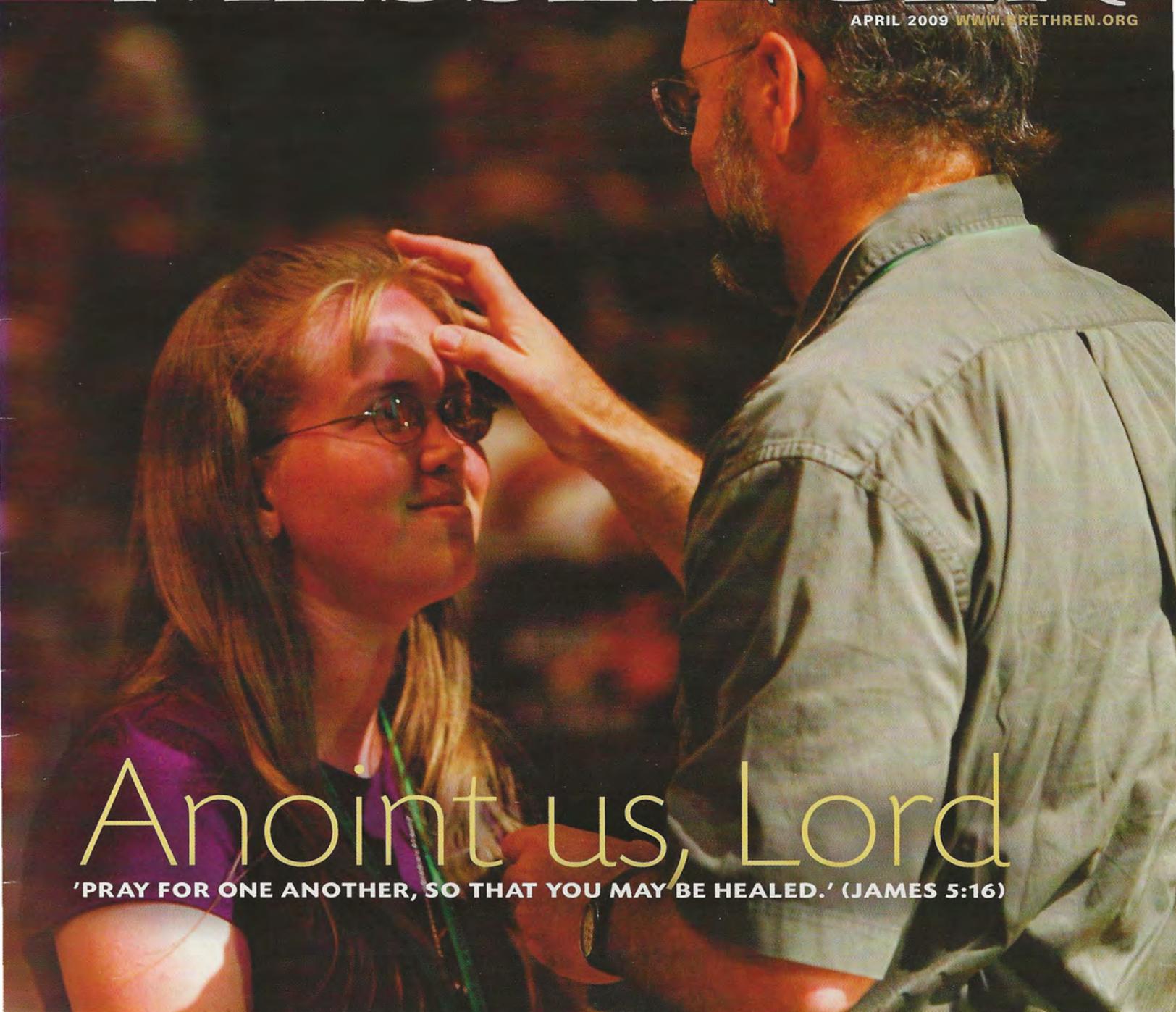


Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

APRIL 2009 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Anoint us, Lord

'PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED.' (JAMES 5:16)

Congregational Life Ministries

Annual Conference • San Diego, California

Annual Dinner

Media, Faith and Congregational Life: Connecting Cyber Space and Sacred Space

Sunday, June 28, 5:00 p.m.

Speaker: Eric H.F. Law

The Reverend Eric H.F. Law is the founder and executive director of the Kaleidoscope Institute for Competent Leadership in a Diverse Changing World. He has been a consultant and trainer for building inclusive community for over 20 years and is currently developing media resources to assist dialog. Rev. Law is the author of six books, an Episcopal priest, a composer of church music, a photographer and a playwright.



Cross Cultural Luncheon

Celebrating Our Diversity

Saturday, June 27, 12 noon

**Special participation by
Imperial Heights Church of the Brethren**

Music by Bittersweet Ministries

Tickets for sale at
www.brethren.org/AC
or at Annual Conference.



Church of the Brethren

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

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

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Chris Detrick



ONTHECOVER

“Anoint us, Lord. . . . Pour your cooling oils down, give us soundness of breath. Bring your Spirit like a dove”—the words flow from one of the hymns (No. 631) in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. Anointing with oil is carried out in the Church of the Brethren in a variety of settings for healing and wholeness, from youth and young adults at national conferences, to services in congregational worship, to bedside services for the sick. *Cover photo by Chris Detrick.*

8 Anointing: Partners in healing

Frank Ramirez wrote the book—literally—on anointing. He traces the ordinance’s deep roots in the Brethren movement, its decline, and its more recent resurgence. In a corollary piece (p. 12), Bob Neff and Floyd Mitchell provide some additional reflections on this ordinance and its use.

14 Deacons: The ‘remnant’ for the Church of the Brethren

Annual Conference secretary Fred Swartz traces the history of deacon ministry among Brethren and says wider realization of this role today could bring transformation for the church.

17 Departure rhythms

Facing a terminal illness, Sandy Bosserman says she has found new “music” to which she can dance and sing. Scripture and the support of those around her are key elements on the journey.

20 1 & 2 Timothy: Mentoring in leadership

These two New Testament letters center on the mentoring relationship between Paul and his student Timothy. But while the letters have a personal tone, they have a congregational focus.

DEPARTMENTS

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It was 15 minutes before church. I was washing dishes, and my seventh grader was finishing breakfast. She picked up the Good News Bus "Talkabout" from her Sunday school curriculum and picked out one of the questions designed for family conversation.

"What would you like to say if you had a chance to visit with Jesus?" she read off the sticker. We both pondered. I said I would probably find myself doing more listening than talking. She figured she'd have lots of questions because, as she pointed out, she's at that age where she's questioning what she believes.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

We kept talking. If Jesus did appear today, how would we recognize him, we wondered. Why is it that we don't see him, even though we hear of some who do? Perhaps we need to practice seeing with eyes of faith.

A short time later we were settled into a pew, listening to the opening words of the sermon, a message about the Transfiguration. Our pastor said he'd read that Orthodox theologians teach that "all throughout his early life and ministry Jesus shone with the kind of dazzling light that the disciples observe in him on that mountain-top, but it was a light that remained unseen by most of the people most of the time."

Hey, this sounded familiar. I poked my daughter.

"Just like we were talking about earlier," I whispered, eager to make the connection for her.

Connections, that is, between home and church, between faith and intellect, between daily life and the set-apart time of congregational worship. After all, this talking is important stuff, according to Deuteronomy 6:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and *talk about* them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

That's one of the foundational scripture texts for the Gather 'Round curriculum. (Check out the others at www.gatherround.org.) It's a basic command for every one of us, because we all are responsible to the children who have been entrusted to us as part of God's gathered community.

What's a Talkabout? A simple way to take Deuteronomy 6 to heart. In a busy, high-tech world, talking about God at the breakfast table can be food for the mind and food for the soul.

Wendy McFadden

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Meet the meat man

Bethany member's efforts have grown into big ministry

Joe Custer, a member of Bethany Church of the Brethren (New Paris, Ind.), along with members of the congregation and other congregations in the Elkhart/New Paris area, are feeding the hungry. However, Custer will be the first to say it is not his work. It is God working through him.

Through this effort named the "Meat Ministry," those suffering from economic times are being fed—in many instances better than those still with jobs.

By the end of 2008 Custer had delivered, on behalf of individuals and participating churches, approximately 6,460 pounds of meat to charities in Noble, Kosciusko, and Elkhart counties, as well as to freezers of churches whose members are in need. It is estimated this provided 25,840 4-ounce meals. In 2009 (through late February), the ministry had bought and distributed more than 2,340 pounds.



Deb Patterson

Joe Custer, who started a small Meat Ministry on his own, stocks the freezer at Bethany Church of the Brethren with meat for members of the congregation in need—no questions asked.

Each Monday Custer picks up close to 600 pounds of frozen outdated meat and makes his distribution. He's never turned away, and recipient agencies have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy.

It all began one day when, as a meat cutter at a grocery store, he had to throw out a box of meat. "It made my heart sick. It was just dated. There was nothing wrong," remembered Custer.

He went to the store manager and inquired what would occur if he came when not on the clock and loaded up the thrown-out meat. He was told he would be fired and would have to be prosecuted for theft.

He left the industry through unrelated circumstances. But then he went back to the store manager with a plan conceived by him and his wife, Mary. "Freeze it on the sale-by date and sell it at a discount to me." The deal was struck. Custer would use part of the couple's church offering to purchase the meat.

It started out at 50 pounds every few weeks at 25 cents to 50 cents per pound. He was purchasing strip steak, rib eye, and other top-dollar beef, plus pork and chicken. The ministry was unknown to many. Then one Sunday morning Custer offered the opportunity for church members to serve others in their own community. The amount of meat available to be purchased increased, and eventually a set price, \$1 per pound, was set.

Bethany has now set up an emerging need fund to be used as needed to purchase the meat. Custer has also been contacted by other congregations who have heard of the ministry. Weekly, members of Bethany are updated of the amount of meat purchased and where it was distributed.

"The need grows each week," stated Custer.—**Deb Patterson**

Deb Patterson is a reporter/photographer for *The Mail Journal* weekly newspaper of Milford, Ind., and a member of Bethany Church of the Brethren.

Northeast A Church Leaders Conference will take place April 29 at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, focusing on spiritual direction. . . . Wyomissing (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren is using the local Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom synagogue for meeting space while its church is under construction; the synagogue used the Brethren building in 1999 during its own renovation/expansion project. . . . Stone Church of the Brethren (Huntingdon, Pa.) hosted a "Creating Healthy Congregations" workshop for the district March 20-21.

Southeast The Puerto Rico region of Atlantic Southeast District held a pastors and leaders retreat Nov. 21, with 30 people present. Ana Mildred Diaz spoke on "Pastors and the Burnout Syndrome" and Luis Filipa spoke on the theme "Abundant Life." . . . A performance by Phyllis Stump of Lexington, N.C., is planned for April 4 at Copper Hill (Va.) Church of the Brethren to raise funds for John Kline Homestead Preservation efforts.

Midwest Illinois/Wisconsin District's Great Harvest Church Planting has called the Sarpiya family to work at a church plant in Rockford, Ill., and Herman and Betty Ware to do so in Chicago's west side. . . . Northern Indiana District planned a game night for young adults March 28 at Agape Church of the Brethren (Fort Wayne). . . . Southern Ohio recently approved a timber harvest at Woodland Altars (Peebles, Ohio) to improve the health of the forest. It will also bring in \$501,000 for the district.

Ozarks/Plains Greene (Iowa) Church of the Brethren collected 354 items for a local food bank in honor of the denomination's 300th anniversary last year. It also sent \$300 each to Church World Service and Northern Plains District for disaster relief. . . . Camp Pine Lake named the late Gary Nicholson of Iowa River Church of the Brethren as its Volunteer of the Year for 2008. . . . The Lybrook (N.M.) Vision Committee is asking for prayers as it develops renewal ideas for the mission there.

West Children's Disaster Services offered a Level 1 training workshop March 28-29 at La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren. . . . A workshop and worship event, "Reach Out and Welcome In," sponsored by Church of the Brethren Congregational Life Ministries, is scheduled for April 25 at Lacey (Wash.) Community Church of the Brethren.

YOU SAID IT

"God doesn't need the Church of the Brethren to be big so much as God needs the Church of the Brethren to be faithful."

—Union Bridge (Md.) pastor Jim Benedict, speaking at Mid-Atlantic District conference

BY THE NUMBERS

1,300

Number of farmers being assisted by Church World Service in drought-stricken Nangarhar and Takhar provinces in Afghanistan. A United Nations official called the situation "catastrophic."

Lima congregation answers gun violence with prayers

When gun violence in a Lima, Ohio, neighborhood dramatically increased last year, the pastors of Elm Street Church of the Brethren invited two other churches to join them for a prayer walk.

During the summer, the two congregations—Future Church of Tomorrow and Power House Church of God Deliverance—worked with Elm Street in offering Vacation Bible School (VBS) for 85 kids of diverse backgrounds. A few weeks later, two separate shooting incidents injured one black male and killed another just a few blocks from the Elm Street church. Another incident that resulted in another injury followed soon after.

“That made us realize that we needed to come together to pray,” Elm Street co-pastors Wes and Sue Richard said.

Racially mixed pairs from the three churches walked or drove in the neighborhood, praying for people on their porches and on the sidewalk. The response was overwhelmingly positive as residents welcomed their prayers. At one house, two adults and 10 children, most of whom had attended VBS, made a circle on the sidewalk to pray.

Farther down the street, one young man said he doesn't believe in prayer, but he added, “People working together



Children enjoy a class at a Vacation Bible School run jointly by Elm Street Church of the Brethren and two other local congregations.

like this—I have never seen that before.”

Afterwards, the group reconvened back at the church for a drink of cold water and to share their experiences.

