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Reflections
on race



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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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on the cover

Emotions ran deep among students at the University of La Verne who participated in an anti-racism rally on campus in December. Photo by Nancy Newman.

Some people might dread that first day back in the office after the holidays. What work has accumulated? What problems have developed? But the stack of mail waiting on my desk in early January was a most welcome gift. It was a collection of notes from readers who wanted us to know how much they value MESSENGER. They and many others had sent checks to help keep the magazine going.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

The messages are so heartening that I must share some of them with you:

“Thanks for the years of deep and thoughtful inspiration MESSENGER has ignited in my soul.”

“I read MESSENGER cover to cover.”

“I want to be a small part of keeping the print copy of MESSENGER circulating, as well as the digital edition.”

“I would like to make a suggestion that local churches would subscribe to MESSENGER for every chair of every work area.”

“Thank you for all you do to make MESSENGER a *vital* magazine challenging its readers to live as people of ‘the way.’”

“MESSENGER continues to be a vital part of who the Brethren are, one of the things that helps make us ‘Brethren.’ . . . In its pages we are also challenged to grow in our faith and to witness, and we are informed of the larger witness by Brethren in the world we live in. Yes, making a difference!”

We’re thrilled to report that the generous donations from you readers have filled the gap in our finances for 2014. On behalf of all MESSENGER readers and the entire Church of the Brethren, for whom the magazine exists, we are deeply grateful. We thank our God upon every remembrance of you (Philippians 1:3).

Wendy McFadden

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Reflections on race



Much of what we know about our world comes from TV, radio, newspapers, the Internet, or some form of social media. What's delivered cannot possibly include every angle. Parts are missing; voices go unheard. Given that the predominant demographic in the Church of the Brethren is white and middle-class, we at MESSENGER realize we are missing important parts of the story when it comes to race, which has dominated our headlines recently. With this in mind, we invited some of our black and mixed-race Brethren—and a student at a Brethren-related university—to talk about what's been going on from their perspective. It took courage for them to share their stories, and for that we are deeply grateful. —Ed.

Encountering race in the church

by Melisa Grandison

I was 5 years old the first time I encountered race. A young white girl in daycare came to where my brother Michael and I were sitting and said, “Michael, you’re stupid because you’re black.”

Fast-forward five years. I just begun attending a new school and was telling the class all the aspects I deemed important in my decade of life: my family, cats, and the Church of the Brethren. One of my classmates blurted out, “Why do you go to the Church of the Brethren?” Having been “born” into it, my answer came naturally. “They help people,” I told him, and added, “and who doesn’t want to live peacefully, simply, and together?” Even

“ White friends and family may want to understand, to empathize, to feel the pain. But most of them will never get the lump in their throats when a police car pulls behind them.”

then my identity in the church seemed so clear, I thought, until he protested, “*That isn’t a church for blacks.*”

These experiences eventually prompted me to be honest with myself about the racial realities of my faith community. My classmate was right. Even though I was a part of the Church of the Brethren, I realized I felt no genuine belonging. I still struggle to feel this. I am, and always have been, a wave of color in a sea of white.

As I grew older, these encounters with racism in the Church of the Brethren intensified and became more frequent. My sense of belonging continued to waiver.

- During National Youth Conference I was called “nigger.”
- At a church camp I was singled out for “ruining” group photos because the combination of the sun and camera flash distorted my face.
- Prior to boarding flights to On Earth Peace board meetings, I have been pulled aside in security lines and had my hair probed for weapons.
- While studying at a Church of the Brethren college, I was pulled over, asked to step out of my vehicle, and questioned by police 12 times during my first semester. I was never issued a warning or a ticket.
- At Annual Conference, Brethren often share family histories and ask, “Who are you related to?” But I am asked instead, “How did you find the church?” They assume that because I am a person of color, it is unlikely that I could share their Church of the Brethren heritage.

Throughout these experiences—those that I’ve shared and those that I continue to hold private—I’ve tried to place a familiar, Brethren face on the emotional and spiritual consequences of racial injustice. While I understand that no part of US society is exempt from racial inequality, perhaps one of my hardest struggles in my relationship with the Church of the Brethren is not only with racism, but rather our inaction in the face of racial injustice.

“We help people,” I proclaimed at age 10. But the failure of Brethren to stand in solidarity with people of color—both in our own communities and beyond—does not feel to me like helping, but rather like denying the experiences of many of us. And it seems to invalidate our “simply, peacefully, and together” motto that once seemed so simple. To me, “together” implies a wholeness that holds myself and my sisters and brothers of color in the light, and extends to us a sense of belonging in our church. 



Melisa Grandison

Melisa Grandison lives in Amherst, Mass., where she is service coordinator for the Massachusetts Migrant Education Program. She is a member of the McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren, and serves on the On Earth Peace board of directors. She currently attends Mount Toby Friends Meeting in Leverette, Mass.

The ongoing debate

by Eric Bishop

In recent months, we’ve been deluged with images of protests and demonstrations around the country. We’ve seen signs reading: “Black Lives Matter,” “I Can’t Breathe,” and “Justice For All.”

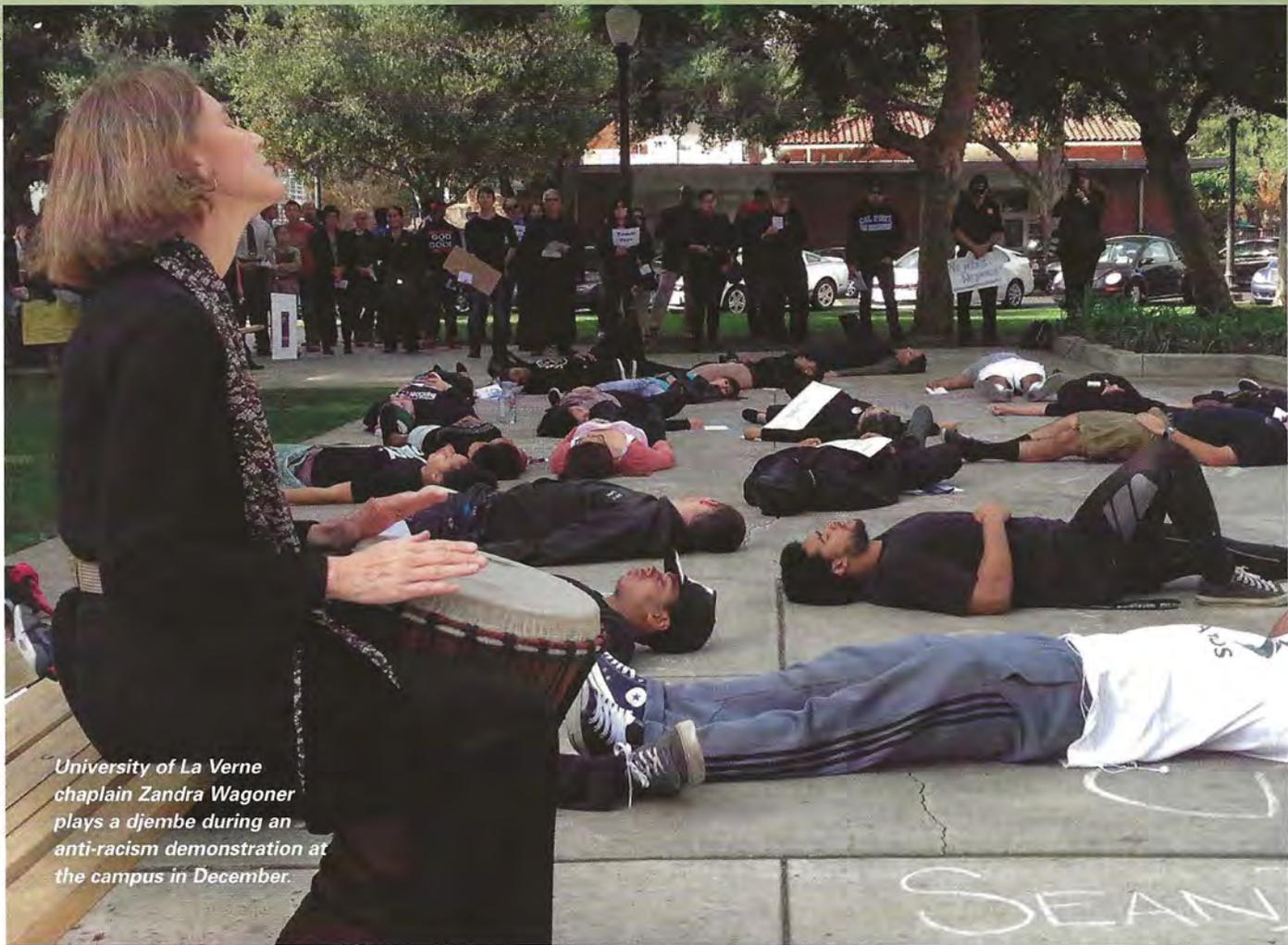
Many may find it difficult to understand the purpose of these protests. In their view, Eric Gardner and Michael Brown were behaving criminally, and so police action was necessary. But this justification insinuates that all cases involving black men equal a threat to life and limb, and therefore extreme force must always be administered.

The protests, anger, and frustration go beyond Eric Gardner and Michael Brown. They are about Trayvon Martin and Rodney King as well. But, to some degree, they also are about Emmett Till and James Chaney. The feelings of fear and frustration are so deep that they transcend a single generation.

At the root of our problem is that our society does not



Eric Bishop



University of La Verne chaplain Zandra Wagoner plays a djembe during an anti-racism demonstration at the campus in December.

consider black men to be educated, upstanding human beings. Our society has gone from once viewing black men as property, to today seeing them as thugs and criminals. And so black men in America know that, regarding Gardner and Brown, “There but by the grace of God go I.”

Good, law-abiding black men live with this constantly. Day in and day out, we must choose whether to stay safe or to stand up for our rights and demand to be treated as equal human beings—as men. The latter may get us detained, arrested, beaten, or even killed. But the former doesn’t guarantee safety, either.

Parents of black children, particularly boys, must educate them early on how to survive their interactions with police officers. You don’t question why they stopped you. You don’t ask what they think you did wrong. Asking those questions makes you seem aggressive. And once a black man is perceived as being aggressive, the use of force immediately becomes justified.

When did death become the punishment for shoplifting (Brown) or peddling cigarettes (Gardner)? When did walking down the street become something that could lead to a death

sentence (Martin), or speeding earn a beating (King)? But in our not-so-distant past, even looking at a white woman (Till) or encouraging people to exercise their rights as members of society (Chaney) were also instant death sentences.

White friends and family may want to understand, to empathize, to feel the pain. But most of them will never get the lump in their throats when a police car pulls behind them. They won’t have to wonder if they will make it home, or instead be detained or arrested for “speeding.”

At the end of the protests, most people in the church get to walk away and go about their lives. But people of color live with the same fears and questions tomorrow that we had today. It’s a painful reminder of the ongoing debate about our value—or lack thereof—in this society, and how fragile life is. **W**

Eric Bishop is interim vice president of Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., and an adjunct professor at the University of La Verne. He is moderator of the Pacific Southwest District and a member of the Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees. He is a former member of the MESSENGER staff and the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee. He lives in Pomona, Calif., and is a member of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.



Students, rabbis, professors, and others speak out for justice during a rally at the University of La Verne.

Nancy Newman

Too personal to share

by Gimbiya Kettering

When the 24-hour news cycle is rife with stories about race and racism, people look to me expectantly. By people, I mean white people. Some of them want to know if it's true, if my life is really different because I'm not white. Others want me to reassure them that it isn't as bad as what the headlines portray. A few who have long suspected it's much worse want to hear my proof.



