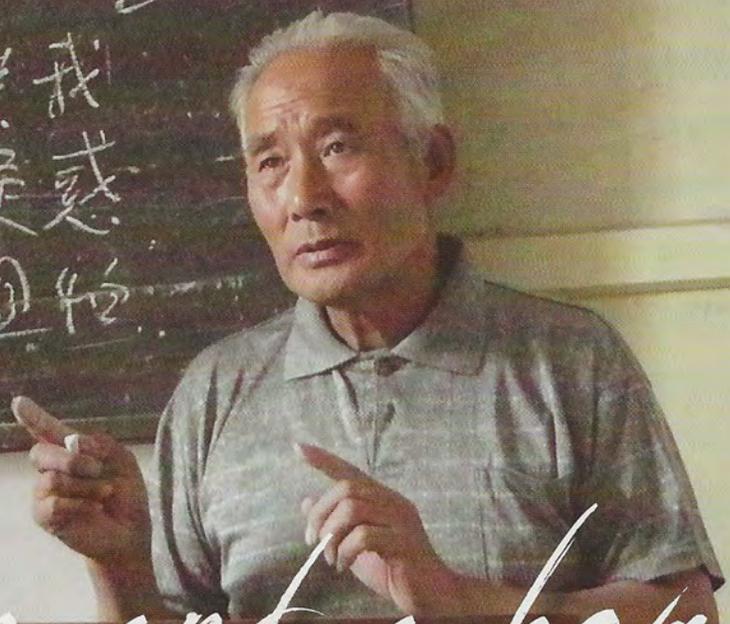
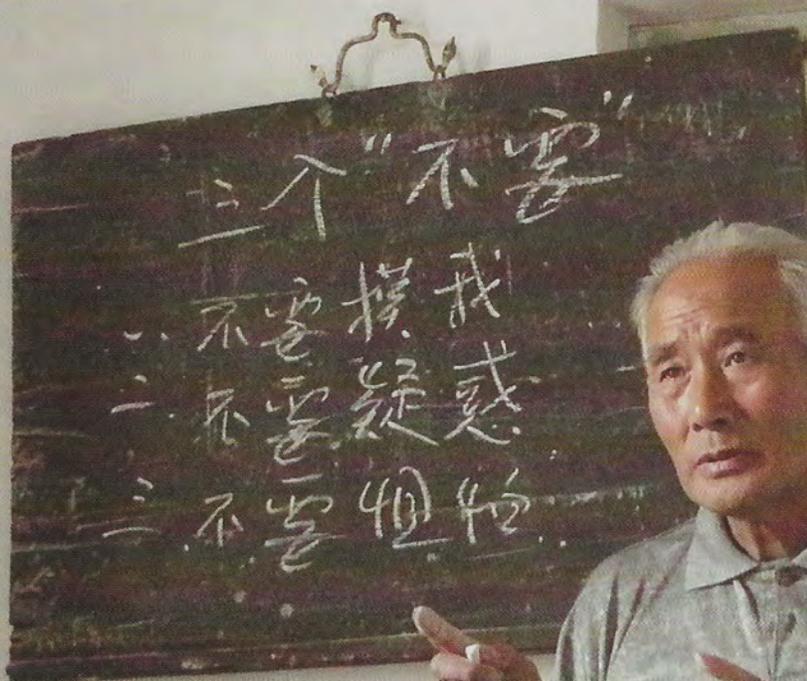


Church of the Brethren

MESSENGER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



A heritage and a home
Brethren mission work in China has lasting legacy



National Youth Conference

July 17-22, 2010 Colorado State University in Ft. Collins, CO

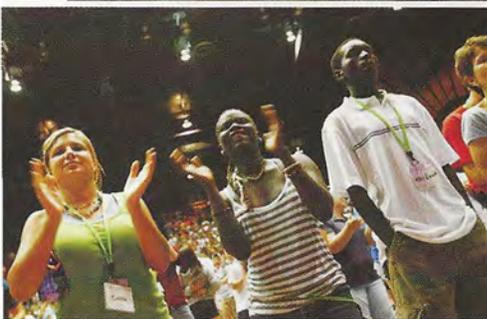
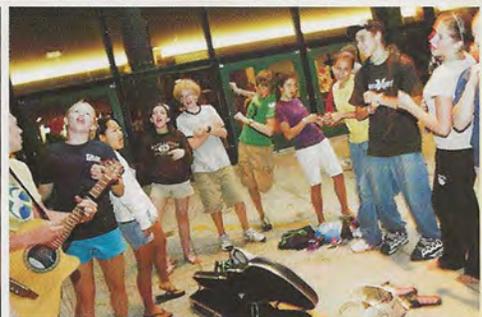
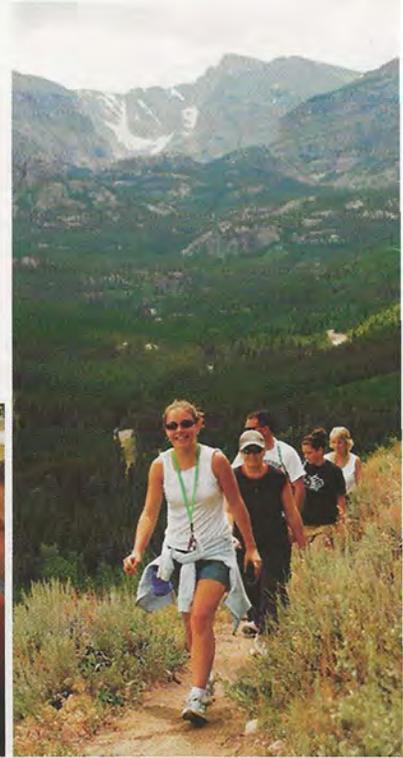
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Registration opens January 5

8:00 pm Central Time and closes April 5.

Registration \$425. After February 15, registration will be \$450.

NYC is for youth, who have completed ninth grade through one year of college at the time of NYC, along with their advisor(s).



More than
meets the
Eye

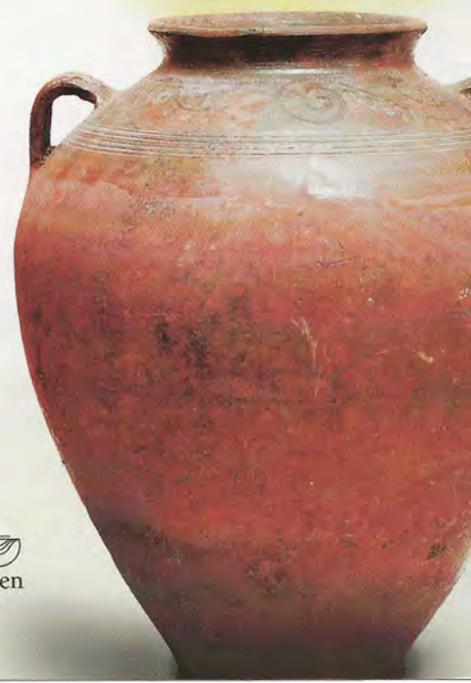
There's far more here than meets the eye.
The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow.
But the things we can't see now will last forever.

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Church of the Brethren

Contact us at 2010nyc@brethren.org or 847-742-5100 ext.246



All photos by Chris Dettick except bottom left by Sarah Kovacs.

“... 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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Ruoxia Li

ONTHECOVER

When 86-year-old Guimei Lang heard a Church of the Brethren visitor was coming to her church, she made the trip there that she usually is no longer able to make. “This is unbelievable,” said Lang, who grew up amid the Brethren mission work in her town. “I can see a sister from the Brethren, and we belong to one family.” In the cover photo by Ruoxia Li, Elder Yin preaches at the Shouyang Church.

DEPARTMENTS

- 2 From the Publisher
- 3 In Touch
- 6 Reflections
- 7 The Buzz
- 21 News
- 25 Youth Life
- 26 Media Review
- 27 Letters
- 31 Turning Points
- 32 Editorial

8 A heritage and a home

Ruoxia Li grew up in Shouyang, China, not going to church or knowing about the Church of the Brethren mission work there. Now a Christian, a recent seminary graduate, and married to a Church of the Brethren member, she has been researching the Brethren work in her home area.

12 Tear down this wall!

David W. Miller reflects on the “spite walls” and other barriers built between neighbors versus the model of unity and harmony modeled in Jesus Christ.

16 Israel Poulson Sr.: Breaking the mold

Israel Poulson Sr. was not your typical Brethren elder. He was a tax collector. He carried a pipe. He spoke English in a mostly German-speaking church. And he had visions—three of them.

18 Judah’s fidelity beyond wisdom’s reach

In the opening episode of MESSENGER’s new year-long Bible study series on wisdom literature, Bob Neff looks at Jacob’s dysfunctional family and eventual reconciliation in Genesis 44.

20 God’s abundance is more than enough

“We can learn much by studying the questions Jesus asks,” Duane Grady says. In this case, it’s about seeing the world in a life-giving way that doesn’t lead to fear and failure.

My father, who's seen more than nine decades, spends much of his time back in the 1930s. He's forgotten long stretches of life in

California, Maryland, and other places, and instead frets that he should call his parents because they must be wondering where he is. Every day his surroundings look new, which means he doesn't know his way to the bedroom but the last piece of pecan pie is as pleasant a surprise as the first one.



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

I can guide him around the corners in the house, but I can't help much with the cobwebs in the corners of his mind. What does he actually *see* when he makes his way haltingly into the living room and can't recognize his chair? How present are those ghosts that visit him from the past? What does it feel like when so little is familiar?

Oh, wait. I think I've had that feeling.

I've seen it in others, too.

The future comes faster than it used to. It doesn't seem so long ago that the world was holding its breath, waiting to see what would happen when the calendar turned over to a new millennium. And now an entire decade has already come and gone—a decade of both horrifying disaster and euphoric optimism, of unraveled hopes and amazing innovation. As the world races by, it can be difficult to recognize where we are. How often are we unintentionally dwelling in another time and place?

This is a good reason to choose to dwell in the season of Epiphany. We remember the mysterious visitors who traveled unfamiliar terrain in the dark. The light of God led them unflinchingly to the One who was made known to us then, and still is today.

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

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Service by the hour

Ridgeway church rises to the challenge

Knowing that members of this Harrisburg, Pa., congregation took seriously the call of Jesus to feed the poor, visit the lonely, and minister to the sick, the witness commission of Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren challenged the congregation to collectively perform 500 hours of community service from March 1 to Nov. 1, 2009. Members could record any volunteer hours that were in addition to their



Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren challenged its members to do more service.

volunteer work at the church. Witness chair Barb Myers said she thought 500 hours of service was an attainable goal for the 80 weekly worship attendees. The witness commission came up with the theme "Together in Service," created a thermometer to record the volunteer hours, and issued a challenge through Sunday morning mission moments, newsletter articles, and bulletin announcements.

Imagine the commission's surprise when all the volunteer hours were tallied, and the congregation had spent 1,740 hours in community service in the eight-month period! On Nov. 8, as part of the congregation's Thanksgiving worship service, Myers announced the results of the challenge. She began the tribute by quoting Martin Luther King Jr.:

"Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. . . . You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

The hours were given in a variety of ways, including making comfort quilts for foster children, providing meals and rides for an ill friend, doing counseling, coaching, collecting and recycling newspapers, cleaning houses, pet-sitting, and performing yard work for shut-ins.

Whether it is counting and recording community service hours or answering Jesus' call to minister "to the least of these," this congregation has hearts full of grace and souls generated by love.

YOU SAID IT

"When is the last time you simply sat down, thought about how you've been blessed, and simply thanked God for all of those things? . . . It's not only a healthy thing to do, but also a necessary task."

—Ben Godfrey, a licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren, writing in the Codorus Church of the Brethren (Loganville, Pa.) newsletter

Northeast Delegates at Middle Pennsylvania District conference Oct. 16-17 approved a "mission plan" of \$211,700 for 2010, a reduction of about \$10,000 from the previous year. . . . Camp Eder (Fairfield, Pa.) held its Fall Festival Oct. 17. . . . Camp Mardela (Denton, Md.) topped its goal for this past summer with 209 campers.

Southeast The Christ the Servant congregation (Cape Coral, Fla.) has changed its name to "A Life in Christ." . . . Shenandoah District senior high youth participated in a 30-Hour Famine at Dayton (Va.) Church of the Brethren Nov. 20-21. . . . Virilina District in October delivered about 650 pounds of Gift of the Heart Kits for disaster relief to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. . . . Virilina District conference Nov. 13-14 drew 529 people; a district budget of \$289,389.97 was approved.

Midwest Members of Lower Deer Creek Church of the Brethren in Camden, Ind., have been having fun with a food collection project called "Raise the Turkey, Hide the Pastor." The church is collecting food for Carroll County Food Pantry and stacking it in front of the pulpit, with the goal of eventually hiding pastor Guy Studebaker. . . . Growing Martin Creek Church of the Brethren (Geff, Ill.) has given birth to the Rock Community congregation in nearby Fairfield.

Ozarks/Plains Panther Creek Church of the Brethren's "quarter tube" challenge to Northern Plains District has resulted in more than \$5,000 for Heifer International, enough to purchase an "ark" of animals. . . . A Foods Resource Bank growing project in Kansas that involves the McPherson, Monitor, and Hutchinson Community congregations raised about \$10,000 with its soybean crop (which yielded more than 61 bushels per acre) and other projects.

West Sunnyslope Brethren/United Church of Christ (Wenatchee, Wash.) held its first "harvest celebration" on Oct. 11, celebrating a year of sponsoring a growing project with Foods Resource Bank. . . . The Fellowship of Christ congregation in Fremont, Calif., will hold a celebration of its ministry as it closes on Jan. 30.

BY THE NUMBERS

787

Number of website hits as of Dec. 1 for a recorded webcast of Diana Butler Bass' presentations at Pacific Southwest District conference. The webcasts are part of a new effort by Church of the Brethren Congregational Life Ministries and Bethany Theological Seminary.



Wendy J. Boettner

Freeport church's youth plant pinwheels for peace

For the third year in a row, members of Freeport (Ill.) Church of the Brethren have celebrated the International Day of Prayer for Peace by planting "pinwheels for peace" on the church yard.

The youth of the congregation created the pinwheels, which are a childhood symbol that reminds us of a time when life was simple, joyful, and peaceful. As part of the process, the youth studied peace and living in harmony with others.

"Pinwheels for Peace" was created by two art teachers in Florida in 2005 as a way for students to express their feelings about peace. In 2009, pinwheels were planted in more than 3,000 locations.—**Wendy J. Boettner**

Jaleel Canada, Cole Miller, Chad Blaser, and Bethany Fike plant "Pinwheels for Peace" at Freeport Church of the Brethren in northwestern Illinois.

and a kitchen with pantry.

On April 26, 2009, he had a special council meeting and voted almost unanimously to follow our design. Then we received the information that about \$95,000 had been willed to our church by the Virginia Martin estate. We knew that God was providing this gift for us, and that this was a sign that the time had come for us to proceed.

