

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

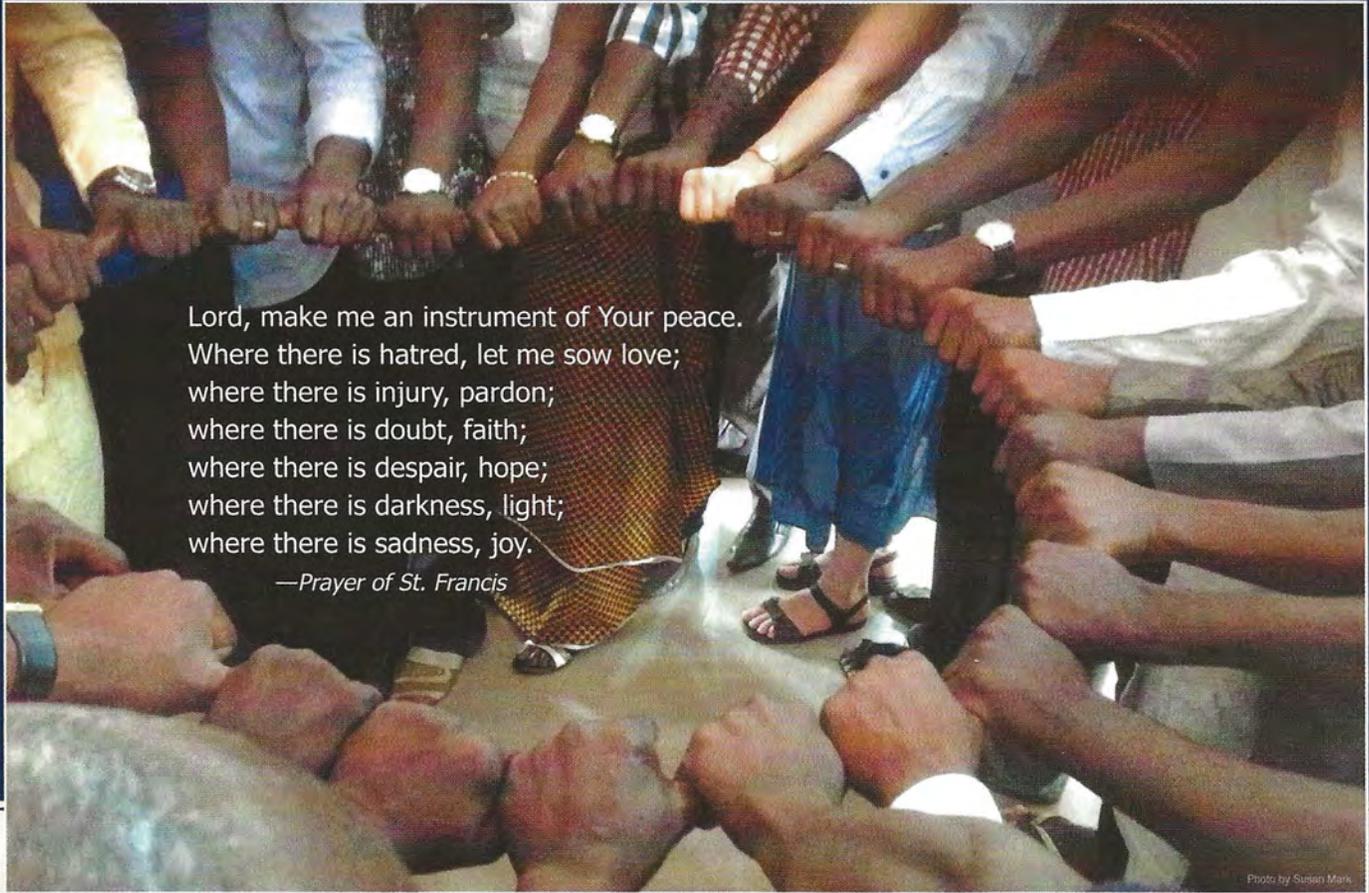
# MESSENGER

JULY/AUGUST 2015 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

## CHAPEL WALK



# Healing the trauma of disaster.



Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

—Prayer of St. Francis

Photo by Susan Mark

Disasters and violence can wound people not just physically, but emotionally. Brethren Disaster Ministries reaches out to traumatized survivors with -

- A listening ear as damaged homes are repaired
- Specialized, therapeutic play activities for children
- Trauma healing workshops that restore hope and faith

**Help Brethren Disaster Ministries sow the love, light and joy of Christ.**



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Photo by Melissa Wilcox



Photo by Katie Lewis



Photo by Roxane Hill

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Nevin Dulabaum

## 8 A call to love

"One big happy family!" It's an observation Annual Conference moderator David Steele's daughter is fond of making when their family is together. Her father has spent the past year observing the larger Brethren family. You may be surprised at what he found.

## 10 Providing space to grow through partnership

You don't have to go far to engage in cross-cultural ministry, especially when you're all in the same building. Find out how two congregations in Roanoke, Va., are reaching across the aisle and into their community.

## 13 Chapel walk

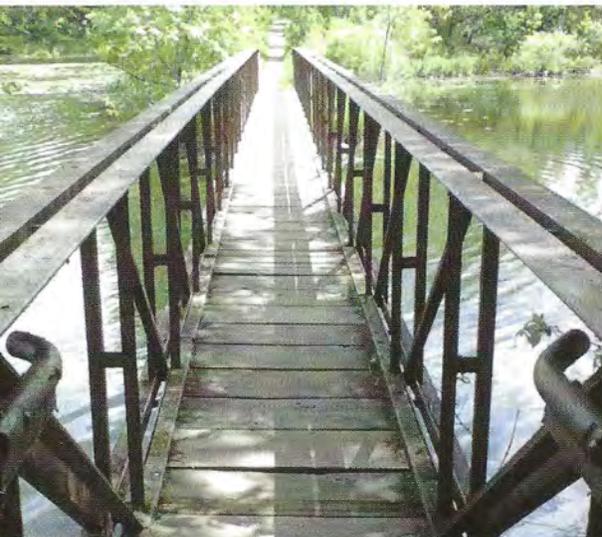
Her stroll through the grounds of a Benedictine monastery became an unexpected lesson in multiculturalism and radical hospitality.

## 16 Is that all there is?

When her prayers went unfulfilled, this Brethren pastor wrestled with anger, depression, and doubt. But it didn't end there. Learn how her struggle led to a new understanding of God and an even deeper faith.

## 18 Bible study

Lessons from the Shunammite woman, begun last month, continue in this issue with a focus on acceptance, obedience, victory, and gratitude.



Anna Lisa Gross



The Voice/Summer Night by Edward Munch, 1896

## departments

2 FROM THE PUBLISHER  
3 IN TOUCH  
6 REFLECTIONS  
7 THE BUZZ

20 NEWS  
25 YOUTH  
26 LIVING SIMPLY

28 LETTERS  
31 TURNING POINTS  
32 EDITORIAL

Cover photos by Anna Lisa Gross and Carla Durand.

**T**hose attending this year's Annual Conference have been introduced to a work of art entitled #BringBackOurGirls. The title alone captures the attention of Brethren, as it did last December in a gallery in Colorado. And then the viewer sees the 276 tiny gingham dresses, uniforms



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

that represent the girls abducted in Chibok a year ago last April. Most of the dresses are arranged in a circular pattern that symbolizes the terrorist group Boko Haram. The girls who escaped are depicted by dresses that have broken free from the circle. "Underlying the visual symmetry," according to the artist's note, "is a loud silence of despair."

The artist is Sandra Ceas, of Littleton, Colo., who is drawn to issues of social justice. She brings together graduate degrees in both fine arts and religious studies. "I have been called to make art that expresses the knowledge, wisdom, and love of God," she comments. "I believe art is a language that God desires to reclaim."

"Reclaim" is the theme of a forthcoming exhibit of the Christos Collective, a collective of Christian artists that Ceas founded. The members of the group seek to reclaim the voice of God in their art. Their first show, "Presence," was exhibited earlier this summer in Denver.

There are many ways to approach the harsh realities of our world. Art is one that often is overlooked. In #BringBackOurGirls, the viewer is reminded wordlessly of the individuality of each girl and the family she represents, as well as the larger devastation of a people suffering from terrorism.

We Brethren bring our own reflections to our experience with this art: We have prayed for the girls by name. We know people who built the school in Chibok. We know the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria—sisters and brothers bound to us through a common faith and heritage. We are witnesses to their resilience and hope.

No wonder, then, that Brethren who have served in Nigeria were convinced that the #BringBackOurGirls art needed to be bought and given to the Church of the Brethren. (You can read the story in the March 4 issue of Newsline, archived at [www.brethren.org](http://www.brethren.org).) May the art give us one more way to be present with our Nigerian family—and with all who suffer.



(Prints of the #BringBackOurGirls artwork are available from Brethren Press. A portion of the sales goes to the Nigeria Crisis Fund.)

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**Congregation Close-Up**

## A prayer path accessible to all

**T**he Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren recently completed construction of a labyrinth (a walking prayer path) on their grounds. Months of planning went into the project, which is designed to represent a spiritual journey to one's center and then back into the world. The circular pathway is one of the oldest meditative tools in existence.

The church's labyrinth was modified in response to concerns about accessibility. In a spirit of hospitality and welcome, the redesign provides a totally flat, stable surface, enabling anyone with mobility issues free access.

Cal Aukeman, a contractor in the congregation, provided the expertise, leadership, and construction skills for the project, which took six weeks to complete. The project was funded by the Couchman family in honor of their parents, Hurley and Thelma Couchman, longtime church members whose lives were dedicated to peace, justice, and service in the larger community. A plaque was presented in their memory at a May 31 dedication service.—**Elaine Harty Forcier**



**by the numbers**

**90,000**

Dollar amount in grants recently allocated by the Church of the Brethren's Global Food Crisis Fund to projects in Honduras, Burundi, Idaho, Spain, and the Democratic Republic of Congo

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



Randy Miller

## Pacific Northwest Brethren gather for musical inspiration

### Church of the Brethren congregations in the Pacific Northwest

District met in March for a worshipful, inspirational musical event at Grinwood Camp and Retreat Center in Lacey, Wash.

“Musicians and singers—including guitarists, ban-

jo-pickers, a washtub thumper, and several percussionists—enlivened our evenings with familiar songs,” reported Steve Gregory, of Wenatchee’s Sunnyslope congregation. Jonathan Shively, executive director of Congregational Life for the denomination, was on hand to lead a workshop titled “How shall we sing the Lord’s song?” Other workshops focused on ways to reach out to the community in its diversity.

“The goal for the event was to foster connections between congregations in a non-business gathering—a place where our churches could both give and receive encouragement and support,” Gregory added. “It was a delightful gathering, with many requests to do it again next year.”



Randy Miller

### Serving others

**Troy (Ohio) Church of the Brethren and the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio,** hosted Nigeria Crisis Response co-directors Carl and Roxane Hill at a presentation at the Heritage Center April 29-30. The Hills had recently returned from working with Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) and talked about conditions faced by Nigerian Brethren.

“About 135 attended the event,” church member Larry Heisey reported. “And about 60 people were treated to a typical Nigerian dinner at the Brethren Heritage Center. The meal was prepared by John and Pat Krabacher, of New Carlisle Church of the Brethren. Donations to the Nigerian Crisis Fund totaled more than \$2,800.”

*Carl and Roxane Hill give a presentation about Nigeria at the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio.*



Neal Fize



## Scholarships honor former Brethren missionary

### La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

awarded \$1,500 in scholarships to six area high school students out of 40 who submitted entries to the Benton Rhoades Peacemaker Scholarships. A committee of the church's Peace and Justice Commission reviewed the entries of essays and art work from local schools and selected the winners. Each student received a check for \$250. Presentations were made at the eighth annual Festival for the Arts held in May at the La Verne church.

Benton Rhoades, who died in 2003, was a former Church of the Brethren missionary to Ecuador and a longtime leader and advocate for agricultural workers. In addition to his work in Ecuador, Rhoades helped create the denomination's rural development program, and later joined Agricultural Missions Inc., eventually becoming the ecumenical organization's executive director.



Bob Dyer (left), of the La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, presents scholarships to high school students in honor of Brethren missionary and agricultural advocate J. Benton Rhoades.

## Shenandoah auction a success

**Another great weekend!** said a Shenandoah District e-mail sharing early results for the district's 2015 Disaster Ministries Auction, held May 15-16 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg, Va. "The 23rd annual Shenandoah District Disaster Ministries Auction is now history—and has some great early results to report. Receipts for Friday and Saturday totaled \$177,052, plus \$32,050 from the livestock sale. This does not include miscellaneous income such as golf tournament fees and oyster purchases. While some bills have yet to be paid, it's looking good for a successful 2015 auction to support Brethren Disaster Ministries." The district reported that at least 1,050 oyster-and-ham dinners were sold, as well as 445 breakfasts and 170 lunches.

