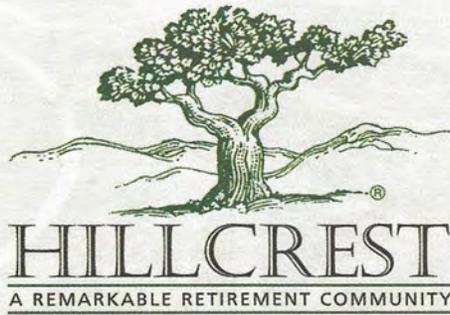


CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

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TURNING THE TIDE  
FROM DEATH  
TO GRACE



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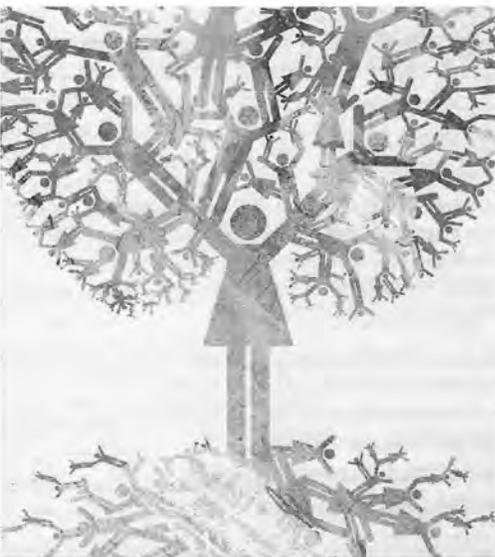


# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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



David Radcliff



**December 2013** VOL.162 NO. 10 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

## **8** Turning the tide from death to grace

Has the shortest book in the Bible been “hiding in plain sight” for centuries? (Hint: If you’ve got a New English Bible, you have a slight edge over those with other translations.) And what does it have to say to us about how grace operates in our lives?

## **12** The not-so-wise men

They certainly look regal, sagacious, and wise—at least as depicted in nativity scenes and on greeting cards—but were they really all that smart? Ken Gibble takes another look at these bearers of gold, frankincense, and myrrh who took their cues from stars and dreams.

## **13** Joseph

He is from “chisel, plane and mallet, from wood dust and chips,” writes poet Paula Sheller Adams about the man who accompanied Mary to Bethlehem. But he also comes from “a long and silent loneliness.”

## **14** The upside of kingdom drift

“Drifting” has gotten a bad rap lately. But could it be a good thing, especially if it involves “keeping an ear to the ground and an eye to the side of the road, on the lookout for where God may be calling us next”?

## **18** A gathering of families

Families remind us of our identities, of who we are and from where we’ve come. That’s especially true at this time of year as relatives gather from far and wide around the home hearth. But families—both immediate and extended—also have a rich tradition in our biblical heritage.

### departments

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**on the cover** What was Jesus drawing in the dirt when he posed questions to those about to stone the woman they’d accused of adultery? And what does this story tell us about grace?

**I**f you are a Sunday school teacher, the Living Word bulletins may look familiar this month. The colorful art was created by Kate Cosgrove for the Gather 'Round curriculum's Advent season in 2012. We liked it so much that we decided to feature it this year in the bulletin series. It so happens that the publishers of the Sunday school materials,



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

Brethren Press and MennoMedia, also collaborate on the bulletin series—which gave this opportunity for a convergence of young and old, of faith formation and worship. (How delightful it will be if the children in your congregation recognize “their” art in the worship service.)

What's so irresistible about Kate's art? For all of us involved with Gather 'Round, it's the spirit of joy. The lively style and vivid colors are exuberantly playful. At the same time, the images convey the reverence and mystery of the gospel story.

These colorful images also remind me of the wide range of nativities carried by SERRV and other self-help handcraft organizations that bring the world into our homes. Once I shopped there with my sister, who is a Bible translator in a country where the skin tones range from ruddy brown to jet black. She was on the lookout for a crèche that would help convey that the Christmas story is for everyone, not just those who look European and American. At SERRV she was able to find a small set from South America that was just right. Interestingly, those brown figures were probably closer to the appearance of the original Middle Eastern nativity scene than the Christmas card versions to which we have become accustomed.

It's amazing, really, that we can all connect with this tableau, even though none of us were present to witness the actual event and few of us have seen even a modern-day Bethlehem stable. Somehow we can recognize it in any form—Renaissance painting; plastic, light-up figures in a front yard; Precious Moments figurines; clothespin art. The most intriguing version that I've ever seen was a minimalist set of unadorned square pillars in specific heights and colors. The arrangement was still unmistakable.

We each bring our own set of expectations to the images of Christmas, and to the Christmas story itself. Whatever our backgrounds and experiences, there is a message that we can receive however it's delivered: good news of great joy.

*Wendy McFadden*

To see more of Kate Cosgrove's Christmas art, visit your digital edition of MESSENGER or go to [www.brethren.org/nativity](http://www.brethren.org/nativity).



## How to reach us

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MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © December 2013, Church of the Brethren.

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

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



Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)

## Run-Walk for Peace a success

**O**n Sept. 21, 2013, runners and walkers gathered in the parking lot at the Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren to participate in the 5K Run-Walk to raise money for and bring awareness to the need for peace. Walkers, runners, sponsors and volunteers at the 23rd Run-Walk for Peace raised \$7,000 for On Earth Peace, with 159 people participating in the race and 50 children taking part in the Fun Run.



**Congregation Close-Up**

## Eight-year-old's pie a hit at auction

**E**ight-year-old Ali Alger captured the hearts of the Disaster Relief Auction crowd at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg, Va., recently with her peanut butter pie. It took five "Sell it again!" bids before the final bidder went home with the pie. Made from scratch, the pie was sold for \$1,800. When the final sale was made, the crowd leaped to their feet to express the appreciation to Ali for her pure desire to help the less fortunate.

It all began last year when Ali received \$10 from the Shenandoah District Auction's "Serve and Grow" project. She used the money to buy the ingredients for the award-winning pie, brought it to the auction, and presented it to the auctioneer in person, holding up the pie on stage as the dramatic bidding began.

Ali Alger, daughter of Brian and Margaret Alger, is a second grade student at the John C. Myers Elementary School in Broadway, Va. With her family, she attends the Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic.

As the Bible states, "A little child shall lead them," and Ali did just that!



**by the numbers**

# 1,150,000

Dollars raised over 30 years by Brethren churches in Franklin County and Roanoke, Va., at their annual World Hunger Auction

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.

## Remembered

### Former general secretary Judy Mills Reimer remembered for her leadership to the Church of the Brethren

**Judy Mills Reimer**, 73, who filled a number of key leadership roles in the Church of the Brethren including service as a former general secretary and Annual Conference moderator, died Nov. 13 in Charlottesville, Va.

“Her death is a loss to the whole Church of the Brethren, to which she gave so much of her life, energy, commitment, and passion,” said a statement

from Church of the Brethren general secretary Stanley J. Noffsinger.

Reimer became executive director of the denomination in 1998 and served in the position until she retired in July 2003, with the job title changing to general secretary in 2001. She was moderator of the Annual Conference in 1995. She served on the denomination’s General Board (now the Mission and Ministry Board) from 1985-90,

and was board chair from 1988-90.

She was born Sept. 5, 1940, the daughter of Gladys and Mike Mills, and was nurtured in the faith as a child by her parents and Hollins Road Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va. She felt a call to the ministry in the late 1950s, according to a remembrance from Virlina District, but it was not until 1991 that she was licensed to the ministry. She was ordained in 1994, following graduation from Bethany Theological Seminary where she earned a master of divinity degree.

Her ministry in Virlina District included at least 11 years as a member of the district board where she served as chair of the nurture commission and chair of outdoor ministry, co-chaired or was vice chair of two district financial campaigns, and chaired the Virlina District Restructuring Committees in the 1970s and 1980s, among other positions.

On the denominational level, she also was field staff for *Passing on the Promise* in Atlantic Northeast and Middle Pennsylvania Districts in the late 1980s and early 1990s, was on the board of the Association of Brethren Caregivers and served a term as chair-elect for the ABC board, chaired the Health and Welfare Council and the denomination’s Deacon Cabinet in the early 1990s, chaired the Pension Board Restructuring Committee in 1986-87, was in a group studying South African Divestiture in 1985-86, was worship coordinator for the 1994 National Youth Conference as well as an advisor for the National Youth Cabinet, was a member of the Brethren Business Network, served a term as delegate to the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the World Council of Churches, and on behalf of the NCC was an official observer at the Nicaraguan election in 1990.

Earlier in life, she did a term of Brethren Volunteer Service at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., and at Hessish Lichtenau in Germany. After two years in BVS, she became an elementary school teacher in Canada and then in Roanoke, Va. Later, she and her husband, George, were the owners of Harris Office Furniture Co. Inc. in Roanoke.

Her life was “miraculous and exemplary,” said the Virlina District obituary, which noted that she suffered heart damage from an infection in 1967 “that would have diminished a lesser person. Judy chose to use every day as a gift from God.”

“I dream of the day when members of the Church

of the Brethren are focused on the ‘bigger’ picture of Jesus Christ,” she wrote in a *MESSENGER* article in October 1994, during the year she served as moderator of Annual Conference, “seeking to discern through scripture, prayer, and community life how God would have us live our days as a denomination. Issues and questions will always be with us. Answers will come as we forthrightly communicate with each other in love and respect. . . . The joy of our faith is to shine through in all we do and say. To live each moment to the fullest. To live for God’s honor and glory.”

Kermon Thomasson



*Judy Mills Reimer at a 1988 General Board meeting. Below, Judy Mills Reimer at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., during her term as general secretary of the denomination.*



# Teach with your Life

1 Timothy 4:11-16

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Church of the Brethren

## Beacons of hope in this season of light

**D**uring the first weekend in October a few years ago, my daughter Maya and I traveled to Indiana to attend my 25th class reunion at Manchester College (now Manchester University). An additional event also attracted me to my alma mater that weekend. The Peace Studies Institute of Manchester College dedicated a plaque honoring 1917 graduate Dan West.

While few folks presently active in ecumenical and interfaith organizations will recognize West's name, many are familiar with the relief agency he founded in the 1940s, now known as Heifer International. Among Brethren, West remains cherished as something of a Dunker saint. He was instrumental in creating Brethren Volunteer Service—which served as one of the models for the Peace Corps—and Manchester University's Peace Studies Institute (the first such program in the world), both founded in 1948.



TOM WAGNER

Although he served on the denominational staff for many years, he maintained his family on a farm in northern Indiana. Folks of my parents' and grandparents' generations recall West as someone who challenged them to think deeply about their faith and place in the world. Often recounted has

Nevertheless, his name has been added to a garden wall next to those of other nonviolent prophets, including Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

We need positive role models. We need mentors, heroes, and saints. People of faith throughout the ages have understood this. For that reason, the church has often preserved the memory of exceptional Christians, honoring them as "saints." Copies of Thieleman van Braght's 17th century *Martyr's Mirror* still are commonly found on Anabaptist bookshelves, reminding readers that faithful living can be risky.

