

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSINGER

MAY 2015 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

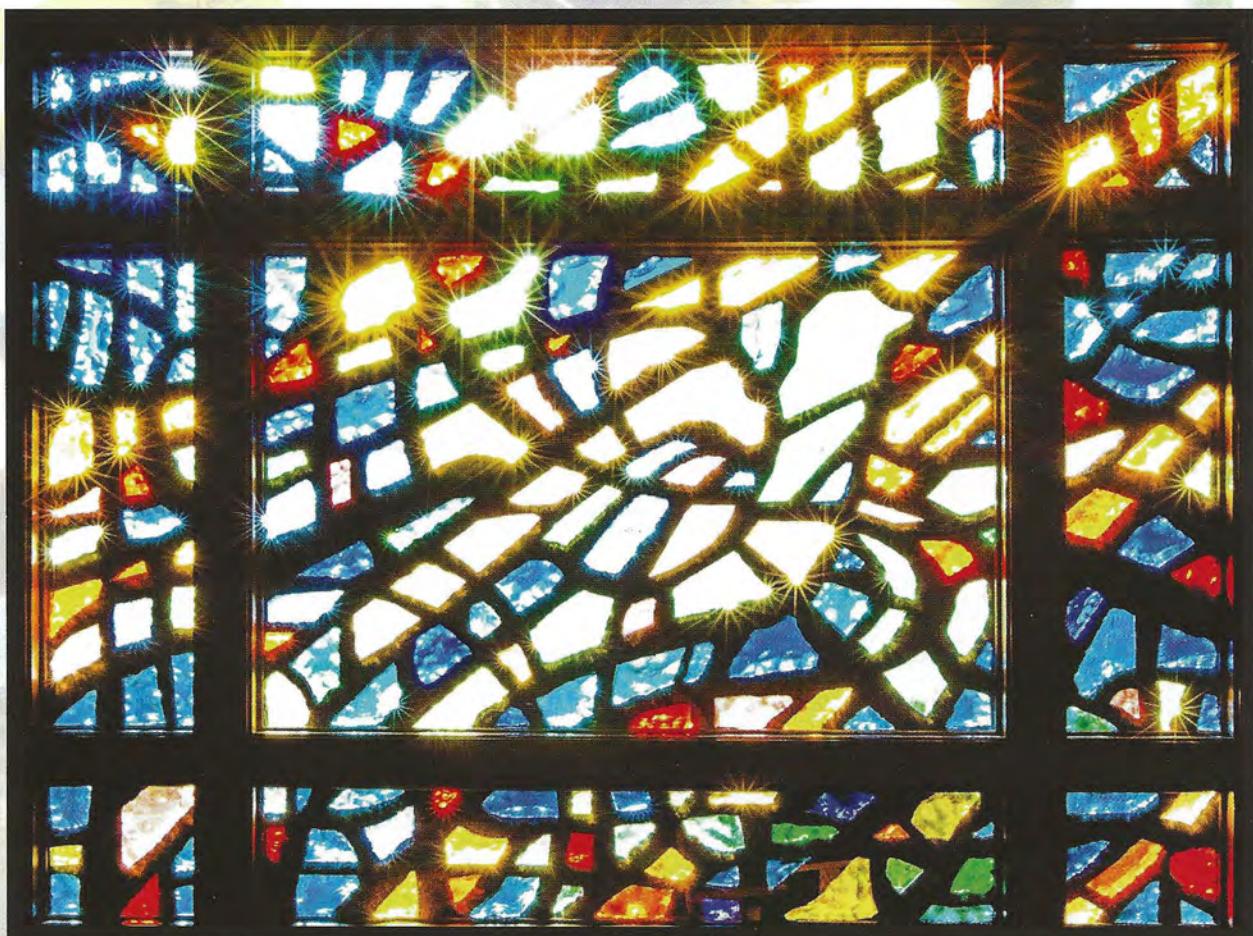


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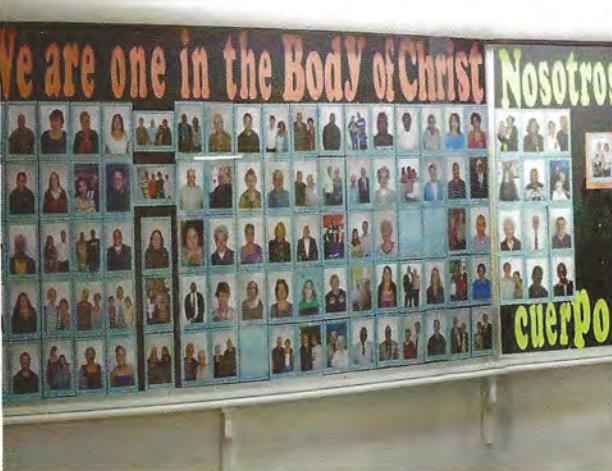


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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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



On Earth Peace

May 2015 VOL. 164 NO. 4 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

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Some say that the biblical message of peace carries a hollow sound—that religion, far from bringing peace, incites violence. With an eye toward Nigeria, a former Annual Conference moderator weighs in with his thoughts.

12 A church for everybody

Urban churches have been known to relocate to quieter, suburban surroundings when things got dicey in the cities. In spite of similar challenges, one city church in Pennsylvania has decided to stay put.

15 The gift of conflict—Ministry of Reconciliation at 25

Conflict, a gift? In a quarter century of working to ease tensions between differing parties, the Church of the Brethren's Ministry of Reconciliation has discovered ways conflict can lead to better communication and understanding.

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Correction: The March MESSENGER cover story, "The sacred dance of grief and joy," incorrectly identifies Naomi Lambert as the daughter of Steve Mason, director of the Brethren Foundation, Inc. She is the daughter of Steven W. Mason, pastor of the Lafayette (Ind.) Church of the Brethren. The article also incorrectly identifies her grandfather, Joseph Mason, as a former Annual Conference moderator. He is a retired district executive.

The evening prayer service was held in a century-old Gothic chapel connected to a cathedral in downtown Chicago. The small underground chamber could hold only several dozen worshipers. That meant the snoring was especially audible.

We filled in around the disheveled man who was slumped over in one of the pews. His sleeping was louder than the gathering music. I thought he might awaken with a start when we reached the unison call to worship. But he slumbered on through the whole service, his rhythmic snores echoing off the stone walls and stained-glass windows during the moments of silent prayer.

Would that every prayer service had so clear a reminder of our earthly obligations. One could not ignore this tired man's presence when we prayed together the words in the litany: "Lord, you have always given bread for the coming day; and though I am poor, today I believe." And again, before we went out into the evening: "Be our light in our darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night."

I have carried this image of God-with-us ever since, and let its meaning color the rest of the conference I was attending. Do our worship services allow room for the inelegant sounds of humanity? Do our sacred spaces welcome those who are looking for rest? Can people lay their burdens down?

The world intrudes—as it should—into our worship of God. The unplanned message of this liturgy, uttered without words, was one we can find in the text of this confessional hymn by Ken Morse:

*Brothers and sisters of mine are the hungry,
who sigh in their sorrow and weep in their pain.
Sisters and brothers of mine are the homeless,
who wait without shelter from wind and from rain.*

*Strangers and neighbors, they claim my attention.
They sleep by my doorstep, they sit by my bed.
Neighbors and strangers, their anguish concerns me,
and I must not feast till the hungry are fed.*



How to reach us

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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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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 © May 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 MESSINGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.

Congregation Close-Up



Janet Houser

Displaying the fruits of their labors for the CASSIE Center are, left to right: Julie Brinkhoff, Esther Shoue, Nancy McBride, and Aubrey Houser.

Sharing the love

Three strong verbs in North Liberty (Ind.) Church of the Brethren's mission statement encourage praise, growth, and activity: "Glorify God, Grow in Christ, and Share His Love with All." But the last one has received special emphasis so far this year.

The sharing began in January, when members tied fleece blankets for the CASIE Center—a child advocacy center serving children and families in St. Joseph County. "Sitting down after a scrumptious potluck lunch, visiting with friends, and tying comfort blankets for children who need them—one can't be any luckier!" says Vonna Holderead, who helped select material and tie the blankets.

"Thank you so much for the blankets," said Carolyn Hahn, executive director of the CASIE Center. "The children really enjoyed picking out a comforting item to take home."

In February, the church continued collecting funds, these directed toward the Nigeria Mustard Seed Project. A Compassion for Nigeria collection calendar suggested items to donate each day, such as coats, light bulbs, and shoes. The congregation also holds monthly birthday and anniversary offerings on the first Sunday of each month. But, instead of receiving gifts, those honored contribute funds to celebrate their special day. To keep the project in focus, a mural of a mustard seed tree hangs in the church narthex and "grows" leaves and flowers as donations for the Mustard Seed Project multiply.

Sharing continued in March with a stone-soup meal and an offering to support the Church World Service blankets program. Children assembled Church World Service hygiene kits. Additional money went to Nigeria. And an all-church roller skating party held in April raised funds again for the Nigeria Mustard Seed Project.

"It is such a joy to pastor a congregation which takes service to others in the name of Christ so seriously," says pastor Don Carroll. "We have such a variety of involvements that there is truly something about which everyone can be passionate."

—Julie Brinkhoff



Julie Brinkhoff

Children from the North Liberty Church display their "Jesus Loves You Snow Much" marshmallow bags after assembling them for children at the local Necessary Pantry.

by the numbers

104,500

Dollar amount raised in two years by the Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren to assist in rebuilding and medical work in Haiti. (Turn the next page for details.)

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

Milestone reached in Lancaster's Haiti outreach

In the winter of 2011, the Lancaster (Pa.)

Church of the Brethren began collecting donations to build one house in hurricane-devastated Haiti. The response of the congregation was overwhelming. Within six weeks sufficient funds were raised to build five new homes.

In the fall of 2012, leaders of the Lancaster church learned about the next fundraiser for Haiti. This time it was to support Mobile Health Clinics. Encouraged by former Mission and Ministry Board chair Dale Minnich, Paul E. Brubaker of Chiques (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, and Earl Ziegler of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, the Lancaster church planned a three-year fund drive to collect a minimum of \$100,000—80 percent to go to an endowment fund and 20 percent for current needs—to create and enlarge the Haiti Mobile Health Clinics. These mobile clinics, staffed by Haitian doctors and nurses, are able to visit local churches periodically to provide medical assistance.

Otto Schaudel, chair of the Outreach Ministry Team of the Lancaster church, accompanied Minnich and Paul Ullom-Minnich—both of Kansas—and Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service, to Haiti in February 2013 to get more insights about the situation. Schaudel was thrilled to see some of the houses

built by the Lancaster church, and the people who found a new home.

By August 2014, after fewer than two years of fundraising, the Lancaster church reached its objective. A total of \$104,500 was donated to Mobile Health Clinics in Haiti. During a soup and salad luncheon last November, Otto Schaudel presented a check to Earl Ziegler, Carolyn Fitzkee, and Paul E. Brubaker to mark this important milestone.

In the meantime, the Haiti Endowment Fund reached \$305,000, toward a goal of \$600,000, including \$80,000



Camp Mack marks 90 years

The Church of the Brethren's longest-running camps are becoming nonagenarians. Camp Mack (Milford, Ind.), the second-oldest camp in the denomination, is commemorating its 90th anniversary on the shores of Lake Waubee this year with a full slate of events. It follows Camp Harmony (Hooversville, Pa.), which turned 90 a year ago.

And the camping ministry of the church has much to celebrate. When Camp Mack asked on its Facebook page for people to share one word that captured their camp experience, words including "friendship," "faith," "fellowship," "memories," "beauty," "quiet," and even "cinnamon toast" quickly piled up in the comments sec-

tion. In a newsletter article, former camper Vonna Walter offered more details on her experience:

"The most important thing that camp offered me, through the guidance of the amazing leaders and fellow campers, was the rich layering, year after year, of my faith in our awesome God!" Walter wrote. "I was raised by wonderful examples of Christ's love, by my parents and my church family, but the week I spent at camp each summer was the most impactful way I experienced God."

The highlight of Camp Mack's anniversary observances will be a "Back to Mack" Homecoming Weekend Aug. 28-30, with a variety of opportunities to celebrate the camp's history, share

memories, and reconnect with members of the camp community along with worship, traditional camp activities, a campfire, and a picnic. The annual Camp Mack Festival on Oct. 3 will also have a 90th anniversary theme and special events—including a scarecrow contest in which the entries are to be dressed as a favorite Camp Mack staff member or Brethren historical figure.

