



# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

MARCH 2022 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

*And let everyone  
who is thirsty come*

*—Revelation 22:17*





*Photos by Pat Krabacher, Brethren  
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# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

March 2022 Vol.171 No. 2 [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger)

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Cover photo by James Deaton

# For the love of God

**A** friend was joyously sharing good news: Though her brother's protracted troubles had seemed hopeless, suddenly there was a profound answer to prayer. She had prayed for him for years, but the problem was so big that she hadn't really expected anything to change. It was like praying for world peace, she said with a laugh that conveyed her wonder and gratitude.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

I knew what she meant. The world has plenty of big needs that beg for prayer. We pray because we should, but sometimes the size of those needs makes prayer perplexing. When we pray, what can we expect?

One person who lived as if prayer and action were inseparable was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who died just recently. He prayed fervently for an end to apartheid in South Africa, and he also worked every day to make it happen. There was a time when I couldn't imagine that such a powerful, intractable system could ever be dismantled. Now it is difficult to imagine how that evil was allowed to exist.

When I read today's newspaper headlines, the solutions seem as elusive as world peace—that perennial prayer list request. But then I remember the example of Archbishop Tutu, who could see beyond the present reality. He never lost heart, so why should I?

For him, liberation was a key theme of both the Old and New Testaments. In the midst of apartheid, he preached, "People are set free *from* bondage to the world, the Devil and sin, in order to be free *for* God. . . . He has set us free from all that has made us less than God intended us to be, so that we could have a humanity measured by nothing less than the humanity of Christ Himself" (*Hope and Suffering*, p. 58). Tutu's life showed that he wanted that humanity for all people, including those who despised him.

I encountered Desmond Tutu three times—in South Africa, New York, and Elgin, Ill. What I especially remember was his lively presence and infectious laugh. He embodied joy. Perhaps what kept him tireless for 90 years was his immersion in God's love, which fueled both his private prayers and his public actions. As he wrote in the first line of the first story of his *Children of God Storybook Bible*, "In the very beginning, God's love bubbled over when there was nothing else. . . ."

*Wendy McFadden*

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### Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate  
- \$32 for 2 years  
\$14.50 gift rate  
\$14.50 church club rate  
- \$27 for 2 years  
\$ 1.25 student (per month)

If you move, clip address label and send with new address to MESSENGER Subscriptions, at the above address. Allow at least five weeks for address change.

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[www.brethren.org/accessmessenger](http://www.brethren.org/accessmessenger).

Visit MESSENGER online at  
[www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger).

MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © March 2022, Church of the Brethren.

MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.



Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)



**"I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs."** —Isaiah 41:18, NIV

**"If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water."**

—anthropologist Loren Eiseley

**"Water is the driving force of all nature."**

—Leonardo da Vinci

**"No water, no life. No blue, no green."**

—marine biologist Sylvia Earle

**"Water is life, and clean water means health."**

—actress Audrey Hepburn

**"A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water."**

—actor Carl Reiner

## GO WITH THE FLOW

**T**his month, **MESSENGER** takes a look at the role of water in our lives (see cluster of articles beginning on page 6). In the puzzle below, can you find the following water-related terms? Answers can be horizontal or vertical or diagonal, forwards or backwards.

RIVER	WASH
CREEK	DRINK
OXYGEN	AGUA
BUBBLE	FLOW
LIQUID	CURRENT
OCEAN	RIPPLE
RAIN	DRIP
WELL	

C	O	B	S	L	W	O	P	L	A
H	S	X	H	L	X	O	C	O	E
D	S	E	Y	O	L	C	L	M	L
A	H	A	U	G	A	E	A	F	B
N	P	E	W	R	E	A	W	R	B
I	C	U	R	R	E	N	T	K	U
A	R	R	I	P	P	L	E	N	B
R	E	V	I	R	Y	D	R	I	P
H	E	R	U	F	F	A	K	R	E
R	K	H	L	I	Q	U	I	D	Y

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Less than 1 percent of the Earth's total water resources is currently available for human use. The remainder is salt water, frozen at the polar ice caps, or inaccessible.
- The average US family uses more than 300 gallons of water a day at home. (Source: EPA)



## LOOKING INTO LENT

**L**ent begins on **March 2 (Ash Wednesday)** this year, running for six and a half weeks; the Sundays are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent. Easter falls on April 17. The *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* notes that Lent should be observed with fasting, a practice that is followed in some form in many traditions. The observance of Lent began around the year 325 with the Council of Nicaea.





## District confronts racial injustice

**T**he Southern Ohio and Kentucky District always has strived to be intentional about addressing the concerns in society. For instance, during a missional renewal team meeting shortly after George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020, the conversation centered on that tragedy and the epidemic of violence against people of color, along with the systemic racial injustice in our country triggering this violence.

Personal stories were shared of workplace experiences and family members and friends who have been

the victims of racial injustice. Out of this conversation came a felt need to be more intentional about confronting this evil in our society. A group of people formed a racial justice team to address these issues.



The team's purpose statement: "The Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Race Relations Team seeks to raise awareness among members of the district about issues of racial justice and call us to action through education, relationship building, and advocacy to bring about healing and wholeness in our community."

This group has been living out this

purpose statement by sending out a monthly newsletter, holding monthly meetings, and by hearing stories from those in the district who have been directly affected by racial injustice. Some other activities of the group have been leading a Racial Justice for Lent Series during Lent 2021 and holding a racial justice workshop during district conference.

A big accomplishment for the group was the formation of a query that was approved by district conference to pass on to next summer's Annual Conference in Omaha, Neb. This query seeks to not only call the denomination to speak out against the injustices, but also to find ways to stand with the victims of racial injustice with the hope of ending such evil.—Nick Beam

## Reading in the neighborhood

**C**entral Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., formed a race education team in 2019. Through racial justice studies led by the team, Central's congregation learned about disparities in educational achievements, particularly the ability to read well, in low-income schools with large Black and Hispanic populations.

Through generous support, Central gave 640 students in 2 inner-city neighborhood elementary schools (Lincoln Terrace and Hurt



Park) 4 books each as a holiday present—that's 2,560 books. From Dec. 8 to 14, Central's congregation and friends read books to the 43 classes in the 2 schools and presented the students in Pre-K to 5th grade their books, along with decorated gift bags.

—Jennie Waering



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](mailto:messenger@brethren.org).



## Service Sundays at Northview

**T**he outreach committee at Northview Church of the Brethren in Indianapolis, Ind., is planning Service Sundays after church members gave input that service is an important part of the church's identity.

The first was held Nov. 21 and included ways to accommodate COVID concerns, ages of participants, and varieties of causes. In place of worship, the congregation met at the church or at Wheeler Mission to serve the wider community together. Among the options: helping Wheeler Mission prepare a Thanksgiving meal for the homeless population, making snack packs for distribution by the Homeless Initiative Program, assembling treat bags for people receiving specialized inpatient psychiatric services at Logansport State Hospital, and—for those attending via Zoom—making cards or writing letters for different organizations. —Joy Kain

## Jesus in the neighborhood

**Two districts have begun programs** to distribute "Jesus in the Neighborhood" grants:

Mid-Atlantic District is distributing grants of up to \$500 through its CORE ministry team for "Church Outreach, Renewal, and Evangelism." The grants are given to congregations for projects related to congregational renewal, revitalization, and community outreach.

Northern Plains District is giving \$500 grants through its witness commission. They are available to congregations for a "Jesus in the Neighborhood" event, project, or activity in 2022.

## Helping Hands to the rescue

**Oasis of Hope Fellowship** (Iglesia Berith, Oasis de Esperanza) in Lebanon, Pa., made a difference in the life of a family in their church with help from Atlantic Northeast District's Helping Hands Benevolence Fund. The district newsletter reported that the family's

roof was damaged, the ceiling was falling from the humidity, and the family was suffering from related health issues, with no help from their homeowner's insurance company. Pastor Arlyn Morales reached out, and the district witness and outreach commission approved a grant of \$5,000 for the roof repairs.

## Midland's warming shelter

**Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren** was open as a warming facility after a blizzard brought as much as 14 inches of snow to parts of Fauquier County, Va. Almost 3,400 homes and businesses in the county were without electricity after the storm. The church stayed open throughout the night until it was no longer needed. Anyone in need of relief from the cold was welcome to drop by or stay the night. Available services included power stations for charging devices, warming up and relaxing with games and puzzles, pre-packaged snacks, and bathrooms. COVID social distancing was required. —Regina Holmes

## Multicultural Excellence in Leadership Scholarship

**Manchester University in Indiana** has announced a Multicultural Excellence in Leadership Scholarship for exceptional and talented students who identify as a racial or ethnic minority. The full-ride scholarship is renewable for a total of four years. Manchester will award one such scholarship each year. Multicultural Student Leadership Awards of \$2,000 a year will go to the next five top finalists.

In more news from Manchester, the board decided to raze the Administration Building. A service was planned for Jan. 21 in Petersime Chapel to honor the legacy of the building. —Anne Gregory

## Juniata installs Peace Arch

**Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa.,** has installed the Juniata Peace Arch, a sculpture "designed to amalgamate the strength and flexibility of stainless steel, the reflective and prismatic qualities of dichroic glass, and the natural light and environs surrounding Kepple Hall," said a release. It was created by artist Nicole Beck and commissioned by college president emeritus Thomas R. Kepple and his wife, Pat, to honor John Dale and his wife, the late Irene (Miller) Dale.

Haldan Kirsch, courtesy of Juniata College





Jim Miner



Ralph Miner



# Water and witness

by Jim Benedict

**W**e humans are drawn to water. Each summer, many of my friends and neighbors head to “the shore” to relax and frolic in the ocean. Others head to the lake or rivers to fish, float, or ski. Children clamor to go to the pool or run through sprinklers. Waterfalls and fountains delight us. Even something as simple as a tall, cold glass of water on a hot day can be a source of joy.

It has always been so. Scripture is full of imagery that celebrates water and the blessings it provides. Both forms of paradise in scripture—Eden and the New Jerusalem—have rivers running through them. Many of the most important events in the Hebrew Bible involve water. As a baby, Moses is found in a basket at the edge of the Nile and as an adult he leads God’s people through the Red Sea. The Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee are leading geographical features of the Promised Land. Jesus’ ministry begins in the waters of baptism, and he meets the Samaritan woman

at a well and offers her “living water.” Throughout history, people have praised lakes, rivers, streams, and springs. Water is beautiful. It refreshes the spirit.

