

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

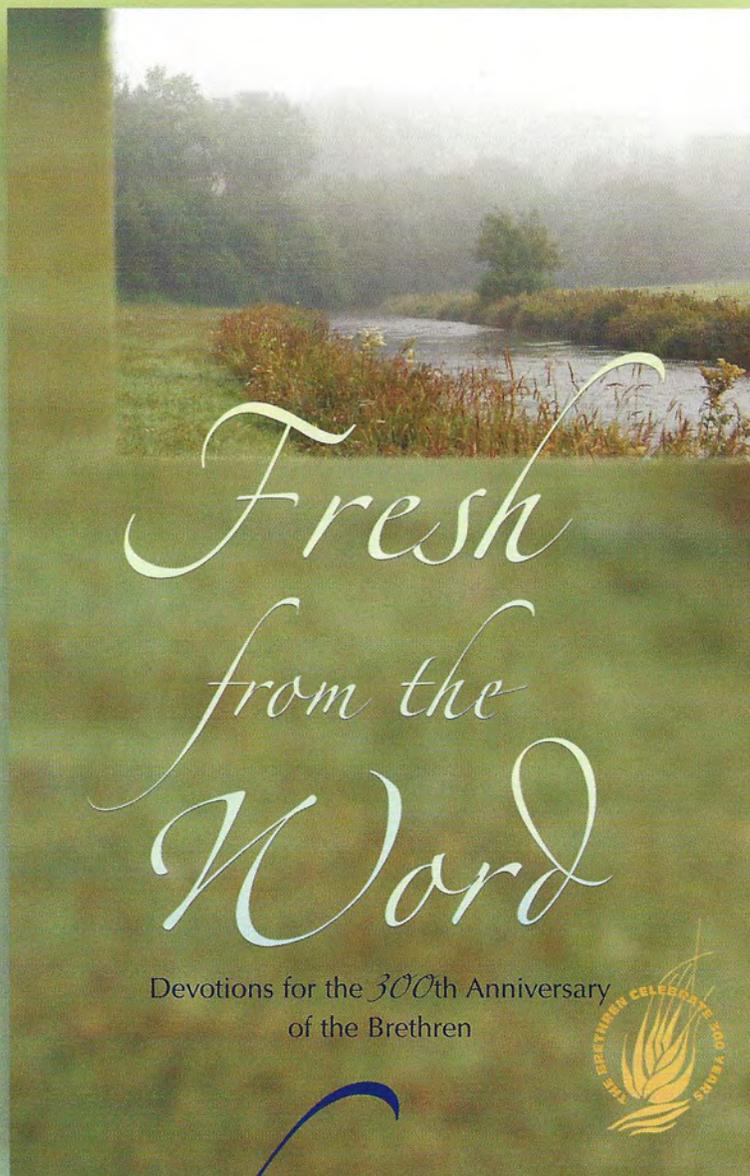
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MESSENGER

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ONTHECOVER

You've seen the statistics. In the Church of the Brethren and most other "mainline" denominations, membership is declining and congregations are graying. But some congregations are bucking the trends. A cluster of stories this month lifts up ideas and examples of new life springing up within congregational settings.

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Almost everyone thinks about worship as a place for hospitality and evangelism to happen in a congregation, but what about the Christian education program? And are those who work with that area given the training they need to make it happen?

12 Making change: Congregations can chart a new course

"Change is difficult whether it's needed in our personal life or in our church," Congregational Life Team member Jeff Glass writes. A congregation faces many dynamics when it looks to shift direction, but there are tools available to help.

14 Seeking God's 'New Harvest'

Like many rural congregations, the Church of the Brethren in Lindsay, Calif., found itself struggling and declining. But the congregation has found new life within—primarily by looking beyond its walls.

16 Fighting geriatrophy

Many of our congregations are aging. That's no secret. But new life is possible for congregations that face their circumstances positively and creatively.

18 Lamentations: Mourning and confession

Lamentations is a book written in a unique literary style, and one that is difficult for readers to wrestle with today. It is a plaintive cry by a people who feel abandoned by God.

The plight of Sunday school in many North American congregations has been a topic of considerable discussion in certain quarters, and it's easy to identify some of the reasons for the decline: Fewer children, as family size shrinks and congregations go gray. Fewer adults experienced in and dedicated to Christian education. Less concern for biblical literacy. More competition for church members' time and attention, as sports, travel, and other activities take over the once-central place of the church. Greater demand for entertainment and variety in all phases of life, including Sunday mornings.

In the dozen years between the 1994 launch of the Jubilee curriculum and the recent launch of Gather 'Round, membership in the Church of the Brethren declined by 10.6 percent, a cheerless statistic that we are inclined to ignore, hoping it will go away.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

But the graph for church membership is a gentle slope compared to average Sunday school attendance, which during that same period plummeted 38 percent.

Does this really matter? Veteran researcher Steve Clapp, who has studied congregations in the Church of the Brethren and many other denominations, might say yes. He identifies a correlation between growing congregations and those that emphasize Christian education (see his article on p. 8).

This isn't surprising, since Christian education is all about growth. Sunday school isn't about pouring information into children. It's also not about entertaining them for an hour. It's about helping them learn to follow Jesus. It's about helping them know and love God, interpret the word, belong to the community, and express their faith in a life of service and witness. It's about growing up in faith, a journey that takes a lifetime.

The curriculum is the whole congregation, not just the books you buy from your denominational publisher. Everything you say, and do, and are is forming the people in your pews, both young and old.

Could a big emphasis on Sunday school turn the church membership graph on its side? Who knows? The great thing about trying: We'd learn a lot along the way.

Wendy McFadden

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Faith amid the flames

Fire strikes Northern Ohio church on Christmas Eve

Northern Ohio District has been spending a lot of time in prayer lately for a congregation that has seen more than its share of setbacks.

The latest blow to Black River Church of the Brethren (Spencer, Ohio) came on Christmas Eve, when a fire burned the church building to the ground just hours after the Christmas Eve service. Preliminary findings led investigators to believe it was an electrical fire. All that was left standing was an entrance area and part of two walls.

In an e-mail to the district, executive minister John Ballinger noted that the congregation had just completed significant repairs to its building after a 2001 tornado caused roof and water damage. Black River, located about 40 miles southwest of Cleveland, celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2005.

"It was a difficult thing to see," pastor Mark Teal told *The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer*. "But we believe all things work together for good for those who love God. Just like last time, God will bless us and make us stronger."

Teal spent Christmas Day 2006 calling members of his congregation and watching the aftermath of the blaze. Nearby Chatham Community Church offered use of its facility until

Black River can construct a new building. The church, which has about 80 members, was insured, but the amount will not be sufficient to cover fully the construction of a new building.

Ballinger put out a request to the district asking for monetary donations of "love offerings" to assist the congregation. Eventually, some volunteer labor will also be useful as the rebuilding process begins. Support has poured in from the community and district, and General Board staff member Brad Bohrer—who recently completed a pastorate in northeast Ohio—made a visit.

Black River is "a vibrant, very healthy congregation," Ballinger said. "They have a very good spirit about them. They are going to recover."

And amid the struggle, Teal said his faith, and the congregation's, remains strong.

"We're looking ahead to rebuild," Teal said in an interview with the Church of the Brethren news service, adding, "The real church is the people. . . . I've felt encouraged that God is going to do something bigger and better."

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and Walt Wiltschek contributed to this article.



The ruins of the Black River Church of the Brethren in Spencer, Ohio, stand on Christmas Day following a Christmas Eve fire.

Northeast General Board mission workers Brandy and Paul Liepelt visited churches and camps in Middle Pennsylvania in January to share about their work at Kulp Bible College in Nigeria. . . . Camp Mardela (Denton, Md.) is renovating its Krabill Hall kitchen and putting on an addition to increase its pantry and storage areas. . . . Shepherd's Spring (Sharpsburg, Md.) has entered a partnership agreement with Heifer International to create a Global Village Learning Center on its property.

Southeast The Church of the Brethren in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, in December began a radio program, "30 Minutes with Our Master," on Tuesday evenings. Jose Calleja Otero is hosting the program. . . . Atlantic Southeast district conference delegates voted to close the Brandon (Fla.) Good Samaritan congregation. . . . Camp Bethel was among dozens of "green" vendors and information booths at the 7th Annual Green Living and Energy Expo in Roanoke, Va., Dec. 1-2.

Midwest Bremen (Ind.) Church of the Brethren held a homecoming celebration Nov. 12, featuring a message by former pastor Bob Dell. About 140 people attended. . . . Lynda Lubbs-DeVore began in December as "apostle" for Illinois/Wisconsin District. The new position will lead church planting efforts. . . . Nathan Polzin is the lead minister for a new church plant in Michigan's Saginaw Valley.

Ozarks/Plains Becky Baile Crouse has been called as camp manager for Missouri/Arkansas' Hammond's Mills Camp program. . . . The Ottumwa (Iowa) congregation recently raised \$300 for district ministries with a hog roast; they are challenging other district congregations to develop creative fundraisers. . . . Sixteen congregations, representing about 55 percent of Western Plains' worship attendance, have now covenanted to be part of the district's congregational transformation process.

West Portland (Ore.) Peace Church of the Brethren is looking at expanding the half-hour community TV program it began in 2005 by offering a Brethren video program to other interested congregations. . . . The Tucson (Ariz.) congregation buried two time capsules as part of its 50th anniversary celebration on Oct. 8. A 12-year-old member, Sam Swain, is to unearth the capsules in 25 years.



"I cannot be a Christian and fail to observe what Jesus teaches about nonviolence. Loving my neighbor is what I must do in order to be a follower of Christ."

—James Lucas, pastor of Meadow Branch Church of the Brethren, Westminster, Md., writing in the winter/spring 2006 issue of *Brethren Life & Thought*

BY THE NUMBERS

43,652

Dollars sent by US Church of the Brethren congregations to Nigeria in 2006 as a "love offering" for Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) congregations damaged or destroyed in interfaith violence last winter.

Iowa church's project seeks to 'bag hunger'

Hammond Avenue Brethren Church in Waterloo, Iowa, collected a ton of food—literally—for the Salvation Army the weekend of Nov. 11-12.

The "Together We Can Bag Hunger" project was a church-wide effort related to 40 Days of Community, a fall spiritual emphasis at the church. Members and friends of the church invited their neighbors to join them in providing nonperishable food for the project by distributing bright yellow "small things done with great love will change the world" bags.

The church, jointly affiliated with the Church of the Brethren and The Brethren Church, also held a food drive at a local



Pete Anna, left, walks on the ice of Antarctica with other workers.

Lacy Lucas

of the Brethren. Wampler, from Bridgewater, Va., found out about the programs available there through a friend in BVS who had made the trip. "I saw her pictures . . . and was struck by the beauty of this environment that before I thought was barren and ugly," she said. "There is life and beauty even without color. I thought,

'What an opportunity! Let's go for it!'

Following a rigorous application process, she traveled to New Zealand in late September. From there, the closest point to McMurdo, she caught a transport to the scientific research station. Wampler signed up for a five-month stint as a "dining attendant" in McMurdo's galley. It's not glamorous work, but she says it's a good way to make money. "It's well-paying, and there's nowhere to spend it," Wampler says.

She and most of the others return home late this month, before the rugged Antarctic winter sets in and often isolates the station. The Annas, who have worked in Antarctica for a number of years, will be among the few hundred who stay. Peter is fire prevention officer for the Antarctic Fire Department, while Erika works with the department in communications.

For now, though, the "bottom of the world" is a veritable hub of Brethren activity.

"It's really funny," Wampler said. "People would say, 'No way! I know someone going there!' You can have that 'Brethren game' connection even with people on the other side of the world."

supermarket as part of the project.

A total of 2,725 pounds of food was collected. It will be used by the Waterloo Salvation Army to meet hunger needs in the region.

"We were quite overwhelmed by the generosity of our neighbors," Hammond Avenue pastor Ronald W. Waters said. "We hoped to outdo our monthly Food Sunday collections from our church members, but God far exceeded our expectations.

"An additional goal to collecting food for the hungry was to provide an easy way for members of the church to meet and connect with their neighbors," Waters said. "As they collected the food, they also offered to pray for their neighbors about any needs in their family."

The church held its 40 Days of Community Celebration Sunday on Nov. 19.

Icy Antarctica sees a 'March of the Brethren'

Only about 1,200 people live at Antarctica's McMurdo Station during the Southern Hemisphere summer. Five members of that group this year have ties to the Church of the Brethren.

Living on the icy continent are Peter and Erika Anna, affiliated with Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.; former Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) worker Emily Wampler; Sean Dell, who grew up in the Church of the Brethren in McPherson, Kan.; and David Haney, a member of Goshen (Ind.) City Church



Ronald W. Waters

Hammond Avenue's Destiny Viers invites grocery shoppers to help her "Bag Hunger."

Making a statement:

Uniontown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren decided this past year to put up a plaque displaying the Ten Commandments on the front of the church "in lieu of the controversy of displaying the Ten Commandments in the 67 courthouses in Pennsylvania," a statement from the congregation said. It encouraged other churches and synagogues to follow suit. A dedication was held Aug. 27. Pictured, from left, are board chair Sandy Stein, adult Sunday school superintendent Clara Kendall, stewards chair Lloyd Kendall, and pastor A. Harrison Smith.



