



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
MESSENGER

APRIL 2022 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

*The body
of Christ*

"My dear friends, we always have good reason to thank God for you, because your faith in God and your love for each other keep growing all the time."

~2 Thessalonians 1:3, CEV



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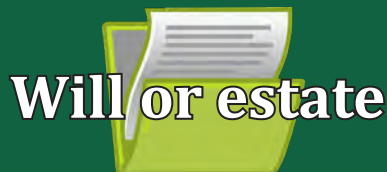
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Do you have a graduate you would like to recognize? Someone to acknowledge on Father's Day? A wedding or birthday to celebrate? For the June issue, you can offer "Warm Wishes" of up to 25 words for the special price of \$15 each. These will appear in a section of the classified ads.

Email the text of your warm wishes by April 22 to messengerads@brethren.org. Make out your check to "Messenger" and mail to Karen Stocking, Messenger Advertising, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120. Checks need to arrive by April 15.

Seek peace, and pursue it

War is hell," said Ted Stuebaker, who knew this firsthand. A conscientious objector raised in the Church of the Brethren, he volunteered to go to Vietnam as an agriculturalist and peacemaker. He was killed there 51 years ago this month.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

While the church helped form Stuebaker, his response to war in turn helped shape the church. In him, Brethren saw a Christ-filled peacemaker who chose to suffer with the victims of violence.

Years later, the church still perseveres in its witness to the power of nonviolence in a world riven by war. With deep concern about today's war being waged against Ukraine, the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board has called for concerted prayer and action for peacebuilding: "While some have claimed that the events of the past weeks in Ukraine show that the machinery of war is necessary for security, we assert that the serious and sustained struggle for peace is the lesson to be learned."

In its call, the board cited the church's 1991 statement on peacemaking: "We believe that living in Christ Jesus, who is our peace, means more than advocating for peace; it means embodying God's peace, living God's real presence in and for all peoples and all creation. Peacemakers are Christ's living and resurrected body at work in the world today."

That is a powerful word for this Easter season.

Ted Stuebaker's personal sacrifice for peace inspired countless people, including a former university classmate who wrote about him last year. In an article in his local paper, Joel Freedman described the impact his friend had on his life, and his continued presence over these past 50 years. He repeated a prayer of Ted's, which began: "Keep us ill at ease and restless, God, as long as we can see need in the world."

Here's my prayer for our day: *O God of peace: Would that we knew the things that make for peace. Keep us discomfited by the warring madness of this world and its tyrants. Open our hearts to those who are forced to flee their homeland, whatever country that might be. Fill us with the compassion of Jesus, who wept over his people. Amen.*

Wendy McFadden

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“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ ”

—Matthew 26:26

“Prayer is vital to a Love Feast.” —North Carolina Conference, United Methodist Church

“To start anew from Christ means being close to him, being close to Jesus. Jesus stresses the importance of this with the disciples at the Last Supper, as he prepares to give us his own greatest gift of love, his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches and says, ‘Abide in my love, remain attached to me, as the branch is attached to the vine.’ If we are joined to him, then we are able to bear fruit.” —Pope Francis

“Jesus gave us a model for the work of the church at the Last Supper. While his disciples kept proposing more organization — Hey, let’s elect officers, establish hierarchy, set standards of professionalism — Jesus quietly picked up a towel and basin of water and began to wash their feet.” —author Philip Yancey

A BRUSH OF GREATNESS

Leonardo da Vinci’s famous painting, “The Last Supper,” was created on the wall of the refectory of the Santa Maria delle Grazie monastery in Milan, Italy, about eight feet above floor level and covering almost 450 square feet in area. The artistic perspective reflects a view as one would see the scene from about 15 feet above the ground. Miraculously, it survived a bombing during World War II that destroyed part of the building.

Da Vinci created the work in the late 1400s, and deterioration took its toll over the years. A major restoration was completed in 1999. Numerous other artists—from Giotto to Salvador Dali—have endeavored to capture the scene over the years, but da Vinci’s image has remained the most enduring.

The unique poses of the characters in the painting reflect “Leonardo’s belief that posture, gesture, and expression

should manifest the ‘notions of the mind,’” says the Encyclopedia Britannica, with each disciple reacting “in a manner that Leonardo considered fit for that man’s personality.”

According to one account, related by journalist Tony Schwartz, while working on



the project “Leonardo da Vinci regularly took off from painting for several hours at a time and seemed to be daydreaming aimlessly. Urged by his patron, the prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie, to work more continuously, da Vinci is reported to have replied, immodestly but accurately, ‘The greatest geniuses accomplish more when they work less.’”

A THEOLOGICAL TWIST

Can you unscramble the following words associated with the love feast? Answers are below.

MUNCOINMO
NEATCREPEN
SHEETWAGFIN
GINGINS
PEAAG
RICESEV
SNABI
UNEEDNAVEL
SODANCE
NINEOCARD

ANSWERS: Communion, repentance, footwashing, singing, agape, service, basin, unleavened, deacons, ordinance.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, when many congregations observe the spring love feast, falls on April 14 this year, three days ahead of Easter Sunday. Most Church of the Brethren congregations hold another love feast service in the fall, often on World Communion Sunday, and occasionally on other special occasions.

Three paths to Bethany

Three very different individuals, three very different career paths, but one destination at a crucial time in their lives. Triplets Alex, Jamie, and Nolan McBride of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind., graduated from Manchester University in 2019, then entered Brethren Volunteer Service, then somehow all found their way to Bethany Theological Seminary.

Nolan cherishes his Brethren heritage but feels a strong call to the Anglican priesthood. Jamie combines an aptitude

for science with a resolve to live her faith. Alex is contemplating a career that may include political activism, community organizing, and journalism.

Nolan decided that Bethany's graduate certificate in Just Peace and Conflict Transformation provided spiritual growth he would not find elsewhere. After achieving that, he pursued and will soon graduate with a master's degree in theology.

Jamie moved to Virginia to work with New Community Project, but when the pandemic shut down her program she decided Bethany's graduate certificate in Theology and Science was a perfect fit. She expects to earn an additional certificate in Just Peace and Conflict Transformation before pursuing a master's in Environmental Science through Goshen College this fall.

While searching for "experience and direction," Alex tackled the Just Peace and Conflict Transformation program but—inspired by professor Scott Holland—he plunged into the master's program in Theopoetics and Writing.

All three qualified for Bethany's Pillars and Pathways Residency Scholarship.—Frank Ramirez



From left: Jamie, Alex, and Nolan McBride.

Tangled twine

Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren placed twine "lanterns" in the sanctuary windows for an Advent worship series from Marcia McFee's Worship Design Studio. For Advent, brass or white metal stars were hung in the lanterns. In January, luggage tags were substituted for a series titled "What's

in Your Suitcase?" In February, logos of the service ministries of the denomination hung in the lanterns: Brethren Volunteer Service, Children's Disaster Services, Brethren Disaster Ministries, the Global Food Initiative, Brethren Service.

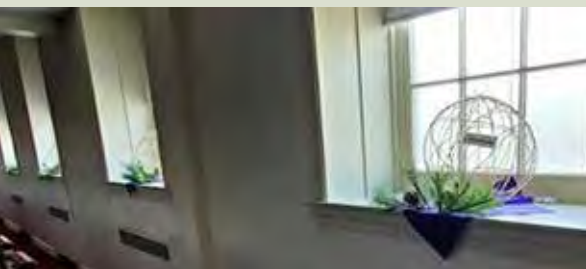
A small group used the lanterns in a spirituality exercise. This is the poem that I wrote for that exercise:

*Tangled twine wound in a circle,
crossed and criss-crossed.
The twine is bound to the tools
Giving a lifeline from the top.
Love in action
Flowing through the universe.
Symbols of service, agencies*



*for doing God's work in the world
Set against a bed of purple, the
color of royalty.*

—written by Carol Hoke



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.



Art by students from Ganesha High School is featured in the Gallery at Hillcrest.

Hillcrest extends its welcome

When the murder of George Floyd occurred, the board of Hillcrest Retirement Community in La Verne, Calif., responded with a policy committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A committee co-chaired by resident Peggy Redman of Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren and staff member Ryan Harrison of La Verne Church of the Brethren, was formed to make sure the policy did not wind up on a shelf collecting dust but became a way of life in the community.

With the support of CEO Matthew Neeley, the committee turned a sitting room into a “Welcome Room” where different cultures and lifestyles are featured every quarter. Space was made in the library for books to encourage the learning process, supervised by resident Julie Kurtz of the La Verne church. Programs include films, speakers, and even meals, to enrich the experience of the culture being highlighted.

In the summer of 2021, the LGBTQ+ community was the first culture to be highlighted, and it was a rainbow-colored event. The unique feature of the display was a collection of photographs of LGBTQ+ family members.

Last fall, the focus was on the Jewish community with Jewish residents entrusting family religious heirlooms and sharing traditions. Hanukkah was observed with food selections from the dining room.

In early 2022, Hillcrest’s Welcome Room honored the contributions of great African American leaders, with a special emphasis on women. Pieces included a seven-panel monograph depicting decades of civil rights progress, created by staff member Shirley Turner of the La Verne church. The Gallery at Hillcrest featured art by students from Ganesha High School and their teacher Kevin Tharpe, responding to the theme “Our African American Influence.” Students chose a famous Black person who had influenced them, did a stippled portrait of that person, and wrote a brief essay about their choice. The results were inspiring and spectacular. —Barbara Smythe

Mentoring at Roaring Spring

First Church of the Brethren in Roaring Spring, Pa., has had a mentoring program for decades—26 years, in fact. Janie Myers reports that it continues as a vigorous way to connect the youth and adults of the church.

“We used to say the youth are the future of the church, and now we realize that the youth *are* the church,” Myers said. “I have a soft spot for teenagers. The world we created for them, gosh what have we done to them? ... With a mentor they have someone who cares for them and prays for them.”

She helped start the program with encouragement from then-pastor David Witkovsky. The program starts with middle schoolers in sixth grade, inviting them to identify an adult they would like to have as mentor. Myers contacts the adults, in conversation with the families of the youth. Each mentor can have only one mentee at a time. The commitment is for one year, renewable annually as long as the youth wishes to remain in the program or until they complete high school. Most continue for the full seven years, Myers said.

Each team makes some kind of contact once a month—if only to say hello before church or sit together in worship. The program offers suggestions of appropriate activities and offers events that the whole group of mentors and mentees enjoy doing together such a hike or a baseball game. Often mentors support the youth by attending their school plays, recitals, and sports events.

In total, about 300 youth have gone through the Roaring Spring mentoring program, with about 30 teams currently taking part. —Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Moderator-elect Elaine Sollenberger (back right) and moderator Bill Hayes (front left) leave the platform at the 1987 Annual Conference. It was a notable year, with the first Black moderator and the first woman moderator-elect in leadership of the church.

Remembering Elaine Sollenberger

Elaine Sollenberger, 91, the first woman elected as moderator of Annual Conference, died on Feb. 14. She served as moderator in 1989 and again in 1998 to fill an unexpired term. She chaired the denomination’s General Board (predecessor to the current Mission and Ministry Board) from 1984 to 1986, during her term from 1981 to 1986. Her leadership extended well beyond the church: service on the Everett school board, including as chair; filling an unexpired term as a Bedford County commissioner; representing the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Association on the board of the Pennsylvania All American Dairy Show. She held a degree from Juniata College and taught at the high school level, alongside her work with her late husband, Ray Sollenberger, to establish and run the farm known as Ralaine Jerseys.

There is a place for you at the table

by Paul Grout

Near the end of my mother's life, diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, she slowly drifted away from us. There came a time when she could no longer remember my name.

I was sitting with her one afternoon. My mother had not spoken my name in months. I said to her: "Mom, I'm Paul, I'm your son Paul, can you say Paul?" She couldn't. I said to her, "It's okay, Mom; I love you, Mom." I was in my middle 50s, longing to hear my mother speak my name.

My mother was a gifted athlete. While my brother and I were growing up, it was my mother who taught us to pitch, catch, and hit a baseball. A star basketball player in high school, she coached us in the basics of the game.

We lived in a farmhouse at the edge of our small town. Just beyond our extensive gardens a large field stretched out toward the town. In the far corner of that field was a mowed section we had cleared for a ballfield.

On warm spring afternoons, my brother and I would race home from elementary school, gather gloves and bats, and meet our friends at that field.

My mother, who strongly encouraged sports, would let us play until my father was home from work and our dinner was practically on the table.