## Remembered

**Gerald Neher**, a former Church of the Brethren mission worker in Nigeria, died May 25 at the Cedars in McPherson, Kan. He and wife, Lois, lived in McPherson since his retirement from teaching. Since the April 2014 abduction of the 200-plus schoolgirls from Chibok by Boko Haram, Neher became known for authoring perhaps the only book published in English about Chibok and its people. The book, which Neher wrote with his wife, also may be the only scholarly study of Chibok society, culture, traditions, and history. The Nehers worked with the Church of the Brethren Mission in Nigeria from 1954-1968, serving in Chibok and at Kulp Bible School. While at Chibok, they helped expand the size of the school building, making it possible for the first girls to attend the school.

The Nehers lived and worked in Chibok early in their missionary career, and made a thorough study of those among whom they lived. The book, *Life Among the Chibok of Nigeria*, was published in 2011 and offered an



Gerald Neher with family in Nigeria.

extensive record of what the Nehers learned about the Chibok during their time there. They "listened to the elders speak about their land, their lineage, their ethos, their farming, religious beliefs, kinship, and much more," according

to a description of the book, "so that the Chibok people would have a record of their past and their present as devastating changes have overtaken them." A follow-up book, *Glimpses of Life in Northeast Nigeria 1954-1968*, was published in 2014.

After the abductions of the Chibok schoolgirls, the Nehers were interviewed by Michael Daly for *The Daily Beast*. In the interview, "We Built a School in Boko Haram's Heartland," Daly noted that "the very opposite of terrorists arrived in Chibok more than a half-century before the world came to know this remote Nigerian village as the place where maniacal members of Boko Haram kidnapped more than 270 girls and burned down their school. While the terrorist group struck in recent days intending only evil, Gerald and Lois Neher of Kansas came to Chibok in 1954 with the purpose of doing as much good as they were able. They helped make it possible for girls to attend school there in the first place."

**Katherine "Kathy" A. Hess**, 63, a past chair of the Church of the Brethren General Board, died on June 4. She was active in the redesign of the denomination's former General board structure. She was involved at Ashland (Ohio) Dickey Church of the Brethren where she taught adult Sunday school classes in addition to serving as chair of the deacon board, chair of the ministry commission, and as a member of the church board. She served on the General Board 1992-97, serving as chair from 1995-97. She represented Northern Ohio District on the Annual Conference Standing Committee in 1999-2004.

## One big happy family

**I**n the Steele home, our youngest daughter, Aubrey, keeps us grounded. She is a constant reminder of the simple and important things in life: family, joy, and love.



DAVID STEELE

Aubrey was gifted with an extra chromosome, and we—and those who know her—have been the beneficiaries of that gift. “One big happy family” often rolls from her lips when the four of us are all together (Aubrey, her mother, big sister, and I). Our family being together is very important for Aubrey—whether it is in the morning when we are all gathered in the kitchen getting ready for our day, those rare times when all of us are together around the dinner table, or when we are in the car driving to church or heading to a local restaurant. She looks around, taking note of everyone’s presence, and exclaims, “One big happy family.” There would be a note of pride in such a proclamation if it were to come from me, of course. Yet, when it comes from Aubrey, that proclamation is motivated purely by love, and in her “One big happy family,” joy resounds.

I have raised the question this past year about what it would be like to be motivated by this kind of love—a vision

by power, control, fear, and ego. It is a church lost in the cultural, political, and/or personal agendas of its membership. It is a church more focused on its own comfort, needs, and desires and, likely, its own survival. Love is often used as a club to hold people accountable to the norms and expectations of the congregational tradition.

Love, however, is not some emotional response or doctrine. Love is something we do simply because Jesus did it to us first. Jesus loved us first and commands us to love one another.

I have had opportunity in my travels this past year as your moderator to experience our church motivated by this kind of love. I have seen you passionate about your faith and ministries. I have seen you alive and working hard to reach and serve your communities in Jesus’ name. I have seen you going to great lengths to be counter-cultural in your witness to show and share that following Jesus is about another way of living. I have seen you caught up in John’s vision, getting your hands dirty, pushing to the margins and the places that make you uncomfortable. And in your sharing, there is evidence of God’s abiding presence as you have worked faithfully to bear fruit.

I recognize that those precious “one big happy family” moments in the Steele home, as we currently understand them, are quickly passing us by. Nevertheless, I know Au-

**While those moments may one day pass, they are far from gone because when we are motivated simply by love, then our joy finds new expressions *in family and community.***

that I believe is described in John 15:9-17. Love would be the motive out of which all decisions are made. Jesus modeled this in his own life as he ate with prostitutes and tax collectors; associated with women and foreigners; condemned the religiously powerful and the rich; and called the poor blessed. The list goes on. This kind of love is about pushing us to the margins, and sometimes into places that make us uncomfortable.

Some would have you believe that such “one big happy family” moments in the life of the church are fading. I have witnessed the church these naysayers talk about. It is a church that has lost sight of John’s vision and is motivated

brey’s joy will find a new expression because love reigns supreme in her life.

Yet, while those moments may one day pass, they are far from gone because when we are motivated simply by love, then our joy finds new expressions in family and community. Love is something we do because Jesus did it to us first. If you forget what that kind of love looks like, then come and spend some time with Aubrey, who will help you better understand the true joy of loving. **W**

David Steele is moderator of this year’s Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in Tampa, Fla., and district executive minister of the Church of the Brethren’s Middle Pennsylvania District.

**“Each day I thank God that I have grown up being nurtured in the Church of the Brethren . . .”**

—Manchester University freshman Sarandon Smith, from Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

**cultureview**

► **More women and children have been used as suicide bombers in Nigeria**

in the first five months of this year than during the whole of last year, according to reports from UNICEF. In 2014, women and girls carried out three-quarters of the attacks in Nigeria, according to UNICEF. Initially, the group used male suicide bombers, mainly, to attack churches, mosques, public places, and government installations. Nigerians fear violence may escalate if female terrorists are deployed because they can hide explosives under their long Muslim abayas, or gowns.

► **The Irish vote to allow same-sex marriage was a “defeat for humanity,”** a senior Vatican official said in the first high-level reaction from the Holy See to the country’s landmark referendum in May. “Not a defeat for Christian principles, it was a defeat for humanity,” Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Pietro Parolin said. The comments by Parolin, Pope Francis’ most senior Vatican official, under-

lined the shock created by the landslide vote in traditionally Catholic Ireland. Pope Francis has struck a more sympathetic tone toward homosexuals than many conservative Catholics, famously commenting soon after taking office: “If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?”

► **Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero was beatified**

May 23, the final step before sainthood, 35 years after he was killed by a right-wing death squad for denouncing the oppression of the poor by the military dictatorship. Catholics from around the world mixed with former Marxist rebels from El Salvador’s brutal civil war as more than 250,000 people gathered in the capital to celebrate the country priest who confronted the US-backed government. Cardinal Angelo Amato, sent by Pope Francis, officiated the ceremony that followed decades of debate over whether Romero had rejected church doctrine by embracing radical, left-wing rebels.

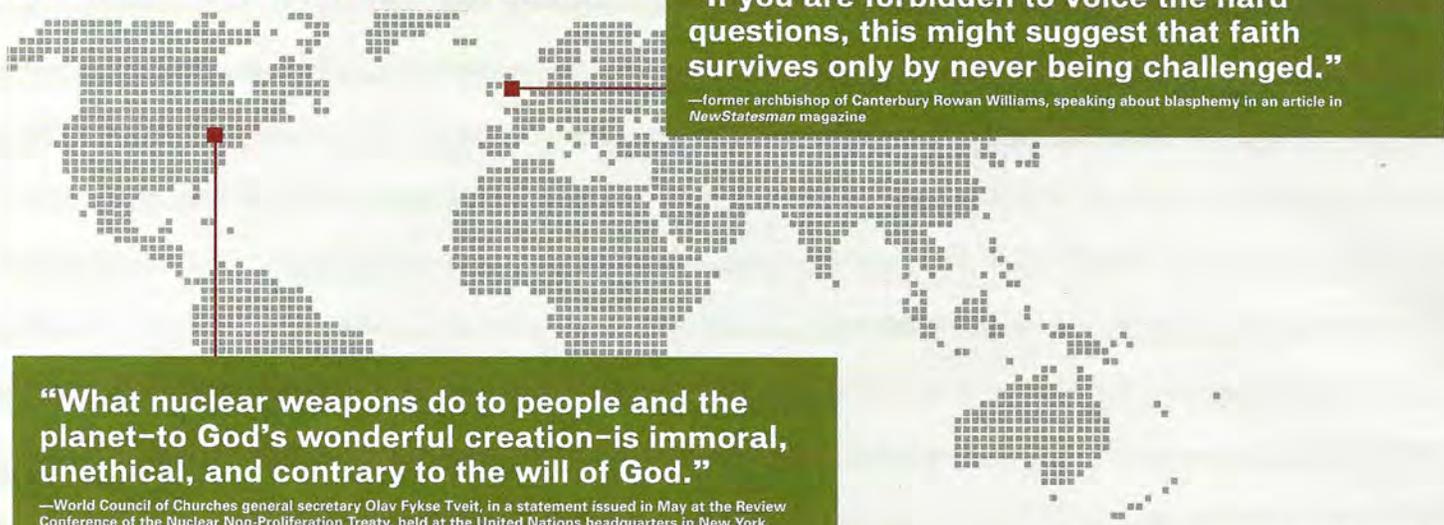
**“Much of the ‘dying’ we worry about is the normal passing away of structures and ideas that no longer convey meaning. The big downtown church isn’t empty because church leaders failed or people were unappreciative. It’s empty because people are finding life elsewhere.”**

—Tom Ehrich, church consultant, president of Morning Walk Media, and Episcopal priest based in New York

**“You see how easily an innocent person can be executed by the state. It’s very hard to support the death penalty and accept the risk and be pro-life.”**

—Marc Hyden, leader of Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty

**Heard 'round the world**



**“If you are forbidden to voice the hard questions, this might suggest that faith survives only by never being challenged.”**

—former archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, speaking about blasphemy in an article in *NewStatesman* magazine

**“What nuclear weapons do to people and the planet—to God’s wonderful creation—is immoral, unethical, and contrary to the will of God.”**

—World Council of Churches general secretary Olav Fykse Tveit, in a statement issued in May at the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, held at the United Nations headquarters in New York

# A CALL TO LOVE

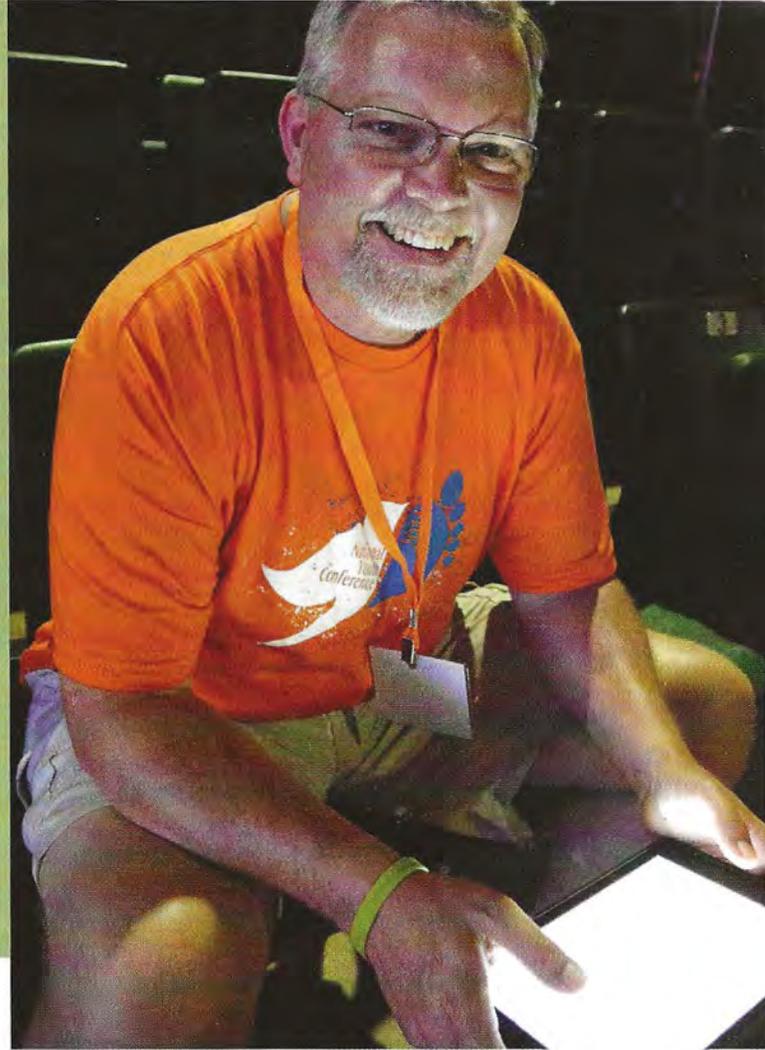
by Karen Doss Bowman

**W**hen David Steele takes the gavel this summer as moderator of Annual Conference in Tampa, Fla., he will challenge his fellow Brethren to act as a community driven by love, making decisions and seeking unity to build a community transformed by joy and the presence of Jesus Christ.

