

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

JUNE 2022 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



## Generation to generation





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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

June 2022 Vol.171 No. 5 [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger)

Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
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# Daily bread

**T**he words “bread,” “fight,” and “war” have the same root in Hebrew. The vowel sounds change and one has a prefix and suffix, but you can hear the same three consonants in each of these words:

Bread: *lechem*

Fight: *lachim*

War: *milchama*

Even if you don’t know any Hebrew, you have said one of these words before, because Bethlehem means “house of bread.” *Bet lechem.*



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

Some say these words are related because *wars* are fought over *bread*.

That is true today. Russia and Ukraine are top producers of the world’s wheat, and today’s war is swelling hunger in countries far beyond them. This in a world where hunger was already increasing. The number of people facing acute food insecurity had already doubled since 2019, says the UN’s World Food Program.

The situation is particularly severe in Ethiopia, South Sudan, southern Madagascar, and Yemen. In Afghanistan, 98 percent of the population does not have enough to eat, and one million children under the age of 5 could die from malnutrition by the end of the year. In Nigeria, where there are vio-

lent clashes between Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers, part of the cause is climate change and a scarcity of pastoral land.

In so many places, war and food are interconnected. Throughout the world and throughout time, people have struggled over who controls land and who controls resources.

Sometimes the struggle is literally for food to survive; sometimes the motivation is not hunger for bread itself, but ravenousness for wealth and power. When the rich and powerful want more, it’s the poor and weak who suffer.

The Bible tells of a time when the people of Israel did not have to struggle for bread. When they escaped from slavery in Egypt and found themselves without food, God provided just enough for one day at a time.

“He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna . . . in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is the Hebrew scriptures that Jesus quotes when he says, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone’” (Luke 4:4).

In a world that struggles violently for things that ultimately do not satisfy, Jesus tells us what to pray for: daily bread, the forgiveness of sins, the kingdom of God.

*Wendy McFadden*

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### Subscription rates:

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

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

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

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

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



Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)



**“Generation after generation stands in awe of your work; each one tells stories of your mighty acts.”** —Psalm 145:4, The Message

**“It is incumbent on every generation to pay its own debts as it goes. A principle which if acted on would save one half the wars of the world.”** —Thomas Jefferson

**“My mom and dad understood that every generation has to earn its freedom over and over again.”** —Martin Luther King III

**“Each new generation is reared by its predecessor; the latter must therefore improve in order to improve its successor. The movement is circular.”** —French sociologist Émile Durkheim

**“Parenthood. ... It’s about guiding the next generation, and forgiving the last.”** —actor Peter Krause, in *Parenthood*

**“Every generation is inculcated in traditions of prejudice which are encouraged as normal, natural, and healthy.”** —author and speaker Bryant McGill

## A TALE OF 14 CITIES

Can you match the cities listed here with the Church of the Brethren district in which they are found? Answers are below. Learn more about the work of the denomination’s districts starting on p. 8.

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Denver, Colo.       | a. Atlantic Northeast     |
| 2. Harrisburg, Pa.     | b. Atlantic Southeast     |
| 3. New Orleans, La.    | c. Mid-Atlantic           |
| 4. Las Vegas, Nev.     | d. Middle Pennsylvania    |
| 5. South Bend, Ind.    | e. Northern Indiana       |
| 6. Richmond, Va.       | f. Northern Ohio          |
| 7. Cincinnati, Ohio    | g. Northern Plains        |
| 8. Toledo, Ohio        | h. Pacific Southwest      |
| 9. Minneapolis, Minn.  | i. South/Central Indiana  |
| 10. Tampa, Fla.        | j. Southeastern           |
| 11. Washington, D.C.   | k. Southern Ohio/Kentucky |
| 12. Indianapolis, Ind. | l. Southern Plains        |
| 13. Knoxville, Tenn.   | m. Virginia               |
| 14. State College, Pa. | n. Western Plains         |



## BY THE NUMBERS

24

**The number of districts in the US Church of the Brethren,** (including Puerto Rico). Puerto Rico was the newest of these, separating from Atlantic Southeast in 2015. According to 2021 *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* statistics, it is also the smallest district, with 339 members, closely followed by Missouri/Arkansas, with 343. Shenandoah was the largest, with 13,253.

ANSWERS: 1-n; 2-a; 3-l; 4-h; 5-e; 6-m; 7-k; 8-f; 9-g; 10-b; 11-c; 12-i; 13-j; 14-d.

## Hillcrest founders witnessed to the goodness of God

**O**n Feb. 15, residents of Hillcrest retirement community in La Verne, Calif., gathered in person and online to celebrate the community's 75th anniversary. Hillcrest was founded on a Saturday morning on Feb. 15, 1947, by a special district conference of the Church of the Brethren.

The idea had been introduced a year and a half earlier, in June 1945 when Martha Lear distributed a petition signed by 110 members of La Verne Church of the Brethren asking the district to build a home to care for older members. The petition was approved by the church and sent on to the district conference in October 1945.

The district commissioned a group of leaders to reach out to all its congregations to assess their interest and willingness to provide financial support. By February 1947, all congregations in the district had participated and the result was in favor of proceeding. The special district conference

approved the motion. Galen K. Walker was appointed to lead the effort, serving as the first board chair.

That day was a defining moment. It has been said that the doors of history turn on very small hinges. This small hinge allowed a door to swing open wide.

With the support of the district, Ross Hanawalt was appointed to locate land. He visited the farm of Warren Crosier, a chicken farmer who was planning to sell and relocate his farm to a more rural area.

Crosier was moved by the conversation and felt a sincere desire to help. In his response to Hanawalt, he offered a significant "in-kind" donation by lowering his asking price from \$18,000 to \$12,500. The first transformative cash donation was given by Lilly Price Dredge, who donated \$3,000. To put these two gifts in context, an average home in La Verne at the time cost \$3,000.

Hanawalt went to Walker's place and shared the good news. Together they visited Galen Ogden, then pastor of the La Verne church. With his blessing, the two went immediately to the bank and signed a personal note for \$6,000, by which they were able to secure Crosier's 6.5 acre farm for Hillcrest.

At Hillcrest's 75th anniversary celebration, descendants of the founders spoke to residents and staff: Don Kurtz, resident and grandson of Galen K. Walker and immediate past board chair of Hillcrest; Clair Hanawalt, resident and son of J. Ross Hanawalt; Mary Kay Ogden, resident and daughter of Galen Ogden; Jon Blickenstaff, current board chair and grandson of Lilly Price Dredge.

Having served 13 years as president and CEO, I share my personal witness of the goodness of God in creating Hillcrest. I have seen the hand of God continue to sustain the organization as we have sought to carry out our mission to serve others. I'm grateful for the Church of the Brethren. While I am not a member of the church, I align with many of its values and teachings and, in studying Brethren history, find many parallels with my own faith heritage. In my close associations with members of the Church of the Brethren, I see that same love and devotion, and for that affirmation of Christianity I express my deepest gratitude and admiration.

—Matthew Neeley



**First Church of the Brethren in Springfield, Ill., celebrated** *celebrated 100 years on Sunday, May 1, with Annual Conference moderator David Sollenberger preaching for a special worship service.*

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.





## Brethren Voices in the neighborhood

**F**or nearly 17 years, Portland (Ore.) Peace Church of the Brethren has produced the community television program *Brethren Voices*. It has been a way for Brethren from all parts of the nation to share their faith with others. In effect, it has become “Jesus in the neighborhood” for many communities around the country. Episodes have originated from 17 states as well as Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., and 8 countries.

Initially, *Brethren Voices* was a way to share with the community of Portland, where very few people had any understanding about the Church of the Brethren. Having some experience in video, I offered to produce a community television program. For less than \$100, we became involved with MetroEast Community Media, the local community access television station. We received training about the equipment and the expectations of producing a monthly television program.

In July 2005, we produced our first 30-minute program titled “Honoring the Creation,” hosted by pastor Kerby Lauderdale. The program was broadcast in Portland three times during the month. One of the early programs featured Heifer International, and that Sunday a visiting couple came to church wondering how they could volunteer for Heifer.

Since then, the show has gone on to feature many well-known Brethren from across the denomination, ranging from musicians and composers to Annual Conference moderators to denominational staff to historical figures. Brent Carlson, a retired social worker and long-time member of Peace church, has served as host for more than 14 years.

*Brethren Voices* is now distributed to subscribers on DVDs, is posted on YouTube, and shown on community access television stations—numbering nearly 80 community stations around the country over the years. Some broadcast in small communities; others have a much bigger reach—like DATV in Dayton, Ohio, which has a viewership of several million people.

Recently, a milestone was reached with the 200th episode featuring Song and Story Fest musicians Mike Stern and Bill Jolliff in concert, supporting the World Friendship Center of Hiroshima, Japan. —Ed Groff

## ‘Jesus in the Neighborhood 2030’

**T**he strategic planning team at McPherson (Kan.) First Church of the Brethren crafted a year-long timeline so that the voices of the congregation could be sought and considered. The team was guided by the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “A genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus.”

A natural starting point for the planning process was the denominational compelling vision statement, “Jesus in the neighborhood,” which is centered on the theme of relationship-based neighborhood engagement.

The team met weekly through February and March 2021, seeking input from the pastors and from an administrator at McPherson College who had been involved with the college’s strategic plan. In April, every member of the congregation was invited to suggest ideas for major goals. In May, a composite listing or “ballot” of the most popular suggestions was distributed as a survey to members.

Four major goals emerged from that survey: 1) care for the climate/environment, 2) emphasize service and peacemaking, 3) prioritize youth, young adults, and young families, and 4) partner for racial justice.

A similar process followed for identifying and adopting tangible actions connected to each of the goals. The year-long process culminated with approval of a long-range strategic plan, called “Jesus in the Neighborhood 2030.”

McPherson’s leadership team intends to keep the long-range plan at the forefront of decision-making and, in doing so, the plan will be adapted and improved along the way. Jesus in the Neighborhood 2030 will help us be who we are and remind us of who we want to be. —Marty Ward





# Close-knit

## This former refugee extends a welcome

by Don Fitzkee

**F**riedlinde Ebersole has been knitting for the Lancaster Church of the Brethren's prayer shawl ministry for more than a decade. She estimates she has made about 100 shawls so far, each taking six or seven hours to create. As she knits, she offers prayers for the eventual recipient, without knowing what their circumstances will be. Often the shawls go to someone who has experienced illness or loss, and they represent the care and concern not only of Friedlinde, but of the entire church.

The most recent recipients of Friedlinde's shawls had experienced a different kind of loss—loss of their homes and homeland and separation from extended family. On Sunday, April 3, just as Ramadan, the Muslim season of prayer and fasting, was beginning, Lancaster's refugee welcome team presented prayer shawls to seven new friends from Afghanistan who the church has been supporting in partnership with Church World Service (CWS) since early January. Call it Afghans for Afghans, if you will. Or not.

When the Lancaster congregation decided to renew its

involvement in refugee resettlement through CWS last fall, 79-year-old Friedlinde signed up to join the welcome team. She felt others on the team had more expertise to offer, but she had one unique quality: She was a former refugee.

"I guess it's just understanding what they are going through," she reflects, "and feeling like I could be a little help."

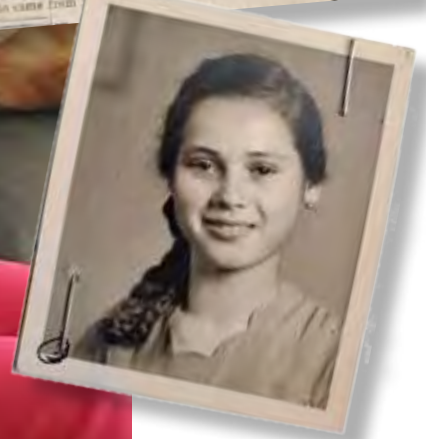
Friedlinde's family was the first to be settled by the Lancaster congregation when she arrived with her parents and brother in June 1956. Eventually four congregations (including Lititz and Conestoga Churches of the Brethren) would assist 21 members of her extended Kratz/Spahr/Lukhaup/Bender family to begin new lives in Lancaster County.

