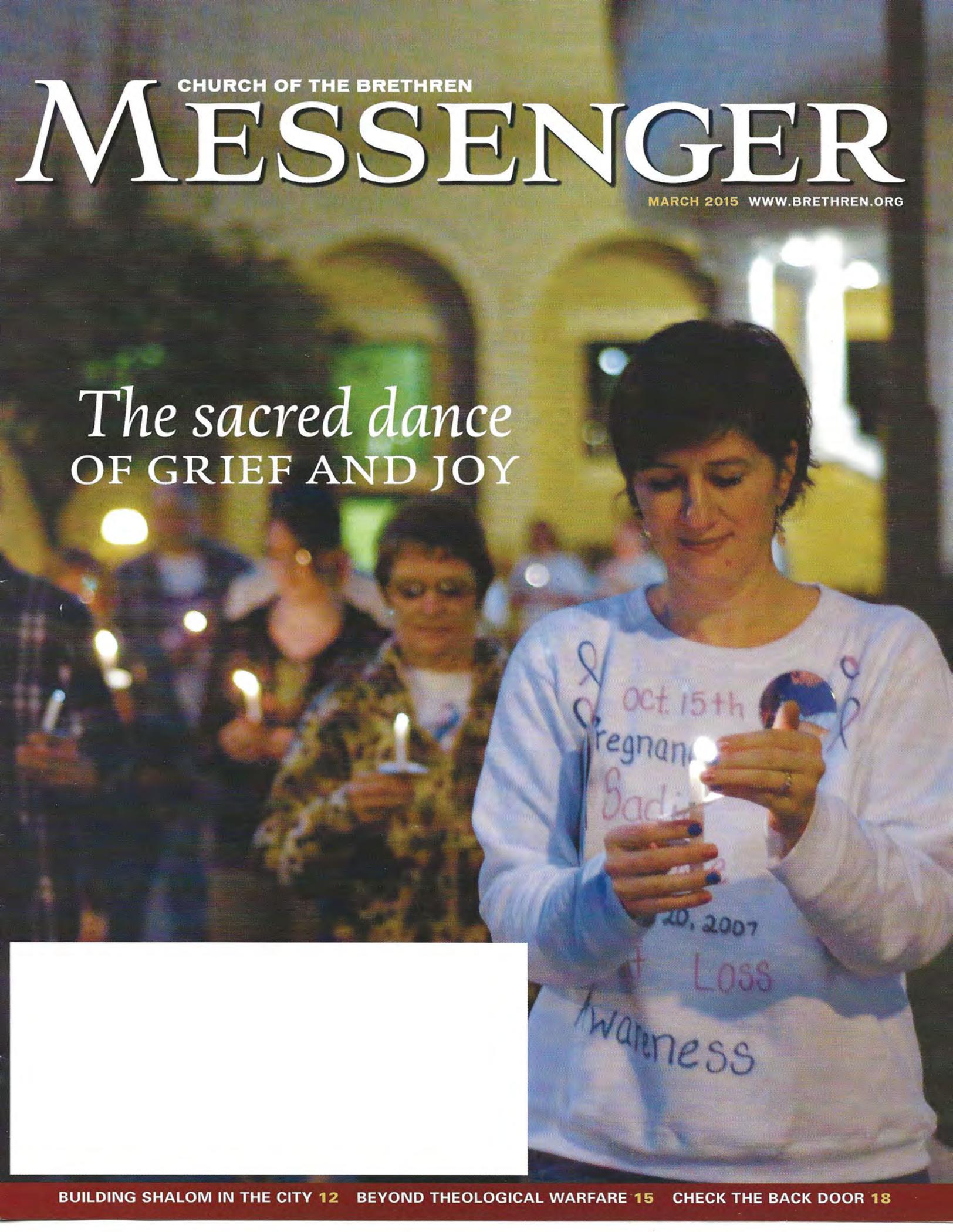


CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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The sacred dance OF GRIEF AND JOY





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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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

March 2015 VOL.164 NO. 2 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Tanya Bennett



Trotwood Church of the Brethren



Glenn Riegel

8 The sacred dance of grief and joy

"Grief changes you," says Regina Cyzick Harlow, who lost her child seven years ago. "People want the old you back, but you'll never be that person again. Part of you dies when your child dies. You'll find joy again. You'll laugh and experience life fully again. But you're never the same person you were before your loss."

12 Building shalom in the city

Like others at churches located in transitioning communities, members at Trotwood (Ohio) Church of the Brethren are not sure what the future may hold. Yet they continue to walk forward, seeking the well-being of a city struggling with decline, violence, and poverty.

15 Beyond theological warfare

Surrender, transformation, and new life: it's the way of Jesus Christ. Still, we in the Church of the Brethren often find ourselves broken and divided as our conflicting theologies overshadow our eternal and unchanging God. Where do we go from here?

18 Check the back door

Have we become so accustomed to encountering God in all the usual places—Sunday morning at church, Wednesday at Bible study—that we miss the moments God may be trying to reach us elsewhere?

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on the cover

Regina Cyzick Harlow leading a candle-light walk around Court Square in Harrisonburg on October 15 in coordination with National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day.

Brethren don't really need a special Sunday to remind ourselves of the importance of service, do we? After all, it's what Brethren do.

Nevertheless, it's worthwhile to spend one Sunday a year celebrating service and recognizing the humble servants in our midst. The scriptural focus this



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

year was Philippians 2:1-8, the same text and theme that shapes the workcamp season for this coming summer. The theme, "Side by Side: Imitating Christ's Humility," is inspired by *The Message* paraphrase of this passage.

In a sermon on Service Sunday, observed just this past month, Ben Bear of Brethren Volunteer Service noted the irony of his job—to promote how great it is to be a humble volunteer. His listeners chuckled appreciatively. Many of them were themselves volunteers of one sort or another, quietly helping out where needed and avoiding the limelight.

About the same time the church was focusing on humility and servanthood, the national media got a hold of the puzzling case of Brian Williams, the star journalist who seemed to implode from his own hubris. Why would someone so important feel the need to add some shine to his resume? Why does anyone at the very top of the ladder feel the need to fabricate success?

Still ringing in our ears is the letter to the Philippians: "Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself."

Perhaps the real value of a Service Sunday is to remind us how countercultural this idea really is. It's not the way of the world to be content with our humanity. In fact, in many ways it's human to strive to become gods.

So let's have more service Sundays—and service weeks, and service years. We need workcamps, disaster response, and volunteer service to remind us to imitate Christ's humility. Service is not just what Brethren do; the act of serving helps form us into followers of Jesus.

Wendy McFadden

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Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate

- \$32 for 2 years

\$14.50 gift rate

\$14.50 church club rate

- \$27 for 2 years

\$ 1.25 student (per month)

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Digital Messenger offers enhanced content. Go to www.brethren.org/accessmessenger.

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

MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © March 2015, Church of the Brethren.

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

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

 Printed on recycled paper (20% post consumer)



Tim Ritchey Martin

Congregation Close-Up

Fuel for the winter

Grossnickle Church of the Brethren in Myersville, Md., held its annual woodcutting day Nov. 22—something the congregation has been doing for 25 years. This time, Mother Nature gave it an extra nudge.

In November, a powerful wind storm blew through a stand of trees several miles from the church. The property owner asked for help in clearing the large trees after the storm. It was a request that fit nicely with the church's annual effort. Once the wood is cut and processed as firewood, it is then shared with local families who use it to heat their homes with wood burning furnaces or stoves.

Nearly 30 people helped that day to process 20 cords of wood for members of the community. In addition, a sizable amount also was put away to dry for next year's delivery. The morning concluded with a hearty lunch and wonderful fellowship.

"We generally serve about 10 families in the area," says pastor Tim Ritchey Martin. "That's about what it was this year. A family that heats their home exclusively with wood will go through about four cords in a season.

"Robert Lee Grossnickle and Marion Leatherman provide the key leadership for the event," he added. "The feast afterward was prepared by Betty Grossnickle, Tina Spade, and Cathie Clemson, with additional food donations from other folks in the church.

"The joy in this project for me comes in seeing members of the church demonstrate Christ's love in a really practical way. Some of the folks we serve are in pretty tight financial circumstances. So if we don't help supply them then they have to buy wood, and it's expensive here. Many we serve live alone, and a load of firewood expresses the love of Christ in a simple, useful way."

by the numbers

506,100

Dollar amount raised for the Nigeria Crisis Fund as of Dec. 31. (See details on page 20.)

Do you have district or congregational stories that might be of interest to MESSENGER? Short items with a photo are best. Send them to MESSENGER, c/o In Touch, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or messenger@brethren.org.

On May 4, the congregation dedicated their solar panels, which are already producing more electricity than the church needs.



Jerry Crouse

Celebrating 100 years in Missouri

“Continuing the Work of Jesus: Celebrating 100 years, looking back, moving forward” served as the theme for anniversary festivities at Warrensburg (Mo.) Church of the Brethren. Founded in 1914, the church has moved its location three times. Currently, a six-member pastoral team leads the church.

On Aug. 24, the pastoral team including Jim Tomlonson, John Thomas, Jerry Crouse, Ethmer Erisman, and Becky Crouse led an old-fashioned service seated at a table on the same level as the laity, with each minister preaching on an ordinance or practice of the church, including baptism, the love feast, anointing, and marriage and family life. Ministry team member Pearl Miller led the a cappella singing, with several of the hymns being lined for the congregation.

On Saturday, August 30, an open house featuring a historical exhibit and SERRV shop was followed by a love feast with traditional sop prepared by the deacons. The evening concluded with a youth worship and praise service organized by Jacob Crouse. The next morning, former Missouri-Arkansas district executive Sandy Bosserman challenged the congregation with her message, “Hearing on Bended Ear.”

Recent highlights in the congregational life include an annual stewardship of creation emphasis and the installation of solar panels, dedicated in May, which have thus far been putting energy back onto the electric grid.

On Aug. 24, the pastoral team including Jim Tomlonson, John Thomas, Jerry Crouse, Ethmer Erisman, Becky Crouse, and Pearl Miller led the congregation in an old-fashioned service.



Lisa He

Hispanic congregations gather in North Carolina

“God’s blessing was on the Convocando a Las Iglesia de Las Montañas (Call to the Churches of the Mountains),” said David Yeazell, a pastor at Iglesia Jesucristo El Camino (His Way Church of the Brethren) in Mills River, N.C., which co-hosted the event. He reported that 300 people representing at least 11 local Hispanic churches attended an event of worship and teaching on Jan. 23. The evening on the theme Clamor de Naciones (Cry of the Nations), “culminated in an extended time of intercession for the nations and for our region,” he said. “It was an amazing time of God bringing local churches and pastors together, starting new relationships; and prayerfully the start of more collaboration among the Hispanic churches of western North Carolina.”



David Yeazell

Pastors of Iglesia Jesucristo El Camino (His Way Church of the Brethren) Carol and David Yeazell (center) with guest leaders Zulay Corrales (left) and Luis Azofofeifa (right).

Serving others

General Offices host MLK Day food drive

The Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., provided warehouse space for the city’s annual Martin Luther King Day Food Drive. This was the fourth year in a row the denomination provided facilities for the drive, which collected canned and boxed foods from congregations, businesses, community groups, and individuals. The food was delivered to the warehouse space at the church’s General Offices, sorted by youth volunteers from the community, and then donated to area food pantries to be distributed to people in need. Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren was one of the congregations that helped collect the food. More than 8,400 pounds of food were sorted with help from youth who participate in the Boys and Girls Club. Joe Wars, who formerly served on the city’s human rights commission, organized the drive. Don Knierem from the Church of the Brethren staff also worked with the event.





Karolyn Moore and her grandson enjoy participating in McPherson's annual Alternative Christmas Gift Market.

McPherson Church raises funds and awareness

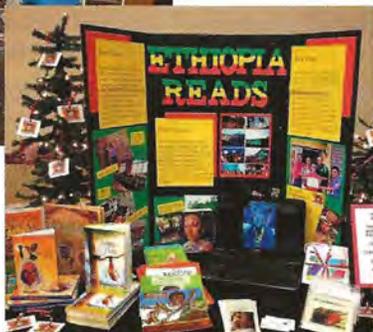
The McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren held its 10th annual Alternative Christmas Gift Market in November at Cedars Conference Center, raising more than \$31,000 for 21 charities. The fair began 10 years ago as a way for members to market their projects during a year-long effort to relieve hunger, and has grown to become a festive community event. In the decade since it began, the event has raised more than \$150,000.

Brethren booths included Brethren Disaster Ministries, the EYN Compassion Fund, and the Haiti Mobile Medical Clinic. Also included were international charities such as Heifer International, Habitat for Humanity, and Trees for Life.

"Our motto is 'Give Hope this Christmas,' and our goal is not only to seek donations that help persons in need, but also to educate persons about various organizations and services," says Susan Taylor, speaking for the church's outreach team. "We try to involve as many of our church members as we can, not only at the booths, but also helping by baking cookies, serving as hostesses, providing music, etc. The youth group puts up balloons to lead the way to the market."



Booths at the Alternative Christmas Gift Market.



Landmarks and Laurels

➔ **Little Swatara Church of the Brethren celebrated 50 years of being in its "new" church** last October. Located in Rehrersburg, Pa., the congregation dedicated their "new" building in October of 1964. The congregation, which is 257 years old, originally met in four meeting houses on a weekly rotating basis. Three former pastors brought greetings, including Jeffrey Copp of Columbia City, Ind., Ervin Huston of Mt. Wilson, Pa., and Robert Krouse of Florida, who pastored for five years before recently retiring. Matt Christ, who began his pastorate in September, brought the morning message.

