

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

NOVEMBER 2008 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Young Adults & Money

7 things you should know



BEING *transformed*

MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN



Walt Wiltschek



Eddie Edmonds



Glenn Riegel



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Amy Fishburn

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

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MESSENGER

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



David Radcliff



BVS file photo



Eddie Edmonds

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ONTHECOVER

"Young people live in a world that is highly influenced by attitudes toward money and possessions." These words start the introduction to a *Generation Why* youth curriculum piece on biblical stewardship. "Being a good steward," it goes on to say, "is one way to show love for God."



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got to peer inside an active volcano once. We stood on the edge and watched the steam rise from the caldera, which looked dead in color but alive in the restlessness under the surface. It was just dangerous enough to be exciting.

Five years later the volcano exploded, covering the nearby town with two feet of ash.

Perched on the edge of a volcano—that's the way we were before the economic bubble burst. Collectively we were focused more on the thrill than on the danger. Surely we all knew that money can't be borrowed and lent forever and that a people's wealth can't continue to rise if it's fabricated out of the air. Surely it takes no degree in

economics to know that such a foundation will eventually dissipate. What were we all thinking?

Many years ago—in the last century, actually—I sat with a small group of high school youth discussing a Bible passage about the rich and the poor. The kids had no trouble getting into the topic. They quickly expressed their indignation about "the rich," which it turned out were those flagrantly wealthy Hollywood types. After a few minutes, I pointed out that the registration fee for the conference they were attending was more than what many families in the world make in a full year: *We are the rich.*

There was silence. That disparity is hard to comprehend for all of us, not just teenagers. (And in the years since that small group session, the problem has gotten exponentially worse.) It is easy to focus our indignation on the obscenely wealthy, whose greed has appeared to fell institutions that looked impermeable, and we are not wrong to place some of the blame there.

But most of us participate—perhaps unwittingly, often unthinkingly—in this system. We have wanted what's best for Main Street, without necessarily asking what that means. Looking out for me and mine may be prudent in the short run, but it's not particularly biblical.

As in a previous national crisis, we are insecure now and we are afraid. Towers of strength have failed us.

It can be in moments of weakness that we are jolted out of complacency and forced to reassess priorities. We who seek to follow Jesus might use this time of insecurity to wrestle with some big questions: What does it mean to really trust God? What would a just and compassionate economic system look like? How can the church be on the front line of responding to the pressing new needs of the nation?

And what would Jesus do? After all, he had plenty to say about money. Perhaps we should too.



HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

dstroyeck_gb@brethren.org
Phone: 847-742-5100
Fax: 847-742-6103

Advertising:

messengerads_gb@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039
Fax: 847-742-1407

Editorial:

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

Subscription rates:

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

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

Connect electronically: For a free subscription to Newsline, the Church of the Brethren e-mail news report, write cobnews@brethren.org.

To view the official Church of the Brethren website, go to www.brethren.org.

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

MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © November 2008, Church of the Brethren.

MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 11 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

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



Printed on recycled paper
(20% post consumer)

CONGREGATION CLOSE-UP

Atlantic Northeast District leaders and civic officials dedicated a new historical marker at Germantown Church of the Brethren in Philadelphia on Sept. 21.



AROUND THE DENOMINATION

Northeast Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren (Johnstown, Pa.) decided to collect 300 canned food items in honor of the denomination's 300th anniversary. More than 500 items were actually received. Western Pennsylvania's district auction was scheduled for Nov. 1 at Camp Harmony (Hooversville, Pa.).....Camp Blue Diamond (Petersburg, Pa.) reported an attendance of 465 campers this summerLancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and Maranatha Multi-Cultural Fellowship held a Multi-Cultural Festival July 26.

Southeast Manuel Gonzalez resigned as pastor/developer of Hispanic outreach ministries in Virlina District effective Aug. 20. He had served in the role since April 2007....Heavy rains in September caused severe flooding in parts of Puerto Rico, but no Church of the Brethren congregations there were damaged....Camp Bethel (Fincastle, Va.) held its big Brethren Heritage Festival on Oct. 4....Burks Fork Church of the Brethren (Willis, Va.) held a benefit concert and auction on Sept. 21.

Midwest Annual Conference moderator David Shumate will preach at the Illinois/Wisconsin District conference in Peoria, Ill., Nov. 7-9....Michigan District continued its heritage car caravans this fall with visits to seven congregations planned Oct. 25 and Nov. 1....Black River Church of the Brethren (Spencer, Ohio), dedicated its new building July 20, a year and a half after the church burned to the ground on Dec. 24, 2006.

Ozarks/Plains A final worship service was held Sept. 7 at Maxwell (Iowa) Church of the Brethren, formerly Indian Creek Church of the Brethren, in Northern Plains District. It was organized in 1856 and spawned numerous other congregations in the district....Missouri/Arkansas District's Women's Fellowship created a quilt in honor of the denomination's 300th anniversary; it was sold by silent auction at the district conference in September to support the group's ministries.

West Pacific Southwest District conference Nov. 7-9 in Fresno, Calif., will include an all-day workshop by Congregational Life Ministries executive director Jonathan Shively on "Leading in God's Mission." ... Wenatchee (Wash.) Brethren Baptist Church United on Sept. 12 hosted the cross-cultural musical group "Best Friends," led by Church of the Brethren minister James Washington, as part of a Northwest tour that also included churches in Idaho.

In Touch

Germantown dedicates historical marker Service wraps up a year of anniversary celebrations

Germantown Church of the Brethren in Philadelphia capped a year full of anniversary celebrations on Sept. 21 with a service of dedication for a new historical marker. Germantown, pastored by Richard Kyerematen, was the first Brethren meetinghouse in the nation, dating to 1770.

The commemorative marker was made possible through the efforts of the historical committee of Atlantic Northeast District in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. "The dedication is especially timely," the district's historical committee said in a release, "since this year is the 300th anniversary of the baptism in Germany of the forebears of current Brethren."

The dedication service included remarks by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission chair Wayne Spilove and an address by Jeff Bach, director of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, as well as recognition of public officials and church leaders in attendance. Musical selections included a mix of contemporary songs by Germantown members and 18th-century Brethren hymns. The event concluded with a tour of the church grounds and cemetery led by Germantown moderator Ron Lutz.

David E. Fuchs, chair of the historical committee, served as master of ceremonies. Other committee members are Jobie E. Riley, Joe Long, and Kay Weaver.

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



"No one can make you quite as angry as your family."

—Kurt Borgmann, pastor of Manchester Church of the Brethren (North Manchester, Ind.), speaking at an Annual Conference worship service about relationships within the church

BY THE NUMBERS

624

Number of cleanup kits sent in an initial shipment from the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., for Hurricane Gustav relief in September. More kits are needed to replace them; see www.churchworldservice.org/kits/cleanup-kits.html for assembly instructions.

New Dale Church of the Brethren adds nearly 10 percent to its membership with baptisms on Aug. 3.

Left to right are new Pipe Creek Church of the Brethren members Richard Himes and Tasha MacIntosh, pastor James Flora, and new members William Joseph Horton Jr. and Ricky Herrmann.



Beverly Maring



Scott Payne



Penny Burkett Henry

Pictured from left are Yellow Creek moderator Joe Clapper Jr., Jarred Miller, Tobias Patterson, Jonas Bequeath, pastor Alan Brumbaugh, Jadya Diehl, Kailynn Clark, Katie Steele, Marina Replogle, Skyler Dawn O'Neal, Laikah Replogle, Richard Clark (who assisted Brumbaugh), and Karley Leidy.

Baptisms bring congregations a stream of new members

The Church of the Brethren's 300th anniversary has provided the setting for numerous baptism services around the denomination this year, many of them held outdoors to mirror the first Brethren baptisms in the Eder River in Germany in 1708. Following are a few accounts of these special occasions:

- Four new members were received earlier this year into Pipe Creek Church of the Brethren, Union Bridge, Md.—which recently celebrated its 250th anniversary. The new members are Richard Himes, received by baptism on May 25; Tasha MacIntosh, by letter of transfer on April 20; William Joseph Horton Jr., by baptism on May 25; and Ricky Herrmann by letter of transfer on April 20. A celebration carry-in potluck meal was held on May 25, following the service.—**Beverly Maring**
- New Dale Church of the Brethren (Mathias, W.Va.)—a congregation of about 75 members—had seven baptisms occur on Aug. 3 at Rock Cliff Lake. "The Spirit is alive and moving here at New Dale," pastor Scott Payne said.
- Yellow Creek Church of the Brethren in Middle Pennsylvania District (Hopewell, Pa.) held a big baptism service this summer, welcoming 10 youth as members on Aug. 2. The youth opted to be baptized in a local river in recognition of the denomination's 300th anniversary, picking a section that looked like the Eder River. Alan Brumbaugh, who had been called as the new pastor of the congregation effective Sept. 1, agreed to come for a Sunday before his official start to perform the baptisms.—**Penny Burkett Henry**

LANDMARKS & LAURELS

• Church of the Brethren Global Food Crisis Fund partner **Foods Resource Bank** has received a \$100,000 grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Several Brethren actively supported FRB's nomination for the award, which will be used to develop sustainable hunger and alleviate hunger in some of the world's poorest communities. FRB president Mary Baldwin formally accepted the award in Geneva, Switzerland, in October.

• Church of the Brethren member **Cliff Kindy** was interviewed on WBEZ Chicago Public Radio's "WorldView" program about his work with Christian Peacemaker Teams in the northern, Kurdish area of Iraq.

• **Katherine Hess**, a member of Ashland (Ohio) Dickey Church of the Brethren, received this year's Distinguished Physician Award from the Visiting Nurse Association of Mid-Ohio.

• **Ewing (Va.) Church of the Brethren** held a dedication service for its new building addition on Sept. 14.

• **Sugar Creek West Church of the Brethren** (Lima, Ohio) celebrated its 175th anniversary on Sept. 28 with worship, a luncheon, an afternoon celebration service, time capsule burial, and balloon release.

• **Hatfield (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** marked its 175th anniversary with a celebration on Sept. 20 at Franconia Heritage Banquet and Conference Center.

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'I'm not saying... I'm just saying...'

A good friend of mine had this way of naming the hard truths in life: the good ol' 'I'm not saying . . . I'm just saying . . . '

"I'm not saying your team plays bad defense. . . . I'm just saying they let the other team score a lot of points."

"I'm not saying that sermon was bad. . . . I'm just saying I didn't quite understand all of it." You get the point.

Now, let me share one: I'm not saying the Church of the Brethren should split. . . . I'm just saying it's time to give it some thought. This became clearer than ever for me at Annual Conference this summer in Richmond.

While Conference does offer some nice worship services and serves as a wonderful "family reunion," it does little more. Business is a mind-numbing if not soul-draining affair. Some important decisions are made, but meaningful dialogue or action is a rarity. While quibbling on the floor over minor and irrelevant details is annoying, the mistrust we carry towards one another is downright alarming. When an item of business hits the floor one can almost hear the delegates ruminating: "This looks too straightforward—I wonder what are they trying to pull on us?" The extreme suspicion

WHILE WE BICKER, THE MAJORITY IN THE MIDDLE HAS NEITHER THE WILL NOR THE STOMACH TO INTERVENE. THERE IS A POINT WHEN CONFLICT DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

we harbor for our denominational agencies, even our Standing Committee, is as discouraging as it is baffling. How quickly we forget that by and large it was we (the Annual Conference and districts) who voted them to their positions just years before.

After family reunions and business are done, the balance of our energy is spent making sure that our voices are heard as we stand up for what it truly means to "be Brethren"—as opposed to what those "pseudo-Brethren" over there think it means.

Let me be clear, I am not opposed to conflict. Conflict is a necessary part of life together as the body of Christ. Done well, conflict can be a powerful force for clarity and progress in our spiritual lives, congregations, and denomination. But let's face it, those passionate souls at the extremes (including me sometimes) are so resolute that there is little interest in compromise (Who knows? Maybe both are right.). While we bicker, the majority in the middle has neither the will nor the stomach to intervene. There is a point when conflict does more harm than good. There is a time to rend.

Many would reasonably argue that splitting the Church of



GREG DAVIDSON LASZAKOVITS

the Brethren as we know it would be to cave to conflict, to deny our legacy of peacemaking, to let negative forces win. Let me offer a different perspective.

My Annual Conference highlight was the celebration and cooperation with the Brethren Church. The reunion exhibited years of preparation, apologies for past actions offered, and forgiveness freely given. What a powerful example!

After all, the splits of the 1880s were an ugly affair. Before the three-way explosion, Annual Meeting minutes show that the same recurrent issues had haunted the gathering for decades (sound familiar?). Following the splits, two noteworthy developments occurred. First, things got nasty—harsh words spoken, communities and families divided. Then, the three groups blossomed.

The Progressives (today's Brethren Church) were freed to pursue foreign mission, Sunday school, and other ministries that excited them. The Conservatives (Old German Baptist Brethren) were no longer distracted by those who wished to push, pull, and prod them into the world. And we Moderates (Church of the Brethren) were able to keep things steady and change as was comfortable.

Looking back, most would say that the sins of the 1880s were not that we split, but how we treated one another before, during, and after. It is interesting to note that this summer in Richmond, even with our sincere expressions of reconciliation between the Church of the Brethren and the Brethren Church, I didn't hear much talk of reunification. Instead, I saw

joint celebration of our shared history and a mutual blessing for one another's separate mission and ministry.

I wonder if we could do what the church in

the 1880s could not: avoid 125 years of bitterness and part ways now in mutual blessing and respect.

