

Church  
of the  
Brethren

# MESSENGER

APRIL 2006 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

## BEING THE CHURCH

*What does it mean to be together?*

# Come Feast With Us!

## Cross Cultural Luncheon

Monday, July 3rd - 12:00 noon - 1:30 p.m.



photo by Jesse Reid

A time for fellowship, song and testimony with your brothers and sisters from our varied cultures.

## Congregational Life Ministries Dinner

Monday, July 3rd - 5 p.m.



### “Reinventing Rural America” - Dr. Gary Farley

As both sociologist and pastor, Dr. Farley is seen by many as the seminal researcher and writer to tackle the work of rural and small membership congregations. Come and listen as he describes the tools and perspectives needed to reinvent a vital and transforming church.

Please purchase your tickets with your online registration or with the Annual Conference ticket order form. A limited number of tickets will be available at Annual Conference.

These two events are sponsored by the Office of Congregational Life Ministries, Church of the Brethren General Board.

“... publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works” (Psa. 26:7b KJV).

Church  
of the  
Brethren

# MESSENGER

Editor: **Walt Wiltschek** Publisher: **Wendy McFadden** Associate Editor/News: **Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford**  
 Promotions: **Beth Burnette** Subscriptions: **Diane Stroyeck** Design: **The Concept Mill**



## ONTHECOVER

Remember the children’s song, “I Am the Church”? It says, “The church is not a building . . . the church is a people.” MESSENGER designer Paul Stocksdale illustrated that visually this month, using 858 images that have appeared in the magazine over the past six years. They are all of Brethren and people who have been in contact with the denomination as we have journeyed together.

## 8 Being the church

This month’s cover story cluster looks at questions of ecclesiology—a central topic for Brethren as the “TOGETHER” conversations begin around the denomination this spring. Jim Beckwith (p. 8) uses three metaphors from scripture to describe what life together as the church should be like. Earle Fike Jr. (p. 12) reflects from his decades of Brethren experience in a “Letter to a soon-to-be-300 church.” And Jeff Neuman-Lee (p. 14) wonders aloud how we can help young people be the church anywhere, even when they find themselves far from their Brethren roots.

## 16 Annual Conference plans for the future

The people behind the denomination’s “Big Meeting” have been taking a close look at the institution recently, helping Conference be prepared for the challenges of the decades ahead. The work so far has produced a strategic plan with new marketing initiatives, with further steps to come.

## 18 Ezra-Nehemiah: Things aren’t what they used to be

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, originally one book, are about builders: Following the exile, Ezra rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem and Nehemiah reconstructs the walls. They also build in less tangible ways, helping the people rebuild their religious life amid a period of turbulent change.

## DEPARTMENTS

- |    |                           |    |                       |
|----|---------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 2  | <b>From the Publisher</b> | 25 | <b>Youth Life</b>     |
| 3  | <b>In Touch</b>           | 26 | <b>Media Review</b>   |
| 6  | <b>Reflections</b>        | 27 | <b>Letters</b>        |
| 7  | <b>The Buzz</b>           | 31 | <b>Turning Points</b> |
| 20 | <b>News</b>               | 32 | <b>Editorial</b>      |

**“He is not here; he is risen!”** Christians around the world pause this month to observe the tumultuous emotions of Holy Week. Blessings to you and your congregations this Easter season, from the staff of MESSENGER.

**T**his is the month that I get to reflect on growing older. All this reflecting has brought me to several realizations:

- 1) I'm not as young as I used to be. Yesterday I actually got confused about how old I was, a sure sign of aging.
- 2) I'm not as good at directions as I thought I was. Just about everybody thinks they're good at driving and good at directions. I still think I'm a good driver, but I no longer think I'm good at directions. My son would just as soon hitch a ride than have me drive him to an away soccer game. Where I grew up we didn't seem to refer to north, east, south, and west, and I've been direction-impaired ever since.
- 3) I'm not as organized as I thought I was. This is the only painful realization.



WENDY McFADDEN  
Publisher

After all, I think in categories, know how to make short- and long-term plans, and want everything to be in its place. When I shared a bedroom growing up, mine was the neat side of the room. I love to clean out drawers and closets. I get satisfaction out of tidying up bylaws, for pete's sake.

Yet somehow my environments at both home and work slide out of control. Like a too-small bedsheet that can't be stretched over the fourth corner without popping it off the third, neatness can't encompass all the rooms of the house at the same time. And deadlines can't be met without losing control of the desktop—the one holding the papers and the one on the computer screen.

Is staying organized harder than it used to be? Are we breathless because the pace of life is really faster? Surely the answer is yes.

This is a good season to reflect not only on the passage of time but on the absence of time. Lent is a good season for being rather than doing. Lent is "a time to lie fallow," writes Sandy Bosserman, in her Lenten devotional.

"In a production-oriented culture, fallow ground is a tough sell, literally and figuratively. We work however late is required, adding whatever is necessary to the soil (or to the caffeine level in our bodies), in order to produce one more bushel, one more paper, one more order before deadline. Even the church is not exempt from a frenzied, fragmented approach to discipleship. . . .

"Lent is a good time to consider fallow ground: a time to be rather than do, trust rather than control, contemplate rather than strategize or produce."

Good advice. As I wait for the new growth that will follow the winter, I am going to put aside thoughts of spring cleaning and my 13-category "to do" list.

As soon as I meet this deadline, that is.

*Wendy McFadden*

## How to reach us

**MESSENGER**  
1451 Dundee Avenue  
Elgin, IL 60120

**Subscriptions:**  
dstroyeck\_gb@brethren.org  
Phone: 847-742-5100  
Fax: 847-742-6103

**Advertising:**  
messengerads\_gb@brethren.org  
Phone: 800-323-8039  
Fax: 847-742-1407

**Editorial:**  
messenger@brethren.org  
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 263  
Fax: 847-742-6103

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

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To view the official Church of the Brethren website, go to [www.brethren.org](http://www.brethren.org).

A free study guide for each issue of MESSENGER is available on the site; go to keyword "MESSENGER" and click on the study guide link.

MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Entered as periodical postage matter Aug. 20, 1918, under Act of Congress of Oct. 17, 1917. Filing date, Nov. 1, 1984. Member of the Associated Church Press. Subscriber to Religion News Service & Ecumenical Press Service. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. MESSENGER is published 11 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren General Board. Periodical postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and at additional mailing office, April 2006. Copyright 2006. Church of the Brethren General Board. ISSN 0026-0555.

Postmaster: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120.



Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)

## AROUND THE DENOMINATION

Updates and highlights from the Church of the Brethren districts

**Atlantic Northeast:** A ministry round-table forum on church planting, sponsored by the district church development commission, was held March 9 at Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

**Atlantic Southeast:** The district board at a recent meeting went "on record" that same-sex marriages will not be performed or blessed in the district's churches or by its pastors.

**Idaho:** A district hospitality workshop took place March 11 at Nampa Church of the Brethren, with leadership by consultant Fred Bernhard.

**Illinois/Wisconsin:** The district is planning its first "All-District Working Fellowship" April 29 at Panther Creek Church of the Brethren near Roanoke, Ill. Volunteers will assist with various work projects around the rural church.

**Michigan:** Nine volunteers participated in a Level 1 Disaster Child Care training workshop Feb. 17-18 at Beaverton Church of the Brethren despite an icestorm. District executive minister Marie Willoughby was among those who took part.

**Mid-Atlantic:** Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren on March 18 hosted a fifth annual benefit dinner for disaster response. Several area musicians provided entertainment.

**Middle Pennsylvania:** The junior high winter retreat at Camp Blue Diamond (Petersburg, Pa.) Feb. 24-26 included "Banana Olympics." Cindy Shumate was the guest speaker, on a teamwork theme.

**Missouri/Arkansas:** Special grants have been made for several disaster response needs, including \$1,000 to purchase a gasoline-powered air compressor at a project in southern Alabama.

**Northern Indiana:** The district youth winter lock-in, held Feb. 11-12 at the West Goshen congregation, featured leadership by the 2006 National Youth Conference coordinators.

**Northern Ohio:** A one-day orientation event for new pastors and pastors new to the district was held March 1 at the district office in Ashland. Dale Stoffer led a session on Brethren heritage.



**Shenandoah:** Children at Mountain Grove Church of the Brethren, Fulks Run, Va., presented a play on the history of the congregation recently. The play, written by Jill Fulk, was taken from a research report by Cindy Fulk Miller. The children dressed in bonnets, hats, long dresses, and shawls for the play; the congregation also wore 1800s-era clothing. Above, a buggy owned by Gail and Karen Billhimer arrives at the church bearing pastor Don Guthrie and Eli Barkley, who played Elder Fulk in the play. Buggy rides were offered in the afternoon.

**Northern Plains:** A district board-appointed committee is studying how to use the insurance claim funds from a fire at Camp Mon-Dak in 2002 and from the sale of the camp property last year.

**Oregon/Washington:** Portland (Ore.) Peace Church of the Brethren and member James Groff are producing a half-hour community television program each month, shown on two area stations.

**Pacific Southwest:** This year's "spring event" will be a cross-cultural celebration. Afternoon events will take place April 29 in Fresno, Calif., and April 30 in La Verne, Calif.

**South/Central Indiana:** Timbercrest Senior Living Community administrator David Lawrenz will be the speaker for a pastors' gathering April 19 at Anderson Church of the Brethren.

**Southeastern:** Camp Placid (Blountville, Tenn.) directors Mark and Kim Eller announced their resignation effective March 31. Mark accepted a maintenance position at Brethren Woods in Virginia.

**Southern Ohio:** District board members plan to visit all 52 of the district's congregations this year, in part to talk about the "Together" ecclesiology conversations taking place around the denomination.

**Southern Pennsylvania:** The fall festival at Camp Eder (Fairfield, Pa.) raised more than \$17,000 to support the camp's programs. About 600 roast pork and turkey meals were served.

**Southern Plains:** A scholarship endowment established in 1982 out of the Oklahoma City congregation has grown to more than \$15,000. This year's grant, for \$654, went to Patricia Owen.

**Virginia:** Pilgrimage X, the 10th in a series of spiritual development retreats, was held at Camp Bethel near Fincastle, Va., March 17-19.

**West Marva:** The annual district songfest is scheduled to be held April 30 at Oak Park Church of the Brethren in Oakland, Md., this year.

**Western Pennsylvania:** A pastors' prayer retreat called "Holy Resting" took place March 16 at Camp Harmony in Hooversville. The retreat, led by Linda McCauliff, focused on creating "sacred space" and silence amid a variety of prayer experiences.

**Western Plains:** District women will head to Colorado this month, for a retreat April 21-23 in Allenspark.

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

## Event helps district 'spring' into renewal

"This time Jesus had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). Jesus did not have to go through Samaria; he could have gone around it as many did. But Jesus went there to offer life-giving water. Could it be Jesus is coming to congregations in the Church of the Brethren, asking us for a drink and then offering us life-giving water, too?

These ideas are the basis of "Springs of Living Water!," a spiritually grounded initiative using servant leadership to develop healthy churches with an urgent, Christ-centered mission. An interpretive breakfast on Springs! was held in Atlantic Northeast District in January. Representatives of numerous congregations and the district attended, along with members of a church that had gone through the renewal process.

After breakfast, a homily lifted up four dynamics of renewal found in the story of the woman at the well, and participants learned the renewal process. Guests from the leadership team of the church in renewal gave stirring testimonies. They shared how renewal starts within and then is taken up by the church.

With an old bucket from a well as a

Courtesy of David S. Young



Participants listen to presenter David Young at the Atlantic Northeast District "Springs!" event.

worship center, Marisel Olivencia from the Harrisburg (Pa.) First congregation sang about living water. People were invited to take an empty cup and a bottle of spring water and fill their cup so they could share it with others.

Another breakfast on church renewal and other events in the Springs! process are in the planning. Further information is available at [www.churchrenewalserver.org](http://www.churchrenewalserver.org).—David Young

## And the Grammy goes to ... the director of a Brethren choir

Members of University Baptist & Brethren Church in State College, Pa., knew their choir director was very good. Now music's biggest stage has taken notice, too.

Christopher Kiver won two Grammy awards in February, for best classical

album and best choral performance. According to the *Daily Collegian* newspaper, Kiver garnered the awards for his work as one of six choir directors on *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, a choral/orchestra work composed by William Bolcom and released by Naxos.



Kiver, who watched the ceremonies at home with his family rather than travel to Los Angeles, said in the article that he had a "good feeling" about the award due to Bolcom's high profile in the music world, but it still meant a lot when the actual announcement came.

"To think that we have two awards now is an incredible thing," Kiver told the newspaper. "Who would have anticipated that?"

In addition to his work with the church, Kiver is assistant professor of music at nearby Penn State University and director of the Penn State Glee Club and Penn State Chamber Singers. He has received several previous honors, including a Fulbright Award and the Alan J. Kirby Choral Conducting Prize.



Mary Dillabaum

Members of Sebring Church of the Brethren helped to make improvements at an area retirement home.

## Sebring members reach out to area retirement home

Upon hearing that the local Magnolia Retirement Home—operated primarily for those on Medicaid and of lower income—was expecting approximately 20 people from the hurricane-affected areas of New Orleans, and that these people would need housing and food, the Friendship Class of Sebring (Fla.) Church of the Brethren decided to assist in any way they were needed.

Working with the witness commission and chair Greg Witmer, volunteers were made available. The home needed roof repairs, cleaning around the outside of the building, installation of an air conditioner, and painting in several rooms.

A Christmas party for the residents was also planned; 42 residents were involved in the party, and Sebring took the responsibility of getting gifts for each of the residents. The church also provided cookies, candy, and other goodies, and Santa made an appearance. Deacons gave communion, and the youth were involved in singing and being person-to-person friends to each of the residents.

Sebring is looking at ways to make this an ongoing ministry, by aiding in caring ministries, marking birthdays and holidays, doing Thanksgiving and Christmas parties, and exploring possibilities of baptism and church membership. Three residents were baptized by pouring on the head and received into membership in January.—Wendell Bohrer

• US Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona visited **Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren** Jan. 9 while touring a clinic hosted by the congregation. The Mission of Mercy's Mobile Medical Clinic provides free medical, dental, and prescription coverage to thousands of Frederick County residents each year at four sites, according to a front-page article about the event in the *Frederick News-Post*. Frederick pastor Paul Munday said the congregation has provided space for a mobile clinic for the "working poor" for some time. "To have this kind of light out here that represents hope for [the poor] is just wonderful," Carmona said in the article.

• **Iowa River Church of the Brethren**, located near Marshalltown, Iowa, will celebrate its 150th anniversary on July 9. An all-day celebration is planned, including worship and a luncheon. The congregation is holding the event the weekend after Annual Conference in nearby Des Moines.

• **Root River Church of the Brethren**, Preston, Minn., will hold its 150th anniversary celebration July 8-9. Former congregation members Gale Burkholder and Roger Schrock will speak. A historical display, videos of baptisms



and communion, tours of area sites, a choir of returning members, and catered meals in a tent on the church lawn are also planned.

• **Garden City (Kan.) Church of the Brethren** is preparing for a 100th birthday celebration to be held Sept. 15-17. The weekend will include a 1906-style service, music, and a historical presentation, along with food and worship.

• Professor **Ken Brown**, whose name is synonymous with peace studies at Manchester College, has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the national Peace and Justice Studies Association. For more than 50 years, Brown has been a nonviolent activist and educator for peace and justice, and for 25 years he directed Manchester's peace studies program. An ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, Brown has founded several organizations, including a grass-roots anti-war organization and the War Tax Resisters' Penalty Fund.