It was then that my mother would leave the kitchen, walk out the back screen door, and walk up through our garden to the crest of a small hill that overlooked the field. She would cup her hands around her mouth and call us.

"Paaaauuul, Alllaannn, come hooommme."

Our friends understood that for us the game was over. We immediately gathered up our equipment and ran home.

It was not that we were such obedient children. We were

not afraid of punishment if we were late. We wanted to be there. Our mom had called us, and we raced to the center of our childhood kingdom, which was our home. And the center of our home was a large kitchen table where our evening meal was waiting.

My father, my mother, my brother, and I were together around that table almost every evening of our growing up. Like no other place in our lives, it was around that table that we knew we belonged. We didn't have to be good; we didn't have to be smart; we didn't have to be anybody but ourselves.

It was around that table that we were unconditionally loved. There was a place for us at that table.



You can imagine how it would have been for the disciples: every day for three years walking with Jesus, hearing him teach, seeing him heal, sharing meals together.

Yet after all this time together they did not really see him, they did not really know him.

Then, on their last night together before his suffering and torturous death, he invited them to share one last experience together, around a table.

Before the meal, as they were coming together, he washed their feet.

He knew they would soon flee from his side. He knew they were not ready or strong enough to follow him where he was going. He knew that one of them had already betrayed him and that another would soon deny knowing him.

Understanding all of this, Jesus wanted them to know there was a place for them at this table. He wanted them to

“ You don’t have to qualify to sit here. You don’t have to be good. You don’t have to have your life together. You don’t have to understand all that it means. ”



know that this table and everything that it was about would sustain and transform their future.

He broke bread and gave to each one—his body broken for them. He shared a cup with each one—his blood shed for them.

There is a place for you at this table. You don’t have to qualify to sit here. You don’t have to be good. You don’t have to have your life together. You don’t have to understand all that it means.

You don’t have to be liberal, conservative, progressive, fundamental, evangelical, political, secular, religious, Republican or Democrat, straight or gay. To receive what this table offers, you cannot be looking around trying to decide who belongs and who doesn’t. At this table love will show you the way. Everyone is welcome.



Finally, there is one last table to consider. This is how I have come to picture it for myself.

I will take my last breath on earth and expel that breath. As I do this, as I die, a woman will step outside through the

screen door of an old farmhouse. She will walk along a garden to a small rise that looks over a field. She will cup her hands around her mouth. This will not be my mother; it will be God. She will call out my name: “Paaauull, come hooommme.”

Upon hearing her voice, I will come running: across a field, down past a garden, and into an old farmhouse through a screen door, into a great kitchen with a table that stretches out beyond sight and time.

All my friends are sitting at that table. All my enemies are there. My father, my mother, and brother are there. There is an empty chair next to them.

My mother rises from the table. She comes to me and takes my hands in hers. I am a little boy again. She looks into my eyes and speaks my name.

“Paul.”

I am home.

Paul Grout is a former Annual Conference moderator and a retired pastor in the Church of the Brethren, now living in Bellingham, Wash. He is a leader in the A Place Apart community based in Putney, Vermont.

Discerning the body

The Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

by Brian Mackie

Can celebrating love feast cause more harm than good? Consider these words from the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 11:17: “But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse” (NRSV). The New International Version says it this way: “... your meetings do more harm than good.”

The issue was the way the church was celebrating the Lord's supper. If we want our love feasts to do more good than harm, it would be wise to study this section of scripture. What was causing the harm and what could be done to make it for the better?

“For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves,” says

1 Corinthians 11:29. The practice of the Lord's supper had brought judgment to the community. As the next verse indicates, members of this church were experiencing sickness and death beyond the normal. The situation was serious, and the way the church was practicing the Lord's supper needed to change.

The corrective hinged on “discerning the body.” If the church members would judge themselves (v. 31) and rightly discern the body, they would not be judged. Since this idea of discerning the body was critical to the judgment that the Corinthian church was experiencing, one needs to understand what that means.

1 Corinthians 11:17 provides the first clue with the words “when you come together.” The focus is on the community of faith coming together. Verse 18

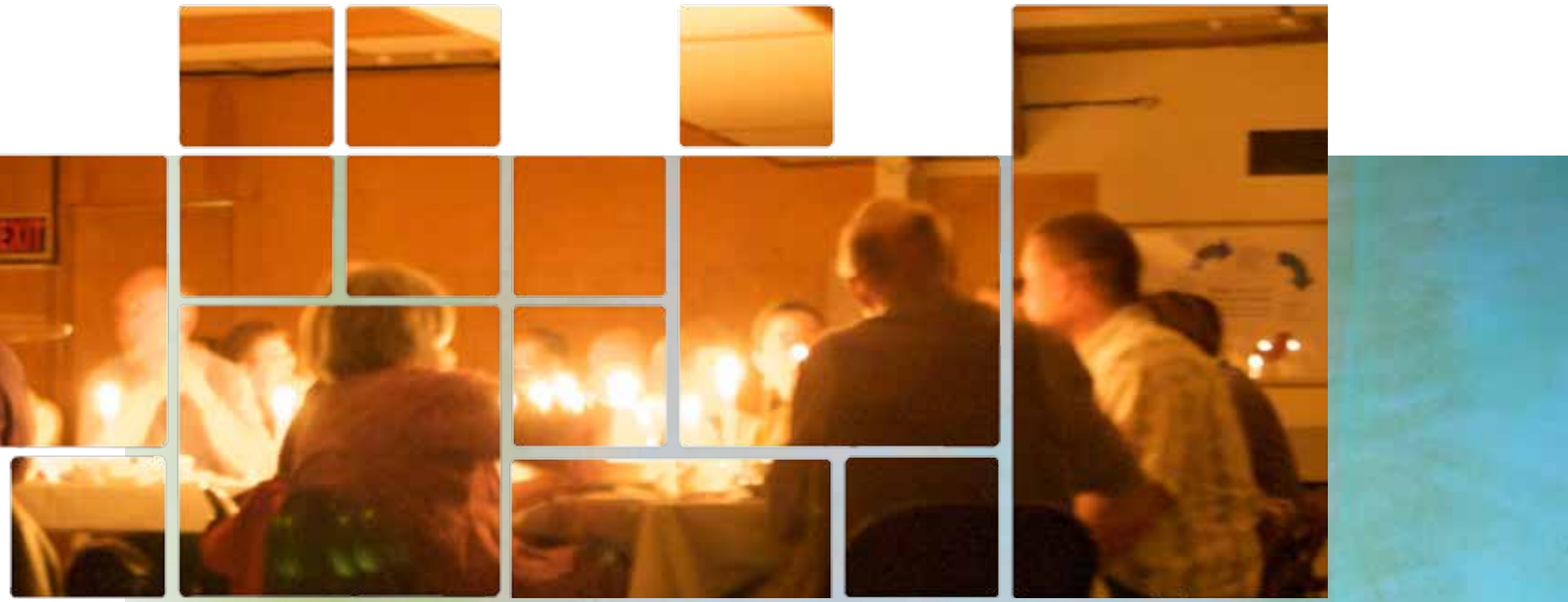
continues, “For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear there are divisions among you. . . .” The problem of a divided church is a repeated theme in 1 Corinthians. (See 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 1 Corinthians 3 for examples.)

This leads Paul to write, “When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk” (vv. 20-21). The focus is on the problems within the community of believers.

Verse 22 continues, “What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” It appears the divisions in the gathered body are not just theological or based on a preferred leader, like earlier divisions mentioned in the book of 1 Corinthians. With the phrase “humiliate those who have nothing,” there's a layer of socioeconomic division.

Paul concludes, “What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this

Action step: As a way to prepare for love feast, read 1 Corinthians, focusing particularly on chapters 10-15. Use this time of meditation and reflection to consider if there is a need to ask for forgiveness and attempt reconciliation before the Maundy Thursday feast.



“ Discerning the body is to place a high value on the community of believers and to partake in the meal in a way that honors and loves each other. ”

matter I do not commend you!” Instead, he advises, “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation...” (vv. 33-34). The problem is the lack of loving one another. Or, to put it another way, it appears to be a loveless love feast; it is a selfish, self-centered feast.

It is significant to note that the chapters just before and after, chapters 10 and 12, address the church as the body of Christ. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Clearly the body of Christ is not limited to the focus on the bread they were eating.

Along with the person of Jesus, the bread itself also seems to represent the people of God. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). Notice again the focus on the people: “... we who are many are one body.” Therefore, they all “partake of the one bread.”


An older rendering of this verse, the King James Version, provides more illumination. This rendering ties the community to the bread so closely that it reads, “For we being many are one bread, and one body.” Thus, it seems clear that the church people are the body of Christ, and that the relationship between the people and how they treat each other in the partaking of the Lord’s supper matters.

1 Corinthians 12:13 also addresses unity amongst the divisions: “For in the Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Here the emphasis is on the unity in the body and the drink is of the Spirit, not the wine.

Verses 22-25 can be applied to the Lord’s supper practices. “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable

members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” Less honorable members were not being given the same honor and respect as those who were more honorable, or possibly of a greater socioeconomic status.

Thus, discerning the body is to place a high value on the community of believers and to partake in the meal in a way that honors and loves each other. The unworthy manner of how the Corinthian church participated in the Lord’s supper was producing division, sickness, judgment, condemnation, alienation. This was truly an unworthy manner.

When the Lord’s supper is convened in a way that honors Christ and his body, the reverse becomes true. It then brings healing, life, grace, forgiveness, unity, and reconciliation. It becomes a proclamation of the Lord’s redemptive reconciliation. 

Brian Mackie is pastor of White Branch and Nettle Creek Churches of the Brethren in Hagerstown, Ind.



The roots of love feast

by Tom Wagner

Most adults know the drill. A child asks some deceptively simple question like, “Why is the sky blue?” or “Why do geese fly south for the winter?” We answer as best we can, but it opens the door to a long string of follow-up questions—most of them starting with that little word “Why.”

Years ago, friends of mine had two pre-school age daughters. The mother had a practice of ending these infinite interrogations, especially when both her knowledge and patience were exhausted, by saying, “Because God made it that way.” At the time, it seemed like a clever response. However, in spite of her theological correctness, I suspect her girls eventually figured out that their mom used the phrase when she didn’t want to admit that she was out of answers.

At a later stage of childhood, kids begin to notice incongruities in the world—not only inconsistencies between adult words and deeds, but also the things that don’t quite add up. Part of the story is missing. Perhaps it’s some family secret adults would rather avoid revealing. While kids at that stage might stop asking questions, they often attempt finding the missing puzzle pieces on their own.

My initial inquiries into Dunker history and practices felt a bit like uncovering old family secrets. I understood there was something different about being Brethren, but couldn’t quite put my finger on it. As a child growing up in an eastern Pennsylvania congregation during the 1960s, I noticed little incongruities I couldn’t quite explain—differences in clothing, the style of our meetinghouse, baptism, views about peace.

The congregation generally avoided discussing Brethren history and tradition. I suspect most folks simply took these things for granted. Had I known even enough to know how to ask, they likely would have given brief explanations, but they weren’t going to volunteer anything. Others were

apathetic about anything historical. In addition, a significant number intentionally shunned references to Dunker distinctives in a drive to fit into a generic Anglo-American civic and religious culture.

Elder Frank Layser was the first person I ever heard publicly discuss Brethren history and tradition. He was an older member of the congregation. Though he was clean-shaven, he dressed plainly. By this point in time, the congregation had a salaried pastor, but out of respect Brother Layser was occasionally asked to preach. He was not a dynamic speaker. Indeed, I remember my uncles complaining privately that he was boring. In spite of that, I paid attention when he spoke because he told stories about our past.

Eventually I figured out the key to the incongruities I observed. For more than two-thirds of our history, Brethren had been nonconformists and unapologetic about it. It wasn’t a matter of being contrary. We simply had a different way of looking at the world. That nonconformist lifestyle had a certain consistency and logic about it, which began to break down in the 20th century as we attempted to assimilate to mainstream Anglo-American culture.

The individuals who formed the first congregation in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708 were all under the age of 30. They had asked questions that led them to leave the state-sponsored churches of their original homelands. That action often cost them their livelihood and citizenship and even earned them jail time. They weren’t satisfied with the answer, “We’ve always done it that way.”

So, as they found places of refuge, they found people like themselves who sought to get back to the roots of the Christian faith. Together they studied the New Testament and early church history to learn more about the example and teachings of Jesus and life in the early Christian community.