Events already in the books include a 90th anniversary Sweetheart Banquet that took place in February and a fundraiser dinner in mid-March. The camp has also made an anniversary goal of having 90 more campers this year than in 2014.

More information is available at www.campmack.org. —Walt Wiltschek

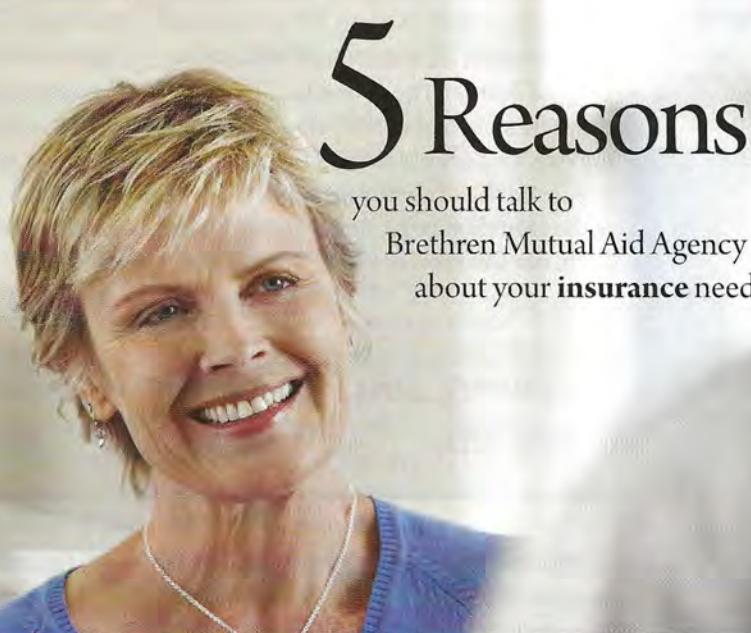
from Lancaster, in less than three years time. These assets produced more than \$20,000 for program support for Haiti in 2014. Thanks to these resources, the number of clinics held in 2014 grew to 48—twice the number held the previous year. More than 7,200 persons in 16 communities were reached, including many with a variety of infectious diseases.

In January, a new community development team was launched, staffed by Haitian personnel. The emphasis is on community health work, including new clean water projects. The first of the new water projects is being constructed in St. Louis du Nord, where a rooftop rainwater collection system involving a lined cistern, pump-to-rooftop storage tanks, and a bio-sand filtration system is being installed with assistance of a grad student/professor team from the University of Maryland. The project will provide clean water for the school's 350 students. The new work in community development affords new opportunities to address root causes of disease in Haiti.

Landmarks and Laurels

Jean Lichy Hendricks, a 1969 graduate of McPherson (Kan.) College, is one of this year's recipients of the college's Citation of Merit award for most distinguished alumni. Hendricks is a member of the Church of the Brethren who has been a teacher and a minister in the church, and served for seven years as president and general manager of the Mutual Aid Association for the Church of the Brethren. She also has worked for McPherson College as director of church relations and in several volunteer roles.

Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren was one of the congregations involved in the first interfaith build of Habitat for Humanity in Fort Wayne, Ind. "There's a new homeowner at Fuller's Landing, a neighborhood completely filled with homes built by Habitat for Humanity," reports WANE.com, the website of WANE TV Channel 15 in Fort Wayne. "Habitat leaders passed the keys over . . . to the new owner of the first-ever local interfaith build home. The new home was made possible thanks to the hard work and collaboration of more than a dozen diverse faith groups."



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The elephant in the room

Let's talk about the elephant in the room: decreasing participation in Brethren events—including Sunday morning worship.

Has anyone noticed that 1,000 fewer people attended Annual Conference in Columbus last year than the previous time it was held in Ohio (Cleveland, 2007); that 400

fewer youth attended National Youth Conference than four years prior (and 2010 saw 800 fewer than 2006, which was 500 fewer than 2002, which was 500 fewer than 1998); that on any given Sunday there are only about 53,000 Brethren gathering for worship in the US (according to 2012 Yearbook statistics), and only half that many in weekly Christian education events?

I know, the work of God is not about numbers. However, these trends

are not minor or temporary, but significant and long-term. Yet I know of no one who seems to be aware of, much less concerned about, these alarming trends.

If my memory is correct, a task force was created in the 1990s to track our decreasing membership and report to each Annual Conference. That eventually went away. I think we grew tired of the gloom and, like the proverbial ostrich, stuck our heads in the sand. There was a time when we had a denominational department focused on outreach, evange-

Too often we want to preserve ourselves, and thus miss the transformative life Jesus offers us.

lism, and church growth. But that got downsized or spun off during one of our many financial crunches.

I know that the reasons for this decline are multifaceted. It seems as if we are in the midst of some kind of spiritual renewal—not necessarily Christian—which may redefine the religious face of the West and result in significant restructuring of church as we know it. Of course, this is not the first time God has brought the church to its knees where it could look up to find a new future.

As for us Brethren, I wonder if anyone is thinking about what denominational structure and district organization will

look like when there are too few of us left to require or support the institutions that now seem to depend on us?

In my district alone (Atlantic Northeast), the list of churches “in trouble” is rather long. I know—megachurches steal our sheep, while sporting events, vacation homes, and travel destinations lure many others away on weekends. These are our excuses. But I fear there is something much deeper amiss among us. It seems the church at large no longer speaks a language that resonates with people, and that we no longer demonstrate a compelling reason to commit to the faith.

We clean up after natural disasters, argue about sexual orientation, and pass resolutions on climate—all necessary engagements. Meanwhile, in our churches back home, we argue over what music to sing, who may use the kitchen, and what color of carpet best matches the décor. It seems as though we are missing something really important. Jesus spoke of dying to ourselves in order to find life in him. Too often we want to preserve ourselves, and thus miss the transformative life Jesus offers us.

“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Those words of Paul carry a new urgency today. The stench of death pervades today’s Christian landscape, and we have grown so used to it that we barely notice. Jesus predicted that the church would always prevail. Of course that is the church at large, not necessarily my particular brand of faith, nor the specific place where I worship each week.

What will it take to return vibrancy to the Church of the Brethren? I admit I don’t know. But I do know that it will not happen until we embrace our dire situation, repent of our self-centeredness, confess our failures, and open ourselves to the possibility of new wine being poured into new wineskins. Then perhaps God will be gracious and show us the way forward.

One thing about elephants: their size makes them easy to locate if you want to find one. ■

Galen Hackman is senior pastor of Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

"Following Jesus is a joint venture undertaken with other flawed and infuriating human beings."

—Christy Wattersdorff, pastor of the York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill.

"I don't know of anyone who feels that homosexuality is a central issue in the Christian faith, but behind it lies the larger issue of biblical authority. It is difficult to see how a house divided on such a foundational issue could stand—unless perhaps it is a duplex."

—Christopher Ritter, directing pastor of First United Methodist Church, Geneseo, Ill.

"Lately I've been wondering if a little death and resurrection is exactly what the American church needs. What if all this talk of waning numbers and shrinking influence means our empire-building days are over and it's a good thing?"

—Rachel Held Evans, American Christian columnist, blogger, and author of the *New York Times* best seller *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*

cultureview

► Anti-Semitic incidents in the US spiked

21 percent last year, according to the Anti-Defamation League, unsettling many American Jews who had thought that hatred of Jews and Judaism was on the decline. The report includes assaults, vandalism, and harassment targeting Jews, Jewish property, and institutions that were reported to ADL's 27 regional offices and to law enforcement. It shows 36 assaults, up from 31 in 2013; 363 incidents of vandalism in 2014, compared with 315 in 2013; and 513 incidents of threats and harassment in 2014, contrasted with 405 in 2013.

► **A leading group of Latino evangelicals has called for an end to state-sanctioned capital punishment.** In a unanimous vote, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition has urged their 3,000 member congregations to end capital punishment across the US. "As Christ followers, we

are called to work toward justice for all," NaLEC President Gabriel Salguero said. "And as Latinos, we know too well that justice is not always even-handed." The organization is the first national association of evangelical churches to publicly oppose capital punishment.

► **Islam is expected to be the fastest-growing religion worldwide** in the next four decades, according to a report released April 2 by the Pew Research Center. The report says that by 2050 Muslims are projected to nearly match Christians in both number and share of the global population. The analysis is based on birth and death rates, immigration patterns, and other information found in censuses and studies around the world. Christians will remain the largest group, with 2.92 billion adherents. Muslims are projected to reach 2.76 billion. Each group will be about 30 percent of the world population.

Heard 'round the world



"Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding."

—Pope Francis, speaking at a mass at St. Peter's Basilica marking the centenary of the killings of some 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks

"We cannot survive alone. . . . The more keenly we are aware of this, the more we will begin to take responsibility for the welfare of other beings."

—Tibetan monk Ogyen Trinley Dorje, considered to be the eventual successor to the Dalai Lama



WHERE IS THE PRINCE OF PEACE?

by Guy Wampler

The prophet Isaiah foretold that one of the names of the coming Messiah would be Prince of Peace. Despite this promise, Brethren today face widespread terrorism and cold murder, not against those of us in the US church, but against our brothers and sisters in the faith in northeast Nigeria. We ponder with heavy hearts the discontinuity between the ancient biblical promise of peace and the ongoing reality of death and destruction.

Some say that the biblical message of peace carries a hollow sound—that religion, far from bringing peace, incites violence. They point to the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Thirty Years War, and 21st-century terrorism when Islamic extremists deliberately kill civilians, even children, in the name of Allah. They conclude that religion is the cause of all the major wars in history.

This line of thinking in a decade of widespread terror-

ism disturbs Karen Armstrong, the noted British writer and lecturer. In her book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, she contends that to focus the blame on religion overlooks the complex reasons for violence. To illustrate, she points out that those 19 hijackers on 9/11 were not selected because they had grown up as fervent Islamists. The majority of them were secular in outlook and relatively indifferent to religion. They were chosen to fly the airplanes on 9/11 because of their technological skills. Their leaders were engineers and architects. As business professionals, they could blend easily into American society while they trained to be pilots. They could be indoctrinated by al-Qaeda partly because they knew too little about mainstream Islam. One analyst wrote, “The problem was not Islam, but ignorance of Islam.”

Organized terrorist attacks in the 21st century carry conspicuous religious trappings and language—references to God or Allah, proof texts from sacred writings. So religion gets the



blame when other more covert motives and conditions—power struggles, corruption in government, ancient enmities, and scarcity of food and other resources—actually may be more primary factors in current hostilities.

When we exaggerate the role of religion in violence we run the risk of losing religion as a deterrent to violence and as an advocate for peace and equality. Think of Mahatma Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States, Pope John Paul in Poland, Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa, and those who gathered at St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig. Think of Pope Francis who expresses a sense of global community, seeks peace across national boundaries, creates ties with the estranged, attends to the needs of the poor, and brings down those in positions of power—even at the Vatican—when they use power for self-gain rather than for service. At their best, all the major religions of the world have spoken against hating and killing and have promoted the ideals of equality and justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

When Brethren missionaries went to Nigeria, they spoke of the Prince of Peace. They interpreted peace to mean the experience of harmony, prosperity, and well-being in the midst of daily life. This *shalom* belonged not to just a few selected individuals but to the whole community. When missionaries encountered illness and a short life expectancy among Nigerians, they set up medical clinics; Brethren doctors and nurses worked not in opposition to local medicine men but in partnership with them to help all who were sick regardless of their status in the community. Where impure water caused disease, Brethren dug wells to provide clean water not just for a few individuals but for the whole neighborhood. Malnutrition was widespread. Brethren farmers taught local gardeners where to get good seed and how to fertilize, irrigate, and care for the soil.

Most Nigerians in that part of the country were illiterate. The missionaries built modest school buildings and brought in excellent teachers. The faces of some of those retired teachers still light up when they talk about Nigerian students who were so eager to learn that discipline was hardly any problem at all—a teacher's dream. The classrooms were open to all in the community. My brother-in-law Kermen Thomasson has written about a local Islamic emir who sent his son to the EYN (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) school at Waka to get an education. That Muslim student was so well re-

ceived he was chosen to be “senior prefect,” comparable to our “student body president.”

