

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

OCTOBER 2022 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



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as Christ embraces us**

Romans 15:7

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on the cover

New growth: 12 projects, fellowships, and congregations were welcomed into the denomination at this year's Annual Conference.

Cover photo by Glenn Riegel



Light: Readers are invited to submit short reflections in prose or poetry or digital copies of art and photography on the idea of light. Written submissions can be as brief as a single paragraph or stanza. The items selected may be used in the January/February 2023 print issue or in Messenger Online. Please send your submission to messenger@brethren.org by Oct. 31.

Who's your prophet?

can't help but read the subtitles or closed captioning on a screen.

Sometimes they help me catch words I missed. But mostly I have to read them because they're there.

What's especially fascinating is live captioning. How amazing that there are people who—even with the inevitable mistakes—can listen while also typing what they're hearing in real time. The output is always impressive, and sometimes amusing.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

This year at Annual Conference, I learned from the real-time closed captioning that *Hoosier Prophet* sounds almost exactly like “Who’s your prophet.” The Brethren Press team didn’t think about that when we titled the book, but surely Dan West would have liked the double meaning.

But maybe we don’t want to figure out who our prophets are. From what we know of biblical prophets, these folks are not the ones you want to hang out with for a good time. They’re not amassing followers on social media, or winning popularity contests. They’re more likely to make you uncomfortable. When they cry out, “Thus says the Lord,” you’re braced to hear about the wrong you’ve done. It’s easy to think of prophets as grim characters always looking to point out the error of your ways.

Perhaps a better point of view would be that prophets are specially attuned to the character of God, and the world is not. I like the way Martin Luther King Jr. described this in several of his speeches:

The world is in dire need of a new organization: The International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment. Men and women who will be as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, could cry out in words that echo across the centuries: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” ... As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say to the men and women of his day, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that spitefully use you.”

We too can look around and see when things are not right. If we chafe at those wrongs and refuse to adjust to injustice, could we each be prophetic? That’s not at all grim; that is a message of hope coming to us in real time.

Wendy McFadden

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“Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.” —Isaiah 58:10 (NLT)

“If you cannot feed a hundred people, then feed just one.” —Mother Teresa

“There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.” —Mahatma Gandhi

“Every farm machine is a spoon that feeds the world’s hunger.”
—agricultural researcher Bhupendra Sagore

“Hunger and poverty would be impossible in a truly civilized world.”
—author Marty Rubin



When did we see you hungry?

World Food Day is observed on Oct. 16 (which falls on a Sunday this year), marking the date that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization was created in 1945. US observance of the day began in the 1980s.

It focuses on raising international awareness of issues related to poverty and hunger. According to *National Today*, about 1 in 9 people globally experience “chronic hunger,” and in the US about 1 in 7 people rely on food banks as “a primary or

supplemental food source.”

The 2022 World Food Day theme is “Safer food, better health.” Some suggested activities for the day including donating to a food bank, supporting small-scale and family-owned farms, and being mindful of what you eat. Some cities light up local landmarks and buildings in blue to mark the day.

Children ages 5 to 19 can participate in a poster contest, with entries due by Nov. 4. Learn more at www.fao.org/world-food-day. A children’s activity book is also available.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Church of the Brethren’s Global Food Initiative (formerly the Global Food Crisis Fund) has raised more than \$8 million for projects around the globe since its work began in 1983. Recent work has taken place in Nigeria, Burundi, Ecuador, the US, and elsewhere. Learn more at www.brethren.org.



A GLOBAL BUFFET

Can you unscramble the names of these international foods (many of which are now found readily in the United States)? Answers are below.

- | | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1. HUISS | 5. CRAMONA | 9. CENTYUH | 13. CHUQEI |
| 2. LARICE | 6. CHINCOG | 10. JATFIA | 14. MICHIK |
| 3. ZOOCHIR | 7. DENOFU | 11. LEAFFLA | 15. AKIKT SLAAAM |
| 4. UDRAIN | 8. ADP HITA | 12. NOTOWN | 16. LALEAP |

ANSWERS: 1. Sushi; 2. Eclair; 3. Chorizo; 4. Durian; 5. Macaron; 6. Gnocchi; 7. Fondue; 8. Pad Thai; 9. Chutney; 10. Fajitas; 11. Falafel; 12. Wonton; 13. Kimchi; 14. Quiche; 15. Tikka Masala; 16. Paella.

Miami Haitian Brethren team travels to Haiti for connection and service

Motivated by the ongoing political and economic crises in Haiti, members of Eglise des Freres Haitiens Miami (Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren) organized and supported a team of eight people to travel to Haiti July 16-25.

Due to security issues in and around the capital of Port au Prince, the team focused their work in St. Raphael, a community in the northern part of Haiti, about a two-hour drive from Haiti's second largest city, Cap-Haïtien. In St. Raphael they were hosted by the local Brethren church and joined by several members of the national leadership of Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti).

Each day began with door-to-door visits in the community, where neighbors were informed of evening revival services.

During the week, 28 people made decisions to follow Christ. On the final weekend, a mass wedding was performed for seven couples who were living together but not officially married due to financial difficulties. The team from Miami brought the wedding



Jeff Boshart

clothes and rings for the ceremony and organized one large wedding reception at the conclusion of the service. The wedding service took place on Friday afternoon and was followed by baptisms on Saturday and a child dedication service on Sunday morning. In all, 12 people were baptized and 13 children were dedicated.

This was the second mission trip organized by the Miami congregation, with the first occurring in 2019. They plan to make this an annual event in partnership with the leadership of Eglise des Freres d'Haiti. Relief efforts are also an ongoing outreach of the church as members are collecting clothes and shoes to send to Haiti. —Jeff Boshart



Jeff Boshart

Washington City creates space to better serve its community

A recent effort by Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren has taken storage rooms in the lower level of the church and “re-imagined” the urban space. After two years of cleaning, planning, and reorganizing, it is now a community room used for art gallery displays, special events, and workshops. (See pages 6-8 for art from the first exhibit.)

The congregation applied for and received a Mid-Atlantic District Core Mini Grant, which funds small projects to focus on the Church of the Brethren’s new compelling vision of being “Jesus in the Neighborhood.” It also received a denominational Faith in Action grant, which encourages congregations to create outreach ministry projects for their communities.



Washington City Church of the Brethren

Volunteers from Oakton (Va.) Church of the Brethren helped create the new community room.

Do you have district or congregational stories that might be of interest to MESSENGER? Short items with a photo are best. Send them to MESSENGER, c/o In Touch, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or messenger@brethren.org.



Wenatchee building experiences role reversal

Wenatchee (Wash.) Brethren Baptist Church United sold its historic church building earlier this year and is renting space from the new owners, Trinity Church, after experiencing dwindling membership in recent years.

The *Wenatchee World* newspaper reported that “the sale is a swap of roles for the two churches. For the past 10 years, Trinity has rented space from the Brethren. . . [which] sold the building and land for 10 percent of the \$1.7 million that it was appraised at. . . Membership, at a high in the mid 200s in the 1960s and ’70s, is down to 75. The average age is 77, says Joe Roy, the lay head of the church, which has been without a pastor for a year and is worshipping with guest pastors.”

Now, according to Wenatchee Brethren Baptist member Leanne Ford, on Sunday the dually affiliated congregation continues “to worship in the building as we always have, following Trinity’s two services. The only difference is that the building will be under new ownership and care of another congregation.”

Wenatchee Brethren Baptist recently received a certificate from the state celebrating 100 years since the church was incorporated in 1922. A celebration of the centennial took place in September. Worship services began in the basement of the new building in 1924, and it was

completed in 1929. In 1979, the Brethren merged with an American Baptist group. A scrapbook has been created to document the congregation’s history.

“There is some sadness that an era has closed, but joy that the building will remain a church and that we will be worshipping there,” Ford said. “And we know that Trinity will cherish and care for the building as we have for 100 years.”

RAWtools, Inc.



Champaign transforms guns into garden tools

Dawn Blackman, a minister at Champaign (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, was one of the first community leaders to receive a gardening tool made from guns in a “Guns to Garden Tools” event this summer, according to a report published by Illinois Newsroom.

Randolph St. Community Gardens, where Blackman is coordinator, hosted the “weekend of peace” event, with leadership from the Champaign-Urbana Interfaith Alliance and the Ministerial Alliance of Champaign-Urbana & Vicinity and support from Champaign Church of the Brethren, Champaign-Urbana Moms Demand Action, and the Central Illinois Mosque and Islamic Center (CIMIC) in Urbana.

The blacksmith collective RAWTools, a Mennonite-sponsored group based in Colorado, did the work of transforming guns into yard signs and shovels for distribution to various local gardens.

Creekside creates a buzz with bee ministry

This year the Indiana Bee Team of Creekside Church of the Brethren (Elkhart, Ind.) has raised more than honeybees. They have also tried to raise awareness regarding the problem of food insecurity.

As part of sharing honeybee education, the Bee Team explained why this tiny, six-legged insect is so important. Earlier this year, the team sponsored a pollination workshop highlighting the important role of honeybees in food production. Did you know, for example, that every third bite of food eaten is a direct result of honeybees and other pollinators?

In May, Creekside’s Bee Team also provided a program for the Camp Mack Garden Club, sharing how the sunflower serves as an important source of pollen and nectar. Marcia Sowles, a member from Arlington, Va., noted that the sunflower is also the national flower of Ukraine and talked about how the war there has affected the children’s lives in that country. Sunflower seeds were supplied for each participant to take home and plant in honor of the Ukrainian children.

As for its ongoing work, the Bee Team says to plant more flowers and remember to “bee kind.” —Ron Nicodemus



Doug May



On the road again: COBYS Family Services held its 26th annual Bike & Hike on Sept. 11, beginning at Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. Participants walked, biked, or rode motorcycles over a choice of four routes, and then joined with others for the “Incredible Ice Cream Celebration” to learn more about the ministries of COBYS, a Brethren-connected organization that provides a variety of services for children and families.

‘I was in prison and you visited me’

Through letter-writing organized by the Death Row Support Project, more than 11,000 pen pals have written to more than 8,500 people who have been sentenced to die

by Rachel Gross

Fifty years ago, in June of 1972, the US Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty, *as it was being practiced*, was unconstitutional. Those five words, “as it was being practiced,” turned out to be critical ones. A few states took up the challenge and wrote new laws; in July 1976 the Supreme Court gave the green light for executions to resume.