Friedlinde's family was part of the *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans living in what then was Yugoslavia. When World War II began, her father was forced to join either the German or Hungarian army. He joined the German army and was wounded at the Russian front. Due to their



Five members of a family of displaced persons who will make their home in Lancaster are greeted as they arrived at the PRR station last night. The family came from Loo, Austria, under the sponsorship of the Church of the Brethren of Lancaster, Lititz and Fayetteville. Welcoming the newcomers were V. Gumbiner, right, who came from

1951, and Mrs. Harold Ebersole, left, chairman of the Lancaster church's Brethren Service Committee. The newcomers are Christian Kratz, second from left, Mrs. Kratz, their son, Johann, and daughter, Friedlinde, and Mrs. Kratz's brother, Johann Spahr, second from right. (Litel Photo)



Don Fitzkee



“ She felt others on the team had more expertise to offer, but she had one unique quality: She was a former refugee. ”

German heritage, the rest of the family was confined in an internment camp and forced by the communist government of Yugoslavia to work on state-owned farms.

After a few years of internment, the women and children escaped the camp under cover of darkness in 1947, fled to Hungary, and boarded a crowded train to Austria, where five-year-old Friedlinde and her family began life as refugees in the partitioned city of Linz. Her father decided they would have more opportunity in the US, and the family eventually was able to emigrate.

The Lancaster congregation settled many refugee families after Friedlinde's family, but had not done so for a decade or more. John “Hank” Herr wanted to change that so, in honor of his late wife, in June 2021 he donated \$50,000 to the church to establish the Theresa J. Herr Endowment for Refugee Resettlement (HERR). Hank's generosity provided a nudge and the congregation joined hands with CWS to form an 11-member welcome team, chaired by Hank's daughter, Kathryn Riegen.

The team completed online training from CWS in December and waited patiently for a call. It came on Jan. 4: In two days would the team be ready to receive a family of five that had been in a military camp in Virginia since August? The honest answer was, “Not sure,” but the team said yes and welcomed father Satar, mother Samia, and three young children on Jan. 6.

A month or so later, Samia's brother Habib and nephew Miraj arrived, and Lancaster welcomed them as well. (Other local groups are assisting three more of Samia's siblings and their families.)

Since January, the Lancaster team and others from the church have invested well over 1,000 hours of time. The church and individual members have donated cash and items valued at about \$18,000 so far to provide for initial needs, furnish two apartments, and obtain two used vehicles. (The vehicles were purchased from another former refugee who the congregation assisted some years ago. They came with a generous refugee-to-refugee discount and teatime with delicious Turkish foods.)

In addition to making the prayer shawls, Friedlinde was happy to help line up home furnishings and clean the apartment before they moved in.

But perhaps her greatest contribution has been empa-

thy. She thinks it's more complicated for refugees coming to the US today than it was for her family, and she respects their resiliency. “I so much admire them,” she says. “Our family didn't know what we would face when we got here, and I'm sure they are going through the same thing.”

When she heard bits and pieces of their story of a desperate and dangerous trip to the Kabul airport last August, she was reminded of her experience as a little girl crowding onto a train in Hungary.

When she sees Samia's concern for 31 additional family members who languish in a refugee center in Abu Dhabi and 5 more in Turkey, she hurts with them and remembers how important it was for her extended family to be together. The church's welcome team has been advocating with government representatives and agencies to reunite the rest of Samia's family in the US.


And when she sees Sedra—Satar and Samia's bright 7-year-old daughter—soaking up new things like a sponge, she is grateful that Sedra is now in a country where girls can go to school. She remembers how her own father wanted her to have greater educational opportunities. Friedlinde eventually enjoyed a career as a high school German teacher.

“I look forward to seeing what Sedra will grow up to be,” says Friedlinde. “I hope I'll be around for it.”

In just three short months, Friedlinde and the rest of the welcome team have formed close-knit relationships with their new friends.

“Even once they are established and won't need us as much,” she says, “I think we'll continue to have contact with them.”

That's what happened with her family years ago, although things probably won't work out exactly the same way this time around. Back in 1956, church member Anna Ebersole headed up the team that assisted Friedlinde's family. Anna and Harold's son, David, took a shine to Friedlinde, and they eventually married and raised three sons.

“David's mother always said the best job she did for the church was to head the refugee committee,” says Friedlinde. Not only because the work was rewarding, but because she got a daughter-in-law out of the deal. 

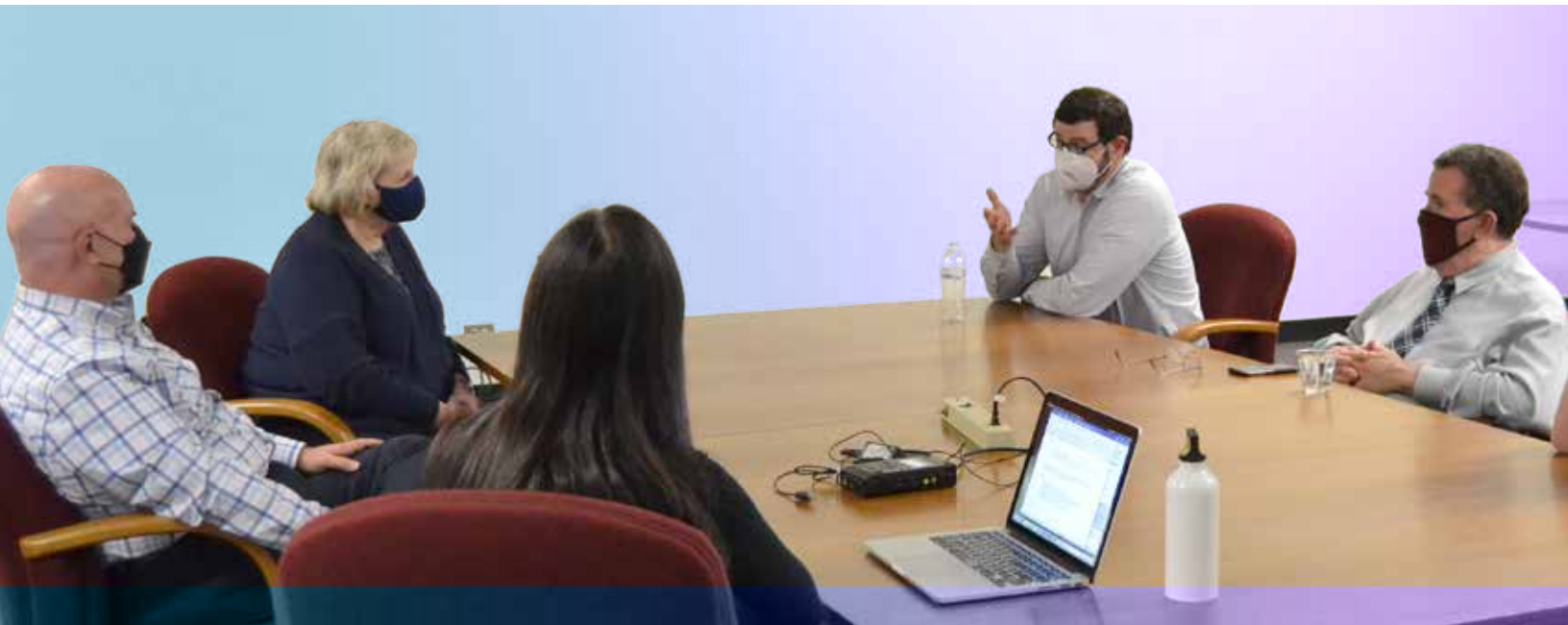
Don Fitzkee is pastor of worship at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.



# Voices from districts

by Wendy McFadden

MESSENGER interviewed four district executives to hear what troubles them and what inspires them in their settings. The four are Torin Eikler, Northern Indiana; Kris Hawk, Northern Ohio; Russ Matteson, Pacific Southwest; and David Shumate, Virgina. This article is edited down from a 90-minute conversation.



## Where do you see growth and creativity in your districts?

**Torin Eikler:** I have a congregation that had three members and sold their parsonage, and has grown 125 percent in a matter of a year. Another congregation that built an addition to their building is having to consider maybe planting another congregation because they don't have enough room in their sanctuary. They've grown by 25, 30 percent in the last three years. It is incredible. I've got more licensed ministers now than I did when I came to the district.



I've got several places where congregations are less than five miles apart and they never have done anything together. And I just found out the other day when I happened to run into a pastor that two churches have started this community project together and it's going great and people are coming from both congregations. They're talking and having fun and didn't really imagine that it could work, but it seems to be doing really good stuff. That kind of thing is really good.

**Kris Hawk:** And seeking revitalization, there are several wonderful stories of how some younger people have gotten involved. The older





people are saying, “We just can’t do this work anymore. The church has to close.” And the younger people are saying, “Just get out of the way, and let us do some of the work. We’re not ready to give up on this yet.”

None of them have had 125 percent growth or are expanding greatly, but they are doing some meaningful ministry. A number of churches are reinvesting themselves in their community, letting go of the idea that it’s only successful if more people come to church on Sunday morning. But they are just being obedient and faithful and loving those in the community, without expectation of a reward to them as a congregation. I find a lot of energy in that.

We have one church that sold the building to a nonprofit group in the area and they are receiving monthly payment for this building. That has freed them up from all of the expenses of the building, and left them so much money to do ministry in the community.



**Russ Matteson:** It’s exciting to work with the Spanish language congregations and the growth there. This weekend, we get to celebrate the dedication of a new church facility. I’m looking forward to that, and, and seeing what Centro Agape en Acción

can do. These are easy places to see excitement, because there’s new life happening and new things where there wasn’t anything before at all.

Some of these smaller congregations figured out different ways of being together during the pandemic and are moving forward in ways that have enriched their fellowship, connecting people locally but also with people who moved away and are now connected again. That’s a blessing for God’s church. We’re working with smaller churches to figure out how to help them open that virtual front door in a more permanent way going forward.

**David Shumate:** Since May of 2020, I’ve been to 57 congregations for worship. I’ve been fascinated by the variety of ways that people have adapted. It’s clear to me that, in spite of the folks that predict the end of the institutional church, the institution-



al church is continuing to work in ways to revitalize and to reach out and, with Russ, I agree with the virtual presence.

I’ve also been amazed at some of the new programming that has sprung up during the time. We have a race education team that has been very active in resourcing churches in the district. That seems to have gone very well. We have made a conscious effort to be a multicultural district. That’s a long-term project.

We have been able to do capital improvements for several of our congregations. We continue to see people go into the ministry. I am noticing that more women are coming into the ministry. We’re able to pay for seminary classes for people. We’re starting to do pastoral placement again. And we’ve stayed in touch with one another.

### **📌 Your two districts, Pacific Southwest and Virginia, have both been rather active in Hispanic/Latino church plants outreach. Is that a growing edge for the church?**

**Matteson:** I’d say yes. Part of it is being in the right place in California. And being receptive to what feels like God’s Spirit leading us into things and into relationships and connecting us to different folks figuring out how to do the training. We did two ordinations this last year, and we have 13 licensed Spanish-speaking folks. The notion of an active, vital faith that’s lived out has been an important piece. In the midst of that, yeah, I think it can be a growing edge for us as a denomination.

**Shumate:** Yeah. I would say that our Hispanic churches are flourishing. We’ve adjusted our ACTS training process to work with them to pass classes that have heretofore been Anglo-friendly but not necessarily to persons who have English as a second language.

The positive element for the Anglo folks is that it has enlightened us to how stuck we were in church order, and how you do things, as opposed to how they do things. I’ve been teaching a Brethren Life and Thought class for the Christian Growth Institute for 32 years. I have them write the history of their congregation, and it tends to be a list of building and our pastors. When the Hispanics write, they have that—but they also have a whole list of transformations, healings, deliverances, and all the things that were of spiritual importance. I found that profoundly moving.

**Matteson:** How do we interpret Brethren into a different culture? And what are the things that are



# Voices from districts

essential to being Brethren? And what are the things that are just Caucasian culture, Germanic history? It really has challenged me to think about what is essential in forming this group. What are the kind of questions we should be asking and thinking about as we move into the future?

## What are you finding when you ask that question?

**Matteson:** We are so tied up in our structure—that to be the church means a moderator and a board chair and commissions. In so many ways that feels ridiculously foreign. But we talk about what does it mean for you all to be the priesthood of

## Close to home: What districts do

by David Shumate

**O**rganization does not drive the mission of the church or the spread of the gospel. The growth of the church drives the need for an evolving structure. As a faith tradition grows, it requires structural forms that fit its ministry in every generation.

One form of organization that has endured for over half the history of the denomination is the “district.” While there are commonalities across all our districts, what is meant varies widely from location to location. Some are compact; others have wide expanse. Some are theologically aligned; others are more diverse. Some serve similar cultures; others have multiple cultures. Some are more corporate and formal; others looser and informal. These contrasts have been present throughout our experience, not just in recent times.

The antecedent of the Church of the Brethren began as a movement. Pietist frustration with the organized state churches in what is now Germany led to a baptism in August 1708 that marks the beginning of that movement. Relocated to the American colonies, by 1742 the Brethren began gathering in what became an annual meeting. This meeting evolved to answering queries from congregations and settling difficulties within the body.

