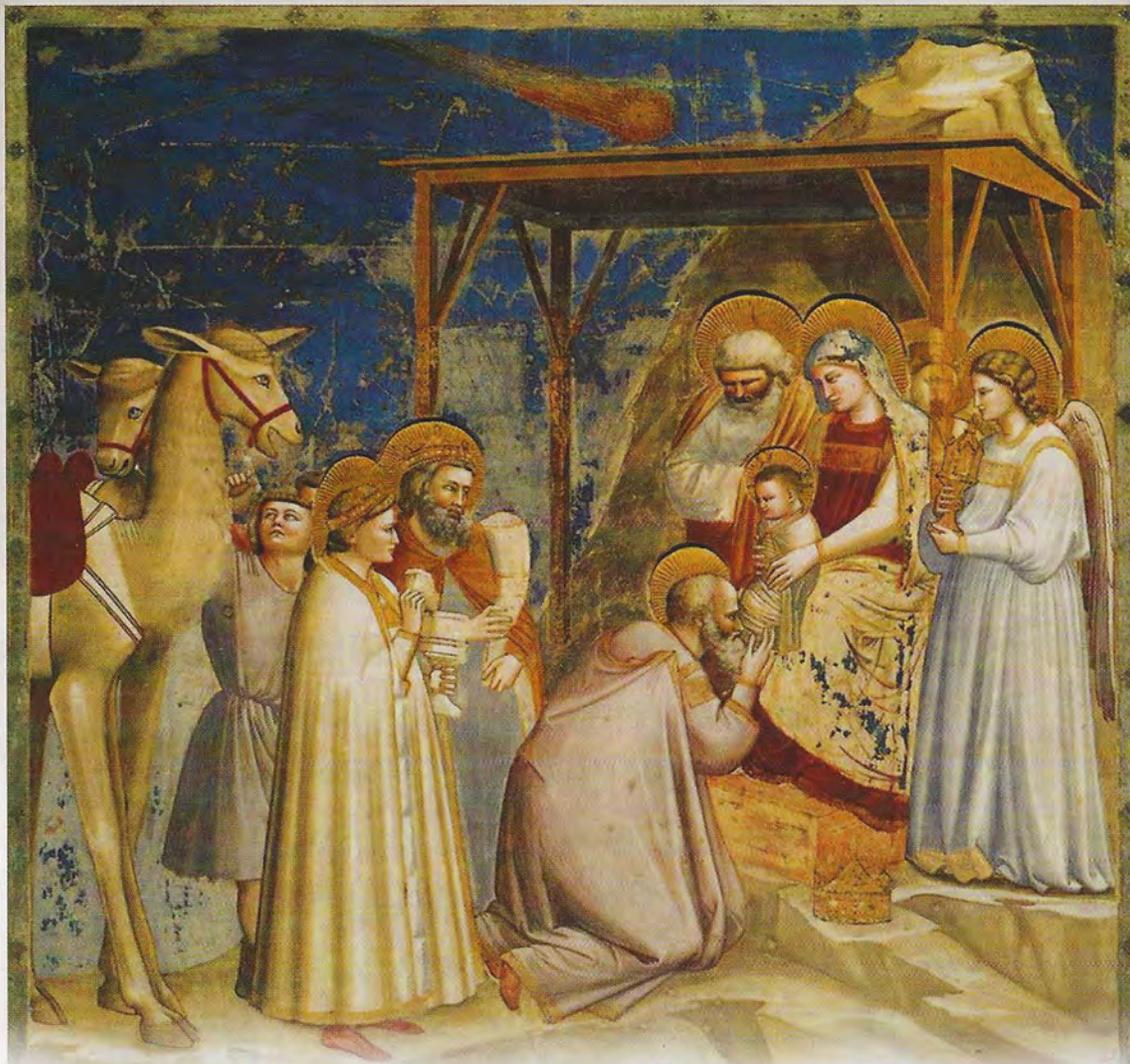


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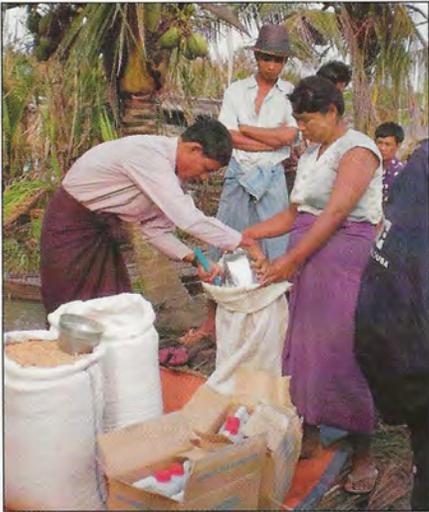


For Christ & the Church

TWO DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS SIT DOWN WITH MESSENGER

Looking for Alternatives this Christmas?

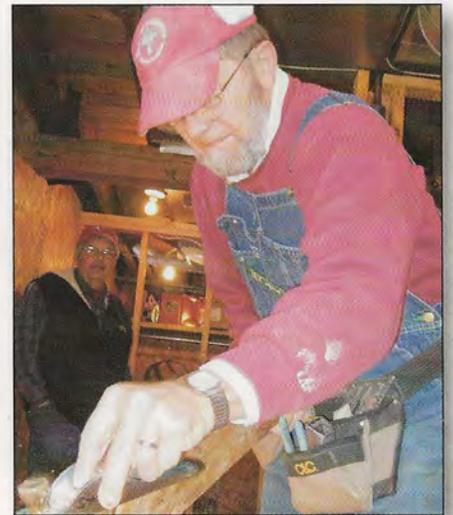
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Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

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Chris Detrick

ON THE COVER

Christmas is always an especially good time to remember what the work of the church is really all about. In this month's issue, MESSENGER shares reflections from two church leaders—general secretary Stan Noffsinger (above) and just-retired Brethren Benefit Trust president Wil Nolen (below)—on their faith and their work for the church.

Cover image is *The Adoration of the Magi* by Giotto di Bondone. Painted around 1300.



Courtesy of BBT

8 For Christ and the church

When Stan Noffsinger was called as general secretary in 2003, he said it was time to “roll up our sleeves and get to work.” More than five years later, he has indeed had much work to do. In an interview with MESSENGER, Noffsinger reflects on the joys, issues, and challenges of the church.

11 Where there's a Wil ...

Wil Nolen's journey began in the mountains of southern Virginia and eventually led to what is now Brethren Benefit Trust. As he retires this year, Nolen shares thoughts from 43 years of denominational service and the people who shaped that journey.

14 Practicing God's presence

“Spiritual growth takes on many forms,” Yvonne Riege says. What are some of the ways that Brethren and others are seeking to encounter God's presence in their lives?

17 We Three Kings of Orient Are ... mostly unknown

Many legends have grown around Matthew's gift-bringers. What's the real story on these visitors who so frequently stand in our Nativity scenes?

18 Ephesians: One-anothering writ large

This New Testament book was likely written as a letter to many first-century churches. A central message, according to Tara Hornbacker: “We are forever a part of one another.”

DEPARTMENTS

2	From the Publisher	24	Media Review
3	In Touch	25	Youth Life
6	Reflections	26	Index 2008
7	The Buzz	28	Letters
20	News	31	Turning Points
		32	Editorial

It was a scene not quite like any other. A multitude of people had streamed into Chicago's Grant Park all afternoon and evening, eager to be together for that historic moment on Election Day. There they were on TV—young and old, black and brown and white, even Democrat and Republican. Unlike the usual rowdy festivals held in Grant Park, this event was celebratory in a quieter way. People were courteous, expectant, emotional.

Maybe it was momentous only in Chicago, hometown of the new president-elect. But no, on our screens we could see similar images across the country, and around the world. Even the defeated candidate, in a gracious concession speech, told us how important this moment was.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

Ironically, it is a man who almost never called attention to his race who has overcome the racial barrier that most people thought was insurmountable. He did so by calling his fellow citizens to a higher understanding of what it means to be an American—to a responsibility beyond blind patriotism or individualism. The response by many people, regardless of which candidate received their vote, was a sense of wonder at what we as a country had accomplished.

"America is a better country . . . not because so many of us voted for Obama," wrote columnist Clarence Page, "but because many more of us have made a place where Obama's victory is possible." Poet Maya Angelou said she realized that America was finally "growing up."

Some of the international partners of the Church of the Brethren joined in the chorus of good wishes pouring in to the country. From Sudan, one colleague wrote, "This is indeed a moment that many of us did not imagine that would happen in our time." From a Nigerian pastor: "Congratulations, America, for turning a new leaf in world history. We rejoice and celebrate with you all. This truly tells us God created all human beings in his image and likeness, and that America has demonstrated her trust in all human beings." Both offered their prayers for the new president and for our country.

They know, as we do, that hard work lies ahead: The problems facing the United States are nearly overwhelming. But now is the time to gratefully accept the prayers of all who send them our way, and to add our own to those petitions. Nov. 4 was not just about one man's election. It was emancipation for millions of people who suddenly found a door swinging open. It was an unbelievable step toward the dream for which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., died. It's been 40 years, but from the mountaintop we can see a long, long way.

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

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

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

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

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Becoming Alexander Mack Jr. Michigan 12-year-old brings Brethren leader to life

On the last day of the 2007 Michigan District conference, 2008 moderator Debbie Eisenbise was given the special district gavel and box, which is given to every year's moderator. She gave her speech about how her 300th anniversary district conference would be like no other. She talked about how she would have historical figures walking around and attending events.

I thought it would be fun to be a historical person. After the service, I went up to Debbie and asked her if she needed more people to be historical people. She was so excited that I was willing to volunteer. We discussed who I should be, and then we went to talk to my dad, and finally we decided on Alexander Mack Jr. or "Sander Mack," as he was commonly known.

Then the work began. I studied and studied. Finally, when I thought I knew every detail of Sander's life, the school year began and I forgot everything I had learned. When school ended, I had to relearn everything. At Annual Conference, my mom was talking to Frank Ramirez, and he got her a copy of his article about Sander Mack from the MESSENGER booth. That was helpful, because he was the speaker for all of the worship services at district conference.

It took a lot of work, but it was worth it to know about our church's history. Over the summer I collected a costume. I wore a wide-brimmed black hat, suspenders, black pants, and a "Mack is Back" T-shirt from Brethren Press.

When I got to district conference (in August), I went to love feast. I sat at a table as Sander Mack with people I knew. Anita Smith Buckwalter was Sarah Righter Major. When we had time for discussions, the men at my table had the most interesting things to say. I had a chance to talk about "myself." When love feast was nearly over, I was introduced.

After that I changed out of my Sander Mack clothing and went to play foursquare with my friends. Then I had to run and change back into Sander Mack and went to worship. I gave the introduction. After speaking in front of all those people, I felt a little sick!

After worship we all went to supper. Then it was time for the business session. The rest of the junior high people went to a campfire, but I needed get back into character to give a citation to Gary Hiesler, a direct descendant of Alexander Mack. Gary was the district conference manager for many years, and he retired at the end of conference last year. I asked the people how many of them knew that he was "my" descendant. Only five people knew. After the citation I went to the campfire.

The next morning, I went to speak with the younger children about Sander Mack. I read them the story called "Alexander's Journey." It was written from Sander's point of view, and talked about what he was told about the original baptisms in Schwarzneau. They had great questions. After that, I was free to do whatever I wanted to do for the rest of the conference. I will never forget that summer.—Zander Willoughby

Zander Willoughby, age 12, is a 7th-grader at Hope Church of the Brethren, Freeport, Mich.



Michele Willoughby

Northeast Two couples from Florin Church of the Brethren (Mount Joy, Pa.) rode their bikes 250 miles to Annual Conference in Virginia as a fundraiser for Brethren Disaster Ministries. It raised \$2,200. . . . An auction and other events at Middle Pennsylvania District's Heritage Fair at Camp Blue Diamond brought in nearly \$35,000.

Southeast Daleville (Va.) Church of the Brethren is planning a Christmas peace witness at several malls and shopping centers in the Roanoke area. Volunteers will hand out fliers promoting nonviolent gifts. . . . Paul White presented fire-damaged Erwin (Tenn.) with a check from Virginia District special offerings during an evening service on Nov. 16. . . . Atlantic Southeast youth will hold a retreat on "Compassion" Jan. 23-25 in Miami, led by Bridgewater (Va.) College's Interdistrict Youth Cabinet.

Midwest Naperville (Ill.) pastor Dennis Webb performed a concert of original Brethren songs Nov. 22 as a fundraiser for the congregation and the district's disaster response work. . . . Champaign (Ill.) Church of the Brethren has begun a "Brethren Grandmothers" program to provide a ministry of cookies and caring to area university students. . . . Camp Brethren Heights (Rodney, Mich.) reported an increase in the number of summer campers in 2008, to 111.

Ozarks/Plains Nelda Rhodes Clarke invited Minneapolis-area Brethren to a peace pole dedication service on the International Day of Prayer for Peace, Sept. 21, at Emma Norton Services in Maplewood, which offers housing for homeless women and families. Clarke worked at the organization for 17 years. . . . Western Plains District conference delegates adopted a statement of vision for the future of the district: "Rooted together in Love to be Christ's transforming hope and power!" . . . A Children's Disaster Services Level 1 workshop was offered in Denver, Colo., Nov. 7-8.

West Camp Peaceful Pines (Dardanelle, Calif.) will host next year's Song & Story Fest, July 3-9, 2009. . . . Wenatchee (Wash.) Brethren-Baptist Church United and Sunnyslope Church of the Brethren jointly celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Brethren and 100 years of Brethren presence in the Wenatchee valley with a variety of events Oct. 11-12.



YOU SAID IT

"We might not all come out at the same place . . . but I pray that we will all be of the same mind in the Lord."

—Eddie Edmonds, speaking at this fall's Mission & Ministry Board meetings.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$1,815

Amount donated to the Global Food Crisis Fund in two offerings at this year's Church of the Brethren National Young Adult Conference. The money will support a farm rehabilitation program in North Korea and a trees, stoves, and cisterns project in Guatemala.

Left to right, Bill Goering, John Burkholder, David Albright, Eugene Lichty, Art Snell, Annette Karr, Susan Taylor, Claron Brown, Wesley DeCoursey, and Anne Albright dedicate a new peace pole in McPherson, Kan.



Rhonda King / The McPherson Sentinel

McPherson group plants peace pole at The Cedars

In August 2006 a group of McPherson, Kan., residents interested in peace, justice, and nonviolence met on the campus of McPherson College for a candlelight service to pray for an end to the war in Iraq.

That group has met weekly since that time to discuss issues and activities that might make for peace in our nation and the world. The group consists of individuals from several churches, a majority of which are from the Church of the Brethren. Their most recent activity was the "planting" and dedication of a peace pole on the campus of The Cedars Retirement Village in McPherson.

Attending the dedication service on the evening preceding July 4 this year was Mayor Bill Goering of McPherson, representatives of the visiting Ulster Youth Project, many Cedars residents, members of the community, and more than 20 "People of Peace" with their identifying green T-shirts.

Cedars chaplain Chris Whitacre explained the significance of the words printed on the peace pole in four languages: "LET PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH." The words were also read in Irish by the Ulster Youth present. We have all continued to pray for peace in Iraq and the rest of the world.—**John Ward**

REMEMBERED

• **Guillermo Encarnacion**, 71, died Oct. 11 in Lancaster, Pa. Encarnacion, a native of the Dominican Republic, served as executive secretary of the Mennonite Church in that country and later became connected with the Church of the Brethren, serving at several congregations in Puerto Rico and the US. After retirement he served as interim coordinator of theological education in the Dominican Republic for the Church of the Brethren General Board. A memorial service was held Oct. 13 at Lancaster Church of the Brethren. A service in the Dominican Republic is planned for February.

• **John Troutman Fike**, 95, passed away Sept. 23 in Sebring, Fla. Over a long career he had held several positions of leadership in Church of the Brethren institutions, including as treasurer and then as vice president of Financial Affairs at his alma mater, Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., from 1952 to 1972. Earlier he was superintendent of buildings and grounds at Bridgewater (Va.) College. He served terms on the Church of the Brethren General Board and on the Standing Committee of Annual Conference, and was president of the board of The Palms of Sebring. He was a member of Sebring Church of the Brethren, where a memorial service was held Sept. 26.

• **David J. Markey**, former associate district executive of Atlantic Northeast District, died Sept. 17. Markey, an Elizabethtown (Pa.) College graduate, served the district from 1977 to 1986. Earlier he served three pastorates in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Indiana.

• **Glenn Neal Rohrer**, 84, passed away Oct. 23. He worked as a paper cutter/receiver for Brethren Press at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. from 1967 through 1985. He also was a custodian and general handyman for Bethany Theological Seminary at its Oak Brook, Ill., campus. He was a graduate of Bethany and Manchester College. During World War II he entered Civilian Public Service, fighting forest fires and building trails in Oregon, and took horses to Poland as a seagoing cowboy after the war. A memorial service was held Nov. 8 at Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren.

Live Oak uses anniversary as opportunity for education

Live Oak (Calif.) Church of the Brethren celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Church of the Brethren this past summer with an intergenerational Sunday school class.

Organized by Barbara Brandt, class took place each Sunday morning in August and used the curriculum "Piecing Together the Brethren Way." Attendees learned about Brethren heritage and spent time together enjoying stories, music, crafts, drama, and games. Cooking projects included making butter, apple juice, ice cream, and communion bread.

A special offering was taken each Sunday to benefit New Community Project's "Give a Girl a Chance," a special project that helps to provide education for girls in Sudan. The celebration was carried over into worship, where sermons, music, and drama revolved around the anniversary theme.

Anna Mow and John Kline (played by Nancy and Jim McAvoy) even visited the church to talk about Church of the Brethren history and share about each other's contributions. The series concluded Aug. 31 with a potluck lunch following worship.—**Anne Palmer**



Anne Palmer

Kaitlyn Piazza, Bev Brandt, Cameron Davis, Brandon Davis, and Aaron Davis take part in Live Oak Church of the Brethren's educational anniversary series.

LANDMARKS & LAURELS



Fantastic float: The yoked Whitestone and Ellisforde congregations in Tonasket, Wash., entered this float in Tonasket's annual Founders' Day Parade, in celebration of the Brethren movement's 300th anniversary. It featured a variety of church projects, such as Heifer International and Christmas Child boxes, and had posters with Brethren history pictures. Several of the congregations' youth rode on the float along with pastor Jim Yaussy-Albright, who played guitar. The float won first place in its division.—Freda Holmes

Shenandoah District celebrates 'seeds' of Brethren movement

A free concert by musician and composer Ken Medema highlighted a weekend of celebration and worship Sept. 5-6 at the Rockingham County, Va., fairgrounds. Sponsored by Shenandoah District, the "Seeds for a Great Harvest" celebration commemorated the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Church of the Brethren.