➔ **Dunker Punks offer morning joe.** Youth at Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., have started a Dunker Punks Café. "Don't buy your morning coffee on the way to church. The Dunker Punk Café fills your caffeine needs!" said an announcement in the church newsletter. Staffed by the high school youth group, the café accepts freewill donations, "but the coffee is still free!" said the announcement.

Remembered

R. Jan Thompson died Jan. 12 in the Huffman Health Center of Bridgewater Retirement Community, Bridgewater, Va. Thompson served the Church of the Brethren in many capacities throughout his life, including Brethren Volunteer Service (1954-1956); mission work in Nigeria (1967-1970); director of Refugee/Disaster program (1978-1987); member of the General Board (1998-2003); and interim executive director of Global Mission and Service (2008). He attended the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Busan, South Korea, November 2013) as alternate delegate for the Church of the Brethren. In related work, Jan served as assistant dean of students for Manchester College (1971-1978); with the Sudan Council of Churches and the Presbyterian Church in Sudan (1989-1991); and in retirement he served as disaster consultant for Church World Service.

C. Wendell Bohrer, who served on the former General Board of the Church of the Brethren in the late 1970s and early 1980s, died Jan. 15 in Sebring, Fla., following a brief illness. A lifelong servant of the church, Bohrer was ordained to the ministry in 1961 and pastored congregations in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, and Florida, retiring in 2007. He most recently served as associate pastor of Sebring Church of the Brethren, and was an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren for 55 years. Bohrer pastored Walnut Grove Church of the Brethren in Johnstown, Pa., and led disaster relief work in the aftermath of the 1977 flood there. Bohrer and the congregation were lauded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development for their work to aid the community following the flood, and for serving as a center for thousands of Church of the Brethren volunteers that came in from outside the community to help. Bohrer also led numerous tours to Brethren heritage sites in Europe, and was active at Annual Conference, National Older Adult Conference, and Brethren Benefit Trust events.

The problem with good intentions

I spend a lot of time thinking about peace and justice. Over the past few months I have found myself thinking about shalom, and what elder Dale Brown has called a shalom lifestyle. Shalom is the biblical understanding of peace with justice. A shalom lifestyle, then, is a way of life that forces us to consider not only our personal peace, but how we contribute to injustice. It is a way of being in the world that forces us to examine how we engage one another and how we benefit from systems of oppression.



DEAN J. JOHNSON

I have been thinking recently about the problem of good intentions. Most of us think of ourselves as good people and as good Christians. We do things to help others with the intent of creating a better world, which gives us a sense of personal shalom.

While the idea of making the world a better and more just place is not a bad thing, doing so in an unexamined way may actually perpetuate injustice and oppression. Let me give you a couple of examples.

As often happens, I think best when in conversation with my partner, Melissa. We often talk about our perceptions of the ideas, people, and events we encounter while together and apart. We were discussing an interaction I had while

pressing praise to men who are doing what should be expected comes with a cost. The man in this case brought to himself a sense of personal shalom through the compliment, but indirectly reinforced the stereotypical roles of men and women.

The second example comes from the movement taking shape in protest of white police officers killing black and brown men, women, and children. White people with good intentions started carrying signs and posting to social media the phrase “All Lives Matter” in response to the slogan “Black Lives Matter.” The intent of the “All Lives Matter” slogan is to communicate that all life is precious no matter the persons’ color. I do not think that this is in question; all lives do matter. However, black and brown people are killed in this country by police officers at an alarming rate. In other words, not all lives matter equally. What this means in our current situation is that there is an urgency to change a system of militarized policing and a biased criminal justice system that has a devastating effect on black and brown communities. Saying all lives matter takes the focus away from the problem and places it in a false sense of equality. The intent of “All Lives Matter” is good, but reinforces the status quo.

Good intentions are part of what allows us to not be critical of our role in systems of oppression which makes shalom impossible. We hide behind our good intentions to distance ourselves from our involvement in injustice.

Good intentions allow us to believe we are doing good without *changing how we live*. By not examining our good intentions we may reinforce the very injustices we seek to change.

our family attended a church conference dinner. During the program, I was working to keep our 3-year-old entertained. A man walked over to me and said, “You are a good dad.” The man was paying me a compliment. He had good intentions. As my partner and I talked about the compliment, it became clear that there was a double-standard. Had she been playing with our child, it is unlikely that the man would have said anything to her. Why? Because it is assumed that it is the mom’s role to take care of the children. Adding to the problem was the fact the event was hosted by a group of folks who advocate for social change and the expansion of gender norms. But his compliment seemed to only reinforce the status quo.

Good parenting is indeed something to lift up. And yet, ex-

History is full of well-intentioned people who did not make things better. In fact, many elders and veterans of struggles for equality have exclaimed that there is more to fear from those who understand themselves to be good human beings and who continue to comply with oppression than from those who are overt bigots.

Our shalom is interconnected. Good intentions allow us to believe we are doing good without changing how we live. By not examining our good intentions we may reinforce the very injustices we seek to change. ❗

A member of the Church of the Brethren, Dean Johnson is director of the Peace and Conflict Studies program at West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

“The church is to be with the suffering people, wherever in the world.”

—Catholic bishop Perle Tahan, who recently conducted mass at the Juba displaced persons camp in South Sudan’s capital, Juba

cultureview

► **Women without religious affiliation** are the next generation’s top givers—more generous than religious women and unaffiliated men, researchers at Indiana University’s Lilly School of Philanthropy found. Their levels of giving were at least double most of the other demographics’. The study was the first to investigate how the conflux of gender, age, and religion affect giving. Researchers measured giving to nonreligious and religious organizations, excluding congregations.

► **“The news that Cuba and the United States** are now ending a half-century of hostility is welcome indeed,” said National Council of Churches general secretary Jim Winkler. “I salute Presidents Obama and Castro, and express thanks to Pope Francis and all those who helped bring this moment to pass. I ask local churches in the United States to follow the example of churches across Cuba and ring their bells in

thanks and celebration!”
 ► **A string of court decisions** paved a way for greater accommodation of religion in public life, dealing a blow to atheist groups that warned that the separation of church and state was under attack. In *Greece v. Galloway*, the US Supreme Court upheld sectarian prayers at public meetings, and the justices also ruled 5-4 in favor of the Hobby Lobby arts-and-crafts chain in its bid to refuse a full range of contraceptive services to employees. That ruling also established religious rights for private businesses, a precedent that could have a range of ramifications. In addition, atheists lost bids to require religious groups to have greater transparency on donors; to remove “In God We Trust” from US currency; and to end a tax break for clergy housing. A federal appeals court ruled that a cross-shaped relic can remain at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum at Ground Zero.

“I think what history is going to record is that this is the first movement in black history that’s not been led by the church or by a religious figure.”

—Jamal-Harrison Bryant, pastor of Baltimore’s Empowerment Temple, whose members marched to a nearby mall after Sunday services for a “die-in” protest

“When I was 4 years old in 1940, the idea was that all Protestants were going to hell. I was going down the street with my grandmother and there were two women from the Salvation Army on the other side of the street. I said, ‘Who are they? Monks, nuns?’ My grandmother said: ‘No, they are Protestants. But they are good people.’ So that opened me up to ecumenism.”

—Pope Francis, speaking Dec. 12 at the Vatican

Heard 'round the world

“The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of all kinds.” —The Dalai Lama

“[A] government that can choke a man to death on video for selling cigarettes is not a government living up to a biblical definition of justice or any recognizable definition of justice.”

—Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ELRC) of the Southern Baptist Convention.



The Sacred dance OF GRIEF AND JOY

Ministering to others after the loss of a child

by Karen Doss Bowman

Mother's Day is always bittersweet for Regina Cyzick Harlow of Grottoes, Va. While the annual holiday gives an opportunity to focus on and express gratitude for her precious children, Eli and Elsie, Harlow also is reminded of the greatest loss of her life: the death of her newborn, Sadie Rose, seven years ago.

“I am overwhelmed by bittersweet this morning,” Harlow posted on her Facebook wall last Mother's Day. “Celebrating the precious sacred gifts of Eli and Elsie and missing our sweet Sadie Rose. I am not to be pitied—my life is far richer and more fulfilled than I could have ever dreamed. But this is my life, my reality, forever keeping rhythm to the sacred dance of grief and joy.”

“I am overwhelmed by bittersweet this morning,” Harlow posted on her Facebook wall last Mother's Day. “Celebrating the precious sacred gifts of Eli and Elsie and missing our sweet Sadie Rose. I am not to be pitied—my life is far richer and more fulfilled than I could have ever dreamed. But this is my life, my reality, forever keeping rhythm to the sacred dance of grief and joy.”

A member of the Beaver Creek Church of the Brethren in Bridgewater, Va., Harlow has come to accept grief as a constant companion in life—but not one that steals her joy. She considers herself a grief educator, helping others to better understand those who are grieving, and a grief companion, walking with others through their own painful losses of a child.

“Grief changes you,” says Harlow, a licensed minister who is enrolled in the Church of the Brethren's Christian Growth Institute. “People want the old you back, but you'll never be that person again. Part of you dies when your child dies. You'll find joy again. You'll laugh and experience life fully again. But you're never the same person you were before your loss.”

Sadie's story

As Harlow and her husband, Lee, prepared for the birth of their first child in early 2007, they learned during a routine 20-week ultrasound that their child was not developing properly. After further testing, doctors confirmed that the baby had a form of dwarfism. Even so, they told the couple that, otherwise, the baby would be healthy.

Six weeks later, Regina went into labor. She was transferred in a medical helicopter from her local hospital to the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville, about 50 miles away, where the baby could be cared for after birth in one of Virginia's most advanced neonatal intensive care units (NICU). Harlow recalls being rushed down the hallway on a stretcher to meet the helicopter. Lee couldn't ride with her because there was no room, so he rushed off in his car to meet her there.

Though doctors tried everything medically possible to delay the delivery, Sadie Rose was born five days later, on June 20, 2007, at 27 weeks gestation. She was tiny and weak, but doctors still thought she would survive. Harlow and her husband held the baby, and other family members had a chance to meet her. But the baby began to weaken, and about 10 hours after her birth, doctors informed the couple that she wouldn't survive. The couple had held their baby girl, loved her and prayed for her for more than 17 hours before she passed away around 11 p.m., the same day she was born.

"We were lost," Regina writes on the Sadie Rose Foundation website. "Our arms were empty. They felt heavy. Life had dealt us a crushing blow. In that time of grief we knew we wanted to reach out to other families who experience the tragedy of the death of a child."

Harlow loves music and has a gift for singing. During the weeks prior to Sadie's birth and after her death, she found comfort in hymns such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "How Firm A Foundation." Three weeks after she said goodbye to her baby girl in the hospital, Harlow stood in front of her congregation and sang a capella, "How Can I Keep From Singing?"

"My life flows on in endless song—that was the anthem of my soul in that moment, and has been ever since," says Harlow, who grew up in the Shenandoah Valley's Old Order Mennonite community. "The whole song is amazing, but the third verse says, 'What though my joys and comforts die, the

Lord my Savior liveth. What though the darkness gathers round, songs in the night he giveth.' Sadie was my joy, and Sadie died. But in that grief I've experienced the risen Lord as I have never known him before. When the darkness enveloped and overwhelmed, he gave me songs in the night to comfort, to reassure and to bless."

Seeking support

As the devastated couple tried to move forward following their great loss, their families and a strong church community supported them with much love and care. Still, they felt a strong desire to connect with other families who had experienced the same profound loss of a child. They briefly connected with a local chapter of Compassionate Friends, an international organization that offers support and resources for parents and other family members who have lost a child. But the local group soon disbanded. The Harlows felt a strong need to make support easily accessible to grieving families.

"A few months after Sadie died, I was on my hands and knees washing my hardwood floors, and I'll never forget the sound of my tears splashing into the bucket," Harlow says. "I started crying out to God, 'What do I do with this?' And the name Sadie Rose Foundation came into my head. It just came to me. I didn't know what it meant or what that would look like. But I knew at that moment that it was something God would use."

By January 2008, the Sadie Rose Foundation was established as an official nonprofit organization to provide support for child, infant, and pregnancy loss within Harrisonburg, Va., and the surrounding communities. Since the foundation



While the journey through grief isn't one that Harlow would have willingly chosen, she feels that God is using her experience to minister to others.

was established, it has connected with more than 300 families. The organization draws in people who have just lost a beloved child of any age, as well as some whose child loss occurred decades ago.

The organization offers monthly support meetings, weekly online support chats, monthly coffee hours, and remembrance events such as an annual Candlelight Ceremony, a Memorial Picnic/Balloon Release and an annual 5K race/walk to raise funds. Harlow personally visits one-to-one with many people in grief and often sheds tears along with them.

Elly Lafkin, whose 3-month-old daughter Camden died in 2012 at her in-home daycare, can't remember how she first heard about the Sadie Rose Foundation, or what event she attended first. But she counts Harlow as a dear friend who has journeyed with her through the grief process. Harlow understands what she's going through, Lafkin says, and "talks me through thoughts, feelings, and questions."

Lafkin and her husband, Cameron, were blessed with a second daughter, Caliann, and as a family, they participate in the foundation's events to celebrate Camden's life and memory.

"These events, along with Camden's birthday and 'angel-versary,' are times that we treasure together as a family," says Lafkin, who started The Cami Campaign to educate parents about choosing safe childcare and to advocate for changes in Virginia's childcare laws to improve child safety. "We appreciate the chance to walk together, talk with each other, and continue the everlasting love and close-knit bonds that Camden taught us all. I've learned that though time goes on and the grief does get easier—some days—it never goes away. And that's okay. Regina has taught me that what I was feeling in the moment was okay. I wasn't being over dramatic, I wasn't crazy, and I was actually reacting the in much the same was as so many other parents who had walked in my shoes had reacted."