LANDMARKS & LAURELS

- **Walnut Grove Church of the Brethren** (Moorefield, W.Va.) officially dedicated a new fellowship hall on Nov. 5, following a revival dinner and love feast in the new facility the previous month.
- **Camp Blue Diamond** (Petersburg, Pa.) celebrated the completion of its 10th and final camp cabin, courtesy of the work of members of Williamsburg Church of the Brethren. The cabin project began in 1999.
- **Oakton Church of the Brethren** (Vienna, Va.) members walking in the Help the Homeless Mini-Walk in October raised more than \$1,500 to support the Brethren Nutrition Program soup kitchen of Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren.
- **Little Swatara Church of the Brethren** (Bethel, Pa.) will celebrate its 250th anniversary June 16-17 with tours of old meeting houses, a Pennsylvania German service, a dinner theater, worship, and other events.
- The Harrisonburg, Va., *Daily News-Record* on Dec. 9 ran a feature on the **Mountain View Fellowship Church of the Brethren** new church start in McGaheysville. The church began eight years ago as a prayer group, according to the article, and officially opened its new building Dec. 10.
- A house-building fundraiser project in Lebanon County, Pa., raised a net \$85,700 for the **Brethren Housing Association** program in Harrisburg. The revenue aided the financial situation of the organization, which finished fiscal year 2004-2005 \$48,000 in the red before showing some improvement last year.
- **SERRV** reported that in November its sales exceeded \$2 million in one month for the first time. Sales were up 11 percent over the previous year. Total sales through the end of November stood at nearly \$8.5 million.
- An Associated Press article in December highlighted the work of **Heifer International**, a program begun by the Church of the Brethren 62 years ago. The article noted those Brethren origins as well as the organization's work in 50 countries today.
- **Jodi Johnson** was honored as "Citizen of the Year" for 2006 by the Cambridge City (Ind.) Kiwanis Club. She has been a member of Nettle Creek Church of the Brethren in Hagerstown, Ind., for 48 years.
- A poem by the late Brethren writer and editor **Kenneth I. Morse** is the text for "Listen to the Sunrise," a choral anthem published in late 2006 by Alliance Music Publications, Inc. (Sheet music is available through Brethren Press for \$1.70 each, plus shipping and handling; call 800-441-3712). The anthem, by Canadian composer Eleanor Daley, was commissioned by the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay and premiered in 2003.
- Nine Church of the Brethren pastors who recently completed the two-year Advanced Foundations of Church Leadership process were honored at a banquet in Hagerstown, Ind., on Nov. 17. Pastors recognized for completing the program are **Eric Anspaugh, Glenn Bollinger, Michael Clark, John Holderread, Bruce Huffman, Peter Kaltenbaugh, David L. Miller, Timothy Peter, Deb Peterson,** and **Sheila Shumaker.**

West Milton celebrates ministry of sponsorship

Soon after World War II ended, charitable organizations like Church World Service and Catholic Welfare helped victims of war immigrate to the United States of America. Henk and Annie Brunsveld were among those who benefited from this new opportunity. Henk was drinking coffee and reading the newspaper in Holland when he saw an ad for Europeans to immigrate to the United States.

Henk and Annie had been married for two years, and they made a choice to move away from family and friends. They were choosing to leave their lives and jobs to start over. They only needed a sponsor, and that's how they met West Milton (Ohio) Church of the Brethren.

It didn't take long until they received their first letter from Thelma Studebaker. There would be several letters from that initial contact until Henk and Annie and their baby daughter, Ineke, were ready to move. They arrived at the Dayton, Ohio, train station on Nov. 24, 1956. The welcome party from West Milton ran late due to slick roads that evening, but soon the warm welcome came.

Fifty years later, the Brunsvelds remain in West Milton, and they still marvel at that warm and loving welcome that the church gave them. The congregation celebrated the 50th anniversary of that sponsorship ministry on Nov. 18.—**Jerry Bowen**

The Brunsveld family is pictured shortly after their arrival in Ohio.

Connecting and reconnecting with God

Three years ago I was among 150 women who applied for a special program, "Women Touched by Grace." It would be funded by the Lilly Endowment as a part of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grants, inviting 30 clergy women to come to Our Lady of Grace Benedictine monastery in Indiana

to be nurtured in becoming spiritual leaders. These women would come together at the monastery twice a year for 10 days for six sessions, and enjoy a seventh session in Italy to visit places critical to St. Benedict's life and ministry.

Those chosen would be paired up with a Benedictine sister as a prayer partner; consistently meet with a covenant group of five colleagues to dialogue and practice *lectio divina*; participate in spiritual direction and presentations on topics related to spir-

itual leadership; and share an innumerable amount of resources with one another from music to poetry, sermons to worship resources, books and more. I was one of the lucky ones who received a letter inviting me into that program, a program that would change my life and the life of the congre-



ERIN MATTESON

We live in a world that, at many turns, will gladly carry us all far, far away from how God would have each of us exercise leadership . . . It is only through coming back to authentically connect and reconnect with God, our true home and eternal source of goodness and peace, that we find our way back.

gation I was then just beginning to serve.

The Benedictine commitment to community life as prayer and treating each one as Christ quickly connected with Brethren heritage and values in ways that astounded me. I was drawn into a renewed curiosity about our heritage, specifically how monastic communities and personalities may have influenced Brethren development. I was reminded that as much as we value and cherish our Brethren heritage, we have a Christian heritage that goes back much farther than 1708, and there is great power and value in exploring it. Benedict, frustrated with the power and politics of Rome, went apart to discover and live into how Jesus would have him be faithful. Sound familiar?

And what a formational experience—worshiping, singing, praying, learning from, and listening carefully with 29 other clergy women and 80-something Benedictine women as we lived together for brief periods over three years. It was an experience of authentic community as we celebrated God's goodness and our gifts, struggled with issues of leadership,

and shared in the nitty-gritty of our lives and the questions and answers of faith. Just like with other faith communities, as much or more happened in "the church parking lot" as did in our main sessions together. Only the "parking lot" for us was a place affectionately known as The Raven, the name of a room we were assigned for socializing late into the night.

These set-apart experiences—for any person—offer hope, inspiration, and opportunity to pause for reflection regarding what we are trying to build and live into back home. I think these experiences remind clergy specifically of the critical need for appropriate collegial groups outside the congregation, where we are able to bare our souls and grow professionally in tremendous ways. Our well-meaning, low-church, communal tradition can often seduce lonely clergy into holding very loose or non-existent boundaries in congregational settings that ultimately serve no one.

I often pondered over the years in this program, as we were steeping ourselves in conversation and practice focused on prayer life and spiritual formation, whether the Benedictines were teaching us something new, or simply holding us to accountability regarding something we already knew—that all leadership, in order to be genuine and effective, must begin with an authentic, active relationship with God.

It is so easy for pastors and parishioners alike to get away from intentional spiritual practices. A big excuse for pastors I've often heard is, "I read scripture and pray

as I prepare for worship and the sermon every week." Nice try. Put down your work and get out to take a look at creation, walk a labyrinth, dust off your journal, or just be silent and listen. We all speak well of the chaos of life, but aren't we each accountable for our time and priorities? Jesus really was wise when he said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." When we make the time to reconnect with ourselves and God, we often realize the great treasure to be had there. But then, what happens?

We live in a world that, at many turns, will gladly carry us all far, far away from how God would have each of us exercise leadership in how we act in relationship with one another and all the earth. It is only through coming back to authentically connect and reconnect with God, our true home and eternal source of goodness and peace, that we find our way back to our truest selves, the only place from which we have any hope of responding to others with focused kindness, compassion, mercy, and grace. **WU**

Erin Matteson is co-pastor of Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.

QUOTE WORTHY

“The congregations that grow put their emphasis on reaching others in Christ. They may do it differently, and from different theological perspectives, but their emphasis is on those whom Jesus misses.”

—Pacific Southwest District executive Bryan Boyer, writing in the district’s “New Life” newsletter

“If we believe that God speaks to us, then we must hold open the possibility for change.”

—General Board member Tim Harvey, from Roanoke, Va., speaking at the opening worship service of the General Board’s fall meetings

“Some of us have been reluctant to speak of our faith in the political arena . . . because we can see a danger that people deeply rooted in faith will seek to use God rather than be used by God.”

—Tennessee State Sen. Roy Herron, a Democrat, commenting on the reasons his party is perceived as being silent on religious issues. He was quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

“This is the consistent story I find when I read these early leaders . . . They seem to sing with one voice their belief that we as a people of God must live as imitators of Christ so that the world will know the Savior.”

—Peoria (Ill.) Church of the Brethren pastor Dana McNeil, writing in his congregation’s newsletter about Brethren heritage

“The real miracle is that people new to faith bring new life to a church. Whether a middle-aged adult who comes to faith for the first time or a teenager whose faith was nurtured through years of Christian education, they often are the unfurling edges of congregational life.”

—Everett J. Thomas, editor of *The Mennonite*, writing in the Nov. 21 issue about mission efforts

CULTURE REVIEW

• Kim Overdyck, who previously led the inner-city “Take Ten” program for the University of Notre Dame, was named new executive director of the **Indianapolis Peace House** effective Jan. 2. The house is a project of the Plowshares consortium of Indiana’s three historic peace colleges—Manchester, Earlham, and Goshen.

• A poll conducted by Opinion Research Corp. for CNN recently found, “most Americans, white and black, see **racism as a lingering problem** in the United States, and many say they know people who are racist. . . . But few Americans of either race—just one out of eight—consider themselves racist,” according to the CNN report. Of black respondents to the poll, 49 percent said racism is a “very serious” problem; 18 percent of whites shared that view.

• In a recent survey conducted by the American Bible Society, 70 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds surveyed said there are **correlations between the messages of the Bible** and the way they apply those messages to their lives. African-American teens were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than teens of all other races and ethnic groups.

• A Religion News Service report notes that **the new US Congress** will, “for the first time, include a Muslim, two Buddhists, more Jews than Episcopalians, and the highest-ranking Mormon in congressional history (Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.). Roman Catholics remain the largest single faith group, accounting for 29 percent of all members of the House and Senate.”

• The need for **qualified young ministerial candidates** is underscored in a recent study by the Lewis Center for Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary. It shows a significant, 20-year decline across mainline denominations, both Protestant and Catholic, in numbers of clergy under age 35.

• A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that nearly one in four Americans (23 percent) are “renewalists,” a term used to cover both **pentecostals and charismatics**. Globally, this generally morally conservative group is among the fastest-growing in Christianity.



JUST FOR FUN: SCRAMBLE

WHO SAID IT? In honor of Presidents’ Day this month, try unscrambling the names (last names only) of these 10 former US presidents. Answers are printed below.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. FLAGRIDE | 6. CRIPEE |
| 2. GOODLICE | 7. ANGERA |
| 3. SAIDNOM | 8. GRAINHD |
| 4. COLINNL | 9. VELDLAGEN |
| 5. SWINEHEROE | 10. CLOTNIN |

ANSWERS: 1. Garfield; 2. Coolidge; 3. Madison; 4. Lincoln; 5. Eisenhower; 6. Pierce; 7. Reagan; 8. Harding; 9. Cleveland; 10. Clinton.



congregations:
new ideas, new life



Reaching out

by Steve Clapp

through Christian education

HOSPITALITY AND EVANGELISM SHOULDN'T JUST HAPPEN VIA THE WORSHIP SERVICE

Efforts to reach new people with the message of Christ and to increase the membership of our churches have tended to focus on the worship and evangelism programs of the congregation. Considerably less emphasis has been placed on Christian education programs as opportunities for outreach and hospitality.

Over the past decade, Christian Community and New Life Ministries have conducted studies of more than 1,500 congregations, including surveys of more than 268,000 members. Those congregations are both Anabaptist (Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Brethren Church) and Protestant (United Methodist, American Baptist, Presbyterian, Church of God, and 22 other denominations). Those studies have shown some potentially strong connections between Christian education programs and church growth:

- 90 percent of those in growing congregations agree that the Sunday school or Christian education program of the church does a good job meeting their needs. That stands in contrast to the overall North American average of 76 percent agreement and the Anabaptist average of 68 percent agreement. Growing churches have Christian education programs that do a good job meeting the needs of people.

- 92 percent of the members in growing congregations say that a conscious effort is made to get new people involved in a Sunday school class, Bible study, or spiritual growth group. The overall North American average is only 71 percent, and the Anabaptist average is 66 percent.

- 91 percent of those in growing congregations say that their church respects diversity of opinion and does not put people down for expressing disagreement. The average North American response is 71 percent, and the Anabaptist average is 64 percent.



CONGREGATIONS THAT ARE GROWING CONSISTENTLY SHOW LARGER PERCENTAGES OF MEMBERS WHO ARE COMFORTABLE SHARING THEIR FAITH AND REFLECT A FAR WARMER, MORE PERVASIVE HOSPITALITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION.

Anabaptist churches have excellent curricula and many dedicated teachers. Our growing Anabaptist churches reflect high levels of satisfaction with Christian education, as is the case in growing Protestant churches. Yet our overall Anabaptist averages on these items are a little lower than the North American averages. Why?

We do have a tendency to be a little more self-critical than Protestants, but that doesn't explain all of the difference. Many of our Sunday schools are very small, which no doubt makes it harder to meet the needs of a wide range of people. Our emphasis on family and consensus may cause some people not to feel comfortable expressing differing viewpoints. But most of all, we may not have thought enough about Christian education in terms of hospitality and outreach.

Wanting to better understand what is happening in Christian education in both Anabaptist and Protestant congregations, Christian Community did a 2006 survey of leaders in 736 congregations, seeking information on their experiences in Christian education, hospitality, and outreach. The overall survey results will be shared in a new book titled *Hospitality and Outreach in Christian Education: Practical Strategies for Sunday Schools, Small Groups, and Other Settings*. The book won't be released until this summer, but this article offers you a sneak preview.