Brethren pipeline flows to Foods Resource Bank

Good reports have continued to come in from congregations' involvement with the Foods Resource Bank growing projects, an effort being coordinated in the denomination by the Church of the Brethren Global Food Crisis Fund.

Congregations or other organizations, sometimes in partnership, set aside a piece of land and donate proceeds gained from the sale of crops on that land to Foods Resource Bank, which carries out hunger relief in needy areas worldwide. Two dozen Brethren projects involving 33 congregations were active in 2008. The Global Food Crisis Fund has helped to select projects for the Brethren contributions, primarily in Central America and North Korea. Some highlights:

- **Greenmount Church of the Brethren** (Harrisonburg, Va.), the first growing project in Virginia, grew corn on a 12-acre plot donated by Theresa and Carlton Bailey last year, raising \$7,431

from the corn and another \$8,000 after expenses from a harvest festival held in the fall with a variety of food and a yard sale/craft sale. The local *Daily News-Record* did a large feature spread on the effort. “We are called to not neglect the less fortunate,” Greenmount pastor Kenneth Dolan said in the article.

- The Fogelsanger family of **Hanover (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** donated 10 acres of soybeans, raising \$1,500, in honor of the 300th anniversary of the denomination and in memory of family member Marjorie Fogelsanger. “Beginning in this century we wanted to help alleviate hunger and starvation by sending food and financial aid,” Doris and Jay Fogelsanger said. It was the first growing project in Southern Pennsylvania District.

- An Iowa project by **South Waterloo Church of the Brethren and Hammond Avenue Brethren Church**, along with other Waterloo-area congregations, has raised nearly \$75,000 for Foods Resource Bank over the past four years. The group held a fall harvest event in October.

- A soybean growing project in northwest Illinois, on 20 acres of land owned by Paul Weaver of **Cherry Grove Church of the Brethren** in Lanark, grossed more than \$14,000 this past year. Numerous local farmers have helped to sponsor the land, and several local farming businesses agreed to cover the cost of seeds and planting needs for the project this year. A harvest festival took place in October. The **Dixon (Ill.)** and **Lanark** congregations are also part of the project.



A very Brethren baptism: Donald Shankster, pastor of Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren in Scottsdale, Ariz., performs an outdoor baptism for Cody Ross at the church. Ross found the church in 2007, was mentored by a member, decided to make it his church home, and was baptized this past November. One member said the scene seemed “very Brethren.”

LANDMARKS & LAURELS

• **Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren** celebrated its 125th anniversary this past year with a picnic, a hayride to sites of historical interest, a visit by Paul Roth to talk about Elder John Kline, and evening fireworks. Former pastors were invited to share memories, and members were encouraged to tell or write stories about the church from their experience. A special communion service was held in November, including representatives of congregations that grew out of Midland. And in December, members presented Vernard Eller's play "The Time So Urgent."

• **Piqua (Ohio) Church of the Brethren** was highlighted recently in the *Piqua Daily Call* newspaper. The feature articles, part of a series on Piqua churches, looked at the history and current ministries of the church.

• **IMA World Health**, based at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., has received a gift of \$250,000 from the F. Dohmen Co. Foundation of Milwaukee, Wis., to support and expand IMA's programs and services. The organization was also recently honored by Forbes.com as "one of the 20 most efficient large charities in America," according to a feature in the *Carroll County (Md.) Times*. The Church of the Brethren is a founding partner of IMA, which provides critical health care services and medicines for those in need worldwide.

• Several Brethren colleges—Elizabethtown (Pa.), Juniata (Huntingdon, Pa.), Manchester (North Manchester, Ind.), and McPherson (Kan.)—earned a place on this year's **President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll** for exemplary service efforts and service to America's communities. A release from Manchester noted that students annually contribute more than 19,500 hours of service to their communities and the college. At smaller McPherson, students in 2007-2008 gave 7,490 hours of service to the local community. The honor roll is the highest federal recognition a school can achieve for its commitment to service-learning and civic engagement. In all, 635 schools were recognized this year.

• **The Palms Estates of Highlands County** (Florida, Fla.), and the **Palms of Sebring** (Fla.)—Church of the Brethren retirement communities in Atlantic Southeast District—are celebrating their 50th anniversary. The community was started as the Florida Retirement Homes in 1958; the Sebring property was purchased in 1961.



Members of Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren present the play "The Time So Urgent" in December.

Rebecca Roberts

Children depend upon adults...
Children learn from adults...
Children teach adults...
Children are a gift from God.
Children and adults need each other.

From the 1986 Conditions of Childhood statement

Keeping
Our
Children Safe

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month

Adopt a Child Protection Policy for Your Congregation

Caring Ministries has provided each district office with a copy of *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*.

Contact your district to borrow this book and other available child protection resources.

Sample policies and information can be found at www.brethren.org/childprotection or call (800) 323-8039.

Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren



Church of the Brethren

Annual Conference Insight Session
June 29 9:00 p.m.

*Keeping Our Children Safe—
Child Abuse Prevention*

Learn More About Preventing Child Abuse

Prevent Child Abuse America
1-800-CHILDREN or 1-800-244-5373
www.preventchildabuse.org

Faith Trust Institute
1-206-634-1903
www.faithtrustinstitute.org

Empty and Easter

Has it ever happened to you? You're driving along—on the interstate, let's say—and you happen to glance down at the fuel gauge. And you are shocked to see the needle pointing all the way to the left, directly over the big, red "E."

Empty. It's one of those words in the English language that almost always has negative connotations.

Come with me for a moment and bring your imagination along. Picture a village in the Sudan. The land surrounding it is barren. We have been told that a vicious combination of drought and warfare has devastated the region. As we enter the village, we notice the people, women and children mostly, who stand or sit listlessly outside the crude buildings that serve as their homes. Many of them face starvation. There simply hasn't been enough food available. Their stomachs are empty.



KEN GIBBLE

Come to another place, a large city in our own land. It is nighttime and the streets and sidewalks are empty.

Why empty? Because in this part of the city, it is dangerous to be out after dark. Fear stalks alleyways and street corners. The threat of violence keeps people inside, cut off from the human interchange so necessary for a healthy community. Empty streets mean all is not well.

There are many kinds of emptiness in our world. A once-thriving steel plant stands empty in a Pennsylvania town. A vacant chair at a family's Easter Sunday dinner gives mute testimony to the absence of a loved one who always sat

EASTER HAPPENS WHENEVER EMPTY HEARTS HEAR THE CHRIST SAY, "I HAVE COME IN ORDER THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE LIFE—LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS"

there. A calendar with blank pages hangs on the wall of the room in a nursing home, a calendar that used to be filled with engagements and appointments before the man who now lies on the bed suffered his unexpected stroke.

Nobody likes the feelings of empty, whether it be parents experiencing the "empty nest," wage-earners who contemplate empty wallets, or pastors who look out and see empty pews in the church. To be human is to experience feelings of emptiness. When hearts are empty, life hardly seems worth living.

How ironic, then, that for Christians who celebrate Easter joy, gladness centers on something empty. A tomb.

John's gospel says that Mary Magdalene's first reaction, when she saw the stone rolled away from the tomb's entrance, was one of distress. Tomb robbing was not unheard of in that time. There was a Roman law dealing with

the crime. Mary, when she sees the stone has been removed, runs to find Peter and the "beloved disciple." She exclaims, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

What else was she to think? Surely nothing so unthinkable and so wonderful as resurrection; only that the dead body of the one she loved had been stolen. And when the two disciples enter the tomb and find it empty, the Gospel tells us that they "believed." Believed what? That he was risen, or merely that what Mary had told them was true, that his body was missing?

An empty tomb alone is not cause for joy. Joy doesn't happen until the risen Lord is met, until resurrection is confirmed by one word spoken to the woman who weeps for him. "Mary!" he says. And suddenly, for Mary, the empty tomb is transformed from a symbol of despair into a symbol of the joy of all joys.

And this is still true, that Easter depends on what we allow it to do to us and for us. For some, perhaps even for most, Easter is simply a pleasant rite of spring, a happy milestone on the journey from a wearisome winter to the warm days and emerging greenery of April and May. And that is enough.

For some.

But for others, Easter is more, much more. It means a promise that emptiness is not the condition for which they are made. It means an invitation to hold up their empty cups to the Lord of life so they can be filled. It means that an empty tomb outside Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago still symbolizes the final victory that God will win over every evil, every emptiness that plagues the human family. It means an assurance that death does not have the final word.

Easter is not just one day out of each year. It is not even just the *best* day out of each year. Easter is an ongoing reality that happens whenever trust wins out over

suspicion, whenever kindness pushes meanness aside, whenever goodness overcomes evil. Easter happens whenever empty hearts hear the Christ say, "I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness" (John 10:10, Today's English Version).

Because the tomb was empty, Easter is an answer to every emptiness you and I may encounter.

In one of his poems, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote this of the risen Christ: "Let him easter in us . . ." Easter as a verb! How absolutely right that is.

Yes, let him easter in us, the Christ who is risen. He is risen indeed!

And so, by God's grace, are we. **W**

Ken Gibble is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and an author. He lives in Greencastle, Pa.

“Despite its wounds, the church is Jesus’ way of healing the world.”

—Michele Hershberger, director of youth ministry and chair of the Bible and ministry department at Hesston (Kan.) College. She was quoted in *Mennonite Weekly Review*.

“Preaching is an art, and we as pastors have to find that moment that is going to capture the head, the heart, the whole being.”

—Tracy Knechel Sturgis, pastor of Mack Memorial Church of the Brethren in Dayton, Ohio, speaking at a Vital Pastors conference

“Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards.”

—US Attorney General Eric Holder, in a Black History Month speech in Washington, D.C. He was quoted by CNN.

“We need to remember that peace is built by the power of love, a love that meets others with grace.”

—Myron S. Augsburger, writing in *Mennonite Weekly Review*

“Churches are not clubs. We’re not meant to be member-centered. We’re here to find God’s light in the world.”

—Father Jack Wall, former pastor of the Old St. Patrick’s parish in Chicago, which grew from four members to 3,000 under his leadership. He was quoted in *WordOne* newsletter.

“For Jeremiah, sin is drying up or becoming desert-like through indifference, indolence, coldness of heart, self-centeredness, intemperate heat of unresolved conflict, all of which lead to injustice, the ultimate mark of fruitlessness.”

—Bethany Theological Seminary president Ruthann Knechel Johansen, writing in *Bethany’s Water & the Word* magazine

“God walks alongside us, not to make all our decisions but as a guiding presence. ... Scripture is quite clear: God is not a control freak.”

—Bethel Lutheran Church (Madison, Wis.) pastor William R. White, writing in *The Lutheran*

• Without immediate, massive intervention and assistance, **starvation in Kenya** will become a deadly reality, according to a new assessment report from Church World Service. The country’s leaders proclaimed a national crisis on Jan. 16, with some 10 million Kenyans—nearly a third of the country’s population—now being affected by food insecurity. The Church of the Brethren’s Emergency Disaster Fund recently approved \$30,000 toward the famine relief effort.

• Two National Council of Churches **Eco-Justice resources**, “Cleanliness and Godliness: A Gathering Guide for Green Cleaning” and the “Cleanliness and Godliness Toolkit,” are available as free downloads. They are available at <http://ncccecojustice.org/resources.html#environmental-healthresources>.

• **Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)** is reducing the budget for its international

program, which carries out relief, development, and peace-making work in more than 50 countries, by about \$2 million (a 10-percent reduction) and administrative expenditures also are being cut, according to Arli Klassen, MCC’s executive director. MCC US and the regional MCCs in the US are facing a 9-percent reduction.

• Despite considerable opposition, the Church of England on Feb. 11 voted to begin the long process of introducing legislation **to allow women bishops**. The legislation, approved by the church’s General Synod, includes complicated provisions to ensure that opponents of female bishops do not find themselves under a woman’s jurisdiction. The vote to move toward women bishops was 281 to 114, with 13 abstentions. The legislation comes back for final approval sometime after 2010. (RNS)



JUST FOR FUN: TOP 10

The 10 largest churches in the United States (according to figures reported by the 2009 *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, edited by the National Council of Churches), with reported growth or decline in total membership in 2008:

1. The Roman Catholic Church, 67,117,06 members, down 0.59 percent
2. The Southern Baptist Convention, 16,266,920 members, down 0.24 percent
3. The United Methodist Church, 7,931,733 members, down 0.80 percent
4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 5,873,408 members, up 1.63 percent
5. The Church of God in Christ, 5,499,875 members, no change reported
6. National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., 5,000,000 members, no change reported
7. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 4,709,956 members, down 1.35 percent
8. National Baptist Convention of America, Inc., 3,500,000 members, no change reported
9. Presbyterian Church (USA), 2,941,412 members, down 2.79 percent
10. Assemblies of God, 2,863,265 members, up 0.96 percent

ANOINTING: PARTNERS IN HEALING

by Frank Ramirez

DEEP-ROOTED BRETHREN ORDINANCE HAS REGAINED SIGNIFICANCE

The winter of 1918-1919 was an especially brutal one—not only for Brethren, but for people around the world.

The influenza pandemic was in the process of killing as many as 50 million people worldwide, more death and mayhem than the recently concluded World War. In January 1919 *The Vindicator*, the monthly periodical of the Old Order German Baptist Brethren, included an obituary for Elnora Hockman Shoup, about whom it was said, "She always had great faith in the anointing (James 5); but her death came so sudden, becoming delirious the anointing could not be administered to her knowingly."



The assumption of the Old Order Brethren, at least, was that the sister or brother receiving an anointing needed to be a conscious

partner in healing. The story demonstrates that for Brethren anointing is a partnership that involves a relationship between the afflicted, the fellowship of believers, and God.