By the 1850s, the denomination had

grown numerically and was spread, albeit thinly, across the United States. This growth prompted some, including such leaders as John Kline, to propose the idea of districts. The purpose was to solve difficulties and address challenges “close to home.” One subtext to this desire was to plant Brethren congregations in “unworked” territory.

The Annual Meeting of 1856 acted on a query as follows:

*A proposal for forming districts of five, six, or more, adjoining churches, for the purpose of meeting jointly at least once a year, settling difficulties, etc., and thus lessening the business of our Yearly Meeting. We believe this plan to be a good one, if carried out in the fear of the Lord.*

By 1860, the Northern District of Indiana was organized and functioning. Others followed, with the exception of those in the South due to the Civil War. In spite of the war, the Brethren of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia met together in 1863 and 1864. By 1866 the formation of districts was substantially complete with the return of peace.

Although districts were advised to organize within the political boundaries of states, some had portions of multiple states or subdivisions of one state. It would appear that some were grouped according to relationships formed prior

to the division of original congregations due to numerical growth and the former pattern of “adjoining elders” as householders in neighboring congregations.

District meetings were not allowed to publish minutes until 1876. They were not to pass decisions contrary to the decisions of Annual Conference, nor to consider questions of a general character that would have effect beyond their boundaries.

A major change in 1868 allowed for each district to choose delegates to the Standing Committee of Annual Conference. This reshuffled the power dynamics of the denomination by replacing the former method of the elders’ present choosing the Standing Committee among themselves. The change contributed to the division of the 1880s.

Congregations within the Church of the Brethren had geographically defined boundaries, particularly in areas with strong concentrations. These boundaries could wax and wane according to numerical growth or decline. The tension within the denomination over issues of dress in the early 20th century accelerated the decline of these boundaries between congregations.

One factor during the period from 1900 through the 1920s, beside a continuing growth of numbers and geographical spread, was that some larger districts were redrawn. Although a number of reasons for this process were given, the



believers, and let them talk about how they experience that in their space, and then build out of that.

Are we incorporating people into the conversations? Not just putting people on boards, but is it meaningful interactions? It's a lot of time and attention.

A couple of years ago, before the pandemic, we got to do

love feast with two new congregations. We repurposed communion sets and basins and towels from two churches that had closed. Both churches were really excited that their love feast supplies were going to live on. It was a different love feast than I've ever been a part of. But it was as meaningful as any, because it was their expression of what

gerrymandering helped to separate the plainer, often rural Brethren from the more accommodating urban Brethren.

Over the years, district boundaries have been adjusted by mutual agreement with the approval of Standing Committee. Most often these have occurred to accommodate new church development or to separate congregations where division has taken place.

As the mission movement took root within the denomination, there were districts named for Denmark, India, Sweden and "First Asia Minor." Districts within the United States in 1900, excluding the four associated with foreign mission, numbered 35. By 1920 there were 47 domestic districts.

In addition to the elders body of a given district, as time passed various boards, committees, and offices were established. Although accountable to the district conference, each of these operated somewhat independently.

As the professional ministry began to replace the plural ministry model, districts began to employ paid staff during the latter 1920s. These persons were often pastors who combined the duties and were described as "field men." They worked to promote the overall program of the denomination with particular attention to Christian education and ministerial issues.

By the mid-1930s, meetings with denominational staff were being held in Elgin. During this period, the denomination began to subsidize the field program in districts, as well as the regions that were centered around the affiliated colleges.

Following World War II, the denomi-

nation began to reevaluate many practices, including how the church was administered. The move to integrate the various denominational boards into one central unit, the increased role of the laity in church administration, and the desire to eliminate redundancy within and between administrative units began to affect district structure and staffing. By 1953 there was a model district structure that brought together multiple intra-district structures into one unified system.

One outcome was a major study of district realignment in 1961. This proposed the reduction in the number of districts from 46 in the United States and Canada to 18. The regional structure disappeared by 1966, with its functions delegated to the now, in many cases, enlarged districts. Although the realignment process took two decades to accomplish and appeared a bit different than the original proposal, by 1983 there were 24 districts in the United States.


While most of these, in the East and Midwest, required no further denominational subsidy, some districts in the South and West continued to receive financial assistance in order to maintain well-trained leadership. As indigenization of mission work in other countries proceeded, all non-domestic districts vanished by 1972 due to merger or independence from the US denomination.

With the movement to enhanced districts, in many cases with multiple staff and greater resources, came the felt need on the part of district executives to organize their own professional association. This was accomplished in March 1970 and was named the Council of District

Executives in 1976. Although not a formal part of denominational structure, it has been described as "increasingly influential." This was particularly evident in goal setting for the 1980s and 1990s, as well as Annual Conference assignments for certain tasks.

Following the redesign of the General Board in 1997 and the deployment of Congregational Life Team (CLT) staff throughout various areas of the denomination, funds that had subsidized smaller district staff programs were discontinued. As membership diminished and financial resources declined, multiple staff in districts disappeared by 2018. In the smaller districts, laypersons and/or teams began to appear to provide basic district services.

While there have been voices suggesting district structures use other than geography as a basis, perhaps ethnicity or theological preference, it is not apparent how these would resource themselves and what effect this would have on the unity of the denomination.

Even though districts have changed over 165 years, their basic functions have remained the same: to handle challenges and difficulties "close to home" and to do together what we cannot do apart. This includes the credentialing of ministers; the placement of pastors; the initiation of new church development projects; the creation and sustenance of ministries such as camping programs, retreats, and training programs; and the receiving and dismissal of fellowships and congregations. From the beginning until the present time, districts have met every year for worship, study, fellowship, service, and business. 



# Voices from districts

they had studied and learned, and they were incorporating it into who they were.

**Shumate:** My viewpoint on church changed when I started hearing myself talk about “white people church.” The folks in the Latino churches have taught me an awful lot. It’s not only about welcoming people to the community, it’s about receiving *from* them.

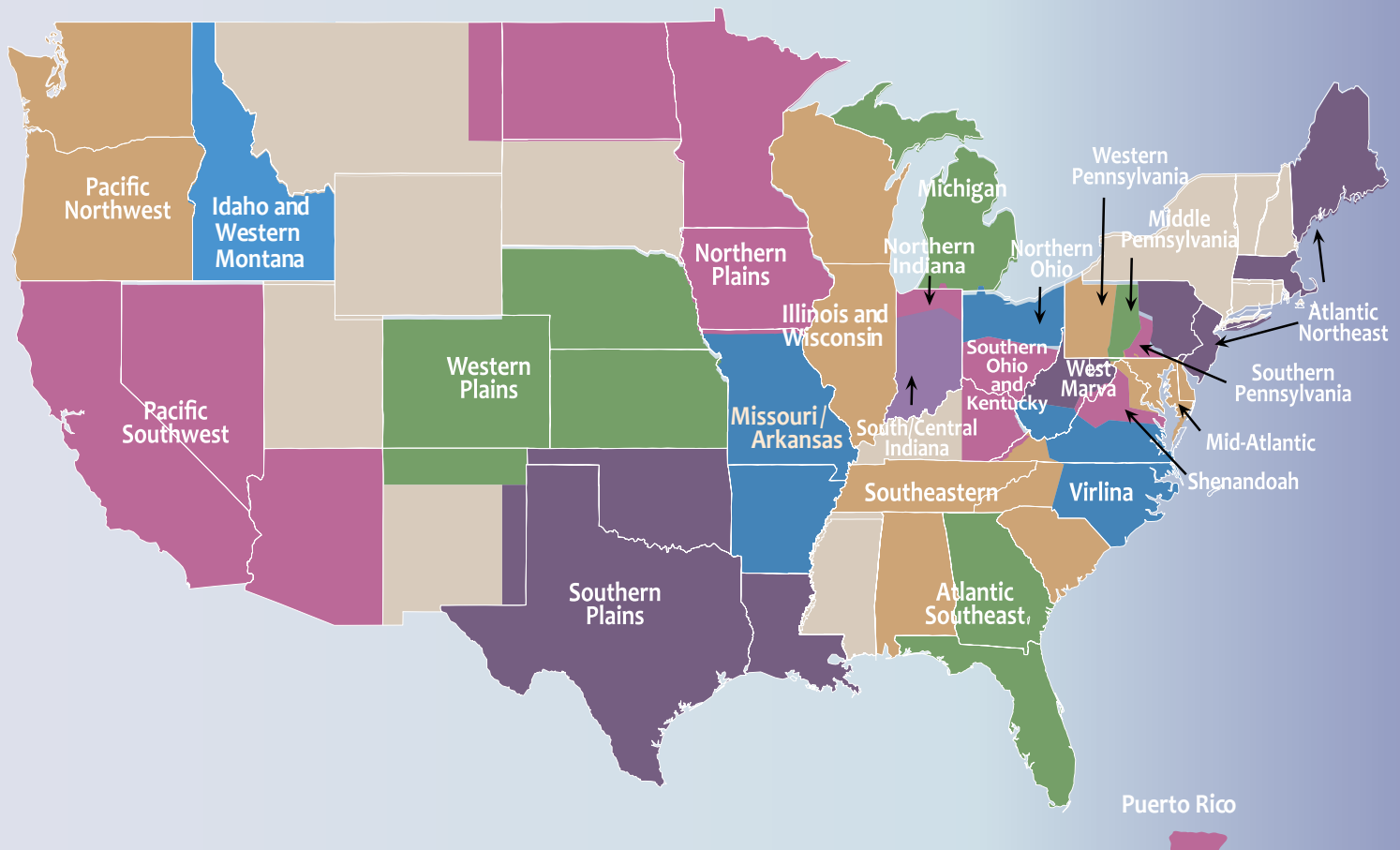
I’m convinced that the future of Christianity in the United States is in large part with the ethnic church. The older I get, the more aware I am how tightly wrapped up you can be in this is what church is, this is what church is about, this is how we do things. It’s been a really great experience for me, in ways that I never could have imagined.

**Hawk:** You all are, at least in some way, dealing with churches that are closing or leaving. How are you dealing with that?

In our district currently we have had no churches that have moved to leave. I expect that might shift soon. We’ve made a commitment as a district board that, while we had hoped that none of this would come to pass, we will go through this process as brothers and sisters in Christ, committed to love one another, to be open and transparent, and to work through the process together.

So we’re not in the midst of anything yet. Several congregations are having conversations at the board level, but have not initiated the district withdrawal process.

## Districts of the Church of the Brethren







*The Council of District Executives and the Leadership Team of the Church of the Brethren at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., April 4-6.*

Does it cause grief? It does. But our call is to be the kingdom of God. We need to show another way. So that's part of our commitment in this process. How things will go over the next couple of years I've no idea, and don't have much control over that piece of it. But we can choose to be faithful.

**Eikler:** I've got two congregations that have left. I'm pretty sure two more are going to vote. I have yet to have a congregation ever get in touch with me about it. Ever.

Our district board made the same expression of saying we want to work through this together gently, graciously. I know I can't control it. And yet it feels very personal, because I have good relationships with these congregations and with their pastors. I do reach out and have conversations. So it's been extraordinarily hard for me.

**Shumate:** It's just so bizarre. It's like, we're all still related. And we all still pray for one another. But we're not the same family anymore, exactly.

One thing I've noticed about the process is no one will talk to you about it. They bring in people from the outside to talk about it. And so there's no clarification of anything.

And there's this alternate narrative that goes around that is very interesting. They also claim they don't recruit. But I hear tales of things.

Judging from past splits in the church, I believe that it's like a rocket. We're just seeing the first stage and it will drop off, and something else will pop out the second stage. And that process will take years.

If you go back to look at the 1880s split, in our district we were two years behind Ohio and Indiana.

Almost every congregation in our district split in the 1880s. We had no Progressive Brethren. All of us split to the right, the Old Order. And so it goes in stages, and there

are unintended consequences that impact these things.

You know, there are some people that are hair trigger. There is great confusion in a lot of our churches about On Earth Peace and the rest of the denomination. And so I get this continual thing: Elgin is spewing this stuff out. And I'm saying, what are they spewing? Tell me what it is. Nobody can tell me.

And then there's a social media war that goes on. I can always tell when somebody got roasted in a private group, because I'll have a pastor call me up and say, you know, I see upper leadership at the Church of the Brethren pouring gas on the fire. I say what gas?

People are trying to do their business on social media, rather than in the councils of the church. They should know better. But it depends on who their relational circle is.