The groundbreaking for the new building was on May 17, and we invited everyone who had had a part in this project. It was a great celebration for the miracle of the Family Life Center.

And then we found out that we would receive another check from the Virginia Martin estate for \$298,230. We had a total of about \$700,000, well on our way now. We knew we could continue and reach our goal. We hope to have our Family Life Center completed in early 2010.

Pa. wall hanging challenge raises big bucks for Haiti

Barbara and Barry Gordon, members of Williamsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren in Middle Pennsylvania District, attended the denomination's Annual Conference in San Diego, Calif., this past summer. While there, they bought a wall hanging at the quilt auction.

There are three patches from churches in the district displayed in the hanging:



pay themselves off and helped us save for our goal.

Our space needs were increased by the Good Shepherd Preschool, envisioned by member Pat Smith. This ministry started in September 1994 with eight preschool children and two staff members; now it has grown to 56 children and six staff members. They gradually needed the whole church basement for their classes. We also had a Family Night program on Wednesday evenings with dinner and Bible study that kept growing in size, to at least 65 on average.

We continued our fundraising efforts and had about \$300,000—not nearly enough, but a start. We found a building plan we could afford and would fit our needs. The Family Life Center would be 120 feet long and 70 feet wide, with five classrooms, a stage, two bathrooms,

A wall hanging purchased at Annual Conference contains three patches from Middle Pennsylvania congregations: A Heifer Project-themed patch from Williamsburg made by Shirley Baker, one from Snake Spring Valley made by Bev Creps, and one from Waterside.

Shippensburg celebrates a 'miracle' on Garfield Street

It's not often you see a miracle happen, but the members of the Church of the Brethren in Shippensburg, Pa., experienced a miracle from God recently—an answer to combined prayers from the congregation of 140 members concerning future plans for our growth and ministry on the corners of Washington and Garfield streets.

In June 1978, the house next to the church was for sale, and we bought it for much-needed parking spaces. However, we also needed more room for expansion for our growing Sunday school, so this building was remodeled to become our office or annex. This was the beginning of our dream of a new all-purpose building or addition. During the next 19 years all the houses between the office and parsonage were sold to us, and our dream of expansion was becoming a possibility. We rented out all of the houses and also the parsonage, paying our ministers a housing allowance. This allowed the houses to

LANDMARKS

Williamsburg, Snake Spring Valley (Everett), and Waterside (Woodbury). When the Gordons returned home, they decided not to keep the hanging themselves, but to present it to the congregation with a suggestion that we do something to raise money to help others.

It was decided to raise money for Haiti in hopes of accruing enough to build a house at a cost of \$4,000. Snake Spring and Waterside were invited in the challenge to raise this money. The reward would be that the church raising the greatest amount could display the wall hanging for the following year and be allowed to decide what the outreach focus would be, thus making this an ongoing thing.

Williamsburg had a homemade donut sale, along with individual donations. Snake Spring and Waterside donated the offerings from their individual fall revival services. When the money was totaled, everyone was shocked: The total amount sent was \$8,300, enough to build two houses plus. What a blessing!—**Shirley Baker**

REMEMBERED

• **Joseph M. Long**, 80, of Harrisburg, Pa., passed away Oct. 14. He had served as the Church of the Brethren's denominational director for youth work from 1959 to 1964 and was the first executive secretary of a tri-district area encompassing Eastern Pennsylvania, North Atlantic, and Southern Pennsylvania, beginning in 1964. He then served as the first executive secretary of Atlantic Northeast District after its formation in 1970. In other church work, he was one of Heifer Project's "seagoing cowboys" delivering animals to Poland, served two pastorates, and was a trustee and assistant manager at Camp Swatara (Bethel, Pa.) and a trustee and director of development for Camp Eder (Fairfield, Pa.). He earned degrees from Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and Bethany Theological Seminary. A memorial service was held Oct. 30 at Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg.

• **Harry E. Graybill**, 89, died Dec. 10 at the Brethren Home Community in New Oxford, Pa. He and his wife, Gerry, were long-time volunteers for many organizations, including the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. Graybill was a member of the Faith Community at the Brethren Home and a former member of the Black Rock Church of the Brethren in Glenville, Pa.

• Defiance Church of the Brethren on Sept. 27 held a celebration of 70 years of music by member **Virginia Campbell**. Campbell—who has been battling cancer—has been playing the organ for worship, weddings and funerals, and other special events over those years, and in the past few years has also directed the local senior center choir. Her husband, Dane, often served as songleader.

• **Stone Church of the Brethren** (Huntingdon, Pa.) celebrated its 100th anniversary Dec. 12-13.

• Last month marked the **50th annual "peace pilgrimage" walk** between the aptly named cities of Nazareth and Bethlehem in Pennsylvania. This year's walk took place on Dec. 12. Many Brethren have taken part in the 10-mile witness event over the years. A simple supper, hymn sing, and address by a guest speaker (Rev. James Forbes Jr. this year) caps off the day. Details are at www.peacewalk.org.

• The 25th annual **Brethren Heritage Day held at Camp Bethel** (Fincastle, Va.), netted \$30,769.91 in support of ministries of the camp and Virlina District.

• **Jerry Sweeten**, the leader of Manchester College's (North Manchester, Ind.) environmental studies program, was named the 2009 Indiana Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. Sweeten was honored in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 19; the college held a reception and program in his honor on Dec. 10.

• Potsdam (Ohio) Church of the Brethren recently celebrated **Bob Kurtz's** 30th anniversary as pastor of the congregation.

• **Tana Durnbaugh** of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren (Elgin, Ill.) received the 2009 Elgin-South Elgin Church Women United Human Rights Award.

• **Virginia Meadows**, director of programs at the Second Mile in State College, Pa., received the 2009 Church College Young Alumni Leadership Award from Juniata College at an Oct. 16 ceremony at Middle Pennsylvania District conference. She received the award for her work at Camp Blue Diamond in Petersburg, Pa., where she worked as program director from 2004 to 2007.

• **Marie Rhoades**, program coordinator for peace education for On Earth Peace, was one of the panelists at a Dec. 3 program of the United Nations Sub-Committee for the Elimination of Racism of the NGO Committee on Human Rights in New York. Joining her on the panel was **Sasha Simpson**, a graduate of the Agape Satyagraha program sponsored by On Earth Peace and Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren.

• Funds totaling \$50,000 were distributed from this year's Virlina District **World Hunger Auction**, which was held Aug. 8 at Antioch Church of the Brethren. About half of the proceeds went to Heifer International; the rest went to the Church of the Brethren Global Food Crisis Fund and local ministries.



BUILDING BRIDGES

Meditations by Wilmer Martin

Take a virtual world trip with an experienced traveler who adds his own faith-building insights. President of TourMagination, Wilmer Martin shares lessons learned leading tours around the world, and in his work as a Mennonite minister. Part devotional, part memoir, **Building Bridges** will encourage faithful readers to consider how they live in the world today.

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On a mission

I recently read something very helpful regarding mission and vision statements. The writer, who specializes in working with non-profit organizations, said in essence that a vision statement answers this question: How do we want the world to change? A mission statement then answers this question: What will we do to change it?

My congregation has a mission statement that I won't quote here, because it clearly is the work of a well-intentioned committee that did not have the simple suggestions above in mind. We also have a "welcoming" statement, which has garnered much more attention given that it includes, among other things, affirmation and welcome of all people regardless of their sexual orientation.

When I look at the two statements, I'm not sure how effective either one is in expressing what my congregation is all about, but all those words do have me thinking about our vision and mission. How do we want the world to change and what will we do to change it?



KURT BORGMANN

Some think that because my congregation is "Open and Affirming" we want not just the world to change, but the church to change—by having all congregations pledge to welcome all persons regardless of sexual orientation, or by laying aside

congregational traditions, or canceling Annual Conference statements, or denying certain scriptural interpretations.

I won't deny that some have such a dream, but I don't think that's my congregation's vision. Still, on these matters it would be better if I didn't try to speak for all of them and simply speak for myself:

Sure, I want the world to change into a world that is more

dren; where we don't do violence to each other by attacking the ones we think of as strangers or enemies.

And my mission as a pastor, here and now? To care for every single person whom God has placed into my care; to keep highlighting inclusiveness as a core value; to struggle with, but ultimately give thanks for, the things that make us different, whether those things are theological or political, matters of perspective or experience; to look for the presence and message of Jesus in anyone and everyone who claims allegiance to Jesus; to affirm that humankind is beloved by God; and in all of that, to proclaim the gospel of grace and invite the life of discipleship.

Of course, all of those statements in general don't get us past our situation in specific. Some time ago a covenant service was held at our church for two women who are members of the congregation. I supported them; cared for them. The event was a congregational matter, but others weighed in. Sensationalized and critical letters to the editor in the local newspaper followed. Our district adopted a "punitive action" statement warning against such services in the future. The Annual Conference Standing Committee upheld their action. It hurt. I'll admit it. But I also quickly realized that none of that changes my vision or my mission, much less my practice of ministry. How could it? When you are clear about how you will carry forward the ministry of Christ, even pain does not dissuade you. The couple I mentioned live their lives at the heart of our congregation. They are us. I will care for them. That's what matters.

I admit that I am looking at the next year of guided discussions in our denomination about human sexuality with more than a little skepticism. Can we really talk with each other in a way that will be helpful? I'm not sure, but I will participate and I will try to do so respectfully and attentively. But I also know this: I will continue to follow Christ's call as I hear it,

WHEN YOU ARE CLEAR ABOUT HOW YOU WILL CARRY FORWARD THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST, EVEN PAIN DOES NOT DISSUADE YOU. THE COUPLE I MENTIONED LIVE THEIR LIVES AT THE HEART OF OUR CONGREGATION. THEY ARE US. I WILL CARE FOR THEM. THAT'S WHAT MATTERS.

just and fair, but my heart's desire has less to do with sexual orientation issues in specific than with matters of Christian respect and compassion and hospitality in general. I want the world (starting with the church) to be a place where people aren't pushed away because they are different; where minorities have the same rights and respect as the majority; where people are judged not by the color of their skin (or any other "difference") but by the quality of their character; where children are welcomed as Jesus welcomed the chil-

and I will try to be loyal and faithful to the gospel as I have received it, and my congregation will continue to deserve and receive my best effort to be their pastor. I love this church—my congregation as well as the Church of the Brethren—but I am also pretty clear about what kind of world I want and what I'm going to do to help it along. **W**

Kurt Borgmann is pastor of Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind.

QUOTE WORTHY

“The body is whole when all the parts cooperate with each other.”

—the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, outgoing general secretary of the World Council of Churches, speaking to an audience in North Korea about 1 Corinthians 12 (WCC News Service)

“Often, the things we don’t know we need come into our lives without knocking.”

—author Dorcas Smucker, in an excerpt from her book *Ordinary Days* reprinted in *Mennonite Weekly Review*

“Faith should be a subject that unites us, not divides us.”

—author Mitch Albom, whose new book *Have a Little Faith* debuted at No. 1 on the *New York Times* non-fiction bestsellers list this fall.

“Many with Christian backgrounds wonder how their faith relates to what is so powerfully emerging within their spirits and yet seems so alien to the present agenda of the church.”

—Paul Grout, director of the “A Place Apart” project, writing in the *A Place Apart* newsletter

“Poor farmers are not a problem to be solved; they are the solution—the best answer for a world that is fighting hunger and poverty, and trying to feed a growing population.”

—Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates, speaking at the World Food Prize Symposium in October. He was quoted by *USA Today*.

“What I have realized is that when we talk about unity, it doesn’t mean to change somebody’s faith. It means to sit together, to share, to love each other, and to accept each other.”

—Deaconess Agnes Simbo Lema, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. She was quoted in a World Council of Churches feature by Sara Speicher.

“Because building interfaith bridges of peace often first requires building relationships, it may not happen quickly.”

—Lawrence Rupley, editor of the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office newsletter

CULTURE REVIEW

• A new **Mennonite World Conference census** showed related churches in 80 countries, with a baptized membership of more than 1.6 million. That includes about 524,000 in North America.

• The United Nations announced in October that the city of Pittsburgh will be host for **World Environment Day** in 2010 on June 5. The theme for 2010 is “Biodiversity: Connecting with Nature.” Pittsburgh will also be host to the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference this summer, July 3-7.

• The National Council of Churches has partnered with Mitch Albom to produce a discussion guide for his latest best-seller, **Have a Little Faith**. The guide to the nonfiction book will be available on BN.com, Amazon.com, Hyperion.com, and Albom’s website. “Albom’s journey of faith, aided by a Jewish rabbi and a Christian pastor, shows how we all can learn from one another’s pilgrimage,” said NCC general secretary the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon.

• Mennonite tour company **TourMagination** is marking its 40th anniversary in 2010. It has

led tours to more than 50 countries worldwide.

• The Lutheran World Federation council on Oct. 26 unanimously approved a statement asking forgiveness “from God and from our Mennonite brothers and sisters” for the church’s **persecution of Anabaptists in Europe** in the 16th century. The statement has been recommended for adoption by the body’s full assembly this summer. (*Mennonite Weekly Review*)

• Six in 10 Americans think the US is “uniquely blessed” by God, but a higher percentage—almost eight in 10—think **the country sometimes does more harm than good** when it relates to the rest of the world, according to a study commissioned by the PBS program “Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly” and the United Nations Foundation. It found that Americans think the country should be involved on the world scene, but researchers found that 79 percent of Americans feel that US involvement abroad sometimes does more harm than good, and 44 percent feel that view strongly.



JUST FOR FUN: MATCHING

AROUND THE WORLD Brethren have carried out various kinds of mission and service work in many countries over the years. Match some of those countries on the left with their capital cities on the right. (Answers printed below.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. China | a. New Delhi |
| 2. Dominican Republic | b. Managua |
| 3. Haiti | c. Beijing |
| 4. Denmark | d. Bern |
| 5. Brazil | e. Tegucigalpa |
| 6. India | f. Santo Domingo |
| 7. Honduras | g. Abuja |
| 8. Switzerland | h. Copenhagen |
| 9. Nigeria | i. Brasilia |
| 10. Nicaragua | j. Port-au-Prince |

Answers: 1-c, 2-f, 3-j, 4-h, 5-i, 6-a, 7-e, 8-d, 9-g, 10-b.



Yu'e Zhang, who was baptized by the Brethren missionaries, looks through her Bible.

A heritage and a home

Insights into the Church of the Brethren mission in China

by Ruoxia Li

AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

Ruoxia Li was born and grew up in Shouyang, Shanxi Province, China, and was joined into the Communist Party in college. She did not go to church until she moved to the United States in 2005. She met her husband, Eric Miller, who grew up in the Church of the Brethren, in Beijing. Later, they discovered that Brethren missionaries were the main group who evangelized Shouyang. When Ruoxia studied at Wartburg Theological Seminary in 2007, she decided to conduct research about the Brethren mission and the Christian community in Shouyang. During the summers of 2008 and 2009, she went back to her hometown to talk with people in the church that had been one of the Church of the Brethren missions in the early 20th century. This article discusses some of her findings about the experience of a former Church of the Brethren mission station in China.