For the most part, individuals whom we have so commemorated were not all that different from you and me. Most were ordinary people who, because of their commitments, made extraordinary decisions. They put flesh and blood on our ideals and give us hope that we may act likewise in similar situations.

We are entering a season in which our faith communities speak in images of light and darkness to describe our human condition. From Isaiah we will hear poetry of messianic hope (9:2), which Matt. 4:16 will echo at the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. . ."

The prologue to John, in its own lyrical way, will tell us of "the light of all people" and that "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:4-5). Later in the same Gospel Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world.

**We need positive role models. We need mentors, heroes, and saints. . . They put *flesh and blood on our ideals* and give us hope that we may act likewise in similar situations.**

been his disciplined refusal to eat desserts. He would say, "I cannot eat cake when others do not have bread."

During West's later years, Manchester's trustees wished to pay respect to him with an honorary doctorate, but he declined the offer, believing that titles distance people. For the same reason, he never allowed the church to ordain him. My own assessment of Dan West is that he skillfully translated traditional Dunker values of nonviolence and plain living within the 20th century context.

It is likely that West would have squirmed a bit even during that October's relatively informal gathering of faculty, students, and alumni who had come together to honor him.

. ." (8:12). More to the point of this essay, in another passage, Jesus declares to his followers, "You are the light of the world . . ." (Matt. 4:14a). Furthermore, he instructs us to "let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven" (v. 16).

As we enter the season of Advent, in anticipation of the light that comes to us in the person of Jesus, let us roll up our sleeves and transform our orthodox abstractions into concrete works of mercy, justice, and peace. **W!**

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren and serves Muskegon (Mich.) County Cooperating Churches as president and archivist.

**“C’mon guys, I’m going to church!”**  
 —President Obama, responding to reporters’ questions about problems with the government’s health care website, while walking to St. John’s Episcopal Church near the White House

**“The church is in a place of real transformation. Where we come from is such a special place. But where we’re going is also special. I think God is doing a new thing. I can see that in our denomination. My hope is that we can step up to the plate. We’re not forsaking our history, but we need to boldly step forward to where we’re going.”**

—Bethany Theological Seminary student Tara Shepherd, speaking at the Church of the Brethren’s October Mission and Ministry Board meetings in Elgin, Ill.

**“Few [church] leaders are brave enough to require critical thinking, introduce new ideas, or challenge people to think beyond their comfort zones, and the ones that do are often labeled ‘heretics.’”**

—Stephen Mattson, staff member at University of Northwestern—St. Paul (Minn.), from his article, “Do Churches Alienate Intellectuals?” in Sojourners online

**“Any idiot can find God alone in the sunset. It takes a certain maturity to find God in the person sitting next to you who not only voted for the wrong political party but has a baby who is crying while you’re trying to listen to the sermon.”**

—Author Lillian Daniel, in an interview with Religion News Service’ Jonathan Merritt, on the importance of community in religious faith

**cultureview**

► **Sixty percent of Americans say they favor the death penalty for convicted murderers**, the lowest level of support Gallup has measured since November 1972, when 57 percent were in favor. Death penalty support peaked at 80 percent in 1994, but it has gradually declined since then.

Currently, 18 states do not allow the death penalty, and six of those bans have occurred since 2006. Six others instituted bans during the mid-1950s through the early 1970s, when US support for the death penalty was lowest historically.

► **Italy’s Center for Studies on New Religions** reported Nov. 10 that around half of the 250 priests it surveyed reported a **significant rise in church attendance** since Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis in March.

“If we project these findings nationally, and if half of the parishes have been touched by the Francis effect, then we’re talking about hundreds of thousands of people returning to the churches,” said Massimo Introvigne, the center’s director and a professor at Rome’s Pontifical Gregorian University.

► **Americans who own firearms** mention personal safety/protection most frequently as a reason for ownership (60 percent), followed by hunting, at 36 percent, according to Gallup’s annual crime poll. After personal safety and hunting, general mentions of recreation or sport are third (13 percent), with 8 percent citing target shooting. Only 5 percent of American gun owners cite “Second Amendment rights,” despite its frequent use as an argument against gun control.

**Heard 'round the world**



**“Any society that wants to call itself ethical in its finances has to find a way in which it values human beings and cares for them right across the board in every part of the society. . . .”**

—Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, addressing an audience of business leaders at the Blueprint for Better Business conference on business ethics in London

**“Jews marched in the march in '63, and they don’t believe in Jesus. If we can make room for those people, we can also make room for people whose gender selection is not in line with the church.”**

—The Rev. W. Franklyn Richardson of the National Action Network, responding to some black church leaders’ concerns that gay rights groups will participate in the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington



# TURNING THE TIDE FROM DEATH TO GRACE

by Frank Ramirez

**C**are to name the shortest book of the Bible? Jude? 3 John? Obadiah?

Wrong. It's the Gospel of Grace, all of 227 words in English, 186 in Greek.

Don't bother looking in the table of contents in your Bible, unless you've got a copy of the New English Bible, where you'll find, after the Gospel of John, a standalone titled "An Incident in the Temple." That's where you'll find the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:59-8:11) which, while it may be printed in the Gospel of John, is not a part of it, and never has been.

It is clear from other ancient authors that a story about Jesus and a woman caught in adultery was known to early Christians as early as the second century if not before, but

no manuscript of John from the first four centuries of Christian history includes it.

If you remove this story from the Gospel, there's a smooth transition from John 7:58 to 8:12. A controversy that began when Jesus spoke enigmatically in the temple about the living water and continues with a defense from Nicodemus seamlessly transitions into a dialog in which Jesus identifies himself as the light of the world. What is primarily a talky scene is not harmed at all if you remove the story of the woman caught in adultery.

That incident, standing by itself, is its own unit, and that's why I call it a separate—indeed the shortest—book of the Bible. I've chosen to call it the Gospel of Grace because Jesus demonstrates how grace operates.



To be honest, the vocabulary and grammar of the Gospel of Grace is more like Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The term “scribes,” for instance, is not found in John. In some ways it fits better following the apocalyptic pronouncements of Jesus that conclude with Luke 21:38, where it is found in some ancient manuscripts.

Keep in mind there were many sayings and stories about Jesus not recorded in the four Gospels that were known to those who witnessed his ministry and passed on what they heard. As it says in John, “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (21:25).

One saying not recorded in the Gospels is revealed by Paul: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Since this was an age before footnotes, my guess is that both Paul and most especially James (Jacob, the brother of Jesus)—whose book includes more echoes of the gospel than any other New Testament book—probably give us more words from Jesus than we realize.

While many Bible experts believe this story is authentic, some ask why it wasn’t originally included in the Gospels. Perhaps one reason was because of the fear that some might misinterpret the ruling of Jesus (“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” John 8:5.) as an endorsement of adultery.

And why was it eventually placed where it was, after John 7:52? Two reasons stand out. In John 7:15, some question how Jesus can be so learned when, in the words of the original Greek, “he doesn’t know his letters” (*my translation*).

As if in answer to this earlier accusation, Jesus twice kneels down in this story and writes in the sand, demonstrating he is literate. But a more important reason might be that the religious leaders who dragged this woman caught in adultery into his presence state that, according to the Law of Moses, this woman must be stoned to death (John 8:5, and see Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22). This gives the lie to the later statement by the religious authorities before Pilate that capital punishment is reserved for Rome alone (18:31).

In a book I’m writing called *The Gospel of Grace* I deal with these issues as well as the hypocrisy of bringing the woman caught in adultery but not the man. I discuss what this passage teaches us about God’s forgiveness as well as our own guilt. Here, however, I want to discuss the math behind this incident.

That’s right. Grace can be found in the numbers. There’s a branch of mathematics known as Information Cascade Theory, which deals with the way individuals are influenced by the people around them.

Under the influence of an Information Cascade, people who know better are likely to act differently. People abandon their own best guess and adopt the choices of the people around them. This happens in small groups and in nations.

And in churches.

If the people around an individual are making a bad choice, that individual may share their bad choice. But an Information Cascade can turn on a dime under the right influence, and suddenly everyone is making a better choice.

We see the Information Cascade in times of national stress. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, many



**An Information Cascade can turn on a dime under the right influence, and suddenly everyone is making a better choice.**



## Put yourself in the scene. What sort of provocation would be required for you to be in such a frenzy you would take part in stoning the woman?

Christians either allowed themselves to believe that waterboarding was not torture but “enhanced interrogation” or else convinced themselves that torture was okay.

Imagine what the scene must have been like: a woman in fear for her life, violently dragged either directly from the act of adultery, or torn from family and friends after being accused of it. The situation was transformed into a deliberate trap on the part of religious authorities who hoped to make Jesus look bad by either mercilessly consenting to the execution of a woman or by taking a stand that could be misconstrued by his enemies as a defense of adultery.

For all of this to take place required ordinary people to be filled with a murderous rage. Death by stoning was a communal event. It did not involve mercenary professionals, like the Roman legionnaires who understood the machinery of nailing someone to a bar of wood and leaving them there to die. Stoning required ordinary people to band together to cast one of their neighbors off a wall, and then throw stones until they were dead.

Put yourself in the scene. What sort of provocation would be required for *you* to be in such a frenzy you would take part in stoning the woman?

There is this fairly complex-looking equation that calculates the odds that an Information Cascade can cause individuals to join a mob and kill someone. Playing with the calculation, I decided it was 50/50, a coin flip, whether a person might actually pick up a stone and throw it.

Then I discovered that I could raise the odds to 100 percent by using scripture to justify the action. The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it. The Law of Moses insists we stone adulterers. Evidently that doesn't include men (unless in this case he was already dead), but the Bible is the Bible. For many people, one verse stands in for

all of scripture.

Except the heart of biblical study in the tradition of our Jewish cousins (and for many of us) is that we encounter, confront, interact, and interpret scripture. That's one reason we don't practice polygamy anymore. It's why, for instance, even in Jesus' day, no one enforced the biblical laws anymore that required a male to marry his deceased brother's wife to produce children to inherit his property.

That's the heart of the Brethren experiment, after all. We study the Bible together. And we're even open to changing our minds after further reflection. That's why the earliest Brethren, who decided that scripture called for both celibacy and pooling of all economic resources, discovered these didn't work well in practice and later decided scripture called for neither. (The fact that Alexander Mack, Jr., was conceived during the celibacy period might have had a lot to do with that!)

And here is where Jesus slowed, halted, and turned the Information Cascade around 180 degrees. Instead of answering the question as the authorities posed it, he bent over and wrote in the sand. Notice that Jesus did not directly answer the question posed by the religious leaders. He did not condone what she had done. Nor he did not allow those who love contention to frame the debate.

In doing so he gave people valuable time to cool down and reflect. Did they really want to throw those heavy, craggy stones and split open the woman's head?

Grace gives us time to think things over, to cool down, to think.

What did Jesus write in the sand? No one knows. Was he writing his judgment, as a magistrate would, before pronouncing it aloud? Because the words he spoke changed the equation.

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (8:7). The scriptures on the one side of the equation still demanded the woman's death. But

these words forced those who were ready to smash the woman's head to take a good look at each other and themselves. This was not going to be a day when they expressed their disapproval of adultery by spilling blood on the earth.