• *The Lancaster (Pa.) New Era* on Feb. 10 ran a feature on **R. Michael Weaver's** involvement with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Weaver, a member of Blue Ball Church of the Brethren, recently joined a 16-member CPT/On Earth Peace delegation to Palestine. It was Weaver's first CPT experience; he said it left him with a "very real hope for a just peace."

• Dupont (Ohio) Church of the Brethren member **Don Smith**, an avid swimmer, swam 250 laps in three hours at the Defiance Area YMCA. He raised more than \$3,700 from the effort, as a fundraiser to send diabetic children from northwestern Ohio to summer camp.

executive from 1954 to 1984. During his career, he served as chair of the Council of District Executives and on the Committee on Interchurch Relations and was president of the Virginia Council of Churches. He was also a leader in establishing Brethren retirement communities in the region.

• **Rolland C. Flory**, former Church of the Brethren missionary in China and Ecuador, died Feb. 13 in North Manchester, Ind. He was 93. A memorial service was held in the Timbercrest Home chapel. Flory and his wife Josephine served with the General Board in China in the early 1940s but moved to the Philippines due to Japan's occupation of the country. Flory spent time in a Japanese internment camp during the

war. He returned to China after earning an agriculture degree in the US, spending three years in a rural mission in Kiangsi Province, followed by eight years in the Brethren mission in Llano Grande, Ecuador. He was a graduate of Manchester College.

• **Ruth Mary Halladay**, a former Church of the Brethren teacher and mission worker in Nigeria, died Feb. 6 at Timbercrest Health Care in North Manchester, Ind. She was 78. Halladay served at the Teacher Training College and Secondary School in Waka, Nigeria, for three years. A Manchester College graduate, she also served in Germany through Brethren Volunteer Service from 1952 to 1954, followed by a career teaching at several US high schools.

**Chicago First Church of the Brethren** sponsored a Martin Luther King Jr. weekend for high school- and college-age youth Jan. 13-15, on the theme "Mixing it up: Standing for Peace, Working for Justice." Both Brethren and Mennonite youth from the area were invited. Resource people for the weekend included Tony Brown, spirituals singer from Kansas; Cruz Cordero, an Anabaptist hip-hop artist from Philadelphia; and Brenda Matthew, a poet from Chicago's west side. Above, Hannah Bachman and her mother, Beth Gerig, of Tisklwa, Ill., converse with Chicago First members Michelle Simmons and Krista Dutt.

## REMEMBERED

• **Patricia L. "Pattie" Bittinger Stern** died Feb. 5 in McPherson, Kan., at age 75. A memorial service was held Feb. 11 at McPherson Church of the Brethren. She and her husband, Irven, served on the mission field in Nigeria for the General Board in the 1950s and early 1960s, where they helped start Kulp Bible College. They also worked together as co-executives of Pacific Southwest District from 1985 to 1993 and then in congregational pastoral ministry. Born in Garkida, Nigeria, Pattie was an ordained minister and a graduate of McPherson College and Bethany Theological Seminary.

• **Stanley Wampler**, former Shenandoah and Tri-District executive, died Jan. 31 at age 86. A memorial service was held Feb. 14 in Harrisonburg, Va. A graduate of Bridgewater College and Bethany Theological Seminary, Wampler was ordained at Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic, Va. He pastored several churches before serving as a district

# To Sabbath or not to Sabbath

*"Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy."  
—Exodus 20:8*

**I**t is a Sabbath morning as I write this. Fresh snow is visible on the spruce tree outside my window as the day comes to first light. I sit in my chair by the window where I've had my quiet time and my coffee and reflected on what is in me to say about the Sabbath.



GLENN MITCHELL

I must admit I have struggled in recent years with my view of the Sabbath. I've even at points blamed Sabbath thinking for the sad state of our spiritual lives. It goes something like this: After centuries of setting aside the Sabbath as a different day, we gradually began to think it was somehow a more sacred day of

the week. From there we began to divide time into sacred and profane, God's and ours, religious and secular.

I don't think the ancient followers ever intended it this way, but over time there developed the notion that time for

middle of a meeting, hanging up the laundry, driving the car, having lunch, or sitting in the pew. Prayer here happens as we deepen our attention just enough to see the connections already present in the day and let our hearts rest in God amidst all things. From this perspective the invitation may be stated, "Remember God throughout every day, and live and share your life from the heart of that prayer."

But, having said all of that, I know I still feel the need of a Sabbath in my week. I find myself connecting to it mostly through its call to cease production and to rest.

When I was growing up I remember futurists talking about the three-day workweek and technology advancing to the point that humans would be freed from their labors, and a great era of leisure would come to be. Where has that sentiment gone? We have certainly had the advances in technology, but it has not resulted in a shorter workweek. People are working more hours today than at any time in the last century. Cell phones, BlackBerry devices, iPods, portable DVD players—all have helped ensure that we are never away from our connections to work, to others, to entertainment.

There is not much cultural or religious respect for Sabbath today, nor much of a break in either production or consumption. We are obsessed with staying connected,

**There is not much cultural or religious respect for Sabbath today, nor much of a break in either production or consumption. We are obsessed with staying connected, staying plugged in or portable, and it is leaving little room for our deeper connection to the quiet, to the self, to one another, to our God.**

God must be special time, sacred time—i.e. worship in church, times of intentional prayer in the day, times of retreat in the stretch of the year. We draw near to God in those special times to be renewed, replenished, recharged, as it were, and then head back into our day or our week with the emphasis on *our*, and with the hope that our charge will last us till our next special time with God.

The tragedy of this kind of Sabbath timeframe is that we have lost the sense of God's presence knit to every moment of every day of every week. Our dependency upon special God days and times has pulled us away from spiritual practices that help us enter each day expectant and aware of the ways God is already there, is already with us. I think the apostle Paul had in mind this manner of daily living inside of God's presence when he said, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

What helps us remain aware of God's presence no matter what we are doing? What helps turn our attention back to God in the day? Whatever aids us here becomes our spiritual practice, and opens our awareness to how God is present with us in all things, at all times, whether we are in the

staying plugged in or portable, and it is leaving little room for our deeper connection to the quiet, to the self, to one another, to our God. We are like hamsters on a wheel with all our gadgets. Who today has either the time or the quiet to hear God as Elijah's "still, small voice"?

So I've recently initiated a Sabbath rule for my house. I've started small—no e-mail or Internet on Sunday, and no tending the tasks on my urgent list. (I grin as I think of how writing this piece is one of them—and I'm doing it on Sunday!) I want to create some space on the Sabbath for quiet. I want to read a bit to feed my soul. I want to walk in creation. I want to treasure community with others with hearts held in worship. I want to reflect back over the week just spent and pray into the week ahead. I want to sit for a time without doing anything.

Yes, I want to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. AND, I want to walk from its quietness into my week, awake to God's presence joined to every moment. **AM**

Glenn Mitchell is director of training and program for Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development, Camp Hill, Pa., and has a practice of spiritual direction and retreat leadership based in State College, Pa. He is the current chair of the Church of the Brethren General Board.

QUOTE WORTHY

“Every feeling of pain before the suffering of others is a living embrace of the life and person of Jesus.”

—Jewish scholar Marc Gopin, quoted by Mark Thiessen Nation in an article on conflict transformation in the January 2006 edition of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*

“Prophetic preaching happens when the preacher has the courage to speak truth to power not only inside of the church building but also in the streets and board rooms and jail cells of the secular order.”

—Marvin A. McMickle, professor of homiletics at Ashland Theological Seminary, writing in the 2005 *Ashland Theological Journal*

“O God, help us to not make you too small for the children we write for.”

—from a prayer delivered by Kathy Fry-Miller at the January 2006 *Gather 'Round* curriculum writers conference

“It is hard sometimes to be on the receiving end when I am always the caregiver. But it is times like these that teach us humility and thankfulness.”

—Dr. Tony Capps, a New Orleans physician who lost everything in Hurricane Katrina and moved to Chicago, where a congregation helped him resettle (Church World Service)

“(She) was a beacon of light and defender of truth and righteousness.... We will never forget her tireless efforts to advance the dream and vision of equality and justice for all people.”

—the Rev. Michael E. Livingston, president of the National Council of Churches, on the death of Coretta Scott King

“I always want to remind my students of the ‘dangers of preaching.’ Because preaching can change people’s lives, it is important not to misuse this authority. Everyone who has been called to the ministry and given the power to preach must carefully consider what they are doing.”

—Eden Theological Seminary president David Greenhaw, writing in an online column

CULTUREVIEW

• The soaring cost of keeping the sanctuary warm this past winter has had congregations fretting. “People are very worried,” said consultant Andrew Rudin, who’s been advising houses of worship on energy conservation for 30 years. “We’ve never had so much business.” (RNS)

• Religious leaders from six faith groups, including the National Council of Churches USA and the Church of the Brethren General Board Brethren Witness/ Washington Office, have written to the National Park Service (NPS) expressing concern over proposed changes to park management polices that they believe would dilute the conservation mission of NPS and “open the door for increased air pollution, haze, noise, and damage from off-road vehicles in the parks.”

• Sixty-four percent of Americans believe that religion is “under attack,” according to a recent poll by the Anti-Defamation League. The poll found that 53 percent of Americans likewise believe that religion as a whole is “losing its influence in American life.”

• Church World Service has joined the call to the US government for stronger United States and United Nations action to stop the genocide in Sudan’s Darfur region, and to do more to protect people suffering under the deteriorating conditions in the African nation. CWS organized rallies in New York and Washington, D.C.



JUST FOR FUN: WORD FIND

**Christ is risen** In the puzzle below, find these 12 words or phrases associated with Holy Week. Answers can be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and backwards:

- cross
- Gethsemane
- palms
- Calvary
- Good Friday
- Pilate
- Last Supper
- Easter
- lilies
- tomb
- resurrection
- Hallelujah

R	E	S	S	U	R	E	C	T	I	O	N
H	G	W	H	Y	B	A	A	D	R	O	Y
A	Y	O	O	M	E	S	L	T	E	G	R
L	E	U	O	L	O	T	V	O	P	K	A
L	F	T	O	D	S	E	A	R	P	T	V
E	H	V	A	M	F	R	D	M	U	E	L
L	T	L	L	L	C	R	O	S	S	B	A
U	C	A	V	E	I	T	I	N	T	R	C
J	P	C	I	S	B	P	E	D	S	C	L
A	J	G	E	T	H	S	E	M	A	N	E
H	S	E	I	L	I	L	X	N	L	Y	P



Being the church:

# A FAMILY, A BODY, A MARRIAGE

by Jim Beckwith

The scriptures offer metaphors to describe our life together

**S**o . . . what did you expect the church to be like?

When sharp tongues wag and cold shoulders turn, when accusations burn and grudges smolder, it's not uncommon to hear someone say, "But that's not supposed to happen in the church." In times like these, it's good to ponder: What do we expect the church to be like?

As the consultations on ecclesiology begin (Together: Conversations on Being the Church, see p. 10), let me share three biblical metaphors that describe what I expect the church to be—family, body, and marriage.

## The church is God's family

My expectations are shaped by my experiences growing up in the church. I was always aware that I belong to a wonderful family beyond my household family: the family of God. Because I was the pastor's son and not blood kin to other families in the church, it was perhaps clearer to me than to children born into the local congregation that this church family was a gift from God, not something that happened automatically.

It was a deliberate choice on my parents' part and soon would require a choice from me to be part of it. I was going to be asked to accept the call from God's son, Jesus, to sepa-

rate from the ways of the world and accept God's desire to adopt me, to graft me into the family tree as a son of the living God. As John 1:12 declares, all who receive God's Son, who believe in his name, receive the right to become children of God, born of God. What an awesome gift!

I gladly taught our new members class in the late 1970s. *My People, Your People* by Joan Deeter and *Becoming God's People* by Ken Gibble begin by describing the church as God's family. That's what I had experienced. That's what I want to help others discover. That's what I expect the church to be like.

"When you decide to be one of God's people, you receive a new 'family' identity," Deeter writes. And, as Gibble quotes Bob Faus, "Like families everywhere, you take what God sends you and learn to love each other." Some of the people God sends to us are real characters! And God isn't finished working on any of us yet. It takes grace to become family together.

Brethren at our best, I believe, grow into that "family identity," welcoming all whom the Lord calls us to take under our wings. Our very name, "Brethren"—despite our concerns that the word is archaic and male—describes well our character when we act like brothers and sisters towards all

whom God created to be part of God's family. Believing that each person either already is, or could potentially become, a brother or sister in Christ helps us to respect everyone, regardless of age, class, race, capability, or perspective.

Brethren are in turn well-respected because our caregiving and peacemaking ministries have a special heartfelt warmth and depth of compassion that arise, I believe, because we approach people with a brotherly/sisterly spirit. We care for others' needs, and we seek to be reconciled to all the various peoples created by God because we believe God calls us to live as brothers and sisters together in the family of God. We seek simplicity in living, not just in order to have a better focus on life with God, but also so that we may share our blessings with brothers and sisters around the world. And we share with others our faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ because we would like to be brothers and sisters in God's family forever.

We expect the church to be the family of God.

#### **The church is to be the body of Christ**

I learned early on that God's family tree includes many other church families beyond my own. In Wiley, Colo., the pastors of the three churches in town got together for fellowship and mutual encouragement. Doctrinal issues that separate our denominations did not trouble us. We belonged together because we all belonged to the Lord. We were family.

On the mission field in Africa as a teenager, I was more keenly aware of doctrinal issues that keep churches separate. In my boarding school, the three largest groups of missionary children were Assemblies of God, Church of the Brethren, and Christian Reformed—labeling one another as pentecostal, pacifist, and predestinarian. And yet we knew we were all part of God's family. Indeed, our faith in God gave us

respect for and connection with the Muslim students in our student body as well. We were one student body. Different as we were, we worked together for everyone's good.

I expect the church to be like that. So did the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul describes the church as a body made up of incredibly unlike parts, each expected to carry out its unique function for the sake of the body as a whole. How amazing that such vastly differing, even opposing body parts can work together to animate the body as a whole!

Why should it surprise us that people are pulling in opposite directions in the life of the church? That's how a body develops its balance and movement. Muscles and tendons pull in opposite directions. If they all pulled in the same direction, the body would stumble and fall. While some body parts bring food and air into the body, others get rid of left-



### **Why should it surprise us that people are pulling in opposite directions in the life of the church? That's how a body develops its balance and movement.**

overs and by-products. If one or the other malfunctions, the body may bloat, dehydrate, or die. How well-balanced are the opposing parts of the body of Christ you belong to? Is each functioning for the well-being of the whole body?

At a convention of another denomination some years ago, I overheard delegates en route to their business session plotting tactics for overpowering other interest groups in their denomination. Opponents were vilified as dangerous. It sounded like they would gladly be rid of those members of their church body. I wondered if outsiders at our meetings would be as uneasy as I was at theirs. I was glad I belonged

to a church which, in my experience, usually refers to one another as brothers and sisters, still values each other as parts of one body, still desires to learn from one another, even when we disagree considerably. It requires humility to realize that God sometimes speaks through those who pull in opposite directions from us.

## As a husband and wife become one body in marriage, so Christ and his followers become one body in the church. We are invited to celebrate spiritual intimacy with our Lord.