The intervening years have seen a rise and fall in the number of death sentences and in the number of executions. Public opinion has had a similar trajectory: In 1966, the death penalty was favored by slightly less than half the population. Support peaked at 80 percent in the mid-1990s. By 2021, a Gallup poll showed 52 percent favoring capital punishment. As support and use of the death penalty wanes, will it finally come to an end in our country?

When my husband, Bob, and I started the Death Row

Support Project (DRSP) in 1978 with the support of the Church of the Brethren Washington Office, I truly believed it would be a short-term endeavor. Surely the Supreme Court would once again rule capital punishment unconstitutional. I never imagined that 44 years later I would still be assigning death row pen pals to volunteer writers. Had I realized that, I might not have agreed to start!

Though what a loss that would have been. I certainly wish that the resumption of capital punishment had been a short blip on our legal landscape. Given that it was not, I am grateful that, through DRSP, more than 11,000 people have been willing to write to one of the more than 8,500 individuals who have been sentenced to die since 1976.

The main purpose for starting DRSP was simply to respond to Jesus’ call to visit those in prison. My love of letter-writing was complemented by Bob’s experience of being

Creativity and beauty

DRSP and Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren have collaborated on an exhibit of artwork created by men on death row who sent pieces to Rachel Gross as a thank you. Called “The Nature of It All: Vision, Dreams, and Greetings from Afar,” the exhibit is available for display in churches.

The exhibit was curated by DRSP director Rachel Gross and Jessie Houff, the church’s community arts minister and also a pen pal to someone on death row. In their words: “The Nature of these artists’ lives are solitary and provide an unknown future. The Nature of society can look dimly on those who are incarcerated, no matter their convictions. They are often neglected and misunderstood. It is sometimes forgotten that they are, indeed, children of God and, by nature, artists.”



Painting by Lancelot Armstrong





Origami by Ahmad Issa

imprisoned for 18 months and his involvement in criminal justice reform efforts.

As the project expanded beyond the Church of the Brethren, involving people from around the world, I learned and grew with it. While there have been challenges and mistakes along the way, those are mitigated by the many meaningful relationships that have been formed between writers and their pen pals. Through these years of writing and visiting those in prison and hearing the stories of others who have done the same, I have an ever-clearer sense of why Jesus calls us to do that.

A hope we had for the project was that it would motivate people to become involved in the movement to abolish the death penalty. This has happened in many ways: Some writers advocate for the person to whom they're writing. For example, one writer had the opportunity to speak at her pen pal's re-sentencing and was told later by the judge that her testimony was instrumental in the decision to commute the sentence from death to life.

A men's prayer group at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, in Elgin, Ill., decided to correspond with one individual as a group. Together, they send a small amount of money to their pen pal each month, making it possible for him to supplement his meager prison diet—thereby feeding



Papier maché by Charles Finney




the hungry, another thing Jesus asks us to do.

For many, learning the story of how their pen pals ended up on death row has been eye-opening, often creating disillusionment with what many refer to as our “criminal punishment system.” There are unlimited ways to engage in this particular neighborhood!

Inevitably, some writers have had to face the execution of their pen pals. Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., may face this situation in the next two years. Through a pen pal relationship that started with one member of the congregation and then grew to include the pastor and others, Raymond Johnson, on death row in

Oklahoma, eventually became a member of the congregation. Now Johnson’s execution date has been set for May 2, 2024. How will his church family be led to respond?

I had hoped that my tenure with DRSP would outlast the use of the death penalty. However, as I turn 70 this year, I have made the difficult decision to hand the reins to others. Since its inception, DRSP has been a volunteer-run project, supported through the Mission and Ministry Board. As with many other Church of the Brethren-initiated programs, it has attracted interest from outside our denomination. Plans are underway to continue the work of DRSP with new volunteer coordinators, maintaining ties with the Church of the Brethren and also depending on non-Brethren to help. Updates on this process will be posted on DRSP’s social media.

I am grateful to the Church of the Brethren Washington Office whose staff in 1978 said “yes” to the idea of DRSP. Thanks also to all the ways that many Church of the Brethren staff have continued to support DRSP since then. 

Rachel Gross, of Liberty Mills, Ind., is director of the Death Row Support Project.

Do you have a story?

Plans are being made to recognize 45 years of DRSP at the 2023 Annual Conference in Cincinnati. If you have a story to share about your experience writing to someone on death row, contact Rachel Gross at drsp@brethren.org.

Why I wrote to someone on death row

Interview with Teresa Gray by Irv Heishman

Teresa Gray is a member of West Charleston Church of the Brethren in Tipp City, Ohio, where Irv Heishman is a pastor.

■ Why would you get involved in writing to someone on death row?

The simplest answer is that God told me to do it. I felt called to do it, and I prayed about it, and was obedient to the call.

The more complex answer is that, as a follower of Jesus, it is my pleasure as well as my duty to be a light in the very darkest of places. There are very few places that are darker than death row. I prayed about it and asked God to pick the person for me to write to, no matter what.

To be absolutely honest, I was taken aback when learning of my new friend’s alleged crimes. But judging was not my

job; that job had already been done by the elected officials of our judicial system. My job was to meet my new friend soul to soul—to reach out into a dirty, scary, smelly, loud place without knowing who would reach back.

After all, God had reached to pull me from the mire. God saved me. God healed me. God made me whole. Who was I to not reach out to one of God’s beloved who was in such a desolate place?

I’m so glad that I did! I met a dear friend full of wisdom, kindness, grace, and a faithfulness to God that I find incredibly inspiring.

■ As you’ve gotten to know this man, what injustices have you become aware of?

Wow! So many and on so many different levels! Primarily, prison is

not about rehabilitating people or making the world any safer. Prison is just an impotent holding tank for our failures as a society.

Many people start life as part of a plague of massive systemic problems including poverty, racism, limited access to healthcare and mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and a host of other societal problems. This original, and often generational, injustice has the potential to lead to situations of utter desperation, monotonous apathy, or, in the worst of cases, a dangerous depravity. These injustices build up and cause other injustices until they end up being represented by a human face that you see peering out from the prison bars.

As I’ve learned more intimately, injustice can be as bold as your legal team being swayed by a political situation, the color of your skin, or the



Drawing by Fabio Gomez



Drawing by Raul Sarinana



Painting by Roderick "Samir" Orme

amount of money you have for your defense. And before you know it, without any forensic proof, you are “sentenced to death. May God have mercy on your soul.” This is said as a threat, not as a promise.


But the story doesn't end there. Our God *is* merciful! My dear friend, after serving nearly two decades away from his close-knit family of children and now grandchildren, is being exonerated with the help of an independent forensics team and others associated with the Ohio Innocence Project! While I'm delighted that my friend is being

returned to his family and home, it is not without tremendous loss and pain at having been separated from his parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren for so many years.

■ What joyful worship experience are you looking forward to that will be a true celebration of justice rolling down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?

When my friend can hug me without being shackled to the floor, I

will thank God! When I see my friend embrace his family and pick up his grandson (who is his namesake), I will rejoice! Knowing that my friend will be able to have a hot, nourishing meal every day will deepen my gratitude to my Creator.

My friend and I worship together, study the Bible together, and pray together using a combination of phone calls, video messages, and emails. How sweet it will be to have him attend church and be able to stand with us and sing worship songs together, in person, knowing that he is truly free! 

World Day Against the Death Penalty, observed every Oct. 10, unifies the global abolitionist movement and mobilizes support for an end to capital punishment. This year, which is the 20th observance, focuses on the relationship between use of the death penalty and torture, or other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment.



Glenn Riegel



Left: Short plays during worship on the theme "Touching Moments from Our Past" were written and performed by Frank Ramirez and Jennifer Keeney Scarr. The plays presented events from Brethren history in ways that were evocative of struggles and challenges facing the church today. They can be viewed at www.brethren.org/bhla/sketches.

2022 Annual Conference

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Annual Conference returned in person in 2022, with an online option for nondelegates. Delegates also returned to a busy business schedule after focusing on the compelling vision in 2021.

The Conference was held July 10-14 at the CHI Health Center, a convention center in Omaha, Neb. Presiding was moderator David Sollenberger, assisted by moderator-elect Tim McElwee and Conference secretary James Beckwith.

The Program and Arrangements Committee included Carol Hipps Elmore, Nathan Hollenberg, Beth Jarrett, and Conference director Rhonda Pittman Gingrich.

THE BUSINESS

■ Polity for Conference agencies

One unfinished business item, "Update to Polity Regarding Annual Conference Agencies," was adopted. The document



Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel

Donna Parcell

Keith Hollenberg



Clockwise from top left: Delegates deliberated at round tables. After closing worship, the new Annual Conference officers were consecrated. The children's choir sang with folksinger Mike Stern. Statues in front of the convention center were a popular photo op. "Jesus in the neighborhood" stories brought congregational stories to the business sessions.

was brought by the denomination's Leadership Team, which includes the Conference officers, the general secretary, a representative of the Council of District Executives, and the Conference director as ex officio staff.

This item originated at the 2017 Annual Conference when, in response to a recommendation from On Earth Peace, the Leadership Team was asked to update current polity for the agencies. The three Conference agencies are Bethany

Theological Seminary, Eder Financial (formerly Brethren Benefit Trust), and On Earth Peace.

A lengthy discussion raised a variety of concerns, such as the make-up of the agencies' boards, what percentage of Brethren should sit on those boards, how agencies maintain their Brethren identity and connections, whether the proposal will lead to more separation in the church, whether it is supportive of reconciliation efforts or punitive, and how it



Glenn Riegel

meets the needs of three very different agencies. Among the many who spoke at the microphones, some were concerned about the length of time since the task was first assigned five years ago. A few said the lack of resolution of the conflict about On Earth Peace has led more churches to leave the denomination.

The Leadership Team said that the polity adopted this year will take effect at the end of the 2024 Annual Conference. It added a footnote clarifying that Conference agencies are not expected to serve the Church of the Brethren exclusively, but also are expected not to seek

The preachers



Glenn Riegel

“If Jesus could embrace Zacchaeus, could he do the same for us? . . . Our core understanding does not include exclusion. . . . Maybe it comes down to Jesus’ command to love one another.”