Some denominations practice a form of anointing called extreme unction that is reserved for those who are on death's doorstep, for the forgiveness of sins prior to judgment. Anointing for Brethren, by contrast, is administered in the earnest hope that a sister or brother will be restored to health.

When the first Brethren in Germany met in small-group Bible study to reconstruct the early church, they determined that James 5:13-16 clearly required the group to practice anointing among themselves. A study of Brethren history makes it clear that we have always practiced this ordinance.

Some background and history

In the Old Testament anointing with oil was part of the rite that set apart kings. The title of "Christ" or "Messiah" that we

THERE IS PLENTY OF EVIDENCE ABOUT THE USE OF **ANOINTING FOR HEALING** IN THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH. *THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION*, A MANUAL OF EARLY CHURCH PRACTICE PRESERVED IN SEVERAL LANGUAGES, TIES THE OLD TESTAMENT TRADITION TO OUR PRACTICE OF ANOINTING FOR HEALING ...



Marcos Inhauser, left, performs an anointing service for a member of the Church of the Brethren in Brazil.

assign to Jesus means “the anointed one,” the one set aside as the descendant of King David.

There is plenty of evidence about the use of anointing for healing in the life of the early church. Origen, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, and Hippolytus of Rome all refer to the ordinance. *The Apostolic Tradition*, a manual of early church practice preserved in several languages, ties the Old Testament tradition to our practice of anointing for healing through the following prayer for the consecration of healing oil:

“Send, Lord, the richness of your mercy upon this fruit of the oil, through which you anointed priests, prophets, kings, and also martyrs, and clothed in kindness with the garment of your righteousness, in order that for everyone coming for anointing it may be for advantage and benefit of soul and body (and) spirit, for averting of every evil, for health to the one anointed through our Lord Jesus.”

Anointing for healing apparently has been practiced among us since the beginning of the Brethren movement, but there has been little written about it. Perhaps that’s because there was little controversy attached to it.

One early reference comes from the Baptist writer Morgan Edwards. Around 1770 Edwards wrote about the many different faiths in the colonies. He noted that Brethren “anoint the sick with oil for recovery.” No recorded reference among the Brethren can be found prior to 1797, when Annual Meeting stated, “the brethren testified unanimously, ‘that the sick who desire and call for it, should be anointed, according to the word of the holy apostle, in the name of the Lord.’ ”

Brethren scholar and writer Graydon F. Snyder, in his book *Health and Medicine in the Anabaptist Tradition*, contrasts the

attitude of the Brethren with other Anabaptist groups in Colonial America. While some of the other Anabaptist groups relied on potions, incantations, charms, and other crude forms of folk medicine, Brethren alone interpreted the passage from James to be a command to anoint for healing.

Over time, however, there was a slow decline in the use of the ordinance. It began as early as the 19th century. Peter Nead (1796-1877), the leading Brethren theologian of the day, noted in his *Theological Writings* (1866): “This is a performance which has become almost extinct in our day; and oh, what a pity! seeing that it is connected with such great promises.” He later adds, “Now, this is the privilege of the afflicted sons and daughters of men; and if they do not embrace this opportunity, it is their own fault.”

L.W. Teeter (1845-1927), in “Tract no. 276,” published by the Brethren’s General Missionary and Tract Committee around 1900, went so far as to suggest that anointing for physical healing “belonged to the age of miracles” and was “somewhat different from . . . the anointing given by James.” Emphasis was given to the “secondary design of anointing the sick with literal oil,” to the effect that the “promises of being saved, raised up, and forgiven, are most precious to the sick.”

Renewed importance

If the earlier 20th-century Brethren experienced a drift away from the ordinance of anointing, one can safely say it has been recovered over the course of the last few generations.

For me one of the defining moments came as a student at Bethany Theological Seminary during the late 1970s.



Chris Detrick

An anointing service for youth and advisors seeking healing or discernment is often a part of the denomination's National Youth Conference.

through humans as well, even though without doubt God could do a better job. Nurses, doctors, and technicians of all stripes aid in the healing process, and their skill—the result of long years of training in most cases—has its roots in the gifts of God.

Brethren believe there are several kinds of healing. Physical healing is the most dramatic and often the most desired form of healing. But there are times when emotional, spiritual, or psycho-

logical healing is just as important as physical healing.

A 1942 pamphlet, "Anointing for Healing," written by Warren D. Bowman (1894-1987), which was revised twice and reprinted many times, emphasized, "Anointing is not a substitute for medical science. A sick person should secure the best medical aid available. Anointing is a supplement to medical science, a service designed to arouse the psychological and spiritual energies, and to help the patient get rid of any fear, anxiety, resentment, sense of guilt, or wrong relationship that might hinder recovery."

Brethren believe healing is a gift, not a right. The prayer of faith is powerful, but the most faithful prayer of power was that of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, on the eve of his great ordeal: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Anointing cannot guarantee healing. If it could it would border on magic, and would imply that we in some way control God's actions. God is in control of history, and healing. It is God who invites us to join into a community of prayer through the ordinance of anointing.

This means that if the result prayed for does not occur it is not an indication of a lack of belief or faithfulness on the part of anyone who participated. It is expected that God will act freely and may not be constrained or coerced, and that in answer God may choose in the negative as well as the positive.

Henry Kurtz, in his *The Brethren's Encyclopedia* published in 1867, makes this point himself when he writes, "We believe, if it is done and received in faith, the Lord will accept it as if done unto himself, and he will bless it either to raise the sick again from his sick-bed, or, what is far better, raise him or her up to glory."

Note that Kurtz addresses one of the central paradoxes of the healing ministry—the charge by some that if a cure does

Then-fellow student Scott Duffey (now a Brethren pastor) preached a sermon at chapel service that outlined the necessity of the anointing service in the life of the Brethren. It had a strong influence on my ministry, and I am sure on the ministry of many others. His sermon was later adapted into a text that was included as part of the 1997 *Deacon Manual for Caring Ministries*.

Continuing on a personal note, during our final months at Bethany in May 1979, my wife, Jennie, gave birth to our first child three months prematurely. As Francisco hovered between life and death we invited professors and ministers Nancy Faus and Donald Miller to come to the neonatal ward of the hospital in Chicago. Faus and Miller donned gowns as per regulations in that ward, and with the encouragement of the nursing staff anointed Francisco (now approaching his 30th birthday) and the two of us. Cisco's physical situation improved after the anointing, and our mental state did as well.

The spiritual healing that complements physical healing was cited in a 1963 Annual Conference report that strongly affirmed the place of deacons and the laity with these words: "Those who administer to the ill person the service of anointing should confer before the visit on what their mission is to be and the specific part to be carried by each. The persons may be elders, deacons, laymen, or the pastor alone, depending upon availability and the desire of the sick person."

The 1997 *Deacon Manual for Caring Ministries* works under the assumption that deacons have a place in the ministry of anointing, both individually and in cooperation with ordained ministers.

The ministry of healing

Brethren believe all healing comes from God. There are occasions when miraculous healing occurs, defying medical explanation. However, it seems to please God to work

THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN ANOINTING NEED TO BE OPEN TO AN **UNEXPECTED AND UNEXPLAINABLE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S GRACE**. . . MIRACLES HAPPEN AT THE TIME AND PLACE OF GOD'S CHOOSING, AND GOD CONTINUES TO ACT DIRECTLY IN HISTORY, AS WELL AS WORKING THROUGH INDIVIDUALS.

not take place then there was something deficient about the faith of those involved. Some few have interpreted this to mean that the truly faithful will rely on God for miraculous healing and not consult doctors. This misconception has occasionally led to abuses among some associated with the Brethren, such as the Glory Barn and Faith Assembly movements of the 1970s and '80s, which at one point, according to *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, led to the deaths of "as many as 100 children and adults."

So while in 1812 the Annual Meeting noted, "In case a brother or sister should desire in their sickness to be anointed, it might be administered to them, provided they would not seek further help from an earthly physician," in 1860 a query asked if it was wrong to "again resort to the use of medicine" after an anointing, to which was given the reply, "We do not consider it wrong according to the gospel to do so."

Some make a distinction between healing and curing. One of the elements of anointing is prayer for the forgiveness of sins. Wholeness—*shalom*—can be the response of God toward every petition, regardless of what happens physically to those who pray.

Still, those who participate in anointing need to be open to an unexpected and unexplainable manifestation of God's grace. Anyone who has participated in many anointings is aware that miracles happen at the time and place of God's choosing, and that God continues to act directly in history, as well as working through individuals.

Anointing is not generally considered a last rite by Brethren. However, this should not be used as a reason to deny those near death the comfort afforded by the service. Those who have chosen to be anointed during difficult times in their lives may wish to be anointed in the final crisis as well. In addition, because some may consider death as a friend and not an enemy, there may be occasions when suffering could be relieved by God's calling a believer home. Easing that path in accordance with God's will is an acceptable desire through anointing, and the service recognizes that the choice rests with God.

Anything can happen

Returning to the incident from the era of the flu pandemic: In that story no anointing was given because the woman was not conscious and lucid. Most Brethren ministers I know



Walt Witschak

would not hesitate to anoint someone who was unconscious, in part because of the benefits for the family who might be present, and also because we simply don't know the level of consciousness the person is experiencing. Besides, who wants to put a limit on what God can or will do? When it comes to anointing there's no telling what will happen.

I think in particular of an anointing service that took place more than a quarter-century ago. I knew a man with cardiac problems who suffered terribly during heart catheterizations, which were pretty primitive and painful back then. He dreaded the prospect of continued medical care. After an anointing service his heart cath revealed that nothing was wrong, and there was no need for treatment. A year later he died swiftly and seemingly painlessly.

His wife and I wondered if God had answered prayer by giving him a year without medical treatments and what looked like an easy passing. Who knows? There's something mysterious and wonderful about our walk with God and with each other. The ordinance of anointing is something we share as part of our shared partnership in health and healing. **W**

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Everett (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. He is author of a book on anointing, *Partners in Healing*, published in 2005 by CSS Publishing Inc.

ARE ANY AMONG YOU SICK?

by Floyd Mitchell and Bob Neff



ANOINTING REQUESTS OFTEN COVER A BREADTH OF NEEDS

In the Church of the Brethren, the anointing service has been a central part of our lives whenever we are facing surgery or a critical illness. We have often limited our view of this ordinance to bodily healing. And yet the directive of the worship manual is that we anoint for three reasons: “the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of one’s faith, and for the healing and wholeness of mind, body, spirit, according to God’s grace and wisdom.”

Anointing for healing is a biblical ordinance that recognizes that God is firmly in control of all aspects of life. It is our invitation to God to re-enter our lives through doors we may have closed. It is a reminder that all healing resides with the Spirit of God. It is a comfort that God cares for us and desires wholeness, shalom, healing, for the people of God. It is part of our attempt as the Church of the Brethren to restore a New Testament church.

Let’s begin with the scripture text:

*Are any among you suffering? They should pray.
Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.
Are any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of
the church and have them pray over them,
anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.
The prayer of faith will raise the sick, and the Lord will
raise them up; and anyone who has committed
sins will be forgiven.
Therefore confess your sins to one another, and
pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective
(James 5:13-16 NRSV).*

This passage from James is practical instruction about what to do when we are in need of healing. James encourages us to participate in the anointing service and explains some of the blessings that may be experienced.

James wrote that those suffering should pray. Those cheerful should sing. Those sick should be anointed. James writes that Christians should do these things. Why? People

can understand why people should pray and sing, but why be anointed? How can anointing help us? Sometimes confusion arises because we confuse healing and curing. Anointing is not magic; it doesn’t automatically bring a cure. Healing can come in many ways, however. When done in the right spirit, James suggests, there are blessings that may be received.

First, the service can bring forgiveness. If we confess our sins and pray, God will forgive our sins. Second, the anointing can strengthen our faith. If one is burdened with fear, anxiety, or anger, confession before God will relieve this distress, remove the burdens, and restore faith. Third, the anointing can bring healing in many different ways as we place our lives in the hands of the great physician—although God provides the healing in frames we may not understand.

Tony Campolo, in his book *Let me Tell you a Story*, writes of holding an anointing service following a sermon. About 30 people were anointed. Sometime later a woman telephoned Tony, telling him that her husband had been one of those anointed. Tony asked her how he was doing, and she responded that he had just died the night before. Tony expressed his sympathy and said he was sorry that the anointing had not been more helpful. “Oh, you misunderstand,” she said. “When he came to church he was angry at God for giving him cancer and all the suffering that it had produced. But after the anointing the anger was taken away, and he was at peace. His last days were the best days of our marriage, and I just wanted to thank you for the anointing. He was not cured of his cancer but he was healed.”

At The Village at Morrisons Cove, a Brethren retirement community in central Pennsylvania, the breadth of requests for anointing is impressive. One very sick woman asked to be anointed so that she would not fear death. Two weeks later she died. Her sister related that the family had never seen her sister that much at peace. Another individual asked that she and her sibling would be reconciled. Soon after the anointing service, the two of them were relating to each other frequently and with loving gestures and conversation.

HOW CAN ANOINTING HELP US? **SOMETIMES CONFUSION ARISES BECAUSE WE CONFUSE HEALING AND CURING.** ANOINTING IS NOT MAGIC; IT DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY BRING A CURE. HOWEVER, WHEN DONE IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT, JAMES SUGGESTS, THERE ARE BLESSINGS THAT MAY BE RECEIVED.

Clearly requests prior to hospital visits abound, but the blessing may reach beyond the initial request, sometimes beyond anything we could imagine.

In the anointing service at Morrisons Cove, people are invited to come and be anointed. Many of those in attendance are in wheelchairs and require someone to wheel them forward. They are asked whether they have anything they would like to confess and what would they like to be anointed for. Often the minister must kneel to anoint the person and pray for him/her. This act of reverence for the individual and for God adds meaning and depth to the service. The service, practiced twice a year at The Village, has brought a deepened faith, greater comfort, forgiveness, and healing to residents, staff, and pastors.