Early in my first pastorate, I was deeply impressed by the respect shown to the body of Christ by a leader in the congregation who argued passionately against tearing down the old church building. Others argued respectfully that the new church was all we needed. The vote was taken in favor of demolishing the old church, and the man who had spoken

so strongly against doing so stood up to speak. "You all know how much I have opposed this decision that the church has taken. I think I had very good reasons, and I have expressed them. But now that the church has made its decision, I want you to know I will do everything I can to help the church do well what we have decided to do."

Wow! That's what the church is supposed to be like: a body of Christ, in which each member pulls in the direction it is inspired to pull, but always for the purpose of moving the whole body along. I expect the church to have a variety of perspectives and opinions. It is important to hear all

sides, as best we can, to be sure to take as much as possible into account before making a decision. But then the body parts must work together to carry out what the whole body has decided God is calling it to do. Life is so much richer when we let God knit us together with people who are different from us, but who share a common commitment to follow Jesus and to seek God's kingdom.

This happens to groups as well as to individuals. Groups of people, clustered together as a congregation or as a special interest group, may serve a specific function as a part of the larger body of Christ in our community or in our denomination. In my first pastorate, other churches in the area often referred homeless travelers to us, because they knew Brethren cared well for "the least of these." Our denomination as a whole is often looked to in the midst of the national and international gatherings of church leaders to be a body part uniquely qualified to help the whole body of Christ discern God's call to respond to disasters and to make peace.

It is good to expect the whole church to function as a body. We will be less frustrated by differences of opinion or emphases, I think, if we can remember that God works through the mysteries of body parts acting in dynamic tension with one another. The key is to expect all body parts to be loyal to the head of the body, Christ. In the midst of all the "votable" issues that we can debate and hold differing

opinions about, this is a "non-votable" (using terminology from Vernard Eller's book, *The Outward Bound*).

There must be no doubt that we are called to follow Jesus, to be the body of Christ, with the risen Lord as the head of the body prompting us to con-

tinue the work of Jesus in this world. When we are agreed on this basic purpose for the body, we can debate diverse

## Talking 'Together'

The process called "Together: Conversations on Being the Church" arose from a concern shared within the Council of District Executives and grew into a denominational endeavor. The district executives noted the fracturing they perceived in the denomination, and that it had been decades since members of the denomination last gathered to discuss, in a formal way, what it means to be the church.

A planning committee spent several years working on plans for a process to address these issues, and the "Together" conversations were officially launched in February with a gathering in New Windsor, Md. District and regional conversations are expected to continue around the denomination over the next year and a half, using a study guide prepared by Jim Benedict and other resources.

Most district conferences, as well as Annual Conference, will pick up the "Together" emphasis in their themes. A culminating event is planned for the 2007 Annual Conference in Cleveland, Ohio.

For more details, visit [www.brethren.org/together](http://www.brethren.org/together).





**We are called to follow Jesus, to be the body of Christ, with the risen Lord as the head of the body prompting us to continue the work of Jesus in this world. When we are agreed on this basic purpose for the body, we can debate diverse ways and means for carrying out Christ's purpose without the suspicion and manipulation that pull the body apart.**

ways and means for carrying out Christ's purpose without the suspicion and manipulation that pull the body apart.

Further, the church can only function as a body of Christ when Christ is an integral part of the body. Again taking a cue from Eller's *The Outward Bound*, ponder that the scriptures never call the church to be "the torso of Christ." We are to be the body of Christ, head (Jesus) included. We are only truly the body of Christ when we are united with the risen Lord Jesus.

**The church is expected to be a deeply-bonded marriage of Christ and his followers.**

We think of being united with Jesus Christ as communion with our Lord or as incarnation—God-with-us, Christ-among-us, being filled with the Holy Spirit. The New Testament also offers the metaphor of being married.

The church is to be the bride of Christ. As a husband and wife become one body in marriage, so Christ and his followers become one body in the church. We are invited to celebrate spiritual intimacy with our Lord. We are commanded to love the Lord with all that we are: heart, soul, mind, and strength, so that our whole life together is filled with the presence of God.

Like a married couple who have begun to look like each other because of similar gestures and expressions of face

and voice, it is appropriate to ask if the world sees the nature of Christ in his bride, the church.

When I counsel with couples preparing for marriage, I point out Ephesians 5, where Paul indicates that a purpose of marriage is to present our spouses to ourselves "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish," the way Christ does the church. In marriage we work to redeem one another. So also in the church. We are called to discipleship: teaching one another to obey all that Jesus has commanded us, intimately embodying the way of life that only his presence among us can bring forth.

We have a lot to learn about building one another up. And we have a lot to learn about how the Lord wants to perfect us, preparing us to be presented faultless before the glory of the almighty God in the everlasting kingdom, where we will celebrate the completed marriage of Christ and the church.

The family of God. The body of Christ. The marriage of Christ and his followers.

That's what the scriptures expect the church to be. Dear Lord, make our churches like that. 

Jim Beckwith is pastor of Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and a former member of the denomination's Committee on Interchurch Relations.

## So, what is 'ecclesiology'?

Where did the word "ecclesiology," referring to the study of being the church, come from? *Ek* is Greek for "out" and *klesia* means "the called ones." Put them together and you get *ekklesia*, the New Testament word for "church"—the ones called out of the world to be God's people. Out of this world! When was the last time someone said that about your congregation? What are you doing to help your world/your congregation heed Christ's call to get out of itself and into the adventure of life with God—to truly be Christ's church, "the called-out ones."



# LETTER TO A SOON-TO-BE-300 CHURCH

by Earle Fike Jr.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Much of the New Testament consists of letters to churches by recognized apostles. I do not own nor claim apostle status, and therefore may not qualify for writing a letter to the present followers gathered in the house called Brethren. But being invited, I brave to do it anyway, for it is within the Church of the Brethren that my faith found its birth, its growth, and its home for maturation and service, now 69 years since baptism. So I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ, whom we seek to follow and whose work we seek to continue: peacefully, simply, and together.

You may already know that those servants of the church known as district executives are concerned about the character and style of our living together. At the 2003 Annual Conference they issued a call for conversation and understanding about what it means for us to be the church (Ecclesiology!). An Annual Conference study committee is currently working on how we do business. Modifying our machinery and our procedure is important, and will surely facilitate our work. But what we may also need is an attitude adjustment—a rethinking of what it means to be the church.

As Brethren, we have had a continual fascination with identity. Carl Bowman in *Brethren Society* reminds us that the question of determining who we are is as old as our church, and that the pressures of contemporary living at any given time refuse to fit into the categories of past identity. That would seem to suggest that who we are now is not just who we used to be. It follows that we never used to be all that we ought to be now. And further, we certainly were not birthed as a new creation by trying to be who we always were before.

I believe the church is more than we think it is, and less than it ought to be. For some, the church is viewed as a comfort station where people of like minds meet, a place where spiritual batteries get recharged and the tank of life gets filled with the proper octane required to motor our living for six more days. For others, it is primarily a place where musical preferences, faith understandings, and social positions we hold dear are re-affirmed. In either case, challenges to what we believe and how we live may happen occasionally, but should not happen so often as to make life uncomfortable and upset our equilibrium. If that's the most of what the church is, then it is less than it ought to be.

But it is more than that! First and foremost, the church is

the body of Christ, the visible incarnation of God's Word to the world in which we live. It is visible in the form of a faith community, a fellowship that meets regularly with a primary focus on worship and praise of God through words, music, and meditation. It is a community where praise of God's good gifts in life and creation is joyfully expressed—a place where our cup of thanksgiving runs over with the gift of God's son and what he means to us.

It is a place where we express concern for friends and any neighbor who needs help. It is a place where we pray and act for justice and peace in the world. Our forefather, Alexander Mack, said our community of faith should be recognized by the manner of our living. That living includes a commitment to live in keeping with the spirit and teachings of Jesus. Arguments over the jots and tittles of right doctrine are not as important as interpretation and encouragement on how to do that. In the community of faith, shortcomings are confessed and forgiven. And growth in faith, in understanding, and in conduct is required, whether that is comfortable or not.

Recall that the New Testament does not recognize solitary Christians. Community is a primary reality. While we may be spiritually fed individually through prayer and meditation, the power of any inspiration from the Spirit springs into life only in the relationship/fellowship with our neighbor and other members of the body of Christ. We are less than we ought to be when we are not in community.

So, dear Brethren, what then are some of the characteristics of a New Testament community? Our family of the church has understood that the changing nature of community requires faith to grow. Deep in our genes is a conviction that we are a people of unfinished faith, what Desmond Bittinger called "the doctrine of the open mind and heart." He said, "Our assurance is not that we know his will; rather we are seekers after it, pursuers of it. That is why we would never write a creed. We did not want to halt or slow down the quest for truth. I believe that Alexander Mack wanted a major distinguishing mark of the Brethren to be an open yearning mind; a mind forever searching for the will of Christ." Brother Bittinger was right.

So I ask you, how is it possible to grow in the faith unless we are continually challenged by the Spirit through new insights? Is not the contribution of a brother or a sister one way in which the Spirit speaks to us? Is not the testimony of a brother or sister in the faith worthy of listening without being



threatened? New life always involves giving up something old to take on something new. Not only is our faith subject to such “servicing” or overhaul, but faithfulness requires it!

I remind you also that in the New Testament understanding of the body, there is a recognition that the ear and the eye and many other parts make it up (1 Cor. 12). Whatever the parts, they are not all alike, either in gifts or in what constitutes a faithful contribution to the body.

Remember early in our history, we “banned” as a way of disciplining those whom we felt had fallen from acceptable behavior. I’ve often suspected that the discipline was more for the comfort of some parts rather than faithfulness to the Head. Those were not some of our best years.

Community is not dependent upon uniformity of the parts, in function or conduct or belief. Our togetherness is rooted in our faithfulness to the head of the body, Christ (Col. 1:18). So we ask ourselves, are those who do not see the same meaning in how to follow Jesus necessarily a problem for the body? The answer is no! The body of Christ is not dependent upon uniformity, but on unanimity of faithfulness to the Head. We parts are only a problem to one another if we allow ourselves to be so. Our Head is more accepting of differences in belief and conduct and contribution to the body than are we parts.

But the virus of uniformity still tempts us to be judgmental about differences. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us of some things about Jesus. “Advising the crowd that they are as blind as those they seek to reform, Jesus suggests that they do some work on themselves before presuming to fix anyone else (Luke 6:37). Jesus has a relatively easy time with sinners. Their hearts are already broken, so it is not hard for him to get inside. But the righteous are like vaults. They are so full of their precious values and so defended against those who do not share them that even the dynamite of the gospel has little effect on them. He cannot seem to make his point often enough. Self-righteousness kills not only those who are bludgeoned by it, but those who wield it as well. The only cure is to recognize each other as kin, united by the only one

who was ever right.”

So I say to you, my brothers and sisters, we are at our best as members of the body when we are unwilling to allow differences to be the occasion of disenfranchising or putting down another person by innuendo or name-calling. When we are at



**While we may be spiritually fed individually through prayer and meditation, the power of any inspiration from the Spirit springs into life only in the relationship/fellowship with our neighbor and other members of the body of Christ.**

our best, we do not have to prove our faithfulness and righteousness by proving another wrong. Our heritage includes standing firm in our belief and a willingness to change our minds in the light of new revelation. We are less than we ought to be when we force another person to agree with us before they are welcome in our part of the body of Christ.

One of our contemporaries, Jimmy Carter, reminds us of another characteristic of the New Testament community. In *Our Endangered Values* he says, “The very existence of the early Christian church was endangered by divisive arguments, such as whether one had to become a circumcised Jew and follow the laws of the Torah before accepting Christ as Savior, whether it was permissible to eat meat that had been offered to pagan gods, which day of the week was to be considered holy, and which of the apostles would be the pre-eminent interpreter of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The healing factor was the realization that drawing nearer to Christ reduced the importance of human difference and brought people closer to one another.”

Carter’s insight about inclusiveness is good. The early faith community grew in openness to anyone who confessed Christ as Lord. The baptisms in the New Testament were not preceded by membership classes that defined doctrinal tenets or acceptable behavior.

Harold Smith in *The Soul of Christianity: Restoring the Great Tradition* says, “The people who heard Jesus’ disciples

proclaiming the Good News were as impressed by what they saw as by what they heard. They saw lives that had been transformed, men and women who were ordinary in every way except for the fact that they seemed to have found the secret of living. They evinced a tranquility, simplicity, and cheerfulness that their hearers had nowhere else encountered. Specifically there seemed to be two qualities in which their lives abounded. The first was mutual regard. Integral to this mutual regard was a total absence of social barriers; it was a discipleship of equals. The conventional barriers of race, gender, and status meant nothing to them for in Christ there was neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free. The second distinctive quality was happiness.”

The early church understood that not all inclusiveness proved beneficial, but on the other hand, all exclusiveness was suspect. Novelist Anne Lamott adds an important insight for us: “You can safely assume that you’ve created God in

those who dare to disagree.”

We come dangerously close to that at times. Often, we do not engage in dialogue. We come with prepared speeches, not always fraternal. We make far more judgmental “you” statements than we do confessional “I” statements. We speak whether it contributes to the business or not. In short, we are short on listening and long on diatribes. Courtesy is too often at a premium. Labeling and name-calling has become acceptable under the rubric of prophetic and/or righteous indignation. To rephrase a concept by Richard Lischer, by declining to practice pugilism at the microphones we may become conscientious objectors in the war of words. If we cannot do this with words, if our language itself is not reconciling, then any peaceful solution is dead on arrival.

We have acted wisely and helpfully on some controversial issues, including our peace position, our understanding of biblical authority, our acceptance of other baptisms, and the ordi-

nation of women. On these matters we have agreed upon denominational positions that uphold New Testament inclusiveness while at the same time allowing for local churches to be different in their practice and in calling members into leadership positions. That reflects

unanimity through the Head without uniformity of the parts. So long as we continue that kind of care and discussion on old or new issues, we are more of what the church ought to be.

I do wonder—is that kind of New Testament inclusiveness also an option for the thing that we most fear may still separate us just now? My hope is that the Spirit may yet lead us to approach the issue of homosexuality in some similar inclusive way. I do believe our Head is more accepting than we presently are.

I hope my letter has not wearied you. It is only one among many ecclesiology opinions that will be a part of our present desire to remember who we are, and who, by the working of the Spirit, we should still become. I close by rephrasing some words adapted from a much more seasoned member of the New Testament tradition of the body of Christ than I am: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen to be a faithful way to continue the work of Jesus, and the God of grace will enable you to do it simply, peacefully, together.”

Your brother in Christ,  
Earle Fike Jr. 

Earle Fike Jr. is a former Church of the Brethren pastor, seminary professor, General Board executive, and Annual Conference moderator. He lives in Bridgewater, Va.



## **I believe that conservatives and liberals can live together without destroying one another, and perhaps in benefit to one another. There is common ground for discussion and growth between us.**

your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Jesus astonished those who felt they had a corner on what they needed to do to be acceptable by reminding them of a fairly open-ended criteria. Love of God and love of neighbor are the necessities, and, “In as much as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.” Early Christians modeled that by being inclusive and rich in love and caring for one another. Julian the Apostate, speaking to his heathen courtiers, made one of the earliest recorded observations by an outsider about the early church: “See how these Christians love one another.”

So I ask you, brothers and sisters, would our Annual Conference, our letters to MESSENGER, our church councils, or our whispers about others deserve that kind of recommendation? You see, don’t you? The church is more than we think it is and too often less than it ought to be. We can do better.

