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Holy **MATERIALISM**



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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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



December 2015 VOL.164 NO. 10 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

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Christmas has become too materialistic, many claim. But can materialism ever be considered good?

11 Begin with small things

What can one person—or even one community—do to affect the daunting challenge of climate change? A Bethany Seminary Peace Essay contest winner suggests we start by looking in our own backyard.

15 Peace, love, and footwashing

Église des Frères Haïtien, the thriving Church of the Brethren congregation in Miami, Fla., is at once distinctly Haitian and distinctly Brethren, claims Jennifer Hosler, in this latest installment in her series on churches in the cities.

24 Sabbath rest and revolution

Sabbath is the way God intended life to be ordered, with a built-in rhythm of rest and refreshment. Yes, there is work to be done, but there is also, by God's grace, a respite from work, a day for rest, refreshment, renewal.



Jennifer Hosler

departments

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on the cover At Christmas, we celebrate God coming into the midst of our crazy material world. The cover art represents that incarnation. Artwork by Paul Stocksdale

A few years back, when I was planning an overseas trip, I found the hotel choices to be out of my budget and overwhelming to wade through. And then I tried Airbnb, an online service that matches people looking for a place to stay with hosts who have a room to rent out. You can sort by price, location, and type of accommodations, meaning you can find anything from a tent (really!) to a villa.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

What makes it work is that immediately after the visit the guest reviews the host and the host reviews the guest. It doesn't take long to develop an online reputation visible to all Airbnb members. The reviews help others decide whether you're a good host or a pleasant guest. Because of this accountability, there's a tendency to be gracious when reviewing. It's a world in which you've got to be nice to succeed.

Now I'm not saying that the "sharing economy" (the term for inviting strangers to rent your spare room or your car or your tools) is better than the other ways we go about our lives. But companies like Airbnb, Uber, and others have figured out how to get strangers to trust each other—no small accomplishment in our cynical, fearful society. Observers of the phenomenon say that people like the personal interaction, the human touch.

The church is a little like that. There's lots of personal interaction. Strangers are welcome. And the early Christians pretty much invented a sharing economy, right? That's the picture we get in the New Testament, our rule of faith and practice. In a world that is desperately short on hospitality right now, we can be welcoming hosts.

On this assignment it turns out that we do get reviewed. The yardstick: welcoming strangers. If we fall short, the consequences are more serious than being shunned on a travel website. "Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:45-46).

Wendy McFadden

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Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate
- \$32 for 2 years
\$14.50 gift rate
\$14.50 church club rate
- \$27 for 2 years
\$ 1.25 student (per month)

If you move, clip address label and send with new address to MESSENGER Subscriptions, at the above address. Allow at least five weeks for address change.

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

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

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



Printed on recycled paper
(20% post consumer)



Congregation Close-Up

Ambler congregation marks 175 years

Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren marked its 175th anniversary with a series of events in October, including a love feast, a campfire with Brethren storytellers, and a visit to the site of the original meetinghouse. Although the church put the spotlight on its dodransbicentennial throughout the month of October, they held a day of special activities Oct. 18, which included a focus on the church's history during Sunday school, morning worship, and a luncheon which included a slide show and final presentation.

First known as the Upper Dublin German Baptist Church, the congregation was founded when John C. Reiff donated land for the church and a cemetery in Upper Dublin. The property was dedicated on Sept. 14, 1840. A small congregation throughout its history, the church has remained close to its progressive roots. According to church documents, the congregation held a special meeting Sept. 17, 1887, to determine whether the church should be progressive or conservative. When the vote was tallied, members had voted 8-1 to be progressive.

The congregation broke ground for its current home in Ambler Borough in May 1922 and laid the cornerstone for the new building in August 1922.

Ambler Church of the Brethren became a regular participant and a leader in cooperative community efforts. Reaffirming its reputation as a liberal congregation within the denomination, the church council voted in 1927 to open the communion to any person who professed faith in Christ.

by the numbers

35,000

Dollar amount of a grant given by the Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) of the Church of the Brethren to support the agricultural work of Eglise des Freres Haitiens, the Church of the Brethren in Haiti

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.

Celebrating 125 years in La Verne

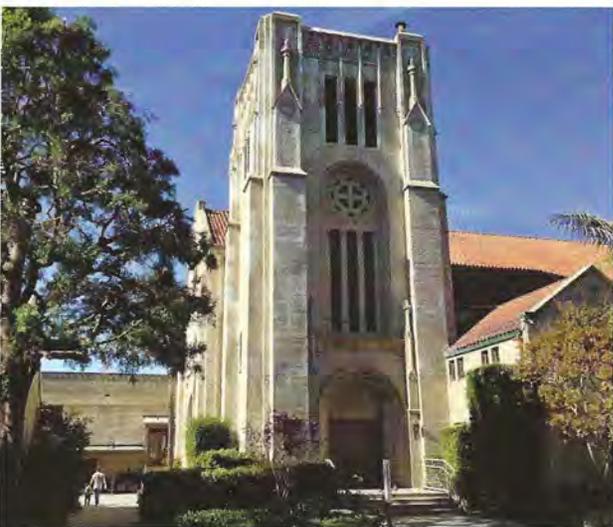
The La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren celebrated its 125th anniversary this year, and took the occasion to note several special events that took place during the church's history, including two Annual Conferences, the first of which was in 1928.

"A large tent seating 5,000 people was rented from the Los Angeles County Fair and constructed in the block recently vacated as the original Lordsburg College building—located a few blocks from the church—was demolished," says member Marlin Heckman. "People stayed in homes around La Verne or camped out at the elementary school grounds

and in vacant lots around town. There were 319 local church delegates plus Standing Committee delegates. A missionary offering was taken one evening which amounted to \$90,084.04. That would be over \$2 million in today's dollars." Annual Conference returned to La Verne for a second time in June 1941. A large tent was again erected in the city park next to the college.

"Looking backwards always encourages me to look

forward," says pastor Susan Boyer. "I have been reading about the history of this church, and am inspired by the stories of the vision that created this church and the mission we have today. I pray that, like our spiritual ancestors, we carry on the tradition of deep faithfulness to God, strong service to our community, and a tenacity and creativity that makes a difference in the world."



Franky Miller



Raking leaves for camp and cows

Youth from the Illinois-Wisconsin District raked leaves for Camp Emmaus in November as part of an On Earth Peace retreat with Rick Polhamus. The youth enjoy doing service projects, and asked to do something with adults in the district instead of doing a youth-only project. Raking the leaves helps provide for a green lawn for next year's camping season, and the leaves are used by neighboring farmers to keep their cows warm.

Serving others

Garden fosters a sense of community

A new community garden in Salisbury, Md., at Community of Joy Church of the Brethren, has had a successful first year reports the Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) e-newsletter. With the help of a \$1,000 GFCF grant through the Going to the Garden initiative, organizers installed 16 raised beds, drip irrigation, a shed, a sign, a children's library, and compost bins, and purchased four dump truck loads of a mix of top soil and compost. "Church members are working with Salisbury University and a local elementary school to develop programming for community children," said the report. "This outreach is attracting support from city officials, neighbors, and garden users, indicating that the garden is producing not only food, but a greater sense of community." Find the e-newsletter at www.brethren.org/gfcf/stories/e-news-2015-fall.pdf.

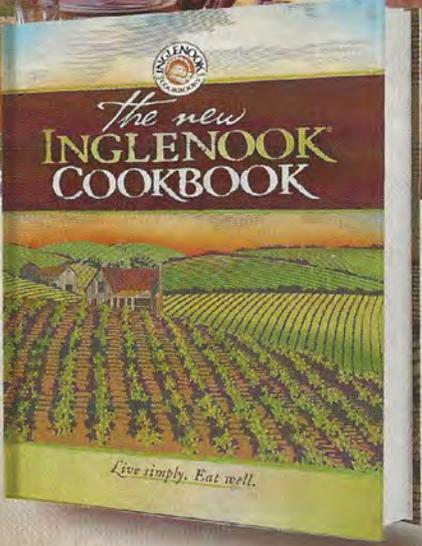


Remembered

Carrie Beckwith, 89, a former mission worker, died Sept. 19 in La Verne, Calif. Together with her husband, Carl Beckwith, from 1963-66 she served as a Church of the Brethren missionary in Garkida, Nigeria. In 1966, they moved to Modesto, Calif., where Carl served as director of the former Brethren Service Center that was located there. In 1970, he transferred to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., and became chief financial officer for SERRV International, while Carrie worked a few years as secretary for the regional CROP office. After retirement in 1988, the Beckwiths worked as volunteers in Pennsylvania, Virginia, California, and Kansas. They spent most of 1992 as volunteer co-directors of the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan.

Lois Alta Beery Schubert, 80, a former employee at the Church of the Brethren General Offices, died Sept. 14. After graduating high school, she entered Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). In 1957, she went to work at the General Offices. In 1970 she began work at the office of Pacific Southwest District in La Verne, Calif. She met her husband, Neil Schubert at Glendora (Calif.) Church of the Brethren where they were married in 1972, and where she served in numerous offices and volunteer capacities in subsequent years.

Lydia Walker, a former national director of the Church of the Brethren's Co-operative Disaster Child Care program, (now Children's Disaster Services, or CDS), died Sept. 29. "Lydia Walker was a beloved leader of the Children's Disaster Services program in the '90s and early 2000s," wrote current CDS associate director Kathy Fry-Miller. "She and Roy Winter, new Brethren Disaster Ministries director at the time, led volunteer groups through the Sept. 11 child care response."



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How will they read our maps?

I'm a young man with old tastes. I love history and radio. I like going—*gasp*—outside! I have a particular soft spot for old books. Much to my parents' chagrin, I tend to spend too much money on used books and not enough on nutritious food. Those books I promptly bring home from college and stuff into every nook and cranny



EMMETT ELDRED

of my parents' house. My bedroom becomes a little smaller every time I come home, the walls lined and the floor obscured by stacks of books. I'd live in a library if I could.

One of my recent acquisitions is a particularly bulky beauty that's two feet tall, 18 inches across, and three inches thick. It's an atlas called *Maps from the Age of Discovery*. It's nothing but maps—mostly in Italian and Dutch (which I can't read)—from the mid-

1400s to the 1800s. This is a fascinating era to study maps of the world because the world as everyone knew it then was undergoing rapid change.