—Moderator David Sollenberger preaching on Luke 19:1-10 for the opening worship service



Keith Hollenberg

“What is it to be Brethren? It is to love . . . beyond our race, beyond our language . . . so that we can come to an understanding as brothers and sisters. . . . We have to leave this place transformed, so we can take it to our congregations and then take it outside our congregations. Word, bread, and an embrace full of the love of Christ.”

—Leonor Ochoa, a pastor at Ebenezer Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pa., preaching on the theme “Loving Beyond the Pain” and the story of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 45.



Glenn Riegel

“To be Jesus in our neighborhood we have to give ourselves away. . . . Give away our church building maybe, give away our balance sheets . . . give away our resentments. . . . We have to give up our nostalgia. . . . When we have nothing left to lose, we have everything to celebrate.”

—Anna Lisa Gross, co-interim executive minister for South/Central Indiana District and pastor at Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Northern Indiana District, speaking on the parable of the “Prodigal Son” from Luke 15.



Keith Hollenberg

“Our salvation is personal but it isn’t individual. . . . The church is a family. . . . The Church of the Brethren has an opportunity to continue to witness [this] to the world.”

—Nathan Rittenhouse, pastor of New Hope Church of the Brethren in Green Bank, W.Va., speaking on Mark 3:31-35 and Romans 12:16.



Glenn Riegel

“One thing Jesus did well was cross social and cultural boundaries. . . . In the church, we need to stop looking at all the differences . . . and look at the needs. . . . If we trust the power of the Spirit in us, there’s no end to what we can do to share the love.”

—Belita Mitchell, a former Annual Conference moderator and pastor emerita at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, speaking on the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well from John 4.

Glenn Riegel



agency status with other organizations.

Various amendments and a motion to refer the item to Standing Committee for further work all failed. The document was adopted with more than a two-thirds majority vote.

■ Standing with people of color

The delegate body accepted the concerns of a query titled “Standing with People of Color” and adopted a Standing Committee recommendation on the query.

The query from Southern Ohio and Kentucky District asked, “How can the Church of the Brethren stand with People of Color to offer sanctuary from violence and dismantle systems of oppression and racial inequity in our congregations, neighborhoods, and throughout the nation?”

The recommendation answered the query with the following response, which is an official statement of Annual Conference, and a plan for implementation:

“We recognize the struggles faced by many of our sisters and brothers of color and believe the church should be agents of change. We encourage congregations, districts, agencies, and other denominational entities to continue to follow the teachings of Jesus by living out the great commandment of loving our neighbor as ourselves. We understand the great diversity that the word neighbor implies. So we encourage congregations to study the teachings of Jesus and how they apply to our relationships with all people of color, to express solidarity with all people of color, offer sanctuary from all forms of violence, and identify and dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions, and then begin to live out those findings by being Jesus in the neighborhood.”

Implementation will be carried out through a two-year study/action process that will include the district and On Earth Peace collaborating to develop various materials for use by congregations, districts, and the denomination. Standing Committee members will support and encourage use of the materials and participation in the process, and will report back to Annual Conference in 2023 and 2024.

Elections and appointments

Moderator-elect: **Madalyn Metzger**, a member of Goshen (Ind.) City Church of the Brethren and vice president of marketing for Everence Financial. She will serve as moderator for the 2024 Annual Conference.



Conference secretary: **David K. Shumate**, a member of Daleville (Va.) Church of the Brethren, who is retiring after nearly 30 years as Virlina District executive minister. He will serve a five-year term as Conference secretary.

Program and Arrangements Committee: **Jacob Crouse** of Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: **Angela Finet**, Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

Mission and Ministry Board—Area 1: **Joel Gibbel**, York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren; *Area 2:* **Rosanna Eller McFadden**, Creekside Church of the Brethren, Elkhart, Ind.; *affirmed:* **Michaela Alphonse**, Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren

Bethany Theological Seminary trustees representing colleges: **Jonathan Paul Frye**, Monitor Church of the Brethren, McPherson, Kan.; *representing clergy:* **Laura Stone**, Manchester Church of the Brethren, North Manchester, Ind.; *affirmed:* **Darla Kay Bowman Deardorff**, Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C.; **Michele Firebaugh**, Freeport (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

Eder Financial board: **Kevin R. Boyer**, Plymouth (Ind.) Church of the Brethren; *reported:* **Donna March**, Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.; **Randy Yoder**, Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.; **Katherine Allen Haff**, Manchester Church of the Brethren

On Earth Peace board: **Doug Richard**, Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren, Mifflinburg, Pa.; *affirmed:* **Beverly S. Eikenberry**, Manchester Church of the Brethren; **Jessica (Jessie) Houff**, Washington City Church of the Brethren; **Tamera Shaw**, Arlington, Va.

Glenn Riegel



Keith Hollenberg



Donna Parcell



The clergywomen's breakfast was one of a host of meal events, equipping sessions, and other activities beyond business meetings and worship services.

■ **Breaking down barriers**

A query titled “Breaking Down Barriers—Increasing Access to Denominational Events” was adopted and a study committee was named. The query from Living Stream Church of the Brethren, the denomination’s only fully online congregation, and Pacific Northwest District, asked, “Should the Brethren explore the possibilities of how we can faithfully, in good order and with proper representation, use technolo-

To bear the church’s pain by Jessie Houff

The first day of Annual Conference, I led the church through a time of lament interspersed with verses of “Drive out the Darkness,” sung beautifully by Scott Duffey and the band. I spoke truth and addressed the pain and brokenness our church has gone through. “In our brokenness we become aggressors; we become mean. We are tired. We are exhausted. We are desperate for hope,” I cried.

It is no secret that the Church of the Brethren has undergone much pain, whether it be due to the pandemic, the splitting of congregations from our larger body, or individual struggle. Weeks before the service, my anxiety for this time of lament grew. As a theater person, I approached this anxiety like I would a performance. I prepared, studied my lines, and practiced. But this was not a theatrical performance—it was Jessie on that stage speaking Jessie’s words from Jessie’s heart.

Glenn Riegel



Moments before I stepped foot on the platform, the feeling of clammy, shaky hands and heart flutters increased to an almost intolerable level. I knew I would get emotional; I was already crying from the powerful message spoken by Leonor Ochoa and her translator, Selma. Hallelujah.

I had no idea that the anxiety I felt leading up to presenting would be *nothing* compared to how I would be affected afterwards. My body felt as though I had been severely beaten. I felt bruised, kicked, suffocated. Every single person in that room and watching online transferred their pain through my body. I felt sacrificed to process all that emotion, too much for any one human to bear. This broke me. My body went through so much shock and stress that I experienced my cramps and bleeding a full week early. My spine was so tense I could barely feel it, yet it was also agonizing to move. My spirit had been sucked out, leaving me depressed, unable to speak, feeling every single pain *and* nothing all at once.

One by one I was approached by my kindred—strangers and friends—bearing the same tears I had just cried. All I could say in response was a weak “thanks” that was drained of any emotion.

I feel a responsibility to say, “And yet. . .” To leave you all with a bright and happy message of hope. To say something to make you feel good. To

say that I’m healed, and that the church is going to be okay. Dear kindred, I will not be providing you with that message today.


There are countless individuals who bear pain daily within the church. Those in leadership. Those of empathy. Persons who have dark skin, don’t speak English, or are anything but heterosexual.

We are in a time when the church finally is working toward being active advocates for persons of color. It is time we join hands and protect those who face violence every day just for having dark skin.

We are finally in a time when we can celebrate with our kindred who speak Spanish, French, Arabic, and Haitian Kreyol. Let us learn these languages and praise God who created us all to be different. Let us acknowledge that the English language and whiteness are not superior to any *thing*, any *one*, any *culture*.

We are finally in a time when lesbian, gay, trans, and others in the LGBTQIA+ community have been named in Annual Conference worship. We have always been here, but never have you *seen* us.

The work is just beginning. I bore your pain. It’s time we bear each other’s pain together.

Thanks for listening. 

Jessie Houff is community arts minister at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren.

gy to remove barriers and facilitate the full participation of delegates and those desiring to be present for Annual Conference and other events, who might be better served—and could better serve the body—from a distance?”

Elected to the study committee were Jeanne Davies, Brandon Grady, and Daniel Poole. They will consult with the director of Annual Conference, the Conference webcast coordinator, and others as determined by the committee. The full Standing Committee recommendation instructed the study committee to “examine the theological, philosophical, and practical implications of the query along with a feasibility study” and bring recommendations to the 2024 Conference.

■ Guides for pastor salaries, benefits

A new “Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement and Revised Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries and Benefits” and a “Revised Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors” were adopted, as presented by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee (PCBAC).

The committee has been at work on these documents since 2018, consulting with a wide variety of groups within the Church of the Brethren as well as obtaining expertise in human resources, taxes for pastors, and legalities around employee compensation and benefits. They reported that 77 percent of Church of the Brethren pastors are serving in less than full time or less than fully compensated positions.

In their review of compensation practices, the committee realized that a fairer and easier framework was needed for calculating pastor pay and benefits. In addition to revising documents, they also worked with Eder Financial (formerly Brethren Benefit Trust) to develop an online compensation calculator for use by congregational leaders and pastors.

A new section of the Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement is the Annual Shared Ministry Priorities Agreement, intended to help pastor and congregation decide on the ministry priorities of the congregation and who will be responsible for those priorities. It is designed to help pastors know where to concentrate their work time, particular-



Through the play We Own This Now, actors Ted Swartz and Michelle Milne delved into what it means to love land, lose land, and connect through story. Their characters learn how the Doctrine of Discovery (the legal framework that justifies theft of land and oppression of Indigenous peoples) is still causing harm today.

Keith Hollenberg



The Tri-Faith Initiative

by Jess Hoffert

The unique Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha

received several groups of Brethren visitors during Annual Conference, including a group of nine young adults. The spacious campus is home to Temple Israel, Countryside Community Church, and the American Muslim Institute. These three independent religious communities are connected by a circular walkway known as Abraham’s Bridge, surrounded by native plants and near a community garden and orchard tended by all three groups.

It’s the only place of its kind in the world.