Gimbiya Kettering

So, I'm not going to tell you my story. At least not today.

Almost always, as soon as I start to talk, I'm interrupted by someone—a white person—who wants to redefine race and racism and ethnicity and prejudice and bias and a thousand other terms. Which means they want my experiences to fit into their definitions.

The first time I said this, the white people in the room were surprised. Then they said they were disappointed. I had to tell my story. My refusal to tell my story made some of them angry. Why not? they demand.

It's my story, I told them. Why do I need a reason to tell it or not tell it?

But if it helps to have a reason, consider this:

- It hurts. The stories you are asking about are painful experiences, and retelling them brings that pain back to the surface.
- When I tell my story and you question it, ask me to prove it, or try to change my interpretation of it, it adds another layer of hurt.
- These are my real-life experiences, not parables for the enlightenment of others.

Most importantly, like you, I choose to share my personal stories with people I'm close to—family and friends. You and I may be coworkers, acquaintances, or colleagues, but we are not yet friends. Friends would not ask me to share a personal story just for their enlightenment. Friends do not ask me to change how I interpret my experience just to fit their framework. When friends hear my stories, their compassion helps heal. 

Gimbiya Kettering lives in Washington, D.C., and is coordinator of Intercultural Ministries for the Church of the Brethren.

Nancy Newman



Miykael Hatter

Acts of random kindness

by Miykael Hatter

Day in and day out this natural phenomenon occurs.
It's an unspoken, unwritten rule, to describe it using words.
From observing people to this fact that I have learned.
It's like to others the thoughts of our internal souls are being heard.
It's the way that we respond that makes me a bit concerned.

See, every day we live, at some point, we have a chance to help somebody out.
Without a doubt. You know what I'm talkin' about.
Like that one time I saw an old white lady crossin' the street.
I chose not to help her 'cuz i wanted somethin' to eat.
So, like Kermit the Frog, I rolled up the window as I sipped tea.
I sat there and waited patiently
while this old white lady, un-hastily, walked across the street.
My internal soul is screamin': "Why don't you help her, Meek?"
But to her she's thinkin': "A large black man helpin' me across the street?
That cannot be. He gonna rob me! Let me call the police. . . ."

Crazy, right? Livin' our lives based on these insane stereotypes.
Making poor choices, letting the devil entice.
There is no end in sight. This is real life.
We could always help each other.
If you think about it, we all are sisters and brothers.
Why is it that we always get so caught up in the color?
I can't help but wonder how kids are taught to discriminate.
You can't be born a racist, you must be raised that way,
taught that black people are beneath you, they are slaves.
The thought is insane—raising that child to be deranged.
Now he has the photo of the burning cross at the front of his brain.

So now this sick, twisted mind feels all mighty and bold,
and feels that his darker brotha is somehow below.
And behold, he shoots the young man in the middle of the road.
Or even worse, puts him in the ever-forbidden chokehold.
RIP Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner.
But don't get me wrong—black people are somewhat guilty.
Rollin' down the street blastin' music that is filthy,
hangin' out on the corner spot, just lookin' for some trouble to get into.
Gang members rollin' by, holdin' up hand signs that offend you.
Then you chase after them and shoot.
They end up on the 10 o'clock news.
The victim's family singin' the blues 'cuz the victim bled blue.

On the streets whistlin' soooooohhwoop.
Had potential cuz he liked to hoop.
But now they gotta spend Christmas without lil Luke?
When will we all see that we are one big earthly family?
Live happily. It has to be. In order for us to attain world peace.
Instead of killing unarmed teens, I believe that we can achieve moral highness.
We can start off with baby steps, with daily acts of random kindness. **WU**

Miykael Hatter, of Compton, Calif., is a sophomore at the University of La Verne majoring in legal studies. He recited this poem, which he wrote, at a rally for justice at the La Verne campus in December.



Make friends not 'converts'

by Jeremy Ashworth and Fred Bernhard

Everybody has a bad evangelism story. Here is Fred's.

It promised to be exciting, but the first part of the conference was predictable. Led by a large local church, it was nothing more than a lecture about the pastor's faith-sharing philosophy. The conference also promised to be educational. On this point it delivered, but the lessons seared into my heart that day weren't found in the curriculum.

After the speech we were divided into small teams, each led by a person from the sponsoring church. We were handed the name and address of one household in the immediate area. The task? Cold-call evangelism. When finished, we'd report back to the others at the conference.

Off we went. We knocked. The door was opened. The

woman who greeted us was old enough to be my mother. She was not expecting visitors, but politely invited us inside. She did not recognize me, but I immediately realized she was a member of a neighboring congregation.

We were barely seated in the living room before our leader cut to the chase: "Are you saved? Do you know that for sure? If you died tomorrow . . . ?" The one-way torrent was no genuine inquiry, but was an interrogation with a deadline. His questions were fast-paced and intense. Her responses were slow and timid. But each time his hard question received her soft answer: Yes. I squirmed, and considered her unbelievably gracious for not throwing us out.

Unfortunately our feckless leader was just getting started. Despite the plain meaning of her words, he interpreted her

hesitancy as doubt in disguise. His strategy, it seemed, was to keep firing religious questions until the response he got was a firm “no” rather than a gentle “yes.” As I recall, there were two prize questions that (in his mind) exposed our long-suffering host as a wicked heathen. Jackpot question one: “Before you take your child to school do you pray to God to confirm that what you are doing is God’s will?” Her: “Uh, no.” Jackpot question two: “Do you pray to God before you go to the hair salon?” Timidity gave way to bafflement and our host responded, “Well, no! Why would I do that?” Our lead inquisitor pronounced that if she were in a right relationship with Jesus Christ she would find out if it was God’s will for her to do each task of her day. Time for repentance!

We prayed a prayer of confession. Our leader prayed for the host’s salvation. Then we left.

When we arrived at the conference center’s parking lot, we spotted the pastor whose church was sponsoring the event. Our leader bolted across the asphalt, grabbed his pastor, and proclaimed victoriously, “I got another one for the kingdom!”

I was aghast. I made a vow to God that day that I would never participate in anything like that again. I vowed to God that I would confront the perpetrator, apologize to the host, and take my leave. And I did.

A more excellent way

Many conversations about evangelism begin and end with unfortunately true stories, stinging encounters with the silly, the inept, or the unethical. Perhaps you have a few tales you could tell. Or scars you could show. The people inside our churches—and outside our churches—probably do, too. But should the story end there?

We believe that the unfortunately true stories should be heard and studied and learned from, but that they should not be allowed to have the last word. We believe that the good

news is far better than the bad stories. Why should an unsavory encounter with a pushy preacher cause a resurrection faith to roll over and play dead? If the gospel is more powerful than sin and death, more powerful than hate and war, then the gospel is also more powerful than the evangelistic disasters created by those who lay claim to it. Why should we surrender our hearts to a bad experience? Instead we should ask, in faith and hope and love, “What is the more excellent way?”

For us, the more excellent way involves relationships.

Good relationships + good news

Relationships matter. Maybe this is old news to you, but it’s taken us a while to figure this out. Consider:

- From the beginning, the Bible is profoundly relational. For all the goodness of creation, God created both man and woman because to “be alone” is “not good” (Genesis 2:18). God walked and talked in the same paradise garden as Adam & Eve (Genesis 3:8). And it is the ruptured relationship and banishment from paradise which calls forth God’s mission to restore a broken creation.
- Although it’s not always recognized, so much of scripture assumes connections: tribes, covenants, families, neighbors, even enemies. And if you remove the relational setting, many of the foundational truths of Christianity don’t make sense. How can we have forgiveness, love, reconciliation, and trust without relationships as a context?
- Jesus’ ministry was profoundly relational. Not only was Jesus recognized—and criticized—as a “friend of sinners” (Matthew 11:19), Jesus also called his followers his friends (John 15:15).
- Followers of Jesus are called to be stewards of all things: our time, our money, our talents, our bodies, and the planet. But when is last time you heard a sermon about being stewards of our relationships?

If the gospel is more powerful than sin and death, more powerful than hate and war, then the gospel is also more powerful than the evangelistic disasters created by those who lay claim to it.

• Even the most sophisticated Christian theology is not just about abstract, disembodied ideas; it involves some kind of bond—of respect, of mentoring, of guidance—between students and teachers. It might not be spelled out on the printed page, but the relationship is there and it's crucial.

Christian discipleship does not exist in a relational vacuum. It never has. So what would happen if the invitation to discipleship were also profoundly relational?

Some folks call this practice relational evangelism. We didn't invent the term, but here's how we mean it: By relational we mean a genuine, ongoing, loving, give-and-take presence with other flesh-and-blood human beings. The bond may be deep, or the bond may be new, but the important thing is that the bond is real. By evangelism we mean expressing the very good news about Jesus. Taken together, relational evangelism means opening up our lives and expressing our faith—implicitly and explicitly—with people who have no doubt about the fact that we care for them. It means initiating loving friendships because that's what Jesus did. And it means growing in God's grace all through the process.

This is not original. It was happening long before we got here and it'll be happening long after we're gone from this earth. It's not a program, project, formula, or technique. It's not just for (insert denominational identity here), it's not just for (insert theological tradition here), and it's not just for (insert personality type or spiritual gift or sociological category here). It's not just for experts. It's not just for Christians who are 100 percent sure about 100 percent of what they believe 100 percent of the time.

Labels abound. Some call this practice "friendship evangelism," or "lifestyle evangelism," or "invitational evangelism." Some call it "incarnational evangelism," believing this approach follows the "with us" nature of Jesus' incarnation. Others call it "hospitality evangelism," while still others just call it "biblical hospitality." One friend refers to it as "doing life together." And some people just call this Christians making friends. We say: use whatever term you like, we're flexible. We're not advocating a particular title, we're advocating a way

of life and a practice of relating that contains certain things. And the contents matter more than the label.

Relational evangelism is a way of loving God and loving our neighbor. But of course this is hard to do if we're running from God or avoiding our neighbors.

What we have . . . and what we don't

Whenever we talk to congregations about reaching out and sharing their faith, we often hear two back-to-back responses:

- "Of course our church would like to grow!
In fact we need to."
- "But we don't have _____ like other churches do."

What our churches feel like they lack, i.e. what fills in the blank, ranges wildly. It can be a tool, an asset, or a strength, some key to growth and vitality that others churches have or seem to have.

"... we don't have a coffeehouse"

"... we don't have graphic artists with cool hairdos."

"... we don't have a top-notch children's play area equipped with inflatable bouncy houses (and a good insurance plan)."

"... we don't have hologram technology that beams the pastor, Star Wars-style, into multi-site venues for the sermon."

In case you think we're kidding about that list, we're not. We know churches that have every one of these things, and we're happy for them!

But here's some good news for the rest of us. Friendship does not require hologram technology. Caring companionship does not require a big budget, or graphic artists, or good hair (ask us, we know about this one). And friendship can make the biggest difference in our lives, in the lives of others, in the life of our church, and for the sake of God's kingdom. Real-life human contact does not require tools.

But there is also bad news: We still resist making friends. This sounds crazy, but it's true. We can be hesitant—perpetually hesitant—about initiating connections with those we don't know. And even the relationships we do have, well, we're not

Christian discipleship does not exist in a relational vacuum. It never has. So what would happen if the invitation to discipleship were also profoundly relational?