“ That nonconformist lifestyle had a certain consistency and logic about it, which began to break down in the 20th century as we attempted to assimilate. ”

In community

One thing that became clear to them was that it was important to be part of a faith community. As separatists, they had tried being Christian on their own and decided that didn't work very well. This led them to form a new faith community. Historian Don Durnbaugh characterized the early Brethren as open to new insights concerning faith and practice, while testing those ideas by scripture and a consensus of the faith community.

Three scripture passages have especially informed Brethren love feast: John 13:1-17, Matthew 26:26-29, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. What we learn from these texts is that Jesus and his disciples met to share a meal together. It was the season of Passover, the springtime Jewish feast remembering their liberation from Egyptian slavery centuries earlier. This was the story of God sending Moses to demand that pharaoh "Let my people go!" Their experience at Sinai, 40 years in the desert, and finally crossing Jordan into Canaan molded these people into a nation. This is what Passover remembers.

An important part of today's Passover ritual is that the youngest person asks a series of questions starting with, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" This is a great way to pass on traditions. In recent years, my congregation has adapted those questions for the celebration of love feast. We too are reminded why we do what we do, remembering God's saving grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

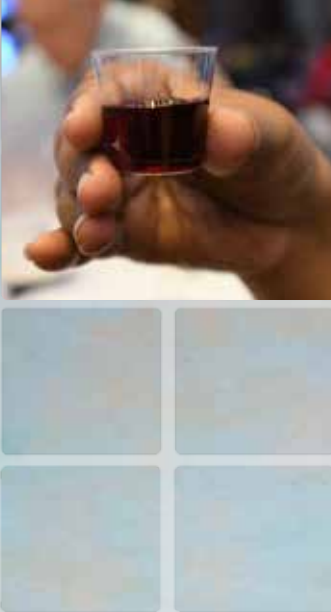
Of the three passages mentioned, Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11 is the oldest. His purpose in this letter was to bring unity to the factions of the Corinthian church. Here he not only gives an account of the Lord's supper, which had already become a custom among Christians; he reminds them that they must get right with God and each other before participating in the ritual.

During love feast, we sometimes read that passage in the early moments set aside for self-examination. Other times we read passages in Matthew 5 or 18 in which Jesus taught about reconciling ourselves to each other. In years past, this process was lengthy, with deacons and elders visiting each household to ask a series of questions. It was a serious attempt to resolve difficulties before love feast so that they could truly celebrate as a unified group. In many ways, that practice functioned like confession in other Christian traditions.

Washing feet

Footwashing was a common practice in ancient times. It was an act of hospitality to wash a guest's feet after they had traveled dusty roads. At the last supper, none of the disciples humbled themselves to perform the task. Luke says they argued about whom among them was the most important.

At this point, Jesus took matters into his own hands and began washing their feet. He was a leader leading by example. Other denominations do practice footwashing, but usually it's not connected to the Lord's supper. Priests, popes, bishops, even the Queen of England wash the feet of



“ Perhaps it was the power of the story, the weight of tradition, the physical reenactment, or some combination that helped me sense the presence of “the cloud of witnesses.” ”

folks lower in the hierarchy. For them it is an example of humble leadership, being a servant of all.

Brethren have read the passage in a more egalitarian sense, assuming that the example Jesus set is for all Christians, not just those in leadership. In addition, we have thought about footwashing as a cleansing exercise, recalling what Jesus said to Peter when he questioned him about washing feet. Seems like a good fit right after the examination service.

Former missionary and seminary professor Chalmer Faw told this story from his days in Nigeria in the 1940s. Garkida, where he and his wife were stationed, was the central church in the Bura language area. When love feast was held, members from mission points in the smaller villages would gather at Garkida.

One day the evangelist from a village among the Whona tribe asked why they always had to travel to Garkida for love feast. They would like to celebrate in their village occasionally. The evangelist said the local members would take care of everything. People from Garkida had only to come and participate.

Indeed everything was ready as promised. As they began to wash feet outside under a tree, Faw noticed that non-members from the village were paying attention. The crowd of spectators grew. After the service, the village chief told Faw through an interpreter that he wished to be a part of it, along with his whole village.

The chief was an old man and remembered when British officers first colonized the area. He remembered how the British conscripted the young men for work crews and the army, and treated the young women dishonorably. This was the first time he had seen a white man get down on his knees and wash a Black man’s feet. If that was what this new faith was about, he wanted to be a part of it.

A cloud of witnesses

I remember my first experience of love feast. I hadn’t felt pressured or manipulated into church membership or “getting saved.” I was drawn to it. The steps on my own faith quest seemed as natural as weekly attendance of Sunday school and worship. Even being allowed to watch love feast from the back benches felt like a rite of passage, in that I had to convince my parents that I was mature enough to sit without adult supervision with other preteens and adolescents.

I witnessed something larger than the nearly 200 folks gathered around the tables. Perhaps it was the power of the story, the weight of tradition, the physical reenactment, or some combination of these elements that helped me sense the presence of “the cloud of witnesses.”

The reverence permeating these ordinances bore the danger of becoming deadly somber. I’m also sure I wasn’t the first Dunker boy to consider the kiss following footwashing a bit “icky.” Yet I remember how the spontaneous laughter of a couple of matronly sisters cinched my decision to join the Christian community.

As I recall they were having a little trouble maneuvering between the bench and table during footwashing, when one of the women landed on her seat a bit more forcefully than she had intended. The resulting laughter reminded me that these timeless rituals in which the church symbolized life on our best behavior—serving, sharing, and reconciling—were taking place in the real world in the midst of our human imperfections. I could be a part of that. **W**

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren and serves Muskegon County (Mich.) Cooperating Churches as clerk and archivist. This article is adapted from a sermon he preached at Muskegon (Mich.) Church of the Brethren.

The 100-day dress challenge

by Mandy North, Nancy Schaeffer, and Karen Croushorn

Would you wear the same dress 100 days in a row? This was the challenge put out by a small sustainable clothing company, with the reward of a gift card for those who completed it. Partly as a pragmatic decision and partly out of curiosity, three of us took on the challenge in 2021. Here are some of our reflections.

We all took on the challenge as a way to cut down on decision fatigue. During a stressful pandemic year, wearing the same dress for 100 days did indeed simplify many things, including what to wear. There is a reason why many decision-makers develop a personal uniform—one less thing to think about. It makes packing for travel much simpler and lighter as well. It also made at least one of us understand why those in generations before always wore an apron.

The challenge made us examine our clothing choices in a deeper way. This dress was the most expensive everyday garment any of us had purchased, and the reason it was expensive was because it was sustainably made, taking into consideration environmental impact and fair wages for the makers. Often it's the environment or those making the garments who bear that cost if we do not. Our decisions affect others, and we are called to be good stewards and loving neighbors. Our clothing choices can play a part.

One of the most unexpected benefits was the community. We joined an online group of other challenge participants. A lot of life happens in 100 days. When compared with much of social media, it

was a nice little encouraging corner of the internet to be a part of.

A few other takeaways:

- People didn't really notice what we wore nearly as much as we expected. If anyone did notice and actually said something—well, it's a great conversation starter. And the people who really care about you will love you regardless.

- We had much less laundry. Fewer items and less often. It turns out merino wool just doesn't capture stink as much as most other fibers. This cut back on environmental impact—water, energy, heat, and detergent—as well as time spent doing laundry. Bonus wins for all.


- A versatile dress can work for hiking and camping, and also for attending a wedding, depending on what you pair with it.

- Wool has great temperature regulation properties—warm in winter, cool in summer.

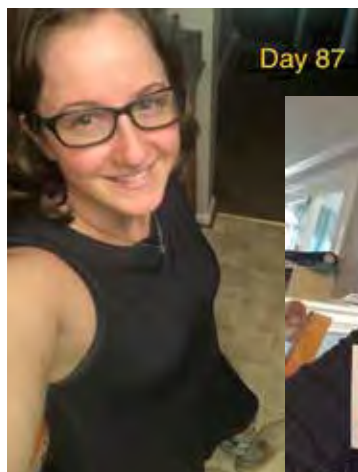
- We were privileged to be able to spend this amount on a garment of clothing. Many cannot.

- Wearing the same thing for 100 days can get monotonous. Some of us like color and variety more than we realized. And some of us really missed jeans.

- You may have to examine some of your own internal stuff and cultural conditioning when your kids want to wear the same thing every day and you find yourself wanting to say no.

In the end, wearing a wool dress for 100 days won't change the world. It may have changed us and some of our habits though, and even made those around us more curious. And maybe that is one way to continue the work of Jesus—peacefully, simply, and together. 

Mandy North, Nancy Schaeffer, and Karen Croushorn are members of Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren, where North is pastor.



Nancy Schaeffer



Karen Croushorn



Mandy North

“ . . .we are called to be good stewards and loving neighbors. Our clothing choices can play a part. ”



Compost happens

by Hope Staton

In her sermon “Ashes to Soil, Dust to Dirt,” Anna Woofenden says:

“God is the ultimate recycler. The Divine Composter. Taking all that has been, all that we’ve used, our best bits and our kind of slimy bits. The ends of this and that. The pain of loss. The tantalizing crumbs of those joyful moments and the leftovers we’ve clung to for too long. God takes all of that and says, ‘Okay, great. What are we going to do with this next?’”

Compost, for the uninitiated, is a collection of decomposing organic matter that is gathered together in a pile, usually balanced between green matter (like kitchen scraps or grass clippings) and brown matter (like dried leaves or newspaper). It’s kept damp and periodically turned in order to add air and allow for the development of microorganisms. This eventually breaks everything down causing it to become a nutrient-rich soil to be added back into the earth to feed whatever is destined to grow next. Nothing is wasted.

Compost is often a dirty, smelly, sometimes tedious process that can be slowed down or sped up depending on

what we are willing or able to add to the pile and how balanced it is, but the transformation is happening either way and cannot be stopped by us (no matter how slow it may seem at times). Well-tended compost can transform quite quickly in a matter of weeks, while neglected or even completely ignored heaps of organic matter may take months and months to transform, but no matter what *compost happens*.

The bones in Ezekiel’s vision aren’t just an implication of recent death, but of long decay. They are dry, perhaps on the verge of dust, reminding us of Genesis 3:19: “You return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” They are closer to humus than human (if such a separation can ever really be made), and therefore the implication is the transformation that is about to occur by the hands of God is beyond mere restoration, but the resurrection of something entirely new.

Whether in our own individual lives or in the life of the church we are peri-

odically tempted to cling to what has come before. To hold tight to plans and ideas which didn’t work or haven’t come to fruition. To lament what is dying and becoming the past. But where we too often see failure and bareness, God sees a new purpose and potential. Where we are tempted to become bogged down by what is lacking, unfinished, and not like it once was, God says, “This is the starting place for resurrection.” Like the dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision, God promises that there is no situation that is so far decayed that God cannot create a new life out of it, even if it is beyond our current imagination.

The balance of green and brown doesn’t have to be perfect. Compost still happens. During times when the heap isn’t turned as often as it should be, compost happens. No matter what stage in the process we find ourselves, or how dry the bones or unlikely a transformation seems, the Divine Composter never stops working, and resurrection happens. **ZU**

Hope Staton is a student at Bethany Theological Seminary. She helped develop a community garden there.

The Parable of the Compost

by Gimbiya Kettering

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:8, NIV).

We call it the Parable of the Sower—though we are not the Sower. By most interpretations, God is the Sower and the seed is the Message. Which leaves us to be the dirt.

Dirt makes me think of dust to dust and ashes to ashes, which makes me think of my own uncomfortably close mortality. I prefer to think about what kind of dirt I am. The Sower sows, and there is not good seed or bad seed. It is the soil that is differentiated: hard-packed, shallow, rocky, weedy, pest-infested, and good. I want to believe that I am the good soil.

My grandfathers were farmers—as were their fathers and grandfathers. But I can never know what my agriculturally oriented ancestors thought of the Parable of the Sower. However, if my faith is anything like theirs, I imagine they had some questions about the Parable of the Sower because a good farmer does not just sow seed. If good crops come from good soil, then a farmer must know that soil can be exhausted and it can be improved. Soil is living and must be cared for. Therefore, I am the descendent of people who mulched, irrigated, and fertilized the soil. I am the good soil, even if this is a fallow season for my faith.

Maybe I believe this because of my mother and grandmothers, who kept gardens, planting food, herbs flowers side by side. In my family, for as long as I can

remember, the kitchen has had a bucket for scraps. Every tea bag, onion skin, and eggshell has been dutifully put into that bucket, and every evening someone has taken it out to the compost pile.

I live in a rowhouse. My garden is a peach tree and a few pots on the deck. Still, I got a compost tumbler and continued the tradition.