Tri-Faith volunteer Gail Knapp, who regularly attends Temple Israel, provided an enlightening overview of the independent nonprofit that sparked this endeavor in the early 2000s. “Whenever I step onto this campus, I feel hope,” Knapp said, noting the collective dedication of each faith group to serving the greater community despite—or perhaps because of—unique theologies and practices.

Of the many interfaith events hosted by Tri-Faith, Knapp said some of her favorites are the ones involving the culinary offerings of each community. “The Christians often do hot dogs and fish fries, while the Jews frequently serve bagels and other traditional foods. And then there’s the Muslim community, which has 40 countries represented. Their community potlucks are like a world showcase of food.”

The young adults asked many questions while finding inspiration in Tri-Faith’s mission to “cultivate inclusive environments to advance interfaith relationships and understanding” and its vision of “a world in which differences are honored, similarities are built upon, and everyone belongs.”

ly if it is limited to fewer hours.

The new framework also includes specific information for filling out the W-2 tax form for pastors. More guidance is given for calculating parsonage adjustments and fair rental values. The documents encourage use of other benefits such as short- and long-term disability insurance and special circumstances days.

The committee revised the Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors, which suggests appropriate fulltime salary with increases for each year of ministry service. Pastors fall into separate columns depending on the educational level they have

attained, with those holding a master of divinity in the column receiving the highest salary. However, the revision takes into account the committee's finding that it is only early on in a pastor's career that the biggest difference in ministry skills come through holding the higher degree. By the time a pastor has been in ministry for 20 or 30 years, their experience and accumulated wisdom may balance out the higher degree. The new salary scale brings the salaries of experienced pastors with less formal training closer to those with higher degrees.

Time was given on the Conference floor and in a hearing to ask questions of the committee. Some who brought ques-

Bits and pieces



■ **Chris Douglas and James Beckwith were honored** with presentations from the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren: a quilted wall hanging for Douglas, and hand-crafted bowl cozies for Beckwith. A reception followed. Douglas retired as Conference director last year. Beckwith completed 10 years as Conference secretary this year.

■ **“First timers”** included a series of life-sized figures that made up the worship center, representing the theme of embrace and welcome. They were carried in during worship processions at the start of each service. The figures, based on a variety of drums, were created by artist Dave Thornburgh of Northview Church of the Brethren in Indianapolis, Ind.


■ **The “Witness to the Host City”** received donations for Girls Inc. of

Omaha. In addition to the \$14,162.71 raised, donations of material goods filled three pallets to overflowing. Girls Inc. was chosen for its more than 45 years of commitment to serving girls and young women in the Omaha area. The donations were “amazingly generous and supportive,” said Roberta Wilhelm, executive director, “and I want the donors to know it works.”

■ **Brethren Volunteer Service** awarded its 2022 Partners in Service Award to the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan, where BVS volunteers have helped host and manage the center for decades.

■ **The Outdoor Ministries Association** gave its Volunteer of the Year Award to Dennis Beckner for his involvement with Camp Alexander Mack, and Staff Member of the Year to

Karen Dillon for her service to Camp Sugarwood.

■ **Cases of COVID-19** occurred among Conferencegoers, but numbers remained low relative to overall attendance. Around 20 cases were reported onsite, and some additional Conference-goers tested positive after the event. Conference director Rhonda Pittman Gingrich made repeated reminders to “wear your masks and be careful. . . . Brothers and sisters, please, please take this seriously,” she said. Conferencegoers were encouraged to take advantage of free COVID tests if they felt any symptoms. The Conference office was to be informed of any positive results. Those who tested positive and had to isolate could request a remote log-in to participate virtually. 

Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel



Keith Hollenberg





Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford



Ginn Riggs



Ginn Riggs

tions were concerned about whether the process will apply to small churches. The committee explained that the online calculator will make the process easier for small churches and accommodates a range of church budgets. The calculator starts with the budget of the congregation, and adjusts the number of average weekly pastoral hours worked to match the pay the congregation can provide.

The committee is planning a series of trainings to be offered across the denomination.

Delegates also approved the committee's recommendation for an 8.2 percent annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors for 2023, commensurate with recent rates of inflation. There was much discussion about congregations having a difficult time paying this, especially in places where church members are not receiving cost-of-living adjustments themselves, and where many members are on fixed incomes. Attempts to reduce the recommended COLA failed and the delegates voted overwhelmingly to approve the recommended amount.

■ Appeals process

Amendments to the appeals section of the "Ethics in Ministry Relations" polity were adopted, as recommended by the Standing Committee that hears appeals of the termination of a ministerial license or ordination by a district. The amendments recognize Standing Committee's need for more time to prepare to receive appeals; provide leeway when two or more appeals are received within a stated time period; and clarify in polity the current Standing Committee Appeal Process requiring that "the dissatisfied party shall have exhausted every means of resolution or reconsideration" at the district level before an appeal. One amendment was adopted, clarifying that when an appeal is received less than 60 days prior to the next Standing Committee meeting, it may be postponed to a subsequent meeting.

■ Bylaws

Revisions to the bylaws of the Church of the Brethren Inc. were adopted. Brought by the Mission and Ministry Board, the revisions included a variety of nonsubstantial changes that correct inconsistencies and grammatical errors, ensure greater clarity, and align polity with current practice.

■ Standing Committee

The Standing Committee of delegates from the 24 church dis-

tricts spent many hours in intense discussion during pre-Conference meetings.

The one item of unfinished business, updates to polity for Conference agencies, provoked discussion about the Standing Committee's roles and responsibilities. According to Conference rules, the district delegates were unable to offer amendments or recommendations for action. Some expressed frustration that they had no opportunity to give input on the proposals.

The new roles and responsibilities for Standing Committee include:

- creating and maintaining a covenant of agreement with each of the agencies (Bethany Theological Seminary, Eder Financial, and On Earth Peace),
- handling any requests from organizations wishing to become Conference agencies,
- receiving annual reports from all the agencies,
- developing a process for maintaining good relationships with the agencies and to address concerns in agency relationships, and
- recommending to the Annual Conference when agency status should be discontinued.

■ Task team proposals

Four recommendations from a task team that has been holding conversations with On Earth Peace was adopted, with several amendments and editing changes. For each, a small group of Standing Committee members were named to follow up. The team also presented a detailed report about the conversations.

The wide-ranging recommendations call for various actions to address expectations and processes regarding agencies, delineate how Conference decisions and statements should be received and implemented, review the organizational structure of the Church of the Brethren, and create a time for intentional confession and repentance of negatives outcomes of theological differences around human sexuality.

The full recommendations:

Recommendation 1: "Standing Committee will provide full clarity of expectations for agencies in the proposed new covenants with agencies. Standing Committee will also create a process with clear and specific provisions that explain steps to deal with concerns when they arise."

Recommendation 2: "Standing Committee should act

Glenn Riegel



Eric Miller of the Global Mission office hosted guests from the Dominican Republic, Spain, and Rwanda. Those invited from Nigeria, Haiti, Uganda, and Venezuela could not get visas.

within three years to bring clarification for how Annual Conference decisions and policy statements should be received and implemented, so that all individuals and entities within the church are more likely to have commonly

understood and agreed upon expectations. Additionally, clear guidelines should be provided for how judgment with regard to compliance should be impartially examined, appealed, or reviewed.”

Recommendation 3: “Standing Committee asks Annual Conference to review the organizational structure of the Church of the Brethren, which includes the denomination, agencies, districts, and local congregations, to address the deep dysfunction that exists in the communication processes, in organizational struc-

ture, in our ability to resolve/transform conflict and division, and in the overall effectiveness of the mission of the church.”

Recommendation 4: “Theological differences around human sexuality have too often been manifested in bullying,

Lonely in the middle by Don Fitzkee

It had been a few years since I attended an in-person Annual Conference.

I had missed a year or two before the two years of pandemic disruption, so I didn’t know what to expect when our family arrived in Omaha.

One clear difference was that Conference was noticeably smaller. The main meeting room for business and worship was a far cry from the bigger halls we used to meet in. And traffic in the exhibit area seemed light.

I’m sure some of that was due to ongoing COVID concerns. And Conference attendance is always lower when we gather west of the Mississippi. But the hard truth is that there aren’t as many of us as there used to be. Membership has been declining for decades and in recent years whole congregations have been pulling out, nearly all of them seeking to maintain traditional views of sex and marriage.

While my theological views are evolving, I grew up in a conservative evangelical context; I count some of the people absent from this year’s

Conference as friends. It made me sad that they weren’t there.


I believe that, with a significant segment of conservatives gone, the denomination eventually will move toward greater acceptance of LGBTQ people. You may celebrate or lament that, depending on your views. In his introduction of next year’s Conference theme, incoming moderator Tim McElwee made it clear that he would advocate for a more inclusive church.

The curious thing is that efforts to make the church more inclusive almost inevitably will result in some people exiting. A more inclusive church might end up being an even smaller church.

I was heartened by one conversation I had with a conservative friend at Conference. When his congregation voted to leave the denomination, he was among the minority who voted to stay. He reasoned that they didn’t need to leave over this disagreement. They could continue to believe just as they always had. To be sure, he maintains his conservative views—he handed me some literature defending traditional

biblical views of sexuality. But he continues to value his heritage and identity as a member of the Church of the Brethren.

I’ve reached a stage in life where I can tolerate some ambiguity. Some would view my unwillingness to denounce gay people as a sure sign of apostasy. Others would remind me that anything less than a full embrace of LGBTQ children of God is no embrace at all. And maybe there is no middle ground.

In some of my more hopeful moments, however, I imagine that a shared heritage and commitment to following Jesus can help us overcome even really big differences. Admittedly, it’s getting more difficult to find evidence to support that view. But I guess I’ll keep muddling along, trying to understand various viewpoints and lived experiences, and seeking to discern the Spirit’s leading. I hope some will join me. It gets kind of lonely in the middle these days. 

Don Fitzkee is pastor of worship at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.