Nobody would have to give up "being Brethren"; the last 125 years have taught us that no one group can stake sole claim to a spiritual heritage. Surely some tough questions and administrative problems would need to be sorted out, and that could be painful; what more opportune time for "the devil to be in the details"? Yet, from where I sit, he's already running amuck in our distrust, distaste, and growing distance from one another.

Before you dismiss the idea out of hand, dare to imagine the energy transfer that could take place if we converted the anger and angst we spend on playing politics and finessing the opposition into actual discipleship and ministry. Just picture how we all might better live into who God is calling us to be as followers of Christ if we loosed the chains that we use to bind ourselves and one another. I'm not saying . . . I'm just saying. ■

Greg Davidson Laszakovits is pastor of Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and former Church of the Brethren representative in Brazil.

“It is time, we believe, for both nations to share a just peace.”

—the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, announcing a week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel

“Government has incredible power and must be watched vigilantly and resisted forcefully when it strays.”

—Dr. David P. Gushee, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University in Atlanta and president of Evangelicals for Human Rights. Gushee organized a National Summit on Torture at the university in September.

“This shows now more than ever how the world’s hungry are forgotten in the global marketplace.”

—Church World Service executive director/CEO the Rev. John L. McCullough, speaking about the worsening global food crisis

“I think whether or not there are hungry people in Ohio is a moral issue. The thing I find a little frustrating is that the media has fallen into . . . a fairly narrow description of what is a moral issue.”

—Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, in an interview with *The Plain Dealer* newspaper of Cleveland about his faith when he was running for office (RNS)

“The problem with loving money is that it will never love you back. It will be just as happy in someone else’s pocket or bank account as it is in yours.”

—Jim Benedict, pastor of Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren

“We have failed to communicate that the United Methodist Church is ready to connect with millennials enough to give up our sacred cows.”

—the Rev. Jerome Del Pino, chief executive of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry for the United Methodist Church. He was quoted in the *United Methodist Reporter*.

“Young adulthood is when you start connecting to the roots that before you unconsciously had.”

—musician Shawn Kirchner of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, at opening worship of the 2008 National Young Adult Conference

CULTUREVIEW

• A slim majority of Americans, including rising numbers of conservatives, say **churches should stay out of politics**, according to a survey released Aug. 21 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Fifty-two percent of Americans say they think houses of worship should not express their opinions about political and social matters, while 45 percent say they approve of such expression. The center said this marks the first time since it started asking the question in 1996 that respondents who want churches to stay out of politics outnumber those with the opposite view.

• According to the recent Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life’s US Religious Landscape Survey, **Protestants make up just 51 percent** of the US population, meaning that segment of Christianity is close to becoming a religious minority. Young people are helping fuel that trend: While 62 percent of Americans 70 and older are Protestant, only 43 percent of Americans ages 18-29 are.

• A long-awaited draft statement by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shies from taking a position on **homosexuality**, saying the church has yet to reach consensus on the matter. Current ELCA policies, which bar non-celibate homosexual clergy, are not discussed in the draft released earlier this year. (RNS)

• A new survey by Ellison Research found that 87 percent of Americans **believe in the concept of sin**. While most Americans think adultery is sinful (81 percent) and consider racism to be a sin (74 percent), far fewer Americans would put gambling (30 percent) or telling a “little white lie” (29 percent) in that category. Only 4 percent considered dancing a sin. (RNS)

• The Internal Revenue Service has cleared the **United Church of Christ** on charges that it violated tax laws by allowing presidential candidate Barack Obama to speak at a church synod last summer, the UCC announced. (RNS)



JUST FOR FUN: TOP 10

ON THE BOOKSHELVES Want to know what people are reading? These are this summer’s top 10 paperback religion best-sellers, as compiled by *Publishers Weekly*. The list is based on data received from general independent bookstores, chain stores, and wholesalers for July. The list is distributed by Religion News Service:

1. *The Shack*, by William P. Young. (Windblown Media, \$14.99)
2. *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life*, by Don Piper with Cecil Murphey. (Revell, \$12.99)
3. *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman. (Moody/Northfield, \$14.99)
4. *A Sister’s Hope*, by Wanda E. Brunstetter. (Barbour, \$10.97)
5. *The Purpose-Driven Life*, by Rick Warren. (Zondervan, \$14.99)
6. *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul*, by John and Stasi Eldredge. (Thomas Nelson, \$14.99)
7. *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins. (Mariner Books, \$15.95)
8. *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*, by Joel Osteen. (FaithWords, \$13.99)
9. *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis. (HarperOne, \$11.95)
10. *Battlefield of the Mind*, by Joyce Meyer. (FaithWords, \$14.99)



7 things young adults need to know about money

by Madalyn Metzger and Darren Pries-Klassen

Whether or not we like it, money is a central part of our everyday lives. And for today's youth and young adults, money will continue to become more and more important as the years go by.

Consider the impact money has when it comes to major life choices, like attending college or university and pursuing a career. How much does tuition cost? What kind of financial aid package do they have? And once you've graduated, what's the average salary for the field you're interested in pursuing?

It's difficult to come up with things that drive our society or catch our attention more than money. So, to help you on your journey, here are seven things you need to know:

1. Money talks . . . God is listening

The way we spend our money sends a message about our lifestyles and our values.

So, what is God hearing from you? Think about the brands and styles you purchase, and what messages they may be conveying. Why do you purchase those brands? Do the companies you frequently purchase products from contribute to our society's pollution problems, or are they ecologically friendly? Do they pay their local and global employees a fair wage? Do their values match up with your values?

God has given us an uncountable supply of gifts, including the gift of money. As stewards of this gift, it's our responsibility to care for and maintain it in ways that show love and respect for God and all of creation.

2. Are you consuming culture?

Watch any television advertisement, and you most certainly won't be told that you should buy fewer things. That's just not the way our society works, and it's not what manufacturers want you to hear.

In fact, today's youth and young adults are more heavily targeted by advertisers than any other generation, which has led to a constant evolution in advertising. So, the next time a com-

mercial grabs your attention, stop and think why. Deconstruct the ad and what it's trying to sell you. By doing this, you can make intelligent choices, informed by your values.

3. Find contentment

Today's culture would lead us to believe that "contentment" is defined as spending money you haven't earned to buy things you don't need to impress people you don't know. It can be easy to get caught up in what's out there for us to buy—and how those things might bring out the best in life.

But, looks can be deceiving, as it says in Romans 1:23: "They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand" (*The Message*). The things we buy may seem like they bring our lives contentment, but the reality is that we're diminished spiritually any time we put our faith in things other than God. Without a basic understanding of stewardship—that we are merely caretakers of what God has blessed us with—we tend to form an attachment to our money and possessions.

So how can you find contentment in our consumer-driven society? Well, you can start by defining "needs" versus "wants" before you make a purchase. Take, for example, a car. It may be practical to have a car to get to and from school and/or work. You may need a small, used vehicle in order to accomplish this goal. But you may want a brand new sport utility vehicle. Weigh the pros and cons, the needs and wants, before you spend the money.

4. Spend less than you earn

Most financial problems are a result of overspending, not lack of income. When you spend more than you earn, you'll eventually need to borrow money to cover your expenses. Borrowing involves debt, which needs to be repaid—which means you'll need additional income to cover living expenses plus the new debt. Overspending and debt end up creating a vicious cycle that's hard to get out of once it starts.

The importance of understanding debt and repayment,



while learning to save first and buy later (see below), can't be overstated. By planning your spending ahead of time and avoiding impulse purchases, you'll be well on your way to avoiding the debt cycle. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have" (NIV). Overspending and debt may be signs of a lack of contentment.

5. Plan your spending

Plan your spending? You may think that sounds a lot like "budgeting." But, relax—it doesn't have to be painful or complicated. You already know that some of your paycheck is held back for taxes and government benefits. You need to know how much of your money is left after taxes, and then plan your expenses so they do not exceed this amount.

The best place to start is by tracking your spending. Ask for a receipt each time you purchase something—anything. You'll be amazed at how quickly a dollar here and a dollar there can add up. If you can track your spending for at least 60 days, you'll begin to see trends in your spending habits and areas where you might make some spending changes. Things like rent and groceries tend to be more consistent, but there is no limit to how much you can spend on entertainment, restaurants, clothing, and having fun. If you want to avoid overspending, consider making some changes in these areas so that you're better able to meet your needs.

Two other things are needed in any spending plan: offerings and savings. Giving money to the church out of gratitude for all that God has done is what Christians are called to do.

God is less concerned about whether you give \$5 or \$500—it's the attitude with which you give it that matters most. If giving is a new thing for you, start small and prayerfully ask God to guide your giving.

You'll be amazed at how much you can give and still have enough to meet your needs.

Saving money for both short- and long-term goals is also important. Purchases like vehicles and

Youth and young adults are more heavily targeted by advertisers than any other generation...so, the next time a commercial grabs your attention, stop and think why.

education require some planning. And even though retirement may feel like it's too far away to think about, the reality is that there is no better time than now when it comes to long-term financial planning. By starting to save money early, even a small amount can grow to an incredible sum for later stages of life.

6. Save now. Buy later.

Our consumerist society would like to tell you the opposite. "Buy now, pay later" seems to be the message of most retailers. Unfortunately many people have listened and gotten themselves into incredible debt trouble. By practicing a little delayed gratification, you can avoid a tremendous amount of financial headache. Here's one way you could approach it:

Make a list of things you want that require more money than your spending plans allows. Then, classify each one into either a "need" or "want" column. Funny how some things can fit into both columns, isn't it?



Plan your spending? You may think that sounds a lot like "budgeting." But, relax—it doesn't have to be painful or complicated.

Think about when you might want to

purchase these things and how much each will cost. Pick an item and divide the total cost by the number of months from now till when you'd like to purchase it. You now have a monthly goal for short-term savings!

For example, let's say you would like to buy a dependable used vehicle in two years to get you to and from work. You estimate that it will cost about \$12,000, including taxes. When you divide \$12,000 by 24 months, you'll need to save \$500 per month. And, if you put that \$500 a month into a savings account, it can earn interest—which means you'll either reach your goal earlier, or you can decrease your savings each month by a few dollars and still reach your goal.

7. Know debt.

While the best debt might be no debt, there may be times in your life when debt is unavoidable. The key is understanding the difference between "good" debt and "bad" debt.

"Bad" debt is characterized by high interest rates (such as credit cards) and using borrowed money to buy something that decreases in value or to maintain a lifestyle. An example of "bad" debt is using your credit card to buy a pair of jeans, and then not paying the credit card bill in full when it arrives. Not only are you using borrowed money to maintain a lifestyle, but it will be even harder for you to pay off the debt

because of the extremely high interest you're being charged.

"Good debt" is characterized by low interest rates and using borrowed money to purchase something with a reasonable chance of increasing in value or providing income. Examples of "good" debt might include educational loans or home mortgages. But even with "good" debt, that doesn't mean you should spend borrowed money with reckless abandon. Paying off debt, even a small amount, is difficult, and you don't have a guarantee that your income will always stay the same or increase.

So, why save now?

Today's financial decisions will affect tomorrow's realities. Place yourself on the right path now. Further down the road, you'll be glad you did.

It might be hard to see so far ahead when it comes to managing your money. But taking simple steps here and there can make all the difference—not only for you, but for those around you.

Madalyn Metzger is a communication manager at MMA and a member of Elkhart (Ind.) Valley Church of the Brethren. Darren Pries-Klassen is a stewardship consultant for Mennonite Foundation. Together, they presented "Seven Things Young Adults Need to Know about Money" at the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) conference in Toronto in November 2007.



LEARN MORE

- The Church of the Brethren Stewardship office has created a four-part series of lock-in/retreat outlines designed for youth, titled **"Reality Check."** They look at how youth spend their money, as well as their time and other resources. Free copies were sent out to congregations this past year; to order additional copies, contact Brethren Press at 800-441-3712.

- "Generation Why?"** youth curriculum titles from Brethren Press include "Go for Broke: Using the Gifts God Gave You," "Living Beyond our Means: The Extravagance of Biblical Stewardship," and "Moneytalk: Living Generously." Each has five sessions. To order, call 800-441-3712.

- MMA (Mennonite Mutual Aid) has created a website for youth and young adults, www.mmaYnow.com. It's designed to help you learn the tools you'll need to manage your God-given gifts—including your money—in ways that honor God. Other helpful resources are also available by visiting the online bookstore at www.MMA-online.org.

- Mennonite Foundation of Canada's book ***First Things First*** can be downloaded at www.mennonitefoundation.ca. It's a simple, and free, resource to help youth learn how to manage money from a Christian perspective.

- A free **downloadable youth curriculum** for a four-week study on money issues is available at www.threerules.org/HighSchool.html or <http://www.threerules.org/MiddleSchool.html>.

- The Church of the Brethren Stewardship office has resources available in a **lending library**. Titles and details are listed at www.brethren.org/genbd/funding/info/StewardshipResources.htm.

- Video resources** to consider include "The Merchants of Cool," "Affluenza," "Escape from Affluenza," and "\$simply Enough: Straight Talk from Tony Campolo & Shane Claiborne on Simple, Just Living."



A mother and child in Sudan face daily struggles with hunger.

A global food fight

Crisis has complex roots and far-reaching effects

story and photos by David Radcliff

We sat under a thatched cooking and eating area beside the small house awaiting supper. It was the first meal with the family for me and my companion, our group having just arrived for a week's stay in this remote village by the Chixoy River in northwest Guatemala. I had been hosted with this same family the year before, and was happy to see them—Diego, Lucia, and three small children—again.