I’m near the end of my letter, but I hope you will allow me to make a few other personal observations. I believe that conservatives and liberals can live together without destroying one another, and perhaps in benefit to one another. There is common ground for discussion and growth between us. It is fundamentalism in either group that is destructive. Again I agree with Jimmy Carter who says, “Fundamentalist ideology is becoming the dominant thought for the most powerful politicians and religious leaders. It’s a you’re with us or against us philosophy. They are those who have managed to change the nuances of subtleties of historic debate into black-and-white rigidities and personal derogation of



# BEING THE CHURCH ANYWHERE

## How can we equip young people with the essentials?

by Jeff Neuman-Lee



**I** suppose we could spend a lot of time trying to describe why, but at this point it seems academic: The issue is that in many, many of our Church of the Brethren congregations the young adults leave to go to college and few return.

Where do they go? Often it is to other places where there is no Church of the Brethren congregation or where the congregation is so different from the one in which they grew up, it just isn't the same. Or they give up on the church and tell themselves that they can believe (and somehow teach their children faith) without being with others and with the Spirit of Jesus. Some lose their faith (there are lots of different reasons, but, in my experience, faith is lost largely in reaction to the hypocrisy of the church). Others live out their faith in social ministry, while others join other churches and many times bring much Brethren "salt" with them.

So what do we do? How do we help those young adults still in our midst or our high school youth to continue the work of Jesus peacefully, simply, together? And what should that look like?

What if we made a goal for ourselves that any youth who graduates from high school in our congregation would be equipped to "be the church" wherever he or she might end up?

So let's say this youth goes to college: He would have the tools to set up worship in his dorm room, tools to invite others to know Jesus Christ, tools to live in forgiving, reconciling peace with his fellow believers and with his dorm floor, tools to read scripture in a small group, and tools to pray and lead others in their prayer. Or, if a youth goes and gets a job and an apartment, she would have the same set of tools. Love feast wouldn't simply be something a young person might go to at their home church, it would be something that young person

could lead if he or she heard God's call to do so.

Being a member of Jesus' body would not be dependent upon there being an established congregation that mediates our relationship with God, neither would it be dependent upon the right pastor. Rather, the young person would understand that it is only dependent upon God's call and being with others in the name of Jesus. The General Board and districts together could have resources to support anyone who so responded to God.

What if we did this? What if we thought through the basic, raw tools for forgiveness among ourselves? Tools for recon-

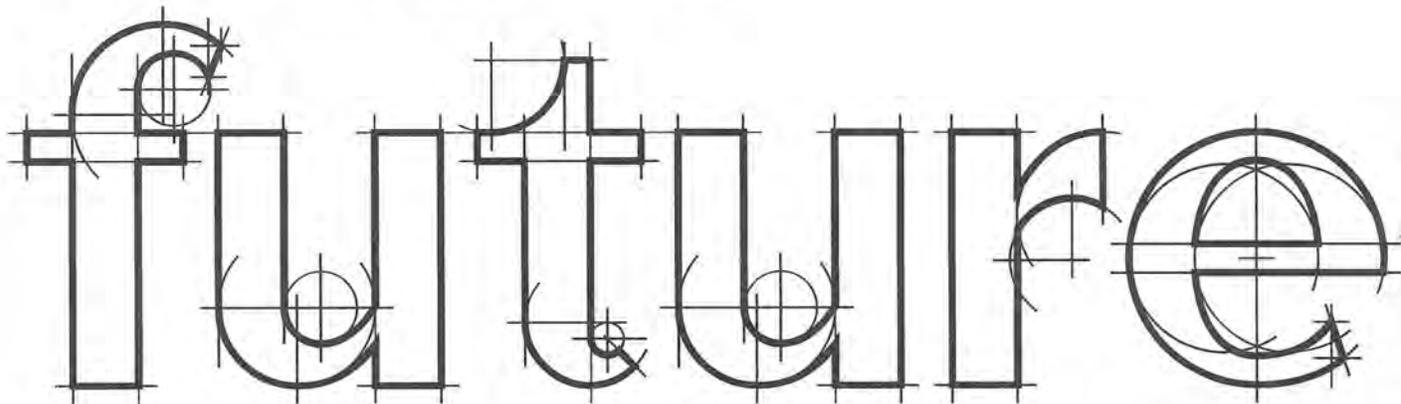
**What if we thought through the basic, raw tools for forgiveness among ourselves? Tools for reconciliation? Tools for scripture? Tools for prayer and leadership?**

ciliation? Tools for scripture? Tools for prayer and leadership? I am sure it would benefit our young people. It would give them basics while allowing them the flexibility to be the church of Jesus Christ in this rapidly changing world. It would also, and perhaps first, benefit those of us who understand our relationship to God as being dependent upon a particular sort of congregation or a particular kind of pastor.

God has given us a message about the Lord Jesus Christ who brings forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, acceptance, and love. What if we teach our children not to be part of our church, but to be his church? What if we actually did that? How could God use that? **W**

Jeff Neuman-Lee is a member of the General Board. He is currently consulting with Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in Littleton, Colo., and writing a book about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Annual Conference plans for the



*Vision statement, marketing are key pieces of new focus*

by Karen Doss Bowman

**F**or more than 250 years, Brethren from all parts of the world have come together annually for fellowship, spiritual renewal, and discussions of church beliefs and practices. In the late 1700s, when Annual Conference became a Brethren tradition, the event would be held during the observance of Pentecost as—according to the Annual Conference website—“an invitation for the Holy Spirit to once again come down upon the hearts and minds of these believers.”

During the past two centuries, Annual Conference has changed dramatically. Years ago, Brethren gathered together in rural farming communities, meeting in tents or specially constructed buildings, and lodged with church members from the community.

### **Annual Conference mission statement**

*Church of the Brethren Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.*

Conferences today are usually held at large convention centers in major US cities with attendees staying in hotels. Planning for the event—which typically draws 3,000 or more participants and includes program options such as worship services, insight sessions, special-interest

luncheons and dinners, and activities for all ages—has become increasingly complex.

The Annual Conference Council (ACC) and Lerry Fogle, executive director of Annual Conference, want to make sure the event continues to be relevant and exciting for Brethren, and meets the needs of the church in the 21st century. To help with this endeavor, the ACC last October implemented Annual Conference’s first-ever strategic plan—a document two years in the making. The plan will provide guidance to all conference staff and volunteers working behind the scenes.

“This strategic plan will help keep us focused,” Fogle says. “It will make sure that short- and long-range planning is an ongoing process, not just a one-time event.”

The most important result of the strategic planning process, says Fogle, was the development of a mission statement for Annual Conference: “Church of the Brethren Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.” Along with that, the ACC wrote a vision statement for Annual Conference that calls for the event to be spiritually uplifting, inclusive, and a catalyst for revival of commitment to Jesus Christ while facilitating the business of the church.

The ACC began the strategic planning process with a complete ministry analysis, examining the event’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Perhaps no surprise to frequent Conferencegoers is that worship, marked by moving congregational singing and powerful preaching, was determined to be one of the event’s greatest strengths. Fogle says he and other planners would like to find ways to make sure the spiritual aspect of worship is evident in all activities of Conference.

### **Core values**

We believe that Jesus is the head of the Church. As part of the larger Body of Jesus Christ, the Church of the Brethren has a unique ministry to the world. Therefore, Annual Conference, the Church of the Brethren assembled, is committed to:

- The Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Worship
- Unity
- The New Testament as our rule of faith and practice
- Relationships
- Identity
- A variety of faith experiences

The Annual Conference strategic plan also includes a vision statement and 13 objectives. To read the full plan, visit the Annual Conference website at [www.brethren.org/ac](http://www.brethren.org/ac). Click on “Mission, Vision & Values.”

Regina Bryan



Horn Dubois



Karin Pickering



Regina Bryan

Anyone familiar with the Brethren tradition of ice cream after worship has first-hand knowledge of another Conference strength: fellowship. Even so, the ACC determined that “Brethren exclusivity,” where some Conference attendees may not feel like part of the Brethren family, can hinder the spirit of community. Additionally, business sessions are sometimes known to become confrontational when a sensitive issue is on the floor. One objective of the strategic plan is to foster “intentional community” in the Conference experience, where all are welcome, differing viewpoints are valued, and participants feel free to disagree in love.

A key component of the strategic plan is the development of a marketing plan—to be finalized in May—designed to increase awareness and understanding of the event among congregations throughout the denomination, as well as to increase attendance. Last year 59 percent of all Church of the Brethren congregations sent delegates to Peoria, Ill., Fogle says. The ACC hopes to see this statistic improve. Additionally, as new members have joined the denomination, it is important to educate them on what Annual Conference is all about and to encourage their participation.

“We hope to discover through the work of the marketing committee why some [congregations] don’t care to support Conference or come,” says Fred Swartz, a retired pastor and current Annual Conference secretary. “In general, what can we do to promote Annual Conference?”

The strategic plan includes a risk management and contingency plan to examine potential problems associated with an Annual Conference venue or the event itself. Prior to each Conference, different scenarios will be assessed (What if, for example, the denomination’s offices sustained serious damage and Conference planning had to be moved?). Planners will propose solutions that minimize or eliminate potential

hazards and ensure Conference is a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants.

While parts of the strategic plan already have been put into motion, Fogle says most of the revisions to Annual Conference will come within the next five to 10 years. Conference planners already have begun to expand the use of technology in busi-

**Planning for the event—which typically draws 3,000 or more participants and includes program options such as worship services, insight sessions, special-interest luncheons and dinners, and activities for all ages—has become increasingly complex.**

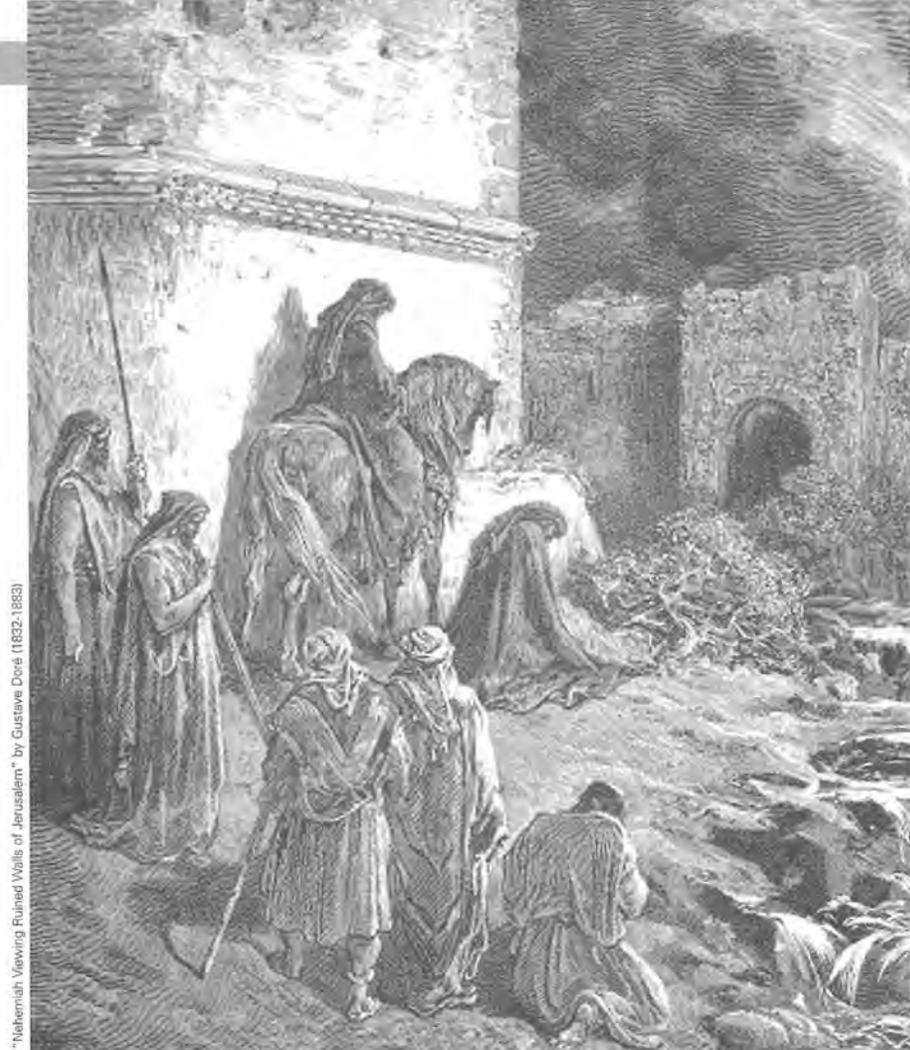
ness sessions and worship services, notably with video and closed captioning. Spanish translations of agency reports, worship service bulletins, and other handouts have been made available to attendees. During the next few years, insight sessions and age-group programs also will be closely evaluated, Fogle says, and changes will be made as appropriate.

Fogle points out that the result of all this work is more than just a plan—it’s a strategic planning process that will be dynamic and alive, not “a piece of paper that gathers a lot of dust.” Annual reviews of the plan’s objectives are built into the process, and the Conference evaluation forms will be modified to reflect whether objectives were met and if attendees found the event to be a spiritual experience.

“We want to make sure the Conference has value for the members of the Church of the Brethren and the delegates that come to it,” Fogle says. “It’s always been viewed as a family conference, and we want to get people there with their families because the future generations of Brethren will hopefully come back to be part of this important event.” 

Karen Doss-Bowman is a freelance writer based in Bridgewater, Va. She is a member of Sunrise Church of the Brethren in Harrisonburg.

**These two men and the material in these books represent a description of what that community did when there was sudden change, and when the community found itself in a context that had radically shifted.**



# Ezra-Nehemiah: by Stephen Breck Reid

## Things aren't what they used to be

**L**ittle attention has been focused on scriptures like **1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah**. These rich biblical texts, however, have much to offer.

Like 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were at one time a single book. Even though these books are not at the forefront of much preaching, few characters figure more prominently in Judaism than do Ezra and Nehemiah. The two have also received little attention as heroes of the faith in Church of the Brethren circles.

Ezra figured prominently in the shift from the religion of the Hebrews to Judaism as it emerged after the exile, but the Old Testament has but one short book with his name on it. He is described as Ezra the scribe (See Neh, 8:2,4). Nehemiah, on the other hand, is

described as the faithful servant of Cyrus and the rebuilders of Jerusalem. These two men and the material in these books represent a description of what that community did when there was sudden change, and when the community found itself in a context that had radically shifted.

Nehemiah, like Ezra, was a bureaucrat in the Persian court (See Neh. 2:1-20). The book of Ezra begins with the reconstruction of the temple. Nehemiah begins with the reconstruction of the city wall and gate structures. Today's reader might notice that this book begins with a "mission challenge" in Nehemiah 1:3.

**Structure and history.** The book of Ezra has two parts: First is the description of the return from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6); and second, the

description of the first year of the work of Ezra (Ezra 7-10).

The first six chapters of the book of Ezra can be seen as a continuation of the Chronicles material: 2 Chronicles 36:1-21 recounts the fall of Jerusalem (in 587 BCE) and the rise of Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22-23). The opening verses of Ezra describe the edict of Cyrus. This was the "emancipation proclamation" for the Hebrew exiles. The edict of Cyrus prompted the occasion for a spiritual renewal, for "everyone whose spirit God had stirred—got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5). It was a "go home free" card for them to play. Cyrus even sent gifts for the rebuilding (Ezra 1:6-11).