As Brethren pastor Frank Ramirez writes, "Anointing for healing is not a substitute for medical care by licensed physicians, nurses, and technicians. God's spirit is working with us, through us, despite us, around us. In some cases where I have offered anointing in hospitals the medical personnel have remained with the patient to be anointed as well."

Healing comes from God. Doctors do not heal. Yet we

believe that their prescriptions and surgery help in the healing process. The anointing with oil, the laying on of hands, and prayer do not in themselves heal. The anointing does, however, prepare the way for God's healing and blessing. **AM**

Floyd Mitchell is a retired pastor and former chaplain at The Village at Morrisons Cove in Martinsburg, Pa., where he continues to assist in ministry. He lives in Martinsburg. Bob Neff is a Bible scholar and serves on the development staff at The Village at Morrisons Cove. He lives in State College, Pa.

A BASIC SERVICE OF ANOINTING

Read aloud Lamentations 3:19-24 and/or James 5:13-16.

Then say:

"We are gathered together to anoint our (brother/sister) in the presence of God for (give reason for anointing). We come boldly forward with courage because Jesus commanded us to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' We come meekly with the fears of Jesus when he prayed, 'Not my will, but yours.' Knowing that in the midst of a broken world God wills your wholeness in body, mind, and spirit, I now anoint you with oil—

(The leader anoints the forehead with oil, in the shape of three crosses)

—for the forgiveness of your sins, the granting of peace to your soul, and the restoration of wholeness to your body.

(The leader will then lay hands on the head, one on top of the other, of the one being anointed. Others present may lay their hands upon the leader's, or upon a shoulder, until all are touching. After the leader's prayer a silence follows in which others may pray aloud or silently as they choose. The leader closes with a brief spoken prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer, which all may join.)



DEACONS: THE 'REMNANT' FOR THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

by Fred Swartz

WIDER REALIZATION OF THIS ROLE COULD BRING TRANSFORMATION FOR THE CHURCH

A tidal wave swept over the Church of the Brethren in 1983. It came in the wake of an epoch-making Annual Conference examination of the biblical church leaders known as *diakonia*, translated in English as "deacons."

Deacons had been officers in the denomination from the church's beginning in the early 18th century. Their first responsibilities were to see that widows and orphans and other needy folk were cared for by the church, similar to the pattern of the seven "servants" called out from the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6). But over time, deacons began to assume administrative authority in the congregation, which eventually led to a discrediting of their value. By the early 1980s, deacons were not even recognized in the denominational polity for congregational structure.

A few congregations, however, still had deacons who were working at shepherding programs, with members of the congregation assigned to deacon teams for purposes of regular contact and needs. Those congregations initiated queries to Annual Conference asking if it would not be appropriate to reinstate and affirm the purpose of deacons in the church.

A call to caregiving

The Annual Conference study committee went back to the roots, the New Testament, to discern the nature and function of the deacon "office." One word stood out above all other possible definitions: **caregiving.**

Deacons in the New Testament were caregivers, not administrators or program directors. The denomination was quick to create some new resources to help train deacons in this renewed direction. The Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Church joined resources to publish the workbook titled *Called to Caregiving*, which contained articles about the philosophy of deacon work and a series of training sessions.

This "new" focus for deacons was a welcome breath of fresh air for the denomination. Deacon groups whose reason for being was primarily to make preparations for love feasts found a new vision for their existence. By the end of the 1990s, 70 percent of the denomination's congregations had deacons. An updated paper on deacons in 1997 further illustrated the many functions for deacon caregivers in their congregational work, and it added a clear and challenging vision for deacons. Workshops at both denominational and congregational levels were in demand. The creation of a *Deacon Manual* proved to be a popular how-to-do-pastoral-care book for pastors as well as deacons.

The primary method for providing congregational care through the 1990s was by some form of an every-member shepherding program. It was welcomed by many pastors as supplemental care to what they could provide their congregations. Deacon groups who took their caregiving functions seriously also provided basic health care and counseling sup-



Church of the Brethren Caring Ministries



port for members of their congregations. Hospitality—including greeting newcomers to church, organizing prayer support methods, assimilating and mentoring new members, and providing times for get-acquainted opportunities—became an exciting challenge for deacons.

Shifts and opportunities

By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, however, there was a notable decline in the number of mid-sized to large congregations employing an every-member contact plan. Factors suggested as contributing to this include deacon burnout, shifts in the busy-ness of individuals, lack of deacon commitment to consistent activity, and the demands of keeping the shepherding plan current. Several congregations have shifted from an every-member assigned plan to having “on-call” deacons that church members can contact if they have needs. That is a critical paradigm shift from the intention of the 1983/1997 vision for deacon caregiving.

On the other hand, with a quarter of a century having passed since the renewed emphasis on deacons, perhaps it is time for a new challenge to deacon caregiving. There is increasing angst in the denomination regarding various conflicts and divisions in both congregations and the church at large. That might suggest the time is ripe for an all-out emphasis on the task of deacons to be reconcilers, peace-keepers, and unity-promoters in the congregation.

Recently a well respected denominational leader made the

observation, “If everyone who went to a microphone at Annual Conference would approach with the attitude, ‘How can I help move us along to a unified decision?’, Conference would be transformed”—as well as the denomination, we might add. What if everyone would adopt such an attitude in their activity and conversation in the local church? What a transformation that would be! The vision, the reality, could start with the deacons.

On one thing there seems to be no disagreement: Church of the Brethren congregations need deacons. The late Brethren historian Don Durnbaugh, in a pamphlet titled *Deacons in Historical Perspective*, published in 1996, said, “During the course of the Brethren Movement, the office of deacon has been seen as essential to the life of the congregation.”

The faithful “remnant”

Not only is the caregiving function of deacons valuable, but deacons also can represent the faith and purpose that gives stability and meaning to the congregation’s fellowship and mission. Deacons are called from among the most committed and loyal members of the church. They speak openly and positively about their faith and the value of the church community. Evidence of this rock-solid core of the church’s mission is manifested in the way deacons have picked up the slack in pastoral care during the transition time between pastors. In those interim periods, deacons have risen to the challenge of more visitation, full responsibility for the church’s ordinances,

DEACONS REALLY ARE THE “PILLARS” OF THE CHURCH. THEY ARE STABLE, DEDICATED, SPIRITUAL MEMBERS WHO CARE ABOUT EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH AND WHO DESIRE TO SEE THE CHURCH BE TRULY THE BODY OF CHRIST TO PEOPLE.



Walt Wiltschko

RESOURCES: LEARN MORE

Books and pamphlets from Brethren Press:

- "And You Visited Me: A Guide for Visiting and Caring for Persons in Times of Crisis and Need" (\$1.95)
- Annual Conference Statement: Deacon Ministry in the Church of the Brethren (1997) (\$1.50)
- *Called to Caregiving: A Resource for Equipping Deacons in the Believers Church* (\$12.95)
- "Deacons in Biblical Perspective" (\$1.50)
- "Deacons in Historical Perspective" (\$1.50)
- *The Deacon Manual for Caring Ministries* (Cost: \$12.95).

Other resources:

- *Ways You Can Help*, by Margaret Cooke, with Elizabeth Putman. New York: Warner Books: 1996.
- *How Can I Help? 12 Things to Do When Someone You Know Suffers a Loss*, by James E. Miller. Fort Wayne, IN: Willowgreen Publishing: 1994.
- *When You are Facing Change*, by J. Bill Ratliff. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press: 1989.

To order, contact Brethren Press at 800-441-3712, or visit www.brethrenpress.com.

Materials available from Caring Ministries:

- "Called to be a Deacon in the Church of the Brethren"
- "Deacons and the Holy Spirit"
- "Essential Servants: Reflections on the Caring Ministries of Deacons"
- "Caregiving" quarterly newsletter (each issue includes two pages of deacon ministry news)
- Quarterly deacons newsletter (e-mail subscription)

To order or subscribe, contact the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren at 800-323-8039.

Deacon training events

- Regional deacon training events are regularly offered around the denomination. Two upcoming events will be May 2, at Pinecrest Community in Mount Morris, Ill., and May 16, at Lebanon Valley Brethren Home, Palmyra, Pa. For more information and to register, visit www.brethren.org/deacontraining, or call Caring Ministries at 800-323-8039.

and assistance with worship leadership and even preaching.

One could make a good case for thinking of deacons as the possible new "remnant" for the Church of the Brethren, especially as the shortage of available pastors increases. Running throughout the history and faith of Israel is a recurring theme that sustained the hope of the much beleaguered nation. Isaiah championed the theory that God always sustains a remnant of the Chosen People, no matter how devastating circumstances may be or become. The Messiah would be the ultimate manifestation of that remnant, establishing the kingdom or reign of God forever. Jesus, in turn, commissioned the church to continue to be the bearer and proclaimer of the Good News.

Deacons provide the promise amid the despair that hangs heavy over our denomination with the economic conditions, declining membership, and crisis in pastoral leadership. There is promise that deacons can revive and nourish the church, even in the most difficult times. Consider the vision statement for deacons that is part of the 1997 Annual Conference statement on deacon ministry:

"Deacons are called to be dedicated caregivers who use their spiritual gifts in a shared ministry of concern for the total well-being of God's people. Deacons are to be Christ-like, welcoming, nurturing, reconciling, sensitive to the presence of God's Spirit in their lives and in the lives of others, and witnessing for Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord within and beyond the body of Christ, the church."

If we take seriously this summary of who deacons are, it can indeed transform the church! It suggests some key qualities about deacons:

- They are dedicated to the church and to Christ;
- Their chief purpose is caregiving, with emphasis on the *total well-being* of all the people related to the church;
- They are conveyors of hospitality and sensitivity;
- They are God's agents of reconciliation and mediation;
- They are spiritual beings and seek to affirm God's Spirit in others and in the congregation;
- They witness to the Lord Jesus Christ at all times with their words and actions.

Existing to serve

Deacons really are the "pillars" of the church. They are stable, dedicated, spiritual members who care about everyone in the church and who desire to see the church be truly the Body of Christ to people. It is important to remember that the pillars of the church serve to hold the building up, not vice versa.

Another metaphor might be the "backbone" of the church; but again, the backbone serves as the pillar on the which the whole body structure hangs. The backbone without the rest of the body would be useless and only cast to the sun.

As Christ said of himself, deacons are called first of all to serve, not to be served. With that perspective, deacons can revive and save the church. The deacons are the remnant God can use to keep the Good News known, shared, and proclaimed in the Church of the Brethren. **W**

Fred Swartz is secretary of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. He previously served as a pastor and was a deacon trainer and resource person for the Association of Brethren Caregivers (now Caring Ministries). He lives in Bridgewater, Va.



DEPARTURE RHYTHMS

by Sandy Bosserman

SCRIPTURES AND SUPPORT FRAME END-OF-LIFE JOURNEY

A good friend tells the story of his grandmother, who, in her late 90's, resided in a complete care facility. Suffering frequent heart palpitations, fainting spells, restlessness, and anxiety, she often ignored her on-call attendant to personally summon a niece who worked on the nursing staff.

After exchanging pleasantries and encouraging words, the frail but savvy senior cut to the chase: "Am I going to die?" Her niece perfunctorily repeated the blood pressure check, located the pulse, and smiled as she reported, "No, not today, Auntie, not today." Life in its present form and familiarity remains worth pursuing for at least the first century.

In whatever stage or condition, it is important that life main-

tains some manner of predictable beat. Folks are capable of embracing and incorporating even the worst news—if it can be set to a rhythm that plays and sings. Acute and chronic illnesses, harbingers of the winding down and departure process, are best experienced set to lively but flexible rhythms. Departure rhythms are not to be confused with the tunes an oblivious band plays as the ship sinks nor the cruel melodies of emperors who fiddle while cities burn. Departure rhythms invite folks to face the music and to play, sing, dance, or listen regardless of time spent, time remaining, or natural musical ability.

In August 2006, I was diagnosed with Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia. I'd never have chosen such a malady



THERE IS NEITHER
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DELIVERING SUCH A
REPORT TO SPOUSES,
CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND
SIBLINGS AND LITTLE
SOLACE IN ASKING THEM
TO WALK THE JOURNEY
WITH YOU.

because inquirers still don't know what's wrong, even after one masters the pronunciation and is informed repeatedly.

Health care professionals seldom hazard a guess as to how long Waldenstrom's may have been working ruin in a body, and, in fact, physicians often become involved only when sagging hemoglobin counts make a trip across the house a long day's journey and weary patients have no choice but to mention it. The illness requires more than one or two sentences to describe, and oncologists do not fully agree on classification. My favorite doctor told me we'd call it a lymphoma and answered my longevity questions with statistics that

could be summed up, "No, not today." That has become the music to which I dance and sing.

It has not been as simple as it sounds. "Treatable but not curable" interrupts predictable rhythms about as fast as anything. There is neither rhyme nor reason in delivering such a report to spouses, children, parents, and siblings and little solace in asking them to walk the journey with you. Catching the glimmer in devoted eyes, huddling in open arms, and receiving and extending reassurance amid fears and tears moves all parties close enough to the music to reclaim rhythms that have maintained homeostasis and enabled relationship up to now.

Into the mirror, however, we speak the grim ponderings: "You know, I really can't imagine not being here—or not breathing for that matter." "My husband will never cook all that stuff stowed in the pantry." "I'm too weak to fight and too tired to care." "God, let's just get this over with." When one is weak and in pain, resignation is not so difficult; indeed, it becomes a departure rhythm that grants peaceful rest and deepened sleep.