Lucia, fine-featured, thin, a bit austere until she warms up to you, began bringing the meal: a bowl of broth with a few beans, and another bowl with a stack of tortillas underneath a cloth. "Began bringing" was what I thought. Actually, that was it; there was no more coming. Even though it was our first meal with them—a time to do your best to honor your guests—and even though she and her husband had spent the day working hard at their chores, it turns out this was their best. Her husband offered a few small red peppers from their backyard garden to add a bit (well, a lot) of spice but not many calories to the meal.

Actually, there were 13 beans in all, small and black. I counted, after I realized this was all that we'd have to eat that evening.

Lucia doesn't have much to smile about. Nor do many of the world's people whose already precarious situation is getting worse due to increasing food insecurity—fully 2 billion, or one-third of humanity, according to World Bank president Robert Zoellick in a recent report.

Supplies and demands

The United Nations Development Program estimates that global warming alone will demand an additional \$86 billion in assistance for the world's poor by 2025, mostly due to diminished food supply. (Keep in mind that total foreign aid from rich governments currently totals \$55 billion per year.) Africa can expect a 20-percent decline in agricultural output due to climate change, and of course that continent only produces a small percentage of the world's greenhouse gases.

People in our own country face food challenges, too. While the average US household spends just under 10 percent on food (about half of this spent eating out), the poorest one-fourth of our society spends more than 30 percent of their income on food. As prices have risen over the past year, food banks have seen a 20-percent increase in visits.

Globally, however, families spend 60 to 80 percent of their income on food (FAO-UN). And the percentage is rising. Since 2007, food prices have risen 83 percent on average around the world. Rice and wheat have risen over 100 percent; cooking oil by 80 percent. And for every 20-percent rise in food prices, 100 million people are added to the ranks of



Lucia faces the multiple challenges of being indigenous, female, a former refugee, and poor. For her and those like her, life is harder—and food harder to come by.

the world's poorest people as their already meager discretionary income shrinks even farther.

They aren't taking it sitting down: Around the world last spring riots and protests broke out in dozens of countries, including those as geographically diverse as Haiti, Cameroon, Yemen, and Indonesia. The unrest isn't typically due to lack of food, but to the cost of food that is on the shelves. So what is behind the current—and likely ongoing—food crisis?

Money talks

Food follows money. The old adage still rings true: Those with money can have all they want to eat and more. That is part of the problem facing world food production right now. People in nations with growing economies like China and India want to move up a notch or two on the food chain (although both of these nations have millions of people struggling to feed themselves). Specifically, they're wanting to have more meat—just like their richer neighbors in the West.

Raising meat requires more grain and water and land than a plant-based diet—a lot more. For instance, a pound of beef requires more than eight pounds of grain and hundreds of gallons of water to produce. The UN recently concluded that beef production is the leading cause of global warming, thanks to the emissions of the cattle themselves and the food and chemical inputs needed to raise them.

So along with global population continuing to grow by around 78 million mouths (people) per year, millions of these new global citizens are shifting to diets that demand more of the earth's bounty per person. In fact, experts say world food production will need to double by 2050, even though population will have only increased by around 25 percent. The numbers say, however, that there is likely to be a widening gap between how much grain is needed in the poor world and how much will be available: a 200 million-ton shortfall by 2025 is likely. The magic beans of former food revolutions—fertilizers, irrigation, new seed varieties (and now genetically modified foods)—aren't likely to be able to work their magic in the years to come, for reasons noted later.

There are other, newer, ways that this adage is true today. Food is also following money to ethanol plants where corn is being turned into biofuels in an attempt to slake this country's seemingly unquenchable thirst for fuel. About a third of this year's US corn crop will be used to power cars, not to feed people (US Dept. of Agriculture). To encourage this shift, the US government will subsidize ethanol production to the tune of nearly \$5 billion in tax breaks this year.

While some ethanol production residue does make it into animal feed stocks, experts say up to 10 percent of the current price increases in food can be pinned on US corn-based ethanol production. In addition, with the boom in corn prices farmers are shifting fields from wheat and soybeans to make room for corn. This, in turn, drives up prices for these commodities on the world market (and leads to further destruction of the Amazon, as higher soy prices fuels slash-and-burn soybean farming there).

Interestingly, making fuel from corn requires a lot of fossil fuel, to the point that there is a 1.3:1 ratio of energy output

to energy input to produce corn-based ethanol. This plays out in greenhouse gas emissions as well, with the corn-based product emitting about 16 pounds per gallon burned, only slightly less than the 20 pounds for straight petroleum. Sugarcane ethanol from Brazil (which we restrict by placing a 50-cent-per-gallon import tariff) produces only nine pounds of greenhouse gases per gallon (EPA; Worldwatch Institute). Ethanol production also requires a huge amount of water: One plant can draw 44 million gallons per year from already heavily taxed western aquifers.

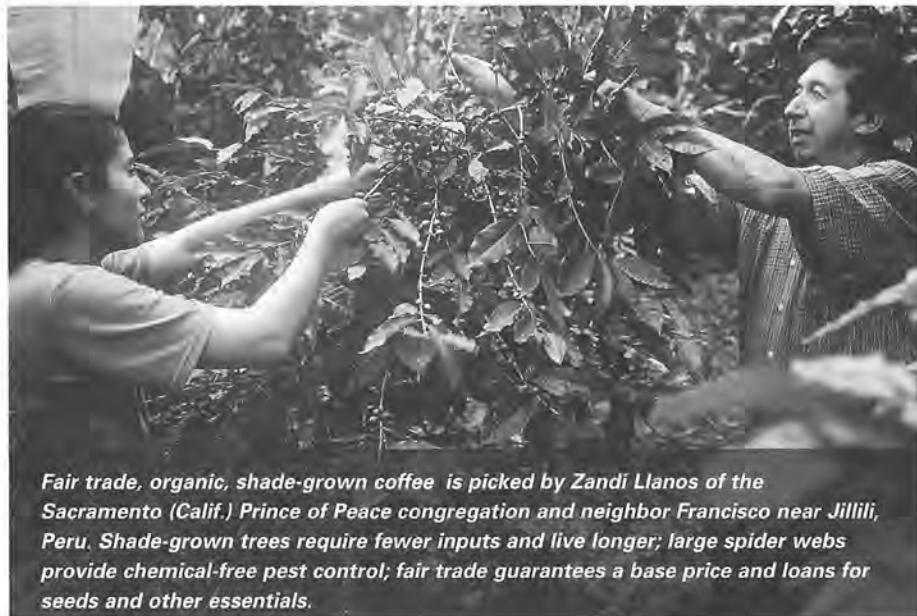
Complex challenges

What else is causing this food fight?

Within hungry nations themselves, there is often a historically unjust system of land distribution. To follow on with

Guatemala, this Central American nation has some of the most skewed land distribution in the world, with just 2 percent of the population owning 70 percent of the land—and this in a country where 60 percent of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. In addition, multinationals such as Dole, Del Monte, and Chiquita control vast swaths of the scarce nonmountainous and most productive lands on the coast and piedmont. (Our own nation had a hand in helping these corporations retain their lands in the early 1950s: We spurred the overthrow of an elected government that was beginning to enact land reform.)

Aid policies of rich countries are also sometimes problematic in terms of offering real assistance to the world's hungry masses. For instance, of a typical US food grant to a needy African country, only 40 percent actually makes it to the intended hungry families. For one thing, US law stipulates that food aid be purchased from US growers (half of which is supplied by four large agribusinesses) and that shipping be on US-flagged carriers (at an annual cost of \$300 million). Some of the food aid is siphoned off by large charities, who



Fair trade, organic, shade-grown coffee is picked by Zandi Llanos of the Sacramento (Calif.) Prince of Peace congregation and neighbor Francisco near Jilili, Peru. Shade-grown trees require fewer inputs and live longer; large spider webs provide chemical-free pest control; fair trade guarantees a base price and loans for seeds and other essentials.

then sell it on the international market to raise their own operating funds. And it can take up to six months for the food to move from here to where it is (desperately) needed.

On top of this, the US is the stingiest donor nation in the world when it comes to the amount of aid given in proportion to gross domestic product.

Then there's the issue of offering relief vs. promoting self-sufficiency. As the previous point makes clear, there's money to be made in offering relief. Making grants directly to programs that not only procure regionally produced (and less expensive) food but also work at longer-term food security is neither as self-serving nor as sexy.

On a visit to Ethiopia a few years back, I met with a UN World Food Program staffer. "I can see famine coming in about a decade in parts of this country due to population pressures, bad farming practices, and lack of watershed management," he said. "With a few million dollars we could provide the training and draw on local knowledge to head this off, but I can't get funding for initiatives like this. I need to be able to show them a starving baby—then the money starts flowing."

CROP WALKS

Church World Service estimated that people in some 2,000 communities across the nation would be participating in CROP (Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty) Walks during the 2008-2009 season as a way to raise money for the agency's domestic and global anti-hunger programs as well as community efforts. Many Brethren are among those who participate annually.

According to US and international reports, more than 862 million people in the world go hungry. In the United States, one in 10 households—including 11.7 million children—sometimes do not have enough food for regular meals; in developing countries 60 percent of preventable childhood deaths are from hunger and malnutrition.

"In our work across the globe, we're finding even those who were once able to buy food are now in danger of malnutrition or even starvation," CWS executive director John L. McCullough said in an article, addressing the "growing international food crisis."

A December 2007 hunger survey of 22 cities by the US Conference of Mayors (<http://usmayors.org/HHSurvey2007/hhsurvey07.pdf>) reported that many cities are unable to meet local demand for emergency food assistance, and they expected the demand to increase in 2008.

See www.cropwalk.org for more details.

(Unfortunately, when either governmental or non-governmental aid groups set out to "fix hunger" they often go about it in all the wrong ways, at least according to William Easterly in *The White Man's Burden*. Top-down approaches, Big Plans, big salaries for rich-world specialists, not listening to the locals, failing to do follow-up assessments—all these and more are reasons 50 years of trying and \$2.4 trillion in resources have brought so little progress for millions of people. We all could learn something by following Jesus' example in asking the blind man: "What do you want me to do for you?" Presuming to know what our neighbors need is almost always a recipe for failure.)

Other factors

Another perverse practice of rich nations: subsidizing agricultural production. The US will provide more in payments to our farmers this year—\$15 billion—than it will give in aid to

tion, even if the husband has also infected the wife with AIDS; lack of education (60 percent of the world's illiterate adults are women); economic discrimination (women often don't have title to land or homes and thus have no collateral for small loans); and gender bias (after cooking for the husband and family, the woman often gets whatever may be left, weakening her and making her more vulnerable to illness and maladies such as anemia).

Did we mention water? Aquifers around the world are dropping rapidly. In the grain-production heartland of the US, the Ogallala Aquifer is being over-pumped by 12 billion cubic meters a year. Looking up instead of down, mountain-top glaciers from the Sierra Nevada in the US to the Himalayas in South Asia are disappearing due to global warming. These glaciers provide dry-season water for some 40 percent of the world's people and their crops.

And of course there's poverty. When the poor can't earn enough income to care for their families and are desperate for a solution, they have to do something. Increasingly fathers (and sometimes mothers) are leaving their families—not for good, but sometimes for years. They join the global mass migration to other countries to look for work that is often undertaken to earn money to buy land back home. Back to Guatemala: One out of three Guatemalan men has gone to the US looking for employment. Thus food insecurity tears parents away from their families in the interest of feeding them.

Higher prices for inputs such as energy, seeds, and fertilizers affect US farmers, but at least some of these costs are offset in the current situation by rising prices for their produce. In other parts of the world where most food is grown for household consumption, there is no one to whom to pass on these price increases. It simply affects how much food can be grown and brings added risk to each growing season, especially if these more expensive inputs have been purchased on credit.

Possible solutions

This provides a good transition point to begin looking at possible solutions for this growing global crisis. Speaking of Guatemala and the cost of inputs, groups there are helping farmers wean themselves from chemical inputs and unsustainable practices. Church of the Brethren Latin American staff Todd Bauer tells of farmers who now use only a "Pepsi cap" of fertilizer per hill of corn, down from many times that amount a few short years ago.

"The transition to mostly organic takes about three years," Bauer told a recent Learning Tour delegation. "By then, the soil has been built up by natural means to the point that yields have met or even surpassed production once gained by relying solely on chemical inputs." Less fertilizer means less petroleum needed for its manufacture, as well as a much



Working with poor farmers on badly-eroded hillsides, Todd Bauer and his partners in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, have been pointing in a new direction of sustainable production—for economic and ecological reasons.

the world's poor. And in a double-whammy, these subsidies make it possible for US producers to unfairly undersell poor-world farmers, costing them millions of dollars every year in lost revenue.

A key factor in families having adequate food is the status of women in a society. It comes as a surprise to many that the majority of the world's farmers are women; they are responsible for up to 80 percent of the food production in some poorer countries. Women are hindered—if not stymied—in their roles as food-producers by many factors, including: the AIDS crisis (they have to tend AIDS-stricken husbands, taking time and energy away from food produc-

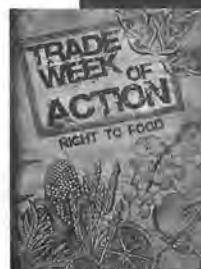
LEARN MORE

"The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice." —Proverbs 13:23.

For congregations or groups wishing to delve more deeply into factors that fuel the global food crisis, three new resources offer guides for study and action.



• **Menu for the Future** is a discussion course for small groups in which participants examine their role as eaters in the global marketplace. Carefully selected readings prompt lively dialogue and foster relationships aimed at initiating behavioral change. Key topics focus on sources and systems of food production, the future of farming, justice issues that surround the production and distribution of food, and choices for change. The six-session, 108-page guide is available for \$18 through Brethren Press (800-441-3712; fax 800-667-8188; e-mail brethren-press_gb@brethren.org).