Although communities in northern Nigeria were close to one another and had much in common, they were divided by tribes and languages. The first missionaries made a point of breaking down these barriers that separated tribes. During the groundbreaking ceremony for the first mission point, the missionaries took as their text words of Paul: “For [Christ] is our peace. . . . He has broken down the wall that divides us. . . . We are strangers no more.” (Eph. 2:14-19, paraphrase). Thereafter, *No longer strangers* became a popular slogan, and Nigerians began to have a larger sense of community as the peace of Christ reached across barriers that divide.

Stover Kulp, from Pottstown, Pa., arrived in Nigeria in 1922 and served on the mission field for 42 years. When he retired he was so loved and respected that officials in northern Nigeria paid tribute to him, and when he died in 1964, those he served honored him with a traditional ancestral funeral service, thus claiming him as their own.

In 1974, 10 years after Kulp’s death, a major transition took



We ponder with heavy hearts the discontinuity between the ancient biblical promise of peace and the ongoing reality of death and destruction.

place in EYN. Leadership of the church was turned over to the Nigerians. Indigenization was risky, but the outcome has been remarkable. When the missionaries with white faces stepped back, they made room for Nigerian leaders to step forward. What extraordinary leaders they have become. The EYN leaders I have met in the last decade are gentle in spirit yet eager to tell others about the grace they have found in Christ. Many of them are brilliant men and women with business acumen and remarkable vocational success in the fields of education, medicine, business, aviation, and government. They are genuinely grateful to former missionaries for the profound difference Christ has made in their lives, and yet they are eager for the church to move forward. In 1974, the year of the transition to local leadership, membership in EYN was 18,000. Forty years later, in 2014, the baptized membership in EYN reached over 500,000. The average attendance at EYN Sunday services was 1.1 to 1.2 million. EYN became one of the fastest growing denominations in Nigeria.

Then trouble came. There had been rumblings before, but in 2014 members of EYN experienced catastrophe. A violent enemy called Boko Haram attacked the very areas where 60 percent of EYN's members happened to be located. Samuel Dali, president of EYN, sent out a report on Dec. 22, 2014, indicating that Boko Haram insurgents had killed 8,083 members of EYN. More than 170,000 EYN members, including over 2,000 pastors and evangelists, have been driven from their homes. In addition, 278 EYN church buildings (some belonging to very large congregations) and 1,390 local worship centers have been abandoned, many of them burned to the ground. EYN is not alone in this great loss. One and a half million Nigerians, including moderate Muslims, are displaced.

What caused this upheaval? Not just radical Islam, but serious economic problems. After a couple of decades of relative prosperity, suddenly there was a deep recession. People couldn't get jobs. Poverty was rife. Nigerian currency was devalued. More than half of the people lived on less than a dollar a day. Government funds, including income from Nigeria's high-grade oil, were mishandled; the Nigerian government—both national and local—became notorious for widespread corruption.

In 2001, a young Muslim cleric named Mohammed Yusuf denounced government corruption, blaming Western education

for creating a moral vacuum. He advocated a separate Islamic state in northeast Nigeria and a government based on sharia law. The name given the movement was *Boko Haram*, a Hausa word meaning "Western education is a forbidden evil." Yusuf gave unemployed young men motorcycles, offered them jobs, and created independent settlements in two of the northeastern states. There were several skirmishes between local government officials and Boko Haram resulting in several deaths.

Yusuf was arrested, and he died while in police custody. A new leader took over Boko Haram after the death of Yusuf and unleashed unspeakable violence and destruction. He led a wave of nighttime attacks burning schools, police stations, businesses, homes, churches, and mosques. The EYN headquarters and Kulp Bible School were overrun. In April 2014, Boko Haram attacked a school in Chibok, a town that is almost 100 percent EYN. About 50 of the school girls escaped, but well over 200 of them between 14 and 18 years old were kidnapped and are still missing. One EYN member said, "We have already turned both cheeks. What do we do now?" When I first read that question I almost cried.

David Sollenberger



As of old, the Prince of Peace appears in unexpected places and at unexpected times. The enemy is fierce, the suffering immense, the losses heartbreaking, the challenges daunting, and yet the church is remobilizing.

Musa Mambula, a leading spiritual advisor among the leaders of EYN, wrote a book entitled *Are There Limits to Pacifism: the Nigerian Dilemma*. Mambula examines a long list of Bible verses about peace. Mambula reaches some conclusions about how Jesus' teachings about peace apply to Nigeria, but he leaves some questions unresolved. He says EYN members should guard those under them. He favors police action when force is used not with the intention to kill but to maintain security and establish order. He mentions the Nigerian army, which seems similar to our National Guard. Mambula is uncertain about military service, but he asks, "How can we accept the protection of the army if we do not support and participate in the army?" Mambula doesn't answer that question, but he believes that it is impossible to kill someone while claiming to love that person.

I don't like the word pacifism. That label puts people into superficial categories, and the word has some connotations that I cannot accept. Often, pacifism is confused with *passivism*—being passive. Sometimes peace is defined simply as an absence of conflict instead of the fuller meaning of shalom as practiced on the Brethren mission field. When asked if I am a pacifist, I say, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ. As Christians, can we talk about Jesus' ideas about peace as related to the world in which we live?"

People under duress lose patience. They ask, "Why doesn't God intervene in ways that are more noticeable?" They would like the Prince of Peace to swoop in and take over by force, booting out the enemy and restoring God's peaceable kingdom. But that is not how Jesus operated. Rejecting three temptations, he chose not to impose peace by force and fanfare. He invited his followers to enter the peaceable kingdom by choice, not coercion. He beckoned ordinary people he met along the way, saying, "Come follow me," and he portrayed for them, by word and deed, life as God meant it to be in the peaceable kingdom. He admitted to small beginnings by comparing the growth of the kingdom with putting yeast into flour: silently, mysteriously a little bit of yeast can permeate and transform the whole loaf. He spoke to large crowds but referred to his followers as a little flock, saying, "Fear not little flock; it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Where is the Prince of Peace today? I believe that he is present in Nigeria:

- when bulk cornmeal, rice, beans, cooking oil, soap, packets of crackers for children, and other emergency supplies are distributed to displaced persons;
- when a women's organization reaches out to those most vulnerable in a crisis—pregnant mothers, young children, and older adults;



- when workshops are held to train church leaders how to support victims of trauma—the thousands who have lost loved ones and all possessions;
- when the church builds new communities with tents and simple mud-brick houses in safe places with land for gardening and space for a church building so that refugees, including the thousands who fled to neighboring Cameroon, can relocate;
- when Kulp Bible College is back in business in a temporary location;
- when EYN members, after a long session of prayer and discussion, decide to help rebuild a mosque that had been burned, and to initiate other projects to strengthen ties with Muslims;

- when Musa Mambula gives tips about how to share the hope we have in Christ without becoming offensive. Do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15) and without denigrating the Koran or Mohammed;
- when EYN and Church of the Brethren specialists meet with officials and political leaders encouraging the Nigerian government to clean up the corruption for which it has become notorious worldwide, distribute government funds from Nigeria oil more fairly among all citizens including those in the north, enforce a code of conduct for police officers and judicial officials, and help find jobs for young men and women out of school.

These are things that make for peace, and it is in these efforts that we meet the Prince of Peace today.

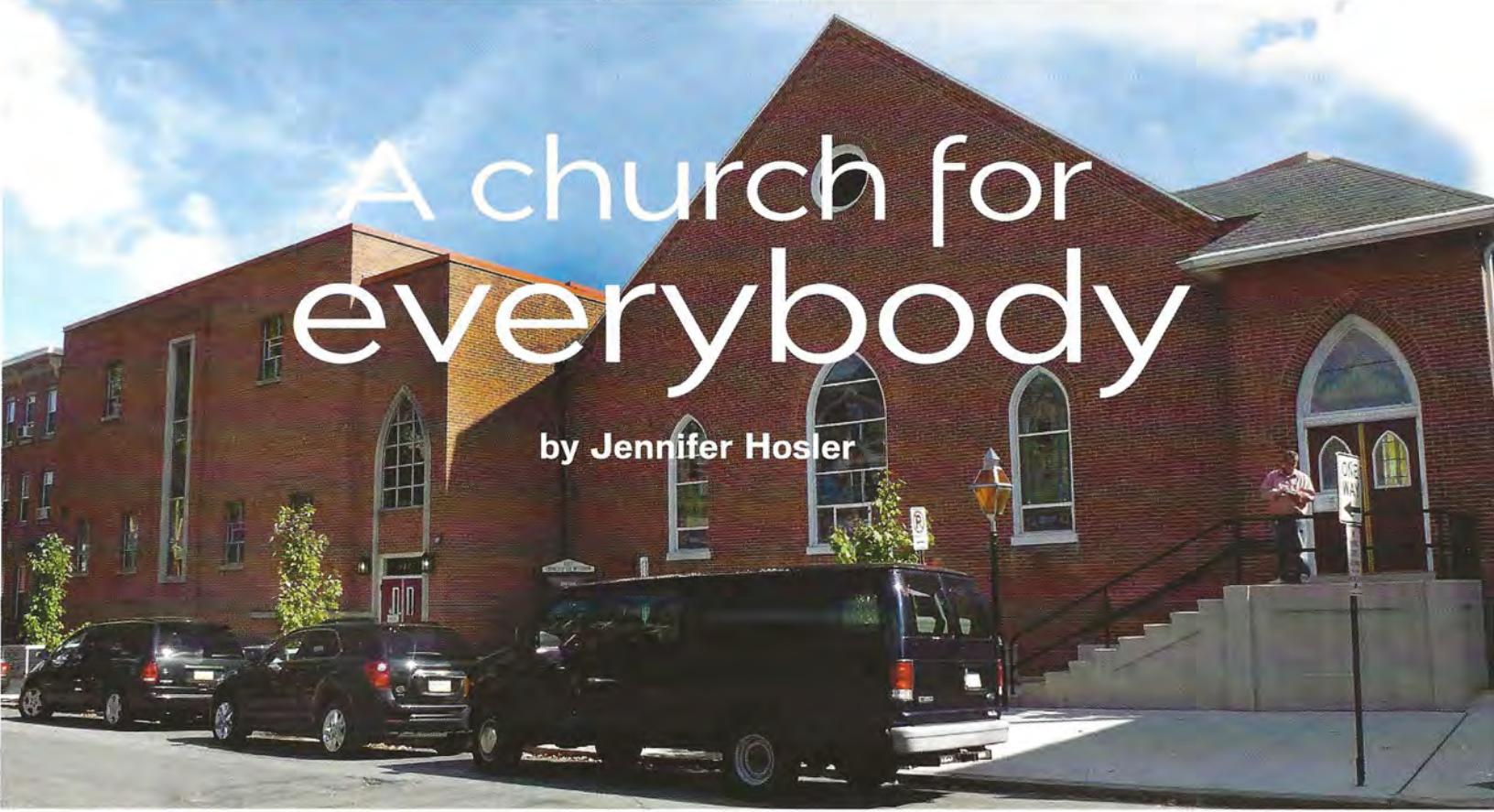
After returning from Nigeria in late 2014, Roy Winter, associate executive director of the Church of the Brethren's Global Mission and Service and Brethren Disaster Ministries, sent a release to the church: "We expected to find gloom and heartache, but we found a team working hard to get organized, to assist EYN members who need help, and to maintain the church. Despite the almost overwhelming challenges we faced in our many meetings with EYN leaders, we found time to laugh and rejoice in God. Even though they are displaced and frustrated by the situation, they are working on a new vision for EYN that will make the church stronger."

As of old, the Prince of Peace appears in unexpected places and at unexpected times (Matt. 25:31, Luke 24:13, John 21:12). The enemy is fierce, the suffering immense, the losses heartbreaking, the challenges daunting, and yet the church is remobilizing. Musa Mambula believes that in the long run Boko Haram in its violent form will not prevail, or as he says, "God is still on the throne." ■

Guy Wampler is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, former Annual Conference moderator, and member of Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

A church for everybody

by Jennifer Hosler



Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren is a church dedicated to being and staying in the city. Despite the local assumption that the Allison Hill neighborhood is a place to be feared, the sisters and brothers of First Church are committed to their neighborhood. They are meeting community needs, while also working to build relationships across races and classes. In the words of their mission statement: "We're called to be a Christ-centered, multicultural community in the inner city, sharing the love, peace, healing, and justice of Christ."

