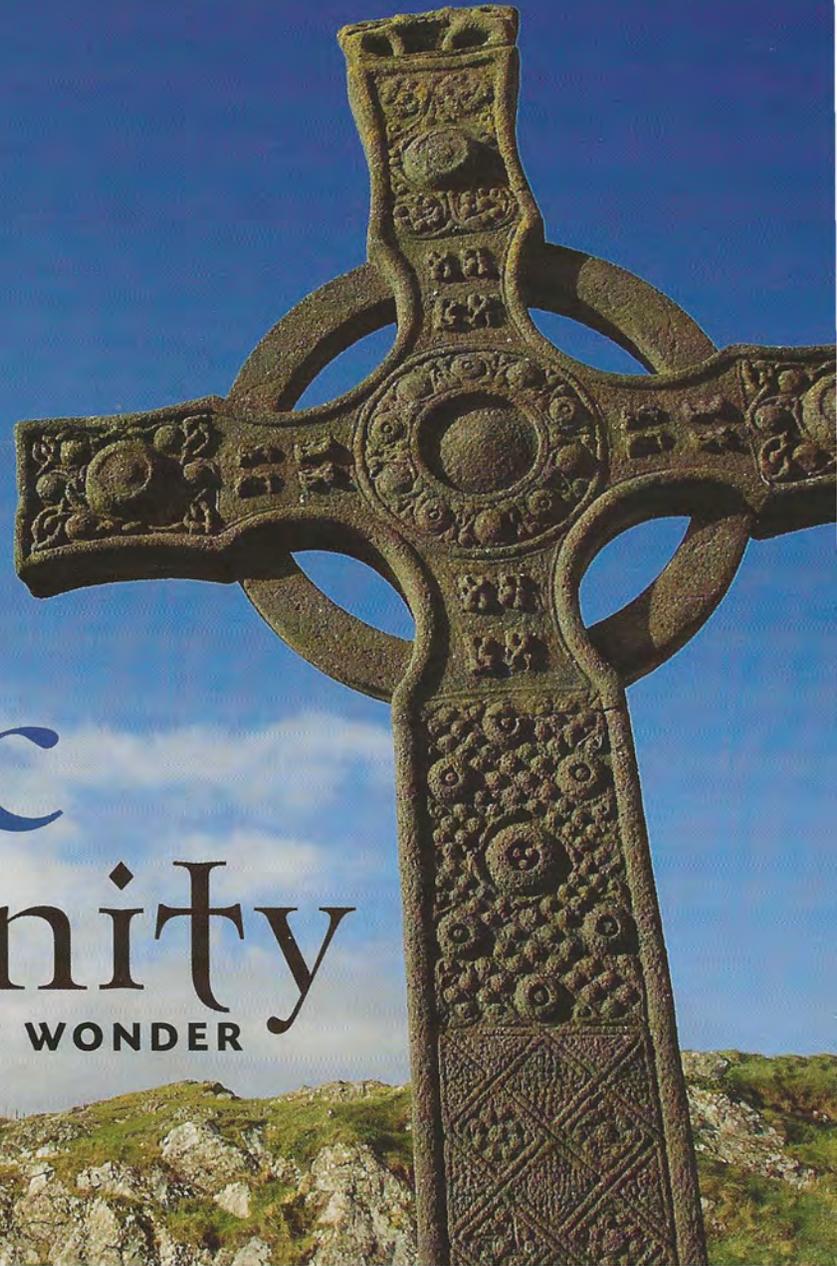


Church of the Brethren

MESSENGER

APRIL 2010 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



Celtic Christianity

AWAKENING OUR SENSE OF WONDER

Vital Congregations and Growing Disciples

Annual Conference enrichment opportunities
sponsored by Congregational Life Ministries



Intercultural Luncheon

Monday, July 5th, 12:00 noon

An inviting celebration including a meal, music and fellowship that inspires and engages participants in a relaxed environment to converse, sing and praise the Lord together. This event will encourage and challenge you to cross the cultural barriers. Music will be provided by the Bittersweet Ministries Band.

Hosted by Ruben Deoleo and the Intercultural Steering Committee

Congregational Life Ministries Dinner

Tuesday, July 6th, 5:00 pm

Come celebrate congregational vitality and encourage one another toward dynamic local church ministry with a dinner program featuring one congregation's story of discipleship and community engagement. John Creasy, associate pastor of The Open Door Presbyterian Church, will share about this inspiring missional church community in the East End of Pittsburgh. You'll also hear about the work of Congregational Life Ministries, meet the staff, and have an opportunity for informal dialog. (.1 ceu)



Church of the Brethren



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

Church
of the
Brethren

MESSENGER

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8 Connecting to Celtic Christianity

It was a flock of snow geese soaring overhead that first stirred in Glenn Mitchell a sense of wonder at God’s creation when he was just a boy. More recently, he has found that expression of wonder articulated most clearly in Celtic Christianity. What can we learn from Celtic Christians that might enhance our own expressions of faith?

12 Theology and climate change

What does the Bible say about climate change? What are the theological insights churches can offer to a world facing an unprecedented ecological crisis? World Council of Churches media relations officer Juan Michel suggests that the Bible offers words of hope, not doom, as we confront climate change.

14 The Lord's Cassel in Africa

In his five years since arriving in Senegal, Jon Cassel has built the Christian Broadcasting Network’s footprint from six nations to 17, and from six stations to 49. But, says writer Matt Hugg, his work is hardly “Hollywood.”

16 Growing the church through joyful worship

Roy Johnson explains that centering our worship on God could bring back the winsomeness of our faith and make it a sound basis for the church’s effort to welcome new believers.

18 Meditation on God's way leads to righteousness

God knows the way of the righteous but does not know the wicked. Because they have forgotten God, they are on their own. As a result, they perish. Bob Neff offers his third installment in studies in biblical instruction: God’s way in wisdom’s path.

DEPARTMENTS

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Glenn Mitchell

ONTHECOVER

Worshippers gather at the foot of St. Matthew’s cross outside Scotland’s Iona Abbey in the fall of 2007 in this cover photo by author Glenn Mitchell. This stone cross, along with St. Martin’s cross nearby, are icons in the Celtic tradition of Christianity, rich with a centuries-old tradition full of symbolism and a reverence for worship. Mitchell explores his own foray into this rich vein of Christian history and invites readers to tap into their own sense of wonder at God’s rich creation.

The job of an editor is varied, but the most visible task is to fix misspellings and punctuation errors. Some sneak through, of course. A favorite typo from my personal collection of goofs is "Historic Peach Churches." (Who wouldn't want to learn more about that group?)

Actually, not all editors are proofreaders, just as proofreaders aren't necessarily editors. I tend to think of proofreading as a skill that's innate—you're born with it or you aren't.

"I'm cursed with the ability to proofread," explained the moderator of a large meeting as he gently called for the removal of an unnecessary apostrophe. Those of us with that curse are constantly wincing from the onslaught of offenses in signs, menus, and other professionally printed materials.

Once in a while, though, a typo is profound: A religion website quoted a well-known author this way: "At the heart of . . . Christianity is scared journey."

Surely this is true, given how many times the Scriptures comfort us with the words "be not afraid." Over and over, from Genesis to Revelation, God tells us not to fear. The Bible

is populated by a lot of scared people.

That should make the Bible seem exceedingly relevant to us today. There are entire industries now whose purpose is to make us more afraid. Some sell products, some are trying to boost ratings, some are trying to get someone elected. It's no surprise that we humans tend to fear each other and our future.

Fear may be a reasonable response to the wilderness of Lent. But we are reminded: "The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything" (Deut. 2:7 NIV).

In his book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, writer and speaker Donald Miller says, "I like those scenes in the Bible where God stops people and asks them to build an altar. You'd think he was making them do that for himself, but I don't think God really gets much from looking at a pile of rocks. Instead, I think God wanted his people to build altars for their sake, something that would help them remember, something they could look back on and remember the time when they were rescued, or they were given grace" (pp. 213-214).

The difference between being scared and sacred can be small. For Mary on Easter morning, the difference was as simple as hearing her name.

Wendy McFadden



WENDY McFADDEN
Publisher

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Pouring out a blessing

'Giving, just because we can, is just awesome'

In November 2008, Manchester Church of the Brethren (North Manchester, Ind.) pastor Kurt Borgmann preached a sermon on the woman with the jar of ointment who poured it out on Jesus' feet as an anointing. He asked, "I wonder what it would be like for us to pour a 'jar of ointment' on someone or some group in North Manchester?"

We decided to find out, so on Christmas Eve 2008 we had people come forward and place coins, bills, checks, etc., in a large vessel. Funds were collected through the year, and on Christmas Eve 2009, after the service, we had a little party atmosphere. Four male youth donned white shirts and black bow ties and served cookies and punch; and with fanfare the girl who played the angel Gabriel in the children's Christmas program came up to the platform to draw the lucky recipient of the funds.

Only people age 18 and younger could submit ideas for the recipients. So if any adults wanted a suggestion submitted, they needed to talk with a child or youth. The idea drawn out of the jar came from one of the youth, Aaron Johnson, who had suggested the food pantry after encouragement from his friend, Derek Self.

Aaron traveled to the food pantry with Manchester associate pastor Jim Chinworth on Dec. 31 and recounted his experience:

"We headed to the church to pick up the 'big' (ceremonial) check and the check that Rowena Greer, director of the food pantry, would care about. We pulled up to the food pantry, walked in, and there was Rowena, sweeping. She greeted us, and we said, 'Rowena, we have a story to tell you.' We told the story of how the fund began and

how it grew through the year. When we finished, we showed her the big check.

She took a step back, a bit stunned by the figure (more than \$15,500).

"I also learned that giving with abandon is fun. Giving that extravagant money is a great feeling. And giving, just because we can, is just awesome. This was a moment I will not soon forget."



Jim Chinworth

Manchester Church of the Brethren youth Aaron Johnson, right, presents a check for more than \$15,500 to Food Pantry director Rowena Greer in North Manchester, Ind.

Northeast Mid-Atlantic District's annual disaster auction took place March 13 at Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren. . . . Middle Pennsylvania District's Shalom Team sponsored a lay leadership training event March 19-20 in Huntingdon, Pa., on the theme "Changing Landscapes: New Challenges for Congregations." . . . Northern Ohio pastor Tom Zuercher was the guest leader for this year's Western Pennsylvania pastor and spouse retreat, held March 5-6 at Camp Harmony.

Southeast Shenandoah District conference delegates approved a new, streamlined governance plan for the district when they met this past November in Bridgewater, Va. The district also recently called Janet Elsea as volunteer "mission servant" to coordinate and share information related to the Haiti earthquake response. . . . Atlantic Southeast District youth had a retreat March 12-14 with leadership by Bridgewater College's Interdistrict Youth Cabinet.

Midwest Tony Keck has been called as the new food service director for Camp Alexander Mack (Milford, Ind.). . . . Salem Church of the Brethren (Englewood, Ohio) is hosting a "Weekend with Don Kraybill" April 30-May 2. Kraybill, who teaches at Elizabethtown College and is a noted expert on the Amish, will speak at several sessions. . . . The Polo (Ill.) growing project this past season raised \$26,240 in support of Foods Resource Bank agricultural projects through the Global Food Crisis Fund.

Ozarks/Plains Stover Memorial Church of the Brethren in Des Moines is continuing a regular young adult group outreach, offering both Bible studies and fun fellowship activities. . . . Camp Pine Lake (Eldora, Iowa) is helping youth raise funds for National Youth Conference by offering hourly "wages" to anyone who would come to camp and help paint hail-damaged cabins on April 17. . . . Sonja Griffith was officially installed as executive minister of Western Plains with three services around the spread-out district from January through March.

West Children's Disaster Services will offer a volunteer training workshop April 30-May 1 at Los Altos (Calif.) United Methodist Church. . . . Twin Falls (Idaho) Community Church of the Brethren has sold more than 1,000 tamales at \$10 a dozen as a National Youth Conference fundraiser. . . . Pacific Southwest District's Shalom Team offered a series of workshops on "Building Healthy Relationships" Feb. 18-22 in La Verne, Calif.

YOU SAID IT
 "Living in community exercises all aspects of living peacefully."

—Audrey Hollenberg, 2010 National Youth Conference coordinator, writing in Brethren Volunteer Service's "The Volunteer" newsletter.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$300,000

Approximate total of donations received by the Church of the Brethren Emergency Disaster Fund in the first month after the massive mid-January earthquake that struck Haiti.



A fresh coat: North Winona Church of the Brethren (Warsaw, Ind.) decided to hold a coat drive for the homeless in its area this winter. "We are a small church," North Winona witness committee member Charles Albert said, "but our members searched their closets and came up with 90-plus coats for children and adults. It's an idea other churches may wish to try."

Snowed-in congregation finds no place like home

Parkway Church of the Brethren, located near the Blue Ridge Parkway atop the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virlina District, is way off the beaten path. It's located at the edge of a woods at the end of a long, non-state-maintained mountain lane.

It is very small in membership, and

quite old in average member age. What does such a congregation do when their building is smothered with about two feet of snow that quickly turns icy hard and denies them access for a month?

Simple: They have "home church" with singing, Sunday school, preaching, and, of course, hot coffee. It was a nice alternative to simply sitting at home Sunday after Sunday. Deacons

Glenn and Etheleen Largen were our gracious hosts for four Sundays in December and January. We owe them a big thank you.—Dale Bowman

Modesto outreach efforts earn community's praise

Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren's outreach efforts are making news. *The Modesto Bee* ran an article in late December highlighting all the creative activities happening at the congregation.

