grow in her faith. Now an alumna, she’s director of youth ministries for Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

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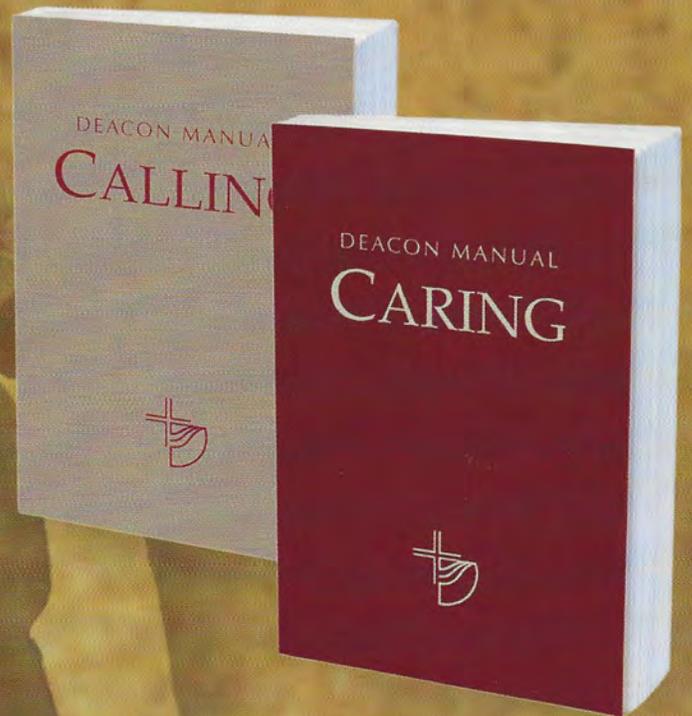
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