Every Friday morning, people arrive at First Church for community Bible study. When I visited First Church last September, I joined the Bible study along with about 30 others from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Waverly Chadwick, who led the session, asked the group, "What good things and what bad things happened since last week?" As people shared their stories, she reminded us that there was "no one inferior, no one superior." After spending time in scripture, the Bible study closed with everyone standing in a circle, holding hands, and praying. Waverly instructed us to look around as we joined hands: "These

are the people you'll be in heaven with—black, white, tall, thin, good-looking, and funny-looking." The group laughed. We closed by singing, "What a mighty God we serve."

This scene sums up much of what I learned about First Church over three days while visiting ministries, conducting eight one-on-one interviews, leading two group interviews, and worshiping at two Sunday morning worship services. When I asked my interviewees about the main strengths of First Church, the most common responses were "multicultural" and "accepting all people." First Church is a place that welcomes all people regardless of their income level, history,

ethnicity, culture, or mental health state. As associate pastor Josiah Ludwick said, "It's a church for everybody."

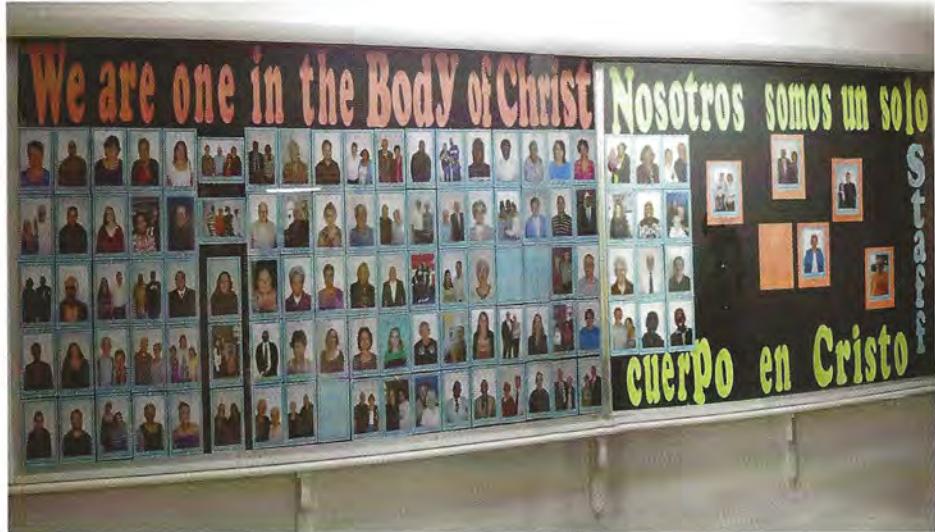
First Church's welcome is a drawing point for many, including Dotti Seitz. Dotti and her husband, Steve, moved to the Harrisburg area over two years ago. Both the worship style and the ethnic diversity compelled Dotti to make First Church her home church. As a Native American, she had not felt comfortable when she visited another Church of the Brethren congregation that was predominantly white. But First Church—with its diverse worship style, theology, and ethnicity—welcomed her.

Pastor Belita Mitchell in front of the new church sign and peace pole.





Associate pastor Josiah Ludwick (in back)
and Harrisburg youth take a selfie.



"I love it that the church welcomes people of every class, every color," Dotti said. "That really touches me, because I think in this church, it's not been easy for them to do that."

Willing to change

Becoming a multicultural church has taken years of effort, and the work is ongoing. "It's something that's very important to us," Josiah explained, "and we've learned how to be more intentional about making that happen."

At First Church, Sunday worship includes traditional Brethren hymns and choir anthems along with African-American spirituals, Spanish-language music, gospel and praise songs. Two services allow worshipers to pick which flavors fit them more, increasing the relevance and accessibility of the church. Some members and attendees even go to both services.

First Church is becoming a church for everybody because it is willing to change. Although many members have been at the church for 50 years or more, First Church has been willing to change its culture and practices in an effort to expand its welcome to newer members. Pastor Belita Mitchell has led the congregation through many changes since her tenure began in 2003.

"They're willing to change and be stretched," she said of her congregation. "They're willing to keep trying to increase the relevance and to increase the opportunity to serve the needs of the community." This openness to change has come through prayer, intentional spiritual practices, and leadership by the pastoral team.

Aside from developing flexible and diverse worship practices, the congregation has also been working on local relationship building. Josiah explained that, instead of just doing things *for* people (meeting basic needs in the community), the church has begun emphasizing relationship building and doing things *with* people. First Church stresses getting to know people in the neighborhood, and combining friendship with service.

The Allison Hill neighborhood shapes the church's identity and ministries. First Church is explicitly committed to the city. In the 1960s, many members moved out of the neighborhood and headed to the suburbs. The church was torn. They wondered if they should leave and begin a new congregation in the suburbs, or if they should stay in the city, even though most members would no longer be living there. The church voted to stay—although many members did leave to establish another church on the edge of the city.

I love it that the church welcomes people of every class, every color. That really touches me, because I think in this church, it's not been easy for them to do that.



Most people who chose to remain at First Church during that period are still there. Waneta Benson came in the 1960s to serve the city as a BVSer, starting children's programs. It was the church's commitment to service—articulated by then-pastor Wayne Zunkel—that prompted her and others to stay. She said, "I think the Church of the Brethren emphasis on service is part of the reason we're here. We saw many needs in the community and realized that church needs to be here to spread God's love and help people who are hurting." Waneta's generation remained committed to doing this ministry in the city, even after many members moved away.

Things that make for peace

Today, First Church is evolving and drawing new membership from the Allison Hill neighborhood, living out its mission to be a "Christ-centered, multicultural community in the inner city, sharing the love, peace, healing, and justice of Christ." The church's outreach ministries are organized under its nonprofit organization, Brethren Community Ministries (*bcmPEACE*)—led by executive director Ron Tilley. The *bcmPEACE* ministry aims to "share the things that make for peace." It does this through things like food distribution, computer classes, kids' church, referrals, and safe, affordable housing rentals.

Brethren Community Ministries extends Christ's holistic peace by meeting basic needs, and also by working to end violence. Two primary peace efforts are Agape-Satyagraha and Heeding God's Call. Agape-Satyagraha is a conflict resolution education curriculum for youth, which meets weekly. Originating at First Church, Agape-Satyagraha is being further developed and distributed nationally via the Church of the Brethren's On Earth Peace ministry.

Besides working with youth, *bcmPEACE* also donates staff time and serves as a fiscal agent for Heeding God's Call. According to pastor Belita Mitchell, Heeding God's Call is a movement "committed to bringing an end to the loss of life as

a result of illegal handguns." She serves as the local chapter chair, while Ron Tilley serves as the chapter organizer.

Although good things are happening in Allison Hill, several people I spoke with acknowledged that the neighborhood has a reputation for being unsafe, which makes it challenging to invite new people to the church. Nevertheless, some members argued that the neighborhood is safer than outsiders may assume. Yet because of this perception, most membership growth can be attributed to people intentionally seeking out an inner city church.

In addition to neighborhood safety perceptions, First Church also faces challenges due to its aging membership. There is an urgent need to close the "generation gap," as pastor Belita calls it.

Finances are also an issue. The older generation provides a substantial proportion of the church's offering. Although new people are coming to the church from the neighborhood, many are low-income. While the ministries of *bcmPEACE* are funded through outside grants, the pastoral team and building are currently sustained by member donations. In order to sustain a future church, more members and new funding streams are needed.

Everyone I spoke with expressed hopes for what they would like to see at First Church in the next five or 10 years. Dick Hunn, who passed away a few months after I spoke with

him, was eager to see where the church's youth would be. "The six people who went to [the Church of the Brethren's] National Youth Conference are going to be something in about five or 10 years. They came back with a report, and they're on fire." Three of these youth expressed an eagerness for more ways to share with the broader congregation through word, music, and song.

"My hope is that we will continue to live into the mission," pastor Belita said, "and that we will have a greater degree of intergenerational representation. I also hope that we will continue to be broadly diverse in terms of the ethnic groupings, cultural backgrounds, and economic and educational levels, so that we can have a sense of community where we learn from one another and uplift one another." ■



Ron Tilley is director of *bcmPEACE*, the church's nonprofit outreach organization.



On Earth Peace

The gift of conflict

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION AT 25

by Leslie A.B. Frye

"Whenever two or three . . . gather in Jesus' name there will be conflict, and that's not necessarily a bad thing! It is in the process of working through the tensions between us—as opposed to avoiding them or escalating them—that we take active part in the work of the Holy Spirit to form us into the church God would have us be. At the same time, working through conflict in healthy, productive ways does not come naturally; we need to help each other if we are to be our best, most faithful selves."

I recently wrote these words—and variations of them—for proposals outlining the logistics for how a Ministers of Reconciliation team could serve Church of the Brethren gatherings such as Annual Conference and National Youth Conference (see www.onearthpeace.org/ministers-reconciliation), and yet I didn't always understand conflict in the way those words describe.

Just as I can easily recall the scenes, conversations, and feelings surrounding the birth of my children or the day my father died, I vividly remember the day my rela-

tionship with conflict changed forever, and my understanding of reconciliation began to be re-formed.

It was a Saturday about 23 years ago. Our congregation was sponsoring an all-day workshop on conflict resolution and I didn't have anything else going on, so we got a babysitter for our infant daughter and went. To this day I don't know what prompted the workshop to be scheduled, though I could make some guesses. As a young adult, I wasn't immersed in the subtleties of congregational dynamics that would have led to scheduling such an event.

Here's what I remember:

- When we talked about all the words we associate with conflict, they were mostly negative.
- When we did an exercise in which we indicated our "relationship" with conflict, we all stood in different places.
- When the facilitator drew the Chinese character for "conflict" as a combination of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity," it blew my mind to think that anything good could ever come out of struggle.



“It blew my mind to think that anything good could ever come out of struggle.”

- When he described the conditions under which various conflict management styles (avoidance, force, compromise, collaboration, and accommodation) were appropriate and inappropriate, my mind was blown again to think there wasn't a one-size-fits-all best practice.

- When I observed the mediation role play, I thought it was magical the way a conflict I thought was insurmountable was resolved when the mediator helped the parties hear each other and creatively work together to find a mutually agreeable solution.

Prior to participating in that workshop, I had thought that conflict was always bad, that the way to work through a disagreement was to win by building the most compelling argument and discrediting my opponent, and that certainly everyone knew these things and approached them the way I did. It never occurred to me that most people (at least in that room on that day) would rather avoid than “win” a “good” fight. Looking back, that was pretty ridiculous, yet not surprising, given that the field of mediation was in its infancy and the term “conflict transformation” was just starting to be used. Twenty-five years ago we rarely talked about such things.

The process of mediation had its start in the labor disputes of the early 20th century. But the concept of “conflict as opportunity” was fairly new in Church of the Brethren settings when I attended that workshop in 1992. Mennonite Conciliation Service (MCS)—a ministry of Mennonite Central Committee focused on conflict prevention and intervention—had only recently been formed (1979). When MCD director Ron Kraybill spoke to the On Earth Peace Assembly in 1982, his perspective was somewhat controversial:

“I am firmly convinced that if congregations take seriously the ministry of reconciliation and take seriously the importance of dealing with conflict along scriptural lines, we could bring an ongoing revival experience into our congregations that would be not only as powerful as the revival spirit of the past, but also would be one that would continue as a permanent part of congregational life.”

Controversial and also cutting edge. At about this time, Chuck Boyer, peace consultant on staff for the Church of the Brethren, at the urging of Barbara Daté, Larry Hoover, and Janet Mitchell, started promoting mediation and interpersonal peacemaking in the denomination. Initial offerings included a pre-Annual Conference mediation workshop in 1983 that was attended by 150 people; several week-long Advanced Pastor's Seminars and Interpersonal Peacemaking in Daily Life courses



at Bethany Theological Seminary; support and training for the newly formed district Discipleship and Reconciliation Committees (what became the current Shalom Teams); and the formation of a steering committee to guide these efforts—a steering committee that named the new program “Ministry of Reconciliation” (MoR). In these early years, Sara Speicher and Barbara Daté served as primary staff support, working not only on these efforts but also providing additional trainings, facilitations, and conflict intervention/mediation services to individuals, congregations, districts, and denominational staff.