In my calculation the odds that any one person might be influenced by the mob to stone the woman were changed from a coin flip—50 percent—to zero. And any number—including the 100 percent scriptural demand that the woman must die—multiplied by zero, is zero.

The tide of the Information Cascade soon flowed in the opposite direction. That's the neat thing. Just as folks get the wrong answer when they hang around with the wrong people, we get the right answer when we hang around with good folks.

We Brethren are no different from anyone else in being susceptible to Information Cascade.

In 1918 an imminent fear that Brethren leaders might be arrested because of our stand against war caused a mini-stampede to repudiate the Goshen Decision, passed a few weeks before to provide support for young Brethren who were being persecuted, tortured, and even killed in the military training camps. On the other hand, Ted Chambers, a diminutive young adult, created such a dramatic scene at the 1948 Annual Conference by placing a wooden crate in front of a microphone (he was not tall enough to reach the mike otherwise) that the delegates ignored Robert's Rules of Order and immediately created Brethren Volunteer Service, bypassing the cumbersome and time-consuming machinery of committees, study groups, and a query that would have had to pass through congregational and district business meetings before arriving at Annual Conference a few years later.

My friend the late Clyde Fulton, whom I knew from Los Angeles, used to tell me the story about the time he tried to integrate his all-white Ohio congregation by inviting an African-American couple to worship. Half the church stood up and walked out, he said. That's a negative example.

On the other hand, game changers like Ralph and Mary Blocher Smeltzer stood tall against racism in all its forms.

Their risk-filled intervention when Japanese-Americans were interned during the second World War helped eventually lead to freedom and relocation for many. Their active involvement in the Civil Rights movement made a difference even among hide-bound Brethren with racist attitudes.

When we hear racist, nationalist, and non-biblical nonsense—often dressed, like Satan's temptation of Jesus, in biblical clothing—we can turn the tide when others seem ready to fall in line, by speaking and acting prophetically, by refusing to let others set the terms of the discussion, or simply by slowing down the tide of misinformation and allowing people to take a breath. We can (with help from the Holy Spirit) turn the tide of the Information Cascade so it flows in the opposite direction.

One great reason for keeping the Gospel of Grace within the boundaries of the New Testament canon is that when cascading incorrect information is pushing Brethren in the wrong direction, against our biblical principles and our better sense, we can allow each other the grace to take a deep breath, write in the sand, and choose mercy over judgment.

My guess is that many of us have been influenced in directions for which we later felt shame. Fortunately, thanks to the Gospel of Grace, we see that while Jesus does not approve of our sins, his mercy and grace demonstrate a belief that we can change and make positive choices. "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11).

Maybe this story did not make the initial cut into the Good News of Jesus Christ, but what I really like about this story is that even people who don't know their Bibles or even believe in Jesus can quote his pronouncement from memory. Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone! These powerful words, whether or not they were an original part of the Bible, continue to stem the onrushing tides of out-of-control Information Cascades.

Remember them the next time you are called upon to turn the tide from death to grace. 

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

**When cascading incorrect information is pushing Brethren in the wrong direction, . . . we can allow each other the grace to take a deep breath, write in the sand, and choose mercy over judgment.**

# The not-so-wise men

by Ken Gible

**I** find it interesting—even a little amusing—what Christian tradition has done to the story of the wise men.

These three have been honored because of the unusual gifts they brought, and their long journey in search of a newborn king. Actually they were astrologers—men who believed they could see in the stars the outlines of human destiny. Today, some people are fervent believers in astrology, but most of us laugh at it. Yet we continue to think highly of the gospel story's astrologers.

Wise men? A pretty good case could be made that they were actually bumblers. How else to explain their shortsighted visit to King Herod?

The opening verses of Matthew's second chapter tell the tale of how these strange-looking foreign dignitaries showed up at the king's palace. They greet the king. "Hello there, your majesty, and congratulations! We've brought some baby gifts for the new king of the Jews. Please take us to the nursery so we can visit him."

Before visiting the king, they could have at least asked someone—anyone—in Jerusalem if a blessed event had recently taken place at the palace. It's called doing your homework. But no, these "wise men" go barging in, never stopping to think what Herod might do if, in fact, there was no bundle of joy in the royal nursery.

Imagine their embarrassment when Herod says to them, "Baby? What baby?" Oops, the wise men think to themselves. Looks like we blew it this time. But they still don't get what Herod is up to when he calls in all the professors and asks them to tell him where the prophets predicted the messiah would be born. "Bethlehem," they tell him. Herod then says to the so-called wise men, "Go find this baby and then come back and tell me where he is so I can worship him myself."

These "wise men" actually fall for it. So off they go, tickled pink that they are still hot on the trail. They find the baby at last and give him their

presents. They are all set to go back and tell the king that they've found him, except that, as the Bible puts it "being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." It's the last we hear from them.

One can only imagine what kind of mess they would have made if they had stayed around much longer. The mess they had already made was bad enough. We usually overlook the fact that the blunders of the "wise men" enabled Herod to be about his bloody business. Herod gives orders to his soldiers to kill all the boys 2 years old and under.

So, am I arguing for the elimination of the wise men from the Christmas story? No. But I am campaigning for some honesty in telling their part in that story.

My hunch is that we shrink from such honesty because we don't much like what follows. Note that the Bible does not dwell on the horror. Unlike much modern writing, scripture contains no gratuitous descriptions of violence. Instead, it invites us to imagine the terror that seized parents in Bethlehem when news of the soldiers' bloody intentions began to spread. If you and I are brave enough, we can hear the helpless cries of infants torn from their mothers' arms, see the impotent rage of fathers watching their sons slaughtered before their eyes.

All the Bible says is this: "Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah,

"Martyrdom of the holy innocents" by Gustave Doré, 1868



The Bible does not dwell on the horror of what happened in Bethlehem after the wise men left. But it is also true that the Bible does not avert its gaze from human suffering.



"Hands with a Stick" by Vincent van Gogh, 1885

wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.”

What a world of sorrow and loss is contained in that phrase: “Rachel weeping for her children.”

The Bible does not dwell on the horror of what happened in Bethlehem after the wise men left. But it is also true that the Bible does not avert its gaze from human suffering.

How terrified Joseph and Mary must have been for their little son. Warned in a dream to flee, they do so at once. Can you imagine leaving everything behind and setting out for a place where you know no one, where the language is strange and the customs are unknown, where you are a stranger and a refugee?

We have led comfortable lives, most of us, so comfortable that we suppose people who are refugees—who are displaced or homeless or poor—have mostly themselves to blame. It’s a lie that even well-educated people can rationalize their way into believing.

I have never experienced the grief of parents whose children were mowed down by gunfire in a war in Iraq or in a Connecticut schoolroom. I cannot identify with the fear mothers and fathers in our inner cities feel when their children are out of the house and prey to dope peddlers or to the bullets of a drug-related killing. In many ways, I have led a sheltered life.

What does all this have to do with the gospel? Everything. There is joy in the gospel story, but there is anger too. The baby who was a homeless refugee in Egypt grew up. He grew into a man who had no patience when he saw the privileged ignoring the plight of the suffering. Injustice made him angry. If injustice does not make us angry too, then we are kidding ourselves if we say he is our savior and lord. Neglect and disease and everything that crushed the human spirit made him mad enough to do something. Woe to us if all those things arouse nothing in us but indifference. Woe to us if we see Rachel weeping for her children and simply turn our backs.

You say you’ve come to visit the manger? Well, you aren’t the first. The “wise men” got there some time ago, but they left before things turned nasty. And, oh yes, the manger is empty now. You’re too late; he’s gone to Egypt. You can still catch up with him if you like. But before you go, you may want to spend some time with Rachel over there; she’s crying. Or maybe you’ll want to do something to keep other Rachels from having to weep for their children. Don’t worry, you’ll still find the newborn king. Look for him wherever people are hurting. ❧

Ken Gibble, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, writes from Camp Hill, Pa. You can read more on his blog at [www.kenslines.blogspot.com](http://www.kenslines.blogspot.com).

# JOSEPH

by Paula Sheller Adams

(with a nod to George Ella Lyon)

I am from hard work and these dusty hills of boyhood.  
 I am from this shop, full with the soft smells  
     of rough wood smoothed and joined,  
     and where the bent branch, now shaped and sturdy  
     reveals the lovely curve hidden in its grain.  
 I am from chisel, plane and mallet, faithful in my hands,  
 from wood dust and chips surrendered to make  
     a chair, a cart, a door for closing and welcoming,  
     a table for our gathering and sustaining  
     and the celebration of our faith.  
 I am from integrity and obedience  
     to the spirit of my fathers,  
 I am from loyalty and duty.

And though I live embraced by family and this village,  
 I will speak one thing more:  
 I am from a long and silent loneliness,  
 broken now by the love of a young woman,  
 and a new, compelling vision.

Today I am from hope.

Church of the Brethren poet and retired family therapist Paula Sheller Adams lives with her husband, Parks, in Forest Grove, Ore., where they moved after living for 32 years in North Manchester, Ind. “Joseph” was first published in her book of poems titled *The Little Space*.



# THE UPSIDE OF KINGDOM DRIFT

story and photos by David Radcliff

**W**e had heard that it was typical to arrive at the bus station several hours early for the 3 a.m. departure.

Since the bus would be open, one could board and perhaps nap, and also avoid paying for an extra night at the hotel. So we made our way toward the station—or where we thought it should be. The streets of Gulu, Sudan, were pitch black as we tried to find our way with only flashlights to guide us.

Out of the darkness a man appeared, seemingly trying to show us the way. As he was the best thing we had going, off we went, with him in the lead. Even though he

stopped occasionally to strike poses, he seemed harmless—and sure enough, we soon arrived at the station and boarded our bus.

We'd been waiting a short while when the driver's side door opened. Someone climbed in and began pulling switches as if testing the equipment. He turned on the headlights and even cranked the engine briefly. Then we saw his silhouette against the large front windows as he scavenged food from near-empty bags. It was the same guy who brought us there!

I thought perhaps this was a normal occurrence; turns out it wasn't. The driver eventually arrived and tried to

Is this a solid enough basis for leading us forward as individuals, congregations, or even as a denomination? If Jesus' own life is any indication, yes it is.

**Alex Murphy (center, wearing headband), of Green Tree (Pa.) Church of the Brethren visits women in Nimule, South Sudan, where New Community Project is helping support tailoring training programs and gardening projects through the Girlchild Education and Development Association.**

get rid of him. After words and a sharp slap across the face failed, he used a metal bar to drive him away. Off he went into the night—with the keys. The driver eventually hot-wired the bus and we departed a little later than planned.

This 16-hour bus ride to Kampala, Uganda, was the first leg of a two-day trip that would take us home after our 12-day visit—one of several learning tours New Community Project offers each year—and it wasn't off to the greatest of starts. To make a long story short, after other delays along the way, we arrived at the airport five minutes too late to check in for our flight. Next departure: two days later.