• **Trade Week of Action: Right to Food** is a 12-page downloadable guide that builds on and broadens the observance of World Food Day, Oct. 16. The guide provides links to biblical passages, includes worship and celebrative activities, recounts stories from developing countries, and points to steps for helping the poor achieve food sovereignty. Visit www.tradeweek.org for not only the guide but for T-shirts, songs, prayers, photos, clip art, and bulletin covers.



• **Reality Check: Meal to Meal** is an outline for a youth lock-in or retreat, enabling planners to choose from an array of experiential activities and discussion topics that examine food consumption from personal, local, and global perspectives. Developed by Carol Bowman of the Church of the Brethren stewardship staff, the six-page outline is available from Brethren Press (see contact information above).

• Also commended is a Church World Service publication from 2007, **Making Poverty History: Hunger Education Activities that Work**, presenting dramas, simulations, and worship resources related to the Millennium Development Goals. A back cover treatment features a litany by Jeff Carter, pastor of Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren, that reveals parallels between the Sermon on the Mount and the Millennium Development Campaign. The 28-page guide is free from Church World Service, PO Box 968, Elkhart IN 46515, or www.churchworldservice.org/hungerbooklet/.

—Howard Royer

Howard Royer is manager of the Church of the Brethren Global Food Crisis Fund (www.brethren.org/genbd/global_mission/gfcf.htm). According to a recent report, the fund gives "upwards of \$350,000 each year" for "fighting hunger in 20 countries."

better profit margin for these poor farmers. Bauer is also working with partners in the Catholic organization Pastoral Social to teach farming practices that slow down the massive erosion of the steep hillsides on which most *campesinos* must plant their crops to survive. With the world losing some 25 billion tons of topsoil a year, these are imperative steps to stemming this loss of natural capital.

Of course there's always room for well-done, larger-scale hunger relief and anti-poverty programs. Development organizations like Church World Service or Heifer International do good, community-based work. The Church of the Brethren's Global Food Crisis Fund has a knack for finding spots in the world that are underserved and can benefit greatly from aid given at the right time in the right place, such as North Korea, Angola, and the Dominican Republic. Micro-credit is a growing global movement providing small loans especially to women who lack the capital to open a shop or start a business. Special funds of the New Community Project support girls' education and women's development, malaria prevention, and reforestation: all important factors in the ending-hunger equation.

Overall, poverty reduction is almost always a big factor in alleviating food insecurity whether at home or abroad. Some suggestions: Buy fair trade products to help small producers in other lands earn a decent income for their labors. Support girls' and women's education to lift them and their families out of poverty. Call for our government to end subsidies for food production that further impoverish our global neighbors—and mostly go to a handful of large corporate farms anyway (the top 10 percent of farms get 75 percent of the payouts). Contribute to or join groups that work in close collaboration with the poor themselves, people who are resourceful and determined but often simply lack the means or a stable enough ecological, economic, or political situation to succeed.

Other actions we can take on a personal and congregational level to help ensure adequate food for a hungry world: eat less meat (given the grain and water inputs and global warming outputs); reduce our contributions to global warming (cars, consumption, and cooling and heating being some of the top offenders); buy locally grown food to break the grip of the food conglomerates and cut down on food transport (the US food supply system is responsible for about 20 percent of our carbon dioxide emissions); make feeding the hungry a congregational priority by adopting the suggestions above as central to the church's life and mission.

"Lord, when did we see thee hungry . . . ?" We find all kinds of ways to reassure ourselves that when called to account for our lives, we'll pass the test. If the parable in Matthew 25 is any indication however, this is a test with only one question: How did we respond to Jesus when we met him in the lives of our poor and hungry neighbors? ■

David Radcliff is director of New Community Project in Elgin, Ill. (www.newcommunityproject.org). He attends Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren

A firm foundation

Brethren Volunteer Service leads to a lifelong career

by Joe Myer

Graduation from Elizabethtown College in 1972 was a difficult time. The Vietnam War was still under way, I had been taught peace by the Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, and a low draft number faced me in the lottery.

I was registered as a conscientious objector but felt a strong desire to serve. Thankfully the draft board recognized my beliefs and heritage, and I began looking at alternative service. While a typical goal upon graduation is finding a good job and starting a career, Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) seemed attractive.

And so I entered the 98th orientation unit, where I joined a wonderful group of young people and was challenged to live a New Testament lifestyle. A practice project in Columbus, Ohio, with a youth commission halfway house seemed my direction. BVS director Chuck Boyer, however, nudged me to consider a small project in the Mississippi Delta where few BVSers had served before: the Delta Ministry's Freedom Village.



Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 98 held its orientation in summer 1972.

You grow amazingly close during orientation, and the farewells are difficult, but soon I was getting off a plane in Greenville, Miss., marveling at the tabletop terrain, the rich clay gumbo soil, and the white fields of cotton, wondering what would lie ahead.

I met the small staff of the Delta Ministry and began learning more about this project to assist displaced share-

croppers who were no longer needed on the plantations due to mechanization. Amid the shock of moving to the Deep South from Lancaster County, I was amazed at the sheer poverty yet strong spirits; the many broken promises yet glimmers of hope; tar-papered shanties alongside pillared mansions; and the openness between the races yet an oppressive political system. My role would somehow be to improve housing conditions and offer necessary support services to the residents of Freedom Village.

The Lancaster church's strong support was very helpful in this often lonely place. I first lived with a black family and later a

white family. The job seemed hopeless at times in this small community that had weathered so many storms, including a famous tent city demonstration at the Greenville Air Base.

I found the business skills learned at Elizabethtown were a good match for community development work, as I was given responsibility for fundraising, bookkeeping, community planning, and some general management. The substantial responsibility seemed overwhelming then, but a blessing now. Efforts were made to operate a general store, and Freedom Craft ceramic products were sold from the kiln. Names like the Ford Foundation and World Council of Churches grew familiar as they had supported Freedom Village in the past, but funding was waning—perhaps as people felt or hoped the struggle for civil rights was over.

A high point was BVSer Dale Kreider joining the team with



A homeownership counseling class taught by NCALL helps families to become mortgage-ready.

his strong construction background and Christian witness. We fixed up a house at Freedom Village and were able to move onsite, where we hoped to have more of an impact.

■ ■ ■

One key mission was to approach the US Department of Agriculture for rural housing assistance to improve existing homes and develop a plan to build more affordable housing at Freedom Village. The need was great in the underserved Delta.

Over a two-year period, the government treated Freedom Village shabbily, ignoring regulations, denying eligible applications, stymieing with bureaucracy, and doing everything to discourage and halt progress. While some local employees helped, the power structure within the state was shameless. What a revelation to a young person who thought all parties could simply come together for good!

Was it the tent city demonstration that had brought worldwide attention to the poverty of the Delta? Was it the name "Freedom" so soon following the civil rights movement in the '60s? Was it something else? I am at a loss to

explain what creates the mean-spiritedness of those who have versus those in need. All the time, energy, creativity, and resources that were employed to stop Freedom Village could have helped to develop a thriving community.

It was suggested by the Rural Housing Alliance in Washington, D.C.—which was watching our work at Freedom Village—that we chronicle the poor and illegal treatment and behavior by some civil servants who blocked the very work their rural development agency had a mission to support. After my two years of BVS were completed, I wrote *The Sabotage of Freedom Village*, which was published by the Rural Housing Alliance as a study in the abuse of power. It was distributed widely and led to a federal investigation and reams of testimony, all of which showed, at best, ignorance and poor decision-making, and at worst calculated malice and subterfuge designed to stop Freedom Village. The hope was that the agency would do better in the future.

■ ■ ■

The experience BVS provided me led to an opportunity to work for Delta Housing in Indianola, Miss.—continuing my immersion in affordable housing work by helping to develop apartments, self-help homeownership, and the first day care center in Sunflower County. As it turned out, BVS provided a firm foundation of trial-by-fire experience in a manner few jobs could.

My dad's ill health back in Lancaster County required a move north. The BVS experience helped me become part of a small rural housing network across the nation, and I learned of an effort to begin a nonprofit based in Dover, Del., to serve the Delmarva Peninsula. They needed a housing person, so I moved in 1976 and began with NCALL (National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor).

Once again, I was amazed at the poverty, the substandard housing, the lack of infrastructure, underutilized housing programs, and yet the strong local people of this rural area. Armed with three people and a \$50,000 budget, we began organizing around local churches who wanted to begin addressing the need for affordable apartments and homes.

The work I did as a BVSer turned into a career, as I have been with NCALL for 32 years, most as executive director.



Freedom Village residents take part in an early 1970s community Easter egg hunt that BVS workers helped to facilitate.

John Myers



A new homeowner and her family enjoy their first home after receiving assistance from NCALL.

Over the years, an able staff and board of directors have tackled difficult housing issues for migrant farmworkers, poultry processing workers, self-help housing where families combine their labor not unlike barnraisings, transitional housing for the homeless, units for fixed-income elderly, and first-time homebuyers. Faithful to its original mission, NCALL has worked hard at affordable housing development, education and empowerment, community development lending, and strong advocacy.

■ ■ ■

Needs change over time, and substandard conditions have lessened on Delmarva. Recently discovered for its attrac-

tive rural lifestyle, beaches, and low taxes, the peninsula has seen its housing crisis change to that of affordability.

The gap between the cost of rental and homeownership and what local people can afford has grown so wide as to block thousands of our workforce from a decent home and suitable living environment, the goal of National Housing Acts as far back as 1939. Once again I see the dichotomy of expensive second homes at the beach and mansions recently built by retirees new to Delaware at a time when many local people employed in the service sector are struggling to secure a place to live.

The environment for developing affordable housing is at best difficult, facing too few resources, large affordability gaps, Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) opposition, and land use and zoning obstacles. Yet NCALL's dedicated staff (now 23 people), a courageous board of directors, persistent community supporters, and steadfast stakeholders have successfully developed 45 apartment communities and assisted more than 6,000 families in becoming first-time homebuyers.

The bricks and mortar are combined with personal enrichment through consumer and financial education and counseling. After all, decent, affordable homes impact all aspects of family life: health, education, finances, employment, stability, esteem, and socialization.

I didn't go into BVS looking for a career, but I am thankful for the exposure and experiences, the trusting responsibilities given at a young age, the opportunity for humanitarian service, and most of all for a glimpse of the radical Christianity Jesus demonstrated in the New Testament. **M**

Joe Myer is executive director of NCALL (www.ncall.org) in Dover, Del. He is a member of Bethany Church of the Brethren in Farmington, Del.

Two former Brethren Volunteer Service workers—Ken Smith, left, and Joe Myer—work together today on housing issues in Delaware.

ANOTHER BVS CONNECTION

For the past 11 years, I have had the opportunity to work together on affordable housing with another former Brethren Volunteer Service worker, Ken Smith, ever since Ken became director of the Delaware Housing Coalition. The coalition advocates effectively for better public policy and more resources, as well as intentional involvement by people with the greatest housing needs.

Efforts have centered around long-term affordability, resident councils, community land trusts, manufactured housing communities, and policy work at federal, state, and local levels. Ken served in BVS for five years beginning in 1972, first in Belfast, Northern Ireland, as a community worker; then in Dayton, Ohio, as a youth worker; and finally for the Church of the Brethren World Ministries Commission as a project developer in Nazareth, Israel.

Prior to coming to the Delaware Housing Coalition, Ken was community services director for the Salvation Army in Delaware, director of the Cecil County (Md.) Men's Shelter, and administrator for Meeting Ground in Elkton, Md. Ken has been an inspiration to many of us in this field and a great comrade in efforts to effect change in Delaware.—**Joe Myer**





Walt Wiltschek

Some recent Brethren Volunteer Service workers catch up at a banquet during the anniversary weekend in New Windsor, Md.

BVS celebrates 60 years of service

Rainy weather couldn't dampen the spirits of the 325-plus people who gathered in New Windsor, Md., to celebrate Brethren Volunteer Service's 60th anniversary.

The event, held Sept. 26-28 at the Brethren Service Center, featured insight sessions, displays, storytelling, tours of the center, a festive banquet, and a closing worship service. Orientation units representing every decade since BVS' 1948 inception also had ample opportunities for reunions and storytelling.

At the Saturday evening banquet, held at the nearby New Windsor Fire Hall, Manassas (Va.) pastor Jeff Carter reflected on how BVS "has a way of changing our expectations." He shared how it altered his own career path from working on Capitol Hill to entering the ministry.

"There is no 'can't' in BVS or in BVSers," said Carter, sporting one of the many bright purple BVS polo shirts visible in the room. "They are not inward-centered but outward-focused. . . . There's always the potential that tomorrow will have even greater hope."

BVS, he said, "has had a tremendous effect upon our denomination. . . . It is the foundation of who we are."

In keeping with BVS' emphasis on service and simple living, a simple soup and salad meal was served at the banquet, with the excess funds from ticket sales—a total of \$1,680—donated to the Church of the Brethren Global Food Crisis Fund. BVS director Dan McFadden presented the check to general secretary

Stan Noffsinger as a testimony that "many, many in this world go to bed very hungry."

Noffsinger also spoke at the closing worship on Sunday morning, which included a consecration for the 18 members of the newest orientation unit—Unit 282—whose orientation in New Windsor overlapped the anniversary celebration.

Insight sessions included an interview with Alma Long, one of the young adults in 1948 who unexpectedly brought the proposal for BVS to Annual Conference; highlights of Brethren Service in Europe; BVS work in Latin America; and sharing of a variety of stories and history.