Of course, water also has a profound practical value. Without water, human, animal, and plant life is impossible. This is why, throughout most of history, access to water for drinking, cooking, and bathing was a conscious, even daily concern. It is only in the last century and a half or so in certain parts of the world that some of us have been able to begin to take access to water for granted: we go to the spigot, turn it on, and there it is. We have all the high-quality water we want at very little direct cost.

Human ingenuity and modern engineering have made it possible, and in parts of the world today ingenuity and engineering are giving many people access to a reliable source of clean water for the first time. According to World Vision, more than 2 billion people have gained access to safe





*O healing river, send down your waters,  
send down your waters upon this land.*

drinking water since 1990. However, there are millions more still waiting, including some in places we might not expect. Aging infrastructure and poor decision-making in several medium and large American cities (most notably in Flint, Mich.) have resulted in serious problems with water quality.

Elsewhere, there are problems with water quantity. Some of the same ingenuity and engineering that has enabled us to give people access to safe drinking water for the first time has enabled us to move vast quantities of water from where we found them to where we wanted them. Cities have sprung up in the desert. Millions of acres of crops grow where rainfall alone would not allow it to happen.

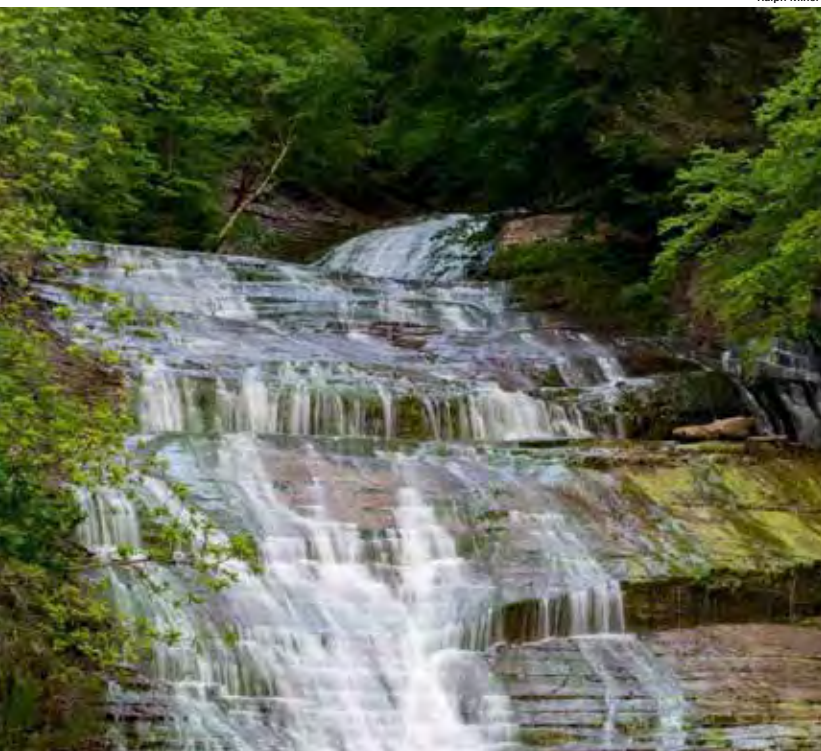
As a result, water levels in some rivers, lakes, and aquifers are declining rapidly. Continued use at the current rate is simply unsustainable. Changing weather patterns are making matters worse, with floods and droughts of unusual intensity creating water problems for tens of millions.

Taken together, problems with water quality, water quantity, and access to safe water constitute what has been called the global water crisis. The global water crisis has drawn the attention of major international humanitarian organizations, businesses, and governments. As those called to be stewards and caretakers of creation and as those who are called to continue the work of Jesus by expressing God's love in practical ways, this crisis should concern us, too.

So what can we do about it?

We can begin by being more thoughtful about water use. Water conservation can be as simple as turning off the water while you brush your teeth so unused gallons don't just go down the drain. We can reduce water use through water-saving technology and plumbing fixtures, through more thoughtful and environmentally appropriate landscaping, and through reuse. Water used for laundry or bathing, which is referred to as "greywater," need not just





go down the drain into septic or sewage systems. It can be used to water ornamental shrubs and fruit trees, especially in dry climates.

Great strides in consumer water conservation have already been made in many places. For instance, Las Vegas and Phoenix are using about the same amount of water they were using 30 years ago, despite growing in population by hundreds of thousands. As water becomes more expensive, conservation will undoubtedly become more popular.

Household conservation is important, but alone it will not change the trajectory of the crisis. Household water use represents less than a third of overall water use. Agricultural water use represents more than half, with much of that going into crop irrigation. Switching from older, more wasteful forms of irrigation to newer, more efficient forms can make a big difference. There are plenty of opportunities for greater

*And let everyone who is thirsty come —Revelation 22:17*

# Taken for granted

by Jeff Davidson

**S**omething I've always taken for granted is water. When I was growing up, most of the time we lived in the country and didn't have city water, but our well water was just fine. It was what we used to call hard water, and sometimes it tasted a little funny, but it was fine. Ever since, I've always lived where there was no need for well water, and so I've always taken drinking water for granted.

That's something that not everybody in the United States has been able to do. My first full-time pastorate was at Lower Miami Church of the Brethren, located in Jefferson Township, just outside Dayton, Ohio. Like the township, which was the primary Black suburb for

Dayton, the Lower Miami congregation was a mix of upper-middle-class and lower-middle-class white and Black folks, with both races represented in both economic groups.

Lower Miami's parsonage got water from the Jefferson Regional Water Authority, which was formed in 1978. Why? Because in 1978 there were still parts of Jefferson Township that didn't have reliable access to safe drinking water.

I was stunned when I learned that. I graduated from high school in 1977, 20 miles from Jefferson Township. I couldn't believe that, when I was 19 years old, people 20 miles away from me couldn't necessarily get safe drinking water.

Every year, the World Council of Churches invites Christians to use Lent to reflect on the gift of water. Last year, the campaign's focus was on water issues in North America.

What? Aren't we an affluent, First World continent? Sure, there are some weather- and climate-related shortages from time to time, and there are individual pockets where safe water may be hard to come by, but by and large the availability of water in North America is not really an issue, is it?

Well, the Seven Weeks for Water website lists a few issues that we may not have thought of:

- **securing** clean water for hand-washing to protect us from diseases;
- **riding** Flint and other American



conservation in agricultural water use, but most of them will require significant investment. Support, especially for small-scale family farms, will be needed.

Industry and the energy sector also consume a lot of water. One of the areas of rapidly growing demand is water

for cooling the so-called “server farms,” where massive computer servers make the internet and search engines work. The production of electricity also uses a lot of water, so lowering your energy use conserves water. It takes about 4 gallons of water to produce the electricity needed to keep

Arne Hoel/World Bank



cities from lead in the water;

- **making** sure freshwater fish have water to survive and thrive;
- **protecting** underground sources of drinking water from contamination by agriculture and fracking;
- **preventing** the depletion of groundwater by excessive agriculture use, which threatens groundwater for future generations;
- **preventing** the destruction of sacred waters to transport fossil fuels, as the droughts induced by greenhouse gases become more frequent and severe;
- **removing** dams that destroy rivers and the creatures who depend on them, while making few contributions to local economies; and
- **denouncing** the commodifica-


tion of water. The trading in water futures by speculators is the ultimate abuse of God's gift to life.

We take water for granted. We take for granted the things that water provides. We Christians even take for granted the things that water has meant in our faith history.

In 1 Peter 3, Peter ties together two images—the flood and the baptism of Jesus. There are what he calls the former times, where people did not obey God—not just where they didn't obey, but where they were so disobedient that water destroyed almost everyone on the earth. There is baptism, which Jesus demonstrated for us and which we do in obedience to him. The waters of baptism cleanse us of sin and call us

to lives of discipleship.

Peter goes beyond those two images, though, and presents a picture of the risen Christ preaching to the spirits of those who were destroyed by the flood and those who are imprisoned in chains of sin. Christ then ascends into heaven and sits at the right hand of God.

Water can bring all this to mind. Water can remind us of the physical needs of people, both here and around the world. Water can remind us of people's spiritual needs, including our own need for forgiveness and repentance. Water can be the trigger that keeps us from taking all of these things for granted. 

Jeff Davidson is pastor of Polo (Ill.) Church of the Brethren.

a single 60-watt light bulb lit for 12 hours. Conserving water is literally as easy as flipping a switch.

Conservation and reuse help address one part of the global water crisis, but other strategies are needed to address other aspects. There are plenty of places in the world where the quantity of water is more than adequate, but quality is poor. Water for drinking and food preparation can be boiled or filtered, but this is time-consuming, doesn't solve all water-quality problems, and people often don't realize their water is contaminated until it is too late.

Water-borne diseases like cholera, dysentery, and typhoid sicken millions and kill more than 500,000 children each year. Even in developed countries, lead and other chemicals in public water systems cause illness, damage organs, and have life-long negative effects.

Insisting that people deserve to have access to safe drinking water, holding those in authority accountable for providing such water, and supporting organizations that help bring safe water systems to places in the developing world are steps we can take. Such steps clearly reflect

# Go with the flow

**P**erhaps it should come as no surprise that a denomination whose roots are sunk so deeply in baptism and footwashing would have an impressive list of congregations with water-themed names. But did you know that there are well over 100 in the Church of the Brethren?

Among the ones you can find while plying the pathways of Pietism are several rivers, including Eel River Community in South/Central Indiana District, English River and Iowa River in Northern Plains, Little River and Middle River in Shenandoah, Rio Prieto in Puerto Rico, and Smith River in Virilina. If you speed up your river, you can also encounter Cedar Rapids First in Northern Plains.

If you scale down to a creek, meanwhile, you're awash with possibilities, all the way from Bear Creek in West Marva and Big Creek in Southern Plains to Yellow Creek—which has versions in Illinois and Wisconsin District, Middle Pennsylvania, and Northern Indiana—and dozens more in between, including the majestically named Swan Creek in Northern Ohio and the more plainly titled Flat Creek/Mud Lick in Southern Ohio/Kentucky.

Head to Virginia and West Virginia, and you have the Runs: Cedar Run, Chimney Run, Crab Run, Elk Run, Friends Run, and Spruce Run among them. You can also find some else-

where, such as Rock Run in Northern Indiana, Welsh Run in Mid-Atlantic, or Raven Run in Middle Pennsylvania. Or you might branch off to Meadow Branch (Mid-Atlantic), West Branch (Illinois and Wisconsin), White Branch (South/Central Indiana), or others.