TRANSITIONS

The study shows that we are definitely living in a time of significant transition in Christian education programs within the Church of the Brethren and within many other denominations as well:

- While some congregations still have very strong, traditional Sunday schools, others are placing more emphasis on Christian education programs on a weeknight, with such programs sometimes replacing the Sunday school in part or completely.
- Attendance patterns for children and youth have changed significantly, with the largest percentage in many congregations attending class two or three times a month rather than every week.
- While computers are being used for instruction in fewer than 10 percent of congregations, two out of three congregations

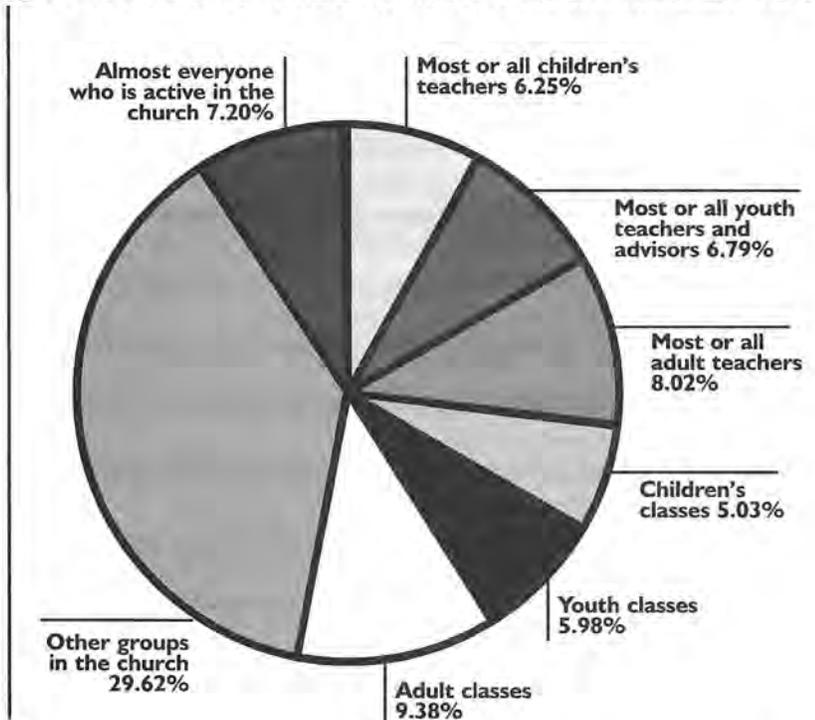
are using DVDs or videotapes as part of their educational program.

- More than half of the congregations use curriculum from a publisher outside the denomination in addition to or as a substitute for curriculum from the denomination. Curriculum loyalty in the Church of the Brethren does remain higher than in many other denominations. Many teachers are creating their own curriculum for some classes.

The chart with this article shows that fewer than 10 percent of the surveyed congregations provide training in outreach to the teachers of classes or to the classes themselves. Thirty percent of the churches provide training in outreach to some other groups in the church, but the Christian education program is clearly not a focus for that instruction.



CHURCH PROVIDES TRAINING IN OUTREACH TO...





Rhonda Marcum

Children can be effective evangelizers if given the opportunity. Here, children take part in a Sunday school class at Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va.

A similar question was asked concerning training in hospitality. Hospitality refers to the warmth of the welcome given to new people and to the way in which people are integrated into the overall life of the congregation. The percentages of congregations providing training in hospitality to teachers and classes were even lower than those providing training in outreach. Only 21 percent of congregations provide training in hospitality to other groups in the church.

The failure to provide this training may be carrying a high price tag for our congregations. Christian Community research consistently shows that the majority of people in our congregations are not comfortable with outreach (telling others about our faith in Christ and inviting people to church). More people tend to think that they know how to give a warm welcome to visitors and how to practice hospitality, but our studies show that most of our congregations

are simply not as friendly as we think they are. Congregations that are growing consistently show larger percentages of members who are comfortable sharing their faith and reflect a far warmer, more pervasive hospitality within the congregation.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OUTREACH AND HOSPITALITY

What are some practical things you can do to improve outreach and hospitality within the Christian education program? Here are some strategies:

1. If you want to have more students, add more leaders first. Having too few class or group leaders can set a growth limit on your program. The more leaders you have for a class or group, the easier it is for those people to:

PREPARED FOR GUESTS?



Use this checklist to help determine how prepared your church is to welcome and involve guests through your Christian education program.

- Are teachers prepared to greet new students as they enter the classroom?
- Are teachers of children comfortable introducing themselves to the parents of guests? Do teachers know whether or not visiting children should remain in the room until their parents return?
- Are teachers comfortable introducing guests to the rest of the class?
- Do teachers provide opportunity for some sharing to help guests feel more at home?
- Is there a procedure to record the name, address, and phone of any guests to a class or group?
- Is there a procedure for sharing information about guests with the pastor and others concerned with outreach?
- Do adult classes have coffee and tea available?
- Do youth classes have juice and donuts?
- Are extra copies of curriculum and other study resources available for guests?
- Are guests informed of any coming social events and encouraged to participate?
- Is there a procedure for follow-up on anyone who visits a Christian education class or event?
- Do students in the class or group take a part in that follow-up process rather than leaving it all to the teacher or leader?
- Are there greeters who can direct guests to the appropriate classes?
- Are class or group members encouraged to invite friends to the group?
- Are the classrooms all attractive, comfortable places to meet?
- Are the rooms all neat, including updated bulletin boards?
- Are class members encouraged to hang banners, posters, and other results of class activity?

ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO BRING FRIENDS TO CLASS AND TO SOCIAL EVENTS. CHILDREN ARE NATURAL EVANGELISTS AND WILL DO A GREAT JOB INVITING FRIENDS IF ENCOURAGED TO DO SO.

- Take the initiative in efforts to recruit new students.
- Bond quickly with new people who come.
- Maintain class records and follow up on guests.

In addition, using a team approach for classes and groups provides better leadership and also makes it easier for leaders to be gone when needed.

2. If you want to nurture growth in the Sunday school or other classes and groups, take time periodically to talk as a group about outreach. Encourage people to bring friends to class and to social events. Children are natural evangelists and will do a great job inviting friends if encouraged to do so. Adult classes should consider studying an evangelism unit at least once a year.
3. Spend time in classes talking about hospitality. Encourage people to think of those who come as guests rather than as visitors. We go out of our way to help guests feel welcomed and included. We also include guests in our social functions.
4. Provide instruction to those who are teachers so they in turn can provide instruction to classes. Teachers and classes can benefit from the study of books like *Sharing Living Water* (by Sam Detwiler and myself) and *Widening the Welcome of Your Church* (by Fred Bernhard and myself).
5. If you want to retain guests, be sure your classrooms are attractive and comfortable. Many of us become accustomed to metal chairs, rickety tables, and linoleum on the floor. What has become acceptable to us may not be

attractive at all to guests who come. Attractive classrooms may not draw people to your church, but unattractive ones will surely keep them away.

6. If you want young families, be especially careful how toddler and nursery care is handled. You want these rooms to be very attractive and clean. You also want the people in charge of care to convey confidence and security to guests. While teenagers often enjoy working in the nursery and may do a good job, be sure that you have an older person present as well.
7. If you want meaningful classes, encourage the church to recruit, train, and honor teachers. Let the Christian education program have first choice of volunteers, provide meaningful training to those who are willing to teach, and show them continuing appreciation.
8. If you want to identify new children and youth, involve everyone in the church in brainstorming the names of potential guests. Take time annually to encourage the whole congregation to identify and reach out to children and youth.
9. If your church has few children and youth, don't be apologetic about broadly graded classes or about involving youth as helpers with younger classes. If your whole church appreciates children and youth, then many significant relationships will be formed. Broadly graded classes can be effective, and youth can learn by helping children learn. **W**

Steve Clapp is the author or co-author of more than 30 books on congregational life. He belongs to Lincolnshire Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind.

LEARN MORE

The research on which this article is based was carried out by Christian Community and by New Life Ministries (www.newlifeministries-nlm.org). Christian Community is a nonprofit research and resource development organization focused on improving the health of congregations and of the communities they serve. New Life Ministries is an Anabaptist organization that started as an outgrowth of The Andrew Center, which was an evangelism and church vitality organization within the Church of the Brethren.

The books mentioned in this article can be ordered through Brethren Press. Call 800-441-3712.



congregations:

new ideas, new life

Making *change*

by Jeff Glass

CONGREGATIONS FACE MANY DYNAMICS IN CHARTING A NEW COURSE

W

e've all heard the light bulb joke on change. It goes something like this:

How many Calvinists does it take to change a light bulb?
None. God has predestined when the lights will be on.

How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb?
At least 15. One to change the light bulb, and three committees to approve the change and decide who brings the potato salad.

How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb?
One. But for the message of light to continue, send in your donation today.

How many Brethren does it take to change a light bulb?
CHANGE?!?!

We all laugh at this joke because it is funny, and we recognize the truth within it. Change is difficult whether it's needed in our personal life or in our church.

The truth that we resist change is not just limited to our era, the previous generation's, or the generation before that. Even the Bible is full of stories of people resisting change.

Think about the story of Moses and the Exodus (Ex. 3-40, Deut. 1-34). The Hebrews were crying out to God for a change in their condition of slavery until they got into the wilderness, the difficult place they had to navigate in order to reach the promised land. How many times did they rebel against Moses and God in this journey?

Think also about the number of times Jesus and the disciples ran into conflict with the religious establishment of their day. These run-ins occurred because Jesus was giving a new understanding of how to have a relationship with God.

So back to today: How is change sometimes attempted in churches? Someone, often the pastor, is concerned about the state of his or her congregation. As this person (let's call him "John") reflects on program, attendance, and vitality, John has concerns about what "is" and what he feels the church "should be." So John, after much prayer, attends a congregational meeting to

share his concerns. At this point, one of two things often happens: Either no one agrees with John's thoughts, or some will.

Let's say it's the latter. The next step is John having a meeting with the people who agreed with the issues. After much discussion, a plan emerges to "change" things. Work is started on their plans. As the work progresses, opposition arises. As the work continues, the opposition gets stronger. After several months (sometimes years), John and the committee give up and hope some of the minor changes enacted remain.

After the change efforts end, a calm and sense of normalcy returns to the congregation. Quietly, most people breathe a sigh of relief. Depending upon their ties and sense of community within the congregation, John and his committee have a choice to make: Either they can give up trying to change things in the future, or they can try again, but feeling it's hopeless. Some may even leave.

Does the above sound familiar? Has this scenario ever occurred in your congregation?

There are many dynamics that prevent change. Some of them include traditions and emotional feelings like, "We like it this way" or "We don't see the need for change." Another dynamic is many feel that change always brings loss, and loss brings more pain to our lives.

One exercise I like to lead in working with congregations is to have people pair off and then stand and face one another. After observing how the other one is dressed, people are asked to stand back-to-back and change three things about their appearance. Next, they turn around to see if they can name what the other person has changed.

The first round of the exercise always goes well, and people happily comply. After people have named the three changes, I ask them to repeat the exercise and change three more things. At this point, people start groaning, but they continue to comply. After round two is finished, I ask the group to do it again. Almost always, when I suggest a third round, I experience rebellion! People are tired of change and can't conceive of changing three more things about their appearance.

As I debrief the group, one of the key learnings is that people



see change being equal to losing something they are wearing or taking something off. Rarely do I see one person interact with another person not in their pairing, to exchange an item and thus “add” something to their appearance. To be successful at this exercise and in church life requires creative thinking.

One way to assist a congregation contemplating change is called “asset mapping.” Carol Bowman of the General Board Funding staff writes, “Often when we begin to plan for the mission and ministries of a congregation, we begin with a needs-based approach—thinking about what we’re missing and need,

and lay leaders who are critical in shaping, communicating, and guiding the vision with the congregation.

- **Discerning the vision and choosing the vision path:** determine what God desires the congregation to be about for the next few years and how to get there.

- **Communicating the vision:** sharing and gaining buy-in by the congregation in a variety of ways.

- **Empowering change leaders:** mobilizing the leadership with training, removing obstacles, and providing clarity for needed actions.

- **Implementing the vision:** taking the steps laid out by the vision path.

***T*HE TRUTH THAT WE RESIST CHANGE IS NOT JUST LIMITED TO OUR ERA, THE PREVIOUS GENERATION’S, OR THE GENERATION BEFORE THAT. EVEN THE BIBLE IS FULL OF STORIES OF PEOPLE RESISTING CHANGE.**

rather than about what gifts are already present among us.

“Asset mapping is an intentional way of thinking and planning. It helps a congregation think positively and opens up the possibilities for what can be done together (or individually) with what is already present in the body of Christ. It’s a way of combining strengths, assets, and gifts to get something done” (in *The Great Permission: An Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations*, available from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

To help people think creatively and be successful in these processes, James Furr, Mike Bonem, and Jim Herrington wrote *Leading Congregational Change*. In it, they took John Kotter’s eight-stage process for leading change and adapted it for a congregational context. Their steps are:

- **Making personal preparation:** leaders need to make sure they are ready with courage, conviction, and vision. What are you willing to endure to see change happen?

- **Creating urgency:** painting the picture that the church is not living up to its God-given call.

- **Establishing the vision community:** a core group of staff

- **Reinforcing momentum through alignment:** celebrate accomplishments, continue the work, revise vision path plans for greater success.

This book, along with Kotter’s (*Leading Change*) and many others can guide you through the difficult process of making changes within your congregation.