Headlined "Modesto church gets to know its neighbors," the feature profiled the work of the congregation's outreach coordinator, Leah Knipe. It listed some of the outreach events of the past year: a community garden, gathering Christmas gifts for needy elementary school children, painting over graffiti, and more.

Knipe was hired to serve on the congregation's staff in late 2008, made possible by a grant from a Pacific Southwest District special fund. It has paid off handsomely, one small step at a time.

"We're doing this because we understand that this is what we're supposed to be about as a church in a community," Modesto co-pastor Russ Matteson said in the article. "Our calling as a church is to be a part of the community in which God has put us. We exist within this little geographic

part of the world, and the truth is, we don't know our neighbors very well."

The feature recounts Knipe's work in gathering demographic data and hanging out in area parks to learn to know the church's neighbors. That led to new relationships and new ideas for the



Members of Parkway Church of the Brethren in southwestern Virginia huddled in the warm home of Etheleen and Glenn Largen (back row, second and third from left) for church when the congregation's building was snowed in this winter.

Dale Bowman

church to be in mission. And the community is noticing.

"It's really nice to finally know that someone else is like, 'Yeah, we can do this!'" Knipe, a former social worker, told the paper, speaking about new community connections to address crime and other issues.

The congregation is now working on ways to continue funding the position, as the grant expires at the end of this year.

'Yesteryear' booklet hopes to inspire future leadership

Mount Hermon Church of the Brethren (Bassett, Va.) has an impressive legacy of leadership—so impressive that it takes an entire booklet to tell it.

The Virgina District congregation has spawned a long list of denominational leaders over the years, from Annual Conference moderators to agency presidents to prominent board members and mission workers. The "Yesteryear Group" of people who grew up in the congregation in the 1940's and 1950's continues to meet at the church every five years for a reunion.

This past year, one of those "Yesteryear Brethren," Paul Wampler (now living in Manassas, Va.), decided to put together a booklet titled "The Legacy of Mount Hermon's Yesteryear Youth." Prefaced by Psalm 144:12, the 10-page booklet notes the influence of Camp Bethel and Bridgewater College and goes on to list all those who have served the church in a variety of roles.

"Implicit in their rationale for reunion gatherings," Wampler writes in an introduction to the booklet, "is the awareness that there was something special at work among them as they progressed to Christian maturity. The congregation's programs and activities were the center of these young persons' social life. Something motivated them."

While the booklet focuses on service to the larger church, it also notes the great contributions of many who stayed in southern Virginia and served locally, and those who served outside the Church of the Brethren.

It ends with the hope that "the Mount Hermon youth story might continue to be one of inspiration for the generations to come."

REMEMBERED

• **Roy E. Pfaltzgraff Sr.**, 92, died on March 1 at Brethren Village in Lancaster, Pa. He was a medical doctor, ordained minister, and long-term leader of medical treatment for leprosy (Hansen's Disease) in Nigeria. He has been widely recognized for his work on leprosy, developing a highly effective program for leprosy patients, shifting leprosarium focus from custodial care to the use of outpatient clinics and rehabilitation, carrying out drug trials, developing prostheses, training medical workers in the management of leprosy, co-authoring a textbook on leprosy treatment, and writing other training materials and research articles. He worked in Nigeria from 1944 to 1982, first as a mission worker with the Church of the Brethren in the Lassa area, and then beginning in 1954 at Adamawa Provincial Leprosarium at Garkida. He also served as administrator for the entire medical program of the church in Nigeria. After returning from Nigeria, he became a program and training consultant for American Leprosy Missions through 1991, when he retired. In 1997 he received the Damien-Dutton Award given to a person who has made significant contributions to the conquest of leprosy. He held degrees from Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and Temple University School of Medicine. He was ordained to the ministry in 1945, and was a member of Middle Creek Church of the Brethren in Lititz, Pa. A "life celebration" service was held at the Brethren Village chapel on March 7.

• **Ethel Schultz**, former district historian for Idaho District and author of an extensive district historical summary for the denomination's 300th anniversary celebration, died on Feb. 22.

LANDMARKS & LAURELS

• A community "Shred for Cereal" event at **Arlington (Va.) Church of the Brethren** this past fall resulted in 4,250 pounds of paper shredded for recycling through an organization called Pro-Shed. The event drew 80 cars and five walkers, which also brought 203 boxes of cereal, other non-perishable food items, and cash donations, all of which was given to a local food pantry.

• The **Brethren Village** retirement community (Lancaster, Pa.) has opened its new Courtyards and Welcome Center. The new facilities include 120 private rooms in a home-like environment. A dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 8 featured Atlantic Northeast District executive minister Craig Smith as keynote speaker.

• **Ministry of Reconciliation** is celebrating 20 years as part of On Earth Peace. MoR coordinator Leslie Frye is collecting stories related to MoR's work over the decades.

• **COBYS Family Services** held a 30th anniversary banquet March 11 at Middle Creek Church of the Brethren in Lititz, Pa. Recently named COBYS executive director Mark Cunningham was formally commissioned at the banquet.

• The denomination's oldest congregation, Germantown Church of the Brethren in Philadelphia, on Dec. 6 honored pastor **Richard Kyerematen** for 20 years of pastoral ministry at the church. Kyerematen, a native of Ghana, was called to Germantown in June 1989.

• Camp Alexander Mack (Milford, Ind.) at its Christmas celebration recognized staff member **Mike Kauffman** for completing 30 years of service on the camp's staff. His titles have included maintenance worker, camp manager in charge of facility and kitchen, facility manager, program coordinator, and, currently, guest services director. He was also honored by Northern Indiana District conference this past September. A member of Maple Grove Church of the Brethren (New Paris, Ind.), he served as district moderator in 2006.

• **Florence Daté Smith** of Eugene, Ore., received her diploma from the University of California at Berkeley in December, nearly seven decades after her senior year on campus was interrupted by Executive Order 9066—which forced Japanese-Americans into internment camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Daté Smith, now 88 years old, attended a ceremony at Berkeley to receive an honorary degree as the school and the state of California sought to make amends, according to an article in *The (Eugene) Register Guard*. Daté Smith eventually completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Chicago in 1946 and earned a master's degree from the University of Oregon in 1978.

Vital congregations

In June, I will be concluding 10 years of service as district executive of the Southern Ohio District of the Church of the Brethren. I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience of working with pastors and congregations. One mission that I've had throughout my time as district executive is to encourage congregations to be vital congregations.

What do I mean by "vital congregations"?

We are living in a time of dramatic cultural change.

Many congregations are frustrated that the ways they have done things for generations are not working like they used to. Discouragement grows as congregations see a decline in worship attendance and membership. Congregations struggle to understand what is happening to them and to the world around them.



MARK FLORY STEURY

A conference I attended early in my time as district executive talked about the importance of congregations moving from maintenance to mission. Maintenance congregations are those that focus on maintaining the status quo—making sure all the board and committee positions are filled and the routine activities that have been planned each year are planned for the current

year. Maintenance congregations focus on taking care of all of the current members of the congregation without thinking of inviting new people into the fellowship.

Missional churches focus more on the world beyond their walls. Missional churches find ways to reach out to their communities. They try to understand the changes that are taking place within the culture and try to find a

of the church. As congregations, we are called to be in ministry to the world.

As we find new ways to communicate to a changing culture, we will see a changing church. For the past several decades, the goal of many churches has been to have a full-time pastor. The mission of the church was to grow to some unknown number so they could financially support a full-time pastor. That was (and is) the mission of many congregations. All the energy of the congregation is focused on paying for a full-time pastor to do the ministry of the church. I often hear congregations complaining that they can no longer afford a full-time pastor. It's as if the vitality of the congregation is based on ability to pay a full-time pastor. They don't feel that they have arrived as a church unless they have a pastor in full-time ministry. Perhaps God is calling us to begin considering new forms of ministry. Perhaps God is calling us to new ways of being the church.

The vitality of a church is not based on size. Jesus says, "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, I am in their midst." A vital congregation can be a small group of people.

The Southern Ohio District Board has the goal of planting many churches in the years ahead. Those churches will not look like the churches that we know today. I would imagine that most of those church plants will be house churches. When the Church of the Brethren began on the banks of Germany's Eder River 300 years ago, there were eight people. I doubt if they were too anxious about there being just eight people. They had a vision. They knew their mission. They were a vital congregation.

It's time to stop measuring vital congregations by their size. A congregation of 200 people may not be a vital congregation. A vital congregation is alive, full of vision and energy. A vital congregation is in mission to its community

WHEN THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN BEGAN ON THE BANKS OF GERMANY'S EDER RIVER 300 YEARS AGO, THERE WERE EIGHT PEOPLE. I DOUBT IF THEY WERE TOO ANXIOUS ABOUT THERE BEING JUST EIGHT PEOPLE. THEY HAD A VISION. THEY KNEW THEIR MISSION. THEY WERE A VITAL CONGREGATION.

way to communicate to that changing culture. Missional churches concentrate less on the needs of the local church and more on the needs of the community around them. Maintenance churches focus on survival. Missional churches place more emphasis on ministry to individuals and less on institutional maintenance.

As I work with congregations about being "vital congregations," I encourage them to reach out to their communities with a new understanding of the missional nature

and to the world. We have been moaning about the decline of the church long enough. Let's start looking at our 1,000 congregations as 1,000 mission points around the country. Then let's pray that God sends fire to ignite 1,000 vital congregations. **AMEN**

Mark Flory Steury is district executive of the Church of the Brethren's Southern Ohio District. Beginning July 1, he will leave his post in Southern Ohio to begin serving as pastor of the Neighborhood Church of the Brethren in Montgomery, Ill.

QUOTE WORTHY

“My situation (is) very bad. I can do nothing... (but) God can do everything for me.”

—an unidentified man living in a tent city in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, following the massive Jan. 12 earthquake. He was speaking to CNN on CNN.com while holding a Bible in his lap.

“This is not just about helping Haiti, but about empowering and working with its people towards a sustainable society, one that is based on justice.”

—World Council of Churches general secretary the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, commenting on the need for reconstruction of economic policies toward Haiti, not just physical rebuilding (WCC News)

“Discipleship that dissolves into duty usually does not last.”

—former Bethany Theological Seminary president Gene Roop, speaking to Church of the Brethren staff about discipleship in the Scriptures

“Take whatever you’re passionate about . . . and turn it into some aspect of your life’s work.”

—Michael Uslan, executive producer of the *Batman* movies, speaking at Manchester College (North Manchester, Ind.) about vocation. He came to the campus as part of the Lilly-funded “Pathways” program.

“We never asked the hard questions about the war on terror, and that is, I think, why Iraq happened. It has everything to do with the inability to distinguish between the Christian ‘we’ and the American ‘we.’ ”

—author/ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, in an interview with Religion News Service editor Kevin Eckstrom. The interview was printed in *Mennonite Weekly Review*.

“When we who claim to follow Christ actually start getting a handle on what that means, it changes the way we see things. Even little things.”

—Gary Diehl, church health and resource specialist for The Brethren Church, writing in the denomination’s *The Evangelist* magazine

“I work with young adults, and many times this is what I hear: ‘Jesus is great, Jesus I love, but the church—no, I don’t do church.’ ”

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

CULTURE REVIEW

• The celebrity-driven **“Hope for Haiti Now” TV telethon fundraiser** held in January broke numerous fundraising records, bringing in more than \$57 million in its initial phase. Sales from a special Hope for Haiti Now album were expected to add to the total. The main event, organized by George Clooney, took place Jan. 22.

• The list of the **“top 10 books for enlightenment and hope in 2010,”** according to ReadtheSpirit.com, includes *We Side with the Morning* by William Cleary, *The Best Spiritual Writing 2010* by Philip Zaleski, *Doing Justice in Our Cities* by Warren Copeland, *Claiming Earth as Common Ground* by Andrea Cohen-Kiener, and *Bounce* by Robert J. Wicks.

• Thousands of religious activists gathered in Washington, D.C., March 19-22 for **Ecumenical Advocacy Days**, which this year focused on immigrants, refugees, and displaced people. A march for immigration reform was held on Sunday afternoon.

• The National Council of Churches’ **2010 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches** reported a continuing decline in the membership

of nearly all mainline denominations. Even the Southern Baptist Convention, which had grown in recent years, reported a membership decline for a second straight year. The Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and the Assemblies of God reported growth of 1 to 2 percent. Presbyterian Church (USA) had the largest loss, down 3.28 percent in the past year, followed by American Baptist Churches in the USA, down 2 percent.

• “With great hope and deep satisfaction,” the World Council of Churches welcomed the news that **Council of Christian Church Leaders of Iraq** was established this winter. It includes all patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, and heads of churches in Iraq from the 14 Christian communities registered in Iraq since 1982. They represent Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions.

• **Baylor University** of Waco, Texas, the world’s largest Baptist university, on Feb. 15 named Kenneth Starr as its new president. Starr, who comes from the Church of Christ, had been dean of Pepperdine University.



JUST FOR FUN: MATCHING

‘TIS THE SEASON Easter falls in early April this year. Its date is determined by the first full moon of spring. Below, unscramble the names of 10 important days or seasons in the life of the church (answers printed below):

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| TEDVAN | SAMTRISCH |
| LYHO KWEE | TENL |
| COSTPENET | MUYAND TRYSHAUD |
| ODOG DRYIFA | HAS ANDYWEEDS |
| ANYPIPEH | DROWL COINUNMOM ADY |

ANSWERS: Advent; Holy Week; Pentecost; Good Friday; Epiphany; Christmas; Lent; Maundy Thursday; Ash Wednesday; World Communion Day.