We still resist making friends. . . . We can be hesitant—perpetually hesitant—about initiating connections with those we don't know.

always good at keeping those thriving and healthy. So the one thing that all of us can do—make friends—is the one thing we'll go to great lengths to avoid doing.

We know of one church that decided to reach out to their neighborhood. "But what do our neighbors need?" they asked. So they formed a committee of smart, committed believers who decided to craft a survey for every household in the area. Potentially, this was a good move. But here's what happened:

Meeting #1: The committee met, worked on the survey.

Meeting #2: The committee met, worked on the survey some more.

Meeting #3: The committee met, pored over the document, manicured the questions, and considered every possible angle on everything.

Meeting #47: The survey was now 1 million pages long (that might be an exaggeration).

The survey also never saw the light of day, and the committee never connected to the community. Privately, the pastor came to a sobering conclusion, telling us, "I began to suspect that our real mission was twofold: to talk amongst ourselves about outreach, and to protect ourselves from ever having any real human contact beyond our small group. And we succeeded in that mission."

It's hard to come clean about this in polite company. It's easier to send out a mass mailing than it is to make a friend. It's easier to install a great sound system (or complain about churches that do) than it is to initiate meaningful interpersonal contact. It's easier to critique superficial relationships on Facebook than it is to build the authentic relationships we claim to be advocating.

Our brothers and sisters who have opened fantastic coffeehouses as a labor of love and Christian service tell us opening a coffeehouse is a lot of work . . . but it may be easier than coming face-to-face with a very real, very complicated human being who, whether they realize it or not, is searching for the face of God. Relationships are complicated, messy, awkward, unpredictable, hurtful, and time-intensive. Relationships put our hearts at risk, and because of this, they are not for the risk-averse. Deep down, we know this.

So maybe what our Christian communities are missing isn't just money, staff, buildings, or inflatable bouncy houses. Maybe what we're missing is something less tangible, less quantifiable, something like interpersonal "oomph." Maybe we need to fess up and say, "Of course we would like our church to grow! In fact we need to. But we don't have the courage to build new relationships."

Time for repentance?

It's probably easier for you to read one more article—even this one—than it is to risk your heart by reaching out to a stranger. Heck, we wrote a whole book on the topic and we'll be the first to admit that it's easier for us to write a book than it is for us to do what it says. But at our best we are all capable of courageous moments. We've done it before. And we'll tell you: relational evangelism is risky but worth it. 

Jeremy Ashworth is pastor of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren in Peoria, Ariz. He also serves as a writer, consultant, and member of the executive advisory team of the E³ Ministry Group, LLC. Fred Bernhard is an advancement associate for Bethany Theological Seminary and also serves on the executive advisory team of the E³ Ministry Group, LLC. They are co-authors of the book *Outrageous and Courageous*, published by Westbow Press, from which this article was adapted.



Changing the climate with love

by Sharon Yohn and Laura White

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-37).

We all know how Jesus responded—not with a direct, cut-and-dried answer, but with a story. The Parable of the Good Samaritan gently challenged Jesus’ interrogator to take a step back, to question his deeply ingrained assumptions and prejudices, and ultimately to rise above his culture’s ways of judging and dividing people.

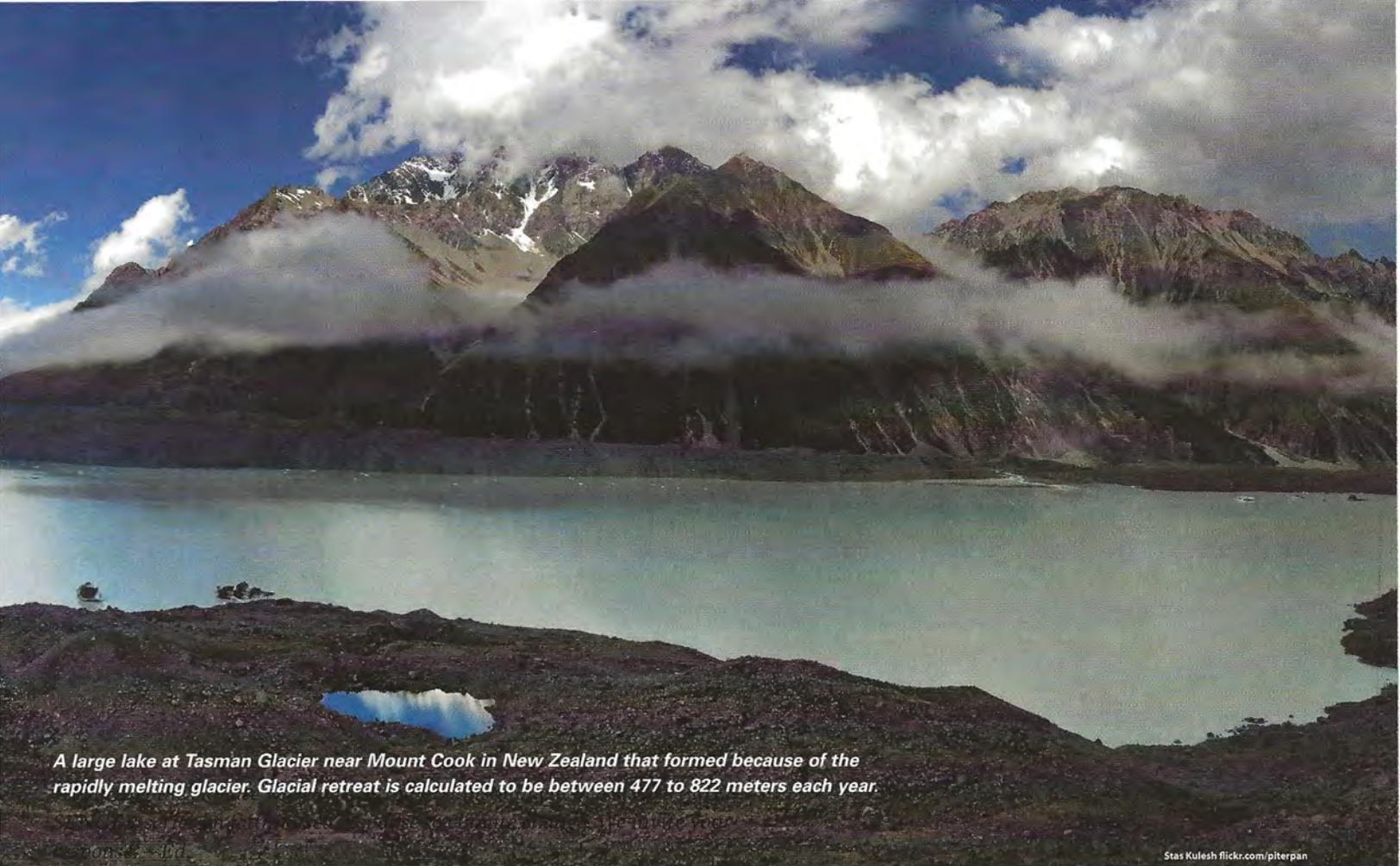
In telling this parable, Jesus was, in the modern-day language of clinical psychologist Mary Pipher, helping the lawyer to “increase his moral imagination.” In *The Green Boat: Reviving Ourselves in Our Capsized Culture*, Pipher describes moral imagination as “respect for [another’s] point of view.” It is “similar to empathy, but more complex . . . slow to develop and longer lasting.” It involves putting ourselves in others’ shoes—acknowledging the others’ worth and the legitimacy of their viewpoints and concerns. Increasing our moral imagination helps us overcome traditional barriers between “Us” and “Them” and enables us

to enlarge our “circle of caring” to include more than just our families, friends, and like-minded people.

As Brethren, we have been blessed with stunning examples of persons with uncommonly vast moral imaginations. Brother John Kline (during the Civil War) and Ted Studebaker (in Vietnam) refused to classify people into the “friend” and “enemy” categories that their cultures promoted or even demanded. In both cases, their moral imaginations led them to respond with love and compassion to those whom they were expected to hate and kill. Likewise, we all stretch our moral imaginations when we pray not only for our brothers and sisters in the Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN), the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, but also for their violent and murderous oppressors.

Is stretching our moral imaginations easy or popular? Of course not. To our human brains, there’s something deeply comforting about placing folks into tidy, clear-cut categories. In fact, we often succumb to “confirmation bias,” paying attention only to information that aligns with our pre-existing ideas about the world. Media outlets, in their determination to present “both sides” of stories, reinforce the idea that every issue has two opposing sides and that We and They naturally disagree about and debate them—often nastily. Shared values and understandings are ignored and common ground is eroded away, often without us even noticing. We and They stay at each other’s throats and no effective actions are taken.

In the midst of this culture of politicization and polariza-



A large lake at Tasman Glacier near Mount Cook in New Zealand that formed because of the rapidly melting glacier. Glacial retreat is calculated to be between 477 to 822 meters each year.

Stas Kulesh flickr.com/piterpan

tion, is stretching our moral imaginations even possible? With the New Testament's guidance and the help of the Holy Spirit, emphatically yes! It is not only possible, but it is vital to living out our calling as 21st-century Christians. What does it take? Patience, humility, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, a thirst for justice—in short, the fruits of the Spirit and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Are such virtues countercultural? Absolutely! Fortunately, we Brethren have over three centuries of experience in the countercultural department.

Stretching our moral imaginations also requires practice and self-awareness—stopping to notice and analyze our unconscious reactions to words. When we hear “healthcare reform,” for example, let's step back and ask what emotions the words trigger. What “Us vs. Them” categories automatically come to our minds? What assumptions underlie those categories? How fair and valid are those assumptions? How is focusing on the political debate getting in our way of solving real problems? What common ground do We actually share with Them? How could

this common ground be built upon, instead of eroded? How can we transform “Us vs. Them” into a single, bigger “Us”?

When we hear (or read) “climate change,” we must take the same step back and ask the same types of questions. What emotions does the phrase conjure up in us? Perhaps we feel fearful, uncertain, anxious, confused, angry, scornful, exasperated, powerless, paralyzed, grief-stricken, despairing, fed up . . . or some combination of these. What “Us vs. Them” categories come to mind? With which of these categories do we tend to identify ourselves? How is focusing on the political debate getting in our way? What is worth debating about climate change, and what isn't?

It comes as a surprise to many people to learn that 97 percent of climate scientists are in agreement that climate change is occurring and that humans are the major culprit. In fact, a number of major national and international scientific organizations have adopted statements acknowledging the human impact on the climate, including the American Chemical

“ There's no denying it—coming to terms with the reality of human-induced climate change is tough. Admitting that it's happening and that we're playing a leading role puts us firmly “on the hook” for doing something about it.



“ In the midst of this culture of politicization and polarization, is stretching our moral imaginations even possible? With the New Testament’s guidance and the help of the Holy Spirit, emphatically yes!”

Society and the Geological Society of America—both of which have members involved in the fossil-fuel industry. The genuine scientific debates that *do* exist focus on other issues—for example, how much future warming and sea-level rise can be expected to occur under various scenarios.

People are often interested to discover that the US military strongly acknowledges that climate change is happening and that it must be addressed. Back in 2007, during George W. Bush’s administration, the CNA Corporation Military Advisory Board—a leading government-funded military research organization comprised of 11 retired senior military commanders—issued a report entitled “National Security and the Threat of Climate Change.” In the introduction to this report, the board stated, “The nature and pace of climate changes being observed today and the consequences projected by the consensus scientific opinion are grave and pose equally grave implications for our national security.” The military has already begun taking a number of steps to decrease its reliance on fossil fuels, to plan for rising sea levels at its coastal installations, and to prepare for emerging threats posed by freshwater shortages and other impacts of climate change. The insurance industry, likewise, accepts that humans are changing the climate in significant ways that can hurt its bottom line. In the *New York Times*, columnist Eduardo Porter reports, “Most insurers, including the reinsurance companies that bear much of the ultimate risk in the industry, have little time for the arguments . . . that climate change isn’t happening, and are quite comfortable with the scientific consensus that burning fossil fuels is the main culprit of global warming.”