A number of people have said that change doesn’t occur until the pain of where you are is greater than the pain of getting to where you want to be. Until we have faith that God has a brighter tomorrow planned for our church, many will be complacent with the way things are.

Our ongoing challenge for our personal and congregational life is to keep seeking God for the vision that God has for our lives, trusting God for the courage and strength to be obedient.

How many Brethren does it take to change a light bulb? Maybe it’s not the light bulb that needs changing. **LU**

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congregations:

new ideas, new life



Seeking God's 'New Harvest'

by Karen Doss Bowman

Lindsay congregation finds revitalization through outreach

What seemed like a series of coincidences about two years ago in the small, rural town of Lindsay, Calif., appears in hindsight to have been the Holy Spirit's guidance in bringing together numerous people who would begin the work of rebuilding Lindsay Community Church of the Brethren.

Down to just 12 members, the struggling Lindsay congregation was considering closing its doors in early 2005. Once a congregation of about 200 regular attendees, the small group of members decided instead to call on the Pacific Southwest District board for help with discernment on the decision. At first, the district board explored selling the property to a nearby non-Brethren church, but the offer fell through. Feeling the tug of the Holy Spirit, the board decided to find a way to revive the dying church.

"There was a real sense of the movement of the Spirit," district executive Bryan Boyer says. "We prayed a long time about it and made the decision that, if we could, we would support them and keep the church open."

At the same time the congregation was seeking direction, Bill Frey, then pastor at Fruitland (Idaho) Church of the Brethren, felt called to pursue a new ministry, although he wasn't sure exactly where. Meanwhile, his friend, Marty Sondermann, who owned two computer stores in neighboring towns and was a member of Calvary Chapel, a non-denominational ministry, was feeling the call to plant a new church. Both Frey and Sondermann say they sensed God calling them to serve as a team.

The faithful few who remained members of Lindsay Community continued to pray for someone to come along and

help them breathe new life into their dying church. In September 2005, Frey answered God's call to serve them as pastor. Two months later, Sondermann gave up his computer store business and moved with his family to California to serve as co-pastor.

The excitement of the ministry has caught on, leading four friends of Frey and Sondermann to relocate from Idaho and participate in the life of the congregation, which changed its name to New Harvest Community Fellowship.

"When I got here, I realized there was so much work to be done," Sondermann says. "We needed a team. . . . Later, I found out that the members of the church were praying that not just a pastor would come, but for a whole team."

Since becoming ordained in the Church of the Brethren in 1999, Frey says he has felt a calling to serve struggling congregations, to help them get back on solid footing. He considers himself an evangelist and isn't shy about approaching strangers to share the good news of the Gospel. Much of his ministry involves outreach to the community, not just in an effort to attract new members to the church, but also to win souls for the Lord—regardless of where they decide to attend church.

"People in the congregation here see [evangelism] as important," Frey says. "It's not about us, even though we're a small church and we want more people. It's about God's kingdom, so they've given me the freedom to go out and do this."

These days, the average Sunday attendance is 35, and members seem to be excited as they share fully in the new ministries of the church. One member, for example, has started leading a

weekly Bible study group, and another has started a children's nursery ministry. In January, the congregation started Saturday evening worship services, which Frey describes as "spirit-led" because of the absence of a planned program.

Frey and Sondermann recently started home fellowship groups, and they are teaching the Bible "line-by-line," applying scriptures to the life of the congregation.

"It's a way to get back to the Word," Frey says. "When you start teaching line by line, people realize that some of the things we're doing at New Harvest—it's not our own personal desire, it's what God wants."

Outreach has become an important endeavor for the congregation. The parsonage, which was being used as church office space, has been remodeled to house a bookstore and coffee-house, where visitors can make donations for SERRV products and Christian books and music. They also are building a two-acre park on the church property, which includes an athletic field that will be used for community youth soccer and football games. The congregation plans to set up a band shell in the park to accommodate outdoor worship services and concerts. Frey says these "ministry tools" will allow him and members of the congregation to reach out to the community, "share the vision of the church and tell them about the Lord."

"Anybody can build a church sitting in their four walls and calling people in," Sondermann adds. "But Christ called us to serve our neighbors."

During their first year living in the small community surrounding the New Harvest congregation, Frey and Sondermann have become familiar faces to area residents. Frey, a motorcycle rider, joined the local chapter of the Christian Motorcyclist Association and teaches evangelism techniques to fellow members. He also preaches regularly at a local homeless shelter and has been a leader at the local high school's "Alive in Him" Christian fellowship club.

Sondermann is a board member of the local chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes and coaches youth football. He also witnesses to elementary school children through the "Good News Club," a weekly program of Bible songs and lessons.

While Frey and Sondermann are engaged in their respective

***I*N GIVING TO OTHERS, THEY SAY, PAST HURTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS MAY BE HEALED, AND THE CONGREGATION MAY FIND NEW LIFE AGAIN. THEY HOPE THIS CONGREGATION'S JOURNEY WILL OFFER HOPE TO OTHER STRUGGLING FELLOWSHIPS.**

outreach activities, they both encourage and challenge members of the New Harvest fellowship to seek their own ministry calling. In giving to others, they say, past hurts and disappointments may be healed, and the congregation may find new life again. They hope this congregation's journey will offer hope to other struggling fellowships.

"If we devote ourselves to study and to sharing the Word with others, to sharing our faith and to prayer, we are recharged as well," Sondermann says. "I think the starting point, the catalyst, has to be a rededication to studying the Word of God and really praying, fasting, and getting back to following his lead."

Though change can be difficult ("At first, people looked at us like we were crazy," Sondermann admits), the New Harvest members are pitching in to do the work of God's kingdom. Despite being worn out from years of trying to rebuild their congregation, they have helped with painting and repairing the church building, renovating the church parsonage, and clearing off the two acres of land designated for the park. They are involved with making their church an inviting place for the community.

"[The congregation's] strength is their dedication," Boyer says. "They're really not just interested in survival; they really do want to thrive." 

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

Courtesy of Brethren Historical Library & Archives



An early photo shows the Lindsay Community Church of the Brethren (now New Harvest Community Fellowship) and parsonage in rural south-central California. The once-dwindling church is showing new life as it reaches out to its community.



congregations:

new ideas, new life

Fighting *geriatrophy*

by Jeff Tomson

Many congregations are aging, but they can reverse decline

It has been my casual observation that many of our churches have an aging problem.

Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, in *A House Divided*, use the term "geriatrophy" to describe what they call a "congregational illness" of the aging of congregations and the failure to grow. They contend that aging of a congregation's members is natural and beyond the control of church leaders, but geriatrophy is not an inevitable outcome of this aging if the community still has a viable population of younger people to reach.

Take a minute to look at your congregation. Does one generation dominate your membership and attendance? In many main-line denominational churches one generation has dominated a congregation's style and ministry, causing another generation to exit. This trend led to the rise of many non-denominational churches.

According to Whitesel and Hunter, some 85 percent of our churches are in decline. They point out, "The primary cause of this decline is the church's failure to assimilate younger generations to the same high degree it has successfully incorporated older generations." They also note that many times churches and even denominations will feel that it's all right if they maintain or only decline slightly in attendance.

Most churches, they say, are envisioned, programmed, and staffed for the needs of one generation. They note that this is not intentional, but it happens because people like to be comfortable and join a congregation without crossing cultural lines. Thus, my parents joined a congregation of like-minded people roughly in the same life stage as they were. The congregation grew because it attracted similar family units. As these families have grown up, though, many have moved away. The church is still programmed to a great degree for that initial generation and for that timeframe.

Charles Arn, in *How to Start a New Service*, writes of the predictable pattern many churches fall into: The first step in a church's life is mission. People are involved in ministry and reach out to the community, and the church grows regardless of lack of buildings and leadership structure. The second stage is the insti-

tutionalization of the church. This happens after the congregation reaches a comfortable attendance level. Organization, buildings, format, and programs become important as control of the church becomes a concern. In this second stage, conversions begin to be less important to church growth, and more transfers into the congregation take place. The third stage of church life is decline. This usually takes place about 50 years after the initial growth.

The answer for many of the congregations in decline, according to Whitesel and Hunter, is a "tri-generational model." They define this model as "a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully coexisting under one roof, one name, and one leadership core." I am unaware of any churches within my local area that have adopted this format, but I do know of several that have adopted separate worship services targeting different generations. This is much different than what Whitesel and Hunter propose.

The idea of multiple congregations under one roof and leadership core is hard for me to handle, given my Anabaptist understanding of community and the church. Arn wrote, "Do not start a new service if community is the highest priority of your church." I don't know that community is the highest priority for the Church of the Brethren, but at least historically, community is indispensable from our understanding of what the church is. The model as a whole may not be right for our churches, but I do believe that if we are to fulfill our biblical mandate in Matthew 28 (the Great Commission), then we need to heed at least some of the strategies Whitesel and Hunter champion.

They suggest using statements to define, motivate, and guide a congregation. These are more than just nice phrases that you print in your newsletter. They propose that a congregation should have a philosophy of ministry, which explains the personality of the church, or, more to the point, "Who are we?" Churches also should have a mission statement, a broad statement of "What do we do?" and a vision statement of "Where do we believe God is calling our church to go in the future?" These statements need to be the driving force for future decision-making.

Next, we need to look to the community around us. We have



Maturation Number" by taking the number of people involved in church educational opportunities per week and dividing that number by average worship attendance. Monitoring this number over the course of several years will give us some indication as to how we are discipling people in their faith walk. They also suggest we poll our congregations to determine how unified our vision, ministry approval, and biblical understanding are. And it's important to know if the community has a favorable opinion of us or not. This can be discovered by going back to the idea of polling the community or doing focus groups.

*G*ERIATROPHY IS NOT AN INEVITABLE OUTCOME OF THIS AGING IF THE COMMUNITY STILL HAS A VIABLE POPULATION OF YOUNGER PEOPLE TO REACH.

to do some research to find out who is in our community and what their needs are. US Census Bureau information, available online, is one source for that information. The best, however, is a direct poll of the local community.

We may discover that our congregations are more generationally disproportionate than we thought. We may discover there are unmet needs in the community, and ministering to them is part of the personality and abilities of the congregation. It is also possible that we should conduct some focus groups to find out what ministries are effective, which should be undertaken, and which need to be discontinued. This may seem like bowing down to public opinion or turning church activities into marketing campaigns, but we are called to minister to our neighbors, not hold to traditions until the church dies of old age. Maybe we need to find new ways to convey God's unchanging message if we are not attracting new people.

Many times it is looked down upon to evaluate attendance statistics, but Whitesel and Hunter think it is a church leader's obligation. As church growth is more than getting people in the building for worship, they suggest computing a "Composite

Two numbers that need to be looked at are what Whitesel and Hunter call the Average Annual Growth Rate and the Annual Growth Rate. To compute these numbers we need to know our attendance figures and membership figures for several years, then compare figures from year to year or over a longer period of time.

If we have this information, then what we do with it is up to us. I believe that congregations are not called to grow old and die, but rather we are called to go and make disciples. Christ paid the ultimate price for our salvation; are we willing to give up time, money, and our own preferences in order to relate his message to the world around us? 

Jeff Tomson is pastor of Living Faith Church of the Brethren, Flora, Ind. He is a licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren enrolled in the Training in Ministry (TRIM) program, and is currently working on a Master of Arts in Church Leadership at Indiana Wesleyan University.

FOR FURTHER READING

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"Lamentations" by Julius Schnoor von Carolsfeld from *Das Buch der Bücher in Bildern*



Lamentations: *Mourning and confession*

by Christina Bucher

Book gives voice to those who feel abandoned by God

Just as families and communities need rituals and ceremonies to express loss at the death of loved ones, so, too, do we need formal opportunities to mourn public tragedy and loss. Witness the local and national ceremonies that take place in the United States on September 11, at which we, as a people, mourn both the loss of innocent human lives that occurred on that day in 2001 and the loss of our nation's sense of invulnerability.

The book of Lamentations expresses

anger, sorrow, and pain at the loss of the Jerusalem temple and the destruction by the Babylonians of the city of Jerusalem. The opening verse of the book poignantly expresses this loss with the words, "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people." The poems' expressiveness draws us in so that we can feel the suffering of the people and share their sense of abandonment by God.

Readers of this book may feel challenged by the brutality of the imagery and the absence of comfort. The anonymous

poet confronts us with the brutality of war: Children cry out to their mothers for food (2:11-12), and dead bodies lie in the streets (2:21). Cannibalism (2:20), rape (5:11), and subjugation (5:8) accompany the invasion and destruction of the city.

Where is God in all this? Lamentations shares the theology we find in the Prophets and in Deuteronomy: Jerusalem's destruction comes as punishment for the people's sins. In chapter 1, a voice claims, "Jerusalem sinned grievously," and Jerusalem, speaking in

DOES GOD ACT THIS WAY? ARE NATIONAL TRAGEDIES (SUCH AS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER) DIVINE PUNISHMENT FOR SINFUL HUMAN BEHAVIOR? RATHER THAN PROVIDE CONFIDENT ANSWERS, THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS PERMITS US TO QUESTION.

a first-person voice, confesses, "The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (1:18a).

Although the poems accept this explanation, they also rage against God, who appears to be their enemy, rather than their friend or savior: "He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe" (2:4a). In chapter 3, the voice of Everyman complains, saying about God, "He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding," and "He bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow" (3:10, 12).

How does one respond? The poems of the book of Lamentations model for modern readers one possible response to public tragedy. First, they legitimate our need to grieve publicly, and they give us language for expressing our grief. The poetry of Lamentations does not shy away from harsh realities or try to move too quickly past the pain.