Most of the 104 congregations in the district participated, through booths at a heritage fair or with musical performances. Evening worship services featured 2009 Annual Conference moderator David Shumate and Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren pastor Jeff Carter.

On Saturday morning, several local sites related to the Church of the Brethren were open for tours, including the John Kline homestead, the Tunker House, and Linville Creek Church of the Brethren, all in Broadway; the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center in Harrisonburg; and the Reuel B. Pritchett Museum at Bridgewater (Va.) College.

The heritage fair included displays from local congregations and church agencies as well as special appearances by figures from Church of the Brethren history—Alexander Mack, John Kline, Anna Beahm Mow, and Sarah Righter Major. Individuals and groups from local churches performed on the "Share the Gift" stage during the afternoon, as well. Both Friday and Saturday evenings closed with ice cream socials.

District congregations continued the celebration on Sept. 7, with special Sunday worship services in their respective churches.—Ellen Layman

• **Amwell Church of the Brethren** (Stockton, N.J.), one of the oldest congregations in the denomination, celebrated its 275th anniversary Oct. 5. The day included a festive and music-filled worship service with greetings from various guests and a message by Phill Carlos Archbold, followed by a luncheon. A special history celebration booklet was also assembled for the occasion.

• **Codorus Church of the Brethren** (Loganville, Pa.) capped off its 250th anniversary celebration with a four-day "preaching mission" Oct. 26-29. Brethren who had been ordained in the congregation and are now serving elsewhere spoke in five worship services. The congregation created a special logo for the anniversary. It incorporates the wheat and flame from the denomination's 300th anniversary logo, circles symbolizing "God's eternity and never-ending love and mercy," and images of Codorus' current and former church building.



• **Oak Grove Church of the Brethren** (Lowpoint, Ill.) celebrated its 125th anniversary Oct. 12 with a remembrance service held after a potluck meal. Former pastors joined members and friends to hear a short history, sing a lined hymn, listen to remarks from the past, hear from pastor Charles Buegel, and view a DVD presentation of past and present events.

• **Genesis Church of the Brethren** (Putney, Vt.) held its final service Sept. 30, when 22 people gathered for a closing celebration. The congregation began in 1981 as a church plant of Southern Pennsylvania District. It was one of only a handful of congregations in New England. The day included a potluck meal and a circle for sharing scripture, singing, and sharing memories. "There wasn't a dry eye in the place," former member Reba Coffman Beery reported.

• **Bristol (Tenn.) First Church of the Brethren** celebrated its 50th anniversary with a homecoming service on Oct. 26.

• Happy 100th birthday to **Viola Rowe** of Pleasant View Church of the Brethren (Jonesborough, Tenn.). Rowe marked her centennial on Nov. 9.

• **SERRV International**, which sells fair-trade products from artists in developing countries, is going back to the "SERRV" name to brand its stores and gift sales, retiring the "A Greater Gift" brand that it began using a few years ago. The new look and redesigned gift shops were officially launched Sept. 27 in New Windsor, Md.

• The Neighborhood Resource Center hosted by **York Center Church of the Brethren** (Lombard, Ill.) was featured July 8 in the *Wall Street Journal* in an article about organizations that offer summertime lunch programs for children in need. The center's director, Mariela Soejarto, said that for some of the children it was the only meal they would get that day.

• Outdoor Ministries Association gave its 2008 Camp Volunteer Awards to **Norris and Gerry Martin** of Masons Cove Church of the Brethren, Salem, Va., for their work at Camp Bethel and **Clifton Smith** for his work at Shepherd's Spring in Sharpsburg, Md.

• Women's Caucus "Friend of Caucus Award" was given this year to **Chuck Boyer** of La Verne, Calif. Boyer is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, a past Annual Conference moderator, and former Church of the Brethren denominational staff member.

• A religion section front-page article in the **Harrisonburg, Va., Daily News-Record** highlighted the 300th anniversary of the Church of the Brethren. It quoted local Brethren from the Shenandoah District office, Bridgewater College, and Linville Creek Church of the Brethren in Broadway. The **Altoona (Pa.) Mirror** also featured the 300th anniversary on the front of its religion section on Aug. 15. It included photos of an outdoor baptism, an overview of the denomination's beliefs, quotes from local Brethren, and a piece on the new Brethren Press book *Brethren Brush with Greatness*.

• **Sam Hornish Jr.**, a NASCAR driver and Church of the Brethren member, received an unusual honor this fall. Leaders Family Farms, located near Hornish's home in Napoleon, Ohio, cut its corn maze into a design featuring Hornish's race car and logo. An aerial photo is posted at www.funtimefarm.com/cornmaze.html.

On faith and art

I might have been 11 or 12 years old when instead of going to the traditional Good Friday service with my family I found myself confined at home. I had been quite ill and was not yet to go out. I remember taking pencil and paper and drawing a crucifixion scene. I cried some when I did this, and I spent a long time on that very clumsy drawing. It was my attempt to express my love to Jesus, to relate to him in a more intimate way. But in a deeper sense it was a way of giving meaning to my faith.

How did I know to draw that crucifix? Not only because I had been given a story and child-sized theology about its significance, but because I had seen many visual representations of this bleeding and dying Jesus. Some were in the children's Bible my father would read to us; some were copies of masterworks in art books or framed renditions hanging in a bedroom of a relative; but I think most of all I had seen them on or above the altar of the churches we worshiped in or depicted in the stained glass windows alongside other scenes of the life of Jesus.

I had time to contemplate these works of art during the long sermons and liturgy. I did not worship these images, but as the light and shadow played due to candlelight or the movement of a tree branch outside changed the colors, the transcendent became flesh in my soul. There it left its mark,

RUTH AUKERMAN

I DID NOT WORSHIP THESE IMAGES, BUT AS THE LIGHT AND SHADOW PLAYED DUE TO CANDLELIGHT OR THE MOVEMENT OF A TREE BRANCH OUTSIDE CHANGED THE COLORS, THE TRANSCENDENT BECAME FLESH IN MY SOUL.

shaping my faith and causing my doubts. All that I poured into that Good Friday drawing.

As an adult artist I have not yet attempted to paint a crucifixion as such. For me there is no pain that compares to that of Christ. All pain ends in the cross, but the cross is not the end. There are many more explicit crucifixions painted than explicit resurrections. Is it because it is on the cross that the incarnation takes place, while the resurrection is beyond our human experience? For me the cross, though, is not only the center of pain but the center of healing, as well. Madeleine L'Engle writes: "It is impossible for an artist to attempt a graphic reproduction of Jesus that is in any way meant to be literal." Maybe that is why as a child I could draw a crucifixion and now I have not been able to do it.

And yet I am homesick for the sacred art of my childhood.

The Church of the Brethren for the most part does not value visual expressions of faith. Sanctuaries are empty. Some feature rather sentimental depictions of Jesus knocking at the door or of Christ as the good shepherd.

Occasionally I have seen banners. Brethren are a functional, action-oriented people, doers of the word.

Why is it that we use so little art in our church buildings? Most Sunday school rooms are sterile even in newer buildings. Once when I taught an adult class and we studied the book *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey I put up posters of Jesus and other art in that room. It transformed the teaching climate considerably. A children's classroom should have a visual story wall made up of master artworks and the art of the children themselves. Even fellowship halls and offices could become more than they are now through art that brightens up the place and invites interaction. A landscape by Cezanne, Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, Paul Klee's portraits, and countless other paintings could help to make the church building a more worshipful place.

As for the sanctuary, it would not take all that much to transform that space. My church has a little mobile of butterflies in the front, and each Sunday I look at it and think about the symbolic meaning of the butterfly. The early church used symbols. And then there could be icons and banners, and even a little stained glass. All of these tangible fragments point beyond themselves, not only to God but also to the love God's people have for God.

Children can much more readily "enter" a painting, just as children are much more involved in the stories than most adults. Jesus said that children are closer to the kingdom of God. They get it before we do. We need to become like them also when we look at art.

So where does all this leave you and me? Here are some challenges for the often lonely and undiscovered artists in our faith communities.

1. Let us not be afraid to speak our faith through art, to hear God's call for visual creating, to practice our prayer language.
2. Let us become bolder in sharing our art with our faith community—to have the courage to become vulnerable, and perhaps misunderstood.
3. Let us call forth and affirm the creative gifts of others in our own church and beyond.
4. Let us use art in worship and preaching and as a way to engage in dialogue with others.

May all of us hear God's call and claim on our individual creative gifts, and then find ways to share these gifts with others while returning them as offerings to the One who gave them to us. **W**

Ruth Aukerman is an licensed minister and a member of Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren.

QUOTE WORTHY

“It is dangerous to try to judge the quality of a man’s faith. That is God’s purview, not ours.”

—Chicago Sun-Times columnist Cathleen Falsani, commenting on the scrutiny of candidates’ religious beliefs in this year’s presidential election (RNS)

“It’s so much easier to focus on the things that don’t matter when the things that do matter are out of control.”

—author/consultant Tom Ehrich of Morning Walk Media, speaking at the 2008 MESSENGER Dinner at Annual Conference

“When we (Brethren) have been our best it’s when we have looked for ‘third-way’ thinking . . . to be among us.”

—Former Southern Pennsylvania District executive minister Warren Eshbach, speaking about alternatives to “either-or” at Dunkard Valley Live in Loganville, Pa.

“We talk about the New Testament being our creed, but we don’t know the New Testament.”

—Jim Hardenbrook, interim pastor of Wakemans Grove Church of the Brethren (Edinburg, Va.) and former Annual Conference moderator, speaking at Mid-Atlantic District conference

“When the doors are opened for us to be agents of Christ’s peace we cannot step away.”

—Church of the Brethren general secretary Stan Noffsinger, commenting on a fall meeting with Iran President Ahmedinejad and other faith-group representatives in New York

“If there is something you want to do, do it. Age shouldn’t be a barrier.”

—Phyllis Winslow of Braintree, Mass., who recently received her Master of Divinity degree from Andover Newton Theological School at age 80 and is planning to be ordained in the United Church of Christ. She was quoted by *United Church News*.

“Binding ourselves to another may mean letting go of a hand we know to take the hand of one who is lonely—quite possibly someone we don’t know.”

—Illinois/Wisconsin District executive Kevin Kessler, writing in the district newsletter

CULTUREVIEW

• Americans are more likely than Europeans to **own and read a Bible**, but Poles are most likely to have a basic knowledge of scripture, the Vatican reported this spring. The statistics are among preliminary findings of a study of Bible reading in the US and eight European countries. More than 90 percent of American households contain at least one copy of the Bible, the highest level among the countries studied, according to the study, which targeted 13,000 interviewees.

• Global humanitarian agency **Church World Service** resettled 4,892 refugees to the United States from October 2007 through September 2008 (FY 2008), or just over 8 percent of the total of 60,192 refugees who began new lives in the US during the year.

• A recent New York Times/CBS News poll revealing deep national divisions along racial lines is an urgent reminder of the need for **“sacred conversations on race,”** said the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. The poll indicated that a large majority of African-Americans—nearly 60 percent—believe race relations in the United States are “generally bad.” Forty percent of blacks said racial discrimination is as bad as

ever, while one out of four whites said there is too much emphasis on discrimination.

• The executive committee of the **World Council of Churches** (WCC), meeting Sept. 23-26 in Luebeck, Germany, announced its decision to extend the contract of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, the current WCC general secretary, through the time when a new general secretary takes office. A new general secretary is to be elected at the WCC central committee meeting to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, Aug. 26-Sept. 2, 2009.

• An average of 1 percent of religious congregations **shut their doors** each year, a lower closure rate than most other organizations, according to a study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Researchers from Duke University and the University of Arizona found that disbanded congregations tended to have fewer adult participants than active congregations, with a median size of 50 compared to 269 in active ones. They also learned that congregations where conflict prompted some people to leave in the previous two years were much more likely to disband than active congregations.



JUST FOR FUN: CRYPTOGRAM

CHRISTMAS CIPHER Substitute the appropriate letter for each letter in the words below to reveal a familiar phrase (Hint: E=C). Answer is printed below.

____ _ ____ _ ____ _ ____ _ ____ _ ____ _
T O P V N B P T P C M H B Y S Y M T Y S W B ,

____ _ ____ _ ____ _ ____ _ ____ _
Z H C P H S Z V B Y L S Z E S . . .

Answer: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace . . .” (from Luke 2:14, NKJV)

For Christ and the church

General secretary Stan Noffsinger reflects on his first five years

Stanley J. Noffsinger was called by the Church of the Brethren General Board (now Church of the Brethren, Inc.) in March 2003 as general secretary—the top administrator of the denomination's largest agency and its chief ecumenical officer. He officially succeeded Judy Mills Reimer in July of that year. This past October, a bit over five years after that transition, MESSENGER sat down with Noffsinger to ask him about the journey so far and what may lie ahead. Following are edited excerpts from that 75-minute interview. Stan and his wife, Debbie, and two sons, Evan and Caleb, live in South Elgin, Ill. They are members of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin.

What led you to accept the call to serve as general secretary?

I really resisted the invitation (to apply)... Debbie and I talked about it, that if it happened it would just be another part of our Brethren service. Because I believe, I strongly believe, that our calling out by the body is for a period of time to bring the gifts and talents we have to bear on the life and the formation of the church. It's not about power or authority, but it is part of the yielding of ourselves to the work of God in the midst of the greater church. So the sense of call really came externally rather than internally. I was raised in a congregation that called historically for lay leadership in the congregation, the free ministry, and you're to pay attention when the greater body comes and says, "Will you consider it?" ... Debbie and I stepped out of the room to consider the call the board gave us. We engaged in prayer and we came away with this peace and calm, and we said yes.

This page, Noffsinger talks with young adult Andy Duffey at a consultation on alternative service; opposite page, Noffsinger speaks at the 2004 Church of the Brethren National Young Adult Conference.

How has the job measured up—or not measured up—to your expectations?

I don't think I had any illusions of grandeur that this would be pomp and circumstance. As I recall my words then were something like, "It's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work," and that's exactly what all of us have had to do in the life of the church. Because we are still a community of human beings, and inasmuch we have differences of opinion, we have a lot of independent thinking in our midst, that casts us one against another. Where I did not expect the journey to take me is that the general secretary also gets called into the midst of ethics issues, legal issues, interpersonal conflict, congregational conflict, and while I understood that intellectually I didn't understand how that would affect me personally and spiritually. We all do really good things; we all in the course of our lives do some really bad things. That manifests itself in the very best behaviors, things in the church we're very proud of,



Walt Witschak



Chris Derrick

and some of the very worst behaviors. . . . It brings to mind the song, "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all of our sins." It's a humble reminder that none of us can live so perfectly that we can find our way to the grace that is expressed at our love feast table except by the grace of Jesus. . . . We just can't seem to be able to get across that chasm between what God must hope for God's creation and what we are able to accomplish as human beings.

So how do you see the role of denominational leadership in the church today, especially in times of crisis or challenge?

I think all the agencies—all the Annual Conference agency executives and the Annual Conference officers—probably the first thing we need to do is to reassure people to not be afraid, because our allegiance isn't in Wall Street. Our hope and our faith is not pledged to Washington, D.C. It is focused on a living presence of God in our midst.

...
So first of all I would say to offer hope to people—these are hard times, but God hasn't abandoned us with the fall of the stock market or the escalation of violence around the world. God's presence is continuing. Do we have the ability to experience the presence of God? . . . Also, more and more of us are hearing about members of our congregations that are affected. This isn't an issue just for the board, but for all of us. What is the fiber of the community that says we will stand together? In these hard economic times, what are our responsibilities to bear each other's burden?

You have talked about the balance between being a business and 'being the church.' Can you speak a little more about that balance?

I can only talk about it within who I am personally. For me, it's not either-or, or one or the other. When I bought my first business, I took the Alexander Mack grapevine logo and underneath it I wrote, "To the glory of God and my neighbor's good." The very first dollar that I earned was given to our church in Wichita. I think my gift and interest in business is a partnership with God. I can't see my faith separate from business. I'm first a child of God and a disciple of Christ. Everything that I am as a disciple needs to be integrated into my whole life. I hope I don't behave or act in business ever outside of the context of being a follower of Jesus. . . . So when it comes to issues of executive leadership for the church, I hope it demonstrates a willingness to be where there's conflict and disagreement and to not be afraid; where there are tough decisions to

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be made that it isn't done without the presence of thoughtfulness and prayerfulness; that when we approach a statement that we have to make to the world at large that it is done in collaboration. For example, the recent visit with the president of Iran—on my own, that's not necessarily where I would want to go, knowing the heat that could come out of that, but statement after statement of the Annual Conference says we are people of peace, we believe in human rights, we believe in care of the earth—we have all these statements that end up saying that we

will love our neighbor, and we define our neighbor as anyone on this earth, and we will love our enemies. . . . It's a faith decision; one could say it's also a business decision because it could affect the assets of the church with happy or not-so-happy members of the church, so it merits the wisdom of the body.

Mission seems to be an area of particular controversy and challenge in the church today, most notably around Sudan. How can we do mission in a way that builds trust and integrity?

One is to be willing to say you made a mistake, either corporately or individually, and to say we're learning every step of the way. It's inevitable when you are always pushing an edge—I hope every one of our ministries are pushing edges. We're going to have successes and we're going to have failures. It's not bad to have failure, as long as there continues to be forward movement out of the learnings of that event. What I hate most is that we are so relational in this church that when things don't go the way we want them to go it's almost inevitable that personalities will be involved and there will be hurt. And I grieve that. . . . We have a hard time with grace. We find out our weaknesses, and we have the challenge of then taking what our weaknesses are and recasting a vision for that ministry in a way that walks forward with more confidence and grace. If there's any gain, I think we are learning as a church out of this that it's not always about us. At the point where we render ourselves to Christ and say we're going to take up the Great Commission, it then becomes about God's work in the world and not about me. It becomes about building up relationships that give us opportunity to yield ourselves to God and to the other. As Euro-Germanic people that are Type A and feel we have all the answers, yielding ourselves to the work of God's Spirit probably means that we need to yield our egos to the work. And please hear that I'm saying that about me; each of us has to wrestle with that. Do I want to do mission? You bet I do. . . . but I want to do it in a way that is respectful of the other and respectful of God's work.