“There is much that continues to distract us from bearing fruit,” Steele writes in his description of this year’s theme, “Abide in My Love . . . and Bear Fruit.” “It is inescapable that the creative people of God will see the complexities of life in different ways. To that end, the command of Jesus is clear: abide in my love and bear fruit. Love one another no matter the cost. Experience the joy of tough loving.”

Steele’s theme was partly inspired by his observation that Brethren haven’t treated one another well in recent years—particularly during struggles with difficult issues. He hopes that conversations during this summer’s conference, which takes place July 11-15, will be inspired by love first.

“While community is one of our strengths in the Church of the Brethren, it’s also an area in which we struggle,” says Steele, who is district executive minister for the Middle Pennsylvania District. “In our sense of community, we want everybody to be like us, but that’s not the way community is going to be. We struggle with knowing how to talk about the tough issues we face as a church. If we’re going to work through our differences, we really need to embrace histori-



cally who we are, gathering around scripture and prayer and conversation—really working through these issues by opening ourselves up to the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

Steele has felt first-hand the transforming love of Jesus Christ through his 19-year-old daughter Aubrey, who has Down Syndrome. In the Steele household, for example, Aubrey is happiest when the whole family comes together for a meal or other special gathering. In these situations, she often looks around the room and comments, “One big, happy family.”

“Aubrey reminds us of the significance of [being together as a family],” Steele says. “So Aubrey has been part of the inspiration for my Annual Conference theme. She’s a constant reminder for our family of the simple things in life. She’s not motivated by personal gain or by personal agenda. She is motivated purely by love.”

## **Nurtured by the church**

Steele’s call to ministry grew out of many opportunities to nurture his gifts in the life of the church. The son of Ken and Dottie Steele, he grew up in Martinsburg, Pa., (where he currently lives) as a member of the Martinsburg Memorial Church of the Brethren. Steele developed his church leadership gifts in numerous ways, from operating the sound system, singing in choirs, participating in dramas, and ushering to serving as worship leader, participating in the youth group, and serving on the district youth cabinet. His pastor at the

**“We feel connected to our global community and to our local communities, and continue to reach out to others in times of need. . . . That’s my vision for Annual Conference. To come together in such a way that we are coming together abiding in God’s love and loving one another.**

— David Steele, moderator of the 2015 Annual Conference

time, Ken Holderread, encouraged Steele to pursue ministry.

“I just always felt at home in the life of the church,” Steele says. “Ken noticed some gifts in me that could benefit the church, and he encouraged me to consider ministry. And generally, there were a handful of folk in all the congregations I’ve served that were always encouraging and affirming me in all that I did in the life of the church.”

Steele went to McPherson College, where he majored in philosophy and religion, and was licensed to ministry in his home district as a young adult. He also met his future wife at McPherson—the former Sarah Baile, whom he married in August 1985. After Steele’s graduation in 1986, the couple moved to Sarah’s hometown of Warrensburg, Mo., where Steele worked on her parents’ farm and served as a lay pastor for several years before enrolling at Bethany Theological Seminary.

During his years at seminary, Steele met two of his spiritual mentors: retired seminary professor Nancy Faus-Mullen and her first husband, the late Bob Faus, former director of ministry for the General Board. Steele has remained close to Faus-Mullen, who walked closely with the couple during Sarah’s treatments for a benign brain tumor that coincided with her pregnancy with the Steele’s first child, Abby, who is now 23 years old.

“Nancy was right there with us during that difficult time and has remained a close friend and strong encourager over the years,” Steele says. “The way Nancy and Bob talked about ministry and the way they helped me understand ministry—that ministry was not a job or a lifestyle, but a sense of who you are—was inspiring for me.”

Steele served as pastor of the Bakersfield congregation in California before returning to his home congregation to serve as pastor of youth ministries and later as pastor. He has served in his current post since 2005. His mother, Dottie—an ordained minister who is a hospice chaplain for the Village at Morrisons Cove—has served as pastor of the Stonertown congregation and as interim for the Bedford and Roaring Spring congregations. His brother Jay is pastor of the Open Circle Fellowship in Burnsville, Minn.

### Reflecting the pure love of Christ

Throughout the year, Steele has enjoyed making visits to churches throughout the district. He recently returned from India, where he and Global Mission executive director Jay Wittmeyer participated in the 100th annual meeting of the First District Church of the Brethren in India. They enjoyed hearing people’s personal testimonies and participating in the celebrations by singing and dancing.

“It was a really rich experience,” Steele says. “I couldn’t understand a lot of what the people said, but I could clearly see the passion of their faith and their commitment to the church. It was really a unique experience.”

Through his travels in the US, Steele has learned that the Brethren are very passionate about their faith and their denomination.

“There is a certain level of pride as they talk about the ministries of their local congregations and districts,” Steele says. “However, they are also concerned about the health of their local church and the denomination in general. They long for a vibrant and healthy church, but don’t know how they might achieve that—and obviously, that looks different for each congregation and district. The church is clearly concerned about all that EYN [Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria] has faced and wants to walk with them as best they can.”

“That is one of our strengths as a denomination—that sense and understanding of community,” Steele says. “We feel connected to our global community and to our local communities, and continue to reach out to others in times of need. . . . That’s my vision for Annual Conference. To come together in such a way that we are coming together abiding in God’s love and loving one another.” 

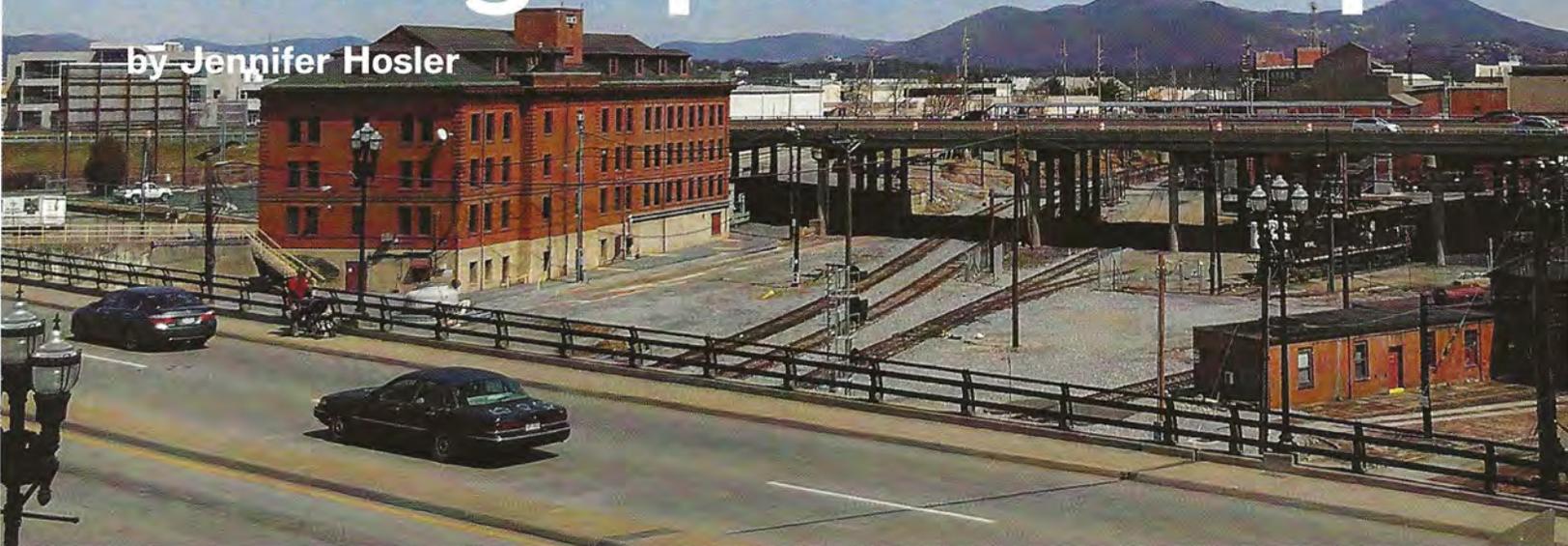


Cheryl Burnhaugh-Cayford

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

# Providing space to grow through partnership

by Jennifer Hosler



**S**urrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains in the city of Roanoke, Va., two Church of the Brethren congregations are providing space for each other to grow. First Church of the Brethren is both separate from and linked with Renacer-Roanoke (*Iglesia Cristiana Renacer*), a Church of the Brethren fellowship within the Renacer Hispanic Ministry movement. The two churches share a building and also a common vision to see the gospel of Jesus proclaimed in their city. I visited both congregations in March and learned how their stories are distinct yet intertwined.

As I thought about how to tell their unique story, the metaphor of “providing space” seemed fitting. Each church is providing space for the other, one relationally and the other physically. For First Church, the relationship with Menacer-Roanoke has provided space to be in a cross-cultural relationship and to continue its journey toward openness to others and racial reconciliation. For Renacer-Roanoke, the partnership has provided the physical space to worship and grow, to live out a vision for planting a Hispanic Church of the Brethren congregation.

## Cultivating openness to others

First Church of the Brethren has not always met in its current building on Carroll Ave., in northwest Roanoke. In the late 1940s, the congregation’s members became dissatisfied with the original building’s location on Loudoun Ave. The neighborhood’s racial makeup changed and an influx of African-Americans made the predominantly white church

feel uncomfortable. It was an era of Jim Crow laws and legal racial segregation. The building was sold and a new church was erected in 1948.

The congregation, however, could not escape the demographic changes—nor its need to confront racism. Over the next few decades, demographic changes took place in its new

Jennifer Hosler



“ These cross-cultural relationships existed for some time before First Church was approached by the Virginia District to house a Hispanic ministry.



Worship space shared by Renacer-Roanoke (left) on Sunday afternoons and First Church (right) on Sunday mornings.

neighborhood, again switching from white to African-American. The building of a new civic center as a part of “urban renewal” created displacement for many African-Americans, who relocated to northwest Roanoke near the church.

First Church was one of the first congregations in the denomination to host a vacation Bible school (VBS) as a mission to its community. In the middle of the past century, the racial divide loomed during its annual VBS preparation. A few members loudly dissented when a decision was made to canvass the neighborhood, inviting *all* neighborhood children regardless of color. Despite the dissent, the church held firm to its decision to include all children made by God. Referring to the history, First Church pastor Dava Hensley said that “it’s never been easy” for the congregation, but that the congregation has continuously sought to take steps toward racial reconciliation ever since the 1960s.

First Church didn’t stop at inviting and welcoming neighborhood African-American children. It began to partner with neighborhood churches, which were predominantly African-American, and has been operating a neighborhood VBS in partnership with two churches for several years. A third church will likely join the partnership this summer.

One of these churches, Williams Memorial Baptist Church, has a unique relationship with First Church. Beginning as a yearly pulpit exchange, the relationship continued into a pulpit and choir exchange. This has since extended to a yearly visit involving the entire congregation. The two churches, one mostly black and one mostly white, take turns each year, leav-

ing one church building empty and joining the other congregation in its building for worship, alternating which church leads with its choir or its preacher. Though differences in style and culture exist, the two churches are committed to relationship and partnership, testifying to how the gospel can transform discrimination into reconciliation.

These cross-cultural relationships existed for some time before First Church was approached by the Virginia District to house a Hispanic ministry. Although the initial phase of the ministry was not successful, the district found new leadership to continue the efforts.

### A vision for new churches

While serving as pastor at Maranatha Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pa., Daniel D’Oleo began to get a vision for a church-planting movement. Recognizing that many Hispanic congregations have a tendency to be pastor-centric, he wanted to build “a different type of church” and “to plant a Latino church in which leadership is not so dependent on just one person.” D’Oleo envisioned a cooperative network of Latino churches that trained leaders and shared similar values and resources. Out of this vision, and with the support of other Hispanic leaders in the Church of the Brethren (like Fausto Carrasco, Rubén DeOleo, Gilbert Romero, Joel Peña, and others), the Renacer Hispanic Ministry movement was born. Its first congregation, Renacer Leola (Pa.), was planted in 2008.