As we regrouped, one member offered to pay the entrance fees at a game park—if we could get there. I had spoken briefly with a woman at the tourist desk at the airport when we had arrived on our incoming flight. Now she was happy to recommend a guide for a trip to Murchison Falls National Park. (We've worked with that guide, Berni Kiw, ever since for our Sudan Learning Tours.)

We had a great experience at the park, and on the way back to the airport two days later, stopped at the Equator—who wouldn't?—and noticed the small shop of a Fair Trade, eco-friendly women's cooperative. It turns out they were looking for an international partner. Today, we're still marketing Papula Paper products in our network, and Murchison Falls continues to be the last stop for our visits to South Sudan.

Our Learning Tours aren't always quite so... exciting... but we also try not to script things too tightly. We want to create space for unexpected experiences. The same goes for our organization, New Community Project. We have a clear idea of our goal ("to change the world"), but

how we get there takes shape as we go along. Our Sustainable Living Center has—quite fittingly—taken shape organically, molding itself to the needs of the community and the gifts of those who come to work with us. Connections to schools and colleges have emerged as someone—students, teachers, community members—facilitated linkages. Several of our key relationships (including Berni and Papula, but also in the Amazon, Arctic, and South Asia) have likewise emerged by... happenstance?

That doesn't quite seem like the right word. These relationships and the specific direction our work has taken have seemed more than coincidence or "luck." They have had a kind of unplanned purposefulness that has emerged from some combination of a clear overall goal combined with an attempt to be attentive to the work of the Spirit, which John V. Taylor said (in his 1970's book *The Go-Between God*) manifests itself primarily by opening our eyes to the world around us.

Is this a solid enough basis for leading us forward as individuals, congregations, or even as a denomination? If Jesus' own life is any indication, yes it is.

Our Lord was certainly a man on a mission. He knew what he wanted to do—proclaim God's justice, righteousness, and peace. He had a sense as to where all this would end up—in Jerusalem. But getting from here to there was another thing altogether. Jesus was no driver with a GPS, nor a texting teen with eyes glued down, inattentive to the things around him and the possible unexpected twists and turns in the planned itinerary. In many situations, the twists and turns *were* the itinerary for our Lord.

The blind man along the road or the woman at the



**A worker displays products made by Papula Paper, in Sudan, a women-led cooperative on the Equator that employs disabled men and women, single mothers, and those with AIDS.**



*Rose Lamia addresses a women's group in Nimule, South Sudan, about ways they might partner with New Community Project to enhance economic development there.*

rather than a cluster of malleable parables and evocative encounters, ours might be just another religion, rather than a dynamic movement able to adapt to the times.

So finding a direction for a denomination like ours and its hundreds of local manifestations is less a function of a small cadre of institutional leaders who set the course, or of harking back to earlier times, as suggested by another recent MESSENGER article. (See "Are Brethren on a course to 'mission draft'?" by Ronald Keener, October.) Rather, it is up to each of us in our own settings, and all of us together in larger corporate gatherings, to keep an ear to the ground and an eye to the side of the road, on the lookout for where God may be calling us next. This doesn't mean we don't still have the values of the kingdom pushing us ahead and pulling us on, but it does mean that we

**Rather than remedies calling us to more narrowly focused and regimented mission strategies, I believe we need to get more serious about drifting—cultivating attentiveness to our communities and our world . . .**

well or the children on the sidelines or the tax collector in the tree or the woman about to be stoned—these were seen by others as distractions, mission drift, or worse: as compromising Jesus' integrity as a prophet of God. For Jesus, these "distractions" were his mission.

Indeed, we might say he allowed these unplanned encounters to give shape to the day-by-day working out of his mission—how it took shape on the ground. Certainly, they gave shape to the way others perceived him. Had he not spontaneously healed the woman-bent-over-for-18-years, refusing to allow Sabbath rules to stop him, he would neither have excited the crowds nor incited the religious leaders. Had he not spoken with the woman of Samaria during a chance meeting at Jacob's Well—to the dismay of his disciples—we might have had to wait even longer than the fourth century and the ministry of St. Patrick to find another Christian leader who treated women as men's equal. Had he left a written tome as his legacy

*A Mennonite from Akron who knew a mission worker in Thailand who knew someone at Hope International in Myanmar who knew a Baptist development organization there: That's what led to New Community Project's connections with this Southeast Asian country—and to seven years of collaboration that has sent dozens of girls to school, planted thousands of trees on deforested hillsides, and assisted hundreds of women like Thin Mar Ning and Zin Zin Mar in beginning small economic enterprises.*

lack absolute certainty about where this may take us in the current day. It may even lead to places the previous article disparaged as examples of "historical and mission drift."

And, while leadership still certainly has a role, "it ain't like it used to be," as many younger people, society-at-large, and even our own congregations are less inclined to take direction from the top, and much more interested in having a say in where we're headed. This seems fitting for a group that has the priesthood of all believers as part of its credo.



I see this kind of purposeful drifting-toward-mission occurring in congregations I visit all across the country.

- In several places, community fellowships are in formation. These groups may be only tangentially related to the local congregation, but are drawing in neighborhood folks for more informal conversations, sometimes study, and often opportunities for service.
- Others are inviting local people onto church property not for worship but for gardening, recognizing a) the environmental cost of tending a typical church lawn; b) the need for better and more local food options, especially in urban areas; c) the spiritual importance of reconnecting to God's earth; d) the opportunity this provides to make a witness to the congregation's values; and e) that there are a lot of young adults out there interested in getting "back to the land," making this a great way to connect with them. (In fact, as I was walking by one of these congregation's gardens while in their community recently, I was stopped by a passerby who asked me who she should contact about volunteering in the garden.)
- In a western urban congregation working to discern how best to connect to its community, some members have been led to focus on the many health impacts of local gun violence, while others feel called to address climate change—a global concern which has also affected their local community of late in the form of massive flooding.
- As my own congregation has assessed the needs and connecting points for local ministry, we are finding that the most pressing challenges are not poverty or daycare or the like, but "suburbanitis"—people caught up in and sometimes overwhelmed by their hectic, consumption-oriented, extremely individualistic lifestyles, with no idea of where to turn for an alternative. We're working to offer this.

This also seems to be the way much of our global mission is taking place today—seeds scattered by unexpected sowers and taking root in unexpected places. This makes some of us uneasy, but we have also seen much more structured and well-funded enterprises flounder and sometimes fail in the past. If these new efforts are "of the Lord"—if there is a resonance between these new seekers and who we are as a denomination—then they may turn out to be a blessing to all concerned.

I do agree with the previous writer that we are facing a critical moment in the life of our denomination, and



**Another worker at Papula Paper, where products made out of recycled plant material and paper waste are marketed through New Community Project in the US.**

indeed in the church at large. Congregations of all stripes within our fellowship are struggling and face uncertain futures. We must get serious about deciding who we are and what values pull us forward. We may also need to admit that our divergent understandings of where God is calling us (and our judgmentalism toward one another in the process) hinders our ability to speak and act with anything like a unified voice—certainly contributing to the perception that we lack moorings—and then decide what to do about this.

Whatever the case, rather than remedies calling us to more narrowly focused and regimented mission strategies, I believe we need to get more serious about drifting—cultivating attentiveness to our communities and our world and the currents roiling both right now, and on the look-out for opportunities to wade in where the Spirit leads—which may carry us who-knows-where, but in good company: that of our Lord and those around us who may find in us just what they've been looking for. ❧

David Radcliff, a member of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren in Peoria, Ariz., is director of New Community Project.



# A gathering of families

by Chris Keating

**S**omewhere in the midst of this month's high-octane push to the Christmas finish line, I'll carve out a few minutes to clear a space at the kitchen table and read our Christmas cards. While digital technologies are reducing the number of cards we receive, there are still plenty to read. With a cup of coffee in hand, I'll glance at the names, read the letters, catch up with friends.

Inevitably, my children also look at these cards and holiday letters. Our cards arrive from across the country and include distant relatives. Typically, these holiday greetings pose this response from the kids: "Dad, just *who* are those people, anyway?"

In other words, they ask me: remind me how these people are related to us. Are they friends or relatives? Their mother was your aunt, is that right? Tell me more about these cousins we've never met, the people who share our names and DNA. This annual recital of family heritage starts over kitchen tables and continues throughout the season as ancestral fables and legendary family tales are told over and over again. There's no doubt that Christmas is a gathering time for families.

Our gatherings are also times for taking stock of the state of our family. We look at our kids and see glimpses of their grandparents. We notice that the youngest has a tendency to tell jokes just like a long-passed uncle. We recreate treasured recipes and tell the stories that answer the question, "Just who were these people, anyway?"

As I read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, I sometimes wonder if an adolescent Jesus may have asked Joseph and Mary the same question: "Just who were these people we call our ancestors? Tell me again how we're related to old Abijah. Remind me of the stories about Grandma Ruth, or Great Grandma Rahab. And this Jechoniah guy, just who was he, anyway?" Stories of faith are stories of families, and Christmas offers us the chance to explore the sacred stories of Jesus' family lineage.

Matthew's genealogical research is ripe for our reflection this Advent, because it leads us to a greater understanding of the Gospel's purposes in reciting the story of the Messiah's birth.

Few of us ever pay much attention to Jesus' genealogy. The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 are part of the fly-over country of scripture, the bits and pieces left out of most sermons. Because these accounts are rarely read aloud in church, we skip the details, relegating them to the margins of scripture.

Like the often-maligned "begats" of Genesis 5, these verses are rarely considered anything more than a gazetteer of vaguely familiar names, hard to pronounce and easily forgot-

ten. But ignoring them is like placing a spectacular ornament on the back of the Christmas tree. The meanings of these lists offer significant clues to the writers' theological purposes.

Given the fascination with genealogy, and the extent that some people go to trace their roots, ignoring the Gospel writers' presentation of Jesus' roots is somewhat ironic. Family research remains popular, and is considered one of the most common hobbies. The pastime has spawned online businesses worth millions. As I learned years ago while attending my first national Church of the Brethren event, discovering your roots isn't merely a parlor game. As a Presbyterian interning on the MESSENGER staff, I was amazed how many people kept asking, "Now, who are you related to?"

We gather families as a way of claiming our identity.

That seems to have been on the minds of Luke and Matthew. The Gospel writers each trace Jesus' ancestry differently. Luke's route goes backwards all the way to Adam. His intent seems to be linking Jesus with God's original creation, demonstrating Jesus' common humanity. Matthew, however, gathers the family in quite a different fashion. The

strange ways by arranging Jesus' ancestors in three groups of 14 generations. Scholars tell us the math doesn't work. It is as if Matthew is furiously trying to wrap a package with too little gift wrap—tucking the corners in as best as he can, taping every loose end.

But I don't think that is what is happening at all. It seems to me that Matthew is making an interesting theological point to remind us that Jesus' birth is no random act. Straight from the start, Matthew reminds us that Jesus' birth is a divine event connected to the purposes of God in history. His birth comes in line with God's covenant, and displays once more the life-giving presence of God throughout Israel's story.

Notice, too, how Matthew includes five women in these verses—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary. Their presence disrupts the conventional roll call of men, highlighting once more the unique way God is at work in the world. These women reveal God's rather unconventional and often surprising way of working—including bringing redemption out of scandal.