Another cause of surprise for many people is that there is a wide variety of possible approaches to reining in climate change, not all of which involve increasing government regulations, jeopardizing the economy, and/or interfering with free trade. The question of which approaches are most desirable is certainly worth debating. The more voices that join this debate,

in a spirit of constructive problem-solving, the better. Our uniquely Brethren brand of resourceful pragmatism embodied by Dan West (and countless other unsung farmers and disaster-relief workers) could carry us far!

There’s no denying it—coming to terms with the reality of human-induced climate change is tough. Admitting that it’s happening and that we’re playing a leading role puts us firmly “on the hook” for doing something about it. Yet, the problem feels too huge and abstract for us to fix. Individual actions seem pathetically unequal to the task, and government-based solutions often sound unappealing or unachievable. “Life as usual” goes on around us. Pushing climate change to the back of our minds is a constant temptation; we have enough other things to worry about. We have heard that the sooner and more boldly climate change is addressed, the better, but our society’s norms and living patterns seem so deeply entrenched. How could we possibly hope to alter them?

When the lawyer described in Luke 10 leaves Jesus, he leaves with a burden—the burden of increasing his moral imagination, of working to change social norms, and of acting with love toward all. As Christians, we are called to carry the same burden today. By and large, the people who will bear (and are already bearing) the biggest brunt of climate change are those least responsible for causing it—the poorest of the poor. Recognizing this, persons of many faiths, from Pope Francis to evangelicals, have called for action on climate change.

In the upcoming articles in this series, we will examine how climate change is related to the core values of the Brethren faith. We will highlight reasons for hope and opportunities for loving our neighbors near and far, human and non-human, present and future—peacefully, simply, and together. 

Sharon Yohn is assistant professor of chemistry at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa. Laura White is a small business owner and serves as the financial manager of the Huntingdon Farmers’ Market. She is especially involved in expanding access to the market for low-income community members.



A great mission opportunity en casa

by Daniel D'Oleo

It is said that numbers don't lie. With this in mind, there's no getting around the influence, presence, and growth of the Hispanic community in the US. The Hispanic population in this country continues to grow, and shows no sign of stopping.

Given this reality, we Brethren need to ask ourselves a few questions: "Can we embrace the growth of the Hispanic population in US as a great mission opportunity for our denomination right here at home? Are we ready to become a more ethnically inclusive church? Are we ready to challenge the Latino leaders in our denomination to take the evangelistic lead for our denomination?" These are important questions to consider in light of the increasing number of Latinos in this country, and the need for our denomination to develop a

vision consistent with the strategic goals of the Mission and Ministry Board.

As we consider this ministry opportunity, let's look at a few facts. As of 2013, the Hispanic population constitutes 17 percent of the US population, making Hispanics the nation's largest and fastest growing ethnic minority. The projected Hispanic population for 2060 will be 128.8 million—31 percent of the nation's population. If it were a country, the Hispanic community in the US would be the second largest Hispanic country in the world, after Mexico. Right now there are 22 states in which Hispanics are the largest minority group. More than 50,000 unaccompanied children from Mexico and Central American have been apprehended at the US border since October. More than 2 million deportations have

“ Can we embrace the growth of the Hispanic population in the US as a great mission opportunity for our denomination right here at home? ”

occurred during the current administration. In every city of this country, the needs and struggles of the Latino community are significant, as the Latino community continues to grow. Deportation, school drop-out, teen pregnancy, unemployment, domestic violence, and poverty are just some of the issues our Latino congregations deal with on a daily basis.

I believe the church has a responsibility to preach the gospel of Christ while also responding to the immediate needs of the communities it serves. We Brethren already have within our “spiritual DNA” a great sensibility for those in social distress and those who are suffering political injustice. This can help us open doors to many communities that often are misunderstood by the social and political systems of this country. The fact that we have that sensibility can help us provide a unified outreach tailored to the needs of the Latino community.

“Ministries that teach English as a second language, encourage students to stay in high school and tutor those who have special needs, or that provide a ramp for those who need to start their training at entry levels will not only help the Hispanic Community socially and economically but will establish bridges that will facilitate the communication of the gospel message,” says Daniel Sanchez in his book *Hispanic Realities impacting America*. He adds that “managing ethnic diversity is the most significant factor affecting the evangelical church today.”

The Renacer Hispanic Ministry believes that reaching out to the Hispanic community in the US can have a great impact on the Church of the Brethren in terms of its numbers, its multicultural goals, and also its future leadership. Membership in our congregations is dwindling, while the average age of our members continues to rise. Actively reaching out to the Latino community has the potential to alter those dynamics given its younger average age, a larger number of children per

family, and a high level of receptivity to the gospel due to its religious background.

In 2007 our denomination’s Annual Conference voted to become an intercultural church. While discussion about the proper term—cross-cultural, intercultural, multicultural—is still confusing for some, I believe that the opportunity before us is not so much to become multicultural, but to intentionally respond to the realities facing us in our communities today, whatever the culture may be. Needless to say, the Latino community in the United States would bring a diverse multicultural flavor due to its diverse representation (23 countries speak Spanish), cultural background, and European and black history.

You may ask: What can the Latino community bring to the Church of the Brethren? Juan Francisco Martinez, in his book: *Walking Among His People*, answered a similar question with several elements:

- Ministry among the people: Reaching the Latino community would develop leaders who can more easily respond to the social, economic, and political needs of these congregations. We must also consider that many of the congregations are not in rural areas (which is often the case of Anglo congregations) but in urban settings, right where the need of the community is known and seen on an everyday basis. Some of our Brethren Latino pastors went through the process of dealing with immigration/documentation issues personally, which gives them the heart needed to understand the suffering and struggle of that particular situation. I personally have to confess that I went through four different kinds of visas, and am still not a US citizen. I believe the Latino community has a lot to offer about ministry among the people . . . not from a distance, but walking among them.



“ If it were a country, the Hispanic community in the US would be the second largest Hispanic country in the world, after Mexico. ”

“ We Brethren already have within our “spiritual DNA” a great sensibility for those in social distress and those who are suffering political injustice. This can help us open doors to many communities that often are misunderstood by the social and political systems of this country.

- **A living faith in God:** The Latino community practices a strong living and practical faith; they are devoted and passionate, with an intimate faith in God. God brings a needed hope in the most basic struggles of everyday life. The reading of scripture becomes a source of hearing God in the midst of deportation, social injustice, prejudice, and poverty. Perhaps this is the reason why Latino worship services are often sincere, passionate, participatory, and inspiring. I believe the Hispanic faith community has a lot to offer in understanding faith in its everyday expression, and a passion in worship!
- **Flexible multicultural model:** In a general sense, the Latino community in the United States is multicultural. We have a lot to teach about multiculturalism because our own roots are the multicultural results of European, African, and pre-Colombian Indian traditions. At the same time, here in the United States there is likely not a single Latino congregation that does not have a representation of several of the 23 countries that speak Spanish. We have a lot to offer about multicultural fellowship. We are not all from Mexico!
- **Disposition to work hard:** The Latino immigrant community is a community that works hard and does what is needed with sacrifice to obtain their dreams. That is how many of them get here despite the danger, family separation, and economical sacrifices. When this disposition is utilized in the life of a congregation, many awesome things begin to happen. Bi-vocational leaders go the extra mile; people begin to commit time and money, despite their low financial resources and educational level. Hard work is not strange to us, but part of who we are!
- **Strong family relationships:** The Latino family brings an evangelistic approach that would transform any congregation (Acts: 16:31). Family unity brings not only an individual person to Christ, but the whole family. Latino congregations are unique because they are made up of the whole family including uncles, aunts, cousins, etc., even people from the same country, province, and town. The funny

thing to some who are not Latino is that all of these people are considered part of the “family.” This sense of family is paramount in its evangelistic approach!

- **A multi-generational reality:** Hispanic congregations are characterized by a multi-generational reality that involves not only people of differing ages, but those who were and those who were not born in this country. The first generation is made up of a mixture of ages, which come with their tight language and cultural unity common to immigrants. Second generations in these families become more bilingual and more comfortable with the predominant culture. By the third generation, families are no longer as tight, with greater participation in the society in general. Reaching to the Latino community includes passing on the values, beliefs, practices, and traditions of our Brethren heritage, while adding a needed up-to-date multicultural reality to our communities. Congregations would, in fact, reflect their community.

The potential for an exponential growth in our denomination can't be denied. The fact that the Latino community represents the largest minority group in the US creates a huge opportunity to do ministry in our own “backyard.” Moreover, such a vision would bring an imperative multicultural influence to our denomination at large, with an immediate bilingual, educated, and strong Latino leadership.

The Renacer ministry, which is a vision with a direct impact in the Latino community, will also bring positive and significant changes at all levels of our denominational structure and greatly impact our future. Membership numbers would change, we would become more multiculturally diverse, and the way we develop leaders will forever change.

As Daniel Sanchez puts it, “The need for Spanish-speaking ministries and Spanish-speaking churches is even greater today than it was three decades ago.” 

Daniel D'Oleo is a leader in the Renacer Hispanic Ministry in the Church of the Brethren and pastors Iglesia Cristiana Renacer in Roanoke, Va.

How do we describe Jesus?

by Tim Harvey

Jim Makos flickr.com/jim-makos

Everyone, I'd like you to meet Luke. He's my nephew, and by the time you read this article he'll be six or seven months old. Cute little guy, isn't he?

One of the first things people do when they see babies is try to guess who the baby looks like. When I show Luke's picture to people here at Central Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., they typically say that he looks like me. To be honest, I don't think he looks much like the Harvey side of the family at all, and so I've wondered why so many people think differently. It might be that I'm just not very good at figuring out who babies look like. But it might also be because people in my congregation don't know my brother-in-law and his family—they're the ones I think Luke resembles.

Either way, when people look at babies, they look for a resemblance, an image of a parent or grandparent. As children grow older, we begin to see more similarities to parents

and even extended families in mannerisms, temperaments, and behaviors. We even do this with adults, saying things like "She's a hard worker, just like her grandmother was," or "He's as worthless as his daddy." Image can be a powerful thing.



Modern generations are not the first people in history to do this, of course. Our habit of trying to figure out who babies look like is at least as old as Jesus (and undoubtedly much older). When the writer of Hebrews begins to describe Jesus, he does so in this exact way. How might we describe Jesus to people who have never met him?

God has spoken

Hebrews 1:1-4 is one very long Greek sentence with seven clauses that each describe Jesus. English translations typically break this Greek sentence into three or more shorter sentences to better communicate these concepts in our day. But however the verses are translated, we should not lose sight of their main purpose: they tell us that "God . . .

has spoken.” This is one of the really key ideas in the Bible—that God speaks to humans. We first see this in the opening verses of Genesis, and the idea continues to the second-to-last verse of Revelation. It is one of the majestic threads running throughout the entire tapestry of the Bible: God speaks!

The issue with Hebrews is *how* God speaks, and the writer draws us into the conversation to think about this together. The passage begins at a place of agreement: God has spoken in many and various ways in the past. Think about these for a moment: God spoke in creation, and the heavens and earth were made. God spoke to Abraham with a promise; to Moses through a burning bush; to Balaam through a donkey; to the wayward people of God through a long line of prophets.