There are other new rhythms. A few units of blood and a week of chemo later, I am ready for the fight, determined to be graceful and grateful: to live well in my days and to die with my affairs in order—starting with all those free address labels that have come from every fundraising organization in the country. The deceased do not need address labels, and while the prognosis did not threaten immediate departure, the likelihood of living

to use even a fraction of them seemed a long shot, especially when I intended to go head-to-head with anything that recognized a concern or need for “the future.”

Soon it was a rhythmic workout of examining and trashing, examining and trashing, hundreds of labels bearing only my name or those sporting the expiring title “Mr. & Mrs.” With more wistful and measured beat, I carefully stacked those reading only “Mr. Maurice Bosserman” and placed them neatly in a drawer. “I just hope he’ll remember to pay the electric bill—I’ve always paid the electric bill,” I concluded, slamming my fist upon his desk. It was a departure rhythm composed in the rage and (surely Brethren-related) passive-aggressive self-pity to which all ailing folk are entitled, and I embraced it with vigor.

I might have learned to enjoy that rhythm to the exclusion of all others, had it not been that “suddenly (and not so suddenly) there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘No, not today, Sandy, not today’”: Falling under the healing vial of anointing oil and borne by the ministry team of the church I once pastored, who dropped by unannounced to pray, anoint, and disappear into the night to the measured rhythm of footsteps on driveway gravel.... A congregational family who insisted we mutually own the chemo treatments ahead, combining more oil and hands and tears in a ritual as old as the church and as new as my diagnosis.... A teddy bear to take to chemo from the Missouri-Arkansas District family, and piles of cards from the denominational family.... A spouse who fished the subscription notice for my favorite periodical from the trash can and, in my hearing, called in a three-year renewal. “No, not today.” “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

I might have forsaken all other rhythms in the aura of such support, but there is a solitary dimension to illness that requires a strong and well-maintained inner meter. The erratic tempo of illness threatens wholeness. Chemicals used to effectively treat illness also work division in the body, tearing away at the bonding of physical, mental, spiritual. Therein the steady tide of scripture and liturgy “makes intercession for (us)” when we cannot pray as we ought (Rom. 8:27).

Too fragmented to remember our best hope or to claim the smallest promise, the prayer of the ancients flows predictably: “Jesus Christ, lamb of God, have mercy on us.” Words we have intoned to exhort and equip others return to buoy us: “I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psa. 27:13). “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:8).

That last one sings in four-part harmony—but with a few

adjustments, it also tangos. As much as I like the swelling chorus of “No, not today,” and as grateful as I am for all those who keep singing it in my hearing, it is not difficult to figure out which words “endureth forever.” That is a good thing to know, in sickness and in health, for as long as we shall live. And let’s face it: Few of us will live to use all of our free address labels. 

Sandy Bosserman has served as a pastor and as district executive minister for Missouri/Arkansas. She lives in Peace Valley, Mo.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Toward the end of 2000—by the grace of God, the faith of friends, and the miracle of modern medicine—I emerged from a long bout of depression caused in part by an undiagnosed form of epilepsy.

I had my life back while at the same time my life as I had known it was gone. I no longer had a career, I lived in a different house, I lived in a different city, and I attended a different church. As I celebrated my newfound freedom from the darkness of depression, a hymn I had learned during my years at Bethany Theological Seminary (with words by Brian Wren set to a tune written by Richard Brode, a Bethany graduate) began to play over and over in my mind: “This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that’s gone.”

Two years later family and friends sang this hymn at my wedding to Dan Meeks. And today it continues to be my personal theme song on this exciting, and often intimidating, road called life. The words continue to reassure me that “Christ is alive, and goes before us to show and share what love can do. This is a day of new beginnings—our God is making all things new.”—**Kaysa Meeks**

Kaysa Meeks is a member of Oakland Church of the Brethren in Gettysburg, Ohio. She lives in Greenville, Ohio. The hymn referenced is “This Is a Day of New Beginnings,” No. 640 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

1 & 2 Timothy: Mentoring in leadership

by Christy J. Waltersdorff

Intimate letters offer advice and encouragement

Mentors are important to our life of faith. Very few of us travel through our spiritual journey without the support, guidance, advice, and challenge of someone more mature in the faith than we are.

While it is true that another person cannot give us faith, they can encourage and lead us in our faith development. From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus made it clear that the life of faith is not a solitary one. Just as he called disciples to walk, learn, and work with him, so we, too, are called to live out our faith within the community of believers.

One of the strongest mentor relationships in scripture is seen in the friendship between the apostle Paul and his student, Timothy. This relationship goes beyond just student and teacher. Paul refers to Timothy as his “son in the faith,” and his “beloved child.”

Paul first met young Timothy during a difficult missionary journey to Lystra. Timothy’s father was a Greek Gentile, but his mother and grandmother were Jewish Christians who had been converted to the faith by Paul. As a child Timothy was educated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul was so impressed by this young man’s faith, loyalty, and intellect that he called him to be a partner in

mission.

Together, they were the first Christians to venture into Europe. Paul entrusted the younger man with important and difficult tasks, such as leading the church in Ephesus. Their relationship lasted for two decades until Paul’s death.

Paul’s missives to Timothy were personal letters with a congregational focus. In the letters Paul offers advice on how to care for the church. He spells out what it means to be a healthy and effective leader in the young church. The church in Ephesus was facing difficulties because of the actions of some of the leaders; Paul knew if the church was to survive Timothy must show true leadership skills and call others to do the same.

Timothy was well-acquainted with Paul’s theology and so did not need the apostle to outline true belief. What he did need was instruction in being a good, Christian leader. Through his letters, Paul encourages, challenges, and instructs his young friend.

In these two letters to Timothy, Paul offers important information on leadership not found elsewhere in the New Testament. He encourages Timothy—and he encourages us—to think about vital questions like: What is ministry? What is our role as pastors, leaders, and laypeo-

ple? Paul knows firsthand that poor leadership is dangerous to the church. He encourages the growth of strong, God-centered leaders in each congregation.

In 1 Timothy Paul stresses the importance of prayer in the life of a leader. In fact, he believes it is the first thing one should do. He also addresses the importance of spiritual maturity and of teaching by one’s own example. He reminds Timothy that he should not see his young age as an impediment to ministry. Paul knew that spiritual maturity is not measured in chronological years but in the depth of relationship with Christ.

One of the ministries the Church of the Brethren does very well is encouraging young people to grow and lead in important ways. National Youth Conference and the national youth/young adult work-camps are coordinated by young adults. Brethren Volunteer Service offers leadership through a wide variety of projects in the US and around the world. Ministry Summer Service pairs a student with a mentor, and together they share in a summer ministry experience. Timothy’s ministry is celebrated each time a young person takes on a leadership role in the church with the support of a more experienced leader.

Paul completes his first letter by

1 & 2 TIMOTHY: A CLOSER LOOK

Authorship: Although Paul’s name is firmly attached to these letters, many scholars now believe they were actually written by his students years after his death. Regardless of the true author, the letters clearly state Paul’s theology and relationship with Timothy.

Difficult passages: Paul’s letters contain some elements that many find difficult to reconcile with his other writings. His admonitions to slaves to respect their masters and his call for women to remain silent seem to be at odds with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Passages like these make it all the more important to read scripture in light of the context in which it was written, and to have a larger sense of Paul’s theology and faith.



PAUL ASKS TIMOTHY TO VISIT HIM IN PRISON AND TO BRING WITH HIM A COAT, BOOKS, AND PAPER. THIS REQUEST INVOKES A SENSE OF INTIMACY BETWEEN THE TWO FRIENDS—INTIMACY BORN OF FAITH AND STRENGTHENED BY TRIALS.



implored the family of faith to care for one another and not to be seduced by the love of money.

The second letter celebrates the faith Timothy received from his mother and grandmother, acknowledging that the faith that lived in them now lives and breathes in the young man. Paul does not shy away from sharing the concerns and problems he faces. Timothy needs to know that leading a church is not an easy task. Not all leaders will be honest people. Not all congregations will follow sound teaching. Timothy will find his strength in his faith in Christ, his understanding of the scriptures, and his relationship with strong Christians like Paul.

The book of 2 Timothy ends with a personal note not often seen in scripture. Paul asks Timothy to visit him in prison and to bring with him a coat, books, and paper. This request invokes a sense of intimacy between the two friends—intimacy born of faith and strengthened by trials; intimacy modeled by Jesus Christ and embodied by the apostle and the young man.

In one sense these letters are Paul's farewell instructions to Timothy. The elder is passing on the mantle of leadership to the younger. And isn't this the way of Christian life? Generation after generation of mature Christians share their wisdom and guidance with a new generation with the confidence that the faith will grow and the church will continue to follow Christ. **AM**

Christy J. Waltersdorff is pastor of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill.

MESSANGER's "Journey through the Word" series will provide a brief overview of a different book (or books) of the Bible each month through December 2009. Coming in May: Titus/Philemon, by James F. Myer.

Brethren among delegation exploring issues in Chiapas

Several Church of the Brethren members returned in early February from a 10-day Faith Expedition to Mexico's Chiapas state. The trip was sponsored by the Brethren Witness/Washington Office in partnership with Equal Exchange and Witness for Peace.

The Brethren were among an 18-member delegation that spent several days in the town of San Cristobal, exploring the history of Mexico and the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the United States' southern neighbor. In addition, issues of militarism and immigration were addressed in regards to policy decisions made by both Mexico and the US.

The group met with organizations representing governmental and nongovernmental structures in regard to development and humanitarian support of the Mexican people. Concerned emphasis was given to indigenous communities who remain persecuted and impoverished, most often due to government suppression. A sobering highlight of the trip was a visit to the nonviolent community of Acteal, which only 11 years earlier had been attacked by paramilitary, leaving 45 dead.

The delegation also visited an indigenous community that produces coffee sold through a regional cooperative. The cooperative markets the coffee as organic, fair-trade coffee



Indigenous girls from Mexico's Chiapas state greet a Faith Expedition delegation.

to Equal Exchange, as well as other fair-trade companies in the US and Europe. Members of the group were able to see the entire production cycle of the coffee that ends up in their cups each morning. The average producer of this coffee works in difficult conditions to earn less than \$3 per day.

The delegates completed their trip with a day of developing strategies that will enable them to clearly articulate their experiences, work toward strengthening free-trade policies, develop fair trade partnerships, and directly advocate on behalf of the people of Mexico.

Matching grant program tops \$200,000 in aid to food banks

Through the end of February, the Church of the Brethren's Domestic Hunger Matching Grant program had provided \$206,000 to food banks and local hunger relief organizations across the country. That total includes amounts raised by the 217 congregations that had taken part to date and matching grants given by the Church of the Brethren's Global Food Crisis Fund and Emergency Disaster Fund, in partnership with the denomination's stewardship office.

Earlier in February, the two funds requested second allocations for the program after the original grant amount had been completely disbursed. As of Feb. 23, the \$87,500 designated by the funds had been fully expended. The amount raised by the 217 congregations averaged \$545; the matching grants averaged \$403.

More than a dozen additional congregations were awaiting matching grants. "Because of two donor gifts of \$20,000 each, designated for US families entrenched in poverty or hunger, we

hope to be able to fulfill the remaining grant requests," said Ken Neher, director of the stewardship office.

Howard Royer, manager of the Global Food Crisis Fund, said numerous letters of thanks had already begun to "roll in" from food banks, stretching from the East Coast to Washington state.

Childcare team responds to plane crash in Buffalo

A Critical Response Childcare Team, part of the Children's Disaster Services (CDS) ministry of the Church of the Brethren, responded to the Feb. 12 crash of Continental Connection flight 3407, in which 50 people were killed near Buffalo, N.Y.

The team, which included eight trained CDS volunteers, completed its work on Feb. 21. Seven of the eight live in the Buffalo area, including team leaders Barb and Don Weaver.

"All gave up personal commitments to work with children" of families affected by the disaster, reported CDS director Judy Bezon, who served as part of the team. "The presence of a

compassionate care giver, along with carefully selected play activities, has a significant impact on the recovery of a child who has experienced the trauma of such a loss," Bezon said.

The work of the Weavers included developing a relationship with the local Red Cross, which facilitated communication, Bezon added. Child care was provided in a hotel suite close to where the families of crash victims gathered.

"Some days there were children throughout the day, others days there were up to 16 children all at once for over three hours," Bezon said. The team also stayed on to care for children during memorial services and calling hours, as requested by the parents.

CDS was invited by the American Red Cross to be a part of their Critical Response Team in 1997. The Critical Response Childcare Teams are groups of experienced CDS volunteers who have received additional training that prepares them to work with children after an aviation incident or other mass casualty event. A six-member team is on call each month, ready to travel within four hours of deployment by the American Red Cross.

BVS begins new emphasis focused on community living

Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) has announced a new endeavor, working to develop community living opportunities for its volunteers in partnership with interested congregations.

BVS will be seeking Church of the Brethren congregations that can host a community house to accommodate groups of four to six volunteers who will work at project sites in the area. Volunteers will commit to being active in the life of the congregation. Housing could be in an unused parsonage or other suitable housing arrangement.

The new emphasis is part of an ongoing partnership that BVS has established with the Volunteers Exploring Vocation program

through the Fund for Theological Education (FTE) and a grant from the Lilly Foundation. Through the new emphasis on community living within the context of a local church community, BVS is seeking to broaden the vocations program it is already doing through FTE. The vocations program invites volunteers to explore their call to ministry.

BVS named Dana Cassell as volunteer staff for vocation and community living, effective Feb. 1, to lead the new effort. She will work with Jim Lehman of Elgin, Ill., facilitator of the vocations program for BVS. Cassell is a member of First Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., and a graduate of the College of William and Mary. She holds a master of divinity degree from Candler School of Theology and recently completed 15 months as a BVS volunteer in the Church of the Brethren Ministry Office.