Old maps tell us a great deal more than just geographic location. These maps are beautiful, dramatic, and political. They're more reliable as works of art than objective glimpses of the world. These maps tended to reflect the way mapmakers wanted the world to be, more than how the world actually was. In particular, mapmakers from the age of discovery had a habit of placing themselves at the very center of the Earth. Maps were a way to chart out dominance, empire, and political ambition.

Old habits die hard. We, too, tend to place ourselves at the

the wretched. We worship a God who has urged us, since the beginning, "Always be generous, open purse and hands, give to your neighbors in trouble, your poor and hurting neighbors" (Deut. 15:11).

Like cartographers in the age of discovery, we, too, live in a rapidly changing world. Our economy is truly global, the spread of information and ideas truly instant. In an age of global connectedness, we can no longer claim ignorance to the suffering and pain of our neighbors around the world.

God has blessed us with new eyes to see every corner of the earth, and those eyes have revealed to us villages in Nigeria burning to the ground, refugee children washing up on the shores of Turkey, and islands in the Pacific vanishing due to rising ocean levels. In our own country, we have seen people of color killed by police and crammed into for-profit prisons. We have watched tens of thousands die each year from guns. We have witnessed gay, lesbian, and transgender youth take their lives at alarming rates because they were not affirmed and celebrated in their own communities. We cannot, must not, look away.

When future generations look back at the way we have charted our faith, what will they see? Will they see a church that put itself at the center? That sought to shape its perception of the world in its own image? That refused to respond? Or will it see a fellowship united in prophetic love that answered God's call to live at the margins and love the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted, the different, and to lead the world toward love for refugees and care for the environment and an end to war?

The same God who blesses us with eyes to see also says to us that if our eyes cause us to sin, we should tear them out. If

If we have the ability to see but choose to look away, we might as well be blind. God has given us the eyes to see; do we have the faith to look?

center of our worldview. We see the world through the lens of America, through the lens of western Christianity, through the lens of our own self interest. Even our modern maps, which we view as bastions of objectivity, distort the world to make the northern and western powers look great and the global South look feeble.

Yet we worship a God who did just the opposite—who became incarnate as someone on the margins who identified with the poor, with the immigrant, with the sick, and with

we have the ability to see but choose to look away, we might as well be blind. God has given us the eyes to see; do we have the faith to look? **W**

Emmett Eldred is a Church of the Brethren member and a junior at Carnegie Mellon University. He was on the denomination's National Youth Cabinet, and following the inspirational speech by Jarrod McKenna at last year's National Youth Conference he founded [DunkerPunks.com](http://dunkerpunks.com) where he blogs and invites others to contribute as well. He also was the catalyst behind a project to send 1,000 letters in support of *Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria* (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Find out more at <http://dunkerpunks.com>.

“Just peace is the new model of doing theological and ecumenical work”

—German Mennonite theologian Fernando Enns speaking at the Bethany Theological Seminary Presidential Forum in October

“Providing justice is neither comfortable nor easy. But since when did being a Christian mean comfort and ease?”

—Eric Bishop, in his reflections as district moderator on the theme of the Church of the Brethren Pacific Southwest District Conference: “Called to be Just Christians”

“While my prayers remember Parisians and the French people, I also pray that the light of Christ removes the veil of darkness which clouds the minds of terrorists.”

—Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger, in a statement on the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris

“Syrian refugees need the aid and shelter of the global community, and Christians should be the first to answer the call for hospitality.”

—Christianity Today contributor Laura Turner

cultureview

► **Americans are becoming less religious**, judging by such markers as church attendance, prayer, and belief in God, and the trend is more pronounced among young adults, according to the results of the Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study, released Nov. 3. The share of US adults who say they believe in God, while still high compared with other advanced industrial countries, slipped to 89 percent in 2014 from 92 percent in 2007, according to the study. The proportion of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” God exists fell even more, to 63 percent in 2014 from 71 percent in 2007.

► **Children who grow up in nonreligious homes are more generous** and altruistic than children from observant families, according to a recent study. A series of experiments involving 1,170 children from a variety of religious backgrounds found that the non-believers were more likely

to share stickers with their classmates and less likely to endorse harsh punishments for people who pushed or bumped into others. The results “contradict the common-sense and popular assumption that children from religious households are more altruistic and kind toward others,” according to the results of a study published in November in the journal *Current Biology*.

► **Americans of all faiths and viewpoints are gloomy** about the economy, anxious about Islam, bothered by immigrants, and mistrustful across racial lines, according to the Public Religion Research Institute’s annual American Values Survey, released Nov. 17. The survey documents discontent among all major religious groups, races, and political views. PRRI CEO Robert Jones noted that white evangelical Protestants express anxiety and worry most sharply. The survey of 2,695 US adults was conducted from mid-September to early October.

Heard 'round the world



“The reality is, if you pray for your enemy, it transforms your view of those who seem less-than-human to human.”

—Iraq war veteran Cory Townsend, who has become an active advocate for peacemaking

“The refugee situation is something that we must treat with the utmost seriousness. People are fleeing without food, water, and somewhere to live. These are people who have fled for their lives.”

—Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches



Holy MATERIALISM

by Susan Boyer

The controversies about the symbols on Starbucks' coffee cups to holiday trees in malls to how we greet each other during this season have begun.

Throughout Advent, preachers around the United States will be warning their members about how Christ has been removed from Christmas. We will be reminded over and over again of the danger of consumerism in our Christmas celebrations. But I want to go on the record as a proponent of the materialism of Christmas. It's true. I think Christmas,

at its very center, is all about materialism. This year in the United States we will spend about \$1.16 billion on live Christmas trees, \$5 billion on gifts for our pets, Santa will receive 1.2 million letters, and we have even added Black Thursday to our Black Friday shopping. But that's not the materialism I'm talking about. I'm talking about another kind of materialism. At the center of Christmas is Incarnation. This time of year we hear that word quite a bit. Incarnation is the heart of this season. Incarnation comes from the Latin and means

“ . . . the first Christmas was *materialistic*. It was messy, threatened by oppression, and filled with the agony of real people who were told that there was no room for them. It was earthy and far from sweet.

“to make into flesh.” In Spanish, we say, “Encarnación,” or “God in the meat.”

Incarnation is God choosing to come to us here. It is eternity coming to humanity—God in flesh. Encarnación is God blessing the material by becoming material. I think the words materialism and Christmas should be spoken together more often.

Donna Schaper, pastor of Judson Memorial Baptist Church in New York City, says that with Incarnation, the “spiritual and material have come together in a child, a human, one such as us, with a pancreas, and knees and hips and an unwed mother.” There it is. She names it for me—why we try to divorce our Christmas theology from the materialism of our world—because this world is complex and complicated and messy. The spiritual finds itself born of an unwed mother lying in a manger with smelly animals as the first witnesses.

Every year the Claremont (Calif.) United Methodist Church puts up a nativity scene on their frontage property along a busy street. It is always controversial because they understand the true materialism of Christmas. Instead of just a sweet stable scene like the one you find on Christmas cards, they invite into their nativity a woman holding her child in a jail cell; or they create the nativity on the border of Mexico and the United States next to a wall; or they put a young black man shot in the chest next to the manger. They put flesh on Christmas because they remember that the first Christmas was materialistic. It was messy, threatened by oppression, and filled with the agony of real people who were told that there was no room for them. It was earthy and far from sweet.

We are in a meta-narrative change in our world. Vast numbers of people are describing themselves as spiritual but not religious. Maybe this new meta-narrative has something to teach us, but I don’t think it can describe Christmas. Spiritual but not material? Spiritual but not communal? Spiritual but not religious? Christmas was never spiritual in this way. Christmas was always material. Christmas has always been religious. Love came down at Christmas. Love came down to a stained and smelly earth in less than perfect circumstances. God comes to us as a baby on a chilly night with the smell of cow dung pervading the air. There is no split between spiritual and religious, between spiritual and material, here.

God comes into the skilled nursing room of your dying father. God sits in the room where your boss is unjustly treating you. God stands beside you when you hear on the phone that your son is dead. God keeps you company in the car while you drive home from the night shift. God waits with you in the emergency room when you can’t stand the pain anymore. God sits quietly in the room when you struggle with the flavorless world of depression.

That is what the author of the Gospel of John tells us with the beauty of poetry. Those of us who live in a prose world may have missed John’s words among the Christmas stories of the other Gospel writers—the stories that include a young girl, a manger, a stable, angels, and shepherds. John tells us the story of Jesus’ birth with just two lines: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That is the sum of John’s Christmas story—the story of Incarnation.

“Embrace materialism this Christmas. Embrace Jesus as God’s song made flesh that we might become children of God.”

It is so beautiful and poetic that you may have lost yourself in it and missed what it had to tell you. When we hear “Word” we think of something written or printed. But John’s description of Jesus as “Word” or “logos” means something said. Author Hughes Old says that Jesus is “God’s sermon preached to us in the living out of a human life.”

Jesus is the Sermon, the Song. Jesus is the Story that tells us who God is, of God becoming human, living, loving, struggling, and dying. Most Christmases we listen to a different voice, a different song, a different sermon. It is a sweet little story, sanitized and filled with light. We take the flesh—the meat—out of Christmas, and we make it something spiritual but not material. We take the heart and rip it right out of Christmas.

Jesus tells us who God is because Jesus is God in flesh—in the meat. In Jesus we hear that God heals, forgives, embraces, and loves even those who hurt him. In Jesus we hear that God understands betrayal and denial, grieving and pain, humiliation—even death. In Jesus we hear that God brings hope over despair, defeat, and death. In Jesus we hear that God is present in the material world. In Jesus we hear God’s love song to the world.

Embrace materialism this Christmas. Embrace Jesus as God’s song made flesh that we might become children of God. In all the songs that are playing this Christmas, may you hear that song. 

Susan Boyer is pastor of the La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.

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Reiland Andrew

Begin with small things

by Gabriella Stocksdale

The world fades to black as heavy poisons suppress and paralyze all. Can't breathe.

Can't see. Too scared to move, everything is wrong. Skin peels and burns. Sounds are muffled as something pushes and shoves into rocks and dirt. This is not a scene from a tear-gassed rally; this is a scene from the bottom of Tyler Creek.