By 1990, however, just two years before the conflict resolution workshop I attended, staff changes in the Church of the Brethren took MoR out of the hands of the peace consultant and into those of On Earth Peace, with a mixed though overall positive response. While On Earth Peace director Tom Hurst was agreeable to the shift and saw good potential, many serving on the On Earth Peace board—as well as other constituents—wondered what interpersonal and congregational conflict resolution had to do with the promotion of world peace. Consequently, there was limited funding and no paid staff devoted to MoR again until 1995, when Bob Gross was selected to be the quarter-time MoR coordinator. (Soon the position was supported at 40 percent, and eventually three-quarter-time, so that by 2012 the MoR director became a full-time On Earth Peace staff position.)

In the meantime, a reconstituted MoR steering committee worked diligently in those early years. They continued to provide education and reconciliation services across the denomination, including discussion rooms and observers during Annual Conference at the request of the conference officers. They produced a professional practitioner's directory listing Brethren involved in reconciliation ministries. And they compiled a comprehensive handbook for discipleship and reconciliation committees.

By the time the Church of the Brethren General Board voted to separate On Earth Peace from the formal structure of the denomination in 1997 (On Earth Peace went on to become an independent Annual Conference agency in 1998), MoR had also developed its flagship “Matthew 18” workshop for congregations. It also formed a Calling to Ministry committee to begin working at a process to formally guide the calling, preparation,

recognition, and accountability of MoR practitioners.

Slowly, a structure was put into place that included a calling and interview arm called Area Recognition Teams and a Practitioner Network steering committee that formulated guidelines and benchmarks. Three levels of practitioners were envisioned—apprentice, basic, and proven—in three categories: intervener, facilitator, and teacher. Completing an 11-page application was required, including provision of three references, a personal interview, and case studies to analyze.

By the time Annie Clark replaced Bob Gross as MoR coordinator in 2004, only eight people had had the fortitude to wade through the process. It seemed to Clark that the resources going into the structure of the Practitioner Network weren't worth the small harvest. When she asked folks whom she knew were qualified why they didn't seek recognition as practitioners, they cited the unwieldy application process.

Around 2005, Annie disbanded the steering committee and the Area Recognition Teams, streamlined the application to five pages, eliminated the "proven" level, and held interviews over the phone rather than in person. Even then, MoR gained only three more practitioners, bringing the total to 11 (Carol Waggy, Anne Price-Fike, Mark Chidley, Mike Crump, Bob Gross, Matt Guynn, Bev Eikenberry, Janet Mitchell, Don Parker, Wanda Joseph, and Bernie Fuska). At the same time, she had about 30 skilled and willing people she could call on, but who were uninterested in going through the process to be officially recognized.

Finally, in consultation with then co-executive director Bob Gross, the decision was made to let go of the idea of the formal MoR Practitioner Network, that it didn't have to be seen as an equivalent to ministry with a calling and recognition process, and that a less formal practitioner network was sufficient to sustain the education, facilitation, and intervention services being provided.

At the time I came on staff as MoR program coordinator in 2008, On Earth Peace was in the midst of a strategic planning process that included the possibility of restructuring staff and programming to better reflect our vision of holistic peacemaking. The process included a program assessment in 2010 which revealed strong programming in education, facilitation, intervention, and coaching provided by a network of qualified, committed, and minimally compensated volunteers at a fraction of what it costs to contract with organizations offering similar services. Ten to 20 workshops and insight sessions along with a handful of facilitations, interventions, and

coaching calls provided each year had planted fruitful seeds. While there was much to celebrate, there was also much room for improvement by way of updating curriculum, unifying procedures, and finding the optimal way to identify, equip, and support those who are gifted and feel called to reconciliation work in the church.

Over these same years (1990-2015), what had been the infant field of conflict *resolution*, with mediation as its primary tool, has grown to be more accurately known as conflict *transformation*, using a wide range of tools and processes. This happened as experts in the field came to discover, among other things, that conflict is not as straightforward and linear as a problem to be solved; that faithful conflict health has more to do with how we live in relationship than how we deal with conflict crises; that emotional traumas wound as deeply and painfully as physical traumas and require just as much intentional healing, such that shaming people by urging them to "get over it" is less than ineffective; and that all of us—even the "experts"—need help being our best selves. Carolyn Schrock-Shenk expresses it well in *Conflict Transformation for Leaders: Some Principles* (1995, MCS) when she urges people of faith to:

- Expect it. Don't let it catch you off guard. It's as much a part of life as food. Be open about its presence. Name it. Explore it.
- Invite it. Welcome and explore differences. Be wary of a decision that seems to be "flying through" without dissent. Create ongoing structures that invite dialogue, feedback, and evaluation.
- Exploit it. Conflict is the stuff of growth, change, and progress. Learn from it and help others learn from it. Use it to learn new truths about yourself, each other, and God.

Jesus says, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 3:17), and yet that is more easily said than done. After all, conflict holds "danger" as well as "opportunity"; it's uncomfortable. As our understanding of conflict and reconciliation continues to increase, the challenge becomes discerning how to live into the implications. The Ministry of Reconciliation of On Earth Peace hopes to faithfully continue engaging that challenge with compassion and grace. 

An ordained minister, Leslie A.B. Frye has served as director of the Ministry of Reconciliation of On Earth Peace since 2008.

“I am firmly convinced that if congregations take seriously the ministry of reconciliation and take seriously the importance of dealing with conflict along scriptural lines, we could bring an ongoing revival experience into our congregations.”

Lessons from gift giving



by Melody Keller

Gift giving can be a challenge. Some people enjoy it. Others tolerate it. Some simply resort to swapping money and gift cards!

I have said on numerous occasions that I need a plan in the gift-giving department. I am one of six children. All of my siblings are married. Twenty-one nieces and nephews have blessed my world. So if you want to celebrate, it turns into lots of dates and people to remember—not to mention moments of panic when Mom announces another birthday is on the horizon.

Last Christmas, I decided to make a gift of sleepovers at my apartment for my in-state nieces and nephews—that is, for those old enough to be away from their moms and dads overnight. The most recent one was held near the end of February. It was for the youngest group. (So young that one didn't come! Maybe next year, Katelyn.) My sister-in-law Jen had made a calendar for two of her children, Megan and Simon, so they could "X off" the days until it was time to come. They were so excited! Megan wanted to begin the sleepover days early. Signs of a good gift!

I arrived home on the appointed day with about an hour until showtime. There was a lot to be done: clearing clutter, putting up groceries, and preparing for a treasure hunt. With help from neighbors (my parents), I soon was ready for my guests.

Samantha was the first to arrive. She stood at my door wearing a little backpack while her father carried in the rest of her things. Then Megan and her mom came, reporting that Simon had woken up from his nap grumpy and would arrive at the party when he was happy. It didn't take him long. We were playing the game Memory when he arrived.

Activities included reading several favorite books, playing

Memory, putting together puzzles, sitting at the "cinema," eating at the kitchen bar, hunting for treasures, clowning around and singing in the car, and sleeping. (I discovered it's not so easy for me to sleep on the floor anymore.)

Samantha, Simon, and Megan are treasures. What gifts they are to me. I gave and, in turn, received.

Some lessons (if we are willing to be taught and willing to see) can be learned from a couple of 4-year-old girls and a little 3-year-old boy.

"I want to show Mom." —Simon

We had just completed the treasure hunt. Their bags were full of treats, and Simon rushed downstairs to show his mother. (They live in the main house below.) I didn't stop him. He was so eager to show what he had received.

Lesson: When blessed, do we rush to tell someone? Words penned by the psalmist read: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah" (Ps. 68:19, KJV). I love the word *daily* in that verse. It's not just a special occasion. It's day in and day out. It's load after load of benefits. The challenge is that we see the blessings, that we run to tell what God is doing. Line up behind Simon and show off your God to others.

"I spilled my soda." —Megan

She was sitting on the floor with root beer in her Tupperware jug. (Parents, hold on. No caffeine. But yes, sugar . . . let's not talk about that.) In a pitiful voice, she told me she had spilled her soda. I looked and saw that some of the root beer

was heading toward the closet door. Quickly, I grabbed the wipes and was down on the floor wiping and sopping up the sugar—I mean soda. Megan was sorry.

Lesson: Be willing to admit mistakes. If you live long enough, you will “spill soda,” too. Be alert to the problem, admit it, be sorry, move on. We are human. Why pretend otherwise? The Philippians were encouraged with words in a letter from Apostle Paul: “Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

“What if grownups got spanked?” —Samantha

As Megan and Samantha were talking together, the subject of spanking came up. I pursued it further. And then Samantha asked her question about grownups getting spanked. I thought it would be good because some folks act like they need it. Imagine, a time of spanking on Sunday mornings for all those adult Christians who were “throwing fits” about whatever situations. That might change a few things. I imagine that some of us adults would be in the line for a good spanking. Some of us more often than others.

Lesson: Good parents ask obedience from their children. So does God. How’s it going, child of God? Are you listening to God’s instructions? Are you obeying them? Is your will submitted to God’s? The writer of Hebrews proclaims, “... for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every

Lesson: Really? Are we in that much of a hurry? If you aren’t there, do we just zoom on without you? Too bad for you! How are we doing following Philippians 2:4? “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” Do we take the time to care about others, to consider others’ feelings, to tarry for others?

“Sometimes in life you have to wait.” —Samantha

We were traveling to BJ’s to connect with Samantha’s ride home. I wanted to take a right turn on a red arrow and remembered that I needed to stop and wait for a green light at this particular signal. I exclaimed out loud about having to wait, and a little voice from the backseat said, “Sometimes in life you have to wait.” It was Samantha, but it could have been God!

Lesson: I came across a verse in Psalms I needed. “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord” (Psalms 27:14). The challenge: It’s God’s timing, purposes, plans, and paths, not ours. God knows what is best and wants us to trust God enough to be at peace, even in the midst of our storms. Don’t be anxious at the red light. Take time to rest in God.

“May I unbuckle?” —Megan

We were less than a mile from home, and Megan wanted to unbuckle her seatbelt. The law doesn’t allow it, although she may not have known that. I told her no, explaining that we weren’t home yet.

Lesson: We aren’t home yet. Stay in the saddle until you

“Some lessons (if we are willing to be taught and willing to see) can be learned from a couple of 4-year-old girls and a little 3-year-old boy.”

child whom he accepts” (Heb. 12:6). If you are being spanked—or if you need one—remember that God’s love for you is beyond knowledge. God “spanks” you because God loves you.

“It’s Samantha’s turn.” —Simon

We were in another round of playing Memory. Simon and I had started; Samantha joined in. For some reason, Samantha left the game a couple of times. Once she made it back in time for her turn. Another time she was still “missing in action.” I encouraged Simon to take his turn. He answered, “It’s Samantha’s turn.” I persisted. He relented. Seriously, it was a sleepover, not the Indy 500. I could have waited.

arrive. Don’t coast, grow weary, or quit. Remain strapped into the faith, stand fast in the Lord, serve the Lord with gladness. Run hard for the finish line, don’t hold back. May you unbuckle? No way, friend, not on your life! Run your race to win!

“Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it” (1 Cor. 9:24).

You just never know what you will receive when you give a gift. Give, friend, give. 

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

Brethren Disaster Ministry projects receive additional funds

Two Brethren Disaster Ministries project sites in the United States are receiving support through grants from the Church of the Brethren's Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF), totaling \$75,000. Brethren

managed and maintained by O.C.E.A.N., Inc., will be rented on a sliding scale to low- and moderate-income families with special needs who were affected by Superstorm Sandy. The project is expected to be completed in early May.

An EDF allocation of \$30,000 funds the opening of a Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding project in northeast Colorado following flooding caused by heavy rains in September 2013. Seventeen counties were affected, with federal emergency declarations covering 14 counties and more than 28,000 families registering for assistance. Reports indicate eight deaths, around \$2 billion in flood damage, and nearly 19,000 homes damaged or destroyed. The Brethren response will focus on some of the most severely impacted areas in Weld, Larimer, and Boulder counties.

An EDF grant of \$20,000 supports the Church World Service response to devastation in Vanuatu caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam in March. The Vanuatu government reports 17 deaths, 65,000 people homeless, and 166,000 people needing assistance on the 24 islands in the storm path. The grant will support Church World Service partnering with Act for Peace and the Vanuatu Christian Council in providing emergency food, water, and household supplies for survivors in 78 communities, and repair of water supply systems and training in disaster risk reduction.

**Brethren Disaster
Ministries volunteers
continue rebuilding at the
Toms Rivers project in
New Jersey.**

Disaster Ministries also has directed an EDF grant to the island nation of Vanuatu after it was hit by Tropical Cyclone Pam.