**📌 You sit in a unique place in the organization of the Church of the Brethren. You see things up close and personal, but you also relate to things on a denominational level. So you have this wide scope, and a lot of wisdom. What would you like to say to the church?**

**Shumate:** The coronavirus has done a job on the church. I have seen pastors have breakdowns. I have seen pastors quit the ministry because they had panic attacks. I've seen the tension between pastors and congregations and within congregations.

But I think the coronavirus is not the big issue. We've had the division and it's done things to the trust fabric of the church. It has done things in relationship between congregations, between congregations and the district and the denomination. There is a lot of grief around that for me, because you can't talk with people for a lifetime and go through the divorce.

“ How do we interpret Brethren into a different culture? And what are the things that are essential to being Brethren? ”



# Voices from districts

The big problem is that we need to rethink from the bottom up our approach to society, and particularly how to work at transformation of individuals, as well as society, without expecting people when they come through the door to be transformed. Which makes me question an awful lot of things like thinking on church membership and what relationship that has to transformation or what blockage that brings to transformation. I think we are often located in the wrong places and that we tie up resources in places where we really are not effective. We can move those resources somewhere else and be more effective, but I've not quite figured out how one does that.

But I think the natural movement of society and attrition will take care of that probably without any kind of interference from the outside. When we tried to do social engineering before, in the 1950s, the regional group did it when we had regions that is still remembered and still resented.

So you have to be gentle on how that's approached. How we are with people seems important to me. I have sort of a sojourner's philosophy of how you approach individuals vis-à-vis how you approach society, and don't think that changes in law change hearts.

We're in a society where we have laws that protect the rights of all manner of people. And we think because there is that "have to" that people are going to change and the kingdom will come and really individuals don't matter. But individuals do matter. And you cannot have transformation of human society if you don't have transformation of individuals.

I don't think you can start by expecting individuals to be perfect, or to have some kind of a philosophy. You take people where they're at, and you work with that. That requires an awful lot of patience and commitment. The church cannot operate as it is operated in the past, at least in the mainstream culture.

Do I think we can learn to be different? Yes, I think we can. But we have to have an open, teachable spirit, talk at all aspects and not just some aspects. And try to figure out how you do that. I haven't got the answer for that. I keep working on that.

**Eikler:** Well, there are two things that continually come up for me.

I am a different generation than the rest of you. And, frankly, the threat or scariness of a church declining in

population does not exist for me. It is not scary to me. It does not feel like a threat to me. It does not feel like an existential crisis.


To me, it feels like a winnowing process, a period of gathering before exploding. Because everybody that I know in my generation who became part of the Church of the Brethren became part because they loved the Church of the Brethren, not because it was a big church or because their family had always been part of it.

The only reason people my age are still here is because this is where we want to be. So for my colleagues and friends that are my age, the vitality of the church is evident everywhere. Now, we're only sprinkled in to people who are a different generation and are terrified. But young people are saying, "If you want the church to be responsive and find a way forward, get out of the way and let us make changes that need to be made."

The other one is the profound grief that I have in watching a church that prided itself on its desire to engage diversity and reach out into different places, different contexts for ministry, different cultures to work together. That's what I grew up in. But the church has so eagerly thrown away the treasures that God created.

That's the thing that brings me the closest to despair, that people are throwing away the treasures that God has given us in the form of sisters and brothers who have a different experience, different perspective, different vision, and the ability to call us to grow and change—because it's uncomfortable, or it's too hard anymore.

**Matteson:** I would want us to be really attentive and patient for the Spirit of God moving among us, ready to respond when the nudge is there, but patient to wait on God's guidance and leading, and trusting that that Spirit working among us can do mighty things.

**Hawk:** What I'd like to say is that it's not about us. It's about the treasure that we're given in Jesus—for eternal life, but also the abundant life now—and the transformational power of that, and, as we come together, to deliver that good news. It's not about us doing the best that we can. It's about us allowing the Holy Spirit to move in and through us with a power that is beyond ourselves, in ways that we never imagined on our own. 

“ You take people where they're at, and you work with that. That requires an awful lot of patience and commitment. ”





A March 1903 photo of the Lincoln Society with Joseph Cunningham at front and center.

## Manchester dedicates building in honor of first Black students

**M**anchester University in North Manchester, Ind., invited descendants of its first Black students to the formal naming ceremony of its Academic Center in honor of siblings Martha and Joseph Cunningham. The ceremony on May 2 included a tribute to the Cunninghams and their descendants. A new timeline inside the building will reflect their life and times.

The Cunninghams grew up near Kokomo, Ind., and started at Manchester in 1900, Joseph in the preparatory school and Mattie in the Bible school.

Martha “Mattie” Cunningham Dolby spent the early part of her career working to improve the lives of impoverished Black families in the segregated South. Having spent much of her childhood in the Church of the Brethren, she worked to establish a congregation in Arkansas and revive one in the Midwest. In 1911, she became the first woman to be installed as a minister in the denomination.

Joseph Cunningham completed the Manchester normal English program—a course designed as professional training for teachers that offered a solid base in mathematics, science, language, history and pedagogy—in 1903 and continued the following year with a program in elocution. He went on to become a physician and lived in Chicago.

## Colleges receive large gifts

**Bridgewater** has received \$1 million from board chair Bruce Christian and his wife, Spas, for the Rebecca Quad project creating outdoor meeting and socializing areas adjacent to the Kline Campus Center and the campus mall.



**Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa.**, has received a donation of more than \$5 million, made anonymously, to develop its environmental science department’s off-campus facilities including the Raystown Field Station that hosts a program for students in environmental science and biology, among other programs. Executive director Charles Yohn is a member of Stone Church of the Brethren.

**McPherson (Kan.) College** announced its first-ever seven-figure gift to Bulldog Athletics, more than \$1 million received from Craig and Karen Holman. The gift supports a Sport Center expansion. Craig Holman is a member of the board and a volunteer assistant tennis coach.

Another large gift to McPherson funds a new endowed scholarship for the automotive restoration program. The initial gift of \$400,000 is from the late Daryl and Ann Hemken, who founded the Hemken Collection Museum in Williams, Iowa. The collection was sold at auction in September 2021.

## ULV offers bachelor’s degree for RNs

The new **College of Health and Community Well-Being**, which is slated to open this summer at the University of La Verne (Calif.), has a new bachelor of science in nursing program for registered nurses (RNs) who want to further their careers and enhance their skills with a bachelor’s degree.

The first cohort of students in the “Bachelor of Science in Nursing: RN to BSN Program” will begin this fall. The coursework is fully online so that working nurses can attend and complete the program in as few as 15 months, with classes offered year-round in accelerated 8-week sessions. The program includes an in-person clinical component and an emphasis on teaching about health inequities and social determinants that affect health at the individual and community levels. ULV is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution.

## Bridgewater launches support for ASD

**Bridgewater (Va.) College’s new Bridgewater Academic and Social Experience (BASE)** program is a new offering for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or those who feel that they may benefit from the support provided.

The program fosters and encourages independence through a variety of support mechanisms for students to learn to apply the skills, strategies, and self-advocacy needed to navigate the demands of college. BASE is designed in a step-down format in which students receive the highest level of support when first enrolled, gradually evolving over time to promote independence based on each student’s needs and progress.



# What is it about *the country church?*

by **Gene G. Bradbury**

**T**he memory came back to me on a recent visit to a country church. Or perhaps it was only a dream.

I wandered through the old sanctuary and through the Sunday school rooms. I found the pastor's office in its usual place, during those early days, next to the communion table. The door was open, unconcerned about intruders. I felt immediately at home among the book-lined shelves.

It was there that the question arose like incense: What is it about a country church that quiets the spirit? The building itself had little to recommend it other than its simplicity. Country churches are often small, as are their congregations. A few faithful worshipers still attend in rural communities. They have been coming for generations and follow a pattern set by parents, grandparents.

In the sanctuary I smell the musty dryness of hymnals. I'm aware of the sharp polish applied to the pews. My eyes are drawn to the tile floor worn by many feet. The carpet down the center aisle is tattered and torn.

Descending the stairs to the basement, a damp odor greets me. I pause at the kitchen to wonder at the gallons



flickr.com/Jonathan Khoo

of coffee served from the large urns on the counter. How many potlucks with their familiar bowls of Jell-O have passed through these serving windows? I can taste the memories.

In the fellowship hall, I feel the hot breath of the furnace. The long tables, heavy and covered with old lino-





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flickr.com/Jonathan Khoo

leum, stand in review. They await the arrangement of plastic flowers to make them more welcoming.

The kitchen itself needs new appliances. Generations have lit the old stove. The counters are clean, but the cracks on the surface show their age. The cupboards have been painted far too many times. The heavy plates, cups, and saucers wait on papered shelves, too good to throw out.

I can still recall people walking overhead as they leave worship. The door of the sacristy squeaks open as the pastor enters to take off his robe; he will sit a minute before coming downstairs. His study is warm and quiet. He looks out the window at the graveyard and remembers the words of hope and resurrection he pronounced beside the graves. Those buried there once worshiped and sang the same hymns the congregation sings today. They, too, drank coffee after services and ate open-faced sandwiches.


What is it about a country church? It's more than dust, dampness, and polished pews. The country church is more than coffee and Jell-O. There is more than a cramped pastor's office with outdated furnishings. What is it about a country church?

I confess, I can't really say. Perhaps it is the spirit of place that follows me between the gravestones as I think about today's sermon. The quiet invites me to ponder the years spent and the years ahead. I peer down the hill and out over the farmland. Families will arrive soon and walk up the path to the door.

My thoughts move to the words I will say, gathered from books I have read. I think of the conversations in the café and in homes I have visited.

"Good morning, pastor," greet the first arrivals.

What is it about a country church? The question lingers. Many country churches are closing their doors. But I hope not all. I would like to think there are still pastors opening the rural churches to turn on the lights and turn up the heat. I would like to think there are pastors sitting quietly before the service begins to look over their sermon one last time.

Yes, I may have lived some of this history. I am hopeful that others also will experience the spirit of place. 

Gene G. Bradbury is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor living in Sequim, Wash. He recently completed an M.A. in Theopoetics and Writing from Bethany Theological Seminary.



# Generation to generation

The church's unique composition offers opportunities—if we want them

by Greg Davidson Laszakovits

*“Why aren’t the young people stepping up?”*  
*“Why aren’t the old people stepping down?”*  
*“Those Boomers/Millennials/Gen Xers just don’t get it!”*

**I**n the past two years of pastoring and consulting congregations I’ve heard these comments and many more like them. Not coincidentally, they are the very same comments I hear from nonprofits and businesses while consulting to create and manage healthy workplace cultures.

Much has been made in recent years about a new reality in the modern workplace: four generations working side by side. Thanks to advances in medicine and extended longevity, people are now able to work longer and stronger. Coupled with a steady demand for workers, it is not uncommon to see a 50-year gap between workplace colleagues, and the challenges that go along with that gap in age and perspective. When frustrated, each can view the other as entitled, lazy, power-hungry, and clueless.

Congregations are not immune to these same dynamics—perhaps to an even great extent due to at least one more generational cohort added on the younger and older ends! Yet despite the multi-generational challenges congregations face, one cannot help but wonder if the church has something to share with other organizations. After all, from its early origins Christianity was designed as a body that welcomed and cared for all, regardless of age or status.

First, a disclaimer about generational analysis: It is not intended to box in entire swaths of people as particular personality types based solely on their birth years. It is helpful to remind ourselves that this type of study is sociology, not psychology; we are looking at broad trends across tens of millions of people.

With that in mind, we can also note there are trends that apply to a high number of people in a specific generation [see sidebar]. This is attributed to their shared experiences, especially in formative childhood and young adult years. Wars, economics, (un)employment, and culture all play a part. For example, we know that a member of the Silent Generation who grew up listening to the radio, now in their 80s or 90s, understands and relates to entertainment differently than a person in Generation Z, who does not know a time before the internet and handheld devices existed.

## What is “normal”?

It’s no secret that generational cohorts often act as rivals with one another, even in the church. Sadly, these differences in perspective often go beyond rivalries to outright conflict. When we slow down and examine the radically different worlds in which each generation was raised, it is easy to understand why: People of different generations view the world in different ways. Our experiences shape how we understand the world and what we view as “normal.”