After his ministry in Lancaster came to an end, D’Oleo and his wife Oris decided to move with their three children

*Renacer-Roanoke congregation following a fellowship meal.*



“The relationship between Renacer-Roanoke and First Church—the providing of physical and relational space—has been a blessing to both congregations.”

to Virginia. He interviewed with the Virginia District and was commissioned as a Renacer Hispanic Ministry church planter at the 2009 Virginia District Conference. Since then, the Renacer-Roanoke congregation has worked to preach the name of Christ to the Latino community in Roanoke. (A third Renacer congregation also meets in Floyd, Va.)

Renacer-Roanoke shares the building with First Church of the Brethren, with their main worship services held on Sunday afternoons. The hospitality of sharing space has allowed the new church plant to exist and build up a core group of leaders. Like many church plants, numbers have fluctuated but, as D’Oleo described, the past five years have brought a core group that is “very committed and very involved, with so many gifts and spiritual talents.”

### United yet distinct

First Church and Renacer-Roanoke are united—by the name of Jesus first and foremost, by the building that they share, and by the relationships that have been built between brothers and sisters in Christ. The two churches have partnered for youth events, fellowship meals, and love feast communion services. Both D’Oleo and Hensley have preached in each other’s worship services. Youth from both churches went to the Church of the Brethren’s 2015 National Youth Conference together.

For Renacer-Roanoke, the relationship with First Church has provided a physical space at a generous price and given support and encouragement for its ministries and youth. For First Church, the partnership has provided them with relational space. It has allowed them to continue on a path toward openness to others who are different from them—different in ethnicity, culture, and language. First Church is mostly made up of native English speakers of European descent—basically, white Americans. The membership of Renacer-Roanoke is mostly Hispanic, and most people speak Spanish as their first language. Many members are immigrants to the United States who come from many different countries, including the Dominican Republic, Chile, Cuba, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Peru, Mexico, and even the Roanoke Valley in Virginia. Though

the congregation is bilingual, their worship services are held in Spanish, with English translation available. The two congregations have twice held Spanish-language classes for First Church members, providing them with a chance to learn basic greetings in Spanish, and decrease linguistic barriers (though most Renacer-Roanoke members are fluent in English).

While the congregations are united, they are distinct with their own ministries, challenges, and strengths. Both churches face challenges of growth, though this plays out in unique ways for each church. Renacer-Roanoke has worked to build a church from scratch and cultivate new leadership for shared ministry. First Church has aged, and is discerning how to become a welcoming place for young adults and young families with children.

Both churches have numerous assets. First Church members describe their church as open-minded, friendly, inviting, and open to new ideas. Their strengths are that they are a group of committed folks who “get things done.” Many cited their pastor, Hensley, as one of the church’s main strengths.

Renacer-Roanoke members describe the congregation as a blessing, dynamic, and a loving church that is filled with the Holy Spirit. The church’s love and welcoming spirit were highlighted as strengths, as were their faith and commitment.

The relationship between Renacer-Roanoke and First Church has been a blessing to both congregations. In February, the members of Renacer-Roanoke decided to host an appreciation dinner for their sisters and brothers at First Church. During my interviews, everyone I spoke with from First Church cited the relationship with Renacer-Roanoke as a “blessing” and positive growing experience.

While Renacer-Roanoke may one day find its own building, the two churches recognize that they are united in ways that extend beyond a shared location. They realize that they are sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ. 

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

# CHAPEL WALK

by Anna Lisa Gross

**It's proper, when hanging out at a monastery, to seek spiritual stimuli around every corner.**

A week of Benedictine hospitality welcomes this Anabaptist to gape at the abbey, peer into the confessionals, and finger the icons. Recommendations for the famous “chapel walk” ringing in my ears, I hustle to the trail, expecting to commune with clusters of trees, eaves-drip on rowdy waves, and encounter Mary, pregnant teenager, in her chapel overlooking Lake Sag.

Rushing the first bend, fretting that I'll be late for dinner, I stop short at a statue towering over the



Anna Lisa Gross



Anna Lisa Gross

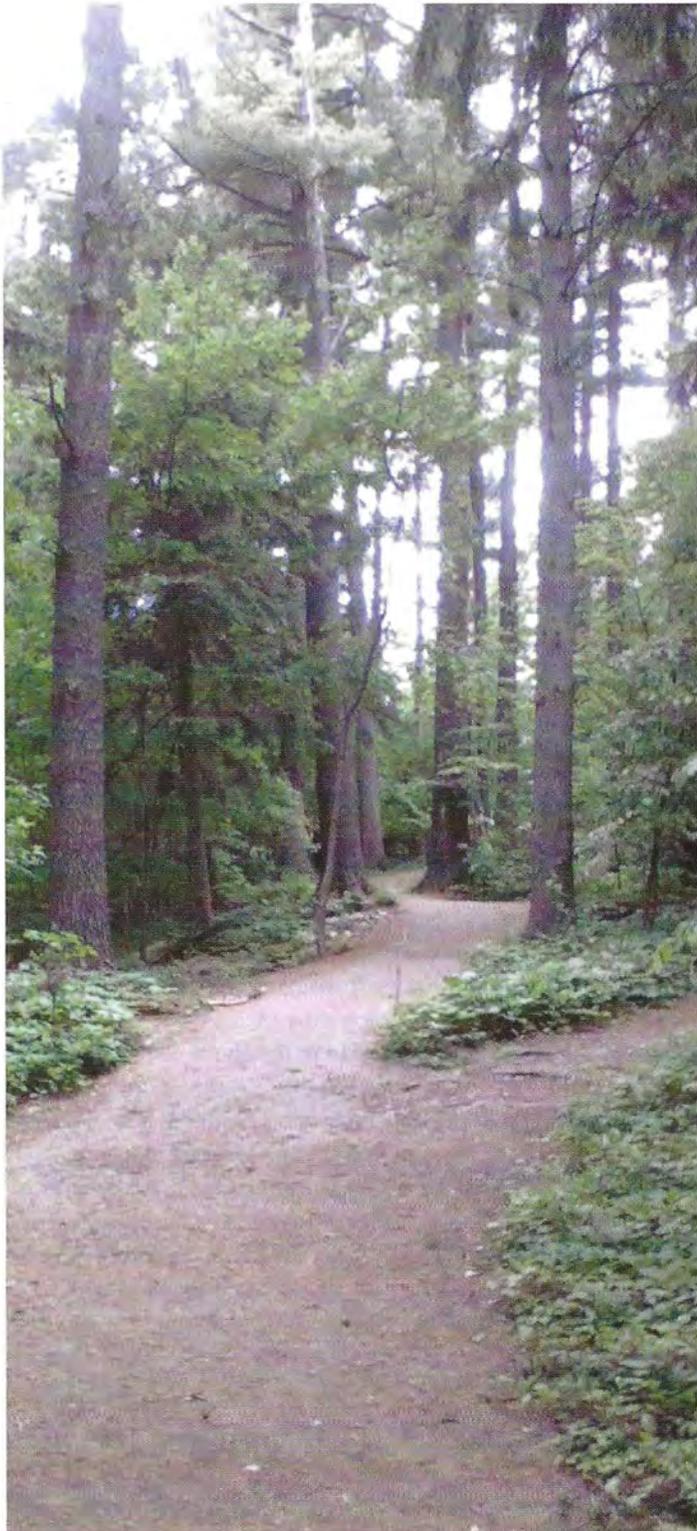
trail—not the swollen Madonna, but a lanky woman, dog at her moccasined feet, braids in her hair. I spy “Mohawk” in the statue’s inscription and smirk at what seems like awkward multiculturalism for a Euro-American institution whose founders displaced the Indians once living here. I pull out my cell phone for a photo. I take three big steps back to get the woman’s full frame, capturing the inscription to read at a later time. *Click.* Being Euro-American, myself, I note ironic tension as I post the photo to Facebook for my friends back home.

Dashing down the next hill I reach a bridge where a cheerful chap is baiting his fishing line. I tip-toe past and spot dozens of yellow blossoms near the shore, eagerly stretching toward the sun. Turning back, I pull out my phone and explain to the fisherman, “I’m mesmerized by lily pads,” not wanting

Anna Lisa Gross



“ The bridge sways under my weight; I move with care. The bridge pulses against my steps; I accept that I am not in control.



Anna Lisa Gross

to talk, but not wanting him to think I'm taking his picture. *Click.* I pivot and crouch. *Click.*

Hastening up the next hill I realize how ridiculous I must have sounded. Mesmerized? I took two quick shots and scampered past the lilies. This is how those of us in dominant cultures repeatedly encounter people who are different from us in matters of deep identity such as race and ethnicity—even in caring relationships. White people in my culture easily tokenize: “I have a black friend who says. . . .” objectify: “Isn't it wonderful that these Hispanic kids from the neighborhood are coming to church? We're multicultural! . . .” fetishize: “I just love the exotic thrill of their music. . . .” and commodify: “Look how many of my Facebook friends are people of color—I'm hip and open-minded.”



Anna Lisa Gross

While marginalized people are not a forest, while people of color aren't the myriad spectrum of life within it, my walk in the woods is a lesson in inter-culturalism—not merely the multicultural welcome many white people strive to offer, but the radical hospitality of taking turns as guests and hosts. Traveling as a guest around this lake awakens me to the hell of my good intentions. I'm not hurting lilies with my commodifying camera clicks. But collecting cultural experiences does harm.

Most white people get multicultural as consumers—soaking up variety in music, devouring diversity at restaurants, collecting trinkets in our travels, amassing photos and stories from exotic adventures—all for our own moral edification, intellectual enlightenment, spiritual evolution, and aesthetic pleasure. An Anabaptist exploring Catholic culture does no harm; but a white person consuming other cultures does plenty of harm. May we cherish the lessons of lilies, rather than continually expecting people of color to take the time, do the work, and risk vulnerability to teach us about ourselves.

A rustle in the bushes catches my ear. I pivot and peer, squinting in the forest's shade. A vibrantly colored turtle ambles through the underbrush, orange zigging up its legs, yellow zagging down its head. *Click.* Wait, shouldn't it shuffle toward the lake? Maybe my alien presence confused the turtle, and it's frantically seeking shelter? If this is my fault, shouldn't I intervene? Well-intentioned white people grapple with this conundrum, and though our hearts are moved to engage, we



Chris Dowd

reach for easy answers and self-righteous suggestions. Assuming others want our help is patronizing. Once invited into a community or family or story, we must listen and learn, and share our own stories before we share any suggestions. We can be multicultural by appreciating other cultures; we are intercultural when we open ourselves to other cultures changing us. Humbly, I recall that turtles have meandered through these woods long before my family got to this country, and will be dawdling long after I'm dead.

People are not turtles, but turtles can teach us something about ourselves. Even as a well-educated white person in the US, I have no tangible power over another person as I have over this turtle. I could cart it to the shore, hurl it into the woods, carry it home for dinner. Power is dangerous. I have no way to communicate with the turtle, not even simple gestures which unite people across language. I can't listen to its stories of wrong turns and long sojourns. I can't hear any unlikely cries for help. I'm certainly not going to pick it up.

Relationships—even simple interactions—in which we have open eyes to see a person as unique, open minds to learn of realities that threaten our own, and open hearts to be shaped by another, are the core of human understanding. White people like me often want to feel multicultural more than we want to

risk our own culture. We want to appear cosmopolitan more than we want to shed our provincialism. We want to be allowed to change others without being vulnerable enough to be changed. Who captures me with a click as I wander through this world, which is always mine and never mine?

The chapel walk's next bridge cannot be captured by my camera. Sure, I could show you a picture of it, but you wouldn't see how it lurches beneath me, how its lack of railings conjures images of plummeting into Lake Sag, how the bridge ripples with each step I take and forces me to notice, slow down, change.

Just like the black Baptist with whom I share my hand, heart, and years sees and shakes me to my very core, forcing me to notice, slow down, change. When relationships transform us we cannot control who we become. Loving a black man does not prove that I'm not racist—it forces me to confront my white privilege each day. Being intercultural is as much about people of color being meaningful in our lives as it is about being fully aware of our whiteness. The bridge sways under my weight; I move with care. The bridge pulses against my steps; I accept that I am not in control. The man I love does more than pulse against me, he throws me off balance, supports my weight, enjoys our bounce, and his voice is the first and last I hear each day.

I wonder how many more twists and turns will take me to Mary's chapel. I looked at a map before I left, but I left the map behind. As we engage in earnest intercultural relationships, rushing in naively is a mistake, but so is overdetermining outcomes. We can plan a multicultural trip through someone else's world, but we'll never be able to control how people from other cultures shape us.