Second, the poems do not fail to confess sin. They do not seek an easy forgiveness, but rather, they acknowledge that the momentous loss of Jerusalem

follows the momentous sin of the people. The poems target no scapegoat. We read in this book no complaint that "the Devil made us do it."

Perhaps a word of caution is in order here. The book of Lamentations does not attempt to explain the reason for all human suffering or for all national tragedies, but rather it responds to a specific occasion, that of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which the poet accepts as the punishment for the people's rebellious behavior. The belief that God punishes whole nations or peoples in this way should stir up conversations among church people today. Does God act this way? Are national tragedies (such as the destruction of the World Trade Center) divine punishment for sinful human behavior?

Rather than provide confident answers, the book of Lamentations permits us to question. It gives voice to the agony of those who suffer great loss. The book ends with complaint and petition, but with no voice of God offering

either forgiveness or hope for the future. "Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored. Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure" (5:20-22).

No single model explains all human suffering. The poetry of Lamentations addresses the experience of God's absence and, even more, the experience of God as enemy. Authentic faith recognizes that many in our world live amidst the chaos of war, famine, and oppression. Rather than offer easy answers to questions of divine absence in our world, Lamentations gives voice to those who mourn. ❧

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MESSENGER'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 March: Ezekiel, by Stephen Breck Reid.

LAMENTATIONS: A CLOSER LOOK

Date: The poems were written sometime after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, probably sometime between 586 BC and 520 BC.

Author: Although the book is anonymous, tradition identifies the author as the prophet Jeremiah.

Literary features: The book of Lamentations contains five alphabetic poems. Each poem is constructed in some way upon the Hebrew alphabet, which contains 22 letters. Each of the first four chapters is an acrostic poem based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. (In an acrostic poem, each verse or line begins with a different letter of the alphabet in sequence.) Chapter five, although lacking the acrostic structure, has 22 verses.

Poetic voices: Several different voices can be detected in the poetry of Lamentations. In chapters 1, 2, and 4, we hear a third-person narrator. The principal voice of chapter 3 is that of a man who has been shamed by the experience of defeat, an "everyman." In the final chapter, we hear most clearly the voice of the community. Perhaps surprisingly, the voice of God is absent from the book.

Quotation: The opening verse of the book poignantly describes the city of Jerusalem following the Babylonian invasion and destruction: "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people" (1:1a).

Anabaptist leaders visit New Orleans, support those recovering from storms

Leaders of five Anabaptist denominations who are part of the Council of Moderators and Secretaries visited New Orleans and other communities in Louisiana in late 2006. The group was there to support communities in an ongoing struggle following hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Belita D. Mitchell, moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, and Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren General Board, were part of the nine-member council that traveled to Louisiana from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2. The council is a gathering of the leaders of the Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Brethren, Brethren in Christ, and Conservative Mennonite Conference. They meet annually to discuss common concerns among Anabaptist denominations.

The council visited devastated New Orleans neighborhoods, worshiped with an Anabaptist congregation in nearby Metairie, and attended the dedication of a house built by Mennonite Disaster Service in the southern Louisiana community of Pointe-aux-Chenes. They also heard from Roy Winter, director of Emergency Response for the Church of the Brethren General Board, and met with local pastors and aid workers.

Enormous challenges still face Gulf Coast communities as a result of the hurricanes, the group

learned. Among those challenges, hundreds of thousands of people who evacuated have not returned. In many cases, they continue to live in trailers or other temporary housing arrangements



Among the Anabaptist church leaders who met with aid agencies and relief workers in New Orleans late in 2006 was Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren General Board (left). Rolando Santiago, director of Mennonite Central Committee US, is at right.

in unfamiliar communities far from family, churches, and jobs. Delays in restoring city services have slowed the return of evacuees, according to Tim Barr, Gulf Coast disaster response coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee. Additionally, many evacuees lack the basic resources they need to

make the transition home. "The hope is that a lot of people are going to come back to New Orleans, but the reality is that many people can't," Barr said.

Bob Zehr, a retired Mennonite pastor, thanked aid agencies for their assistance to churches and communities in the Gulf Coast, but added that many needs remain. He said many members of his congregation, Lighthouse Fellowship in Plaquemines Parish, have not yet qualified for housing assistance for various reasons. He fears that some people, such as those in his congregation, are "falling through the cracks."



Andi Dube/Mennonite Disaster Service



Amy Heckert

Left: During their visit to Louisiana, Anabaptist church leaders helped dedicate a house on stilts built by Mennonite Disaster Service in the community of Pointe-aux-Chenes. Right: A sign in Chalmette, La., expressed frustration with lack of response to the needs of the Gulf Coast following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in a photo taken the same week that Anabaptist church leaders visited Louisiana to support communities still struggling with the effects of the storms.

Feb. 4 Potluck event for alumni and friends of Brethren Volunteer Service and Civilian Public Service, Gotha, Fla.

Feb. 4 General Board "Service Sunday"

Feb. 12-15 Sustaining Pastoral Excellence National Vital Pastor Retreat, Ellenton, Fla.

Feb. 16-18 Global Women's Project Conference, North Manchester, Ind.

Feb. 18-22 Brethren Volunteer Service summer and fall mid-unit retreat, Gotha, Fla.

Feb. 22-25 TRIM/EFSM new student orientation

March 4 Brethren Press spring curriculum quarter begins

March 9-11 Eastern Regional Youth Conference, Juniata College, Huntingdon, Pa.

March 10-12 General Board meeting, Elgin, Ill.

March 11 One Great Hour of Sharing offering

March 16-18 Association of Brethren Caregivers board meeting, Elgin, Ill.; Roundtable Regional Youth Conference, Bridgewater (Va.) College

March 23-25 Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees meeting, Richmond, Ind.

Amy Heckert



Brethren Disaster Response volunteers Eddie Motley, left, from North Carolina, and Dave Duffy, right, from Atlantic Northeast District, replace drywall in a home in Chalmette, La., damaged by the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Brethren Disaster Response opens new project; child care continues

The General Board's Brethren Disaster Response ministry opened 2007 by opening a new Hurricane Katrina recovery project in McComb, Miss., located just north of the Louisiana border.

Effective Jan. 1, volunteers who were scheduled for the Pensacola, Fla., project were reassigned instead to the new Mississippi project. District disaster relief coordinators informed volunteers of this change.

The Brethren are working in McComb with Southwest Mississippi Recovery Network. "We are thrilled at the prospect of having your folks with us and will do everything to help them be comfortable and productive," said Judy Powell Sibley, director and chair of the network. "With your coming, I feel a huge burden lifted to help secure the storm affected families in our area."

Work includes repair of roof damage that has resulted in water-damaged interiors of homes, and the related removal and replacement of walls, ceilings, and floors and cleanup of black mold. The project may possibly construct new homes as well.

Meanwhile, Disaster Child Care (DCC) has been requested by FEMA to provide child care for a "Road Home" program in New Orleans throughout this year. To assist people returning to the area after being evacuated from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, FEMA opened a "Louisiana Welcome Home Center" in New Orleans on Jan. 2. This "one-stop shop" houses agencies and organizations that provide resources to people returning home.

"FEMA anticipates that this assistance will be available for one year, therefore, this will be an ongoing DCC project," DCC coordinator Helen Stonesifer said. "This is an excellent opportunity for all certified child care volunteers who are available to respond. It will also allow us the privilege of scheduling persons ahead of time," she noted. Volunteers will be requested to serve for two-week periods. A team of four was deployed initially to serve for the first two weeks in January.

Annual Conference Council proposes new site rotation plan

The Annual Conference Council, at its meeting Nov. 28-29 in New Windsor, Md., approved a proposal to change the rotation of Conference sites.

The new plan, which will need approval from the Annual Conference delegate body, would have the meeting in the East and Midwest four times each in a 12-year cycle instead of only three times each cycle. The other years of the cycle would see the Conference held one time each in the Northwest, Plains, Southeast, and Southwest. The new rotation would allow Conference to be held most often in areas with the highest concentration of Brethren members.

The council also set a goal of 4,000 registrants for the 2007 Annual Conference in Cleveland, Ohio. That threshold is what is esti-

mated as necessary to get the Annual Conference fund back in the black and meet the 2007 budget, Conference secretary Fred Swartz said in a report. Registrations were much lower than expected in 2006, he reported, especially in the number of congregational delegates.

This resulted in a slight deficit in meeting 2006 expenses. Anticipated costs in Cleveland call for an even larger budget.

In other business, the council began to look at other budget and marketing issues related to Annual Conference; approved a revised disaster recovery plan for the Conference office; reaffirmed policies on requirements to be met by queries; reviewed the budget and plans of the 300th Anniversary Committee; and received reports including reflections from the moderator and a report on the move of the Conference office to New Windsor, Md. The group postponed final work on a revision to a paper on dealing with strongly controversial issues until Annual Conference finishes its current business item on Doing Church Business.

2007 Annual Conference Logo by Becky Goldstein



United Church of Christ becomes cooperative user in 'Gather 'Round'

On Nov. 3, the United Church of Christ (UCC) signed an agreement to become a cooperative user of *Gather 'Round: Hearing and Sharing God's Good News*, the new Sunday school curriculum from Brethren Press and Mennonite Publishing Network. The UCC's Local Church Ministries department entered into the agreement through the United Church Press.

A positive response to *Gather 'Round* has extended, as well, to seven other Christian groups. Denominations recommending the curriculum to their congregations include several other Mennonite groups, Friends United Meeting, the Cumberland Presbyterians, and the Moravians. Some of these groups were users of the earlier *Jubilee* curriculum, and others are coming on board after selecting *Gather 'Round* from among several options that were evaluated. Individual congregations from a wide range of denominations are also finding *Gather 'Round* online at www.gatherround.org.

The UCC is a US denomination in the Reformed, Congregationalist, and evangelical traditions. With 1.26 million members, it is roughly 10 times the size of the Church of the Brethren. "Their support strengthens the financial foundation of

Gather 'Round," reported Anna Speicher, project director and editor of *Gather 'Round*.

The UCC does not currently produce any curriculum itself; instead the Local Church Ministries department selects a few curricula to market to UCC congregations, Speicher said. Several UCC readers reviewed sample curricula and chose *Gather 'Round* as the curriculum that would best replace the *Bible Quest* curriculum, which will not be produced after the 2007-2008 school year.

The UCC intends to market *Gather 'Round* modestly this year, Speicher said, with a "full rollout" for fall 2008. "The UCC is investing a significant amount of money in purchasing *Gather 'Round* resources for their education consultants, and likely for their resource centers," Speicher said.

Ken Ostermiller, minister for Curriculum Development for the UCC, invited

Speicher to lead a workshop on Dec. 4 to equip 18 education consultants to lead regional training workshops on *Gather 'Round*. Those trained will then introduce *Gather 'Round* in UCC congregations.



Writers for year three of the *Gather 'Round* curriculum (2008-2009) met for a writers' conference in October 2006. The group includes: front row, Regina Shands Stoltzfus, Elkhart, Ind.; second row, from left, Kathy Felty, Lebanon, Pa.; Aimee Reid, Hamilton, Ontario; Sandra Franklin, Modesto, Calif.; third row, Ingrid Loepp Thiessen, Kitchener, Ontario; Linda Wendling, Maryland Heights, Mo.; Kathy Fry-Miller, North Manchester, Ind. Franklin and Fry-Miller are Brethren; the others are from the Mennonite Church.

Committee sees 'positive future' for Brethren Service Center

The Brethren Service Center Ministry Options Exploration Committee held its second meeting Nov. 10-12 at the center in New Windsor, Md. "We want the church and the New Windsor community to know that we envision a continued and very positive future for the Brethren Service Center," said chair Dale Minnich. "Numerous specific recommendations are under study—and all of these will need to be considered by the General Board when the committee makes its final report."

The group is a committee of the General Board, assigned the task of assessing options for ministry at the Brethren Service Center. The committee worshiped together, met with General Board staff and executive directors of three partner agencies located at the center, processed more than 30 reports, and discussed the emerging direction of its work.

Regarding the center's future, the report of the meeting stated, "We believe that the Brethren Service Center should be continued, strengthened, and undergirded with new vision." Minnich outlined some reasons for this preliminary recommendation: the center's mission—which revolves around mounting creative efforts to address human need—continues to be urgently relevant; its history as an incubator of visionary and effective ministries to meet human need, and as a focus for motivating peo-

ple to develop their witness in areas of service and peacemaking, provides a "reservoir of passion" that is a valued asset to be nurtured and developed; and its current ministries and ministry partners are particularly strong in lifting up the vision for meeting human need, providing volunteer opportunities, and challenging people to develop Christian discipleship.

The New Windsor Conference Center as a resource that provides hospitality to support the work of center partners and other groups has potential for a greater educational and motivational function to undergird response to human need, Minnich said. While Service Ministries and the conference center face some management challenges, the committee believes each of the four ministry areas of the General Board at the Brethren Service Center (Service Ministries, Emergency Response, lease partnerships with other agencies, and the New Windsor Conference Center) can be financially viable for the foreseeable future, he said.

The committee plans to meet again Feb. 23-25 to work on more specific recommendations. Members are David R. Miller of Dayton, Va.; Dale Minnich of Moundridge, Kan.; Fran Nyce of Westminster, Md.; Dale Roth of State College, Pa.; Jim Stokes-Buckles of New York, N.Y.; Kim Stuckey Hissong of Westminster, Md.; and Jack Tevis of Westminster, Md.