Tyler Creek is one of the main tributaries that flow into the Fox River, which runs through my hometown of Elgin, Ill. It is the source of drinking water for many communities, as well as an important ecosystem for a variety of organisms. Like many urban creeks, there is not much to slow down storm-water runoff. Rain doesn't percolate naturally through shrubs and grasses at the stream's edge. It rushes like a torrential force through a world of concrete and asphalt, picking up

mud, heavy oils from parking lots, and pesticides from lawns. Each rain causes another episode of an increasingly oxygen-depleted environment. In this suffocating world, small crustaceans called scuds struggle to simply breathe.

These tiny shrimp may seem insignificant, but they are essential in the food web of this and many other ecosystems. Without them, native fish such as darters, shiners, and sticklebacks perish. The richness of the creek perishes and the health of the river into which the creek flows is greatly diminished.

When discussing climate change and ecosystem preservation, we rarely think of the creek half a mile away, with the only identifiable organisms affected being minute crustaceans and inch-long fish. We tend to think about the immense job

This essay by Church of the Brethren high school student Gabriella Stocksdale took third place honors in Bethany Theological Seminary's 2015 Peace Essay Contest. The contest resulted in a wide response from students ranging from high schoolers to doctoral candidates.

of cleaning oil out of oceans, ridding the air of harmful gases, rescuing species from the brink of extinction, and reversing the inevitability of climate change.

Maybe, occasionally, we should think smaller and take a look at our little creeks. We may gain some understanding about what they are and who lives there. Because in reality, we live there. Our neighborhoods and our faith communities are a part of our creeks. They are our local watersheds.

Brock Dolman, cofounder of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center in West Sonoma County, Calif., refers to local watersheds as “basins of relations.” He refers to them as cradles that capture all the water in a local area—cradles that include all life, including us. We need to learn to protect the unique cradle where we live, understanding that everything we consume and dispose of is connected to our watershed.

As I write this, there are shocking reports of a toxic spill affecting the entire western part of North Dakota, resulting in the destruction of entire ecosystems in the Yellowstone River, and the contamination of drinking water for entire towns. Even as companies attempt to suck away the water from these creeks to get rid of the toxic by-product they created, Congress continues to try to pass the Keystone Oil Pipeline, a portion of which would run through the same area where these toxic spills occurred.

As shocking as the spills may be, our everyday actions can cause similar damage. A Pew Oceans Report notes that “every eight months, nearly 11 million gallons of oil run off our streets and driveways into our waters—the equivalent of the Exxon Valdez oil spill.” That’s a big deal, too. But it is something we can help reduce through our own small actions.



Scott Vincent

These small steps may include simple things like turning the parkways in front of our homes into rain gardens that capture and slow down rainwater. And, if we live near a waterway, another simple step may be to just not mow, allowing taller grasses and native plants to slow down these rainy torrents. These are small steps, but they can make a big difference.

While it is critical that we work to limit damage to the earth’s environment for the health of all who live here, it is also important to think of the social environments we create with one another.

The environment we need to change is not limited to the air we breathe or the earth we touch, but also includes the environment of people we encounter. The social environment in which we live requires just as much change as the ecological one. Racial tensions, the growing wealth gap, and prejudicial assumptions we make about people tend to make us think of those not like us as the “others”—those who are not in the small groups we create for ourselves.

Sometimes I wonder if small steps are enough.

Several years ago I was in a play with a Christian theater group. It was near Christmas, and some of the cast and directors thought it would be a good idea to donate toys for children from poor families. It was presented as something we could easily do by just not eating out a time or two during any given week, and spending that money instead on toys. A couple things struck me about that suggestion—well-intentioned though it may have been—that didn’t feel quite right. One was the assumption everyone was wealthy enough to eat out several times in a week. The other was the feeling that these people were very separated from the needs of the poor. I thought about the community members I had worked with through our church’s soup kettle program. These children needed warm shelter, adequate food (especially during school breaks), the luxury of toilet paper, or maybe a toothbrush. Perhaps a few small steps to understand others’ needs would have helped.

A similar thought went through my mind as I recalled a large food pantry at a nearby megachurch. Like many large churches, it was situated on a lovely rolling campus about 30 minutes outside of the nearest city center. It is also not along any bus line, so that donated food is out of reach for those most in need. The poorer residents of my town use the bus as their only means of transportation. I got to know many of

“ Maybe, occasionally, we should think smaller and take a look at our little creeks. We may gain some understanding about what they are and who lives there.

“ We may dream big, but for our actions to have outcomes, starting small may be the way to go. Like the mustard seed, even small actions can have a big impact if they spread throughout the entire garden.

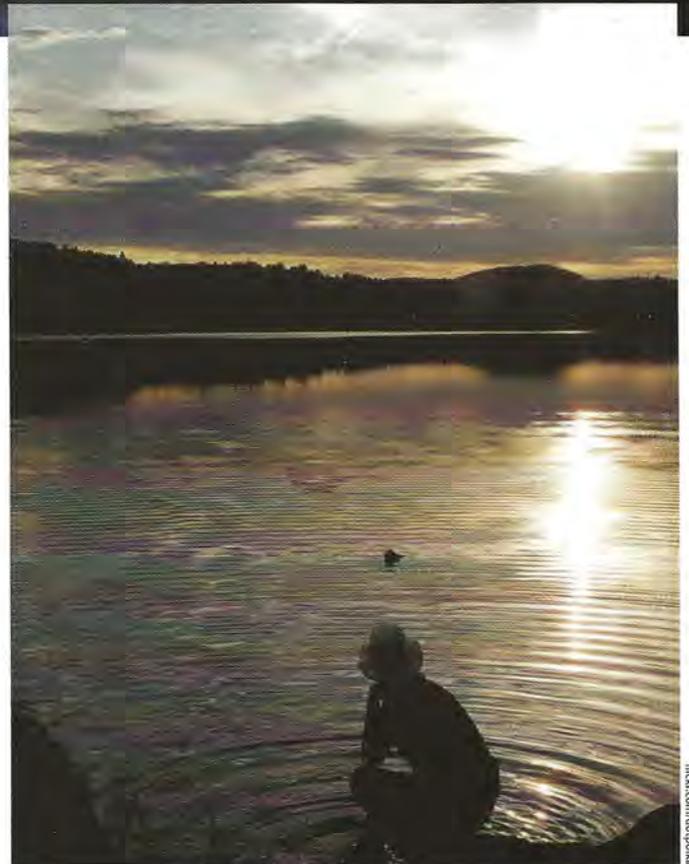
these people by face if not by name during a time when my own family didn't have a vehicle.

There are mothers with small children, older people with canes and walkers, completely healthy people just trying to get to their minimum-wage jobs. Many of these people would have greatly benefited from the food pantry at the megachurch, but they would likely not have the chance to ever see it. Just like with the theater group, small steps to understand the situation behind the needs would have helped.

Societal environmental problems are all around us. In some areas of the United States, cities prohibit feeding homeless people, and actually arrest those who try. Laws like this—and the fact that there are people who make and enforce them—scare me. I had a friend in high school who lived all four years in very unstable situations. She was eventually taken in by another friend's mom for a time when she and her father lost the house they had been living in. How can a law like this help any kind of situation? The only thing this law makes me think of are the plaques in parks saying “Don't feed the birds.” The fact that homeless people aren't even being treated as human is infuriating and horrible. Some have developed this idea that a free meal once in a while “attracts” the homeless as if they were animals. No one wants to be homeless, or to constantly have to rely on others. Again, small steps of understanding would go a long way.

Thanks to social media, we are more connected than ever. The night the grand jury results in the Michael Brown case were announced, I scrolled through my Tumblr and saw that nearly every blog on my dash was posting “#black lives matter.” Social media helps fuel social change, and allows individuals to have more control over what appears on the Internet. Although older generations may grumble about how social media swallows up our time, the Internet is helping to speed up global change.

Are these small steps helpful? Maybe. But the positive aspects of social media don't come without a cost. Sweatshops in Asia are often part of the engine fueling our phone and computer addiction. How can we find a middle ground in all of this chaotic mess of rights and wrongs? Is social media inherently evil if it is propelled by child labor? Is it inherently good if helps move public opinion toward positive change? These are what I ponder as I stare at my brand new iPhone.



If we fix one part of the environment in which we live, does that help the rest? Do we cause the “correct” change or does it destroy what we have already built and called good? How do we peacefully yet aggressively change the our environment for the better? What can we keep and what has to be tossed?

We are a society that dreams of big, but desires easy. I'm no exception as I sit in my comfy chair and write this essay in between Tumblr posts and watching cat videos, while expecting these words to flow easily. And, when they don't, well, what's the point? If the desired resolution to a problem or goal is not in sight, most give up before trying. The same can be said for the pursuit of peace. Most would look at the world around them, with its war, famine, poverty, child labor, and injustices of every kind and say that peace is just idealistic drivel, that it's impossible to achieve in our generation. Maybe impossible in any generation. Impossible—so why even try?

Environmental change and peace in the world may seem like immense tasks, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try with all

“ Our churches are well situated as centers for teaching people to love our land and our water, and to help inspire people to restore and defend them.

of our might to work toward them. We may dream big, but for our actions to have outcomes, starting small may be the way to go. Like the mustard seed, even small actions can have a big impact if they spread throughout the entire garden.

Lately, thoughtful congregations have been experiencing new trends of helping preserve the earth we live on and the air we breathe. An idea to give this new movement substance was put forth by Ched Myers, who said that people and their congregations should start practicing “watershed discipleship”—in other words, to teach people to know and love and eventually save the watersheds of America, or, more specifically, the neighborhood watershed.

“Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live

where the river goes” (Ezekiel 47:9). Our churches are well situated as centers for teaching people to love our land and our water, and to help inspire people to restore and defend them.

Solutions to giant problems begin with one or two here and there, working together for a common good, changing norms, asking difficult questions, and doing new things. If we were all to make small changes like volunteering our time, making food and other necessities available to those in need, or even cleaning up local creeks, then maybe peace isn’t so far away. The mustard seed of change may spread throughout our community and eventually to the entire world if we just start planting seeds. . 

Gabriella Stocksdales is a senior at Larkin High School in Elgin, Ill., and a member of the Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill. For more on the church watershed project, see “A Watershed Moment,” by Ched Myers, *Sojourners*, May 2014.

Is your church
in tune with
young adults?