This genealogy is what New Testament scholar Warren

**As they heard each name, these disciples would know that not only was Jesus *gathered into this family*, but that they, too, were included.**

first Gospel places priority on Jesus' Jewish heritage, beginning with Abraham and continuing through King David's ancestors. Scholars observe it's not quite historically accurate, yet that doesn't seem to be the point.

Clearly, Matthew is staking his claim on Jesus' Jewish bloodline. While this seems self-evident to modern readers, recall that Matthew's readers would have been wrestling with what it means to be, as Tom Long says, "Jewish by heritage and Christian by conviction" (Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*, p. 7). Moreover, what seems to us to be an interminably boring roll call of deceased relatives was instead a dynamic moment designed to arouse the audience's attention. These stories would call to mind the long-memorized portions of Hebrew scripture.

As they heard each name, these disciples would know that not only was Jesus gathered into this family, but that they, too, were included. With each name, the audience could fill in the blanks, recalling the risks undertaken by Abraham and Sarah, the courage of Boaz and Ruth, and the adultery of David and Bathsheba. This bloodline runs deep, and expands to include Joseph and Mary and their soon-to-be-born baby.

Matthew also has what many see as a somewhat contrived arrangement of generations. This family tree sprouts in

Carter calls a family photo album, with a story pegged to every picture. It is like the homemade mosaic of family photos that my father kept above his desk. He had clipped and pasted different photos of family events, arranging them according to his preferences rather than strict historical chronology. Each photo told a story. When placed together, those stories comprised our family history.

That is what Matthew is attempting to do, and that is why this genealogy is so fascinating. Every epoch of Jewish history is presented, a reminder that the Messiah's birth was no mere coincidence.

Advent and Christmas are the perfect times to ponder these verses, for they establish Jesus' identity as Messiah. They tell of his place within the "house and lineage of David," and prepare our hearts to receive the infant Savior. They call us to take our place in the family of God. Like the original audience, when we read these lines carefully, we are prepared for the birth of the Messiah. ❧

Chris Keating is pastor of Woodlawn Chapel Presbyterian Church in Wildwood, Mo. Serving as MESSENGER's Bible study writer during 2013, Keating is connected to the Church of the Brethren through the University of La Verne and an internship with MESSENGER in the 1980s.

“By and large there’s hope on every one of these doors for us to be ‘strangers no more.’”

—Janet Elsea (pictured below), a Mission and Ministry Board member, commenting during an exercise to assess the Strategic Plan and its six goal areas—Brethren voice, vitality, service, mission, planting, and sustainability. Each goal was represented by a door, and participants wrote sticky notes to place on the doors showing how the goals are being carried out in the church.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



## Mission and Ministry Board meets

A budget for denominational ministries in 2014 and responses to items of business sent back by Annual Conference—the Ministerial Leadership document and a query on equitable representation—were high on the agenda of the Mission and Ministry Board at its fall meeting Oct. 18-21. The meeting was chaired by Becky Ball Miller. A class from Bethany Theological Seminary attended and led the Sunday morning worship service.

The board adopted a revision to the Ministerial Leadership Polity document, after the 2013 Annual Conference returned it with instruction for certain changes. Once adopted, the document will represent a major revision to Church of the Brethren polity for ministers. It was presented to the Conference in early July.

The new revision was presented to the board by Mary Jo Flory-Steuery, associate general secretary and executive of the Ministry Office. Revisions respond to Annual Conference concerns in several areas: integration of plural non-salaried ministry (free ministry) into the document, guidelines for the make-up of “calling cohorts” for ministry candidates, a process for commissioned ministers to be ordained and a process for change of call for commissioned ministers, and intentional conversation with ethnic congregations about how the document will affect ministers in their contexts.

The board received the report of the revisions with appreciation, focusing particularly on the guidelines for makeup of calling cohorts. The board made one significant change, to state that calling cohorts “will include” an ordained mentor appointed by the district ministry commission. With that change the document received approval from the board, and will be brought back to the 2014 Annual Conference.

### A budget for 2014

The board approved a total budget of \$8,033,860 income and \$8,037,110 expense for all Church of the Brethren ministries in 2014. Those figures include a Core Ministries balanced budget of \$4,915,000 for next year, as well as separate budgets for the “self funding” units of Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Conference Office, Global Food Crisis, Material Resources, and MESSENGER.

The board approved a new Gift Acceptance Policy to help staff evaluate proposed gifts to the church’s ministries, and to set up a committee that reviews proposals for large gifts.

The board also followed up on an earlier conversation and decided to end the practice of charging interfund interest within the organization.

### Query on equitable representation

After lengthy discussion, and review of suggestions and responses from the table talk at Annual Conference 2013, the board decided to recommend to the 2014 Annual Conference that no change be made in the process for selecting members of the Mission and Ministry Board.

Several board members and staff expressed trust that the current system works effectively to ensure equitable representation from the various areas of the denomination.

The query that originated in Southern Pennsylvania District was directed to the Mission and Ministry Board by Annual Conference in 2012. However the board’s



proposed amendments to the bylaws to respond to the concerns of the query did not receive enough votes from the 2013 Conference, so the business was returned to the board for further work.

**Brethren Service Center**

The meeting also included a discussion of the Brethren Service Center, located in New Windsor, Md. The conversation followed up on a decision made by the Mission and Ministry Board at the summer meeting on June 29, authorizing staff to pursue all options for the property.

In June the board received a brief update on the situation of the Brethren Service Center following the closing of

the New Windsor Conference Center, and heard that staff have been working hard to seek options for the use of two of the main buildings on the campus that are not being fully utilized, including meeting with county officials and real estate consultants.

“There has been exhaustive work by your staff and people who love the center to find ways to utilize the center,” general secretary Stan Noffsinger told the board. He asked the board’s help to discern “how to approach the heart side of this conversation with the church,” noting that the property is not on the market but staff need to be prepared “if and when a bona fide offer comes.”

Several rounds of small group “table talk” followed. Board members, staff,

and guests including the class of Bethany Seminary students who were at the meeting, responded to questions including “Identify what has been the essence of the legacy of the Brethren Service Center?” and “Who do we need to engage in similar conversations to identify the holy memories to carry forward?”

The staff hope for a time for similar small group conversations during “table talk” time at the 2014 Annual Conference, Noffsinger said. In the next few months, the Inter Agency Forum and the Council of District Executives’ annual retreat are also possible venues for conversation about the Brethren Service Center.

► **MORE** Find a photo album from the Mission and Ministry Board’s fall meeting at [www.brethren.org/album](http://www.brethren.org/album).

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## upcoming events

**Dec. 11**

**Pioneering in a Global Context:** A webinar with David Kerrigan (go to [www.brethren.org/webcasts](http://www.brethren.org/webcasts))

**Dec. 24**

**Christmas Eve,**

**Dec. 25**

**Christmas Day,**

**Jan 1**

**New Years Day**

**Jan. 13-16**

**Clergy Women's Retreat,** Malibu, Calif.

**Jan. 18-25**

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

**Jan. 19-23**

**Council of District Executives Winter Meeting,** Cocoa Beach, Fla.

**Jan. 20**

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day,** offices are closed

**Jan. 21**

**Call and Gifts Discernment:** A webinar led by Bekah Houff (go to [www.brethren.org/webcasts](http://www.brethren.org/webcasts))

**Jan. 26-Feb. 14**

**Brethren Volunteer Service Winter Orientation,** Gotha, Fla.

Courtesy of Brethren Volunteer Service



*Members of Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 303 are (front row) Olivia Haddad, Carson McFadden, Tracie Doi, Sean Smith; (second row) Erin Duffy, Becky Snell; (third row) Theresa Ford, April Moyer, Angela I., Craig Morphev; (fourth row) Verena Goetz, Emily Davis, Becky Harness, Grace Elkins, Evelinia Husser; (fifth row) Michael Himlie, Jenna Stacy, Brandon Gumm, Svenja Koenig, Tyler Goss; (back row) David von Rueden, David Mueller, Andreas Pielczyk, Nate I.*

## Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 303 begins service

Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 303 has completed orientation and the volunteers have been sent across the US and into Europe and Latin America to begin a term of service. The volunteers, who met Sept. 22 to Oct. 11 at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., have been assigned to the following placements: **Emily Davis** of Columbia, Mo., to Midwives for Haiti, Hinche, Haiti. **Tracie Doi** of Granger, Ind., and **David Mueller** of Kassel, Germany, to Project PLASE, Baltimore, Md. **Erin Duffy** of Hempfield Church of the Brethren, Manheim, Pa., to Highland Park Elementary School, Roanoke, Va. **Grace Elkins** of Hollidaysburg, Pa., to CooperRiis, Mill Spring, N.C. **Theresa Ford** of Green Tree Church of the Brethren, Oaks, Pa., and **Olivia Haddad** of Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren to Family Abuse Center, Waco, Texas. **Verena Goetz** of Furth, Germany, to New Community Project, Harrisonburg, Va. **Tyler Goss** of West Richmond Church of the Brethren, Richmond, Va., to Capstone, New Orleans, La. **Brandon Gumm** of Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren and **Evelinia Husser** of Speyer, Germany, to Cincinnati (Ohio) Church of the Brethren. **Becky Harness** of North Liberty (Ind.) Church of the Brethren and **Svenja Koenig** of Dortmund, Germany, to Abode Services, Fremont, Calif. **Michael Himlie** of Root River Church of the Brethren, Preston, Minn., to Brethren Disaster Ministries, New Windsor, Md. **Nate and Angela I.** of Olympic View Church of the Brethren, Seattle, Wash., to CPR Sierra Unión Victoria, in Unión Victoria, Guatemala. **Carson McFadden** of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill., to Boys Hope Girls Hope, Kansas City, Mo. **Craig Morphev** of Bethany Church of the Brethren, New Paris, Ind., to L'Arche Cork, Cork, Ireland. **April Moyer** of Perkiomenville, Pa., to Capital Area Food Bank, Washington, D.C. **Andreas Pielczyk** of Troisdorf, Germany, to the Center on Conscience and War, Washington D.C. **Sean Smith** of Saint Petersburg (Fla.) Church of the Brethren to Church of the Brethren Material Resources, New Windsor, Md. **Becky Snell** of McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren to Quaker Cottage, Belfast, Northern Ireland. **Jenna Stacy** of Melvin Hill Church of the Brethren, Columbia, N.C., to Brethren Workcamps, Elgin, Ill. **David von Rueden** of Wieseloch, Germany, to SnowCap, Portland, Ore.

## Manchester president Switzer to retire, McFadden named successor

Manchester University president Jo Young Switzer has announced plans to retire effective June 30, 2014. Dave McFadden, executive vice president and dean of Manchester's College of Pharmacy, has been chosen by the university's board of trustees to succeed her on July 1, 2014.

As its first female president, Switzer led her alma mater through many years of growth and success. "President Switzer has led Manchester with a strategic focus unprecedented in the history of Manchester," said board chair Marsha Link. "She has led from within and has also risen to great respect across higher education as a dynamic and thoughtful leader."