It began with the English Baptists, who started a mission in my hometown of Shouyang, China, at the end of 19th century. Then in 1908, the Brethren came to China; in 1910 they built their first mission station in Pingding, Shanxi Province, a town near Shouyang. The Shouyang mission was transferred to the Brethren in 1919 because the English Baptists lacked personnel and resources to continue the work, due to an uprising in China and the pressures of the recently ended World War I back home.

Between 1919 and 1938, the Brethren missionaries established a girls' school, boys' school, Brethren Friendship Hospital, the Women's Evangelistic Department, women's prayer group, and "industrial societies" that helped women create items for sale. Amazingly, many of those projects were already started within the first year of the mission. I used to walk by the gate of the girls' school when I walked to my school, though I never noticed the name above the door until I began this project.

Although the church is now part of the Chinese United Church, people still remember their Brethren heritage. I was able to interview people who went to the girls' school and still remember the missionaries.

Chinese churches became one Chinese United Church starting in the 1950s, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Shouyang Church is now part of this church.

Today there are only 20 people regularly worshipping at Shouyang Church because of a division in the church. In 1992, almost half of the congregation left and built An'sheng Church, a Seventh Day Adventist Church but officially under Shouyang Church as part of the United Church. Most of those members had belonged to a Seventh Day Adventist Church before the churches were merged into the Chinese United Church. In 2001, a group of people from An'sheng Church left and split into another church called Shibangou Church, which is also a Seventh Day Adventist church but which is an unregistered house church.

Past and present

I visited all of these churches and talked to the people. It was very interesting to discover how the Shouyang Church relates to its Brethren missionary past as well as to its present place within the United Church, and to these separate churches in this small community.

Although the church is now part of the Chinese United Church, people still remember their Brethren heritage. I was able to interview people who went to the girls' school and still remember the missionaries. Many spoke highly of the developments and innovations in Shouyang that the Brethren missionaries brought.

Yin is the elder of Shouyang Church and serves as its leader today. Since the original church building was destroyed in the 1930s, it now meets in the old mission house on the north compound of the mission. He introduced me to people who had ties to the church during the mission days as well as current members. It was interesting to hear Yin's own story as well.

His grandfather was converted and became a faithful believer in Qinquan village during the missionaries' time there and used to host worship and prayer meetings at his home. With the influence of his grandfather, Yin's mother, aunt, and uncle all became believers. He was selected as the Christian representative by the county government and started to serve Shouyang Church in 1962.

When churches were closed during China's Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, he led an underground gathering and was persecuted. The house where the church met during that time was just a few blocks from my home, where I often passed as a child. That part of Shouyang, including the old house church and my childhood home, were just demolished in September 2009.

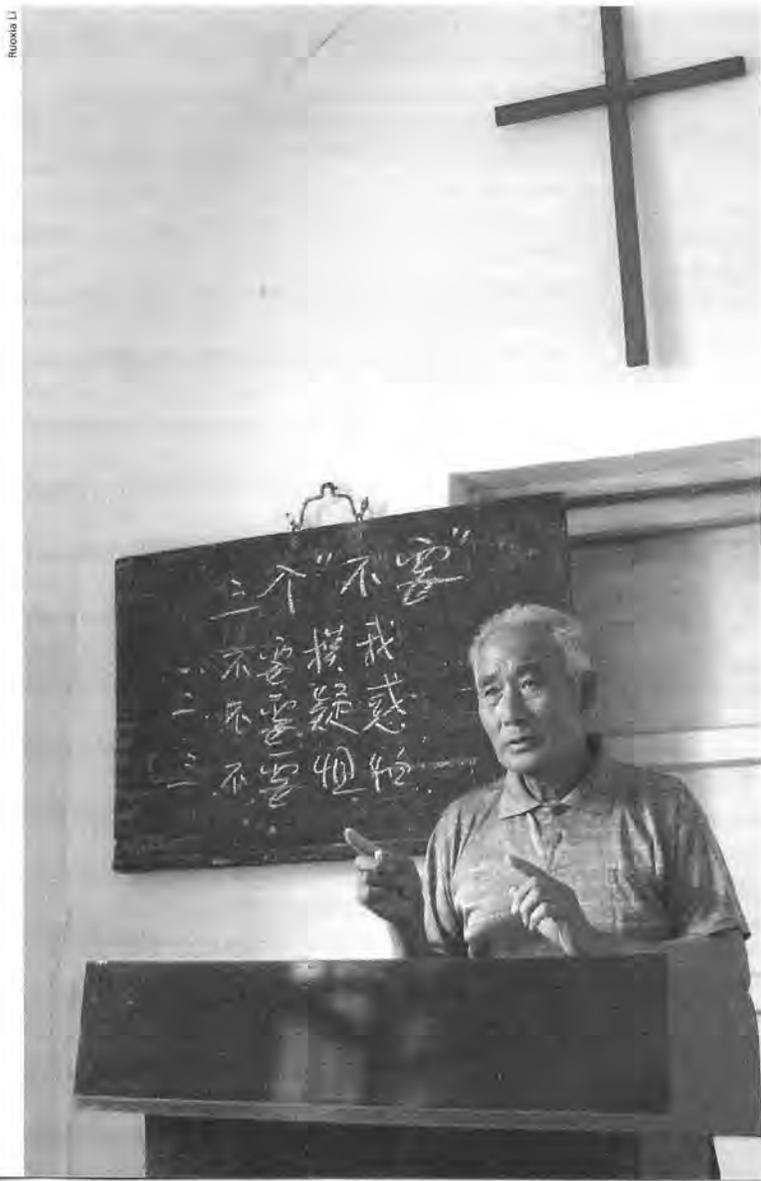
Pastor Yin later returned to leadership in the church, which returned to the old mission compound in 1980. In addition to memories of Brethren teachings from his earlier years, he also has a worn, handwritten copy of a manual that was written as a leadership manual in the church.

Sustained by faith

Shuzhen Li, now 86, went to the girls' school from first grade to fourth grade in Shouyang, and then continued fifth and sixth grade in the girls' school in Pingding. She was one of the few women to receive this much education at that time. (Interestingly, my father realized that Li's son was a friend of his in high school after he heard Li's name.)

Because Christianity was driven underground for many years and Christians were sometimes actively persecuted, Christians

Elder Yin preaches at the Shouyang Church in China.





Shuzhen Li looks at old photos of Brethren missionaries who served in China.

Members of one family

Guimei Liang, who is also 86, is the aunt of Elder Yin. When she was a child she visited the Shouyang Church with her older sister, and she also attended the girls' school when she was seven. Later she was baptized in the Qinquan River. Her sister was a member of the Women's Evangelistic Department, where the female missionaries taught Chinese women how to knit sweaters. All children, whether they were believers or not, were given a free education, though documents indicate there was some disagreement as to whether or not non-believers should be educated by the mission schools. People from poor families were also given housing, clothes, and meals.

Liang said that all the students prayed or sang before the meals. The local teachers were all believers, but they did not teach the gospel in class in accordance with local laws. On Sundays, all the students went to church. American pastors sang hymns, and the Chinese pastors preached. Liang still remembers that they celebrated Christmas with the missionaries, receiving gifts as children. When the students were sick, American pastors took care of them, checked their temperatures using thermometers, and took them to the hospital.

This past summer, my mother-in-law, Eileen Miller, traveled to Shouyang and visited Shouyang Church with me. Liang is unable to travel to church normally, but she came to worship accompanied by her daughter because she heard a visitor from the Church of the Brethren would come to visit. Liang and Eileen hugged each other, and Liang had tears as she shook Eileen's hands: "This is unbelievable," she said. "I can see a sister from the Brethren, and we belong to one family."

Good News and love

Yu'e Zhang, an 85-year-old resident of Pingding, followed her older brother to church when she was a little girl. "We went to church every day when we were very young, just to listen," Zhang said.

often kept their faith to themselves. My father never knew that Li's family were Christians until he went with me to meet them, even though he and Li's son grew up together. Li was baptized by the Brethren in Shouyang when she was 14. She said that two missionaries adopted two Chinese girls and they taught students to pray, "giving thanks to the Heavenly Father." The students who were at the girls' school learned to pray for each other as well as for their families. Li said that Pastor Minneva Neher—who disappeared along with fellow missionaries Alva and Mary Harsh in December 1937 after the Japanese army occupied the town—came to inject medicine when her mother was sick.

Missionaries organized and built a simple building to use as a church on the Li's family land in the village so that people there could worship together without the long walk to Shouyang. Li and her children remembered that people in the village received many things from the missionaries, including books, quilts, wool sweaters, and clothes.

I showed her copies of some photographs of missionaries that I had found in my research. Li was excited to recognize Neher and the Harshes. "This is Teacher Neher, I can tell. The students missed her very much!" she said. "The missionaries not only gave us material support, but also brought the message of Jesus to us. I could not have lived so long without my Christian faith!" Li repeated.

Li and her family were so excited to see me doing this research and to have an opportunity to share their journey of being a Christian through the hard times in China. "My mother never complained, doubted, or wavered about the (Christian) life," Li's son and daughter said to me. "It is the faith rooted in the Lord that gives her strength to keep going." Sister Li prayed for us before my father and I left.

Worshippers pray in the Shouyang Church.



Guimei Liang visits with Eileen Miller, the author's mother-in-law, in China. "We belong to one family," Liang said.



She could not remember the year when she was baptized by the missionaries, but she did remember the footwashing and communion at love feast. She was very excited when she talked to me about the missionaries, saying they cared for people and prayed for them every day. She said that the American people trusted in God, and they came to China bringing the Good News to the Chinese people.

I also learned that my own grandmother attended the girls' school at the mission. My uncle told me that going to the girls' school was the only education my grandmother received in her life, as girls did not normally have the chance to go to school. My grandmother could read and write, which helped her in many ways, though later many women were jealous of her education.

My uncle had not been born when the missionaries were in Shouyang, but he recalled hearing people speak of them. He said that people at that time thought the missionaries were all knowledgeable, kind, and had loving hearts.

Lingering influences

It is hard to find specific traditions or evidence of Church of the Brethren practices still present in Shouyang, such as anointing with oil for the sick, footwashing, and baptism by immersion. I did speak to some elderly women who remembered the missionaries, but those women are now unable to travel to church on Sundays, so those who now attend the church do not remember the missionaries personally.

as part of the Church of the Brethren mission.

Elder Yin said that denominations are caused by the differences of human thought. As a leader of Shouyang Church, he believes that believers are totally free in the Lord no matter what the denomination, though sometimes certain activities are not allowed at a registered church. At the same time, Yin also acknowledges the heritage the Brethren left for Shouyang Church—for example, that believers should live a simple life and have a theology that emphasizes peace and love.

While some people in China have negative ideas about missionaries, it is clear that people had many positive interactions with the Brethren missionaries. Many do not remember them, but those who had direct contact with them remember their industry and kindness. Also, while many believe that missionaries intended to control the church from afar, my review of the mission documents indicates that it was clearly the intention of the Brethren missionaries to start an indigenous church from the start.

The mission was impacted over the years by rebellions,

Liang and Eileen hugged each other, and Liang had tears as she shook Eileen's hands: "This is unbelievable," she said. "I can see a sister from the Brethren, and we belong to one family."

Elder Yin was familiar with the Brethren past, which he says was a good Christian background. He remembered only one time since 1940, in 1989, when baptism by immersion was practiced in Shouyang. Beginning in 1990, they sprinkled water for baptism because it was too hard to arrange for immersion.

It was interesting to find a baptismal pool on the dais in the front of the nearby Pingding Church. People told me that immersion baptism is still practiced today in Pingding. The union of many denominations into one may allow for churches to adopt the most suitable practices for their needs. In this case, baptism by immersion and sprinkling are both used in the Chinese United Church and in different churches that share a heritage

famines, a World War, civil war, and a revolution, but for a time it thrived, and although the current church is small and the mission is forgotten by many, the spirit still moves in the hearts of the Christians of Shouyang.

I grew up playing outside the home where the church met, walking by the old gate of the mission school and talking to people who had gone to the school and knew the missionaries. Finally, I came to the United States, became a Christian, and came to know my Brethren family and the Church of the Brethren. ❧

Ruoxia Li is a recent seminary graduate and in 2008 attended her first Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. Her husband, Eric Miller, study abroad coordinator at Loras College and a member of Pittsburgh (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, contributed to this article. They live in Dubuque, Iowa.

by David W. Miller

TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!



**CHRIST PROVIDES MODEL FOR
RECONCILIATION AND UNITY**

The world is full of walls.

Everywhere we go there are fences, gates, partitions, and other ingeniously constructed barriers—all aimed at keeping something or someone in and something or someone else out. We need walls, of course: walls for our houses to protect us from wind and rain; walls to keep livestock safely in and predators out; walls to separate spaces and improve organization and efficiency. But you don't have to be a sage to see how walls, both literal and spiritual, can lead to division.

All walls serve a purpose, but not all walls serve the purpose of God.

Consider the "spite fence," legally defined as "an unsightly fence erected for no other purpose than to irritate a neighbor" (www.nolo.com/glossary.cfm). Bill Machrone tells a story of just such a fence in a newsgroup posting:

"My father built a classic spite fence after our clueless-city-bred-former-apartment-dweller neighbor put in central air, with a heat exchanger that exhausted horizontally—right at our screened back porch. In post-WW II suburbia, on 75 by 100 lots, you could feel the heat.

"The fence was a sight to behold: Wood of every color and kind. Peeling plywood. Rec-room paneling. Two-bys. Four-bys. Rough tongue-and-groove flooring. Wedges driven into the earth. A sheet of aluminum. Some galvanized ducting opened and hammered flat. A piece of corrugated fiberglass. Big nails, bent over. Rusty sheet metal screws. This from a master craftsman who enjoyed working to 'half a tenth.'

"The neighbor came over, wanted to know what all the fuss was about. Dad refused to tell him—told him to figure it out for himself. Dad could have put a lot less effort into making a 90-degree deflector out of sheet metal for the thing, and it would have looked factory. But retribution for the neighbor's inconsiderateness was more important, at least to Dad."

All walls serve a purpose, but not all walls serve the purpose of God.

Unity and hostility

In Ephesians 2 we read that Christ has "broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." It's difficult to understand how this

can be so when hostility seems to be the bread and butter of human relating and living, and when we realize that we have often helped to build such walls—not out of bricks and mortar but out of the raw material of sin and division that we cement with name-calling, labeling, and prejudice.