Springs also figure prominently in the naming, such as Free Spring or Three Springs in Southern Pennsylvania or powerful-sounding Roaring Spring First in neighboring Middle Pennsylvania. You can even double up on your water terms with Spring Branch (Missouri-Arkansas), Spring Creek (Atlantic Northeast), or Spring Run (Middle Pennsylvania). It might be a stretch to include Springfield in the list, but you can find four of them in the denomination: Atlantic Northeast, Northern Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin, and Pacific Northwest all have versions.

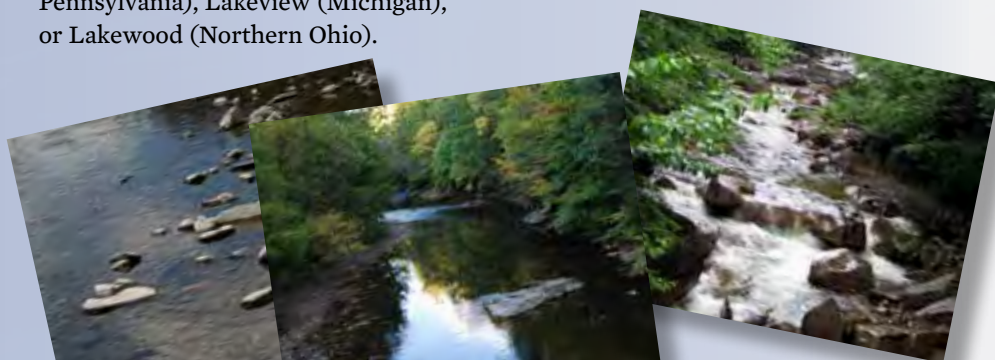
If lakes are more your speed, then you might enjoy the likes of Cedar Lake (Northern Indiana), Smith Mountain Lake Community (Virilina), or any of Lake Breeze (Northern Ohio), Lake Side-Moneta (Virilina), Lake View Christian Fellowship (Southern Pennsylvania), Lakeview (Michigan), or Lakewood (Northern Ohio).

You can also find forks, such as Henry Fork in Virilina; fords (but no fjords), such as Atlantic Northeast's Parker Ford; bends, at North Bend-Danville in Northern Ohio; bays, at South Bay Community in Pacific Southwest; and even an oasis: Iglesia Berith Oasis de Esperanza (Oasis of Hope) in Atlantic Northeast.

And, of course, if you want to cross these many waterways without getting wet, you might take advantage of Stone Bridge, Union Bridge, or Woodbridge (all in Mid-Atlantic) or, of course, Bridgewater (Shenandoah).

Before we meet our (South) Waterloo—in Northern Plains, by the way—let us note just one more: the relatively new Living Stream online/virtual congregation based in Oregon. In that case, it might reference a "stream" of a more digital sort, but it upholds the tradition well in current times.

If this whets your appetite, feel free to explore further on [www.brethren.org](http://www.brethren.org) or in the *Church of the Brethren Yearbook*. You never know what you might discover in the Long Run (Atlantic Northeast). —Walt Wiltschek







Jim Miner



Jim Miner



Ralph Miner

“Water, land, plants, and animals are not merely resources for human use but are part of a whole system.”


scriptural values, such as those we find in Jesus’ commendation for those who offer a cup of cold water or in Proverbs where we are commanded to give water even to our enemies.

Just as scripture supports a variety of practical actions, so too does scripture provide a fundamental understanding of creation that can inform and guide our actions. In Genesis 1, creation takes place in a series of orderly steps. Each step arises out of those that precede it, and each element of creation “fits” as part of a larger whole. At the end of each day of creation, what has been done that day is declared “good.” On the sixth day, after humans have been created, the whole project is pronounced “very good.”

When we study Genesis, we don’t usually give much thought to the meaning of the words “good” or “very good,” but some interpreters believe we should. They believe that “good” is far more than a term of mild approval. Rather, in this context, “good” is a major affirmation. Something good is able to fulfill the purpose for which it was created. In short, it works. Thus, creation as it is described in Genesis 1 is an integrated whole, where each part exists in harmony with the rest. Creation is “very good” when humans are created not because humans are better than the rest of creation but because humans complete creation.

From this perspective, creation is designed to operate harmoniously. Water, land, plants, and animals are not merely resources for human use but are part of a whole system. In order for the system to continue to operate as God intends, humans must recognize and respect the ways in which creation was designed to be self-sustaining. As we

learn more about how creation works, we can cooperate rather than compete with the rest of creation. Human ingenuity will be essential for meeting the challenges we now face and those that are approaching, but it must be an ingenuity that takes into account the design and balance of creation.

The global water crisis is an opportunity for Christian witness. Wise stewardship of water, grounded in an understanding of creation as a complex, balanced system, is one way we can show that God’s love dwells in us. Our efforts to assure that people everywhere have the quantity and quality of water they need are rooted in God’s love for all. 

Jim Benedict has been a scholar in residence at the Center for Global Health Ethics at Duquesne University since 2016, and co-edited *Cascading Challenges in the Global Water Crisis*, published by Cambridge Scholars Press in 2019. He is interim pastor at Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and lives in New Windsor, Md.

## Follow up

Celebrate World Water Day on March 22 ([www.worldwaterday.org](http://www.worldwaterday.org)). This year’s theme is “Groundwater: Making the Invisible Visible.”

Download “Water, Holy Water” for Christian education resources, worship resources, sermon starters, and ideas for action. Find this and more at [www.creationjustice.org/water](http://www.creationjustice.org/water).



# The Pathways Project

## RENTERS BECOME HOMEOWNERS AFTER THE OHIO TORNADOES

by Jenn Dorsch-Messler

**D**isasters caused by natural events are often unpredictable. This is especially true for tornadoes. Their likelihood is difficult to predict, and their exact paths can seem random, without respect to neighborhood or jurisdictional boundaries. The whole community, regardless of social or economic status or property ownership, is at risk.

The 2019 Memorial Day tornado outbreak around Dayton, Ohio, is a perfect example of this. The National Weather Service recorded 19 tornadoes on May 27 to 28. Three of the tornadoes were rated EF-3 with windspeeds between 136 and 165 miles per hour. One EF-4 tornado carried winds of up to 170 miles per hour, spanned over a half mile wide, and traveled more than 20 miles. The twisters affected 10

counties across the state, damaging more than 7,000 homes, with more than 1,500 destroyed.

The Church of the Brethren response began with the active involvement of the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District in clean-up and debris removal in the hardest-hit neighborhoods. Local Brethren leaders also stepped up to represent Brethren Disaster Ministries at the partnership

*Before and after pictures of some of the rebuilding done by Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Pathways Project: at right, empty lot next to an abandoned property; below, a building raised on the empty lot by Mennonite Disaster Service and the rehabbed home completed by Brethren Disaster Ministries.*

courtesy of Brethren Disaster Ministries





tables, including with the Miami Valley Long Term Recovery Operations Group (MVLTRG) that helped families unable to recover on their own. When Brethren Disaster Ministries opened a national rebuilding site, which ran from July to November 2020 and May to October 2021, MVLTRG was the primary partner for volunteers to serve with cases that had been vetted against Brethren Disaster Ministries' "Qualifications for Assistance" guidelines.

Media reports about disasters often focus on affected property owners. However, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) estimated that nearly 43 percent of family or individual survivors of the Ohio tornadoes were renters. MVLTRG found that figure to be 53 percent of the 2,100 clients they served. Unable to find affordable housing after the tornado, most of these renters were displaced from their community.


To address the housing needs of this large and diverse rental population, Brethren Disaster Ministries representatives worked in collaboration with

MVLTRG and other partners to create the Tornado Survivors Pathway to Homeownership Project, often simply called the Pathways Project. Out of the 31 applicants to this pilot program, 27 were African American, 25 were female heads of household, and most currently spend 36 to 40 percent of their income on rent.

Pathways applicants complete an education program that readies them to become homeowners. Meanwhile, volunteers make repairs to abandoned properties or build new homes on empty lots possessed by the local jurisdiction, so they are ready for a possible purchase. Not only does this program bring a tornado survivor to a new home in their own community, it also addresses a lack of affordable housing and an abundance of vacant and abandoned "nuisance properties" in the most heavily damaged communities—which also have high levels of poverty and vulnerable populations.

Extensive public and private partnerships were formed with more than 20 local, regional, and national partners to leverage resources to kick-start the

Pathways Program. The program holds promise to stabilize neighborhood safety, raise property values, and provide affordable housing in the future. Using the proceeds of the sale of each home to help complete the next house, local partners say they plan to continue the program as long as possible.

While Brethren Disaster Ministries typically works on damaged or destroyed homes for homeowners of those properties, this program breaks new ground in providing a way to serve disaster-affected renters. It actually offers renters a better housing opportunity as they recover from the disaster. There is hope that this type of program can be replicated in other communities where a high number of those affected by a disaster are renters. In fact, one Brethren Disaster Ministries partner for the current Coastal North Carolina rebuilding project visited Dayton last year to learn more about the Pathways Program and how it may be adapted to address needs in Pamlico County, N.C. 

Jenn Dorsch-Messler is director of Brethren Disaster Ministries.

“ Not only does this program bring a tornado survivor to a new home, it also addresses a lack of affordable housing and an abundance of vacant properties. ”

# Full circle

by Joy McPherson

**D**on't you love those God moments that happen sometimes? When you know you are exactly where you're supposed to be, and you were put there for a reason. I just sort of fell into this story, but I was thoroughly blessed to be a part of it.

Tornadoes devastated Dayton, Ohio, in May 2019. Brethren Disaster Ministries has worked since then to

repair damaged homes, and also got involved with the Pathways Project. One of the Pathways houses on Natchez Avenue had been an abandoned eyesore for many years. It was being gutted, right down to the studs, to be rebuilt for a displaced family to purchase and call home.

Volunteers from Northern Indiana District worked on the demolition, knocking out walls, ceilings, and insulation. As

“Through a series of God moments, Church of the Brethren people were involved in the various pieces that connected the dots and brought it full circle.”

they cleaned up the debris, they started finding things that fell from the attic into the walls: a baby shoe, a toy gun, a greeting card, newspapers from 1944, a dentist bill, a photograph, and—the biggest treasure of all—two love letters from a World War II soldier to his sweetheart back home.

The letters were from Earl Kuns to Willa Sollenberger. In one of them, he promised to buy an engagement ring when he got home, and he asked her to please think about it and don't say no. This was fascinating stuff to find, and drove home the fact that this derelict property once had been someone's home. A family had lived and loved there, but who knew what happened in the years since they owned it?