CONNECTING TO Celtic Christianity

story and photography by
Glenn Mitchell

My earliest remembered experience of God didn't happen in church. It happened under the open sky—the sky over the Eastern Shore of Maryland, to be precise. That is where I lived when I was five, and on this particular day my family had taken a drive, which means it was probably a Saturday or a Sunday afternoon. It was winter and there was a skiff of snow over the ground. We came to a long, flat field where there was a huge flock of snow geese feeding. I don't know how many there were—far more than I could count, and clearly more than I had ever seen in my life. We stood beside the car in the cold air and watched them. Suddenly, the entire flock rose from the field, circled and then, as if on cue, flew right over us. Hundreds upon hundreds of white birds with jet-black wing

tips flew above the white snow and against the blue sky crying out with a gathered din only geese can create.

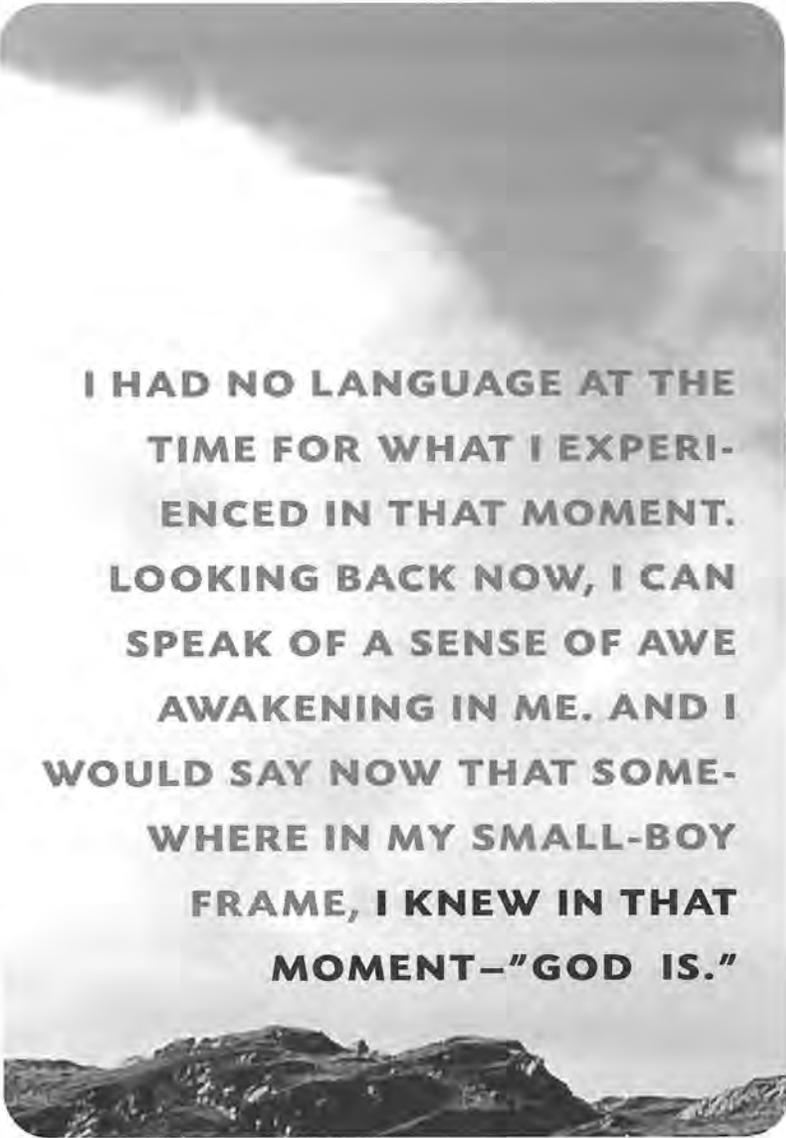
I had no language at the time for what I experienced in that moment. Looking back now, I can speak of a sense of awe awakening in me. And I would say now that somewhere in my small-boy frame, I knew in that moment—"God is." This "knowing" in me that began in that wintry expression of creation has continued. In many ways it has anchored my life. A hike up the mountain behind my home or a stroll through the grassy fields in any season can still quickly return me to a sense of awe and the felt awareness of God's presence in all things.

Spring forward about 50 years. I'm standing in another field, this one on the island of Iona, Scotland. I'm looking up at St. Martin's cross near the restored Abby of Iona. The cross is huge and I'm looking at it against the blue sky. The cross is hewn from stone and was erected where it still stands about 700 years before Columbus sailed the blue. Scenes from scripture stories are carved into one side of the cross's stone surface. Creation scenes are carved on the other.

St. Martin's cross and hundreds like it were created and erected by early Celtic Christians. They liked to speak of two books central to the life of faith: the little book and the big book. The little book is the Bible and the big book is creation itself. Both books were understood to reveal the love of God and how that love takes shape and form among us. Both books continue to invite us to be more of ourselves—children of God immersed in the family of created things and restored in relationship to all things through the redeeming love of God in Christ.

In pairing inseparably the two sides of the cross, Celtic Christianity preserved all of creation as an embodiment of God's love and a sanctuary beautifully arrayed for worship. Standing before St. Martin's cross, I felt such a strong sense of kinship. Here was a people who clearly knew the love of God manifest in our midst in both creation and Christ. And I could only smile when I discovered that the bird that symbolized their approach to life was a goose! Long before the big cathedrals of Europe were erected, Celtic Christians were worshipping God under the open sky. Who were these people with whom I felt such a natural affinity, and how did they come to have such a unique voice in the Christian family?

Celtic Christianity took shape in lands that remained on the fringe of the Roman Empire: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, The Isle of Man, and Brittany. For a time, Rome occupied Britain, and Christianity was introduced. Then, early in the fifth century, Rome pulled back to deal with invasions of the empire, and the region was left without Rome's unifying, organizing presence for the next 200 years. During this period, the spread of Christianity through the entire Celtic region was achieved primarily through the establishment and influence of monasteries. Monastic life had its roots in the wilderness of Egypt, where men and women went to seek the Christian life in the first centuries following the earthly ministry of Jesus. In the monasteries, the brothers and sisters



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FRAME, I KNEW IN THAT
MOMENT—"GOD IS."**

were seeking the full integration of faith and life. Prayer was at the heart of the whole day. Whether they were working in the fields, baking bread, or singing the Psalms together throughout the day, there was no compartmentalizing of faith and life. It is little wonder that the Christianity that spread quickly through the Celtic lands was one that didn't so much emphasize church and Sabbath as it did the calling of persons to live daily a Christian life. They understood that all of creation and all of time is overflowing with the presence of God. They therefore sought to live every day as a string of moments opening more fully into awareness of that presence and into a life that manifests that presence in all aspects.

In the rich oral tradition that permeated the Celtic experience, a number of prayers were passed down through the centuries and published in the early part of the 20th century as the *Camina Gadelica*, by Alexander Carmichael. As the day began and the one rising took water in the hand to wash her or his face, a prayer would be offered:

The palmful of the God of Life.
The palmful of the Christ of Love
The palmful of the Spirit of Peace.
Triune
Of Grace.

Suggestions for further reading:

Introductions

de Waal, Esther, *The Celtic Way of Prayer: The Recovery of the Religious Imagination* (Doubleday, 1997)

de Waal, Esther, *The Celtic Vision: Prayers and Blessings from the Outer Hebrides* (St. Bede's Publications, 1988). (A collection of prayers from the *Carmina Gadelica*)

Newell, J. Philip, *Listening to the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1997)

Newell, J. Philip, *The Book of Creation: An Introduction to Celtic Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1999)

Newell, J. Phillip, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (Jossey-Bass, 2008)

Prayer and devotional

Newell, J. Philip, *Celtic Benediction* (Eerdmans, 2000), *Sounds of the Eternal: A Celtic Psalter* (Eerdmans, 2002), *Celtic Treasure: Daily Scriptures and Prayers* (Eerdmans, 2005). (These three have morning and evening prayers with beautiful illustrations.)

O'Donohue, John, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (Doubleday, 2008) (a collection of modern prayers and blessings)

Denham, Joyce, *A Child's Book of Celtic Prayers* (Loyola Press, 1998). (This delightful collection of simple, ancient and contemporary prayers help introduce children to the "God present everywhere.")



In starting the fire in the hearth, a prayer is spoken:

I will kindle my fire this morning
In the presence of the holy
angels of heaven.
God kindle thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbor,
To my foe, to my friend,
to my kindred all...

Before milking the cow, the farmer would utter a prayer like this:

Bless, O God, my little cow,
Bless, O God, my desire;
 Bless Thou my partnership
And the milking of my hands, O God.
 Bless, O God, each teat,
Bless, O God, each finger;
 Bless Thou each drop
That goes into my pitcher, O God.

Similarly there were prayers for working at the loom, harvesting the fields, heading out on a journey, receiving a visitor, etc. And at the close of the day, they would utter a prayer like this one that recalls with gratitude the ongoing presence of God throughout the day and now through the night:

God, bless to me this day,
God bless to me this night;
 Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
Each day and hour of my life;
 Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
Each day and hour of my life.

God, bless the pathway on which I go,
 God, bless the earth that is beneath my sole;
Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
 O God of gods, bless my rest and my repose;
Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
And bless, O God of gods, my repose.

[Prayers from *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, by Esther de Waal, 1997]

Praying this way continually reminded the one praying that each part of the day was sacred, each action in the day was joined to God, and the awareness one brought to it only deepened the meaning of both the activity and the prayer. Much of the Celtic region lies where rugged land meets the sea, and life could be hard in the harsh extremes of weather, but they knew not to equate ease (or hardship for that matter) with blessing. Rather, the constancy of their prayer and their connections in the day prepared them to be open to God right where they were, whether in a moment of great hardship or a moment full of repose.

Other gifts that emerged in the Celtic experience of Christianity include a more positive view of human nature, a greater participation of women in leadership, freedom for priests to marry, a readiness to include certain elements of the indigenous religion while maintaining the centrality of Christ and an

**HERE IS A TRADITION
WHERE MY ABIDING
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IN CREATION JOINS MY
ABIDING LOVE OF
CHRIST**



abiding Trinitarian understanding, a creative flair for artistic expression as evidenced in the beautiful illustrations in hand-scribed Bibles such as the Book of Kells, and a strong zeal for journeying for Christ to other lands. Some think early Celtic explorers may have come as far as the New World in their little boats, and they clearly led missions into Europe and Russia.

In the late seventh century, the Roman Church re-established its unifying presence in the region. Gradually, over the next centuries, the Celtic expression of Christianity became less visible, until the more recent revival of interest in its unique embodiment of Christian faith and life.

For me, there has been great grace in reading more from this part of my Christian heritage (see bibliography). Here is a tradition where my abiding love for and experience of God in creation joins my abiding love of Christ—the “goose” and the glory of God in Christ, held together. Here is a tradition where prayer is understood to be the joining of devotion with daily life. The following two verses from the longer “Breastplate Prayer of St. Patrick” (b. 387), who brought Christianity to Ireland, speak of the unity of God in creation and Christ:

...I bind unto myself today,
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun’s life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks...

...Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger... 

Celtic blessing template

Try writing your own blessing in the style of Celtic blessing prayers using this template:

Bless O God, _____, *(descriptive phrase for God)*
Bless to me my _____; *(what your blessing focuses on)*
May it _____, *(three different things)*
May it _____,
May it _____.

Bless O God, _____, *(descriptive phrase for God)*
Bless to me my _____; *(repeat your blessing focus)*
So that _____, *(three different things)*
So that _____,
So that _____.
Bless to me my _____, *(repeat from above)*
O God, _____, *(descriptive phrase for God)*

For example:

Bless O God, Giver of Light
Bless to me my day;
May it be guided by the light of the Son,
May it be sweet with the fragrance of your Spirit,
May it be filled with the Creator’s love.

Bless O God, Lord of Life,
Bless to me my day;
So that I may enjoy your presence,
So that I may please You in all I do,
So that people may see You in me.

Bless to me my day,
O God, Giver of Light.
—LuAnn O’Connell



CAN THEOLOGY HELP CURB CLIMATE CHANGE?

by Juan Michel

“IN A VERY THREATENING AND VERY DISTURBING WAY, THE CLIMATE CRISIS BRINGS US TOGETHER AS ONE HUMANITY, AS ONE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS, AS ONE CHURCH. ... IT IS NOT A MATTER OF SAYING THIS IS A PLANET FOR SOME OF US, **THIS IS A PLANET FOR ALL OF US.**”

—OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



What does the Bible say about climate change? What are the theological insights churches can offer to a world facing an unprecedented ecological crisis?

These questions, addressed at a public seminar on “Creation and the climate crisis” attended by church representatives to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen on Dec. 15, seem even more urgent after the summit’s failure to reach the fair, ambitious, and legally binding agreement that millions around the world had hoped for.

“There is no evident relation between the gospel and climate change,” said Jakob Wolf, head of the Department of Systematic Theology of the University of Copenhagen, which co-hosted the seminar with the National Council of Churches in Denmark.

However, to the extent that climate change is a consequence of human activity, it falls within the imperative of ethical principles, because human beings are responsible for their actions. The ethical demand to love one’s neighbor applies here, as “planet Earth has become our neighbor,” said Wolf, and one that is “vulnerable to human activity.”