Frankly facing the complexity of living and loving in a segregated, stratified world, we see how much we don't know. That's a wonderful place to begin. *Click.* 

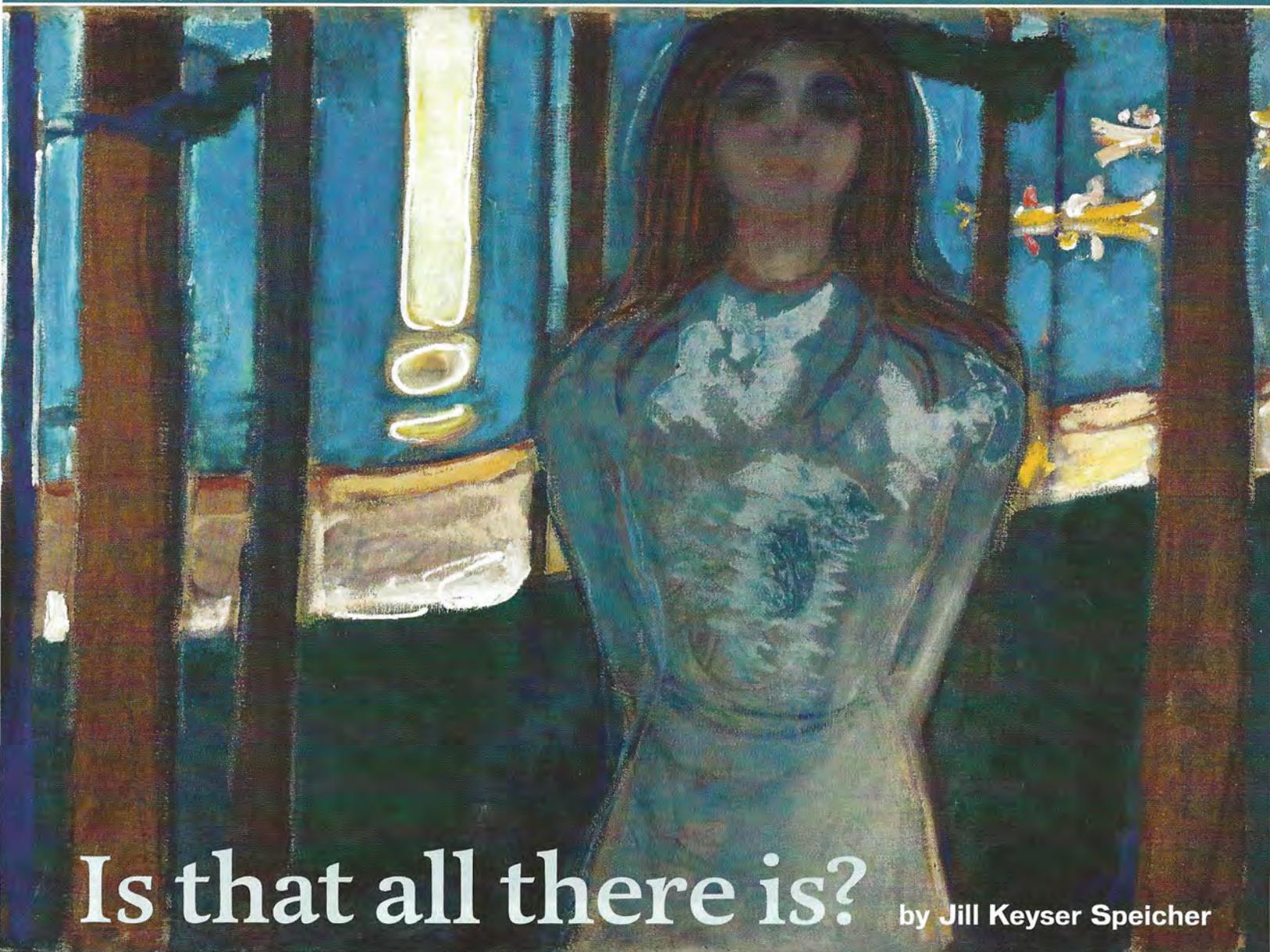
Anna Lisa Gross is a vagabond pastor and writer and a member of Common Spirit Church of the Brethren in Minneapolis, Minn. She is grateful for her intellectual and romantic partnership with Charles Watson. A similar version of this essay first appeared in *Bearings*, an online journal by the Collegeville Institute, where Anna Lisa first took the chapel walk.



Anna Lisa Gross



Anna Lisa Gross



# Is that all there is?

by Jill Keyser Speicher

**A** parent once told me about her child's actions one Christmas. After her small girl had opened the many gifts under the Christmas tree, she had asked, "Is that all there is?"

Over the years, I have found myself whispering that very question: "God, is that all there is?" Even though God has given me many blessings, a very special gift was not placed in my arms—the gift of my own biological child.

I prayed fervently for a child with faith that God loved me and wanted what was best for my life. It was an important learning experience for me to discover that God does not always answer our prayers with a "yes," but sometimes says "not yet" or "no."

From my childhood and through my adulthood, I grew in Christian faith. It felt like my faith was shattered when my dream became unfulfilled. I withdrew for a while with my deep hurt of being "passed over" by God. Christmas, birthdays, and Mother's Day became agonizing celebrations. Deep depression caused me to lose hope and made my days difficult.

Hope did not return easily even though I did a lot of searching during this time.

Reading the Psalms helped me realize that psalms of lament are very much a part of the book. On one occasion, I did work on expressing my anger and disappointment in a psalm of my own. At first, it did not feel right to be angry at God, but after many years had passed, I realized that my loving parent could handle my anger. Gradually, my childhood view of an authoritarian father God, who "micromanages" our lives, changed to a belief in a loving parent who walks beside us as we go through our disappointments and suffering.

Since my youth, I had heard the scripture, "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Luke 11:9). After all, my prayer was not a selfish, materialistic request, but one that would allow me to experience new life inside of me and the opportunity to share the nurturing and molding of our own child with my husband. It was hard to understand why I had not received an answer to this request.

Some people may say that the special gift was not given to me for a reason. While I have asked, "Why?" I realize that I may never receive an answer to that question. Still, "everything happens for a reason" seems simplistic.

A scripture which was a favorite of my mother, and has become a blessing to me, says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5). I could not go on if I based my future on my own understanding, but instead on how God was to direct my path in the future.

At menopause, I knew there was no hope of my being a mother of my own child. So, learning to trust that God would lead me in the days ahead was difficult but necessary. It was through my suffering that God touched my life in a special way by calling me to the ministry. It was during a chaplaincy interview that the question was asked, "How has your barrenness affected your ministry?" The term "barren" caused me to fumble because this was the first time anyone, including myself, had used this term to describe me. If I were to answer the question today, I would say that I have become more understanding of the struggles of all humankind, for it appears that many of us have been wounded by some life circumstance.

Barrenness has been an issue for some biblical figures. In Genesis 11:30, Sarah was barren. Rebekah, wife of Isaac, could not have children (Genesis 25:21). Rachel, wife of Jacob, was "remembered by God" in her barrenness (Genesis 30:22). 1 Samuel speaks of Hannah and her fervent prayers to the Lord to have a child. In Luke, Elizabeth was unable to have children even though she and Zechariah were "living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord" (Luke 1:6).

The difference between these women and myself is that

they all were "blessed" by God, became pregnant, and gave birth. As I have searched the scriptures, the only reference where a "barren" woman did not eventually give birth to a child was Michal, the first wife of David. The genealogical listing of David's sons does not include Michal as a mother (1 Chronicles 3).

Becoming an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, and an experienced chaplain, gave me the feeling of being needed. God has blessed me by allowing me to be on "sacred ground" as I sit with the dying, share prayer and scripture with patients and their caregivers, and allow others to express their hurts and strengths.

As time went by, I found it easier to answer the many questions of others about whether I have children. A simple "no" suffices for me since I have had some distance from the experience of infertility. It is becoming easier for me to rejoice with others who can show me the pictures of their children and grandchildren. However, I must admit that there is still a twinge of emotion that passes through me.

Some may say, "Why didn't you adopt a child?" This is a personal question and, for us, one that was not feasible emotionally. However, adoption is wonderful for those who are able to do it.

I trust God to continue to lead me as I speak with people who are experiencing difficult circumstances. I am open to God's love for me and for those whom I serve.

Faith enables me to move forward regardless of my circumstances. In Philippians 4:13, the apostle Paul said, "I can do all this through him who strengthens me." God gives me the strength to be able to live fully each day. **W!**

Jill Keyser Speicher is an ordained minister from the Wyomissing (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. She has worked as a chaplain in hospitals, hospice, and nursing homes.

**“ I prayed fervently for a child with faith that God loved me and wanted what was best for my life. It was an important learning experience for me to discover that God does not always answer our prayers with a “yes,” but sometimes says “not yet” or “no.”**





# All is well

by Melody Keller

**T**he last time we left the Shunammite woman, she was on her journey to find Elisha to tell him that her promised son had died. (See the June MESSENGER Bible study.) The lessons from Part 1: See the need and take action. Dreams can live again. Run to your answer.

## Lesson #4—It is well

Elisha was at Mt. Carmel when he saw the Shunammite woman coming. Even though she was still a great distance away, he wanted his servant to run and ask her if all was well with her and with her family. Gehazi did just that.

What if this story were *your* story? What would have been your response had you been asked the same question? If you had laid your dead child upon a bed and walked out of the room, how would have you answered Elisha?

The Shunammite woman said, “It is well.” What? Are you serious? Your child is lying dead back there in your house and you say that it is well? How can you say that on the darkest day of your life? Are you out of your mind? Are you in denial?

I don’t know what the Shunammite woman was thinking,

but in her answer I see faith and hope. She came to the one whom she believed could do something about her problem. Her faith was able to say, “It is well,” even though her circumstances said otherwise.

In a way, this is our story, too. It is the story of the ages. It is the story of God, and our faith in God. People of faith have had troubles and trials throughout history. Noah had never seen a rainstorm, yet he was charged with building a large boat. Consider his hardships. He endured—and was he glad.

Consider Abraham and Isaac. God wanted to know where Abraham’s loyalty lay. Abraham raised the knife, and God was satisfied with the answer.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, was enticed by his boss’s wife, and jailed for being righteous. The Bible says that the Lord was with Joseph, even in prison. Do you hear the echoes down the corridors of that jail? It is well. It is well.

Moses and the children of Israel faced the Red Sea, blocking their advance. Pharaoh and his army were racing to capture them and take them back to Egypt. Was all well? It was—God delivered them.

What about Rahab? She defied her country and spared the spies. She showed her faith by a scarlet cord hanging from her

window. And, when the dust cleared, she and her household were saved. All was well.

“It worked out for those people,” you may say, “but what about the ones in the family line of faith who were stoned or slain with a sword, who were destitute, afflicted, and tormented? What about Christians today who suffer disease or are beheaded by ISIS? Is it well?”

Twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians were beheaded earlier this year by Islamic State militants. Milad Saber was one of those killed. At the moment of his decapitation, he invoked the name of Jesus Christ.

His mother recalled the last phone call she received from her son. “Usually my husband takes his cell phone with him to the fields. This day, he forgot the device at home. Therefore, I decided to bring it to him. On my way to the fields, the phone rang, I answered and my beloved son asked, ‘Mother, do you need anything?’ I answered, ‘I want everything to be good with you. We are told the situation is not good there. Come back, my son.’ He answered, ‘Don’t worry, Mother. Let God protect us, and whatever is set for us shall happen.’”

With a pained smile, she added, “Having one of ours as a martyr in heaven is a huge blessing and a big grace that we don’t deserve. . . . I will not forget his last words, ‘I am coming back, Mother. Bless me and find me a beautiful wife. . . .’”

Gehazi didn’t waste any time. He was a man on a mission, and his purpose was straightforward. He had a task to complete.

What if Gehazi had figured the staff was unimportant, had visited with others or stopped to dine along the way? But he didn’t. Gehazi did what he was told—and so should we.

Recently I heard a speaker say, “God is God, and we aren’t.” We are called to obey. God knows best. As a child, I heard this phrase in our home: “Delayed obedience is disobedience.” How are we doing with obeying God?

### **Lesson #6—Death defied**

The Shunammite woman refused to leave Elisha. She would not let go until this situation was solved. So Elisha followed her back to her home. I like the faith and determination of this woman. She wasn’t satisfied that death was final.

As the woman and Elisha traveled home, they were met with devastating news. The child had not woken. Upon Elisha’s arrival, the child was still dead. When Elisha entered the room, he shut the door and prayed. I love that response. Prayer should be the pinnacle in solving a problem. I can picture a weary, weeping woman outside the room, also praying.

After a series of events that included Elisha’s lying on the child twice and his pacing in the house, the promised child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. Elisha asked his ser-

**As Christians, even through our trials and tears, we are called to look through the eyes of faith and, along with the Shunammite woman, say, “It is well.”**

Your path may be painful, your days may be difficult, your situation may be serious. As Christians, even through our trials and tears, we are called to look through the eyes of faith and, along with the Shunammite woman, say, “It is well.”