Regarding the choice of McFadden as her successor, Switzer remarked, "Dave is an outstanding selection as Manchester's next president. He is prepared, has exceptional leadership skills, and most importantly,

the commitment and desire to see Manchester University do great things."

McFadden is a 1982 graduate of Manchester and earned a Ph.D. in political science at Claremont Graduate University. He led Manchester's enrollment initiatives beginning in 1993. McFadden has served as executive vice president throughout Switzer's presidency and also as an assistant professor of political science, with particular interest in environmental policy.

McFadden also is a member of the board of trustees of Bethany Theological Seminary. In previous service to the denomination, he was a coordinator of National Youth Conference in 1978 as a young adult, and also served on the staff of the former General Board for a term in the 1980s where he worked in the human



resources office to recruit mission and Brethren Volunteer Service workers.

He and his wife, Renee, a retired elementary teacher and Manchester alumna, reside in North Manchester. They have two adult children, Rachel and Sam, both Manchester graduates.

—Jeri S. Kornegay is staff for media relations at Manchester University.



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# A geography of faith

**L**et's begin with a quiz. Which of the following could be called spiritual practices for Christians?

- |                               |                   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Spending time in prayer    | 5. Getting lost   |
| 2. Reading the Bible          | 6. Carrying water |
| 3. Attending worship services | 7. Feeling pain   |
| 4. Wearing skin               | 8. Saying No      |

If your answer was numbers 1, 2, and 3, you are absolutely correct. If you answered 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8, you also are correct—at least according to Barbara Brown Taylor. And after you have read her book *An Altar in the World*, you might find yourself agreeing with her.



KEN GIBBLE

Taylor announces in the book's introduction that she is writing for people who are tired of arguing about religion, tired of simply reading about spirituality, tired of "talk-talk-talking about things that matter" without *doing* a single thing about it. She wants her readers to recognize altars in the world, ordinary-looking places where they can encounter God. The subtitle to her book,

*A Geography of Faith*, points to her intention to commend physical, in-space practices that will help people to that end.

Those who begin reading this book will discover that Taylor is an engaging writer who uses language in powerful yet winsome ways. The pages are sprinkled liberally with stories from her own experience, and are told with self-deprecating humor and disarming honesty. She, like most of us, has traveled a faith journey with some success, but with a huge bucketful of stumbles along the way. It was in many of those stumbles that she gained new insights, a fresh appreciation of what it means to find blessing.

Although the book can be helpful to the non-religious, it has special significance for Christians. A former Episcopal pastor, Taylor has the advantage of having been with people in their most intense moments. She draws on those experiences, as well as her work as a college teacher of religion, to undergird her reflections. Especially helpful are her use of biblical stories

and the life and teachings of Jesus to illustrate the 12 spiritual practices she discusses.

In a chapter called "Getting Lost" (subtitled "Wilderness"), Taylor tells the story of Abraham and Sarah setting out in their advanced years to the place God had promised them. As Taylor puts it, God chose them because of "their willingness to get lost." I had never thought of getting lost as a way of describing not just the Abraham and Sarah story, but also the 40-year trek to the Promised Land by the children of Israel, Elijah running away from the anger of Jezebel, or the 40-day stay of Jesus in the wilderness before he began his ministry. There are many ways of "getting lost," of course, and Taylor urges us to seek out unfamiliar places or engage in new activities—anything to move us beyond our comfort zones. As long as we stick to the known, the routine, the everyday, we forfeit opportunities to let God find us in unexpected ways.

What about that spiritual practice Taylor calls "Saying No"? The subtitle to that chapter, "Sabbath," provides a clue. She writes: "In the eyes of the world there is no payoff for sitting on the porch." There is, after all, success to be achieved and money to be made. However, "In the eyes of God the porch is imperative—not just every now and then but on a regular basis." According to Taylor, the practice of periodic rest, disengagement from an attitude of I've-got-so-much-to-do, is more difficult than giving a tithe or "praying on a stone-cold floor."

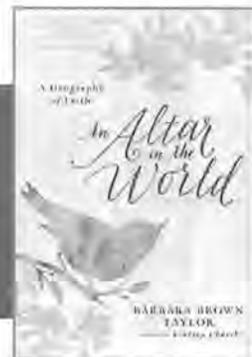
One of the joys in reading this book was coming across so many quotable phrases, such this one: "For reasons beyond our understanding, God decided to be made known in the flesh. Matter matters to God." And this one: "People can learn as much about the ways of God from business deals gone bad or sparrows falling to the ground as they can from reciting the books of the Bible in order."

For Brethren, who have historically valued practice above creed, *An Altar in the World*, will ring true because it champions an in-the-flesh way of following Jesus. The book would make an excellent resource for leading a group discussion or Sunday school class on spiritual practices. **M**

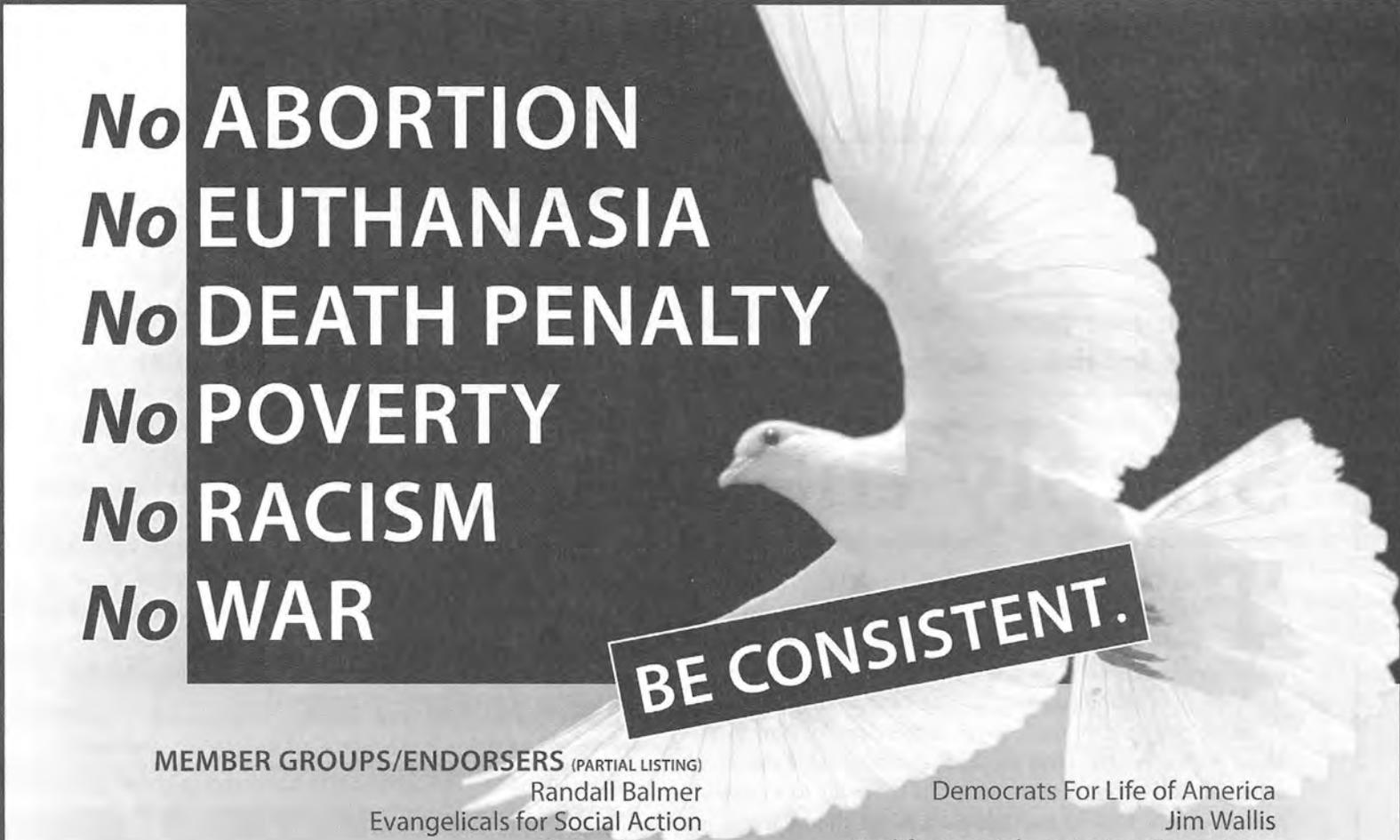
Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, lives in Camp Hill, Pa.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *An Altar in the World*. **Author:** Barbara Brown Taylor. **Publisher:** Harper One, February 2010. **Number of pages:** 240. In a review of the book, Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Great Emergence* (and speaker the Church of the Brethren's recent National Older Adult Conference), said, "This is the most completely beautiful book on religion that I have read in a very long time. Gentle, humbly crafted, lyrical, and deeply wise, *Altar* is Barbara Brown Taylor as she was meant to be: a pastor who understands that knowing God occurs in a place beyond theology."



**No ABORTION**  
**No EUTHANASIA**  
**No DEATH PENALTY**  
**No POVERTY**  
**No RACISM**  
**No WAR**



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Sometimes I wonder if even our best attempts to remember the “reason for the season” still distract us from the *heart of the matter*

## Simply the season

**T**he Christmas season is probably the most over-complicated holiday of the year in the US. If there was ever a thing that could stand to be simplified, it would be what has become the holiday of shopping, spending, and socializing.

Many people have made great suggestions for how to avoid getting caught up in the holiday frenzy: Give the same amount of hours that you spend shopping to a community outreach program. Give back to the church the same amount of money that you spend on gifts. In lieu of wish lists, have family members choose charities to which to donate in their honor. Instead of succumbing to the ultra-consumerism of shopping malls, stay home and make handmade gifts. Short on time? Give two gifts for the price of one by visiting the SERRV store to buy fairly traded products.



MANDY GARCIA

Another suggestion to cut back on consumerism and waste is to make gift bags out of fabric. They are easy to make, totally customizable, and prettier than paper.

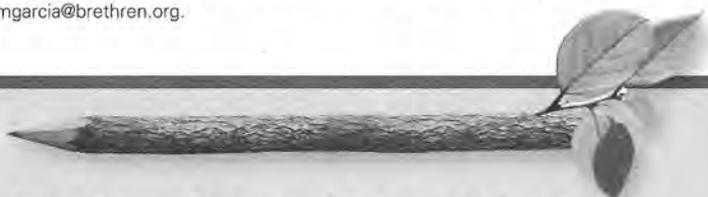
All of these are wonderful ways to intentionally focus on the lasting joy we celebrate at Christmas and, as long as they don't replace one stress for another, they have the ability to simplify our lists, menus, and schedules. In the right mindset, they might even be seen as gifts for Jesus—it is his birthday we're celebrating, after all.

But sometimes I wonder if even our best attempts to remember the “reason for the season” still distract us from the heart of the matter—the heart of our hearts.