While this is all quite reasonable and true, it actually sounds so similar to what the writer says in the next clause that I’m inclined to part ways with the NRSV and suggest that “radiance” is the better translation. Translating the Greek this way allows us to see Jesus like the morning sun, which illuminates, warms, and provides the energy for life upon all things on which it falls.

About 10 years ago, I was driving on a country road the morning after a snow storm. The roads were plowed and clean; the skies were clear and bright. Suddenly, however, I went around a curve in the road and encountered one of those places where the sun just doesn’t shine. I spun on the ice and ended up in a ditch, all because the radiance of the sun hadn’t warmed the

The ultimate message that God speaks through Jesus is that it is possible for all persons to be reconciled to God.

With this history in mind, we might expect the author to now say, “And in these last days, God has spoken through apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” If that were the point, we might easily include ourselves in that listing. But that’s not what the writer says, and the unexpected turn ought to catch us by surprise, making us sit up and pay closer attention. “In these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son.” Jesus is the message. We might talk to others about Jesus, but ultimately Jesus is the one through whom God has spoken.

The seven clauses that make up Hebrews 1:1-4 are all different aspects of this point. They each show one way that Jesus is God’s message. Time and space don’t permit a full treatment of these seven clauses, so we’ll just take two of them from verse 3: Jesus “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.”

God’s character shining forth

Both of the clauses in verse 3 use Greek words that are only used here in the New Testament. In the first clause the writer says Jesus is the “reflection” of God’s glory. Other translations use “radiance” here; either is a reasonable option for this Greek word. The choice is significant.

On the one hand, the writer might be saying that when we look at Jesus’ actions and character we see a reflection of God, just as when we look at the surface of a pond we see a reflection of whatever is next to the water, or when we see whatever is reflected in the field of vision of a mirror. Jesus is passing on a picture of God’s character and being, and we are able to glimpse that by seeing Jesus. Further, Jesus is no “fun house” mirror that portrays a distorted image of God; Jesus conveys an accurate image of God.

pavement and melted the ice. Just as Paul would write in Romans that “for what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them” (Romans 1:19), Jesus reveals God’s character, and his radiance brings life.

The spittin’ image

The second clause in Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as “the exact imprint of God’s very being.” When we talk about seeing a family resemblance between a baby and his or her parents, or when we say someone is “the spittin’ image” of a parent, we are conveying the idea found in this Greek word. The word itself refers to the process of making a coin or a medal, where a stamp is made that imprints its exact image onto the final product.

How is Jesus the exact imprint of God’s very being? When we consider the context of Hebrews 1:1-4, the idea is clearly about forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were intended for our salvation. The reason God speaks to humans—from Genesis to Revelation to our day—is because God desires a relationship with God’s creation. That relationship was broken by sin. But God’s radiance has shined forth in Jesus, and God’s character has been made known. Even though we are the ones who continually break that relationship, God is the one who continually seeks to renew it. Jesus reveals this to us.

The ultimate message that God speaks through Jesus is that it is possible for all persons to be reconciled to God. May the words we speak give testimony to the message that God has spoken through the Son that we might be reconciled with God for eternal life. 

Timi Harvey is pastor of Central Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va. He was Annual Conference moderator for the Church of the Brethren in 2012.



New grant for Haiti Medical Project

For a second year the **Royer Family Charitable Foundation** of Lancaster, Pa., is providing major support to the Church of the Brethren Haiti Medical Project. The current grant of \$126,300 will support an expanded program of mobile clinics, a first Social Ministries Consultation in Haiti, a new thrust into community health and pure water projects, and an endowment fund.

An earlier grant from the foundation is making it possible to double the number of mobile clinics to 48 in 16 Haitian communities in 2014, and increase the number of persons served to about 7,000.

The new grant will continue the expanded effort to provide basic health care in partnership with congregations of l'Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti).

"This grant really helps us change the lives of the poorest in the western hemisphere, the remote rural poor of Haiti," said Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service for the Church of the Brethren.

The Royer Family Charitable Foundation was founded by Kenneth Royer and his late wife, Jean. In its mission statement, the foundation "seeks to im-

prove the quality of people's lives internationally and domestically through sustainable programs that have a long-term impact on individuals and communities. The foundation's aim is to support basic needs for life and health while encouraging long-term self sufficiency. The foundation prefers to support efforts that have a tangible impact, defined measurable goals and permit a relationship between the grant recipients and the foundation."

"We're really impressed by the work being done in Haiti, and we feel like our support is making a quantifiable difference," said Becky Fuchs, a daughter of Kenneth and Jean Royer, who is the foundation's vice president and treasurer. She is pastor of Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. The improvement to people's health and quality of life resulting from the Haiti Medical Project "is encouraging us to continue to be involved," she said.

The Haiti Medical Project is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren Global Mission and Service. It was begun in late 2011 as a grassroots initiative without specific budget support, depending almost completely on support by committed Brethren.

For more information go to www.brethren.org/haiti-medical-project.

General secretary attends launch of Ecumenical Peace Advocacy Network

To build just and sustainable peace, engaging churches as well as ecumenical organizations and civil society, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has launched an Ecumenical Peace Advocacy Network (EPAN). The launch came out of a consultation Dec. 1-5, 2014, in Sigtuna, Sweden.

Church of the Brethren general secretary Stanley J. Noffsinger was one of the Christian leaders to attend the consultation, and he moderated one of the sessions on the topic "Inter-Religious Cooperation in Peacebuilding." The WCC consultation also afforded an opportunity for conversation about the situation of the Nigerian Brethren with ecumenical colleagues, Noffsinger reported, including Ibrahim Wushishi Yusuf of the Christian Council of Nigeria.

Noffsinger noted key words spoken by WCC general secretary Olav Fykes Tveit in his opening remarks: "War is always undermining the intention of God's creation. War and the violence it elicits are sin and work against God's creation, each aspect of creation in total."

EPAN will aim to turn into concrete action the theme "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" described in a call issued by the WCC Busan Assembly in 2013. "This consultation was intended to create program synergies and develop collaboration methods, sharing best practices and lessons learned in peace-building, conflict prevention, and advocacy for peace," said Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, WCC representative to the UN

in New York. "This is a great opportunity for churches to act collectively to address issues related to peace on a global level."

As a follow-up to the consultation, two events will be organized in 2015 in Africa and the Middle East with the purpose of preparing advocacy strategies and plans to promote just peace, reconciliation, and conflict prevention. More about the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is at www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace.



Courtesy of Stan Noffsinger

Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger with Ibrahim Wushishi Yusuf of the Christian Council of Nigeria during the consultation and launch of EPAN.

Children's Disaster Services offers workshops

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) has announced a number of workshops in early 2015. Since 1980, CDS has met the needs of children by setting up child care centers in shelters and disaster assistance centers across the nation. Specially trained to respond to traumatized children, CDS volunteers provide a calm, safe, and reassuring presence in the midst of the chaos created by natural or human-caused disasters.

Participants in the 27-hour workshops learn to provide comfort and encouragement to children by offering healing care in traumatic situations, and how to

create a safe and friendly environment that gives children the chance to engage in therapeutic play activities designed to relieve stress and calm fears. The workshops include a simulated shelter experience (an overnight stay) and will be provided to any group of 15 or more adults interested in working with children after a disaster. Participants completing the course will have the opportunity to become certified Children's Disaster Services volunteers.

Following are dates and locations, for the workshops in early 2015:

Jan. 23-24, Central Christian Church,

Bradenton, Fla.

Feb. 21-22, La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.

March 5-6, Diocese of Orange Pastoral Center, Garden Grove, Calif.

April 17-18, First Congregational Church of Wallingford, Conn.

April 24-25, Latrobe (Pa.) United Methodist Church.

May 21, pre-conference of the Child Life Specialist National Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio. Available only to Child Life Specialists.

Information and registration are at www.brethren.org/cds.

upcoming events

Jan. 26-Feb. 13
Brethren Volunteer Service orientation, Camp Ithiel, Gotha, Fla.

Feb. 1 Service Sunday
(www.brethren.org/bvs/files)

Feb. 18 Ash Wednesday

Feb. 22 First Sunday of Lent

March 1 Transfiguration Sunday

March 6 World Day of Prayer
(www.worlddayofprayer.net/eventWDP.php)

March 14-15 Mission and Ministry Board meeting, Lancaster, Pa.

March 15 One Great Hour of Sharing Offering
(www.brethren.org/oghs)

Courtesy of Manchester University



Manchester University executive chef Chris Fogerty, left, and Carole Miller-Patrick distribute locally produced honey at a Community Dinner.

La Verne and Manchester receive presidential award for service

White House officials have named the University of La Verne and Manchester

University as recipients of the 2014 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, which designates them as top-five institutions in the category of interfaith and community service.

The ceremony, held in September at George Washington University, drew presidents of higher education institutions, students, administrators, and chaplains, among others. The award recognizes higher education institutions whose community service efforts achieve meaningful outcomes in their communities.

Manchester University has a long reputation for service projects and volunteer opportunities, which include projects at Camp Mack, American Red Cross blood drives, Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, and the Indiana Reading Corps. Last year, Manchester students contributed more than 49,000 hours to their communities, their churches, their country, and nations around the world.

University of La Verne representatives at the ceremony included president Devorah Lieberman, chaplain Zandra Wagoner, provost Jonathan Reed, professor of religion and philosophy

Richard Rose, Office of Civic and Community Engagement director Marisol Morales, and two La Verne students.

"This is a significant honor and point of pride for La Verne, not only for the recognition it brings, but for the level of excellence it represents," Lieberman said.

Programs that set La Verne apart include Freshman La Verne Experience's (FLEX) Community Engagement Day, which introduces new students to the value of volunteerism. Students have also contributed thousands of hours of service to community groups that address issues such as hunger, homelessness, and environmental conservation. La Verne also received accolades for interfaith cooperation, another component of the award. Its Summer Service Program pairs students with religious, secular, and social service organizations and emphasizes leadership development, personal, and spiritual growth.

Wagoner said the recognition reflects La Verne's work to be a model interfaith campus. "We want to be a place of welcome and hospitality to students and staff from any faith or non-faith perspective. We want our students to have basic religious literacy and the skills to navigate a complex world of pluralism, and to do so with a commitment to peaceful practices and empathy."



Reflections on returning to South Sudan

by Roger Schrock

Mal??” the Nuer greeting of “peace” filled the air as I reconnected with Nuer people of the Mayom/Bentiu area of South Sudan after 34 years. What a joyous occasion to again see these friends and to be able to introduce them to Jay Wittmeyer on our recent trip to South Sudan. This meeting confirmed the importance of the presence of the Church of the Brethren personnel from the 1980s to the present as we worked on issues of development and peace.

During the first half of the 1980s the Brethren were asked by the Sudan Council of Churches to initiate a Primary Health Care Program for the Western Nuer of Upper Nile Province. The scope of this development work for the five Brethren persons involved was to provide basic health care for persons and cattle as well as the digging of water wells and the promotion of food production. It also resulted in the planting of a church in Mayom. The work was to serve 200,000 persons.

We learned that development cannot move forward in the time of war. That was true in the 1980s and it is still evident in South Sudan today as the possibility of development has again stopped because of the current factional fighting. Even though the conflict has stifled development, within the hearts and minds of the South Sudanese, hope for the future and the belief that God will provide is very strong.