In Tune

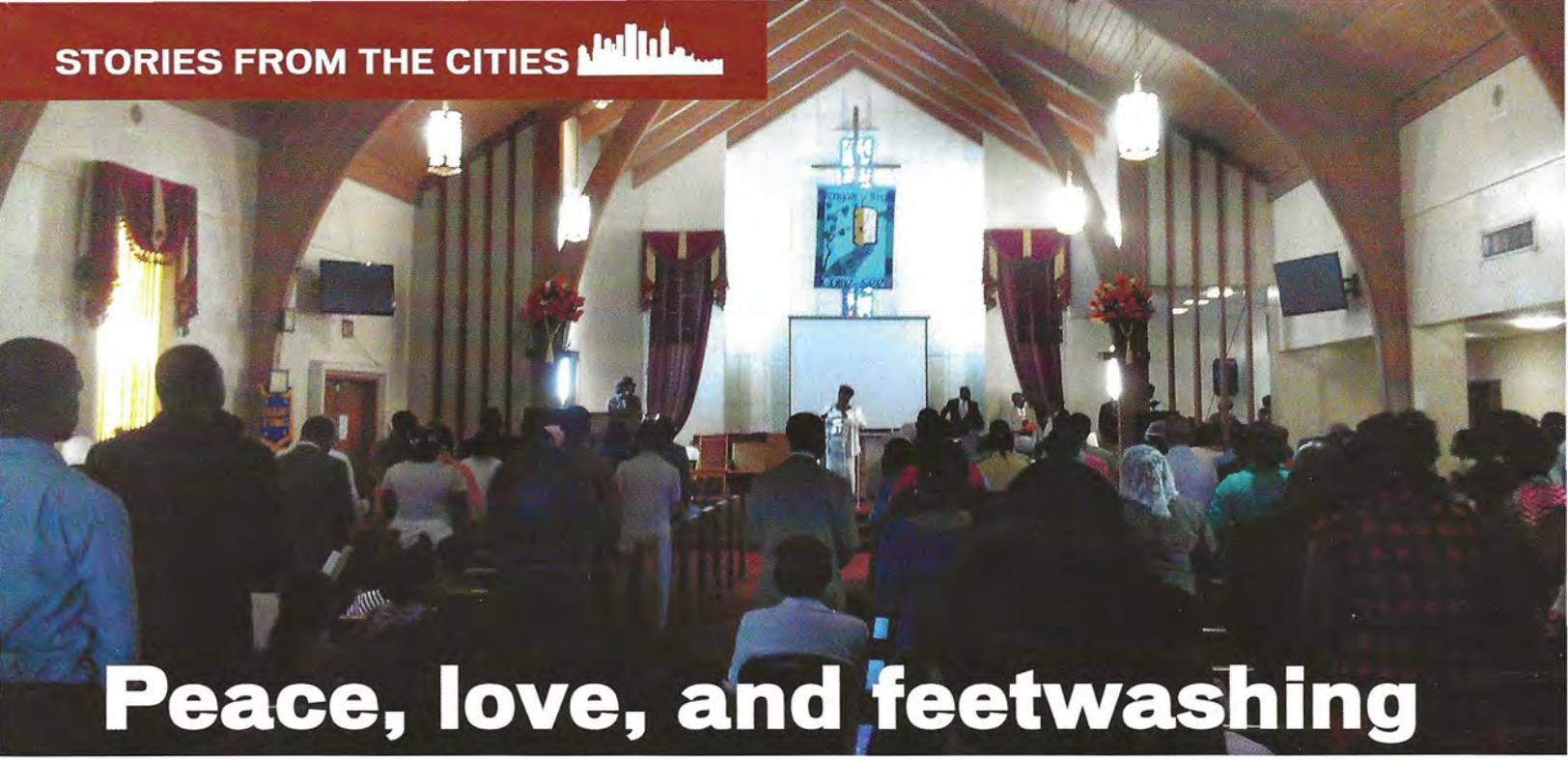
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Peace, love, and footwashing

A CHURCH DISTINCTLY HAITIAN, DISTINCTLY BRETHREN

story and photos by Jennifer Hosler

They came at first by boats, as refugees from Haiti. Those refugees are now a vital part of our denomination—they've planted new churches in both the US and Haiti. Église des Frères Haïtien (in English, Haitian Church of the Brethren—phonetically: Egg-lease day Frayer Ay-sean) is a thriving congregation in Miami, Florida. Although most of the adults did not “grow up Brethren” (as many US Brethren refer to their faith heritage), Église des Frères Haïtien is distinctly Brethren in faith, in practice, and in love.

The congregation welcomed me as family in August 2015, where I worshiped with, learned from, and interviewed many sisters and brothers. Pastor Ludovic St. Fleur and his wife, Elizabeth, hosted me in their home and blessed me with their fellowship and delicious Haitian food. They told me, “For three days, you are Haitian.” As I listened to stories of the congregation’s history and growth, I couldn’t help but marvel at their willingness to both love hard and work hard for Christ’s kingdom, and at the genuine affection and devotion that they have for Brethren beliefs and practices.

Église des Frères Haïtien is a church of sisters and brothers, where caring and supporting each other as family is key.

Love pervades all of the church’s teaching. They resolve to work through conflicts and to promote Christ’s message of peacemaking as a core part of the gospel. Footwashing at love feast is core to their church life, as is teaching the New Testa-



“ As I listened to stories of the congregation’s history and growth, I couldn’t help but marvel at their willingness to both love hard and work hard for Christ’s Kingdom



ment. What does it mean to be Brethren at Église des Frères Haïtien? Peace, love, and feetwashing.

Faithfulness bearing fruit

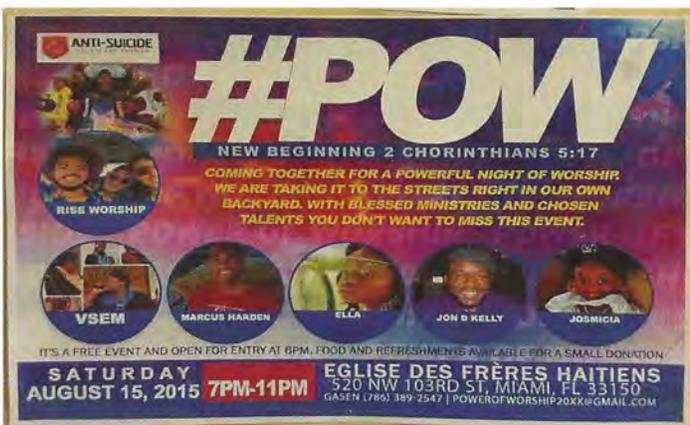
The story of Église des Frères Haïtien began with a crisis of international proportions. Fear of political violence, social unrest, and a dictatorial regime forced thousands of Haitians from their homeland in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Refugees from Haiti arrived in Florida by boat, risking their lives in perilous journeys, hoping for freedom and a new start for their families. Wayne Sutton of Miami First Church of the Brethren described the situation: “There was a humanitarian crisis unfolding in Miami. Many of those who survived the trip arrived on our

cultural group” (IV.D. article 7). Faced with a challenge to reach out to another cultural group, First Church immediately had one in mind.

Planting a Haitian Church of the Brethren was a way to address Miami First Church’s own challenges while also being faithful to a call to bear new fruit. At the time, according to Sutton, Miami First was “a small and struggling intercultural urban congregation in a changing neighborhood. We were on the dole from the district to help us pay our pastor’s part-time salary, so we didn’t have a lot in the way of financial resources. And we didn’t know any Haitians.” Despite these hurdles, Miami First church stepped out in faith to care for and meet the needs of newly arrived Haitians, building new relationships. One of those who received assistance was pastor Ludovic St. Fleur

St. Fleur came to the US as a refugee during the crisis. A preacher in Haiti, he began a Bible study in his apartment shared with several other newly arrived Haitians. St. Fleur met another Haitian minister, R.C. Jean, who had recently become connected to Miami First as a potential Haitian pastor and church planter. Both participated in a Brethren love feast. St. Fleur described that he was “struck by the feetwashing and the holy kiss.” He was interested in learning more about the Brethren and being part of a Haitian Brethren church plant, incorporating his Bible study into the new church project. Miami First encouraged plural leadership, so both Jean and St. Fleur served as leaders in the beginning. Theological and practical differences around the use of violence led to Jean withdrawing from the Brethren and to St. Fleur becoming the lead pastor.

The fledgling church project grew, and St. Fleur’s ministry was supported by Miami First in the beginning. One time, St. Fleur invited former Miami First Church pastor Bill Bosler to speak about Brethren history. According to Sutton, Bosler explained how the early Brethren were also “boat people,” fleeing oppression and coming to America looking for a new life.”



Poster for a youth event organized by the church.

beaches with few connections and no means of support.”

At Annual Conference in 1981, the denomination approved a study committee’s response to a query on “diminishing membership.” The paper made several recommendations, one which particularly resonated with Miami First Church’s leadership: “That every congregation be challenged to begin at least one new outpost. This may be a Bible study group, a group of persons geographically distant, or another

The church was received as a fellowship in October 1983. As it grew, other Haitian congregations were also planted in Orlando, West Palm Beach, and Naples, Fla. In 2003, St. Fleur began to plant churches in Haiti. To date, there are 21 Église des Frères Haïtien congregations in Haiti. While starting these new churches, Église des Frères Haïtien has intentionally planted congregations both distinctly Haitian and distinctly Brethren in belief and practice. Keeping this distinction involves ongoing teaching and training, through preaching and also things like bi-annual peace seminars for Haitian Brethren to learn about biblical peace theology and practice.

In all things, love

“What is Église des Frères? Is it Baptist? Methodist?” For Haitians encountering the Church of the Brethren for the first time, the denomination is perplexing. Members must often describe their church, what it is, and what it believes and does. Servilia Attelus explains it this way: “Église des Frères is a group of persons who get together, share love together, unity together, share confidence together. That’s why it’s named Église des Frères.” Members interviewed described the church as a “community of support,” with a strong sense of community, where people are accepting and loving. According to Claudette Phannord, their pastor teaches that “the church should be a group of people who love one another and support one another. We try hard for that.”

Numerous Haitians in the US provide for the needs of both their families at home and back in Haiti. As such, resources can be scarce. Many members of Église des Frères Haïtien work two minimum-wage jobs, with long, irregular hours. Unexpected events would be extreme hardships without the support of the church; members assist each other during weddings, funerals, or illnesses.