According to Wolf, a theological view of the planet and of the life in it as God’s creation confers an intrinsic value, therefore raising “respect and love.” “The more we love life on Earth the more we are ready to act unselfishly,” Wolf said.

Here lies the contribution of Christian faith and theology to fighting climate change: a motivation that is comprehensive, deep and “much more vig-

orous" than if it were based on "cool calculations and cold-hearted duty." This is crucial, because humanity has "all the tools at hand" to take action on climate change. "It is only the will that lacks."

Not apocalypse but hope

Biblical scholar Barbara Rossing, professor at the Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago, agreed with Wolf that "the Bible does not say anything about climate change." But she believes Christians can base their response to climate change on the Bible.

Rossing's point of departure is the question: "Where is God in this crisis?" She rejects the notion that God is punishing humanity and rather sees God "lamenting with the world."

According to her reading of the book of Revelation, "God is mourning on behalf of the earth rather than cursing it." The famous plagues are not predictions, but threats and warnings, wake-up calls, projections in the future of the logical consequences of human actions if their course remains unchanged.

However, for Rossing, the book of Revelation does not announce the end of the world, but the end of the Empire. So in spite of the current unsustainable patterns of consumption and carbon-based economy, Rossing finds in it a message of hope: "Disaster is not necessarily inevitable; there is still time to change."

This "vision of hope for today" is an essential contribution that Christian theology and faith can make to global efforts to address climate change.

The ecumenical dimension

"In a very threatening and very disturbing way, the climate crisis brings us together as one humanity, as one fellowship of believers, as one church," said Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

"We are called to show a sign of what it means to be one humanity, of what it means that God loves the whole world," Tveit said. As churches come together to offer this sign, addressing climate change "is uniting us in a very special way: as churches, as believers."

The message that God loves the world and

WCC/Peter Williams



WCC general secretary Olav Fykse Tveit with (seated from left) Barbara Rossing, Jakob Wolf, and Jesse Mugambi.

every creature on Earth "has been the heartbeat of the ecumenical movement facing climate change," said Tveit, recalling the long history of WCC concern with ecological matters.

In an ecumenical perspective, the concern for creation has always been linked to the concern for justice and peace. "It is not a matter of saying this is a planet for some of us," said Tveit, "this is a planet for all of us."

This point was also stressed by Jesse Mugambi, from the University of Nairobi, and a member of the WCC working group on climate change. "The world is a world in which we are all relatives, but somewhere along the line we decided...to treat each other as strangers," he said.

Mugambi explained that in Africa, climate change is already causing both severe droughts on the one hand, and flooding on the other. With the help of maps, he showed that those parts of the continent rich in water and cultivable land are also the areas of greatest conflict. Such a conflict "has nothing to do with ethnicity, it has to do with resources."

For Mugambi, the role of Christian faith and religion in general—through its leaders, theologians and ethicists—is that of "bringing us back to the norms" that can contribute to addressing a challenge like climate change.

"We are not talking about 'helping' African countries," Mugambi said. "It is not a matter of 'help,' but of survival for all of us." ❏

Juan Michel is media relations officer for the World Council of Churches.

THE LORD'S CASSEL IN AFRICA

by Matthew Hugg

We sat in a cafe at the westernmost tip of Africa. Our plastic table, topped with a light African-print cloth, abutted the seawall. To my left, only a few thousand miles away, were the Americas. To my right, all of Africa. Jon Cassel, raised in a farming family and small Brethren church in eastern Pennsylvania, was perfectly comfortable between two worlds.

Between bites of fish in yassa (lemon) sauce, I said to Jon, "I think the story here is that even small, rural churches can have a huge impact."

"No," Jon replied, with a broad, Pennsylvania farmer grin. "The story is that even here, Jesus has an impact." Jon rarely minces words.

With the exception of Heifer International founder Dan West, few people with Brethren roots have had an impact as far-reaching as Jon Cassel. While Dan West did the work of Christ over sea waves, Jon Cassel does it over air-waves. As the head of the Christian Broadcasting Network's Francophone Africa Service Region, Jon's as comfortable in the milking barn as he is in the broadcast studio. In his five years since arriving in Dakar, he has built CBN's footprint from six nations to 17, and from six stations to 49. CBN programming for this region—all in French, and filmed in Virginia Beach, Va.—now reaches more than 275 million people in Africa and beyond. Through satellite technology, CBN's Francophone broadcasts extend their reach to Europe and the Middle East where French-speaking African and Middle

Eastern immigrants make contact with his ministry on a regular basis.

But his work is hardly "Hollywood."

"Dakar is a great place to work, by African standards," Jon says. "We get consistent internet service, and the lights almost never go out." Working to spread the gospel from a nation where more than nine of ten people are Muslim, and broadcasting in several Islamic republics, the relative ease of his Senegalese base is more than made up by the challenges he faces throughout his nearly four-million-square-mile territory. But this American—who makes every waitress we met smile by asking for ketchup with his meals—is determined and focused, speaking with disarming honesty.

"I've been in a lot of situations that my American friends would call risky," he confesses. "But I've learned that if you smile and tell folks that you meant no harm, things work out pretty well." It's a skill that he's cultivated well in an economy where everything is a negotiation.

Yet for all the work Jon puts in to convince local broadcasters to air his programming, Jon knows that you can't just show television shows to win hearts and minds to Christ. His work is backed up by an active program of on-the-ground outreach, sometimes in places where he brings in the community's first programming. Working closely with village elders, Jon brings in materials and leaves staff to back up the Good News. With the aid of CBN ministries, hundreds of churches have been planted, all staffed by African ministers



Jon Cassel at the Dakar lighthouse with some gifts from the Skippack congregation, including the Phillies t-shirt, the local history book, and the "Skippy Bear" which is sometimes passed around during prayer at church services.

who serve a circuit, similar to what was done during America's frontier days.

But Jon's work doesn't stop with the spiritual needs of his expanding flock. Jon administers CBN's active community development program. For example, through CBN's Operation Blessing program, Jon brings wells to regions where, in some villages, women used to walk five or six miles to provide their families with often questionable water. Now, not only is the water closer, it's much safer to drink, allowing them to dedicate more of their time to their children, gardens, weaving, and more.

But to those who knew Jon back in Pennsylvania at the Skippack Church of the Brethren, it's no surprise that he went on to serve the Lord in a big way. Commitment to the church was something his family was known for—as free ministers, deacons and elders—over several gen-

"JON'S ALWAYS LOVED THE LAND AND WAS NEVER AFRAID OF HARD WORK. I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW HE'S DONE SO WELL IN A PART OF THE WORLD WHERE MOST PEOPLE LIVE FROM THEIR CROPS AND LIVESTOCK."

erations. Jon's father even started a scholarship for Brethren youth at Elizabethtown College.

If you ask people who knew Jon growing up, his going to Africa was a bit of a surprise at first, but now it makes sense. Frank McDonnell, the last remaining farmer in a congregation soon to be absorbed into suburbia, put it well. "Jon's always loved the land and was never afraid of hard work. I can understand how he's done so well in a part of the world where most people live from their crops and livestock."

My time with Jon was too brief. He was soon off to Thailand for a conference of Christian leaders, but had to be back to make the move to new office space. At a time of shrinking budgets and doing more with less, Jon was blessed with an increase in funding to support the work of his expanding staff. But it was clear that Jon isn't an "office guy." His passion is for the Lord, and for the men, women and children he serves in remote corners of Africa.

As we picked the bones from the last of our fish, and the tablecloth fluttered in the warm, sticky night air, I asked Jon what was next.

"Next?" Jon paused thoughtfully. "I'm here for as long as the Lord wants me here." At that point, I knew that I was mistaken. Jon wasn't between two worlds. He was planted firmly in the Lord's. **W**

Matt Hugg does freelance writing from his home in Collegeville, Pa. He also teaches non-profit and NGO management for Eastern University in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Asia and Africa.

GROWING THE CHURCH THROUGH JOYFUL WORSHIP

by Roy Johnson



Joe Vecchio

Leah Hileman, a Brethren pastor in Cape Coral, Fla., lends keyboard to joyful singing at last year's Cross-Cultural Consultation and Celebration.

I have a basement office with a computer, a desk, a few books, and my "prayer chair." It is in that chair that I pray for my family, for peace, and other concerns. One of my most frequent prayers is for the survival of our denomination. Sometimes I feel that the blessings of Brethrenism may someday be lost as our membership dwindles, so I pray for a turnaround to that trend.

I don't often feel that God sends direct messages to me, but one day as I prayed for our church, I found myself asking: What is the most important thing we should be doing in the church? What could we do to bring back the joy and vitality we once had and begin growing again?

Then God spoke to me, saying that we must "Seek the Lord while he may be found, (and) call upon him while he is near..." (Isaiah 55:6). Soon another text appeared in my mind: "Love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Matthew 22:34). I asked myself whether we in our worship today ever really put our hearts and minds and souls and strength into our worship. I confess that often our worship is dreary and lacking in enthusiasm. I had to ask myself: Do I let the distractions of modern life crowd my mind? Do I really know how to love God with all my heart?

I could list the distractions that plague me. I could number the idols that all too often displace the God I profess to love. I suspect that all of us could list many idols without difficulty. Our concerns are most often with our material possessions and our relations with other people. But love God, with all our hearts? Let us confess, it is not easy to love God as Jesus demands.

Since becoming Brethren many years ago, I have enthusiastically agreed that the New Testament



church was a model. Yet I had never asked myself exactly what New Testament worship was like. Were these early Christians able to keep their minds on God? They must have been as passionate about God as Jesus thought they should be. Then I remembered reading somewhere that the only written worship guide that the New Testament Christians had was the book of Psalms. So I began reading the Psalms, rediscovering them once again with that in mind. As I read, I became more excited and convinced that the Psalms may hold the clue that leads to the true worship of God, and perhaps the key to the vitality of the modern church.

As I read, I discovered that almost every Psalm was centered on God and the many blessings the Lord has given us. In most of the Psalms, we read a dialog between the writer (in most cases, David) and the voice of God. Sometimes the

author complains. Sometimes he sings. Sometimes he makes a "joyful noise." We hear the worship leader pleading, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord..." Worshipers are frequently invited to use musical instruments. In Psalm 98, the worshiper is invited to sing praises to the Lord with the lyre. If you wish to praise God but lack the ability to play an instrument, you are invited to "Clap your hands, all you people" (Psalm 47:1).

Having been invited to preach the next Sunday, I decided to try some "God worship." I read three Psalms of joy during the sermon and invited the congregation to clap and sing songs of joy intermittently throughout each Psalm. The joy was surprisingly contagious. I had chosen randomly Psalms 96, 98, and 104. All of them express the gratitude and elation of the worshiper marveling at the wonders of the Creator's world. Somehow, the alarms of global warming slipped from my mind. As I

I AM CONVINCED THAT WE NEED TO HAVE NOISIER SERVICES. LET US SING MORE JOYFULLY. LET US USE MORE INSTRUMENTS. LET US DO ALL WITH ENTHUSIASM AND JOY.

read the praises directed to God, my fears of such things were replaced with a confidence in God's care. There is reason for joy even in these times.

If early Christian worship was noisy and filled with praise, is it asking too much to surmise that people may have gathered to witness these gatherings of love and joy? Wouldn't all of us be attracted to a group of people who obviously were having a good time?

Older Brethren will recall something similar happening among our people years ago. In decades past, the Brethren love feast often lasted entire weekends, with meetings, meals, and much socializing. These gatherings often attracted neighbors. Must it not have been true that some of the curiosity seekers eventually became members attracted by the spirit of the meetings? Were not the large love feast meetings a form of evangelism and a time when many neighbors were invited to share the joy of knowing God?

I am convinced that we need to have

noisier services. Let us sing more joyfully. Let us use more instruments. Let us do all with enthusiasm and joy. Our world is paralyzed with fear due to worries about the troubled economy and the future consequences of our present energy use. Politicians can preach their sick gospel of gloom all they want. We know better. We will be frugal and obey God. That is sufficient. Do we have the courage to really believe in our God? Our worship of God can bolster our energy stewardship and also rid us of unnecessary panic.

Will having the joy of the Spirit bring back the 70,000 lost members? Obviously, we do not know. However, many people are open to change at the present time. Centering our worship on God could bring back the winsomeness of our faith and make it a sound basis for the church's effort to welcome new believers. **W**

Roy Johnson, now retired, is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren living in New Windsor, Md.



Psalm 1: Delightfully planted in living water

God's way leads to righteousness

by Bob Neff



Psalm 1 is recognized as a wisdom psalm, and introduces the Psalter much as Genesis 1 introduces the Torah. We are given a view of the world as it is meant to be from God's perspective. It is a world in balance. The good life is blessed, and the evil life perishes.

The psalm begins with the blessedness of the righteous and ends with the destruction of the wicked. The first three verses describe this righteous life, and the last three verses describe the unrighteous life. Strong words of comparison contrast these two lifestyles: tree/chaff, planted/wind-driven, water-nourished/dried out, fruitful/barren, righteousness/wickedness, blessed/destroyed. In this psalm there are only two ways, and a clear choice between them is required.