For example, Generation Z (born 1997-2012) does not remember a time before hand-held devices, and business apps on those devices. They wonder why on earth an old fogey like me would ever physically walk into a bank when virtually all banking can now be done virtually. It is normal, comfortable, and convenient for them to do their banking from their device. On the other hand, I still remember the satisfaction and safety of seeing my deposit registered on a little piece of paper that I could tuck into my checkbook. That was normal for me. (Full disclosure: I think they're right, and I'm slowly making the change)

How we go about our personal banking is one thing. But what about when we need to make decisions together as the world changes around us? In our congregational communities, how do we come together about how to worship (is it okay for a "member" to participate solely online?), use the church building (can the day care use the sanctuary for an art class?), or organize ourselves (in person under a complex organizational structure using Robert's Rules of Order, or a Zoom gathering with minutes on Slack, the budget on a Google Sheet, side conversations happening via text, and simple decision-making?).

It's easy to see how intergenerational conflict might arise when questions like these come up. Each of these not-so-hypotheticals questions how we view the world, solve problems, and envision the future. What do we do when versions of "normal" include two, three, or even four different perspectives?

One congregation I worked with couldn't figure out why "no young people want to serve on the church leadership team." Some comments trended even more negatively as loyalty, commitment to service, and work ethic were scrutinized. Then we started examining what was "normal." For the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, church leadership

positions were considered prestigious positions that served the church and had taught them valuable life and leadership skills in their young adult and middle years. That was their "normal." The younger generations felt their disapproval and felt guilty, angry, and some disillusionment with the congregation. So we got curious.

A basic study showed us that the number of vacant positions was numerically overwhelming for younger generational cohorts because the governance structure was built when the congregation was much larger. We also discovered that the calling process presumed people already knew the importance and value of serving the congregation but did not communicate that to potential leaders.

The last, and most important, information gathered was insight into the lives of several young families. In sum, rising college costs left many of the families with educational debt to the extent that two jobs were necessary to support their family and service their debt. This also meant that some of them would have to hire childcare to attend evening, in-person meetings. Not only would serving on these committees cost these families time away from their families—from whom they had already been away all day—but it would also cost them money. In sum, it was a very big ask.

As this information came forward, the entire conversation changed. Generations began to understand one another's "normal," as well as their hopes, dreams, and challenges. Finding solutions to these challenges was not easy, but we were able to find success through an improved calling process, greater flexibility in meeting, and improved focus (read: shorter) at meetings.

How did we create the environment where these problems could be solved? Here are three habits every organization can adopt to overcome generational differences and maximize each generation's strengths.

“Generations began to understand one another's "normal," as well as their hopes, dreams, and challenges.”



### #1. Get curious not furious.

I encourage every organization I work with to practice this habit early and often, especially when it comes to conflict and decision-making. Asking questions of curiosity, even if just internally, probes assumptions about what is “normal.” Admittedly, this can be thornier when it comes to something as dear as congregational practices and traditions. Nevertheless, it is the embodiment of humility: “I may not have all of the answers.” “The way we’ve been doing it may have been effective for decades, but is it now?”

Curiosity asks non-leading questions, seeks input, gathers information, and listens deeply. When we develop and practice this skill personally, it will rub off on others. We will begin to create the setting where others can climb out of their positional trenches and begin solving problems together.

In the example above, it was easy for each generation to feel justified in their anger and assumptions. It was not a

matter of right or wrong; it was a gap in understanding solved through non-judgmental inquiry.

### #2. Take the long view.

In Genesis—and much of the Hebrew Bible—there is a clear emphasis on the value of future generations. Time and again, the covenants and punishments alike between God and God’s people are couched in terms that are strikingly forward-looking and framed in a generational context. To have peace and security (*shalom*) now is good. To experience *shalom for generations* is a tremendous blessing.

What would happen if we viewed church decisions, rivalries, and differences of preference from the generational long view, rather than the short view of what my generation prefers or feels comfortable with?

### #3. Leverage the strengths of each generation.

It should go without saying, but no one generation is better

## THE GENERATIONS

**A brief look at today’s most populous generations, and the events, technologies, and economic factors that shaped them:**

### Silent Generation

(Born 1928-1945. Current population 22 million, according to US Census data provided by Statista.com.) Shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, this generation is loyal to and gives a high level of trust and respect to institutions. They are willing to sacrifice for these institutions, including the church. They were grateful for employment and could often find a job for life. They grew up on radio and newspapers as their sources of entertainment and information. The car was cutting-edge technology for the masses. Through most of their lives the church was at the center of community, and family life and denominational affiliations were important and valued. Sixty-six percent belong to a church, according to Gallup studies.

### Baby Boomers

(Born 1946-1964. Current population 71 million.) Boomers believed they could change the world. Then they did just that as the largest generation ever in US history. Highly motivated by work, upward mobility, and status, they enjoyed unprecedented economic growth. They saw the Civil Rights and Women’s movements make great strides and remember the moon landing, the golden era of television, and the advent of rock and roll. Boomers are accustomed to holding power. To wit, a Boomer held the US presidency for nearly 30 years straight (Biden is an almost-Boomer, but very young Silent Generation). Boomers are the richest and most influential generation. Many church buildings today were literally built on the promise of this numerically huge generation, and they fulfilled that promise—though many peeled away as church attendance and denominational affiliation became less important. Fifty-eight percent belong to a church.



“ Communities of faith are among the few organizations that have practice existing as a multi-generational organism. ”

than another, even though each generation seems to think that generation above them has too much power and the one below them doesn't know how good they have it! (“Back in my day...”) In fact, studies show time and again that no generation has a stronger work ethic than any other.

Multi-generational organizations are a gift for all. Yes, younger generations can help older generations with technology and finding modern solutions to problems, and older generations can pass their accrued wisdom on down. But I believe we can go at least one layer deeper if we understand one another's “normal.” If we know Baby Boomers are motivated by work and Millennials by making a difference, how can we communicate our volunteer needs to speak to both? If the Silent Generation is loyal and understands the value of institution and also is wondering where they fit in now, and Generations X and Z tilt towards institutions cynically, how do we connect them in ways that will edify each?

### In conclusion

Communities of faith are among the few organizations that have practice existing as a multi-generational organism. Where else does a body exalt a toddler's exuberance and a 100-year old's wisdom, along with every other gift in between? Our faith carries rituals that nurture the young, feed us in our middle years, and care for the needs of the aged.

In spite of our stumbles, the church universal—and congregations in particular—have gifts, rituals, and perspectives woven into our communities that prepare us to live into the challenges of multi-generational interaction. The church's unique composition offers opportunities. Do we want to take them? [M](#)

Greg Davidson Laszakovits is a leadership coach and organizational development consultant, and sometime Church of the Brethren pastor. He lives in Elizabethtown, Pa., and can be reached at [gdl@gdlinsight.com](mailto:gdl@gdlinsight.com).

## Generation X

(Born 1965-1980. Current population 65 million.) This age cohort lived through the proliferation of divorce culture and being latch-key kids, runaway inflation in the 70s, the end of the Cold War, and increasingly targeted marketing. Often branded as “slackers,” they adopted a more laissez-faire attitude towards work, especially as employers became less devoted to employees. If the Boomers “live to work,” Gen Xers “work to live” and sought greater life balance and flexibility, though they are currently in the prime of their careers. Gen X welcomed in the personal computer and World Wide Web, and it became a place to find the grunge rock and hip-hop they so adore. Fifty percent are church members, and the downward trend of loyalty to institutions, including church and denomination, continued.

## Millennials

(Born 1981-1996. Current population 72 million.) Perhaps the most derided generation in recent years, Millennials are now the largest generation. Most of them remember 9/11 and the wars that followed, and they were students as school shootings became part of the norm in American life. Despite these horrors, it is an optimistic generation that was raised to think they could do anything, often by “helicopter” and “snowplow” parents. Career-wise, work is a transactional means to an end, often done as multiple “gigs,” and student debt has altered many of their futures irrevocably—delaying marriage, family, home-buying, etc. At the same time, they want what they do to mean something. Thirty-six percent belong to a church.

## Generation Z

(Born 1997-2012. Current population 67 million.) Still coming into their own, Gen Z appears to be on course to continue the trend of a more pessimistic generation following an optimistic one, as Gen X did after Baby Boomers. Who can blame them: They've not known a time when terrorism was not a threat, they grew up on live-shooter drills at school, saw *two* economic downturns, and have now endured COVID-19. They are trending towards a generation that will prize safety and predictability. It is still too early to measure church membership numbers, but estimates show numbers close to the rates of Millennials.

# Getting to know Gen Z

by Jan Fischer Bachman

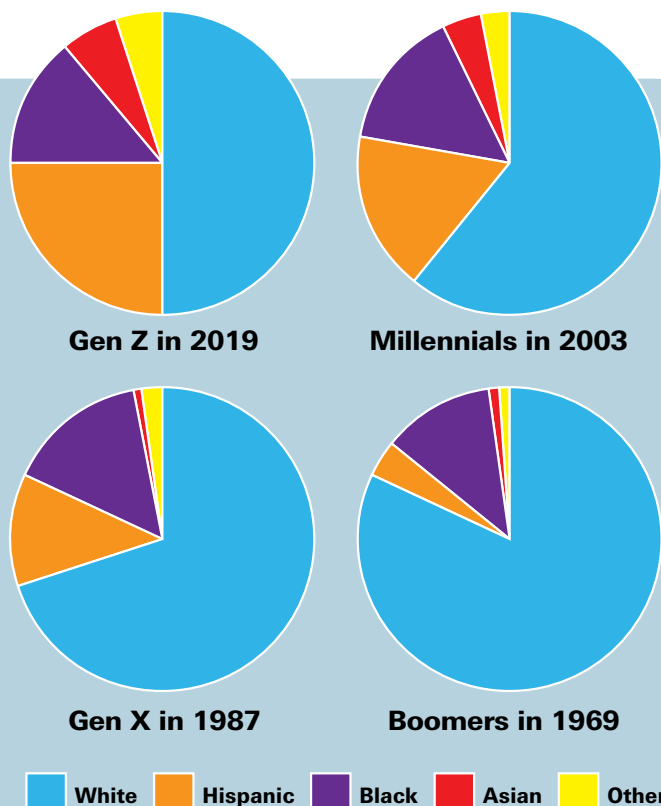
*Does church need a glow up so the fam will stan it? Or is that just cheugy?*

**E**ach generation uses words in a different way—and holds different views and values than their predecessors. Generation Z consists of people born from 1997 to 2012 (or 2003 or 2019 or the present, depending on the source). They have grown up with the internet, school shootings, recessions, a pandemic, and rising prices and levels of income inequality.

What are distinctive characteristics of this generation?

## Diversity

Gen Z represents the most racially diverse age group in US history (see chart). Six percent were born outside the US, with 22 percent having foreign-born parents.



Source: Pew Research Center

Gen Z is also the most diverse group in terms of gender and sexuality, with 20.8 percent identifying as LGBT, according to a 2021 Gallup poll. YPulse, a youth research company, found this number to be 27 percent.

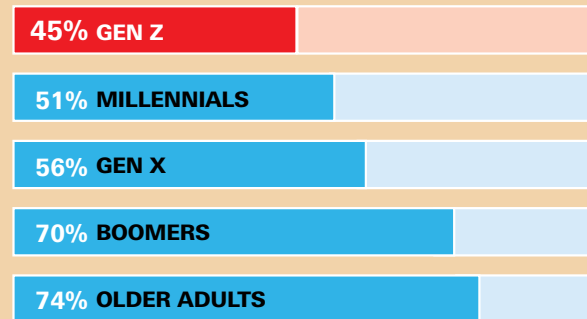
## Digital engagement

Gen Z has never known life without the internet. According to YPulse, 64 percent of Gen Zers get most of their media content from YouTube, which is also the first place they go for information; 60 percent follow an online creator, and 88 percent of them regularly game (compared to 70 percent of Millennials).

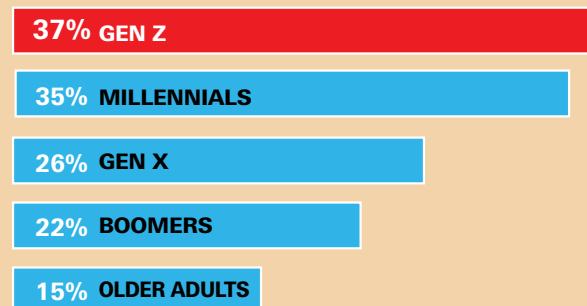
## Mental health issues

The American Psychological Association, partnering with the Harris Poll, reported that 91 percent of Gen Z adults said they had experienced physical or emotional symptoms related to stress. Gen Z had the lowest percentage of any age group to describe their mental health as very good or excellent.

### Percentage reporting very good or excellent mental health



### Percentage receiving treatment/therapy from a mental health professional



Source: APA (2018). Stress in America: Gen Z.



“Forty percent of those ages 13-25 felt that they had no one to talk to and that no one knows them well.”