When asked about the strengths of their church, members cited its emphasis on love and reconciliation. Attelus commented that “pastor Ludovic has never preached without



teaching about love.” “Respect, love, and unity,” said Ramses Papillon, “we have this even though there’s a lot of diversity in the church.” While members are all of Haitian origin, people come from a variety of theological backgrounds (e.g. Baptist, Roman Catholic, or Church of God). These differences provide challenges and can cause conflict. Thankfully, the church navigates these conflicts by teaching both love and conflict resolution.

Biblical teaching on peace gives members the tools to engage with people of different theological backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. Rose Cadet explained, “It helps me in my personal life and relationships, trying to make peace and keep peace with everyone around me. I think that’s one of the greatest benefits of being in the Church of the Brethren.”

A future for youth—and a new baby

Similar to all congregations, challenges do exist alongside strengths and areas of growth. Theological diversity can create conflict. Time and energy are challenges: It is difficult to get to Bible study if you work 14-hour days to support your family. Culture and language pose unique hurdles. Youth born in the US to Haitian parents often speak less Creole and more English. It has been difficult to retain young people in the church, who relocate after college or find other churches upon their return. St. Fleur and several others cite the need to engage and empower youth in the church, supporting them in spite of cultural, generational, and linguistic differences. Église des Frères Haïtien is trying to support their youth in new ministries and outreaches. During my visit, youth were planning an event called #POW (Power of Worship), with singing, poetry, dance, and preaching.

For Église des Frères Haïtien, engaging and empowering youth is where the church’s energy must be focused. Seeing youth become leaders was cited by many, when asked what they hoped to see in the next five or 10 years.

St. Fleur also hopes to see a new church plant in the US. Église des Frères Haïtien is seen as the “mother church” of 24 other churches and, he said, “It’s time to have a new baby.” Another church distinctly Haitian, distinctly Brethren, characterized by peace, love, and footwashing. 



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 seven 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.

Claiming a hem-of-the-garment faith

by Melody Keller

I am intrigued by the Bible story of a woman about whom I know very little. But the little I do know is really all that I need. Read about this woman's encounter with Jesus in Mark 5:25-34.

As you'll discover, she was sick, and had been for 12 years. Appointment after appointment with doctors had led nowhere, and her resources had been depleted. I think about this woman and imagine her hope for healing as she went from physician to physician. I imagine the anxiety she must have felt when her funds were gone.

It could be that we, too, have sought comfort from a counselor, from a doctor, or from a friend. It could be that we have resorted to books for help, to pills for peace, or even to busy schedules to forget our pain. In the end, we are hurting and we are unhealthy, still woefully in need of a touch.

Think about the moment that this woman heard about Jesus. What did she think? How did she feel? She was done. Her hope had faded. She had tried again and again, each time with the same result. Not only was her money gone, so was her fight. She had tried very hard, and it was time to accept the inevitable. This was her lot in life and, for better or for worse, she would live with it.

But somehow the spark of faith was ignited in her barren desert of doubt, despair, and dread. Somehow this woman knew that she needed to get to Jesus.

I love this woman's big faith. She didn't ask to hold God's hand. She didn't request a heavenly hug. She didn't require an hour of God's time. All she needed was to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. That was it. Nothing more.

In our deserts, in our valleys, in our needs, do we have ears to hear the answer and then have the faith to respond? The

woman with a problem too big for her to solve and too great for medicine to heal is an example for us to follow. Imagine her whispering into our situations words of hope: "Go to Jesus."

This woman went—maybe with great effort—into the crowd. She had one goal, and that was to reach out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. And in the moment that she touched it, she was healed.

Jesus knew what had happened, but he gave this woman a chance to testify to the miracle that had just occurred. She spoke from a position of humility at the ground in front of him. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

He called her daughter, a word of possession. He complimented her faith and sent her away in peace. She left healed, grateful, and changed. Maybe someday the rest of her story will be told.

The great news is that the same God still walks and works in our situations, and that he still honors hem-of-the-garment faith.

I am convinced that we make faith much too complicated. We need to be more basic and childlike. Put away the calculations, the pie charts, the graphs, and the reports. It's time for us to have big faith in a simple way.

Be a person whose life shines with that kind of faith to your family. Be a church that shares simple but strong faith in your community. Be a denomination that exhibits active faith to the world.

Let's get in line behind this restored woman and claim hem-of-the-garment faith. 

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

The generous will themselves
be blessed, for they

share

their food with the poor.

Proverbs 22:9 (NIV)



Discover ways you can be part of the sharing at www.brethren.org/gfcf.



GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS FUND

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1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin IL 60120. Or give online by visiting www.brethren.org/gfcf.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Sharon Watkins of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), right, and Samuel Logan, left, a professor at Earlham College, addressed the 2015 Presidential Forum.

Presidential Forum at Bethany explores Just Peace

A Pilgrimage for Just Peace: Rejecting Cruelty, Creating Community, Rediscovering Divinity was the theme of the recent 2015 Presidential Forum at Bethany Seminary in Richmond, Ind. Held Oct. 29 to 31, the forum featured international participation, including some members of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The forum was the seventh held by the seminary, and the first hosted by Bethany's president Jeff Carter. "I have dreamed of this gathering since the moment I was called to be president of the seminary," Carter said as he welcomed participants.

During the two-day forum and pre-forum, the history of Just Peace was presented with a theological analysis of the concept and what it means for churches. "Peace is not easy, or popular, or even possible," said Richmond (Ind.) Church of the Brethren pastor Matt McKimmy in the opening worship service of the pre-forum. "But we cannot ignore what Jesus said about peace."

Sharon E. Watkins, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and member of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, preached at the opening worship. The Disciple's profession of faith in Jesus Christ enabled them to maintain

unity at Christ's table despite differences. "You come to the table with your differences," she said, "realizing its Christ's table. We don't invite and we can't exclude."

Keynote speakers also stressed the significance of Just Peace for Christians and the churches. Fernando Enns, a German Mennonite theologian and member of WCC Central Committee, presented the history of Just Peace and the process that brought it to the consideration of the WCC. Enns has been deeply engaged with the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence and is a leading proponent of Just Peace in ecumenical circles. "Just Peace is a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world," he said, quoting from the WCC document.

Scott Holland, Bethany's Slabaugh Professor of Theology and Culture and director of Peace Studies, and one of the architects of the WCC's Just Peace document, asked whether religion has a role in peace anymore, given the widespread questioning of religion around the world. Elizabeth Ferris, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C., presented an analysis of the world's refugee crisis. "The Syrian crisis has become a focal point and an indicator of the depth of the concern and desperation of the refugee population," she said.

Other presenters included Christina Bucher, Carl W. Zeigler professor of religion at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, who took on the question of "Pondering Joshua in Search of Just Peace." The question of ethical tourism—how to travel in a just and peaceful way—was tackled by Ben Brazil of the faculty of Earlham School of Religion. James Samuel Logan, National Endowment for the Humanities Endowed Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies at Earlham College, and a Mennonite minister, explored racism in society, and the challenges peace churches face in dealing with it.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Fernando Enns (left), one of the keynote speakers, listens intently during a session of the Forum.

A Haitian man poses for a picture with a goat he received with help from the Church of the Brethren.



Joan Dignat

GFCF gives to Haitian agriculture project

The Global Food Crisis Fund (GFCF) of the Church of the Brethren has given a grant of \$35,000 to support the agricultural work of Église des Frères Haïtien (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti). This grant is in addition to three previous grants to the project. This is the fourth year for the agriculture program, which was planned to last five years as a post-disaster response effort following the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010.

This allocation will provide funding for

19 “mini-projects” ranging from animal raising and crop production projects for rural communities, to value-added food projects for urban communities such as sales of fruit drinks and peanut butter.

The project’s new budget reflects an increased emphasis on training seminars, said the grant request. Of note is the addition of a new member on the project’s staff, whose focus will be on strengthening the work with women in urban areas of Haiti.

Emergency Disaster Fund grants go to families in Myanmar and Haitians in the DR

The staff of Brethren Disaster Ministries have directed grants from the Church of the Brethren’s Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to aid families in Myanmar (Burma) who were affected by Cyclone Komen, and to help people of Haitian descent who are living in the Dominican Republic.

An EDF allocation of \$4,000 supports the Church World Service (CWS) response to families affected by flooding caused by Cyclone Komen in Myanmar. The storm made land-fall July 30, causing heavy winds, flash floods, and landslides across Myanmar. The flooding continued through mid-October when the monsoon season ended. Damaged roadways and bridges have impaired the distribution of humanitarian aid.

The Ayeyarwady region where CWS is responding lost more than 200,000 acres of farmland, with more than 100,000 homes suffering damage. Roughly 500,000 people have been displaced. The Church of the Brethren grant helps

CWS provide food, water treatment materials, and non-food items including mosquito nets to 10,000-20,000 families. Additionally, 23,000 to 46,000 people will receive livelihood restoration support, including seed rice, farming equipment, and improved community infrastructure.

A grant of \$3,000 aids Iglesia des los Hermanos (the Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic) to assist with the naturalization of ethnic Haitians living in the DR. As of the date of the grant request, the Dominican church had helped to register more than 450 people of Haitian descent for naturalization.

The Dominican church has requested \$3,000 in addition to a previous grant of \$5,000 made in June, in order to continue with the work. The naturalization process requires legalization of documents, gathering missing data, and archiving of documents for future identification needs of those seeking naturalization.

For more information about the Emergency Disaster Fund or to contribute donations to the fund go to www.brethren.org/edf.

upcoming events

Dec. 1

AIDS Awareness Day

Dec. 6

Second Sunday of Advent

Dec. 10

Human Rights Day

Dec. 13

**Advent Offering Emphasis,
Third Sunday of Advent**

Dec. 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Dec. 24 Christmas Eve,

Church of the Brethren
offices are closed

Dec. 25 Christmas Day,

Dec. 31 New Year’s Eve

Jan. 1 New Year’s Day,

Jan. 6 Epiphany

Jan. 17-23 Week of
Prayer for Christian Unity

Jan. 18 Martin Luther
King Jr. Day, Church of the
Brethren offices are closed

Children's Disaster Services receives Methodist grant

Children's Disaster Services, a program of Brethren Disaster Ministries, has received a grant of \$100,000 (\$50,000 for two years) from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). The grant is for building local and state networking and Rapid Response efforts throughout the US. CDS is partnering with churches, the American Red Cross, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and FEMA

Voluntary Agency Liaisons to expand these networks.