As the Sadie Rose Foundation grows in size and impact, Harlow has explored the possibility of establishing satellite support groups to reach beyond the local community. She also

dreams of establishing a grief and healing center in the area to house the Sadie Rose Foundation, as well as providing space for anyone in the community to come for prayer or meditation. This summer, Regina presented a workshop in Chicago at the 37th national conference of Compassionate Friends on the topic, "Helping Others to Honor Our Grief." The session focused on how the loss of a child affects relationships.

Accepting grief

Starting a nonprofit is never an easy venture. But supporting others through their grief and raw emotions means that Harlow often is reliving her own painful experience of child loss. It's often a challenge to put aside her own emotions to just be there for others. Everyone's loss is different, she says, but the grief and pain are very much the same.

"There is a great sense of family within the child-loss community, and they have been there for me as much as I have been there for them," Harlow says. "They embrace my tears as much as I embrace theirs. So we've really found healing together. The Sadie Rose Foundation is an emotional investment of my life—as well as a spiritual investment and a financial investment. It is an investment of my whole life and being, and it's really hard to separate it from work and home. It's all a part of my story."

Harlow isn't alone in supporting grieving families. Each month, the Sadie Rose Foundation newsletter includes names of others who are willing to talk to families that have experienced loss. Naomi Lambert, who lost an infant son (Mason) in 2005 and an infant daughter (Kourtney) in 2006—both due to a genetic heart condition—is one of those resources. Lambert and her husband, Daniel, met the Harlows before the foundation was established, when the grieving couple reached out to them for support. The couple, who have eight living children (including one adopted as an infant), have been very involved with the Sadie Rose Foundation from its beginning. Their oldest daughter, Cassandra, works as an office assistant in the

Family members participating in the Sadie Rose 5K in memory of Sadie Rose



foundation office. When Lambert meets parents who have experienced the death of a child, she tries to help them understand that it's okay to talk about their loss.

"It's okay to talk about losing a child, and they're not alone," says Lambert, who is the daughter of Steve Mason, director of Brethren Foundation Inc., and granddaughter of former district executive and Annual Conference moderator Joseph Mason. "It sometimes feels like a taboo subject, like you're supposed to cover it up, brush it aside, and pretend it never happened. When people ask, 'How many children do you have?' that's hard to answer. You often feel like you can't discuss it. But these children are still part of your family no matter how long you had them with you or how you lost the child. They made an impact and every life is valuable."

Answering God's call

While the journey through grief isn't one that Harlow would have willingly chosen, she feels that God is using her experience to minister to others. Now serving as interim pastor at Dayton (Va.) Church of the Brethren, she is learning about other types of grief. Recently, for example, she has noticed the role that grief plays in changing relationships between adult children and aging parents.

"I've always been drawn to people in grief, but I never knew what that meant for me," says Harlow. "My own experience with losing Sadie and my work through the Sadie Rose Foundation have taught me a lot, and it has expanded my heart to people who are experiencing grief—of whatever the source might be, not just child loss."

While her own faith in God gave her strength in the aftermath of losing Sadie, working with others who face similar losses has convinced her of the importance of walking closely with Jesus Christ.

"There's a lot of joy, and there's a lot of grief in this life," Harlow says. "But there is a difference between those who grieve in hope and those who grieve without hope. Faith plays an integral role in how people cope with grief. And it doesn't mean that someone who has a strong faith doesn't grieve. You can experience the deepest, darkest night of the soul, and yet there's hope that can be found in the midst of grief when you have faith in God."

Despite her own strong faith and view of the Sadie Rose Foundation as a ministry, the organization is not marketed as

a Christian or church-affiliated organization. That's because many people who have lost a child are angry with God, she says. They have a lot of questions for God. And some aren't even Christians. She wants the ministry to be inclusive and supportive of anyone who's experienced the loss of a child, regardless of their religious background.

"These are often the people who need us more than anybody," Harlow says. "I don't want to turn them off. Faith usually becomes a part of our conversations, but I let it happen naturally. For me, as a person of faith, it can be tough to listen to someone who is screaming, 'I hate God.' But you have to understand where they're coming from and the pain in their overwhelming grief. At the same time, we have had people have found faith again as they've worked through their grief."

Sadie remains very much a part of the Harlow family, and her picture sits on a shelf in the family's living room. Eli and Elsie each have a stuffed animal, called their "Sadie bear," as a treasure to remember their older sister. The family has many conversations about the parallels of life and nature. Harlow talks to the children about dragonflies, for example. These insects start their life in water, but can't stay there once they are ready to fly. And they never go back down into the water. Much like their precious Sadie in Heaven.

"It's not just one single thing we do to remember Sadie—we just talk about her a lot," Harlow says. "As a society, we've made death uncomfortable. Part of my life's mission is to confront that and accept that this is a part of life. Sometimes, as Christians, we tend to sterilize our gospel. We want to remove hardship and suffering and pain from our vernacular. But instead of always removing hardships, scripture gives us wonderful examples of God meeting people in hardships. The incarnation and cross of Christ are the ultimate examples of God stepping down to enter into the sufferings of humanity. Not only does Christ walk with us through pain, but he extends the invitation for us to surrender our sufferings to him."

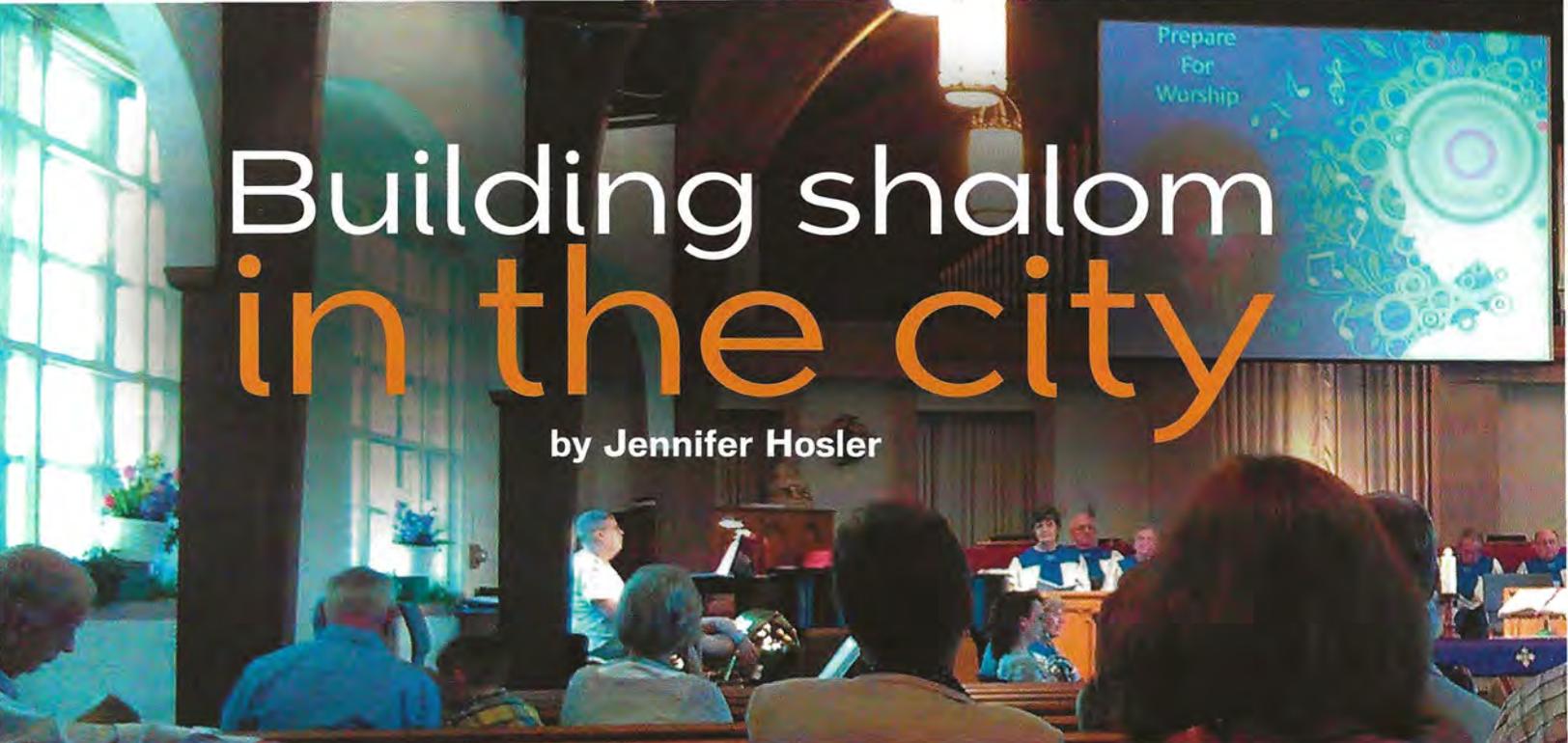
"That's how I perceive my ministry through the Sadie Rose Foundation," Harlow adds. "To be an extension of the arms of Christ. To enter people's journeys of suffering. To be a sacred pain-holder of those grieving the death of a child, and to gently point them to Christ, who meets us in our sorrow." ❧

Karen Doss Bowman, a member of Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in the Shenandoah District, lives in Bridgewater, Va.

...it doesn't mean that someone who has a strong faith doesn't grieve. You can experience the deepest, darkest night of the soul, and yet there's hope that can be found in the midst of grief when you have faith in God.

Building shalom in the city

by Jennifer Hosler



In the small city of Trotwood, Ohio, the Holy Spirit is slowly revealing a new way forward for the sisters and brothers of Trotwood Church of the Brethren. While, to some, the city's situation may look bleak, the congregation is pressing forward with a different vision: one that shows a city of wholeness, justice, and well-being.

I visited Trotwood Church of the Brethren in May. My time there was both intense and joyful, with seven one-on-one interviews and a lunch-based group conversation over two days. In the interviews, words of hope and tears of joy accompanied stories of change, descriptions of pain and struggle, and expectations for the future. Like many members of churches located in transitioning communities, they are not exactly sure what the future holds. Yet in spite of uncertainty, they continue to walk forward, seeking the well-being of a city struggling with decline, violence, and poverty.

Musical. Family. Open. These were the most common descriptors of Trotwood Church of the Brethren. And each word held true as I met with, ate with, and worshiped with sisters and brothers there. During worship, their musical heritage was evident: a significant proportion of the 100 attendees were up front in the choir or orchestra. When I heard the church share, listen, and pray for

each other during joys and concerns, it was apparent that they supported each other like family. As I listened to my interviewees describe the church's ministries and opportunities for community involvement, their openness to new pathways of mission became evident.

One of the ways that pastor Paula Bowser explains her vision for Trotwood is through Jeremiah 29:7. In her paraphrase: "Seek the shalom of the city to which I have called you into exile, because when the city prospers, you will prosper." Seeking the *shalom*—the Hebrew word often translated as "peace" in the Old Testament— involves working for justice, well-being, and wholeness. This vision shapes how the Trotwood congregation lives out God's mission in their community.

A changing city

Trotwood is located just outside of Dayton, Ohio. What was once a village became a suburb and then an urban center, albeit one now with a diminishing population. In the 1950s, the Trotwood church had around 700 members, many of whom were professionals, civil servants, or educators—leaders in

their community. During that era, the school superintendent, the treasurer, the high school principal, the elementary school principal, and many teachers were members at Trotwood. The city's population, at that point, was primarily of European descent.

In the 1970s and 1980s, middle-class African-Americans



Youth of The Peace Place gather for a "selfie."

Trotwood Church of the Brethren



Jennifer Hosler

began to move out of Dayton and into Trotwood, seeking its high-quality school system. As African-Americans moved in, white residents began to move out. Even after the civil rights movement, many white Americans did not want to live alongside black neighbors.

Eventually, economic changes affecting the United States began to hit Trotwood. Factories and blue-collar jobs closed or moved, leaving fewer opportunities for working and middle-class people. Many left in search of work. The tax base decreased and schools began to struggle, prompting other families to leave. There was an influx of economically disadvantaged persons, many from urban Dayton. The small city began to face challenges typically reserved for larger urban areas: violence, gangs, and drugs. Trotwood, once known for its good schools, became known as the community to avoid.

Despite these challenges, however, there are bright spots of hope for the church and the community.

Retired Brethren pastor and denominational executive Glenn Timmons was one of four from the Trotwood congregation to attend the 2009 On Earth Peace workshop, "You Can't Stop the River." Held in Kansas City, Mo., the event presented by the Brethren organization focused on community change for congregations. Timmons described the event as the catalyst for a long discernment process that eventually birthed "The Peace Place," a community nonprofit established in 2012 in Trotwood. The Peace Place uses the Agape-Satyagraha cur-

riculum, which originated at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren and has now been launched nationwide through On Earth Peace. The organization's board represents an array of community leaders from city government, the education system, and the faith community. Every Wednesday evening, mentors from across the community help local youth learn nonviolent conflict resolution skills.

A free evening meal serves as an incentive to draw in youth, but The Peace Place members keep coming back because of its safe setting and positive relationships.



Trotwood Church of the Brethren

Volunteers from Trotwood Church of the Brethren help give a local park, John Wolfe Park, a "face lift." The event, supported from churches all across Trotwood, involved repainting a pavilion and planting 27 trees.

“ Seeking the *shalom* involves working for justice, well-being, and wholeness. This vision shapes how the Trotwood congregation lives out God’s mission in their community.



Every Wednesday evening, The Peace Place offers local youth a free meal and lessons in nonviolent conflict resolution skills.