Compost is made of the scraps—the peels, the browned outer leaves, the discarded grounds. It feels sometimes like my faith is made of fragments of scripture I have memorized, lines from sermons that moved me, interpretations that do not feel as true as they once did. Scraps.

The first time I saw the worms in my compost, I was surprised. I didn't put them there so there must have been worm eggs on something peeled or chopped from my CSA. Worms are a sign of good, living soil.

I imagine that Mary had a compost bucket, probably a clay pot, and that it was one of Jesus' jobs to empty it each evening. I imagine Jesus, turning the compost pile mixing the old and the new. He would have seen rebirth alongside disintegration as sprouts reached toward the sun.


Sometimes I imagine that we will find a scroll, in a pot in a cave, that recorded when Jesus told the Parable of the Compost. Other times I can only believe the story was written on a papyrus already turned to powder and brushed into the compost pile like dry leaves.

My compost tends to be too wet. I add the dried leaves from the peach. For

me, spinning the compost tumbler is an act of mindfulness. It is heavy, there are sometimes slimy drips I do not want to touch, and I try to rescue the worms that have gotten out through the airholes.

The cycles of compost—filling, resting, harvest—are unpredictable but steady. I wait for my faith to shift, the moment it goes from slimy and slick to rich and earthy. The elements of my old beliefs that had browned and soured are becoming ready for new spiritual growth. From the beginning, separating the water from the land, the work of God is making good soil.

Through the cold winter, my compost bin mostly rests. Yet, on warmer days I spin it and am surprised to see the worms still there, still wiggling and pink. I add another layer of dried leaves, hoping it will keep them warm the way the old parts of my faith are sometimes, suddenly familiar and comforting. It is not that my old beliefs and understandings are thrown out, as much as it is that they are spun around by my experiences. Decay leads to renewed nutrients.

In the spring, I have more compost than I need to start a few pots with tomatoes, cilantro, and basil. I share compost with neighbors starting a raised bed garden, a spoonful for a toddler putting seeds in a paper cup, or I take a bagful for a city tree box at the end of the block. As in the miracle of the bread and the fishes, I have never run out. I have enough of the good soil to share. 

Gimbiya Kettering is a writer and storyteller who has worked for various Church of the Brethren agencies. She lives in Washington, D.C.



“ The elements of my old beliefs that had browned and soured are becoming ready for new spiritual growth. ”





Klub Boks



Hari K Patibanda

Our call to creation care

by Ingrid Rogers

In the biblical account of *Genesis 1*, humans are put in charge of creation as caretakers. We have proven to be unreliable stewards, contributing much toward destroying our planetary habitat. This behavior has contributed to the devastation of the land, led to severe droughts and desertification, and caused the suffering of animals and the destruction of species. Currently, no region of the planet is spared the painful consequences of climate change and environmental degradation caused by our unfaithful stewardship.

In a spirit of confession and with a prayer for change, I went back to the *Genesis* account and wrote the following reflection, creating haikus followed by free verse, pondering each day of creation. Now, more than ever, it is time to confess our failings and embrace our calling to be stewards of God's gifts. The "beginning" in the opening stanza is the present. What follows is a vision of the future—the things we could do as more responsible caretakers of the earth.

Creation revisited

*Like the morning sun
Breaking through pollution haze
Out of death we rise*

In the beginning, earth and its creatures were plagued by droughts, storms, fires, floods, starvation, injustice, and disease. Confused, we search for solutions. We noticed a ray of sunlight break through the darkness and saw the beauty of creation we had been charged to take care of. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

*Watery blessing
Caresses of soft rain
From sky to deep sea*

We began to clean up the oceans, removed mountains of dumped plastic, passed laws against overfishing, helped coral reefs renew themselves. We limited greenhouse gas emissions that hung over the land like a suffocating cloak. Blue skies returned, and we saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.





*Filling earth and sky
Swarms of living creatures roam
Colors multiply*

We recognized the interconnectedness
of all living things, not just among humans.
Animals, like us, deserved
care and protection from abuse.
We switched to a meatless diet, ceased
to exploit the essence of living beings
for selfish gain, stopped cruel practices,
and admired the splendor of the species
that co-inhabited our common planet.
And there was evening and there was morning,
the fifth day.

*Made in God's image
Caretakers of the garden
Both male and female*

We stood together in the fight
against hunger, poverty, and injustice.
We recognized the treasure of diversity:
Black, brown, and white, all people together;
humans, animals, plants, all of one substance.
We supported leaders who would protect creation.
Replacing hatred with love,
freed from greed and selfishness,
confessing, we made the turn.
And there was evening and there was morning,
the sixth day.

*Earth's wellness restored
Blessings received and given
Time to celebrate*

We looked at the now unpolluted sky,
admired the brilliant stars,
breathed the clean air,
joined hands in a dance, rejoiced,
and saw that keeping the garden
was indeed very good
and that we were part of a Spirit
that made it so. ❧

Ingrid Rogers, professor emerita of Manchester University (North Manchester, Ind.) and a former pastor, has published books and resources on peace and justice issues. A member of Manchester Church of the Brethren, she is studying Theopoetics and Writing at Bethany Theological Seminary.

*Growth on fruitful land
Vegetation yielding seed
Hyacinths in bloom*

As allies of the earth, we planted trees,
prohibited deforestation, stopped poisoning
the land with chemicals, reused and recycled.
We danced under redwoods
and prayed on holy mountains.
We drew strength from the land,
harvesting and sharing what we grew.
And we saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning,
the third day.

*Day apart from night
Light in the dome of the sky
Days, years, and seasons*

When it became clear
that extracting fossil fuels
would bring certain death
to future generations,
we harnessed the heat of the sun,
the strength of the wind,
and the steadiness of waves and rivers.
We knew energy as gift and birthright—
free, safe, and accessible to all.
And we saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning,
the fourth day.

“ We drew strength from the land, harvesting and
sharing what we grew. And we saw that it was good. ”



Uncharted territory

The pandemic experience of retirement communities

by David Lawrenz

The Church of the Brethren has a long and storied history of providing benevolent, compassionate, and exceptional care to older adults. This history dates back to at least 1889 with the development of small group homes for widows and orphans. Over 130-plus years, these organizations have faced scores of misfortunes and hardships that tested their faith and fortitude, that threatened their health and even their existence. Now these communities are facing a unique challenge and find themselves in uncharted territory.

Our Church of the Brethren-related retirement communities face significant challenges as essential organizations. They can't simply respond to the pandemic by temporarily closing or sending their staff home to work virtually. These organizations and their staff are essential to provide vital,

hands-on personal care and services, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

From day one these communities encountered all the uncharted and unknown aspects of the virus. What are the symptoms? How contagious is it? How does it spread? Does it survive on hard surfaces? How do we disinfect and sanitize? What's the incubation period? How long must infected employees quarantine? What kind of personal protective equipment is safe and effective? Can the virus travel through air-handling systems? How do we test? How often must we test? What about contact tracing? The complicated questions and issues seemed endless.

Government agencies stepped in to provide answers, but also regulatory oversight. The communities were forced to comply with an array of rules, regulations, and mandates

The Fellowship of Brethren Homes includes 20 retirement communities across the United States: **Brethren Retirement Community** in Greenville, Ohio; **Brethren Village** in Lititz, Pa.; **Bridgewater (Va.) Retirement Community**; **Casa de Modesto**, Calif.; **The Cedars** in McPherson, Kan.; **Cross**

Keys Village in New Oxford, Pa.; **Fahrney Keedy Home and Village** in Boonsboro, Md.; **Garden Terrace** in Wenatchee, Wash.; **Good Shepherd Home** in Fostoria, Ohio; **Hillcrest** in La Verne, Calif.; **Londonderry Village** in Palmyra, Pa.; **Northaven Retirement Residences** in Seattle, Wash.; **Palms Estates** of Highlands County Florida,

Fla.; **The Palms** of Sebring, Fla.; **Peter Becker Community** in Harleysville, Pa.; **Pinecrest Community** in Mount Morris, Ill.; **Spurgeon Manor** in Dallas Center, Iowa; **Timbercrest Senior Living** in North Manchester, Ind.; **The Village at Morrisons Cove** in Martinsburg, Pa.; and **West View Healthy Living** in Wooster, Ohio.

“ Being deeply rooted in faith assures peace and security amid the uncertainty of uncharged times. ”

often at odds with one another. The local department of health suggested this, while the governor or the state department of health required that, and the federal government demanded something else. Existing infection-control policies and procedures were frequently revised to match the evolving data and research and to accommodate the ever-changing rules and guidelines. Navigating the regulatory landscape always is challenging. It has been especially difficult during the pandemic.

Early on, all efforts were concentrated on protecting residents and employees, taking extreme measures to prevent the transmission of the virus and potentially fatal outcomes. It was a difficult and complicated time. Staff were distressed when residents became infected and distraught if a resident succumbed to the virus. One community grieved greatly after their first virus-related death. They questioned all their careful efforts in trying to protect the resident. Their heartbreak was eased by a comforting letter from the resident's son assuring them they did all they could and commending them for the loving care given his father.

Soon regulatory agencies required precautionary but highly restrictive visitation protocols. Staff were saddened by the heart-wrenching separation and isolation that followed. For weeks, husbands and wives were unable to be together to hold hands, hug, or kiss. Children were unable to visit and provide emotional support. Residents were unable to congre-

gate with friends for meals, activities, or worship.

Not surprisingly, the forced separation resulted in physical and psychological decline for many residents. In one circumstance, the condition of an attentive, healthy, care-giving husband declined precipitously. Being deprived of his daily visits and unable to attend to the needs of his wife took a physical toll. Soon he was admitted to receive care for his own health needs. However, now back together and having recovered, he and his wife are thriving and even are assisting staff by busing tables after meals.

In another situation, the daughter of a resident creatively resolved her separation by becoming an employee of the community. This gave her regular access to her mother and the opportunity to provide reassuring visits to mitigate her decline. Sadly, her mother eventually died. But the daughter stayed on to serve other residents to whom she was endeared.

Likewise, staff were creative in finding ways to provide comforting and uplifting contact with family and friends. Throughout the pandemic, staff have been intent on battling the ill effects of separation and isolation. They helped residents connect with families via Facetime, Zoom, and other video-conferencing platforms. They created designated spaces, indoors and outdoors, that could be reserved for in-person yet socially distanced visits. Staff coordinated “window visits,” providing special devices to accommodate conversations with family members separated by glass.

Parades were organized. Vehicles packed with family and friends and plastered with encouraging signs drove through the community, bolstering spirits. In one instance, a family pulled a flatbed trailer loaded with kids, grandkids, and great grandkids. Although brief, these types of efforts were heart-warming and immensely appreciated.

At administrative levels, regular and transparent communication became essential. Group messaging via phone and email were frequent, and daily newsletters and in-house television broadcasts became routine—all for the purpose of providing updates about rates of infection and new precautionary guidelines. These were in addition to the many personal contacts with families.

While protecting the health and well-being of residents and staff, retirement communities also confronted significant business challenges, such as shortages of supplies and increased costs. Staffing concerns became critical as the already tight labor market tightened further. Some workers resigned to stay home and care for their young children. Some workers resigned due to the elevated health risk. Some older workers retired early. As competition for employees intensi-



Pinecrest Community



Cross Keys Village

fied, some left for other opportunities. Staff took on new and unfamiliar responsibilities to cover understaffed departments or functions. Staff who were committed to stay faced long hours, fewer days off, and the threat of burnout. Staffing issues remain a major concern.

Stable rates of occupancy are essential for retirement communities. Regrettably, the pandemic caused many potential residents to postpone their moves, resulting in lower rates of occupancy—which of course means reduced revenue.

Financial pressures ensued. Communities experienced unprecedented challenges caused by reduced revenue combined with higher costs. They face significant tests—to reverse the decline in occupancy, to unearth new sources of revenue, and to find creative ways to control costs without affecting the quality of services provided.

The pandemic remains worrisome, stressful, demanding, and taxing. How are these essential workers dealing with it all? What's being done to alleviate concerns and stress?

- **They are bolstered by prayers, cards, and letters of support** from friends, family members, residents, congregations, and other unexpected sources. Prayers are extremely helpful and much valued.

- **Gifts and expressions of appreciation are common experiences.** One board of directors issued an appeal and raised more than \$60,000 to provide gifts to employees. The letters that accompanied the donations were truly amazing and encouraging. In another community, an anonymous donor sent a gift to show appreciation to the hardworking team. This motivated others to come forward and contribute in the same spirit. In another community, the state representative provided lunch for the day shift health care team, while an anonymous donor provided gift cards to all the other team members.