"CDS always welcomes host congregations for their trainings in locations throughout the US," said associate director Kathy Fry-Miller. "Please let CDS know if you or your church would like to be involved locally as we continue to develop this work." Contact kfry-miller@brethren.org or go to www.brethren.org/cds for more information about CDS.

EYN offers seminar on trauma healing for displaced pastors

A seminar on trauma healing for displaced pastors of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), was offered at Yola Sept. 7-12. The seminar, which drew more than 100 pastors, was organized by the office of the Ministers Council in conjunction with the EYN Disaster Relief Management financed by the Church of the Brethren. It was offered for 100 displaced pastors.

The purpose of the seminar was to provide assistance in trauma and reconciliation for pastors so that they can help their members; brief pastors of the activities of the Church of the Brethren through Disaster Relief Management in EYN; correct misconceptions among the pastors that EYN and the Church of the Brethren do not care about their welfare—especially their salaries; encourage them to work among the displaced in camps and other places; and assist them with 20,000 Nigerian Naira, (about \$100) to buy food for their families.

Church of the Brethren volunteer Jim Mitchell delivered a message about working through trauma. Joseph T. Kwaha, who had just returned from a one-month course in South Africa on reconciliation organized by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), emphasized the need for reconciliation among displaced people returning to their homes, and said pastors are key

to achieving that. Yuguda Mdurwva, manager of the EYN disaster team, briefed the pastors on the work of the disaster relief team serving jointly with the Church of the Brethren.

EYN president Samuel Dante Dali talked about the activities of the Church of the Brethren in EYN through Disaster Relief Management, and corrected the misconception that the pastors were left out. Some pastors confessed that they had said things out of ignorance, and asked the president to ignore what happened in the past and focus on the current plan with the Church of the Brethren.

Pastors were encouraged to go out and minister to displaced people in camps and churches. Immediately after the seminar, five pastors went and settled with displaced people in

different camps, conducting Sunday services and helping with counseling. Complaints among the displaced have reduced drastically and relationships have improved.

Training is being organized for pastors who were directly affected by the insurgency, even though they have returned back to their stations. They have numerous challenges before them. This will be for pastors from Gombi to Madagali, and the Chibok and Lassa/Dille areas.

The ministers of EYN have expressed their gratitude to the Church of the Brethren their assistance with this effort.

James K. Musa is an EYN minister and serves as secretary of the EYN Ministers Council. For more information about the Nigeria Crisis Response, a cooperative effort of EYN and the Church of the Brethren, go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis.



Blazing with Holiness

2016 Brethren Workcamps

"We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it." —Madeleine L'Engle

www.brethren.org/workcamps

Registration opens:

January 7, 2016, at 7 p.m. (central time)



Workcamp photos by Theresa Ford and Hannah Shultz.

Jr. High Completed 6th – 8th grade

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. June 15-19 | Brooklyn, New York |
| 2. June 15-19 | South Bend, Indiana |
| 3. July 4-8 | Camp Brethren Woods – Keezletown, Virginia |
| 4. July 14-18 | New Community Project – Harrisonburg, Virginia |
| 5. July 20-24 | Elgin, Illinois |
| 6. July 27-31 | Harrisburg, Pennsylvania |
| 7. July 27-31 | Roanoke, Virginia |

Sr. High Completed 9th grade – age 19

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 8. June 6-12 | Washington, D.C. |
| 9. June 13-19 | New Orleans, Louisiana |
| 10. June 19-25 | Crossnore, North Carolina |
| 11. June 21-27 | Knoxville, Tennessee |
| 12. June 21-28 | Puerto Rico |
| 13. July 3-9 | Family Abuse Center – Waco, Texas |
| 14. July 10-16 | Pine Ridge Reservation – Kyle, South Dakota |
| 15. July 10-17 | BRF – Puerto Rico |
| 16. July 18-24 | Portland, Oregon |
| 17. July 19-25 | Santa Ana, California |
| 18. July 31-August 6 | ECHO – N. Fort Myers, Florida |
| 19. August 8-14 | Koinonia Farm – Americus, Georgia |

Intergenerational Completed 6th grade and older

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 20. June 12-18 | Camp Mardela – Denton, Maryland |
|----------------|---------------------------------|

Young Adult Ages 18-35

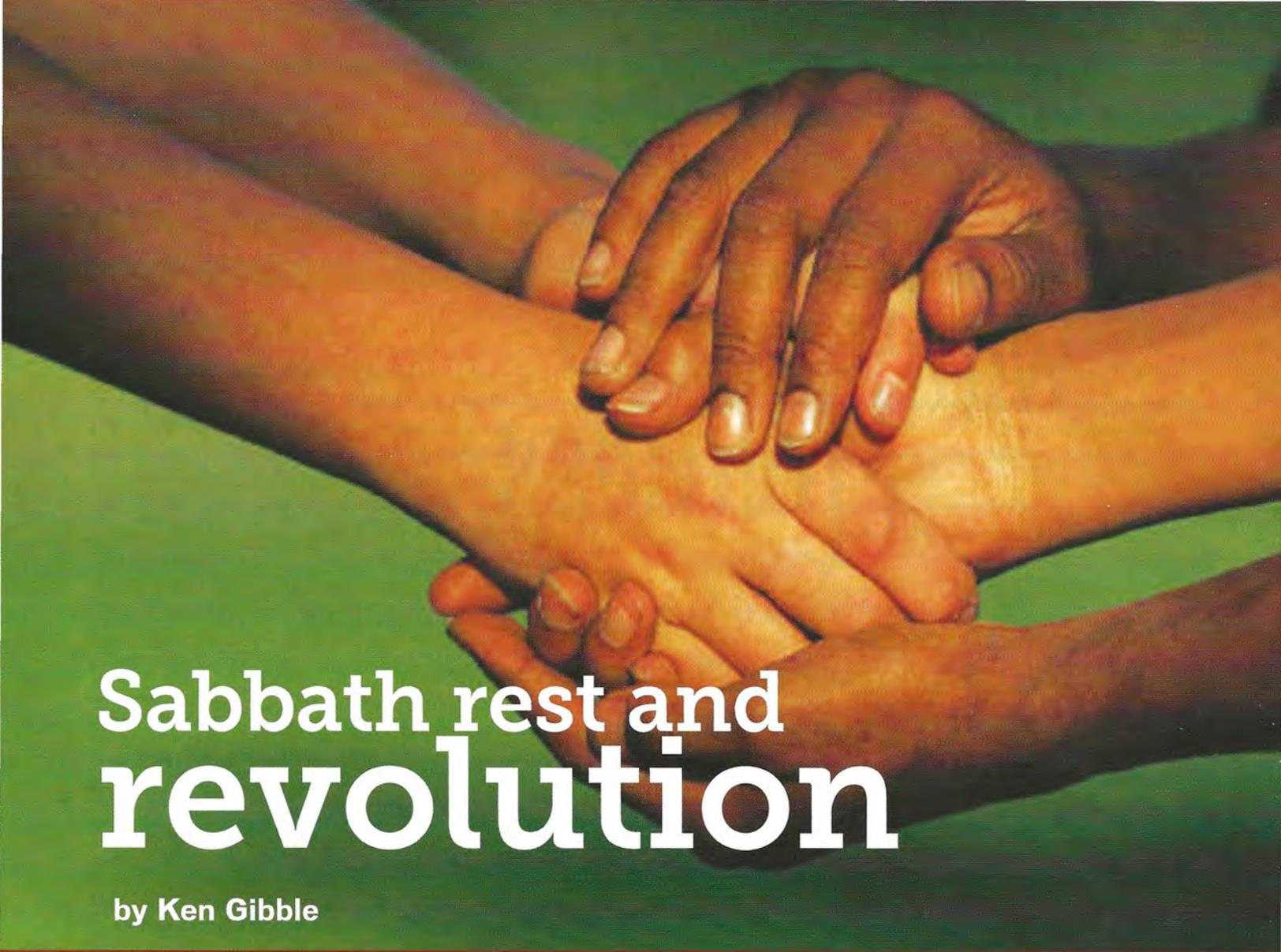
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| 21. June 2-12 | Northern Ireland |
| 22. July 10-13 | We Are Able Assistants – New Windsor, Maryland |

We Are Able Ages 16-30

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 22. July 10-13 | New Windsor, Maryland |
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Church of the Brethren



Sabbath rest and revolution

by Ken Gible

The sabbath—**isn't it mostly an outmoded custom that has lost all relevance for today's complex, busy world?** Isn't it naive to expect

people to set aside an entire day each week as a “day of rest”?

It's true that a mist of nostalgic longing hovers over the faith tradition called sabbath. The commandment in Exodus 20:8 runs: “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.” This command to remember does not simply mean “don't forget to observe the sabbath,” it also is a reminder to recall what happened at creation—“for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it” (Exod. 20:11).

The Jewish tradition of sabbath intimates a kind of wistful yearning for return to original creation. Sabbath is the way God intended life to be ordered, with a built-in rhythm of rest and refreshment. Yes, there is work to be done, but there is also, by God's grace, a respite from work, a day for rest, refreshment, renewal.

Into the natural rhythm of creation of day and night, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, God has introduced a rhythm of blessing, a holy rhythm called sabbath. The sabbath is a gift from God intended to benefit the human family.

The rhythm of modern life is all but isolated from the rhythms of the natural order. Night and day? We use electricity to create our own daylight with the flip of a switch. Seedtime and harvest? A backyard garden is about as close to it as most people get—modern transportation means the supermarket has every kind of food available regardless of the season. Summer and winter? We escape summer heat and winter chill with central heating and air conditioning.

It wasn't too many years ago that sabbath laws, called “blue laws,” ordered social life in nearly every community in North America. Many adults can remember growing up in churches and homes where the weight of restrictions of what they could do on the sabbath was so heavy that they rebelled (or would have if they could have). In such circumstances, the word of Jesus concerning the sabbath was liberating: “the

sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

The situation has changed. Shopping malls are not only open on the sabbath, they are crowded. Weekends get jammed with errands to run, social obligations, and travel.