The ill-conceived application of the Torah, the Law of Moses, helped ensure that a wall of hostility was solidly in place among those in the early Christian community. It was the circumcision insiders, those formed in the movement from its inception in the Jewish traditions, versus the uncircumcised outsiders, Gentiles drawn from the surrounding communities and cultures. The Law is pictured as a wall keeping Jew and Gentile apart: a reference, perhaps, to an actual physical barrier erected in the temple to keep Gentiles out of the inner court on pain of death.

And walls are still being built between and within the Christian community, particularly over struggles with identity and boundaries in relation to social class, ethnic heritage, worship styles, peace and justice issues, and human sexuality, just to name a few of the more contentious items. Such troubles in the body of Christ compromise the church's witness, grieve the Holy Spirit, and fly in the face of Jesus' prayer for unity.

Unity. An interesting, and frequently ill-used, word. It's often understood as uniformity or conformity, implying that we express unity when all think alike, act alike, look alike—working together in lockstep in all things to achieve a common and agreed-upon purpose.

Consider the young newlywed couple from eastern Pennsylvania, who were heading back home from their Berkeley Springs, W.Va., honeymoon. On their way home they decided to take a day to visit Gettysburg. Being the adventurous sort, they decided to rent a tandem bike and tour the battlefield by pedal power.

They were about five miles into their ride,

going along quite well, when they began the ascent of Little Round Top. Now these two were not experienced cyclists, so that steep climb of 150 vertical feet was a bit daunting. But the husband, who was prepared to show his new bride that he could handle any daunting task that came their way, decided to put his muscle into it. As the incline got steeper he was soon up and standing on the pedals, huffing and puffing, sweat pouring down his face as they laboriously inched their way toward the peak.

When they reached the summit he practically fell off the bike in exhaustion, looked at her, and said: "That was tough. I didn't think we were going to make that one, it was so steep." She said, "I know. I was so scared we would roll backwards that I had the brakes on the whole way."

Isn't that the way it sometimes feels when the

WE REALIZE THAT WE HAVE OFTEN HELPED TO BUILD SUCH WALLS—NOT OUT OF BRICKS AND MORTAR BUT OUT OF THE RAW MATERIAL OF SIN AND DIVISION THAT WE CEMENT WITH NAME-CALLING, LABELING, AND PREJUDICE.

church strives to continue the work of Jesus together? Some are pedaling as hard as they can while others are putting on the brakes. We might be headed in the same direction, but it feels as if we're working against each other. Of course, the church is not a bicycle. There are times when someone has to put on the brakes to keep others from pedaling out of control. Working together does not necessarily mean doing the same thing in the same way. Unity is not uniformity.

Heavenly harmony

Now and then when pastors get together, they begin to dream about serving churches where everyone agrees and there is no conflict. But at some point in the conversation, one wise pastor in the bunch will speak up: "What a boring church that would be! What would we preach about?! What would God have to teach us?"

In the Gospel of John, after Jesus has finished his last supper, washed the disciples' feet, and given them their final instructions, he prays. The whole of John 17 is Jesus' prayer. In the first five verses, Jesus prays for himself, that he may be glorified and bring his work on earth to fulfillment. In the next verses Jesus prays for his disciples, that they may be protected from the evil one.

Then Jesus prays for all his followers:

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they

own part: soprano, alto, tenor, bass. Each part has a different tune, different rhythms, sometimes different words. Any one part alone is complete in and of itself, and can be sung independently. But it really makes music when all the parts are sung together.

A choir singing in harmony is a good analogy for people dwelling together in unity. Unless, of course, you can't sing.

Vera was a member of the congregation I was in as a youth. Whenever I think of what it means to love God with heart, mind, strength, and soul, I think of Vera. She was one of those godly people who wear their faith on their shirt

sleeve. And she wore it with great joy!

Vera's joy was most pronounced when she sang. When the congregation stood for a hymn, Vera was the first one up.

CHRIST'S RECONCILING PEACE BREAKS DOWN WALLS OF DIVISION WITHIN THE CHURCH AND PROVIDES A FOUNDATION FOR MISSION BEYOND THE CHURCH TO ALL **THOSE STILL ESTRANGED FROM EACH OTHER AND GOD.**

also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Jesus prays for you, that you might be one with other believers and with God. Jesus prays for us, that our unity may be a witness so others may come to believe.

James Edwards, professor of religion at Whitworth College in Spokane, Wash., suggests that the unity of the church is not the kind of unity we find in a country club, where members join because of common interests. Rather, the unity of the church is produced by something from the outside that binds the members together, an external harmony that comes as God's gift from the proclamation of the gospel. Our unity stems from the fact that we are all sinners forgiven by the unexpected and unmerited grace of God which we know in Jesus Christ.

I like using "harmony" to describe how we are brought and held together. It helps me understand how unity differs from uniformity. Think of a choir singing, each on his or her

When the pianist finished the introduction, Vera was the first one to sing out. And sing out she did, loud and strong, with a powerful voice that belted the notes right up to the rafters.

Unfortunately, Vera's notes did not stay up in the rafters. They came crashing back down to wreak havoc on our harmony. Vera couldn't carry a tune in a Ziploc bag, let alone a bucket. She didn't even much follow the up-and-down flow of the melody. And sometimes she would rapturously hold a warbly fermata at the end of a phrase long after the rest of the congregation had moved on to the next line.

But, I tell you, I have never heard anyone sing with as much joy as Vera. She made the music come alive, not through the tune, but through the Spirit. What she lacked in tonality, she more than made up for in the sheer delight of singing out her love for God and her joy of being in God's presence.

And when it comes right down to it, that's what unity is all about: being in God's presence. Jesus defined unity as himself being in

God and God in him, and he in us and us in him. The model Jesus offers for unity is relationship, his relationship with God and with us. Our unity is not in what we say or do. Our unity is in Christ. And our community grows as we seek Christ together.

Going in circles

Author Milton Schwartzruber shares this tidbit of wisdom: "No matter where two objects are on the circumference of a circle, when they move toward the middle, they move toward each other."

The curious thing about this saying is the hidden lesson that the two points appear to be moving in opposition to each other. Just as in the church we sometimes oppose one another. "It takes so long to get anything done!" we complain, leaving unspoken the frequently underlying sentiment: "Why can't everyone just agree to do it my way." We get so frustrated when it seems as if we are working at cross purposes.

Actually, if we are truly working at "cross" purposes—continuing the work of Jesus—then we are like those objects on the edge of the circle, moving toward the center, moving toward Christ, moving toward each other, even when moving in opposition. That's why unity is so hard. After all, Christ's body is made up of a lot of people who are just as difficult as I am. Community is hard work; it has to be continually maintained. Unity does not come cheap; it takes all the prayer of Jesus to keep us at it.

The letter to the Ephesians tells us that in his flesh Jesus made two groups into one and broke down the dividing wall. Through the cross Christ put to death the hostility that separated them. The divine initiative in bringing about reconciliation now takes the form of Christ the peacemaker destroying enmity by giving his own life—both in the sense that he gives up his life *for* humanity and that he gives life *to* humanity.

Christ's reconciling peace breaks down walls of division within the church and provides a foundation for mission beyond the church to all those still estranged from each other and God.



Thomas Yoder Neufeld in his reflections on this passage challenges us:

"If true to its Lord and its calling, the church is . . . always a community on the lookout for walls to breach, for enemies to befriend—with each other and with God. With respect to a reconciling and re-creating God, God's home is never big enough; better yet, God's family is never big enough. With respect to those people and peoples still estranged from God and God's family, there will always be room. God's home is permanently under construction."

Christ overcomes all enmities, all dualisms, all divisions—even that of a sinful humanity from a loving God. Perhaps you know this particular wall, the wall we build to keep God at arm's length. A wall you and I construct of bricks and blocks of reason, excuse, and fear in order to keep from getting too close to God.

The good news is that even this wall is broken down in the reconciling love of God demonstrated through the cross of Christ.

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35, 37-39). 

David W. Miller is pastor of Black Rock Church of the Brethren in Glenville, Pa. Sources for this article not cited above include articles and commentaries by James R. Edwards, John Hogenson-Futford, Robert Kysar, Gail R. O'Day, Pheme Perkins, Christy Waltersdorff, and Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld.



ISRAEL POULSON SR.: BREAKING THE MOLD

HIS FAMOUS 'THREE VISIONS' INCLUDED SCENES OF LAST JUDGMENT

by Frank Ramirez

There's a tendency to think of the old Brethren elders as "one size fits all," but even when they sought uniformity in faith and practice, they still tended to be unique figures. Certainly Israel Poulson Sr. followed the pattern of not following a pattern.

First, he was half Native American in a largely German church. Second, he played the fiddle when Brethren sang *a capella*. And finally, he was a dreamer, and he told people about his dreams.

Israel Poulson (1770-1856) was abandoned by his parents when he was seven years old. He was raised by Brethren near Centerville, N.J. When he first married he was unable to read or write, but his first wife taught him those skills. When she died he married her sister. All his children were born through her. He married a third time after her death.

Poulson was much beloved by the children and trusted by his neighbors. Once a man called a "false prophet" announced that the world was about to come to an end and asked what people intended to do. One individual who was developmentally disabled had a quick answer: "I would hold on to Uncle Israel's coat-tail."

Prior to the 20th century, Brethren pastors earned their living as farmers and in various trades, usually cobbling together more than one position. Israel Poulson was a farmer, like most Brethren. He was also literally a fence mender. He built fences. He built homes. A stonemason, he built walls.

But he was also active in civic affairs. He



Brethren from Middle Pennsylvania District presented a musical based on the life of Israel Poulson Sr. as part of the denomination's 300th anniversary observances. The show was written by Steve Engle and Frank Ramirez. Pictured, with role played, are: front row, left to right, Bonnie Frijters (Chorus), Anne Siems (Chorus), Barbara Parlett (Chorus), Marilyn Lerch (Widder Calhoun), Karen Calhoun (Recording Angel); back row, left to right, Frank Ramirez (Israel Poulson Sr.), Chip Harclerode (Laborer Two), Dave Wilt (Laborer One), Jim Ake (Chorus), Dale Dowdy (Chorus), David Meadows (Chorus), and Joshua Oldham (Caleb Calhoun).

was made assessor for Amwell Township in New Jersey when he announced that \$300 was too large a sum for the job, and that he would do it for \$100. He was also the tax collector. To facilitate collections, his notice in the Nov. 2, 1829, number of the *Hunterton County Gazette* encouraged early payment and included a little poem (see sidebar).

Poulson was singular in his appearance. It was remembered that, "He was not particular in the form of his dress, yet intended to conform to the order of the Brotherhood," according to biographical reports, and that he

was known for two props, a cane and a pipe, which accompanied him as he cut across fields to make visits. More important, he was part of the transition among the Brethren from a German-speaking to an English-speaking church. The popular preacher and storyteller spoke primarily in English.

A bit of an outsider himself, Poulson encouraged the ministry of Sarah Righter Major by becoming the first to invite her to preach outside Philadelphia, her home church. Though based in New Jersey, he was recognized as an elder at the 1848 Annual Meeting and was widely respected. Perhaps the one blot on his record, in the mind of his contemporaries, was his son, Israel Poulson Jr., whose abrasive form of leadership led to a schism in the Amwell congregation after the elder Poulson's death.

His famous three visions were recorded in the reminiscences of 19th-century Brethren historian and book collector Abraham Harley Cassel, published in *The History of the Church of the Brethren in Eastern Pennsylvania in 1915*.

The first two, "The Laborers by the Way" and "The Old Fiddle," concerned the importance of the attitude we bring to our Christian work and the danger of preaching the same old sermon over and

over. But the one he called "The Loaf of Bread" was the most compelling.

Told in dramatic fashion, the dream found him "in an immense concourse of people" who were milling forward toward who-knew-what goal? Far in the distance he could see a giant set of scales. To his alarm he realized he had found himself at the Last Judgment.

Galatians on one hand, versus Matthew 25 and the letter of James on the other. Brethren believed in salvation by faith, but believed that faith without works was dead. The two were different sides of the same coin. Self-educated Brethren pastors did not spend their time in church offices. Their daily lives in their professions and their ministries took place in

THE LIFE OF A HIGHLY RESPECTED HALF NATIVE AMERICAN PREACHER WHO SPOKE ENGLISH AND ENCOURAGED WOMEN IN MINISTRY IS A REMINDER THAT THE BRETHREN EXPERIENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN FLUX.

Many of those who stepped on the scales were too light to hold them down. It was no better when his turn came. His heart was failing him as he heard the judge pronounce, "Weighed and found wanting." But before words of condemnation could be spoken, a boy ran forward through the crowd and tossed him a loaf of bread. Down came the scale. The judge pronounced, "Accepted." Only then did he recognize the loaf as one he had once given to a widow.

The vision is a reminder that Brethren lived with the tension found in New Testament books such as Romans and

the real world. Rather than resolve the tension, they lived the gospel.

Poulson's ministry is a reminder that there was never a period when the Brethren experience was crystallized in a perfect stasis. The life of a highly respected half Native American preacher who spoke English and encouraged women in ministry is a reminder that the Brethren experience has always been in flux. 

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Everett (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and an avid historian. With his friend, composer Steve Engle, he wrote a half-hour musical titled "The Three Visions of Israel Poulson Sr."

POETIC (TAX) LICENSE
Tax collector Israel Poulson Sr. encouraged Amwell, N.J., residents to avoid late fees with the following bit of doggerel:

There's one thing more you may remember:
Unless 'tis paid by the twentieth December,
Of course there will be two cents cost,
Which will be so much to you lost.
And if not paid in five days more,
An additional sum of thirty-four.
The law is plain, you all may see;
Then I would have you not blame me;
If I return you to the Squire
'Twill be just what the laws require."

(from *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, p. 1049)



Genesis 44:18 -34: A dysfunctional family and reconciliation

Judah's fidelity beyond wisdom's reach

by Bob Neff



When MESSENGER asked me to do a series of Bible studies on Proverbs, I suggested that we examine the wider world of wisdom. This world includes Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, sections of the historical books in Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, prophetic passages, and the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

The editorial staff agreed, so I am solely responsible for the direction and character of the studies. I assume that at any time they may exercise the editor's prerogative in the final form of what is shared. Each study will be limited primarily to one chapter, although in this month's study it may be helpful to read the larger narrative of Joseph and his family, Genesis 37-50, even though we will focus primary attention on the speech of Judah in Gen. 44:18-34.

The story of Joseph begins with a teenager sharing classic adolescent dreams that demonstrate his superiority and suggest that at some future time he will rule over the whole family. Joseph is the favorite of a doting father who protects him from hard work, clothes him in the latest fashion, lets him loiter around the house all day, and sets him at odds with his brothers.

God's path in the life of this wise one is one of reconciliation brought about by Judah, who had no such wisdom training but unveiled mercy and reconciliation in a story of a dysfunctional family.

One day Joseph is sent to check on his brothers, who seize the opportunity to sell him into slavery to Midianites who take him to Egypt. The brothers bring the identifiable coat covered with blood to the father, Jacob, who now believes that Joseph has been killed by a wild beast. Jacob refuses to be comforted and further antagonizes the rest of the family.