The Indiana crew gathered the items in a box and took them back to the place where the volunteers were being housed. Someone did an online search for the name of the soldier and found an obituary from 1987. Earl and Willa Kuns had been members of nearby Happy Corner Church of the Brethren in Clayton, Ohio, when he died. It was a

complete coincidence (or a God moment?) that a Church of the Brethren volunteer group was working on the former home of a Church of the Brethren family, all these years later.

A few weeks later, I filled in as a household assistant for a couple of days. After supper, project leader Sammy Deacon mentioned the box and said we were welcome to look through it. Then she turned to me and said, “You're from Happy Corner Church, right? We think these people were once members of your church.” I vaguely remembered the names, but I did not know the children mentioned in the obituary. I was determined to track them down and get these precious items back to the family.

Through a string of folks from church, each saying, “Try this person, they might know,” I finally was given the contact information for one of the daughters of the family, Susan Kuns Horen. I called her and surprised her with the whole story over the phone. It made her cry, but she said yes, of course, she would love to have the letters and other mementos.

I met with her and her husband, and also brought them a bowl crafted by Brethren Disaster Ministries project leader Dale Ziegler. The bowl was made out of a block of wood from a maple tree in the yard of the house. She told me that words cannot express how grateful the family is to have these love letters and other mementos that were saved. The Kuns family lived on Natchez Avenue from the early 1950s, and it was the only childhood home she ever knew. She remembers it as a wonderful place to grow up, with lots of great neighbors and friends, and Grandma living around the corner. She also told me that my dad was the pastor who conducted the funeral service for her dad in 1987, and that her mom thought the world of him.

Blessings just keep pouring down on everyone connected to this story. How easily could those items have been tossed into a dumpster and lost forever? Through a series of God moments, Church of the Brethren people were involved in the various pieces that connected the dots and brought it full circle. And through the good work of Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Pathways Project, another family soon will be making memories on Natchez Avenue. Praise God! 

Joy McPherson is a Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteer from Happy Corner Church of the Brethren in Clayton, Ohio.

Joy McPherson



Full circle: Family mementos make their way home to Susan Kuns Horen.







*A Heart which Renounces World and Time, illustration from a fraktur text from the Ephrata Cloister, c. 1750.*

# *Truth, beauty, and goodness*

## **The theopoetic life of the early Brethren**

**by Brian Nixon**

**T**he Ship *Allen* carried an early congregation of **Christians**—a peculiar people—who sought new life in North America. It was on this ship that Alexander Mack, leader of the young Brethren movement, brought a group of men, women, and children on the long and dangerous ocean voyage from the Netherlands to the New World.

These Brethren, as they called themselves, landed in North America on Sept. 11, 1729. (What a contrast between this long-ago Sept. 11, a journey by seekers of peace, and the Sept. 11 we

know today, a journey of violence.)

A log from the Ship *Allen* provides us with the passenger names, which are forgotten to many. But to the new arrivals seeking freedom of worship, these names represented sojourners seeking God's promises and pastures to plow (both literal and figurative). They sought another way of living.

One name important to my family was Klauser (later Clauser), one of the first known members from our family tree to arrive in North America. My maternal family

“ In the end, we’re all on a ship, planet Earth, a gift from God to be tended with the care of a theopoet sowing seeds of truth, beauty, and goodness. ”

lineage—via my grandfather—finds its roots here.

There’s another name, William Knepper, and from him we get a glimpse of an early integration of theopoetics within Brethren circles.

In simple form, *theopoetics* means “God poetry,” or the “poetry of God.” The theopoetic quest is described by Bethany Theological Seminary as the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness driven by the vehicle of metaphor. As Bethany professor Scott Holland wrote in *Messenger* (April 2017), “we theopoets tend to resist the temptation to capture God in logical propositions and instead favor poetic metaphor. . . . This leads us to see mystery, metaphor, and meaning-making as marks of the best spiritual composition.”

While the term came into use in the 20th century, we find signs of theopoetics in the earliest stages of Brethren development. In Carl Bowman’s *Brethren Society*, quotes from William Knepper’s writings provide us with a historical clue as to how the Brethren integrated truth, beauty, and goodness into their faith (*italics are added*).

It is well that we were instructed to consider seriously the cost of our actions, for not a year had passed before seven of us were arrested, bound and led away to the prison at Dusseldorf, a journey we passed mostly in *singing hymns* . . . that we might endure something for *His pure truth* . . .

We spent much of our *time in reading and writing*, responding to letters and inquiries by explaining our convictions.

I praised God’s grace by *composing about four-hundred hymns* while there, and I also *put into rhyme a creed* which we had written . . .

All of us were together in a dungeon, four feet under the ground. . . . The grating was so narrow that a rat could hardly creep through. In the summertime when *we wanted to sew*, we *had to light a candle*.

After we had labored in prison for four years . . . we were released. . . . Praise be to the loving God for His boundless mercy! *How Jesus Christ, the bright-shining morning star penetrated the foundation of our hearts!*

We were *farmers and artisans*, and lived modestly and quietly. . . .

After a few years in Surhuisterveen, we [William Knepper and his wife, Veronica] accompanied Brother Mack to Philadelphia on the Allen, arriving on September 11, 1729. We have now *lived peaceably together . . . enduring love and grief with patience* . . .

In Knepper’s words, we find an integrated theopoetic life weaving together a tapestry of truth, beauty, and goodness.

First, he gives us a glimpse into the quest of *truth*. The Brethren were seeking Christ’s “pure truth.” And though Knepper doesn’t expound on his definition of truth (he does, interestingly, formulate a creed), we can conclude from his fuller words that it was based upon scripture and, possibly, the broader revelation of creation and a committed community of Christians. Truth was vital for Brethren.


Second, Knepper provides a peek into the Brethren integration of *beauty*. In his words, we find the practical outlets of beauty: singing, writing hymns and letters, reading, composing poems, and sewing. Knepper mentions that among the early Brethren were artisans, probably skilled men and women working within a particular field of practical arts. Art abounded within this peculiar people.

Third, Knepper conveys a concept of the *good*. Notice his emphasis on community, worship, doing good, enduring grief, and glorifying God even during persecution. We also find references to a quiet life well lived. Today we say that Brethren live *peacefully, simply, together*, a practical measure of the good life. Jewish-Christian philosopher Mortimer Adler understood the good life as the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty along with liberty, equality, and justice. If this is the case, the Brethren excel in the good life!

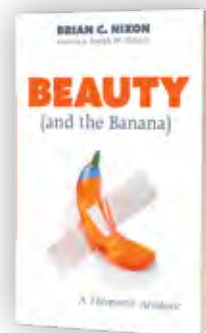
One phrase from Knepper is striking: “we had to light a candle.” Though he is referencing the means to provide light in a dark prison, the sentiment can be applied more broadly to the theopoetic quest, a metaphor for our day.

In an age where a host of things are challenged in our church and culture, many have agreed with poet William Stafford, “The darkness around us is deep.” Brethren can find solace in Knepper’s words. When the darkness around us is deep, when you’re in a dungeon of despair, light a candle. Strike a match, bring the flame to the wick, and experience the warmth of God’s grace and love.

In the end, we’re all on a ship, planet Earth, a gift from God to be tended with the care of a theopoet sowing seeds of truth, beauty, and goodness.

The darkness is deep, yes, but we have Light. Light your candle and burn bright! 

Brian Nixon is a writer, artist, musician, educator, and minister in Albuquerque, N.M., and a former licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren. His recent book is *Beauty (and the Banana): A Theopoetic Aesthetic*.







Manuscript illustration, c. 1830, Pennsylvania.

## *Seeds*

by **Brian Nixon**

I wrote this for you,  
though you may  
not appreciate it  
as much as I. But  
that's what love  
does, it gives;  
even when it is not  
repaid in words or  
understanding. It  
gives, and doesn't  
expect something  
in return—but  
perhaps a gesture of  
thanks, like a house  
finch at a feeder,  
eating that  
which it will become.

## *If I, with wings*

by **Alexander Mack Jr.**

If I, with wings,  
Could swiftly fly  
To the farthest end  
Of the great sea,  
Yet would my state  
Be known to Thee,  
And Thy right hand  
Would lead me on.



Manuscript illustration, c. 1820, Pennsylvania.



# Beneath the shadow of the cross

## LENT WITH PERRY HUFFAKER

by Karen Garrett



Brethren Heritage Center collection

Perry Huffaker directs the choir at West Milton (Ohio) Church of the Brethren.

Calvary, 1895 by Odelon Redon (1840-1916)

**P**erry Huffaker composed the music for “Move in Our Midst,” a hymn text by Ken Morse that was introduced in 1951 in *The Brethren Hymnal*. The hymn soon became well loved and is consistently sung at Annual Conference. I am passionate to tell Huffaker’s story because he was much more than the melody and harmony of “Move in Our Midst.” I am convinced the Spirit has moved through his work. As I share a small fraction of his writing, a few pieces appropriate for Lent, I trust the Spirit will continue to move.

Perry Huffaker (1902-1982) pursued his passion for poetry and music throughout his adult life. He pastored a variety of congregations, served on denominational



“ With the Lenten season at hand, the members of the Church by the Side of the Road are turning their thoughts to the cross, and the sufferings of Jesus thereon. ”

committees, spent summers directing camps, preached revival meetings, directed choirs, had a radio ministry, and the list goes on. He had unbounded energy, both physically and creatively. In a letter to Bill Eberly, Huffaker named a regular practice of his—I name it as his “spiritual practice”: “My writing discipline is a poem a day and a hymn a week.” He wrote poems and hymns wherever he was, often dedicating them to a local congregation, a minister, a group of campers, or young people including Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS).

Huffaker lived through some challenging times. In 1914, as World War I began, he was 12 years old. In the letter to Eberly, Huffaker shared the following: “In 1914 I was taking German in High School but they canceled the German class because of the war and I had to take Latin—I did not like it!!!” In 1918, as the war came to an end, he was taking classes at Bethany Bible School. He was 16 years old, living with his family in Chicago. Following two years studying at Bethany, he headed to Manchester College. There he studied alongside such persons as Paul Halladay (singer and musician) and Andrew Cordier (who eventually served the country at the United Nations). He also met a young lady, Lauree Whitehead. They married in 1923, the year he graduated. The years of their marriage spanned the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and the war in Vietnam.

Huffaker served in congregational ministry from 1928 to 1967. The bulk of this ministry was prior to and early in the years when the Church of the Brethren shifted to be more mainline Protestant. In one sense Huffaker was part of the shift. He was drawn to the majesty of choral anthems. He was a supporter of instruments in sanctuaries, preferring a pipe organ. He also stated that the value is not in the fact that there is an instrument, but rather in how it is used.