So many of us, myself included, don't seem to know how to rest anymore, to be still and at home in the presence of God. In an attempt to escape from the work routine, we invest in the machinery of leisure: campers, skiing equipment, boats, and bicycles. The more money we spend on them, the more we feel obligated to use them to justify the expense. We become captives of what we consume. Instead of being a means of refreshment, they turn into yet another obligation, one more thing to rob us of the genuine *re*-creation we so desperately need.

The sabbath commandment also appears in Deuteronomy, but there are subtle yet important differences between it and the Exodus version. In Deuteronomy the reason for observing the sabbath is not, as in Exodus, the remembrance of God's resting after creation. Rather: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out . . . with a mighty hand (Deut. 5:15).

Here the sabbath is understood as a remembrance and celebration of the Hebrew liberation day, the exodus, when the chains of slavery were broken by God's mighty hand. The Deuteronomy version of the sabbath commandment puts special emphasis on the treatment of servants. True, the Exodus version also mentions that male and female servants as well as cattle shall participate in sabbath. But in Deuteronomy, this idea is underlined with the words “that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave. . . .” On the sabbath there are no masters and slaves, only liberated people. And Deuteronomy adds to the list of those who shall rest two beasts of burden, the ox and the donkey. Even the work animals are blessed by sabbath!

Do you catch the whiff of revolution in the sabbath air? Surely it was not accidental that Jesus seemed to make a

point of healing people on the sabbath, of breaking a fossilized religious law to demonstrate that God desired health and salvation for all.

Is that why religious people have so often domesticated the sabbath? Are the implications of its true significance too frightening? Perhaps. Freedom, after all, can be a scary thing, especially the kind of freedom God desires for the human family. But every now and then the music of sabbath liberation rings in our ears, our minds and hearts sing its melody. And the Holy One breaks through the defenses we have erected against the liberating truth of freedom and justice.

To observe sabbath is not only to affirm our need of rest and refreshment, it is also to say “yes” to God's radical justice, where the barriers between rich and poor, male and female, parent and child, black and white all fall away. To take sabbath seriously is to participate in the rule of God that sets captives free. Worship on the sabbath thus becomes a revolutionary event, a celebration of the divine power that turns the world upside down!

For Christians, the radical nature of sabbath is underscored both by when we observe it and by what we call it. We observe sabbath on the first day of the week because it was on that day that our Lord was raised from the tomb. The ultimate power of God is displayed in a dramatic victory over death demonstrated in the resurrection. We are liberated people indeed, set free from the captivity of death and blessed with the hope of eternal life.

And so we call sabbath by a new name: the Lord's day. As the apostle Paul put it: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Even sabbath is new. On the Lord's day we not only find refreshment for our spirits and a promise of true freedom, we also gather to celebrate in our worship the joy that comes from the Holy One who, in Christ, makes all things new. 

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

To observe sabbath is not only to affirm our need of rest and refreshment, it is also to say “yes” to God's radical justice, where the barriers between rich and poor, male and female, parent and child, black and white all fall away.



Seeing beauty in the ordinary

I recently found myself sitting at a piano in a recording studio in the middle of the woods, playing an original tune about finding beauty in solitude. The song will be part of a compilation project called “Beauty in the Common,” a collection of music, musings, and photographs that showcase beauty often missed in the ordinary. It’s about noticing simple beauty, like the way cream billows through coffee, how sun shines through vibrant autumn leaves, or the tiny flecks of color in your grandmother’s eyes. Deep beauty can be found in things as simple as food, melody, and hugs, in the strength of community, healing in pain, and miracles in chaos, if we only stop to



MANDY GARCIA

notice it.

As we enter Advent, this exercise of realizing beauty in common places is more than appreciating dancing flames in the fireplace or the taste of a delicious meal. It’s about the soul-stirring beauty in creating simple spaces of welcome for the stranger, offering hospitality to the other, and inviting all to join us at the table. In a time when there seems to be “no room at the inn” for the thousands of refugees fleeing violence and war, it’s about offering the beauty of a safe place to rest.

Of all the common places in Jerusalem, a stable must have been the most common, yet it became the scene of beauty untold on Christmas. Even as Mary and Joseph were strangers themselves, they opened their door to shepherds—surely the most common of people. The sky, a common backdrop to our days and nights, bore an uncommon beauty in the star that guided another trio of strangers to the Christ child. These subtle moments of beauty gone unnoticed by so many, are the

kind that we are invited to engage this season and always.

Advent is a time of preparing for Jesus and celebrating his birth. It’s a time to look for beauty in common places and common people, and in the simple act of welcoming strangers to eat and drink and get warm by the fire. As we prepare to welcome a Savior born among cows and donkeys, let’s also welcome the least of these in his name. Let’s pay attention to the ordinary, the communal, and the common, and be prepared to be moved by their beauty.

Give the gift of welcome by donating at www.brethren.org/bdm, or by hosting a refugee by calling Church World Service at 212-870-3300. Find more beauty at www.beautyinthecommon.com. 

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



Maple popcorn

Here’s an easy way to dress up a simple snack:

Pour a tablespoon of oil and 1/2 cup of popcorn kernels into a 3-quart pot. Stir to coat, cover, and pop kernels over medium/high heat.

When popping slows, remove from heat and empty corn into large bowl. While the empty pot is still warm, add 2 tablespoons of butter or oil and 2 tablespoons of real maple syrup.

Stir to combine slightly, then drizzle over popcorn and toss with salt to taste.

Big results from a small church

I was impressed by the October MESSENGER article by Jennifer Hosler about the ministries of the Washington City Church of the Brethren entitled "The Power of Small." Many of our Church of the Brethren congregations

could be called small if we are talking about membership. The importance of a congregation or denomination should not be evaluated by number of members, but rather by the depth of commitment and scope of its ministry for Christ.

The real size of a church is evident

by how much its members are willing to attempt because of their love of Christ and people. Admittedly, more people can provide greater resources for ministry and mission. But churches often are held back in their ministry not so much because of lack of money and resources, but because they think small, attempt

CLASSIFIEDS

Camp Mack Executive Director Position

Camp Alexander Mack, on Lake Waubee, Milford, IN, is a year-round camping and retreat ministry of the Indiana Churches of the Brethren. The camp is 65 acres with additional 180 acres of wilderness area. Camp Mack was founded in 1925 and continues to serve 1000+ users per year. The Executive Director will serve as the camp administrator and will develop policy and long range goals for the camping ministry in partnership with the Board of Directors. This full time position has responsibility for developing and implementing policies and programs of the Board of Directors; staffing; overseeing the promotion and scheduling of programs and facilities; overseeing administration of the camp; maintaining professional standards; fund-raising in coordination with the Board of Directors. The qualified candidate will be a faithful Christian with a clear understanding and appreciation of the Church of the Brethren; have a bachelor degree, with IACCA certification preferred; have proven supervisory experience in outdoor ministries; have appropriate emotional maturity and stability and be able to create excitement in persons of diverse backgrounds; be gifted in interpreting the camp's mission.

For more information about the camp visit www.campmack.org. Send inquires, letters of interest and resumes to CampMackSearch@gmail.com. (ACA accredited.)

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I am excited to be a member of the Church of the Brethren! As a denomination, our ministry has resulted in accomplishments far greater than own membership. We have had members of vision, such as Dan West, M. R. Zigler, and others, who were more interested in our Lord's ministry to the needs of people than who received the credit. They were able to inspire not only the Brethren but also the broader Christian church to translate God's love into feeding and helping people. Who would have believed that the Brethren Heifer Project (originally called Heifers for Relief, now Heifer International, Inc.), could have grown to reach the lives of more than 22 million families, or that Christian Rural Overseas Program (CROP) could have resulted in the annual broadly supported community hunger CROP walks? Upholding Christ

as the Prince of Peace has been made more extensive as we have worked as a part of the World Council of Churches.

Jesus recognized the power of the small. He chose only 12 disciples to train for three years to change the world. He said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20).

Owen G. Stultz
Roanoke, Va.

Why mention skin color?

Growing up in the Church of the Brethren, I was taught to not judge a person by outward appearances, especially skin color. I was surprised, therefore, to find in the 2015 Annual Conference booklet's biographical descriptions of election candidates an indication of the person's skin color. What on earth does someone's skin color have to do with

whether or not they may be qualified to be a leader in our denomination? If skin color was an issue, that would have been addressed by a mere glance at the person's photograph. To state the obvious, particularly when the obvious is inconsequential, seems unnecessary.

My chance notice of that particular line in the candidates' summaries left me with a deep sense of dismay and sadness. Including skin color as a possible criterion for voting for a fellow church sister or brother is not a step in the right direction. God have mercy on us as we seek wisdom and strength.

Ron Good
Elizabethtown, Pa.

Still learning from Phyllis Tickle

It was with profound sadness that I read of Phyllis Tickle's death in the November MESSENGER. I was privileged to hear her speak at NOAC [Church of the Brethren National Older Adult Conference] in 2013. What a brilliant woman she was, and what a loss to the worldwide intellectual community of faith. I appreciated her theory on emerging Christianity—the theory that about every 500 years there is a great change in society and in religion. "Everything shifts when this happens," she said. "Our Great Emergence has been building for 150 years. It affects the church. We have to readjust to a new society and a new culture." She reminded us at NOAC to be the purveyors of Christianity to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, or else the church may not survive. Thank you for mentioning her in the "Remembered" column. We continue to learn from this amazing woman, even as she rests in peace.

Diana Roemer Verhulst
Prophetstown, Ill.

Thanks for helping me thrive!

Melody Keller's article "Thrive!" in the October MESSENGER inspired and thrilled me. Her encouragement "to

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grow vigorously; to flourish," gave me impetus to express my appreciation to her and to my congregation for helping me thrive. As Melody says, God wants us to thrive. God's spirit is very much at work among the people with whom I worship, learn, and serve. I am constantly encouraged, challenged, uplifted, supported, and loved

by "my people." As a congregation, we attempt to follow Jesus simple, peacefully, and together in many ways: housing the homeless; giving opportunities for our youth to learn and serve; providing automatic door openers for those of us who are elderly and handicapped; bringing new insights to the Scriptures; being helped to grow in

small group interactions; and simply being together each Sunday morning. These are but a few of the ways I can say I thrive. I like that word, and I like what it says to me about how God works among us. Thank you, Melody, for your words.

Pat Royer
Modesto, Calif.