If you were to name a few of the most pressing issues for the Church of the Brethren today, what would those be?

There's a temptation to go to social issues, and I think they're important, but I sense that both the church and the culture that we're in are really calling us to re-examine our understanding of what Jesus is calling us to be and do. And—this is so influenced by our 300th anniversary—to really almost become a first-century church. I think there is intellectual knowledge of who we have been, but in many aspects it is the faith of our parents, not our faith. I think the church as a whole really needs to rediscover that. . . . Also, we have to yield our insistence on our own way within the body. We've historically believed that we've done our best thinking and discernment together, and not apart. And we have believed

that Annual Conference is the voice of the gathered body of the church, and we will live by the decisions through that discernment process, but I see that being challenged by individualism. . . . We need to stop being so angry, and we need to love each other.

What, on the other hand, are some things Brethren have to offer the world?

I am constantly reminded by my colleagues from other communions of the value of the Brethren. Sometimes I think we're so enmeshed in it that we can't even see it. Colleagues from huge denominations keep saying, "You don't just read the Scriptures and say, 'Aren't they nice.' You folks read the Scriptures and you work harder than anybody we know at trying to understand how the Scriptures relate to your life today." Two, the Church of the Brethren has an interesting understanding of what happened at the Ascension—The disciples were standing there, watching, and there was a presence there with them that said, "Why are you standing here waiting?" The other part of it was, "Didn't Jesus tell you what to do? Didn't he show you by example? Get busy!" We have historically pushed the edge of that, and we do today: it means care for the poor, the ill, the homeless, the hungry; walking where there is injustice being wielded; to seek for justice, to seek peace and pursue it. . . . It's been amazing to me in the past few years what our friends in (developing nations) have been saying. They keep saying, "You are invited, because we trust you, and you have been walking with us for years." It seems like the word is coming from outside of us to say, "These are the gifts that you bring to bear, and we need them desperately. Come walk with us."

Is there a story that stands out from your experiences across the church?

I made a commitment, actually when I was executive director of the Brethren Service Center, that sometime during the course of my work for the church that I would have opportunity to be in every congregation that my dad served (as pastor), to say thanks for the love and concern and support and formation that every one of those congregations gave to our family. I have one congregation to go, and that's the Conestoga congregation. . . . We have a lot of bright, bright spots and places within this church. I know by naming them I would miss people, but I see places of brightness in both large and small congregations that have turned a corner. There are congregations that are just full of vital life. There are districts that are catching the vision for a contemporary, alive church, and they're just moving ahead. Also, the Haiti Advisory Committee and the way that committee has worked with the Miami Haitian church and the people of Haiti and staff, very collaborative and supportive—what has happened is a church that is growing by the influence of their own people with the love of the church family. Those are the points of encouragement that make every day worth its struggle and its joy. 



Where there's a Wil...

Nolen retires after 43 years of denominational service

by Walt Wiltschek

Wil Nolen has been sorting through history this fall. Some 1,200 files have occupied his attention as he sorts out what's worth archiving and what should be tossed.

That's the key question, on various levels, as one retires: What do I leave behind? In Nolen's case, he exits after more than four decades of denominational service—the past 25 years of that time leading what is now the Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT).

"It's not hard for me to leave," says Nolen. "As much as I've loved all this work, it's time. I hope I've done the work well and given good leadership, but there always comes a time when new leadership is needed. This is a good time."

Nolen officially retired as president of BBT in early September, but he agreed to stay on through the end of the year as an advisor/consultant to new president Nevin Dulabaum. It has also given him an opportunity to sift through all those records and all those memories, putting them in boxes or other receptacles.

"It's been a great run," says Nolen, now 67. "I have a lifelong sense of fulfillment from all the ministries I've been part of."

. . .

Nolen's roots go back to southern Virginia, where he grew up in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Those mountains provided the perfect place for hiking, fishing, and being a community.

The hard-working, mostly blue-collar people of that region had a powerful effect on him. He saw them toiling in the factories and mills, sometimes struggling to make ends meet. Nolen opened his first savings account at age 6, pouring out all \$10.16 from his piggy bank; later he earned money by picking potato beetles out of the family patch.

"It was a hearty life," he says. "I suppose we were on the poor side economically, but I don't think any of us knew that. Our wealth was in caring families and a heritage of hard work and self-reliance."

Nolen saw the same dedication and work ethic play out in the church. He and his family attended Mount Hermon Church of the Brethren in Bassett,

where all the members from the surrounding ridges and hollows would come together. It was the center of both religious and social life. To this day, a group that grew up at and around Mount Hermon gets together for a reunion every five years.

In that church Nolen also witnessed people who took seriously the development of their God-given gifts. He found leaders who took the gifts of children and youth seriously, too, and encouraged those young people to consider ministry. Not coincidentally, Nolen is one of several denominational leaders who came out of that church.

"I have a real fondness for the adults who helped influence

"They were all very satisfying opportunities for me," Nolen says. "I loved them all."

me in that community," Nolen says, ticking off the names of local and district mentors like pastor Guy Wampler Sr., Camp Bethel leaders Paul Fike and Dottie Murray, and district youth cabinet leader Julia LaPrade. "There were key people all along the way that affirmed me, encouraged me, and challenged me."

Eventually, with encouragement from those mentors and his parents, his path led to Bridgewater College. Nolen's father took on extra work to help pay the tuition. Nolen encountered more mentors there, especially in the music department, and after graduation he continued on to Bethany Seminary.

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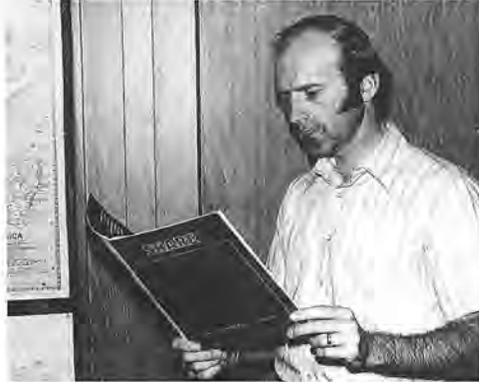
After two years at Bethany, a call came. As a youth, Nolen had served on local through national youth cabinets, and he had come to the attention of national youth director Joe Long.

He was invited to take a year off and do an internship at the denominational offices in Elgin, Ill., as director of the 1966 National Youth Conference, which took place at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Those were turbulent times, especially in youth and young adult culture, and the conference was shaped by some of those currents. That tension gave the conference an infamous reputation, but Nolen says he was proud of it.

"It was a watershed conference," he says. "We took on some major issues and did new things. Wonderful things took place there at a time when many were leaving the church."

Nolen had figured on going back to finish seminary when the conference duties were done, but general secretary Norman Baugher invited him to become a full-time member of the denomination's youth ministry staff. It would be 10 years later, during a sabbatical, until he could finish up his master of divinity degree at Bethany.

Above, Nolen works with the SHARE program earlier in his career; at right, Nolen addresses a BBT board meeting.



Messenger file photo

The denominational work included youth ministry, then worship and the arts, a racism education program, the SHARE program and community development work, and as director of the SERRV fair trade handicrafts program. Finally, he was invited to become director of the pension board—which a few years later became the Brethren Benefit Trust.

"They were all very satisfying opportunities for me," Nolen says. "I loved them all."

The last two assignments, however, with SERRV and the pension board/BBT, are the ones he lists as his favorites. The personal relationships he developed in those roles, whether with artisans or investors, top everything else.

"People come up and talk with tears about how much better their monetary resources are than they ever imagined they could be, primarily because of the pension plan," Nolen says. "It's been so gratifying."

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When Nolen began his leadership of the pension board in 1983, it was formed of the same 25 members who sat on the Church of the Brethren General Board. Members would just shift hats during the meeting.

Under Nolen, a separate, 12-member board was created with the new BBT name in 1988. That, he says, allowed better governance, with board members who had the needed specializations and more time to focus on the particular issues of the pension and insurance plans.

Other improvements followed: BBT diversified its investment system to create a broader portfolio and more stability in difficult market times. It allowed lay employees to join pastors in the pension plan, opening up a much larger base for participation. It moved to "market-value" accounting, focusing on stocks as well as bonds. In 1990 it began the Brethren Foundation, providing other asset management services for Brethren; today the Foundation manages more than \$130 million for more than 200 clients. And in 2004 BBT became administrator and sponsor of the Church of the Brethren Credit Union.

"I came into this work at a pivotal time when some evolution



Courtesy of BBT

of the structure was very much needed," Nolen says. "Now these are very well established programs in the life of the church."

Nolen was blessed with bull markets during much of his tenure, aiding the strong growth that saw pastors and others build up those impressive retirement resources. For some pastors, the income has been higher in retirement than it was during their church careers.

Not everything has been golden, though. Nolen still feels the sting of the Annual Conference decision to end BBT's Brethren Medical Plan for pastors in 2007, after the plan struggled with too many high-risk members and not enough healthy ones participating to balance them out.

This "death spiral" that pulled down the plan is "an example of the loss of a sense of mutuality in the church," Nolen says wistfully. "It's far bigger than the insurance program. It's about a community that works to support one another. That's been a disappointment to all of us."

• • •

Others will take the lead in struggling with those issues now. Nolen says he plans to avoid any new commitments for a while, although he will continue serving on several boards.

He and his wife, Joyce—who have no children—hope to enjoy some time for golfing, spending more time with their beloved avocation of music (see sidebar), continuing participation at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, going traveling and hiking, and other "fun times."

"We may even sleep in occasionally," Nolen says with a grin.

Eventually they hope to return to Virginia, with plans to retire in Bridgewater. Nolen is a member of the college's board of trustees, and "we have many, many friends there," he says.

At the Church of the Brethren Mission & Ministry Board meeting this fall, Nevin Dulabaum—the new BBT president—said, "The denomination really owes (Nolen) a lot of gratitude for the leadership he gave BBT," noting the many people who saw their resources grow during Nolen's tenure.

Nolen, for his part, says Dulabaum's call to the position makes the transition an easy one. Dulabaum has worked for BBT since 1999, most recently as director of communications.

"I've had a good staff, excellent. We've done some tremendous work," Nolen says. "If I didn't feel my successor was going to do a good job, it would be harder to leave."

As he does re-enter "civilian" life, Nolen expressed three main thoughts for the church: First, a desire for the denomination to "rekindle a sense of mutuality, of caring and support among the Brethren" in all aspects of the church's life; second, to "dwell more on the values we share as Brethren than the differences that polarize us," particularly lifting up the paper of forbearance passed by Annual Conference this past summer; and third, a sense of gratitude for the privilege of serving in the denomination's ministries for some 43 years and all the help along the way.

"Thanks for the guidance and support of all my mentors in the church," Nolen says. "Thanks for being patient with me when I stumbled and affirming my efforts at providing good leadership.

"I have been truly blessed." 

Walt Wiltschek is editor of MESSENGER. He interviewed Wil Nolen in Elgin, Ill., in October.



Courtesy of BBT



Messenger file photo

Above, Nolen directs the choir at National Older Adult Conference; at left, he delivers a fervent speech to Annual Conference in the 1980s.

MAKING MUSIC

Wilfred E. "Wil" Nolen is best known for his work with the financial ministries of the denomination, but music may be his greatest passion.

His father was chorister at Mount Hermon Church of the Brethren in Virginia, and his parents valued music. They scratched out the money to get Nolen piano lessons, and his father took him along to district hymn sings led by Al Brightbill.

"That so impressed me and influenced me," Nolen recalls, "that making music in the church was really important and satisfying."

He became Mount Hermon's pianist, and in high school he formed a band that would play for high school dances and other events. That love grew as he sang in the choir at Bridgewater under Phil Trout and Nelson T. Huffman and served as student choral director in seminary.

A few years after his move to Elgin, he began as choir director at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, a post he still holds nearly 40 years later. He has also directed choirs at Annual Conference, National Older Adult Conference, and district conferences, and he expects to increase his involvement in music in retirement as opportunities come. It's a passion that he and his wife, Joyce, share, and they sing together in the Heartland Voices community choir.

"Music has helped me maintain a balance," Nolen says. "It's the deeply feeling side of who I am along with the administrative, nuts-and-bolts work. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have such an emotive outlet. The combination has been wonderful."

PRACTICING GOD'S PRESENCE

A variety of methods offer pathways to 'holy connection'

by Yvonne Riege

I headed back across the yard, oblivious to the dip until my left foot plummeted. In dismay, I gave a quick look back and scooted on. How could I have missed something so obvious?

For the past 45 minutes, I'd been heading through the same area in a time of prayer walking. Making random patterns, I had somehow avoided the hole until now. While connecting with God in my time of prayer, I'd been oblivious of its depth.

Prayer walking has deepened my connection to God in recent years. This type of prayer-filled movement allows me to combine my physical need for exercise with an inner need to connect with God during time alone. Alone, I can sense the presence of God; as a pastor, I have learned that I can regenerate best when I'm by myself.

. . .

Spiritual growth takes on many forms. Within the Church of the Brethren many have found ways to deepen their spirituality through a variety of practices. Some are familiar, while others have branched into "holy connections" foreign to the majority of Brethren.

For example, pastors Larry and Ann Fourman of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind., are oblates at Our Lady of Grace monastery in Indianapolis. During recent years, they have deepened their union with God through use of the "daily office." The common prayers that are published are tied directly to various scriptures and allow for prayer several times a day.

Larry Fourman shares, "This is an experience that allows open silence." He has found it meaningful, as well, to repeat

the "Jesus prayer": "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." For him, these practices are sometimes used while in a quiet room or during a time of walking.

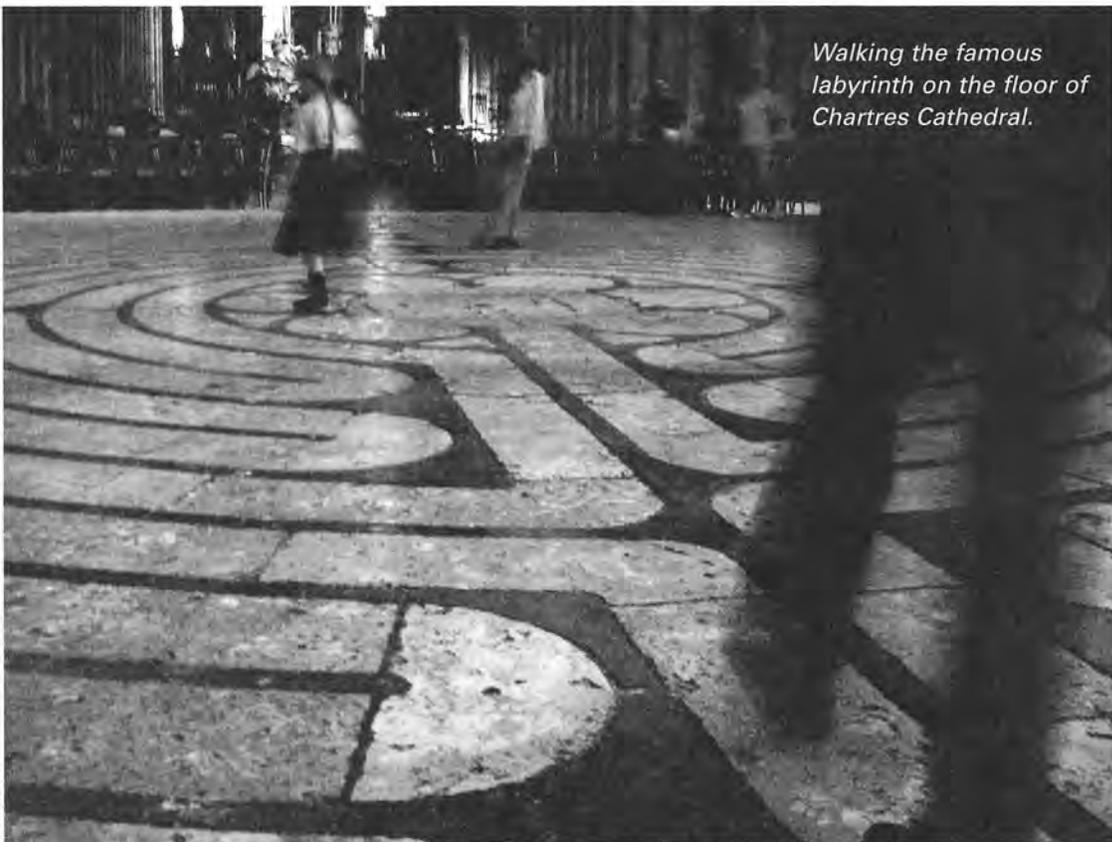
Labyrinth walks have become relatively well known in the past decade. Camp Alexander Mack (Milford, Ind.) put in its first labyrinth in the late 1990s at the original location of the Quiet Place Retreat Center. Later, when the Quiet Place relocated to the Waubee lakeside, the labyrinth disappeared. However, the Quiet Place steering committee encouraged the visioning of a new one after the dust settled in the new retreat center. This new labyrinth is in the shape of a tree, carefully and regularly mowed into grass in the prairie area of the camp. In 2005, campers fashioned stepping stones that were included in this pathway, allowing people who walk the labyrinth to gaze on their beauty after following the pathways inward.

Some individuals prefer walking this type of distinct pathway as they pray. A. Lee Kinsey, pastor of Mill Creek Church of the Brethren (Port Republic, Va.), says that using a prayer labyrinth the past few years has deepened his faith journey.

"I become focused on God as I move toward the center," Kinsey says. He has found that labyrinth walking allows him to communicate with God and to "get beyond the verbiage."

Not everyone is immediately taken with experiences of this sort. Larry Fourman says that at first he "didn't see much in it" when he tried to walk a prayer labyrinth. But he goes on to explain that for him this became a more meditative experience after he experienced prayer walking in diverse places around the country. Several years ago at the Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico, for example, he

Walking the famous labyrinth on the floor of Chartres Cathedral.



encountered a labyrinth outlined in large rocks the size of softballs in the desert sand, and tree roots and wildflowers enhanced the journey.

The various labyrinth structures now offer depth to his spiritual experience, and he says he is more aware of the natural habitat when sauntering a labyrinth amid wildflowers, bees, and flies.

"This actually will deepen the experience," he says.

. . .