For all of us, Christmas and Easter are high points in the church year. I have accessed Huffaker collections at both the Brethren Historical Library and Archives (BHLA) in Elgin, Ill., and the Brethren Heritage Center at Brookville, Ohio. I have found multitudes of Christmas carols, simple songs for congregations to sing. For the Easter season, Huffaker wrote poems and some congregational hymns. He also wrote choral anthems and Easter pageants. References to Lent are limited, which was possibly the case across the denomination. However, there are some references to Lent that give a glimpse into Huffaker’s theology.

In “The Church Music Year,” a document from the BHLA

files, Huffaker listed topics and hymns appropriate throughout the year. It is my assumption that he compiled this list shortly after the 1951 hymnal was released. The hymn numbers are from *The Brethren Hymnal* (1951). For the month of March he named as a focus, “Celebrate the ‘Lion of Judah’ who became the ‘Lamb of God.’” He stated:

March brings the beginning of the Lenten season leading up to Easter. The emphasis is on Hymns of Self control and denial . . . and Call[s] to Consecration. . . . During this season the Music should set the tone of deep spiritual contemplation which is needed to understand and appreciate the meaning of the Cross.

The hymns he listed that are included in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* are “Take My Life and Let It Be,” “Have Thine Own Way Lord,” “Jesus My Lord, My God, My All,” “Savior of My Soul,” and “Thou Art the Way.” The last one, “Thou Art the Way,” was suggested for the Sunday that precedes Palm Sunday, when our thoughts turn to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

By 1939, pastor Huffaker and members of Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren were broadcasting regular radio programs on WJEJ. Poems, songs, and scripture were the core of each script, with limited commentary and an occasional sermon. The radio congregation was named “The Church by the Side of the Road.” A radio script from March 5, 1939, included the following thought:

With the Lenten season at hand, the members of the Church by the Side of the Road are turning their thoughts to the cross, and the sufferings of Jesus thereon. Some of them have expressed their belief that the beauties of nature offer an ever present reminder of the agony and suffering that our Lord willingly bore on the cross, to save us from our sins.

Then followed the reading of a poem and the singing of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Easter was April 9 in 1939, so this script was from early in Lent. The country was continuing the slow recovery from the Great Depression and Hitler was beginning occupations in Europe.

A radio script from March 24, 1942, reveals more insight into a Lenten theology. In 1942, Huffaker was broadcasting from WMRF in Lewistown, Pa. The script was for a program that aired the Tuesday before Palm Sunday. The focus was friendliness. Toward the end of the program, Huffaker included a refer-

“The words challenge us to kneel to worship Christ. Clearly, for Huffaker, Lent is a time to ponder anew Christ and the cross.”



*Huffaker leads a group at Camp Mardela in Denton, Md., in 1957.*

ence to the Lenten season as a lead-in to the Passion Week experience. Jesus' love transcended friendship in that "even when we were yet sinners Christ died for us," and "we are constrained to take our Lenten journey with Him." The journey will lead us to salvation and service, which we hear in the first two stanzas of a Huffaker poem shared on that program:

Where do we start our Lenten journey?  
We start in lost condition;  
On pathway straight, salvation's road  
We kneel in deep contrition.

The way with Christ goes up God's hill,  
High mount of preparation;  
Then down in service valley deep  
Filled with inspiration.

Jesus commanded this when he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind, heart, soul, and spirit and thy neighbor as thyself." This is true friendship with God and neighbor. Our journey with Jesus also will lead us to live in peace and love. A poem by Huffaker from the March 5 program gives us much to ponder:

Complacent I lived in selfish shell,  
And there was well content;  
Locked my love in narrow cell,  
For self alone intent.

'Till suddenly, with blind'ning flash,  
The world invaded my soul;  
And o'er my gasping heart with lash,  
Humanity did roll.

The marching armies of the world,  
War's hell and desolation;  
With vi'lence on love's cell were hurled  
Demanding consolation.

All thru love's cobwebb'd corridors,  
With moving spirit's might;  
They opened wide the long closed doors,  
Exposing selfish sight.

But ah! love, cold in selfish cell,  
From lack of sunlight, dead!  
There in its place grim hatred's hell,  
Had raised its ugly head.

In anguish, at the sight I cried,  
"O God in heaven, why?"  
Swift answered God, "Love's spirit died,  
Because you let it die.

Forsaking my unselfish ways,  
You lived for selfish power;  
Forgetting—man who lived his days  
For self, regrets the hour—

When from the world invasion comes,  
Demanding that he serve.  
Inadequate he has become  
He has no love reserve.

O Man! Build up reserves of love,  
Christ's cross a flowing fount;  
Streaming from God's throne above  
Grim shade of Calv'ry's mount.

O Man! Return to God's own Son,  
His love and Name confess;  
Then, blest of thee, will mankind come  
To know true friendliness.

America had been drawn into World War II in December 1941. Some people listening to that radio show remained in poverty due to the Great Depression. Listeners also faced the reality that during that Easter season the country was at war. That war impacted our denomination. Our resolve to be nonviolent, as a historic peace church, began to shift as many of our young men headed off to war to take up arms. Many writings by Huffaker show his commitment to peace.




It is not surprising that he named the pull of the world on our call to love. Those were bold words for Huffaker to share on a public radio station. He was not preaching to a Brethren congregation committed to peace. Of course, the Church of the Brethren at the time needed to hear those words. Perhaps we too, need to ponder Huffaker's words. What does it mean to be a people of peace, called to love our neighbor in a culture of violence, distrust, fear, and anger? Where are we turning our thoughts during Lent this year? What about the cross and its call on our lives?

Eighteen years later, Huffaker wrote "Neath the Shadow of the Cross of Jesus" and dedicated it to Painter Creek Church of the Brethren. He was pastor at West Milton Church of the Brethren at the time. I assume he was preaching a series of revival meetings at the Painter Creek congregation a couple of counties to the west. The words express the reaction of the centurion and the disciples at the cross. The words challenge us to kneel to worship Christ. Clearly, for Huffaker, Lent is a time to ponder anew Christ and the cross.

We are not the same as we were a year ago. Are we closer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? Have the weight of the world and the weariness of current realities caused us to turn away from or toward the message of scripture, the message of the cross?

As we walk forward this year toward Easter may our

journey beneath the cross bring light, and hope, to our lives and to each person we encounter. 

Karen Garrett is a longterm volunteer with the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio. She has an interest in hymnody and the ways hymns shape our theology, and is researching the papers of Perry Huffaker for an upcoming book.

Poems and hymns used with permission of the Huffaker family. With gratitude to the Brethren Heritage Center for making available its Perry Huffaker collection.

**'Neath the Shadow of the Cross of Jesus**  
Dedicated to the Painter Creek Church of the Brethren  
Lenten Season 1960

P.L. Huffaker



The Refugees, 1908, by John Henry Amshewitz (1882-1942)

# Who is my neighbor?

by Bob Neff

**I**n the New Testament, Jesus summarizes the essence of Jewish law with these words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). In the second half of his answer, he is citing Leviticus 19:18b.

Jesus and a lawyer are talking about what one must do to inherit eternal life, and they both agree on this point. The question now becomes a critical one—not which God shall I worship, but who is the neighbor I should love. Jesus then tells the story of the Samaritan who acts as neighbor to an individual left for dead.

The issue of neighbor permeates the whole 19th chapter of Leviticus and is the background for Jesus’ response. A whole series of individuals are discussed: parent, blind, deaf, laborer, poor, older adults, and the alien. What all have in common is their vulnerability. The blind person

cannot see an obstacle, the deaf person cannot hear a disparaging comment, the older adult and parent require respect as vitality wanes, the laborer should be paid on time, the poor should be given the possibility of food at the harvest, as should the alien. Because these people are vulnerable, they are open to mistreatment and can be taken advantage of.

In the conclusion of this key chapter, the one group that requires special attention is the immigrant. The alien is particularly vulnerable because he or she is perceived as an outsider and a threat.

## Radical welcome

The alien, or sojourner, is first referenced in the laws regarding harvest practices. Along with the poor, aliens are provided opportunity to reap grain and pick grapes during the harvest (19:9-10). In a number of texts, the alien comes under the same law as the

Israelite citizen: “There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you” (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22, and Numbers 15:16, 29).

This injunction requires a single set of laws for all those residing in Israelite territory, even though they are framed in the context of the journey to the promised land. In a much later text, Ezekiel promises the same right of inheritance to an alien as to any Israelite male (Ezekiel 47:21ff). However, this early brief allusion to the alien in Leviticus 19 requires more detailed treatment.

The practice of equal treatment under the law is illustrated in the first part of the injunction regarding the treatment of the immigrant, “You shall not oppress (*ynh*) the alien” (Leviticus 19:33). The Hebrew verb *ynh* might better be translated “cheat,” as it is in Leviticus 25:13 and 17. As the law of jubilee recognizes, people are tempted



to take advantage of other individuals, and this is particularly true for the alien.

Such is the case in Genesis 23, where Abraham is identified as “a stranger and alien.” The Hittites gouge Abraham in setting the price on a burial property of “four hundred shekels of silver”—an astronomical fee. The resident is tempted to cheat the outsider with regard to wages, cost of product, or false exchange rates, since the immigrant may not know the customs, the language, or the business traditions of the new land and falls prey to abuse and misdealing.

This text goes much further with the declaration that “the alien who resides with you shall be as the citizen among you.” In all other texts, the contrast between the *ger* (alien) and the *‘ezrach* (citizen) is sharp. These two words represent separate categories and different standings within the community. But here in this text, this distinction is wiped away, since the sojourner receives citizenship status.

This is the most radical legal statement anywhere in the ancient world, according to anthropologist Mary Douglas. The radical welcome at the end of this series of commandments arises out of the granting of full citizenship status to the alien.

With this status now granted, the Israelite neighbor is to love the alien: “You shall love the alien as yourself” (v. 34b). The standard of ethical behavior in relationship to the outsider is the same as for caring for any Israelite. In fact, this commandment repeats word for word what is recognized as the highest ethical norm for human behavior and now requires it for the treatment of the foreigner.

Such a directive makes clear that

there cannot be two standards of ethical treatment, one for the insider and the other for the outsider. “To love the alien, arguably, is the ethical summit not only in this chapter but in all of Scripture,” concludes Joseph Milgrom, the leading authority on Leviticus.

This directive is undergirded by reminding each Israelite that “you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (v.34c). The Israelite forebears were treated harshly as slaves when they themselves were foreigners, and they depended on God for deliverance from this oppression.