An EDF allocation of \$45,000 supports the Tom Rivers project site in New Jersey, where Brethren Disaster Ministries continues work on a building project following devastation caused by Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. Partnering at the site is O.C.E.A.N., Inc., which is providing the land to build six single-family homes in Berkeley Township, N.J. The new homes, to be



Brethren Disaster Ministries

A family receives a quilt at the ribbon-cutting of the completed work on their home.



Brethren Disaster Ministries

Church of the Brethren staff receive a check for the insurance dividend from Brethren Mutual Aid and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.



Church of the Brethren dividend from Brethren Mutual and Brotherhood Mutual is largest ever

The Church of the Brethren denomination has received an insurance dividend of \$182,263 from Brethren Mutual Aid and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, through the company's Partnership Group Program. Brethren Mutual Aid is the sponsoring agency for the program, which rewards the annual claims experience of the congregations, camps, and districts that make up the group along with the denominational organization.

This represents the largest dividend check ever written by this program, said Annual Conference moderator David Steele in his report to the Mission and Ministry Board. However, it also will be the last because of restrictions that Brotherhood Mutual falls under as it moves to a new legal status as a national corporation.

The Annual Conference officers and general secretary Stan Noffsinger, who make up the denominational Leadership Team, have decided to share the dividend in the following manner:

- \$2,000 to each Church of the Brethren

agency, district, and camp that participates in the insurance program;

- \$1,000 to the Finance Office to cover the expense of administering the funds;
- The remainder to be divided between the Ministry Assistance Fund that aids ministers experiencing financial need, and the Nigeria Crisis Fund's support for trauma healing and training for leaders of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

The Church of the Brethren denomination is donating its \$2,000 back into the larger project so that it will be divided between the Ministry Assistance Fund and the Nigeria Crisis Fund. Moderator Steele said that the denomination is inviting the other recipient agencies, districts, and camps to consider doing the same.

Brotherhood Mutual returns excess premiums not needed to pay losses, up to a certain level, as part of its Partnership Group Program. The company grants the dividend if the denominational group collectively enjoys a better-than-average claims experience.

Nigerian Brethren pastor quoted by Fox News

A Nigerian Brethren pastor, and the father of two of the schoolgirls abducted from Chibok, Nigeria, in April 2014, was quoted in an article from the Associated Press, published on March 18 by Fox News. "Restless nights have been the lot of the Rev. Enoch Mark, a pastor with the Church of the Brethren whose two daughters are among the kidnapped girls," the article reported. "He said he is in hiding because he has become a wanted man by Boko Haram because of his role as a spokesman for parents of the Chibok girls. 'I have been spending the nights sleeplessly worrying about what condition my daughters might be in,' Mark told AP by telephone. 'I am so disturbed, thinking of my daughters, thinking of the other Chibok girls.'"

upcoming events

May 3
National Youth Sunday

May 9
Bethany Theological Seminary 109th Commencement, Richmond, Ind.

May 14-16
Church Leadership Conference, Frederick (Md.) Church

May 24
Pentecost Offering

May 29-June 3
Ministry Summer Service Orientation, Elgin, Ill.

June 19-21
National Junior High Conference, Elizabethtown (Pa.) College

July 9-11
CODE Meeting, Tampa, Fla.

July 10-11
Ministers' Association Continuing Education Event, Tampa, Fla.

July 11-15
Annual Conference, Tampa, Fla.

July 15-16
BBT Board Meeting Tampa, Fla.



On Earth Peace board and staff meet in New Windsor.

Mary Ann Grossnickle

On Earth Peace board meets at New Windsor

The On Earth Peace board of directors joined staff March 19-21 at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., for their spring board meeting. Board members heard an update on the work of the Anti-Racism Transformation Team, spent time in small groups with staff hearing information about their work, and received reports from the various board committees.

The board and staff also discussed the direction of On Earth Peace's community organizing work, particularly in relationship with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. On Earth Peace continues to work in solidarity with leading groups within the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and is developing efforts to help build peace wherever there is violence.

There also was discussion about the need to periodically engage in civil disobedience or nonviolent direct action. The board approved a policy outlining parameters around which the organization would support staff members or appointed individuals

who might risk arrest when participating in On Earth Peace-approved civil disobedience or other nonviolent direct actions.

During the conversation, Patricia Ronk, On Earth Peace board member from Roanoke, Va., reminded the board and staff of the three-century grounding this kind of activity has in the Church of the Brethren's heritage. "In 1708, a group of people felt called to act on their carefully considered biblical convictions. In an act of civil disobedience, they baptized one another," she said. "The courage of these first Brethren exposed spiritual oppression and released vibrant communities of spiritual renewal. During the remainder of his life, Alexander Mack paupered himself as he paid fines and supported the growth of the Brethren movement. We are thankful for opportunity to build on their witness to faith."

For more information about On Earth Peace, go to www.onearthpeace.org.

—Jordan Bles is chair of the On Earth Peace board

Thompson Memorial Fund makes grants

The Joel K. Thompson Memorial Endowment Fund, administered by Brethren Foundation, is helping to underwrite the planned visit of Alexander Gee, Jr. to the National Older Adult Conference. Gee is the founder and president of The Nehemiah Urban Leadership Institute in Madison, Wis. He will speak on "In Search of Racial Righteousness" on Sept. 9.

A second one-time grant has been made to the On Earth Peace internship program, whose purpose is to "offer skill-development and personal growth for emerging peace-builders." The

grant will enable a young person to serve in an organization working for peace and justice.

The Thompson Fund was established in 1994 in memory of Joel K. Thompson by his widow, Janine Katonah, and his children. Thompson was serving on the BBT staff when he died in the crash of US Air Flight 427 at Aliquippa, Pa., on Sept. 8, 1994. The fund supports ministries in health care, stewardship, peace, reconciliation, social justice, and service—work to which Thompson was committed in his life and his ministry.



Joel K. Thompson

General secretary Stan Noffsinger to conclude service in July 2016

Stanley J. Noffsinger will finish his service as general secretary of the Church of the Brethren when his current contract concludes July 1, 2016. The Mission and Ministry Board made this announcement at its March meeting, following a process of "discovery, discussion, and deliberation."

"The board recognizes and expresses deep appreciation for Stan's gifts, passion, and sacrificial service," said chair Becky Ball-Miller. "We sense that the next season of the church's life will be best served by

new leadership."

Noffsinger reflected that "in the matters of the church, when we call for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, decisions are not made with winners and losers in mind. We may not always know where the roads lead, but each of us trusts that we will be led where the Holy Spirit desires."

The board has named a team to recommend next steps of the transition. A celebration of Noffsinger's 12 years of leadership will be held at the 2015 Annual Conference in Tampa, Fla.



GENERAL SECRETARY'S LUNCHEON

Monday, July 13 - 12 noon • Church of the Brethren Annual Conference • Tampa, Florida

Who Was Jesus: First Century Archaeology for Twenty-first Century Theology

Guest Speaker

Dr. Jonathan Reed

Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, University of La Verne

Dr. Jonathan Reed is a leading authority in early Christianity and the archaeology of ancient Mediterranean religions. A well-known Bible scholar and author, Dr. Reed has also provided National Geographic and The History Channel with expert commentary for televised documentaries that focus on Jesus and First Century life.



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The Church of the Brethren has been enriched by the educational experiences provided for well over 120 years by Brethren-related institutions of higher education (Bridgewater, Elizabethtown, Juniata, La Verne, McPherson, Manchester, and Bethany Theological Seminary). This luncheon, hosted by the General Secretary, is the second in a series engaging educators in topics of importance to the church and society.

Judas—worth another look

In 2006, there was amazing news from *National Geographic*. A television special and a book would reveal that when Judas betrayed Jesus, it was at the Savior's insistence. Having been hidden for more than 2,000 years by Christian "authorities," the Gospel of Judas, which belonged not to Christians but to Gnostics, was going to change everything.

Everything!

Or something like that.

I didn't watch the TV special because I've learned that these cable channels take five minutes of footage and stretch it into

two hours with a lot of subsonic music and pretentious narration. I did read the *National Geographic* article, however, and I downloaded materials made available on the Internet.

Afterwards I put everything in a folder and filed it away because it just didn't make sense.

The Gospel of Judas didn't seem to say the things they said it was saying, and although I can read Greek and some Hebrew, I can't read Coptic, the Egyptian language which is what the Gospel of Judas was written in.

Enter April D. DeConick, a professor of biblical studies at Rice University, and an expert in Coptic and the Gnostic religions. She heard rumors about the Gospel of Judas and knew the scholars assigned to translate it. It struck her as odd that these scholars had been forced to sign a nondisclosure agreement so they couldn't talk about how they'd reached the conclusions they'd drawn.

Also, although the Coptic text of the gospel was made available, there was no access to the original document so that other experts could evaluate whether the text they produced was the same as the one on the page.

You see, an ancient, crumbling sheaf of papyrus, with ink nearly two millennia old, can be very hard to read. And even when a facsimile of the document was printed, it was reduced to nearly half its real size, rendering it unreadable to experts.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Thirteenth Gospel (Revised Edition): What the Gospel of Judas Really Says*. **Author:** April D. DeConick. **Publisher:** Bloomsbury Academic; 2nd Edition, June 23, 2009. **Number of pages:** 296. **Price:** \$12.64 (paperback). "April DeConick created quite a storm with the publication of *The Thirteenth Apostle*," writes Birger A. Pearson, professor emeritus of religious studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. "Anyone wishing to know 'what the Gospel of Judas really says' must read this book. It is clearly the most important book yet published on this much-misunderstood gospel."

Well, DeConick was persistent. In this book she presents the text she produced as well as the translation she made after studying a good copy of the original text. She describes how Gnosticism, which competed with Christianity (and lost) for the right to interpret the life of Jesus, consisted of several competing branches. Gnostics believed that the spiritual universe was good, the physical universe was evil, that Jesus was a pure spirit who was misunderstood by his rather dim disciples, and that those who learned and shared the secret knowledge about who Jesus really was would be saved.

It was a rather elitist, mystical, and silly faith, and wading through this Gnostic collection of Jesus is a bit tedious, but worth it. DeConick writes clearly about difficult matters. I recommend you get the revised version.

Why did I choose to review this book? Because most people—especially non-believers who lack background in the gospels—will remember the TV special or a misleading feature article about the Gospel of Judas instead of the facts. Misleading information with a sensational twinge gets remembered while the facts are ignored.

Take the recent kerfuffle over the small scrap of papyrus that purportedly referred to Jesus' wife. It's been recently proven a forgery, but it's unlikely that most who heard the original story have heard that it's a fake.

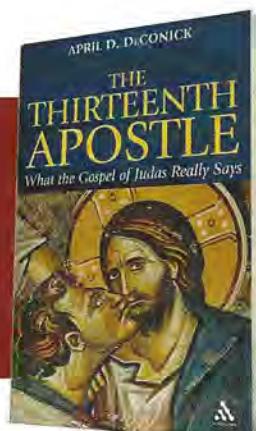
Even when actual facts are shared on television, it's often presented in a sensational light. A recent cable news program asked the question, "Could Mary Magdalene have funded the ministry of Jesus?" Well, it's been in the Gospel of Luke (see 8:1-3) for going on 2,000 years if anyone bothered to read it.

Why do we have the four gospels we have? Not because of some sinister plot by a cabal of religious and political leaders. The four gospels became authoritative because they work. Their truth is demonstrated by their use.

There is light and life in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because they are grounded in reality. The other gospels faded away because they were not much use at all.

Remember that. 

Frank Ramirez is senior pastor of the Union Center (Ind.) Church of the Brethren.



Living the La Verne Experience

Studying ethnography on the island of Gozo for her senior project is exactly why Sabrina Consiglio chose to pursue her Bachelor of Science degree in anthropology at the University of La Verne. For one month, Sabrina lived with a senior citizen community on Gozo – the sister island of Malta, located just off the south shore of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea – studying the interplay between women, Alzheimer's and faith. Sabrina presented her findings at academic conferences and discoursed with leading scholars in her field. Because of these opportunities, she was offered a full tuition scholarship to pursue a Master of Public Health degree at Yale University, which houses one of the top public health programs in the nation. She enters Yale well equipped to meet her new challenges. She has grown. She has changed. "La Verne has instilled in me my sense of self," she says. "I am leaving knowing that I am loved and supported by my family and by La Verne."