“Some of the kids have said that the mentors at The Peace Place provide a safe place to be on Wednesday nights,” says Jen Scarr, a Bethany Seminary student who worked as interim program director during the 2013-2014 school year. “They’ve used the word family quite a bit. ‘This is my family,’ they say. ‘This is the place that takes care of me. You guys care for me.’ They keep coming back because they feel safe with us.”

Beyond their involvement with The Peace Place, members of the church are also working to bring about peace in their city through a new community partnership called Trotwood Neighborhood Transformation (TNT). TNT is built upon years of relationship-building among church members, school workers, and civic leaders, much of it fostered through the Trotwood Ministerium. In April 2014, faith leaders, congregations, and civic leaders gathered to receive training in asset-based community development. This approach utilizes community strengths and resources in order to promote positive change and community improvement.

Challenges and opportunities

Just as the city’s population has been in decline, so too has the Trotwood congregation experienced a downturn in membership. The decline in numbers imposes financial and human challenges to the congregation’s ministry, even though The Peace Place, a church-based food pantry, a school-church partnership, and a mission to Guatemala would seem to belie that fact. The decline is due in part to the aging of long-term members and also to the changing demographics of Trotwood. Though more diverse than many Brethren congregations, the Trotwood church is still predominantly white. The city of Trotwood is mostly black, with 68 percent African-American and 28 percent white.

Most of the members I spoke with noted that worship culture and style represent an obstacle when it comes to

Pastor Paula Bowser with a member of The Peace Place



Trotwood Church of the Brethren

the congregation’s appeal to the community at large. Several said that worship and cross-cultural challenges are key issues that the church must address if it hopes to attract members from the city itself. (Many members live outside of Trotwood.) Some steps have been taken, including the use of Steve and Kathy Reid’s Covenant Bible Study, *Uncovering Racism* (Brethren Press, 1999), during an adult Sunday school series. The Peace Place’s board of directors is intentionally multi-ethnic, and its new executive director, Georgia Alexander, is African-American.

Despite this progress, some said that continued discernment was needed regarding race relations and cross-cultural competencies, and in order to take stock of the church’s strengths, weaknesses, and future goals for ministry in a changing community.

A hopeful future

When I asked about the congregation’s strengths, several people mentioned their pastor, Paula Bowser, who has attempted to help the church go deeper in their relationships and in their care for the community. Some also cited “a really high level of acceptance, openness, and a deep concern for the community as the church’s biggest strengths.

I could sense these assets, which were evident when I heard about how they embraced several African-American youth who attend The Peace Place. The youth were invited and began attending church—but it wasn’t easy. The youths’ lack of familiarity with the church’s etiquette and norms forced members to back up their words of welcome with patience, love, grace, and mutual learning.

After observing their commitment to seeking the *shalom* of the city, I believe this congregation has a bright future, going forward in both uncertainty and certainty—uncertain over what the future may bring, but certain that God will be faithful as they seek to extend Christ’s peace. **ZU**

Stories from the Cities is a project of Church of the Brethren’s Congregational Life Ministries (CLM), presented in conjunction with MESSENGER. This series highlights six urban churches from across the denomination, and is being conducted and written by Jennifer Hosler, licensed minister at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren and community psychologist.



Beyond theological warfare

Glenn Riegel

BOUND TOGETHER IN GOD'S GRACE

by Jonathan Emmons

*Take, o take me as I am.
Summon out what I may be.
Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.*
—John Bell

Over and over, youth sang that simple refrain last summer at the Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference. I had sung these words many times before. They were not new and they are not complicated. But during that week in Fort Collins, Colo., they were profound.

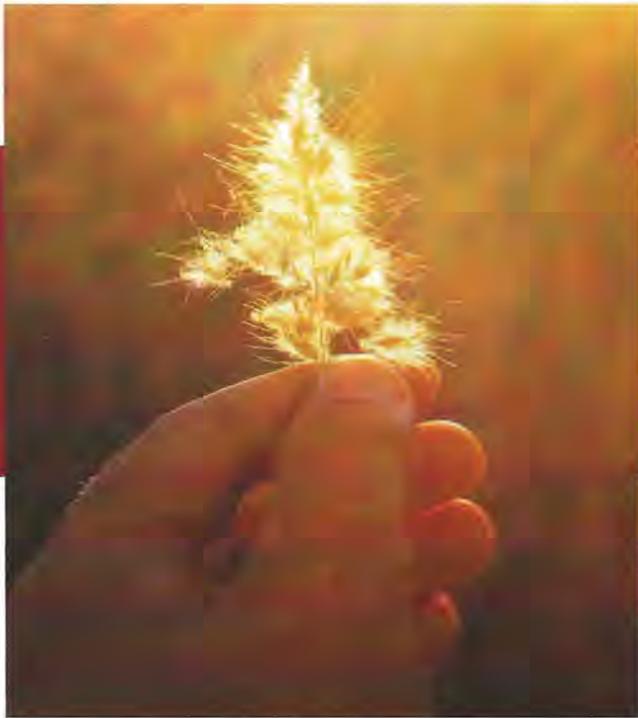
During that week, it became stunningly clear how effectively these three phrases capture the heart of Christian faith. Surrender, transformation, and new life: it's the way of Jesus Christ. This path of discipleship takes courage and commitment, but it is theologically simple. Still, we in the Church of the Brethren often find ourselves broken and divided as our conflicting theologies overshadow our eternal and unchanging God.

Our most vehement disagreements when we debate God's law and its application to our lives. In the fourth chapter

of Paul's letter to the Romans, we encounter Paul's explanation of the law as it pertains to Abraham's faith—our faith.

For the promise that [Abraham] would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Romans 4:13-17, NRSV)

“ Only God can fulfill and transform, and only God knows his plans for fulfillment and transformation within us.



“ God does not desire my domestication or yours; God wants us to run wild in the freedom of God’s Spirit.

If we are reading with open hearts and minds, verses 14-15 should give us pause. Neither clinging to nor disregarding the law is to be our life in Christ. Where do we go from here?

The answer lies in verses 16-17, where Paul draws our attention to grace through faith, then extols its depth and potential, claiming that God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” God’s grace promises us new life! It is through faith that all Christians can be transformed, brought to life, recreated, made righteous, and given wholeness!

Grace is the transformational element that simultaneously binds us to the law—whatever it may be—while also setting us free from it. Glorious paradox! When we accept grace, we take on transformation. When we accept transformation, we work never again to legislate or abolish the law, for Jesus explains: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17, NRSV). Paul reminds us again in Galatians: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” (Galatians 6:15, NRSV). This transformational faith must be our story. This is our call in this world; it is our bridge between this world and the next.

Our God is making all things new. And still, we remain broken and divided.

A close reading of the Scriptures and a true encounter with God remind us that a life of faith is one always in holy tension. The fully realized Christian life is embodied in the continuous progression from our worldliness into our Christ-likeness, between our earthly nature and the divine and mysterious nature of our creation in God’s image. The transformative path is often unclear and uncharted, but it is always directed and protected by the light of Christ.

Christianity should be held captive by God’s transforming power. Transformation is arguably the most important and unifying theme of Christianity, and yet it is the part that we cannot readily explain, intellectualize, formalize, or systematize. We are afraid of ambiguity. We shy away from situations in which the answers are not convenient and easy. We are most often uncomfortable with a course of action that doesn’t provide all the answers.

Even those among us who claim a firm grasp of God’s law cannot—must not—claim to comprehend the divine nature of the transformation that aligns us with that law. Only God can fulfill and transform, and only God knows his plans for fulfillment and transformation within us.

God is transforming my life. My path is not always clear, and it is not always comfortable, but through it all, as in Romans 4:17, God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” This brings me great joy and abiding peace, yet it also brings me great sadness, for while my transformation is firmly rooted in the power of God, it seems removed from much of my mainstream Christian experience. Too often, our “conservative” and “progressive” dealings with the law leave little room for God’s transforming power. Church, why have we stripped our Christian experience of its most basic and profound principle?

Through the “conservative” lens, we are made aware of our need for redemption. While the confessional nature of our faith is critical, we must not insist upon redemption without relying on grace. God’s transforming grace leads to righteousness, and yet we prefer to skip directly to morality. And while you may suggest that morality is the first step toward holiness, we should all be keenly aware that moral adherence is all too often accompanied by self-righteous vanity or unhealthy and spiritually stunting suppression. Neither is transformative, and neither authentically encourages or relies on God’s movement in our lives. Each is subtly, yet fundamentally, faithless. The one who has accepted some lawful moral recipe is likely further from salvation than the one who is slowly being engulfed and encompassed by the power of

God's love. Forced heaven is quite simply a veiled region of hell, and it amounts to nothing more than legal propaganda.

Thus, I call my "conservative" brothers and sisters to replace their emphasis on morality with a call to Abraham's faith, proclaiming that discipleship in Christ is the transformative pathway to righteousness. Assimilation to a system of rules is attainable by most animals, but transformation into God's light makes us fully and wonderfully human. God does not desire my domestication or yours; God wants us to run wild in the freedom of God's Spirit.

Through the "progressive" lens, we are reminded of Christ's affinity for those who are marginalized, oppressed, and on the edges of society. This focus on social justice is undoubtedly at the core of Jesus' teachings, but so is spiritual renewal and healing for us all. Our deep desire to free the oppressed cannot blind us to our own need to be liberated by God. We are quick to bind up the broken, but we also must surrender and be bound up—then set free. Our human love for one another leads us all on to God, but it does not match, replace, or have the power of Christ's love for us. You will agree that love always wins, but we must not forget that love also purifies, cleanses, and changes us, summoning out a new creation previously unimaginable to us.

Thus, I call my "progressive" brothers and sisters not to forget that peace and justice must be profoundly personal, too. The social gospel cannot replace the personal one; the personal gospel must instead inspire the social one. God's restoration begins in my heart and in yours. Christian service and love that flow from personal redemption are the only fruits in this world that are profoundly reflective of God's will.

I am being profoundly changed. Had I followed the "conservative" church, I would be trapped beneath a glass ceiling of morality and legalism, blocked from rising into the righteousness that flows from a life of Christian discipleship and that leads to wholeness. Had I followed the "progressive" church, I would have unknowingly isolated myself from a true experience with God, continuing to share deep love with others but never falling into the depths of God's love.

Both sides have forgotten that Christ came so that the law—whatever it is—would be neither legislated nor abolished, neither followed nor forgotten, but profoundly embodied and

fulfilled. When will we stop claiming ownership of the law and instead wholeheartedly receive it as a gift through transformative grace? When we reorient our focus and embrace faith and discipleship, God will transform our souls and our churches. We need look no further than the eighth chapter of Romans for Paul's call to a new life in the Spirit: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8:1-2, NRSV).

We can be transformed and thus set free from the law! Paul's message and my personal story of transformation are a call for change in our approach to the law, a call for you and me to do our part in seeing this change through, and a plea to the church not to block God's righteousness in our lives. Inasmuch as we stand in the way of righteousness, we block the mission, the work, and the miracles of Jesus Christ for one another and for ourselves. We block the very essence of God.

"Conservatives" and "progressives," we must stop and humbly turn to one another, for each side embraces elements that the other too often overlooks. Our isolated approaches are incomplete and will hasten the spiritual death of the church. Each side holds a perspective necessary for the cultivation of faith, discipleship, and profound transformation. Brothers and sisters, we will never resolve our disagreements by positioning and posturing. We cannot claim God's will in a majority. Even our biblical knowledge does not alone lead to transformation and eternal life. Even our most theologically sound biblical interpretations will not completely capture God's profound truth. All these things will let us down, but God's transforming work will never fail us. Nothing lasts longer, nothing shines brighter, and nothing provides life more abundant.

God's transforming grace is sufficient for me, for you, and for us. When we refocus on profound and life-guiding faith and discipleship, we will find the God who has always been among us, longing to transform us, aching to move in our midst. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is 'another way of living.' ❧

Jonathan Emmons is organist and associate director of music at Antioch Church of the Brethren in Rocky Mount, Va., and Memorial United Methodist Church in Thomasville, N.C. He grew up in the Church of the Brethren, and has served as Annual Conference organist, as he did again this summer in Columbus, Ohio.

“All these things will let us down, but God's transforming work will never fail us. Nothing lasts longer, nothing shines brighter, and nothing provides life more abundant.”

Check the back door

by Melody Keller

Have you ever waited for guests to arrive at your house for a visit? Piles of clutter have been collected, cobwebs have been cleared, and culinary treats have been created. You are ready!

The time arrives and you wait, watching from the windows, working at little details that don't matter, waiting by the front door to welcome your anticipated company.

Five minutes pass, then 10, then 20. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. You had planned it precisely, had prepared well, and now you wonder, "What went wrong?" You open the front door and look out, scanning the driveway for any signs of the vehicle that is supposed to be there. You race to the calendar to see if you have the right date. You glance at the phone, willing it to ring to let you know that they are on their way. You tilt your head, listening for the sound of a car door.

However, the driveway is deserted. The date on the calendar is correct. The telephone is silent. You feel uneasy, a bit

dejected, and very disappointed. You take the clutter out of the closets, put the piles back where they had been, and sit down to a delicious dessert that doesn't taste the same without your friends being there. The excitement of an hour ago is lost somewhere behind a cobweb that you noticed had escaped your earlier cleaning efforts.

It's then that you hear something at the back door. It sounds like a herd of elephants trying to make a grand (or not so grand) entrance. People are laughing and calling out "Hello!" They're tripping over boots and shoes in the entrance, trying to get past boxes that are intended for the attic. You spring to your feet to welcome them, wondering why they have come in the back door and why they are so late.

Do you ever think that you have life figured out—that you know how things are going to happen? Have you ever watched your plans fade away, leaving you wondering, "What in the world is going on?"