- **Communities are reaching out for support.** One CEO commented, "So many organizations, when under stress, turn inward to solve their challenges. We chose to reach outward by involving stakeholders like staff, residents, families, the church, and donors to help us thrive during a challenging time. The outpouring of financial and moral support has

been, and continues to be, incredible."


- **Partnering with other similarly affected organizations was a huge benefit.** Whether it was with organizations in the same community or state, or with like-minded colleagues within the Fellowship of Brethren Homes, or with other peace church-related communities, the sharing of problems, solutions, concerns, anxiety, and words of support was beneficial.

- **Staff have sought inspiration in their residents.** For one CEO, help was always nearby. "When I had a bad day, I spent extra time with our residents. It reminds me of why we do what we do." The residents of our communities are, and always have been, a source of support and encouragement.

- **Likewise, the employees of these communities are a source of strength and resilience.** One CEO commended his staff for their dedication and flexibility, especially as they covered for co-workers who were ill and quarantined. Another complimented team members for how they learned to work together, communicated better, came to know each other better, and deeply supported each other through this difficult time. Without exception, all our communities thrived in this challenging time because of the hard work and dependability of their employees.

- **And, without exception, all our communities thrive because of their roots within the Church of the Brethren—their faith-based philosophies, values, and traditions.** Although the words communities use to express this may differ, all have a mission to serve older adults, and they do so in ways consistent with the values and principles of the Church of the Brethren: living as Jesus lived; following Jesus' message of life, love, and hope; attending to spiritual needs as well as physical needs of food, health, rest, comfort, friendship, and unconditional acceptance.

Being deeply rooted in faith assures peace and security amid the uncertainty of uncharted times. Such are the stories of our Church of the Brethren-related retirement communities, yesterday and today—in spite of, and because of, a dreadful pandemic.

These essential communities continue to create new stories. Some are heart-breaking stories of sadness, struggles, and challenges. Some are heart-warming stories of generosity, love, and inspiration. They are life-changing stories about good people trying to do the best they can and honoring God, all written in the context of living out one's faith and values. Thanks be to God. 

David Lawrenz is executive director of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes, an organization of the Church of the Brethren-related retirement communi-

A crack, a cord, and a college song

by Robbie Miller

As the 13th century Persian poet and scholar Rumi once observed, “The wound is the place where the light enters you.” Leonard Cohen expressed a similar idea in his song “Anthem”:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in*

On Feb. 1, our campus was cracked open and every member wounded when campus police officer John Painter and campus safety officer J. J. Jefferson were killed while protecting us from a deeply disturbed young man with a gun. That was the hardest part—losing our “dynamic duo” in a senseless act of violence we thought would never happen on our quiet little campus.

The hopeful part is that, as Rumi and Cohen knew, the crack and the wound are how the light gets in. Five days after the shooting, a standing room-only crowd of students, faculty, and staff gathered in Cole Hall to light candles honoring the lives of J. J. and John, to declare that love is stronger than hate, to remind us of our connection to each other, and to begin the healing process.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NIV).


As these words remind us, we are better and stronger together than alone. We have felt that since the loss of J. J. and John. The outpouring of support from alumni, the town of Bridgewater, and the larger community has truly helped us rise up, kept our hearts warm, and given us strength to move forward since that awful day.

This tragedy reminds us that Bridgewater College is a cord of not just three strands, but a thousand strands, interwoven with memories, connected by generations, bound together with love.

On the morning after the shooting, a large group of students, faculty, staff, and alumni gathered in front of the Forrer Learning Commons and sang our *alma mater*. Some came to express their love for the college, some to take a stand against violence, some to find comfort in the company of others, and perhaps some who didn't know what else to do.

*Bridgewater Fair, my heart's sweet care,
I love thy laughing waters;
I love thy walls and storied halls,
I love thy sons and daughters.*

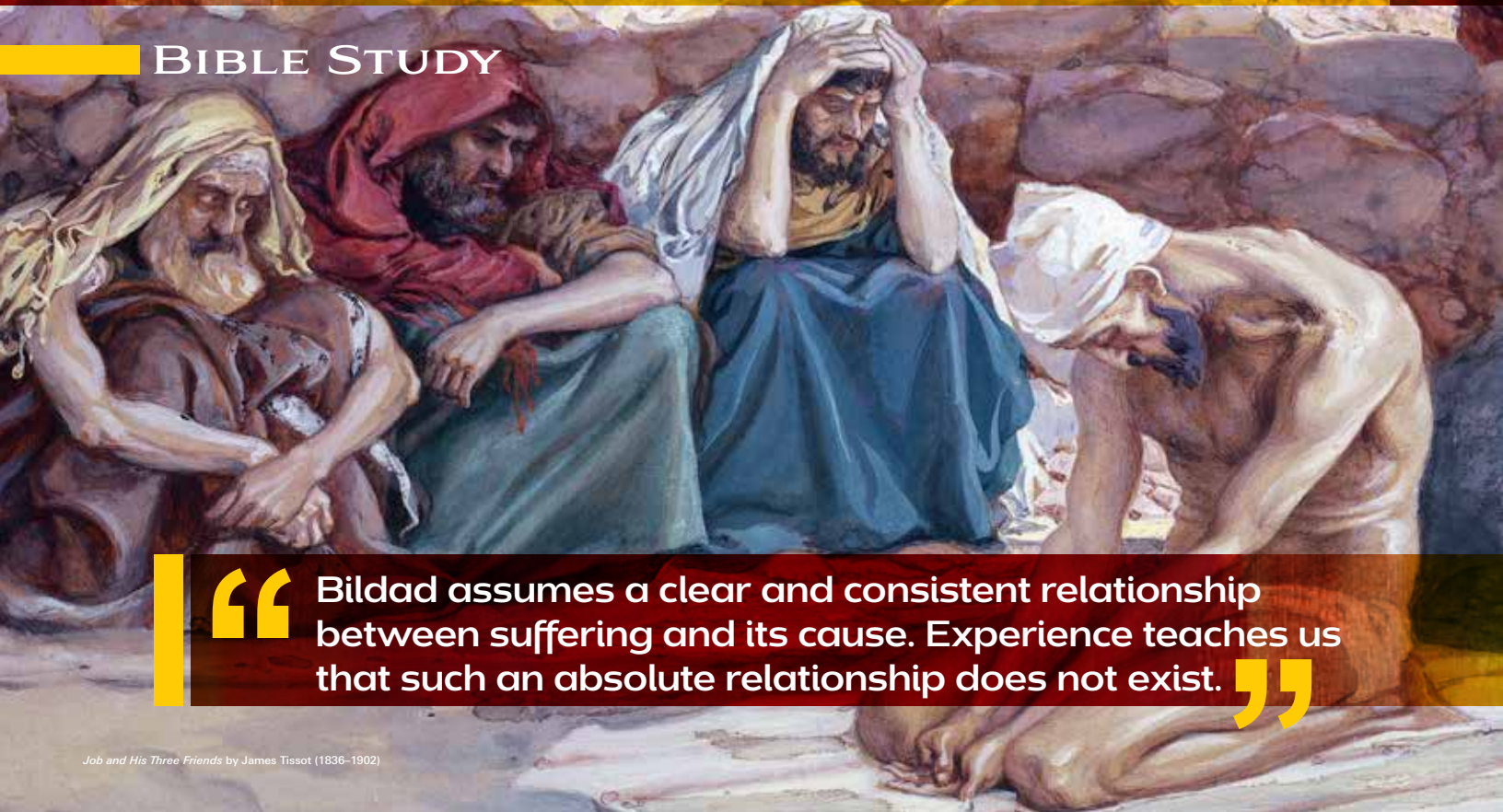
Whatever the reason, there was a power in that singing I had never felt before. Perhaps “Bridgewater Fair” has been sung more beautifully, but never with the emotion and meaning so present that day. By raising our collective voices in song, we assured ourselves and each other that we are not alone and that the ties binding us together are stronger than the forces seeking to tear us apart.

A *crack* where the light gets in, a *cord* that keeps us strong, a *song* that assures us we are not alone: Such simple, ordinary things are surely no match for the violence and hatred that affected our campus and infect our world. Or are they? 

Robbie Miller is college chaplain at Bridgewater (Va.) College.



“By raising our collective voices in song, we assured ourselves and each other that we are not alone.”



“ Bildad assumes a clear and consistent relationship between suffering and its cause. Experience teaches us that such an absolute relationship does not exist. ”

Job and His Three Friends by James Tissot (1836-1902)

Bildad misunderstands

Job 8:1-10, 20-22

by **Gene Roop**

Scholars have long recognized the connection of Job to ancient wisdom’s focus on a predictable act/predictable consequence sequence. Sages inside and outside Israel observed that the relationship between action and consequence defined much of life.

For wisdom, this principle of justice was foundational in all aspects of life, including human behavior. Hence, if I want friends, I must act toward others as I want others to act toward me. If I want to have enough to eat, a place to live, and a mobile phone, I must work hard and earn money. If I want to remain healthy, I must eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep.

It is easy to see that the book of

Job has its feet rooted in the world of wisdom. The sages insisted that God consistently acted to ensure that justice was done. God responded fairly and justly based on a person’s behavior. If Job acted wisely and justly, then he would receive a just response from God. This was the perspective of Job’s friends.

For the most part, Job agrees. But he does not agree that the disasters that have befallen him resulted from foolish or wicked behavior. Job insists both to his friends and to God that he did not deserve the disasters. He maintains that he is an innocent and righteous man.

Job is not simply a wisdom narrative. His friends insist that Job’s poetic

blasts at God prove that he deserved what happened to him. In fact, his rage against God echoes not wisdom but the complaint psalms, such as the one Jesus quoted: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” (Psalm 22:1).

Repeatedly, Job’s outbursts employ the language of anger and anguish found in the Psalms. Rather than a complaint psalm, the sages turned to a wisdom psalm like Psalm 1: “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers. . . . They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do

not wither. In all that they do, they prosper” (vv. 1, 3).

Bildad, one of Job’s friends, points to Job’s attacks against God as troubling enough to warrant divine punishment. Job charges: “It is all one; therefore I say, [God] destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent” (Job 9:22-23).

Suffering and justice

Most folks inside and many outside the church and synagogue know the story of Job. People who have read the biblical book, and even some who haven’t, picture Job as a good person who suffered dreadfully even though he didn’t deserve it.

Parents who have lost children, children who are abused, people of color who are victims of discrimination and violence, and many others feel the stabbing, aching pain of undeserved attack and painful suffering. Clearly the pain and suffering of Job calls us to recognize and respond to undeserved pain and suffering wherever we see it.

In addition to the suffering of the innocent, a conversation between God and Satan in Job 1:6-12 points to another issue: Does Job revere God for nothing? As the story opens, God begins the conversation by affirming Job’s goodness and innocence: “There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil” (v. 8).

Satan points out that God has blessed Job’s work with food, family, wealth—everything a person might want. Would Job be faithful if he weren’t so richly rewarded? How will Job react if his goodness does not receive the reward he believes divine justice ensures? Disaster strikes Job again and again. Would Job still believe life is governed by a just God?

Bildad remains convinced that a just God’s justice does define life: “Does God distort justice? Does the Almighty

distort what is fair? . . . If you will seek God, appeal to the Almighty. If you are pure and without fault, certainly God will act on your behalf, restoring you to your rightful place” (8:3, 5-6, writer’s translation).

Whatever we may think of Bildad, he does not attack Job for past sin. However, Bildad insists that we must always remember the sacred relationship between act and consequence. Thus, Job can change his future by changing his behavior! Bildad maintains that Job’s future health, wealth, and family depend on changing his behavior *now*. A good future emerges with wise and just behavior.

Bildad today

We often criticize Bildad for his speech directed at Job, but we don’t get around to addressing the issues. Obviously, there is much truth in wisdom’s dogma. We recognize that respectful and wise actions are more likely to result in rewarding relationships than mean and foolish behavior. The future is affected by wise or foolish behavior. But does it always happen as we expect?

Bildad assumes a clear and consistent relationship between suffering and its cause. Experience teaches us that such an absolute relationship does not exist. Good actions are not always rewarded, nor are evil actions always punished. Sometimes the unprincipled flourish and the moral languish. We echo the psalmist: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Nevertheless, quite often we do act as if we can glean the cause from the result. The son of a family friend became addicted to drugs. No one ever said it directly to the parents, but the talk around the edges suggested that the son’s problem was likely the result of poor parenting. They referred to a familiar wisdom proverb: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Proverbs 22:6).