As Carter concluded in his address: "Sixty years of change. That adds up."—Walt Wiltschek 

Walt Wiltschek is editor of MESSENGER.



Former BVS workers lift hands high for an informal "poll" of their experiences.

LEARN MORE

A DVD with highlights of the Brethren Volunteer Service anniversary celebration and an assortment of "bonus material" is available from David Sollenberger for \$20. Contact LSVideo@comcast.net or call 717-867-4187.

Galatians: Polemical Paul

*Letter addresses blessings and limits
of freedom in Christ*

by Rick Gardner

Ever send a “flaming” message? Paul would be sympathetic. His letter to the Galatians is full of heated rhetoric, fueled by exasperation with the letter’s recipients. He rebukes them for deserting God and turning to a different gospel (1:6), and later calls them “you foolish Galatians” (3:1).

Indeed, Paul is so riled up that he omits his usual “thanksgiving” for the faith and witness of his audience (cf. Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9). He is in no mood to offer praise.

(1:2), a geographical reference with two possible meanings:

(1) Galatia could refer to a region in central Asia Minor settled by Celtic tribes from Gaul (cf. Acts 16:6); (2) Galatia could refer to the Roman province by that name, which encompassed both the ethnic region of Galatia and areas to the south (where Acts 13-14 reports the founding of several churches).

So, the destination of Paul’s letter remains somewhat uncertain. However, the name “Galatians” in 3:1 is more

saved through Christ. However, unlike Paul (whom they discredited as someone who only knew the gospel secondhand), they insisted that Gentile converts become practicing Jews, adhering to Jewish law. They likely argued that circumcision was the only way to be included in the blessing promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:1-14). And they urged the Galatians to follow in Abraham’s footsteps by submitting to this rite.

Apparently these teachers were very persuasive. At least some Galatian con-

verts were embracing their message and accepting circumcision. And it is this turn of events that Paul views as a threat, not only to the churches he founded in Galatia,

CHRIST FREED US TO LIVE IN FREEDOM, NOT IN SUBJECTION TO FORCES THAT ENSLAVE US.

So, who are these “Galatians” who have provoked Paul’s ire? What has happened that Paul views as wholly contrary to the gospel? And what does Paul have to say in his polemical response?

The first Celtic Christians

The letter tells us several things about the identity of the Galatians. First, they are Gentiles. Paul refers to them as people who formerly “did not know God” (4:8), the kind of language Jews used to describe non-Jews. Second, they are converts who came to believe through Paul’s preaching of the gospel. They are his “little children,” whose life in Christ he helped to birth (4:19, cf. 4:12-19). Third, the churches or assemblies where they gather are located in “Galatia”

applicable to groups whose ethnic roots were Galatian. Most probably, therefore, Paul is writing to churches in the region of Galatia—the very first Celtic Christians!

The lure of new teachers

The situation Paul addresses is one that arose in his absence. Some time after he left Galatia, he was followed by other missionaries. According to Paul, these teachers have perverted the gospel, unsettled the Galatians, and act with dubious motives (cf. 1:7-9; 4:17; 5:12; 6:12). While Paul never names these teachers, the points he makes in his letter provide a fairly clear picture of their identity and agenda.

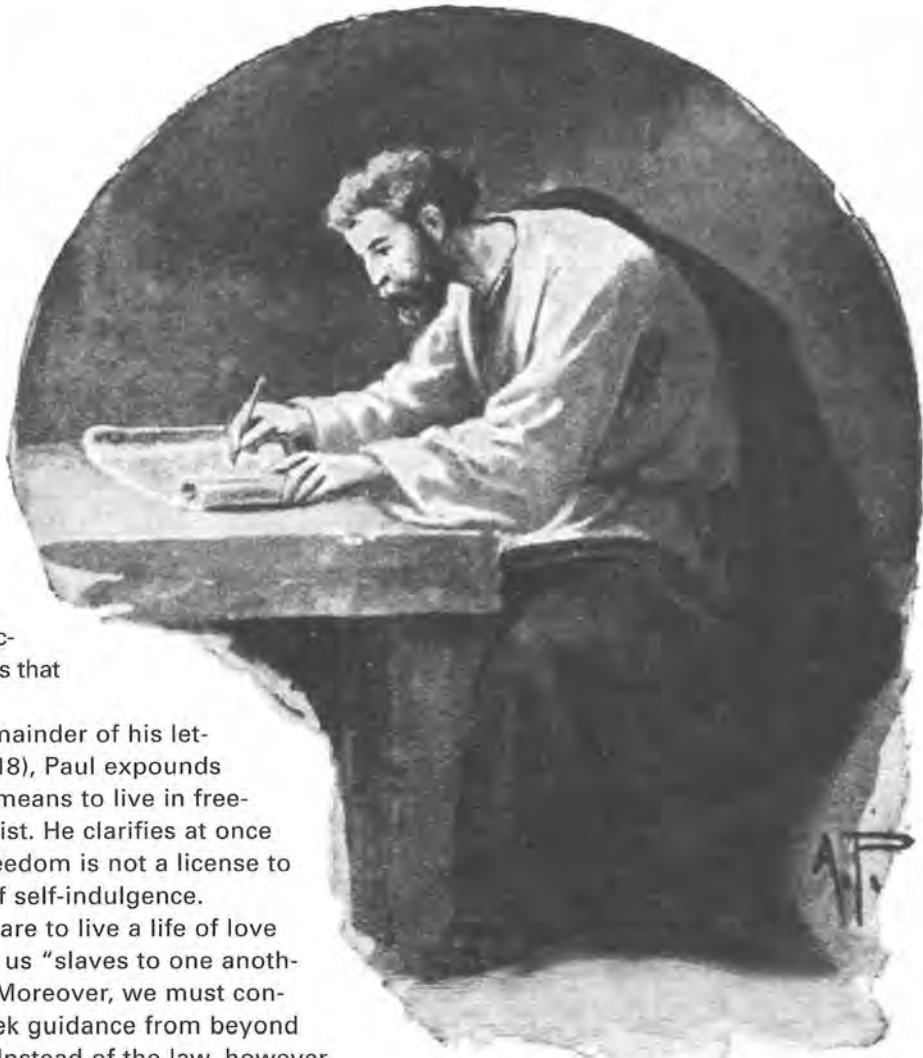
Like Paul, they were Jewish Christians who believed that Gentiles could be

but to the very heart of the gospel. Did Christ come to bring Gentiles into the fold of Judaism? Or did Christ come to inaugurate a new creation in which the distinction of Jew and Gentile no longer matters? Paul clearly believed the latter.

Paul’s defense of the gospel

The impassioned rhetoric of Galatians is Paul’s attempt to defend his understanding of the gospel. Not surprisingly, he begins with a defense of his own credentials (1:1-2:21). Responding to his detractors, Paul affirms that Christ himself is the source of his gospel and his apostolic calling (cf. 1:1-2; 1:11-17). That’s about as first-hand as you can get.

Moreover, when Paul met with church leaders to report on his mission a num-



ber of years later (cf. 2:1-10), they had nothing to add to his gospel and endorsed his work with the Gentiles.

In the middle section of his letter (3:1-5:12), Paul presents a series of arguments to counter the view that Gentiles must perform "works of the law" (i.e., observe Jewish practices). Among the points he makes, Paul argues that:

- 1) The Galatians received the gift of the Spirit by simply trusting the good news; nothing more was required.
- 2) God's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham preceded the law and is independent of the law.
- 3) The law had a role to play as a disciplinarian for God's people until the coming of Christ, but that era has now ended.
- 4) If we belong to Christ through faith and baptism, we are heirs of all that God promised to Abraham.
- 5) Submitting to the law is a form of spiritual bondage, the kind of bondage in which the Galatians were previously enmeshed.
- 6) Christ freed us to live in freedom,

not in subjection to forces that enslave us.

In the remainder of his letter (5:13-6:18), Paul expounds on what it means to live in freedom in Christ. He clarifies at once that this freedom is not a license to live a life of self-indulgence. Rather, we are to live a life of love that makes us "slaves to one another" (5:13). Moreover, we must continue to seek guidance from beyond ourselves. Instead of the law, however, we look to the Spirit for that guidance, to our very life-source. And we give the Spirit free reign to work the wonder of a new creation.

The particular issues in Galatia are no longer our issues. Annual Conference is unlikely to receive a query on circumcision. The larger question, however, of the character of the gospel is as timely as ever. Is the gospel tied to an exclusive identity or tradition, to what divides us from others? Or is the gospel about a realm where different stories come

together, where "there is no longer Jew or Greek . . . no longer slave or free . . . no longer male and female" (3:28)? **M**

Rick Gardner is emeritus professor of New Testament Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind., where he is serving again as interim academic dean in 2008-2009. He lives in Huntley, Ill.

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 December: Ephesians, by Tara Hornbacker.

GALATIANS: A CLOSER LOOK

Author and audience: Galatians was written by the apostle Paul and sent to "the churches of Galatia" (1:2). It was composed sometime between the late 40s and mid-50s CE.

Key verses: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (2:19-20); "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (3:28); "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1); "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6); "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (5:25, RSV).

Other notes: Paul's letter to the Galatians has deeply influenced Christian thought, most notably through the way it develops the themes of faith and freedom. Yet another point of influence is the powerful affirmation found in 3:28, which depicts the church as a community where social divisions and inequalities are overcome in Christ.

Rushford flood relief project heads down home stretch

Church of the Brethren volunteers have been in Rushford, Minn., for nearly a year now, helping the town recover from floods that devastated the town in August 2007. The town of 1,700 has taken notice of the long-term presence.

"The people in town—I can't tell you how amazed they are by the Brethren," said Jerry Moore, a disaster project director who has been assisting in Rushford this fall. "Every day people stop me. They say, 'Everyone else has been disappearing, but you're still here.' They can't believe people keep coming and coming and coming. People appreciate it, and they let you know it."

The work has been extensive. Nearly 500 homes in the town were affected by the fast-moving flood, some with water up



Walt Witschek
Disaster project director Dave Engel shows features of one of the homes being totally rebuilt after floods in Rushford, Minn.

to the main floor, and almost 100 families were displaced. Few had flood insurance. Volunteers began with clean-up, rehabilitation projects and smaller fix-up jobs, then progressed to eight total rebuilds.

Brethren Disaster Ministries hopes to

finish the project by the end of the year. As of mid-September, four of the rebuilt houses had been completed, two were under way, and two more were awaiting donated supplies to begin. One house went from deck to roof in a week, with

Older adult conference wades in to week full of worship, activities

Warmth and friendliness were hallmarks of the National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) held

Sept. 1-5 at Lake Junaluska, N.C. About 900 Brethren gathered by the calm waters of the lake to hear engaging keynote speakers on the theme "Come to the Water," attend workshops, eat gallons of ice



Eddie Edmonds

NOAC participants enjoy some aerobics in an optional session; opposite page, golfers head out on the course for the NOAC tournament.

cream, and catch up with one another since the last NOAC in 2006.

Sandy Bosselman, former Missouri/Arkansas District executive minister, preached at the opening worship and invited the conference to "Come to the Troubled Waters." She began with pleasant images of water, such as beaches with lazy waves and gentle breezes, but then recalled times in her life when

water played a more troubling role. She called Brethren to the troubled waters that brought healing to the crippled man in John 5:1-7. "'Come to the Troubled Waters' is a loaded invitation," she said. "We Brethren certainly know about troubled water and the dangers of wading into it."

Stephen Breck Reid, former dean and professor of Old Testament Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary, led a series of three Bible studies. He opened the series by stating, "'Come to the waters' is not just about a sentimental, warm-fuzzy time, but it is an invitation to come to the troubled waters that God has presented to us."

Tuesday morning keynote speaker Donald Kraybill described the tragic day of the shooting of Amish children at Nickel Mines in Pennsylvania. Silence fell upon Stuart Auditorium as Kraybill, senior fellow at the Young Center at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, recounted the events. The message was sobering, but of greater importance was the Amish response of faith, grace, and forgiveness. "My question to us this morning is simply this: If these had been our children, our sisters, if these had been our granddaughters or nieces, how would we have responded?" Kraybill asked. "What would we have done?" Kraybill is co-author of the book *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*.

Other highlights of the conference included inspiring messages from keynote presenters Jane Thibault, a clinical gerontologist and clinical professor at the University of Louisville; Valerie Bridgeman Davis, associate professor of Hebrew, homiletics, and worship at Memphis Theological Seminary; and Scott Sheperd, who used a humorous, nontraditional approach to focus on stress. Rounding out the

volunteers who were all 65 or older. Some volunteers have traveled 1,000 miles or more.

"We're helping the poorest of the poor," said Dave Engel, a native Minnesotan who served as project director in September and also opened the project last winter. "If we weren't here, they'd be—well, I don't know where they'd be."

A video about the flood, caused when remnants of Tropical Storm Erin moved across the upper Midwest, can be viewed at www.rushfordcommunityfoundation.com.

Theme for 2009 Conference in San Diego is announced

"The old has gone! The new has come! All this is from God!" taken from 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, has been announced as the theme for the 2009 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. The Conference will be held June 26-30 at the Town and Country Resort in San Diego, Calif.

An extended theme statement reads, in part,

"We are God's new creation transformed through Christ. Released from the past, we find God's presence no longer guilt-provoking, frightening, and condemning; but dynamic, creative, and life-giving. . . . As we move past the celebration of our heritage and toward the culmination of our purpose, let us hear these words! The old has gone! The new has come! All this is from God!"

In other news related to the 2009 Conference, a special parking rate of \$5 per day has been negotiated, rather than the previously announced \$12 per day.

