

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



*Light*



# IT'S TIME TO SHARE

## One Great HOUR OF SHARING

Photo by Craig Thompson

So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up... - Galatians 6:9

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

January/February 2023 Vol.172 No. 1 [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger)

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Photo by Ellie Kosek

# The God who gathers

**One of the meetings scheduled for March 2020** was a planning retreat for the MESSENGER editorial team. We were going to get together in the Washington, D.C., area in conjunction with a big religious communications congress that, of course, also didn't happen.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

Thirty-three months later, we finally got to hold that planning retreat. In the intervening years, two of the four members of the team had moved from the East Coast to points farther west, so our substitute meeting ended up in Elgin, Ill.

While editorial collaboration has been smooth because of a good project management tool and monthly Zoom meetings, there's nothing quite like an extended, in-person meeting to dig deeper. We alternated between the nitty-gritty of article planning for 2023 and broader conversations about the big challenges of the day.

The model of an editorial team of part-timers is working well. Each of us carves out a slice of time to work on MESSENGER, while still holding down a primary job doing something else. That adds up to a full-time equivalent of about one staff person, but with the creativity and opinions of multiple minds—much like the team ministry models that some congregations are using.

Collectively, the four of us share many years with MESSENGER, whose lineage stretches back more than 170 years. In a time when many large denominations have had to let their magazines go, we marvel that the diminutive Church of the Brethren still has one. Every day we're grateful for readers who want to connect with the rest of the church by reading and responding to the pages of MESSENGER.

At the end of our retreat, we realized a fun fact—that the four of us editors were born on four different continents.\* That piece of trivia doesn't really mean anything. But perhaps it can symbolize the way God gathers people from the east and the west, from the four corners of the world, and puts us in conversation with each other. If our denominational magazine is one of God's gathering places and if the conversation there is filled with faithful ferment, then maybe our church is not actually so small.

*\*In case you were wondering: Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.*

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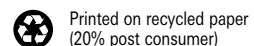
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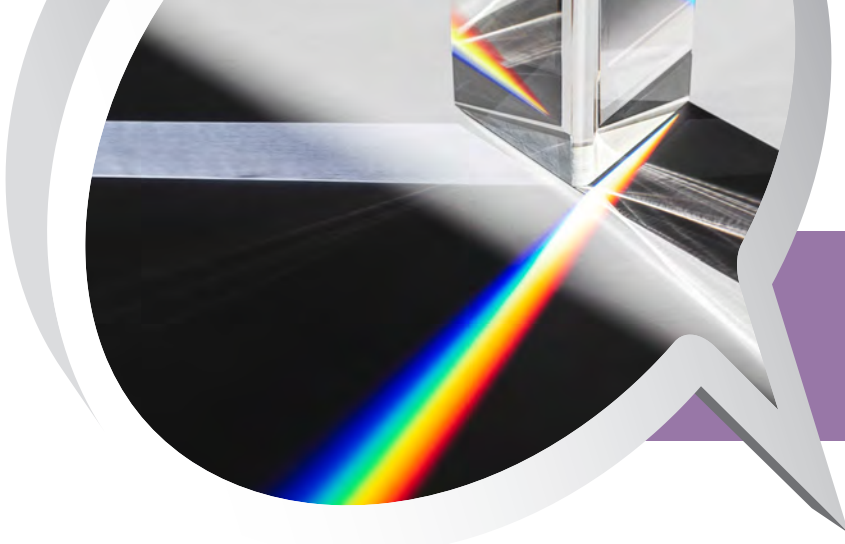
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**“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.”**

— Matthew 5:14, *The Message*

**“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.”** — Martin Luther King Jr.

**“How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a weary world.”**

— William Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*

**“Love is not consolation. It is light.”**

— French philosopher Simone Weil

**“You have to find what sparks a light in you so that you in your own way can illuminate the world.”**

— Oprah Winfrey

**“Pointing to another world will never stop vice among us; shedding light over this world can alone help us.”** — Walt Whitman

## SEEKING ENLIGHTENMENT

The word “Epiphany” means

“appearance” or “manifestation,” used in the Christian sense as Christ’s glory being made manifest to the world. The holiday is often associated with light, from the star that the Magi followed to see Jesus and from light breaking into the world, as poetically rendered in John 1. In the Orthodox tradition, Epiphany is often termed the “festival of lights.”

Another, less familiar, Christian holiday is Candlemas. It falls on Feb. 2—the 40th day of the Christmas/Epiphany season—and marks Jesus’ presentation at the temple as recorded in Luke 2. In some traditions it is marked by blessing and lighting candles, symbolic of the light of Christ shining into the world.

Read more about ways people experience light in their life and faith beginning on page 6.