Unfortunately, parents can increase

their own suffering by assuming they are to blame for their children’s problems. Parents do make mistakes. But adult children may try to escape their own responsibility by blaming their parents.

Bildad makes a second assumption that we need to consider. Does God generate natural disasters to punish wrongdoers? Mentioning that assumption usually prompts a negative response: No, of course not!

Our generation has faced a viral pandemic that has killed millions around the world. Often, we try to figure out who is to blame. Some suggest this pandemic was brought by God to punish the United States for specific sins or general godlessness. The same response followed Katrina, the hurricane that killed almost 2,000 people in the area around New Orleans. Pandemics and other disasters do happen, but not as a tool of divine judgment. God sent Jesus not to destroy, but to deliver.

Finally, there is a third assumption: Bildad assumed that we can control God. If we do well, God will reward us. If we sin, God will punish. If it weren’t for the predictable relationship between behavior and result, why would people be good?

Jonah’s anger came from the realization that he could not control God’s response. Both Jonah and Nahum insisted that the horrific torture Assyria inflicted on Israel required divine punishment. Jonah raged because he “knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (Jonah 4:2b).

One of the hallmarks of our faith is that God, in Christ, promised to respond to sin and evil out of the uncontrollable mystery of divine compassion. We cannot control God. ❧

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.



Membership falls to near 90,000

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Church of the Brethren membership in the United States and Puerto Rico is just over 91,000, according to the most recent report in the 2021 *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* from Brethren Press. The 2021 *Yearbook*—published last fall—includes the 2020 statistical report and the 2021 directory for the denomination.

The directory features detailed information about Church of the Brethren structure and leadership, including listings of congregations, districts, ministers, and more. The statistical report on membership, worship attendance, giving, and more derives from self-reporting by congregations. Over recent decades, the number of congregations that submit reports has fallen off. The 2020 statistics reflect the reports returned by 481 (52 percent) of the churches in the denomination, which means *Yearbook* figures are approximate.

Denominations that are part of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion outside the US and Puerto Rico are not included in the directory or statistical report.

The *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* is published annually as a searchable document in pdf format. It may be purchased for \$24.95 at www.brethrenpress.com.

Statistics from 2020

The *Yearbook* reported 91,608 members in 24 districts and 915 local worshipping communities (congregations, fellowships, and new church projects) across the Church of the Brethren denomination in 2020. This represents a net loss of 7,072 members over the previous year.

Average worship attendance for the denomination was reported as 30,247.

The number of local worshipping communities in the denomination included 874 congregations, 29 fellowships, and 12 new church projects.

Comparisons over the years

The statistical report includes a comparison over five years, revealing that a decades-long gradual slide in membership is increasing year-on-year:

- In 2016, denominational membership was 111,413, a net loss of 1,225 over 2015.

- In 2017, the net membership loss increased to 2,172.

- In 2018, the net loss more than doubled to 4,813.

- In 2019, the net loss increased to 5,766.

- In 2020, the net loss was 7,072.

To compare total membership over a “baker’s dozen” years, for 2008 the *Yearbook* reported a total membership of 124,408. That year, when the Church of the Brethren celebrated its 300th anniversary, the denomination for the first time since the 1920s recorded a membership total below 125,000. In 2008, 66.2 percent of congregations reported.

A comparison of the number of local worshipping communities over five years reveals an annual loss, sharply increased in 2020:

- In 2016, there was a net loss of 6 local worshipping communities over the previous year, for a total of 1,015.

- In 2017, the net loss increased to 16.

- In 2018, the net loss was 5.

- In 2019, there was another net loss of 16.

- In 2020, the net loss was 63.

The loss of local worshipping communities represents those that have become inactive or have been closed by their districts (usually because of insurmountable membership losses or financial difficulties) and those that have left the denomination.

In the past couple of years the largest losses of congregations have happened in just a few districts, with three—Western Pennsylvania, West Marva, and

Southeastern—each losing from a dozen to more than 20 congregations. While some congregations left in recent years to join the breakaway Covenant Brethren Church, others chose to become independent.


Continuing trends in 2021

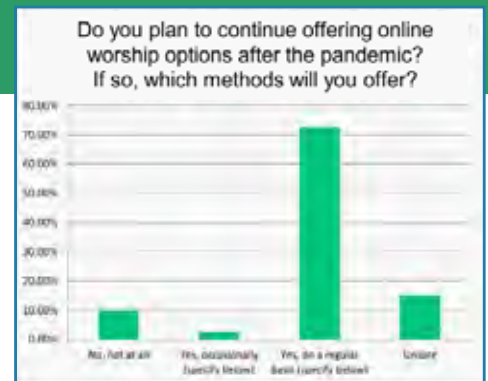
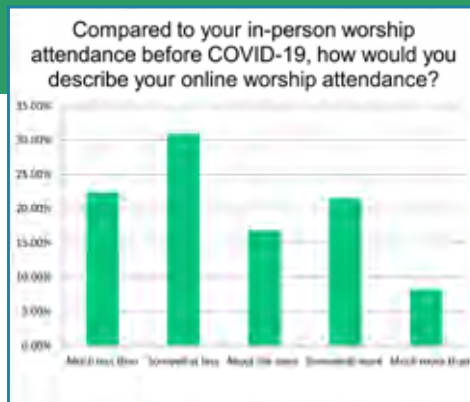
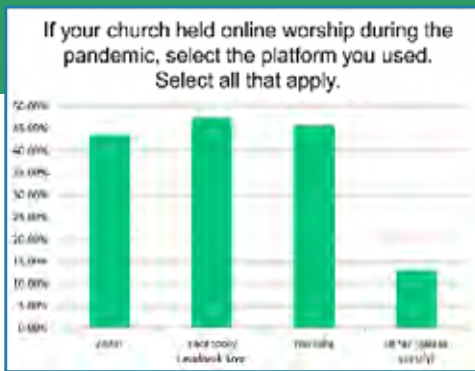
Two of the denomination’s 24 districts continued to lose significant numbers of congregations in 2021, in statistical reporting that will be published in the *Yearbook* for 2022. Typically, closing or leaving congregations are reported to or confirmed by district conferences in the summer or fall and then reported to the *Yearbook* office, which keeps the official listing of congregations.

West Marva and Western Pennsylvania each reported large losses of congregations in 2021: 14 congregations closed or left West Marva during the year, and nine closed or left Western Pennsylvania, according to preliminary reports. The other 22 districts each have reported three or fewer congregations closing or leaving in 2021.

More district statistics

Shenandoah District, with 13,253 members, and Atlantic Northeast District, with 10,683 members, were reported in the 2020 statistics as the two largest districts and the only districts with more than 10,000 members. Atlantic Northeast reported the largest total average worship attendance, at 4,348, followed by Shenandoah at 3,922. No other district reported an average worship attendance of more than 3,000.

Of the smaller districts, six had a membership of fewer than 1,000 in 2020: Southeastern with 794, Pacific Northwest with 763 members, Southern Plains with 469, Idaho and Western Montana with 437, Missouri and Arkansas with 343, and Puerto Rico with 339. 



Yearbook survey reveals worship habits during pandemic

by James Deaton

In 2021, the *Church of the Brethren Yearbook office* conducted a survey asking congregational leaders to weigh in on their worship habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 300 congregations participated in the survey, representing more than a third of the nearly 900 congregations in the denomination.

The survey asked congregations about the various ways they worshiped, and to provide feedback on any online worship options they offered. Additional questions related to the challenges congregations experienced in counting worship attendance.

Results confirm that a large percentage (69 percent) worshiped in person but have stopped and started in-person services again at least once. Also, an overwhelming percentage of congregations have adapted to offer some form of online worship option. Of congregations surveyed, 84 percent have worshiped online, whether it was livestreamed, pre-recorded for later viewing, or another hybrid method.

Examining online worship habits, the survey showed that almost 77 percent of responding congregations did not offer any online worship option prior to the beginning of the pandemic. When asked if they planned to continue offering online worship options in the future, a significant majority (72 percent) said they would do so on a regular basis.

There was not a predominant technology named when congregations were

asked about platforms used for online worship. Zoom was used by 43 percent of responding congregations, Facebook by 47 percent, and YouTube by 45 percent.

Worship attendance

Most congregations saw in-person attendance decrease, but the availability of online worship has caused some to see an increase in overall attendance. In fact, 21 percent of those responding to the survey said that their online worship attendance has been somewhat more than their in-person attendance before COVID-19, and 8 percent said it was much more than their in-person attendance prior to the pandemic.

When asked about the makeup of those participating online, responding congregations revealed a diverse composition:


- 95 percent reported attendance by current members.
- 77 percent reported attendance by family/friends/colleagues of current members.
- 64 percent reported attendees living more than two hours from the church building.
- 57 percent reported attendance by family/friends/colleagues of the pastor.
- 56 percent reported attendance by former members.
- 48 percent reported attendance by people previously unconnected to the church.
- 40 percent reported attendees from the local community.
- 26 percent reported attendance by people living outside the United States.

• 18 percent reported attendance by people interested in becoming members.

Counting worship attendance was a challenge for many congregations, given the need to provide some form of online worship option. Some congregations didn't attempt to count online engagements for a variety of reasons. Those congregations that started using streaming technologies frequently noted the inconsistencies among platforms in how viewing is tracked.

With Zoom, attendance is simpler to count, but it's often difficult to tell how many people in a household are participating, with some family members floating in and out of view. Metrics for Facebook and YouTube are more complex. Those who used these two platforms often wondered what to do about "views" that last for a brief amount of time. Others weren't sure how to handle views that occur after a worship service ends and it then continues to be viewed online.

In summary, many congregations responded to the pandemic by providing some form of online worship option, but tracking attendance was difficult for many reasons and some ended up just monitoring online engagements instead of attempting to quantify them.

The *Yearbook office* continued to evaluate the survey's responses, especially those related to counting worship attendance, as it prepared to send out its annual forms to congregations. 

The *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* staff are James Deaton, managing editor for Brethren Press, and Jim Miner, Yearbook specialist.

Annual Conference announces ballot

The 2022 Annual Conference ballot is headed by candidates for moderator-elect and Conference secretary.

**Moderator-elect:
Marla Bieber Abe**

of Lynchburg (Va.) Church of the Brethren, a retired pastor, has served on the Program and Arrangements Committee and has been a messenger at Conference. She has served on the boards of Bethany Seminary and the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center and on the New Church Development Committee.



Madalyn Metzger of

Goshen City (Ind.) Church of the Brethren is vice president of marketing for Everence Financial. A trustee of Manchester University, she has served on the Intercultural Ministries advisory committee and chaired the board of On Earth Peace. She has provided leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion for church-related institutions.



Conference secretary:

Connie R. Burkholder of Monitor Church of the Brethren in McPherson, Kan., is a former district executive and pastor. She has been secretary of the Council of District Executives, repre-

sentative to the National Council of Churches, a writer for Brethren Press, and on the planning committee for the Clergy Women's Retreat. She has worked with Central American refugees in the Sanctuary Movement.



David K. Shumate of Daleville (Va.) Church of the Brethren is Virgina District executive minister. He is a former moderator and has served on the Pastoral



Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, Review and Evaluation Committee, Ministry Advisory Council, New Church Development advisory committee, and Council of District Executives, where he served terms as chair and treasurer.

Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee: Jacob Crouse of Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren; **Rachel Bucher Swank** of Mount Wilson Church of the Brethren, Lebanon, Pa.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Angela Finet of Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; **Diane Mason** of Fairview Church of the Brethren, Unionville, Iowa

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1: Joel Gibbel of York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren; **Regina Holmes** of Midland (Va.) Church of the Brethren. **Area 2: Linda Fry** of Mansfield (Ohio) Church of the Brethren; **Rosanna Eller McFadden** of Creekside Church of the Brethren, Elkhart, Ind.

Bethany Seminary Board of Trustees, representing the colleges: Katharine Gray Brown of Manchester Church of the Brethren, North Manchester, Ind.; **Jonathan Paul Frye** of Monitor. **Representing clergy: Susan Stern Boyer** of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren; **Laura Stone** of Manchester

Brethren Benefit Trust Board: Kevin R. Boyer of Plymouth (Ind.) Church of the Brethren; **Carl Eubank** of Happy Corner Church of the Brethren, Clayton, Ohio

On Earth Peace Board: Matt Boyer of La Verne; **Doug Richard** of Buffalo Valley Church of the Brethren, Mifflinburg, Pa.