Retired Brethren pastor and current spiritual director Phyllis Carter has learned to rely on "being" in the presence of God in times of prayer walking. She stresses that one can focus on "dropping of things" when entering a prayer labyrinth. By this, a person recognizes God's ability to take away burdens,

ing quiet in the center for a chosen period of time, people often sense a word or phrase that comes to mind, as though given directly from God. Many people like to literally "carry" that phrase with them as they journey back out the labyrinth pathways.

Helen Beery, ordained minister and spiritual director with Manchester Church of the Brethren (North Manchester, Ind.) emphasizes, though, that there is no specific formula for a deep holy connection.

"My sense, as I get older, is there no sure-fire way any more," Beery explains. "A specific process does not guarantee this. Sometimes when I walk the labyrinth, my experience is so rich. Sometimes I just walk the labyrinth."

Her experience typifies what many have learned to recognize as normal in seeking holy moments with God. A person

Spiritual growth takes on many forms. Within the Church of the Brethren many have found ways to deepen their spirituality through a variety of practices. Some are familiar, while others have branched into "holy connections" foreign to the majority of Brethren.

as expressed in 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast your burdens on him for he cares for you."

As one begins to wind through the various twists and turns, one can mentally cast aside those things that formerly caused anxiety. On reaching the center, an individual pauses in waiting—recognizing that God will provide. After remain-

cannot simply will a holy connection. Part of this inward journey is awareness of the presence of God, and sometimes it will feel more real than at other times.

A time of quiet solitude is key to individuals who seek a sense of God's presence through various prayer practices. Carter begins her days with a combination of quiet solitude



I carry a polished stone. When I touch it, I am reminded to check in with God. I've used this in membership classes I teach at various weekend retreats with youth. At the end of our time together, I give each one a polished stone, as a nudge of the importance of being spiritually disciplined. This can then urge them toward the more subtle elements of spiritual growth.

and journaling that are tied with scripture study. For her, this daily *examen* allows an introspective way to look back at the previous day and be aware of when she sensed God's presence the most, or even "when I blew it." Through the years, she has also shared a special way of allowing others to sense the presence of Christ—by carrying a polished stone as a reminder.

Kinsey shares how this practice has affected him:

"Years ago Phyllis Carter gave me a polished stone to carry. Her words helped me see that I could have a sense of God, closer than the stone itself. So today I carry a polished stone. When I touch it, I am reminded to check in with God. I've used this in membership classes I teach at

various weekend retreats with youth. At the end of our time together, I give each one a polished stone, as a nudge of the importance of being spiritually disciplined. This can then urge them toward the more subtle elements of spiritual growth.

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Some Brethren have been drawn into a deeper faith journey through the scripture study of *lectio divina*—a meditative, reflective way of repeatedly reading passages of scripture. Both Beery and Fourman say that this practice is extremely meaningful to them, for it draws one into the text.

"When I am sitting with the text I am able to visualize what is on the page," Beery says. "The text becomes more personal."

For the past five years, I've been fortunate to be part of a group that studies scriptures on Thursday mornings. Together, a group of Brethren and Mennonite women pore over texts—primarily from the lectionary readings. As a group, we have bonded as we have lived into the Word. Growing in relationship as well as listening within the text have allowed incredible insights and awareness of the Holy Spirit to spring forth in our lives.

There are as many unique ways of becoming connected to God's presence as there are unique individuals. No specific way is paramount. But central to all of this is an individual's willingness to experience God in open ways that deepen spiritual growth.

Yvonne Riege is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren. She lives in Wakarusa, Ind.

READ MORE

Yvonne Riege says the following books have been helpful to her in exploring spirituality:

The Rhythm of God's Grace, by Arthur Paul Boers

Soul Feast, by Marjorie J. Thompson

A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice, by Jane E. Vennard

Inviting God In: Scriptural Reflections and Prayers Throughout the Year, by Joyce Rupp

Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God, by Sybil MacBeth

For information on ordering books, contact Brethren Press at 800-441-3712.

We Three Kings of Orient Are ... mostly unknown

by Benedicta Cipolla

Many legends have grown around Matthew's gift-bringers

They came. They saw. They gifted.

That's about all we know of the foreign visitors who traveled to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus.

The scene ingrained in the public imagination—a stately procession of three kings in turbans, crowns, elaborate capes, and fancy slippers, with an entourage of servants and camels trailing behind—isn't from scripture.

In fact, there's no evidence in the Gospels that the Magi were kings, or even that there were three of them, much less that they sidled up to a manger on dromedaries exactly 12 days after Jesus' birth.

"Legends pop up when people begin to look closely at historical events," said Christopher Bellitto, assistant professor of history at New Jersey's Kean University. "They want to fill in the blanks."

Only the Gospel of Matthew mentions "wise men from the East" who follow a star to Bethlehem. In the original Greek, they were called *magoi* (in Latin, *magi*), from the same root that gives us the word magic. It's been posited they were astrologers or members of a Persian priestly caste.

But what matters more than their exact number and status, say historians and biblical scholars, is the fact that they were not Jews.

"For Matthew, the magic star leading the wise men to the place of Jesus' birth is his way of saying what happened in Jesus is for the Gentile world as well," said Marcus Borg, professor of religion and culture at Oregon State University and co-author of the book, *The First Christmas*.

After being warned in a dream to avoid the murderous King Herod, the Magi returned home "by another road."

Metaphorically, that suggests they were transformed by their experience. While Matthew doesn't say they converted to Christianity, popular legend holds that they were baptized by St. Thomas and died in Armenia in 55 AD.

The first artistic depictions of the Magi are found in second-century Roman catacombs, but it wasn't until the early third century, when Christian writer Tertullian referred to them as "almost kings," that they began to cultivate a royal air.

Their kingly designation also echoes biblical passages in Isaiah and the Psalms, keeping with the common belief that Jesus' birth was predicted in the Old Testament. Prophecies foretold gifts of gold and frankincense, two of the three gifts the Magi brought. The third, myrrh, was a burial spice, which some believe foreshadowed Jesus' death and resurrection.

Around the same time as Tertullian, Origen—a theologian in Alexandria, Egypt—set their number at three, likely because they carried three gifts, said Teresa Berger, a professor at Yale Divinity School. Later, the wise men were portrayed as representatives of the three races of man as descended from Noah's



sons—Semitic, Indo-European, and African—which is why one is sometimes pictured as a black man.

Fast forward to the sixth century, when a Latin document recorded their names as Gaspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthazar, though the source is unknown, and different names exist in other languages.

By the time their relics arrived at the Cologne cathedral in 1164, after stops in Constantinople and Milan, the faithful venerated the Magi as saints, and festivals sprang up to honor them. A 14th-century report of an Epiphany play described costumed "kings" riding through Milan on horseback with a large retinue, similar to contemporary three kings parades in Latin America and in Latino communities in the United States.

Today, Roman Catholics and some Protestants commemorate the Magi's visit on Jan. 6 with the Feast of the Epiphany. Orthodox Christians celebrate both Jesus' birth and the adoration of the Magi together, either on Dec. 25 or Jan. 7, depending on which calendar they follow.

In Europe and Latin America, where Jan. 6 remains a holiday in some places, Epiphany folk customs abound. The elderly Befana and Babushka bring gifts to Italian and Russian children, while in Puerto Rico, the *tres reyes* are said to deposit presents in children's shoes, often in exchange for oatmeal or hay left out overnight for their camels.

The Magi may get short shrift in the US compared to other countries, but they play an integral part in the Christmas story, cropping up in songs and often stealing the show in pageants.

William Studwell, a retired professor at Northern Illinois University and an expert on Christmas carols, chose "We Three Kings of Orient Are" as one of two "Carols of the Year" for 2007 to mark its 150th anniversary. He recalls his own Magi days fondly.

"It's one of the only things I remember about third grade," he said, "being one of the kings."

Benedicta Cipolla is a writer for Religion News Service.

Ephesians: One-anothering writ large

Letter was likely written as a message to many churches

by Tara Hornbacher

As you prepare for worship on a Sunday morning, open your Bible to the letter to the Ephesians.

When you read that first verse, read it “To the saints who are in (fill in the blank with your church name) and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you . . .” (1:1b). Many scholars believe that this letter was written as an encyclical, a circulating letter that was meant to be read in each church with their own name in that blank. Eventually, the blank was filled in by the church at Ephesus and saved as such.

Written in the style of the apostle Paul, most scholars agree that this letter was probably written after the death of Paul in the final years of the first century. It develops a theological understanding of the church as Christ’s body, with the foundation being the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone or keystone (3:20).

The structure of this letter is similar to other Pauline letters, with some important differences. It begins with a greeting, but not as particular or personal as

some other letters. An outline of the text might look like this:

- Greeting, blessing, and prayer 1:1-19
- Theological treatise on Christ and the church 1:20-2:22
- Paul’s mission and prayer 3:1-21
- Instructions to the life in Christ’s body 4:1-6:9
- Unity in the Spirit 4:1-16
- New life 4:17-5:2
- Turning from old ways 5:3-20
- Household codes 5:21-6:9
- Strength and the whole armor of God 6:10-20
- Benediction 6:21-24

The first three chapters give background, theological understanding, and hope for the church, while the last three chapters are the practical applications of the first three chapters. The writer argues for the church to be the body of Christ,

individually and corporately. Here the writer offers a life that is lived as a witness to the peace of Christ in the way we treat each other and the very life we lead in our homes, as well as in our public dealings.

This letter depends upon the text of Colossians for much of the teachings. Parallels are found with other letters as well (i.e. 1 Cor. 12 with Eph. 4:11-12). The household codes of 5:21-6:9 are similar to those in 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter. In the past, some of these household codes have been misused to justify common social institutions, such as slavery and the oppression of women.

The point of these admonitions and much of this letter is to put forward the theological concept we might call “one-anothering.” This unity in one another is explained in 5:32 when the writer exclaims: “This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.” We are a part of one another through the mystery of the body of Christ in the church through the salvation offered in Christ’s death and resurrection.

Here is good news for the hope of a

EPHESIANS: A CLOSER LOOK

Key verses: “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (2:10); “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (4:4-6); “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21).

new heaven and a new earth: We are forever a part of one another; created to be part of one another. Interdependence is not something new for the 21st century; rather this is the Good News since God breathed across the waters.

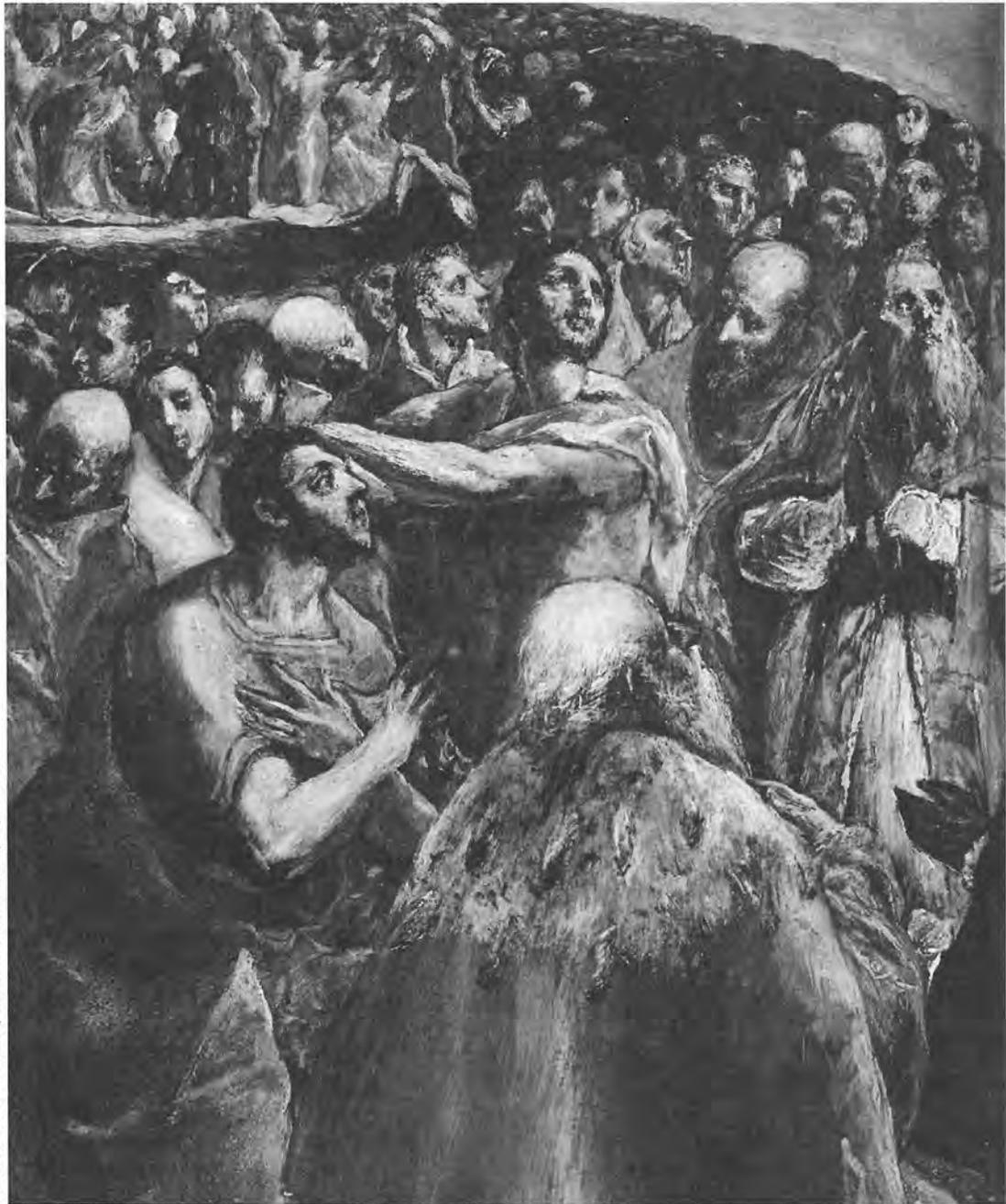
The author of this letter was warning against personal and corporate behaviors or attitudes that could keep us from the fullness of God's purpose for our lives in Christ. The guidance for unity centers in our understanding that we are one in the body of Christ, knowing that we might not all agree on all issues. We are to one-another each other "with humility, gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . ." (4:2). Unity is not easy, but we are reminded that it is possible!

Next Sunday morning, if you prepare for worship by reading the letter to the Ephesians and you have a sudden urge to stand and read this scripture aloud, perhaps our spiritual ancestors are still at work. I am sure the Spirit lives in and through us if instead of just reading out the scripture, we live out the one-anothering as we greet one another with the peace of Christ. **✠**

Tara Hornbacker is associate professor of ministry formation at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind.

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 January: Philippians, by Tara Hornbacker.

The Adoration of Christ (detail), by El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos) 1541-1614



THIS UNITY IN ONE ANOTHER IS EXPLAINED IN 5:32 WHEN THE WRITER EXCLAIMS: "THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY, AND I AM APPLYING IT TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH." WE ARE A PART OF ONE ANOTHER THROUGH THE MYSTERY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH THROUGH THE SALVATION OFFERED IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

Mission and Ministry Board holds first meeting in Elgin

The Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren held its first meeting Oct. 18-21 at the denomination's General Offices in Elgin, Ill. The Mission and Ministry Board is the board of the new Church of the Brethren, Inc., and is chaired this year by Eddie Edmonds, pastor of Moler Avenue Church of the Brethren in Martinsburg, W.Va.

Board members come from the former General Board and the former Association of Brethren Caregivers board. Ex officio members represent Annual Conference, Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Benefit Trust, On Earth Peace, and the Council of District Executives.

On the agenda were financial reports and a budget for the new organization, a resolution on the "Responsibility to Protect," reports from several church programs, and consideration of the need for new strategic planning documents, among other business.

The meetings began with a day of professional development for board members. Using a theme from Romans 12:2, "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds," board members and staff leaders expressed hopes for the new organization of the Church of the Brethren, and anticipated exciting and challenging work ahead.

Budget and finances

The board approved a 2009 total operating budget for all Church of the Brethren ministries of \$10,236,210 income, \$10,391,760 expense, and an expected \$155,550 deficit for next year. The board's actions included a revision of the 2009 budget parameter for the Core Ministries Fund, adding the sum of \$289,000 for the Caring Ministries budget to the General Board's previous budget planning. For the Church of the Brethren's core ministries, a budget parameter of \$6,036,000 income and \$6,176,000 expense was approved, representing an expected deficit of \$140,000.

After reviewing a chart showing the 10-year history of net assets for each of the funds, the board expressed concern about an increasing negative net asset for Brethren Press over the past few years and asked the general secretary to bring an action plan to its March meeting. Brethren Press is one of the board's self-funding units.

Funding director Ken Neher reported that giving to the Church of the Brethren remained strong despite the global economic crisis. Treasurer Judy Keyser identified an overarching long-term financial issue for the board, that income is not matching current ministry needs.

An offering for a capital campaign to upgrade facilities at the General Offices and the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., totaled \$2,083.

Responsibility to Protect

There was strong affirmation by the board for a resolution on "The Responsibility to Protect," presented by Phil Jones, director of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office,



The Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren held its first meeting using a theme from Romans, "Transformed by the renewing of your minds." The board used a consensus decision-making model, which included many opportunities for "table talk" among board members and executive staff. Above, John Wenger and Marian Thornton converse.

and Larry Ulrich, a member of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., who has been involved with a coalition connected with the Council of Religious Leaders in Chicago.

The United Nations adopted "The Responsibility to Protect" in 2005 to address the problem of a country where the government persecutes or eliminates its own people, as in the case of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Using all of its diplomatic, economic, and political resources, the UN can under this doctrine use military force as a last resort to halt atrocities.

"We do differ with the UN document on the Responsibility to Protect," Jones said. "We support it fully, except for the use of military force." The resolution was brought as a Church of the Brethren response to the action of the UN and to the global increase of catastrophic atrocities. The resolution also responds to a 2007 call from the National Council of Churches governing board, which adopted a resolution on the Responsibility to Protect and called for support from member communions.

Board members affirmed the resolution but also identified some concerns. A small task team was asked to bring a revision that more clearly identified alternatives that the Church of the Brethren may suggest for nonviolent prevention of and response to atrocities. The modified resolution was adopted by consensus (see www.brethren.org/genbd/GBResolutions/2008ResponsibilityToProtect.pdf).