The return came in waves. The writer of the book that bears Ezra's name want-



ed to capture the names of the participants much as we might take a photograph today. In the years after the exile the leadership roles would be given to those who came from the first families of returnees (Ezra 2:1-70). Today we experience this in organizations such as Daughters of the American Revolution.

One of the distinctive elements of the book of Ezra is its use of a second language. The majority of the book is written in Hebrew typical of the post-exilic period. There are two places, however, where the language shifts to imperial Aramaic, the language of official documents of the empire (See Ezra 4:8-6:18 and Ezra 7:12-26).

**The literary types.** The books of Ezra-Nehemiah present us with a rich variety of literary types. Four come to mind: censuses, letters, memoirs, and prayers. All four serve as a backdrop to the conversations that were providing the context for that community of faith.

• **Census:** During the post-exilic period, there was a fascination with lists, genealogies, and census data. Think of this as an ancient census in the county courthouse or the slave rolls on the ship manifests.

Both Ezra (Ezra 2:1-70; 10:18-44) and Nehemiah (7:6-73a; 11:1-36; 12:1-26) have their own list of participants. During that period, social status and access to certain positions such as priest depended on these sources.

• **Memoirs:** Ezra 7-10 is often described as Ezra's memoir. Here, Ezra reflects on the situation and recounts his experience. The book of Nehemiah begins as the book of Ezra ends, with a memoir (Neh 1:1-7:5). The first section of the Ezra memoir is in third person (7:1-26), and the second section uses first person (7:27-9:15). A final section returns to third-person memoir of Ezra (10:1-44).

• **Prayer:** At the end of the first-person (Ezra) memoir, one finds an excellent example of a prayer of confession (Ezra 9:5-15). There are frequent prayers in the book of Nehemiah (1:4-10; 2:18; 4:4, 20; 5:9, 19; 13:14,31). The covenant renewal ceremony includes another prayer of confession by Ezra (Neh 9:6-37).

• **Letters:** The Aramaic section of Ezra also includes some of the oldest letter forms found in the Old Testament. These

include correspondence to the Persian kings Darius and Artaxerxes and their replies (4:8-16; 4:17-22; 5:6-17; 6:3-12). Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, becomes the focus of the opposition (Ezra 5:3,6; 6:6,13). This is the transition from the correspondence to the second commissioning of Ezra (7:12-26).

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah introduce us to characters and literary types that might seem new to us. However, there is much for us to learn about what it is like to live in a culture where there seemed to be more change than people and institutions could tolerate.

The voice of these prophetic and important leaders in their community speak to our modern community of faith and bring us insight into our current context. **W**

Stephen Breck Reid is academic dean of Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind.

MESSINGER'S "Journey through the Word" series will provide a brief overview of a different book (or books) of the Bible each month through December 2009. Coming in May: Esther, by Eugene F. Roop.

## EZRA-NEHEMIAH: A CLOSER LOOK

**History:** The events described take place after the end of the exile of the Hebrew people; the exact dates of these events are a subject of debate but likely in the mid-400s BCE. Some have suggested that the author was the same as the person who edited Chronicles due to the carryover between the books.

**Notable stories:** The rebuilding and dedication of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem (in Ezra and Nehemiah, respectively); Nehemiah serving as cupbearer to the king (1:11); the mocking and threats of Sanballat (Neh. 2-6).

**Key verses:** Ezra 3:11, "And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever toward Israel.' And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."; Nehemiah 1:11, "O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."; Nehemiah 6:15-16, "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."

## New Sunday school curriculum is launched for Brethren, Mennonites

*Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News*, a new Anabaptist Sunday school curriculum, was officially launched by Brethren Press and Mennonite Publishing Network Feb. 10-12 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

The Bible-based curriculum offers sessions for all ages of children and youth, as well as a class for parents and caregivers of children, and a multi-age option for grades K-6. Each group studies the same text on the same Sunday. The first quarter of the curriculum is scheduled to be used in churches this fall; new materials will be produced each quarter of each year for every age group.

The launch event also served as a training workshop for more than 100 Christian educators and staff of the Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church Canada, and Mennonite Church USA.

"It is exciting to be here to launch this curriculum," Brethren Press publisher Wendy McFadden told the gathering. The new curriculum was dedicated at the opening worship service, when each participant received a sample kit, standing in a large circle as prayers of thanksgiving were said.



A Christian educator at the *Gather 'Round* launch event flips through the "Together" student book for the "Multiage" class option (grades K-6, with tips for older students). The theme for the first quarter of the new Brethren and Mennonite Sunday school curriculum is "Creation and Covenant."



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

An activity station during closing worship at the *Gather 'Round* launch event offered conversation cards focused on the shema from Deuteronomy 6, one of the foundational texts for the new Sunday school curriculum. Mennonite Publishing Network executive director Ron Rempel discusses a card with *Gather 'Round* staff Amy Gingerich.

Presenters emphasized that *Gather 'Round* is biblically based. "*Gather 'Round* is a new curriculum that tells the old story in a new way," said Eleanor Snyder of Mennonite Publishing Network. The three foundational texts for the curriculum are Luke 10:27, Matthew 18:20, and Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

*Gather 'Round* may be the first Sunday school curriculum to offer a class for parents and caregivers, the publishers said. Another feature is a multi-age option designed for small congregations. A unique piece called the "Talkabout" helps make the connection between church and home. The Talkabout for the fall quarter, a 14-sided cardboard "ball," intrigued participants at the launch with its suggestions to spark talk about faith around the dinner table at home.

"Our curriculum is different" than those of larger publishers because it shares our Anabaptist heritage, said Anna Speicher, director and editor of the *Gather 'Round* curriculum. Designed for busy teachers who may or may not have time to research scripture texts for themselves, each lesson includes a short Bible

insight piece by a Brethren or Mennonite biblical scholar.

"We are trying to embed Anabaptist principles through and through," Speicher said.

Christian educators had a first chance to explore the new materials in their sample kits on the first evening of the launch. Then, over the next two days, they were led through a series of activities to help them explore the materials more

thoroughly. Worship experiences at the training focused on the *shema*, which begins, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God. . . ." The passage from Deuteronomy is the memory verse for the first quarter of the curriculum.

Pam Reist, associate pastor at Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, was on the advisory committee for the curriculum. At the launch, she saw final materials for the first time. "I'm really pleased to see how attractive the finished product is," she said. "It's a very good product, better than anything else."

For more about *Gather 'Round*, and to download free samples, go to [www.gatherround.org](http://www.gatherround.org). Materials may be ordered from Brethren Press, 800-441-3712.

A table of *Gather 'Round* resources was on display at the launch of the new Brethren and Mennonite Sunday school curriculum in Pittsburgh in February.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

## Beckwith and Zuercher head Annual Conference ballot

The Annual Conference Office has announced the ballot for the 2006 Annual Conference, to be held July 1-5 in Des Moines, Iowa. The nominating committee of Standing Committee developed a slate of candidates, and Standing Committee then voted to create the ballot that will be presented. Nominees are listed by position.

**Annual Conference moderator-elect:** James M. Beckwith of Lebanon, Pa.; Tom Zuercher of Ashland, Ohio.

**Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee:** Robert D. Kettering of Manheim, Pa.; Scott L. Duffey of Westminster, Md.

**Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee:** Jill I. Loomis of Boalsburg, Pa.; Philip Hershey of Quarryville, Pa.

## Conference committee meets with Brethren Mennonite Council

A meeting between the Program and Arrangements Committee of Annual Conference and representatives of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests (BMC) took place Jan. 21 at the Church of the Brethren offices in Elgin, Ill.

The meeting, held at the invitation of Program and Arrangements, followed the issuing of revised guidelines for exhibits and literature distribution at Annual Conference.

The committee "felt it was important to have a face-to-face meeting with members of the Brethren Mennonite Council after denying a request for exhibit space at Annual Conference for 2006," reported Annual Conference moderator Ronald Beachley. BMC, founded in 1976, has requested exhibit space for more than 20 years, according to BMC director Carol Wise. Those requests have been denied.

At the meeting, time was spent talking about the history of BMC, its relationship with the General Board liaison program, and its relationship with the Program and Arrangements Committee, Beachley said. Those at the meeting watched the video

**Committee on Interchurch Relations:** Rene Quintanilla of Fresno, Calif.; Carolyn Schrock of Mountain Grove, Mo.

**Association of Brethren Caregivers:** Verne Wetzler Greiner of Mechanicsburg, Pa.; Dave Fouts of Maysville, W.Va.; Ann M. Bach of Richmond, Ind.; Chris Whitacre of McPherson, Kan.

**Bethany Theological Seminary, representing colleges:** Betty Ann Ellis Cherry of Huntingdon, Pa.; Jonathan Frye of

McPherson, Kan. **Representing laity:** Kathleen Long of North Liberty, Ind.; Rex M. Miller of Milford, Ind.

**Brethren Benefit Trust:** Eunice Culp of Goshen, Ind.; Daniel D. Joseph of Onekama, Mich.

**General Board, at large:** Ben Barlow of Dayton, Va.; Hector E. Perez-Borges of Bayamon, P.R.

**On Earth Peace:** Myrna Frantz of Haverhill, Iowa; Madalyn Metzger of Bristol, Ind.



Dale Seese

At the 2005 Annual Conference, the Brethren Mennonite Council called attention to its exclusion from the exhibit hall by constructing a small table and carrying it into the hall. Members and friends of the group, whose requests for booth space have been turned down for more than 20 years, then served communion from the table. Here Jill Kline, left, of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill., and Carla Kilgore of Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Fort Wayne, Ind., help serve communion to Conference attendees.

*Body of Dissent* produced by BMC. The committee's representatives shared reasons why BMC was not granted exhibit space for the 2006 Conference, and the group talked about how to encourage and foster dialogue.

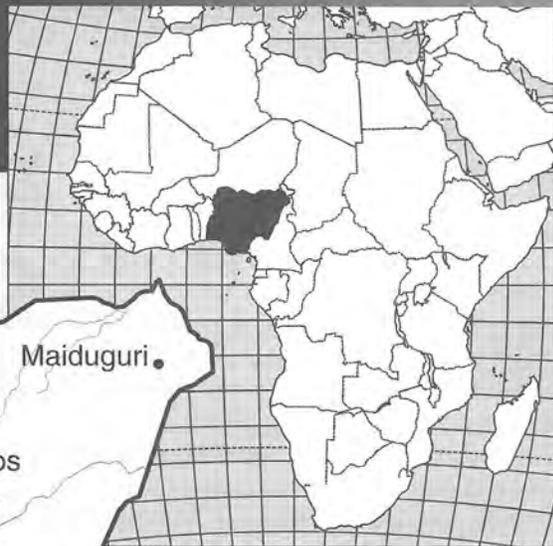
The meeting was "a mutual style conversation, with all of us exploring various ways to foster dialogue and move the church forward," Wise said.

Beachley reported that "the representatives of the Program and Arrangements Committee felt the major reasons exhibit

hall space was not given to BMC had to do with the church's stance on covenantal homosexual relationships and a concern for those in the denomination who view scripture differently." The conversation did not produce any major breakthroughs and no decisions were made, he said, "but being at the same table talking was a first step."

The revised guidelines for Annual Conference exhibits and literature distribution are at [www.brethren.org/ac/](http://www.brethren.org/ac/); click on "Polity, Policies, and Guidelines."

# INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT: NIGERIA



At least five churches of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwaa Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) were damaged or destroyed in Maiduguri during riots and protests over cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Robert Krouse, Nigeria mission coordinator for the Church of the Brethren General Board, also reported that five EYN members were seriously injured in the Feb. 18 rioting.

Violence spread to other areas of Nigeria following the Maiduguri riots, in the northeast of the country. In the city of Onitsha, in the southeast, Christians attacked Muslims in retaliation.

The Associated Press reported at least 15 people were killed in Maiduguri and many more churches were burned as thousands of Muslim rioters held a three-hour rampage. It was “the deadliest confrontation yet in the whirlwind of Muslim anger over the drawings,” the report said. The cartoons, considered offensive for their depiction of the prophet, first appeared in a newspaper in Denmark in September but have since been reprinted in Europe and elsewhere. In the first several weeks of 2006 the cartoons were protested in many places around the world, sometimes with violence.

The five damaged EYN churches are EYN Farm Center, which was completely destroyed; EYN Polo, burned but not completely destroyed; EYN Gomarigana, also burned but not completely destroyed; EYN Bulunkutu, which has steel beams that could not be burned, “so all the pews and other furniture were put in a pile and burned,” Krouse said; and EYN Dala, which was destroyed in similar violence in 1996 and was completely destroyed again. Maiduguri No. 1 church, EYN’s largest congregation with thousands of members, was not affected, Krouse said.

“There is no (loss of) life involved in the crises in Maiduguri in EYN churches, but many people died from other denominations,” reported Markus Gamache, a business manager for EYN, in an e-mail to Church of the Brethren representatives who were attending the World Council of Churches (WCC) 9th Assembly in Brazil at the time. EYN’s president, Filibus Gwama, was also there. Gamache said the church would “continue to pray for ... God’s intervention.”

At the Assembly, WCC general secretary the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia said both Christians and Muslims had a responsibility to promote tolerance and to address ignorance about the other faith. “Violent reactions, as

well as justifying these cartoons as an expression of freedom of speech, continue to put fuel on the fire,” Kobia said.

In addition to the violence in Maiduguri, other areas of northern Nigeria saw flareups—including Gombe and Bauchi, where there are EYN churches, according to Krouse.

“It now appears that the present ‘Christian/Muslim’ conflict is more of an ethnic conflict than a religious conflict,” Krouse said. He explained that the conflict is a historical one that has pitted the northern Hausa ethnic group against the southern Ibo ethnic group. This decades-long conflict contributed to Nigeria’s civil war, the Biafra War, in the 1960s. The Hausa are mostly Muslim, and the Ibo mostly Christian.

Krouse asked for prayers for peace in Nigeria. “Pray that leaders within the Muslim community will call for peace among their people. Pray that the violence will not continue to escalate. Pray that Christians in Nigeria won’t react to the acts of violence that have been committed against them by going on a rampage themselves,” he said.

Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the US Church of the Brethren General Board, said Brethren “need to be remembering our Nigerian church leadership in the quest for bringing about interfaith peace in these times, and for the members of each EYN community affected, as they reach out to the families who have lost loved ones in this round of violence.” EYN recently created a peace educa-

tion committee at its headquarters in Mubi, in northeastern Nigeria. “Times like these test the fibre of newly founded programs, and [our] understanding of the gospel,” Noffsinger said.



Merv Keeney

*Filibus Gwama is currently serving as president of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwaa Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Gwama was attending the World Council of Churches 9th Assembly in Brazil when he learned of the violence that led to the burning of five EYN congregations in Maiduguri.*

**Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 268** held its orientation Jan. 29 to Feb. 17 at Camp Ithiel in Gotha, Fla. Volunteers, their hometowns, and their project assignments are as follows:

Front row, left to right: Elizabeth Davis-Mintun, Indianapolis, Ind., project pending; Genelle Wine, BVS orientation co-ordinator; Becky Snavely, BVS orientation assistant.

Back row: Claus Mendler, Stuttgart, Germany, to Brethren Nutrition Program, Washington, D.C.;

Bastian Matutis, Allmersbach im Tal, Germany, to Gould Farm, Monterey, Mass.; Wanja Frank, Berlin, Germany, to Samaritan House, Atlanta, Ga.; Patrick Meinelt, Burgstadt, Germany, to Community Home Repair Project of Arizona, Tucson.