When Joseph enters Potiphar's household, the story picks up themes associated with wisdom teaching that appear in Egypt and the area where Israel settled. In these stories and teaching, a youth entered the household of a high official and began a system of training to manage the daily affairs for his master much as we find in Genesis 39:

"In the world of apprenticeship, fidelity to one's master was paramount. The *famulus* (apprenticeship) system explains the emphasis on some recurrent themes . . . delivering messages accurately, avoiding (domestic) quarrels, and guarding against entanglements with women of the household" (Clark, *Proverbs*, p.15).

Joseph is fully trained as a young apprentice in the household of Potiphar, handles all the household duties, and lives up to all the virtues expected of such a manager, including the advances of Potiphar's wife. He is unjustly accused and thrown into prison, where again he is placed in charge of the prison as a skilled manager and a wise human being.

This wisdom is demonstrated by his interpretation of the dreams of the chief wine steward and the chief baker. The wine steward remembers Joseph when the pharaoh has dreams that none of the "wise men" of Egypt can interpret. Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of the cows and the corn in which seven years of plenty are followed by seven years of famine.

When the pharaoh and the court look for someone to guide them, they conclude, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you" (Gen. 41:39). Joseph is an individual trained much as the courtiers in the time of David and Solomon to

assist in the ruling of the realm with wisdom and discernment.

While Joseph manages the realm of Egypt and Canaan, the family situation with his brothers and father has not changed.

Jacob still plays favorites with Joseph's brother Benjamin, whom Joseph insists be brought to Egypt if the family is to receive more food. The reader is given no indication into the motives of Joseph, but all his actions seem to be designed to create jealousy in the brothers. When Benjamin is accused of stealing Joseph's divining cup and is threatened with slavery, the focus of the narrative changes and turns to the action of Judah.

As detailed in the Brethren Press *Gather 'Round* curriculum, Judah gives one of the most powerful reconciling speeches in all of scripture (Gen. 44:18-34). He comes to the defense of Benjamin, but places the responsibility for Benjamin's presence in Egypt on Joseph. What is most remarkable about Judah's speech is that he places himself in the position of his father, and explains to Joseph that his father will die if Benjamin does not return.

Judah recognizes that Jacob loves Benjamin more than him. He recognizes that his father would be devastated by the loss of his beloved Benjamin. He begs to take the place of the boy so that his father will not need to endure any further suffering for the one he loves. Note also that Judah knows that his father will not lament his loss if he, Judah, were to stay behind.

Judah sees clearly the foibles and unfairness of his father's love but affirms Jacob as his father as well. In the space of four verses, Judah says "my father" three separate times and understands his father's position, even though it relegates him to secondary status. Judah will live as a slave so that his father will not suffer distress in his old age. In doing this Judah paves the way for reconciliation of a dysfunctional family.

Far more than the activity of Joseph, it

is Judah who lays the foundation for the reuniting of the family and the creation of peace and reconciliation. The family circumstances haven't changed, but Judah has. Judah has learned to place himself in the position of another person even when that individual shows no regard or care for him. Judah's fidelity to a higher purpose reaches well beyond what wisdom teaching required. Judah embodies a reconciling faith.

When Joseph sets the stage for keeping Benjamin in Egypt, the reader is never clear until Gen. 45:1-15 whether he seeks revenge, the break-up of his family, the reunion with his beloved brother, or is engineering a test. However, in the tears and lament of Joseph the reader discovers the healing of a family and the breakdown of the cold exterior of an efficient and powerful administrator and wise man.

Before Judah's speech Joseph had the advantage of knowing the situation, playing on the fears and anxieties of the brothers, and concealing his emotions. After Judah's speech he is a changed man who no longer hides behind his administrative post. The wise man has become compassionate and reconciled. He now views his life as arranged by God when others sought to destroy him.

God's path in the life of this wise one is one of reconciliation brought about by Judah, who had no such wisdom training but unveiled mercy and reconciliation in a story of a dysfunctional family. Isn't it interesting that the line of the Messiah comes from Judah and not Joseph? ❏

Bob Neff is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren; he serves on the development staff and as chaplaincy coordinator at The Village at Morrisons Cove in Martinsburg, Pa. He was previously on the faculty of Bethany Theological Seminary, served as general secretary of the Church of the Brethren General Board, and was president of Juniata College. He lives in State College, Pa.

This article begins a new, year-long Bible study series on wisdom literature by Bible scholar Bob Neff. His studies will appear monthly.

God's abundance is by Duane Grady more than enough

A view of scarcity only leads to fear and further decline

"Do you not yet understand?" Mark 8:21

We can learn much by studying the questions

Jesus asks. Questions from the lips of Jesus are sprinkled throughout the four Gospels. The one above, for example, follows an amazing sequence of events.

The immediate context of Jesus' question occurs when he and his disciples are in a boat. The disciples are complaining that they have nothing to eat, although they have a loaf of bread. Admittedly, a single loaf of bread divided among 13 hungry adults isn't much of a meal, except the disciples should be beyond such limiting concerns. For as Jesus reminds them, in their recent past they had participated in the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people (with 12 baskets of leftovers) and then the same miracle happens again with 4,000 people (with seven baskets of fragments).

In each miracle story the disciples express fears and anxieties about having too few resources (only a few fish and pieces of bread) and too many people to feed. They are in the midst of things when Jesus miraculously makes a difference by producing—with adequate faith and God's help—much from a little.

Jesus' question to his disciples, who are once again fretting over their lack of resources, hopes to provoke their memory. Have they already forgotten about the 5,000? And the 4,000? The setting of being in a boat also calls to mind the experience the disciples had between the two miracle feeding stories when a great storm arose and the disciples panicked. Jesus, while walking toward them on the water, says, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

These images along with Jesus' question serve to illustrate for us the difference between a worldview of scarcity and a theology of abundance. Fearing the world and seeing things as too scarce (i.e.,

We only have one loaf), leads to decisions that add to decline and deterioration. A theology of abundance trusts in God's providence and acts accordingly. Scarcity seeks safety, is averse to risk-taking, cries about harsh conditions, and stumbles in the darkness. A theology of abundance assumes we already have all the resources we need (Yes! We have loaves and fishes!) and believes that God's promises can be trusted.

Jesus' question reminds me of my work as the first executive director of the Interfaith Council for the Homeless in Chicago during the 1980's. Those of us who preach a theology of abundance ought to be able to back it up with real life experience, so here is one of mine. One of my favorite memories from those start-up days was when the board of directors met for the first time with the director of human services for the city of Chicago. As we presented our two-year goals and mentioned that we intended to add 500 new emergency shelter beds, the director literally scoffed and told us in no uncertain terms that such a goal was impossible.

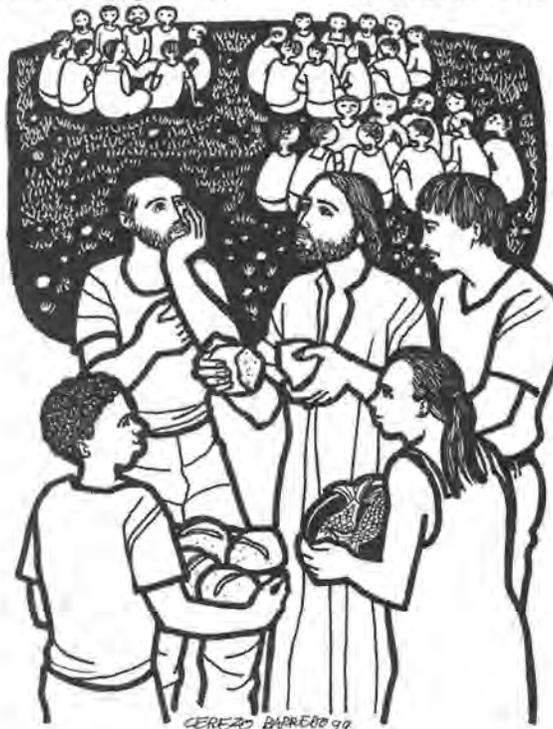
In reality it took less than six months to add 500 new shelter beds, and by the end of two years 2,000 new emergency shelter beds were serving Chicago's homeless men and women. The human services director failed to grasp what happens when God's people respond to a clear vision and trust in God's overabundant resources.

Likewise, amid economic challenges and "necessary" wars

today, I would rather climb into the boat with Jesus and live into a theology of abundance. I would rather believe in the power of God's assurance coupled with decisive leadership, clear goals, and a compelling vision that moves people from fear to courage.

A theology of abundance requires a new attitude—or, as Jesus put it, "being born anew"—so that we can, as new creatures, see with divine vision and resurrection hope. **W**

Duane Grady is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren. He is serving as interim pastor of Cedar Lake Church of the Brethren in Auburn, Ind.



Annual Conference announces lineup of preachers for 2010

Preachers have been named for the worship services at the 2010 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, to be held in Pittsburgh, Pa., July 3-7, 2010.

Preaching for the opening worship service of the Conference, on Saturday

evening, July 3, will be Shawn Flory Replogle, Annual Conference moderator and pastor of McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren. Marlys Hershberger, pastor of Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, will bring the message on Sunday morning.

Speaking Monday evening will be Earle W. Fike Jr., former Conference

moderator and retired pastor, seminary teacher, and General Board executive from Bridgewater, Va. Nancy Fitzgerald, pastor of Arlington (Va.) Church of the Brethren, speaks Tuesday evening. Jonathan Shively, executive director of Congregational Life Ministries, will bring the closing message on Wednesday morning, July 7.

Outdoor Ministries conference considers 'Christ as Cornerstone'

More than 40 people gathered at Woodland Altars in Southern Ohio District for the 2009 Outdoor Ministries Association (OMA) National Conference. The event, held every three years, took place Nov. 13-15 with the theme "Christ as Cornerstone."

The conference featured keynote speaker Rick Dawson of Camp Highroad, a United Methodist camp in northern Virginia. Dawson focused his presentation around his "Seven Foundations of Christian Camping," which he developed with a team working on a new vision for camp ministries in their church region.

"We came to the realization that Christ needs to be the cornerstone of whatever we're trying to build," Dawson said. "We need that foundation to build our camps on."

He encouraged each camp present to have a vision for its ministry. "Know where you want to go," Dawson said.



Jan Long, right, gives instruction on the dulcimer to Valeriy Bukchimov after Long was part of an evening concert.

Walt Witschek

"What's special about your site? What is it that guests remember? Each of your camps has something."

He outlined the dimensions of each of the seven foundations, which include providing an intentional place apart, teaching creation care and appreciation, developing Christian spiritual leaders, extending genuine Christian hospitality, nurturing Christian faith and discipleship, equipping guests to do love and service, and collaborating with churches and agencies.

"Try to make sure that everyone who comes to your camp has a mountaintop experience," Dawson said. "Offer them every tool you can."

An afternoon session led by Dawson encouraged "nuts and bolts" sharing in small groups on how the seven foundations might apply in practical ways to particular camp settings. He encouraged the development of a strategic plan at each camp to achieve those objectives, along with setting clear roles for staff and examining the camp's church relationships.

The weekend also included a concert by John and Jan Long of Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., who provided a mix of folk and peace tunes, including some sing-alongs, accompanied on banjo, dulcimer, and guitar. Breakout sessions between Dawson's keynote addresses provided an opportunity to hike, do creative arts and crafts, or have further conversation with Dawson.

The annual OMA auction was held Saturday evening, and worship closed the gathering Sunday morning.

Following the conference, camp directors, managers, and other staff remained at Woodland Altars for their annual networking retreat through Nov. 19.

An afternoon hike takes some OMA conference participants on a tour of the Woodland Altars property in Southern Ohio.



Walt Witschek

Emergency Disaster Fund issues grants for Haiti, Iowa

Several recent grants have been made from the Church of the Brethren Emergency Disaster Fund:

- An allocation of \$25,000 will aid work in **Cedar Rapids, Iowa**, where much assistance is still needed more than one year after severe flooding occurred in June 2008. BDM is joining with CWS and member denominations and partners in an ecumenical rebuild effort. BDM will be taking a lead role by committing additional staff and volunteer time to take on responsibilities and management. Funds will support the purchase of building materials, tools, and supplies, as well as volunteer support and travel expenses for additional project leadership and equipment during the build.

- An allocation of \$75,000 supports a Church of the Brethren program in **Haiti**. The grant will support the building of eight new homes and a simple road to the Gonaives area, provide a drinking water well, support a third Brethren workcamp this winter (the second Brethren workcamp there took place Oct. 24-Nov. 1 and took part in the dedication and opening worship service of a new church building in Fond Cheval), and support continued oversight and management of the program including travel expenses. Previous grants to this project have totaled \$370,000.

- An allocation of \$40,000 responds to a Church World Service (CWS) appeal for assistance in **Pakistan**. The grant will assist in providing the basic needs of displaced families, mobile health services, schools for children, vocational training for adults, and special programs for women.

- A grant of \$7,500 responds to an appeal from IMA World Health, following up a previous allocation of \$10,000 provided in September 2007. IMA received initial funding from a special Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) to develop basic health services in the Jonglei and Upper Nile States of **southern Sudan**. Additional funding from MDTF has been withheld for unclear reasons, and this grant will continue to support IMA's work in Sudan while efforts are made to restore the MDTF funding.

- An allocation of \$30,000 continues funding for Brethren Disaster Ministries' (BDM) Hurricane Katrina rebuilding site 4 in **Chalmette, La**. The grant supports the repair and rebuilding of homes, and volunteer support including travel expenses, leadership training, tools, equipment, food, and housing.

BVS' new community house project launches in Cincinnati

Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) and Cincinnati (Ohio) Church of the Brethren have partnered to open a BVS House as part of an initiative to develop new community living opportunities for volunteers.

The initiative, which was announced last year, envisions a number of volunteer community houses supported by BVS and local congregations, each housing four to six volunteers serving in full-time BVS projects and committed to intentional practices of life together.

The BVS House opened in early October in Cincinnati and has welcomed four full-time BVS volunteers: Katie Baker of Taneytown, Md.; Ben Bear of Nokesville, Va.; Laura Dell of Holmesville, Neb.; and Anne Wessell of Hershey, Pa. All are Church of the Brethren members.

On Oct. 11, the congregation held a dedication service for the volunteers. The Cincinnati church has rented a house for the volunteer community and provides spiritual support including weekly meetings of congregation members and volunteers. For their part, the volunteers have committed to worship with the congregation, take part in the program of the church in the local community, and provide 40 hours a week of work for a local project.

Ben Walters, a co-pastor of the Cincinnati congregation along with Roger Crusier, has provided much of the impetus for the church's involvement, according to BVS director Dan McFadden. Having served as a BVS volunteer at the denomination's Washington (D.C.) Office in the 1990s, Walters was one of the first to express interest in the BVS House initiative and has

worked with BVS staff since then to make it a reality. He personally visited the most recent BVS orientation to recruit prospective volunteers and "talk up" the project. Walters said the congregation is "building a new model of church in Cincinnati, where most of our work is outside our walls."