Sudan Initiative

A report on the Sudan Initiative was given by director Brad Bohrer, who had just returned from a visit to southern Sudan. He presented plans to place Church of the Brethren staff with RECONCILE, an organization that does community-building and peacemaking work in southern Sudan and was begun under the auspices of the New Sudan Council of Churches. Referring to placements of Brethren mission staff with the New Sudan Council of Churches in years past, Bohrer said, "There is a strong sense that we are coming back to walk alongside" the council again.

Board members responded with numerous concerns about the Sudan Initiative, and some shared critical responses to the initiative from members of their districts. Concerns focused on the perception that the initiative has lost the elements of evangelism and church planting, as well as concerns about funding and donations to the initiative. The board acted by consensus to direct the general secretary to create a communication piece to bring clarity about the Sudan Initiative for the denomination.

Other business

The board formally affirmed the appointments of Stan Noffsinger as general secretary and Judy Keyser as treasurer of the Church of the Brethren.

Another item addressed property considerations in Elgin, Ill. The Stewardship of Property recommendation to develop surplus acreage at the General Offices was reviewed. Noffsinger asked the board to discuss and give guidance on the general question of selling or leasing 13 acres of land located behind the office buildings. He and Keyser presented information

about an opportunity to develop the land presented by Mercy Housing Lakefront, a nonprofit that develops and operates affordable, program-enriched housing for families, seniors, and people with special needs who lack the economic resources to access quality, safe housing opportunities. No action was taken, and the board asked for more information to be brought to its next meeting.

The board also was invited to sign a letter of support to the Synod of the Church of North India (CNI) and the Bishop of Gujarat State. CNI and its members have been seriously affected by violence directed at Christians. The violence began in late August in the state of Orissa, where three CNI dioceses are located, but has begun to spread to other areas. The board heard that it had not yet affected the area where most India Brethren live.



The new Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren used a consensus decision-making model, in which board members held up green, red, or yellow cards to indicate their feelings about items of business requiring action.

Leadership Team reviews budget, planning for Annual Conference

The Leadership Team of the Church of the Brethren, the group designated in the new denominational structure to continue the functions previously assigned to the Annual Conference Council, met Oct. 16 at the denomination's General Offices in Elgin, Ill.

Participating were the Annual Conference officers—moderator David Shumate, moderator-elect Shawn Flory Replogle, and secretary Fred Swartz—and general secretary Stan Noffsinger. Treasurer Judy Keyser briefly participated to deliver a report on the Annual Conference Fund.

The financial report indicated that the high attendance at the 2008 Annual Conference in Richmond, Va., provided a

boost to the revenue for Conference, but costs for technical support at the site exceeded expectations by \$72,000.

Swartz reported that the Annual Conference Fund is anticipated to be in a positive position by the end of 2008. The Leadership Team will monitor budget projections for 2009, which currently appear to yield a deficit situation again.

The Leadership Team discussed ideas for revitalizing Annual Conference, with hopes for continuing the celebration of the mission, vision, and values of the Church of the Brethren that was begun in connection with the 300th anniversary of the denomination. The team will continue to support and work with the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee in pursuing this objective.

Long-range envisioning for the denomina-

tion was another primary topic. Building on extensive discussions by the former Annual Conference Council, the Leadership Team reported that it hopes to pursue the creation of a new visionary group composed of members of the Inter-Agency Forum (a meeting of the executives of the Church of the Brethren agencies related to Annual Conference) along with some members possibly chosen by Annual Conference.

The group also reviewed changes needed in the Church of the Brethren's *Manual of Organization and Polity* as a result of the actions of the 2008 Annual Conference, and prepared a first draft of a revised set of bylaws for the Church of the Brethren, Inc. to be presented to Annual Conference in 2010. The Leadership Team scheduled its next meeting for Dec. 17-18.

Brethren representatives attend conference on human trafficking

In the wake of unanimous support for the Annual Conference resolution on "Slavery in the 21st Century," two Church of the Brethren staff members participated in an Ecumenical Conference on Human Trafficking in New York Sept. 29 to Oct. 1. The conference was sponsored by the National Council of Churches and the United Methodist Women's Division. Anna Speicher and Phil Jones attended on behalf of the Church of the Brethren.

Much of the conference focused on the serious and extensive problem of sex trafficking, which is a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide and victimizes millions of women and children. Other types of enslavement were also addressed, particularly those most commonly found in the United States in agricultural, hotel, restaurant, and domestic work.

While laws on the books prohibit slavery and impose penalties on traffickers, many loopholes still exist and successful rescues and prosecutions are few and far between, the conference revealed. There is a great need for more education and outreach to law enforcement officials, to those who are currently

held in bondage or are vulnerable to being enslaved, and to ordinary people who are unaware of the existence of this problem, let alone its depth and breadth.

Participants in the conference included representatives from many faith communions, including Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Mennonite. Also attending were many representatives of faith-based organizations who are tackling some piece of the trafficking issue.

The Church of the Brethren is among the few communions that have issued broad-based denominational condemnations of modern-day slavery. The Church of the Brethren Study and Action Guide on Modern-Day Slavery was made available at the conference and was well received (www.brethren.org/genbd/washofc/ModernDaySlavery.html).

"The conference was valuable as a step in the process of combating this horrific problem," Speicher reported. "It was heartening to see so many people of faith either interested in or already committed to action. It was people of faith who were primarily responsible for abolishing the institution of legalized slavery in this country in the 19th century. In the 21st century there is again a pressing need to work together to 'proclaim release to the captives,' " she said.

PERSONNEL MOVES

• **Steve Bob** started Nov. 3 as director of the Church of the Brethren Credit Union, a ministry related to Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT). His responsibilities will include oversight of the credit union's daily operations and development of new services, including online banking and bill pay. He has most recently been executive director of the Fox Valley Micro Loan Fund, since February 2007. Bob was director of World Relief's Micro Enterprise program in Nashville, Tenn., from 2001 to 2007 and finance manager for The Enterprise Center in Philadelphia from 1996 to 2001. He is a graduate of North Park University in Chicago, and holds an MBA in economic development from Eastern University. Born and raised in Quito, Ecuador, to missionary parents, he is a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Elgin, Ill.

• **Tammy Chudy** has been promoted to a salaried position as manager of Insurance Operations for BBT. She has worked for BBT for seven years in the areas of finance and insurance. Chudy first worked with BBT in the finance department from November 1990 to May 1995, when she left to raise her two children. She was rehired in August 2006 as a member services representative for insurance.

With staffing changes in BBT's insurance department over the past two years, Chudy has become more involved with duties that are in line with a managerial role.

• **Donna Hillcoat** began in October as part-time director of Deacon Ministry for the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren. Hillcoat has been a member of the Family Life Ministry Group of the former Association of Brethren Caregivers and has assisted with several Caring Ministries publishing projects. Her professional and volunteer experiences have included counseling services for older adults and their caregivers, developing and leading training programs and workshops, coaching people in transition, and facilitating caregiver and grief support groups. She is business partner and coach for Between Us: Personal Coaching for Women. She holds a master's degree in community counseling from Argosy University and a master's in library science from the University of Michigan.

• **Dave Ingold**, director of Buildings and Grounds at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., has announced his retirement effective Dec. 31. Ingold began working for the Church of the Brethren General Board as an engineer in October 1980. He was promoted to his present position in October 1981. He and his wife, Rose, plan to move to their farm in Missouri.

• **Patrice Nightingale** has been promoted to director of communications for BBT in Elgin, Ill. In this role, she will provide oversight of communications, marketing, promotional, and operational initiatives for BBT's ministries. Nightingale was originally hired as manager of publications, and on Sept. 15 was named interim director of communications. She has worked in the publications field in various capacities since 1973. She is a graduate of Manchester College, North Manchester, Ind., and holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology. She is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin.

• **LeAnn Wine** has been appointed executive director of Systems and Services for the Church of the Brethren. This is a new position in the office of the associate general secretary of Operations, and will oversee the departments of Finance, Information Services, and Buildings and Grounds in Elgin, Ill. Wine will continue to be assistant treasurer for the Church of the Brethren. She began working for the Church of the Brethren General Board as director of Financial Operations and assistant treasurer in March 2004. She earned her bachelor's degree in accounting, finance, and management from McPherson (Kan.) College, and attends Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren.

Church executives issue pastoral letter on racism

"We believe that this time in the life of our nation and our denomination is an opening for spiritual reflection and positive change in race relations." This sentence opened a pastoral letter on racism signed by the executives of the main Church of the Brethren agencies. It was sent in late August to all congregations and districts, as well as to the Brethren-related colleges.

Church of the Brethren United Nations representative Doris Abdullah also has shared the letter with the Sub-Committee for the Elimination of Racism of the United Nation's NGO Committee for Human Rights. The letter has been included as an advocacy statement to the Anti-Discrimination Unit of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Geneva, Switzerland.

The letter was signed by Stanley J. Noffsinger, general secretary; Bob Gross, executive director of On Earth Peace; Kathy Reid, executive director of the Association of Brethren Caregivers; Ruthann Knechel Johansen, president of Bethany Theological Seminary; and Wilfred E. Nolen, then-president of Brethren Benefit Trust.

"This letter is not a partisan political statement and is not an endorsement of any candidate," the executives said. "We are writing because the presidential campaign and its coverage in the media have made it clear that prejudice continues in our nation." The letter was headed by a passage of scripture from Matthew 22:37-39.

The executives wrote "in a spirit of humility . . . admitting that we have more questions than answers." The letter went on to mention the prominent roles that racism, sexism, and militarism have played in the US presidential campaign. "We

are realizing that the nomination of an African-American for president of the United States presents the church with a unique opening to talk about racism," the executives said. "We sense that this is a time in which the church needs to step forward and lead in a national conversation on race."

The letter also made a series of confessions and posed questions, "as a way to examine our personal and collective conscience." Heading the confessions was the statement that "all of us have been caught up in racism, and we name it as an evil. We confess that there have been expressions of racism in our congregations and in our denomination."

A list of recommended resources was attached. The letter also affirmed the witness of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, in particular the statements "Becoming a Multi-Ethnic Church" (2007), "Community: A Tribe of Many Feathers" (1994), "Brethren and Black Americans" (1991), and "Statement Addressing the Concern of Undocumented Persons and Refugees in the United States" (1982).

The complete letter and attached resource list is available at www.brethren.org.



Baltimore police investigate actions of BVS unit trainee

A trainee in the Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) unit that held orientation Sept. 21-Oct. 10 in Maryland was involved in a situation that is under investigation by the Baltimore City police department.

The trainee checked in to a hospital on Oct. 4 and was discovered to have given birth recently. After the woman told police the baby was still-born, they found the body in a trash bin outside St. John's United Methodist Church in Baltimore, where the unit was staying for several days.

An investigation by the state medical examiner's office later determined that the baby's death was a homicide by asphyxiation, according to an Oct. 29 report in *The Baltimore Sun*. The outcome of a police investigation was not yet known at that date, and no charges had been filed.

BVS leaders said they did not know the trainee

was pregnant, nor did they know she gave birth.

"This is a tragedy," said Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren.

The denomination's executive staff were involved in offering support and caring for the members of the orientation unit and the BVS staff after the incident. Direct care and support were also offered to the family of the individual involved.

St. John's pastor Drew Phoenix offered support to the orientation unit immediately. The church has hosted BVS units previously in order to give trainees experience with inner-city life and an opportunity to do volunteer work with organizations such as soup kitchens and homeless shelters. The remainder of the orientation time took place in New Windsor, Md.

Church of the Brethren staff expressed gratitude to the St. John's pastor and congregation for their support during a very difficult time and requested prayer support from church members across the denomination.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dec. 1 World AIDS Day

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

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

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

Jan. 13-17 "Heeding God's Call," a gathering of the Historic Peace Churches, Philadelphia

Jan. 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Jan. 25-28 Council of District Executives winter meeting, Cocoa Beach, Fla.

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

Feb. 1 Brethren Volunteer Service "Service Sunday"

Feb. 8-March 8 Church of the Brethren Nigeria workcamp

Feb. 26-27 Annual Forum for the Brethren Homes, Elgin, Ill.

March 8 One Great Hour of Sharing offering

March 14-16 Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board meeting, New Windsor, Md.

'Come Be My Light': Honest doubt

Mother Teresa, the saint of Calcutta, was a shining example of dedication to Christ and to Christian service throughout the last half of the 20th century. So the book *Come Be My Light* surprised many when it was published in 2007. According to excerpts from decades of correspondence, Mother Teresa lived for nearly 50 years in a state of prolonged spiritual drought.

Her early call to minister to "the poorest of the poor" came from what she heard as the direct voice of Christ: "Come, be



ANNA SPEICHER

My light. I cannot go alone—they don't know me—so they don't want me. You come—go amongst them, carry Me with you into them." She heard this voice repeatedly as she petitioned her superiors for the authority to begin her lifework. Yet after her request was granted she no longer heard this voice. While she remained outwardly cheerful she shared her deep spiritual loneliness with her advisors: "If I ever become a saint—I will surely be one of

'darkness.' I will continually be absent from heaven—to light the light of those in darkness on earth."

My first reaction as I read this book was a sense of wonder that it was published at all. The collector and editor was no Mother Teresa-basher but rather the Roman Catholic priest in charge of the drive for her canonization. I was surprised but appreciative that he was willing to share Mother Teresa's doubts with the world. It's so easy to believe that spiritual superheroes like Mother Teresa must be, like Mary Poppins, "practically perfect in every way." And it is too bad that many people feel that the last place they can share their experience of spiritual darkness is in the company of those with whom they worship. Like most of us, Mother Teresa did not intend to air her doubts in public, but this honesty and openness on the part of the church is refreshing.

My second reaction was puzzlement that the Jesus whom Mother Teresa heard calling her to a life of sacrifice and service did not check back in once in a while. Wouldn't a little support and encouragement have been in order? Mother Teresa answered this question for herself in a very painful way. She had repeatedly prayed that she might suffer even as Jesus had suffered. She told herself that, in withholding his presence from her, Jesus must be permitting her to suffer the loss and abandonment that he himself had felt.

Might this have been so? It is true that we don't understand the mysteries of divinity. But I also wonder if it just might be that Mother Teresa got it wrong. Might it be that God was still present with her but in a form she did not recognize? I am reminded of a story told from many pulpits. Floodwaters are rising and threatening the life of a man in a house on the bank of a river. Three different would-be rescuers come by in a car, then a boat, then a helicopter, but each time he refuses help, saying, "No, thanks; I'm waiting for God to save me." Having declined all human assistance, he continues to wait on his rooftop until finally the flood overtakes him and he drowns. Arriving in heaven, he meets God and asks indignantly: "Where were you? Why didn't you save me?" God responds: "I tried—I sent a car, a rowboat, and a helicopter."

After her early profound and mystical experiences, it isn't surprising that Mother Teresa would expect encounters with the divine to take a very direct form. But perhaps—for whatever reason—the divine manifests much more commonly in the faces of you and me. For Mother Teresa, this might have been in the spiritual directors with whom she met and corresponded for many years, in her other confidants, in the sisters—and later brothers—who joined her cause, and in the many who were helped by her work. Mother Teresa may in some sense have been handicapped by her early mountain-top experience.

Another thought: Mother Teresa begged to be allowed to share in Christ's sufferings. Perhaps she was permitted to do so in a way that was even more profound than she understood. Lucretia Mott, a 19th-century Quaker minister and reformer, preached that people have an absolute responsibility to emulate Christ: "Let us," she urged, "aspire to similar purity—to similar glory. . . . Let us not hesitate to be the messiah of our age." Is it possible that Mother Teresa could no longer hear the Messiah because she had in fact achieved the union that she so longed for? That Christ in fact lived within her in a way that her humble soul could not comprehend?

These are just musings, of course. And yet I think it can only be helpful for us all to look for the light in others and to expect it in ourselves. Let us be no less ready to answer God's call. ❧

Anna Speicher is director and senior editor for the Gather 'Round curriculum project of Brethren Press. She is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light—The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta.*

Editor: Brian Kolodiejchuk. **Publisher:** Doubleday.

Pages: 416. **List price:** \$22.99 (hardcover). **To order:** Call Brethren Press, 800-441-3712.

ONCAMPUS

Bridgewater College (*Bridgewater, Va.*)

Matt Guynn, coordinator of peace witness for On Earth Peace, spoke at Bridgewater on Sept. 25 for the Fall Spiritual Focus. . . . Bridgewater's "Every Student, One Commitment Campaign," which seeks to raise \$40 million for academic and capital improvements, reported this fall that it had already raised \$31.7 million. The majority of the goal—\$34 million—is earmarked for endowments.

Elizabethtown College (*Elizabethtown, Pa.*)

Elizabethtown welcomed Caroline Hartzell, the college's 2008 Alumni Peace Fellow, for a two-day residency, titled "Crafting Peace," in mid-November. This annual residency is sponsored by the Elizabethtown College Alumni Peace Fellowship.

Juniata College (*Huntingdon, Pa.*)

Stone Church of the Brethren (Huntingdon, Pa.) co-pastor Christy Dowdy and Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren member David Beachley were among six who joined Juniata's board of trustees effective Sept 1.

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

Roland "Ort" Ortmayer, a long-time La Verne faculty member and a nationally recognized coach who spent 43 years guiding the Leopards football program, died Oct. 9 at Hillcrest Homes retirement community. He was 91. La Verne president Steve Morgan said that Ortmayer "genuinely embodied the mission and spirit of this university."

Manchester College (*North Manchester, Ind.*)

Manchester enrolled its largest class in more than 25 years, with an anticipated 1,150 total students for the first day of class on Sept. 3. Nearly 400 new students were expected. . . . Senior peace studies major Mary Cox helped to arrange an anti-nuclear speaker and an exhibit at the college this fall. Hiroshima bomb survivor Sachiko Masuoka spoke on Oct. 10, and an exhibit on the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs was on display from Oct. 27 to Dec. 1.

McPherson College (*McPherson, Kan.*)

McPherson's enrollment increased for the sixth year in a row, with 509 full-time students enrolled for the fall 2008 semester, the largest enrollment since 1976. McPherson has experienced an overall growth of nearly 170 students in the past six years. . . . The newest McPherson Athletic Hall of Fame inductees are Vance Carlson '50, Roger Kamla '74, Christy Allen '91, and Lee Haun '37 (posthumous). They were inducted Oct. 10 during the college's homecoming weekend.



Walt Wiltchek

Regional Youth Conference ponders politics

Three dozen senior high youth and advisors gathered Oct. 4-5 at Manchester College (North Manchester, Ind.) for a Regional Youth Conference weekend exploring faith and politics.