To remember and act in this way toward the alien embraces the holiness that God intends and fulfills in the command “I am the Lord your God” (v. 34d).

#### Doers of the law

The book of Ruth is read by the Jewish community at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), which celebrates the receiving of the law. One reason for this connection is that this is a harvest festival, and the book features the harvest. In addition, it demonstrates the fulfilling of law by the behaviors of Ruth to her adopted family when she cares for her mother-in-law, a dispossessed widow.

One becomes and remains a member of the community by fulfilling the law, and Ruth fulfills the law by an obedience that transcends its letter and reaches the spirit of its individual commandments. In other words, the doer of the law *par excellence* is not an Israelite, but a Moabite. Wonder of wonders, this doer of the law can be an alien. The life and obedience of this foreigner is celebrated every year in the Jewish calendar when the giving of the law by God is celebrated.


Jesus follows this tradition when he singles out a Samaritan, a hated alien, as the one who fulfills the law. Out of their concern for holiness and purity, the priest and the Levite fail to offer assistance to an individual left half dead. However, in this account in Luke, the lawyer understands that the alien did the right thing and served as neighbor to the ailing individual, even though the one bringing assistance might become contaminated.

Thus in both the Old and New Testaments, it is the alien who serves as an example in fulfilling the law. Remarkably, the best citizen is the outsider who understands what it means to provide care to those in distress.

#### What about us?

At this time, there is no bigger issue for the American Christian community than care for immigrants in our society.

Following the lead of these texts, so central to our faith, we have a scriptural basis for speaking the truth in love to the fearful and distressed. We are required by this biblical mandate to come to the defense of those who are imperiled and threatened by hate and mistrust.

We cannot be silent in the face of restrictive laws and overzealous behaviors anchored not in the Bible but in the basest of human instincts—fear of the outsider and the unknown. The Christian response is not only an embrace but a defense and a witness for the alien, the immigrant, the other in our midst. 

Bob Neff is a biblical scholar, teacher, and writer in Pennsylvania. He has served as a professor at Bethany Theological Seminary, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren, president of Juniata College, and associate for resource development at the Village at Morrisons Cove.

“ The Christian response is not only an embrace but a defense and a witness for the alien, the immigrant, the other in our midst. ”

# Justice and the marginalized

## Deuteronomy 24:10-21

by Gene Roop

**T**he law code in Deuteronomy (chapters 12–26) speaks to a time of significant change in ancient Israel, a shift from a collection of semiautonomous small villages and defined clans to a more centralized urban people.

The emergence of urban centers like Jerusalem, Bethel, and Samaria changed the social, economic, legal, and religious structures for everyone. This change emerged slowly. The first king, Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin, a small tribe located between the large, strong northern tribes, especially Ephraim, and the large, strong southern tribes, especially Judah.

### Law and the royal city

As far as we know, Saul didn't centralize his power in a specific city, although he is frequently associated with Gibeah (1 Samuel 11:4). According to scripture, Saul's leadership was more military—dealing with the Philistine threat—than political, economic, or religious.

The major change came with David, and even more with Solomon. These kings had a capital—Jerusalem—which was not only a political hub but also an economic and religious center. This movement from village to city, from decentralized to centralized power, from elders and judges to royal leadership generated tension in every aspect of life.

Deuteronomy 24 focuses directly on some of the important social and religious values that characterized village life. The villages functioned as an organic community. As such, they could care

for the orphan whose parents died and the widow whose husband died. At their best, they could receive and include those living in the community who were not extended family—namely, immigrants. While not perfect, village values remained clear: We are to be focused on a healthy community that cared for the wellbeing of *all* who lived there.

The development of cities changed the villages. Cities needed food they did not grow. Wealthy people owned fields and orchards in villages where they did not live. The king's army needed men for the army they did not have.

What would happen to those community-minded religious and social values that were central to village life? That's what our passage from Deuteronomy addresses. The laws lay out practices designed to care for the poor, orphans, widows, and immigrants. Those less fortunate must be provided the basic requirements of life, such as food, clothing, housing, and a place in the community.

### Justice, poverty, and compassion

Verses 10-13 discuss the appropriate response to a person whose circumstances require seeking a loan. First, one should not go into the person's dwelling to get the collateral intended to secure the loan. We don't know exactly the reason for this stipulation. We do know ancient Israel was an honor-shame culture. Entering the dwelling to seize the object might increase the shame connected to needing a loan.

Secondly, one should not keep an

object of collateral if the item is needed for safety. Poverty may reduce one's clothing to a single coat—a coat needed to keep one warm at night. The poor must not be put in a position of not having even a cover for sleep.

Verses 14 and 15 address the situation of the day laborer. They must not be misused. Their life may depend on receiving their salary every day. The Lord hears the cry of the oppressed, as was the case when the Egyptians oppressed their Hebrew ancestors (Exodus 3:7).

Verse 16 seems a bit out of place in a section dealing with poverty because it deals with another issue of justice, the ancient practice of retaliatory justice. In the village, a person or group might retaliate against a whole family for an offense committed by one member of the family—a parent or a child. This could, and sometimes did, escalate into a cycle of revenge.

While a Hittite law code made provision for inflicting revenge against the whole family, there is no such provision in Hebrew law codes. In the biblical law codes, the practice of such retaliatory justice is never authorized.

Justice must never exceed an "eye for an eye." Even such "justice" is heavily regulated. A murder must have been witnessed by two or more people (Numbers 35:30). Jesus insisted that we move beyond even that form of retaliation: "You have heard that it was said: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matthew 5:38-39).



“The emergence of our present urban economy has brought new challenges to our effort to care for one another.”

A Street in Jaffa by James Tissot (1836–1902)

Verses 17 and 18 read like a summary statement. We find a similar statement in verse 22: “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.”

Verse 17 states the legal value—justice for those marginalized by culture and/or circumstance. The “widow, orphan, and immigrant” becomes an oft-repeated list referring to all those with little material or relational security. The death of parents leaves a child vulnerable. The death of a husband does the same for a widow. The immigrant lives in a community in which they find themselves as outsiders, without any natural family support, and perhaps not wanted. They must not be mistreated. Why? Because Israel once lived as unwanted immigrants, and so they are to live together as a community of God’s liberated immigrants.

The unit concludes in verses 19-21 with a law authorizing the practice of gleaning. Gleaning allows those who are food-insecure to gather excess grain and fruit after the harvest has concluded.

The book of Ruth narrates a story that includes gleaning. This practice has a long history in village culture. Gleaning not only provided subsistence food for the poor. As the story of Ruth illustrates, it also provided the opportunity for the social bonding that may enable some people to move out of poverty.

#### Law in their time and in ours

The emergence of our present urban economy has brought new challenges to our effort to care for one another. We don’t use coats and bed linens as collateral for loans. Property—if the borrower has property—can be used as collateral. If not, one’s eligibility may be based on the amount and security of the borrower’s income. In any case, default on a loan can leave one homeless.

Occasionally, the debtor may be able to live with a friend or family member—if someone is willing to make room for them. Otherwise, they must look for a second job or seek whatever public assistance is available to them. Public assistance provides for a surviv-


al existence but does not provide the person a “place” in the community.

We live in an individualistic culture, quite unlike the corporate or communitarian ancient Israel. Therefore, our legal system is grounded in a program of individual accountability in which each person is held accountable for his or her behavior. Of course, there are exceptions. In some situations, like underage drinking, parents may share legal responsibility.

While the legal system basically stays with individual accountability, community conversation can be different. Gossip often holds parents responsible: *What do you expect? Her mother neglected her child for her profession. Or, his father probably abused him.*

On one hand, we are an individualistic culture. Each one is responsible for his or her own success or failure, security or poverty. On the other, we recognize the power of cultural influence and corporate responsibility. Some of us emphasize individual accountability, others highlight our cultural context.

Many insist that we won’t make real progress with poverty until we deal with the economics which advantage the wealthy, “the system” that is in place. Similarly, we won’t reduce racial discrimination until we deal with culturally carried racism. Others emphasize the importance of the values and initiative of the individual.

Come, Holy Spirit, and speak to us. 

Gene Roop is president emeritus and Wield Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Bethany Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren.



Zakariya Muse/EYN

## EYN struck by new attacks

**V**iolent attacks have marred the start of the new year for Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

On Jan. 15, an ISWAP/Boko Haram attack on the town of Kautikari in Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State killed at least 3 people and burned 2 EYN churches and at least 26 houses. The 5 people abducted ranged from age 9 to age 20, with one of those kidnapped having been able to escape. The churches that were burned were EYN No 1, Kautikari and EYN LCC Mission Road.

On Jan. 20, an attack on the community of Pemi in the Chibok Local Government Area of Borno State killed 1 person and burned the main auditorium of the Pemi EYN church, 6 shops, 8 houses, and other properties. The attackers abducted 17 children, including a 4-year-old boy.

## Faith groups urge peace in Ukraine

**With the threat of a Russian invasion** looming in Ukraine, faith groups wrote to Congress and the Biden administration calling leaders to protect human lives and prevent war. The Office of Peacebuilding and Policy was one of those signing the letter. "Rather than relying on militaristic approaches, our leaders must invest in efforts to sustain peace and prevent harm to those who would suffer the most from the devastating and long-term impacts of conflict," the letter said.

## Bridgewater mourns deaths of officers

**The Bridgewater (Va.) College community** is mourning the deaths of police officer John Painter and campus safety officer Vashon "J.J." Jefferson, who were shot and killed on the college campus on Feb. 1. The two men were coworkers and close friends. A former student was charged in their deaths.

General secretary David Steele sent a letter of condolence to Bridgewater president David W. Bushman: "Our church and its members reach out with Christian caring during this time of grief for the officers' families, the college's students, faculty, and staff, as well as the town and the entire community that has been touched by this tragedy," the letter said. "We realize that you are mourning a deeply personal loss, while also walking through a time of great fear and anxiety that will have repercussions for some time to come—in particular for students and staff and their families."

Classes were canceled throughout the week of the shootings and mental health counseling was made available to all students.

Several special events were held in honor of the two officers and to support the community, including gatherings to sing the school's alma mater, "Bridgewater Fair," an ecumenical prayer gathering at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren, and a request for prayer, scripture, and encouragement for the young adults affected by the tragedy, posted on Facebook by the Youth and Young Adult Ministry office.

The college has established a John Painter and Vashon "J.J." Jefferson Memorial Student Support Fund.



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## Conference prepares COVID plan

**T**he Program and Arrangements Committee has published a COVID-19 response plan for the Annual Conference to be held July 10-14 in Omaha, Neb.