"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary."

Galatians 6:9

Sabrina Consiglio

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Time to purge

My husband teases me for losing things by compulsively putting them away.

I like to line up items in neat rows, I go nuts for the Container Store, and I hang clothes by color.

But sometimes I line things up in clearly labeled boxes,

tuck them away where they "belong," and completely forget about them.

Years will go by and I'll stumble upon a box of ribbons, ancient business cards (in alphabetical order), or receipts in files created in high school—things that were at one point deemed important.

Just this week, inspired by a sunny, breezy, almost-warm spring day, I explored the back corners of my desk drawers at home. Along with a sweet card from an old friend and photos of my sister and me, I discovered brittle gum, pens that no longer write, and a checkbook with an address from two moves ago.

I purged the drawers, reorganized, and found all kinds of



MANDY GARCIA

Spring is also a great time to purge your pantry to make room for all the new produce that is soon to come. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Remove all items from your pantry.
2. As you go, dispose of dented cans, ripped bags, anything past its expiration date, and old spices (which should be replaced every six months).
3. Place canned goods that you've had for more than a year in a box to donate.

4. Once the cupboard is bare, dust off shelves and jars.
5. Then refill by grouping "like" items together (spices, canned goods, pastas, grains, etc.). Storing your core baking ingredients in a shared container, for example, means that when it's time to whip up a batch of cookies, you only make one trip to the pantry.
6. Consider a small, well-placed lazy Susan—especially on high shelves—so tiny jars and pouches never get lost.
7. Commit to using the food you keep. Consider making fried rice, jambalaya, soup, or potpie to use up canned vegetables and grains.
8. Remember that less is more. Don't hesitate to let go of the stuff taking up space that might otherwise be occupied by things you will actually use.

space for fresh projects and new ideas. The cards and photos went into a keepsake box, and a pile of previously precious garbage moved to the trash.

Now I was ready—ready to work, to write, to build something, learn something, create something. No longer burdened by dust and clutter, I saw my desk with fresh eyes and was energized. It was satisfying to excommunicate the clutter that had wormed its way in, and it was inspiring to wonder what treasures might fill my vacated drawers. Like the day outside, there was light shed in dark corners, fresh air breathed into tired space, and promise of new growth itching to break through the surface of imagination.

In this springtime of new life, may you have eyes to see the burdens you've become accustomed to that clutter your home, work, or heart, and may you be inspired to shed those things that no longer serve a purpose. May you experience the joy of finding new space and fresh air, and may you breath deeply of their promise. ■

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



Heeding a new call

When I was younger, I thought I was going to be a physical therapist. I was going to study health and exercise science, get my doctorate, and then be a PT for the rest of my life, helping people of all ages recover from injuries. However, I also was interested in studying peace or conflict resolution. Being raised in the Church of the Brethren provided me with a passion for peace and, as I've grown, that passion has only burned brighter.

Fast forward to last summer at National Youth Conference, in Colorado, where my life took an interesting turn. Actually, just prior to going to NYC, I had spent a few days with seminary professors at an event called Exploring Your Call, where I talked about where I thought my life was leading me.

During Exploring Your Call, we talked about how to know if what we are pursuing is truly God's call for us. One way to determine the call that especially applies to me is the leading of the Holy Spirit—or nudges from God. Over the past few years, the word "peace" has been etched in my heart. Then, during my week at NYC, I recognized that this was the direction in which I was being nudged.

At NYC, events such as watching a video about the Nigeria situation, and sending a postcard to the US secretary of state, led me to feel even more called to peace ministry. Who knows where God will lead me? And plans may change. But for now I feel as though I understand what I am called to be and do.

Since I had a change of plans right before my senior year of high school—after I already explored my intended career through previous job shadowing, and finished my college search—I had to essentially start over . . . but not really. I was already set on going to Bridgewater College, so I did not have to go on any more campus tours. However, I was interested in observing the activities of the Church of the Brethren's Office of Public Witness, in Washington, D.C. Since office director Nate Hosler's job had caught my attention—especially from my observing his work during my experience in Washington at Christian Citizenship Seminar (CCS)—I thought it would be appropriate to see more of what he does on a daily basis through job shadowing.

I quickly learned that the Office of Public Witness is a small but mighty office that works on a variety of topics. The three office workers stay abreast of current events that have an impact on their more pressing is-

sues, such as Nigeria and drones. Also, they are working to implement a more intentional "Going to the Garden" initiative with the denomination, advocating for food security.

After some time spent in the office, Nate, advocacy assistant Bryan Hanger, and I went to a meeting at the US State Department Office of International Religious Freedom to inform staff there about the atrocities Brethren are facing in Nigeria. This was similar to congressional visits I had made during CCS. Later, we went to an event on resilience and peace-building at the Wilson Center. Experiences like these are useful for making connections with people working on similar topics, and for staying informed about upcoming issues.

This visit confirmed for me that I was called to peace ministry. My plans are to study political science or global studies, and minor in peace studies. After my experiences at NYC and the Office of Public Witness, among others, I know I am headed in the right direction. Thanks to Christian Citizenship Seminar, Exploring Your Call, and National Youth Conference, I have been able to hear and accept my call. **M**

Jenna Walmer is a high school senior from Lancaster County, Pa.



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“Thank you . . . for loving us enough that you have stayed with us and are trying to show us a better way! Please don’t give up on us.

Don’t give up on us

Congratulations to Melisa Grandison for writing of the pain she experienced in connection with her growing up in a strong, mostly white, Brethren community and congregation in western Kansas (January/February MESSENGER). Because she was both black and white (racially), too many of us did not “see” her beauty or talent, much less the love she had for a church that taught living peacefully, simply, and together. And, the same could be said for her brother Michael, who was killed in a vehicle accident.

Thank you, Melisa, for loving us enough that you have stayed with us

and are trying to show us a better way! Please don’t give up on us yet, or treat us as we have treated you. After all, most of us who are white do not even know that most Brethren in this world today are neither American nor white, and we are pretty clumsy in our efforts to walk in the footsteps of Jesus!

Leon C. Neher
Quinter, Kan.

We are all neighbors

Once again I’m delighted with the content and look of MESSENGER. I especially

ministering. proclaiming. living.

*Britnee Harbaugh
senior MDiv student*

- named to Seminaries That Change the World 2015
- member of Seminary Stewardship Alliance for creation care



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appreciated the January/February article, "Changing the climate with love." Please convey my thanks to these authors. I was disappointed that Annual Conference did not take a strong stand on this, as we need to be good stewards of the gift of our home planet. The science is overwhelming and agreed upon. To put credence in false prophets on this issue will make the outcome even worse than it could be, and things are not looking good. The Church of the Brethren cannot have a big impact on changing greenhouse numbers, as we are a small denomination. However, as we have done many times in the past, we can take the lead and show bigger denominations the critical role of treating others in the world with compassion as this sad story unfolds and many persons are displaced and stressed in other ways. We are all neighbors in this deal.

Craig Coble
Elizabethtown, Pa.



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The Seagoing Cowboy

Heifer's high-sea adventures



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MESSENGER



Peggy Reiff Miller began interviewing seagoing cowboys in 2002. The research soon claimed her, making her the foremost authority on the seagoing cowboys of Heifer International's storied history. Her latest project is the forthcoming children's picture book, *The Seagoing Cowboy*. Peggy lives in Milford, Indiana, and is a member of the Goshen City Church of the Brethren.

"You can go anywhere on the back of a heifer"
—M. R. Zigler

Every page a blessing

Thank you for the excellent April issue. From Wendy's opening note to Randy's closing column, every page was a blessing. While each article was valuable and appreciated, I'll comment on just three of them.

Mandy Garcia's monthly columns speak of things close to my heart, and I'm always inspired by them. Her fresh look at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was wonderful.

It's so important to acknowledge that we are as prone to idolatry as those whose stories are told in the Old Testament. Like them, we don't recognize it as idolatry; like them, we think of it as conventional wisdom or obvious necessity or established religious belief. I commend Nathan Hosler and Brian Hanger for speaking plainly about idolatry in the context of national security and drone warfare.

David Radcliff has set forth a clear, well-reasoned explanation of two ways of understanding Jesus and our relationship to him: we can follow him or we can believe in him. Or both. The difference in

I love the way she unpacked the burglary, taking us deeper and deeper into what brings her home its value and where her *treasure* really lies.

these approaches has seemed to me to be at the heart of why we so often seem to be divided by our common faith in Jesus, and this article spells it out very helpfully. Radcliff says, "Jesus was less about right belief and more about right practice." The more I read, study, and reflect on the gospel story, the clearer this becomes.

Thank you to all who make it possible for us to receive the MESSENGER.

Bob Gross
North Manchester, Ind.

Where treasure truly lies

I just read Wendy McFadden's "From the Publisher" piece in the April MESSENGER. (Always my first read upon receiving my copy.) I love the way she unpacked the

burglary, taking us deeper and deeper into what brings her home its value and where her treasure really lies. The final irony is that if the robber had actually taken her treasure, all would not be lost as the books themselves hold the possibility of continued transformation. Sweet.

Glenn Mitchell
Boalsburg, Pa.

Send letters to MESSENGER, Attn: Letters, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or e-mail 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.

CLASSIFIEDS

Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore? Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Tampa, Florida. If you have interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120 or jdeaton@brethren.org.

Consignment sales at Annual Conference. Brethren Press makes space available at Annual Conference for individuals and groups to sell items to Conference attendees on a consignment basis. Consignment space must be reserved by June 1. For information on consignment sales, contact Brethren Press Consignments, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or kstocking@brethren.org.

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

New Members

Camp Creek, Etna Green, Ind.: Jared Bules, Jaelyn Bules, Jenna Bules, Haley Carson, Connor Large, Michael Nunez, Mathew Nunez

Ephrata, Pa.: Sara Weaver, Casey Weaver, Daryl Thomas, Lindsay Thomas, Austin Brass, Charlie Dimer, Lindsay Murphy, Tristan Hawkins, Bethann Poehler, Giovanna Poehler, Isabelle Groff, Paul Sleek, Andrea Sleek, Andrew Sleek, Dave Shirley, Ryan Clift, Kaila Clift, Maria Ulrich

Frederick, Md.: Dick Autz, Reah Autz, Manny Blackner, Brian Flegel, Lorna House, Eric Jones, Heather Jones, Rich Komonchak, Chris Komonchak, James Lacey, Jennifer Lacey, Dianne Watterson, David Watterson, Donnie Wiles, Bernice Wiles

Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.: Perry Hall, Zoe Hanabass, April Camp

Lancaster, Pa.: Robert Finkbiner, Robbin Finkbiner

Linville Creek, Broadway, Va.: Wendy Reid, Ben Beid, Bonnie Holsinger

Little Swatara, Bethel, Pa.: Kenneth Coots, Judy Coots, Jeremy Platck, Melanie Platck, Donald Larimer, Amelia Dettwiler, Anthony Fazio

Mountain Grove, Fulks Run, Va.: Otis Custer, Stacy Craft, Deanne Craft

Myerstown, Pa.: Jenifer Fetzer, Timothy Fetzer, Jason Fuhrman

Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.: Frank Ramirez, Jenine Ramirez, Dewey Ray

Price, Diane Price, Noah Price, David Price, Junelle Miller, Kira Radtke, Francisco Ramirez, Joseph Toscano, Megan Toscano

Wedding Anniversaries

Anglemeyer, Wayne and Charlene, Nappanee, Ind., 50

Buckingham, Sam and Francisse, Prairie City, Iowa, 69

Coutts, Richard and Shirley, Gettysburg, Pa., 50

Garl, Harley and Betty, Nappanee, Ind., 65

Herr, Larry and Donna, Nappanee, Ind., 50

Klotz, Willard and Deloris, Nappanee, Ind., 70

Long, Warren and Winnie, Frederick, Md., 55

Myers, James and Peggy, Goshen, Ind., 60

Riegsecker, Duane and Ellen, Goshen, Ind., 65

Searer, Glenn and Bonnie, Elkhart, Ind., 50

Deaths

Bayles, Eileen Ruth Tritapoe, 92, Frederick, Md., Feb. 3

Beachley, Donovan R., Jr., 89, Hagerstown, Md., March 4

Binkley, Richard Ober, 87, Lancaster, Pa., March 7

Brechers, Henry H., 93, Mount Morris, Ill., March 12

Bricker, Gail Glass, 97, Chambersburg, Pa., Feb. 19

Burkholder, June Yoder, 84, Goshen, Ind., Aug. 9

Byrem, Lois Cumpson, 88, Strasburg, Pa., Oct. 7

Carlson, Kathleen Rice, 64, Goshen, Ind., June 19

Cline, Joyce Ann Davis, 62, Frederick, Md., Dec. 27

Cole, Ruby Irene St. John, 95, Hillsdale, Mich., Feb. 28

Cope, Paul Raymond, 97, Landisville, Pa., March 13

Croy, Roger D., 60, Nappanee, Ind., Nov. 6

Dean, Sara Alyce Garber, 70, Harrisonburg, Va., Aug. 27

DeGrange, Agnes May Holt, 89, Walkersville, Md., Sept. 14

Dixon, Ruth Alderfer, 91, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 15