Two of the volunteers at the Cincinnati BVS House will work with the congregation's program for children and other programs in the community surrounding the church. The others will serve at Interfaith Hospitality Network, an ecumenical agency partnering with local congregations to provide housing for homeless families, and Talbert House, a large agency providing a community-wide network of social services.

The new community emphasis in BVS is part of a partnership with Volunteers Exploring Vocation through the Fund for Theological Education (FTE) and a grant from the Lilly Foundation. Dana Cassell is helping to guide the initiative as the BVS volunteer staff for Vocation and Community Living. Long-standing BVS houses exist in Elgin, Ill., and Washington, D.C. For more information contact dcassell@brethren.org.

From left, Ben Bear, Anne Wessell, Katie Baker, and Laura Dell are the first volunteers at the new Brethren Volunteer Service community house in Cincinnati.



Dana Cassell



BVS/BRF Orientation Unit 285: Brethren Volunteer Service unit 285, held in cooperation with Brethren Revival Fellowship, did its orientation Aug. 16-26 at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., before heading to year-long service projects. Volunteers, with their home congregations and project assignments, are as follows: from left, Ben Nell, Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren, Abottstown, Pa., to Good Shepherd Food Bank, Auburn, Maine; Korina Copenhaver, White Oak Church of the Brethren, Manheim, Pa., to the Root Cellar, Lewiston, Maine; Roy Martin, Trinity Church of the Brethren, Waynesboro, Pa., to Good Shepherd Food Bank; Amanda Akers, Welsh Run Church of the Brethren, Mercersburg, Pa., to Maine Area Home School Project, Lewiston, Maine; Verda Martin, Trinity Church of the Brethren, Waynesboro, Pa., to Good Shepherd Food Bank. For more information on BVS, see www.brethrenvolunteerservice.org.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

• **Walt Wiltschek** has resigned as editor of *MESSENGER* effective Feb. 1 in order to accept a call as the new campus pastor at Manchester College in North Manchester, Ind. He began work with the Church of the Brethren General Board in August 1999 as interim editor for *Newsline* and the *MESSENGER* news section. He began as full-time director of news services in Elgin in January 2000, overseeing a variety of publications and the denominational website. He also briefly covered the Identity and Relations position for part of 2003 and was called as editor of *MESSENGER* in October of that year, officially stepping into the role in January 2004. Prior to his work in Elgin, he served as associate pastor of Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren, as a sports writer and editor for the *York (Pa.) Daily Record*, and as program director for Camp Eder in Fairfield, Pa. He holds a certificate in biblical studies from Eastern Mennonite University, a master of arts in religion from Lancaster Theological Seminary and a master of arts in communication studies/journalism from Northern Illinois University. An ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, he begins his new

duties at Manchester on Feb. 2 for the start of the spring semester.

• **Sandy Schild** accepted the position of director of financial operations for Church of the Brethren Benefit Trust beginning Dec. 14. Schild is a licensed Certified Public Accountant in Illinois and holds several degrees: Master of Science in taxation from DePaul University, Chicago; Master of Business Administration in accounting and a bachelor of business administration, both from the University of Wisconsin. She is currently involved in a post-graduate study in environmental sustainability through the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Schild most recently served as controller for her husband's company, Schild Consulting Inc., and previously was a management company controller and directed a department that provided accounting, reporting, and cash management services for 15 foreign and domestic companies supporting multiple hedge funds. She has also worked in tax planning, both domestic and international. Schild resides in Barrington, Ill., and is an active member of the Barrington United Methodist Church.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

Jan. 5 National Youth Conference registration opens

Jan. 6-18 On Earth Peace Middle East delegation to Israel/Palestine

Jan. 9-30 Church of the Brethren Global Mission Partnerships Nigeria workcamp

Jan. 24-Feb. 12 Brethren Volunteer Service winter unit orientation, Gotha, Fla.

Jan. 24-27 Council of District Executives winter meeting, Cocoa Beach, Fla.

Jan. 25 Church of the Brethren youth/young adult workcamps registration opens

Feb. 1 Ministry Summer Service applications due

Feb. 7 Service Sunday

March 7 Brethren Press spring curriculum quarter begins

March 13-15 Mission and Ministry Board meeting, Elgin, Ill.

March 14 One Great Hour of Sharing offering emphasis

March 18-20 On Earth Peace board meeting, New Windsor, Md.

March 19-21 Roundtable Regional Youth Conference, Bridgewater (Va.) College

March 26-28 Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees meeting, Richmond, Ind.

April 9-11 Regional Youth Conference, McPherson (Kan.) College

Bethany board gives approval to mission statement, aid plan

The Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees met in Richmond, Ind., Oct. 30-Nov. 1 and welcomed new member David Witkovsky of Huntingdon, Pa., representing Church of the Brethren colleges. Other returning members elected or affirmed at the 2009 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference are Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, representing alumni/ae, Jerry Davis of La Verne, Calif., and John D. Miller, Jr., of York, Pa.

Continuing work from their spring meeting, the board spent considerable time discussing a proposed new mission and vision statement and refining specific goals and action plans for the strategic direction paper. The new mission statement was approved and can be viewed at www.bethanyseminary.edu/about/mission. Objectives in the strategic direction paper were compiled into a three-year completion plan and assigned to groups or individuals. The board also approved funding for a marketing study and communications audit.

The Academic Affairs Committee reported that a comprehensive curriculum review is in progress, with a simultaneous examination of the M.Div. and M.A. curricula. The board approved proceeding with the development of an M.A. Connections program proposal, a distributed education track for the Master of Arts degree. The proposal will be presented to the Association of Theological Schools, an accrediting agency for theological schools, for approval. The number of students in the M.Div. Connections program continues to grow, with 32 students currently.

The Institutional Advancement Committee reported that annual giving in fiscal year 2008-2009 was less than the previous year. Although gifts from congregations have been declining slowly for more than a decade, there was a greater drop in gifts from individuals in the past fiscal year. The total also was affected by the receipt of fewer estate gifts than usual. The board approved a recommendation from the



Vital Pastors retreat: The 2009 Vital Pastors program National Pastors' Retreat took place Nov. 16-20 at Mary and Joseph Retreat Center in Palos Verdes, Calif. The 28 pastors who attended represented six cohorts from 10 districts. The Vital Pastor continuing education track is part of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program offered by the Brethren Academy and funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. Each cohort's picture, the "critical question" studied, and the destination of their immersion retreat can be found in the December issue of the Academy's newsletter, "The Scroll." It is available online at www.bethanyseminary.edu/academy/newsletters.

committee to conduct a feasibility study for a new financial campaign.

The board approved recommendations from the *Student and Business Affairs Committee* related to tuition and financial aid. Tuition for the 2010-2011 academic year will be \$1,260 for a three-credit-hour class. A new financial aid plan will be implemented in 2010-2011, with a primary goal of meeting students' financial needs. It addresses seminary priorities relating to the makeup of the student body, financial goals, and support from congregations and districts. All students will pay a flat amount that will vary each year, based on the annual income needed to keep the plan viable. It will offer generous scholarships for students with high academic standing and those who plan to pursue a vocation that serves the church.

Twenty-six new degree-seeking students and two new occasional students began taking classes this fall, a 12-year record high.

The board meeting was preceded by a service of installation for new aca-

demic dean Steven Schweitzer. Jim Olson, pastor of Bethel Christian Fellowship in Minnesota shared the message, and David Hendricks, pastor of Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind., officiated a service of anointing.

A celebration marking the completion of the restoration of the seminary's special collections project took place Saturday evening. The special collections contain portions of the libraries of three donors: the William Eberly Hymnal Collection, the Ora Huston English Bible Collection, and more than 4,000 titles from the Abraham Cassel Collection. A grant of nearly \$150,000 from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations provided for restoration of most of the valuable volumes and the enclosure of each item in acid-free clamshells or hinge boxes. More than 300 digital images of title pages and other illustrations are on the Bethany website at www.bethanyseminary.edu/specialcollections. Murray Wagner, emeritus professor of historical studies, directed the project.

ONCAMPUS

Bridgewater College (Bridgewater, Va.)

Two major construction projects—one that will significantly improve the existing Wright and Heritage student residence halls and another that will provide new village-style student housing—have been announced by the college's board of trustees. The first phase of both projects will get under way in February or March and be completed by August.

Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, Pa.)

The Nov. 12 Snowden Lecture at the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies featured Steven Nolt, professor of history at Goshen (Ind.) College, on the topic "Globalizing a Separate People: World Christianity and North American Mennonites."

Juniata College (Huntingdon, Pa.)

Ryan Johnson, a senior from Mountain Top, Pa., received the 2010 Raymond W. Sarber Award for Scientific Achievement from the American Society for Microbiology, the only undergraduate in the nation to receive the award.

University of La Verne (La Verne, Calif.)

La Verne has been awarded a five-year Title V grant from the US Department of Education designed to strengthen graduate studies. The first year of the grant is funded for \$575,000; the total amount requested for the five-year grant period is \$2,875,000.

Manchester College (North Manchester, Ind.)

Manchester will locate its new School of Pharmacy on the Randallia campus of Parkview Health in Fort Wayne. Parkview Health will help Manchester transform the Fort Wayne Cardiology office building at 1819 Carew St. into a satellite campus in 2012.

McPherson College (McPherson, Kan.)

Michael Schneider was inaugurated on Nov. 7 as the college's 14th president, becoming the youngest president in McPherson history and one of the youngest presidents at any institution of higher learning in the United States. He is a 1996 alumnus of the school and has been on the staff since 2002.

Youth take lead on Iowa garden project

A Foods Resource Bank (FRB) growing project in Iowa has a different twist: Youth from participating congregations have been planting a garden, growing produce, and selling it at a local grocery store to benefit FRB hunger relief and food security programs.

Proceeds have benefited several programs, including one in Madagascar, as well as in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic where the Church of the Brethren is the lead sponsor through the Global Food Crisis Fund. This past year's proceeds topped \$3,000.

"It gave us a good feeling knowing we were working together to help other people in need," the youth said in a statement to the project leadership.

The garden is part of the larger Conrad-area "A-maize-ing Grace" growing project, which includes Ivester Church of the Brethren (Grundy Center, Iowa) as well as Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God, and Disciples congregations. Ivester joined in 2004, a year after the project was organized.

FRB staff member Joan Fumetti planned to travel to First Presbyterian Church in Conrad on Jan. 10 to personally recognize the youth and thank all those involved.—Lois Kruse



Kristin Flory

Cream of the crop: The Balkan nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina is home to the newest Brethren Volunteer Service project in Europe, with an organization called Bread of Life in the town of Prijedor. Bread of Life, a Christian humanitarian association founded by Protestant churches in Serbia, initially provided food and material aid for refugees and other displaced and marginalized people since opening in the region in 1996. It now is developing programs to promote income-generation, long-term employment, and self-sustainability for its beneficiaries, including local dairy farmers and rural young people involved in agriculture and crafts. It also offers low-cost English and computer classes at an education center.

Bits and pieces

• Bridgewater (Va.) College will hold its annual **Roundtable regional youth conference** March 19-21. The theme for the weekend will be "Come to the Mountain," based on Micah 4:1-5. Leadership will be provided by Joel and Linetta Ballew, a husband and wife team from Shenandoah District. Joel is pastor of Lebanon Church of the Brethren, and Linetta is program director at Camp Brethren Woods. Friday night entertainment will be by "BAM" magician Brett A. Myers. An offering will be collected for the Tent of Nations, a project that brings youth of various cultures together to build bridges of understanding, reconciliation, and peace. Registration opens in January; further details are at <http://bridgewater.edu/orgs/iyc>.

• McPherson (Kan.) College's **Regional Youth Conference** will take place April 9-11. Paul Grout, director of the A Place Apart project in Vermont and former Annual Conference moderator, will be the keynote speaker. He will address the theme "Fully Alive: Taking Hold of the Life That Is Really Life in Body, Mind, and Spirit," drawn from John 10:10.



'The Help': Powerful voices

Book gives insights into South's segregation era

If you'd like to read a new can't-put-it-down novel that doesn't involve mayhem, murder, or the fate of the earth hanging in the balance, but actually deals with true-to-life courage overcoming fear . . . well, good luck.

Wait—I'm kidding. There is such a real page-turner (at least I found it so): *The Help*.

The action in *The Help* takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s at a time when segregation of the races was a way of life. A young white woman, Skeeter Phelen, has recently



KEN GIBBLE

graduated from college. She returns to her parents' home and begins to wonder, for the first time, how the black maids working in the homes of white people must feel about the way they are treated by their employers. An aspiring writer, Skeeter begins talking with the maids and then collecting their stories with a view to publishing their accounts anonymously. What happens during that process comprises the plot of *The Help*, and, in the hands of a gifted storyteller—first-time author Kathryn

Stockett—makes for a compelling reading experience.

has gained a reputation among prominent white families as "sassy." Unlike Aibileen, who is careful not to make waves, Minnie can't help venting her frustration at the low wages and the condescending attitudes of her employers. The chapters told in her voice contain a barely suppressed rage.

As the story unfolds, Skeeter Phelen's voice grows increasingly skeptical and then critical of the racist attitudes held by the women in her circle of friends. In addition to confronting the injustice she is beginning to perceive in the city of Jackson, Skeeter is troubled by personal struggles: her mother's illness, a romantic relationship with a young man from a prominent family, and a deteriorating friendship with Hilly, one of the least attractive characters I've encountered in current fiction.

I was especially drawn to the author's portrayal of the church where Aibileen and Minnie are members. In contrast to the scant references to the casual church-going of the white families, the novel probes deeply into the faith experience of the black maids. Aibileen uses a "prayer book," in which she writes the names of the people she prays for. Members of her congregation ask to be placed on her prayer list because, as Minny tells her: "Rumor is you got some kind of prayer power, gets better results than just the regular variety." When troubling events occur, such as the murder in Jackson of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, the congrega-

SHE CONFESSED THAT SHE WILL NEVER KNOW "WHAT IT REALLY FELT LIKE" TO BE IN THE SHOES OF THE BLACK WOMEN WHO WORKED IN THE WHITE HOMES OF THE SOUTH DURING THE 1960'S. "BUT I HAD TO TRY, . . . I WANTED THE STORY TO BE TOLD."

Voice plays a prominent role in making this novel so good. I emphasize the word "voice," perhaps because my first time through the book was by listening to an audio recording. The story is told in 34 chapters, each chapter spoken in the voice of one of three main characters in the story.