Not pictured: Tom and Gail Druck, Yorkana Church of the Brethren, York, Pa., to The Meeting Ground, Elkton, Md.

More information on Brethren Volunteer Service can be found at [www.brethrenvolunteerservice.org](http://www.brethrenvolunteerservice.org).



John Minnich

## Inter-Agency Forum discusses decline in church membership

Two major concerns occupied much of the discussion at the Inter-Agency Forum's annual meeting, held Feb. 1-2 in Daytona Beach, Fla.: a proposal from the Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC) to examine the structure and vision of the Church of the Brethren, and the declining membership of the denomination.

Jim Hardenbrook, immediate past moderator of Annual Conference, presided at the meeting that included the Annual Conference officers, a representative of the Council of District Executives, and the executives and board chairs of the five Annual Conference agencies—the Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC), Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Benefit Trust, the General Board, and On Earth Peace.

The concern about the denomination's vision and structure originated in the ABC board, which has made a proposal for Annual Conference to examine the issues "toward a greater sense of unity and a more responsible stewardship of resources," reported Annual Conference secretary Fred Swartz. The IAF referred the matter to the Annual Conference Review and Evaluation Committee for

consideration and recommendations.

The issue of declining membership was raised by Hardenbrook, but Swartz said it was rapidly evident that several of the agencies have had discussion within their boards about the matter. The General Board currently is supporting a survey of factors contributing to the membership and attendance decline, and Brethren Benefit Trust and Bethany both have had discussions relating to the relationship of the decline to the number of constituents available for their program.

"Several other ideas related to the decline were noted, such as cultural and social factors, family patterns, the Brethren style of evangelism, and confusion about Brethren identity," Swartz said. "The agencies agreed to keep this matter on their agendas, to give it prayer, and to continue to look for answers."

The meeting also included an evaluation of the 2005 Annual Conference, especially the participation of the five agencies, and a look ahead to the 2006 Conference, July 1-5 in Des Moines, Iowa. A report was received on a wellness initiative by ABC, Brethren Benefit Trust, and the General Board. ABC will provide overall administration for the program, including the hiring of a full-time wellness director.

## Recent grants from the General Board's Emergency Disaster Fund

- \$40,000 was given in response to a Church World Service (CWS) appeal for a prolonged drought in Kenya affecting an estimated 2.5 million people
- \$35,000 supports a continuing Brethren Disaster Response project for hurricane recovery in Florida
- \$30,000 supports a Brethren Disaster Response project in Mississippi as part of continuing clean-up and rebuilding work following Hurricane Katrina
- \$20,000 supports a CWS appeal for the Liberian civil war that has left 500,000 people displaced
- \$13,800 continues emergency response work after landslides and floods in Guatemala
- \$9,000 covers the balance of expenses for a Brethren Disaster Response project in Alabama following Hurricane Katrina
- \$7,200 covers the balance of expenses for a Brethren Disaster Response project in Louisiana following Hurricane Rita
- \$3,000 continues support of a CWS appeal in the aftermath of Hurricane Rita
- \$3,000 responds to a CWS appeal after wildfires in Texas and Oklahoma
- \$1,800 covers the balance of expenses for Disaster Child Care after Hurricane Wilma

## Recent grants from the General Board's Global Food Crisis Fund

- \$11,800 for the balance of expenses of the Church of the Brethren Community Development Loan Program in the Dominican Republic in 2005

## UPCOMINGEVENTS

**March 31-April 2 Plains Regional Youth Conference**, McPherson (Kan.) College;  
**Roundtable Regional Youth Conference**, Bridgewater (Va.) College

**April 8 Association of Brethren Caregivers' Deacon Ministry Training Event**, Sebring, Fla.

**April 21-22 On Earth Peace board meeting**, New Windsor, Md.

**April 21-23 Connecting Families retreat**, Ligonier, Pa.

**April 22 Association of Brethren Caregivers' Deacon Ministry Training Event**, North Manchester, Ind.

**April 22-23 Brethren Benefit Trust board meeting**, Elgin, Ill.

**April 24-May 5 Brethren Volunteer Service orientation**, New Windsor, Md.

**April 29-30 Midwest Regional Youth Conference**, Manchester College, North Manchester, Ind.

**May 4-6 Fellowship of Brethren Homes Annual Forum**, The Cedars, McPherson, Kan.

**May 4-7 Cross-Cultural Consultation and Celebration**, Lancaster, Pa.

**May 7 National Youth Sunday**

## 'Walk for Jesus' shifts to new phase of journey

"After over four years and 18,000 miles it is time for a change in the way scheduling has been handled," said Don Vermilyea, in an announcement about the Walk Across America. Vermilyea is a Brethren Volunteer Service worker who began a "Walk Across America for Jesus Christ" in February 2002. He started walking in Tucson, Ariz., with the goal of walking to every Church of the Brethren congregation in the US.

As of Feb. 12, Vermilyea began asking congregations to take the initiative in arranging for him to visit, by calling contact people who will be handling the scheduling of his church visits. Vermilyea said he is no longer able to make arrangements for congregational visits from the road, and will no longer take the initiative to call congregations that are on his route in order to arrange the visits.

He also announced a change in the name of the effort: "Chapter One of the 'Walk Across America for Jesus Christ' will end Feb. 12 in Jacksonville, Fla.," he said. "The next day, Chapter Two will begin as the 'Walk for Jesus' from Florida to Michigan." Vermilyea planned to be in Southeastern



Hannah Edwards

District beginning in February, then traverse Kentucky and Indiana on the way to Michigan. For more information about the Walk for Jesus, and for stories and photos from Vermilyea's experiences on the road, visit [www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/Walk.html](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/Walk.html).

### Personnel moves

• **Scott Douglas** has resigned as director of Older Adult Ministries of the Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC), effective in June. He joined ABC in 1998 as director of resources. During his eight years with ABC, Douglas has served as conference coordinator, planning and overseeing five National Older Adult Conferences, four Caring Ministries Assemblies, and three regional deacon ministry training events. He also served as

Don Vermilyea takes a break alongside the road during his walk through Illinois last summer.

program staff for several ABC ministries including Denominational Deacon Ministry, Family Life Ministry, and Lafiya: A Whole-Person Health Ministry.

• **Warren Eshbach** has resigned as dean of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center, a partnership of Bethany Theological Seminary and the districts of Atlantic Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Middle Pennsylvania, Southern Pennsylvania, and Western Pennsylvania. He has filled the part-time position for nine years. He had previously served as a district executive, pastor, and chaplain.

• **Robert Krouse** will complete a two-year term of service as mission coordinator for Nigeria, effective in July. He and his wife, Carol, worked with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) through the Global Mission Partnerships of the Church of the Brethren General Board in the areas of congregational renewal and leadership development, on a scholarship committee, and on the planning group for an AIDS response. The Krouses previously spent two years in mission work in Nigeria from 1985 to 1987.

• **Greg and Karin Davidson Laszakovits** have completed a 2½-year term of service as representatives in Brazil for the Church of the Brethren General Board. They returned to the US in March. While in Brazil, they mentored pastors and shared leadership of the mission effort with Marcos and Suely Inhauser. Greg had previously served as coordinator of the Church of the Brethren Washington Office. Karin was previously employed at the Center for Mental Health in Washington, D.C., as a therapist.

• **Jeff Garber** has resigned as Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) director of Employee Benefit Plans, effective April 3. He has worked with the insurance plans of BBT for more than 10 years. Garber joined BBT in August 1995 as director of Insurance Plans, a position he held until his responsibilities were expanded this January. Also effective April 3, **Randy Yoder** of Huntingdon, Pa., will begin serving as interim director of the Brethren Insurance Plans. Yoder has served as a BBT field staff representative for 15 months, with most of his work focused on the Brethren Medical Plan and the Brethren Foundation. He was previously district executive for Middle Pennsylvania. **Wil Nolen**, BBT president, will serve as director of the Brethren Pension Plan and Church Workers' Assistance Plan until new leadership of these plans is in place.

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**Bridgewater College** (*Bridgewater, Va.*)

Bridgewater received a grant from the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges and the Verizon Foundation to fund a series of classroom technology upgrades. The \$22,500 VFIC/Verizon Technology Grant has allowed the extension of new projection-system technology and the addition of upgraded equipment in classrooms.



**Elizabethtown College** (*Elizabethtown, Pa.*)

The single largest cash contribution in Elizabethtown's history, \$4 million from an anonymous donor, is paving the way for construction of the college's new state-of-the-art Science, Math and Engineering (SME) Center. Groundbreaking for the most intensive portion of the multi-phased project is expected by summer.



**Juniata College** (*Huntingdon, Pa.*)

Magda Sarnowska, a junior from Mazowieckie, Poland, received the first-place award in the annual Juniata College Bailey Oratorical Contest Feb. 21 by convincing the audience that her choice for 2005 Person of the Year, Karol Wojtyla, or Pope John Paul II, was the right one. Sarnowska, who received \$1,000 for her award, and six other contestants were asked to address the topic "Who Would Be Your Choice for Person of the Year 2005 and Why?"



**University of La Verne** (*La Verne, Calif.*)

La Verne's College of Law has been granted provisional accreditation from the American Bar Association, making it the only ABA-accredited law school in the inland southern California area. The Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar recommended provisional approval, and the ABA delegate body voted to make La Verne the nation's 192nd institution to receive accreditation.



**Manchester College** (*North Manchester, Ind.*)

A year ahead of schedule and \$20 million over goal, Manchester announced that it had concluded its "The Next Step!" fundraising campaign. The total was at least \$70 million, which will cover a science center, recital hall, fitness center and sports offices, a new college union, \$8.2 million in scholarships, enhanced technology, parking lots, and more.



**McPherson College** (*McPherson, Kan.*)

Sally Nelson has joined the advancement department as the director of alumni development and events coordination. Nelson, a 1978 graduate of McPherson, is a native Kansan, and grew up in the Abilene area. . . . McPherson's auto restoration program was represented at this year's Barrett-Jackson Auction by a 1949 Chrysler Royal Coupe, which sold Jan. 17 for \$11,000.

**BVS takes part in vocations pilot project**

A pilot project is giving 11 volunteers with Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) a chance to think about their vocational calling. The year-long project of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Theological Exploration of Vocation program is for college-age, full-time volunteers. It is being carried out with five volunteer organizations: BVS, Lutheran Volunteer Corps, Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Mission Year Program, and the Presbyterian Year in Mission.

Each organization has its own facilitator for the project—the BVS facilitator is David Witkovsky, campus minister at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa. James Ellison, a Presbyterian outreach minister working with at-risk children and youth at Mother Jones House in Wheeling, W.Va., is a consultant for the project and has been visiting each of the volunteer organizations to interview participants as well as "alumni" volunteers.

The Fund for Theological Education became interested in volunteer organizations as a source for the pilot project because they represent a cadre of young people involved in the church who may become church leaders in the future, Ellison explained. BVS hopes the project will help volunteers "think more seriously about where God's calling them during this time and afterward," director Dan McFadden said. Many volunteers choose full-time service because of the spirituality component of such work, he added.

The project, which began in late summer 2005, includes three retreats for the 11 BVS participants, led by Witkovsky. Each participating volunteer seeks out a mentor to guide him or her in thinking about call and vocation, and each is asked to participate actively in a local faith community. In March, six volunteers from each organization attended a conference at Princeton (N.J.) University. A grant of \$20,000 has been given to BVS from the Fund for Theological Education to cover expenses for these events, as well as some other work BVS is doing to facilitate conversation with pastors.

Ellison gave examples of weaknesses and strengths the organizations are already discovering through meeting with each other's staff. "The Brethren model really impressed everybody," he said. BVS' three-week orientation is "very in-depth," and it was the only organization to have volunteer placement take place during orientation, he said. BVS also is unique in the volunteers' "strong sense of community and strong identity with the denomination," he added.

Ellison hopes the one-year pilot will expand into a several-year program, and will include more volunteer organizations in the future. The end result of the project will be a report and a design for larger investment into volunteer programs, he said.



**Bits and pieces**

• Plans continue to build for this summer's **National Youth Conference**, July 22-27 in Fort Collins, Colo. About 2,900 people had registered for the event as of March 1. The NYC planners have designated June 25 as a day of prayer for the conference and all the people who will be attending. Details on NYC can be found at [www.nyc2006.org](http://www.nyc2006.org).

**National Youth Conference '06**



# 'Kite Runner' shows road of redemption

**W**hy should you read this novel? After all, it contains scenes of rape, suicide, torture, child abuse, and ethnic cleansing. Its main characters engage in lying, emotional brutality, violence, and betrayal; they are plagued by guilt, shame, and remorse.



KEN GIBBLE

Doesn't sound like something you'd want to spend your time on, does it? On the other hand, all those unpleasant things and more are also found in another book, a book that many of us have been reading all our lives. . . .

Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*, was born in Afghanistan and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1980. He says of his main character: "Amir will be the

first to tell you that he is neither the noblest nor the bravest of men. But three years ago, he did something both noble and brave: He went back to Afghanistan, then ruled by the Taliban, to settle an old score. He went back after a 20-year absence to atone for a sin he had committed as a boy. He went back to rescue a child he had never met and to rescue himself from damnation."

**It is that theme that makes this novel so important for Christians to read, even though the religion of the book's characters is not Christianity but Islam, and the redemption Amir experiences is not described with Christian terminology.**

*The Kite Runner* is a most unlikely book to make it to the *New York Times* Best Sellers List and win several book awards. Unlikely, not because it includes the kind of violence that occurs in war-torn countries, but because its primary theme is that of guilt and redemption. And it is that theme that makes this novel so important for Christians to read, even though the religion of the book's characters is not Christianity but Islam, and the redemption Amir experiences is not described with Christian terminology.

The first third of the book is set in the Afghan city of Kabul. The boy Amir is the son of a wealthy businessman, a Sunni Muslim. Amir and Hassan grow up like brothers, even though Hassan's father is a servant to Amir's father. Hassan is a Sh'ia Muslim and, unlike Amir, is illiterate. Neither boy has a mother, and they spend their days roaming the streets of Kabul together and engaging in kite-flying contests. But Amir continually uses his superior position to taunt and demean Hassan, and one day hides in fear as Hassan is beaten mercilessly

by bullies. Driven by guilt over his failure and by a desperate desire to win his father's approval, Amir accuses Hassan of theft, an accusation which results in Hassan and his father leaving the household in disgrace.

The shame of this betrayal pursues Amir into adulthood and follows him to California, where he and his father relocated after the Russian army invaded Afghanistan. Invited to go back to his country of birth by a phone call from Rahim Khan, an old family friend, Amir decides to return after hearing Khan's closing words: "There is a way to be good again."

The difficult road Amir must take to fulfill that promise makes for a riveting and heart-wrenching narrative. David's prayers in Psalm 15: "Remember not the sins of my youth" and "Do not let me be put to shame" came to my mind as I read this powerful story. And, of course, David's prayers are yours and mine as well, as we look at our lives with relentless honesty and see there things that make us cringe. Shame is more than embarrassment. Embarrassment says, "I did something foolish." Shame says, "I'm a damned fool."

It is that kind of damnation Amir must deal with as he returns to Afghanistan and realizes that Rahim Khan has summoned him "to atone not just for my sins but for [my father's] sins, too." In a letter to Amir, Khan writes: "True redemption is . . . when guilt leads to good."