The righteous individual avoids malicious behavior in all manner of activity—sitting, standing, and walking (v.1). Actually, these behaviors are encouraged by disruptive groups. Notice that all

When we go through transition periods—early adolescence, retirement, illness, loss of any kind—we feel uprooted and lost. **To be planted brings a sense of security and . . . a source of strength.**

those described are in the plural: wicked ones, sinners, scorners. These groups appear to be planners of community unrest, schemers in breaking the law, and verbal snipers who make fun of people at tea time.

The wicked take pleasure in putting other people down in speech, running over them in a business deal, or falsifying claims in a lawsuit. These wicked ones are the measure of all things in their own minds and focus on their own advantage. In the end they undermine the life of the community. The righteous individual shuns association with these groups.

The righteous one instead finds enjoyment in studying and following God's law (*torah*, literally "instruction," v. 2). Those of us oriented in Paul's teaching about the law find such a statement about rejoicing in the law hard to accept. Deep in Hebraic consciousness, however, is this delight in God's law. I remember taking part in a worship service in Me'ah She'arim in downtown Jerusalem in the early 1960's. When the Torah was unveiled, the worshippers began jumping up and down in joy, a celebration called the *Simchat Torah*.

God is the measure of human behavior. This insight is cause for great joy. By beginning with a description of the upright life, the poet invites the individual into righteousness—not out of fear of judgment, but by the attractiveness and joy of the good life.

Such delight leads to meditation day and night. The Hebrew word *hagah*, translated "meditate" in the NRSV, is not a quiet activity as we normally think of it. It can refer to the growling of a lion (Isa. 31:4) or the cooing of doves (Isa. 59:11). This word carries a sense of muttering, speaking in undertones, making the words of the law come alive in speech.

In Joshua 1:8 one finds the same verb parallel with speaking and acting: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate (*hagah*)

on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written. . . ." Study does not imply passivity but the internalizing of what is read, so that behaviors will follow accordingly. This style of study is often referred to as "active reading," engaging the text in order to internalize it.

In Psalm 1:3 we find the results of such meditation: A person who engages in this study will be like a faithful fruit-bearing tree planted by streams of water whose leaf never withers and whose life prospers.

In 2001 I was asked to develop a series of Bible studies for National Older Adult Conference based on a text from Psalm 92:12-13: "The righteous flourish like palm trees and cedars; planted in the household of God, they still produce fruit and are fresh and green in old age." I took this assignment because I had memorized that psalm soon after I retired from Juniata College in 1998. These words echo Psalm 1. The metaphor of this planted tree is clearly in mind.

Until recently I had not understood why these words of being planted in both psalms captured my attention. When we go through transition periods—early adolescence, retirement, illness, loss of any kind—we feel uprooted and lost. To be planted brings a sense of security and, in this metaphor, a source of strength.

The palm tree in Psalm 92 is fed in an oasis by underground artesian wells that provide nourishment in a climate that has no rain. The tree in Psalm 1 flourishes under any and all external circumstances and produces fruit. In these last years I have returned to my love of the Old Testament and have found a whole new life in this study in a way I could never have imagined. I feel planted and nourished by the grace of God whose word is a source of strength, direction, and delight. Being planted does not mean immobility but connotes a time of growth in the discovery of a source of

strength beyond oneself.

The second half of the psalm begins with a simple declaration: The wicked are not so. They are like chaff that the wind drives away. They have neither roots nor mooring to anchor them in times of dislocation, times of drought, or high winds. They are dry and brittle and have no flexibility in days of trouble. They fail in the Day of Judgment and have no community of righteousness to whom they may go (v. 5).

The conclusion of the psalm simply says that God knows the way of the righteous but does not know the wicked. As a result, they perish. Because they have forgotten God, they have no court of appeal and no place to turn. In the end they are on their own and they perish (v. 6).

Why begin the book of Psalms in this way? The psalms that follow often raise the complaint that the world is not like this. In fact some psalms argue, as we shall see in our next study, that the wicked do in fact prosper and the righteous do suffer. This psalm is a reminder that God does not intend the world to be this way.

In the most significant Christian prayer, the Lord's Prayer, we ask, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We recognize in parts of our life a disjunction between what this righteous God intends and what we receive. The prayer life of the Psalter grows out of the belief that God is just and seeks a just world. The prayers of the righteous petition God to live up to such a view of the world as stated in this psalm. **■**

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 is the third installment in a year-long Bible study series on wisdom literature.

Disaster response begins in American Samoa

Brethren Disaster Ministries staff have announced a new project site in American Samoa, following an earthquake and tsunami in September 2009. Associate director Zach Wolgemuth made an assessment trip to the South Pacific Island earlier this year.

The Church of the Brethren has been invited to help rebuild homes on American Samoa by FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and the American Samoa VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster). Working with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), Brethren Disaster Ministries will serve as the lead organization for the project and will coordinate and manage the construction.

The project will offer skilled assistance in disaster rebuilding, while also helping with the high unemployment rate on the island by having local apprentices from a government-funded program work with rotating teams of skilled volunteers selected by the three church organizations. The first team of disaster volunteers from the United States traveled to American Samoa on March 28.

In Chile, which suffered a massive earthquake Feb. 27, the Church of the Brethren is supporting ecumenical relief efforts. BDM is preparing to request grant funding to support the effort of ecumenical partners Church World Service (CWS) and the ACT Alliance. Local church partners in Chile are assessing damage and preparing initial relief.

Brethren Disaster Ministries continues its major work in Haiti, responding to the earthquake alongside members of Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Haitian Church of the Brethren). "We're heartened by the tremendous response of the Brethren to the Haiti earthquake relief effort," reported Jane Yount of BDM.

"The first Family Household Kits (for Haitian families affected by the earthquake) arrived at the Brethren Service Center here in New Windsor," said Yount. "Many, many Hygiene Kits and Baby Care Kits have also been pouring in. Generous giving to the Emergency Disaster Fund has enabled Brethren Disaster Ministries' response, including children's feeding programs, dry food distribution, temporary shelters, water purification buckets, and a medical team set to travel this month, and more."



A. Carroll Thomas



A. Carroll Thomas

Brethren Disaster Ministries associate director Zach Wolgemuth talks with a woman named Nuwa, whose property on the west end of American Samoa was destroyed by a tsunami wave reportedly in excess of 40 feet high.

In the US, BDM is calling for additional volunteers for building projects across the country. The program currently has active projects in Chalmette, La.; Winamac, Ind.; and Hammond, Ind. BDM is also cooperating in an ecumenical build this month in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Since January 2007, volunteers have repaired more than 150 homes in St. Bernard Parish, the project site in Chalmette, La. "After four and a half long years, thousands of Katrina survivors are still waiting," Yount reported. "Ever so gradually, Brethren Disaster Ministries is helping to restore Chalmette and other communities in St. Bernard Parish." The project site is in an area where Hurricane Katrina caused levee failures that inundated homes with 6-20 feet of water. More than 200 residents lost their lives, and every house was officially declared uninhabitable.

After a mid-winter hiatus, BDM is returning to the Winamac area in Pulaski County, Ind., to build another new home and repair three more homes damaged in a flood in 2008. The project will run at least through the end of May.

The Hammond area of northwest Indiana was hit in September 2008 with a devastating storm and flooding caused by remnants of Hurricane Ike. Some 17,000 residences were affected. With hundreds of homes in this lower income area still in need of assistance, BDM has been called upon by the local recovery agency to help with repair and reconstruction.

The ecumenical "blitz build" in Cedar Rapids will take place April 11-May 22. Volunteers will repair homes damaged by severe floods that devastated eastern Iowa nearly two years ago. The Brethren are recruiting 10 volunteers per week for the effort. While most volunteers will come from Northern Plains District, volunteers from other areas are welcome.

Countless homes like this one were decimated by a tsunami that struck American Samoa last September.

Renewed violence in Nigeria prompts call for prayer

Church of the Brethren leaders are calling for prayer for peace in Nigeria following renewed violence near the city of Jos. On March 7, as many as 500 people in three villages south of the city were killed by armed mobs.

"We express profound sadness for the loss of human life," said Stan Noffsinger, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren, who asked the church to join in prayer for Nigeria and for Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

So far, no word has been received that EYN churches or members have been affected by the violence.

"We hold the families that have suffered this loss in our thoughts and prayers," Noffsinger said. "At the same time, our prayers extend to those involved in the violence, that we discover a way to overcome our human differences that restores relationships rather than enacts retribution. We wish there was a way that peace could prevail."

Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission Partnerships, also called for prayer. He said that his office is staying in reg-



ular contact with EYN staff and the Church of the Brethren mission workers who are placed with EYN. The EYN headquarters and the Church of the Brethren mission workers are located near the city of Mubi, some distance away from Jos toward the eastern border of the country.

The Jos area has suffered several episodes of sectarian violence and rioting, the most recent in mid-January, and previous to that in late 2008. In 2001, some 1,000 people were killed in rioting in Jos.

According to media reports, some experts say the recent attacks had to do with ethnic conflicts, while others blamed political and economic tensions in the country, and others characterized it as inter-religious violence between Christians and Muslims.

'Standing Up With Jesus!' is theme for fest

This year's Susquehanna Song and Story Fest, an annual family camp co-sponsored by On Earth Peace, will focus on the theme "Standing Up With Jesus!" The intergenerational camp takes place June 27-July 3 at Camp Swatara in Bethel, Pa.

A number of Brethren storytellers, musicians, and workshop leaders will help lead the event. The schedule includes worship, intergenerational gatherings, and workshops for adults, children, and youth, along with recreation, story swaps, music-making, evening campfires, concerts, and a folk dance.

Registration includes all meals, on-site facilities, and leadership, and is based upon age. For online registration, go to <http://www.onearthpeace.org/programs/special/song-story-fest/index.html>.



Kathy Gulerwicz

A Brethren banjo jam at the 2009 Song & Story Fest at Camp Peaceful Pines.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

April 18-30 Brethren Volunteer Service older adult unit orientation, New Windsor, Md.

April 22-25 Cross-Cultural Consultation and Celebration, Camp Harmony, Hooversville, Pa.

April 24-25 Brethren Benefit Trust board meeting, Elgin, Ill.

May 1-31 2010 Older Adult Month

May 2 National Youth Sunday

May 20-22 New Church Planting Conference, Richmond, Ind.

May 25 – 27 Spiritual Director's Retreat, Shepherd's Spring, Sharpsburg, Md.

May 29 – 31 Young Adult Conference, Camp Blue Diamond, Petersburg, Pa.

June 27-July 3 Susquehanna Song and Story Fest, Camp Swatara in Bethel, Pa.

July 3-7 Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Retreat focuses on environmental stewardship

Pastors, science teachers, and environmental advocates convened for a weekend retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Mount Pleasant, Pa., in mid-February. "Creation Care: Stewards of the Earth" was sponsored by the Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA), and Laurelville.

The weekend aimed to encourage participants to persevere in the face of a culture that, in spite of warnings from the science community and pleas from the world's marginalized peoples, has been slow to change its habits of consumption.

"This is a new model of resourcing for us," said Carol Bowman, coordinator of Stewardship Formation for the Church of the Brethren. "By collaborating with other Anabaptists, we had a broad pool of leadership from which to draw, and content was strengthened."

Keynote speakers included David Radcliff of the Church of the Brethren and Luke Gascho of the Mennonite Church USA.

David Radcliff provides an engaging presentation about our environmental impact. He and Luke Gascho of the Mennonite Church USA were featured speakers for the Creation Care retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Mount Pleasant, Pa.



Brian Pfaff

Carol Bowman, Church of the Brethren coordinator of Stewardship Formation, was one of the workshop leaders at the Creation Care retreat.

Radcliff highlighted indigenous people residing in the Alaskan Arctic, as well as groups living in the equatorial rain forests, sharing images and stories of environmental degradation and its impact on these cultures. "Thank God for communities who persevere," Radcliff said. "They are in some ways canaries, helping us sense that perhaps danger is ahead." — **by Carol Bowman and Brian Pfaff**

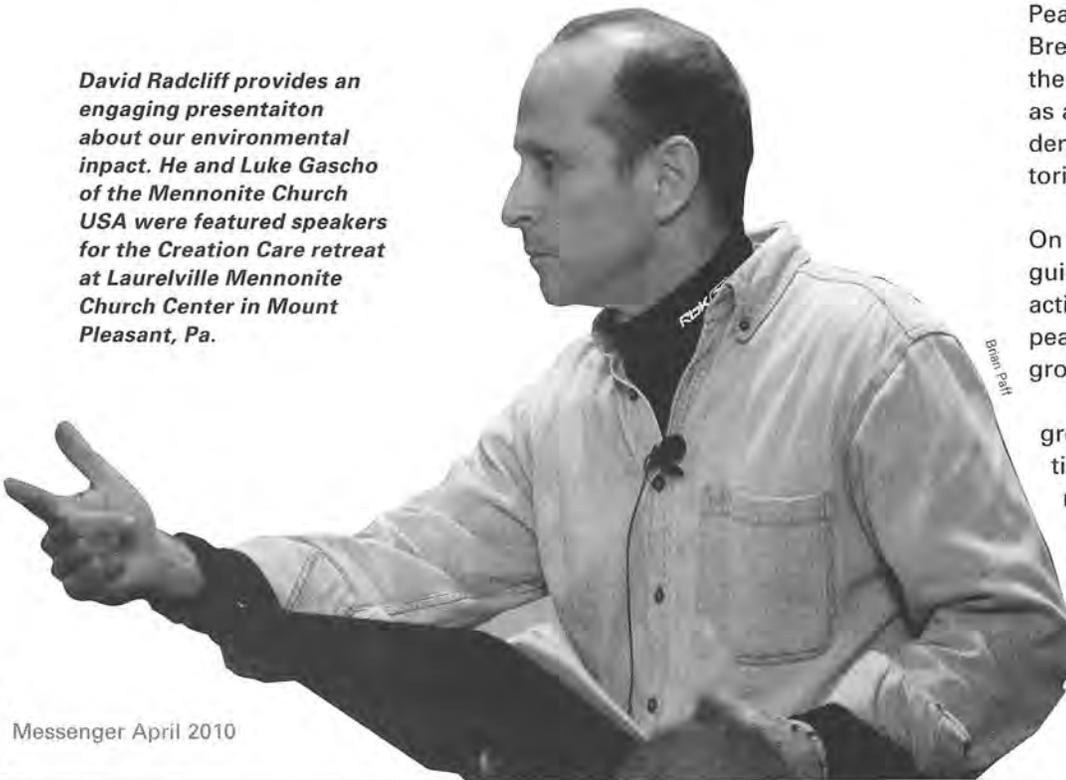
Historic Peace Churches in Florida hold consultation

Florida peacemakers from the historic peace churches—Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, and Friends—met Jan. 30 to get acquainted with each other as peace people, learn what the other denominations are doing, and explore what projects could be accomplished together.