Aibileen is the maid for the Leefolt family. In addition to providing meals and doing household chores, she is the primary caregiver for Mae Mobley, the family's precocious 2-year-old. The relationship that develops between Aibileen and Mae Mobley assumes added significance in light of events that we know today as the civil rights movement. Aibileen makes up stories to entertain the little girl and teach her that white children and black children can be friends. Martin Luther King Jr., whose "I Have a Dream" speech has been in the news, appears in one of Aibileen's stories as a kind visitor from outer space named "Martian Luther King."

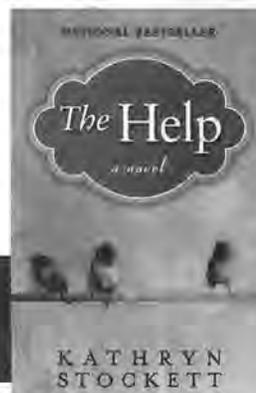
Minnie, a good friend of Aibileen, has taken a new job after being dismissed as the maid of an elderly white woman. She

provides strong support, both personal and spiritual, for its members as they face uncertainty and fear.

Kathryn Stockett, who grew up in Jackson, has admitted in an interview that she "didn't even question the situation" of segregation and racial injustice during her formative years. She said, "I figured that's how the whole world lived. It wasn't until I was about 30 years old that I started looking back on it." She confessed that she will never know "what it really felt like" to be in the shoes of the black women who worked in the white homes of the South during the 1960's. "But I had to try," she said. "I wanted the story to be told."

Tell it she did, with riveting suspense and a generous sprinkling of humor in the process. *The Help* is the most enjoyable, perceptive, and moving work of fiction I've read in a long, long time. **M**

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



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The Help*. **Author:** Kathryn Stockett. **List price:** \$24.95. **Pages:** 464. **Published:** February 2009.

Notes: Questions about the book for reading groups are at www.kathrynstockett.com/reading-groups.

'Seedbeds' are needed to grow prophetic witness

I was inspired by the (July/August 2009) MESSENGER. Having been privileged to participate in many of the innovative programs initiated by the Church of the Brethren following World War II, I too dream that the Church of the Brethren could embrace such a vision in today's world, which is gasping for the message of love and reconciliation that we could share.

The "prophetic witness" of the Brethren in the wake of World War II was not limited to responding to the physical needs of persons but also included actions aimed at changing the conditions which brought about the misery. Any prophetic witness that we attempt today must certainly do likewise.

Brethren participation with the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches and other ecumenical and governmental groups has been instrumental in recent years in helping us discover issues that need attention and also has provided a means for our influence to spread quickly to other groups. I fear that it will be difficult for us to adequately maintain the governmental contacts especially without an ongoing presence in Washington, D.C. Therefore I would urge that the Church of the Brethren plan to reinstate an office in D.C. as soon as it is financially possible. I believe that the cross-fertilization such an office can provide is a much-needed factor in maintaining a fertile seedbed in which prophetic dreams can grow.

Esther Mohler Ho
Hayward, Calif.

What legacy does our behavior communicate?

The matter of one's legacy to be passed on to those younger than us was the central challenge at the recent National Older Adult Conference (NOAC, see November MESSENGER). The theme, "Legacies of Wisdom," resounded throughout worship services, addresses, and workshops the entire five days. What will we leave to those who follow; what values will we pass on; what will our children and

grandchildren learn from our lives?

During this time I thought of another theme that has been resounding through our denomination in recent months, as the financial crisis all around us is being felt within the church wherever investments or contributions are counted on for income. This includes especially Church of the

Brethren agencies, academic institutions, and retirement communities. The scarcity of funds has led to cutting staff and other office positions, paring down program, salary freezes, and reducing pension payments. This has necessitated a number of very difficult decisions being carried out by church leaders who, while capable

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and experienced, nevertheless represent the next generation behind those of us seniors attending NOAC.

Certainly our heart goes out to those whose careers have been interrupted, or their earnings cut. But a further concern has to do with how we seniors and others relate to those, in many cases our juniors, who find themselves, along with their boards, wading through troubled waters. I'm thinking of such leaders as our denominational staff, the board members presiding with them, our seminary and college presidents, and the leaders of other agencies where the financial crunch affects personnel and program.

Carrying out decisions that put people out of the work to which they were

called, or knowing others may lose a portion of their pension for life, has to be extremely stressful. We who look on have choices as to how we respond. We can criticize openly, or more subtly just avoid even those whom we know on a first-name basis; or we can make an effort to reassure them of our support for their leadership even though the pinch we feel is real. In so doing, we acknowledge that these leaders did not create the problems we're facing, but understand it is their role to lead us through them. I've been impressed by a few who are my elders, who while hurting from loss of income or disappointed by program reductions have nevertheless offered encouragement to those in leadership,

thus serving as role models for me, a decade behind them.

So, the word "legacy" constantly rang in my ears for most of a week, just days after learning of the pension reduction on its way, and with church leaders who faced these tough decisions moving all about us in various sessions and even in the choir. It occurred to me then that we who are in our "senior" years—whether or not we attended NOAC—are challenged to extend encouragement and support to those who follow behind us as leaders, and pass on a legacy that places respect for people, the values of our faith heritage, and the mission of the church above the financial and personal stress we feel. I'm reminded of the words by Jon Mohr that were sung by the NOAC choir: "O, may all who come behind us find us faithful."

Willard E. Dulabaum
Elgin, Ill.

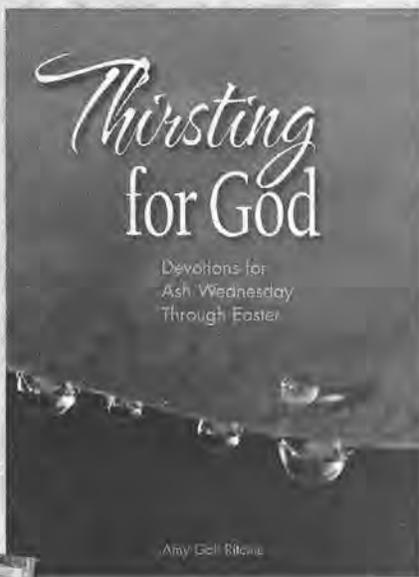
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Commitment to truth must be balanced with grace

After reading Charles McGuckin's letter in the November issue of MESSENGER, I have to say that I couldn't agree more. We need a return to the solid foundation of biblical authority. As broken people living in a broken world, it is the only true source of knowledge we have to guide us in our lives and our interaction with each other.

However, that biblical authority must be used in an even-handed way. While much of the recent discussion has focused on diversity regarding homosexuality, we should not allow that one single issue to divide us or stop us from discussing other issues within our church that are equally or more pressing.

We are all sinful beings, and we should not discriminate against one type of sin while ignoring many of our own sins. This gets back to what Jesus said about trying to help our neighbor remove a speck from their eye when we have a log in our own.

The situation that we will always struggle with is the fact that Jesus came in truth and grace. To lean too heavily on truth leads to dangerous fundamentalism. Likewise, leaning too heavily on grace leads to a "do what-

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ever feels good" form of Christianity. A balance of both is what we need—a balance that we are not likely going to achieve in perfection in our broken lives.

We need to accept biblical authority as our only guide while also accepting that none of us are capable of living true to that authority. We must accept that we are not all going to agree completely on everything and that we are going to have to accept a certain amount of disagreement while not dividing. We are going to have to accept one another as being sinful by nature and encourage each other when we see one of our brothers or sisters fall. To do otherwise would be to lose a battle over sin that Christ already won when he died on the cross. To do otherwise would be to hand Satan a solid victory over our church.

Joel Postma
La Porte, Ind.

Progressive Brethren Gathering offered conversation and hope

I attended the Progressive Brethren Gathering in mid-November, held at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. The group met under the theme "Ready at the Thresholds." The gathering was well planned, and the hospitality of the Elizabethtown congregation was the very best, every detail meticulously cared for in a most welcoming way!

Those who attended the gathering, just under 150 and representative of a significant number of Church of the Brethren members, came together to thoughtfully and prayerfully assess the denomination at this time. Participants came from the West Coast, the East Coast, and many points between. There was a mix of church leaders and laity; they attend Annual Conference, National Older Adult Conference, young adult events, walk the halls of Bethany Seminary and the colleges, the grounds of the camps, and count themselves faithful members—with progressive ideas—of congregations of the Church of the Brethren. (A hopeful note: Some children of participants had their own "gathering" and at times were with parents in the larger circle.)

Such a gathering finds much to affirm and appreciate about the church; it also identifies issues that give rise to concern, that both disappoint and disturb. One of

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ISRAEL/PALESTINE (June 24 - July 5)
EUROPEAN HERITAGE II
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)
FAITH LUTHERAN HOLY LAND TOUR (September 5-16)
EUROPEAN HERITAGE III
with PAUL ZEHR (September 5-18)
THE ROAD to JERUSALEM (September 11-22)
EUROPEAN HERITAGE IV (September 16-29)

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the deepest concerns focuses on ways the church continues to accept the exclusion of some persons who are part of the fellowship. The "thresholds" theme indicates the group has the readiness to move decisively in ways designed to address the deep concerns, to make some positive changes, and at the same time hold on to the basic tenets of Church of the Brethren heritage.

The gathering offered a variety of issues for conversation that emphasized both the hopes and the challenges. Ever mindful of the theme, those issues included peace, stories of intimidation, new possibilities for ministry, young adults in the church, stay or leave, inclusion and exclusion issues, organizational alternatives, and others, plus envisioning the future with the question, "What can I do?"

"Ready at the Thresholds" can be described as a refreshing, inspiring, educational, and hopeful experience, one that I feel many others would appreciate.

Elaine Sollenberger
Everett, Pa.

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

Letters should be brief (300 words or less), clear, and respectful of the opinions of others, with strong differences handled in the spirit of Matthew 18. Preference is given to letters that respond directly to items in MESSENGER. Anonymous letters will not be considered.

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Please send information to be included in *Turning Points* to Jean Clements, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-325-8039 ext. 206; jclements@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

New Members

Bassett, Va.: Lee Anna Cassell, Ashley Mills

Bear Creek, Dayton, Ohio: Jim Shepard, Pat Shepard, Sheri Wine Benges

Camp Creek, Etna Green, Ind.: Yvonne Riege, Larry Lemler, Donna Lemler, Loren Stackhouse, Helen Stackhouse, Jose Nunez, Missy Nunez, Dalton Bailey, Tanner Neeley, Trevor Neeley

Chambersburg, Pa.: Clarence D. Stouffer, Michael D. Hotchkiss, Robin L. Hotchkiss, Mary C. Bunn, Antonio H. Guillen, Travis M. Hotchkiss

Charlottesville, Va.: Jenna Grace Kelliher, Mandy Wehrle, Richard Wehrle

Defiance, Ohio: Bruce Lipp

Dixon, Ill.: Vernon Meyer, Lorraine Meyer, Emily Brooks, Devor Rodabaugh

Drexel Hill, Pa.: Christopher Montgomery, Amanda Montgomery, Barbara Sullivan

Eden Valley, Saint John, Kan.: Lynda Lyon, Lyndon Lyon, Russ Shelton, Deanna Shelton, Brett Ward, Shannon Ward, Kathleen Ward, Matthew Ward, Jacob Faulk, Haley Faulk, Bob Faulds, Vicki Faulds, Sheryl Striplin, Kalla Estes, Pauline McConnell, Alyssa Roberts

Everett, Pa.: John Shamback, Charlene Shamback, Bruce Zimmerman, Jr., Mary Zimmerman, Amy Guelich

Fellowship, Martinsburg, W.Va.: Mike Dinterman, Lois Dinterman, Gary Stevens, Sondra Stevens

Florin, Mount Joy, Pa.: Hannah Kraenbring, Trinity Breneman, Kelsey Bollinger, Lauren Becker, Thomas Price, Connor Maxwell

Free Spring, Mifflintown, Pa.: Joe Leach, Brenda Hosler, Brianne Kell

Hagerstown, Md.: Sandy Clipp

Hartville, Ohio: Allison Aubele, Nancy Aubele

Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.: Michelle Miller, Angie Burton, Carolyn Lyman

Lebanon, Pa.: Adam Doutrich, Paige Kenney, Joseph Kenney, Joseph Kenney, Jr.

Manassas, Va.: Scott Craighead, Rhonda Craighead, Karen Villegas, Melanee Montalvo, Donna Bolt, Jim Lunsford, Susie Lunsford, Annise Crawford, Kathryn Crawford, Norma Sparks, Maralee Pumphrey

Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.: Roy Snow, Diane Snow, Donna Sellers

Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Thomas McCleaf, Diane Schmidt

Mill Creek, Port Republic, Va.: Ron Powdrell, Debbie Powdrell, Madysen Alger, Daniel Martin

Montgomery, Commodore, Pa.: Joseph Tyger, Leasa Tyger, Dustin Tyger, Dylan Tyger

Myerstown, Pa.: Joel Fahnstock, Linda Fahnstock, Valerie Zimmerman

Neighborhood, Montgomery, Ill.: Ellie Jeskie

North Liberty, Ind.: Tracy Macias

Osage, McCune, Kan.: Gina Kirby Buzard, Dianne Nutt Hiller, Adam Martinie, Alaina Martinie

Roaring Spring, Pa.: Marsha Josapak

Spring Branch, Avery, Mo.: Larry Lee, Lisa Yeast, Mikala Johnston

Uniontown, Pa.: Edward Jacobs, Penny Young, Sarah DeFazio

White Cottage, Ohio: Jason Leavitt, Yvonne Leavitt, Jessica Osborn, Roger Fletcher, Diana Fletcher

Yellow Creek, Goshen, Ind.: Ramiro Arguijo, Jr, Nori Arguijo, Laura Brubaker, Mark Bendes, Scharna Bendes, LeRoy Cramer, Dee Cramer, Kevin Goss, Staci Goss, Travis Brovont, Cody Brovont, Nathan Bendes, Linnea Bendes, Janet Stutzman, Emily Vanderveer