YPulse found that 84 percent of Gen Zers were anxious about the future. Forty percent of those ages 13-25 felt that they had no one to talk to and that no one knows them well (Springtide Research Institute). In 2019, suicide was the second leading cause of death for those between the ages of 10 and 34 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

**Financial insecurity**

The percentage of those 18-29 years old living with parents reached 52 percent in 2020, the highest level in 80 years. (The highest previous recorded percentage was 48 percent in the 1940 census; data for the 1930s, during the Great Depression, does not exist.) The main cause? Finances.

**Commitment to change**

According to LinkedIn, 80 percent of Gen Z place a high priority on alignment with their values and interests at work—compared to 59 percent of Millennials. YPulse found that 59 percent of Gen Zers thought they should speak out on important social issues; just 47 percent of Millennials felt the same.

In a 2022 survey of people aged 13-19, 77 percent indicated responsibility for protecting the future of the planet, and 84 percent agreed that “if we don’t address climate change today, it will be too late for future generations” (4-H/Harris Poll).

**Not opposed to church, but . . .**

According to Springtide Research Institute, in 2020 78 percent of those ages 13-25 considered themselves at least slightly spiritual (including 60 percent of those who are atheists, agnostics or “nones”), and 71 percent at least slightly religious. Just 8 percent have a religious leader they could turn to if needed.

The pandemic affected young adults’ religious beliefs and practices. Only 1 percent had a faith leader reach out to them when pandemic shutdowns began; this increased to 10 percent by 2021. According to Springtide Research Institute, 26 percent reported that their faith grew stronger, while 47 percent said it had stayed the same, and 27 percent that they were doubting or had lost their faith.

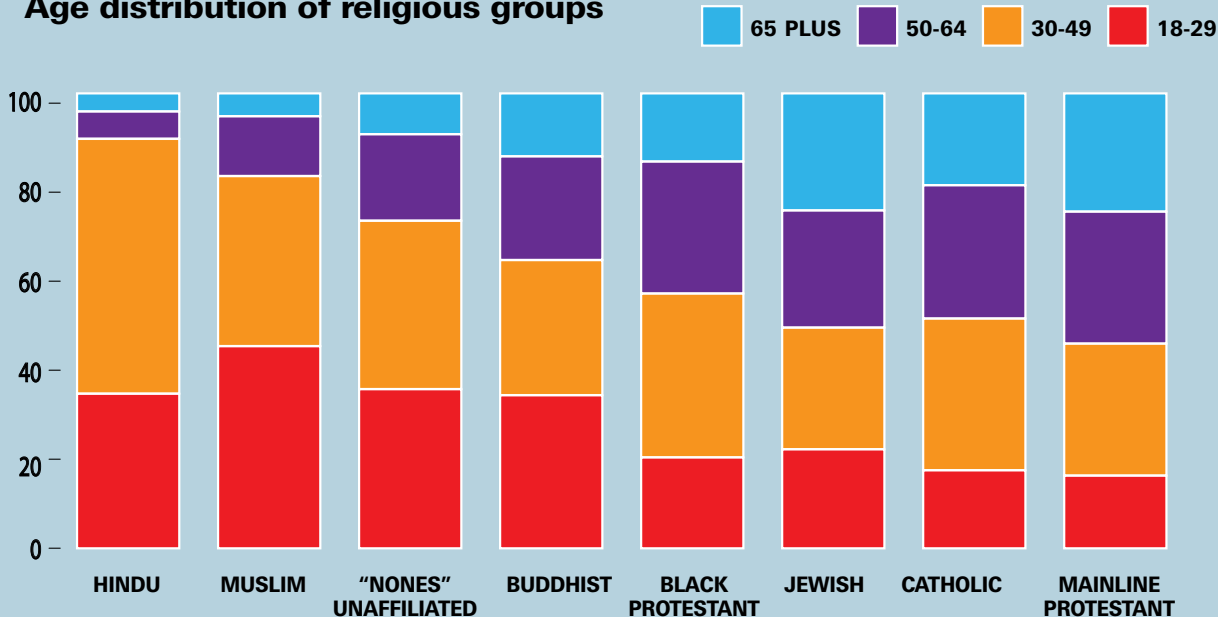
**What does the Bible say?**

In three of the Gospels, Jesus identified the necessity for change; in Luke, he acknowledged people’s dislike for it.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, ‘The old is good’” (Luke 5:37-39).

What fresh wineskins might be needed for Gen Z? 

**Age distribution of religious groups**



Source: Pew Research Center

# Parish the thought

## Seattle event invites faith communities to re-imagine local connections

by Walt Wiltschek

**M**aybe Sesame Street had the right question all along. Who are the people in your neighborhood . . . the people that you meet each day?

That's essentially what members of the Parish Collective—a group of Christians centered in the Pacific Northwest but drawing from across the country—urge churches to ask: Who *are* the people in your neighborhoods? And what do they need? The idea isn't new, but it's a fresh expression of the broader Parish Movement, which dates back decades. This hyper-localized approach to re-imagining ministry emphasizes the need for congregations to be intentionally shaped around their immediate "parishes," or local communities.

It takes the outward focus of being "missional" that has permeated church consulting circles for years but tightens the radius further to look carefully and caringly at the streets and places that are a stone's throw from the church. It also does it in a way that isn't patronizing or transactional ("If we do this for you, what can you do for us?") but rather embraces a heavily relational and collaborative long-haul approach.

The focus might particularly resonate in the Church of the Brethren right now, as the recent compelling vision process has made being "Jesus in the neighborhood" a buzzword (buzzphrase?) in the denomination. So as Discipleship Ministries co-director Stan Dueck learned more about the

Parish Collective's work in the past few years, he began encouraging Brethren to take notice.

"There are so many shared values with the Parish Collective and what we have," Dueck said. "One of the things I really appreciate is their organic approach to church and mission and thinking about ministry. It's better aligned with us than some bigger conferences that are more programmatic and geared for larger churches."

Parish Collective members have spoken at past denominational events, and in late April about 20 Church of the Brethren members—pastors, denominational staff, and others—attended the Parish Collective's "Inhabit" conference in Seattle, where storytelling, resource-



Walt Wiltschek



Walt Wiltschek



Walt Wiltschek

“ Who are the people in your neighborhoods? And what do they need? ”



sharing, and networking (and lots of coffee) took center stage.

Paul Sparks, one of the organization's founders, did a special session for the Brethren group before the main conference, talking about a "vicious cycle" that turns churches more and more inward, consumed by structure and bureaucracy and legalism rather than mission and relationship. That leads to isolation and a breakdown of neighborhood connections.

"The more time you spend in the building, the less time you spend in the neighborhood," Sparks said. "You can learn to see the world through the lens of your neighborhood and parish, and you move differently when you see the world through that lens."

Sparks, who was once pastor of a large, traditional, contemporary church in Tacoma, Wash., made an intentional shift in his ministry, one he says allowed him to start "experiencing great joy" by finding the holy in everyday places.

He noted Jesus' tendency to "chuck" some traditions in a quest to reach out more authentically and broadly, especially to those who had been left out, and suggested that today's churches might need to do the same. It calls for finding a "third way" between "church as it's always been" and a "complete deconstruction till we have nothing left," valuing both history and change.

"The current system is reaching a tipping point of unraveling," Sparks said. "We don't know how to interact with each other. How do we be as generous as possible to what's coming in from outside (the church) without losing our story? How can what we're doing together transform us in what we do in the neighborhood?"

Speakers and musicians in the larger conference reinforced and built on those themes, intentionally crafting liturgy, songs, poems, and stories that embodied values of connection and community. Words of evangelism and witness mixed readily with notes of justice and combating racism.

Songwriter Tom Wuest, for example, introduced one of his compositions by

saying, "When we stop seeing the image of God in each other, it takes us down a path of hate and division." When we do see that image of God, however, "we start to see beauty everywhere," Wuest said, "even in places of suffering."

Another speaker, Erinn Oxford of The Dale Ministries in Toronto, told a story of a panhandler named Ronnie who often stood outside a coffee shop she frequented. Through eventual regular interactions he became an important part of her neighborhood community, leading to a tear-filled funeral when he passed away earlier this year.

"We want to nurture relationships and create interdependence with as many of our neighbors as possible," she said.

And Brent Ross, a Methodist pastor in San Diego, observed that traditional church services are often "controlled and managed, everything that life is not, everything Christ is not." Instead, he said, the call to go out into our neighborhoods often leads us into places that are "shattered, broken, and wounded."


Going into those "deep, hurting places" can be painful and difficult, a participant from inner-city Detroit later added, but "the joy is always coming to supersede that."

Importantly, the focus is not primarily on bringing people *into* the church building, but rather turning the church's orientation so that it becomes a better neighbor, living and walking among the community as Jesus did. It carries divine goodness into the world simply to be present and to be a blessing, opening the door for deeper relationships.

"It's much of what our heritage is about," Dueck says. "What the Parish Collective has been doing connects with us and is well received by the people in the church who interact with them. They find common ground and similarity."

So as you head to church this week, perhaps slow down and take a deeper look around at the roads or streets or alleys near the familiar walls of your church. Who else might be out there in your "parish"? How might they be part of what your church is doing—or not yet

doing? How might you be a blessing to one another? It could begin with very small things, maybe even with a new story of connection.

As Sparks said to Brethren at the Seattle conference, "Everywhere the Spirit is doing beautiful things. But we just haven't taken the time to look and celebrate it." 

## FIVE SIGNS

These principles are considered the "Five Signs" of the Parish Movement:

- Centering on Christ
- Inhabiting Our Parish
- Gathering to Remember
- Collaborating for Renewal with God
- Linking Across Parishes

For more information on the "Five Signs" and other resources, visit [www.parishcollective.org](http://www.parishcollective.org).

## FOR FURTHER READING

To learn more about the ideas of the Parish Movement, consider these books:

- *The New Parish*, by Dwight J. Friesen, Paul Sparks, and Tim Soerens
- *Reclaiming Our Community*, by Majora Carter
- *The Ministry of Ordinary Places*, by Shannan Martin
- *Falling Free: Rescued from the Life I Always Wanted*, by Shannan Martin
- *Everywhere You Look: Discovering the Church Right Where You Are*, by Tim Soerens

Order from Brethren Press, 800-323-8039 or [brethrenpress.com](http://brethrenpress.com).

## LEARN MORE

The Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board's Discipleship Ministries, Office of Ministry, and Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church program provide resources for congregations and pastors that want to explore deeper neighborhood engagement. Contact [DiscipleshipMinistries@brethren.org](mailto:DiscipleshipMinistries@brethren.org). The next New and Renew church planting/revitalization conference will take place in spring 2023.

# A song of salvation

Isaiah 49:1-13

by David Radcliff

Ministry of Agriculture of Rwanda

**F**unny how God works. In our world today, nearly every political leader makes claims to restore former glory or to lead their people to new heights of prosperity and power. This passage in Isaiah seems to have a similar goal—restore what has been lost, renew those who have been famished, bring to song those who have known only sorrow.

The difference between these two promises of a better life is the approach—how the people are brought from one place to another. Among nations, the tools for this resurrection are often investments in military power or economic programs, appeals to nativism or racism, slick propaganda promoting this ideology or that. Even corporations get into the act, promising to restore everything from one's hairline to one's social status via the right ointment, car, clothing, or other consumable.

For Isaiah, the means of this trans-

formation is through a person or people of promise. This is not to be a monarch or magnate, as is typically the case in our world, but a servant. This servant leads by being a light (a beacon), a covenant (a connector), and even a slave-like figure (one who draws others through unmerited suffering).

Some of the most powerful figures in recent global and national history fit this unconventional model of leadership. Malala Yousafzai survived an assassination attempt for her role in promoting girls' education in Pakistan, then went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize. There are movements across the United States for justice for those historically excluded, led by these very excluded ones even as they experience pushback from many sides.

In our own denominational history, we think of figures like Ted Stuebaker, who famously said, "Give me a shovel instead of a gun," and went to Vietnam as a service worker rather

than a soldier. He faced pushback from many in his community and eventually gave his life for the cause, but now is an inspiration for young peacemakers.

Isaiah recognizes there is something deeply powerful about this way of being in the world—bringing changes with more staying power than those wrought by the weapons of war or commerce.

## Light—and land

Isaiah reminds the people of Israel of their higher purpose, the important mission God's given them. Not only will their own people experience redemption through the servant, but the light of salvation will shine beyond them to all nations—even to the ends of the earth. The writings of Isaiah are part of the transition in scripture away from a narrower view of who resides within the scope of God's care and concern to a more universal audience for God's redemptive work.