NCC Assembly approves war message, resolutions on biotech and climate change



Among the work of the 248 delegates from 35 member Christian denominations at this year's General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) was passage of a pastoral message on the war, a new policy on human biotechnology, and resolutions banning human reproductive cloning, providing bio-warfare oversight, and combating global warming.

The gathering, held Nov. 7-9 in Orlando, Fla., also heard from several speakers each issuing unique challenges to the oldest Christian ecumenical organization in America.

A statement of the General Assembly on this fall's election acknowledged the NCC's "strong support for raising the minimum wage." Initiatives to raise the minimum wage passed on all six states in which they were on the ballot in November. The statement expressed a "real sense of joy and thanksgiving" at the votes, "acknowledging that such public policy is good for business as well as workers."

The theme of the assembly was "For the Healing of the Nations," based on Revelation 22:1-2. Healing was on the minds of many speakers. NCC President the Rev. Michael Livingston urged the representatives of 45 million Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican, historic African American, and traditional peace churches to claim their leadership by asserting greater national influence.

"In a society that values volume over substance, so much greater is the need to

be a 'national' council of churches," said Livingston, a Presbyterian who is executive director of the International Council of Community Churches. "Simple cooperation is not enough to bear the weight of the witness our times demand. Being a national council means that we bear witness together, stand and testify together, that we become the exclamation points—like the cross stabbed into the ground on Calvary."

On the Iraq war, delegates voted overwhelmingly to approve a pastoral message that calls for "an immediate phased withdrawal of American and coalition forces from Iraq." The withdrawal plan is linked to "benchmarks for rebuilding Iraqi society." It was sent to the Bush administration and members of Congress, and was also addressed to "people of faith and all people of goodwill." Of the nearly 250 delegates voting, two abstentions and one 'no' vote were heard. Those votes were cast by Brethren and Friends (Quakers) representatives who felt some of the language and ideas in the pastoral message were not in accordance with a peace stance.

The Assembly also adopted a new policy on human biotechnologies entitled, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" (www.ncccusa.org/pdfs/BioTechPolicy.pdf). The policy proclaims the sanctity of all human life as God's creation and condemns human reproductive cloning. But it acknowledges differences exist among the 35 different member communions regarding stem

cell research.

The new policy was the basis for two resolutions. One calls for a worldwide ban on human reproductive cloning. A second, "Biotechnology and National Security," calls for more oversight of government and private sector laboratories developing bio-warfare weapons. The resolution calls for creation of a National Science Advisory Board for Bio-defense within the US Department of Health and Human Services. It would have "powers of regulation and oversight" of government and private bio-defense projects. Both passed unanimously.

Neither was there any dissent over a resolution to protect God's creation.

"Global warming threatens the very fabric of God's creation and will hit those who are least able to adapt—both human and nonhuman—the hardest," the resolution said in part.

Representing the Church of the Brethren at the General Assembly were elected representatives Nelda Rhodes Clarke, Jennie Ramirez, and Marianne Miller Speicher, and by general secretary of the General Board Stanley Noffsinger and director of identity Becky Ullom. The delegation led morning devotions one day, drawing on the peace church tradition.

The 2007 General Assembly meeting will be held in New York.

Historical committee celebrates 70th anniversary of archives

A recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives (BHLA) opened the Brethren Historical Committee meeting in Elgin, Ill., Nov 3-4. The archives is a ministry of the General Board, and began in 1936 when the books and

files of J.H. Moore were donated to the General Mission Board.

The group's agenda also included microfilming of Brethren periodicals and full minutes of Annual Meeting, transfer of 16-mm film files to DVD format, addition of new space and equipment for BHLA, revision of a pamphlet for local church historians, plans for an insight session at Annual Conference, and a budget review. The committee elected Jane Davis to serve as chair beginning in July.

Wendy McFadden, executive director of Brethren Press, presented a report giving special attention to the publication of a new Brethren history "source book," *The Brethren During the Age of World War* by Stephen L. Longenecker. Publication of the book had been recommended by the committee.

Responsibilities of the committee include encouraging Brethren historical research and publication, promoting the preservation of Brethren historical records, and advising BHLA. Members are William Kostlevy (chair), Jane Davis, Marlin Heckman, and Kenneth Kreider. Kenneth M. Shaffer Jr. is director of BHLA.



Logan Condon

Members of the Brethren Historical Committee viewed new storage areas for the Brethren Historical Library and Archives at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., during the committee's November meeting.

Help Your Church's Caregivers Receive the Training They Need

The Association of Brethren Caregivers will hold three deacon/caregiver ministry training events this spring. Each training event will:

- Follow the theme of "Healing Balm"
- Feature Bible study, keynote presentations and worship
- Offer workshops on deacon roles and functions, care circles, love feast, resolving conflict, advance directives and being a healing presence
- Cost will be \$15 per person



Take Advantage of the Deacon/Caregiver Ministry Training Event Nearest You!

March 10 — Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren — 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

April 21 — Hillcrest Senior Living, La Verne, Calif. — 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

June 9 — The Cedars, McPherson, Kan. — 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Registration materials are available at ABC's website,
www.brethren-caregivers.org.

Celebrate Health Promotion Sunday this May 20

Christ Exalted in the Body: Congregational and Personal Health

Church leaders across denominational boundaries are lifting up the need for healthier clergy and congregation members. One pastor and physician noted that in many cases the least healthy meals we eat may be at our churches!

Jesus modeled a ministry that cared for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of all people. The church's renewed emphasis on wholeness, or complete health in body, mind and spirit, is vital for others to experience the healing touch of Christ.

ABC will have many worship and congregational resources for Health Promotion Sunday on May 20. The following on-line resources will be available by March 1 from ABC's website:

- Multi-sensory worship experience
- Dramas with a focus on well-being
- Reflections and activities for small group discussion
- Tips for promoting healthy choices in families
- Exploring the body-mind-soul connection
- Forgiveness and health
- Personal health and healthcare as an issue of faith



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Brethren Caregivers**

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Annual subscriptions are \$12 for individuals. Congregations receive a special \$6 rate. To subscribe, visit www.brethren-caregivers.org or call the Association of Brethren Caregivers at (800) 323-8039.

ONCAMPUS

Bridgewater College (Bridgewater, Va.)

President Phillip C. Stone has been named incoming chair of the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Stone's one-year appointment was made at the 111th SACS-COC Annual Meeting in Kissimmee, Fla., in December.

Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, Pa.)

A \$1 million grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will give Elizabethtown a jump start on a campaign to improve its athletic facilities. The funds from the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, awarded through the Borough of Elizabethtown, will kick off an estimated \$3 million project (Elizabethtown will match the grant with a \$2 million commitment) to renovate the pool and add a 13,000-square-foot addition to Thompson Gymnasium.

Juniata College (Huntingdon, Pa.)

For the fifth time in his career Juniata women's volleyball coach Larry Bock was selected as the 2006 Tachikara/AVCA Division III National Coach of the Year. The honor comes after Bock led Juniata to its second Division III National Championship.

University of La Verne (La Verne, Calif.)

District VII of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education honored La Verne president Stephen C. Morgan with its Chief Executive Officer Leadership Award on Dec. 8. The presentation took place during the District VII Conference Awards Luncheon in Los Angeles.

Manchester College (North Manchester, Ind.)

Students modeled native clothing from at least 17 countries for the college's annual International Fashion Show, held Dec. 1. The show celebrates the diversity of Manchester, which in the fall semester drew almost 5 percent of its students from 27 countries. The Office of Multicultural Affairs also used the show as an opportunity to raise awareness about how AIDS affects society.

McPherson College (McPherson, Kan.)

McPherson's auto restoration program recently received a donation of a CNC machining center from Fadal, a leading manufacturer of CNC equipment. The donation was made possible through the efforts of Jay Leno, long-time friend of the program and sponsor of an annual scholarship. . . . Brian Ward, a 1997 graduate of McPherson, has been named as the school's new head football coach.

Anabaptist youth examine peace issues at pair of events

Two recent events more than 1,000 miles apart brought together youth from Brethren, Mennonite, and other Anabaptist traditions to look at aspects of promoting peace amid a world of violence.

The first, held in San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 3-5, focused on counter-recruitment. Organizers and participants of the event, sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) US, say they hope it will inspire churches to work together to further develop strategies for countering the lure of military recruiters. Each year, about 180,000 young people enlist in the US military.

"We now have a lot of information to take home to our church members, people in our community, and the other youth who did not come to the conference," reported Brooklyn (N.Y.) First Haitian Church of the Brethren pastor Verel Montauban, part of a 16-member Brooklyn delegation sponsored by On Earth Peace. "I believe we have to live for the glory of God, not live to kill each other."

Ertel Whigham, a former Marine recruiter turned Mennonite pastor, advised the church to be proactive. "Just as the military has people who are dedicated to recruitment, we ought to be putting into place people who are counters to that," he said.

The second event took place two weeks later in Philadelphia. More than 100 youth and members of local Anabaptist churches came together Nov. 17-18 for "Packing the Peace of Christ," a conference focused on a Christian response to handgun homicide.

Through worship, rap, and the spoken word the conference—held at Philadelphia Mennonite School—delivered a Christian message of peace, urging participants to pack the peace of Christ instead of a gun.

Anabaptist pastors and youth leaders organized this conference with a grant from MCC in response to Philadelphia's increase in gun violence. In one of Saturday's workshops, Conrad Moore, a trainer for MCC's Damascus Road Anti-Racism Process, analyzed the violent history of the United States, concluding, "Violence is not a problem limited to urban youth; it is a national problem."

Participating denominations included Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, and Brethren in Christ. About half of the 28 urban Anabaptist congregations and ministries in greater Philadelphia, including Germantown Church of the Brethren, took active part in planning and participating in the workshop.

Mennonite Central Committee Communications, Justin Shenk, and Shannon Burgess contributed to this report.



Kris Edlin

Damascus Road leader Conrad Moore addresses the group at the Philadelphia event on gun violence.

Bits and pieces

- Young adults from Church of the Brethren congregations nationwide will meet at the Estes Park (Colo.) YMCA camp, just outside of Rocky Mountain National Park, Aug. 11-15, 2008, for the second **National Young Adult Conference (NYAC)**. The first was held at Snow Mountain Ranch YMCA in Colorado in 2004, featuring worship, workshops, fellowship, and singing. The 255 young adults who attended asked that it continue, so the General Board Youth/Young Adult Ministry office has made plans for this second gathering at the site of many previous National Youth Conferences. A Brethren Volunteer Service position to coordinate NYAC will be available in June 2007 to work for a year in Elgin, Ill. Contact Chris Douglas at cdouglas_gb@brethren.org for more information.

- Promotional DVDs for the 2007 Church of the Brethren **youth/young adult workcamps** are available upon request. Newly re-done, the DVD includes general information about workcamps and the program expansion, as well as 2007 calendar information. It features interviews with the coordinators and past workcamp participants. Registration began Jan. 3; visit www.brethren.org/genbd/yya/workcamps to check current availability. To request a DVD, write to cobworkcamps_gb@brethren.org or call Amy Rhodes at 800-323-8039, ext. 281.

A call for rise of the 'middle church'

Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), is troubled by the deep polarities in the United States. We hear from the religious right and from the liberal left, but not enough from the middle.

In his new book, *Middle Church*, he argues that the religious right has set the terms of the religious, moral, and political debates with hot-button issues like abortion, homosexuality, stem cell research, and the war on terror, and has created a climate of fear. He wants to reclaim the debate and

shift it to issues of poverty, environmental responsibility, and peace in a climate of love. He believes the way to do this is to energize the middle. He mostly means "middle church," as his title indicates, but he also wants to challenge "middle synagogue" and "middle mosque."



JAMES H. LEHMAN

Before his present stint with the NCC, Edgar served as pastor of a parish in inner-city Philadelphia, six terms as a US congressman from Pennsylvania, as finance director of the

presidential campaign of Paul Simon, and as the president of Claremont School of Theology in California. He draws extensively on this experience, referring frequently to the events in which he participated and the people with whom he worked.

Edgar believes that ordinary, middle America is made up of good people who want to do the right thing for the poor, who want to be good stewards of the environment, who want to see people with adequate health care, and who do not want the US to use its power recklessly.

Despite this glittering resume', Edgar claims to be a person of ordinary gifts who responded to opportunities and challenges. He wants others to believe the same is possible. "My purpose," he writes in his opening, "is to awaken the conscience of average, ordinary, common folks . . . the many millions of faithful people who do not always connect their spiritual values with political issues and whose voices are, as a result, often drowned out by the far religious right."

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

"Part politics and part religion, this book is a red-hot challenge to 'middle of the road' Christians, Jews, and Muslims in America. . . . Weaving homespun storytelling with a persuasive plea, Edgar makes a strong case both against the current political agenda of the religious right and for a national policy that truly reflects the best values of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam."

—Publishers Weekly

Edgar's book came out earlier in 2006 before the huge shift in the US political climate caused by the November elections. It is too early to tell whether the election results mean the change Edgar is calling for has begun, but there is no question that the goals he puts forth are more achievable now than when the book was first published.

In many ways Edgar's is a classic liberal agenda, and he doesn't shy away from the word. At the beginning of the book he quotes John F. Kennedy on being liberal and proudly owns the definition, but it's a liberal approach redefined for a post-conservative political climate—progressive goals and values without ideological rhetoric. Edgar believes that ordinary, middle America is made up of good people who want to do the right thing for the poor, who want to be good stewards of the environment, who want to see people with adequate health care, and who do not want the US to use its power recklessly.