The second phase of the Brethren work which happened in the 1990s was focused on Nuer Bible translation and helping the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) work to unite and support the churches during the raging civil war. The number of Brethren involved in this phase was 10 persons. A major emphasis was on the People to People peace movement which helped end 50 years of civil war, and this led to the creation of the newest nation in Africa—the Republic of South Sudan.

This trip allowed us to reconnect with persons of the NSCC and their cherished hope for peace that still eludes the new nation. These friends reflected that the peace did not hold because

it did not go deep enough, and there is still a need for friends like the Brethren to accompany them in working to transform their society from the greed of war to a culture of peace.

We traveled to Torit, the state capital of Eastern Equatoria, to see the current Brethren staff person, Athanasus Ungang, and the ongoing work. It was encouraging to see a flourishing English-speaking church in Torit, which Athanasus leads. The building of the Brethren Peace and Service Center in Torit will provide a base from which to carry out the future ministry of the Church of the Brethren in South Sudan. We traveled with Athanasus to meet the two evangelists that he is training in the village of Lohilla who are excited about starting a church fellowship. We met with the leaders of Lohilla to finalize plans for their first village elementary school.

Visiting the Imatong Bible School of the Africa Inland Church, our partner in South Sudan, helped us see the hopes and potential for the church but also the need to strengthen and build up the capacity of the South Sudanese. In our visit with the bishop of the Africa Inland Church, Bishop Archangelo, we heard a clear call to assist in the trauma healing ministries that are very needed because of the many years of civil unrest and war.

It is clear to me that God is not yet done with the Brethren and the work in South Sudan. As the Sudanese say, “Only God knows” what all the future holds. But it is clear there are things for us to learn and do with the Sudanese. There is hope as we continue the work of Jesus—peacefully, simply, and together! Thus we look forward to an Experiential Learning/Work Group traveling to South Sudan in April 2015 to take the next step with the people of South Sudan. 

Roger Schrock is pastor of Cabool (Mo.) Church of the Brethren and a member of the Mission Advisory Committee for the Church of the Brethren Global Mission and Service. He and his wife, Carolyn, served in Sudan throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in addition to nine years of service in Nigeria. He traveled to South Sudan with Global Mission and Service executive Jay Wittmeyer in November 2014.

Grace, if we are open to it

In her new novel, *Lila*, Marilynne Robinson continues the story of John Ames, a pastor of a small church in rural Iowa who first appeared in *Gilead*, the novel for which Robinson was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. *Gilead* was written in the form of a letter from the 76-year-old Ames to his son.



KEN GIBBLE

Lila is that son's mother, a young woman who met her husband-to-be—a then childless widower—when she came to his church and helped women of the congregation wash the windows of the parsonage. Readers of *Gilead* may remember how the Reverend Ames told his son what happened next. “I said [to her], ‘How can I repay you for all this?’ And she said, ‘You ought to marry me.’ And I did.”

In this book, readers get to hear the story from Lila's point of view. That story begins when Lila is 4 or 5 years old and is stolen from her violent home by a woman named Doll. They join a group of migrant workers trying to survive in the Dust Bowl world of the 1930s—a setting familiar to readers of John Steinbeck's famous novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. The grinding poverty experienced by the group leads to disagreement, occasional violence, and eventual disintegration.

As Lila's story unfolds, we are taken back and forth between the harsh conditions she experienced in her childhood through teenage years, and her unexpected marriage to the pastor who tries his best to understand the young woman he has come to love deeply. For her part, Lila is determined to learn something about the life of the man she has married. Uneducated except for a few years of elementary school, she decides to read the Bible on her own. She begins with the book of Ezekiel and copies out the text word for word. When her husband learns of the book she has chosen, he asks, “Why Ezekiel? That's a pretty sad book . . . it's a difficult place to begin.” Later, he adds, “You know, I wouldn't mind if you were reading Matthew along with

Ezekiel. Just a suggestion.”

For people who have grown up in the church, one of the best reasons to read this novel is the opportunity to comprehend, in at least a small way, what those with little or no church experience face as they try to become part of a Christian community. What enables Lila to survive is the love she encounters not only from her husband but from the members of the congregation.

That acceptance is personified in Lila's husband. As she gradually reveals to him the extremely difficult circumstances of her prior life, he makes every effort not to expect more than she can offer. Even after they are married, he is never sure she won't one day bolt as a way of dealing with past situations. In one of their conversations he says, sadly, “You still don't trust me at all.” She responds: “No, I can't really say that I do. No reason you should trust me, either. There are things I ain't told you.” He answers, “I know. Maybe you should just tell me those things, whatever they are, and you'd see that I didn't care about them and then you could trust me.”

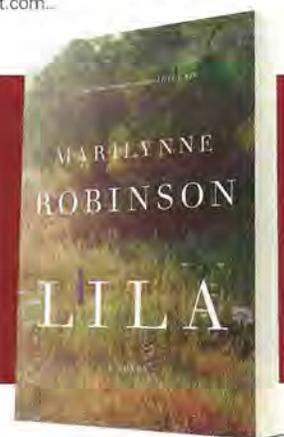
Similar interchanges occur throughout this wonderful book. I use the word “wonderful” deliberately. One of the best things about Robinson's writing is its beauty. She paints scenes with language that is poetic, language that has echoes of biblical expression. She is not a prolific writer. She has said, “I take my time. I don't meant to sound snobby, but I really don't want to write bad stuff. I would rather be tastefully silent.” She had not planned to write another book that included the Reverend John Ames until, as she puts it, Lila “spoke” to her.

Readers of *Lila* will be very happy that Marilynne Robinson decided to listen to that voice and refrained from being “tastefully silent” about it. Despite this novel's realistic depictions of loneliness, heartache, poverty, and other kinds of suffering, it tells a story of redemption in the fullest sense of that word. It is all about grace, that amazing grace we sing about which, if we are open to receive it, will bless us on our way.

Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, writes from Camp Hill, Pa. You can read more on his blog at www.kenslines.blogspot.com.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Lila*. **Author:** Marilynne Robinson. **Publisher:** Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2014. **Number of pages:** 272. **Price:** \$26. In *The New York Review of Books*, Cathleen Schine writes, “Marilynne Robinson has written a deeply romantic love story embodied in the language and ideas of Calvinist doctrine. She really is not like any other writer. She really isn't. . . Robinson has created a small, rich and fearless body of work in which religion exists unashamedly, as does doubt, unashamedly.”





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Dream big and be bold!

by Jennifer Scarr

What do you want to do next summer?"

It was a simple question.

"I don't know yet," I replied.

"Let's just dream a little bit here. If you could do anything next summer, what would you do?"

I was having lunch with Amy Gall Ritchie, director of Student Development at Bethany Theological Seminary, and she was asking me what I wanted to do for my Ministry Formation Elective (MFE). The MFE usually takes place over the summer between a Bethany student's second and third year and is the second of two internships designed to help affirm or re-direct one's calling in ministry. Some students know for sure they want to be placed in a church. Others work for non-profits or do units of clinical pastoral education.

I didn't know what I wanted to do, but Amy's question got me thinking. After a few moments of silence, I said, "Actually, I'd love to work with Ted Swartz for a summer."

Ted Swartz, of Ted&Company Theaterworks, is a Mennonite actor based in Harrisonburg, Va. He and his former

of him and was looking forward to having an extra set of hands to help out, so I decided to go in with an open heart and see what God had in store. It became clear rather quickly that I'd be spending a great deal of time learning about social media and marketing for "Listening for Grace," Ted's newest show about sexuality and the church.

Having very little experience with marketing, I was eager to learn. In order to do these tasks effectively, I would need to see the show a few times, so I took to the road. Some of the most fun I had during my internship was touring with Ted for "Listening for Grace," and later for "Laughter is Sacred Space." I helped with set-up and tear-down, sold products, answered questions, and in a few cases helped organize volunteers.

My favorite part of touring was having the opportunity to listen to the stories audience members were willing to share. After each show, people would crowd around Ted to talk with him. During these times I would scan the edges of the room. There always seemed to be one or two people sitting quietly off to the side with a story to share—

only someone would approach them. I decided to be that someone. These "off to the side" people became a collage of smiles, tears, hugs, and holy moments. Their stories helped guide my work as I presented these shows

through marketing and social media. In fact, they became invaluable.

One of the biggest highlights of the summer was when I joined Ted on stage at National Youth Conference (NYC). I first met Ted at NYC in 2006 when I was a teenager and was lucky enough to be a part of the sketch that introduced him and Lee. I went to every thing Ted and Lee did that day: worship, workshop, and the late-night show. They quickly became my heroes, and I wanted nothing more than to be on stage with them.

Eight years later, there I was, standing off stage at NYC 2014, about to get that wish. And not only with Ted, but with singer/songwriter Ken Medema!

The theme for that worship service was "Struggle," and the scripture was from Genesis, where Jacob wrestles with the angel before going to meet his brother Esau. Ted was Jacob, Ken was the blues-playin' angel, and I was the

After a few moments of silence, I said, "Actually, I'd love to work with Ted Swartz for a summer."

business partner, Lee Eshleman, brought the Bible to life for me when I was a teenager. They found humor and humanity in the biblical story and put it on stage. Being a theater kid myself, this approach to the Bible made sense to me.

"But," I added, "I know that'll never happen."

Amy looked back at me with a sparkle in her eye and said, "Why not?"

It was a simple question. All I could do was repeat it back to her. Why not?

That afternoon I sent an e-mail to Ted, asking if he'd be interested in taking on an intern. I was doubtful I'd even get a reply. It was a shot in the dark, after all. An hour later the reply came in the form of a single-word answer from his smart phone: "Yes."

Ted Swartz is a man of few words!

When I began my internship in May, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew Ted had a busy summer of shows ahead



Jennifer Scarr performing a skit with Ted Swartz at the 2014 National Youth Conference. Below: Jennifer with Ted Swartz and Ken Medema.

somewhat clueless servant Abigail. Performing with these two people was so much fun, and getting to hang out with them that day was an absolute delight. It is inspiring to be around those who have embraced their God-given gifts and use them to create space for the Spirit to move. Laughing with them, listening to them quote their favorite lines from past shows, telling stories—it was my favorite day.

As the summer drew to a close, I began the transition back into my studies at Bethany. Leaving my internship at Ted&Company was bittersweet. Many have asked me what I learned while at Ted&Company. I can say without a doubt that being a part of this company has enhanced my confidence in my own creative ideas, and made me more comfortable in my own skin. I have also learned quite a bit about vulnerability. Watching Ted perform, and having the opportunity to perform my own writing, taught me that it's terrifying taking the risk of letting people see you as you are, in joy and brokenness. However, our stories are meant to be shared. They can help us heal, celebrate, and grow, and in so doing we can create holy connections with one another. I believe it is worth the risk.