“ Those who have been excluded from goodness . . . are promised to be led along highways made straight and lined with springs of water. ”

What is the nature of this redemption? It is very concrete: land, release to captives, emancipation of those who have lived in the shadows, sustenance from the earth. In sum, it's a path to a better future thanks to a combination of social and environmental justice.

The importance of land was clear on a visit to Batwa communities in Rwanda, among whom the Rwandan Brethren are ministering. These people (sometimes called pygmies) had been driven out of their ancestral forest home decades ago to make way for national parks and agricultural interests. Consigned to squatter settlements and without land of their own, they were dependent upon day labor and cross-border trade with Congo when the pandemic hit their area, ending these income-producing activities. This laid bare their loss of land, as they had no good way to grow food to eat or sell.

Our text is attentive to people such as this. Those who have been excluded from goodness by disenfranchisement of one kind or another are promised to be led along highways made straight and lined with springs of water.

### Barriers to abundance

In our world today, many people have been sent on a journey. But rather than being cared for and catered to along the way, they are part of the global refugee crisis. Indeed, one out of every one hundred people in the world has fled their home due to war, climate change, ethnic conflict, religious persecution, or other factors. Our own nation has vacillated between cracking and closing the door to these exiles.

Our passage today promises food and water aplenty, shelter from scorching sun and wind, and access to these things for people from all corners of the earth. What a world that will be!

But alas, we need to look no further

than climate change to find shortages of food and water, overages of heat, increases in severe storms and wildfires, and the displacement of people and other living things from their home areas. Fossil fuel combustion will also kill 8.7 million people this year around the world because of air pollution, accounting for one out of every five deaths worldwide.

So, the very things our scripture promises “on a day of salvation” (v. 8) not only have yet come to pass but also seem even more in jeopardy as time goes along.

There is a remedy, however. God has chosen the one (or ones) needed to bring the lost back, comparing this servant to a polished arrow hidden away in the quiver for this special assignment (v. 2). The mission (should you decide to accept it . . .) will be to restore the scattered ones, bringing them back to God and into a future of promise and prosperity, as described above.

### Good news for all


This will be no mean task, but God being God considered this “too light a thing” (v. 6) and sets the bar even higher. The chosen will also be a light to the nations, spreading the good news of this salvation to the ends of the earth.

The ends of the earth may be at the end of a 20-hour flight—or at the end of our driveway. I recently heard the testimony of a relatively new member of one of our congregations. Her pilgrimage began as a Roman Catholic and then passed through a couple of other denominations, but at each stop she found herself ostracized over things she felt

were essential to her faith. These mostly had to do with intransigence in relation to understanding scripture and/or accepting others.

After being away from the church for several years, she met the pastor from the local Brethren congregation at a meeting of folks working at immigration issues. At some point, as she explored joining the church over the coming weeks, the pastor told her with a smile that her era of wandering was over: “You are more Brethren than you know.” She had found her home.

The Batwa people of Rwanda, too, had been made to be wanderers. However, as they shared their desire for land for cultural, nutritional, and economic reasons, Brethren pastor Etienne Nsanzimana listened to them and worked with them to identify just over seven acres for sale near their community. Funds were raised and sent, potatoes were soon in the ground, and it was not long until a photo was forwarded of women dancing between the rows of flowering potato plants.

As people anywhere are provided the sustenance and security they need, they do indeed exult, just as our scripture predicts they will. As God's servants, we are to stand between the promise maker and those to whom the promise is given—the covenant linking these two, enabling the suffering ones to be comforted and shown compassion. 

David Radcliff, an ordained Church of the Brethren minister, is director of New Community Project, a nonprofit organization working at care for creation and peace through justice. This study is selected from the summer quarter of *A Guide for Biblical Studies*, which is celebrating 150 years of the International Sunday School Lessons.



## Mission grants made to international partners

**T**he Global Mission office has announced grants made to international partners in 2021. Close to \$700,000 was distributed, made possible through donations and significant financial support from Brethren World Mission, the Brethren Mission Fund, and the Royer Foundation. Global Mission also distributed funds on behalf of the Global Women's Project. These amounts do not include grants from the Global Food Initiative or the Emergency Disaster Fund.

**Democratic Republic of Congo:** \$10,000 to the administrative budget of the church in the DRC.

**Dominican Republic:** \$22,000 to the administrative budget of the church in the DR.

**Haiti:** \$478,131, including grants to the Haiti Medical Project, \$80,000 to purchase property for the Delmas Church, and \$35,000

for the church building in Saut-Mathurine.

**Honduras:** \$500 for theological training.

**India:** \$2,000 to the administrative budget of First District Church of the Brethren in India.

**Mexico:** \$250 for program supplies.

**Nigeria:** \$41,214 mostly for rebuilding churches that have been destroyed in violence.

**Rwanda:** \$57,857 for the building of church headquarters, scholarships for Twa students, and seminary training for pastors.

**South Sudan:** \$36,000 for mission programming.

**Spain:** \$19,706 including theological training for leaders of the church in Spain.

**Uganda:** \$6,410 including a Christmas event at an orphanage.

**Venezuela:** \$23,955 including church building and outreach to indigenous peoples.

## EDF grants aid Ukraine refugees

**B**rethren Disaster Ministries directed grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to relief for displaced Ukrainians and to a National Youth Conference (NYC) service project making school kits.

A grant of \$50,000 was given to the International Orthodox Christian Charities, a US-based NGO, for its work to support Ukrainians displaced in neighboring countries, host families and institutions providing humanitarian assistance for refugees, and protection for women and children.

A grant of \$37,500 helps fund a project to collect Church World Service school kits at NYC. Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction in Pennsylvania are partnering in the project to assemble at least 3,000 kits. The auction has contributed \$20,000. NYC participants will bring additional donations.



Aniel Rosario

## DR Brethren move toward reconciliation

**S**mall but important steps were taken earlier this year toward reconciliation within Iglesia de los Hermanos (Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic), which suffered a division beginning in February 2019 when pastors of Haitian descent walked out of the annual Asamblea citing discrimination, among other reasons. They organized La Comunidad de Fe (Community of Faith) as an autonomous nonprofit.

Since then, attempts have been made by representatives from the US church and the leadership of Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (Church of the Brethren in Haiti) to reunite the DR church.

When Iglesia de los Hermanos held its 2022 Asamblea Feb. 18-20, representatives from the leadership of La Comunidad de Fe were in attendance. More recently leaders from the board of Iglesia de los Hermanos attended the Asamblea of La Comunidad de Fe April 9-10. A joint pastors' retreat was planned for late May, as the two groups pursued a process of reconciliation.



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## Personnel notes

**James Deaton** resigned as managing editor for Brethren Press, as of May 24, to take a position as communications content editor for the Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church. He began his work with Brethren Press on Oct. 29, 2007. Over almost 15 years he edited curriculum, books, and the bulletin series; supervised freelance writers, editors, and designers; overseen the Church of the Brethren Yearbook; and managed the production process for the publishing house. Projects of note during his tenure included additions to the Inglenook Cookbook series—*The New Inglenook Cookbook* and *Inglenook Desserts*; representing the Church of the Brethren on the Committee on the Uniform Lessons Series; and making improvements in how the *Church of the Brethren Yearbook* collects directory and statistical data.

**Margaret (Maggie) Elwell** will join Bethany Seminary this fall as assistant professor of Peace Studies. She is an assistant clinical professor in the University Honors program at the University of Maryland. She has done undergraduate work in English and religion and holds a master's degree in teaching, a master of divinity, and a doctorate in Religion and Society. She earned her degrees from Swarthmore College, Johns Hopkins University, and Princeton Theological Seminary, where she earned the Senior Fellowship for Best Thesis and

a Doctoral Merit Fellowship and directed the Center for Theology, Women, and Gender.

**Sam Locke** began May 2 as executive director of institutional advancement at Bethany. Most recently he was director of development for Indiana Legal Services, a nonprofit law firm based in Indianapolis providing free legal services to low-income people. He previously worked in fundraising for the Presbyterian Church (USA). Originally from Connersville, Ind., he earned undergraduate degrees in education and political science from Indiana University, a master's in public administration from the University of Wyoming, and a master of divinity from Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

**Dauda Gava**, provost of EYN's Kulp Theological Seminary in Nigeria, was international scholar-in-residence at Bethany for the spring semester.

**Linetta Ballew** has been hired as executive director of Brethren Woods Camp and Retreat Center in Keezletown, Va., where she has been acting director. She has worked in camping ministries for 19 years including as program director and assistant director at Brethren Woods and as co-administrator of Camp Swatara in Bethel, Pa. She holds degrees from Bridgewater (Va.) College and Eastern Mennonite Seminary, where she earned a master of divinity.



National Council of Churches

**Galen Fitzkee (at right), a Brethren Volunteer Service worker at the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, is pictured at a Cuba Working Group event. National Council of Churches leader Leslie Copeland-Tune was present along with faith partners from the Cuba Working Group of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community at a dinner with Cuban ambassador Lianys Torres Rivera and vice-minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Fernandez de Cosio Dominguez.**

## On Earth Peace board considers staffing

**On Earth Peace held its spring board meeting via Zoom on April 7-9, led by co-chairs Melisa Leiter Grandison and Irvin Heishman.**

The meeting opened with a report on the current interim staffing arrangement. Responsibilities previously carried by the executive director are now divided among the three staff: Marie Benner-Rhoades, Matt Guynn, and Darlene Johnson. The board is preparing to consider proposals for a new staffing structure.

Staff have stepped up development work, with interns assisting in making calls to donors. The board is assisting with planning a Dec. 3 concert fundraiser at Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., in-person and online, featuring Friends with the Weather.

In other business, the board continued work to become “unapologetically multiracial/multicultural”; held conversations about the On Earth Peace branding; considered recommendations that board members be trained in Kingian Nonviolence; celebrated progress made with National Youth Conference staff “for training for all adult advisors with guidelines in place to protect queer youth from bullying as well as providing identified safe space and advisors”; and reviewed polity recommendations being brought to Annual Conference, five years after On Earth Peace asked for clarification of polity relating to agencies.

Board member Beverly Eikenberry was appointed as treasurer. Two candidates were affirmed as new board members, beginning in 2023: Tamera Shaw, a program coordinator in the Psychology Department at George Mason University, and Jessie Houff, community arts minister at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren and Community Arts coordinator and an adjunct professor at Wesley Theological Seminary.





## WARM WISHES

**Congratulations,** Melissa Gallihugh and Eddie Sumbry! June 12, 2022

**Congratulations, Grandsons!** Graduation from universities: Matthew Roop, Illinois; John Roop, Trine; Eric Yager, Valparaiso. We love you today, tomorrow, always. Delora and Gene Roop

## CLASSIFIEDS

**Online Worship: Living Stream Church of the Brethren has been a consistent online presence for 9 years.** Join us for worship from wherever you are! **We meet ONLINE every Sunday** at 5:00 pm Pacific / 8:00 pm Eastern. Each worship is recorded if you want to view it later. Our congregation has no building or walls but includes participants throughout the US and from several other countries. Find out more or see previous services at [www.LivingStreamCoB.org](http://www.LivingStreamCoB.org) or email [contact@LivingStreamCoB.org](mailto:contact@LivingStreamCoB.org).