“One of our top priorities is caring for the health and wellbeing of all Conferencegoers,” the committee wrote. “The Program and Arrangements Committee developed the following plan in consultation with epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen and physician and former Program and Arrangements Committee member Dr. Emily Shonk Edwards.”

The committee decided not to implement a vaccine requirement but the plan strongly encourages vaccinations for everyone who is eligible. Vaccines will be required for key leadership and others who may need the flexibility of removing masks while speaking. Vaccines will be required for anyone volunteering with the early childhood program. COVID tests are encouraged for all Conferencegoers within 24 hours of arrival. Those receiving positive test results should stay home and will receive a refund of their registration fee.

See [www.brethren.org/ac2022/covidresponse](http://www.brethren.org/ac2022/covidresponse).

## Devotional breaks sales records

The 2021 Advent devotional from Brethren Press, *Do Not Be Afraid* by Angela Finet, broke sales records for the devotional booklets. More than 7,000 copies were sold. Brethren Press has offered seasonal devotionals for Advent and Lent for almost 20 years, since the first was published for Advent 2002. From 2019 to 2021, unit sales grew by 13 percent. More than 400 churches and individuals now participate in a subscription program to receive the devotionals at a discount.



## Personnel notes

**Bill Scheurer** completed almost 10 years as On Earth Peace executive director before the organization restructured in late 2021 and eliminated the position. Scheurer's term of service was shaped by crisis and challenges and the work of clarifying the organization's identity. He supported staff work on an internship program that led to more than 90 interns participating since 2016; supported the adoption of Kingian Nonviolence as a core framework; helped prompt the agency to recreate its values,

vision, and mission statements; helped create a three-year set of strategic priorities (2020-2022); and provided leadership for the decision to join the Supportive Communities Network of the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests in 2019. During his tenure, Scheurer served a term as board chair for the Fellowship of Reconciliation and continued relationships with organizations resisting the militarization of youth and supporting conscientious objection.

**Sherry Chastain** resigned

Dec. 31, as program assistant for Children's Disaster Services (CDS). She worked for CDS for more than four years, beginning on May 23, 2017. Her previous work at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., was for IMA World Health.

**Lauren Bukszar** started Jan. 10 as a part-time database support specialist in the Information Technology team for the Church of the Brethren, working out of the Brethren Service Center and her home in Maryland.

**Kay Gaier** and **Anna Lisa Gross** have been named co-interim executives for South/Central Indiana District, in a half-time position that started Jan. 17. Gaier will focus on supporting pastors and congregations, connecting with district committees and teams, and continuing orientation and educational opportunities for pastors. Gross will focus on pastoral and congregational transitions and will represent the district with the Council of District Executives and other organizations.

## Brethren Benefit Trust announces changes

**Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT)** made two changes beginning Jan. 1, related to its strategic goals to adapt to denominational demographics and societal pressures. BBT adopted a work-from-home model for all staff, allowing all positions to be remote from centralized office space at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., and began implementing a new organizational structure.

The former seven-person management team has been succeeded by a four-person executive team consisting of the president; CFO and vice president of Investments; vice president of Products and Services (retirement, insurance, organizational investing, and client relations); and vice president of Vitality (data, IT, marketing, sales, communications, human resources, and special project management).

The following staff changes have been made: **Loyce Borgmann** is leading the Client Services team, on which **Steve Mason** also serves. **Ed Shannon** is product director for Pension. **Jeremiah Thompson** is product director for Insurance. **Dan Radcliff** is product director for Organizational Investing. Other directors include **German Gongora** (IT), **Huma Rana** (Finance), and **Tammy Chudy** (Special Projects). **Scott Douglas** retired at the end of January.

# Learning to know Jesus

**W**ho is Jesus? That is a question people have been asking for centuries. According to Matthew's Gospel (16:15), it was a question Jesus himself asked of his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?"

From the title and subtitle of Diana Butler Bass's book *Freeing Jesus: Recovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior,*



KEN GIBBLE

*Lord, Way, and Presence*, we are given what turns out to be its table of contents. It is also a brief outline of the author's life story and how she has come to know Jesus in many different ways. What she has written is, in her own words, "a spiritual autobiography" centered on her six-decade experience of answering the question Jesus asked his friends.

As is true for many Christians, Bass learned about Jesus as a child attending Sunday school. She tells about seeing a picture of Jesus with children surrounding him, one of them sitting on his lap.

I remember that picture well, just as I recall singing a song about this person named Jesus who loves me. Little ones like me, the song declared, belong to him. And I remember the grown-ups singing a song beginning with the words "what a friend we have in Jesus." The author introduces the reader to her childhood experience with Jesus and then moves on to consider what it means to call Jesus a "friend." Equal space is then given to each of the other words in the subtitle.


Bass, author of 10 books on Christian history and belief, reminds us that a man named Saul was on his way to Damascus when he was struck down by a bright light and heard a voice asking, "Why do you persecute me?" When Saul asked, "Who are you?" he received the answer, "I am Jesus." In the years that followed, the man renamed Paul wrote letters in which he named and explored the many

ways in which Jesus was alive in his own life and the lives of his followers. In the same way, the author writes, our life experiences enlarge our understanding of who Jesus was and, more importantly, who he becomes in our own life journey.

Through her account, I found my own understanding of Jesus renewed and confirmed—but also challenged in unexpected ways. I was reminded that the many names by which Jesus has been known (son of man, son of God, light of the world, bread of life, lamb of God) all speak to different ways of learning to know and embrace the holy mystery of who Jesus was and continues to be.

Our Brethren heritage has traditionally emphasized what the book explores in Chapter 2: Jesus as teacher. We have placed high value on his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. We have given special attention to his parables, his primary teaching method. The author gives her readers a close look at both what Jesus taught and how he lived it.

Of special interest to me was the author's discussion of Jesus as "presence." Less familiar with this sense of who Jesus was, I was led to engage what she calls "the Jesus mystery." With her help I have a better understanding of Jesus' words from Matthew 28:20: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (KJV).

Bass concludes that we know Jesus in the best and deepest sense through our life experiences. "There is no other way," she writes, "to become acquainted with the one who lived so long ago and who lives in ways we can barely understand through church, scripture, and good works and in the faces of our neighbors." This book invites its readers to find the many ways in which Jesus still speaks to our living and our loving. 

Ken Gible is a writer and retired Church of the Brethren pastor living in Camp Hill, Pa.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *Freeing Jesus: Recovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence.*

**Author:** Diana Butler Bass. **Publisher:** HarperOne, 2021. Available from Brethren Press.



“His insights and suggestions are as morally and theologically sound as they are practical and persuasive.”

### Insightful and urgently needed

My deep gratitude for yet another outstanding issue! My wife, Linda, and I both really appreciated Wendy McFadden's opening piece as well as her hopeful and hope-filled article. As we read and reflected on several of the articles in the January/February issue, I marveled again at the high quality of your fine publication.

Many thanks to Robert Johansen for his well-crafted and urgently needed assessment, "Lessons from Afghanistan." His insights and suggestions are as morally and theologically sound as they are practical and persuasive. War was indeed the wrong choice for the US in Afghanistan, as it was in each of the historical cases he cites. His cogent analysis enables us to recognize much-needed lessons from the past as we embrace more promising and life-affirming alternatives for peacefully resolving international disputes in the future.

Tim McElwee  
Wolcottville, Ind.

### Another Brethren road

I was thrilled to see the cover of my January/February MESSENGER when I removed it from our mailbox this afternoon. The accompanying article on Brethren roads was quite interesting and informative. Thank you.


I have a very significant, if international, addition. On each of my dozens of trips to Schwarzenau, Germany, the first thing that I was delighted to point out to my guests

was the prominent sign—just after we crossed the bridge over the Eder River: Alexander Mack Strasse (Alexander Mack Street).

Attached is my photo of the Alexander Mack Strasse street sign in Schwarzenau. I think this may have been taken during the 250th anniversary celebration in 1958. I not only appreciate the street sign but also the background: the near house (on right) has slate siding and religious designs on a

portion, and the far house is typical German *fachwerk* architecture.

I was born and lived near Quarryville, Pa., until I entered the 25th unit of Brethren Volunteer Service in 1954. For almost a century, members of the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge of Quarryville and the surrounding area have celebrated the abilities of Octoraro Orphie, the resident groundhog (and descendants), to prognosticate on Feb. 2 the weather for the following six weeks.



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“ The first thing that I was delighted to point out to my guests was the prominent sign—just after we crossed the bridge over the Eder River: Alexander Mack Strasse ”



J. Kenneth Kreider

Occasionally, he got it right. To my knowledge, no member of the Church of the Brethren was a member of the Slumbering Lodge; but we read about their merriment as reported in the newspaper. I never dreamed that I would read of this lore in MESSENGER!

Keep up the good work on MESSENGER. We appreciate it.

**J. Kenneth Kreider**  
Elizabethtown, Pa.

## Two more roads

I just read Walt Wiltschek's "Take Me Home, Brethren Roads" in the January/February MESSENGER. It reminded me of two more Brethren-related roads in eastern Pennsylvania, near where I was born.

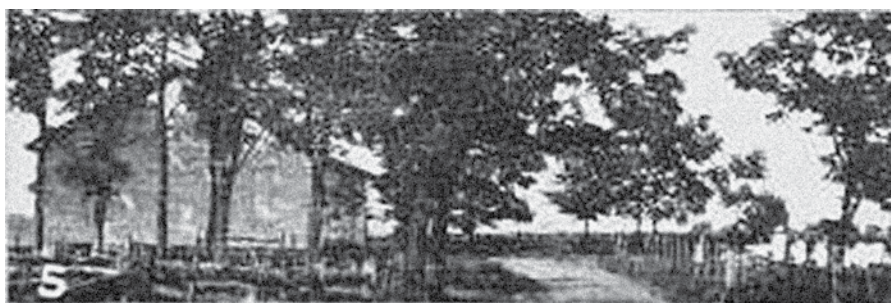
Camp Swatara Road is located in

Bethel Township, in the very northwest corner of Berks County, Pa. It also is known as PA 645. It goes through Frystown and crosses I 78/US 22 at exit 20.

Light's Church Road is a short road in Bethel Township, Lebanon County, east of Jonestown. The name refers to a Brethren meetinghouse that existed on the

southern end of the road from 1877 to 1920. During most of that time it was one of the meetinghouses used by the Little Swatara congregation. The property originally belonged to Johannes Licht III (1750-1829). He and his wife, Mary (Doner) Licht (1755-1810), and a number of descendants are buried in a small graveyard that predates the meetinghouse. The family was originally Mennonite and became Brethren sometime in the 19th century. When the Fredericksburg congregation was created in 1919, the new congregation inherited Light's meetinghouse. It was dismantled the following year and timbers were reused to build a meetinghouse at Rankstown. That building was torn down in 1931 when the property was sold to the Commonwealth to build Indiantown Gap Military Reservation. I've attached an image of the meetinghouse and graveyard originally from J.G. Francis, *The Church of the Brethren (Dunkers) in Lebanon County*, Lebanon County Historical Society, Sept. 15, 1916, p. 95.