NOAC's 10th edition will focus on the 'Legacies of Wisdom'

"Legacies of Wisdom: Weaving Old and New" is the theme of the 10th National Older Adult Conference (NOAC), to be held Sept. 7-11 at Lake Junaluska (N.C.) Conference and Retreat Center. Sponsored by the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren, this 10th NOAC will celebrate the legacy born out of the wisdom, foresight, and creativity of the planners of the first NOAC, held in 1992.

Adults age 50 and older are invited to attend. Speakers, preachers, workshops, and entertainers will explore the legacies of the faith that adults yearn to pass on to future generations—reclaiming the treasures of the

past while creating new possibilities of hope for families, the church, and the world. The week will include Bible study, recreation, creative expression, fellowship, and service.

A "Hike for Haiti" around Lake Junaluska will raise funds to assist with leadership development in Haiti, and school and hygiene kits will be assembled to give impoverished children and struggling families needed resources for learning, health, and wellness.

Scheduled preachers include Christopher Bowman, pastor of Oakton (Va.) Church of the Brethren; Cynthia Hale, senior pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Ga.; and

Dennis Webb, pastor of Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren. Other main speakers are Rachael Freed, founder of Life-Legacies, who will speak on "Harvesting the Wisdom of Your Life: Creating your own Spiritual-Ethical Will"; David Waas, presenting a keynote address on the theme, "And the Earth Moved"; and Judson University (Elgin, Ill.) professor Michael McKeever, speaking on "Wisdom on

the Road," exploring the journey motif in the Gospel of Luke.

Throughout the week, Bob Neff will lead the morning Bible study. Entertainment includes concerts by acclaimed Quaker

singer/songwriter Carrie Newcomer and Brethren musicians Andy and Terry Murray.

Members of the 2009 NOAC planning committee are Deanna Brown, Barb and Lester Kesselring, Joyce Nolen, and Glenn and Linda Timmons. Kim Ebersole is the coordinator. Registration brochures were mailed to past NOAC attendees, congregations, districts, and retirement communities in early March. Information about NOAC is available at www.brethren.org/NOAC or by calling the Caring Ministries office at 800-323-8039. Online registration is available for credit card users.



SPECIAL EVENTS

April 16-20 Brethren Volunteer Service retreat, Newark, Ill.

April 17-19 McPherson (Kan.) College Regional Youth Conference

April 18-19 Brethren Benefit Trust board meeting, Elgin, Ill.

April 23-26 Church of the Brethren Cross-Cultural Celebration and Consultation, Miami

April 25 Congregational Life 'Reach Out and Welcome In' workshop, Lacey, Wash.

April 25-30 Youth Christian Citizenship Seminar, New York/Washington, D.C.

April 26-29 Council of District Executives professional growth event, Parkville, Mo.

May 1-2 Children's Disaster Services Level 1 workshop, Kerneysville, W.Va.

May 1-3 Church of the Brethren Wellness Ministry Women's Retreat, Lyons, Mich.

May 2 Deacon training event, Mount Morris, Ill.

May 3 National Youth Sunday

May 7 National Day of Prayer

May 16 Deacon training event, Palmyra, Pa.

May 17 Health Promotion Sunday

May 23-25 Church of the Brethren Young Adult Conference, Camp Swatara, Bethel, Pa.

May 27-29 Spiritual Directors Network retreat, Sharpsburg, Md

• The Church of the Brethren eliminated two denominational staff positions in February, citing a re-evaluation of staffing needs. The coordinator of district ministry position, which had been staffed by **Nancy F. Knepper**, was eliminated on Feb. 17; the coordinator of mission connections position, which had been staffed by **Janis Pyle**, was eliminated on Feb. 16.

Knepper had served as coordinator of district ministry since October 1997. She started working for the Church of the Brethren General Board in February 1989 as director of Outdoor Ministries in a half-time position through 1997. An ordained minister, she also served briefly as interim coordinator of the General Board's Ministry team. Previously she was administra-

tor and manager of Camp Ithiel in Gotha, Fla., and administered Atlantic Southeast District's outdoor ministries program.

Pyle had served in her position since November 2001, seeking to strengthen the connections of church members with the denomination's global mission efforts. In previous employment she was a writer/editor for newspapers, corporations, and non-profits.

• **Paul Derstine** has announced his retirement as president and CEO of IMA World Health (formerly Interchurch Medical Assistance), a nonprofit organization headquartered at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. Derstine is a member of Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren. Derstine

served IMA for 17 years. During his tenure, he shaped IMA World Health from a service organization with a staff of four focused mainly on distributing donations, to a membership organization with a staff of 75 working in five countries to strengthen health systems and eliminate tropical disease. In 2008, a *Forbes* magazine report on "America's 200 Largest Charities" identified IMA as one of the 20 most skilled and well managed among that group. During a year of transition, Derstine will continue to serve as president. The IMA board has appointed a transition committee to work with a consulting firm to name a successor in late 2009. Donald Parker, IMA board chair, is leading the transition committee.

• **Lois Grove** has been named district minister of leadership development for Northern Plains District. The new position was created by the district board with "awareness of the need for a dedicated effort to identify, call out, train, and nurture leadership in our district," an announcement in the district newsletter said.

Responsibilities will include communicating with individuals and churches to identify gifts of leadership and offer opportunities for training, identifying needs and opportunities for professional growth for ministers, and ongoing development of ministers' spiritual awareness and growth.

• **John and Mary Mueller** have been named to a new role as project consultants for Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM), on a contract basis. They formerly worked as regional project directors. Their new position was created to assist BDM in achieving a number of goals identified through a recent survey, including teaching construction skills to volunteers, increasing the number of homes rebuilt, and maintaining leadership teams. The Muellers will support the work of BDM project leaders and volunteers by providing construction expertise, project estimation, consultation, spiritual support, household and transitional management, and teaching construction skills.

"Bear one another's burdens..."—Galatians 6:2

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Annual Conference announces ballot for positions open in 2009

The ballot has been announced for the 2009 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, to be held June 26-30 in San Diego, Calif. The nominating committee of Standing Committee—a committee of the representatives of Church of the Brethren districts—developed a slate of candidates, and the full Standing Committee then voted to create the ballot that will be presented. Nominees are listed by position:

Annual Conference moderator-elect: Robert Earl Alley of Harrisonburg, Va.; Rhonda Pittman Gingrich of Minneapolis, Minn.



Robert Earl Alley

Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee: Connie R. Burkholder of Great Bend, Kan.; Victoria Jean (Sayers) Smith of Elizabethtown, Pa.



Rhonda Pittman Gingrich

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Emma Jean Franklin Woodard of Roanoke, Va.; Tim Button-Harrison of Ames, Iowa.

Committee on Interchurch Relations: Jim Hardenbrook of Edinburg, Va.; Carolyn Schrock of Mountain Grove, Mo.

Bethany Theological Seminary trustee, representing the Church of the Brethren colleges: Katy Gray Brown of North Manchester, Ind.; David Witkovsky of Huntingdon, Pa.

Brethren Benefit Trust board: Carol Hess of Lancaster, Pa.; John Waggoner of Herndon, Va.

On Earth Peace board: Robert C. Johansen of Granger, Ind.; David R. Miller of Dayton, Va.

Registration and an information packet for the Conference are available at www.cobannualconference.org.



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'The Shack': Tackling complex questions

I've heard a lot of things about the novel *The Shack*. *The Shack* will change your life. *The Shack* is blasphemous. *The Shack* makes everything clear. *The Shack* is demonic.

I'd been given a copy by a good friend whose taste I trust. Her description of the plot was intriguing. Basically it's about a man named Mack whose daughter had been brutally murdered. The tragedy turned him against God—until God visited with the man in the very shack where his daughter's body had been discovered.



FRANK RAMIREZ

But I had a tall pile of books I was meaning to read, so *The Shack*, described on the title page as "A novel by Wm. Paul Young in collaboration with Wayne Jacobsen and Brad Cummings," took a spot about a third of the way down that stack.

Then I got a call from a friend of mine whose wife read the book and asked him to order a crateful so she could

give them out to friends. That caused him to do a little searching on the Web, where he discovered that many people considered the book a demonic trap full of deliberate and willful errors.

That got me interested enough to move the book up to the top of the stack and start reading. And once I started I, too, found it very difficult to put down.

The Shack is an engaging novel that explores concepts like the Trinity, the nature of evil, free will, forgiveness, salvation, heaven, hell, and judgment. That's a partial list, by the way.

It is, to be sure, a little talky at times, and occasionally over the top. It is startling to hear God speak in jargon and slang. Attempts to convey ethnicity seem a little forced. But these are minor quibbles compared to the moments of great and transcendent beauty, evoking tears of sorrow and joy. Powerful is not too strong a word. The book is compelling and thought-provoking, to say the least.

It is a novel. For some the word "fiction" means lies. Story, however, contains the heart of truth, as Christians like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were at pains to point out. Truth be told, there is nothing in this book that one would not encounter in Christian books that wrestle with difficult issues.

How can a God of love allow unspeakable tragedies to hap-

pen? That's the real problem this book tackles, assaults, embraces. I appreciate the fact that complex questions do not get simple answers—and if the authors outline a solution, they do so without cutting away the real mystery of faith.

Mack's anger and struggle against God is not condemned by the Bible. If one thing is clear from scripture (see Job, Moses, Isaiah, and Jesus) no one gets zapped by lightning for complaining to and about God. Relationship demands such honesty, and this novel is about the relationship that God desires to have with everyone, and that everyone ought to desire to have with God and with everyone else.

I suppose what throws some people off is that God the Father appears as a black woman, Jesus as a Middle Eastern laborer, and the Spirit as an Asian woman. Oh, and when Wisdom makes an appearance she is Hispanic. The characters are at pains to relate that how they appear is not who they are. The novel makes it clear that Mack had experienced a difficult relationship with his own father, and seeing God as father might not have been helpful, at least at first.

As stated earlier, it's a novel. Personally, I hope you enjoy it as much I did. And as it says in the foreword, "Mack would like you to know that if you happen upon this story and hate it... it wasn't primarily written for you."

Some Brethren in the 19th century argued that Brethren didn't need outside reading material because they already had the Bible. But the earliest Christians cherished works we might consider novels: *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Book of Enoch*, *The Book of Jubilees*, and *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

The best course for those who disagree about the book might be to follow the advice of the 1762 Annual Meeting of the Brethren, which stated on the controversy about Catharine Hummer, a young Brethren girl who claimed she had looked into heaven and saw people baptized after death, "... that those who think well of it, should not judge those who are of the contrary opinion, and those who do not esteem it, should not despise those who expect to derive some use and benefit from it" (*The Brethren's Encyclopedia*, by Henry Kurtz, pp. 136-137).

Good advice then and now. 

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

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Shack*. **Pages:** 256. **Author:** William P. Young. **Publisher:** Windblown Media (July 2008).

List price: \$14.99 (paperback).

Other notes: According to the book's website, work is under way to turn the book into a feature film.

What others are saying: "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his." —Eugene Peterson, professor emeritus of spiritual theology, Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

To order: Call Brethren Press, 800-441-3712.



ONCAMPUS

Bridgewater College (*Bridgewater, Va.*)
Bridgewater president Phillip C. Stone helped to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth on Feb. 12 with presentations at Eastern Mennonite High School in Harrisonburg, Va., and conducted the 34th annual Lincoln Day Ceremony at the Lincoln Cemetery.

Elizabethtown College (*Elizabethtown, Pa.*)
Elizabethtown professor Donald Kraybill, co-author of *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*, discussed the book with a panel of sociology students on Feb. 12 in the Bucher Meetinghouse. Later in the month, on Feb. 26, Brethren historian and author Emmert F. Bittinger presented a guest lecture titled "Crisis of Conscience: The Shenandoah Anabaptists During the Civil War."

Juniata College (*Huntingdon, Pa.*)
Juniata students, under the leadership of the Campus Ministry office, sponsored an annual "Meal for CROP" Feb. 17. Each year, the Christian Ministry Board asks Juniata students to sacrifice their evening meal so those meals can be sold to the general public. Their places in line are sold to members of the community, and the money is donated to CROP and local food banks.

University of La Verne (*La Verne, Calif.*)
Asher Naim, a former Israeli diplomat who is an internationally recognized human rights activist and noted author, discussed the plight and 1990s rescue of Ethiopian Jews during a free March 5 lecture in the school's La Fetra Auditorium.

Manchester College (*North Manchester, Ind.*)
State and area conservation leaders and biologists gathered Feb. 12 to organize the steering committee of the \$1 million Middle Eel River Watershed Initiative. Committee members planned to define the mission of the initiative and create sub-committees that will focus on water quality, education and outreach, said newly hired watershed coordinator, Terri Michaelis, who will serve on the committee.

McPherson College (*McPherson, Kan.*)
McPherson's enrollment increased for the sixth year in a row for 2008-2009, topping 500 full-time students for the first time since 1976. The total of 509 includes 200 new students who enrolled this past fall.

Youth Peace Travel Team chosen for 2009

Four young women will make up the denomination's 2009 Youth Peace Travel Team: Chelsea Goss of Mechanicsville, Va.; Jessica Flory-Steury of Kettering, Ohio; Marianne Houff of Bethel, Pa.; and Bethany Funkhouser of Strasburg, Va.

The team will represent the Church of the Brethren as it travels to camps across the denomination during the summer. They also will attend and lead sessions at National Junior High Conference, Annual Conference, and a workcamp at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

The Youth Peace Travel Team is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren's Youth/Young Adult Ministry office and Brethren Witness/Washington Office, Brethren Volunteer Service, On Earth Peace, and Outdoor Ministries Association. The program is designed to share with Brethren youth the message of peace and justice that has been a core faith tradition of the church throughout its 300-year history.