At the end of the day, when the dishes are done, the chatter has ebbed, the candles are blown out, and the night has finally become a silent one, we are left alone with our thoughts. Bundled under covers, blinking at the soft red and green lights bouncing off the ceiling from the neighbors' outdoor decorations, where are our hearts? My hope

is that they are brimming with thanksgiving, utterly content and overflowing with gratitude for the blessings God has given. My prayer is that our hearts beat confidently with the rhythms of grace found in tiny miracles, and singing tidings of great joy to all people. ❧

Mandy Garcia is associate director of donor communications for the Church of the Brethren. She also produces eBrethren, stories of Brethren stewards, every other week for the Church of the Brethren. For information, contact [mgarcia@brethren.org](mailto:mgarcia@brethren.org).



### Instructions for making three small bags (9" x 9")

You'll need 1 yard of 45" fabric, thread, 1.5 yards of ribbon for each bag, scissors, quilting pins, a large sewing ruler, fabric-marking pencils, a seam-ripper, and pins. Essentially, you're making a tiny pillowcase.

1. Cut one rectangle for each bag 13.5" x 34.5"
2. Fold fabric right sides together; stitch 1/4" side seams (the bag is inside out)
3. Create mitered corners using a 1.5" square
4. Fold under the top edge of the bag 1/4", all the way around. Press. Fold under another three inches. Press. Stitch top hem.
5. Turn bag right side out.
6. Lay bag so that the back is face up. Mark the bag in the center, on the hem stitch line. Mark center of ribbon length. Pin the ribbon to the bag, matching centers, so the ribbon's upper edge covers the stitch line on the bag. Stitch a vertical line across the ribbon to hold it to the bag, or use fabric glue to attach the ribbon.
7. Tie the ribbon around the bag. Tie knots in the ends of the ribbon to keep it from unraveling.
8. Optional: Add buttons, appliqué, and bows.

## Not drifting

In his October MESSENGER article, Ronald Keener offers interesting questions and analysis on mission “drift” and the state of the church. That is, until his article “drifts” severely off course from its original mission by entering the human sexuality debate. Contrary to Keener’s abrupt reflections about the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) persons in the church, my personal and pastoral experience has been that open and affirming congregations are exemplars of the type of mission focus that he highlights positively in his article.

Congregations that are open and affirming of LGBTQ persons tend to engage in intentional conversation, rigorous Bible study, and prayerful discernment on their mission and vision, guided by God’s abiding presence. As a result, open and affirming congregations are frequently invigorated by this process and experience a renewal of spiritual growth. They also tend to not only attract LGBTQ individuals and families, but they also attract opposite-gender families who

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want to raise their children in truly inclusive and welcoming communities of faith that follow in the manner of Jesus' embrace of all peoples.

These congregations are not drifting. They are filled with people seeking to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The spirit of God is upon them. Their mission is faithful and strong.

**Brian Flory**  
Fort Wayne, Ind.

## Not helpful

The article in the October MESSENGER by Ronald Keener is on the subject of mission drift. However, he is bringing up subjects that are not related to the topic. He did not explain why the topic of homosexuality was raised. People live as they are born. Why are people's lives brought up for review? Those of us who are "other" are judging people who

didn't choose how they are born. This seems not Christlike.

I did not find Mr. Keener's comments to be helpful in moving the discussion forward, but mission drift is an important topic for Brethren to be discussing.

**Marianne Michael**  
Hills, Iowa

## Chili is a big hit!

I just want to let you know that we really like your Pumpkin Chili! (See Mandy Garcia's "Living Simply" column in the October MESSENGER.) My youngest child, Ben, is 16 and doesn't usually care for meatless meals, but he really likes this chili. In fact, he cleaned and helped chop up the pumpkin when I made it for the second time yesterday. Thanks for the great recipe!

**Jo Miller**  
Lombard, Ill.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**Book: *Living Gift: John's Jesus in Meditation and Poetry, Art and Song*** (attractive art lithocover), Willard Swartley, \$24. BCBC John Companion. Living Gift correlates with the Winter-Spring Gather Round curriculum on John's Gospel. Great for Sunday School classes of parents who have children in Gather Round! Worship and sermon could be correlated also; copious Genre and Subject Indexes aid worship planning. Swartley correlation sheet available. Pre-Christmas sale, \$20, includes USA shipping. Order from (wswartley@ams.edu). Quantity discounts: inquire. Wonderful Christmas gift!

**Andy and Terry Murray** are releasing a "40th Anniversary CD Edition" of the original vinyl album, *Summertime Children*, recorded in Nashville for the 1974 National Youth Conference at Glorieta, New Mexico. The CD is mastered from the original Nashville studio tapes and will include all songs, lyrics booklet and photographs. Songs include the first NYC theme song, "Summertime Children", "The Ballad of John Kline"; "Grace Revisited" (Earle Fike); "Cowboy Dan" and "The Great Botetourt Bus-Truck Race." CD's are \$14.95. To order, contact Andy and Terry at andyandterrymusic@icloud.com

**The New Inglenook Cookbook** website has all-new content: [www.inglenookcookbook.org](http://www.inglenookcookbook.org). Share your favorite Inglenook recipe or story in our new blog, Kitchen Scrapbook. Visit the online store to see all our cookbooks and merchandise, including mugs and aprons. And don't forget to check the home page for an updated list of cookbook corrections. Stay connected, spread the word, and keep cooking!

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## New Members

**Antioch**, Rocky Mount, Va.: Roger Flora, Martha Flora, Joshua Dickerson, Scott Bowman, Julia Angell, Abigail Brubaker, Ryan Brubaker, Nicholas Robertson

**Beachdale**, Berlin, Pa.: Barbra Weyant, Diane Bittner, Barry Bittner, Herman Hickle, Thomas Watson, Debbie Werner, Mark Walker

**Bear Run**, Mill Run, Pa.: Kayla Hay, Kelly Hay

**Defiance**, Ohio: Darion Collins

**Florin**, Mount Joy, Pa.: Bob Johnson, Yvonne Johnson

**Frederick**, Md.: Carole Arneson, Virginia Arneson, Sally Ausherman, Clinton Bagley, Lindsay Bagley, Ali Blickenstaff, Ryan Blickenstaff, Whitney Blickenstaff, Liz Bridge, Steve Bridge, Lori Chapman, Stu Essey, Brecca Faust, An-Lorraine Hertzog, Ray Hertzog, Laura Keilholtz, Mindy Kiracofe, Barb Leishman, James Letora, Jessica Letora, Kim Long, Darlene Moser, Ed (Merhle) Moser, Barbara Muller, David Muller, Andrea Percy, Keith Percy, Erin Poteat, Tom Stackhouse, Sandra Stackhouse, Cliff Waldrep, Peggy Waldrep, Rachel Wells, Summer Wilkes, Fred Young, Pat Young

**Hempfield**, Manheim, Pa.: Ron Smith, Suzanne

Smith, Sallie Hoppert, Jennifer Baker, Rick Bard, Bonnie Bard, Betty Stout, Elaine Crouse, Terry Kreider, Mary Peffley

**Henry Fork**, Rocky Mount, Va.: Elvis Hudson, Trey Harrison, Logan Dent, Eugene Harrison, George Dickens, Curtis Williams, Barbara Guilliams, Don Reynolds, Katrina Harrison, Coleman Doss, Matthew Hodges

**Living Peace**, Plymouth, Mich.: Bailey Short, Paige Russell, Ian Russell, Abby Ellstrom, Rose Vowler

**Maple Grove**, New Paris, Ind.: Maynard Hartsough, Gilbert Hartsough

**McPherson**, Kan.: Linda Brittingham, Joanna Hoffman, Paul Hoffman, Jen Magnall, Cam Magnall

**Melvin Hill**, Columbus, N.C.: Craig Scruggs, Jada Scruggs

**Middle Creek**, Lititz, Pa.: Elvin Groff, Jennifer Groff, Valeria Stauffer

**Mount Hermon**, Bassett, Va.: Logan Fulcher, Phil Vaughan

**Oakland**, Bradford, Ohio: Levi King, Jacqueline King, Cassandra Clark, Danele Price, Nicole Shell, Shawn Stephan, Tasha Stephan, Chris Cox, Mary Cox, Alice Craig, Jeremy Manalo, Heather Manalo, Elizabeth Clark, Kathy Matthew, Rick Rehmert, Roxanne Rehmert, Rose Kaverman, Eden Sgro

**Parker Ford**, Pottstown, Pa.: Wes Crouse, Deb Crouse, Jay Fazekas, Sherrie Fazekas, Rob Lovatt, Jeri Lovatt, Deidre Cargile, Chris Wenger, Jen Wenger