What about God? Do you feel you have God figured out—that this is the way God works, and no other way? Do you assume that God will come at this time, park in this spot, walk up to this door, turn this doorknob, and walk into your world exactly when you expect? Do you believe that God will not come sooner than you want, or come later than you think?

In Isaiah 55: 8-9 we find these words: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Do you want to hear some good news? We can’t fully understand God! Oh, we try. We put God into our own little boxes. Sometimes we even make God “look” and “act” like us.

dried-up path through the Red Sea.

David was called to face Goliath. He “met” God at the back door, where there were five stones—and it took only one to bring that tall man down.

Esther, faced with life and death, chose to stand for her people, and at the “back door” she met a golden scepter that was raised for her. Thus, there was help for the Jewish people.

Daniel would not stop praying, even if it meant his life, and, for a while, it looked like it would very well cost him just that. What went through Daniel’s mind as he awaited his fate? Did he check the “front door” one more time, thinking that maybe, just maybe, God would be there? When he landed in that den, did he brace himself to be torn to pieces? When did Daniel

How often have we been perched in anticipation by the front door of our lives, watching for God to enter there, only to discover that God is at the back door?

But in reality, God is bigger. Period.

Paul joins the chorus with these words in Romans 11:33: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”

How often have we been perched in anticipation by the front door of our lives, watching for God to enter there, only to discover that God is at the back door? Or that maybe God has already entered and is working and we don’t even realize it!

There are many examples in scripture about this “back door” God.

Noah, a man who found grace in God’s eyes, finds God at the back door with a hammer and a blueprint for a large boat, even though it had never rained before. Talk about a higher way!

Abraham—with his son, Isaac, an altar, a knife, and fire—is another example. Isaac was to be the sacrifice, but then at the back door—at the last moment—the knife is stopped, the test is passed, and a ram is provided.

What about Moses and the Israelites by the Red Sea? There’s water ahead and the Egyptian army behind. Imagine the fear and turmoil. They thought they were to die in that wilderness and complained to Moses. Moses reassured them and then cried to the Lord. It was a desperate situation. Time was of the essence. They were helpless without God’s intervention. But guess who went to the back door? “The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them” (Exodus 14:19). How’s that for back-door protection? The way of deliverance was a

hear the back door close, and realize, with relief, that God had come and that he would not be lunch for the lions after all?

What about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? They were bound for the fiery furnace. They were certain that their God was able to deliver them. Even if God did not, they were determined, still, not to serve the gods of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The fire was so hot that it killed those whose task it was to throw the three Hebrews into the flames. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the front door didn’t open. They were tied up and were thrown into a blazing furnace. But God had slipped in through the “back door” of that inferno and was waiting for them. When they came out of the fire, their bodies were not harmed, their hair was not singed, their clothes were not burned, and they didn’t even smell of smoke. Again we find the back door God.

The story of Christmas highlights, in a wonderful way, our back door God. We wouldn’t have sent a baby. We wouldn’t have told mere shepherds. We wouldn’t have experienced a dirty stable. But we aren’t God. Really, that is the point. God slipped in the back door that night because God knew what we needed. We needed a Savior.

Let’s embrace our God of the back door and not try to regulate how, when, or where God works. And in the quietness of your heart, listen closely for the creaking of your own back door. ❧

Melody Keller lives in Wales, Maine, and is a member of the Lewiston (Maine) Church of the Brethren.

Donations to Nigeria Crisis Fund meet board's matching challenge

More than \$500,000 has been raised for the Nigeria Crisis Fund, meeting a matching challenge issued by the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board last fall. As of Dec.

David Sollenberger



The donations to the Nigeria Crisis Fund and the board's matching challenge totaling \$1 million will help pay for aspects of the crisis response, such as these bags of grain at a school where displaced people live.

31, the Nigeria Crisis Fund had received a total of \$506,100.50 in donations.

"Once again the Brethren have amazed me," commented general secretary Stan Noffsinger. "At a time of year when there are many demands on our finances, members of the church have generously given. We are part of a family of churches that span the globe and when one is in crisis, all join with them, just as the church did after the Haiti earthquake. We don't expect that generosity to wane because we've met the challenge match. We will walk with the Nigerian Brethren through

this time of turmoil so they are not alone.

"We hear frequently from Samuel Dali, president of EYN, that the e-mails and letters and financial assistance serve as a tremendous encouragement at a time when Nigeria is frequently overlooked by the international community," Noffsinger added. "They know their church family cares for them, cares for the displaced people, the orphaned children, and the widows."

The Nigeria Crisis Fund supports the crisis relief effort of the Church of the Brethren working cooperatively with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). For details about this relief effort, go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis.

In October 2014, the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board challenged Brethren to raise a half million dollars for the crisis response effort in Nigeria, pledging to match that with funds from denominational reserves. At that time the board also committed \$500,000 from reserves, and approved an allocation of \$500,000 from the denomination's Emergency Disaster Fund.

The amount cited above does not include an allocation of \$500,000 from the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction, which was given to the denomination's Emergency Disaster Fund with flexibility for part or all of it to support the Nigeria Crisis Response, as the rapidly changing situation in Nigeria requires.

With the matching challenge now met, the Church of the Brethren has more than \$2 million in funds that have been donated or allocated to the Nigeria crisis response effort.

Donations toward the matching challenge came from individuals and congregations, with many church groups holding special fundraisers and events in support of EYN and its members as they continue to face violence in the northeast of Nigeria, and many thousands of Nigerian Brethren are displaced from their homes.

For more information and updates on the Nigeria crisis, go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis/



The ecumenical group that attended the Believers Baptism Consultation in Jamaica included Church of the Brethren representatives Jeff Carter, president of Bethany Seminary, and Bethany faculty member Denise Kettering-Lane.

Ecumenical consultation explores 'believers baptism'

A three-day consultation took place in early January involving representatives from six different "believers baptism" church traditions to share their understandings and practices of baptism, and to explore how their thinking has changed in light of the emerging theological convergence on baptism and growing ecumenical encounter over the past 30 years. This was the first time such a gathering has taken place, and thus represents a historic moment in the life of these traditions.

The traditions who gathered for the event in Kingston, Jamaica, included the Baptists, Brethren, Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Mennonites, and Pentecostals. The 18 participants came from Jamaica, Kenya, Germany, Paraguay, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Dagmar Heller, academic dean of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, and executive for Faith and Order Commission, represented the World Council of Churches.

Church of the Brethren participants were Bethany Theological Seminary president Jeff Carter and Denise Kettering-Lane, assistant professor of Brethren Studies at the Church of the Brethren seminary, sponsored by the general secretary's office. Kettering-Lane presented a paper on behalf of the Church of the Brethren, and Carter co-authored the conference report.

The initiative for the consultation grew out of the annual meeting of the Secretaries of Christian World Communions in 2012, which noted fresh thinking and official agreements around the mutual recognition of baptism between churches who practice "infant baptism" and those who practice "believers baptism."

The agenda of the consultation included pre-

sentations from each of the traditions on their past and current teaching and practice of baptism, with attention to how their understandings have changed or developed, along with the opportunity to discuss the presentations. A representative of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission provided input from the perspective of the wider global discussion on baptism within the ecumenical movement.

Highlights of the consultation, as stated in a report on the meeting, included:

- gratitude for the opportunity to have an open and honest reflection on the meaning, practice, and shared understandings of baptism among participants;
- naming the potential found in the image of "being on a journey" for the Christian life, with different forms and expressions of initiation and confession, while sharing a similar call to discipleship;
- the significance of understanding the Holy Spirit as a source both of our diversity as well as our unity in Christ;
- the need for a re-examination of the language of "sacrament," "ordinance," "sign," and "symbol" as ways to acknowledge that God is the primary actor in baptism;
- the need to recognize the continuity between ecumenical reception of other traditions as church, and the practices that mark each tradition as a unique expression of the body of Christ.

The full text of the report on the meeting will be shared with both the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions and the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC with the hope that it will move the discussion and work on the mutual recognition of baptism and Christian unity forward.

Upcoming events

March 1
Transfiguration
Sunday

March 5 World Day
of Prayer

March 14-16
Mission and
Ministry Board
meeting, hosted at
Lancaster (Pa.) Church of
the Brethren

March 15 One
Great Hour of
Sharing Offering

March 29 Palm
Sunday

April 1-30 Child
Abuse Prevention
Month

April 2 Maundy
Thursday, Church of the
Brethren offices are closed

April 3 Good
Friday, Church of the
Brethren offices are closed

April 5 Easter
Sunday

April 17-20
Ecumenical
Advocacy Days,
Washington, D.C.

April 22 Earth Day

Robert and Linda Shank



A classroom at PUST, the university where Robert and Linda Shank teach in North Korea, helping to enhance agricultural education and food production.

Global Food Crisis Fund supports projects in North Korea, Brazil, New Orleans

The Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) of the Church of the Brethren has announced several recent grants totaling \$22,000. A grant of \$10,000 supports agricultural education in North Korea via the work of Robert and Linda Shank at PUST in Pyongyang, North Korea. A grant of \$10,000 supports a Brethren-led gardening project involving prisoners in Brazil. A grant of \$2,000 supports the work of Capstone 118 to begin a small farmer's market in New Orleans, La.

The allocation of \$10,000 for the work of Robert and Linda Shank with undergraduate and graduate students at PUST is in addition to previous allocations to the project totaling \$6,802.45. The Shanks, along with undergraduate and graduate students they have trained, will continue crop breeding work on corn, rice, other grain crops, and fruit crops, and will add sweet potatoes as a new crop. A significant new emphasis will be working together with nine county nurseries for the distribution of tissue-cultured raspberry plants for sloping marginal lands. This work is done in conjunction with the Ministry of Land and Environmental Planning, a government agency. Funds will be used for field evaluation materials, lab improvements, tissue culture materials, seed stock, and greenhouse supplies.

The allocation of \$10,000 to support the work of the Rio Verde congregation of Igreja da Irmandade-Brasil (Church of the Brethren in Brazil) will aid the work of the church with prison inmates. The Rio Verde congregation, under the direction of pastor José Tavares Júnior, has developed a multi-faceted program working with inmates in the local prison

and their families. This work includes a gardening project involving 32 prisoners, which provides food for meals for 400 inmates at the prison. Four charities in the city also are receiving vegetables to improve the meals they serve to people in their programs.

The grant of \$2,000 to Capstone 118 in New Orleans, which some may know as Capstone Community Gardens and Orchard in the Lower 9th Ward begun by Church of the Brethren member David Young, will aid a farmer's market. Last year Capstone worked with several community partners to begin a small farmers' market as a way of not only providing fresh produce, but also to help local food producers generate some income. The funds will benefit both local producers and recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP—formerly known as food stamps). SNAP recipients who shop at the market would be provided with a coupon which entitles them to 20 percent more free produce when used at the market. The market vendors will collect the coupons and exchange them for reimbursement from Capstone.

Capstone



The Capstone gardening project tends honeybee hives. Here honey is harvested from the honeycombs.

National Council of Churches express outrage and concern after Paris attacks

The US National Council of Churches issued this statement following the terrorist attack and shootings at the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*:

The National Council of Churches joins the world in expressing outrage upon the news of the killings of the 12 employees of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. We condemn the killings, along with any ideology that seeks to silence voices of comment and criticism, especially with the use of extremist violence fueled by political ideology or misguided religious zeal. We also defend the rights of those who critique even that which is deemed sacred and untouchable to others, even as we ask that this critique always take place in a spirit of charity because of the inherent sensitivities.

“At the same time, we fear that this defense of free expression may feed anti-Muslim sentiment and bring further division between Christians and Muslims. We are also aware that this same defense of free expression may be further misinterpreted by extremists as being against Islam itself. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as we speak

out against this act of senseless violence and its perpetrators, we join with Muslims across the globe who are also horrified by this evil.”

NCC president and general secretary James Winkler remarked: “Around the world, millions of Muslims have struggled against oppression in their own societies in order to obtain the very rights that the Paris attackers have attempted to silence. These freedoms are treasured by people of faith everywhere, except by those who follow politically motivated ideologies that seek to violently to stifle them and sow seeds of fear.”

The National Council of Churches is a partner with the Shoulder-to-Shoulder campaign, an effort to resist Islamophobia. It also co-sponsors the National Muslim-Christian Initiative, an ongoing dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

“Tragedies like these, and the unfortunate aftermath that usually follows, underscores the importance of efforts like the ongoing Muslim-Christian dialogue,” said NCC chair Roy Medley. “We are always pleased to work with our dialogue partners, people who show forth the true nature of faith.”



Explore your Brethren roots on a Brethren European Heritage Tour

September 18 to October 1, 2015 Trace the history of the Brethren through The Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland with Anabaptist storyteller John Ruth and tour leader Wilmer Martin.

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– Ted and Sue Noffsinger,
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PERSONNEL CHANGES

Debbie Eisenbise has been hired to fill a director-level position in Congregational Life Ministries, with the main focus of her work to be the National Older Adult Conference (NOAC). **Kim Ebersole's** position as director of Family and Older Adult Ministries has become part-time, effective Jan. 1. As she moves toward retirement, NOAC will be her primary focus until leadership is fully transitioned. Eisenbise is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, has served as a pastor, and from 1989 to 1993 was coordinator of orientation and recruitment for Brethren Volunteer Service. From 1993 to 1996 she was a staff member at Bethany Seminary in the Admissions and Alumni Relations Office.

Also in Congregational Life Ministries, **Gimbiya Kettering** was promoted from coordinator of Intercultural Ministries to director of Intercultural Ministries, in a recognition of the evolving depth and breadth of the position.