Youth office provides guidelines for NYC 2010

The Church of the Brethren Youth/Young Adult Ministry office has released some guidelines to help congregations and youth groups prepare for participation in the 2010 National Youth Conference (NYC), which will take place July 17-22, 2010, at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo. All youth who have completed ninth grade through one year of college (at the time of NYC) will be eligible to attend; participants and churches who wish to request an exception to these age guidelines are asked to consult with the NYC staff. All youth must be accompanied by an adult advisor; congregations must send at least one advisor for every seven youth; churches sending female youth are requested to send a female advisor, churches sending male youth are requested to send a male advisor; all adult advisors must be a minimum of 22 years of age. Children of participants, advisors, and staff are not permitted at NYC unless they are eligible as NYC participants. Contact 2010nyc@brethren.org for more information.



BBQ bucks: After Camp Mack representative Mike Dilling visited Agape Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., the congregation's church board overwhelmingly voted to support the camp's "On the Way" capital fund campaign. To finance it, Agape decided to use the money raised at its annual chicken BBQ event, held at the Allen County 4-H Fair—which came to a total of \$1,177.82. Funds collected from the next three years of the BBQ will also go to the camp's campaign. Above, Agape board chair Steve Fox, right, presents the congregation's 2008 contribution check to Rex Miller, executive director of Camp Mack, at district conference.

Courtesy of Roger Haupt

 **Pontius' Puddle**



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BVS opened my eyes

In the February 2009 issue of MESSENGER, my eye caught two articles on BVS (Brethren Volunteer Service). The first one was on BVS/Brethren Revival Fellowship unit 281. I could hardly believe that I was 271 units ahead of it. I was in the 10th unit.

The second was a letter to the editor titled "Long Live BVS!" I agree with Gene Mascioli that it should have a long life. It played a very important role in my life, as I was also only 19 years old, the same as Mr. Mascioli. Reading his comments made me start to recollect my experiences in BVS during my tenure. I was at the "farm" in Falfurrias, Texas, and then at the program of First Church of the Brethren in Chicago.

The two assignments were as different as night and day from each other in venue and in challenge. I experienced situations that were totally different from each other and were totally foreign from my point of view to that point in my life. Those experiences and the training at New Windsor opened my eyes and heart in many ways.

I have always cherished that time with BVS.

Leon Albert
San Diego, Calif.

Keep Nigeria in prayer

We hope to read more about the Nigerian Brethren call for prayer (January 2009 MESSENGER, p. 21). I am attending the church that Miss Lily "Pennie" Pinneo attends; she was significant in starting the hospital at Jos, in central Nigeria, in 1947. She is also the nurse that the book *Fever* by John G. Fuller was written about.

She reported that 500 past and present nurses from the hospital met for their annual convention held in September 2008 in Jos. Soon after the convention sectarian violence was sparked by a disputed political election in the town of Jos. Four hundred people from Jos were killed, and homes, businesses, churches, and mosques were burned.

We are keeping the area in and around Jos in prayer and are anxious to read more about it and how the church in the US is responding.

Virginia Groves
Sebring, Fla.

Caring for your pastor

At the 2008 Annual Conference held in Richmond, Va., the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee invited individuals to share their ideas on "how to care for your pastor."

Many Conference participants stopped and shared suggestions by writing out an idea or sharing what they were already doing for their pastor. After reading through the over 100 ways to care for your pastor, it was suggested we could share these ideas with others who just might need a good idea.

The area that had the most numerous suggestions was focused on the emotional aspect of caring. Individuals shared how they prayed for their pastor, "asking for their pastor to be guided, protected, and generally blessed as they did their ministry." Other suggested thanking the pastor, offering to babysit, giving invitations to dinner and/or gift cards to just relax without an agenda. Basically, these results showed caring and appreciation for one in their "family."

Another area of care that had many suggestions was about financial concerns. Suggestions of salaries being "at least at scale," the surety of health insurance and pension, adequate vacation time, and housing situations that were fair and responsive to the differing situations pastors face in these changing markets showed caring in solid ways.

The single item most referred to was sabbath rest or sabbaticals. This concept was suggested over and over, many times being the only idea turned in on the index card to our committee.

Of the many other ideas—such as care groups, prayer groups, watch-over groups, volunteers to do specific tasks, and sharing the "yoke of service"—was the idea that "full-time" cannot mean 24/7 times 365.

Out of the 100-plus suggestions of a positive note, there was one that was more hurtful than a helpful suggestion in caring. We do hope whatever was present will be taken care of in a loving spirit.

Great ideas shared privately, and now seen clearly, are only ideas until they are carried into practice. How can you care for your pastor? How can you make a difference in caring for your pastor?

Peter C. Kaltenbaugh
Meyersdale, Pa.
Pastoral Compensation
and Benefits Advisory Committee

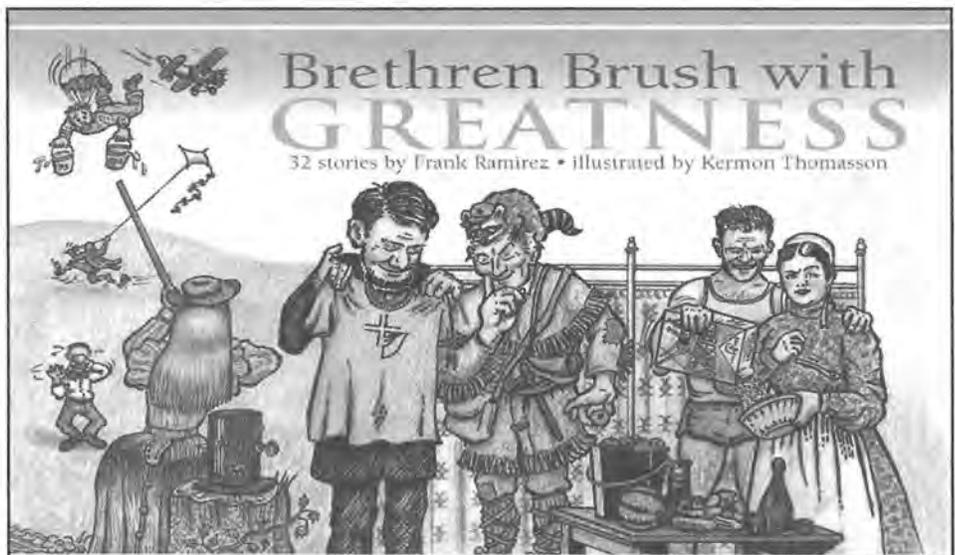


Church of the Brethren

Take one step at a time ...

- download the Wellness Study Guide by clicking on the GROW section on the new www.brethren.org site for use in small groups
- contact the Wellness Ministry office for ideas on starting a wellness ministry, a 'symptom' list of healthy congregations, or scheduling a speaker for an event at your church - mgarrison_abc@brethren.org in Caring Ministries
- attend one of the well-being sessions at Annual Conference on staying sane during change or experience new ideas for self-care
- commit to walking during the "Hike for Haiti" if you attend NOAC
- and most of all, take time to feed your physical, mental and spiritual self

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- 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)
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Where do we stand?

Where do we stand on bearing arms and being a peace church? I have read so much on the peace subject in recent MESSAGERS that I am confused.

At the 300th anniversary Annual Conference in Richmond, I sat behind the tellers' station. After the offerings were lifted, armed persons would come in to escort the money away. When someone is armed, they are prepared to kill.

The Brethren church divested of Caterpillar Co. stock because some of the equipment was used for war. It seems we are more willing to protect our money than our country.

Raymond Deardorff
Dover, Pa

CORRECTION

Due to a design and proofing error, the credit line for the last "Quoteworthy" quote on page 7 of the March issue was cut off in mid-sentence. The sentence about Shane Claiborne should have gone on to say, "He was speaking about the current economic crisis in an interview with ReadtheSpirit.com."

CLASSIFIED ADS

Walk where Jesus walked. Come along with Rev. John and Rev. Linda Stoner as they return to the Holy Land. The Stoners are both ordained CoB pastors with over 22 years experience as professional travel agents. This inspirational journey takes place November 3-12, 2009, and departs from Western Pennsylvania. Departures can also be arranged from any major gateway city. Transportation, first-class lodging, daily breakfast and dinner, and more included. \$3,389.00 877-456-8769 or www.small-grouptours.com for details.

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



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New Members

Beavercreek, Ohio: Jon Hess, Minh Hess, Noel Siler, Linda Sabin, Rosella Combs

Berkey, Windber, Pa.: Rozanna Helbig, Tom Haire, Bev Haire

Chiques, Manheim, Pa.: Jake Nolt, Tina Nolt, Charlotte Parsons, Tracy Kreiser, Karlie Nolt, Erica Heisey, Malinda Heisey, Brooke Myer, Nicolas Myer, Colby Eckman, Beth Hoffer

Copper Hill, Va.: Cynthia Manning Beckner, Kira Flattery, Maggie Mason, David Mason, Misty Knapp, William Akers, Debbie Akers, Kali Akers, Jesse Akers

Danville, First, Danville, Va.: Amber Hogan, Charrie Marie Field Benedetti

Faith Community of the Brethren Home: New Oxford, Pa.: Harvey Kline, Ruth Kline, Charlotte R. Herb, W. Romayne Kemper, Richard Devault, Marian Devault

First Central, Kansas City, Kan.: Lisa Burnett

Fraternity, Winston-Salem, N.C.: Holly Brooks

Frederick, Md.: David Anspach, Denny Bernhardt, Emily Larson Brandon, Lyndale Brandon, Marissa Clopper, Jan Diaz, Manny Diaz, Rachel Fogle, Janet Gorden, Milton Gorden, Carol Ann Greenwood, Richard A. Greenwood, Jr., Chuck Horne, Lisa Horne, Sherie Johnson, Jennifer Kuhn, Barbara Lawrence, Shannon Loftis, Scott Mogar, Joseph Anthony Ortiz, Bruce Persons, Debra Persons, Lewis Persons, Brett Query, Jill Query, Robert D. Rice, Faith N. Richardson, Brenda Rowles, Andrew Schnepfe, Chanin Storm, Bennett Walker, Stefanie Walker, Jason Wallin, Jill Wallin, Lois Willard, Becky Zimmerman, Tarah M. Zuniga Sanchez

Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.: Duane Grady, Beverly Weaver

Greensburg, Pa.: James Gettins, Shelley Gettins, Sylvia Logan, Reid Maust, Christine Maust

Grottoes, Va.: Donald Fitzsimons, Sarah Long, Barry Trimble, Doris Trimble

Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Owen Etter, Ermaleen Etter, Mark Pickens, Robert Ziegler, Nancy Ziegler, Linda Wevodau, John Michael Pickens

Midland, Va.: John Keys

Midway, Lebanon, Pa.: Maurice A. Taylor, Margie Gray, Sarah Gray, Kelly Gray, Darren Hitz

Mount Hermon, Bassett, Va.: Christine D. Wilson

Mountain Grove, Fuls Run, Va.: Angela LaPrade, Michael LaPrade, Jenny Dove

Pine Creek, North Liberty, Ind.: Agnes Gorby, Phyllis Scarbrough, Karen Peterson, Richard Peterson

Ridgely, Md.: Lisa Anderson, Donna Mathews, Donna Milby, Kelly Ricker

Smith Mountain Lake, Wirtz, Va.: Shirley Wray, Diane Thompson, Polly Hawkins, Leonard Foley, Sandi Foley, Scot Overstreet, Wanda Overstreet

Stover Memorial, Des Moines, Iowa: Harold Smith, Louise Smith

Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.: Ariana Eshelman, Nolan McBride, Brandon Miller, Guy Biddle, Christina Biddle, Connor Biddle, John Dye, Linda Dye, Mark Steinmetz, Jenny Steinmetz, Jennifer Myers

White Oak, Manheim, Pa.: Lauren Fahnestock, Krandon Wenger, Emily Kline, Kayleen Wenger, Jordan High, Briana Fahnestock, Anthony Hess, Matthew Stoner, Jared Martin, Brandon Martin, Andre Nolt, Alexander Martin, Hans Nolt, Andrew Cassel, Michael Cassel, Shana Heagy, Bernice Copenhaver, Abrielle Minnich

Zion Hill, Columbiana, Ohio: Katherine Tuck, Linda Simko, Richard Rubeck, Lori Rubeck, Robert Jones, Betty Jones, John Mihalko, Jane Mihalko, Jill Bair, Martha Jarvis

Anniversaries

Biller, Jack and Evelyn, Harrisonburg, Va., 60

Bryant, Kenneth and Ruby, Goshen, Ind., 72

Burkholder, Bob and Maxine, New Market, Va., 60

Carter, Bryan and Diane, Nappanee, Ind., 50

Cashour, Stewart and Lillian, Frederick, Md., 65

Coffman, Bob and Carolyn, Moneta, Va., 55

Creager, Max E. and Nancy, Waynesboro, Pa., 50

Erbaugh, Lowell and Kay, Dayton, Ohio, 60

Fagan, William and Lorraine, Huntingdon, Pa., 50

Fields, Ron and Connie, Syracuse, Ind., 50

Flora, Clifford and Louise, Elkhart, Ind., 70

Forbus, Jim and Ellen, Frederick, Md., 55

Frenger, Bob and Ada, Syracuse, Ind., 60

Garst, Denton and Peggy, Frederick, Md., 55

Kirkdorffer, Phil and Shirley, New Paris, Ind., 55

Layman, William and Ellen, Dayton, Va., 65

Lewellen, Arthur and Phyllis, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 55