Duncan, Shirley Keith, 79, Floyd, VA., Jan. 19

Elkins, J. Burton, 80, Middlebury, Md., Sept. 27

Friend, Regina M. Glover, 57, Uniontown, Pa., April 24, 2014

Funk, Glenford E., 96, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 15

Furr, Jerry Wayne, 66, Newport News, Va., Feb. 1

Gashaw, Uleta Pyle, 93, Somerset, Pa., March 7

Gayer, Loreen F. Cline, 80, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 3

Geisbert, William C., 84, Frederick, Md., Dec. 24

Hahn, Milton L., Sr., 82, Frederick, Md., Nov. 19

Hall, Kathryn Rittenhouse, 87, Charlottesville, Va., Jan. 16

Hildebrand, Anna Lee, 78, Frederick, Md., Oct. 1

Holland, Louis E., 90, Duncansville, Pa., Feb. 26

Hollifield, Gertrude Ponder, 96, Johnson City, Tenn., Feb. 24

Holsinger, Evelyn Fahrney, 89, Timberville, Va., Dec. 30

Houff, Mary Ziegler, 92, Champaign, Ill., Feb. 26

Johnson, Fred Roger, Jr., 47, Fishers, Ind., April 17, 2014

Kindy, June A., 85, North Manchester, Ind., Feb. 20

Lassiter, Alice W., 80, Hopewell, Va., Feb. 10

Long, Emma Shettles, 88, Westminster, Md., Feb. 1

Mackley, Marjorie Aileen, 91, Frederick, Md., Sept. 29

Means, Juanita Jean Davies, 77, Ohiopyle, Pa., Feb. 15

Metcalf, Mary Lou Miller, 84, Knoxville, Md., Dec. 27

Metcalf, Wanda W., 87, Brunswick, Md., March 3

Mishler, June Evelyn, 85, Nappanee, Ind., Jan. 31

Mock, JoAnne Livingston, 84, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 16

Ogburn, Earl Fay, Sr., 90, Hopewell, Va., Jan. 26

Oxley, Derald William, 87, Onalaska, Wash., March 3

Petry, Margaret M., 84, North Manchester, Ind., Dec. 8

Price, Dean W., 100, Napavine, Ind., Oct. 17

Rackley, Garnetta L., 84, Modesto, Calif., Feb. 24

Rotruck, Marshall L., 89, Keyser, W. Va., Feb. 28

Roudebush, Pete, 73, Taylor Valley, Va., Feb. 22

Sampselle, Joan Cobb, 88, Frederick, Md., Aug. 25

Schreck, Richard Frank, 74, Westminster, Md., Dec. 12

Sheets, Virginia Jeanette Jackson, 90, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 10

Stanley, Delmar S., 91, La Verne, Calif., March 18

Stein, Elizabeth L. Hoover, 90, Uniontown, Pa., Feb. 18

St. John, Donna I., 90, Camden, Mich., March 1

Summers, Ruby Ruth Moser, 87, Frederick, Md., Oct. 3

Taylor, Velma Lee, 90, New Carlisle, Ohio, March 1

Tinsman, Edith Casey, 91, Wilmington, Del., Feb. 28

Vought, Winifred, 73, Friends, Pa., Feb. 15

Walter, Darlene L. Stayer, 85, Claysburg, Pa., Feb. 25

Woolery, Marian J., 84, West Alexandria, Ohio, Feb. 14

Zuck, Lowell H., 88, Saint Louis, Mo., July 30, 2014

Licensings

Leonard, Michelle, N. Plains Dist. (Dallas Center, Iowa), Feb. 8

Martin, Derrill Jay, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa.), Feb. 8

Mattox, Nathan, Atl. S.E. Dist. (The Rock Bible Church, Middleburg, Fla.), Oct. 22

Petry, Daniel M., chaplain, Evergreen Place, Greencroft Communities, Goshen, Ind., March 2

Raker, Robert C., from interim pastor to pastor, Bear Creek, Dayton, Ohio, March 1

Ray, Mark A., from pastor, Leake's Chapel, Stanley, Va., to pastor, Covington Community, Covington, Wash., Jan. 11

Reichenbach, Douglas A., team pastor, Eel River Community, Silver Lake, Ind., Jan. 4

Sonafrank, Harold E., pastor, Coulson, Hillsville, Va., March 1

Wilson, Clint A., team pastor, Eel River Community, Silver Lake, Ind., Jan. 4

Reinhart, Mary Etta, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.), March 1

Seese, Mark L., W. Marva Dist. (Shady Grove, Bruceton Mills, W. Va.), March 1

Placements

Cave, William W., coordinator of congregational care, Palmyra, Pa., Feb. 9

Eberly, Roger W., team pastor, Eel River Community, Silver Lake, Ind., Jan. 4

Long, Janice Kulp, team pastor, Eel River Community, Silver Lake, Ind., Jan. 4

Loose, Vaughn A., pastor, Mansfield, Ohio, March 1

Martin, Derrill Jay, pastor, Drexel Hill, Pa., June 8, 2014

Mattox, Nathan, pastor, The Rock Bible Church, Middleburg, Fla., April 14, 2014

Mitchell, Elizabeth Anne, from associate pastor to pastor, Lighthouse, Boones Mill, Va., March 15

O'Neill, Lawrence J., chaplain, Souderton Mennonite Homes, Souderton, Pa., Feb. 1

Petry, Daniel M., chaplain, Evergreen Place, Greencroft Communities, Goshen, Ind., March 2

Raker, Robert C., from interim pastor to pastor, Bear Creek, Dayton, Ohio, March 1

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Unexpected grace

She was in a hurry to leave the grocery store. With a baby strapped to her front, a screaming toddler in tow, and her husband ahead pushing the cart, she was tired, harried, and frustrated, and, on the heels of her son's meltdown, she just wanted to get away from onlookers, to be invisible—or at least blend in. But that's difficult for Lauren and Joe Casper to do even under normal circumstances.

"Our family doesn't exactly blend in with the wallpaper," she explained in a blog she wrote about the incident not long afterward. "Not only are we two white parents with a brown son and daughter (something that causes enough stares and questions all by itself), but our son has noticeable developmental delays and different behaviors caused by his autism, and our daughter has physical differences with her missing and webbed digits. In other words, when we go out together we stand out."

She was hoping to reach the car as quickly as possible, strap her children in, and leave, when she heard a woman call out.

"Ma'am!"

Hoping it was not meant for her, she slowly turned to see a young worker from the store approaching her. Casper thought she must've dropped something.

The woman was smiling and holding a bouquet of flowers. Casper noticed her soft, black curls, similar to her own children's.

"I just wanted you to have this bouquet," the woman told

That's the thing about grace—it often arrives when we least expect it, and when we feel we least deserve it. We do our best in life, but sometimes we lose our patience. We lean on our horns a little too long. We utter some snarky remark. We hurt those close to us. Sometimes our transgressions are quickly forgiven. Sometime the damage is deeper. When we're to blame, penance must figure into the equation. There must be acknowledgment of wrongdoing, time to contemplate the offense, time to ponder how we might change.

The words "penance" and "penitentiary" come from the same Medieval Latin word "poenitentia." I heard once that the original intent behind penitentiaries was for offenders to do penance—to spend time pondering their offenses in an attempt to regain wholeness. If that's true, then penitentiaries initially were meant not for punishment but for redemption. There was room in the process for grace.

"[Grace] doesn't make much sense to our human understanding of justice," writes *Orange County Register* Faith and Values columnist Cathleen Falsani. "It doesn't seem fair. It isn't fair. And that's precisely the point of grace."

We humans, with our feet of clay, tend to lean toward vengeance when it comes to settling scores. Thankfully, God has other ideas. Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son to illustrate God's grace. The son didn't deserve his father's open-arm welcome when he returned from a life of debauchery, but he got it.

"Grace is a gift available to all of us," Falsani continues. "We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. But we get it anyway. Abundantly. Audaciously. Without caveat or qualification."

It turns out, just like the grocery store worker who approached Casper in the parking lot, we can play a part in the

Just like the grocery store worker who approached Casper in the parking lot, we can play a part in the process of spreading God's grace . . .

her. "I was adopted as a baby and it has been a wonderful thing." She patted Casper on the shoulder and told her that her family was beautiful. "We need more families like yours."

Casper thanked her and walked slowly to her car, tears spilling down her cheeks.

"On a day when I felt like we were the worst example of family, a day when I hoped no one noticed us, she did," Casper wrote. "But she didn't see what I assumed everyone was seeing. She didn't think what I assumed everyone was thinking. She saw beauty and love and hope and family."

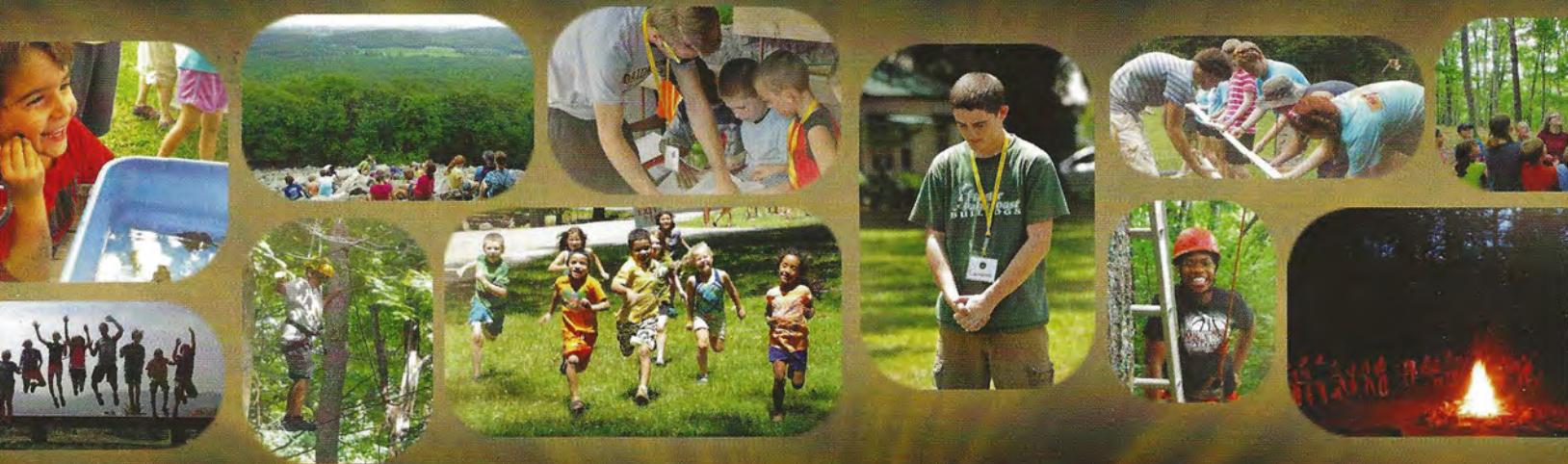
process of spreading God's grace, in spite of ourselves.

"Sometimes," Falsani writes, "by not just 'accepting' but by loving without limits, we extend grace to one another. We give each other the space to be known, valued, and cherished for the beautiful and wondrously made people we inherently are."

Next time someone cuts you off on the highway, or you witness a toddler's temper tantrum in aisle 6, practice grace. It's one of the small ways we can be hands and feet for spreading the unmerited grace that is available to us in such abundance. **¶**

COMING IN JUNE: The Brethren in Nigeria

FOR THE SPIRIT GOD GAVE US DOES NOT MAKE US TIMID,
BUT GIVES US POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE. 2TIM1:7



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