He believes these are the true values of Christianity: "Do we believe fervently enough in Christ's message of love . . . to stand up and say we will no longer allow it to be co-opted in the service of an agenda that runs contrary to our religious teachings?" ❗

James H. Lehman is an author and owner of Brotherstone Publishers. He is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Middle Church: Reclaiming the Moral Values of the Faithful Majority from the Religious Right*

Author: Bob Edgar, NCC general secretary **Publisher:** Simon & Schuster (September 2006).

Pages: 258 (hardback). **Price:** Retail for \$25.

To order: This book is available through Brethren Press. Call 800-441-3712.



Walk in the shoes

I am a Brethren from the South—south Texas, to be exact. I have experienced discrimination since a child. Discrimination and segregation are a way of life in the South. People living in the North might not recognize it in their own communities, but it is there, hidden behind civil courtesies.

It seems our nation's leaders are taking our nation backwards to a time before the Civil Rights Act. It is such a waste of lives and efforts to have gained our human rights just to have them taken away again. And now we will have a fence along the southern borders of the US. This does not seem like progress to me.

In the most southern part of Texas, we have lived under the watchful eyes of the Border Patrol; then the Minutemen were included in the watch, and now we will have the US National Guard.

Jesus says all people are equal in the eyes of God, that we should feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and love one another. It is getting harder and harder—almost impossible—for us to help people crossing the border into the US. It used to be possible to feed and clothe them before sending them on their way. Now we cannot even be caught giving them water because we will be charged with a federal felony.

Our nation, we thought, was founded by immigrants stressing human rights, freedom, and trust in God. "What has happened?" we wonder. The way it seems is that what we thought we had gained is going down the drain.

I might be critical, perhaps harsh on the subject, and even wrong, but to understand how it is here you might have to walk in the shoes of those being persecuted and prosecuted for crossing into the US, and those who are trying to help them.

Ester Olvera
Alice, Texas

Jesus says all people are equal in the eyes of God, that we should feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and love one another. It is getting harder and harder—almost impossible—for us to help people crossing the border into the US.

No room for oppression

I am writing to share my concern that when we abuse others, or discriminate against groups of people, or wage war against others, we have failed to see their humanity and the children of God.

Healing for people who have oppressed others begins when they start to hear the pain they caused others, those whom they did not even see as people to begin with. In listening, we begin to recognize that the other *is* a per-



For everything there is a season. . .

- A time to plant, a time to pluck up. . .
- A time to weep, a time to laugh . . .
- A time to keep silence, a time to speak. . .

For pastors, this is a season for shared learning. . .

- A time to gather and study a critical question. . .
- A time to reflect on one's ministry. . .
- A time to give and receive support. . .

SUSTAINING PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Church of the Brethren pastors interested in facilitating a group of colleagues can contact Linda or Glenn Timmons in the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence office by March 15, 2007.

A Vital Pastor Orientation for pastoral facilitators is scheduled for April 16-17, 2007.



Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
Bethany Theological Seminary
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A fully funded initiative of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, Bethany Theological Seminary, and the Church of the Brethren General Board, supported through a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc.

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. Please include hometown and phone number.



Pontius' Puddle

Letters




“Professors at EMS approach their courses with a high degree of theological intentionality. They do so in a way that makes it impossible to disconnect theology from the life of the church and from my life as a follower of Christ.”

Jonathan Bowman
seminary student

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son with feelings and rights and boundaries, just as we are. We must begin to develop empathy for all people as the human beings that they are, regardless of age, gender, nationality, religion, race, ability, or gender orientation.

Oppression usually starts with putting the other down, making them seem less than human; then we get into “scientific” or “religious” reasons to justify our feelings of being better than the other, which then “excuses” abuse, discrimination, and violation of their rights—the same rights we would demand for ourselves. Many people in the past have deluded themselves with this kind of “justification.”

Oppressed groups have already suffered enough discrimination. We don't want to perpetuate it any further. In my opinion, its time to grow into mature Christians, discarding unhelpful behavior and speech. We need to guard against those who would use speech, behavior, or false justification to motivate people to be prejudiced and discriminate against others. That's how hate crimes and genocide begin and are fueled.

I speak up because it pains me immensely to see people suffering from inequality and discrimination. Church doesn't feel like a safe place, if people can be targeted, abused, discriminated against, and then the Bible used as justification to do so. There is no excuse for not respecting and honoring one another as human beings. There's no excuse for not granting equal rights to people. There's no excuse for abuse and violence and war against others. We as Christians should treat it as suspect



**PEACE
ESSAY CONTEST**

The first decade of this new millennium has been declared by the World Council of Churches as the “Decade to Overcome Violence.” The Historic Peace Churches—Brethren, Friends, and Mennonites—have been invited to think creatively and critically in communion with the international ecumenical community about seeking cultures of peace in a violent world. What story will a Peace Church tell the world?

The Peace Studies Program of Bethany Theological Seminary, in partnership with MESSENGER, announces the Jennie Calhoun Baker essay contest. Contestants will submit an essay or story-shaped manuscript addressing this question: “A narrative beyond creed and confession: What story will a Peace Church tell the world?” First prize; \$2,500. Second prize \$1,000. Winning essays will be published in MESSENGER.

The genre of the essay may be personal, philosophical, story-shaped, or composed in a style similar to National Public Radio's “All Things Considered” radio series, *This I Believe*. Manuscripts should not exceed 2,000 words.

Manuscript submissions will be accepted from Jan. 1-June 1, 2007. Awards will be announced by Sept. 1, 2007. Send manuscripts to Scott Holland, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture, Bethany Theological Seminary, 615 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374.

whenever we hear that kind of language used against others.

We should not listen to excuses for hurtful behavior; it's not loving, it is not Christian, and it's dangerous. I believe the dynamics of blame in dehumanizing people are similar across many experiences of discrimination, violence, and abuse. Abuse and violence are never justified. There may be real problems that need just solutions, but violence, "justification," and excuses only continue the cycle of violence toward others.

The Church of the Brethren cared for victims of war after World War II and participated in civil rights marches in the '60s. Hopefully we have not lost our willingness to speak up and stand with victims of war and discrimination. Only by so doing can we help make our churches, communities, and world a safer place for all of us to be.

Myrna Frantz
Marshalltown, Iowa

Brethren is a great name

Church of the Brethren—what a great name!

I feel badly that many people do not know how to embrace the word "brethren." The word means kinship among friends, and working together for a common cause.

Did you know that the word "brethren" appears 350 times in the Bible? It appears many times in song lyrics. In the song "America the Beautiful" we sing, "God shed His grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood . . ." In the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth" we sing, "With God as our Father, brothers all are we . . ."

In my music classes I explain even to my youngest classes the meaning of words in songs. I tell them that this word means all people—men, women, boys, and girls all coming together for a common cause. In the case of the Church of the Brethren it would be to do the work of Jesus. I don't think we need to "correct the situation" as Carol Wise put it [December 2006 Letters], I think we need to enlighten people on its meaning through the works that we do as a church. Peace to all brethren, and good will towards men.

Susan Harris
Nokesville, Va.

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KAUFFMAN FAMILY TOUR to EUROPE (May 25 - June 8)
EXPLORING the WORLD of PAUL -
TURKEY and GREECE (May 25 - June 10)
ALASKA CRUISE TOUR (June 11-23)
SPECTACULAR SCANDINAVIA and its
FJORDS (June 15-29)
EUROPEAN HERITAGE (July 10-25)
RUSSIA and UKRAINE (July 27 - August 10)
LANDS of the BIBLE (September 26 - October 8)
SCENIC RHINE RIVER CRUISE (October 13-21)
BEHIND THE VEIL - EXPERIENCING EGYPT
(November 12-24 - with MEDA)

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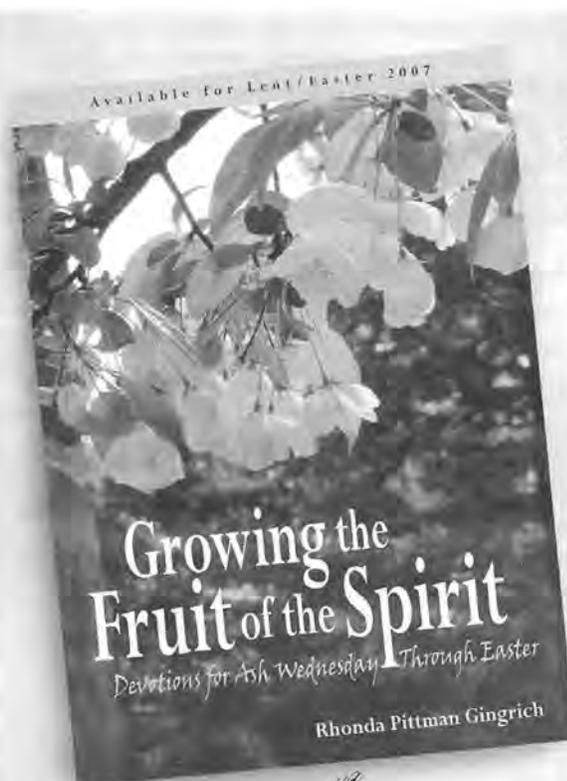
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Name isn't main issue

It was fascinating to me to read, in the same issue [December 2006], two letters that had to do with a "name." The first was about an inaccurate use of an organization's name. The second was about our denominational name being exclusionary.

I do not want to debate the content of the first letter, nor am I at odds with most of the second. I will, however, take

issue with the second letter as to the reason(s) for our declining membership.

The second letter seemed to imply that at least part of the reason for our declining membership is that the name Church of the Brethren is a "for men only" club. So I decided to see what Webster had to say. The word "brethren," when used in one sense, is the plural form of the word brother. However, when the word is

used as a proper noun (which is the case here), the meaning changes dramatically. According to Webster it means: "members of various sects originating chiefly in 18th-century German pietism; esp: dunkers." It's simply an historical description of where we came from.

So the logical conclusion to me was if someone feels offended or excluded due to our name then they have put that

CLASSIFIEDADS

Need Property Insurance? Mutual Aid Association (MAA) has been providing reasonable-cost coverage for homes, farms, renter's contents, collectible items, business and rental properties for over 120 years. Join other sisters and brothers who are part of this all-Brethren business group! Our friendly staff is ready to assist you in any way we can. 1-800-255-1243; maa@maabrethren.com; Fax 1-800-238-7535; 3094 Jeep Rd, Abilene, KS 67410.

Little Swatara Church of the Brethren, Bethel, Pennsylvania, to celebrate 250 years June 16 and 17, 2007. Activities scheduled: Saturday, June 16: Tours of four old meeting houses and cemeteries; Pennsylvania German service; dinner theater recounting the history of the church. Sunday, June 17: Worship service, welcoming back ministers from the congregation and former pastors; carry-in lunch; welcoming all visitors; additional tours of old meeting houses and cemeteries. For more information contact: Little Swatara Church of the Brethren, 31 Rehrersburg Rd., PO Box 437, Bethel, PA 19507. Phone 717-933-4723. Or contact co-chairs Richard & Beatrice Frantz, 35 Wintersville Rd., Richland PA 17087-9611. e-mail rbfantz@paonline.com.

Ireland Van Tour hosted by CoB couple. Both are licensed pastors as well as professional travel agents with 20 years experience. April 2007 departure caters to only 10 guests and includes airfare from any major gateway, van transportation throughout, all listed attractions, first-class lodging, daily devotional time, and full breakfast and dinner daily. Also ask about our September trip to Germany and Scandinavia featuring time in Schwarzenau!! Phone: 877-456-8769. Fax: 814-444-8800. www.smallgrouptours.com for details.

TRAVEL Cruise the Greek islands and walk in the steps of St. Paul, including Rome, Athens, and Ephesus, October 15-27, 2007; Enjoy the spectacular Rose Bowl Parade and begin the new year by visiting Hawaii, January 1-12, 2008. For information contact J. Kenneth Kreider, 1300 Sheaffer Road, Elizabethtown, PA 17022 or kreiderk@etown.edu.

PASTORS NEEDED. Congregations in many of the denomination's 23 districts are in need of strong, trained Christian leaders who are dedicated to Church of the Brethren beliefs and practices to serve as pastor. The available placements are both full-time and part-time and include some associate/second-staff positions. The congregations vary widely in size and program. A full listing of openings can be found at www.brethren.org/genbd/ministry/place-ment.htm. Contact the appropriate district executive or call the Ministry office at 800-323-8039.

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Spring 2007 Workshop Schedule

**MARCH
9-10**

**Midwest Regional Matthew 18
Training for Trainers**

Camp Mack, Milford, IN

Matthew 18 leadership skills for Shalom Team members
Leadership: Annie Clark, MoR Coordinator

**APRIL
18**

Eastern Regional Shalom Team Training

Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, MD

Basic skills for Shalom Team members
Leadership: Celia Cook Huffman, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, Juniata College

**APRIL
19**

Appreciative Inquiry Workshop

Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, MD

Skills for facilitating positive change in congregations. For pastors, leaders, facilitators, Shalom Teams, practitioners, and laypersons
Leadership: Marty Farahat, Congregational Consultant, and Sharon Rice, Nonprofit Development Leader

**APRIL
21**

Ministry with Difficult Behaviors

Myerstown (PA) Church of the Brethren

For pastors, staff, key leaders, leadership team members, and deacons
Leadership: Paul Roth, MoR Practitioner and Pastor

**MAY
4, 5,
11, 12**

Christian Conciliation and Mediation

Crest Manor Church of the Brethren, South Bend, IN

For pastors, laypersons, Shalom Teams, youth leaders and practitioners
Leadership: Janet Mitchell, Attorney Mediator and Annie Clark, MoR Coordinator

For details and registration information, click on:

www.brethren.org/oeпа/mor/upcoming/

or contact
Annie Clark at
aclarк_oeпа@brethren.org
or 260-982-8595



...they could reasonably conclude that what is most important to this church is being religiously and socially tolerant and politically correct rather than being biblically accurate.

exclusionary constraint upon themselves, because that is not what the word means. Without redefining the word there is no exclusion either intended or implied—which brings me to why I think our membership is declining.