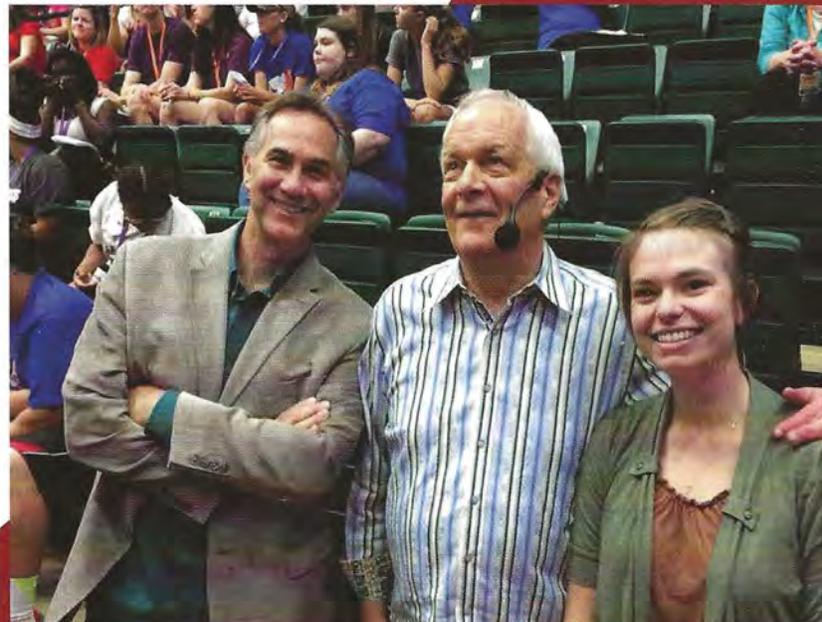
The capstone on my internship was performing a one-act play I wrote entitled "Hero." Writing the show was a holy space for me. It meant confronting a tough spot in my own story and then putting it on paper. Then, recognizing that I'd need to perform it, I had to give it back to God—it was too scary for me to do on my own. As I reabsorbed the words I'd written through memorization and staging, it was like accepting a part of my story that I'd been trying to keep at a distance. God made the broken aspects of my life beautiful.

I owe that opportunity to Bethany Seminary, and to Ted for directing it as well as helping me write it.

I am not the same person I was at the start of the summer, and I am grateful for that.

So . . . what do you want to do next summer? Next month? Next week? Dream big. Be bold. To every voice that whispers "But that will never happen," I pray you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit whispering back: "Why not?" 

Jennifer Scarr is a student at Bethany Theological Seminary.





Ken Owen flickr.com/kenowen1 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Rest in winter

January is a time when many of us decide that we're going to make a change. We're going to lose weight, get in shape, de-clutter, cook more, spend less, or quit a bad habit. We raise a new standard, set a higher bar of excellence and make bigger demands for ourselves.

My "Type A" personality likes the idea of starting new challenges on the first day of the new year for the same reason that I like to hang my clothes according to color, but I've realized that this "new year, more work" concept is a little backwards.



MANDY GARCIA

Think about it: there is less daylight in January, snow and cold force us indoors in many parts of the country, the ground is frozen, animals hibernate, and plants don't grow. This entire season of winter seems designed to force us to slow down . . . stop . . . rest.

When I was younger, winter seemed to be the longest, most miserable season. But ever since my husband and I started growing and preserving enough produce to last us through the winter, I have actually begun looking forward to the cold. It means a break from our labor—that we've finally subdued the towering mountain of tomatoes and zucchini, and that we can spend our evenings doing something other than canning, and our early mornings doing something other than weeding. It means that we can rest, and that it is now time to enjoy the sweet fruits of our labor.

Stillness is a practice of willpower. To rest is an exercise in restraint. Why is it that we deny ourselves this thing that we so desperately need, as though restoration of the soul were an indulgence? Social expectations and cultural demands have wandered so far from what was surely God's intent for the winter season.

Over the next few weeks, let's take advantage of the gift of winter. Let's savor the quiet. Let's allow ourselves the luxury of respite in this season most designed for the practice of being still. Let's set a new standard of excellence for down time

in this New Year, and wait for the reawakening of spring before revamping our workload. Let's take a break, give thanks for our many blessings, and relish the fruits of our labor.

Speaking of fruits of our labor, one of my favorite things to do with raspberry preserves canned in August is to spread them over these simple shortbread cookies. The same with blueberry and strawberry preserves as well. 

Mandy Garcia is a freelance writer living in Elgin, Ill.



Classic Swedish Shortbread Cookies

- Preheat oven to 300 degrees.
- Cream together 1 cup of softened margarine and 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons of sugar.
- While mixing, slowly add 2 1/4 cups flour and mix well.
- Pat dough evenly into a jellyroll pan until it covers the entire bottom of the pan. Use a butter knife to divide the dough into four long rows. Make a small indentation the long way down the center of each row with your finger. Spread a jar of fruit preserves into each indentation.
- Bake 10-15 minutes.
- While shortbread is baking, mix 1 cup of powdered sugar, 2 teaspoons of water, and 2-3 teaspoons of almond extract into a glaze.
- While cookies are still warm, drizzle them with the almond glaze.
- When cool, cut shortbread into diagonal strips and serve (especially with coffee).

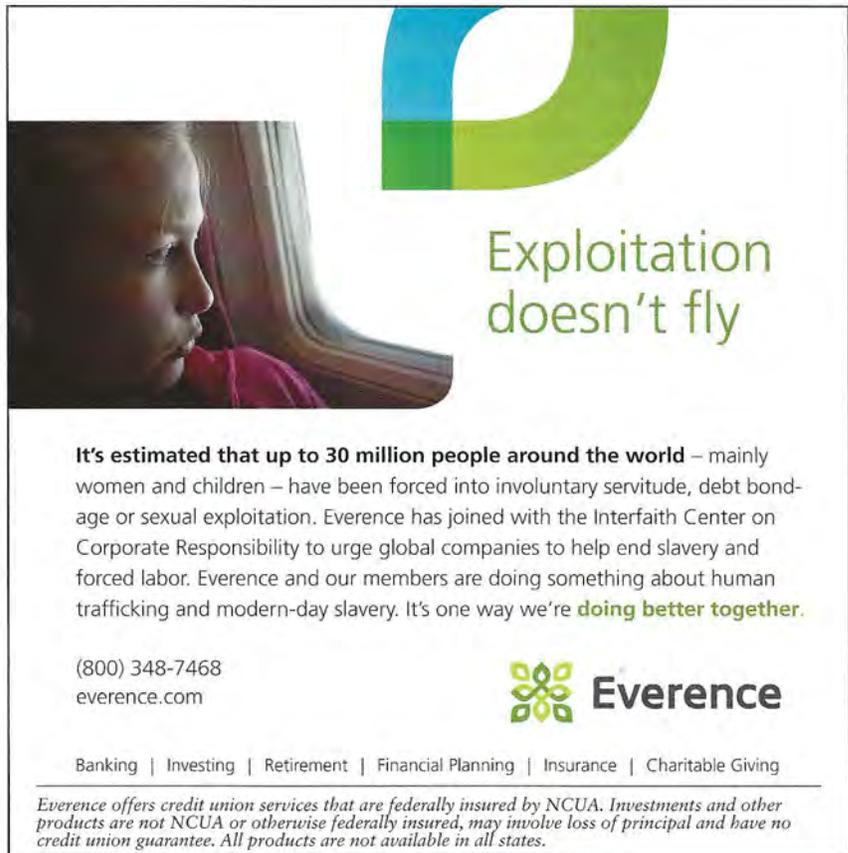
That article gives me hope

Tim Harvey has put in print (“Rethinking church,” November MESSENGER) what I have long believed: that the church as a building is no longer important in the world. When I moved to Bloomington, Ind., from Bremen, Ind., I had to find a new place to worship. I found the Salvation Army 10 years ago and that is where I worship. Tim Harvey’s article gave me hope for the future. It makes me wish I were young again and could make a difference. I have made it a practice to tell every police officer I see: “God bless you and keep you safe.”

Barb Muncy
Bloomington, Ind.

Dialogue and respect needed

Thanks for a beautiful edition of MESSENGER, which I read cover-to-cover the first day I received it. I was delighted by the honesty and thoughtfulness of the Reflections column by Sonja Griffith in the November MES-



Exploitation doesn't fly

It's estimated that up to 30 million people around the world – mainly women and children – have been forced into involuntary servitude, debt bondage or sexual exploitation. Everence has joined with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility to urge global companies to help end slavery and forced labor. Everence and our members are doing something about human trafficking and modern-day slavery. It's one way we're **doing better together.**

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What comes after the “nones” and the “dones”?

Anabaptism, the Next Generation

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SENGER. I was raised with six siblings who had opinions on everything. Trying our mother's patience, we voiced these opinions freely, and sometimes loudly. I'm not sure how much humility we had at the time, but we had dialogue. And we are still talking! In fact, as the years went by, our agreements and love for each other far outweighed any differing opinions. One brother tended our inherited family farm and shared proceeds for 38 years. We never asked to see his books because our interchanges proved that he was always open and always fair. Sonja's summary of what's needed (humility, respect, and eagerness to learn) is a lasting gift, born of dialogue and long, vital relationships. Thanks for sharing her article. Please keep writing, Sonja!

Marilyn Koehler
Udell, Iowa

Do you drive a vehicle?

Our Creator blessed us with a wonderful world and made us its stewards. I was therefore disheartened by the Annual Conference majority's refusal to take any personal or church responsibility for climate change. Some denied that we have any effect. Do any of you drive a vehicle?

Personally, I enjoy new vehicle reviews and watch *MotorWeek* regularly. Amid talk about style, handling, braking distance, etc., the show also examines carbon dioxide emissions in tons per year. How do they figure that?

As the Environmental Protection Agency website puts it: "What are the average annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of a typical passenger vehicle? A typical passenger vehicle emits

about 4.7 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year. This number can vary based on a vehicle's fuel, fuel economy, and the number of miles driven per year. The average gasoline vehicle on the road today has a fuel economy of about 21.6 miles per gallon and drives around 11,400 miles per year."

Why do we care? Driving a high miles-per-gallon (mpg) vehicle and/or a low number of miles per year reduces the amount of CO₂ we put into the atmosphere. Operating a low mpg vehicles and/or a high number of miles per year increases the CO₂ we personally put into the air.

Does CO₂ really contribute to climate change? False prophets say it doesn't. The website theguardian.com reported on May 16 of last year how "our team of citizen science volunteers at Skeptical

Searching for the Kingdom of Heaven

SCRIPTURES, MEDITATIONS, AND PRAYERS
FOR LENT AND EASTER 2015

CRAIG H. SMITH

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FREE WEEK OF CAMPING IN FLORIDA. The Palms Estates, a Church of the Brethren 55+ community located 108 miles SE of Tampa, is offering up to one week of free camping in its RV park in conjunction with 2015 Annual Conference. Stop by before or after Conference to see if Palms Estates could be your winter destination. Pool, library, fishing, bird watching, planned activities (during winter season) and nearby golf courses available. For reservations call 863-655-1909. For more information: www.palmsestates.com.

The New Inglenook Cookbook website has all-new content: 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!

Science has published a new survey in the journal *Environmental Research Letters* [where] we found that just over 4,000 papers took a position on the cause of global warming, 97.1% of which endorsed human-caused global warming.”

Our Creator blessed us with a wonderful world and made us its stewards. Perhaps some individual Brethren and Annual Conference need to accept personal and corporate responsibility and reconsider their stance on climate change. David Radcliff, of New Community Project, suggests that we might “commit ourselves to making the needed lifestyle changes, working for change in our communities (bike lanes, stopping sprawl), and challenging our carbon-intensive growth-driven economic system.” And, for starters, simply: “take a bus or a bike or share a ride.”

Dave Bell
Columbia City, Ind.