Sponsored by the Action for Peace Team of the Church of the Brethren's Atlantic Southeast District, the event at Camp Ithiel was designed as a "consultation" of those three denominations with long-standing histories of an emphasis on nonviolence.

Bob Gross, executive director of On Earth Peace, served as facilitator, guiding the participants in a variety of activities that resulted in identifying peace-related concerns and laying groundwork for action in the future.

The six concerns receiving the greatest interest for future cooperative efforts were witnessing to lawmakers, peace education in schools and for children, the Kids as Peacemakers Project, praying for peace, building relationships with Muslims, and peace influence to the media.



Brian Pfaff



Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 287 begins service

Members of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) Unit 287 finished orientation recently in Gotha, Fla., and have begun assignments across the United States and Europe. Following are the 15 volunteers, their home congregations or hometowns, and project sites: **Bottom row:** Dane Sollenberger, Rochester, N.Y., to CooperRiis, Mill Spring, N.C.; Pam Dirting, Wakeman's Grove Church of the Brethren, to Quaker Cottage, Belfast, Northern Ireland; Lucy Loucks, Goshen, Ind., to L'Arche, Belfast, Northern Ireland; Ashley Eckert, Folsom, Calif., to Bridgeway, Lakewood, Colo.; Kendra Johnson, Waterloo, Iowa, to Peace Brigades International, Hamburg, Germany; Lacey Perfors, Elgin, Ill., to Abode Service, Fremont, Calif.; Erin Duffy, Hempfield Church of the Brethren, to Brethren Woods, Keezletown, Va.

Middle row: David Reger, Herrenzimmern, Germany, to Abode Services, Fremont, Calif.; Micah Loucks, Goshen, Ind., to L'Arche, Belfast, Northern Ireland; Michael Camps, First Miami Church of the Brethren, to Camp Courageous, Monticello, Iowa; Andy Loos, Salzgitter, Germany, to Boys Hope Girls Hope, Kansas City, Mo.; Alex Bahn, Codorus Church of the Brethren, to Camp Mack, Milford, Ind.; Michael Kramarczyk, Bad Driburg, Germany, to Brethren Nutrition Program, Washington D.C. **Back row:** Ian Sollenberger, Los Angeles, Calif., to CooperRiis, Mill Spring, N.C.; Jeremy McAvoy, Live Oak (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, to Brethren Disaster Ministries, New Windsor, Md.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

Allen R. Kahler has resigned as district executive minister of South Central Indiana District, effective May 31. He has served the district since Sept. 1, 2004.

Previously, Kahler served pastorates at South Whitley, Muncie, and Marion, Ind. He is a graduate of Manchester College in North Manchester, Ind., with a degree in religion, and holds a master of divinity degree from Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind. He plans to return to pastoral ministry.

Pete and Martha Roudebush will retire Aug. 1 as executive ministers of

Southeastern District. During their tenure, which began April 1, 2001, the district established its first Hispanic church and is working on its second, began an ACTS (Academy Certified Training System) ministry training program called School of Spiritual Leadership, called ministers to serve as directors of Outdoor Ministries at each of the district's camps, and made advances in the utilization of technology.

Pete Roudebush was called to the ministry in 1998 by Eaton (Ohio) Church of the Brethren, where the couple both

served as deacons for 20 years. Martha Roudebush served on the staff of the Eaton Church as director of lay ministry for 10 years.

Linda Banaszak began Jan. 1 as chaplain and director of Spiritual Care at the Village at Morrisons Cove, a Church of the Brethren retirement community in Martinsburg, Pa.

Brethren Volunteer Service worker **Jeremy McAvoy** has begun an assignment with Brethren Disaster Ministries. He will assist with project coordination at the Hammond, Ind., flood recovery project.

Delegates vote on an item of business at last year's Annual Conference in San Diego.



Ken Weinger

Annual Conference agenda includes five major items

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference will address five major items of business in Pittsburgh, Pa., on July 3-7: A query on "The Mission of Annual Conference," from Southern Ohio District; a query on "Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper," from Western Pennsylvania District; a "Resolution Against Torture;" revised bylaws for the Church of the Brethren Inc.; and a change in polity for appeals of decisions of the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee.

An interim report from Standing Committee on the special response process will be brought, following up on an action of the 2009 Conference.

Business sessions will be led by moderator Shawn Flory Repogle, pastor of McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren. The agenda also will include elections for denominational offices and reports from agencies of the church and committees of the Conference.

The query on "The Mission of Annual Conference" originated with a group of pastors in Southern Ohio District. Referring to earlier models of Annual Conference that used to meet over Pentecost "to heighten the symbolism and reminder of being led by the Spirit" and the model found in Acts 15:1-35, the query states that "Annual Conference has the potential of being a visionary and motivational gathering of the spiritual community." It asks, "What ways are there to structure Annual Conference that might more effectively fulfill the mission . . . to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus?"

The query "Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper" originated in Western Pennsylvania's pastor and parish ministry team. Referring to the process for dealing with complaints of ministerial misconduct in the denomination's "Ethics in Ministry Relations" paper, it

notes the lack of such a process in the "Ethics for Congregations" paper. The query asks if it would be helpful to develop "a uniform denominational process by which districts might deal with a congregation that engages in questionable ethical activity."

The "Resolution Against Torture" was adopted by the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board last October. The brief document includes four sections: an introduction from the Church of the Brethren's experience of persecution and violence at times in its 300-year history, a biblical basis represented as "foundational for our conviction regarding the sanctity of life," a section headed "Torture Is a Violation of Word and Life" stating the church's awareness of growing occurrences of torture throughout the world and attempts to legitimize it, and a section calling the church to confession and action in response. An additional page of references accompanies the resolution.

The question of appeals of Program and Arrangements Committee decisions originates with the Church of the Brethren's Leadership Team, which will bring a proposal to direct such appeals to the Annual Conference Standing Committee.

Online registration for Annual Conference and an Annual Conference Packet with more details about schedule, cost, age-group activities, meal events, and other information are available at www.brethren.org/ac.



Pittsburgh Convention and Visitors Bureau

Brethren will gather for the 2010 Annual Conference on July 3-7 in Pittsburgh.

ONCAMPUS

Bridgewater College (*Bridgewater, Va.*)

Twenty-three students participated in an alternative spring break experience in March, working with Habitat for Humanity in Lafayette, La., with assistant professor Tim Brazil. The students raised money and awareness for the trip by sleeping out in cardboard boxes on the campus mall on Feb. 19.

Elizabethtown College (*Elizabethtown, Pa.*)

Elizabethtown was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for a fourth straight year. About 740 schools were honored this year. Fellow Brethren colleges Juniata, Manchester, and McPherson joined Elizabethtown on the list.

Juniata College (*Huntingdon, Pa.*)

Juniata president Thomas R. Kepple Jr. has agreed to extend his current employment contract through May 2013. He had been scheduled to retire in May 2011. . . . Juniata has installed a new labyrinth for reflection and contemplation near the campus' Beeghly Library. It is a gift from the class of 2009.

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

President Steve Morgan has announced plans to retire effective in summer 2011. He has served as president for 25 years. . . . Applications for traditional-age undergraduate admission reached an all-time high this year, with 2,504 applications received as of Feb. 4. It's a 151 percent increase from a year earlier.

Manchester College (*North Manchester, Ind.*)

Construction has begun this year on a \$1.5 million addition to the school's Physical Education and Recreation Center. . . . A "Hope for Haiti" spaghetti dinner fundraiser in February raised \$1,237 for Haiti relief. Sales of a special pin raised more than \$1,000 in additional aid.

McPherson College (*McPherson, Kan.*)

McPherson has announced a new \$3,000 Church of the Brethren/Alumni Scholarship available to any new student who is a Church of the Brethren member or the child of an alumnus. . . . Human rights activist John Fife, co-founder of the Sanctuary Movement, spoke at the college on Feb. 19.

NYC names song, speech contest winners

Jacob Crouse of Warrensburg, Mo., has been named the winner of the Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference (NYC) song contest, and Kelsey Boardman of Modesto, Calif., and Renee Neher and Arbie Karasek of Lombard, Ill., have been named winners of the NYC speech contest.

Crouse, born in Virginia and raised in the Dominican Republic, is a full-time, first-year music technology student at the University of Central Missouri and an active member of Warrensburg Church of the Brethren. He participates in several university music ensembles and local bands. At the church, he is part of the leadership team and is involved in community outreach. His winning song is titled after the NYC theme, "More Than Meets the Eye."

Boardman, a fourth-generation member of the Church in the Brethren in Modesto, was part of the Youth Heritage Travel Team for Pacific Southwest District during the denomination's 300th anniversary year. She will graduate from Fred C. Beyer High School this spring and will study biology at California State University, Stanislaus, in the fall.

"Winning this speech contest was very important to Kelsey because of the recent death of her great-grandmother," said Audrey Hollenberg, one of the two NYC coordinators. "Her great-grandmother was a strong advocate for female preachers in the Church of the Brethren. Kelsey considers it a great tribute to her great grandmother to be a speaker at National Youth Conference."

Neher and Karasek, both members of the youth group at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard and students at nearby Willowbrook High School, wrote and will deliver their speech together. Neher, a sophomore, and Karasek, a freshman, are also both members of the Illinois/Wisconsin District youth cabinet.

The winners—who will be featured during a morning worship service at NYC—were selected by the National Youth Cabinet as it met in Elgin, Ill., Jan. 28-31. During the meeting, the cabinet also stuffed registration packets for NYC participants, worked on details for the NYC week, recorded a webcast for a Mid-Atlantic District youth retreat, and began discussing plans for 2011.

NYC will be held July 17-22 in Fort Collins, Colo. As of late February, the registration total had topped 2,000 and continued to grow. Registration closes April 5.

A church-wide "NYC Prayer Day" has been scheduled for June 20. Materials will be made available at www.brethren.org/nyc.



From left, Sam Cupp, National Youth Conference (NYC) co-coordinator Audrey Hollenberg, and Tyler Goss stuff registration packets for this summer's NYC during a late January meeting in Elgin, Ill.

'Avatar': American monomyth

The same old story with a blue hue?

When the Internet was young, I remember seeing a *New Yorker* cartoon that showed a dog typing at a computer while saying to another dog, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." More recently, upon reading that Disney paid \$700 million to purchase Club Penguin—the social networking website where Tweens can explore a



MICHAEL C. MCKEEVER

snowy virtual world by means of a personal animated penguin avatar—I couldn't help thinking that we had somehow turned a corner. Forging your own online reality and refashioning your virtual identity—your avatar—has now become a common part of our cultural landscape, and a profitable one. Which brings us to *Avatar* the movie, or rather, the cultural event. Like *Star Wars*, elements of the film are already becoming part of our cultural vocabulary. But what is the film saying?

I went to see *Avatar* with two university colleagues, one a theologian and the other a film and media specialist. As we were driving back someone said, "That film sent a powerful message—I'm just not sure what it was." *Avatar* is like an inkblot test that signifies different meanings for different people. Film critic Roger Ebert says it has a flat-out green and anti-war message, yet other suggested themes have included American imperialism, corporate greed, and even healthcare reform. This may be because *Avatar* is somewhat of a pastiche of different films and genres: sci-fi, apocalyptic, Western, mythic. A kind of a *Star Wars* meets *Dances with Wolves* meets *Matrix* gumbo.

The film is set in the year 2154 and the story unfolds on Pandora, an Earth-sized moon circling a giant planet in a distant solar system. Pandora is populated by an indigenous race of peace-loving, blue-skinned giants known as the Na'vi—a kind of exotic yet stereotypically generic aboriginal people. However, Pandora is also rich with a mineral called "Unobtainium," which purportedly can solve Earth's energy problems. Hence, Earth's corporate mining operations on Pandora are supported not only by scientists and biologists, but also heavily armed military contractors. As the story goes, Earth's scientists have cloned several Na'vi mixed with human DNA that can serve as human-controlled avatars. The hero of the story is a paraplegic ex-Marine named Jake Sully whose mission it is to infiltrate the Na'vi by means of an avatar. If he learns their ways, perhaps he can persuade them to leave their territory in advance of the mining operations; if not, at least he can spy on them to gain a military

advantage. However, Jake falls in love with Neytiri, a Na'vi princess who teaches him the ways of her people, and he ultimately "goes native" trying to defend the Na'vi from the advancing civilization that will destroy them.