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## Centenarians

**Eikenberry,** Faith, 101, La Verne, Calif., April 25

## New members

**Bush Creek,** Monrovia, Md.: Dawn Weller

**Columbia City,** Ind.: Aleece Garcia, Michael Garcia, Clay Geiger, Darcy Geiger, Ryan Geiger, Sandra Geiger, Cheryl Hamlin, T. Scott Hamlin, Donna Ott, Jeff Ott, Liz Pfeiffer, Linda Sutton, Robert Sutton

**Curryville,** Martinsburg, Pa.: Kathleen Kenny-Heinlein, Caleb Myers, Cameron Myers

**Freeport,** Ill.: Mary Barber

**Garden City,** Kan.: Fredrick Crockett, Max Raymond Crockett, Sheryl Holiman, Zoey Wenzel

**Hagerstown,** Md.: Dave Fisher, Doris Fisher, Scott Fisher, Jim Laird, Sue Laird, Brian Shay, Cinnamon Shay

**Palmyra,** Pa.: Jose Aponte, Joy Derck, Randy Derck, Jill Keyser Speicher, Tim Speicher, Caryn Thurman

**Troy,** Ohio: Jeannie Darnell, Ron Mack

**Waynesboro,** Pa.: David Castle, Dianna Castle, Ellya Kennel, Wendy Metcalf, Curtis Myers, Kim Myers, Barbara Paterno

## Wedding anniversaries

**Albaugh,** Wayne and Sue, Westminster, Md., 50

**Betterly,** Sheldon and Peggy, Nokesville, Va., 67

**Clay,** Roger and Patricia, Hartville, Ohio, 65

**Kuhn,** Robert and Linda, North Canton, Ohio, 50

**Leverknight,** Blaine and Carol, Johnstown, Pa., 55

**Martin,** James and Jennifer, Lititz, Pa., 50

**Miller,** Paul and Patricia, Harrisburg, Pa., 67

**Snyder,** Robert and Rita, Uniontown, Ohio, 60

**Wilson,** Donald and Andrea, Union Bridge, Md., 60

**Wright,** Owen and Patricia, Cottage Grove, Ore., 65

## Deaths

**Ackerman,** Ralph George, 74, Bethel, Pa., March 12

**Baldwin,** David B., 75, Cedar Falls,

Iowa, March 11  
**Becker**, Norma J. Weikert, 92, Hanover, Pa., March 13  
**Bowers**, Opal Laverne Thompson, 95, Dixon, Ill., Nov. 30  
**Bright**, Elsie Alice Trent Young, 109, Greenville, Ohio, Sept. 17  
**Brooks**, George Wayne, 87, Dixon, Ill., Feb. 5  
**Cline**, Myrtle Inez Miller, 102, Palmyra, Pa., June 26, 2021  
**Coffman**, Doris Janette Myers, 91, Rockingham, Va., Nov. 5  
**Cole**, Stella Kathleen (Auntie) Shaffer, 99, Denton, Md., March 15  
**Daffin**, Shirley Anthony, 79, Denton, Md., Feb. 2  
**Davis**, Margaret Shifflett, 93, Charlottesville, Va., April 7  
**Dietz**, Paul Richard, 89, Palmyra, Pa., June 6, 2021  
**Doyle**, Jimmy R., 84, Lima, Ohio, Nov. 9  
**Ecker**, Richard Lee, 93, Plymouth, Ind., March 2  
**Edson**, Erika Rusev, 98, Dixon, Ill., Jan. 30  
**Fansler**, Clyde Allen, 83, Cerro Gordo, Ill., April 11  
**Feldman**, James, 80, Lima, Ohio, Sept. 21  
**Felix**, Joyce LaVern, 72, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Jan. 14  
**Fike**, John P. E., Sr., 82, Hanover, Pa., March 12  
**Good**, Alan Dale, 74, Los Angeles, Calif., March 28  
**Grubb**, Wilmer E., Jr., 96, Palmyra, Pa., Oct. 29  
**Hallacher**, Virginia May (Ginny), 95, Palmyra, Pa., Jan. 12  
**Henderson**, Virginia C. Shuttlesworth, 101, Greenville, Ohio, Oct. 2  
**Lambert**, Matthew Henry, 0, Columbia City, Ind., March 6  
**Lampe**, Edith Hull, 97, Waynesboro, Pa., April 12  
**Layman**, William R., 102, Dayton, Va., Dec. 31  
**McCan**, Roger D., 90, Plymouth, Ind., April 16  
**Melvin**, Lelia Wetz, 79, Troy, Ohio, March 17  
**Osterwise**, Ileen Charlotte Ross, 98, Greensburg, Pa., March 17  
**Pannell**, Leo Wayne, 86, Stuarts Draft, Va., March 1  
**Parsley**, Bessie Mae, 95, East Wenatchee, Wash., March 20  
**Person**, Richard Roy, 84, Polo, Ill., Dec. 28  
**Preston**, Charles E. (Bud), 94,

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

Wenatchee, Wash., Sept. 27  
**Sanford**, Mary Margaret Jones, 95, Dixon, Ill., May 7, 2021  
**Snoke**, Leroy O., 93, Palmyra, Pa., Feb. 18  
**Sponaugle**, Ennis Dorothy, 98, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 25  
**Strickler**, Mary Novella Junkins, 88, Keyser, W.Va., March 30  
**Stutzman**, Ordo J., 97, Wenatchee, Wash., Dec. 5  
**Wallace**, JoAnn Rae deArmas, 78, Elizabethtown, Pa., Jan. 31  
**White**, Christina M. Bellows, 97, Dixon, Ill., Jan. 10  
**Wolfe**, Mary Edris, 95, Palmyra, Pa.,

May 18, 2021  
**Workman**, Meredith (Kay) Kuhn, 82, Lima, Ohio, March 23

## Ordained

**Boyd**, Harold, Virgina Dist. (Hollins Road, Roanoke, Va.), March 27  
**Fink**, Teresa, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Parkview, Lewistown, Pa.), April 11  
**Leonard**, Michelle, N. Plains Dist. (Panora, Iowa), March 20

## Licensed

**Reed**, Robert, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Raven Run, Saxton, Pa.), March 27

## Placements

**Fink**, Teresa, from pastor of special ministries to pastor, Parkview, Lewistown, Pa., April 11  
**Heinlein**, Christopher, from interim pastor to pastor, Curryville, Martinsburg, Pa., April 3  
**O'Brien**, Shawn, from minister of youth to pastor, West Green Tree, Elizabethtown, Pa., March 13  
**Tutolo**, Amiel, pastor, Oak Grove South, Rocky Mount, Va., April 1  
**Weller**, Dawn, pastor, Bush Creek, Monrovia, Md., April 4



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# God be with you

**T**here's a Brethren beard," my coworker declared under her breath. I turned subtly, trying not to stare at this older man with a long, bushy beard. "But he doesn't have a mustache," I noted. She chuckled. "That's how they wear them. Odd, don't you think?"

This was my first Annual Conference, and the Brethren were new to me. The Richmond, Va., convention center was abuzz with people from all over. I was doing my best to



JAMES DEATON

soak it all in, but honestly it felt like a deluge. Had I made a mistake by taking this job? Was I going to fit in? Who were these Brethren?

I remember jumping in to help set up the bookstore. Unpacking boxes of books was doable, something in my wheelhouse. *Another Way of Believing. Shoes of Peace. The Middle Man. For All Who Minister. Fruit of the Vine.*

These felt weighty. Pay close attention, I told myself. As I flipped pages, reading snippets and studying photos, I began to sense a people who knew who they were, an openhearted church, a kindred spirit.

I'm a generalist, fascinated by all Christian traditions and what sets them apart. I affectionately call myself a Christian mutt—not born and bred in any one camp—so tracing my spiritual ancestry is complicated. I grew up in Baptist and Holiness churches, graduated from a United Methodist seminary, considered becoming a United Church of Christ pastor, was baptized in an Episcopal church, and have spent over 14 years working for the Brethren.

I may not be purebred anything, but mongrels are hardy and adaptive. The Church of the Brethren's peculiarity wooed me as I looked for a way to marry my seminary training and writing background, and I'm grateful for being invited in. It's been a good place to pitch my tent.


So much of what I've learned about the Church of the Brethren and its beliefs and practices has come through tending the books and resources Brethren Press has published.

The lore of the seagoing cowboys captured my imagination. Marie Hamilton's stories of forgiveness in *Grace Goes to Prison* moved me to tears. The heirloom recipes and the hospitality in the two recent Inglenook cookbooks fed my body and soul. Brethren hymnody and four-part harmony lifted my heart in praise. Peacemakers like Art Gish, who walked the walk and talked the talk, prodded me out of complacency. Black voices from the margins such as Mattie Cunningham Dolby challenged my white privilege. These stories and songs and symbols have left an indelible mark. How could they not?

An observer of cultural symbols, I have been most captivated by love feast. I would be so bold as to say that this ordinance is *the* interpretive key to Brethren belief. It unchains the Holy Spirit, and is the Dunkers' greatest gift to the world. I grew up washing feet as a Free Will Baptist, so that part wasn't foreign. But the whole dramatic movement of God's grace and love—providing space for reconciliation, eating a meal with friends and enemies, washing feet, sharing in the Lord's Supper, and praying and singing together—is what gives the Church of the Brethren the star in its crown. In the simplest, humblest way possible, of course.

Siblings in Christ: The church—the beloved body of Christ—is undergoing seismic changes. We have felt it throughout this pandemic, and even before. The artificial structures that have propped up religious institutions for decades are crashing down, and renewed expressions of Christian faith are emerging. People are hungry for authenticity. And Brethren, you've got the real deal.

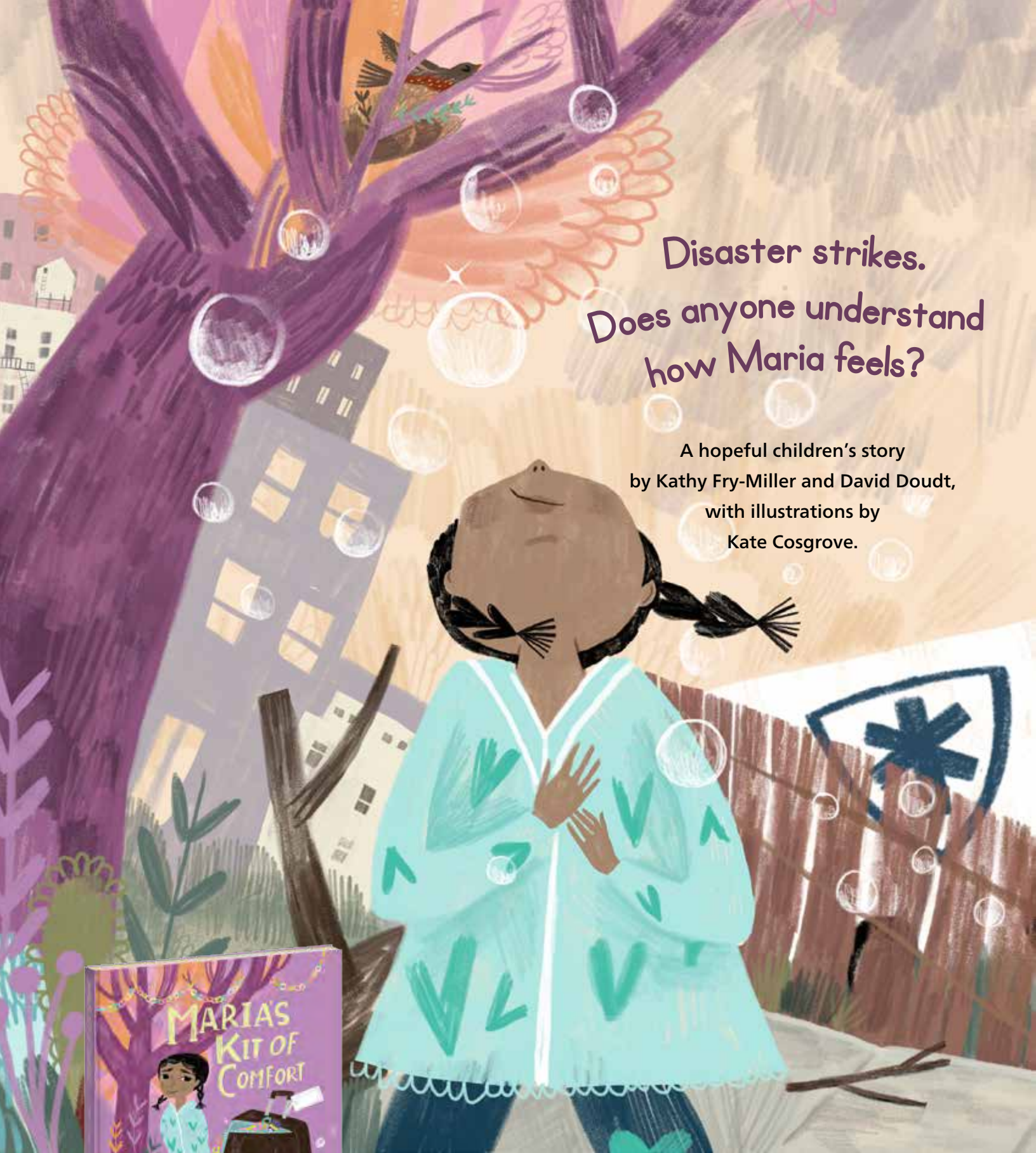
Keep your hearts wide open. Invite the curious in. Be bold in proclaiming the good news that has been entrusted to you. Continue feasting on God's love and pursuing the Holy Spirit's blazing trail. And, please, hang on to those Brethren beards.

There's only one regret that lingers: It's that I never got to experience love feast in person. God willing, I'll remedy that, and thankfully I know there's a spot for me at the table. 

James Deaton has been managing editor of Brethren Press since 2007. In late May, he moved on to work for the Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church.

“Keep your hearts wide open. Invite the curious in. Be bold in proclaiming the good news that has been entrusted to you.”





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