Phil Jones, director of the denomination's Brethren Witness/Washington Office, led four group sessions, emphasizing the possibilities that Christians can help bring about.

"Politicians and political structures are not going to be the answers for this world," Jones said. He described from scripture what the world "should be" and told youth, "It's up to us to help (government) get there. It's putting our basic and core faith understandings into action."

Individual sessions explored topics of justice, passion, and humility, using Micah 6:8 as a central text. Paul Fry-Miller led music for the weekend, while Manchester students helped to lead small groups for deeper discussion. The two-man band Jayber Crow gave a Saturday evening concert.—**Walt Wiltchek**

Summer travel team shares hope for peace

"There is good news I bring from serving my summer on the (Church of the Brethren's) Youth Peace Travel Team. My good news is that there is hope for peace. The campers this summer have renewed my hope for the peacemaking of our generation."

Those words came in a reflection by Samantha Carwile of Anderson, Ind., who served this past summer on the Youth Peace Travel Team. The group traveled to camps around the denomination as well as Annual Conference and National Young Adult Conference. Other team members were John-Michael Pickens, Melisa Grandison, and Gabe Dodd.

Carwile also challenged the church to do its part in teaching peace to children and youth: "It is now the church's job to take in the young peacemakers of our denomination and guide them in the ways of peace," she said. "In fact, it is essential for us as a living peace church to embrace our new generation of peacemakers."

The team is sponsored annually by several Church of the Brethren agencies and the Outdoor Ministries Association. Details and an application for the 2009 team are at www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/YPTT.htm.

Bits and pieces

• **Bekah Houff**, coordinator of the 2009 Church of the Brethren National Junior High Conference and an assistant workcamp coordinator, served as a young adult steward at this year's National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) general assembly in Denver, Colo., in November.



Listed on these pages are articles, editorials, opinion letters, and names of contributors that have appeared in MESSENGER during 2008. They are classified in five groups: authors, In Touch contributors, letters to the editor, congregations, and subjects. Numbers following the listings indicate month and page number, with 7/8 representing the combined July/August issue.

AUTHORS

- ARCHER, ALICE**
Alexander Mack: A seeker of scripture1-8
- ARCHER, J. DOUGLAS**
James Quinter: Gentle, persistent progressive4-10
- AUKERMAN, RUTH**
On faith and art12-6
- BECKWITH, JIM**
From the moderator: Discipleship and surrender7/8-6
- BENEDICT, JAMES**
Peter Becker: Forgotten founder on earth9-7
The Wolves: Leading the way west3-10
Following Christ on pretty feet3-14
- BOWMAN, KAREN DOSS**
The message in the magic4-18
Big and Brethren7/8-16
Economic justice for all10-16
- BOWMAN, S. LOREN**
Opinion: We need some 'active creativity'5-28
- BOWSER, PAULA**
Stuck in Groundhog Day2-6
- BOYER, SUSAN**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-10
- BROCKWAY, JOSH**
Media review: 'Irresistible Revolution'3-26
- BRUBAKER, PAMELA K.**
Sarah Righter Major: Preaching with power3-8
In mission in India4-14
- BRUMBAUGH-CAYFORD, CHERYL**
Seeking 'Separated No More'7/8-15
Brethren culminate anniversary with celebration in Schwarzenau10-22
- BUCHER, CHRISTINA**
Conrad Beissel and the Ephrata Cloister2-12
- CARTER, JANA**
Beyond justice: Confessions of a (Brethren) trial lawyer10-13
- CASSELL, DANA**
Women in ministry: 'The time is surely here'10-8
- CIPOLLA, BENEDICTA**
We Three Kings of Orient Are12-17
- CONDON, LOGAN**
Fighting the war at home6-12
- CROUSE, JERRY**
Media review: The Harry Potter series6-26
- DAVIS, JANE**
Westward ho, Brethren!3-12
Let's go camping5-14
- DEARDORFF, DARLA KAY BOWMAN**
Guided by God: An intercultural journey3-6
- DENLINGER, JAMIE**
Delighted by our diversity: Moderator Jim Beckwith6-14
- DONCKELS, HEATHER**
Media review: GodTube7/8-26
- DULABAUM, NEVIN**
Schwarzenau: Then and now1-12
- EDMONDS, EDDIE**
Older adult conference wades in11-22
- ENNS, FERNANDO**
Glory to God and peace on earth9-7
- FALSANI, CATHLEEN**
Media review: Henry Poole Is Here10-26
- FAUS, RONALD E.H.**
Purity vs. mission4-6
- FIKE, EARLE W. JR.**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-11
- GARDNER, RICK**
Matthew: Good news for God's people2-20
Romans: The gospel according to Paul7/8-20
Galatians: Polemical Paul11-20
- GIBBLE, KEN**
Living without the answers9-18
- GRADY, DUANE**
Practicing biblical hospitality5-18
- HORNBACKER, TARA**
The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit moves6-18
Ephesians: One-anothering writ large12-18
- JONES, DAVID LEE**
Peace is systemic9-15
- KAUFFMAN, NICK MILLER**
A 'messed up' minister of Christ1-14
- KEENEY, MERVIN**
A global sense of being Brethren2-17
Starting in Sudan2-19
- KELLER, SETH**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-11
- KETTERING, DENISE**
Dan West: Pied piper for peace 5-12
- KREIDER, J. KENNETH**
Anna Beahm Mow: A fount of inspiration6-8
M.R. Zigler: A crusader for peace6-10
- LASZAKOVITS, GREG DAVIDSON**
'I'm not saying ... I'm just saying ...'11-6
- LEHMAN, JAMES H.**
Media review: 'Three cups of tea'4-26
- LONG, THEODORE E.**
A route to renewal4-15
- LONGNECKER, STEVE**
Caught off-guard at Goshen5-11
- MARTIN, HAROLD S.**
Luke: Jesus the Son of Man4-20
1 Corinthians: A straight letter to a crooked church9-20
- McFADDEN, WENDY**
From the publisher1-2, 2-2, 3-2, 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 7/8-2, 9-2, 10-2, 11-2, 12-2
- METZGER, MADALYN AND DARREN PRIES-KLASSEN**
Seven things young adults need to know about money11-8

- MILLER, ERIC**
Annual Conference: Wide-ranging worship9-10
- MILLER, GALEN**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-13
- MYER, JAMES F.**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-12
- MYER, JOE**
A firm foundation (BVS)11-16
- PRIES-KLASSEN, DARREN, AND MADALYN METZGER**
Seven things young adults need to know about money11-8
- PLYLE, JANIS**
Nigeria: From humble beginnings to the largest of all5-17
- RADCLIFF, DAVID**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-13
A global food fight11-11
- RAMIREZ, FRANK**
John Naas: Tall man or tall tale?1-13
Media review: 'Neglected Voices'1-26
Alexander Mack Jr.: The tolerant reconciler2-10
Media review: 'Amish Grace'2-26
Faith o' the Irish3-16
Ring in the bicentennial5-9
Brethren and the pandemic5-10
Media review: 'Ratatouille'5-26
Young adults: Indiana Jones9-26
Media review: 'The Dark Knight'11-26
- REID, STEPHEN BRECK**
Zechariah and Malachi: Ending or beginning?1-18
- REIMER, JUDY MILLS**
Press on!10-6
- REPOGLE, SHAWN FLORY**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-9
- RIEGE, YVONNE**
Not as simple as they seem6-6
Practicing God's presence12-14
- ROTH, PAUL**
John Kline: A beloved man of God4-8
- ROYER, HOWARD**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-10
Learn more: Global food crisis resources11-15
- SCHROCK, J. ROGER**
Preparation before celebration1-6
- SHAFFER, KENNETH M. JR.**
Christopher Sauer Jr.: Faith under fire2-8
Polarization and schism among the Brethren4-12
- SHIVELY, JONATHAN**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-8
- SMITH, JEANNE JACOBY**
Hope for the hungry7/8-18
- SNYDER, GRAYDON F.**
John: Signs of the divine5-20
2 Corinthians: The ministry of reconciliation10-18
- SPEICHER, ANNA M.**
Samuel Weir: African-American preacher and elder3-12
INH Beahm: 'Little Man' with a big heart5-8
Media review: 'Come Be My Light'12-24
- SPEICHER, SARA**
WCC 'making a difference' 60 years later6-16
- SWITZER, JO YOUNG**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-8

- VROON, BOB**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-12
- WALTERSDORFF, CHRISTY**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-11
The practice of preaching10-12
- WAMPLER, GENE**
China revisited: A legacy of mission5-15
- WAMPLER, GUY**
From nostalgia to grief to hope5-6
- WILHELM, DAWN OTTONI**
Mark: The good news of God's power alive among us3-18
- WILTSCHKE, WALT**
Transformation on the Plains1-20
Editorial: ...but be transformed1-32
And the survey says2-14
Editorial: Pressured prognosticators2-32
Editorial: Scenes from a plane3-32
Editorial: Paralysis in the pews4-32
Editorial: Between good and good5-32
Genocide: Will it ever be 'Never again'?6-20
Editorial: Handle with care6-32
Editorial: Making a statement7/8-32
John Kline rides again9-10
Editorial: It's about time9-32
Young adults 'Come to the Mountain'10-20
Editorial: Real dedication10-32
BVS celebrates 60 years of service11-19
Editorial: Putting the 'harm' in harmony11-32
Where there's a Will12-11
Editorial: Be of good cheer12-32
- ZIEGLER, EARL**
We're 300 years old!
Now what?7/8-9

CONTRIBUTORS TO IN TOUCH

- Beach, Martha1-5
Bohn, Joyce10-4
Chapman, Beth1-4
Conrad, Jim2-5
Crosby, Gil5-4
Daniels, Felton4-4
Duhai, Karen10-25
Elder, John10-3
Eller, Enten and Mary7/8-23
Farrar, Fletcher6-4
Fitzkee, Don2-27
Frantz, Myrna10-23
Grady, Duane6-4
Hay, David2-3
Henry, Penny Burket11-4
Horne, Meghan11-27
Keene, Merv3-20
Kinsel, Glenn4-22
LaPrade, Emily1-27
Layman, John6-3
Maring, Beverly11-4
Palmer, Anne3-5, 12-4
Ramirez, Frank7/8-4
Riege, Yvonne2-4
Rieman, Louie7/8-23
Royer, Pat5-3
St. John, Mary Sink4-3
Smalley, Terry1-4
Thompson, Roma Jo5-4
Ward, John12-4
Willoughby, Zander12-3
Wilson, Norma10-5
Wiltchek, Walt7/8-3, 12-25
Yelinek, Prue4-4
Ziegler, Dawn6-25

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- Abdullah, Doris Theresa9-29
Albert, Lee2-30
Brown, Rachel W.N.7/8-30
Coble, Craig9-28
Coffman, Paul1-30
Connell, Patty12-30
Dell, Joe3-27
Duble, Lois12-28
Eberly, Chris3-31
Eberly, Roger3-29, 9-29, 12-29
Eisenbise, Debra L.3-27
Eller, Jan6-27, 12-28
Fisher, Herb6-29
Flint, Donald K.11-29
Fouts, Dave1-31
Harrison, Bert M.11-28
Hartman, Brian3-28
Hildreth, G. Gayle7/8-28
Hileman, Leah J.10-28
Isaacs, Ed9-28
Johnson, Roy6-27
Keener, Ron4-29
Keene, Leroy M.6-28
Kindy, Cliff10-30
Koebler, Marilyn J.4-27, 10-30
Lehman, Randall S.12-30
Mason, Dorothea Fry1-29
McSherry, Walter10-29
Miller, Maggie6-27
Mitchell, Olden D.3-30, 11-28
Pickens, George F.2-29
Radcliff, Richard7/8-29
Ramirez, Frank1-28
Rosenberger, Bruce7/8-28
Shenk, Ellis J.2-29
Summer, Heddie4-30
Waterman, Jerry4-27

CONGREGATIONS

- Ambler (Pa.)6-3, 9-3
Amwell (Stockton, N.J.)12-5
Antelope Park (Lincoln, Neb.)6-3
Bella Vista (East Los Angeles)1-14
Bellevue (Ohio)10-5
Bethel (Arriba, Colo.)6-4
Black River (Spencer, Ohio)2-3, 11-3
Bowmont Community (Nampa, Idaho)4-3
Briery Branch (Dayton, Va.)9-4
Bristol (Tenn.) First9-3, 12-5
Burks Fork (Willis, Va.)11-3
Carson Valley (Duncansville, Pa.)4-4
Cerro Gordo (Ill.)9-5
Chambersburg (Pa.)10-5
Champaign (Ill.)12-3
Chicago First3-3, 7/8-3
Church in Drive (Saginaw, Mich.)9-14
Circle of Peace (Peoria, Ariz.)9-25
Codorus (Loganville, Pa.)2-5, 9-5, 12-5
Creekside (Elkhart, Ind.)5-3
Curryville (Pa.)1-3
Daleville (Va.)12-3
Dixon (Ill.)10-5
East Fairview (Manheim, Pa.)2-27
Edgewood (New Windsor, Md.)1-5
Ellisforde (Tonasket, Wash.)12-4
Emmanuel (Mount Solon, Va.)3-5
English River (South English, Iowa)5-4
Erwin (Tenn.)9-3, 12-3
Ewing (Va.)11-4
Faith in Action (Delta, Ohio)9-14
Faithful Servant (Atlanta)3-31
Fairfurnias (Texas)2-3
Fellowship (Martinsburg, W.Va.)1-4, 9-4

Florin (Mount Joy, Pa.).....	12-3
Flowing Faith (Stokesdale, N.C.).....	9-14
Frederick (Md.).....	2-4, 7/8-16
Garden City (Kan.).....	10-3
Genesis (Putney, Vt.).....	12-5
Germantown (Philadelphia).....	2-1, 11-3
Germantown Brick (Rocky Mount, Va.).....	6-3, 7/8-3
Good Shepherd (Blacksburg, Va.).....	7/8-3
Goshen (Ind.) City.....	2-4, 10-5
Grossnickle (Myersville, Md.).....	3-3
Hagerstown (Md.).....	3-3
Hanover (Pa.).....	7/8-25
Harmony (Myersville, Md.).....	3-3
Hatfield (Pa.).....	11-4
Hempfield (Manheim, Pa.).....	6-3
Highland Avenue (Elgin, Ill.).....	4-3, 9-3
Holmesville (Neb.).....	2-3, 6-3
Jesucristo El Camino (Hendersonville, N.C.).....	5-3, 9-14
Kokomo (Ind.).....	7/8-25
La Verne.....	7/8-3
Lacey (Wash.) Community.....	1-5
Lake Side (Moneta, Va.).....	5-3
Lakeside (Smith Mountain Lake, Va.).....	9-14
Lancaster (Pa.).....	10-4
Lewiston (Minn.).....	3-5, 10-5
Linville Creek (Broadway, Va.).....	4-8, 12-5
Lititz (Pa.).....	7/8-17
Live Oak (Calif.).....	3-3, 3-4, 12-4
Long Green Valley (Glen Arm, Md.).....	7/8-5
Manassas (Va.).....	9-5
Maxwell (Iowa).....	11-3
McPherson (Kan.).....	7/8-18
Messiah (Kansas City, Mo.).....	6-5
Meysersdale (Pa.).....	6-3
Miami First.....	10-3
Miami Haitian.....	1-5
Middle River (New Hope, Va.).....	2-5
Milledgeville (Ill.).....	10-4
Modesto (Calif.).....	4-4, 5-3
Mount Airy (N.C.).....	7/8-3
Mount Hermon (Bassett, Va.).....	12-11
Mountain Grove (Fulks Run, Va.).....	11-4
Nampa (Idaho).....	7/8-3
Naperville (Ill.).....	7/8-9, 12-3
Neighborhood (Montgomery, Ill.).....	7/8-5
New Dale (Mathias, W.Va.).....	11-4
Ninth Street (Roanoke, Va.).....	4-3
Oak Grove (Lowpoint, Ill.).....	10-5, 12-5
Oakland (Gettysburg, Ohio).....	7/8-17
Olympic View (Seattle).....	10-3
Panora (Iowa).....	9-3
Peoria (Ill.).....	5-4
Pipe Creek (Union Bridge, Md.).....	9-5, 11-4
Pleasant Hill (Johnstown, Pa.).....	11-3
Puerta del Cielo (Reading, Pa.).....	1-3, 9-14
Quinter (Kan.).....	7/8-3
Ridgeway Community (Harrisburg, Pa.).....	6-4
Snake Spring Valley (Everett, Pa.).....	2-4
Somerset (Pa.).....	2-3
South Waterloo (Waterloo, Iowa).....	9-4
Springfield (Ill.) First.....	6-4
Sugar Creek West (Lima, Ohio).....	11-4
Sugar Valley (Logan, Pa.).....	4-25
Sunnyslope (Wenatchee, Wash.).....	12-3
Una Nueva Vida en Cristo (Willis, Va.).....	2-5, 9-14
University Baptist and Brethren (State College, Pa.).....	9-3
Venice (Fla.).....	3-5
Washington (D.C.) City.....	10-5
Waynesboro (Pa.).....	4-4
Welty (Smithsburg, Md.).....	3-3

Wenatchee (Wash.) Brethren-Baptist.....	11-3, 12-3
West Green Tree (Elizabethtown, Pa.).....	7/8-4
West Milton (Ohio).....	6-5
White Oak (Manheim, Pa.).....	7/8-16
Whitestone (Tonasket, Wash.).....	9-3, 12-4
Wichita (Kan.) First.....	10-5
Williamson Road (Roanoke, Va.).....	10-6
Woodbury (Pa.).....	7/8-3
Yellow Creek (Hopewell, Pa.).....	11-4
York Center (Lombard, Ill.).....	6-3, 12-5