Scott Douglas has been named director of Client Relations for Brethren Benefit Trust effective Jan. 5. He has served BBT since Jan. 1, 2009 as director of the Pension Plan and Employee Financial Services and, more recently, director of Employee Benefits.

Loyce Swartz Borgmann, who has served BBT as manager of client relations as part of the Communications Department, has been promoted to assistant director of the new Client Relations Department. She has served BBT since Jan. 2, 2001, beginning as interim

eMountain Communications marketer/sales representative. Since that time, she has served as marketing coordinator, customer representative for the Brethren Foundation, coordinator of Client Relations and, most recently, manager of client relations.

Lynnae Rodeffer has been named interim director of Employee Benefits and will balance her time between the BBT office in Elgin, Ill., and her home office in Snohomish, Wash. She is a long-time member of the Church of the Brethren, and has more than 30 years in the financial services industry, including 17 years at Washington Mutual in Seattle, Wash. She also served as interim director of the Church of the Brethren Credit Union from Jan. 25, 2010, through Oct. 11, 2011.

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Jennifer Quijano
Senior MDiv student

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The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College



The study of the Brethren heritage is a vital part of the Young Center at Elizabethtown College, where stellar resources are attributed to the following:

- Recognition as the world's premier research institute for the study and interpretation of religious groups including the Amish, Brethren, Brethren in Christ, Mennonites and Hutterites.
- The study of Brethren heritage, including a conference on the life of Alexander Mack, Jr. in 2012, welcoming Brethren junior high youth groups to the Center in 2013 and 2014, and hosting a Brethren Heritage Tour for pastors from Shenandoah District in 2014.
- Global connection to Brethren, including hosting Young Center Fellow Musa Mambula (Fellow in 2007) and President of EYN Samuel Dali at the Young Center (in 2013, 2014) to lecture about the recent suffering of EYN in Nigeria.



"The Young Center keeps alive the Anabaptist and Pietist heritage that contributed to the founding of Elizabethtown College and promotes research and learning by scholars and students about the important religious minorities from these movements."

Jeff Bach, Director



Elizabethtown College



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FOR ANABAPTIST AND
PIETIST STUDIES**

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www.ETOWN.EDU

University of La Verne
www.laverne.edu

McPherson College
www.mcpherson.edu

BCA Study Abroad
www.bcanet.org

Enough is enough

Studies show Brethren own guns at a higher percentage than the population at large.

That's not surprising. Guns are tools, indispensable for rural people. Brethren remain that largely rural people.

But unlike other tools, it seems well-nigh impossible for folks to have a discussion about guns in our society without someone turning beet red and busting a blood vessel.



FRANK RAMIREZ

Personally, I wondered if I ought to review *Enough: Our Fight to Keep America Safe from Gun Violence*, by Gabrielle Giffords and Mark Kelly. Nobody listens to anybody else on the subject of guns in America, and everyone's mind is already made up. But that's why Giffords and Kelly wrote this book—to plead with us to listen.

You will recall that Giffords was a US Representative from Tuscon, Ariz., from 2006 to 2012. She was shot through the head by a mentally unstable man at one of her public forums on January 8, 2011. Her assailant had no problem obtaining a gun and ammunition even though his condition was known to many people. In addition to Giffords' catastrophic injuries, six people were killed and many others were wounded in the same attack.

Even as she endured grueling rehabilitation, another equally shocking shooting by another deranged individual took place at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. These events galvanized Giffords and her husband, former astronaut Mark Kelly, to encourage quiet and reasoned discussion by people of good will to address the recent wave of high-profile mass murders by mentally unstable individuals, and the equally shocking fact that government seems unable and unwilling to do anything about it.

This book's co-authors are long-time gun owners who support the right to own firearms. Both collect guns, and enjoy to this day their time spent in target practice.

In their book they address several myths, and counter the

with hard realities. Few people know, for instance, that the so-called Wild West was an era in which guns were checked in at the sheriff's office when cowpokes came to town. Despite what you see on TV westerns and movies, you didn't belly up to the bar with a six-gun at your waist.

They address the assumption held by many that the only way to stop a bad person with a gun is by a good person with a gun. The authors point out, for instance, that at Giffords' shooting the only person at the scene with a gun nearly shot and killed the man who was disarming the assailant.

More to the point, we learn that this is a less dangerous country than it used to be. Homicides are actually going down. This is reflected in the fact that the percentage of Americans who own guns is dropping.

They argue that the ease with which mentally unstable people obtain weapons is fueled in part by fears fanned by gun lobbyists like the NRA, all the while ignoring polls that show the majority of gun owners favor waiting periods, background checks before gun purchases, and the sharing of information about those who are mentally unstable.

The authors track the fear caused by the power of money that silences legislators. They also chronicle their own lack of success in getting politicians to listen or vote on simple common-sense legislation.

I find it is distressing that this subject cannot be discussed in many of our churches, either. Try to talk about central church doctrines and people yawn. Bring up safeguards for gun sales and some people respond with white-hot fury.

Each era's controversies inspire passion, but later we wonder what all the fuss was about. In Paul's day the issues of circumcision and food offered to idols were red meat (pardon the expression) to partisans on both sides of the issue. Now we shrug and wonder what the big deal was.

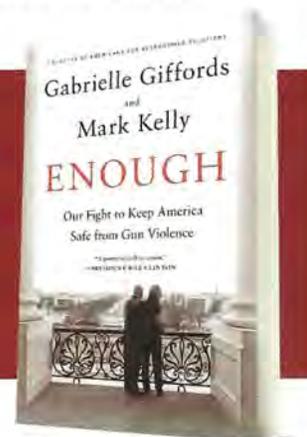
"This is not the America we strive for," Giffords insisted at one congressional hearing. It's not the church we're striving for either. ❧

Frank Ramirez is senior pastor of the Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.,

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Enough: Our Fight To Keep America Safe from Gun Violence*. **Authors:** Gabrielle Giffords and Mark Kelly with Harry Jaffe. **Publisher:** Scribner, New York, September 30, 2014. **Number of pages:** 256. **Price:** \$25.

"Enough is about Giffords' and Kelly's evolution from a political couple, to an inspirational tale of survival and recovery, to committed activists," writes Sam Stein in huffingtonpost.com. "It's a rich read, even if it has an agenda. . . . But the underlying theme of the book is that the political system is tilted in favor of well-heeled interest groups and legislative caution. And for a political neophyte like Kelly, it's jarring to confront."



Youth Peace Travel Team is named for 2015

The **2015 Youth Peace Travel Team** has been announced. The team is cooperatively sponsored by the Outdoor Ministries Association, On Earth Peace, Bethany Theological Seminary, and the Church of the Brethren's Office of Public Witness and Youth and Young Adult Ministry Office.

The four team members for 2015 are: Annika Harley of Madison (Wis.) Mennonite Church and active in Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren; Michael Himlie of Root River Church of the Brethren

in Northern Plains District; Brianna Wenger of Woodbridge Church of the Brethren in Mid-Atlantic District; and Kerrick van Asselt of McPherson Church of the Brethren in Western Plains District.

As the team spends time with youth this summer at camps across the denomination, they will teach about peace, justice, and reconciliation—all core values throughout the Church of the Brethren's 300-plus year history. Follow the ministry of the 2015 Youth Peace Travel Team by visiting www.brethren.org/youthpeacetravelteam.

“Living the Change” is the theme for National Junior High Conference

National Junior High Conference will be held June 19-21 on the campus of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College. The conference will invite youth and their advisors to consider Romans 12:1-2. The theme, “Living the Change: Our Offering to God,” asks participants to consider taking their everyday, ordinary life—sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering.

As junior high youth encounter a number of changes in their lives, the conference will encourage them to live the changes in ways pleasing to God. The event will be enriched by worship speakers Lauren Seganos, Steve Schweitzer, Amy Gall Ritchie, and Eric Bishop. Seth Hendricks will coordinate music, and worship will be coordinated by Rebekah Houff and Trent Smith. In addition to four celebrations of worship, there will be time for learning during workshops and time for play during recreation and evening activities.

Through March 31, the cost is \$160 per person. After March 31, the cost for regular registration is \$185 per person. Travel scholarships are available to those who live west of the Mississippi River. For more information and to register, visit www.brethren.org/njhc or call 847-429-4389. National Junior High Conference is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren Youth and Young Adult Office.



Living the Change:
Our Offering to God

National Junior High
Conference 2015



Room for redemption

There is a tiny room that sits just off my kitchen. It has a very old hardwood floor, and dark wood trim around two big windows that make up the entire south-facing wall. It's furnished with a round wooden table and four chairs, and a narrow bookcase made of refurbished wood and filled with cookbooks and canisters of loose-leaf tea. Above the door frames are thin shelves that stretch the length of two walls, which I use to store jars of summer produce put up between April and October.



MANDY GARCIA

This room is my favorite place to sit in the morning, with a hot cup of coffee and a book (or a notebook, as is the case this morning). The sun reflects off the snow and warms the whole space, which is likely why the cat has graced me with her presence.

But the thing that amazes me about this room is that the previous owners of our house used it to kennel their dogs. When we moved in it smelled like animals and was covered in a layer of grime. The wood floor was scratched and painted red, and the windows were covered with broken shades.

I'll never forget returning home from Annual Conference a few summers ago to the surprise that my husband had spent the week on his hands and knees, working in our little room. He had stripped the floor, pulled out dozens of staples, and oiled it into the beautiful (albeit rustic) floor that it is today. After that initial push, the rest came more easily. Together we washed and painted the walls, and we uncovered the beautiful wood trim around the windows. He built the shelves, and we replaced the broken shades with ones that let the sunshine through. Now here it is, our cozy nook off the kitchen and my favorite morning spot.

Like many relationships, churches, lives, and so many other broken and often mistreated things, the redemption of this room took a little vision, hard work, and perseverance.

I like to think that it also took time on our knees, stripping away layers of dirty, dead things, and anointing with blessed wood oil. It was worth every effort, and has become more than we could've ever made it on our own.

Now, instead of pets, this room regularly holds friends from near and far, meals of all kinds, and conversations that spark new ideas and deep-seated joy. It's a very simple room—four walls and two big windows—but it is lived in deeply, and has been a blessing born of renewal. **W**

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



Homemade salt scrub

In the dry winter months, our skin takes the brunt of many an icy wind. This homemade salt scrub is just the thing to slough off layers of dead cells and leave you feeling clean and refreshed.

In a shower-proof container, mix 1 cup of fine salt (regular table salt is too scratchy) with a ½ cup of neutral oil like almond oil or baby oil.

(Optional: Add essential oils for scent.)

The consistency of this mixture should be like that of wet sand.

After bathing, rub it into your heels and elbows and rinse away the dead skin. (Be careful if you use this rub in the shower as the oil can make it extra slippery.)

Wonderful essay

Christine Smith's essay "Beyond the stained glass ceiling" was simply wonderful! So full of needed and meaningful insights. Smith states truths in a palatable, accessible, and non-provoking way so that more people can hear what she says without feeling attacked or threatened. Her explanation of the "crab in the bucket" mentality is extremely useful to describe the tendency, by those denied opportunities and respect, to push others down. I'm glad to know that she is scheduled to be a speaker at the National Older Adult Conference in September, too.

Rita DeCoursey
Leiden, Netherlands

Giant sunspots?

It is likely that solar radiation, (maybe even giant sunspots, as noted by Don Bruner in the December MESSENGER) plus variations in the Earth's celestial movements, caused the last ice age glacier to recede. However, we are now faced with global warming caused by a marked increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. Climatologists report that this is the result of rising fossil fuel consumption and deforestation that began with the industrial revolution. This is an escalating problem, with the average global temperature having already increased by one degree, and expected to rise higher in the near future.

It appears that 2014 will be the hottest year ever recorded. The polar glaciers are melting, and severe storms and extreme droughts are occurring more frequently. Perhaps it's time for the Brethren to act on their motto of "simple living" by developing a model energy conservation program to reduce fossil fuel consumption. A first step

Send letters to MESSENGER, Attn: Letters, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or email messenger@brethren.org. Please include hometown and phone number.

Letters should be brief, clear, and respectful of the opinions of others, with strong differences handled in the spirit of Matthew 18. Preference is given to letters that respond directly to items in MESSENGER. Anonymous letters will not be considered.

Do you feel called to a career in Nursing?

When she was six years old, Amy told anyone who would listen that one day she was going to be a "baby nurse."

Today she is realizing her dream. As a Certified Nurse Midwife, she envisions working with rural women of low socioeconomic status, or with those on an American Indian reservation.

Amy Hoffman
Northview Church of the Brethren



Can the Church of the Brethren help?

The Nursing Scholarship program is available to members of the Church of the Brethren enrolled in an LPN, RN, or nursing graduate program. **Application deadline is April 1.** Application materials are available at www.brethren.org/nursingscholarships.



Church of the Brethren

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could be setting our home thermostats at 68 in the winter and avoiding air-conditioning as long as it doesn't threaten one's health. As stewards of God's creation, it is important that we act to preserve this beautiful planet.

Dave Fouts
Maysville, West Va.

CLASSIFIEDS

Bethany Seminary Institutional Advancement Opening - Bethany Theological Seminary seeks energetic leader to serve as Executive Director of Institutional Advancement. Major responsibilities as senior administrator are: develop and implement the Seminary's strategic development plan; develop and implement fund-raising strategies for annual, major, and planned gifts; cultivate relationships with Church of the Brethren congregations and constituents; supervise the institutional advancement department. Qualifications: proven leadership in institutional advancement and fund-raising, commitment to Church of the Brethren values, bachelor's degree (graduate degree preferred). Full position description at www.bethanyseminary.edu/opportunities/employment. Women, minorities, and persons with disabilities encouraged to apply. Review of applications begins February 1, 2015, continuing until appointment is made. Send application letter, CV, names and contact information for three references: Rev. Dr. Jeff Carter, President, Bethany Theological Seminary, 615 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374-4019, president@bethanyseminary.edu

"1001 Arabian (days and) Nights" Adventure Travel with us to Dubai and Oman—the mysterious land of camels, dhows, and souks, yet also with skyscrapers, including the world's highest building. Experience modern city life and Bedouin culture in the desert. October 2-13, 2015. For information on this opportunity to experience a unique culture, please contact J. Kenneth Kreider, 1300 Bear Creek Road, Elizabethtown PA 17022, or kreiderk@etown.edu.