Glenn Riegel

Moderator David Sollenberger passes the gavel to Tim McElwee.

violence, and a general sense of dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters. We must redouble our efforts to live out these differences, as individuals and through our systems of governance, in ways that preserve the humanity, dignity, and deeply held spiritual convictions of all. Harsh, dismissive, unloving, and unforgiving behaviors toward one another cannot have a home among us. We recommend that a first step toward healing be taken through Standing Committee leading a significant intentional time of confession and repentance as part of Annual Conference 2023 around this specific point of failure in our relationships with one another. As is so well stated in James 5:16: “Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

■ **In other business**

Standing Committee held a conversation about the state of the church with general secretary David Steele and district executive representative Torin Eikler, from the denomination’s Leadership Team. Questions focused on the scope of the loss of congregations and the effect on the denomination, both emotionally and practically. Steele commented on the “loss and pain” he has seen in visits with congregations and districts, the problem of misinformation, and the problem of having another denomination actively meeting with Church of the Brethren congregations.

Two proposals from the Nominating Committee were adopted. One is a new process for making nominations from the floor of Annual Conference; it will be an item of new business next year. The other is for a study committee on calling denominational leadership.

Elected to the Nominating Committee were Richard Davis of Atlantic Southeast District, Becky Maurer of Southern Ohio and Kentucky District, Ben Polzin of Northern Ohio District, and Dennis Webb of Illinois and Wisconsin District.

Elected to the Appeals Committee were Ron Beachley of Western Pennsylvania District, Mary Lorah Hammond of Michigan District, and Don Shankster of Pacific Southwest District; first alternate Laura Y Arroyo Marrero of Puerto

By the numbers

1,315 total registration included 425 delegates, 748 nondelegates attending in person, and 142 nondelegates attending virtually.

\$51,717 received in offerings (received onsite, online, and since the close of the Conference) including \$10,596.05 to support the Conference, \$11,447 for the Church of the Brethren’s Core Ministries, \$9,069.98 for ministerial training for international Church of the Brethren leaders, \$5,120.91 for transportation for international guests attending Annual Conference, \$1,320 to support the webcasting, and \$14,162.71 for Girls Inc. of Omaha, this year’s “Witness to the Host City.”

8.2 percent increase approved for the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors, responding to the current rate of inflation.

12 projects, fellowships, and congregations welcomed into the denomination: *From Atlantic Northeast District, Ebenezer Church of the Brethren, Lampeter, Pa.; Un Nuevo Renacer, Mountville, Pa. From Atlantic Southeast District, all in Florida, Eglise des Freres Haitian, West Palm*


Glenn Riegel



Beach; **Gospel Assembly of LeHigh Acres; Haitian Church of the Brethren, Naples; Haitian Church of the Brethren, Orlando; Iglesia des los Hermanos Nuevo Comienzo, Kissimmee; Jesus Lounge Ministry, Del Ray Beach; Lorida (Fl.) Iglesia des los**

Hermanos; Ministerio Jehova Es mi Pastor, Fort Pierce; Tabernacle the Restoration, Lauderdale Lakes; Unify Christian Church of the Brethren, North Miami.

105 pints of blood collected by the Annual Conference Blood Drive sponsored by Brethren Disaster Ministries with the American Red Cross, including 9 “double reds” and 83 whole blood units.

Rico District; second alternate Myron Jackson of Missouri and Arkansas District. 

The Press Team for the 2022 Annual Conference: Jan Fischer Bachman, Keith Hollenberg, Russ Otto, Donna Parcell, Frank Ramirez, Glenn Riegel, Frances Townsend, and Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford.

Business documents and more information about the 2022 Conference are at www.brethren.org/ac2022.



License to preach

100 years of women in ministry

by Nancy Sollenberger Heishman

The concept of *sankofa* suggests that we can better discern the journey toward the future by looking back and understanding the path that led us to the present. This year, which marks the 100th anniversary of Annual Conference granting Brethren women the license to preach, is a good time to look back—and also look forward.

The denominational decision in 1922 was initiated by a request from the McPherson congregation in Kansas: “We also decide that sisters, who are properly qualified, may be licensed by the church to preach. These licenses may be renewed from year to year. When, in the judgment of the church and the District Ministerial Board, their work and interest justify it, they may receive permanent licenses to preach.”

A deep dive into the Brethren archives reveals that more than 80 women were licensed to preach in the years between 1922 and 1958, when Annual Conference finally granted “full and unrestricted rights” to the ministry. During those years, “preaching sisters” went about faithfully leading Bible studies, preaching sermons, visiting in homes, officiating at weddings and funerals, welcoming new believers, and ministering wherever they were welcomed. In spite of the pervasive reality of sexism and the effects of patriarchy within society and the church, they persevered and flourished.

Looking back

One of those treasured preaching sisters presents an inspiring picture of how female ministers responded within the limits granted to them by the church. Edith Griffith, one of 14 children, was raised in the Fairview Church of the Brethren in Cordova, Md. At age 16, she served as Sunday school superintendent, opening the hour with a

devotional each week. When she eventually gave her first sermon, her parents were filled with humble pride, her father with tears streaming down his cheeks.

After she graduated from Bridgewater College, she and her husband, Enos, a widower with three children when they married, raised their growing family of eight children. It was not until 1951 that Griffith was affirmed as a “preaching sister,” and she was permanently licensed in 1953. In 1970 she was ordained in the Coulson congregation in Hillsville, Va.

Over her years of ministry, Griffith faithfully carried out the role of pastor, particularly enjoying visiting in the homes of church members and offering Bible studies and sermons to her “flock.” She occasionally experienced cold receptions from some congregations, but that never deterred her. Her call to ministry had been clearly confirmed by God, her family, and her faith communities. Who was she to turn away due to the occasional hardship?

Griffith finds delight in the memory of a young parishioner of the Eden (N.C.) congregation who, upon hearing her preach, remarked to herself, “Oh! Women can preach?” That parishioner went on to affirm her own call to ministry, and now Dava Hensley is Griffith’s pastor at First Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va.

“Edith was the first woman I saw preaching in the pulpit,” says Hensley. “Now, I’m her pastor. What a privilege! Women like Edith who kept on heeding their call opened the door for many.”

In 2001 at Virlina District’s recognition of Edith Griffith’s 50 years of ordination, her husband, Enos (now deceased), standing with their daughter, Carol Lena Miller, addressed the crowd with words of pride and love for Edith and the district. When he finished speaking, the hundreds gathered there gave her a standing ovation.



“ We also decide that sisters, who are properly qualified, may be licensed by the church to preach. ”
 —Annual Conference, 1922

Looking back, Brethren clergywomen unequivocally give thanks for the many faithful “Ediths” among the Brethren as well as those who pioneered before her. Among the many who quietly labored in love for Christ and the church in the past, these faithful sisters include Sarah Righter Major, a much-admired Brethren preacher in the mid-1800s, and Mattie Cunningham Dolby, who in 1911 became not only the first woman officially recognized as a minister but also the first African American woman installed as a minister.

Looking forward

What does this 100-year anniversary mean today?

For Brethren poet and pastor Audri Svay, the 1922 decision “means more to me than I can say. This [decision] opened doors for my grandmother, Harriet Finney, to follow her passion and calling to influence this world in a positive way. I am sure she inspired so many others as she inspired me to follow in her footsteps. There were so many obstacles the first women in ministry had to endure and overcome. Women to this day face being valued as less than men, licensed or not, ordained or not. My hope for the church is to continue to make ministry possible and welcome for all in this priesthood of believers.”

Svay’s passionate longing is heard from other voices as well. Some of their words appear here.

“ We indeed truly are standing on the shoulders of giants, and we still face the same struggles the early church women faced—humiliation, rejection, and persecution—just for

being a woman. But a calling from the Lord himself is stronger than any naysayer. In light of this 100-year anniversary, I pray we please the Lord and continue faithful service to him. Knowing that many areas still reject women clergy, even 100 years later, may we be prayerful, that with the help of the Holy Spirit we continue to contend for the faith and proclaim our Lord. He said in his word that he would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh and his sons and daughters shall prophesy. Well, here we are, fulfilling [that] scripture.” —Kristie Wilson, newly ordained minister, Southeastern District

“ It’s shocking to be reminded of how recent this [anniversary] is. How the arc of history bends toward justice, yet how slowly it unfolds. I am deeply and profoundly grateful to live in this time.” —Paula Bowser, retired pastor, Southern Ohio/Kentucky District

“ It’s not really about what it means to me as a clergy of the Church of the Brethren. It’s more of a celebration of what has been added to the body of Christ due to this decision—what the church would be missing out on if this wasn’t decided upon. It’s about the church missing out on vitality and faithfulness due to us not including our LGBTQ siblings in Christ. So I celebrate this anniversary and thank God for the church having more diverse leadership and pray it will widen its circle of inclusion in the future.” —Susan L. Smith, ordained minister, Western Plains District



Nancy Sollenberger Heishman

At 91, Edith Griffith of Virlina District may be the oldest and longest-credentialed woman in the Church of the Brethren. Here she is pictured with one of her daughters, Donna Hornsby.

“Me siento muy honrada de recibir su notificación con relación a la participación de las mujeres en nuestra organización como predicadoras de la palabra poderosa de Jesús, para ser portavoces de Cristo en la evangelización del mundo. Muchas gracias por declarar que no somos invisibles, que se nos reconoce de la mano del maestro y que el valor que reflejo el maestro para dignificar y darle lugar a la mujer sea el mismo que este dando la organización de la Iglesia de los Hermanos para cumplirlo y hacer justicia.

“I am very honored to receive your notification regarding the participation of women in our organization as preachers of the powerful word of Jesus, to be the voice of Christ in the evangelization of the world. Thank you very much for declaring that we are not invisible, that we are seen by the hand of the Teacher, and that the value that the Teacher reflects to give dignity and a place to women is the same that is giving the organization of the Church of the Brethren the capacity to fulfill [this calling] and to do justice.” —Evelyn Tanco, newly licensed minister, Puerto Rico District

“I love every chance I get to sit under the preaching or observe the ministry of my female colleagues and am grateful for their ability to use all their gifts. My pastor happens to be female, and she has impacted my life of faith immensely!” — Martin Hutchison, ordained minister, Mid-Atlantic District

“I am glad that my daughter grew up in congregations where there was good female clergy leadership! I want us to continue to call women, but I am ready to have some more “pressure” brought to bear on those churches that choose not to consider us, even in a part-time situation. There is such a huge pastoral shortage right now, that I wonder if we don’t need to make some radical changes in how we support pastors and what our expectations of them are.” —Leah Harness, ordained minister, Virlina District

“I was told by EYN (Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) denominational leadership, “neither you or any other female theologian will ever be ordained,” and I told him, “You are not God.” So, when my pastor told me that [I will be considered for licensing] I remembered and was speechless and God affirmed his greatness: ‘Nothing is impossible to God.’ By the grace of God, if God helps me to scale through all the processes and be ordained to the glory and honor of God, it will be very significant and will serve as encouragement to other women in EYN.” —Rebecca Dali, candidate for licensing in Northern Plains District



According to a 2008 General Board statement, “In 1958, after a decade of debate rife with disagreement, condescension and contention, Edward Ziegler declared, ‘The time is surely here, in this anniversary year, when we ought to remove all ambiguity and all discrimination which is based on sex alone. . . . The time is here when we ought to take this step of recognizing that the gifts of God may be bestowed equally upon the sisters of the church.’”