Make no mistake, this is an extraordinary movie to watch. Much has been written about the technological advances and nearly \$500 million budget that enable viewers to virtually inhabit the exotic world of Pandora. Yet as eye-catching and ground-breaking as it appears, beneath the surface, *Avatar* tells a rather conventional story. Like *Star Wars*, *Avatar* draws deeply from what Joseph Campbell called the hero's journey or the classic monomyth, a mythic pattern found in countless narratives around the world. But *Avatar* represents a distinctly American version of this story. In their book *The American Monomyth**, religious scholars John Shelton Lewis and Robert Jewett explore a ubiquitous subtext in American film and narrative, what they refer to as the "American Monomyth." "A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisiacal condition...."

Despite what our history might disclose otherwise, when we Americans tell our own story, we perpetually fashion our identity and that of our heroes as essentially good, peaceful, and non-violent—until pushed beyond the brink of reasonable limits, that is. At that point, we and our heroes unflinchingly unleash a torrent of "redemptive" violence. (On this, see nearly every Western, war, martial arts, hero, or superhero movie ever made in America.) Indeed, it is questionable whether a Hollywood movie could be profitable in America if it were to truly go against the grain of our own master plot. Even when Hollywood attempts to give voice to minority narratives, it is typically white people who play the role of savior for peoples of color—only this time the skin is blue.

Innovative technologies and storytelling forms have created new worlds of opportunity for imaginatively embodying alternative identities and characters. All kinds of potential plots and unconventional outcomes wait to be explored. What does it reveal about us, then, that we insist on fashioning the same dubious persona and telling ourselves the same story over and over? ❧

Michael McKeever is professor of biblical studies at Judson University in Elgin, Ill., where he also directs the "Reel Conversations" film series. He is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren.

*Jewett, Robert and John Shelton Lawrence. *The American Monomyth*. New York: Doubleday, 1977.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Title: *Avatar*. **Rating:** PG-13. **Released:** December 2009. **Running time:** 163 minutes. **Written and Directed by:** James Cameron. **Studio:** Twentieth Century Fox, 2009. **Notes:** This multi-layered film gives critics and movie-goers plenty to ponder, and should provide a good platform for discussion long after it comes out on DVD and blu-ray—even without quite the dazzling movie-house special effects.



“IF WE CONSISTENTLY TOOK THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT AS OUR “RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE,” AS BRETHREN HAVE HISTORICALLY DONE, WE WOULD GROW IN LOVE AND HOLINESS AND BE THE CHURCH WE ARE CALLED TO BE.”

Pontius' Puddle



Examples of holiness

The January MESSENGER was inspiring. Hazel Rothrock was a Church of the Brethren missionary to China from my childhood congregation (Whitestone, Wash.). Her life was an example of holiness, teaching that the New Testament can be lived by the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit.

If we consistently took the whole New Testament as our “rule of faith and practice,” as Brethren have historically done, we would grow in love and holiness and be the church we are called to be. We see that fruit in the Brethren impact in China.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us to deal promptly with anger because of the connections to murder, and to avoid lust and divorce because of the connections to adultery. Jesus warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. That means we must scrutinize everything, and abhor that which is evil and stick to what is good. We should question things we may have assumed were harmless, to see if they have connections to evil because we are advised to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22) and to purify ourselves.

While impossible for us, it is possible with God. God gives us the desire and power to do what he commands. One of our strengths as Brethren is to love everyone. And God's love produces holiness. “I'm allowed to do anything, but not everything is helpful, not everything encourages growth” (1 Cor. 10:23). We



Joyful children receive tickets for food at a Brethren feeding program in Port-au-Prince, January 10, 2010. Photo from Brethren Disaster Ministries.

Help for Haiti

Your loan can make a difference in Haiti!

For each new loan processed between March 1 and April 30, 2010, CoBCU will make a \$50 donation to Brethren Disaster Ministries for its response to the Haiti earthquake.

Eligibility: \$5,000 minimum loan amount, applications must be received by end of business April 30, 2010, and must close within 30 days of application. Approval and rate are subject to credit score.

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should avoid even what is okay if it might weaken someone's trust in Christ. The Lord will determine whether his servant has been successful. "[Christ's] servant will be successful because the Lord makes him successful. ... Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:4, 19).

Beth Holmes Nonemaker
Harrisburg, Pa.

On the "dialog"

[Regarding the dialog in the denomination over sexual orientation], as many have observed, the problem with this "dialog" is the polarization that has already occurred. Before we can even begin, we will have to get past that. The call for dialog now seems to ignore the fact that a dialog on this issue has been running within the church for the better part of three decades. We have come to the

point where it is impossible for a person to speak about the moral question of homosexual practice without receiving a label and being dismissed by those holding an opposing point of view on the question. I am sure that by framing this as a moral question, I've will have already received a label and been dismissed by some.

What is needed is perhaps more listening and less talk. First, and most important of all, we need to listen to God. If we are genuinely interested in finding the mind of Christ at the end of this process, we will need to let God weigh in on the matter. Then, after prayer and scriptural study, we need to hear what God has been saying within the community. And that is something quite different from hurling our personal opinions past each other. Then, after prayer and personal study, we need to be willing to hear each other's reasoning about not only *what* we believe the Holy Spirit is saying to the



GARDENING FOR THE
Earth
AND
Soul
by Heather Dean and
Illustrated by Tom Benevento

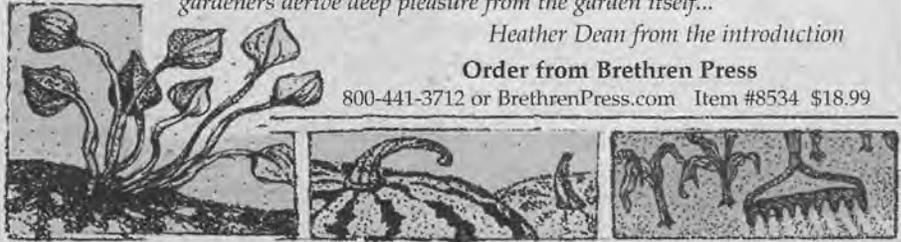
*In time
for spring
planting*

Drawing on education and personal experience, Heather Dean and Tom Benevento address both the practical and spiritual benefits of gardening. Social commentary, soil enrichment, global community and children's activities all have a place within the pages. Lyrically written, with enchanting line drawings, this book inspires the reader to see the connection between humus and humanity, soil and soul, peonies and peace.

"People create gardens for many different reasons. Some wish to eat local organic produce... others see a connection between gardening and peacemaking. Others long for a greater spiritual connection to the earth, or they want to create native wildlife or reduce chemical pesticides in the environment to protect their own health and the health of their children. And nearly all gardeners derive deep pleasure from the garden itself..."

Heather Dean from the introduction

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“ WE NEED TO ASK FOR THIS KIND OF WISDOM FIRST AND THEN WE NEED TO APPROACH THIS DIALOG IN SINCERITY AND TRUTHFULNESS TOWARD EACH OTHER, NOT WITH RHETORIC AND DISMISSIVE LABELS AS THOUGH THIS WAS A POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE AMONG UNBELIEVERS. ”

church, but even more important, *why* we believe that this direction is from the Holy Spirit. To simply pin our personal opinions on the Holy Spirit is the blasphemy of false prophecy.

God is alive. God has a point of view on any moral question. “If anyone lacks wisdom let that person ask God who gives to all freely and without reproach and it will be given; but he must ask in faith....” (James 1:5, 6). We need to ask for this kind of wisdom first and then we need to approach this dialog in sincerity and truthfulness toward each other, not with rhetoric and dismissive labels as though this was a political power struggle among unbelievers. “But you yourselves are to put off all of these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy and filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old person with his deeds and have put on the new person who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him” (Col. 3:8-10).

I don't mean to sound preachy or harsh on this. I've participated in these debates over the decades, and I know that at times I have been guilty of dismissing others and putting forth my own opinions as though this were a mere political struggle among people who don't have a God. I'm just saying that if that is all this is, then let's not waste the church's time. But over the years I have also refined my understanding through listening, study and prayer. I've been following the current discussion with interest, and I do

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Church of the Brethren

want to participate, but when I do, I don't want to be dismissed under a label. I want my "whys" to be heard and considered seriously (they are serious to me). And I want to extend the Christian courtesy of hearing the "whys" of others. May God give me the discipline to do this for him. And most of all, I want God to take his rightful place as a full participant in this dialog, knowing that the Holy Spirit is heard most completely and clearly among a gathered people who are willing to listen.

May God reveal his will among his people.

Wayne Sutton
Miami, Fla.

One in Jesus Christ

My mother, who is 95, receives and enjoys your Messenger and supports her church at Silver Creek. She knows that no matter how old you may be or where you are, you are a witness to Jesus. Before I married my wife Helen, she promised to go to church every Sunday. No matter how good or bad things got, on Sunday, we went to church. We've been together for 47 years, and truly have become one in Jesus Christ. I can't praise the Lord enough for what he has done, and is doing, for our family.

Keep up the good work.

Bill Harding
Camden, Mich.

Practicing what we preach

Kurt Borgmann's "Reflections" column, titled "On a Mission," in the January/February MESSENGER, is a bold and challenging call for our church to

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

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

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practice what we preach. As James says: "Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (1:22 NRSV). I often wonder, when I pass a church sign that declares, "Everybody Welcome," if that really means everybody.

What are we saying to a hurting world when a district adopts a "punitive action" statement against a congregation that dares to offer acceptance and compassion to those who have a different sexual orientation than the majority? I am a member of Columbia United Christian Church, an open and affirming, just peace church. We drive some distance to attend this church because we believe God calls us to love all our sisters and brothers without regard to the color of their skin (or any other "difference"), but by the quality of their character.

May we have more prophetic pastors and congregations in the Church of the Brethren, and maybe then we will see our denomination grow in spirit and numbers.

Howard A. Miller
Westminster, Md.

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

New Members

Antioch, Rocky Mount, Va.: Emily Green, Rachel Knick, Tim Bowman, Monica Bowman, Jim Mohler, Jan Mohler, Jim Mohler, Pat Mohler, Deane E. Parker

Beech Run, Mapleton, Pa.: Brad Harkleroad, Jill Harkleroad, Don Allison, M. Joann Park, Nick Banks, Angie Hatch, Caitlyn Hatch, Mary Bowman, Greg Foster

Cerro Gordo, Ill.: Rex Richardson, Brenda Richardson

Community of Joy, Salisbury, Md.: Jenilee Brookshire, Myron Nelson

Crest Manor, South Bend, Ind.: Valerie Brubaker, Tim Barwick, Deb Barwick, Abram Bergen

Eden Valley, Saint John, Kan.: Tom Harrison, Alanna Harrison, Wade Sanders, Tonya Sanders, Albert Thorne, Rutha Thorne, Sonny McConnell, Aaron Figger

English River, South English, Iowa: Ambrose Coffman, Brianna Goldman, Adam Grove, Audrey Grove, Leah Kerr, Seth Kerr

First Central, Kansas City, Kan.: Vic Lee

Germantown Brick, Rocky Mount, Va.: Jonathan Allen, Katie Enix, Allison Enix, Jeff Enix, Hunter Ingram, Dean Boitnott, Cherri Boitnott, Jacob Boitnott

Good Shepherd, Silver Spring, Md.: Debbie Dyer

Hollins Road, Roanoke, Va.: Stephanie Johnson, Brenda Hunt, Jerry Hunt, Hillie Mae Stanley, Casey Carr, Ashley Lyle, Ashley Martin, Robert Moran, Tia Brown, Savannah Buchanan, Raymond Burks

Locust Grove, Mount Airy, Md.: Leroy William Smith, Jr., Sally Rippeon, Douglas Schlotterbeck, Letitia Schlotterbeck, Jean Esworthy, Wayne Esworthy, David Blank, Susan Cline

Mohrsville, Pa.: Issac Rohrbach, Kurtis Rohrbach, Danielle Wink, Devin Schweitzer

Northview, Indianapolis, Ind.: Mike Smith

Poplar Ridge, Defiance, Ohio: Megan Meeks, Hope Hornish, Dick Neuwirth, Richard Shock, Bernice Shock, Barbara Williams

Potsdam, Ohio: Beverly Jenkins, John Jenkins, Barbara Elifritz, Brittany Kinney, Chloe Brumbaugh, Don Kepler, Ruth Kepler, Beth Schrodi, Tyler Schrodi, Jean Mangen, Jim Davis, Amy Davis, Lloyd Shroyer, Twila Shroyer

Prairie City, Iowa: Kendi Charls, Chad Gipple, Kari Gipple

Sunnyside, New Creek, W.Va.: Marilyn Rogers, Angela Betson, Harold Betson, Kemma Simpson, Doris Sowers, Frank Sowers, Clay Rawlings, Michelle Rawlings, Guy Harris, Diana McCoy

Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.: Seth Jordan, Jadon Steinmetz, Arika Flickinger, Gavin Bontrager, Madison Baker-Ott

Waterford, Calif.: Christina Van Lewen, Ali Moyer, Tarrin Stepp, Lori Minson, Jim Weaver, Anne Weaver