It is well not because of our strength but because of God’s. It is well not because our stories always work out the way we want, but because God works for our good. It is well not because the journey is easy, but because God is our living guide.

### **Lesson #5—A call to obedience**

The Shunammite woman came to Elisha after encountering his servant. In her distress, she grabbed the prophet by the feet and reminded him of his promise to her for a son. Elisha sent his servant to the dead boy. Gehazi was to take the staff of Elisha and hurry to the Shunammite’s house, not stopping to talk to others or even acknowledging anyone along the way. Upon his arrival, Gehazi was to lay the staff on the face of the child.

vant to call this faithful woman to attend a joyful reunion.

### **Lesson #7—Grateful hearts**

First of all, the Shunammite woman was thankful. The Bible says that she went into the room and fell at the feet of Elisha. It was in that same room that she had left her dead son on the bed hours before. And there, in that same room, she received the blessing of a living son.

Are we thankful? God is so good to us. God daily loads us with benefits. Do we see the blessings and thank God for both the little things and the big things? Do we always expect good from God’s hand?

I look forward one day to finding this woman in heaven and talking for awhile. I want to hear her story. I think she will want to hear our stories, too. 

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



David Gave Andrews

*The ordination service at the 2015 Majalisa or annual meeting of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).*

## Church of the Brethren general secretary attends Nigeria Annual Conference

**C**hurch of the Brethren general secretary **Stanley J. Noffsinger** traveled to Nigeria May 3-11 to attend the Majalisa (annual meeting) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Noffsinger was billed as the guest speaker for EYN's 68th annual meeting. Roxane and Carl Hill, co-directors of the Nigeria Crisis Response, accompanied him and were also given an opportunity to share before this large gathering.

During the gathering of almost 1,000 pastors and delegates, Noffsinger addressed the Majalisa crowd twice. He encouraged members of the church in Nigeria by assuring them that they have not been forgotten by their sister church in America. After one of his talks, Noffsinger held a footwashing ceremony during which members of the audience were brought forward to receive the first washings.

Noffsinger, who also attended last year's Majalisa, noted the difference in the mood from one year to the next. "Last year the attendees

had a sort of shocked expression on their faces. The proceedings were constantly being interrupted by announcements of tragedy—news of a pastor being killed or abducted, or a village being overrun by the terrorist group, Boko Haram. There was no joy at last year's Majalisa.

"This year the mood is completely different," he said. "There is true worship going on. People are lifting their voices to God. Laughter can be heard throughout the hall. Real fellowship is being experienced and there appears to be hope for the future, where last year there was only despair."

Because so many of the churches of EYN have been damaged or destroyed, this year's Majalisa conducted an ordination service for new pastors. The current ordained ministers, including EYN president Samuel Dali, gathered around the candidates, laying hands on them and commissioning them for the work ahead.

Besides attending the Majalisa, Noffsinger, the Hills, and two American Brethren volunteers who have been serving in Nigeria—Peggy Gish and Donna Parcell—helped with a food distribution under the direction of Rebecca Dali, whose nonprofit humanitarian organization CCEPI (Center for Caring, Empowerment, and Peace Initiatives) is one of the organizations partially funded by Brethren funds raised in America. About 350 families were given relief supplies through this effort. After the distribution, Noffsinger said, "I'm tired, but it's a good tired. I wish we could do more."

Carl and Roxane Hill are co-directors of the Nigeria Crisis Response, a cooperative effort of the Church of the Brethren with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).



Carl and Roxane Hill

*Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger (left) with EYN president Samuel Dali (right) during Noffsinger's visit to Nigeria for the Majalisa or annual meeting of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria.*

# First District Church of the Brethren in India celebrates 100th Jilla Sabha

**Indian Brethren gathered in Valsad, Gujarat,** May 13-14 for the church's 100th Jilla Sabha (district conference). Attending on behalf of the Church of the Brethren were David Steele, moderator, and Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service.

A day of celebration during the conference began with a 1,000-person parade through the city of Valsad that included a truck full of speakers for music, and a horse-drawn carriage for the US guests. The parade stopped periodically for singing and dancing as it wound through the town, finishing at the Valsad church for an afternoon feast and worship service. The evening featured a historical slide show on a large outdoor screen, followed by fireworks and a cultural program on a large stage.

The First District, under the leadership of Brethren missionary Wilbur Stover, held its first conference in 1901, and its 69th in 1970, when the First District (Gujarat) and the Second District (Maharashtra) joined five other communions to



*Two moderators: David Steele (left), moderator of the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, and Maganlal Gameti (right), moderator of the First District Church of the Brethren in India.*

form the unified Church of North India. After an interim period, the First District Brethren resumed meeting as the First District Church of the Brethren, and was recognized as such by the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2003. The Second District, which only had four churches at the time of unification, has continued with the Church of North India.

Wittmeyer reminded the community that Stover used to say that the Indian church was like a Banyan tree. When Stover tried to plant a Banyan log in his front yard, people criticized him because it was not the monsoon season. "Even so," Stover said, "with patience and careful watering, I can get the tree to grow." The tree still stands in Valsad to this day. Just like that Banyan tree, First District Church of the Brethren has now reached its 100th annual meeting.

*A day of celebration for the First District Church of the Brethren began with this procession, some 1,000 strong, that paraded through the city.*



## upcoming events

**July 9-11**  
Council of District Executives, 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.

**July 24-26**  
Southeastern District Conference,  
Mars Hill, N.C.

**July 24-25**  
Northern Ohio District Conference,  
Mohican Church of the Brethren, West Salem, Ohio

**July 31-Aug. 2**  
Northern Plains District Conference,  
West Des Moines, Iowa

**July 31-Aug. 2**  
Western Plains District Conference,  
McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren and McPherson College

**Aug. 6-7** Southern Plains District Conference, Clovis (N.M.) Church of the Brethren

**Aug. 14-16**  
Michigan District Conference, Camp Brethren Heights, Rodney, Mich.

# Nigeria Crisis Response update

**C**hurch of the Brethren staff working with the Nigeria Crisis Response have provided an update on the relief effort in Nigeria, which is responding to needs of those affected by the violent Islamist insurgency in the northeast of the country. The crisis response is a cooperative effort of the Church of the Brethren and Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

Brethren Disaster Ministries has issued an appeal for \$5.3 million to fund two years of the effort. Carl and Roxane Hill, co-directors of the Nigeria Crisis Response and Global Mission and Service staff, have provided a detailed accounting of the \$1,031,086 spent as of April 15, and what has been accomplished with that money.

The Nigeria Crisis Response is funded through donations from Brethren congregations and individuals, ecumenical partners, and other groups and individuals. As of April 15, donations amounted to \$1,299,800.51. When added to the \$1.5 million in "seed funds" designated by the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board out of denominational reserves and existing monies in the Emergency Disaster Fund, the total comes close to \$2.8 million.

Other partners in the work in Nigeria are Mission 21 and Mennonite Central Committee, whose Nigeria staff are providing training for trauma healing workshops in partnership with EYN. Christian Aid Ministries is another US-based organization helping to fund the work in Nigeria, working through the Church of the Brethren to aid EYN. Brethren Disaster Ministries estimates that, although the current appeal for the Nigerian Crisis Response is for two years, the work will be of much longer duration.

*One of the trauma healing workshops being held in Nigeria.*

Staff note a number of accomplishments of the effort so far, which has included the purchase of three large pieces of land to build care centers where people displaced from northeast Nigeria may relocate in central Nigeria.

At these care center sites, bore holes have been dug to provide water, some of the land has been cleared, 56 shelters are completed, and families have moved in. Foundations have been laid for an additional 40 structures. In addition, new interfaith communities are being developed where Christians and Muslims are living side by side.

Distributions of food and household supplies have taken place at more than 25 sites, giving aid to more than 20,000 people displaced within Nigeria. In addition, assistance has been provided to more than 12,000 EYN members who are refugees in Cameroon.

Several hundred people have taken part in trauma healing workshops. A peace and democracy conference was held before the elections, among the efforts going on to promote peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims.

Seeds and farming implements are being distributed at care centers as displaced people relocate there and begin farming. Gifts of small businesses have been provided to 200 families. Training in computer skills, sewing and knitting are underway at Skills Acquisition Centers.

Many children have returned to school,

but education is not free for Nigerians, so crisis response funds have been used to help displaced children pay for school fees, uniforms, and books, and also to pay teachers' salaries. Some 60 orphans also are being cared for on a full-time basis.

Much has been done to keep EYN functioning as a church despite the destruction of many of its congregations and most of its district infrastructure, as well as the need for its headquarters to relocate to central Nigeria. A new annex has been set up for the EYN headquarters, and the building has been remodeled and re-roofed. Housing has been obtained for all the denominational leaders and their families, and staff quarters are being built. A warehouse with storage space and housing for the relief staff has been purchased. An existing school property is being prepared to relocate Kulp Bible College. In addition, crisis response funds also have been used to help EYN hold its annual minister's conference and Majalisa (annual meeting) this year.

EYN has hired seven staff to work on the relief effort, and has purchased two passenger vehicles and a large truck as well as equipment for the relief office. Also included in the Nigeria Crisis Response budget are the administrative costs of all the Nigerian NGOs that are part of the effort.

For more information about the Nigeria Crisis Response, go to [www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis](http://www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis).

Carl and Roxane Hill



# Volunteers help families affected by tornadoes

**Children's Disaster Services (CDS)** set up a children's center in a Multi Agency Resource Center in Oklahoma City, Okla., in May in response to the tornadoes and floods in the area. CDS is a part of Brethren Disaster Ministries. Since 1980, CDS has been meeting the needs of children by setting up child care centers in shelters and disaster assistance centers across the nation. The program works with the American Red Cross and FEMA to set up child care centers after disasters.

"Thank you to our Children's Disaster Services team in Oklahoma City: Nancy McDougall, Myrna Jones, and Donna Savage! And to the children and families who shared of themselves, even in the midst of their own difficult circumstances," wrote CDS associate director Kathleen Fry-Miller in a Facebook post about the response.



CDS volunteer Donna Savage cares for children in Oklahoma City after tornadoes and flooding affected the area.

Courtesy of Bethany Theological Seminary



## Commencement celebrated at Bethany Theological Seminary

*Graduates pose for a group picture at Bethany Seminary's 2015 commencement: Standing: Nick Patler, M.A. (Staunton, Va.); Steven Lowe, M.Div. (Keymar, Md.); Eric Landram, M.Div. (Waynesboro, Va.); Nathan Hollenberg, M.Div. (Broadway, Va.); Samuel Sarpiya, M.Div. (Rockford, Ill.); Paul Shaver, M.Div. (Staunton, Va.). Seated: Patricia Mitchell, M.Div. (Franklin, N.H.); Jennifer Scarr, M.Div. (Pomona, Calif.); Britnee Harbaugh, M.Div. (Keedysville, Md.); Tanya Willis-Robinson, M.Div. (Indianapolis, Ind.); Tara Shepherd, M.Div. (Bent Mountain, Va.); Karen Cassell, M.Div. (Roanoke, Va.); Beth Middleton, CATS (Boones Mill, Va.); Kim Ebersole, CATS (Elgin, Ill.); Richard Propes, CATS (Indianapolis, Ind.) In absentia: Kenneth Frantz, M.Div. (Fleming, Colo.); Paul Stutzman, CATS (Winston-Salem, N.C.); Warren Wade, CATS (Bloomington, Ind.).*



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# Brethren

MUTUAL AID AGENCY

## Transforming ‘thorns’ into joyful action

by Katie Furrow

### Collect. Plant. Grow. Tend.

When we came together as a group for Young Adult Conference over Memorial Day weekend at Camp Swatara, in Bethel, Pa., our focus during worship, workshops, and small groups was on these four themes. Overall, we reflected on and discussed how we can take the negative and painful “thorns” of our world and transform them into “joyful action” meant to bring God’s kingdom into this world.

As young adults, we have been uniquely blessed and challenged with this role. We find ourselves in a difficult time filled with thorns—few of us have known a life that hasn’t been consistently colored by the impact of war; we have watched as our planet and its inhabitants struggle with the impact of climate change; and, most recently, we have become witnesses to the corruption and brutality of forces meant to keep us safe.

We have been told that our generation is doomed to fail when it comes to making a positive difference in any of these challenges, and sometimes it’s easy to believe that there is truth in that statement. Sometimes it’s easy to let the thorns take over. However, when events like Young Adult Conference happen, those thorns get pruned back, as we are rejuvenated in the hope of our future and of the role of young adults who are going to make positive change happen.