Also, there are two corrections to the listing of denominational offices open for 2009: only one person will be elected to the Bethany Theological Seminary board, and the opening is for someone to represent the Brethren colleges; and a district executive will be elected to the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, not someone from the laity. Nominations must be sent to the Annual Conference Office by Dec. 1.

week was Frank Ramirez, pastor of Everett (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and author of several books.

Nancy Faus-Mullen, professor emerita of Bethany Theological Seminary, led the conference in a celebration of 300 years of Brethren hymnody. The gathering sang hymns and songs from the 18th century to the present time. The evening featured several hymn writers leading their own hymns, and included a hymn led by Wil Nolen, retiring president of BBT and former song leader at NOAC. Conference entertainment also included the group Trifolkal, whose songs and stories had conferencegoers laughing, crying, and tapping their feet along a journey of healing.

David Sollenberger and the NOAC News Team provided twice-daily doses of humor, announcements, news, and other material. The antics of the news team were anxiously anticipated, as attendees waited to see the latest creative installment. A DVD of the week's episodes of NOAC News is available from Brethren Press (800-441-3712).

Several groups celebrated anniversaries. Brethren Volunteer Service celebrated its 60th anniversary, NOAC observed the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Church of the Brethren, and those who were at National Youth Conference (NYC) in 1958 held a 50th reunion. The 1958 NYC was the second in Church of the Brethren history, and also was held at Lake Junaluska.

Over 200 walkers in the Well Walk, and even more NOAC participants who gave donations,

SPECIAL EVENTS

Nov. 2 National Junior High Sunday

Nov. 7-8 Shenandoah District Conference, Bridgewater, Va.

Nov. 7-9 Illinois/Wisconsin District Conference, Peoria, Ill.; Pacific Southwest District Conference, Fresno, Calif.

Nov. 14-15 Virlina District Conference, Roanoke, Va.

Nov. 16 National Donor Sabbath

Nov. 21-22 Brethren Benefit Trust board meeting, Elgin, Ill.

Dec. 1 World AIDS Day

Dec. 1-4 Ecumenical Stewardship Center leadership seminar, Marco Island, Fla.

Dec. 7 Christmas Offering Emphasis; *Gather 'Round* winter curriculum quarter begins

Jan. 12-15, 2009 Church of the Brethren Clergywomen's Retreat, Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.

Jan. 25-Feb. 13 Brethren Volunteer Service winter unit orientation, Gotha, Fla.



pushed toward two goals—two miles around Lake Junaluska and \$5,000 to provide a sustainable water system at the Comprehensive Secondary School of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) at church headquarters in Kwarhi, Nigeria. More than \$4,700 was received, with donations still coming.

In order to insure that no more than two major Church of the Brethren conferences are held in any one year, the next NOAC will be in 2009, again at Lake Junaluska. Thereafter the conference will return to its biennial schedule. NOAC 2009 will take place Sept. 7-11 on the theme, "Legacies of Wisdom: Weaving Old and New." Registration brochures will be mailed in March.—**Eddie Edmonds**

Eddie Edmonds is pastor of Moler Avenue Church of the Brethren, Martinsburg, W.Va., and chair of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board. He served as director of communications at NOAC. Alice Edmonds, Frank Ramirez, and Mary Lou Garrison contributed to this report.

Brethren leaders among those at meeting with Iran president

Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren, and Phil Jones, director of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office, were among some 300 international religious and political figures—including Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—at a Sept. 25 dialogue in New York. The meeting was held to discuss the role of religion in responding to global challenges and building peace and understanding between societies.

The gathering was one of an ongoing series of meetings that have come at the initiative of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The Church of the Brethren was requested to accompany Mennonite leaders and MCC staff to the meeting as one of the three Historic Peace Churches.

At a meeting with President Ahmadinejad a year ago, three Brethren were among some 140 Christian leaders: Jones, Annual Conference moderator James Beckwith, and Church of the Brethren representative to the UN Doris Abdullah. Previous gatherings occurred when a small group of religious leaders met with President Ahmadinejad during a previous visit to the US, and when a delegation of US religious leaders traveled to Iran in February 2007.

The theme of this most recent dialogue was "Has not one God created



On September 25, religious and political figures—including Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—met for an international dialogue on the role of religion in building peace. Here, President Ahmadinejad addresses the audience.

Peace, and the World Council of Churches United Nations Liaison Office, in consultation with the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the UN.

Arli Klassen, executive director of MCC, gave welcoming remarks on behalf of the sponsoring organizations. She lit an oil lamp as a symbol of faith and invited participants to reflect on peacemaking from their own faith perspectives. "As a Christian, I believe that we are following Jesus Christ's example and his teaching as we eat together and hold this dialogue despite our many differences," Klassen said.

Klassen noted several areas of high tension in relations between Iran, the US, and other nations. Addressing Ahmadinejad, Klassen raised concerns about his statements on the Holocaust and Israel, Iran's nuclear program, and religious freedom in Iran. "We ask you to find a way within your own country to allow for religious diversity, and to allow people to make their own choices as to which religion they will follow," Klassen said.

Ahmadinejad spoke in broad terms about "challenges facing the human community," including poverty, declin-

us? The significance of religious contributions to peace." A series of panelists shared Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives on addressing poverty, injustice, environmental degradation, and war. Speakers included Ahmadinejad, former prime minister of Norway Kjell Bondevik, and Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, president of the United Nations General Assembly.

The dialogue, which followed a meal, was sponsored by MCC, American Friends Service Committee, the Quaker United Nations Office, Religions for

and will begin teaching in January.

• **Shelly Wagner** resigned as director of the conference center and marketing at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., effective Oct. 10. She had begun in the position on March 24, with a background in domestic and international marketing in the for-profit arena.

• **Steve Mullaney** of Plymouth, Minn., began a two-year assignment with the Church of the Brethren's Global Mission Partnerships on Aug. 4 at Miguel Angel Asturias Academy in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. He will serve through BVS as an office and volunteer coordinator at the school, which offers high-quality experiential learning opportunities to indigenous students.

• **Patrice Nightingale and Eric Thompson** began in new positions at

Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) effective Sept. 15. Nightingale assumed the responsibilities of BBT's interim director of communications while applications are being accepted to fill the position permanently. Thompson was promoted from network administrator to the newly created position of director of operations for information technology. Nightingale came to BBT in May as manager of publications and will continue in that capacity during the interim. Thompson began working for BBT on Jan. 2, 2001, as information services/eMountain support technician. He became network administrator in 2003.

PERSONNELMOVES

• **Barb Sayler** resigned as coordinator of communications for On Earth Peace, effective mid-October. She joined the staff as co-executive director in Sept. 2000. In May last year, she stepped back from the co-director role to work part-time and have more time for family. In previous work for the denomination, she served in Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) and worked as a program assistant for BVS, assistant to the director of the Washington Office, and coordinator of volunteers in Children's Disaster Ministries. Sayler planned to do an internship this fall with Music Together, a music program for young children and their parents/caregivers,

ing morality, and a lack of religion in public life. He decried the humanitarian costs of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon, and spoke extensively about the hardships suffered by Palestinians. He criticized nations such as the United States for maintaining nuclear weapons and did not deviate from his previous statements that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

A few hundred protesters demonstrated across the street during the meeting with Ahmadinejad, Noffsinger said. The protesters, he felt, were identifying the peace churches as "irrelevant to American culture. That's been abrasive and difficult to hear," he said.

Noffsinger said he has received questions about why the Brethren participated.

"To be at that table, this is what it means to be a peace church," he said. "We're always called by Jesus' command to love neighbors as ourselves. The church also has position papers on nuclear weapons, war, international

relationships. We have a statement on peacemaking, and we will take every avenue of nonviolent resolution. These are reasons we go to the table; that's why we risk it. Our faith compels us."

The Church of the Brethren has consistently engaged in conversation and relationship-building with people identified as political enemies, in obedience to the command of Jesus to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44, Luke 6:27). For example, during the Cold War the Church of the Brethren hosted delegations of Russian representatives from the Russian Orthodox Church, at a time when those visits also were met by hostile groups of protesters.

"There are going to be other places around the world where we are going to be called to be in the middle of it, and that's where we ought to be" as Brethren, Noffsinger said. "It's where we've always been."

(Mennonite Central Committee contributed to this report.)

Recent grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund

- \$50,000 to Brethren Disaster Ministries to continue rebuilding following Hurricane Katrina, at the project site in **Chalmette, La.**
- \$30,000 to support Church World Service (CWS) relief work in **Myanmar**, following the destruction caused by Cyclone Nargis
- \$22,500 to respond to a growing food crisis in **Ethiopia**, helping CWS provide emergency food rations targeted to the most vulnerable people
- \$15,000 to CWS for Palestinians living in **Gaza and the West Bank**, supporting medical care, agricultural training and development, and job creation
- Two grants totaling \$11,000 to CWS to respond to the **flooding in the Midwest**

- \$8,000 to aid **Iraqi refugees** and internally displaced people, supporting the work of the International Orthodox Christian Communities and the Middle East Council of Churches through CWS
- \$7,500 to CWS appeal following flooding and damage from Hurricane Dolly in **Texas**
- \$7,000 to CWS following **Tropical**

Storm Fay

- \$5,000 to support the work of Children's Disaster Services in **Indiana and Iowa**
- \$5,000 to support the work of Northern Plains District following flooding in **Iowa**
- \$5,000 to support the work of Children's Disaster Services in Louisiana and Mississippi following **Hurricane Gustav**
- \$4,000 to a Church World Service (CWS) appeal following **spring tornadoes and flooding** across the US
- \$2,500 to CWS following flooding caused by the breach of an irrigation canal in **Fernley, Nev.**

Recent grants from the Global Food Crisis Fund

- \$13,760 to the **Foods Resource Bank**, representing the Church of the Brethren's 2008 allocation for operational support
- \$12,500 to support CWS partner work in **Ethiopia**, assisting people vulnerable to hunger with food rations, seeds, edible oils, and corn soy blend, and helping provide seed for future crops.

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'The Dark Knight': A study in ethics

The discovery of Scholastic Book Services brought an end to my short comic book phase. I wasn't much of a superhero fan as a child, but Batman intrigued me. He had no superpowers but was pretty super. I enjoyed the various movies that came over the years but skipped *Batman Begins* when it was released a couple years ago. When I finally saw it on DVD I wasn't that impressed.

The Dark Knight is different. The second of a planned trilogy directed by Christopher Nolan and starring Christian Bale

answers a very basic theological question in a pretty Brethren fashion.

A central conflict in the film is the question of whether any individual, no matter how well intentioned, has the right to be judge and jury. That's what Batman, Commissioner Gordon (well played by Gary Oldman), and Lucius Fox, CEO of Wayne Enterprises (wonderfully portrayed by Morgan Freeman, one of my favorite actors), struggle with in different ways.

Vigilante justice can be alluring. Cut the red tape, eliminate the bad guys. But Batman and others struggle with a dark side. By the end of the film all, including Batman, conclude that no one is good enough to wield absolute power.

The Joker, played by Heath Ledger, believes everyone is evil. What matters, therefore, is self-preservation at all costs. He believes that everyone, at their heart, is like him. And at least one of the good guys, a prosecuting attorney, comes to share this view.

That brings us to the heart of the film, at least for me. Spoiler alert. In the second half of the film, having created a general panic in Gotham City, the Joker forces the passengers on two stalled ferries to make a choice. One is filled with ordinary citizens, the other with convicts. Each has the power to detonate a bomb in the other boat. If neither chooses to detonate its bomb, both ships will explode at midnight.

Aren't the ordinary citizens more valuable than the convicts? Can't we assume the convicts will heartlessly choose to kill the citizens? How do you decide what to do? Take charge? Take a vote? Make no choice and die anyway?

And that's the real question of the movie: Are people basi-

cally good or basically evil? The Joker is betting that people are, like him, basically evil. He's wrong.

Now let's take a historical step backwards. Prior to the legalization of Christianity by the Romans in the fourth century, ours was not a monolithic faith. There were various expressions in Alexandria, Asia Minor, Jerusalem, and the north coast of Africa. One of these expressions, developed by a man named Pelagius, was only labeled a heresy after Christianity became legal.

Pelagius said God made people basically good. His antagonist, Augustine, insisted we were basically depraved. Most Christians, no matter what they say, end up somewhere in the middle. We say we believe in original sin, but judging by the way we act it's clear we believe folks will come through.

Brethren are at least part Pelagian. Yes, we believe in original sin, but not really. That's why we don't baptize infants. Besides, we've seen too many examples of redeemed humanity doing great things in the name of Jesus. Sinners all, we're still good people, and we think everyone else is good until they prove otherwise.

So what happens? One of the convicts takes hold of the trigger mechanism and tosses it out of his ship. One of the citizens insists that the convicts must be sacrificed, takes hold of the trigger, and in the end cannot push the detonator. No one blows up. Bad bet by the Joker.

Brethren Old Testament scholar Bob Neff in his study of the book of Job has concluded that God always bets on humanity, no matter if we seem like a good risk or not. That's why the real heroes of the film are the passengers on the two stranded ferries. The real heroes in life are us.

This is not a movie for young children, or for people who don't like long chase scenes and things blowing up. I confess whenever I watch scenes like this I agonize about the problems the ordinary people are going to have with their insurance companies after they're struck a glancing blow by the Batmobile.

God is taking a bet on us. We Christians, despite the evidence that there is real evil at work in the world, keep taking a bet that redemption is possible.

Ultimately God's going to win that bet. **M**

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Everett (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.



ABOUT THE FILM

Title: "The Dark Knight." **Rating:** PG-13. **Released:** July 18.

Director: Christopher Nolan. **Running time:** 2 hours, 32 minutes.

DVD: The DVD is expected to be available in December.