Wedding Anniversaries

Ayers, Bobby and Phyllis, Roanoke, Va., 55

Barcus, Bob and Mary Evelyn, Indianapolis, Ind., 50

Dixon, James and Pat, Knoxville, Md., 50

Dotterer, David and Mary Louise, Woodsboro, Md., 60

Drawert, Carl and Lori, South Bend, Ind., 50

Eagle, Gene and Janet, Palmyra, Pa., 50

Flickinger, Glenn and Evelyn, Wakarusa, Ind., 65

Garl, Harley and Betty, Nappanee, Ind., 60

Gray, John and Mary, Wirtz, Va., 60

Huffman, Earson and Lois, Daleville, Va., 76

Iscminger, Jerry and Linda, Keedysville, Md., 50

Kauffman, John and Dorothy, Hershey, Pa., 50

Metcalf, Wallace and Mary, Knoxville, Md., 60

Plank, J. Donald and Edna, Cocoa, Fla., 70

Sheets, Amos and Virginia, Nappanee, Ind., 65

Smalley, Dale and Marge, Beaver, Iowa, 50

Snyder, Burton and Virginia Ann, Saint John, Kan., 60

Stutzman, Lyle and Jane, Taneytown, Md., 60

Deaths

Abbiehl, Wayne, 88, North Liberty, Ind., Dec. 24

Aker, Virginia, 87, Plymouth, Ind., Jan. 20

Aldrich, Wallace M., 91, North Liberty, Ind., Dec. 28

Aliff, Beulah McCarty, 89, Roanoke, Va., June 13

Altice, Rebecca, 75, Wirtz, Va., May 27

Altman, Emma, 95, Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 9

Andrew, John Claude, 79, Hagerstown, Ind., Nov. 27

Baughman, Mary Joan, 84, Walkerton, Ind., Dec. 1

Baughman, Max, 78, Goshen, Ind., Dec. 26

Berger, Carl, 95, South Bend, Ind., Nov. 1

Berger, Edna, 90, South Bend, Ind., Nov. 21

Betz, Barbara J., 67, South Bend, Ind., Jan. 10

Billingsley, Dorsea M., 92, Virden, Ill., Feb. 1

Bortner, Paul L., 93, Greenville, Ohio, Jan. 4

Bradshaw, A. Arlene, 84, Waterloo, Iowa, Dec. 28

Brawner, Dennis E., 78, Brunswick, Md., Oct. 2

Bruchey, Robert, 60, Mount Airy, Md., Sept. 25

Buss, Agnes Keiser, 94, Bayamon, P.R., Oct. 2

Caldwell, Lilly Dews, 93, Roanoke, Va., Aug. 9

Campbell, Glen A., 85, North Manchester, Ind., Jan. 29

Carlson, Neva C., 67, Fort Collins, Colo., Nov. 13

Condon, Donald, 64, South Bend, Ind., April 20, 2009

Condon, Elaine, 89, South Bend, Ind., Jan. 10

Cooper, Evelyn, 95, Johnstown, Pa., Feb. 9

Dillon, Clyde W., 92, Trotwood, Ohio, Jan. 11

DuMond, Jennifer M., 37, Indianapolis, Ind., Feb. 8

Duncanson, Kathryn L., 91, Modesto, Calif., Jan. 28

Elrod, Roberta Mae, 88, Prairie City, Iowa, Jan. 7

Finley, Donald C., 90, Bethany, Okla. Feb. 16

Flora, Rada Barnhart, 87, Boones Mill, Va., Nov. 28

Frederick, Noble I., 100, Goshen, Ind., June 26

Graham, Gladys, 96, Kingsley, Iowa, Jan. 1

Hahn, Charles, 72, Frederick, Md., Aug. 7

Harrison, Ruth M., 83, Traer, Iowa, Dec. 11

Hasegawa, Hiroshi Harry, 90, Des Moines, Jan. 26

Hlavaty, Calvin Hugh, 85, Ozark, Mo., Dec. 28

Holderread, Robert, 92, North Liberty, Ind., Dec. 21

Holter, Hulda, 94, Frederick, Md., April 20, 2009

Humpherys, Goldie, 90, Dixon, Ill., Feb. 9

Latham, Hubert, 96, Wadsworth, Ohio, Aug. 23

Latshaw, Emmaline, 92, Rossville, Ind., Feb. 16

Leffue, Thelma F., 99, Boones Mill, Va., Oct. 8

Lightener, James, 79, Johnstown, Pa., Feb. 3

Logan, James, 64, McAlisterville, Pa., Feb. 2

Lyon, Marlyon, 71, Keyser, W.Va., July 9

Maurizio, John A., 48, Windber, Pa., Jan. 20

McFalls, Lois, 85, Dixon, Ill., Feb. 15

Metz, George Allen, 79, Roanoke, Va., March 25

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

Miller, Vernon R., 95, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Jan. 25

Mohamed, Ali, 49, Frederick, Md., June 18

Moore, John E., 85, Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 9

Moran, Robert, 79, Troutville, Va., Oct. 29

Moser, John, 93, Frederick, Md., May 9

Mullen, Ruby, 84, Roanoke, Va., Oct. 20

Nolley, Eugene D., 85, Stuarts Draft, Va., Jan. 26

Parrish, Howard Russel, 85, Roanoke, Va., Nov. 27

Plank, Edna, 91, Cocoa, Fla., Dec. 15

Pullin, Alfred D., 77, Seymour, Wis., Jan. 4

Rader, Charles, 80, Keyser, W.Va., Nov. 15

Richards, Bill, 76, Pinellas Park, Fla., Jan. 19

Saul, Geraldine, 80, Roanoke, Va., June 25

Shamp, Jeff, 47, Millbury, Ohio, Feb. 9

Shelly, Edith Jane, 97, Broadway, Va., Dec. 25

Showalter, John Junior, 93, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 22

Licensings

Bondurant, Daniel, S. Ohio Dist. (Greenville, Ohio), Jan. 17

Brubaker, J. David, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Middle Creek, Lititz, Pa.), Dec. 13

Eberly, Anthony, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Middle Creek, Lititz, Pa.), Dec. 13

Haro, Dylan James, Pac. S.W. Dist. (La Verne, Calif.), Jan. 10

Henry, Rebecca, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Thurmont, Md.), Jan. 17

Jones, Jeremy, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Lampeter, Pa.), Dec. 13

Mason, Diane, N. Plains Dist. (Fairview, Unionville, Iowa), May 3, 2009

Mitchell, Elizabeth Anne, Virgina Dist. (Lighthouse, Boones Mill, Va.), Feb. 14

Ordinations

Beam, Frances Kay Semones, Virgina Dist. (Living Faith, Concord, N.C.), Feb. 21

Broadwater, Kevin, W. Pa. Dist. (Meysdale, Pa.), Jan. 10

Cloyd, Gary, S. Ohio Dist. (Castine, Arcanum, Ohio), Jan. 10

Delk, Brian, S. Ohio Dist. (Castine, Arcanum, Ohio), Jan. 10

Lenker, C. Allen, S. Ohio Dist. (Pittsburg, Arcanum, Ohio), Jan. 3

Schaub, Jeremy A., Pac. S.W. Dist. (San Diego, Calif.), Jan. 17

Tomlinson, Neville, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Mount Zion Road, Lebanon, Pa.), Jan. 17

Tuttle, Jon M., W. Plains Dist. (Prairie View, Friend, Kan.), May 17

Placements

Black, Larry G., from associate pastor, Hartville, Ohio to pastor, Blue Ridge Chapel, Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 1

Detwiler, Robert W., from pastor, Valley Point, Orbisonia, Pa., to pastor, Diehl's Crossroads, Martinsburg, Pa., Feb. 15

Gardner, Mark, from interim to pastor, West Alexandria, Ohio, Feb. 1

Johnson, Roland D., pastor, Live Oak, Calif., Feb. 1

Miller, Robert P., from pastor, Crest Manor, South Bend, Ind., to pastor, Northview, Indianapolis, Ind., Feb. 14

Mitchell, Elizabeth Anne, associate pastor, Lighthouse, Boones Mill, Va., Jan. 17

Oren, Kenneth, from pastor, Good Shepherd, Tipp City, Ohio, to pastor, Pittsburg, Arcanum, Ohio, Nov. 29

Paterson, Harry J., from interim to pastor, Laughlin, Grantsville, Md., March 15, 2009

Rice, James E., associate pastor, Lighthouse, Boones Mill, Va., Jan. 17

Rinehart, Charlie, pastor, Cornerstone, Lewisburg, Ohio, Sept. 27

Sheffer, Gary C., pastor, Cedar Grove, Ruckersville, Va., Nov. 1

West, Nathan L., team pastor, Welsh Run, Mercersburg, Pa., June 14

Williams, Donald J., Jr., pastor, Bethel, Broadway, Va., Dec. 7

Wiltschek, Walt, from *Messenger* editor, Church of the Brethren staff, Elgin, Ill., to campus pastor, Manchester College, North Manchester, Ind., Feb. 2

Training wheels

This is how it happens nearly every evening. A young father and his son ride their bikes up and down our street. The kid is maybe three or four. He's riding a two-wheeler with training wheels. From my kitchen window at the end of our cul de sac, I see them again tonight as shadows run long in the setting sun, and the houses are bathed in orange.



RANDY MILLER
Interim MESSENGER Editor

I taught my son and daughter to ride their bikes on this very street some years back. I watched them teeter and wobble on four wheels, then courageously take their first rolls on two. Today, Kayla, fresh out of college, takes me on rides past vineyards and rolling hills around her home in San Luis Obispo, Calif. She is confident now, when I ride beside her. She knows the roads there, and I defer to her as she wends her way through the streets of that college town. Here at home, in La Verne,

Calif., Tyler and I sometimes ride around Lake Puddingstone. He politely scoffs at my fatherly advice to be careful, watch for cars. He's in high school, confident and self-assured.

We teach our children and offer guidance directly and intentionally sometimes, like when they're learning to ride a bike. But probably most of what our children learn happens

and other former participants, published by The Brethren Press in 1975. I was a BVSer (Brethren Volunteer Service) in 1974-75. For orientation, Unit 110 holed up at Camp Swatara, in Pennsylvania. While we were there, these legendary figures in the Church of the Brethren, such as M. R. Zigler, Anna Mow, and Dale Aukerman, came through and talked with us about their own journeys, and about what may lie ahead for us.

Sometime afterward, I had the presence of mind to ask M. R. Zigler to sign my book, and he was gracious enough to do so. In it, he wrote, "To Randy Miller, with my best wishes. Thanks for your interest in peacemaking. You, as a youth, will have a great opportunity to lead with others to get done what my generation started. M. R. Zigler, Aug. 9, 1975."

It's a wonderful thing to have, those words of encouragement on those yellowing pages. It's an invigorating charge to press onward, to do what can be done to further the cause of peace.

We learn from such people directly, by reading their words and hearing them speak. But, as we well know in this denomination, much of what we learn is often transmitted through example. We are who we are in part because of M. R. Zigler's hand in the formation of BVS; and Al Brightbill's ministry of music; and Ted Studebaker's sacrificial service in Vietnam. Did they imagine they were building noble legacies for us to follow? Probably not.

WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN AND OFFER GUIDANCE DIRECTLY AND INTENTIONALLY SOMETIMES, LIKE WHEN THEY'RE LEARNING TO RIDE A BIKE. BUT PROBABLY MOST OF WHAT OUR CHILDREN LEARN HAPPENS WHEN NEITHER OF US IS AWARE OF IT.

when neither of us is aware of it. We go about our lives and don't realize that we're teaching them, and our children are probably not aware of what's soaking in. Much of it happens subconsciously.

Growing up as the son of a Brethren pastor, I often heard names like Dan West, Ralph and Mary Smeltzer, and M. R. Zigler mentioned at home and in church. I sometimes wonder if these renowned Brethren imagined that they were setting examples for us to follow. More likely, they were just following their own calling—following the lead they felt from those who came before them, and maybe only indirectly aware that subsequent generations might look to them for guidance.

On my bookcase, I have a copy of *To Serve The Present Age: The Brethren Service Story*, by M. R. Zigler

Probably, they were simply going about their lives, following Jesus as best they knew how.

On the other hand, it's a heck of a legacy to aspire to. M. R. Zigler—in terms of Brethren history—is right up there with John Kline and Dan West. How can us mere mortals live up to what these legendary figures accomplished in their lifetimes? By starting with small steps, perhaps.

Maybe there's a lesson for us there. Maybe we, too, are setting examples as we go about our lives that we are unaware of.

Like that father guiding his son down the pavement, patiently, lovingly, it starts at home. It starts with us. We can do it—with training wheels today, perhaps, and then in time, and with a gentle shove, on our own as we find bigger avenues to pursue. —Ed.

COMING IN MAY: Scripture and authority; rhythms of life, health and spirituality; Juniata history; movie review; and more Bible study from Psalms.



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in Pittsburgh on Monday, July 5, will be Roger Thurow, long-time foreign correspondent for the Wall Street Journal and now senior fellow on agriculture and global food policy for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. He is co-author of the widely acclaimed 2009 book *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*.

Thurow will address the Global Ministries Dinner on Monday at 5 p.m. and a Global Food Crisis Fund insight session at 9 p.m. He also will autograph his book at the Brethren Press exhibit.

Join Roger Thurow in Annual Conference moments clearly designed to inform, to outrage, and to inspire.

Annual Conference Events with Roger Thurow
Monday, July 5: 5 p.m., Global Ministries Dinner, and 9 p.m., insight session. Book signing at Brethren Press exhibit.

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