This is most evident to me in the creativity in young

adults’ approach to handling the problems of our world. During workshops, we talked about topics ranging from beating Boko Haram by addressing literacy, to how we can use comic book characters to help us better understand our roles in society. We’ve been given the responsibility to make the world a better place in spite of some fairly high odds, and it is this creativity that is going to make the difference; after all, unique challenges call for a unique response.

During the course of the weekend, we discussed the little things we can do in our own lives—through relationships and spiritual practices—that can lead to the joyful action to which we are called. These little things were the most inspiring, as they served to remind us that any act, no matter how small, can still have an untold effect on the world.

Through shared experiences like Young Adult Conference, we are able to come together to combat the negative aspects of our world that so often hold us back. We are able to plant new ideas, and we are equipped with resources to grow and tend new movements. Through all of this, we emerge with a new sense of empowerment and ability to face the challenges that are ahead. *W*

Katie Furrow of Monte Vista Church of the Brethren in Callaway, Va., has been serving through Brethren Volunteer Service at the Church of the Brethren Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C.



courtesy of Youth & Young Adult Ministry

The 2015 Young Adult Conference

# Deeply rooted, tassels in the breeze

**I** grew up surrounded by Midwestern farms—oceans of corn and soy growing as far as I could see. My childhood summers included many a game of hide-and-seek among corn stalks, and treks over a mile of rows to get ice cream. We even planted corn in our backyard garden, spacing the seeds so they would grow into mazes and forts to play in.

Corn is a simple starch, but a complex carbohydrate. It's delicious when eaten right off the cob, of course, but also when popped, or ground into meal or flour for bread or tortillas. Corn is a perfect vessel for butter and salt, sour cream, lime zest, and crushed red pepper—so versatile in its simplicity.



MANDY GARCIA

But more than flavor, the way corn grows is perhaps what makes it stand out the most.

My parents' pastor uses corn as an illustration for the way we ought to grow as followers of Christ. Sending our roots deep

into what grounds us in scripture, we can hold fast, even when the fiercest winds push us every which way. Reaching high, stretching toward to the sun, we can offer our prayers to a God whose face shines upon us. Waving our tassels in the breeze, we can offer praise to a creator who made each us unique. And as we grow as individuals, we can grow close together, reaching out to touch each other and build one another up through every season.

As the corn fields turn green this summer, and the stalks work to be knee-high by Annual Conference, may you be inspired by the way they grow up, down, and out—so simple, steady, and strong. 

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



## Chef Russell's Maque Choux (Pronounced "Mock-Shoe")

Those of you from southern Louisiana will recognize this tasty, one-dish wonder that overflows with summer in every bite.

### Ingredients:

- 4 strips of bacon, diced
- 1/2 red onion, small diced
- 1 red bell pepper, small diced
- 1 green bell pepper, small diced
- 1 jalapeño, minced
- 1 stalk of celery, small diced
- 3 red potatoes, peeled and small diced
- 6 oz. chicken or vegetable stock or broth
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 8 oz. heavy cream
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups frozen or fresh sweet corn
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced
- 6 basil leaves, thinly sliced
- 1 plum tomato, small diced
- salt, pepper, and hot sauce to taste

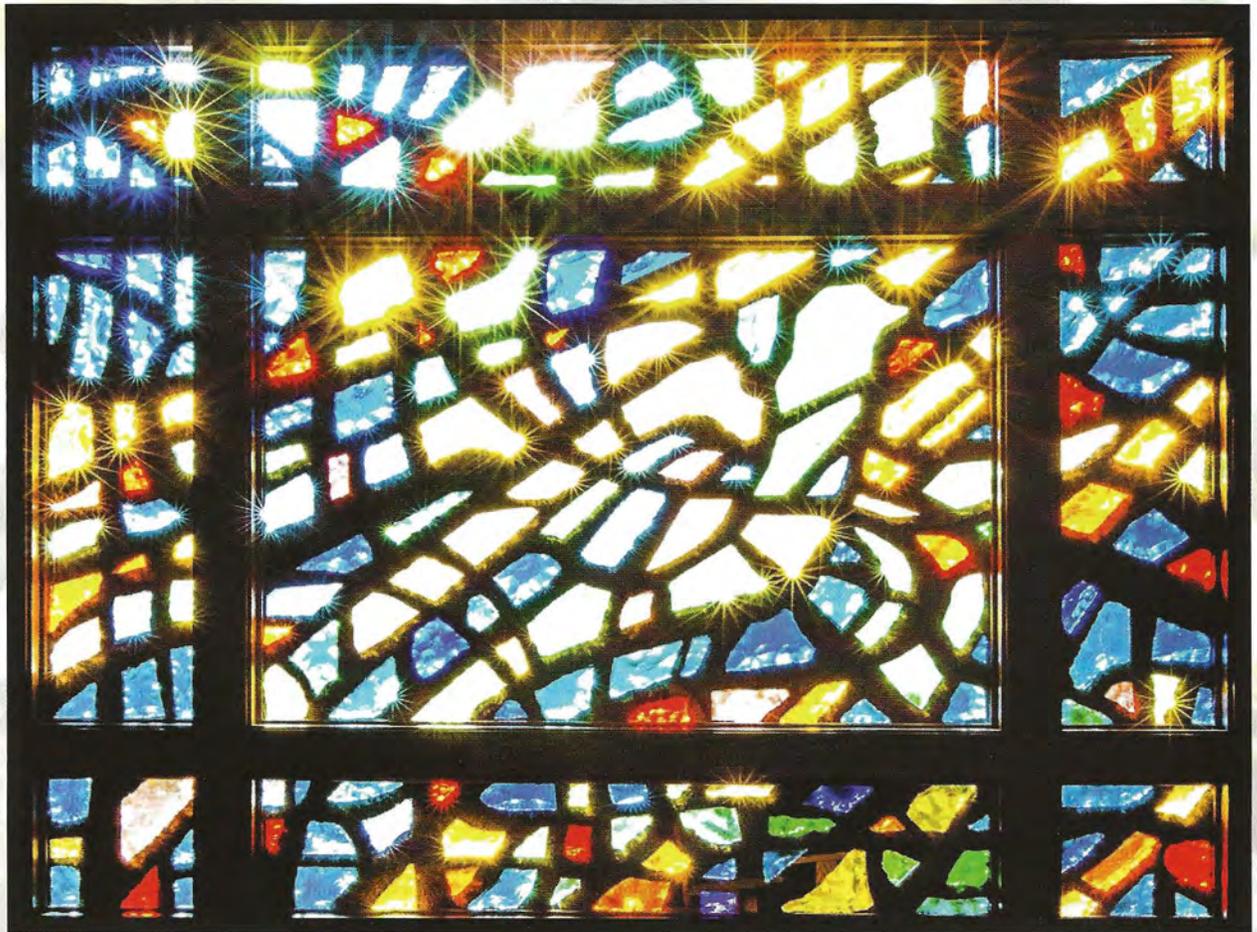
### Instructions:

Saute bacon in a large pan over medium heat. When crisp, add onion, peppers, and celery and cook five minutes. Add potatoes, stock, and sugar, cover and simmer until potatoes are tender, about five to eight minutes. Add cream and simmer, uncovered, on low heat until reduced by half and thickened, another five to eight minutes. Stir in garlic, corn, scallions, basil, tomato, and seasonings. Simmer on low for another five minutes, just long enough to incorporate the flavors. Serve hot like a summertime stew, or over rice or pasta, or on a bed of lettuce for a delicious salad.



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## Our first choice is crucial

The question, "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" on the cover of the April MESSENGER caught my attention. It indicates that there is a "real Jesus" and all others are false. That premise is consistent with what Jesus Christ said as recorded in Matthew 24:4-5; "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." So Jesus warned us that many will wear the label of Christian and even proclaim Christ, but their message is deceptive. Therefore, we must test the spirits as 1 John 4:1 instructs us: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." What we believe and who we follow will charge our lives and determine our eternal destiny.

The article correctly stated that "the choices we make will depend on the Jesus we follow." The first choice is to follow the



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real Jesus. When we follow Jesus, he determines the decisions and choices we make. Every decision I make and action I take is based on what I believe. If I fail to follow through on my belief, then my faith is really unbelief. James 2:17 says, “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being alone.”

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven he gave a great commission in Matthew 28:19-20; “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

May we teach and do all things that the real Jesus has commanded us as recorded in the Bible! Then, he will always be with us, even to the end of the world.

**Ben Haldeman**  
Greencastle, Pa.

## Thanks for MESSENGER

Thank you, Randy, for another excellent editorial, “Unexpected grace” (May MESSENGER), as well as the variety, scope, and depth of writings in MESSENGER. An expression of our appreciation is overdue.

We look forward to each issue and read it cover to cover within the first couple of days of its arrival. Being among the older, long-time readers, we appreciate printed material which we can read and reread, mark, add notes, and refer to later . . . even years later. Thank you for your continuing work which is part of the total ministry of the Church of the Brethren. Thank you for going digital to keep pace with the times, and for those who prefer that form. For the many positive letters in recent months, such as the ones from Leon Neher, Craig Coble, Bob Gross, and Glenn Mitchell, we rejoice and give thanks.

**Emily and Luke Mumma**  
Lorida, Fla.

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## New Members

**Annville, Pa.:** Joel Ballew, Linetta Ballew  
**Bethany, New Paris, Ind.:** Beth Krull, Larry Fourman, Ann Fourman, Steve Armstrong, Michelle Armstrong, Josie Armstrong, Eric Gay  
**Bethany, Stet, Mo.:** Jessica Waters-Oyler, Dillon Oyler, Jennifer Finley  
**Creekside, Elkhart, Ind.:** Karen Kohler, Joe Kohler, Kathy Nowicki, Tom Nowicki  
**Dayton, Va.:** John Wilfong, Dana Wilfong, River Wilfong, A.J. Botkin, Marguerite Botkin, Katelyn Lough, Daisy Wilfong, Patricia Hunsaker  
**Fellowship, Martinsburg, W.Va.:** Michelle Durst, Andrew Chapman, Noah Strickler, Amber Norton  
**Gettysburg, Pa.:** Nathan Mickley, Cameron Mickley, Clayton Wagner  
**Heidelberg, Myerstown, Pa.:** Justin Eberly, Hadassah Bucher  
**Lancaster, Pa.:** David Koser, Elizabeth Koser  
**Mountville, Pa.:** John Ament, Julie Ament, Charles Few, Theresa Few, Beth Hess, Joan Pontius, Amanda Ritchie, Barry Shreiner  
**Somerset, Pa.:** Penny Hamer  
**Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.:** Tom Ness, Kim Roth, Luke Roth, Aron Christopher, Dave Christopher, Jeff Cloz, Cathy Cloz, Sarah Worley, Ryan Wetzel  
**Topeka, Kan.:** Colton Oshel, Rylie Oshel, Alexa Dutch

## Anniversaries

**Altvater, Jacob and Shirley,** New Windsor, Md., 60  
**Bitner, Robert and Diana,** Greenville, Ohio, 50

**Glasmire, William and Grace,** Lancaster, Pa., 70  
**Haldeman, David and Mary,** Lancaster, Pa., 65  
**Kagarise, Dean and Janet,** North Manchester, Ind., 60  
**Weaver, Jay and Mary,** Lancaster, Pa., 60  
**Weaver, Mark and Thelma,** Lancaster, Pa., 75

## Deaths

**Bewley, Allen C.,** 89, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 2  
**Bowyer, Hilda Eloise** Stevens, 85, Vinton, Va., March 6  
**Brown, Jean,** 93, Phoenix, Ariz., Oct. 31  
**Buckwalter, Anna N.** Fahnestock, 103, Lancaster, Pa., May 3  
**Carter, Margery A.,** 88, Garden Grove, Calif., March 7  
**Crim, Kenneth W.,** 75, Martinsburg, W.Va., Sept. 17, 2014  
**Ditmer, Russell E.,** 81, Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 13  
**Forrey, Margaret Mayermik,** 91, Mountville, Pa., Jan. 16  
**Ganger, Anna Taylor,** 81, Greenville, Ohio, March 24  
**Groff, Lloyd G.,** 93, New Holland, Pa., March 12  
**Gutshall, Merle Ola, Jr.,** 84, Howard, Pa., May 12  
**Herr, Dorothy M. Kline,** 76, Annville, Pa., March 26  
**Hewitt, Margie Ashby,** 87, Waynesboro, Va., March 25  
**Hollinger, J. Graybill,** 95, Lititz, Pa., Dec. 12  
**Hopple, Esther M. Sholley,** 82, Lebanon, Pa., March 21  
**Hottinger, Leonard G.,** 91, Mount Crawford, Va., March 20  
**Huff, Margaret Helen** Bowin, 95, McCune, Kan., Dec. 18  
**Hughes, Alma J. Heilman,** 71, Palmyra, Pa., April 1  
**Jamison, Carolyn Mae,** 89, Quinter, Kan., April 6  
**Johnson, Alfred E.,** 89, Kingsley, Iowa, April 23  
**Jones, Beverly Curtis,** 86, Kingsville, Texas, Jan. 1  
**Keck, Larry,** 77, New Paris, Ind., March 14  
**Keener, Arlene,** 81, Telford, Pa., Feb. 6  
**Kiester, Edith Mae Merkey,** 89, Filer, Idaho, May 3