What others are saying: "Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* is a haunted film that leaps beyond its origins and becomes an engrossing tragedy. . . . (It) poses a more complex puzzle than usual." — Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*

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

Receiving the Merlin E. and Dorothy Faw Garber Awards for Christian Service this year were Daniel Rudy, a 2008 graduate from Mount Airy, Md.; Claire Gilbert Ulrich, a 1978 alumna; and Dale V. Ulrich, provost and professor of physics emeritus, both from Bridgewater, Va. . . . Beverly S. Butterfield of New Market, Va., began as vice president for institutional advancement on Oct. 1.

Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, Pa.)

Jeffrey Miller, a 1995 Elizabethtown alumnus and most recently Pennsylvania State Police Commissioner, was named director of strategic security for the National Football League effective Aug. 8. . . . Erin Fisher and Kevin Clark, both 2008 Elizabethtown graduates, earned All-America honors at the NCAA Division III Outdoor Track and Field Championships.

Juniata College (Huntingdon, Pa.)

Juniata president Thomas R. Kepple Jr. has been named to the Higher Education Cabinet by the editors of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *New York Times*. As a member of the cabinet, Kepple will travel to New York once a year to meet with journalists and editors from both newspapers. The inaugural meeting of the group was Sept. 15.

University of La Verne (La Verne, Calif.)

Two La Verne psychology professors have helped to create a program designed to provide mental health professionals with the training they need to serve a multicultural clientele. Professors Glenn Gamst and Aghop Der-Karabetian have contributed 10 years of research and evaluation to the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale (CBMCS) Multicultural Training Program, currently being implemented across the United States and around the world.

Manchester College (North Manchester, Ind.)

Manchester was again named a "Best College" by *U.S. News & World Report*. It ranks the college 18th among Midwest schools that focus on undergraduate degrees. The 2009 ranking marks Manchester's 14th consecutive year as a "Best College."

McPherson College (McPherson, Kan.)

Richard D. Doll of Louisburg, Kan., a 1976 alumnus and a board of trustees member, will chair McPherson's 13-member presidential search committee. Current president Ron Hovis has resigned effective summer 2009.

Hundreds serve through summer workcamps

Nearly 700 junior- and senior-high youth and adult advisors were part of Church of the Brethren workcamps this past summer.

In all, 28 workcamps were offered by the Church of the Brethren's Youth and Young Adult Ministries office in 12 states and four countries. Participants traveled as far west as Idaho and as far south as Mexico and the Caribbean. The theme for the summer's workcamps was "... Strengthen My Hands," based on Nehemiah 6:9.

Youth had a wide variety of experiences. The groups at the Pine Ridge (S.D.) workcamp learned about Native American culture through participating in an "inipi" or sweat lodge, a beading lesson, and a trip to the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre. Work projects included home repairs around the reservation, as well as improvements to a school.

Workcampers explored urban issues of poverty and homelessness in Roanoke, Va.; Baltimore, Md.; Indianapolis; Chicago; and Ashland, Ohio. Workcamps in Neon, Ky., and Keyser, W.Va., were provided with a perspective on rural life. Those who went to Saint Croix in the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Reynosa, Mexico, experienced cross-cultural interactions.

Dates and locations for the 2009 workcamps are now available. Registration begins Jan. 5. For more information, go to www.brethren.org/genbd/yya/workcamps; brochures will also be mailed to each congregation.—Meghan Horne

Meghan Horne is an assistant coordinator for the 2009 workcamp program. A member of Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Tryon, N.C., she is serving through Brethren Volunteer Service.

Jeanne Davies



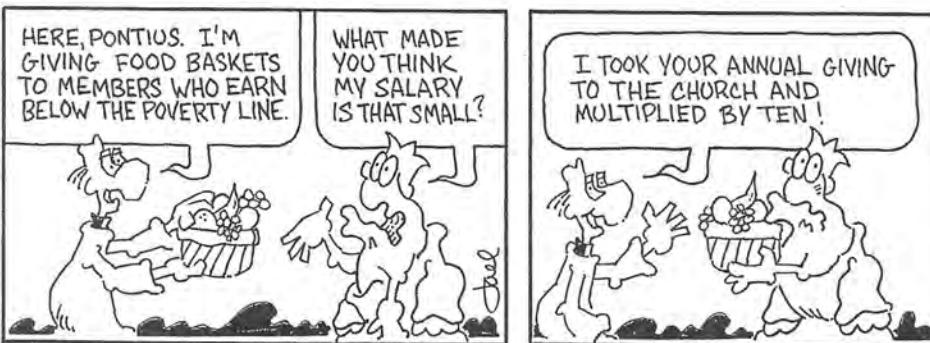
Youth put in a full day's work at the John Kline Homestead workcamp in Broadway, Va. It was one of 28 youth/young adult workcamps offered by the Church of the Brethren this past summer.

Bits and pieces

- The Church of the Brethren **National Youth Cabinet** worked on selecting the national youth theme for 2009, on plans for next year's National Youth Sunday, and on worship materials to be sent to youth groups across the denomination as it met Aug. 1-3 in Elgin, Ill. The cabinet includes Seth Keller, Joel Rhodes, Elizabeth Willis, Turner Ritchie, and Tricia Ziegler.

- The 2009 **National Youth Christian Citizenship Seminar**, sponsored by the Church of the Brethren Youth/Young Adult Ministries office and Brethren Witness/Washington Office, will be held April 25-30. The event, for senior high youth and advisors, begins in New York and ends in Washington, D.C. This year's theme is "Unwavering Resistance to Modern-Day Slavery," which will be addressed through keynote sessions, worship, a visit to the United Nations, small groups, and other activities. Registration is \$350, not including travel or most meals, and is limited to the first 100. For more details, visit www.brethren.org/genbd/yya/CCS.htm.

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Proud to be a member

I recently read the news release that reported that Stan Noffsinger, the general secretary of the Church of the Brethren, and Phil Jones, director of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office, participated in a meeting with some 300 international religious and political figures that included President Ahmadinejad of Iran.

The subject of the meeting was to discuss the role of religion in responding to global challenges and building peace and understanding between societies. In short, learning of the Church of the Brethren's participation in such a meeting made me proud to be a member. I pray God will bless the effort.

Bert M. Harrison
South Bend, Ind.

The other statistics

I appreciated the list of the 17 largest Brethren congregations in the July/August issue of MESSENGER—largest

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in membership. I encourage you to include in the [next] issue a list of the largest congregations in church worship attendance, for church attendance may be as significant as membership.

Olden D. Mitchell
North Manchester, Ind.

Editor's note: Good suggestion, Olden. The largest 17 by worship attendance, according to the 2008 Church of the Brethren Yearbook, are Frederick (Md.) 920; White Oak (Manheim, Pa.) 566; Eaton (Ohio) 517; Middle Creek (Lititz, Pa.) 461; Chambersburg (Pa.) 434; Ephrata (Pa.) 425; Castine (Ohio) 411; Lancaster (Pa.) 391; Lititz (Pa.) 361; Chiques (Manheim, Pa.) 360; Midway (Lebanon, Pa.) 359; Pine Glen (Lewistown, Pa.) 348; Bridgewater (Va.) 320; Pleasant Hill (Spring Grove, Pa.) 314; Eglise de Freres Haitiens (Miami, Fla.) 303; Mechanic Grove (Quarryville, Pa.) 302; Buffalo Valley (Mifflinburg, Pa.) 300; Manchester (North Manchester, Ind.) 300.

We're under orders

I come from a family with significant military experience. I myself have had training in the reserves. I know about logistics, tactics, and destroying an enemy. I understand there is a "chain of command." Those who serve are highly trained to follow their orders. Orders must be followed at all costs. Many have sacrificed their lives following orders. The soldier at the bottom of the "chain of command" does not have complete information as to why the orders have been given. Orders have, sometimes, been given with faulty intelligence. Faulty intelligence can even have its basis with the commander-in-chief, yet the soldier must follow the orders that come through the chain of command. An army without chain of command would be useless.

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.



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A CONTINUING TESTIMONY



Kate Gandy

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Youth/Young Adult Minister
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Jon Keller

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This brings me to others who are also under orders. All Christians are under orders. Christ has ordered us to: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all I have commanded; love God with all your heart strength and soul and love your neighbor as yourself; love one another; go the second mile; turn the other cheek; love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you; feed

CLASSIFIED ADS

Alexander Mack: A Man Who Rippled the Waters, written by Myrna Grove and illustrated by Mary Jewell, celebrates the life of our first Brethren leader 300 years ago in 18th-century Europe. In clear and graceful prose, the 64-page book with nearly 50 oil paintings traces the life events of our religious forbear in Germany, Holland, and early Pennsylvania. Autographed copies for \$22 plus \$3 postage are available as Christmas gifts and can be ordered from the author's website, www.mgrovbooks.com, or by writing to Myrna Grove, PO Box 801, Bryan, OH 43506.

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Lone Star Church of the Brethren is looking for copies of the old *Tabernacle Hymns, Number Three*, published in 1935. Contact: Angie Fishburn, 977 650 Rd., Lawrence, Kansas, 66047. Phone: 785-748-0819.

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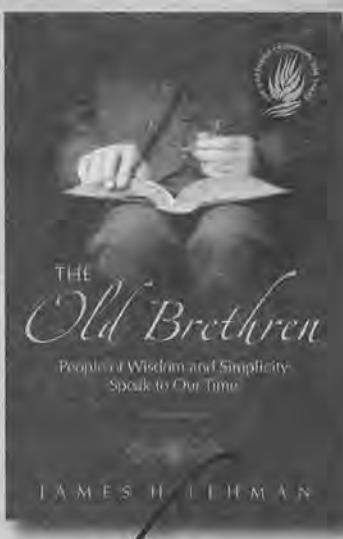
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MANY OF US BELIEVE FREEDOM IS A STATE OF BEING GIVEN TO OUR HEARTS AND MINDS FROM OUR LORD AND NOT SOMETHING GIVEN BY GOVERNMENT POLICY. CONSIDER, WITH ME, BEING UNDER HIS ORDERS.

the hungry; clothe the naked; visit the sick; welcome the stranger; liberate those held captive. These are the basic orders from my "Commander," our Lord and Master and Savior.

The New Testament of our Bible has more orders, but, as I said, these are basic. If Christians do not follow his orders, then the Christian church does not exist. We then have social organizations with a religious flavor. There are many of these in existence today. If I find myself as a citizen of a country whose laws or whose required service

in the military require me to disobey the heavenly commands of our Lord and Master I will choose as Peter did in Acts when he was told by the governing authorities he could not speak about Jesus: "I must obey God rather than man." I also return to my Boy Scout training: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and Country."

I am one under orders to obey God first. I rejoice that America allows this freedom. I am also aware that many claim that I have this freedom because of fighters who sacrificed their lives

(even my own brother on Wake Island), but nevertheless this does not free me and many others from opposing war and saying we are under orders from our Supreme Commander. If we fail to follow his orders the Christian church will cease. Many of us believe freedom is a state of being given to our hearts and minds from our Lord and not something given by government policy. Consider, with me, being under his orders.

Donald K. Flint
Sterling Heights, Mich.

Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-523-8039 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

Bassett, Va.: Jeff Alderman, James Mills
Champaign, Ill.: Sally Steffens
Elizabethtown, Pa.: Jennifer Fairbanks, Alexander Good, Ler La, Aidan Maghan, Hallie McDonough, Margaret Rhodes, Lucas Strayer
Everett, Pa.: Shawn Hendershot, Tracey Hendershot

First Central, Kansas City, Kans.: Joel Hembree, Phillip Rambeaux

Indian Creek, Harleysville, Pa.: Morgan Bechtel, Alicia Bateman, Victoria Bateman
Lewiston, Maine: Mackenzie Negley

Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.: Justine Kreider, Veronica Mull, Dennis Mowery, Kim Mowery, Kayla Schneider, Dave Wilhelm, Lisa Wilhelm, Larry Costa, Shannon Costa, Tyler Costa, Lacey Costa, Kathleen Mowery, Lindsay Capoferri, Michael Malloy

Mohican, West Salem, Ohio: Jim Flinn, Mary Flinn, Alex Flinn, Nick Flinn, Sarhra Flinn, Emily Flinn, Deana Gilmore, Nicholle Lamson, Karen Sobiesienski

Monte Vista, Callaway, Va.: Ryan Clingenpeel

New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, Lititz, Pa.: Justin Brubaker

New Enterprise, Pa.: Zane Grimes, Alexandra Clark, Carol Hess, Collin Hess

Pleasant View, Jefferson, Md.: Carolyn E. Storm, Aletha Swisher

Rummel, Windber, Pa.: Debbie Lehman, John Lehman, Jake Lehman

Saint Petersburg, Fla.: Caitlyn Cunningham

Trotwood, Ohio: Abby McGhee, Marcus McGhee, Linda York, Mallory Sommer, Brittany Bush

Woodbury, Pa.: April Drake, Christopher Houp, Laura Ritchey, Matthew Ritchey, Shane Ritchey, Ryan Wertz