As Christians we embrace the good news of God's grace. God freely, generously loves us without condition. In Christ we see that love most clearly. But once we have received that gift of love, we dare not simply continue on the path of self-centeredness.

*The Kite Runner* shows us a man who leaves that path to encounter his past and to make a hope-filled investment in the future. As we journey with him, we catch glimpses of a place and a culture much different from our own. But, as one reviewer has put it, this story requires no atlas or translation to engage and enlighten us.

And, I would add, to inspire us. 

Ken Gibble is interim pastor of Glade Valley Church of the Brethren in Walkersville, Md. He lives in Greencastle, Pa.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini is published by Riverhead Books, New York, 2003. It is a 400-page paperback and has a list price of \$14. It can be ordered through Brethren Press, 800-441-3712.

## Don't discredit Genesis

In response to the Reflections article by Christy Waltersdorff in the January 2006 MESSENGER: If you get Genesis wrong, you will get much of the Bible wrong. Moses wrote Genesis. The Jews protected the writings for thousands of years. Ask them who wrote it. Jesus and the apostles believed in the creation story and Adam and Eve. There is one creation story, but it is told twice with added details.

I would tell anyone taking this course not to accept modern criticism of the Bible. The criticism is deeply flawed. The reason people want to discredit Genesis and other books of the Bible is so that they can impose any viewpoint they want to promote whatever agenda they have. I choose to believe God. I think you will find most people will believe God more than any human-designed course. I would suggest the "Answers in Genesis" website for anyone wanting help in a Bible-based study of Genesis.

Larry Lutz  
Vandalia, Ohio

## March issue was 'meaty'

Thanks for an especially informative and inspiring March issue! It is a rich resource for any small discussion group that wants to add "content" to their important care-and-share discussions.

I generally read MESSENGER from back to front—in part as I approach age 80, to get to the list of deaths faster, looking for new faces in the "cloud of witnesses" in the heavenly olympiad.

But this time I read from front to back—greeted by the curriculum ad inside the

front cover. Lo and behold, it's called "Gather 'ROUND"! I mused, since a current TV commercial in our part of the country uses "Gather Round the Good Stuff" as their "come-on" for superior pizza: Who sensed the "sign of the times" first?

The ensuing news reports and "meaty" articles proved satisfying, and I got to the poetry page. Since I did a survey of churches' love feast practices several years ago and discovered that relatively few bakers of communion bread engage in any kind of special devotional acts as part of the process, I was attracted to

## Pontius' Puddle



## Messenger on Tape

MESSENGER is available on audio tape for persons with visual impairments. Each double-cassette issue contains all articles, letters and editorials. Volunteers of the Church and Persons with Disabilities Network, a ministry of ABC, provide this service.

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## Preparing Sunday Dinner A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching

“A feast for the soul. June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough give particular attention to symbols, rituals, and various ways of experiencing worship across congregational contexts. This book will be helpful to students, congregations, and church leaders interested in developing collaborative and creative approaches to worship design.”—*Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, Bethany Theological Seminary*

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## Priority Parenting Reclaiming Your Home for Heaven's Sake

“Steve Ganger focuses on key areas that make a difference in parenting.”

—*Sibyl Towner, Director of Spiritual Mentoring, Willow Creek Community Church*

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Paula Bowser's contribution, a prayer worthy of inclusion in every communion baker's resource bank.

Finally, the “tale of two sites” editorial leaves me “standing on tiptoe” awaiting the March report on the future use of Elgin and New Windsor church-owned facilities. Thanks for the thoughtful review of issues and opportunities.

**Norman L. Harsh**  
Roanoke, Va.

## Focus on pleasing the Maker

First of all, congratulations on trying to cover so many debatable questions in our churches today. How to meet the needs of so diverse a group in an ever-deteriorating society is certainly a formidable task.

Two letters to the editor in the January issue of the MESSENGER caught my attention. Michael Hoshour's “How the world sees us” and Walter McSherry's “Keep Christ in dates” touched on subjects that bother many of us who follow the directions our churches and its subsidiaries are going.

No one can please everyone. But the one we so-called Christians should be trying to please is the Maker of us all. Martin G. Brumbaugh, in a bicentennial address, says a church is weak or strong in proportion to the individuals trained and skillful in defending the faith—not caring about tracing the history back to the 12, but to the leader of the 12.

In his comments, Hoshour is concerned about how the present-day world sees us Brethren. Why are we failing to grow as a denomination, even losing people? Many of us are concerned about this trend. His contention is that one of the reasons is the worldly direction we're going. Many of us agree with him.

In your response to McSherry's defense of using BC and AD in dealing with timeframes, you “passed the buck.” Most current magazines set guidelines. If authors

*The opinions expressed in “Letters” are not necessarily those of MESSENGER. Readers should receive them in the same way as when differing views are expressed in face-to-face conversation.*

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

*Send letters to MESSENGER, Attn: Letters, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or [messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org). Please include hometown and phone number.*

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fail to meet these guidelines, authors do not get published in that magazine.

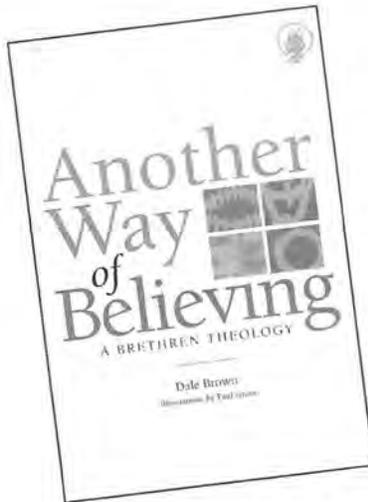
It is the opinion of this writer that church publications should do the same. And as Brumbaugh stated, the goals should be to educate, inform, and lead by trying to please, not everyone, but the Master whose life we claim to be emulating.

**Virgie M. McIntyre**  
Columbus, N.C.

### Liberal and proud of it

A disclaimer: I am no longer a member of the Church of the Brethren—in fact, I'm an atheist—so perhaps my opinion should count for nothing in a debate about the direction of the church. Nevertheless, I still read MESSENGER magazine, and feel moved to respond to Michael Hoshour's letter in the January 2006 issue, "Liberal views are hurting the church."

The Church of the Brethren has historically stood for radical positions, like pacifism and the separation of church and state. Sadly, these positions are again controversial ones in contemporary America, and, yes, they may risk alienating conservatives.



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But people whose ancestors fearlessly faced being burned at the stake, drowned in barrels, and hung in cages on the spires of cathedrals to die for their beliefs shouldn't be daunted from those same beliefs by fear of political unpopularity or declining membership.

Jesus Christ wasn't especially concerned with lowering property taxes. He said not one word about abortion. He said, "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." He told you to "sell your belongings and give your money to the poor." These are not ambiguous statements.

I left the church because I no longer believed in God, not because I disagreed with its moral teachings. I'm proud to have been brought up in the

Church of the Brethren and still hold to many of the values it taught me. Because of that upbringing I believe in speaking the truth and opposing illegitimate authority and siding with the powerless against the powerful. I believe that the wealthy should care for the poor. I believe that our invasion of Iraq—which by President Bush's conservative estimate has killed at least 10 times as many people as 9/11—is not just "unlawful and immoral" but a monstrous and irredeemable evil. The Church of the Brethren made me a liberal, and I'll take this opportunity to thank you for it.

**Tim Kreider**  
Charlestown, Md.

## CLASSIFIED ADS

**Come Gather 'Round!** Find out about the new Sunday school curriculum, *Gather 'Round: Hearing & Sharing God's Good News*, coming soon. *Gather 'Round* includes materials for preschool through high school, as well as year-round multi-age resources and a class for parents and caregivers. All groups study the same Bible text at the same time. Bible outlines, free sample sessions, and more at [www.gatherround.org](http://www.gatherround.org).

**Join the MYW Tour to the lands down under, Australia & New Zealand in Springtime, October 17-November 11.** Begin with the Great Barrier Reef. Tour a ranch and join the rancher for lunch. Sydney's Opera House and harbor, and culture of Melbourne will attract you. On NZ South Island, see rolling pasture land, millions of sheep and working dogs. Cruise Milford Sound and see the Southern Alps. The North Island introduces the ancient Maori culture and modern Auckland, the city of sails. Itineraries available: Box 425, Landisville, PA 17538; phone: 800-296-1991; e-mail: [MYW1525@aol.com](mailto:MYW1525@aol.com)

**VACATION IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:** Have you thought of attending a Church of the Brethren family camp for a week or part of the week in the High Sierra Mountains? Camp Peaceful Pines is offering two Family Camps, June 16-23 and July 21-28. Camp Peaceful Pines is located in the Sierra Mountains, east of Sonora, CA, north of Yosemite National Park, east of San Francisco, and south of Lake Tahoe. For more information contact the Pacific Southwest District website: [www.pswdcob.org](http://www.pswdcob.org) and seek out the camp link, or the camp registrar by e-mail: [cppregistrar@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cppregistrar@sbcglobal.net), or by phone: 209-523-9490.

**Apostle, District of Illinois and Wisconsin** The New Church Development Board, District of Illinois and Wisconsin, seeks an apostle to travel among the church planters and mission points of the district to encourage them in their work and to assist in the teaching of those new to the faith. The apostle will also interpret the work of the board to the existing churches and call out new church planters. Preferred candidates will have a master of divinity degree or equivalent experience and at least one year of association with the contemporary church planting movement in the Church of the Brethren. This is a half-time position. Send letter of application and current resumé, or requests for more information, to: Dennis E Metzger, Chair, New Church Development Board, 1523 E. Walnut St., Chatham, IL 62629 217-483-4592 [d-v.metzger@att.net](mailto:d-v.metzger@att.net).

**Mennonite Disaster Service Open Positions:** MDS is expanding its bi-national staff as a result of the increased need following the Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005. MDS will interview and hire qualified candidates to head the following areas, each reporting directly to the Executive Director:

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## New Members

**Frederick, Md.:** Patricia Wertz, Laurie Wiles, Sandy Moreland, Francis Dennis, Elizabeth Kurtz, Donald Stagers, Sr., Jack O'Dell, Bunny O'Dell, Laura Fitzgibbon, Joe Fitzgibbon, Kim Bream, Kevin Bream, Dec Shoemaker, Jackie Callis, Larry Lowe, Kim Branson, Dennis Branson, Sherrie Angleberger  
**Friendship, Linthicum Heights, Md.:** Gary Varner, Jeanne Varner

**Garden City, Kan.:** John Elder, Michele Elder, Mike Dougherty, Gene Thompson, Kay Thompson

**Hollidaysburg, Pa.:** Sean Cramer, Barbara Sheppard, Kenneth Sheppard, Brian Bert, Ethan Eldred, Emmett Eldred, Gabriel Imler, Loren Hershberger, Ron Byrnes

**Lincolnshire, Fort Wayne, Ind.:** Kristen Bowley, Tammy Boothby, Doreen Brattain, Betty Dawson, Tom Dawson, Henry Haus, Kathy Haus, Rachel Haus, Jerry Wood, Jan Wood

**Marsh Creek, Gettysburg, Pa.:** Trish Neth, Jennifer Norman, John Skiles, Linda Skiles

**McPherson, Kan.:** Elly Ullom  
**Miami, First, Miami, Fla.:** Kevin Ford, Ray Hileman, Cindy Hileman, Ilexene Alphonse, Gladys Sullivan

**Middle Creek, Lititz, Pa.:** Jeremy Swiney, Tommy Thompson, Allison Putt, Hope Sholly, Natalie Beckman, Michael Beckman, Michelle Hess, Mitchell Saylor, Nicole Saylor, Richard McCune, Grace McCune, Virginia McCune, James Tome, Anna Hahn, Harvey Hahn

**Midway, Lebanon, Pa.:** Joshua Kirkwood, Austin Kirkwood, Brooke Frazier, Megan Arnold, Charles Ilyes, Jane Ilyes, Elizabeth Ilyes, Colton Wasson, Steven Patches, Chucky Yost, Alexis Loy, Drew Haller, Jennifer Haller Schell, John Devine, Betty Devine, Gregory Armstrong, Michael Armstrong, Eric Hoover, Vickie Hoover, James McKinney, Sr., James McKinney, III, Joshua McKinney, Clifford Bennetch, Karen Balsbaugh, Ruthanna Eichelberger, Jason Wolfe, Erin Wolfe, Todd Balsbaugh, Nicole Balsbaugh, Lynn Bressler, George Heisey, Delores Heisey, Alfred Donmoyer

**Mohican, West Salem, Ohio:** Kristen Archibald  
**Moorefield, W.Va.:** Richard Baker  
**Mount Bethel, Dayton, Va.:** James Andes, Andrew Raines, Justin Miller, Kacey Miller, Lauren Miller, Connie Miller, Ilda Robinson, Amy Shipe, Lisa Sirico, Whitney Showalter, Jordan Burkholder, Kaitlyn Bowman

**Nappanee, Ind.:** Courtney Simpson, Kinsey Streib, Alli Heeter, Cameron Spiteals, Wes Kirkwood

**Polo, Ill.:** Keith Nesemeier  
**Potsdam, Ohio:** Billie Birt, Robert Birt, Kenny Buckingham, Alex Cota, Eulalia Dennis, Bethanie Gambill, Rachel Heck, Jacklyn Seel, Jaime Seel, Jim Vallieu, Carolyn Vallieu, Dee Earle, Madison Dunley, Linda Francis, Dale Francis

**Pulaski, Va.:** Patricia Graham, Wayne Graham, Gale Grantham, Linda Grantham

**Troutville, Va.:** Burnart Hall, III  
**Troy, Ohio:** Zane Fessler, Timothy White

**Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.:** Betty Ward, Rachel Pippenger, Zach Holdeman, Tori Saucedo, Cassy Searer, Marissa Stevens, Trent Saucedo