The 2022 Conference will have an online option for nondelegates giving access to livestreaming of business meetings, the Ted & Co performance of *We Own This Now*, concerts by the Bittersweet Gospel Band and Mike Stern & Friends, and selected equipping sessions. Register and find out more at www.brethren.org/ac2022.



Elienne Nsanzimana

A pig-raising project in Rwanda is among the recipients of final grants for 2021.

Final grants for 2021

From the Emergency Disaster Fund: \$15,000 to Church World Service following December tornadoes; **\$3,000 to Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services in Burundi** for roof repairs following a storm.

From the Global Food Initiative: \$15,270 to the Church of the Brethren in Rwanda for a pig project.

From the Brethren Faith in Action Fund, grants of \$5,000 each to Camp Colorado in Sedalia, Colo., Camp Koinonia in Cle Elum, Wash., Camp Peaceful Pines in Dardanelle, Calif., University Park (Md.) Church of the Brethren, Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren, and Whitestone Church of the Brethren in Tonasket, Wash.

Prayer for Ukraine

General secretary David Steele called for prayer as Russia began its invasion of Ukraine. Brethren raised up prayers for peace in concert with other Christians around the world, including the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

Brethren Disaster Ministries began planning a Ukraine crisis response with ecumenical partners. Donations are received at www.brethren.org/give-ukraine-crisis or via check to the Emergency Disaster Fund, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120, marked for “Ukraine Crisis.”



Keith Funk

Pastor Alexander Zazhytko and his wife, Tonia, in their church house.

Among those calling for prayer was Quinter (Kan.) Church of the Brethren pastor Keith Funk, who has maintained a close relationship with pastor Alexander Zazhytko and a congregation in Chernigov (Chernihiv), Ukraine, that identifies as Church of the Brethren.

Funk visited Ukraine in 2015, and in 2016 welcomed Zazhytko on a visit to Western Plains District. As the invasion began, the two pastors were in daily communication. Zazhytko reported on the status of the 30 to 35 church members who were sheltering in their homes. As of March 10, they were unharmed despite daily bombing, the loss of power, water, and heat, and difficulty finding food.

Funk said, “I am assuring Alex that his brothers and sisters are praying here in the US. This is giving them encouragement and assurance. May we pray for safety and deliverance. May we pray for an end to this carnage.”



Brethren Volunteer Service Winter Unit 330, from left: Johannes Stitz of Westphalia, Germany, serving at SnowCap Food Pantry in Fairview, Ore.; Marvin Blenkle of Berlin, Germany, serving with Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren and bcmPEACE; Tate Johnson of McPherson, Kan., and McPherson Church of the Brethren, serving at Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center in Little Rock, Ark.; and Florian Wessler of Westphalia Germany, also serving at SnowCap. The next orientations are July 31-Aug. 19 at Camp Wilbur Stover in Idaho and Sept. 18-Oct. 7 at Camp Brethren Heights in Michigan. Apply at www.brethren.org/bvs.

Personnel notes

Emily Tyler resigned as director of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) Feb. 18, after three years in the position starting Feb. 4, 2019. She was employed by the Church of the Brethren for almost 10 years, since June 27, 2012, when she began as coordinator for BVS recruitment and the former Workcamp Ministry. As director of BVS, she oversaw this long-term program to train and support units of volunteers each year to serve full-time at projects in the US and internationally. During her

tenure, the Workcamp Ministry transitioned to FaithX and BVS adapted to pandemic challenges. Tyler has begun as membership and communications specialist for the Association of Professional Chaplains in Hoffman Estates, Ill.

Dan McFadden began Feb. 21 as part-time interim director of BVS. He was BVS director for more than 20 years, from Dec. 1, 1995, to Nov. 2, 2018. He will continue part time as a therapist in Elgin, Ill.

Atlantic Southeast

District has announced that the interim district executive position has been changed to a team of directors: **Vicki Ehret** is director of administration and representative to the Council of District Executives, **Founa Augustin-Badet** is director of Haitian ministries, **Fausto Carrasco** is director of Hispanic ministries, **Ray Hileman** is director of English ministries, **Aida Lymaris Sanchez** is director of program, and **Eva Shoemaker** is director of finance.

Michigan District

has made changes to its executive team. **Beth Sollenberger** has been hired as part-time interim district executive minister. Also appointed to the team on a volunteer basis are **Frances Townsend**, **Dan Rossman**, **Wendy Russell**, and **Frank Polzin**, with **Jennifer Betts Pendragon** as administrative assistant.

Western Pennsylvania District is being represented by retired pastor **Pete C. Kaltenbaugh Jr.** during a time of transition in the district executive role.

Who keeps Brethren-ness flowing?

by Karen Garrett

A division is happening in the Church of the Brethren. Some congregations are making the difficult decision to withdraw their membership. That means individual members, and ultimately congregations, are weighing their beliefs about some ongoing issues.

Congregations choosing to withdraw seem to be moving in one of two directions. Direction one: Several are choosing to become independent. I informally refer to this group as “Independent Brethren,” though I know a few do not intend to be very Brethren. Direction two: Others are joining the newly formed Covenant Brethren Church denomination.

The Church of the Brethren denomination that remains will be fewer in number of members and congregations and, perhaps, limited in our Brethren-ness.

We have faced divisions before. During the Civil War, the German Baptist Brethren (our name at the time) did not divide. Other American denominations divided North and South, partly based on stands on slavery. We, however, remained firmly nonresistant (members did not serve in the military) and firmly against members owning slaves.

It wasn’t until the 1880s when years of discussion about issues defining how we practice our faith led to a three-way separation. After the separation, we became Old German Baptist Brethren, Brethren Church, and German Baptist Brethren (the latter name changed to Church of the Brethren in 1908). All retained the name Brethren. Did they all retain Brethren-ness? My opinion is, yes.


All three groups are theological descendants of eight brave individuals who chose to be baptized as adults in the Eder River in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708. The eight became convinced that when they were infants, they had no idea what believing in and following Jesus Christ meant. As young adults they chose to “stand” on scripture and against the state churches and were baptized as believers, a punishable offense. These first Brethren coming up out of the Eder River began a Brethren faith stream that continues to flow.

In 1926, a separation led to the formation of the Dunkard

Brethren Church as a reaction to the relaxing of some distinctives in the Church of the Brethren. By 1940, a separation happened in the Brethren Church resulting in the formation of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. The words grace and fellowship in their name suggest two of their concerns: grace, and a more congregational polity.

Even as more divisions occur across the Brethren groups, a common heritage remains. All Brethren groups maintain believers baptism, three-fold love feast, the importance of scripture, and the centrality of Christ. A difference, perhaps, is how we practice Brethren-ness.

As I volunteer and do research at the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio, I am growing in my understanding of our common heritage, and our unique differences. Volunteers and board members of the center come from a variety of Brethren groups. One mission of the center is to archive primary sources from all—yes, *all*—Brethren who trace their heritage back to the first eight Brethren in 1708. We also archive resources on church history, especially Anabaptism and Pietism, because both of those faith streams inform Brethren theology. We are not in competition for who is most Brethren. We are different expressions of a common faith. We all belong to the same Brethren faith stream.

If we step back and look at the bigger picture, we can value each of the Brethren groups and their unique understanding of Brethren-ness. Each group has strengths that clarify a Brethren way of walking in the world. And each group, the Church of the Brethren included, have blinders as to where we miss important elements of our heritage. Divisions do result in all groups becoming smaller numerically, and that can bring hurt and confusion. I grieve the Church of the Brethren’s loss of individuals, congregations, and theological diversity. We need to learn from each other. We need to respect and value one another. Let us name with joy that the Brethren faith stream continues to flow. 

Karen Garrett is a longterm volunteer with the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio.

“ Each group has strengths that clarify a Brethren way of walking in the world. ”

A gentle reminder

I just read Wendy McFadden's opening column on "Light" in the January/February issue. Lovely.

Here in New Mexico, a stopping ground for sandhill cranes, the piece was a gentle reminder of God's marvelous light, physically and spiritually, found in creation. Keep up the fine work.

Brian Nixon
Albuquerque, N.M.

Wonderful issue

Thank you for the wonderful March issue of the MESSENGER. We enjoyed it very much.

We appreciated the focus on water in the issue. I enjoyed the word puzzle. In addition to the 15 water-related words, I found 24 other words: ace, car (2), claw, cobs, fir, fur, her (2), law, lea, log, pay, pew, rip (2), reel, rues, ruff, saw, shy, wear, wolf, and yes.

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We also appreciated Wendy McFadden's description of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I had the opportunity to spend a little time with him in Cape Town, South Africa. I agree with you that he is the personification of joy.

Brad Yoder
Noblesville, Ind.

The origin of a name

I read with great interest Walt Wiltschek's article "Take Me Home, Brethren Roads" in the February MESSENGER. I am responding to the invitation to submit other interesting Brethren-inspired place names.

My submission has a different twist to it. I grew up in Eglon, WVa., home of the Eglon congregation of the Church of the Brethren. The original name of the congregation was German Settlement, founded in 1854. An influx of German descendants had populated the area, some with earlier Brethren connections, hence the logical moniker. The name, however, was changed during World War I, likely due to the negativity of the German connection. The new name reflected the name of the local community, Eglon.

The community itself originally was named Maple Run. When the first post office was established in 1881, the name was changed due to another Maple Run in the state. For some unknown reason, the name Eglon was chosen. For Old Testament scholars, Eglon is anything but a pleasant name. Judges 3 records the rather disturbing account of Eglon, king of Moab, an enemy of Israel, who was tricked into death by Ehud the Israelite. The account of the death of the obese Eglon is indeed fodder for a thrilling horror movie.

Needless to say, even today members of the Eglon congregation scratch their heads in wonder about the origin of the name of not just their community, but their beloved peace-loving flock as well.

Mike Fike
Bridgewater, Va.

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

Centenarians

Hitt, Maryella, 101, Bridgeport, W.Va., Dec. 31
Stump, Paul, 100, North Liberty, Ind., Sept. 11

New members

Free Spring, Mifflintown, Pa.: Hudson Soccio, Fina Williams, Karen Williams
Lancaster, Pa.: Greg Bachman, Marie Bachman, Cathy Boshart, Richard Boshart, Kathryn Keeny, Angela Shenk, Mervin Shenk, Barry Shoff
Ligonier, Pa.: Roman Simmons
Maple Spring, Eglon, W.Va.: Sharon Miller, Tyler Miller, Rebecca Teets
New Enterprise, Pa.: Martha Beach, Robert Beach
Uniontown, Pa.: Dan Gatts, Glen John Metcalf, Suan May Metcalf

Wedding anniversaries

Elrod, James and Mary, Prairie City, Iowa, 50
Elrod, Robert and Joan, Prairie City, Iowa, 50
Fike, J. Rogers and Elizabeth, Oakland, Md., 71
Frazee, Willard and Betty, Uniontown, Pa., 69
Kinzie, William and Elizabeth, Midlothian, Va., 65
Stansbury, Leighton and Dottie, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 71

Deaths

Baker, Uldene Rosamond Greene, 87, Mount Morris, Ill., Dec. 28
Baum, Eleanor Jean Steiner, 91, Miamisburg, Ohio, Oct. 1
Belcher, Marvin Alford, 96, Bakersfield, Calif., Nov. 26
Benner, Shirley J. Schoonover, 85, Ashland, Ohio, Jan. 7
Berwager, Jacob E., 94,

Hanover, Pa., Dec. 23
Blackford, Mary Louise Strait, 81, Tipp City, Ohio, Dec. 3
Bollinger, Benjamin B., 85, Hanover, Pa., Jan. 11
Brainard, William K., 98, Goshen, Ind., Dec. 1
Brandt, Linda R. Decker, 71, Saint Thomas, Pa., Jan. 13
Bright, Janet L. Harris, 57, Ashland, Ohio, Dec. 22
Brodbeck, Dean P., Sr., 95, Hanover, Pa., Jan. 15
Brubaker, Irvin W., 101, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Jan. 8
Buckingham, Francis Y. Trombley, 94, Prairie City, Iowa, Dec. 31
Circle, Marlys F. Wolf, 88, Saint Paris, Ohio, May 14
Clark, Virginia Lee Wennerholt, 86, Peoria Heights, Ill., Jan. 8
Cole, Larry Thayne, 77, Modesto, Calif., Dec. 12
Couchenour, Helen Marie Kilgore, 82, Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 20
Crosby, Virginia May, 81, Greensburg, Pa., Dec. 19
Cundiff, Margorie N. Manges, 95, Hope, Mich., Dec. 22
Dehoff, Jill Y. Sweitzer, 43, York, Pa., June 20
Dively, John Frederick, 91, Friedens, Pa., Jan. 29
Dunlap, Gladys L. Steiner, 80, Pottstown, Pa., Nov. 2
Erdman, Lori, 55, Edgewood, Md., Dec. 22
Erickson, William, 87, Duncansville, Pa., July 29
Eshleman, Nathan Samuel, 87, Chambersburg, Pa., Jan. 7
Foor, Anna J. Holler, 77, Bedford, Pa., Nov. 15
Frantz, James Easton, 73, Southport, N.C., Sept. 1
Frantz, Loren D., 90, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 23
Freeland, Charles Herman, 97, Shepherdstown, W.Va., Dec. 26
Frey, E. Floyann, 89, Columbia City, Ind., Nov. 23
Gill, Samuel E., 73, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Dec. 11