Wedding Anniversaries

Baile, Glen and Betty, Warrensburg, Mo., 60

Butterbaugh, Duane and Janis, Dixon, Ill., 50

Erisman, Ethmer and Kathryn, Warrensburg, Mo., 60

Fulton, Marvin and Lois, Bellville, Ohio, 60

Hamilton, David and Velma, Virden, Ill., 80

Hoover, Richard and Margaret, Hollidaysburg, Pa., 50

Kauffman, Donald and Rosita, San Juan, P.R., 55

Koontz, Ray and JoAnn, Everett, Pa., 55

Krall, Marlin and Shirley, Cerro Gordo, Ill., 50

Longenecker, Marlin and Marion, Lititz, Pa., 50

Manges, Harold and Arlene, Windber, Pa., 70

Maurizio, James and Donna, Windber, Pa., 50

Shively, Glen and Norma, Dayton, Ohio, 50

Showalter, Arlen and Edna, Everett, Pa., 55

Sisler, James and Winifred, Oakland, Md., 50

Smith, Don and Norma, Harleysville, Pa., 60

Deaths

Appenheimer, A. Clay, 81, Dixon, Ill., Aug. 31

Boitnott, Daisybelle, 88, Somerset, Pa., Aug. 24

Brenner, John H., 80, Lititz, Pa., July 14

Bucher, Marie, 98, Quarryville, Pa., July 27

Clatterbuck, George Lee, 81, Charlottesville, Va., Aug. 20

Enck, Dale, 55, Quarryville, Pa., Aug. 16

England, Paul C., 92, Everett, Pa., Oct. 16, 2007

Fields, Glenn, 72, New Carlisle, Ohio, Aug. 20

Fissus, Ivan, 95, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 4

Foutz, Larry Leon, 85, Roanoke, Va., Aug. 8

Gibson, Wayne, 87, McPherson, Kans., Sept. 10

Goode, Michael D., 37, Troutville, Va., Sept. 8

Groff, Rebecca S., 95, Lititz, Pa., July 24

Hess, Esther, 98, Waterloo, Iowa, Aug. 22

Hixon, Roy W., 90, New Carlisle, Ohio, Aug. 3

Holdiman, Mabel M., 91, Waterloo, Iowa, Aug. 31

Hoover, Warren W., 85, Fort Washington, Md., Sept. 4

Horvath, Frank, 85, Windber, Pa., July 7

Jarrett, Agnes, 86, Bassett, Va., Aug. 20

Keeney, Ruth, 72, Lebanon, Pa., Sept. 4

Kephart, Ruth, 95, Bethel Park, Pa., June 24

Lear, Marion, 80, Duncansville, Pa., April 18

Lichty, Richard, 83, Waterloo, Iowa, Sept. 11

Miller, Charles A., Jr., 67, Keyser, W. Va., April 30

Nixdorf, Anna B., 89, Lititz, Pa., Aug. 8

Nolen, Aaron D., 95, Bassett, Va., June 13

Northup, Lois V., 86, Modesto, Calif., Aug. 20

Phillips, Olga, 78, Johnstown, Pa., July 21

Priser, Clarence G., 101, Sparta, N.C., Aug. 22

Priser, Floyd, 79, Bremen, Ind., Feb. 12

Puterbaugh, Emerson, 90, Dayton, Ohio, Aug. 26

Ratcliff, Sheila Padgett, 66, Roanoke, Va., April 20

Reiff, Mary Ellen, 88, Goshen, Ind., Aug. 7

Royer, Ruth R., 93, Granite Bay, Calif., July 24

Stone, Mary, 89, Everett, Pa., Nov. 5, 2007

Thim, William, Sr., 81, Harleysville, Pa., Sept. 9

Trout, Mike, 64, Bassett, Va., July 13

Webster, Lena Ratcliff, 106, Roanoke, Va., June 28

Welch, Reuel P., 89, Quarryville, Pa., July 31

Wenger, Henry N., 89, Quarryville, Pa., Aug. 30

Licensings

Deichert, Martin, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Harmonyville, Pottstown, Pa.), May 25

Lynde, Katherine, Atl. N.E.

Dist. (Ridgeway Community, Harrisburg, Pa.), Aug. 17

Ordinations

Carmody, Michael W., Southeastern Dist. (Bristol, Tenn.), Aug. 24

Jones, Jeffrey B., Southeastern Dist. (Beaver Creek, Knoxville, Tenn.), Sept. 14

Martin, Curvin, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Heidelberg, Myerstown, Pa.), Sept. 14

Ream, Kim, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Ephrata, Pa.), Aug. 17

Placements

Baker, Ronald Lee, pastor, Bannerville, Pa., Sept. 1

Bean, Ruby, associate chaplain, Peter Becker Community, Harleysville, Pa., Sept. 2

Bland, Gregory A., pastor, Harpers Chapel, Moorefield, W. Va., Sept. 14

Brumbaugh, Alan E., from pastor, Dunnings Creek, New Paris, Pa., to pastor, Yellow Creek, Hopewell, Pa., Sept. 1

Brunk, David L., from pastor, Evergreen, Stanardsville, Va., to pastor, West Richmond, Richmond, Va., Sept. 1

Button-Harrison, Timothy, from interim district executive to district executive, Northern Plains District, Ankeny, Iowa, July 26

Curling, Rusty, pastor, Dundalk, Md., Sept. 7

Hoffman, Richard A., Jr., from interim to pastor, Schuylkill, Big Dam, Pine Grove, Pa., July 1

Stackhouse, David L., pastor, Baugo, Wakarusa, Ind., Sept. 7

Putting the ‘harm’ in harmony

There I was, standing in the midst of a district conference worship service last fall, when I heard it. Somewhere nearby, a cat had fallen into a paper shredder.

Subtly, I tried to glance around for the unfortunate feline. And then I found the source of the sound.

No, no cats were harmed in the making of this worship service. Instead, a few rows back and down the pew a woman was singing with gusto, hitting notes that hadn’t been invented yet. I confess beginning a silent prayer that the music leader would feel inspired to skip to verse four.

Just then, though, I saw her face. It was a portrait of joy. She was singing to God, and she was loving it. And isn’t that what worship is really all about?

Not all of us, myself included, are masters of four-part harmony. Some of us sing like canaries and others more like can openers. But we can all find a place in the song as it’s offered heavenward.

That interplay of voices united in praise has become identified with Brethren worship in part, perhaps, because it symbolizes who we are at our best. In that informal choir we are different parts working together to bring out the richness of a piece, even if they aren’t all perfect.

THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE HOLDS EXCITING, INTRIGUING POTENTIAL, BUT IT’S ALSO SCARY TERRITORY, ESPECIALLY FOR LONG-STANDING INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE CHURCH.

Likewise, in our life together as a church we have been more a people of pilgrimage than of perfection. From the beginning we set ourselves apart from the rigid, authoritarian churches of the day and attempted to seek the mind of Christ as a body. It was not accommodation of any old view that came along, but prayerfully engaging in honest, collective discernment.

Early Brethren did practice “avoidance” of members who strayed from New Testament principles once the community had come to agreement on them, as *The Brethren Encyclopedia* points out. But it was usually in extreme cases, and the practice fell out of favor by the mid-1800s.

In the past decade or so, however, we seem to be moving back toward rigidity and even authoritarianism. Looking at

recent district or Annual Conference decisions or at the dialogue that takes place in MESSENGER letters or on electronic list servers, one senses that our theological elasticity is drying out like an old rubber band. All sides of the spectrum have been drawing deeper lines.

Perhaps we are seeking more certainty in an increasingly uncertain world. The shifting landscape holds exciting, intriguing potential, but it’s also scary territory, especially for long-standing institutions like the church.

In politics this time of year we hear terms that describe the nation’s polarization like something out of a Dr. Seuss book: red state, blue state, old state, new state. The tone of the campaigns has played on our fears and divisions, ones often mirrored in the church. Criticize a black candidate? You must be a racist. Criticize a candidate who’s female? Surely you’re sexist. Express uncertainty about gays and lesbians in the church? Homophobic. Against war? Unpatriotic.

Rather than naming true injustice, the descriptors become weapons in their own right. We substitute quick and loaded labels for real engagement.

One case study: A summary during this Annual Conference season called the exhibit hall process—determining who can and can’t have a booth—a “battleground” for those with differing views on hot-button issues, with the Program and Arrangements Committee in the crossfire. It should say something to us when a peace church has a battleground.

Two pieces in this issue offer some good food for thought on the topic. The

first is the “Reflections” column by Greg Davidson Laszakovits (p. 6), who wonders whether it’s time to at least consider an amicable parting of ways for the benefit of all before the bitterness grows too deep. He asks good questions, and in the right way.

The second is the Bible study on Galatians (pp. 20-21), in which Paul addresses a divided church with the counsel, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28).

We would do well to make some honest appraisals. Are we all still singing the same song? And if so, how much variation on the notes are we willing to abide as we sing?—Ed. ■

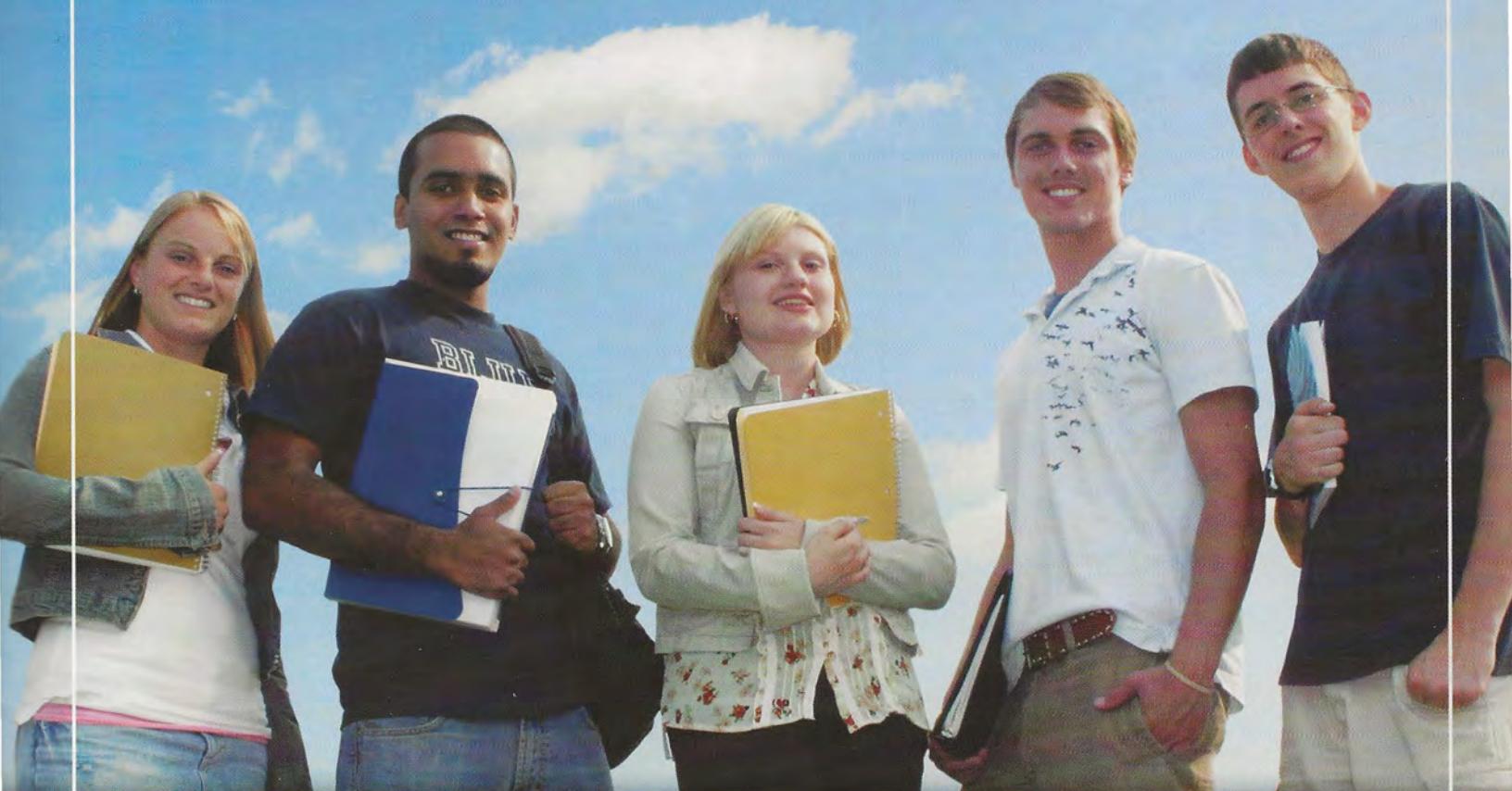
COMING IN DECEMBER: A study in spirituality, the legacy of Wil Nolen, an interview with the general secretary, Bible study on Ephesians, reflections on art and faith, and more.



WALT WILTSCHEK
MESSANGER EDITOR

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WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

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**"Here is my servant, my chosen, in whom my soul delights...
He will not grow faint until he has established justice in the earth."** (Isaiah 42:1, 4)

**"He aquí mi siervo... mi escogido, en quien mi alma tiene contentamiento...
No se cansará ni desmayará, hasta que establezca en la tierra justicia."** (Isaías 42:1, 4)

Your Advent Offering gifts join us to God's servant son in bringing justice to God's creation and God's peoples. We cannot only be those who wait; we must also be those who continue Jesus' work of bringing justice. Jesus will not grow faint. In this reminder we find strength for our work, for there are many who wait for his teachings. Your gifts honor the many ministries of the Church of the Brethren and especially the advent of Christ the peacemaker, the servant son.

Sus Ofrendas de Adviento nos unen al siervo e hijo de Dios para traer justicia a la creación de Dios y a los pueblos de Dios. No podemos simplemente ser personas que esperan; debemos también ser personas que continúan la obra de Jesús de traer justicia. Jesús no se cansará. En este recordatorio hallamos fortaleza para nuestra obra, pues muchos esperan sus enseñanzas. Sus ofrendas honran los muchos ministerios de la Iglesia de los Hermanos y en especial el advenimiento de Cristo el pacificador, el hijo y siervo.

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1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, Illinois 60120