**Peace**, Council Bluffs, Iowa: Annie West

**Somerset**, Pa.: Barron Deffenbaugh, Carolyn Willoughby, Deffenbaugh

**Sunrise**, Harrisonburg, Va.: Richard Wehrle, Mandy Wehrle, David Puffenbarger, Stephen

Farrar  
**Wilmington**, Del.: Catherine Sholtzberger

## Wedding Anniversaries

**Buffington**, John and Charlotte, Westminster, Md., 50

**Cline**, Franklin and Mary Anna, Mount Crawford, Va., 50

**Colaw**, Layman and Doris, Hinton, Va., 65

**Cregger**, Irvan and Marian, Woodsboro, Md., 65

**Holsinger**, Don and Jo Ann, Richmond, Va., 55

**Keck**, Larry and Marilyn, New Paris, Ind., 55

**Martin**, Galen and Janice, Frederick, Md., 50

**Mauck**, Lloyd and Martha, Frederick, Md., 60

**Nogle**, Francis and Louise, Waynesboro, Pa., 70

**Petry**, Edgar, Jr. and Pauline, Dayton, Ohio, 50

**Stacy**, Eugene and Nancy, Campobello, S.C., 50

**Stockman**, Charlie and Wanda, Frederick, Md., 50

**Stone**, Phil, Sr. and Cherrill, Harrisonburg, Va., 50

**Swope**, Harry and Josephine, Union Bridge, Md., 50

**Thomas**, William and Joyce, Hagerstown, Md., 50

**Williams**, Richard and Karen, Ollie, Iowa, 55

**Yoder**, Jerry and Julie, Goshen, Ind., 50

## Deaths

**Balsbaugh**, Virginia Violet, 97, Lakeville, Ind., Sept. 21

**Berkey**, Nancy Jean Cober, 82, Shippensburg, Pa., Sept. 17

**Brubaker**, Lowell David, 83, Rocky Mount, Va., Nov. 21, 2012

**Catledge**, Bonnie Lou, 83, Gridley, Calif., Sept. 18

**Clark**, Dan, 83, Jackson, Tenn., Sept. 18

**Cline**, Dennis Wayne, 62, Frederick, Md., April 1

**Cline**, Oneitta Mae Byers, 89, Verona, Va., Oct. 20, 2012

**Colaw**, Layman Howard, 88, Hinton, Va., June 30

**Cregger**, Marian Yulee Williamson, 84, Woodsboro, Md., June 21

**Croyle**, Ernest L., 91, Johnstown, Pa., Oct. 3

**Cupp**, Marcus Silver, 77, Verona, Va., May 17

**Diehl**, Joanna M., 93, Bridgewater, Va., May 30

**Dotterer**, Nancy Jane Smith, 79, Lancaster, Pa., Sept. 24

**Dove**, Frederick Denton, Jr., 93, Williamsport, Md., Sept. 20

**Duvall**, Betty Virginia Adams, 82, Frederick, Md., Jan. 14, 2013

**Early**, Loyd Franklin, 100, Richmond, Mo., Sept. 21

**Farnen**, Andrew Bryan, 21, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 6

**Feazelle**, Shirley Maze, 93, Rocky Mount, Va., Nov. 9, 2012

**Finks**, Alan Peter, 72, Harrisonburg, Va., Sept. 5

**Finley**, Sarah Elizabeth, 90, Bethany, Okla., Sept. 17

**Frye**, Maudie Virginia Hetzer, 90, Hagerstown, Md., Sept. 12

**Gillin**, Willa Jean, 87, Johnstown, Pa., Sept. 4

**Grove**, Walter Remle, 79, Frederick, Md., April 6

**Hahn**, Harvey W., 82, Ephrata, Pa., July 9

**Hancock**, Anna Mary, 95, Shippensburg, Pa., Sept. 9

**Herbst**, Michael James, 58, Frederick, Md., March 7

**Herr**, Lois F., 83, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 24

**Herrell**, Bruce Jesse, 90, Bakersville, N.C., Sept. 9

**Hershey**, Jacob K., 92, Lititz, Pa., July 9

**Kipp**, James E., 69, Newport, Pa., Oct. 7

**Kirk**, Silas Hoover, 101, Rivesville, W.Va., Aug. 22

**Kisamore**, Christena Lambert, 83, Mount Crawford, Va., Oct. 7, 2012

**Knill**, Bertha Despeaux, 88, Frederick, Md., Feb. 8

**Lape**, Janice Gail, 55, Frederick, Md., Feb. 14

**Lucas**, Mary Frances Brubaker, 82, Rocky

Mount, Va., July 28

**Mack**, Barbara J. Detwiler, 71, Limerick, Pa., Oct. 15

**McLaren**, Rebekah Jane Leatherman, 89, Frederick, Md., Jan. 4, 2013

**Meily**, Robert L., Sr., 80, Lancaster, Pa., Sept. 28

**Melena**, Betty L., 86, Omaha, Neb., Feb. 10

**Michener**, Vera Hutter, 99, Phoenixville, Pa., Sept. 20

**Miller**, Dwight E., 78, Somerset, Pa., Aug. 16

## Licensings

**Bell**, Jodi Christine, W. Plains Dist. (Peace Community, Windsor, Colo.), July 14

**Bell**, Stephen Joe, W. Plains Dist. (Peace Community, Windsor, Colo.), July 14

**Brummett**, Erik, S. Ohio Dist. (Cedar Grove, New Paris, Ohio), Sept. 22

**Iscman**, Kelly, Mich. Dist. (The Church in Drive, Saginaw, Mich.), Aug. 25

**Krieg**, Steven J., Mich. Dist. (The Church in Drive, Saginaw, Mich.), Aug. 25

**Stultz**, Adam Christopher, Virlina Dist. (Summerdean, Roanoke, Va.), Oct. 6

**Stultz**, Roger Gale, Virlina Dist. (Summerdean, Roanoke, Va.), Oct. 6

## Ordinations

**Hanks**, Brandon M., Atl. N.E. Dist. (Wilmington, Del.), Oct. 20

**Tuttle**, Mary Beth, W. Plains Dist. (Holmesville, Neb.), Aug. 4

## Placements

**Iscman**, Kelly, associate pastor, The Church in Drive, Saginaw, Mich., Aug. 1

**Krieg**, Steven J., assistant campus pastor, The Church in Drive, Saginaw, Mich., Aug. 1

**Payne**, G. Scott, pastor, Pine Grove, Harrisonburg, Va., Oct. 1

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Listed on these pages are articles, editorials, columns, and opinion letters that have appeared in MESSENGER during 2013. They are classified in five groups: authors, In Touch contributors, letters to the editor, congregations, and subjects. Numbers following the listings indicate month and page number, with 1/2 and 7/8 representing the combined January/February and July/August issues.

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# Going to church at Cheers?

**C**hurch should be like *Cheers*,” a Brethren pastor once said to me. He was referring to the 1980s TV show set in a Boston bar.

I was taken aback. “Are you kidding?”  
“Just listen to the theme song,” he said.



**RANDY MILLER**  
MESSENGER EDITOR

Check it out:  
“Making your way in the world today takes everything you’ve got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn’t you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, And they’re always glad you came. You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same, You wanna be where everybody knows your name.

You wanna go where people know, people are all the same.  
You wanna go where everybody knows your name.”

He’s right, of course. We want to be where everybody knows our name and they’re always glad we came. We want to feel welcomed. And church, when it’s at its best, does just that.

These days, however, a different image comes to mind—especially among the young. To many of them, church is the

ing goes. “Paradigm shift,” “Think outside the box”—those beloved catch phrases of 1990s management seminar consultants may actually have some merit for churches today. Case in point: the Calvary Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

To coin a phrase, if Mohammed will not go to the mountain, the mountain must come to Mohammed. Members of Calvary Lutheran seem to have taken this to heart, and have begun holding church services Sunday evenings at Zio Carlo Magnolia Brew Pub in Fort Worth.

“It’s a way of reaching out in the neighborhood and just getting outside our four walls,” pastor Phillip Heinze told a reporter recently.

Leah Stanfield, a 28-year-old leasing agent who has been attending Church-in-a-Pub for a year, and who occasionally reads the evening’s gospel message, told National Public Radio, “I find the love, I find the support, I find the non-judgmental eyes when I come here.”

Are there implications here for us tea-totaling Brethren? Are we supposed to start installing beer taps and bar stools in our sanctuaries? I don’t see that in our future. But alternative methods for reaching out are worth considering for churches that hope to not only stay afloat but, more importantly, remain relevant.

The Church of the Brethren has been seeking ways to look beyond our church walls, remembering that “The word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” Jesus certainly didn’t sit around the temple waiting for people

## Jesus told us that new wine couldn’t be put into old wineskins. So maybe it’s time for a *paradigm shift*.

place their parents and grandparents go. It’s where old people sing old songs—slowly and out of tune—and then a gray guy in a gray suit drones on while people snooze or doodle in their bulletins. While this is not always the case (some congregations sing on key—in four-part harmony, even—and most pastors do have something to say), it’s the impression many young people—and others—have of church today.

Some say this is one of the reasons mainstream churches are in decline. A former pastor told me recently that only one young family that grew up in his congregation still attends their church. All the others who once were in their youth group have drifted away. Church stopped being relevant to them when they became young adults.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, the say-

ing to come to him. He went into the neighborhoods, the valleys, and hillsides. He walked among the tax collectors, the outcasts, the down-and-out in society.

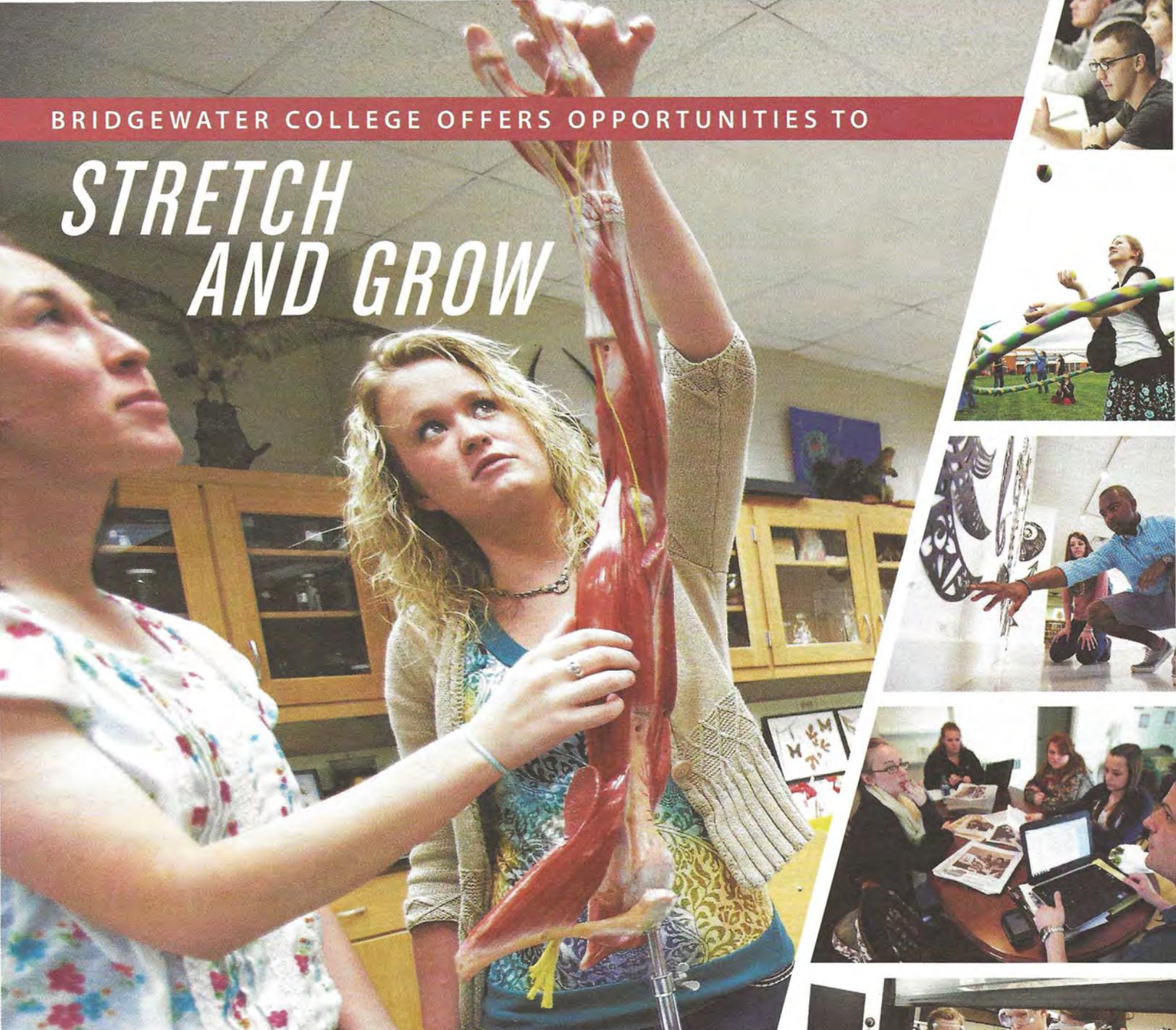
People are out there—in shopping malls and sports bars and pubs. They want to go where everybody knows their name, and they’re always glad they came. Are our churches also those kinds of places? In their present form, perhaps less so than they once were. But there’s reason for hope—and it doesn’t have to involve pints and kegs.

Jesus told us that new wine couldn’t be put into old wineskins. So maybe it’s time for a paradigm shift. Let’s put our finger to the wind and see where the Spirit is leading. The church of the future may look quite different. But as long as we’re following Jesus into the neighborhood, I’d say we’re on the right track. **W**

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