**King, John Y.,** 77, Ephrata, Pa., Jan. 9  
**Krull, Betty A. Vonhof,** 88, Lancaster, Pa., March 22  
**Lamb, Thomas E.,** 84, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 14  
**Latshaw, Robert M.,** 86, Pottstown, Pa., March 26  
**Lavy-Hanft, E. Kathryn,** 95, Louisville, Ohio, March 26  
**Long, Emma,** 88, Westminster, Md., Feb. 1  
**Loy, Kathryn M. Ege,** 90, Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 3  
**Lyles, George Robert, Jr.,** 86, Hagerstown, Md., April 8  
**Martin, JoAnn Lamb,** 82, Weyers Cave, Va., Jan. 21  
**Masters, Edna Gouge,** 84, Johnson City, Tenn., Jan. 9  
**Matzen, Maralyn E. Pickering,** 86, Lima, Ohio, Oct. 29  
**McClain, Donald Ellis,** 82, Monrovia, Md., Feb. 16  
**Mellard, Betty,** 94, La Verne, Calif., April 13  
**Menser, Herbert L.,** 83, Berlin, Pa., Nov. 13  
**Meyers, Laura A.** Nenner, 95, Gettysburg, Pa., April 24  
**Michael, Ronnie Bruce,** 71, Mount Solon, Va., Jan. 8  
**Miley, Loraine S.,** 83, Lancaster, Pa., April 30  
**Miller, Curtis W.,** 80, Mount Morris, Ill., March 28  
**Miller, Dorothy S.,** 91, Palmyra, Pa., Feb. 26  
**Miller, Eleanor I. Proch,** 83, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Feb. 26  
**Millar, Glenn W.,** 95, New Oxford, Pa., April 30  
**Miller, John,** 90, New Oxford, Pa., April 25  
**Moyer, Dorothy M.,** 86, Manheim, Pa., Jan. 12  
**Myers, Ken,** 92, Lancaster, Pa., March 23  
**Nissley, Jay R.,** 83, Manheim, Pa., Jan. 19  
**O'Shea, Tracy L. Hyle,** 42, Bedford, Pa., Feb. 15  
**Peters, Ira Buford, Jr.,** 94, Roanoke, Va., March 25  
**Petry, Nolan Eugene,** 98, Hudson, Ohio, Feb. 19  
**Ritchey, Audrey J. West,** 74, Ashland, Ohio, March 25  
**Rittenhouse, Veda Viola** Bishop, 98, Defiance, Ohio, April 4  
**Ritter, Andrew Keith,** 60, Sterling, Va., March 29  
**Roth, Arlene Ziegler,** 93, Mechanicsburg, Pa., April 9

**Royer, Barale Eigenbrode,** 79, Harrisburg, Pa., May 4  
**Ruhl, Bernice Juanita** Stoops, 89, Fayetteville, Pa., April 21  
**Schwabe, Howard V.,** 86, Beavercreek, Ohio, Jan. 12  
**Scott, Donna M. Houtz,** 79, Boiling Springs, Pa., Feb. 7  
**Seapy, Viva,** 95, La Verne, Calif., Nov. 2  
**Senger, David Addison,** 61, Crimora, Va., Feb. 21  
**Shaulis, Wayne C.,** 85, Somerset, Pa., March 23  
**Sheets, Amos Jesse,** 92, Goshen, Ind., May 7  
**Shifflett, Mildred Louise,** 87, Charlottesville, Va., April 12  
**Shoemaker, A. Caroline,** 85, Burlington, W. Va., April 11  
**Sisler, Winifred Winona** Miller, 74, Oakland, Md., March 22  
**Sloan, Connie L. Repine,** 74, Windber, Pa., Feb. 21  
**Smith, Miriam,** 87, Hershey, Pa., March 30  
**Smith, Shirley Snyder,** 86, Hummelstown, Pa., Jan. 16  
**Snyder, Harvey W.,** 83, Nokesville, Va., April 5  
**Springsteen, Rosella C. Livengood,** 74, Fairchance, Pa., Feb. 20  
**Stanley, Delmar S.,** 91, La Verne, Calif., March 18  
**Steckman, Nancy J. Lebo,** 73, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 16  
**Steiner, Harold Paul Raymond,** 80, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 19  
**Stem, Truman Bernard,** 83, Westminster, Md., April 14  
**Sturtz, John,** 60, Waterloo, Iowa, March 30  
**Sutton, Wilma Edith Frantz,** 91, McPherson, Kan., March 3  
**Tannreuther, Charlotte L.** Carter, 88, Waterloo, Iowa, May 1  
**Thompson, Claude,** 76, Hagerstown, Md., April 18  
**Toms, Sandra Dec Nichols,** 54, Frederick, Md., May 1  
**Vanasdlen, Lee Etter,** 86, Newville, Pa., March 6  
**Ward, John K.,** 87, McPherson, Kan., April 22  
**Wagner, Anna King,** 98, Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 27

**Walker, Mary J. Ward,** 83, Kentwood, Mich., March 12  
**Walker, Maynard Cecil,** 87, Roanoke, Va., April 15  
**Way, Anne,** 87, La Verne, Calif., Feb. 11  
**Waybright, Jean G.** Stehman, 89, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 2  
**Weible, Emma Jane Baer,** 89, Friedens, Pa., April 8  
**Welbaum, Penny Flint,** 54, Greenville, Ohio, March 18  
**Wetzel, Rebecca Zimmerman,** 91, Hagerstown, Md., May 10  
**Wort, Mary Jo Turner,** 86, Huntertown, Ind., Oct. 18  
**Wright, Thomas Greer,** 87, Salem, Va., March 27  
**Yoder, John,** 81, Elkhart, Ind., April 21  
**Ziccardi, Patricia A.,** 79, North Canton, Ohio, Feb. 25

## Licensings

**Trott, Michael T.,** Shen. Dist. (Wakeman's Grove, Edinburg, Va.), May 17

## Ordinations

**Hollandsworth, Judith L.,** S/C Ind. Dist. (Buck Creek, Mooreland, Ind.), May 5  
**Long, Philip A. S. Pa. Dist.** (Falling Spring, Waynesboro, Pa.), June 7, 2014

## Placements

**Ellsworth, Jeffrey,** from interim to pastor, Eden, Canton, Ohio, April 26  
**Finet, Angela,** pastor, Nokesville, Va., May 20  
**Harbaugh, Britnee,** youth and young adult director, Frederick, Md., May 26  
**Hershey, Matthew,** from pastor of leadership and church development to pastor, Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa., Feb. 8  
**McCumber, Jay,** from pastor to pastor of teaching and regional leadership, Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa., Feb. 8  
**Peyton, James M.,** pastor, Sharpsburg, Md., May 3

# Older—and wiser?

**W**e grow too soon old and too late smart.”

I remember seeing a black, cast-iron plaque bearing those words hanging on a wall in my grandparents’ dining room. Except it was actually written in cutesy phonetic German/English, so it went something like: “Ve grow too soon old und too late shmart.”



**RANDY MILLER**  
MESSENGER EDITOR

Back then I didn’t worry much about growing old. Like most 7-year-olds, I figured I

was going to be young forever. Today, as I inch gingerly toward the cardigan-and-hearing-aid years, I find myself reflecting on that maxim more frequently.

Still, I’m reluctant to admit that I’m actually old enough to attend NOAC (the National Older Adult Conference for the Church of the Brethren, held every two years in North Carolina.) Frankly, I’ve been qualified to attend for a decade, but am only just now getting around to admitting it. Seeing one of my former church youth group members on the planning committee also came as a sobering jolt.

In any case, while I’m a true foot-dragger when it comes to owning up to my aging self, I’m hoping that, since I appear to be nibbling at the edges of codgerdom, I’ve at least grown a tad *schmarter*. I suppose the jury’s still out on that. But I’d like

A line from a campfire song comes to mind: “They’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Have you heard it? Great! You must be old, too! It’s from a song by Peter Scholtes which was inspired by John 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

When he said this, Jesus was with his disciples, sharing what he realized would be their last meal together. He wanted to impress upon them the essence of what he’d been talking about for the past three years.

In the familiar passage from 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul expanded on what Jesus was saying: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. . . .”

Love—not a bad yardstick for measuring how smart we are when it comes to following the teachings of Jesus.

As I write this column, Annual Conference lies on the horizon. *There’s* a place where this “love” concept gets tested! Passions run deep because people care about the issues. Sometimes they care a little too much and risk losing sight of what Jesus and Paul were talking about. That happened a few years ago when our denomination wrestled with the matter of sexual orientation and inclusivity during the Special Response Process.

But it wasn’t long before we remembered who we are, and what we are about. We calmed down and talked to each other around tables, and we remembered. I like to think of that turn of events as a sign that perhaps we’re not just growing older,

**Passions run deep because people care about the issues. Sometimes they care a little too much and risk losing sight of what Jesus and Paul were talking about.**

to think that since I’m now among the target demographic for Geritol, Metamucil, and Centrum Silver ads, I’ve learned a few things that qualify as smart. Or at least that maybe I’ve become a little wiser, more graceful, and more tolerant.

The Church of the Brethren is aging too. At 307, we’re not exactly in our salad days anymore. We’ve been around the block—and the world—a few times. We’ve grown older. What about *schmarter*? I’d like to think that we have. But how can we tell?

but also smarter: wiser, more graceful, more tolerant. And not just tolerant, but more accepting.

Yes, we remembered. Thankfully, we haven’t grown so old that we’ve lost that capacity—although let’s not grow complacent. Keep that ginkgo biloba handy, and don’t stop doing those crosswords!

If we continue to remember who we are and what we’re about, maybe getting old won’t be so bad after all. **RM**

**COMING IN SEPTEMBER:** Annual Conference coverage

Suggested offering date: Sept. 20

# Proclaim

## Rejoice in Christ

“That Christ is proclaimed  
in every way...”

~Philippians 1:18 NRSV



# Mission offering

The Mission offering emphasizes service and international mission in the Church of the Brethren.

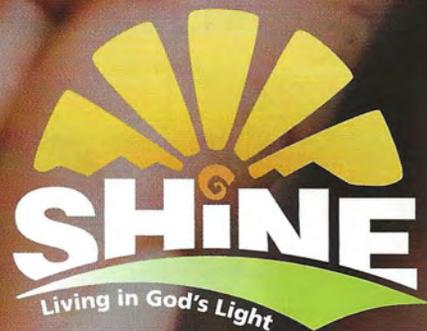
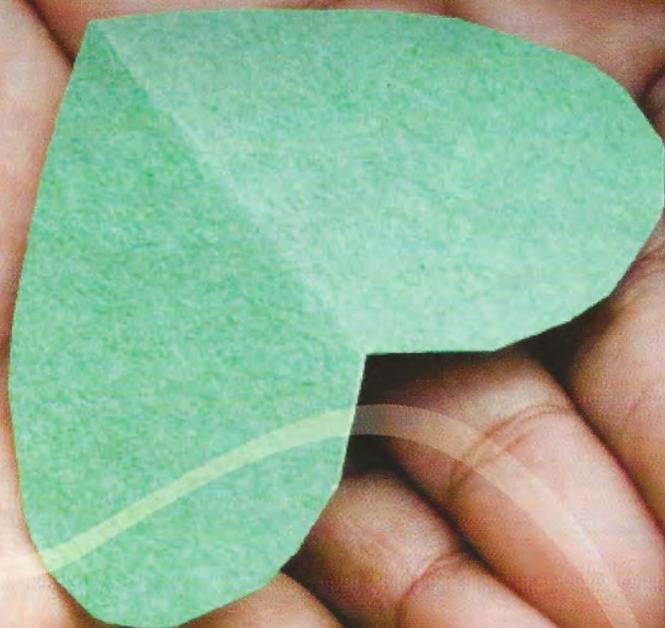
Find worship resources at [www.brethren.org/missionoffering](http://www.brethren.org/missionoffering)



Give to Church of the Brethren special offerings today at [www.brethren.org/offerings](http://www.brethren.org/offerings)

Imagine if forgiveness and love were commonly spoken, if conflicts were resolved with a healing touch and everyone felt value and worth. Our children are ready to learn that language and we have been given the words of life. So let's speak to them of peace and justice. Let's tell them of Jesus and God's shalom. Let's teach our kids to shine in this world.

*\* Start small*



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