May it be so!

Nancy Sollenberger Heishman is director of the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry.

Women in ministry. The Office of Ministry has additional articles at www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/women-in-ministry.

Part-time pastors. The Church of the Brethren Part-time Pastor; Full-time Church program offers resources on mentorship and collegial companionship, capacity-building, and support for spiritual rest and renewal. www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/part-time-pastor/.

Seriously? To hear what some clergywomen face in their ministry, view “Seriously? Actual things said to female pastors by parishioners and male pastors in the North Carolina Lutheran Synod” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTcaAkG86QQ.

Patriarchy. Mennonite Church USA has produced a resource on confronting and dismantling patriarchy: www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/laboring-toward-wholeness-a-training-on-dismantling-patriarchy/.

A foundation of footwashing

Southeastern event heals the present with tradition of the past

by Dora Smith-Cook

Earlier this year, some members of Southeastern District gathered for a fellowship rally at John and Barbara Smith's picnic shed in western North Carolina. The shed sits on property inherited by Barbara—a small piece of the land settled by the Henry Masters family approximately 200 years ago, and handed down through generations.

The day included a message shared by John—pastor of Pleasant Grove Church of the Brethren in Bakersville, N.C.—followed by lunch at the picnic shed, then a short trip back down Bee Branch Road to the cemetery. Guests visited the gravestones of ancestors who founded the Masters settlement on Bee Branch, and learned more about the history of the first Church of the Brethren that was started there.

Then, below the cemetery, John and Barbara prepared a love feast and footwashing service at the barn where the community held its first love feast more than a century ago.

As people made their way back down the hill to the barn, they gathered around a fire where water for the service was being heated. John shared a prayer and a time of silent introspection. Then everyone moved inside the barn to wash feet and share communion.


People who have been just as dedicated to their faith communities as Barbara and John are to their own passed dishpans across the uneven straw, washed each other's tired feet, and shared the bread and cup. The singing voices of these brothers and sisters, who have been through a tumultuous season of conflict and division together, reverber-

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

Many congregations in the Church of the Brethren celebrate love feast as part of the international observance of World Communion Sunday, established to promote "Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation." It is held annually on the first Sunday of October.

ated off the walls of the old barn. Some of the children attending the rally participated in the service. Others, who were too young to sit still, peeled off their shoes and socks and splashed in the little branch next to the barn.

Inside the barn, the building's stone foundation sat like a monument. Each stone had surely shifted slightly over decades, edging left or right, up or down, with the change of seasons. And yet, the barn stands today. The foundation holds. Much like the tradition of love feast itself, which brought these people together on a warm spring Saturday and was first held in this very spot decades ago, a firm foundation can transcend time and conflict.

Those attending the rally are continuing to move forward, with Christ and their love for one another as their foundation. 

A version of this article originally appeared in the "Southeastern District News."



The call of Gideon

Judges 6:1-27

by Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

The book of Judges records Israel's settlement in the Promised Land. And it's not quite the conquest that was predicted. Joshua has died leaving Israel in a crisis. Without consistent leadership, the people are quick to turn away from God and God's commandments.

The cyclical rhythm of the stories within Judges drives the narrative. The people inevitably turn away from God, so God gives them over to oppressive nations, which leads to Israel's repentance. In response to their repentance, God raises up a judge to restore their faithfulness and security in the Promised Land.

Judges follows this cycle, recording Israel's tendency to do "what was evil in the sight of the LORD," a repeated phrase throughout the book. However, most of the narrative focuses on the leadership of the judges God calls in response to their waywardness, not the waywardness itself.

The call of Gideon is the most prominent calling of a judge in the

whole book. Gideon is called to judge Israel after they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, resulting in God delivering them into the hands of the Midianites. The Midianites ruthlessly oppressed Israel for seven years (Judges 6:1). But when the angel of the Lord finds Gideon, he announces that this is about to change. Even though Israel feels abandoned and even though Gideon feels inadequate, God assures him that God will be with him as he is sent to deliver Israel.

Israel became small

In Judges 6:6a, the NRSV says, "Thus Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian," but the Hebrew should literally be translated as "Israel became small because of Midian." This hints at not only the economic poverty of Israel but also the poverty of spirit that has plagued them since God gave Israel into the hand of the Midianites.

The Israelites were so severely oppressed that they hid out in caves and strongholds in their own land.

They could not sow seed or keep livestock because the Midianites would attack and destroy all their produce and animals (vv. 2-6). They laid waste to the land of Israel so that Israel cried out to the Lord for deliverance.

When the angel of the Lord finds Gideon, he is beating out wheat in a wine press so that the wheat chaff would not blow away and be seen by the Midianites. If the Midianites saw any evidence that Israel was thriving, they would swarm the wheat like locusts and destroy it. With such ruthlessness, it is no wonder that Israel feels small. Likewise, Gideon questions his ability to rectify Israel's situation. He cannot see anything other than their oppression.

The angel assures Gideon that the Lord is with him, but Gideon questions God: *If you are with me, why have you thrown Israel into the hands of the Midianites? How is our being made small compatible with the covenant you made with us, saying we would be a great nation?*

God indirectly answers this

“ Sometimes periods of struggle and chaos turn us inward, causing us to lose perspective. Our pain becomes our bedfellow, and we can see nothing else of the world around us. ”



question by commissioning Gideon to deliver Israel. Even though Israel was unfaithful, turning away from God, God has heard their cry and intends to deliver them through a new leader. Israel felt insignificant, just like Gideon who was in despair, bent over in a pit to conceal his meager produce. Yet God calls Gideon “a mighty warrior” (v. 12) to show how both Gideon and the people of Israel would soon be rescued by God’s hand. The people made to feel small will soon stand tall and mighty again!

Gideon’s reluctance, God’s confidence

The call of Gideon may be familiar to anyone who has ever felt a sense of calling. And it doesn’t have to be a calling to set-apart ministry to be relatable. Has God called you to a new job, to a new place to live, or to volunteer leadership in your local congregation? Often these calls are met with skepticism. We respond like Gideon: *God, why don’t you go ahead*

and take care of that yourself? How can I do what you ask me to do? I am not qualified. There are better choices!

Gideon is reluctant to accept God’s call to deliver Israel from the Midianites. In spite of this, God responds to each hesitation with overwhelming confidence in Gideon, reassuring him that he will not deliver Israel alone. The Lord will surely be with him.

Gideon’s conversation with God may remind you of another conversation. God called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt and Moses responded with similar reluctance. Moses wasn’t sure how a single person could lead the people out of Egypt, let alone one who was slow of speech. Moses even pleads for God to call someone else, but God responds with unwavering commitment to Moses. The similarities between these two call stories likewise anticipate similar outcomes. God will deliver Israel through the leaders God calls.

God knows you best

God sees something in Gideon that Gideon does not yet see in himself, so God sends a messenger to call it out of him. Feeling unworthy, Gideon hesitates to receive his calling initially. He is from the weakest tribe in Israel. He has likely never had much opportunity to lead people, let alone an army. Yet, it does not seem to be those skills that qualify him for leadership in God’s eyes. Gideon’s current situation need not limit his ability to do as God wishes in the future. God will equip him for this role because God knows his strengths and his weaknesses.


Have you ever had someone call out a gift in you that you were not

quite sure you had? I remember a college class where we had to debate a controversial topic as a class. After the debate, my professor asked me if I had ever considered becoming a lawyer. He was serious, but it’s not a career I entertained then or anytime since. However, there have been other times when someone mentioned a gift they saw in me that I may have reluctantly received at first, but then later felt like it could possibly be true. Those moments carried a sacredness, like God was speaking through those individuals to me, that I often did not notice until later.

How is it that someone else can know you better than you know yourself? Shouldn’t we be our own experts? Not always! Sometimes periods of struggle and chaos turn us inward, causing us to lose perspective. Our pain becomes our bedfellow, and we can see nothing else of the world around us. Confiding in a trusted friend or a counselor can help us turn outward again, enabling us to see more and grounding us in a narrative that is larger than a single moment.

Remembering that God can also be a similar grounding presence is also beneficial. God has known you since you were knit together in your mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13), and

God has plans for you that are in your best interest (Jeremiah 29:11). Remembering these scriptures and remembering your own experiences of God’s care help to shape your identity.

You are God’s beloved. If God wills something for you, feel strengthened and confident in that calling. 

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey is co-pastor with her husband, Tim, of Oakton Church of the Brethren in Vienna, Va.



Mission and Ministry Board sets budget

The Mission and Ministry Board, led by chair Carl Fike and assisted by chair-elect Colin Scott and general secretary David Steele, approved a budget parameter for Core Ministries of \$5,217,000 for 2023 at a pre-Annual Conference meeting in Omaha, Neb. The proposal is for a break-even budget.

In financial reporting, the board learned that the total asset balance as of May represents a \$4.7 million decrease from the beginning of the year. The investment balance has decreased \$5 million, including market performance and draws. However, giving to denominational ministries is up significantly over last year, representing the highest giving total since May 2010.

In response to high inflation, the board approved a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment for employee compensation, taking effect immediately. Another 3 percent increase begins in January.

A position for an executive director overseeing Discipleship Ministries and the Office of Ministry was approved, including financial implementation through use of unrestricted reserves from the Bequest Quasi-endowment. General secretary David Steele thanked Discipleship Ministries staff Josh Brockway and Stan Dueck for serving as co-coordinators since an executive director was last in place.

The board adopted new initiatives recommended by the Strategic Planning Committee, including a “foreground vision” titled “Putting Away Our Swords (Kingian Non-Violence Training)” for board members and director-level staff to be trained in Kingian nonviolence.