SUBJECTS

1 Corinthians.....	9-20
2 Corinthians.....	10-18
A-Mack.....	1-9
Abortion.....	7/8-28
Acts of the Apostles.....	6-18
Agency merger.....	1-22, 3-21, 5-22, 6-23, 9-12
'Amish Grace'.....	2-26
Anniversary celebration.....	9-8, 10-22
Anniversary reflections.....	7/8-8
Anniversary resources.....	7/8-14
Annual Conference.....	1-23, 4-23, 5-23, 6-14, 9-8, 11-22, 12-21
Annual Conference Council.....	6-23, 10-23
Art.....	1-4, 12-6
Baptisms.....	11-4
Bauer, Todd.....	9-22
Beahm, INH.....	5-8
Becker, Peter.....	1-10
Beckwith, Jim.....	6-14
Beissel, Conrad.....	2-12
Berry, Malinda.....	9-22
Bethany Theological Seminary.....	3-24, 6-22, 9-24
Bicentennial (of Brethren).....	5-9
Bittersweet Gospel Band.....	1-14, 7/8-4
Bob, Steve.....	12-22
Bomberger, Harold Z.....	5-5
Booz, Donald R.....	10-24
Bowman, Carl.....	2-14
Brazil.....	2-17
Brethren Academy.....	3-4
Brethren Benefit Trust.....	12-11
Brethren colleges.....	4-15, 9-24
Brethren heritage.....	1-5, 2-22, 4-4, 6-4, 10-22, 11-3, 12-3, 12-4
Brethren identity.....	2-22, 9-2
Brethren Member Profile.....	2-14
Brethren Press.....	10-2
Brethren Service Center.....	6-10
Brethren Volunteer Service.....	1-25, 5-13, 5-24, 7/8-23, 9-3, 10-24, 11-16, 11-18, 12-23
Bright, Harriett Howard.....	10-9
Brockway, Joshua.....	6-24
Bulletin series.....	3-23
Butler Chapel.....	4-22
Button-Harrison, Tim.....	9-22
Camp Brethren Heights.....	4-4
Campanella, Kathleen.....	5-24
Camps.....	5-14, 12-5
Campus ministry.....	4-25
Celebration.....	1-6
Celts.....	3-16
China.....	5-15
Children's Disaster Services.....	10-24
Christian Churches Together.....	3-21
Christian Citizenship Seminar.....	6-20, 11-27
Chudy, Tammy.....	12-22
Church of the Brethren, Inc.....	3-21
Church renewal.....	1-20, 4-15
Church splits.....	4-12, 11-6
Clark, Annie.....	9-22
Clergymen's Retreat.....	10-10
Climate change.....	6-32
COBYS.....	2-27

Conflict mediation.....	9-13
CROP Walks.....	11-13
Cross-cultural ministry.....	3-6, 5-2, 7/8-15
Dako, Lillian.....	9-4
Davis, J. Rodney.....	9-4
Deardorff, Darryl.....	9-22
Decade to Overcome Violence.....	9-6, 10-7
Dedication.....	10-32
Deficits.....	9-22, 12-20
Disabilities.....	1-28
Disaster response.....	1-22, 6-23, 7/8-3, 7/8-22, 10-24, 11-3, 11-22
Discipleship.....	7/8-6
Dominican Republic.....	2-18, 6-3
Doubt.....	9-18, 12-24
Dulabaum, Nevin.....	9-22
Dunn, Donald J.....	4-5
Easter services.....	6-4
Economic justice.....	10-16
Ecumenism.....	6-16
EIRENE.....	6-5, 10-23
Elections.....	12-2
Encarnacion, Guillermo.....	12-4
Environment.....	6-32
Ephesians.....	12-18
Ephrata Cloister.....	2-12
Ethics paper.....	5-23, 9-13
European work.....	6-11, 10-23
Evangelism.....	1-3
Fair trade.....	10-16
Feetwashing.....	3-14
Fike, John Troutman.....	12-4
Finger, Thomas N.....	6-24
Fogle, Lerry W.....	9-22
Food issues.....	11-11
Foods Resource Bank.....	3-3, 7/8-3, 11-4
Forbearance.....	4-24, 9-12
Forgiveness.....	2-26
'Four Horsemen'.....	5-14
Frye, Leslie.....	9-22
Galatians.....	11-20
Gardner, Rick.....	6-24
General Board.....	5-23, 6-24, 9-22
General secretary.....	12-8
Genocide.....	6-20, 9-28
Gibble, Jay.....	3-23
Global food crisis.....	11-11
Global Food Crisis Fund.....	6-22
Global mission.....	2-16, 4-14, 5-15, 5-17, 5-32, 6-24, 7/8-22, 9-11
Global Village.....	2-4
GodTube.....	7/8-26
Goodwin, Helen J.....	5-5
Goshen Statement.....	5-11
Gosnell, Diane.....	10-5
Good-Visiter.....	3-1
Groundhog Day.....	2-6, 6-28
Guatemala.....	11-11
Gunzel, Beth.....	10-24
Haiku.....	3-7, 6-7
Haiti.....	2-18, 7/8-24
Hansell, Allen T.....	5-24
Hardenbrook, Jim and Pam.....	5-24
Harry Potter series.....	6-26
Heifer International.....	2-4, 5-13
Hillcoat, Donna.....	12-22
Historic Peace Churches.....	3-20
Holderreed, Andrew.....	9-4
Holland, Scott.....	6-24
Holsinger, Henry R.....	4-11, 4-12
Honesty.....	2-32
Horning, John Samuel.....	3-4
Hospitality.....	5-18, 7/8-28
Hostetter, J. Earl.....	9-4
Hostetter, Julie Mader.....	9-23
Housing issues.....	12-16
Hovis, Ronald D.....	9-23
Hunger.....	1-5, 3-3, 3-23, 5-4, 7/8-18, 10-3, 11-11
Implementation Committee.....	1-22

India.....	2-19, 3-22, 4-14, 12-21
Indiana Jones.....	9-26
Influenza pandemic.....	5-10
Ingold, Dave.....	12-22
Intercultural Study.....	3-6
Iran.....	11-24, 11-28
Irish Christianity.....	3-16
Jarrett, Janice Lee.....	2-5
John (Gospel of).....	5-20
John Kline Homestead.....	4-8, 9-25
John Kline Memorial Riders.....	4-8, 9-10
Justice.....	9-13
Kahler, Dean.....	6-12
Keeney, Mervin B.....	5-24
Keller, Elizabeth J.....	9-23
Kent State shootings.....	6-12, 10-29
King, Martin Luther Jr.....	3-5
Kingery, Dennis.....	9-23
Kline, John.....	4-8
Kobia, Samuel.....	6-17
Lamer, Eric K.....	6-24
Large congregations.....	7/8-16
Lightning.....	9-3
Los Angeles.....	1-14
Love feast.....	3-14, 7/8-4
Luke (Gospel of).....	4-20
Mack, Alexander.....	1-8
Mack, Alexander Jr.....	2-10, 12-3
Magic.....	4-18
Major, Sarah Righter.....	3-8
Malachi.....	1-18
Mark (Gospel of).....	3-18
Markey, David J.....	12-4
Martys.....	3-16
Matthew (Gospel of).....	2-20
Manchester College.....	3-4
McCabe, Shari.....	5-24
McPherson College.....	4-4
Medical insurance.....	9-14
Membership figures.....	10-22, 11-28
Miner, Nancy.....	10-24
Ministerial ethics.....	5-23, 9-13
Miracles.....	10-26
Mission advisory group.....	6-24
Mission Alive.....	7/8-22
Mission & Ministry Board.....	12-20
Moderator (Annual Conference).....	6-14, 7/8-6
Money.....	11-8
Mosley, Bob.....	9-23
Mow, Anna Beahm.....	6-8
Murray, Andrew.....	9-23
Music.....	12-13
Naas, John.....	1-13
National Council of Churches.....	2-23, 12-25
National Institutes of Health.....	2-5
National Junior High Conference.....	6-25
National Older Adult Conference.....	11-22, 12-30
National Young Adult Conference.....	10-20
National Youth Cabinet.....	11-27
Nedli, Laura.....	9-23
Nicaragua.....	6-22
Nigeria.....	2-18, 5-17
Nightingale, Patrice.....	9-23, 11-24, 12-22
Noffsinger, Stan.....	12-8
Nolen, Wil.....	1-22, 12-11
North Korea.....	2-24
Nostalgia.....	5-6
One Great Hour of Sharing.....	3-3
Old Testament.....	1-26
Olympic Games.....	7/8-3, 10-5
Pastoral ministry.....	2-24
Patalano, May.....	5-5
Peace convocation.....	1-7, 6-17, 9-6
Peace essays.....	9-15, 10-13
Peace witness.....	5-4, 12-4
Poverty.....	11-14
Preaching.....	10-12

Pritt, Arveda Mae.....	10-5
Program and Arrangements.....	1-23, 9-13
Puerto Rico.....	3-4
Puppets.....	9-4
Purity.....	4-6
Quinter, James.....	4-10
Race.....	12-2, 12-23
Reconciliation.....	10-18
Regional youth conferences.....	3-25, 6-25, 7/8-25, 9-25, 12-25
Reid, Stephen Breck.....	6-24
Responsibility to Protect.....	12-20
Rhoades, Marie.....	4-22
Rogers, H. Kendall.....	9-23
Rohrer, Glenn Neal.....	12-4
Roller, Robert.....	5-5
Romans.....	7/8-20
Romero, Gilbert.....	1-14
Roundtable conference.....	6-25
Sauer, Christopher Jr.....	2-8
Saylor, Barb.....	11-24
Schism.....	4-12
School of the Americas.....	1-3
Schrock, Carolyn.....	5-3
Schwarzenau.....	1-12, 10-22
Sedition Act.....	5-11
Sell, Brian.....	7/8-3, 10-5
SERRV.....	12-5
Service blitz (Annual Conference).....	9-11, 10-25
Sexuality.....	1-23, 9-13, 12-29
Shepherd's Spring.....	2-4
Shively, Jonathan.....	3-23
Slavery.....	9-14, 12-21
Spirituality.....	12-14
Statements.....	7/8-32
Steiner, Donna Forbes.....	5-24
Stewardship.....	11-2, 11-8
Stowe, Edward W.....	1-5
Sudan Initiative.....	2-19, 5-23, 12-21
Surveys.....	2-2, 2-14
Sustaining Pastoral Excellence.....	2-24
The Tall Man.....	1-13
Thompson, Eric.....	11-24
Thompson, R. Jan.....	5-24
Three Kings.....	12-17
'Together' conversations.....	5-6, 7/8-2
Transformation.....	1-32, 5-26
Transitions.....	9-32
Vacation Bible School.....	1-4
Vietnam War.....	6-12
Violence.....	4-32
Vital Pastors.....	2-24
Wagner, Shelly.....	5-24, 11-24
Walker, Robert C.....	2-5
Websites.....	6-4
Weir, Samuel.....	3-12
West, Dan.....	1-5, 5-12
Western Plains 'Gathering'.....	1-20
Western Regional Youth Camp.....	3-25, 9-25
Westward migration.....	3-12
Whitten, David.....	10-24
Willoughby, Marie.....	10-24
Wine, LeAnn.....	12-22
Wirth, Lena M.....	4-5
Wittmeyer, Jay.....	3-23
Wolfe, George.....	3-10
Woolf, Ed.....	9-23
Women's ordination.....	5-23, 10-6, 10-8, 12-28
Workcamps.....	1-4, 5-25, 10-25, 11-27
World Council of Churches.....	6-16
Yoder, Randy.....	3-23
Youth Center.....	2-22, 6-5
Youth Heritage Teams.....	5-25
Youth Peace Travel Team.....	1-27
Zechariah.....	4-25, 12-25
Zigler, M.R.....	1-18

More study is needed

I applaud the article about the 50th anniversary of ordained women in the Church of the Brethren [October 2008]. It was good to see the accomplishments of these women in the life of the church.

For several years some of us have wondered what happened to the rest of the women who have been licensed and ordained in the past. It seems that neither the (Church of the Brethren) Ministry Office nor Bethany Seminary has records on all the women who have

been in ministry. It would be a great case study to see who has been ordained in the past, where they served, for how long, and what they are doing now. Reasons for this study could inform us as to the obstacles that still stand in the way of women serving as pastors and in other roles in the church.

As I write this, I can think of a number of women I've known who are no longer in ministry. Anyone want to take up this study?

Janice M. Eller
Portland, Ore.

Righteous forbearance

"Love one another" is what Jesus taught, While urging his followers to do as they ought. His mission on earth: to seek and save the lost, Cautioning would-be believers to first "count the cost."

At what cost do his followers walk in his way? One risk is the threat that the words which we say May offend others, thus ruining their day. The value of our reputation, we must weigh.

Forbearance implies: others' burdens we bear; Fulfilling Christ's law, showing how much we care. The flip-side of the coin we must also be aware: Speaking the Truth in love, after much prayer.

Truth is God's Word, for us to obey. What then shall we do when others say: I have discovered "new light" to walk in today: What the Bible calls sin is really okay?

The One who did not condemn also said, Go, sin no more; follow me instead. If we veer from the Truth, into deception we're led. So, forbear one another and submit to the Head.

Lois Duble
New Windsor, Md.

Pontius' Puddle



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The elephant and the Spirit

I am responding to "The elephant in the room" on page 13 of the September 2008 MESSENGER. How can it be stated in "A Statement of Confession and Commitment" from Standing Committee that the tension is honest and healthy when some are excluded?

Furthermore, one of the precipitating reasons for the Program and Arrangements Committee of Annual Conference to bring the concern to Standing Committee relates to the 20-some years of rejecting a booth to BMC at Annual Conference. I do not see this issue even addressed, and it is certainly not answered.

Maybe since we are now at least talking about the elephant in the room we will also come to see more of the moving of the Spirit. As the disciples saw the Spirit moving in Jerusalem (Acts 2); as Philip, Peter, and John saw the Spirit moving in Samaria (Acts 8); as Philip saw the Spirit moving in the eunuch (Acts 8); as Ananias and Barnabas saw the Spirit moving in Paul (Acts 9); as Peter saw the Spirit moving in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10); as Barnabas saw the Spirit moving in Antioch (Acts 11); as the whole Jerusalem Council confirmed that the Spirit was moving in Antioch and throughout many Gentile areas (Acts 15)—many of us through careful study of the Scriptures and seeking the mind of Christ together have seen the Holy Spirit working in and among and through our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers just as among heterosexuals.

No longer as blind men do we deny parts of an elephant that we have not yet felt. Indeed we cannot but continue speaking about what we have seen and heard of the moving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4).

Roger Eberly
Milford, Ind.

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within each of us,
within our communities,
and around our world.*

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AMERICAN SOCIETY IS SUFFERING FROM A CONDITION CALLED "EXISTENTIAL NEUROSIS." ... THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND THEIR PURPOSE IN LIFE, ACCORDING TO THE DIVINE NATURE OF GOD'S CREATION.

Thanks for NOAC

I want to thank everyone who helped me in so many ways when I attended my first National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) in September at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina. I was there 50 years ago attending a National Youth Conference, so it was a thrilling experience for me meeting folks I haven't seen in 50 years. Since all of us had nametags, we were able to tell who everyone was.

About 960 of us really had a "mountain-top experience" worshipping and praising the Lord all week.

Patty Connell
Sandwich, Ill.

Stand out from society

American society is suffering from a condition called "existential neurosis." In other words, they don't understand their purpose in life, according to the

divine nature of God's creation.

Homes and families are hurting. We live in a wicked society where many do what is right in their own eyes and justify their own actions fully. Ideas so contrary to sacred scripture have become institutionalized in the thinking of many people.

What America needs today is not more politics or racism, but for all families to place themselves in the middle of God's holy will. This is why it is much more important for those who claim to be Bible-believing Christians to tell the truth in love and not try to accommodate the decaying morals and behavior of our present world.

According to the Bible, racism is a sin, as recorded in Revelation 14:6: "...to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

God doesn't look at the "color" of the skin. He looks at the heart, no matter whether we're black, white, brown, or

red. Furthermore, black and white are not colors. They are neutral.

We as a nation need to gather together as one people, celebrating our heritage, "America, the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The Old Testament prophet Micah says it so well: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

Randall S. Lehman
Wooster, Ohio

CORRECTION

A photo credit was missing from the photo of Erwin Church of the Brethren on page 3 of the September issue. It was courtesy of *The Erwin (Tenn.) Record*. The cover photo of that issue was taken by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford.

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.mgrovebooks.com, or by writing to Myrna Grove, PO Box 801, Bryan, OH 43506.