Turningpoints

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

New Members

Common Spirit, Wyoming, Mich.: Amy Gardine, Cyprian Gardine, Scot Miller
East Fairview, Manheim, Pa.: Norman Kreider, Orpha Mae Kreider, Jeffrey Leaman, Tracy Leaman
Elm Street, Lima, Ohio: Desiree Weber, Cory Spence
English River, South English, Iowa: Brooke Coffman, Ella Coffman, Isabel Coffman, Sage Coffman, Cheyenne Conrad
Gettysburg, Pa.: Glenn Simpson, Jean Simpson, Emilie Smith
Good Shepherd, Silver Spring, Md.: Melissa Drake
Lancaster, Pa.: Dan Errett, Judy Errett, Shane Burkholder, Barry Shoff, Jessica Dunbar, Dan Wallace
Lebanon, Pa.: Annita Spotts, Kylie Holl, Caleb Gable, Karlee Gerdes
Lebanon, Mount Sidney, Va.: Kaitlyn Brush, Ashleigh Brush
Marilla, Copemish, Mich.: Amanda Thomas
Meadow Branch, Westmin-

ster, Md.: Anne Marie Anderson
Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.: Paul Myers, Stephen Graham, Kirsten O'Connell, Lacey Costa
Mohrsville, Pa.: Peter Rohrbach
Mountain Grove, Fulks Run, Va.: Brad Custer
Mountain View Fellowship, McGaheysville, Va.: Katosha Greene, Bobby McCauley, Robert McCauley, Tammy McCauley, Dusty Bonniwell, Carol Bonniwell, Amy Phippen, Juliet Good
Myerstown, Pa.: Jean Soliday, Amanda Albright
Pine Creek, North Liberty, Ind.: Dan Peterson, Theresa Peterson, Samantha Peterson
Somerset, Pa.: Gary Gardner, Hayley Gardner, Daniel Gilley, Stan Supranowicz, Joyce Gardner, Angie Supranowicz, Bradley McCoy, DeAnn McCoy, Eric Shaffer
Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.: Luke Sheppard, Wyatt Howe, Steven Bollinger, Amy Bollinger, Penny Radcliff

Anniversaries

Bergy, Keith and Jean, Caledonia, Mich., 70
Bollinger, Harold and Nancy, Akron, Pa., 55
Hinkle, Delmas and Gloria, Fulks Run, Va., 50
Lichty, Ralph and Mary Ellen, Oakland, Md., 55
Medlar, Thomas and Alice, Tipp City, Ohio, 50

Patterson, Ivan and Clara, Greenville, Ohio, 65
Turner, John and Louise, Hagerstown, Md., 50
Wolf, Paul and Marty, Hershey, Pa., 55

Deaths

Bahr, Charles Grayson, 88, Copemish, Mich., June 3
Berkey-Rush, Pauline, 92, Johnstown, Pa., Oct. 17
Blough, Aida Dermenjian, 86, Polo, Ill., April 16
Boone, Naomi Mae Fritz, 93, Westminster, Md., Oct. 2
Chiov, Jack, 76, Defiance, Ohio, Sept. 16
Dolph, Joyce, 92, Plymouth, Ind., May 12
Drinkall, Thomas O., 83, Granger, Ind., Sept. 23
Ellegood, Kenneth Neil, 80, Waldo, Kan., Oct. 1
Ferner, Ruby L. Tinkey, 92, Rockwood, Pa., Feb. 15
Ganger, Dallas E., 91, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 23
Gindlesperger, Marjorie Gail, 71, Huber Heights, Ohio, Sept. 27
Glassmire, William E., 94, Lancaster, Pa., Sept. 2
Grenz, Fern, 95, Loveland, Colo., Sept. 20
Grove, Bernice Marie, 79, Waynesboro, Va., Aug. 16
Heckman, Benjamin J., 81, Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 20
Hess, George Griffith, 77, Xenia, Ohio, Sept. 4
Hoffman, Rose L. Codding-ton, 101, Polo, Ill., Oct. 4
Johnson, Becky Sue Skinner, 67, Peru, Ind., July 2
Kreider, Robert H., 79, Quarryville, Pa., June 25

Liley, Patrick R., 61, Oroville, Wash., March 17
McCaman, Donna, 89, Sebring, Fla., Oct. 13
Merrifield, James Dale, 78, Peoria, Ariz., Oct. 4
Mosholder, Virgil C., 79, Rockwood, Pa., Oct. 7
Moyers, Dorothy N., 80, Bruceton Mills, W. Va., Sept. 25
Picking, Jacqueline L. Miller, 75, Marion, Pa., Oct. 9
Primozech, Tracy Ann Stoddard, 40, Yellow Springs, Ohio, Oct. 15
Reeves, Robert Garland, 84, Bridgewater, Va., May 13
Robinson, Boyd Martin, Jr., 74, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 3
Scott, Ellen E., 98, Tacoma, Wash., Sept. 18
Shank, Doris Danner, 84, Greenville, Ohio, Sept. 27
Sherrick, Donald N., 80, Polo, Ill., July 8
Shirk, Harlan Ben, 93, Waterloo, Iowa, Sept. 28
Silvius, Doris E. Weigle, 87, Polo, Ill., Feb. 16
Strohm, Mary L., 78, Modesto, Calif., Sept. 9
Stroup, Donald W., 81, Brethren, Mich., Sept. 19
Sumpter, Helen, 81, North Liberty, Ind., Sept. 24
Tornetta, Joseph P., 77, Eagleville, Pa., Oct. 2
Turner, Shirley J. Crawford, 87, Polo, Ill., March 24
Walker, Lydia H., 78, Berkeley Springs, W. Va., Sept. 29
Weatherholtz, Beverly Jeanette Dobbins, 80, Waynesboro, Va., Oct. 21
Weaver, Harriet A. Keyes, 90, Peru, Ind., May 10

Webster, David Kulp, Sr., 89, Roanoke, Va., Oct. 9
Whitmer, Camoletta Cline, 95, Harrisonburg, Va., July 2
Williams, Margaret Ella, 89, Oroville, Wash., Sept. 15

Ordained

Beachley, Linda E., W. Pa. Dist. (Nanty Glo, Pa.), Oct. 18
Hollenberg, Nathan P., Shen. Dist. (Mill Creek, Port Republic, Va.), Sept. 6
Sable, Alix M., Atl. N. E. Dist. (Lancaster, Pa.), Oct. 18
Stucky, Alan T., W. Plains Dist. (Wichita, First, Wichita, Kan.), Sept. 27

Licensed

Miller, Pearl A., Mo. & Ark. Dist. (Warrensburg, Mo.), Oct. 25

Placements

Judy, Donald, pastor, White Pine, Old Fields, W. Va., Sept. 27
Krieg, Steven J., associate pastor, The Church in Drive, Saginaw, Mich., Sept. 13
Miller, Pearl A., team pastor, Warrensburg, Mo., Oct. 25
North, Amanda, pastor of faith formation, Manassas, Va., Oct. 1
Teets, Mark, from pastor, Elkins, W. Va., to pastor, Brookside, Aurora, W. Va., Sept. 20
Yoder, Timothy, pastor, New Salem, Milford, Ind., Oct. 11

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Room at the inn?

We don't know much about the innkeeper in the Christmas story beyond what's implied in Luke 2:7: "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Conventional



RANDY MILLER
MESSENGER EDITOR

wisdom has it that the innkeeper was cold-hearted and didn't want to rent a room in his fine establishment to this obviously poor, young couple.

But all the verse says is that "there was no place for them in the inn." It was a busy time in that region. People were streaming into town to be registered. Chances are, Mary and Joseph were turned away not because they were raggedy and poor, but because the inn was already full. I doubt that I'm the first to suggest that the innkeeper

actually may have had a soft spot in his heart for this young couple. Although his inn was full, he went out of his way to make them comfortable in the only place he had left: his stable.

On the heels of the Nov. 13 terror attacks in Paris, the US House of Representatives joined more than half the governors in the United States in declaring themselves against allowing Syrian refugees into the United States. Given that action, it is heart-

frigid water to meet a raft—one of 60 or 70 that arrive on the shores daily. Not all of them arrive intact. "Almost every day, one of these boats doesn't make it to shore," says one worker.

"Yesterday we saw a boat come in with a baby who was just 1 month old," says Nathalie Macdermot, a physician working at the site. "I just can't imagine doing that . . . and how afraid [the mother] must have been that something would happen."

Later, at a makeshift holding area, Macdermot speaks through an interpreter to a woman who is pregnant, and who is afraid of losing her baby. "Has she felt the baby kick yet?" Macdermot asks. She has. "Then the baby's OK," she tells the relieved young woman.

These stories remind me how worried those other Middle Eastern refugees, Mary and Joseph, must have been as they searched for shelter, and how grateful they were when someone went out of his way to make them feel safe and comfortable so they could welcome their own infant into the world.

There will always be those who, out of fear, are unwilling to open their homes and their hearts to the stranger. But we are called to embrace the stranger in spite of the risks. In so doing, we may find, as one worker on that Lesbos shore did, that the refugees are not the only ones who benefit.

"We are the first faces that they see when they land," says aid worker Dan Stephens. "Probably a lot of them have never met a Christian. When they land on that beach, we're happy

We are called to embrace the stranger in spite of the risks. In so doing, we may find, as one worker on that Lesbos shore did, that the refugees are not the only ones who benefit.

warming to see Christians and others showing love and kindness toward those forced to flee their homes—the kind of thing Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25 regarding "the least of these."

A video making the rounds on social media shows Christian aid workers on the Greek island of Lesbos welcoming refugees as they arrive on the island's rocky shores in overcrowded rubber rafts. The chilly travelers are met by workers with blankets and warm clothes. One worker even takes off his own jacket and wraps it around a shivering boy. Another swims out in the

that we can be here as part of that first step, and be here to show them that there are Christian people who love them. I've never done anything like this. This is extremely special, what we're doing here."

Like that innkeeper of old, we too can find ways to open our hearts and our homes—even if our countries won't—to those needing shelter and relief. In so doing, we help bring to life the true spirit of giving and unconditional love that is at the heart of this season. **ZU**

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Merry Christmas!

Thank you for being an essential partner
 in the mission and ministry of the
 Church of the Brethren in 2015.

May you and yours be filled with Christ's peace
 as we celebrate the coming of Immanuel.



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