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.

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039, ext. 520; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

Bassett, Va.: Greg McAlexander
Bethany, Stett, Mo.: Misty Frazer
Bush Creek, Monrovia, Md.: Leo Barnes, Melissa Barnes
Champaign, Ill.: William Kuykendall, Stephanie Kuykendall
Chiques, Manheim, Pa.: Lois Yeater, Kean Dubble
Evergreen, Stanardsville, Va.: Andrew Patrick Kelliher, Sherry Ann Moubray, James Harvey Moubray
Freeburg, Paris, Ohio: Ema Simmons, Carlyn English, Robert Cessna
Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.: Adam Warner, Sue Mishler
Greenwood, Mountain Grove, Mo.: Dale Schaeffer
Harrisburg, First, Harrisburg, Pa.: Jillian Patterson, Tracy Ramirez, Tonya Long, Philip Lapine
Hempfield, Manheim, Pa.: Darren Meiser, Laura Meiser
HIS Way, Mills River, N.C.: Salvador Lopez Hernandez, Osvaldo Davila, Sr., Gabriel Montero Holt, James Holt, Georgina Montero, Jennifer Cuarenta, Fiorella Mendez
Hollins Road, Roanoke, Va.: Glenn Sink, Nancy Sink, Shelby Mowles, Judith Farano, Amanda Byers, Jason Byers, Heather Bennett, Dale Bennett, Cindy Crouch, Tony Crouch, Heather Crouch, Mark Booth, Carl Glass, Faith Craft, Brandy West, Robin Kidd, Debra Dudley, Shyanne Powell, Deborah Williamson, Travis Foley, Leslie Foley, Buddy Crumpacker, Linda Crumpacker
Hope, Wynn, Ark.: Summer Rogers, Hayden Curtis
Ivy Farms, Newport News, Va.: Gloria Williams
Kokomo, Ind.: Keith Burke, Jolie Good, Branson Good,

Donnie Smith, Stephanie Smith, Marcia Floyd
Lancaster, Pa.: Sadie Bowser, Alex Nye, Paige Snyder, Deborah Hall
Little Swatara, Bethel, Pa.: Emma Stupp, Lydian Stupp, Matthew S. Christ, Denise Christ, Thomas Schwenk, Bonnie Schwenk, Kevin Schwenk
Live Oak, Calif.: Mike Thomas, Jessie Thomas
Madison, Brightwood, Va.: Elijah Priest, Colby Messinger
Manor, Boonsboro, Md.: Shannon Peters, Janice Barnhart, Jeff Planck, Nancy Webster Reed, Warwick Browning, Joel Guyton, Kevin Unger, Shannon Unger, Fred Kretzer
Messiah, Kansas City, Mo.: Samuel Gahm
Middle Creek, Lititz, Pa.: Earl Smoker, Vera Smoker, Elise Balmer, Ethan Balmer, Janae Bollinger, Reagan Kline, Colby Martin, Jayda Thomas
Mohican, West Salem, Ohio: Kathy Sampsel, Eileen Balliett, Zachary Berry, Stephanie Martinez, Laura Williams, John Donnelly, Tiffany Donnelly, David King, Tabitha King, Kelton Kunkle, Hannah Osborn, Doris Reichard, Devon Williams, Zachary Workinger, Ted Workinger, Samantha Workinger, Dallas Martin, Troy Martin, Heather Osborn, Elvin Beswick, Nancy Beswick, Beau Rector, Kelly Rector
Mountain Grove, Fulks Run, Va.: Lewis Slater, Emily Jenkins, Kendra Schmidt, Colton Bowman, Bryce Keller, Dietrich Wetzel, Dickie Funkhouser, Nadia Armentrout
Peoria, Ill.: John Barrick
Ridge, Shippensburg, Pa.: Brad Shearer, Lauren Shearer
Somerset, Pa.: Maria Barnick, Dave Barnick, Kayla Barnick, Vanessa Hillard, Dave Leslie, Angie Leslie, Tim Resh, Janet Resh
Staunton, Va.: Kaila Broderick, Zachary Curry, John Crawford, Eva Frederick, Brennen Gilbert, Isaac Sanger, Cameron Sellers, Carson Sellers, Chris Washington
West Charleston, Tipp City,

Ohio: Joshua Kraus, Caitlin Bernard
West Green Tree, Elizabethtown, Pa.: Dane Youtz, Lauren Youtz, Randy Youtz, Anita Youtz, Lexi Youtz, Dustin Youtz, Dana Youtz, Marlin Kerchner, Lisa Kerchner, Jim Shumate, Dolly Shumate, Matt Ramsey, Julie Arndt, Clint Arndt, Ryan Arndt, Eugene Walmer, Betty Walmer
West York, York, Pa.: Anna McMonigle
White Oak, Manheim, Pa.: Katie Jo Reeves, Dustin Snyder, Shaina Snyder, Bethany Clapper, Laura Patches, Erika Kline, Ryan Longenecker, Hendrik Nolt, Blake Patches, Darin Patches, Tyson Snyder, Adrienne Snyder
Wyomissing, Pa.: Jennifer Garner, John Hane III

Wedding Anniversaries

Bartholomew, John and Ruth, Lisbon, Ohio, 63
Brodzinski, John and Joanne, Alliance, Ohio, 60
Brubaker, Paul and Evy, Ephrata, Pa., 50
Cory, Norm and Martha, Kokomo, Ind., 60
Feasenhiser, Ken and Bethel, Fruitland, Idaho, 50
Frey, Vernon J. and G. Berdine, Goshen, Ind., 70
Hartman, Ray and Christeen, Roanoke, Va., 55
Hauser, Jerry and Barbara, Oakland, Md., 50
Hodges, Bill and Rachel, Boones Mill, Va., 50
Hodges, Marshall and Carol, Callaway, Va., 55
Horn, Dennis and Carol Garver, Wabash, Ind., 50
Kover, Virgil and Floy, Lancaster, Pa., 65
Long, Lawrence and Hazel, Boonsboro, Md., 71
Merritt, Karl F. and Bonnie Dee Freed, North Manches-ter, Ind., 55
Moyer, Lloyd and Naomi, Bethel, Pa., 55
Myer, Hershey and Anna Mary, Womelsdorf, Pa., 70
Neal, Roger and Bonnie, Elkhart, Ind., 50
Rankin, Stanley and Amy, Uniontown, Pa., 50
Rohrer, Wilbur and Judy, Lititz, Pa., 50
Rummel, Marion and Vera, Paris, Ohio, 60

Teets, David and Wilma Mae, Eglon, W.Va., 66
Tomaine, Bill and Jane, Ruckersville, Va., 50
Weiss, Bob and Mabel Lou, Staunton, Va., 50
Winters, Claude and Bonnie Jean Miller, Eglon, W.Va., 70

Deaths

Allen, Lulu Marie Cunningham, 97, Fairview, Pa., Dec. 12
Anderson, Ruth Agnes, 70, Portland, Ore., Dec. 18
Ayers, Karen Lorraine, 59, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 13
Ayers, Marion Adele Spickard, 84, Roanoke, Va., Oct. 26
Baker, Kathy Faye, 59, Chambersburg, Pa., Dec. 13
Baxter, Jean N. Maust, 89, Gibbon Glade, Pa., Nov. 1
Becker, J. Franklin, 86, Manheim, Pa., May 23
Berkley, Nancy Ruth Noonkester, 84, Dry Fork, Va., Oct. 29
Bohrer, C. Wendell, 85, Sebring, Fla., Jan. 15
Boitnott, James Christopher, 96, Rockwood, Pa., Jan. 5
Bowers, Violet Mae Burner, 84, Maurertown, Va., Dec. 25
Buch, Alverta Balmer, 97, Lititz, Pa., Oct. 1
Burkholder, Mary Lou Myers, 87, Gettysburg, Pa., Dec. 24
Byrne, Shelly D., 63, Homeworth, Ohio, Nov. 8
Campbell, William Edward, 89, Stuarts Draft, Va., Nov. 27
Castle, Robert W., 88, Dixon, Ill., Jan. 14
Cessna, Sheron Ann Sutton, 71, East Canton, Ohio, Jan. 5, 2014
Cook, Helen Lorraine Wagner, 99, Des Moines, Iowa, Dec. 17
Davis, Dale Allen, 82, Bartonville, Ill., Dec. 22
DeLoach, Lorene Rorrer, 76, Collinsville, Va., Oct. 27
Dettra, Mary F. Shaver, 79, McLean, Va., Nov. 3
Dhue, Noble Jack, Jr., 79, Greensboro, Md., Jan. 1
Diffenderfer, Alvin W., 90, Manheim, Pa., Aug. 9
Eanes, Bobby Cecil, 74, Bassett, Va., April 19, 2014
Ecenroad, William, Jr., 86, Ephrata, Pa., Oct. 28

Enfield, Warren George, 98, Somerset, Pa., Nov. 12
Fackler, Janice Elaine, 70, Syracuse, Ind., Feb. 10, 2014
Fike, Kathryn Virginia Methner, 95, Coleman, Mich., Oct. 2
Flora, Fred, 95, Roanoke, Va., Jan. 5
Fulesdy, Charles Andrew, 93, Alexandria, Va., Nov. 9
Gallego, Frank A., 83, Arlington, Va., June 29
Galloway, Dorothy Lucille, 93, Kokomo, Ind., Jan. 6, 2014
Geib, Alta Mae, 81, Landisville, Pa., Nov. 15
Gish, Carl Martin, 75, Landisville, Pa., Dec. 21
Greer, Helen J., 92, Plymouth, Ind., Nov. 30
Groff, Miriam R., 75, Stevens, Pa., Oct. 29
Heller, Jack B., 83, Windber, Pa., Jan. 11
Henderson, Katherine Jackson, 92, Dayton, Ohio, Jan. 9
Henretty, Martha Virginia, 101, Knoxville, Md., Sept. 13
Heptinstall, Kevin L., 60, Roanoke, Va., May 23
Hoffmaster, Karl, 75, Knoxville, Md., Sept. 17
Holland, Dorothy M., 97, Wenatchee, Wash., Jan. 17
Humelsine, Julia Mary, 95, Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 1
Hunn, Donald Richard, 69, Harrisburg, Pa., Nov. 30
Jenkins, Angela Paige, 36, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 20
Knically, Ken, 82, Bristow, Va., Sept. 28
Koop, Joyce Ann Armstrong, 78, Gaston, Ind., June 14
Leasure, Emogene H., 95, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 27
Liggett, Julie Sue, 75, Thornton, Colo., Nov. 28
Mabe, Roland Wallace, 71, Woodlawn, Va., Nov. 29
Mathis, Andrew Gladden, 90, Tampa, Fla., Aug. 18
McClay, George Eric, 44, McFarland, Calif., Dec. 6
Medley, Roy Wayne, 71, Roanoke, Va., Nov. 7
Mellot, Launa Draper, 83, Boonsboro, Md., May 26
Merkey, Frances, 85, Ankeny, Iowa, Oct. 29
Merritt, Karl F., 76, North Manchester, Ind., Nov. 23
Metcalf, Mary Lou Miller, 84, Knoxville, Md., Dec. 27
Miller, Charles, 89, Boons-

boro, Md., April 2, 2014
Miller, Ernest H., 89, Lancaster, Pa., June 14
Miller, Peter S., 81, Elkhart, Ind., Dec. 1
Miller, Wilbur D., 87, Rockwood, Pa., Nov. 2
Mishler, Mary Ellen Stutzman, 84, Hollsopple, Pa., Dec. 19
Mitchell, Huston O., 87, South Bend, Ind., Dec. 29
Moore, Miriam Gloyd Utz, 98, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 3
Nolen, Linda Mitchell, 75, Floyd, Va., Nov. 13
O'Neil, Carol Roberts Bryant, 45, Botetourt, Va., May 5
Pardee, Ruth A., 79, Williamston, Mich., April 7
Perrin, Fred J., 79, Everett, Pa., Dec. 11
Pickle, Maxine Brubaker, 99, Wabash, Ind., Sept. 13
Place, Allen, 85, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 19
Roeder, Betty Jean Markley, 88, Peoria, Ill., Oct. 29
Rogers, Elizabeth J., 90, McPherson, Kan., Dec. 19
Rohrbaugh, Dale, Sr., 90, Spring Grove, Pa., Sept. 17
Rohrbaugh, Marlet, 75, Spring Grove, Pa., July 19
Rose, Hattie Clark, 96, Bassett, Va., Nov. 12
Rounds, Betty J., 82, Alliance, Ohio, March 20, 2014
Rowe, Eleanor Jane, 82, Westminster, Md., Nov. 1
Sauder, Dorothy, 89, Manheim, Pa., Sept. 27
Savage, Ruth E., 96, Gibbon Glade, Pa., Nov. 27
Schlemmer, Stanley L., 83, North Liberty, Ind., Dec. 19
Seese, Katherine Ruth, 89, Easton, Md., Dec. 16
Shaffer, James, 68, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 14
Shaffer, Janet Faye, 68, Somerset, Pa., Oct. 28
Shaul, Evelyn Lucille Mellott, 91, Fairplay, Md., April 6, 2014
Sheeler, Lucy Catherine, 98, Somerset, Pa., Sept. 22
Shifflett, Prentiss, 92, Harrisonburg, Va., Jan. 6
Shindlecker, Mary Basore, 94, Shippensburg, Pa., Oct. 10
Showalter, Ruth McDaniel Garst, 100, Chester, Va., Dec. 29
Sink, James Howard, 90, Roanoke, Va., Jan. 2
Smart, John H., 91, New Carlisle, Ohio, Dec. 13
Smith, Colleen Alice Bean,