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Anniversaries

Aldrich, Wallace and Pearl, North Liberty, Ind., 60

Arnold, Arthur and Erma, Bluffton, Ohio, 73

Baer, Harvey and Fern, Somerset, Pa., 60

Carter, Clyde and Karen, Daleville, Va., 50

Fryman, Robert and Waneta, New Lebanon, Ohio, 60

Gable, John and Grace, Roaring Spring, Pa., 50

Kirkbride, Bill and Mary Jane, Zanesville, Ohio, 50

Morral, Eugene and Allegra, Everett, Pa., 60

Moyer, Ronn and Diane, Harleysville, Pa., 50

Oshel, Clifford and Phyllis, Topeka, Kan., 60

Pasley, Gerald and Clara Mae, Wirtz, Va., 50

Petry, Larry and Alice, Lakemore, Ohio, 55

Pryor, Edgar and Betty, Hagerstown, Md., 55

Roberts, Denny and Donna, Mount Perry, Ohio, 50

Rosell, Benny and Pat, Baldwin City, Kan., 50

Slack, Paul and Irene, Mount Perry, Ohio, 50

Walker, Reid and Jean, Somerset, Pa., 60

Deaths

Arnold, Erma, 90, Bluffton, Ohio, Dec. 3

Atwater, Dale, 86, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 7

Berger, Lillian, 85, Olathe, Kan., Nov. 16

Bledsoe, Ruth O., 89, Winchester, Kan., Nov. 26

Brubaker, Velma E., 90, Roaring Spring, Pa., Oct. 27

Brumbaugh, Loren, 72, Albion, Ind., Oct. 27

Byerly, Ruth L., 84, Lima, Ohio, Nov. 3

Clabaugh, Florence W., 87, Everett, Pa., Aug. 29

Cook, Melinda, 27, Denver, Pa., May 12

Cripe, Constance, 82, North Manchester, Ind., Nov. 24

Cripe, Jeanne, 88, Venice, Fla., Sept. 21

Davis, Elizabeth Williard, 88, Winston-Salem, N.C., Nov. 20

Davis, Margaret, 87, North Liberty, Ind., Oct. 11

Duncan, Samuel Curtis, 90, Mount Morris, Ill., Oct. 28

Eller, Edna Cornelia Marquis, 90, Nampa, Idaho, Oct. 16

England, Samuel E., Jr., 86, Everett, Pa., July 26

Ferguson, Cecel, 90, Spirit Lake, Iowa, July 31

Fisher, Frances Agee, 89, Rocky Mount, Va., June 20

Frick, Harold, 82, Fort Mill, S.C., Sept. 5

Graham, Karen Buckwalter, 53, Quakertown, Pa., Dec. 3

Graybill, Harry E., 89, New Oxford, Pa., Dec. 10

Grove, Elizabeth, 101, Hershey, Pa., Nov. 4

Hammond, Mary Marshalllette, 88, McPherson, Kan., Nov. 28

Harshbarger, Lois K., 92, Troy, Ohio, Nov. 24

Haugh, John R., 74, Charlottesville, Va., Sept. 12

Heisey, John, 90, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 16

Hoch, Glenn, 75, Harrisburg, Pa., Oct. 31

Hoffer, Isaac, 86, Hershey, Pa., Oct. 21

Houff, James Lee, 88, Champaign, Ill., Nov. 29

Huffman, Dorothy Ellen, 98, Quinter, Kan., Oct. 11

Imler, John S., 83, Everett, Pa., Aug. 4

Imperio, Charles Benjamin, 84, Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 12

John, J. Jean, 87, New Windsor, Md., April 4

Koontz, Marie B., 85, Everett, Pa., Jan. 5, 2009

Lange, Rose-Marie, 63, Nokomis, Fla., Oct. 22

Lavy, Wilma M., 82, North Canton, Ohio, Nov. 21

Leech, Alice E., 83, Canton, Ohio, Oct. 31

Leonard, Samuel, 84, Everett, Pa., Jan. 20, 2009

Lovell, Doris, 87, Rock Mount, Va., Oct. 7

Lybarger, Eileen, 88, Windber, Pa., Nov. 25

Mackey, Wilbur H., 90, Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 31

Masters, Gene, 90, Waldorf, Md., Nov. 7

McRoberts, Roy J., Jr., 79, West Manchester, Ohio, Sept. 1

Miller, Dorothy Ellen, 93, Saint John, Kan., Oct. 20

Miller, Ruth, 87, Somerset, Pa., Aug. 5

Mohlar, Pat, 71, Rocky Mount, Va., Oct. 19

Moore, Doris Marie, 78, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 21

Myers, Phyllis J., 80, Louisville, Ohio, Oct. 17

Reed, Kenneth, 92, Everett, Pa., Dec. 12, 2008

Replogle, Myra Phyllis, 88, Troy, Ohio, Oct. 18

Rider, Michael, 51, Mechanicsburg, Pa., June 24

Rohrer, Harry H., Jr., 86, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Nov. 3

Schildt, Ralph Edgar, 90, New Oxford, Pa., Aug. 22

Shank, John S., II, 55, Boonsboro, Md., Oct. 22

Shirk, Ella, 94, Lewistown, Pa., Oct. 20

Smyers, Fern S., 88, Everett, Pa., June 17

Snyder, Charles Erwin, III, 55, Hagerstown, Md., Nov. 18

Spitler, Gregory Stewart, 50, Broadway, Va., Sept. 27

Turley, Judy Ann, 58, Virden, Ill., Nov. 13

Van Benthuyssen, Harriet L., 77, Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 10

Walker, Reid Oscar, 82, Somerset, Pa., Dec. 1

Wastler, Eileen, 86, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 30

Webb, Terry, 93, Rocky Mount, Va., Oct. 23

Wenger, Harry, 88, Fayetteville, Pa., Oct. 14

Whitmer, Dora, 99, North Liberty, Ind., Oct. 4

Wickham, Janet, 65, Ashland, Ohio, Oct. 20

Wylie, Eula Lavonne Tridle, 81, Pittsburg, Kan., March 1, 2009

Licensings

Beck, Brenda L., Ill./Wis. Dist. (New Beginnings, Batavia, Ill.), Aug. 2

Bracy, Arthur, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Philadelphia, First, Wyndmoor, Pa.), Aug. 16

Cantu, Francisco, S. Plains Dist. (Falfurrias, Texas), Nov. 15

Duffey, Andrew C., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Westminster, Md.), Nov. 17

Eastead, Mark, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Florin, Mount Joy, Pa.), Oct. 18

Ebersole, Kim, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Highland Avenue, Elgin, Ill.), Nov. 15

Hanks, Brandon, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Hatfield, Pa.), Aug. 16

Henry, Ryan Michael, S. Pa. Dist. (York, First, York, Pa.), May 10

Hess, Jennifer, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Lancaster, Pa.), Oct. 11

Rice, Kent, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Hempfield, Manheim, Pa.), Sept. 27

Rogers, Sandra E., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 11

Romero, Jody, Pac. S.W. Dist. (Bella Vista, Los Angeles, Calif.), Nov. 29

Sarpiya, Gretchen, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Rockford, Ill.), June 21

Sarpiya, Samuel, Ill./Wis. Dist. (Rockford, Ill.), June 21

Syes, Kevin J., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 11

Syes, Kevin J., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 11

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Syes, Kevin J., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 11

Worth a second look

She had the look of an aging '60s hippie who had lived through some wild times back in the day. She sat behind a small folding table covered with various knitted and crocheted products, another one working its way to completion in her hands.

He was an African-American man who had the look of someone who might have spent some time living on the streets, perhaps the previous night. He wore a well-used jacket, with a backpack slung over his shoulder.



WALT WILTSCHKEK
MESSENGER Editor

And on his head he wore a still-new-looking handcrafted knit cap. "I love my hat!" he called to the woman behind the table.

"You're welcome!" she called back, the smile on her face rivaling the ascending sun in brightness. "Have a great day!"

It was a simple exchange, yet beautiful, tender, and very human. It was also not at all what I expected given

the somewhat rough exterior of Venice Beach, Calif., that morning.

Gilbert Romero, pastor of Bella Vista Church of the Brethren in East Los Angeles, had urged me on several

"American Idol" and entranced the audience with her soaring melody. No one expected a plump, dowdy, middle-aged, unemployed Scottish woman to sing like an angel—especially on a reality show looking for cannon fodder—but there she was.

When asked by the judges why her stated dream of becoming a professional singer hadn't become reality to that point, she replied, "I haven't been given the chance before, but here's hoping it will change." Her first album debuted in November and quickly raced up the charts.

"Susan Boyle's performance became the watershed moment that neither she nor anyone involved could possibly have imagined," said a press release accompanying a new TV special about her life. "During her three and a half minutes of song, Susan Boyle elicited a moment of pure, molten zeitgeist that became both her and the show's defining moment."

Such epiphany moments are reminders of God's Spirit constantly breaking through in unexpected and unorthodox ways. They are the continuation of a progression of such stories dotting the pages of scripture, including the one we just celebrated at Christmas.

That spirit is echoed in the theme for the 2010 Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference, which begins registration this month. With the phrase "More Than Meets the Eye," it prompts us to consider that God is present in the

GOD IS PRESENT IN THE PLACES WE MAY LEAST EXPECT, PERHAPS ESPECIALLY SO, AND EVERY PERSON HAS VALUE SIMPLY BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST IS WITHIN THEM—THE TREASURE IN OUR EARTHEN VESSELS, AS 2 CORINTHIANS 4 DESCRIBES IT.

occasions to visit Venice. He said it was one of the places where you see the real L.A.

Finally making it there in November, I understood what he meant. The "ocean walk" running along the Pacific in Venice Beach is not glitz and glamor or family fun. It's grit and unvarnished life. It's skaters and artists and druggies and drifters. It's absolutely real. And on second glance you see glimpses of interaction and caring between these fellow journeyers that one suspects run far deeper than the "plastic" relationships so common elsewhere.

Perhaps we should not be surprised when the pages of the book are indeed not reflected by the cover. But for better or worse, we often are. First impressions die hard.

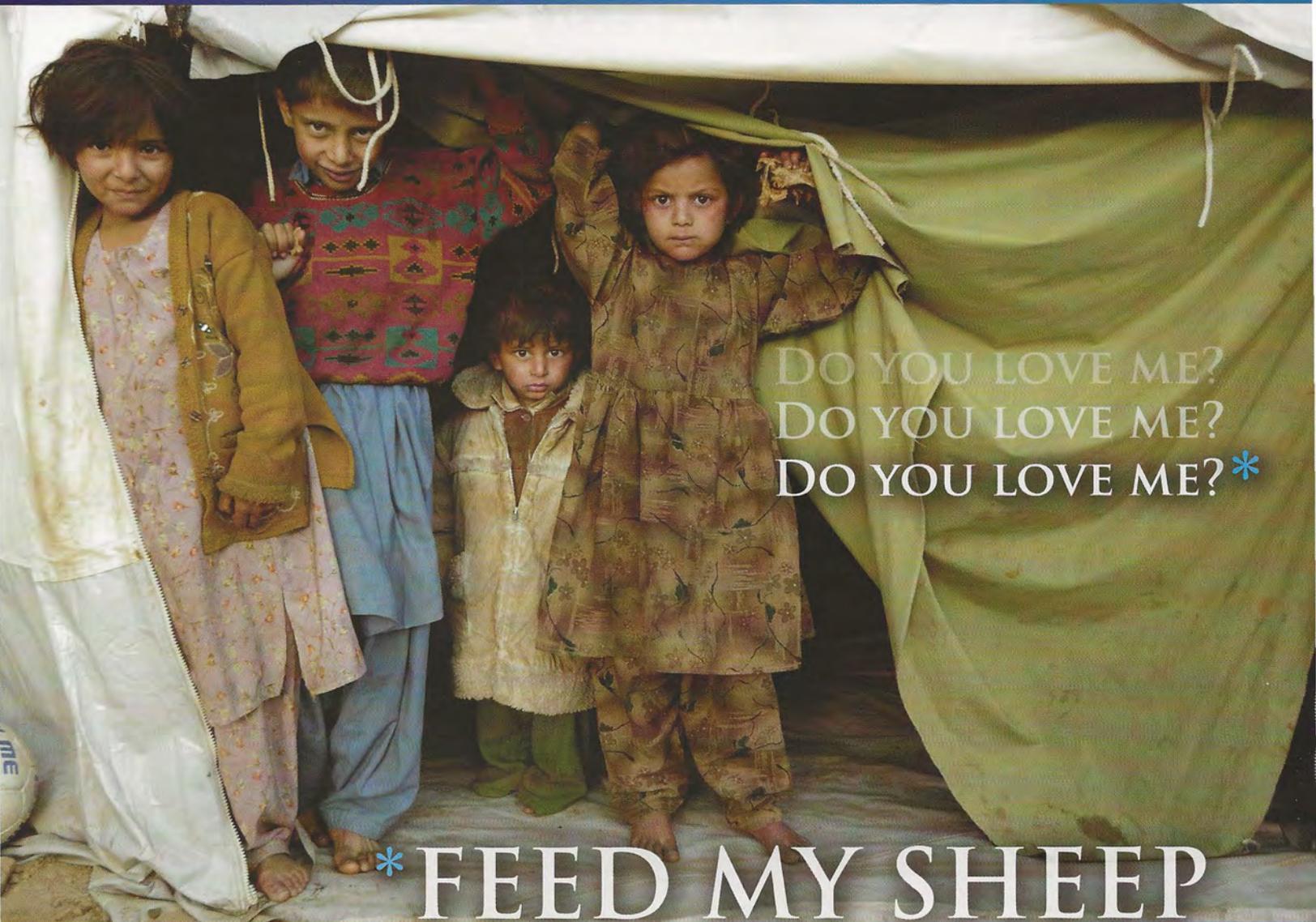
It's what propelled Susan Boyle to sudden fame last year when she stepped onto the stage of the British equivalent of

places we may least expect, perhaps especially so, and that every person has value simply because Jesus Christ is within them—the treasure in our earthen vessels, as 2 Corinthians 4 describes it.

In Eugene Peterson's *The Message* rendition, the chapter goes on to say: "Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace."

It is a reminder that our communities, our congregations, and our own journeys are full of God-moments if we dare to take a second look and let them emerge. Whether we are walking amid gritty bohemian oceanfronts, in the countryside, or along the sidewalks of our neighborhoods, God is always at work. Epiphany bursts are everywhere. Have you noticed?—Ed. 

COMING IN MARCH: Young adult ministry, seeking a Brethren college, technology in worship, Brethren Revival Fellowship, Bible study from Proverbs, movie review, and more.



DO YOU LOVE ME?
DO YOU LOVE ME?
DO YOU LOVE ME?*

* FEED MY SHEEP

¿ME AMAS? PASTOREA MIS OVEJAS

John 21:15-19 Juan 21:15-19



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Sus donaciones para La Hora de Compartir hacen posible todas las formas en las cuales la Iglesia de los Hermanos alimenta al "rebaño" de Jesús. Al unir su donación junto a las de otros miembros de la iglesia, nuestros actos de amor se multiplican. Vivan el amor del Buen Pastor a través de donaciones generosas.



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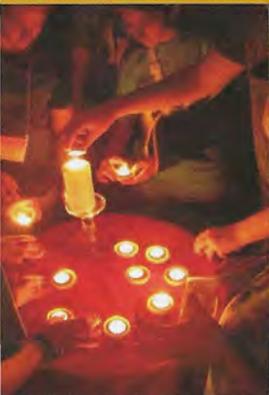
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taking Jesus seriously

- John 14:15

This "taking Jesus seriously" is evident from the first gatherings around the Eder River, and runs true through our history, even during the moments of our past which include much brokenness; the Brethren have sought the mind of Christ."

—Shawn Flory Replogle, 2010 Annual Conference moderator
and pastor of McPherson (KS) Church of the Brethren



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Photos by Justin Hollenberg, Glenn Riegel, and Ken Wenger

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

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Church of the Brethren

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