**Tom Wagner**  
Whitehall, Mich.



Light's meetinghouse

Courtesy of the Lebanon County Historical Society



## Stimulate discussion

I greatly appreciated the articles by Walt Wiltschek and Frank Ramirez in the most recent issue. Wiltschek's article stimulated thought and contemplation, unlike some articles which seem to

be focused on telling readers how or what to think. Ramirez's article gave pause for reflection on "our church" and how the institution which has long been the model of tolerance in society has come in some ways to share the intolerance which surrounds us.

When we in the local congregation are able to get back to having in-person adult classes, articles such as these will be good to stimulate discussion.

**Bob Fletcher**  
Denton, Md.

## TURNINGPOINTS

**To submit information for Turning Points, go to [www.brethren.org/turning-points](http://www.brethren.org/turning-points). Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at [dstroyeck@brethren.org](mailto:dstroyeck@brethren.org) or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published. Individuals are not listed under both Centenarians and Deaths in the same issue.**

### Centenarians

**Davis**, Murel, 100, Norton, Kan., Jan. 30

### New members

**Bakersfield**, Calif.: Linda Hylton, Marcy Ladd, Mark Ladd, Timothy Matthias

**Beaver Creek**, Hagerstown, Md.: Carol Reed

**Buck Creek**, Mooreland, Ind.: Jane Matarese, Phil Matarese

**Codorus**, Dallastown, Pa.: Carol Gordan, Ken Gordan

**Columbia City**, Ind.: Jeff Frank, J. Irene Ott

**Evergreen**, Stanardsville, Va.: Hope Barber, Steve Barber, Amanda Brown, Tracy Morris, Colby Sheehan, Jerri Sheehan

**First**, Harrisburg, Pa.: Lexi Aligarbes, Samson Arnold, Chloe Oustrich, Lydia Pebly, Ade Senaie

**Garden City**, Kan.: Carolee Jehlik, Roy Johnson, Stephanie Snowder

**Geiger**, Friedens, Pa.: Holly

Shroyer

**Maple Grove**, Ashland, Ohio: Jay Kettering, Douglas Musser, Pamela Musser, Stephen See

**New Enterprise**, Pa.: Jacob Sensenig, Laine Sensenig, Shawn Shirk, Aiden Wadel

**Papago Buttes**, Scottsdale, Ariz.: Michael Gannon, Wanita McLaughlin, Brian McMillen

**Pleasant Chapel**, Ashley, Ind.: Mark Crow, Nolan Johnson, Floyd Stutzman

**Pottstown**, Pa.: Sandi Miller

**Rossville**, Ind.: June Harris, Ken Harris, Karey Pritchett

**Sipesville**, Pa.: Kennedy Faidley, Jackie Tressler

**Sunrise**, Harrisonburg, Va.: Carol Early

**York Center**, Lombard, Ill.: Marty Creager

### Wedding anniversaries

**Belcher**, Marvin and Virginia, Bakersfield, Calif., 73

**Brounce**, Howard and Janet, Aiken, S.C., 69  
**Brumbaugh**, Dennis and Linda, New Enterprise, Pa., 50

**Dutrow**, Alfred and Mary Ann, McPherson, Kan., 50

**Kline**, Dale and Audrey, Myersville, Md., 60

**Kruse**, Charles and Lois Moats, Conrad, Iowa, 55

**Neher**, Lyle and Marlene Moats, Grundy Center, Iowa, 65

**Ott**, Jeff and Donna, South Whitley, Ind., 55

**Wolfe**, Kip and Karen, Eagleville, Pa., 50

### Ordained

**Clift**, Ryan, Atl. N. E. Dist. (East Fairview, Manheim, Pa.), Dec. 5

**Ramirez**, Eric, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Ebenezer, Lancaster, Pa.), Dec. 19

**Shoemaker**, Ernest, Shen. Dist. (Waynesboro, Va.), Nov. 21

**Trott**, Michael, S. Ohio & Ky. Dist. (Brookville, Ohio), Jan. 2

### Licensed

**Ames-Kruse**, Lisa, N. Plains Dist. (Hammond Avenue, Waterloo, Iowa), Nov. 7

**Christ**, Marie, Mo. & Ark. Dist. (Warrensburg, Mo.), Jan. 6

**Cook**, Jeffrey, S/C Ind. Dist. (Lower Deer Creek, Camden, Ind.), Dec. 5

**Gonzalez**, Octavio, P. R. Dist. (Yahuecas, Cristo Nuestra Paz, Adjuntas, P.R.), Oct. 30

**Kissel**, Wayne, N. Ohio Dist. (Mansfield, Ohio), Dec. 12

**Rosario**, Evelyn, P. R. Dist. (Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera Fellowship, Rio Piedras, P.R.), Sept. 1

### Placements

**Ames-Kruse**, Lisa, pastor, Hammond Avenue, Waterloo, Iowa, Nov. 7

**Bernhard**, H. Fred, from interim pastor, Brookville, Ohio, to interim pastor, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, Jan. 16

**Christ**, Marie, plural ministry team, Warrensburg, Mo., Jan. 9

**Cook**, Jeffrey, plural ministry team, Lower Deer Creek, Camden, Ind., Dec. 5

**Forrester**, Donald, interim pastor, Bethany, Farmington, Del., Dec. 1

**Kreighbaum**, Jennifer, from interim pastor to team pastor, Bear Creek, Accident, Md., Nov. 8

**Lare**, Dawn, interim pastor, Pottstown, Pa., Dec. 1

**Miller**, David, from pastor, Montezuma, Dayton, Va.,

to pastor of special ministries, Bridgewater, Va., Dec. 1

**Ramirez**, Eric, team pastor, Ebenezer, Lancaster, Pa., Dec. 19

**Ream**, Kim, interim pastor, Green Tree, Oaks, Pa., Jan. 9

**Rogers**, Sandi, interim pastor, Woodbridge, Va., Nov. 1

**Rosario**, Evelyn, associate pastor, Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera Fellowship, Rio Piedras, P.R., Sept. 1

**Shoemaker**, Ernest, from pastor, Hollins Road, Roanoke, Va., to pastor, Waynesboro, Va., Nov. 1

**Smith**, Alan, interim pastor, Welty, Smithsburg, Md., Nov. 1

**Sonafrank**, Harold, pastor, Christiansburg, Va., Jan. 1

**Spencer**, Robert, from interim team pastor to pastor, Long Run, Lehighton, Pa., Jan. 1

**Studebaker**, Guy, from interim pastor to pastor, Living Faith, Flora, Ind., Oct. 24

**Trott**, Michael, pastor, Brookville, Ohio, Jan. 3

**Upole**, Lisa, team pastor, Bear Creek, Accident, Md., Nov. 8

**Yoder**, Leon, interim pastor, Thurmont, Md., Jan. 1

# Lost in grace

**S**omehow the exit wasn't where it was supposed to be.

Okay, it was probably my brain that wasn't where it was supposed to be, but I'm not sure how the exit slipped by unnoticed. I had taken the route several times before,



WALT WILTSCHKE

ducking off I-64 west of Charleston and taking a convenient—if slightly annoying—diagonal up to southeastern Ohio. Yet this time I missed it.

Darkness had fallen, and traffic was heavy, kicking up the remnants of road salt from a recent storm, so my eyes were likely elsewhere when the sign went by, despite my efforts to watch for it. After a while, I felt rather certain I hadn't usually gone this far

before turning off, and when I reached Huntington some miles later I was sure.

I wasn't entirely lost, but I was most definitely misplaced, and I wasn't quite certain how best to rectify the situation. The jarring feeling of disorientation set in. Now what? I didn't want to backtrack, so I hastily concocted Plan B. I took an exit just before the Kentucky state line that I vaguely remembered from some previous trip and made my way up what I hoped was a good alternate route.

It was that and more. I was soon in Ohio, whose fine transportation folks had made most of the journey a four-lane road. A new bypass took me around some congested areas on what turned out to be a perfect shortcut with almost no traffic. And in between I was treated to some gorgeous views across the Ohio River on a clear night, with lights reflecting off the water.

All in all it was a delightful detour with fresh new sights that didn't end up being much further than my planned route would have been. Sometimes getting lost is a wonderful way to find places you didn't know you were looking for.

Over these past two years, I think the church has often felt lost. I hear it from stressed pastors who haven't been able to do most visits or hug their parishioners even as they


try to juggle new duties. I hear it from congregations who notice the absence of members and miss long-held traditions. I've felt it myself as I've missed being at Annual Conference and gathering around the table with others, plus watching a denominational schism unfold amid it all.

Like the Hebrew people millennia ago who thought they were taking a direct route to the Promised Land only to find themselves on an exasperating detour, we are wandering. We've found ways to maintain some sense of togetherness and to continue being "the church," but it hasn't been the same. And, frankly, we know it probably won't be the same. That's jarring.

This might be particularly felt in a church so intentionally built around community and togetherness and the intimacy of the love feast. We might cry out as the people later did to Jeremiah: "Pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do" (Jeremiah 42:3, NIV).

But among the hardships and disorientation of this time, we've found some new perspectives and possibilities, too: We've learned how to better include people beyond our church walls who can't be there physically. We've reassessed what's really important as we seek to follow Jesus Christ. We're discovering some creative models for pastoral ministry. We might better know Alexander Mack's admonition to "count well the cost." And we've been reminded not to take one another or our church communities for granted.

It brings to mind some words from Brethren musician Andy Murray's beautiful ballad "Goodbye, Still Night": "We might be lost in the wilderness, with things not going just like we've planned, and our spirits tied down flat to the ground, in a way that we might not understand. Just like Moses on Mount Sinai, forty days and forty nights, let's go to the mountain, there you'll see, that the word's coming down that will give us freedom."

It might not be on the road we intended, but we will end up where we needed to go. For as long as we must journey it, let's keep our eyes open for reflections of grace and fresh glimpses of God along the way. We might find things we never knew our hearts were seeking all along. 

“It might not be on the road we intended, but we will end up where we needed to go.”





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Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be afraid; do not be  
discouraged, for the Lord  
your God will be with you  
wherever you go.  
—Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

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