Gordan, Carol Hoover, 66, Windsor, Pa., July 6
Graby, Penny Marie Boyd, 55, Bethel, Pa., Nov. 3
Halt, Elmer, 95, Angola, Ind., Jan. 6, 2021
Hansen, Dorothy Lenora Ecker, 95, Parkville, Md., May 5
Hengst, Cynthia A., 62, New Oxford, Pa., July 12
Henry-Bleicher, Bonnie L., 63, Woodbury, Pa., Feb. 6
Herr, Paul Richard (Chick), 94, East Petersburg, Pa., Jan. 26
Hinesley, Bobby Eugene, 85, Rossville, Ind., Nov. 6
Hoff, Mary Jane Baublitz, 97, Spring Grove, Pa., Sept. 5
Hoover, Joyce Ann Cash, 78, Harrisonburg, Va., Jan. 31
Hoover, Mary Elizabeth, 65, Silver Spring, Md., Oct. 6
Hummel, Keith E., 85, Littitz, Pa., Dec. 27
Ikenberry, Sandra, 82, Reston, Va., March 27, 2021
Joseph, Kimberly L., 58, Harrisburg, Pa., Dec. 11
Kerschensteiner, Edward Lewis, 90, Boise, Idaho, Jan. 15
Kettering, Mary E. Moore, 102, Palmyra, Pa., Oct. 26
Kitt, William, 87, Oakton, Va., Nov. 16
Koser, Carroll I. Rush, 79, Mansfield, Ohio, Sept. 9
Kwak, Frank J. (Buck), 62, Ligonier, Pa., Jan. 17
Leo, Lois Vivian Megonnel, 90, Zelenople, Pa., Jan. 24
Leslie, Alice Irene Woolley, 77, Berlin, Pa., Feb. 6
Long, Dorothy M. Phillips, 97, Ashland, Ohio, Jan. 6
Loucks, John Carleton, 74, York, Pa., Jan. 10
Luing, Judy Joan Calvin, 84, Worthington, Minn., Jan. 2
Mackey, Joyce K. Knoll, 85, Chambersburg, Pa., Dec. 11
McKnight, Laura Ann, 64, Boonsboro, Md., Jan. 19
McLaughlin, Louise Birchett, 97, Hopewell, Va., Oct. 11
Means, John J., Sr., 91, Ohiopyle, Pa., Jan. 3
Mellinger, Allen B., 88, Ronks, Pa., Dec. 11
Merritts, Melissa A., 53, Martinsburg, Pa., Dec. 18
Miller, Mary A. Zeigler, 80, Red Lion, Pa., Aug. 10
Mosholder, Roberta Jean Maust, 78, Rockwood, Pa.,

Nov. 23
Nies, David Lee, 79, Beavercreek, Ohio, Nov. 15
Nymeyer, Clara Irene Thomas, 94, Goshen, Ind., Aug. 13
Payne, Betty Wanda Miller, 86, Knoxville, Md., Jan. 18
Perry, Edward Merl, 88, Muncie, Ind., Dec. 25
Pfefferkorn, Dean A., 67, Auburn, Ind., Dec. 28
Ray, Marianne Louise, 62, Midland, Mich., Nov. 17
Riblett, Betty L. Vivis, 91, Greensburg, Pa., Jan. 15
Robinson, Patricia Ann Moser, 78, Hagerstown, Md., Nov. 26
Rufkahr, Juanita (Ellen) Baldwin, 81, Olathe, Kan., Nov. 17
Sadd, Hudson W., 85, Manheim, Pa., Dec. 11
Saunders, David Jordan, 82, Mount Morris, Ill., Dec. 19
Shaffer, Patsy R. Hay, 88, Holsopple, Pa., Oct. 17
Shank, Delbert Eugene, 97, Bakersfield, Calif., Sept. 29
Sheard, Judith Ann, 75, Ambler, Pa., Jan. 25
Shenk, Ellis James, 90, Bel Air, Md., Dec. 28
Shope, Kimberly A. Bontrager, 61, Hopewell, Pa., Nov. 7
Shores, Robynne A. Hylton, 63, Ashland, Ohio, Nov. 23
Shreckhise, Richard Fulton, 77, Midlothian, Va., Dec. 14
Smail, Ronald W., Sr., 79, Johnstown, Ohio, Oct. 2
Smeltzer, Dennis L., 71, Ligonier, Pa., Jan. 23
Smith, Earl D., 96, Plymouth, Ind., Oct. 31
Smith, Sandra Boyd, 74, Ligonier, Pa., Nov. 24
Stevens, Ray M., 85, Holsopple, Pa., Nov. 12
Strom, Faith Mae Hansberger, 100, Worthington, Minn., Dec. 1
Stump, Herbert B., Sr., 95, Elizabethtown, Pa., Dec. 14
Stutsman, Lily Marie Block, 94, Mount Morris, Ill., Sept. 8
Stutzman, Donald E., 55, Jerome, Pa., Dec. 2
Swartz, Paul, 85, Winter Springs, Fla., Jan. 1
Swigart, David L., 84, McVeytown, Pa., Nov. 28
Taylor, Chuck, 81, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 29
Terry, Thelma Pauline Smith, 91, Waynesboro, Va., Dec. 12
Thompson, Kenneth, 95, Freeport, Mich., Dec. 2
Torres, Jose Luis, 83, Lebanon, Pa., Jan. 7
Torres, Nancy L. Erb Younker, 82, Lebanon, Pa., Jan. 13
Van Houten, Steven Wayne, 66, Plymouth, Ind., Jan. 1
Watson, Christine, 81, Bakersfield, Calif., Dec. 27
Weatherholtz, Garnett Lee, 86, Waynesboro, Va., Dec. 29
Weaver, Lois Eleanor Snare Carter, 96, Bridgewater, Va., Dec. 3
Weybright, Harold Royer, 89, Nokesville, Va., Oct. 15
Whitcraft, Chad A., 43, New Freedom, Pa., March 29, 2021
Wilson, P. Barry, 78, Millersville, Pa., Dec. 30
Wiseman, Reba Simmons, 93, Winter Haven, Fla., Dec. 2
Younkins, Della Deener, 93, Boonsboro, Md., Dec. 18
Zellers, Gerald K., 79, Mount Morris, Ill., Feb. 12

Ordained

Garvey, Mary, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Stonerstown, Saxton, Pa.), Jan. 23
Munson, Timothy, Shen. Dist. (Grottoes, Va.), Feb. 6
O'Brien, Shawn, Atl. N. E. Dist. (West Green Tree, Elizabethtown, Pa.), Jan. 9
Wintsch, Robert, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Lancaster, Pa.), Jan. 23

Licensed

Connor, Michael, N. Ohio Dist. (Springfield, Akron, Ohio), Jan. 16
Cook, Deborah, N. Ind. Dist. (Plymouth, Ind.), Jan. 16
Higgs, Keith, Shen. Dist. (Newport, Shenandoah, Va.), Jan. 9
Johnson, Rachel, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.), Jan. 2

Placements

Leister, Jeannine, interim pastor, Maitland, Lewistown, Pa., Jan. 10
Pearce, Teresa, plural ministry team, Warrensburg, Mo., Jan. 1

Are we still at the tomb?

Do you remember where you were on Aug. 23, 2011? I do.

I was working for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in downtown Harrisburg. At first the day was no different than any other day, but around 2 p.m. things just didn't seem right. I can't fully explain the panic that came across me as I thought I was feeling the building move. At first I thought I was it was my imagination.

Suddenly I knew I didn't want to be in the building, and I wasn't alone. We headed for the stairwell and rushed outside. By the time we congregated, we heard the news:



TRACI RABENSTEIN

There had been a 5.8-magnitude earthquake around Mineral, Va., just over 200 miles to the south.

Matthew 28 begins with a violent earthquake as the women were gathering at the tomb of Jesus to care for his body. What went through their minds? *Where is he? Did someone take him?* Maybe they felt sick to their stomachs, or light-headed. Maybe they were confused and afraid.

But the angel said, "Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there'" (Matthew 28:7, CEB).

Matthew says that they ran—with "great fear and excitement"—to deliver the message to the eleven. *He wasn't there! There was an earthquake . . . did you feel it? And this angel who rolled the stone away from the tomb told us to look for ourselves to see that Jesus wasn't there.*

Then Jesus himself "met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him" (v. 9).

He said to tell the others he will meet them in Galilee. Off they went, full of joy as they exclaim to the disciples: *He did it! He isn't dead. And . . . we saw him! Touched him!*

Held onto him for dear life. He told us to tell you he'll meet you in Galilee. You can't stay here hidden, you must go and meet him. He'll be there!

Some of the disciples went to the tomb to see for themselves, according to other Gospel accounts. They just couldn't comprehend what the women were telling them. Why didn't they believe them? Why didn't they have faith?

Why don't we? Do we continue to stare into an empty tomb?


What Jesus did in those three days was revolutionary! He conquered death. The fear of death is gone; the hope for eternal life is now what we wait for. "Do not be afraid!" the angel said. "Do not be afraid!" Christ said. Our relationship with a risen Savior gives us assurance that we no longer need to fear death. The mystery is still there; we have no way of truly understanding physical death until we go through it, but we do not need to fear it.

He took on our sins so that we would have a way to reconcile ourselves back to God without sacrifice. Without burnt offerings. Without priestly intercession. We have been given the Holy Spirit—God not only with us but *in* us.

That is worth running with excitement to share with others!

When I felt the tremors 10 years ago, I couldn't get out of that building fast enough. When the women learned that Jesus was alive, they couldn't get to the disciples fast enough.

Are we ready to stop being afraid? Afraid of congregations leaving? Of the dwindling size of the denomination here in the United States? Are we ready to run from emptiness and move forward in faith knowing that "he who is in me is greater than he who is in the world"?

Let us run with joy to tell our neighbors the good news of Jesus! 

Traci Rabenstein is director of mission advancement for the Church of the Brethren.

“Are we ready to run from emptiness and move forward in faith knowing that “he who is in me is greater than he who is in the world”?”



Glenn Riegel

Let us embrace one another as we

- Enjoy opportunities to reconnect with old friends and build new relationships.
- Address the business before us through prayerful and communal discernment.
- Lift our voices in inspiring praise and worship.
- Equip ourselves for ministry with our neighbors through almost 40 equipping sessions.
- Engage in late night activities including a game night, a Ted & Company production of *We Own This Now*, and concerts from Bittersweet Gospel Band and Michael Stern and Friends.
- Explore a vibrant host city, including scheduled excursions to the Durham Museum and the Tri-Faith Commons.


Embracing
one another
as **Christ**
embraces us
Romans 15:7

I appreciate the opportunity for the denomination to gather to discuss and do the business of the church, to meet old friends and make new ones, to hear many sides and perspectives, to learn and worship together.

—Annual Conference participant

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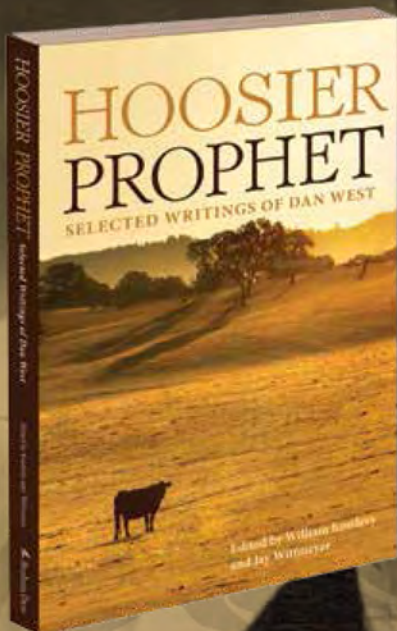
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SOMEDAY THE WORLD
WILL COME TO SEE
THAT JESUS' WAY IS
THE ONLY PRACTICAL
WAY OF LIFE.—*Dan West*



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