



courtesy of Lancaster Church of the Brethren

A culture of connection Lancaster's International Fun Day looks outward

by Walt Wiltschek

On one particular late-summer Saturday, you could see France, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and more from Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. More importantly, the day allowed local residents to see the church.

“We wanted the neighborhood to know, ‘We love you and this is your place. We’re part of your neighborhood and we’re here for you,’” lead pastor Misty Wintsch said. “What can we do to draw them in so they can see we’re fun-loving people and not scary people your parents told you not to associate with?”

Wintsch said the idea for the “International Fun Day” came about from a small committee brainstorming fresh ways to do outreach. She and members Karen Graeff and Dee Zimmerman bandied about some possibilities, figuring some were too

crazy or beyond what they could do until it turned to, “Maybe we could do this.”

That eventually grew into the Aug. 21 celebration that saw 14 international-themed booths fill the area around the church in what pastor of worship Don Fitzkee called “a beehive of activity.”

In addition to a “Tour de France” bicycle course (complete with free helmets from the local police department) and a bounce house with towers that stood in for Russia,

visitors could enjoy international cuisine such as German gingerbread cookies, fried Nigerian chin-chin cookies, and a British-style tea party that began with a prayer for the queen. Traditional Ethiopian food prepared by a congregation that shares Lancaster’s church space added to the feast.

A neighbor who runs an Irish dance school brought a dance company to perform, local musician Stu Huggens sang, and Lancaster member Jerry

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Brown brought smiles while strolling around with his pet Capuchin monkey, Django. As a bonus, kids who had their “passports” stamped at each of the international tables received a goodie bag as a prize.

“It takes an entire church to pull something like that off,” Wintsch said of the cultural celebration. “I firmly believe everyone can do something. Some of our older members just sat and smiled and greeted people, while others helped to set up or helped with parking. It takes the entire church. A three-person committee can only come up with ideas.”

Fitzkee estimated that “a few hundred” people attended the unique event. He said a special invitation was made to families with children in a local “Leap into Language” program, a community partnership that works to enhance language skills of refugee children whose resettlement was

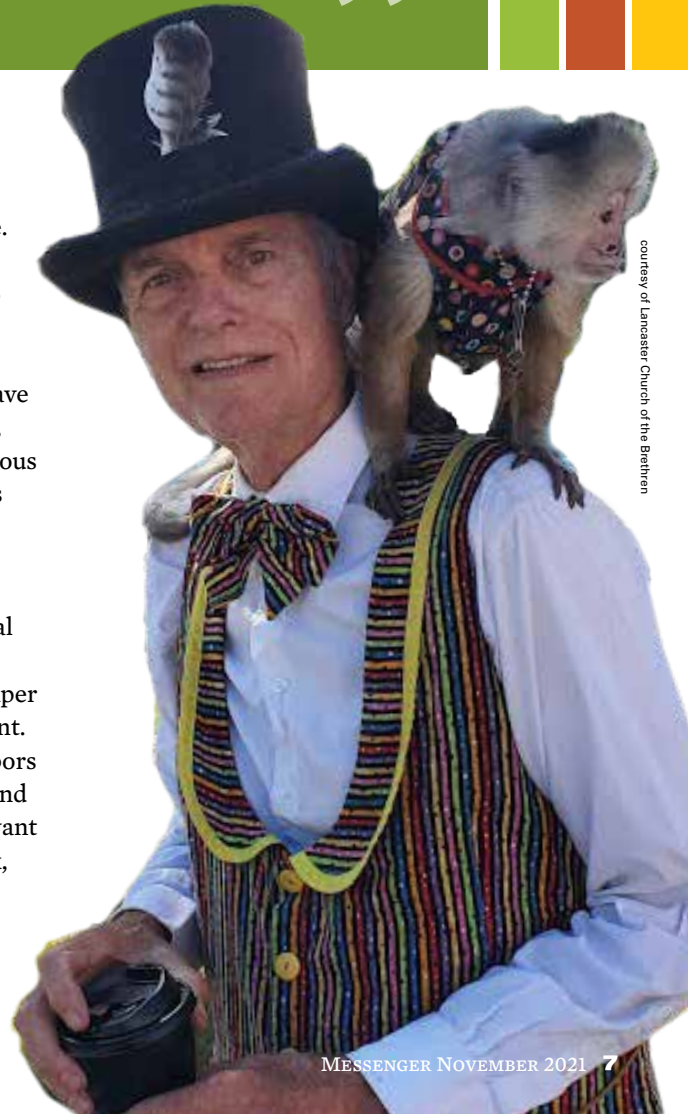
sponsored by Church World Service.

Wintsch said she took inspiration from a 2004 Annual Conference logo that she ran across, with the theme “Loving God and Neighbor.” Logo designer Rosanna Eller McFadden gave Lancaster permission to use the logo, which now adorns a church van, various pieces of church literature, and items they distribute to the neighborhood.

Some of those fliers were given out to visitors at the international celebration, and Wintsch said several families have started attending the church as a result. The local newspaper also did a colorful spread on the event.

“We’re trying to show our neighbors that we are yours and you are ours and we are all God’s,” Wintsch said. “I want people in our neighborhood to think, ‘This church had a party for us.’ ”

Don Fitzkee contributed to this report.



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