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- GREAT TREK TOUR 2009 (May 24-June 4)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE TOUR (June 4-17)
- RUSSIA and UKRAINE (June 5-18)
- ALASKA CRUISE TOUR (June 8-20)
- MWC #1 / #2 / #3 / #4 / #6 - A Few Seats Available
- MWC #5 - PARAGUAY and PERU (July 12-28)
- MWC #7 - PARAGUAY and IGUAZU FALLS (July 8-20)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with JOHN SHARP (July 31-August 13)
- ENCHANTING DANUBE RIVER CRUISE (October 24-November 1)
- BEHIND the VEIL - EXPERIENCING EGYPT (November 16-28)

2010 TOURS

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- WITH OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY: SPRINGTIME in HOLLAND, BELGIUM & GERMANY (May 6-17)
- LUTHERAN HOLY LAND TOUR (May 8-19)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with JOHN RUTH (June 1-14)
- SPECTACULAR SCANDINAVIA & ITS FJORDS (June 13-28)
- PENNSYLVANIA to EUROPE (June 19-July 2)
- ISRAEL/PALESTINE (June 24-July 5)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with JOHN SHARP (June 29-July 12)
- ITALY, AUSTRIA & GERMANY (July 7-17)
- ENGLAND and SCOTLAND (July 23-August 4)
- SWISS GLACIER EXPRESS (July 29-August 11)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE with PAUL ZEHR (September 5-18)
- THE ROAD to JERUSALEM (September 11-22)
- EUROPEAN HERITAGE for GERMAN-SPEAKING PERSONS (September 16-29)



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New Members

Bakersfield, Calif.: Renee Bockover, Robby Burke, Roshanna Matthias, Tim Matthias, Mollie Montgomery, Merritt Lecrone, Audrey Logan

Beaver Creek, Hagerstown, Md.: Abigail Socks, Jessica Turner, Ed Myers, Karen Myers, David Fogle, Erin Gaines, Madison Gaines, Moriah Garling, Robert Resh, III

Center, Louisville, Ohio: Emily Sweitzer, Ruth Double, Dean VanFossen, MaryLou VanFossen

Chambersburg, Pa.: Debbie Brunk, Carla LandaVerde, Joshua LandaVerde, Justin LandaVerde, Nicacio LandaVerde, Sara LandaVerde, Susanne LandaVerde, Vanessa LandaVerde, Betty Meier, Nathan Meier, Amy Simmers, Penny Suffecool

Creekside, Elkhart, Ind.: Eric Houser, Sharon Houser, Ned Hostetler, Jerry Hostetler, Keith Hostetler, Doris Hostetler, Wylan Shultz, Peter Miller, Teresa White, Bryce Metcalf, Cara Mastic

Curryville, Pa.: Jeff Holm, Dorcas Holm, Clinton Zimmerman

Dixon, Ill.: Rosemary Appenheimer, Jane Monteith

Dupont, Ohio: Amber Grant, Andy Grant, Eddie Groce, Cheyanne Holton, Dillon Holton, Brianna Sarka

Flowing Faith Fellowship, Greensboro, N.C.: Stephanie Johnson, R. Keith Beckner, Cheryl Beckner

Fraternity, Winston-Salem, N.C.: Victor Crews, Ruth Kitner, Wendy Strain, Austin Judd, Dawna Judd, Ashlyn Craft, Lydia Williard

Free Spring, Mifflintown, Pa.: Alan Naylor

Glendale, Calif.: Carrie Jacoby, David Wall, Melissa Wall

Hanoverdale, Hummelstown, Pa.: Donald Grubb, Martin Groff, Joseph Shaver, Jodie Homer, Nathan Estes

Harrisburg, First, Harrisburg, Pa.: Katie Benson, Ivellesse Class, Dianne De Marco, Maria Nieves, Gladys Santanna

Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.: Sabrina Holcomb, Cerina Holcomb, Heather Custer, Brenda Lackey, Heather Braddock, Wayne Spradlin

Holidaysburg, Pa.: Bessie Quarello, Tim Quarello, Brad

Beatty, Bailey Campbell, Cooper Campbell, Sarah Carter

Ivy Farms, Newport News, Va.: Brett Baldwin, Amanda Baldwin, Donny Storer

Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio: Evelyn Callas, Carly Huston, Joseph Routh

Lampeter, Pa.: Sarah Johnson, Daniel Brubaker, Greta Mellinger, Daniel Weigel

Locust Grove, Johnstown, Pa.: Amy Cobaugh, Jim Cobaugh, Elizabeth Gawel, Fred Ogline, Robert Spanko

Locust Grove, Mount Airy, Md.: William Hall, Alan Christopher Day, Robyn Burrier, Barbara Horton, Bill Wobbleton, Robert E. Eyer, Betty Jane Eyer, Randy L. Eyer, Dena M. Barnes, Dustin W. Barnes, Robert Wayne Barnes, Robert E. Bruchey, Pearl Beard, Joy Musselman

Longmeadow, Hagerstown, Md.: Brian Keefer, Stacey Keefer, Mark Renner, Linda Renner, Kelly Baker, Matilda Stottlemeyer

Manor, Boonsboro, Md.: Dottie Planck, Jack Nerlinger, Donna Nerlinger

Maple Grove, New Paris, Ind.: Brent Berkeypile, Lauren Rink, Angela Runkle, Casey Reyenga Sizemore

Memorial, Martinsburg, Pa.: Betsey Saltgiver, Missy Saltgiver, Wesley Burket, Jack Keebaugh, Diane Keebaugh

Mountain View, Bunker Hill, W. Va.: Brooke Sparkman, Taylor Sparkman, Jo Anne Steele, Sue Moore

Myersville, Md.: Caleb Wilson, Jacob Wilson

Peoria, Ill.: Charlene Henry, Eleanor Butterfield

Pine Creek, North Liberty, Ind.: Steve Van Houten, Lisa Van Houten, Erin Van Houten, Josh Van Houten, Robin Dombek, Ashley Dombek, Nicole Dombek, Michael Dombek

Roaring Spring, Pa.: David Smith, Mary Jane Brumbaugh, Benjamin Brumbaugh, Adam Frederick, Craig Wagner

Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.: William Martin, Sue Martin, Parker Thompson, Katie Thompson, Phil Paterson, Patti Paterson, Tinka Berger, Mark Dowdy

Anniversaries

Anderson, Paul and Barbara, Huntingdon, Pa., 55

Bailey, Doyle and Fran, Centerville, Iowa, 60

Beard, Paul and Bernice, Westminster, Md., 60

Bowser, John and Joyce, Huntingdon, Pa., 50

Burger, Richard and Ann, Moravia, Iowa, 65

Burger, Vernon and Beulah, Centerville, Iowa, 72

Cronc, Glenn and Clara, Frederick, Md., 60

Deardorff, Duane and Marie, Canton, Mich., 60

Fisher, Bryant and Margaret, Thurmont, Md., 60

Fleming, Walter and Betty, Monrovia, Md., 60

Hall, Bill and Kathy, Martinsburg, Pa., 50

Hartman, Henry and Betty, Myerstown, Pa., 55

Hoffert, Joseph and Lois, Winona, Minn., 65

Kriner, Harvey and Shirley, Lancaster, Pa., 50

Lambert, Charles and Janet, Waynesboro, Va., 50

Lambert, Wannie and Geneva, Dayton, Va., 50

Lewis, Charles and Ellen, Lancaster, Pa., 50

Loose, John and Beulah, Martinsburg, Pa., 70

Lusk, Wallace and Audrey, Mount Airy, Md., 60

McBride, Paul and Carol, Plymouth, Ind., 60

McClain, Bernard and Virginia, New Market, Md. 60

Miller, Ammon, Jr. and Violet, Freeport, Mich., 60

Powell, Orris and Patty, Moulton, Iowa, 55

Rinchart, Raymond and Betty, Hagerstown, Md., 60

Shriner, Homer and Jean, Martinsburg, Pa., 50

Smith, Ben and Margaret, Plymouth, Ind., 60

Walter, Roy and Norma, Huntingdon, Pa., 50

Deaths

Barklow, Helen Alice, 90, Empire, Calif., Aug. 8

Beckner, Peggy Frye, 72, Winston-Salem, N.C., Nov. 16, 2007

Brennan, Doris, 77, Pinellas Park, Fla., Sept. 19

Butner, Nancy Caroline Reed, 88, Winston-Salem, N.C., June 26

Carroll, Ray, 88, Osceola, Mo., Oct. 1

Claycomb, Jack, 85, Martinsburg, Pa., June 18

Cochrane, Grayson, 84, Boonsboro, Md., June 9

Cohen, Ruth Patricia, 67, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 16, 2007

Cook, Delbert, 85, La Porte, Ind., Sept. 12

Copeland, Eulalia, 98, Champaign, Ill., May 9, 2007

Cupp, Cletus, 80, Bridgewater, Va., April 29

Dieterich, Charles L., 89, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 3

Encarnacion, Guillermo, 71, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 11

Fickes, James, 72, York, Pa., Sept. 17

Fike, John T., 95, Sebring, Fla., Sept. 23

Fishel, Charles Emory, 76, Winston-Salem, N.C., March 26

Flook, Julia, 51, Ijamsville, Md., Sept. 13

Ganger, Barbara E., 83,

Elkhart, Ind., Sept. 16

Green, Eva, 91, Bakersfield, Calif., Jan. 4

Guisinger, Jean, 81, South Bend, Ind., Oct. 6

Guyer, M. Alverda, 99, Martinsburg, Pa., Aug. 31

Haldeman, Alta O., 72, Manheim, Pa., Sept. 20

Hamm, Ethel M., 90, Hastings, Pa., May 22

Harless, Cecil F., Jr., 78, Lindside, W. Va., July 4

Hoffman, Ruth, 81, Mount Airy, Md., Dec. 23, 2007

Hollinger, Paul D., 91, Stuarts Draft, Va., Aug. 15

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

Isard, Dorothy, 65, Hagerstown, Md., June 26

Joynt, Ralph, 88, Mount Morris, Ill., Oct. 8

Kline, Welty, 83, Mount Sidney, Va., Sept. 21

Leggett, Arlene, 72, Harrisville, W. Va., Dec. 10, 2007

Lengel, Wilbur Ervin, 78, Juda, Wis., Sept. 26

Mackey, Dorothy, 90, Dixon, Ill., Sept. 18

Markey, David J., 81, Harrisburg, Pa., Sept. 17

Masincupp, Jim, 67, Mount Sidney, Va., July 5

McCune, Earl C., 83, South Bend, Ind., June 15

Metz, Zion, 19, New Market, Md., March 3

Michael, Mildred, 86, Clinton, Iowa., July 11

Mowery, Mildred, 87, Martinsburg, W. Va., Aug. 31

Moxley, Melvin, 87, New Windsor, Md., Oct. 29, 2007

Murphy, Clarence, 72, Mishawaka, Ind., May 1

Olinger, Esta, 95, Champaign, Ill., Sept. 15

Over, Ruth L., 88, Woodbury, Pa., Sept. 23

Pickett, Mary Robertson, 91, Winston-Salem, N.C., Jan. 24

Radke, Eloise, 84, Dixon, Ill., Sept. 19

Raftery, James, 45, Newry, Pa., June 4

Rariden, Floyd J., 90, Modesto, Calif., Aug. 24

Reid, James R., 86, Hagerstown, Md., Sept. 9

Rotruck, Evelyn L., 92, Keyser, W. Va., Sept. 3

Saylor, Dorothy Eileen, 85, Friedens, Pa, Sept. 20

Simmons, Rachel, 85, Waynesboro, Va., June 6

Smith, Carl A., 65, Willow Street, Pa., Sept. 11

Smith, Ivan Eugene, 77, Milledgeville, Ill., Sept. 4

Steele, Amy, 104, Martinsburg, Pa., June 4

Streight, Lyda, 105, Martinsburg, Pa., July 2

Stroman, Delta, 98, Goshen, Ind., Oct. 4

Sumner, Pat, 78, Lafayette, Ind., Sept. 28

Taylor, Melissa, 96, Goshen, Ind., Sept. 26

VanLear, Walter, 89, Verona, Va., March 20

Williard, Richard Allen, 67, Winston-Salem, N.C., Jan 16

Workman, Irene, 72, St. Louis, Mo., Sept. 18

Wright, Margaret, 95, Sykesville, Md., Oct. 26, 2007

Yeager, E. R. (Gene), 84, Bakersfield, Calif., March 31

Licensings

Bryte, Mark H., Jr., Southeastern Dist. (Hawthorne, Johnson City, Tenn.), Oct. 5

Guthrie, Thomas G., Pac. S.W. Dist. (Empire, Modesto, Calif.), Aug. 17

Jensen, Jennifer K., W. Plains Dist. (Antelope Park, Lincoln, Neb.), Oct. 12

Lowe, Steven, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Thurmont, Md.), Sept. 21

McKenzie, J. Michael, W. Pa. Dist. (Salisbury, Pa.), Sept. 21

Smith, Paul Lee, Jr., Shen. Dist. (Greenmount, Harrisonburg, Va.), June 29

Westlake, Jeremy S., Ill./Wis. Dist. (Woodland, Astoria, Ill.), Sept. 21

Ordinations

Heidt, Philip, Pac. S.W. Dist. (South Bay, Redondo Beach, Calif.), Aug. 10

Olivencia, Marisel, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Harrisburg, First, Harrisburg, Pa.), Sept. 21

Placements

Bream, Jonathan W., from youth pastor, Bemudian, East Berlin, Pa., to pastor, Brooklyn, First, Brooklyn, N.Y., Sept. 1

Brown, Dennis L., from interim to pastor, Ivester, Iowa, Sept. 7

Bytwerk, Joshua, co-pastor, Parker Ford, Pottstown, Pa., Aug. 1

Doering, Timothy, from pastor of discipleship, Ephrata, Pa., to co-pastor, Parker Ford, Pottstown, Pa., Aug. 1

Duffey, Scott L., from pastor, Westminster, Md., to pastor, Staunton, Va., Oct. 1

Fox, Dickie, pastor, Community, Cleveland, Ala., Oct. 19

Frey, William R., Sr., from pastor, New Harvest Community, Lindsay, Calif., to pastor, Indiana, Pa., Sept. 28

Hawkins, Stanley H., from pastor, Smith Chapel, Bluefield, W. Va., and associate pastor, Masons Cove, Salem, Va., to pastor, Duncans Chapel, Willis, Va., Oct. 1

Kensinger, James M., pastor, Montgomery, Commodore, Pa., Oct. 1

Shaver, Byrl E., Shaver, II, co-pastor, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 21

Shaver, Janet S., co-pastor, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 21

Syes, Kevin, associate pastor for youth & young adults, Frederick, Md., Sept. 1

Be of good cheer

The roll call at Mid-Atlantic District conference began in typical fashion. Starting with "Allensville," the moderator read through the list of congregations and awaited a response.

The choruses of "Here!" rang out one by one as the respective names were called. A few bold groups mixed it up and called out, "Present!" A handful of congregations were missing, but there were no real surprises.



WALT WILTSCHKEK
MESSENGER Editor

And then came Manassas.

No mere "Here!" for them. The group from that northern Virginia congregation let loose with a chorus of cheers and yells that made it seem more like their favorite team had just scored a touchdown. After a moment of shock, everyone broke out in laughter. Then the roll call carried on.

You have to give Manassas some points. Many of us don't get that excited when we walk into church on a Sunday morning, let alone when it's to sit in a day-long business meeting.

That's even harder to do in troubled times when the economy and other world issues occupy so much of our atten-

tion. On a recent flight to Baltimore I happened to be sitting by a stockbroker, who was fretting on his cell phone before takeoff. "It's scary," he said, as he noted a drop of 90 points in 15 minutes. "It's really scary."

times. On a recent flight to Baltimore I happened to be sitting by a stockbroker, who was fretting on his cell phone before takeoff. "It's scary," he said, as he noted a drop of 90 points in 15 minutes. "It's really scary."

Times like that can be reminders to rely on God rather than the stock market or technology or other material goods. They are also opportunities for us to take stock (so to speak) of the amazing gifts we have received, despite all the difficulties we encounter.

Consider, for example, the words that Suffolk, Va., mayor Linda Johnson shared with CNN after at least three tornadoes

struck the area this past spring and caused significant damage: "We have had some injuries," Johnson said. "Most of them are minor, so in many ways we are blessed."

We can hear reflections like this from many disaster victims at sites where the Church of the Brethren has been at work, counting their blessings despite all they have lost. We can see this attitude among Christians in developing nations like Haiti, who share freely despite having so little.

We can even see it in our own midst if we pause long enough to take a deep breath and look about with fresh eyes. As this 300th anniversary year comes to a close, we celebrate the rich heritage and examples we have from centuries past. We celebrate the many gifted people in our midst, and the community that we have today. We celebrate good things being done by local congregations and by members working in their own unique contexts. We are grateful that most of us have our basic needs met, and that there are people in our churches who care about those who do not.

And here in the space between Thanksgiving and Christmas we count all those blessings in our lives, leading up to history's greatest gift in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Whatever weighs against us, we have much in which to rejoice. This fall I was reading Daniel Defoe's classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* and paused as I came to a part where the shipwrecked

Crusoe was considering his fate. He made a list of all that had gone wrong, alongside another list of all the good fortune he'd had—or at

least things that could have gone much worse.

Crusoe's conclusion: No matter how "miserable" the condition, "We may always find in it something to comfort ourselves from, and to set in the description of good and evil, on the credit side of the account." For people of faith, that should be an especially full ledger.

One Church of the Brethren pastor I know, when asked, "How are you?" would almost invariably answer: "Blessed. I'm blessed."

If we can live in that spirit, then we, too, may cheer loudly, whatever may come.—Ed.

AND HERE IN THE SPACE BETWEEN THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS **WE COUNT ALL THOSE BLESSINGS IN OUR LIVES,** LEADING UP TO HISTORY'S GREATEST GIFT IN THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

COMING IN JANUARY: A collection of stories from across the church will look at our care for creation; Bible study on Philippians; book review; and more.



Bound Together, Finely Woven

2009 NATIONAL WORKCAMPS

Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands. This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even. As it is written, nothing left over to the one with the most, nothing lacking to the one with the least.

- 2 CORINTHIANS 8:12-15 (THE MESSAGE)

Just as each thread is important in a tapestry, each person is important in a workcamp. This summer we will work side by side, giving and receiving; revealing a God already present in the weave of the world.

ON-LINE REGISTRATIONS WILL BE PROCESSED ON A FIRST-COME, FIRST SERVED BASIS STARTING JANUARY 5, 2009 8:00 PM CENTRAL TIME AT

www.brethrenworkcamps.org

New! Intergenerational Workcamp *Passing on the Peace Witness* and Senior High/Young Adult *We Are Able* Workcamp designed to give youth/young adults with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to serve at the Brethren Service Center at New Windsor, MD. For more information go to www.brethrenworkcamps.org.



Junior High (Completed Grades 6 - 9)

1. June 15-19 Broadway, Virginia
2. June 21-25 Innisfree - Crozet, Virginia
3. July 5-9 Elgin, Illinois
4. July 6-10 Ashland, Ohio I
5. July 12-16 Ashland, Ohio II
6. July 13-17 New Windsor, Maryland
7. July 22-26 Richmond, Virginia
8. July 27-31 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
9. July 29-Aug 2 Brooklyn, New York
10. August 5-9 Indianapolis, Indiana

Senior High (Completed Grade 9 - Age 19)

11. June 14-21 Idaho Mountain Camp
12. June 14-21 Brooklyn, New York-BRF
13. July 5-12 Caimito, Puerto Rico
14. July 5-11 Disaster Response I
15. July 12-18 Disaster Response II
16. July 12-18 Camp Myrtlewood, Oregon
17. July 13-19 Pine Ridge, South Dakota
18. July 20-26 Chicago/Lombard, Illinois
19. July 20-26 Putney, Vermont
20. July 26-Aug 1 Keyser, West Virginia
21. July 27-Aug 2 St. Croix, Virgin Islands
22. July 27-Aug 2 Los Angeles, California
23. July 27-Aug 2 Germantown, Pennsylvania
24. August 1-9 Dominican Republic
25. August 3-9 North Fort Myers, Florida
26. August 3-9 Tijuana, Mexico

Senior High/Young Adult (Ages 16 - 23)

27. July 6-10 "We Are Able" ID Workcamp
New Windsor, Maryland

Young Adult (Ages 18 - 35)

28. June 6-14 Northern Ireland

Intergenerational (Completed Grade 6 - Age 100+)

29. August 2-7 "Passing on the Peace Witness"
New Windsor, Maryland

If you have any questions, please contact Jeanne Davies, Meghan Horne, Bekah Houff or Emily LaPrade at 1-800-323-8039 or cobworkcamps_gb@brethren.org.

Photos by Jeanne Davies and Sarah Neher.

GRATEFUL PRAISE

We thank God for all the blessings of this past year. We thank each of you for your 2008 gifts, volunteer hours, and prayers for the mission and ministries of the Church of the Brethren.



Church of the Brethren