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039, ext. 320; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

Faith Community, New Oxford, Pa.: Janis Klima, Jean Zumburum
Green Tree, Oaks, Pa.: James Scott
Maple Grove, Lexington, N.C.: David Long, Sheree Long
Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va.: Frances Comer, Garrett D. Kessler, Dan Wine, Roxie Wine, Dustin Rogers, Genny Rogers
Plymouth, Ind.: Jim Smith, Dianne Smith, Dick Featherstone, John Greer, Krista Greer, Kathryn Hiatt, Kent

Kimpel, Carol Kimpel, Hugh Rettinger, Carol Shafer, Elizabeth Chambers, Rosanna Starr, Cameron Eveland, Cooper Eveland, James Greer

Wedding Anniversaries

Mason, Frank and Martha Deaton, Clarence, Mo., 66
Mummau, J. Eugene and Kathy, Lancaster, Pa., 55

Deaths

Clayton, Daniel Lee, 81, Philippi, W. Va., Oct. 19
Cloud, John Phillip, 78, Dayton, Va., Nov. 11
Combs, Jerri J., 61, Mogadore, Ohio, Oct. 25
Dundore, Helen Buttorff, 90, New Oxford, Pa., Dec. 4
Eisenbise, Russell Emerson, 95, Elizabethtown, Pa., Sept. 29
Gotwals, Lois Marie Folk, 79, West Lafayette, Ind., Nov. 7

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Turningpoints

Jahn, Kathleen Sue, 57, Amboy, Ill., Nov. 6
Jordan, William Ralph, Sr., 87, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 23
Lapp, Jacob S., Jr., 81, Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 6
Layton, Theodore L., 86, Harrington, Del., Sept. 26
Martin, Noah S., 74, Johnstown, Pa., Nov. 16
Myers, Richard A., 87, Canton, Ohio, Sept. 5
Petre, Mary Guyton, 97, Boonsboro, Md., Nov. 11
Reid, Robert Coleman, 78, Roanoke, Va., Nov. 3
Rinehart, Donald L., 83, Dayton, Ohio, Dec. 2, 2013
Ross, Mary Louise Braden, 77, Ashland, Ohio, Sept. 24
Roth, Maxine V. Luper, 93, Rossville, Ind., Nov. 20
Sampson, Willard George, 86, McPherson, Kan., Dec. 19
Schwalm, Dean L., 85, Goschen, Ind., Nov. 27
Smith, Charles Lee, 78, Jacksonville, Fla., Aug. 7
Stauffer, Harold L., 88,

Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 8
Stem, Charles Edward, 79, Westminster, Md., Sept. 17
Stern, Irvén Fike, 86, McPherson, Kan., Oct. 20
Sweet, JoAnn Buchanan, 80, Waynesboro, Va., Sept. 17
Todaro, Cary L., 53, Hollsopple, Pa., Aug. 1
Weddle, Wilbur Curtis, 91, Floyd, Va., Aug. 29
Whisman, Elizabeth May Carper, 99, Staunton, Va., Oct. 30
Williams, Theresa, 94, New Oxford, Pa., June 23
Zug, Mildred Kathleen Wolfe, 92, Harrisburg, Pa., Oct. 25
Zurin, Ernestine Gainer, 90, Mount Joy, Pa., Oct. 4

Smith, Joanna Lynn, W. Plains Dist. (Mont Ida, Garnett, Kan.), Nov. 30

Ordinations

Fullen, Daniel L., S. Ohio Dist. (Circleville, Ohio), Nov. 30
Sites, Timothy L., Shen. Dist. (Flat Rock, New Market, Va.), Nov. 23
Stiles, Laurie C., Mid. Pa. Dist. (Curryville, Pa.), Nov. 23

Placements

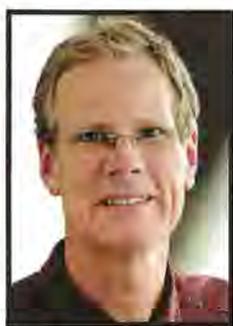
Caputo, William V., pastor, Thurmont, Md., Dec. 1
Heishman, Irvin R. and Nancy S., from interim team pastors to team pastors, West Charleston, Tipp City, Ohio, Nov. 30
Wetzel, Eric G., pastor, Mountain Grove, Fulks Run, Va., Nov. 1

Peering beneath the surface

Mel Tormé wrote “The Christmas Song” during a blistering summer in 1944, so maybe it’s not so unusual that I’m thinking about snorkeling in Maui while snow falls gently on pine boughs outside my window.

But I’m also thinking about Pennsylvania. And California. And round tables at Annual Conference.

On my first visit to Maui, I thought I’d seen all that the island had to offer after I’d strolled Lahaina’s pristine beaches, been to



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER EDITOR

the top of barren, windswept Haleakala, and driven the twisty road to Hana. There were swaying palms, balmy breezes, perfect sunsets, and endless fields of sugarcane. My preconceived notions of island life had all been confirmed. What more could there be?

Then I slipped on a diving mask and a pair of fins and found out.

I slid into the ocean and watched another world unfolded beneath me as I glided over beds of iridescent coral, while multi-colored angelfish, butterfly fish, parrot fish, and tangs darted inches before me. Then, without warning, the coral reef abruptly ended, and I suddenly found myself floating over a deep expanse. It was such a breathtaking and unexpected experience that I turned and swam back to the reef, then turned again and glided over the edge of the cliff. It felt as if I were flying over the rim of the Grand Canyon. I went back and did it three times. I had never experienced anything like it before, nor have I since. And I would have missed that—and the fish and the coral—had I

than just chocolate. Among other things, there’s the Milton Hershey School, which got its start as an orphanage. And did you know that every three years between 1915 and 1936 the Church of the Brethren’s Annual Conference was held at Hershey? According to hersheyarchives.org: “When the Church of the Brethren chose Hershey as the location for its next annual meeting, the church requested permission to erect a tent on park grounds. Milton Hershey responded with an offer to build a 6,000 seat convention hall for their use. The Convention Hall was completed in less than a year, just in time for the Brethren’s June 1915 meeting. Over 60,000 people from all over the United States attended the convention that year.” Pennsylvania: it’s more than beards, buggies—and chocolate!

Then there’s California. When they come to Fort Collins, Colo., to attend National Youth Conference, some Brethren kids from east of the Mississippi have expected their counterparts from the West Coast to show up in flip-flops, board shorts, and Hawaiian shirts. California, after all, is synonymous with surfing, Hollywood, Disneyland, and left-leaning wing nuts, right? While California may be home to Hollywood and all that it represents, it’s also home to Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, and Tommy Collins—major players in what’s known as the “Bakersfield sound.” Merle Haggard! Folks, you can’t get more country—and less Hollywood—than California’s own Merle Haggard.

All of this reminds me again how grateful I am for round tables at Annual Conference. This modest change in furniture that came about a few years ago has done much to erode our stereotypes of one another. Sitting across a small table from one another, we talk. We get acquainted. We discover that the teenager from California in a tie-dye T-shirt grew up in the

not taken time to peer beneath the surface and see the rest of what the island had to offer.

This year, let’s expect the unexpected. Let’s peer beneath the surface and see the people behind our stereotypes.

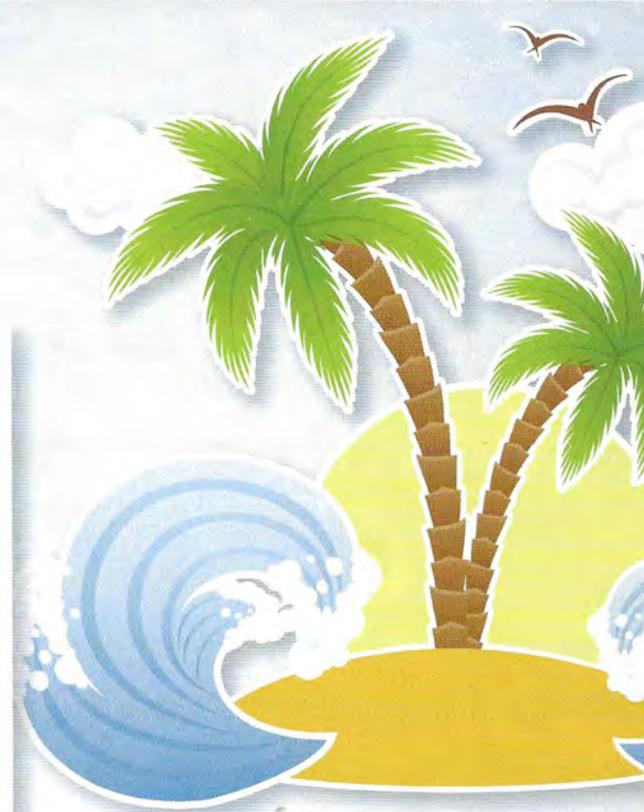
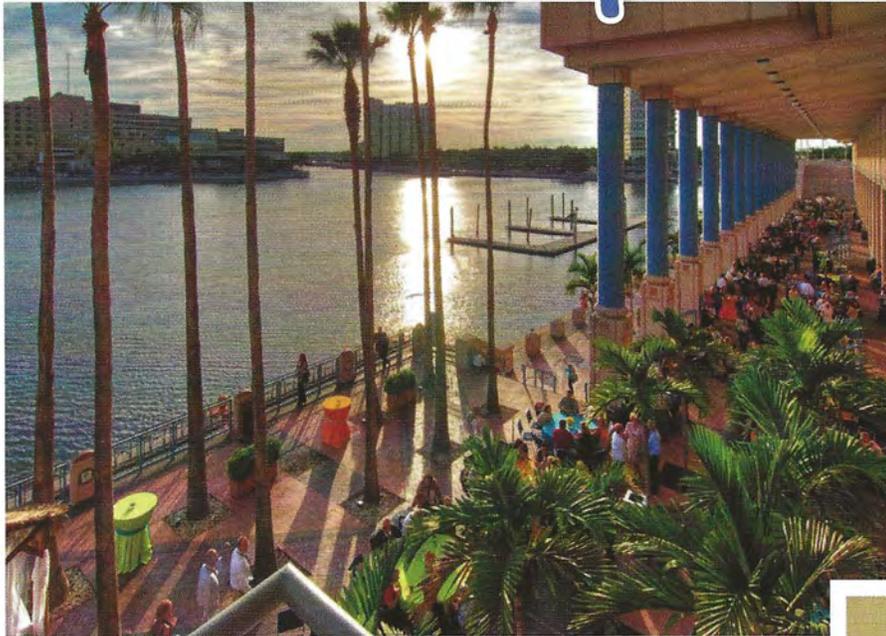
To most who’ve never been there, Pennsylvania is synonymous with Lancaster County. Pennsylvania is black buggies, long beards, and shoofly pie. Tourists flock to Lancaster County and, having snapped a picture of something Amish, figure they’ve seen Pennsylvania. But Pennsylvania is also home to Martin guitars and the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts. And Hershey’s chocolate. But even Hershey is more

church and is planning to go to seminary and become a pastor. And that the middle-aged woman from Virginia wearing a prayer covering reads *Sojourners* magazine and has a son in a heavy-metal rock band. Who knew?

This year, let’s expect the unexpected. Let’s peer beneath the surface and see the people behind our stereotypes. We may discover we have much more in common than we thought. For instance, a commitment to continue the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together. **AM**

COMING IN MARCH: Profiles of peacemakers

Come to Tampa

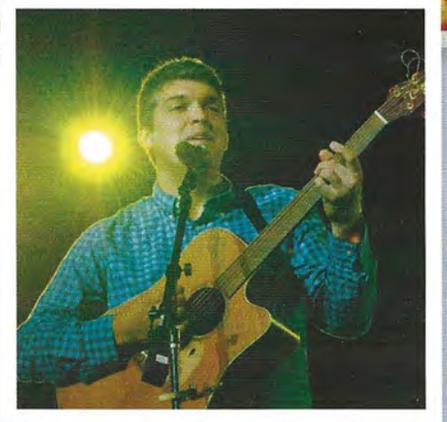


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