International guests were welcomed



David Steele recognized Beckie Miller Zeek, Dava Hensley, and Christina Singh for completing their terms of service.

from three countries: Ariel Rosario, church president, and Anastacia Bueno from the Dominican Republic; Santos Terrero, church president, and Maribel Roa and Welinthon Perez from Spain; and Etienne Nsanzimama, church president, and Theoneste Sentabire from Rwanda.

Middlebury (Ind.) Church of the Brethren was recognized as a new member of the Open Roof Fellowship.

The board called an Executive Committee for 2022-2023: Lauren Seganos Cohen, Kathy Mack, and J. Roger Schrock, to serve with chair Carl Fike and chair elect Colin Scott.

Personnel

Emily Bowdle of Denton (Md.) Church of the Brethren joined the Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) team as orientation assistant, serving as a BVS volunteer. She also has volunteered at Camp Myrtlewood in Myrtle Point, Ore., and the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Tochi-ken, Japan.

Michael Brewer-Berres began July 18 as interim program assistant for BVS. She served as the BVS orientation assistant, working as a BVS volunteer 2021-2022. Her first BVS project placement was at Quaker Cottage in Belfast,

Northern Ireland.

Carrie Eikler in July resigned as coordinator of the English-Language Ministry Training Programs for the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. She joined the academy staff in 2014. She coordinated the Training in Ministry (TRIM) and Education for Shared Ministry (EFSM) programs, among other responsibilities.

Galen Fitzkee completed his year of BVS on Aug. 12, serving as an associate with the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in Washington,

D.C. He has begun a job as legislative associate for the Mennonite Central Committee National Peace and Justice Ministries Office.

Sharon Flaten has joined the staff of Bethany Seminary as assistant of Recruitment and Student Development in Nigeria. She first traveled to Nigeria in 2009. From March 2019 to July 2021, while enrolled at Bethany, she worked with students in the Certificate for Biblical Peacemaking in Nigeria.

Chelsea Goss Skillen begins Oct. 24 as director of

BVS. She is a graduate of Bridgewater (Va.) College and of Regis University, where she earned a master's in Organizational Leadership. Her two years as a BVS volunteer included one year as orientation assistant. She has worked with New Community Project, Camp Bethel, and a refugee program in Australia, and most recently co-founded a business to empower and educate authors to share their stories and helped run a production and publishing company.

Gene Hagenberger has



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Church ministries respond to extreme flood events

After devastating flooding hit areas of Missouri, eastern Kentucky, and other states, staff of Brethren Disaster Ministries were busy monitoring the situation and identifying

needs. Conference calls and meetings were held with FEMA, Kentucky Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and district leadership in Missouri and Arkansas and Southern Ohio and Kentucky districts.

District staff were in touch with Church of the Brethren congregations in affected areas of Kentucky. As of early August, the buildings of the Flat Creek and Mud Lick congregations were not affected.

By mid-August, Material Resources had sent three shipments of relief goods to Kentucky on behalf of Church World Service including cleanup buckets, hygiene kits and toothpaste, school kits, and blankets.

Children's Disaster Services also responded at the request of the national Red Cross. A first team of volunteers began serving in Kentucky on Aug. 6. Another team responded in St. Louis.



Glenn Thompson



Joyce Smith

Online donations to assist those affected by flooding can be made at www.brethren.org/give-kentucky-flooding.

In addition, CDS had volunteers serving families seeking asylum in the Washington, D.C., area, who had been bused from Texas and dropped off in the nation's capital with few provisions. Families were receiving support from churches and mutual aid groups. Local and regional Church of the Brethren congregations were assisting in a variety of ways.

retired as Mid-Atlantic District executive minister, after more than 13 years. During his tenure, he served in various roles on the Council of District Executives and represented the council on the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee. Previously, he pastored congregations in Virginia, Middle Pennsylvania, and Mid-Atlantic districts.

Mid-Atlantic District has called an interim executive minister team. **Kim McDowell**, who heads the team, serves in a regional role and is representative to the Council of District Executives. Also serving in regional roles are **Joe Detrick** and **Eddie Edmonds**.

Gretchen Zience provides volunteer administrative support as liaison to the district administrative assistant.

Andrew Hamilton began July 23 executive minister for Southeastern District. He holds degrees from John Brown University in Arkansas; Ashland (Ohio) Theological Seminary; the University of St Andrews, Scotland; and Evangelical Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He has pastored churches in Northern Ohio and Atlantic Northeast Districts, and has served on the Mission and Ministry Board.

Zechariah Houser resigned Aug. 12 as coordinator of short-term service, after having

worked with FaithX and BVS recruitment for about a year.

Martha "Martie" Hummer on Aug. 20 joined the Brethren Disaster Ministries project leadership team as a BVSEr, serving at the Waverly, Tenn., rebuilding site.

Beth Martin of Beaver Falls, Pa., began Aug. 15 as marketing director for Eder Financial (formerly Brethren Benefit Trust). She holds a bachelor's in English and writing from Slippery Rock University and in 2023 will complete a master's in marketing communications at St. Bonaventure University.

Annabeth (AB) Roeschley has begun as executive director of the Brethren Mennonite

Council (BMC). Roeschley brings years of advocacy experience in the Mennonite Church, and succeeds former executive director **Carol Wise** who is now interim pastor at La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.

Allison Snyder in early July completed two years as intern for the Brethren Historical Library and Archives. **Ashley Scarr**, of San Diego (Calif.) First Church of the Brethren, began June 27 as the 2022-2023 intern.

Julie Watson resigned June 17 as administrative secretary for Northern Ohio District, due to health concerns. She worked for the district for more than eight years.

NYC REFLECTION

And who is my neighbor?

by Kara Bidgood Enders

The parable of the good Samaritan, told in Luke 10:25-37, is directed to all of us. If we were the person on the side of the road, we would likely cry out for help as well. However, if we found ourselves in the opposite position, the passersby, most of us would be hesitant to help.

In respect to this parable, I often think about homeless people, especially in large cities, holding signs with messages begging for food or money. Most of us are hesitant to approach these people, treating them like they are a threat. As people walk by and stare, it

can be uncomfortable for those in need. I imagine the man feeling this way about the priest and the Levite.


Often, as shown in the parable, the ones who are least expected to help create the most impact. Be the Samaritan. This is a situation where Jesus calls us to reach out a hand and provide help. It is a perfect chance to live out our Christ calling.

Society sets expectations for just about every group or person you can think of: athletes, nerds, band kids, kids with disabilities, or even bullies and victims of bullying. Part of having that strong faith foundation is pushing past those expectations, both for myself and the way I treat others. There is so much more to someone than what we can see on the outside. Looking at the titles, the priest and Levite were expected to be the neighbor, but the Samaritan, the outsider, is the one who reached out and went above and beyond.

This also applies to the man on the side of the road. He, like many modern-day examples, is seen as bad and dangerous. Why do we jump to conclusions about people we do not know? I would suggest that it is our own fear and personal pride. We are too absorbed in our own lives to reach out to those on the outskirts of society. We are afraid of who the unknown people are and of their past stories. Instead of jumping to conclusions of how someone ended up in said position, we should question our own actions of why we are not helping or would not help.

How can we “go and do likewise?” We are called to reach out to and bear witness to those who are different from us, just like Jesus did. The compelling vision of the Church of the Brethren is centered around the idea of “Jesus in the neighborhood.” Not only does this mention work in neighborhood communities, but it calls us to be creative and adaptable in our actions. We are called to reach out to those who are different. If we claim to follow the work of Jesus, we cannot achieve that by ignoring our call to be a neighbor.

It can be hard to be bold and reach out, but when you do, it will make an impact on both your life and the lives you are helping. Part of living out my own faith is through volunteering at my school’s food pantry. This is my way of being a neighbor and continuing the work of Jesus. It is my personal example of “Jesus in the neighborhood.”

Who is my neighbor? Our neighbors are everybody we connect with and see. We are all neighbors to each other, and we should treat each other as such. I challenge all of us to not only treat others the way we would want to be treated, but the way that they would want to be treated—with love, care, and compassion. We live in a world that provides us with endless possibilities to continue the work of Christ. 

Kara Bidgood Enders, a senior in high school, is from Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa. This article is excerpted from her speech at National Youth Conference, where she was one of three youth speakers. The assignment was to “Bring Your Own Jesus Story.”



Glenn Regel

“ As I opened the March MESSENGER I saw the article about Perry Huffaker. I was thrilled. He was one of the first ministers I met in the Church of the Brethren. ”

Thrilled

As I opened the March MESSENGER I saw the article about Perry Huffaker. I was thrilled. He was one of the first ministers I met in the Church of the Brethren. I first met him when he came to lead our small choir to help us dedicate the red hymnal.

We had a small choir of about eight teenagers. We weren't singing loud enough for Brother Huffaker. He told us to pretend to have a hot piece of cake in our mouths. Then we really sang loud.

During the '50s there was a once-a-month youth rally held in different churches. He was usually there playing for everyone.

I sang in that wonderful choir for 10 years, and I've sung several times in the Billy Graham Choir.

I am now 87 years young and I really don't sing solos anymore, just group singing. My minister [at Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren] has written some wonderful songs about our church.

Patricia Brate Connell
Sandwich, Ill.

Call us 'Post-Boomers'

I have some serious concerns about the names for different generations in the June article, "Generation to Generation." They are what psychologists call "external referents," descriptions imposed from the outside. As a result, they make it easy to see what the label encourages you to see, and difficult (if not impossible) to notice anything else. As the saying goes, "Nothing about me, without me."

I am just about to turn 65. That puts me squarely in what your article calls

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“ They are ... descriptions imposed from the outside. As a result, they make it easy to see what the label encourages you to see, and difficult (if not impossible) to notice anything else. ”

the “Baby Boomer” category. But so are my older sister and brother—8 years and 11 years older than me—and their life experiences as true “Baby Boomers” (post-war babies) are incredibly different than mine.

My brother and I serve as a particularly good example of why calling us both “Boomers” is so misleading. He was born in 1946, and started first grade in 1952—the same year that Truman left the White House and Eisenhower moved in. Eisenhower

remained president until 1960, when my brother was a freshman in high school. Whatever else can be said about his childhood years (think of the movie *A Christmas Story*), American society didn’t change very much.