67, Peoria, Ill., Jan. 9
Smith, Samuel T., 64, West Chicago, Ill., Dec. 11
Snavey, Elsie Mae, 91, Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 12
Stauffer, Dorothy, 88, Manheim, Pa., Nov. 3
Stine, Donald E., 88, Dover, Pa., April 2, 2014
Studer, Thomas Paul, 65, Wooster, Ohio, Nov. 10
Stump, June R., 93, North Liberty, Ind., Jan. 6
Swanson, Carl Richard, 93, New Carlisle, Ohio, Nov., 24
Swigart, Roger P., 79, Ephrata, Pa., Oct. 28
Swope, Carolyn Miller, 86, Easton, Md., Oct. 19
Thomas, Helen Nester, 95, Bedford, Va., Dec. 23
Thompson, R. Jan, 79, Bridgewater, Va., Jan. 12
Tosten, Esther L. Holtry, 76, Shippensburg, Pa., Dec. 9
Turner, Walter D., 86, Bassett, Va., Oct. 22
Vernon, Mary Curry, 78, Douglasville, Ga., April 28, 2014
Walborn, Romaine K., 90, Fredericksburg, Pa., June 28
Wartluft, Donald Wood, 85, Alliance, Ohio, Jan. 10, 2014
Weisgerber, Joyce E. Simpson, 95, Gettysburg, Pa., Dec. 24
Weller, Fern L. Hartman, 86, Sinking Spring, Pa., Sept. 9
White, Stanley H., 94, Manheim, Pa., May 24
Whited, Mary, 91, New Carlisle, Ohio, Dec. 13
Wilkins, Paul Harlan, 74, Fulks Run, Va., Oct. 11

Licensings

Bartley, Les, N. Ohio Dist (Pleasant View, Elida, Ohio), Nov. 16
Collett, Wiley Arnold, S. Ohio Dist. (Troy, Ohio), Dec. 28
Farrar, Stephen M., Shen. Dist. (Sunrise, Harrisonburg, Va.), Jan. 11
Hollsopple, William, N. Ohio Dist. (Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio), Jan. 11
Kell, Mark, N. Ohio Dist. (Mount Pleasant, North Canton, Ohio), Dec. 14
Michael, Judith Colleen, Pac. N.W. Dist. (Wenatchee Brethren/Baptist, Wenatchee, Wash.), Jan. 4
Rudy, Tabitha Hartman, Virgina Dist. (Monte Vista, Callaway, Va.), Nov. 9

Ordinations

Baker, Paul Maynard, Virgina Dist. (Saunders Grove, Moneta, Va.), Jan. 11
Boughton, Ellis, Ill. & Wis. Dist. (Yellow Creek, Pearl City, Ill.), Dec. 13
Hollenberg-Duffey, Audrey, Mid.-Atl. Dist. (Westminster, Md.), Aug. 31
Hollenberg-Duffey, Timothy, Mid.-Atl. Dist. (Westminster, Md.), Aug. 31
Kinsel, Sarah, Pac. N.W. Dist. (Peace, Portland, Ore.), Dec. 21
Leck, Joshua R., W. Plains Dist. (Monitor, McPherson, Kan.), Dec. 28
Payne, Deborah L., Southeastern Dist. (Spindale, N.C.), Dec. 28
Vaught, Vassie A., Jr., Virgina Dist. (Saint Paul, Cana, Va.), Oct. 12

Placements

Bailey, Dallas Lyn, associate pastor, Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va., Jan. 1
Colley, Brad M., from associate pastor to pastor, Dupont, Ohio, Sept. 1
Foley, W. Leonard, associate pastor, Pleasant Dale, Fincastle, Va., Sept. 1
Hollsopple, William, pastor, Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio, Jan. 4
Kinsel, Sarah, from interim pastor to pastor, Peace, Portland, Ore., Sept. 14
Lohr, Cecil M., pastor, Sipesville, Pa., Jan. 1
Martin, Michael D., pastor, Elkhart Valley, Elkhart, Ind., Dec. 9
Matteson, Russell L., from team pastor, Modesto, Calif., to district executive/minister, Pacific Southwest District, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 16
Matthews, Philip, pastor, Wiley Ford, W. Va., Jan. 1
Sable, Alix, from pastor, Maranatha Multicultural Fellowship, Lancaster, Pa., to associate pastor, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 1
Sisitki, Kimberly A., pastor, Robinson, Pa., Jan. 1
Stutzman, Paul F., pastor, Fraternity, Winston-Salem, N.C., Jan. 12
Wine, Daniel M., pastor of visitation, Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 1

The runt of the litter?

Maybe it's just me, but, of all the Christian holy days, holidays, and seasons, it seems that Lent gets the short end of the stick. At least that's been my sense growing up in the Brethren corner of the Protestant tradition. Other faith groups—the ones with more pageantry, robes, and incense—seem to approach it with more gusto.

It's not that we Brethren don't observe it. We do. We have Lenten focus groups and Lenten sermons, and Brethren Press offers a Lenten devotional. There are even Lenten screensaver images (www.brethren.org/lent-screensavers.html). But next to Easter, Advent, and Christmas, Lent seems to be the runt of the holiday litter.



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER EDITOR

Still, I thought I should verify my hunch, so I did some research. According to Richard Wagner in *Christianity for Dummies* (a source revered by all serious theologians), "Some Protestant denominations observe Lent (such as Anglican and Episcopalian), but many

Protestant churches attach less significance to the season of Lent than to the individual holy days leading up to Easter."

In an essay for townhall.com about Ash Wednesday, which kicks off Lent, Rebecca Hagelin writes, "Unlike Christmas and Easter or even Mardi Gras, this 'holy day' is often overlooked. Most of us overlook it for one of two reasons: we don't understand it, or we prefer to only celebrate the 'fun' holidays. I have found this to be particularly true among Protestants (of which I am one) who often seem to have missed out on the

OK—apparently it's not just me. Assuming it's true, maybe we should consider doing a little more with this holy season than downloading new screensavers or giving up chocolate.

At its core, Lent is about reflection and repentance. It is a time for examining the essential values of our faith. It is about centering ourselves and considering once again what it means to follow the teachings of Jesus. It is about coming to terms with our weaknesses, renewing our commitments, and opening ourselves to God's grace.

"Lent was first observed in the fourth century as the 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter," Wagner explains. "Its focus was on self-examination and self-denial, and Christians used *fasting* (abstaining from eating food) in the early years as a visible demonstration of this process."

During Lent, Hagelin writes, "we commit to searching our hearts. Instead of feasting at parties, we let ourselves be hungry and we remember our need. We choose to spend time and energy in prayer and meditation, reading and seeking truth, ready to let God reveal our weaknesses, ready for our hearts to soften and break from the knowledge of our own sinfulness. Then God is able to reshape our hearts, our relationships and our lives."

Time for prayer and meditation—really? With our hectic schedules?

"The idea behind Nowhere—choosing to sit still long enough to turn inward—is at heart a simple one," Pico Iyer writes in *The Art of Stillness—Adventures in Going Nowhere*. "If your car is broken, you don't find ways to repaint its chassis; most of our problems—and therefore our solutions, our peace of mind—lie within." And, later, "The need for an empty space, a pause, is something we have all

It is about coming to terms with our weaknesses, renewing our commitments, and opening ourselves to God's grace.

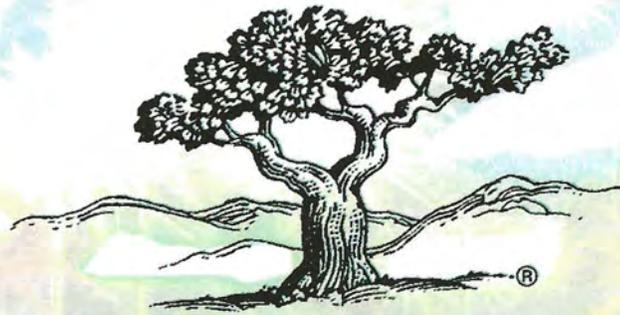
blessings of the full Lent and Easter seasons."

Could it have something to do with American evangelicalism that has crept into the Church of the Brethren over the past several decades? Whitney Hopler, writing for crosswalk.com, observes, "Lent is often overlooked by evangelical churches that eschew the liturgical calendar in favor of following their own themes for sermons and activities. And evangelical churches that do follow liturgy sometimes give short shrift to Lent."

felt in our bones; it's the rest in a piece of music that gives it resonance and shape." Lent is the perfect time for finding that empty space.

Lent may remain the runt of the holiday litter. But, if we have neglected it—or if we think of it mainly as that season where we have to find some minor indulgence to sacrifice—then I suggest we reconsider it. In doing so, we may discover that Lent can help us find ways to restore resonance and shape in our own lives. 

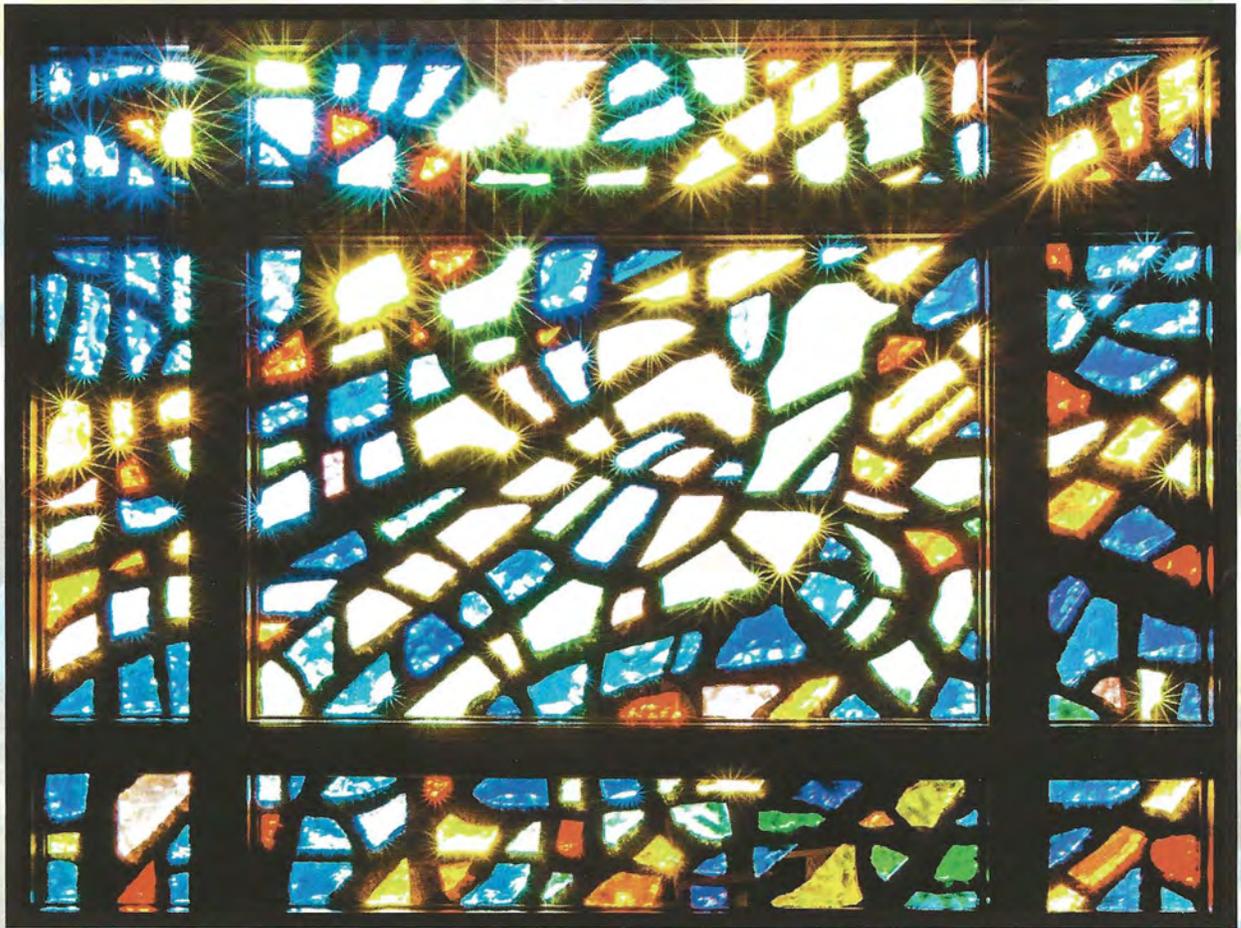
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1 Cor. 12:26 (GNT)

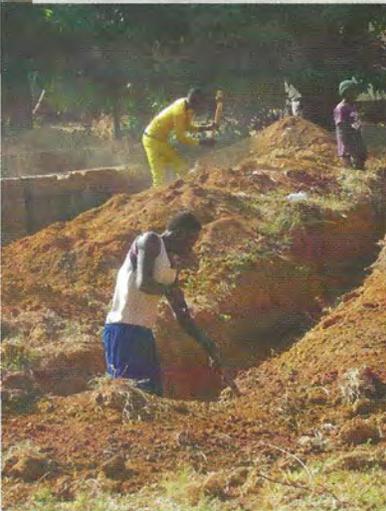
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