As I said, it was fascinating to read two letters that dealt with a name, because I believe those two letters represent a microcosm of why membership is where it is. For somebody on the outside reading those letters, and knowing nothing of the Church of the Brethren, they could reasonably conclude that what is most important to this church is being religiously and socially tolerant and politically correct rather than being biblically accurate. To say it another way, there's a world lost and going to hell out there, and we seem to be more focused on getting a gay orga-

nization's name right and complaining that our own name excludes women.

I am 49 years old. I have a 14-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son. A chief concern of mine is: Will there even be a Church of the Brethren when my children are my age?

Jerry Brenneman
Fort Wayne, Ind.

Children need protection

Not for one moment would I detract in any way from the monumental work of David Eller in his career as a top-notch Brethren historian. His legacy is solid in that area, and nothing can take that away from him.

Nor do I wish to prolong or sensationalize the reports of Dr. Eller's alleged recent behavior.

Marianne Michael
Hills, Iowa

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039 ext. 206; jclements_gb@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

Ankeny, Iowa: Vicki Harmon
Bethany, New Paris, Ind.: Martha Bontrager Herschberger, Myron Herschberger, Elizabeth Yontz, Sara Yontz, Travis Patterson
Big Swatara, Paxton, Harrisburg, Pa.: Ronald Stump, Sr.
Dixon, Ill.: Lora Pfister, Elaine Berkenpas, Pamela Rodabaugh
Everett, Pa.: James Hood, Diana Hood, Kristen Hood, Alicia Hood, Taylor Hillenbrand, Joshua Bridges
Grottoes, Va.: Debbie Winegard, Lois High, Josh Messick
Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.: Karly Arrington, Jackie Gibson, Vickie Amos, Jessie Amos, Mindy Dent
Holidaysburg, Pa.: Mary Leitz, Joy Gioiosa
Hollins Road, Roanoke, Va.: William Kenny Craft, II, Carroll Clement, Sally Clement, J. J. Johnson, Sharon Johnson, Paul Murphy, Lori Huffman Murphy, Richard Firebaugh, Bill Graham, Iris Graham, Terry Kirkley,

Frances Firebaugh Kirkley
Maple Grove, New Paris, Ind.: Shari Hoopingarner, Megan Cripe
Maple Spring, Eglon, W.Va.: Edward Lipscomb, Elaine Lipscomb, Crystal Spaid, Crystal Johnston, Jeremy Skiles, Lonnie Junkins, Michael O'Connor, Daniel O'Connor, Charles Stoner, Frances Ball, Shaun Ball, Shelly Cassidy, Justin Sharp, Amanda Sharp, Leah Harsh, Catherine Harsh, Amy Knepp, Lyndia Lewis, Brittany Paugh, Roger Paugh, Tucker Paugh
McPherson, Kan.: Sarah Heidebrecht, Linda Cunningham, Beverly Martin, John Miller, Maxine Miller, Dick Yeargan, Jerri Yeargan
Monroeville, Pa.: Jan Stauffer, Rebecca Stauffer
Polo, Ill.: Chad Stauffer, Benjamin Persons, Kelsey Taylor, JoAnne Dusenberry
Rocky Mount, Va.: Richard Culp, C. C. Booth, Rosemary Booth, Eddie Overstreet
Skyridge, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Jason Byler, Janine Byler
Smith River, Woolwine, Va.: Morgan Elizabeth Boothe, Luther Troutt, Becky Troutt
University Baptist & Brethren, State College, Pa.: Julie Brumbaugh, Katherine Carpenter, Shannon Daniels, Kelly Freeman, Erica Harp, Carolyn Hay, Christopher

Kiver, Nicola Kiver, Avery Ludwig, Rachel Reed, Peggy Van Meter

Wedding Anniversaries

Ayers, Larry and Gloria, Grottoes, Va., 50
Burket, Edward and Helen, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 65
Fike, J. Rogers and Elizabeth, Oakland, Md., 55
Huffman, Earson E., and Lois, Daleville, Va., 74
Teets, Ellis and Marie, Eglon, W.Va., 60
Teets, Hancell and Mildred, Eglon, W.Va., 65
Wray, Luther and Kathleen, Callaway, Va., 65
Yoder, Clarence and Ideana, Goshen, Ind., 50

Deaths

Allen, Esther Fike, 85, Solon, Ohio, May 30
Baker, Evelyn S., 88, Oregon, Ohio, Nov. 13
Bush, O. Clyde, 90, Martinsburg, Pa., Nov. 21
Clayton, Lester, 64, Sheloceta, Pa., Nov. 13
Dickinson, Walter, 88, Everett, Pa., Aug. 29
Emrick, Leland Brinley, 89, Pasadena, Calif., Nov. 28
Harsbarger, John, 87, San Diego, Calif., July 4

Henry, Dean, 91, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 29
Hershberger, John Dean, 74, Bedford, Pa., Nov. 22
Jennings, Joseph R., 95, La Verne, Calif., Nov. 4
Klahre, Glenn, 85, Martinsburg, Pa., Aug. 10
Louder, James F., 63, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Nov. 19
Ott, Carl F., Jr., 64, New Enterprise, Pa., Nov. 14
Parcell, Helen, 71, Goshen, Ind., April 27
Parsons, Ronald, 94, Eglon, W.Va., May 26
Rembold, Wilma Feather, 92, Eglon, W.Va., Oct. 19
Ross, Alveta R., 82, Bakersfield, Calif., Sept. 13
Sheets, Carl, 87, New Paris, Ind., Oct. 10
Shelly, Noami G., 91, Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 17
Spitler, Clarence, 89, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 25
Wiseman, Frank L., Sr., 88, Millboro, Va., Nov. 9
Witkovsky, Delma, 75, Martinsburg, Pa., Nov. 14

Licensings

Berube, Jeannine L., M. Pa. Dist. (Maitland, Lewistown, Pa.), Dec. 3
Boughton, Ellis, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Yellow Creek, Pearl City, Ill.), Sept. 10
Mader, Abby R., W. Pa. Dist. (Rummel, Windber, Pa.), Nov.

19
McKnight, Melanie, W. Pa. Dist. (Tire Hill, Pa.), Nov. 5
Nutting, Donna, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Sharpsburg, Md.), Nov. 19

Ordinations

Hinkle, John Shannon, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Martin Creek, Fairfield, Ill.), Nov. 12
Lubbs-DeVore, Linda, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Christ Connections Community, Oswego, Ill.), Nov. 12
Payne, Jeffrey S., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Arlington, Va.), Nov. 19
Statler, Betsy J., W. Pa. Dist. (Sipesville, Pa.), Nov. 12
Statler, Charles B., W. Pa. Dist. (Sipesville, Pa.), Nov. 12

Placements

Baynard, Wanda J., pastor, Baltic, Ohio, Jan. 1, 2006
Horrell, Stephen, pastor, New Covenant, Gotha, Fla., Aug. 1
Layman, John P., pastor, Hempfield, Manheim, Pa., Dec. 1
Poling, Larry R., pastor, Harmony Worship Center, Elkins, W.Va., Sept. 15
Rogers, Clifford B., pastor, North Fort Myers, Fla., July 10

Turningpoints

A matter of trust

Finding misplaced car keys can be a challenge. Ditto for that elusive remote control or the missing puzzle piece. Something else, though, is far more difficult to find again once it's lost: trust.

When the Mark Foley scandal broke in Congress this past fall, it shook up an already hot election season. When former National Association of Evangelicals president Ted Haggard admitted to sexual immorality in November, it caused waves of controversy and crisis.



WALT WILTSCHKEK
MESSENGER Editor

As these stories were breaking, a colleague wisely noted that nobody, regardless of his or her political or religious persuasion, can take joy in seeing such figures fall. When a political leader breaks the public trust, it further erodes an already-dimming view of politicians and government. When a religious leader admits to impropriety, it tarnishes the image of the church and Christians as a whole.

While we should always be ready to offer grace and forgiveness, such actions are never without consequences—both for the people directly involved, and often for many others.

Recognizing this, the Church of the Brethren (along with most other denominations), has carefully set up codes of ethics for those who carry out the work of the church. Ministers, in particular, are often given privileged entry into the innermost parts of people's lives and venture into situations of great vulnerability.

While not all are spelled out as explicitly as the physicians' Hippocratic Oath, most occupations have a code of ethics of some sort that guides conduct in that work. Those expectations take on added importance in our roles as church members and leaders, where we are called to an even higher standard.

Annual Conference in 1992 passed a paper related to these ethical responsibilities. The 1992 "Ethics in Ministry Relations" paper (revised in 1996) included an 18-point code of ministerial ethics that covered everything from sexual misconduct and gossip to financial dealings and plagiarism. It included the pledge, "We will not misuse the trust placed in us and the unique power inherent in our function by exploit-

ing in any way those who seek our help or care."

It's a high standard, and one that has not always been met. A report at this past fall's General Board meetings noted that 24 cases of ministry ethics violations had been reported from late 1999 through 2005. About half of those involved sexual misconduct.

Those cases go through a careful progression of steps to investigate the charges, working at reconciliation and resolution as needed. That can include legal action or withdrawal of credentials, depending on the situation. "It's heavy work," General Board Ministry Office director Mary Jo Flory-Steury said at the meeting. "It's intense, but it's important work that we take very seriously."

Some board members noted that congregations also have responsibilities when it comes to ethics, although those violations are seldom if ever brought to light. Annual Conference took action on that front, as well, adopting a "Statement of Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren" in 1996.

It, too, covers a wide range of areas, from relationships with the larger church to relationships with the community and with staff. An inventory allows congregations to quickly evaluate their behavior. The paper instructs each congregation to "exhibit a spirit of thanksgiving in all of its life" and to treat pastors and others in leadership fairly. Yet stories of congregations that "chew up" pastors and handle conflict in unhealthy ways persist.

Clergy and other church occupations still tend to fare rather well in polls surveying the trustworthiness of various occupations—unlike lawyers, stockbrokers, politicians, and (gulp) journalists. But the scandals in the Catholic Church and other reports of religious impropriety have taken a toll.

While not all are spelled out as explicitly as the physicians' Hippocratic Oath, most occupations have a code of ethics of some sort that guides conduct in that work. Those expectations take on added

importance in our roles as church members and leaders, where we are called to an even higher standard.

As Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 16:11, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." (NIV) A little ethical behavior can go a long way; the reverse, unfortunately, is also true.—Ed.

COMING IN MARCH: A cluster of stories on health and wellness, dealing with anger, Bible study on Ezekiel, movie review, and more.

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2007

March 15

Public Lecture: "Who Are the Brethren Today?"

Carl D. Bowman presents the preliminary results of a 2006 national survey of Church of the Brethren members.

April 19

Annual Banquet (by reservation)

Dr. Musa Mambula of Jos, Nigeria, Young Center Fellow for Spring 2007, presents "Peacemaking in a Muslim Context."

Fall Semester

Love Feast Exhibit

October 11-13

National Conference: "Honoring a Legacy, Embracing a Future: Three Hundred Years of Brethren Heritage."

The conference explores changes over 300 years of Brethren experience. Plenary speakers include Richard Hughes, Marcus Meier, Carl D. Bowman, Dale Stoffer, and Chris Bucher. Breakout sessions will feature additional speakers.

October 13

Love Feast Celebration (by reservation)

Jeff Bach leads and interprets this event in the Bucher Meetinghouse.

2008

Spring Semester

Hymnody Exhibit

Display of Pietist, Anabaptist, and Brethren hymn books and hymns.

April 5

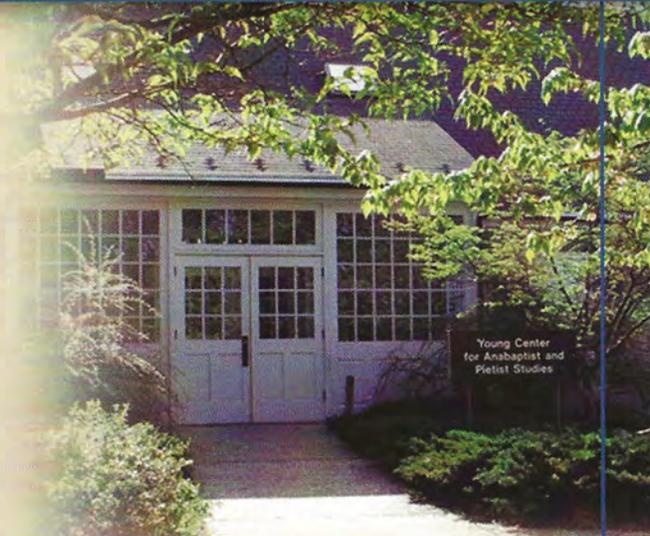
Public Concert

The Elizabethtown College Concert Choir presents a concert featuring select Pietist, Anabaptist, and Brethren hymns from 300 years of Brethren heritage. This event will also celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Young Center.

The Durnbaugh Lectures and other presentations will address Brethren heritage themes throughout 2007 and 2008.

Visit www.etown.edu/youngctr or call **717-361-1470** for more information.

These events are supported by a special grant from the Office of the President, Elizabethtown College.



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