Market Business News identifies another generation between Baby Boomers and Generation X: Generation Jones, born between 1954 and 1964

I was born in 1957 and started first grade in 1963—the beginning of what I

call the “Roller-Coaster Decade” that lasted until 1973, when Nixon resigned. The changes began to explode in 1963: In June, the Supreme Court ruled that public school children in Pennsylvania couldn’t be forced to hear 10 Bible verses read aloud every day. In August, Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington and gave his “I Have a Dream” speech. In September, I started first grade. In mid-October, Bedford County, Pa., stopped having us say the Lord’s Prayer every morning (16 months after the Supreme Court ruling on school prayer).

About six weeks after that, on the Friday before Thanksgiving, Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy with a hunting rifle just like my Dad’s. Two days later, Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald, live on national television. There was no delay, warning, or cutting away of the camera. My mother just started shouting, “He shot him! He shot him!” And eight days later, the Monday after Thanksgiving, was the first day of Pennsylvania’s deer hunting season. How does a six-year-old process all of this? And then, just three months after that, in February, the Beatles appeared on Ed Sullivan.

Bible reading to Beatles, my world changed more in eight months than my brother’s world had changed in eight years. And I was still in first grade. People my age, “we had to guess at what normal is,” just like Adult Children of Alcoholics remind themselves at every meeting. I remember thinking, “I guess presidents just get killed now and then. I guess that’s just the way the world is.”

Jesus, the best gift of all

2022 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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The “big kids,” the real Baby Boomers my brother’s age, would never have said that. Their idea of normal was the Eisenhower Years.

The 1960s were trying times for those who were in high school and college, but they were absolutely devastating for those of us who were still in grade school. For us, the whole country was like one gigantic alcoholic fam-

ily. And after 50 years, I hope somebody finally notices. Call us “Post-Boomers.” Please.

Bill Bowser
Martinsburg, Pa.

A valid point

I very much appreciated Craig Enberg’s letter to the editor (July/August) in response to Robert

Johansen’s article.

At the end of his letter Enberg writes, “It seems to me things are really cooking at MESSENGER now that the Covenant Brethren have separated themselves.”

I think he makes a valid point. I certainly agree!

Richard A. Moyer
Erie, Pa.

TURNINGPOINTS

Centenarians

Haring, Jean, 102,
Sellersville, Pa., Aug. 1
LeClerc, Nelle Stinnette,
100, Greeley, Colo., July
21

New members

Christiansburg, Va.: Lea
Mosley, Carol Wall
Maple Grove, Ashland,
Ohio: Kenneth Benner,
Sally Benner, Holly Taylor,
Robert Taylor, Wendy
Taylor
Middlebury, Ind.: Maxine
Harvey
Middlecreek, Rockwood,
Pa.: Tiffany Ash, Jimmy
Hay, McKenzie Hay
**University Baptist and
Brethren**, State College,
Pa.: Leah Carswell, Harper
House, Phil Jones, Ellory
Potter, Lucy Potter, Éa
Stilson, Nate Will

Wedding anniversaries

Anderson, Ervin and Ann,
Bridgewater, Va., 65
Bates, James and Kay,
Lafayette, Ind., 55
Bowser, Harold and Betty,
New Oxford, Pa., 69
Brode, Robert and Marian,
Mechanicsburg, Pa., 67

Brown, Maurice and Jane
Phyllis, Parkville, Md., 71
Cline, Carlyle and Kaye,
McGaheysville, Va., 50
Clouse, Wendell and Ruth,
Goshen, Ind., 68
Dotterer, Don and
Lorraine, Landisville, Pa.,
66
Eller, Wendell and Sonya,
Bridgewater, Va., 65
Gardner, Rick and Carol,
Huntley, Ill., 60
Gundlach, Jerry and
Marilyn, Plymouth, Ind.,
65
Keeney, Ray and Sandra,
Bethel, Pa., 60
Lybrook, Charlie and Rose
Mary, Lafayette, Ind., 60
Miller, Charlie and Kathy,
Mount Crawford, Va., 50
Phillipy, Curtis and Fern,
Richland, Pa., 70
Sanbloom, Robert and
Joan, West Lafayette, Ind.,
66
Strycker, G. Brad and Jo,
Goshen, Ind., 69
Trax, John and Norma,
Easton, Md., 60
Turner, Roger and Mary
Kay Snider, Gettysburg,
Pa., 50

Deaths

Alwine, Harold, 87,
Hollsopple, Pa., July 25
Bean, Ronald D., 72, New
Oxford, Pa., July 31
Bowser, Betty Louise
Hyre, 91, New Oxford,
Pa., July 15
Butler, Ailene Mary Sell,
90, Duncansville, Pa., July
7
Copeland, Zola Landgrebe,
93, Forsyth, Ill., Aug. 7
Corbett, Floyd Eugene, 91,
Mount Morris, Ill., May
30
Denlinger, Carl R., 86,
Lancaster, Pa., July 25
Dieterly, Lisa Nicole, 38,
Philadelphia, Pa., Jan. 11
Eberly, James W., Sr., 88,
Luray, Va., May 15
Flora, Sylvus Dean, 93,
Rocky Mount, Va., June
30
Geiman, Alice Ebersole, 81,
Bridgewater, Va., June 24
Heid, Gordon Paul, 87,
Machesney Park, Ill.,
May 30
Hibbard, Betty L.
Domasky, 75, Crabtree,
Pa., July 30

Higdon, Leonard Ulysses
(Pete), 96, Knoxville, Md.,
May 31
Holsinger, P. Constance
Berger, 97, Quakertown,
Pa., Dec. 24
Kaufman, Martha Ann
Greenhoe, 71,
Bloomington, Ga., July 25
Keeny, Layne Thomas, 42,
York, Pa., July 12
Kline, Ronald W., 88,
Elizabethtown, Pa., July 28
Longnecker, Otterbein Dale
(Barney), 96, Byron, Ill.,
May 23
Longwell, Jerry Franklin,
78, Kittanning, Pa., July 9
Lumsden, Clarence E., 94,
Mount Morris, Ill., June 2
McLeod, Jerry O’Dell, Sr.,
83, Harrisonburg, Va.,
July 15
Moeckly, Esther B., 80,
Polk City, Iowa, June 25
Morris, Jean, 88, Frederick,
Md., June 20
Puffenberger, Mary
Katherine (Kitty), 85,
Elizabethtown, Pa., July 12
Reisinger, Clifford L., 77,
Dixon, Ill., Aug. 7
Royer, Patricia Ann
Patterson, 92, Modesto,

Calif., Aug. 7
Scott, Jeffrey David, 75,
Westminster, Md., July 5
Shaffer, John E., 88,
Jerome, Pa., July 7
Wampler, Dorothy
Kuykendall, 82,
Bridgewater, Va., Aug. 13

Ordained

Bennett, Amanda, Pac. S.
W. Dist. (La Verne, Calif.),
June 12
Good, Jason, Atl. N. E.
Dist. (Swatara Hill,
Middletown, Pa.), June 26

Licensed

Via, Brenda, Shen. Dist.
(Pleasant Hill, Crimora,
Va.), June 19

Placements

Higgs, Keith, pastor,
Leake’s Chapel, Stanley,
Va., June 1
Johnson, Robert, interim
pastor, Briery Branch,
Dayton, Va., June 5
Kraenbring, Naomi, interim
pastor, Elizabethtown, Pa.,
June 1

To submit information for Turning Points, go to www.brethren.org/turning-points. Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at dstroyeck@brethren.org or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published.

Life's what you make it

grew up watching the Disney Channel show *Hannah Montana*.

The show follows a girl named Miley who doubles as a superstar with the stage name “Hannah Montana.” She sings a song called “Life’s What You Make It,” in which some of the lines read, “Life’s what you make it, so let’s make it rock!” and, “With a new attitude everything can change. Make it how you want it to be.”



ERIKA CLARY

As I reflect on my time as National Youth Conference (NYC) coordinator, I am reminded of the challenge in this song.

When I interviewed for the position in the fall of 2020, I really thought the pandemic would be over by the time NYC was due to happen, almost two years later.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case. There were times during the last year when I wondered if NYC was going to be able to happen at all.

At first, I found myself thinking only about what would happen if NYC couldn’t take place. Eventually, I realized that I had to accept the fact that I couldn’t possibly know, and instead focus on all the good that was right in front of me.

I decided that my experience as NYC coordinator, or in Elgin in general, or in life, is what I make of it. It’s on me to grow, and it’s my responsibility to surround myself with people who enhance my experiences, and who I can do the same for. So, that’s what I did. I took it upon myself to make my experience what it was (with the help of others along the way, of course).

This is not to say everything went smoothly after that. Things were still difficult over the last year, and I will continue to face difficulties as I journey through life. I’m simply journeying with a new perspective.

Because of this new perspective, I’ve come to realize

that thinking God will just open doors for us to walk through is mostly false. Sometimes, we have to walk up to the door and turn the knob. Other times, we have to beat the door down. God does not always hand things to us simply because we want them.


Allowing ourselves to grow can require uncomfortable situations like beating the door down. One thing that makes me feel most uncomfortable is asking for help. Though I did not necessarily like asking for help, I knew I needed to in order to turn my experience around, and I am grateful I did it.

Over my year in Elgin, I met with a spiritual director. I don’t mean it lightly when I say spiritual direction is one of the best things I’ve done. Spiritual directors do not tell you what to do. They simply enter into your space with God and sit with you as you discover what the Spirit is calling you to do or think about.

With the help of my spiritual director, I learned more about myself and how to listen to God when God just wants to be trusted. I learned how to reframe what God is teaching me to what God might be preparing me for. Most of all, I learned how to make the most of what is in front of me and trust that things would work out, no matter which obstacles arose along the way.

Meeting with a spiritual director was the first step, but many other steps were just as important. I connected with the people who were in the office each day, I rediscovered my love of reading, and I deepened my friendships with people I knew I could count on.

Mostly, I learned to trust God. NYC happened and was wonderful. But even if it hadn’t, I would have ended up with an experience I would fondly carry with me, because I took the initiative to grow.

How are you making life what you want it to be? 

Erika Clary was coordinator of National Youth Conference, working in Elgin, Ill., through Brethren Volunteer Service.

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