**Uniontown, Pa.:** Gregg Wilson, Wilma Wilson

## Wedding Anniversaries

**Baker, John and Barbara, Cerro Gordo, Ill., 50**

**Boltz, Arthur and Marian, Jonestown, Pa., 55**

**Bowman, Wilbur and Evelyn, Polo, Ill., 55**

**Brode, Robert and Marian, Harrisburg, Pa., 50**

**Duvall, Roger and Mamie, Everett, Pa., 50**

**Evans, Paul and Ruth, Beaver, Iowa, 50**

**Fike, Herschel and Shirley, Rocky Mount, Va., 50**

**Fisher, Russell and Frances, Rocky Mount, Va., 65**

**Fogelsanger, Jay and Doris, Hanover, Pa., 50**

**Imler, John and Carolyn, Everett, Pa., 50**

**Keeling, John M. and Doris, Roanoke, Va., 60**

**Leister, Roy and Shirley, Hollidaysburg, Pa., 50**

**Molison, Elvin and Irene, Hanover, Pa., 50**

**Over, Alton and Betty, Woodbury, Pa., 60**

**Patches, LeRoy and Caroline, Lebanon, Pa., 55**

**Sheets, Vernon and MaryLou, Nappanee, Ind., 50**

**Sink, Curtis and Elene, Rocky Mount, Va., 65**

**Slothour, Robert and Betty, Hanover, Pa., 55**

**Wilson, Harold and Jane, Johnstown, Pa., 60**

## Deaths

**Baker, Eva C., 76, Boonsboro, Md., Jan. 21**

**Baldwin, Charles L., 87, Winona Lake, Ind., Jan. 30**

**Barbe, Hansel Claudell, 75, Old Fields, W.Va., Jan. 4**

**Berkey, Alice, 94, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Jan. 9**

**Boots, Hilda, 97, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 6**

**Bowman, Jacob, 88, Bridgewater, Va., Sept. 22**

**Bowman, Timothy, 23, Polo, Ill., Nov. 24**

**Brilhart, Leonard, 88, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 26**

**Bronell-Blough, Kathy, 51, Appleton, Wis., Dec. 27**

**Brown, Charlie, 58, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Oct. 20**

**Brunner, Janet A., 55, York County, Pa., Dec. 29**

**Buckell, John B., 74, Bluffton, Ohio, Jan. 29**

**Cadd, Robert Eugene, 83, Roanoke, Va., Jan. 7**

**Carter, Conley, 94, Bourbon, Ind., Dec. 15**

**Christ, Edith, 98, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 28**

**Cleveland, Helen, 83, Nappanee, Ind., Oct. 26**

**Croy, Phyllis, 78, Wakarusa, Ind., Jan. 9**

**Dilling, Kenneth G., 75, Carmel, Ind., Oct. 14**

**Dine, Mary Gauch, 95, New Paris, Ohio, Nov. 3**

**Duvall, Roger and Mamie, Everett, Pa., 50**

**Erickson, Lori, 38, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Jan. 25**

**Eshelman, Jeannette, 80, Roaring Spring, Pa., Jan. 20**

**Fifer, Helen, 95, Wyoming, Del., Dec. 31**

**Frenger, Dorothy, 95, Nappanee, Ind., June 12**

**Fuhrman, Burnell K., 82, New Oxford, Pa., Jan. 21**

**Garber, Esther Pence, 95, Neffsville, Pa., Dec. 11**

**Garland, Doris, 68, Elizabethtown, Pa., Nov. 25**

**Gianakos, Jim, 68, Johnstown, Pa., Dec. 22**

**Glunt, Gladys, 88, Roaring Spring, Pa., Jan. 7**

**Groff, Forrest, 91, Springfield, Ore., Dec. 31**

**Harkness, Marie, 101, Hutchinson, Kan., Dec. 30**

**Harsbarger, Dorothy A., 90, Bartonville, Ill., Jan. 2**

**Herr, Melva, 86, Windber, Pa., Jan. 14**

**Hopple, Jack K., 75, Lebanon, Pa., Jan. 16**

**Imler, John and Carolyn, Everett, Pa., 50**

**Johnson, Josephine, 82, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 17**

**Johnson, Olah M., 94, Millbury,**

**Ohio, Feb. 7**

**Jones, Edgar Earl, 90, Boonsboro, Md., Dec. 15**

**Joseph, Leona M., 90, Lake Charles, La., May 26, 2005**

**Judy, Lelia, 106, Greenwood, Del., Dec. 7**

**Kesler, Elsie May, 86, Modesto, Calif., Jan. 15**

**Kieffaber, Dean, 61, Glendora, Calif., Feb. 3**

**Knox, Margarette, 78, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Jan. 16**

**Koontz, Glenn H., 97, Martinsburg, Pa., Dec. 31**

**Loucks, Marilyn, 69, New Paris, Ind., May 27**

**Maphis, Mary, 83, Springfield, Ohio, Jan. 5**

**Marshall, Robert E., 64, Everett, Pa., Nov. 23**

**Minnix, Robert Jacob, 86, Roanoke, La., Oct. 24**

**Mosholder, Frank, 101, Hollsopple, Pa., Dec. 14**

**Palmer, Paul W., 78, Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 14**

**Personette, Donald Grant, 86, Mount Morris, Ill., Jan. 14**

**Poffenberger, Mary I. Emrick, 101, Eldorado, Ohio, Jan. 4**

**Rush, J. Deane, 86, Friendsville, Md., Dec. 15**

**Schmidt, Fern, 77, Polo, Ill., Nov. 7**

**Shanck, Esther Rinehart, 93, Potsdam, Ohio, Jan. 23**

**Shank, Harry, 89, Bridgewater, Va., Dec. 19**

**Shencfelt, LaVon, 84, Polo, Ill., Dec. 21**

**Smeltzer, Lynn, 63, Nappanee, Ind., Oct. 26**

**Smith, Ida Mae, 91, Decatur, Ill., Jan. 15**

**Snoke, Cora M., 95, East Peoria, Ill., Sept. 30**

**Snyder, Jesse, 87, Carlisle, Pa., Jan. 25**

**Stauffer, Dorothy, 88, Polo, Ill., Oct. 20**

**Stern, Patricia L. Bittinger, 75, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 5**

**Strite, Dorothy M., 79, Mount Morris, Ill., Jan. 30**

**Sumey B. Clyde, 97, Uniontown, Pa., Jan. 23**

**Sutter, Elna, 85, Yuba City, Calif., Dec. 17**

**Thompson, Chester, 91, Raytown, Mo., Jan. 5**

**Van Sickle, Denise, 44, Uniontown, Pa., Nov. 1**

**Varner, Robert, 64, Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 10**

**Wagner, Florence, 92, McPherson, Kan., Dec. 17**

**Welshimer, William J., 91, La Verne, Calif., Nov. 15**

**White, Elsie, 91, La Verne, Calif., Dec. 4**

## Licensings

**Elza, Roger Lee, W. Marva Dist. (Glady, W.Va.), Jan. 15**

**Hess, Michael, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Chiques, Manheim, Pa.), Oct. 9**

**Riffle, Bruce E., W. Marva Dist.**

**(Bowden Family Worship Center, Bowden, W.Va.), Jan. 15**

**Sites, Timothy, Shen. Dist. (Flat Rock, New Market, Va.), Sept. 1**

**Tabb, Nancy K., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Mountain View, Bunker Hill, W.Va.), Feb. 5**

## Ordinations

**Engle, Keith S., S. Pa. Dist. (Yorkana, York, Pa.), June 26**

**Gerber, Linda Kay, S. Pa. Dist. (Black Rock, Glenville, Pa.), June 26**

**Krape, Thomas M., S. Pa. Dist. (Yorkana, York, Pa.), June 26**

## Placements

**Banaszak, Linda Sue, associate pastor, Clover Creek, Fredericksburg, Pa., Jan. 1**

**Collins, John W., from pastor, Pulaski, Va., to pastor, Rocky Mount, Va., Feb. 1**

**Elmore, Kendal W., from pastor, Pittsburgh, Pa., to pastor, Heatherdowns, Toledo, Ohio, Jan. 15**

**Gerber, Linda Kay, chaplain, AseraCare, York, Pa., Jan. 23**

**Hensley, Dava Cruise, pastor, Roanoke, First, Roanoke, Va., Feb. 1**

**Kuryn, Carolyn M., minister of visitation, East Nimishillen, North Canton, Ohio, Jan. 1**

**Peel, Cynthia Ann, pastor, Woodworth, Youngstown, Ohio, Feb. 15**

**Quintanilla, Rene, pastor, Latino Community Brethren, Fresno, Calif., Jan. 15**

**Richie, Daryl, pastor, Friends Run and Smith Creek, Franklin, W.Va., Jan. 15**

**Sites, Timothy, assistant pastor, Flat Rock, New Market, Va., Sept. 1**

**Smith, Justin Trent, pastor, Beaver Creek, Ohio, Feb. 2**

**Stouffer, Clarence D., pastor, Myersville, Md., Feb. 1**

**Whitacre, Christopher J., chaplain, The Cedars, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 1**

**Williams, E. Thomas, from pastor, Knights Chapel, Barboursville, Va., to pastor, Charlottesville, Va., Jan. 1**

**Yowell, Richard H., from interim to pastor, Cedar Run, Broadway, Va., Jan. 1**

# Los arcos de oro

**Ronald McDonald speaks fluent Spanish. It's true—I've heard him!**

I was in downtown Montevideo, Uruguay, in February, en route to the World Council of Churches 9th Assembly in far southern Brazil. After four days of using my limited Spanish to get around, I was ready for an easy meal.

There was a McDonald's just down the street and around the corner from my small hotel. I usually try to avoid American fast-food joints overseas in favor of local color, but at this point it felt good to just go in somewhere, point at a picture and say, "Megacombo seis, por favor."



WALT WILTSCHKEK  
MESSENGER Editor

Food in hand, I went looking for a table. The few tables downstairs were full, but steps led to an upstairs dining room. As I emerged on the upper level, I found myself in a sea of happy children. I waded through

them to the back of the room, where I located a just-vacated table.

Up front—the source of the kids' glee—was Ronald himself, chatting away in Spanish. (Ronald also did a mean disco dance and the macarena later in the show.) Here, in another hemisphere some 5,000 miles from home, a familiar American icon had found its home in a different culture.

Many would say that's not necessarily a good thing. Studies of globalization have noted with concern the way that Western culture is overrunning other parts of the world. From a business perspective, though, you have to give McDonald's and its kin credit. They have figured out how to take their product or message and infuse it worldwide. They have learned how to speak the local language.

At the World Council of Churches Assembly, it was readily apparent that Christianity is global, too. Africans and Latin Americans joined in large numbers with Europeans, North Americans, and other Northern Hemisphere residents. Six languages were part of the plenary hall proceedings. Worship was filled with songs that had African and Latin American flavors.

For anyone who has been following statistics, this shouldn't come as a surprise. Christianity has been

booming in the southern half of the world. No longer can those of us in the so-called "first world" North feel that we are in the driver's seat of religion. Even in the Church of the Brethren, the church in Nigeria is now far larger than the one in the US. It's growing while we are in decline.

As Hugh McCullum—a veteran religion journalist who spent many years in Africa—said at a conference a few years ago, "The balance has shifted, and it's not going to shift back." He said the global South had a "very different expression of Christianity" that is typically very orthodox and traditional. He termed it a new Reformation, even as much of the North trends more secular.

The differences are significant enough, he said, that it "poses problems for any church that aspires to a global identity." Some of that has already been seen in recent divisions over issues in the Anglican/Episcopal church, and to lesser degrees in other denominations. To avoid an irreparable rift, McCullum suggested, the North will need to find a way to have a "Christian expression that is global."

While McDonald's success is mostly dependent on

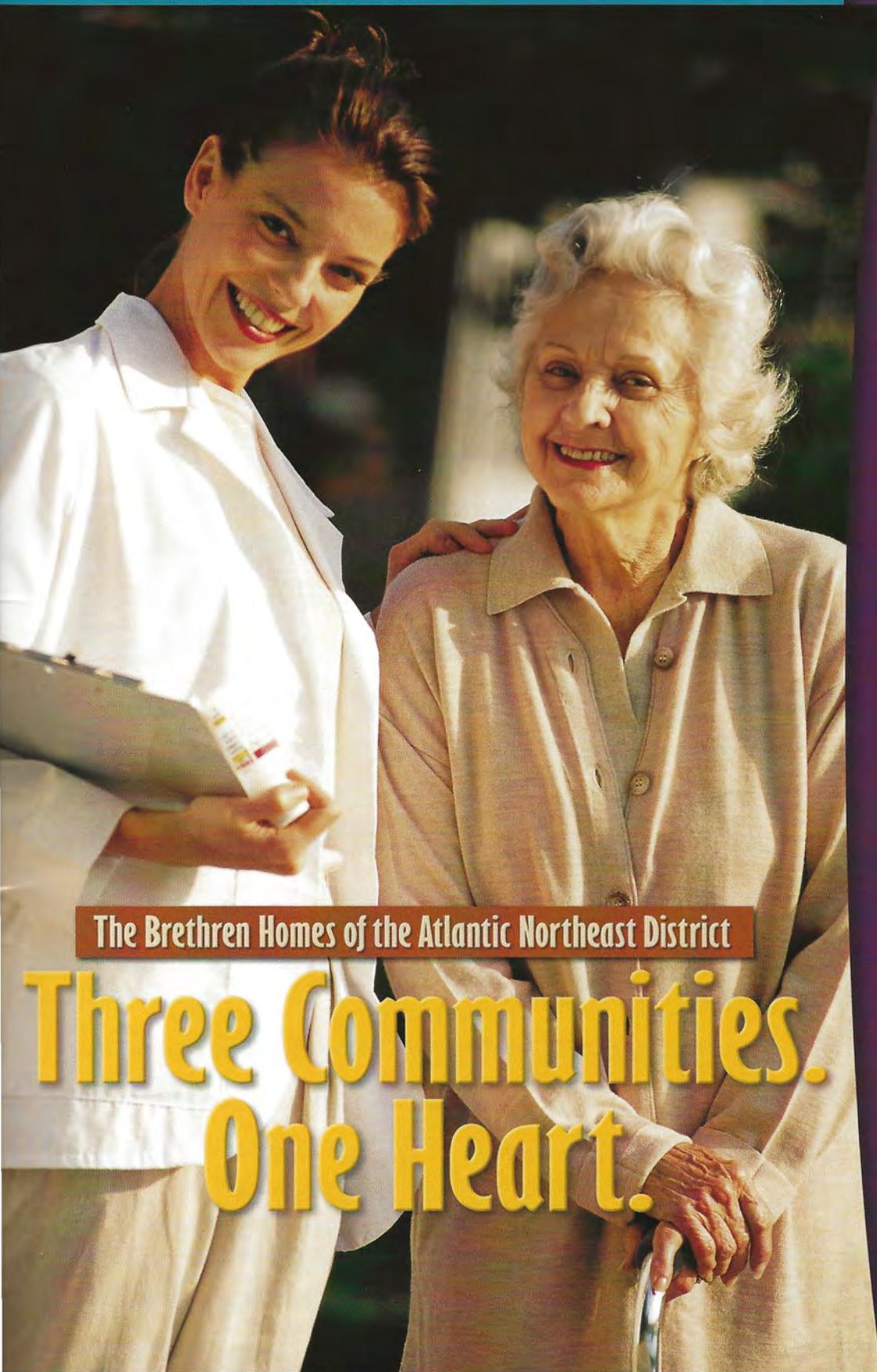
**We may find new rustlings of the Holy Spirit if we let ourselves learn from the richness of these other expressions of our faith. This can apply within our borders, as well as beyond.**

uniformity, creating near-identical franchises around the globe, faith is flavored by diversity. Jesus Christ remains at the center, but each culture brings its own culture, flavors, and understandings to its expression of Christianity. We can't expect to create carbon copies of US church. What works for Big Macs doesn't work for Alexander Mack.

Brethren have gone into many parts of the world to share the gospel—Nigeria, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Sudan, India, Haiti, and more—but it's time that we let the rest of the world speak to us, too. We may find new rustlings of the Holy Spirit if we let ourselves learn from the richness of these other expressions of our faith. This can apply within our borders, as well as beyond, as the church reaches out to encompass cross-cultural and intercultural ministries in the US.

If Ronald McDonald can learn Spanish, and a host of other languages, the church can, too. And may we not just speak in the words of those cultures, but also let their words speak to us.—Ed.

**COMING NEXT MONTH:** How Brethren and Mennonites compare, World Council of Churches Assembly report, Vital Pastors, a look at Esther, movie review, and more.



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- Sunday ..... Moderator, Ronald Beachley  
*District Executive of Western Pennsylvania*
- Monday ..... Myrna Long Wheeler  
*Chaplain of Brethren Hillcrest Homes*
- Tuesday ..... Dennis Webb  
*Pastor of Naperville Church of the Brethren*
- Wednesday ..... Brian Maguire  
*Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Xenia, Ohio*

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### MISSION STATEMENT

Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.

I Timothy 4:6-8

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