Lose, Leroy and Eleanor, Johnstown, Pa., 55

Messick, Mylin and Doris, Middletown, Pa., 50

Meunier, Bob and Maxine, Littleton, Colo., 55

Nogle, Francis and Louise, Waynesboro, Pa., 65

Rodgers, Terry and Nancy, Zullinger, Pa., 50

Rohrer, Jim and June, Harrisonburg, Va., 60

Shoemaker, Dick and Virginia, Broadway, Va., 55

Stitely, Ray and Josephine, Waynesboro, Pa., 50

Thomas, Clifford and Marie, Nappanee, Ind., 50

Todd, Edward and Mary Jane, Columbiana, Ohio, 50

Whalen, Dennis and Melva, Huntingdon, Pa., 60

Williams, Richard and Karen, Ollie, Iowa, 50

Deaths

Abrecht, Charlotte, 86, Mountain Top, Pa., Oct. 22

Ambrose, Evelyn, 94, Huntingdon, Pa., Jan. 16

Andrews, Ruth, 92, Darby, Pa., Sept. 23

Angleberger, George, 85, Walkersville, Md., May 5, 2008

Anglemeyer, Frank, 87, Wakarusa, Ind., July 15

Baker, Lester W., 83, Frederick, Md., July 21

Baughman, Kathryn, 85, Somerset, Pa., Feb. 7

Baughman, Loretta, 74, South Bend, Ind., Dec. 15

Beachley, Norma, 80, Chambersburg, Pa., Dec. 22

Blair, Georgina V., 92, Virden, Ill., Jan. 26

Bowlus, Ruth Louise, 95, Frederick, Md., Jan. 16

Bridge, Donald, 63, Easton, Md., Jan. 11

Bullock, Eleanor, 90, Wawa, Pa., March 8, 2008

Bush, Mary Jane, 75, Windber, Pa., Dec. 29

Bussard, Robert Lee, 65, Middletown, Md., April 29, 2008

Bussard, Vada, 90, Boonsboro, Md., Jan. 15, 2008

Cecil, Madeline Emma, 93, Frederick, Md., Nov. 20

Clapper, David, 46, Papua New Guinea, Aug. 9

Coffman, Ray J., 82, Huntingdon, Pa., Nov. 10

Cooper, Josie, 96, Harman, W.Va., Dec. 22

Cramer, Kathleen, 86, Frederick, Md., Sept. 12

Crosby, Jane M., 92, Huntingdon, Pa., Oct. 24

DeGolier, Verna, 90, Somerset, Pa., Jan. 29

DeGrange, David C., 54, Frederick, Md., June 22

DeGrange, Lee, 91, Frederick, Md., Feb. 2, 2008

DeLair, Marjorie, 84, Thurmont, Md., Nov. 11

Diediker, Charlie, 89, West Plains, Mo., Jan. 13

Dorsett, Florence Beckner, 86, Waynesboro, Pa., Nov. 27

Edwards, Thelma, 91, Denver, Colo., March 2, 2008

Eidemiller, Merlin S., 93, Beavercreek, Ohio, Aug. 14

Fahnestock, Edith, 85, Manheim, Pa., May 21

Fifer, Mary Fries, 94, Frederick, Md., Nov. 19

Fisher, Russell E., 90, Rocky Mount, Va., Oct. 18

Fogelsanger, Marjorie, 70, Chambersburg, Pa., Nov. 16

Fogle, Alvin Eugene, 59, Frederick, Md., June 17

Fraleigh, Harold, 92, Englewood, Ohio, Jan. 16

Furry, L. Carl, 92, Williamsburg, Pa., Jan. 21

Gipe, Mary Virginia, 68, Shippensburg, Pa., Nov. 18

Greene, Margaret Garner, 87, Akron, Pa., Jan. 6

Groom, Dorothy, 92, Grand Junction, Colo., March 22, 2008

Grossnickle, Doris E., 89, Middletown, Md., Oct. 2

Hamilton, Thomas, 85, Salem, Ohio, May 15

Hardenbrook, Dorothy J., 79, Caldwell, Idaho, Jan. 16

Harter, Jack L., 74, Lebanon, Pa., Feb. 5

Hay, Robert, 43, Gettysburg, Pa., Jan. 24

Herbster, Margaret, 87, South Bend, Ind., Dec. 15

Hoover, Rose, 54, Brookville, Ohio, Jan. 29

Hosler, Mark, 91, Lititz, Pa., Sept. 29

Howlett, L. Wayne, 78, Elgin, Ill., Jan. 25

Hunter, John W., 81, Modesto, Calif., Dec. 27

Johnson, John B., 67, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Jan. 16

Judy, Richard M., Jr., 56, Canfield, Ohio, Jan. 10

Jump, Edith Louise Heishman, 92, Arlington, Va., Dec. 30

Kaltenbaugh, Natalie, 80, Bradenton, Fla., April 28, 2008

Kimmel, Edna D., 89, Trent, Pa., Feb. 1

Kimmel, Pauline, 91, Frederick, Md., July 29

Kimmel, William, 90, Ozawick, Kan., July 11

Knight, Edith, 92, Columbiana, Ohio, Oct. 1

Leister, Alma, 99, Huntingdon, Pa., Dec. 20

Linton, Alice Marie, 91, Frederick, Md., April 5, 2008

Lipp, John, 79, Defiance, Ohio, Feb. 3

Liu, C. T., 76, Frederick, Md., March 29, 2008

Luciano, Jane P., 84, Frederick, Md., July 2

Lundquist, Linda Whitacre, 53, Lakewood, Colo., Jan. 31

Mabe, Lanzy Robinson, 94, Hillsville, Va., Jan. 11

Mankle, Ruth Ann, 71, Topeka, Kan., Feb. 2

Martin, Robert E., 86, Dayton, Ohio, Nov. 3

McCue, Karen, 49, Frederick, Md., Jan. 11, 2008

McDowell, Alexander, 26, Alexandria, Pa., Dec. 13

McDowd, Kenneth E., 93, Hanover, Pa., Feb. 13

Meadows, Alice Evelyn, 90, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Feb. 10

Miles, Harold Edward, 70, Ridley Park, Pa., Nov. 27

Miller, Ruth, 93, Frederick, Md., March 30, 2008

Myers, Anna Rice, 91, Waynesboro, Pa., Dec. 24

Neat, Jeanette, 94, Frederick, Md., March 15, 2008

Nicodemus, Marc, 45, Union Bridge, Md., Nov. 24

Ours, Della F., 85, Broadway, Va., Jan. 21

Pence, Geneva W., 95, Bridgewater, Va., Jan. 30

Plows, Doris, 81, Lititz, Pa., Nov. 29

Pluck, Lanny, 78, Drexel Hill, Pa., Sept. 24

Rhodes, Ruthanna, 87, Salem, Ohio, Oct. 1

Richardson, Bertha Poper, 94, Waynesboro, Pa., Sept. 14

Saulsberry, Merrick, 67, Easton, Md., Jan. 6

Shankle, Barbara Lynn, 45, Walkersville, Md., Sept. 11

Shankle, Robert L., Jr., 46, Frederick, Md., April 15, 2008

Shatzer, Paul, 85, Chambersburg, Pa., April 2, 2008

Shilling, Elizabeth J., 93, New Oxford, Pa., Jan. 30

Shoemaker, Emory, 94, Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 5

Shorter, Lois Thornton, 85, Danville, Va., Dec. 31

Smedley, Robert W., 76, Waynesboro, Pa., July 8

Smith, A. Barbara, 77, Dayton, Ohio, Jan. 16

Smith, C. Ralph, 85, Mount Airy, Md., March 18, 2008

Smith, Charles E., 95, Frederick, Md., March 18, 2008

Smith, Vivian, 84, Grottoes, Va., July 7

Smoot, Eliza, 100, Walkersville, Md., Sept. 5

Spangler, Joseph E., 87, Waynesboro, Pa., Dec. 30

Sprenkle, Leone Stoops, 91, New Oxford, Pa., Dec. 10

Steele, Fred, 58, Landisville, Pa., Feb. 7

Sternberg, Beth, 63, Elkhart, Ind., Jan. 7

Stumbaugh, Lucille, 93, Lima, Ohio, Feb. 5

Turner, William F., 75, Broadway, Va., Jan. 11

Ullery, Gladys, 100, Dayton, Ohio, Feb. 3

Walton, Eve Elizabeth, Newborn, Frederick, Md., Nov. 15

I believe

For me, the start of baseball season represents one of the best parts of spring. My concerns about pro sports have grown amid steroid scandals and multimillion-dollar contracts, but the joys of following the sport keep drawing me back.

Despite its greed and excesses, its mistakes and missteps, baseball still captivates me with its strategy, its team chemistry, its pennant chases, and the robust atmosphere of a game. Spring training in Florida and Arizona provides the appetizer, and then the regular season rolls out in April.



WAIT WILTSCHKEK
MESSENGER Editor

My personal cheering loyalties each year go to the Minnesota Twins. I thought I was a loyal and passionate fan—until I moved to the Chicago area nearly a decade ago. There I met all these legendary Chicago Cubs fans I'd heard about. They follow their

loveable losers unflinchingly, packing historic Wrigley Field to capacity, even though the team hasn't won a championship in more than a century.

Stickers proclaim their undying hope: "I Believe." Bracelets also carry the message: "Believe." And now a new documentary is poised to showcase their loyalty. Its title? *We Believe*. Filmmaker John Scheinfeld told Business Wire

church "always feels like home." Even if he messed up and made mistakes, he said, he felt confident the church would always be there to welcome him back with open arms.

I know for some that hasn't been their experience of church. At times I echo those disappointments and frustrations. I frequently grow weary of the politics, the resistance to change, and the inability or unwillingness to adapt. I wince at some of the actions taken and things said. I occasionally even just wish worship would be livelier or that people would show better hospitality.

And yet, somehow, I still come back to feeling that it's where I belong. It is a home of sorts. I still believe.

I don't come from a lengthy Brethren ancestry or a congregation full of relatives, and yet there's still a sense of family. I have worshiped in a variety of other faith traditions and attended schools of other denominations—and I appreciate many things about those other groups—yet the Anabaptist-Pietist lens still makes the most sense to me in viewing my faith and the world and who Christ calls me to be.

Is it perfect? No. Has it lost some of its luster in the course of 300-plus years? Perhaps. But at its best, at its essence, I still feel it has something important to offer the world. It may be the church equivalent of Winston Churchill's famous line: "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried."

We cannot carry the banner of our tradition with a sense of entitlement or better-than-thou, for we cannot discount

the lessons and gifts that other traditions can offer. We can, however, carry it high.

At the same time, we need to guard against blindly jumping on every theological band-

WE CANNOT CARRY THE BANNER OF OUR TRADITION WITH A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT OR BETTER-THAN-THOU, FOR WE CANNOT DISCOUNT THE LESSONS AND GIFTS THAT OTHER TRADITIONS CAN OFFER. **WE CAN, HOWEVER, CARRY IT HIGH.**

he wanted to "capture the unique relationship between a great city and its baseball team" and find out why Cubs fans display their particular passion.

Such fans are sometimes said to follow their team or sport "religiously," and that's probably apt. The root of the word of "religion" carries the meaning of "to tie fast" to something: What is it that we maintain our devotion to, regardless of circumstance?

It brought back to mind a Youth Sunday service I heard at a congregation last spring, in which several youth shared some of their reflections on the church. One talked about the different places he goes and the farther-off places he was likely to go in the future. No matter what, he said, the

wagon that comes down the street. We have something of value, and we need to educate ourselves and those who come in about the heart of our heritage. Our methods and structures will almost certainly have to change, but the message doesn't. If anything, traditional Brethren beliefs are becoming increasingly embraced in the faith mainstream—an interesting challenge to our historic distinctiveness.

For all its foibles and failures, its slowness and setbacks, the church still offers the opportunity to continue the work of Jesus and to do so traveling along the way with others doing their best to do the same. Does it try my patience and drive me nuts? Absolutely. But it's something I can believe in, even if it takes another century.—Ed.

COMING IN MAY: Preview of the 2009 Annual Conference and profile of the moderator, a look at global finances, choosing a church, Bible study on Titus and Philemon, and more.

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- Theodore Roosevelt

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Beyond Our Means

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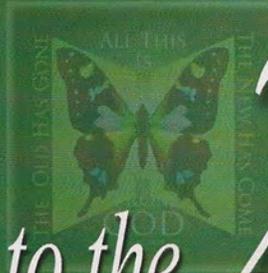
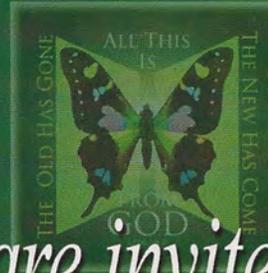
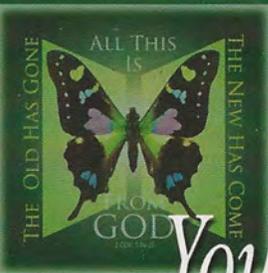


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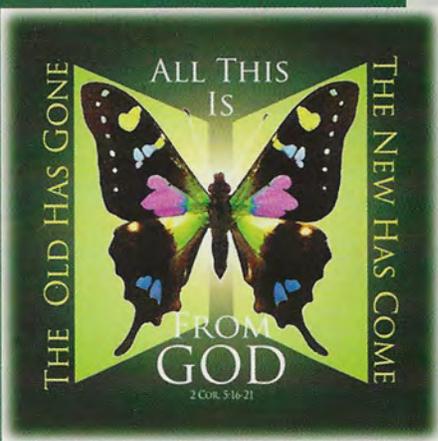
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You are invited to the

Annual Conference in

San Diego, California June 26-30, 2009

Annual Conference Preachers



<i>Friday</i>	<i>David Shumate</i>	<i>Virlina District Executive</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Richard Shreckhise</i>	<i>Pastor, Lancaster, Pennsylvania</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Eric Law</i>	<i>Church Consultant & Author</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Nancy Heishman</i>	<i>Mission Coordinator, Dominican Republic</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Jaime Diaz</i>	<i>Pastor, Castener, Puerto Rico</i>

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