## HIDDEN LIGHT

In the puzzle below, find these words that are associated with light. Answers can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, forward or backward.

LIGHT	RAY	SHINE	FLASH	BEACON
BULB	LAMP	BEAM	CANDLE	LANTERN
GLOW	BRIGHT	ILLUMINE	TWINKLE	JESUS

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

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The speed of light is just under 300,000 kilometers per second. At that speed, you could make seven trips around the earth in one second.
- The Las Vegas Strip features approximately 12 million lights, according to research by Smart Lighting Industries, making it the brightest city on the planet. As of 2021, it cost nearly \$500 million a year to pay that electric bill.
- According to some research, blue light has a “calming effect” on humans.
- Of all the creatures who live deeper than 1,500 feet in the ocean, about 90 percent are luminescent.
- The word “photography” literally means “writing with light.” English astronomer John Herschel coined the term.

Sources: *Travel and Leisure*, *facts.net*, *Discover*

# Kidlandia!

**B**eacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., has been seeking to serve like Jesus in the neighborhood, led by a child. Maya Koczan Flory wanted her congregation to build a kid-oriented village in the spirit of KidZania. Without the corporate sponsors, the church did the Brethren version: simplicity, sharing, service. Kidlandia!

On beautiful July days in 2021 and 2022, the congregation made kid-sized storefronts, borrowed canopies, and invited people to empty their basements and attics and closets. The result was a toy store, clothing store, grocery/household store, and bookstore. Wanting neighbors (especially kids) to have an empowering experience of choosing, free tickets were handed out, color coded for each of the stores, and shoppers got to choose how to spend them. Everyone got a backpack of school supplies. Musicians, cooks, and artists nour-

ished the gathering.

As the church prepared for Kidlandia 2, in order to engage neighbors, surveys were handed out asking what they like and don't like about the neighborhood. The survey showed the neighbors enjoy this part of Fort Wayne but lament limited opportunities to get to know each other.

With a big parking lot on a visible corner, the church has offered a thriving food bank and preschool for 40 years, a Little Free Library, a playground, and a basketball hoop available to neighbors. But do neighbors know they are welcome? The church decided to change its look to communicate welcome. The basketball net was replaced, the backboard repainted, and extra basketballs purchased to loan out. A couple of benches were moved out of the bushes into the



Anna Lisa Gross

open. Families started sitting and watching kids play basketball.

A new thing was tried: Trunk or Treat. Turns out you can pack a church parking lot with kids and adults in costumes—just buy candy and put out signs. The church shared Sunday school craft supplies with those who wanted to make “God’s Eyes.” Everyone was invited to trace their hand, decorate it, and add their name to a mural for the playground.

Beacon Heights prays neighbors know that the church cares about them; their need for food, books, and play; their need to share what they have to offer; their need to meet each other and be known. —Anna Lisa Gross

## HYGIENE CARE CLOSET FOR AT RISK YOUTHS

FOR STUDENTS 18YO AND UNDER

jesusloungeministry@gmail.com / (786)273-3787



## Jesus Lounge Ministry partners to support at-risk youth

**Jesus Lounge Ministry**, a new church start in Atlantic Southeast District, has partnered with the Student Life Alliance in West Palm Beach, Fla., where pastor Founa Augustin Badet is the treasurer, and the Delray Beach Library “Let’s Talk Period” program. The effort supports at-risk teens and tweens with hygiene and feminine hygiene kits.

In October 2022, after Hurricane Ian, the ministry sent 50 hygiene kits with pads, underwear, soap, wipes, washcloths, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and a suitcase of clothing, in collaboration with KOP Mentoring and the Delray Beach Police Department. The kits were part of three truck-loads of supplies delivered to students on the west coast of Florida, in the hard-hit Fort Myers area.

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.



Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., celebrates the women's volleyball team's NCAA National Championship. The game on Nov. 19, 2022, was the third championship win for the school's women's team, and the ninth time that Juniata Women's Volleyball headed to the championship game.

## College news

**World's only four-year automotive restoration program** gets \$500M boost" is the title of a report on **McPherson (Kan.) College** by Kyle Smith of Hagerty Media. "You can kickstart an informal education with a few hundred bucks and a search on Craigslist—or you can learn the craft of restoration from professionals at Kansas' McPherson College, which just announced a massive gift of \$500 million that could make it one of the richest liberal arts colleges in the United States." The donation

is a 2:1 match, the donor giving \$2 for every \$1 raised by the college through June 2023.

**Bridgewater (Va.) College** announced an undergraduate major in engineering. "The field of engineering has consistently been named among the top four career objectives by admitted students," said a release. "In response . . . the college reworked its applied physics major curriculum." Students will be able to graduate with career-ready skills in the fields of mechanical engineering, automation engineering and mechatronics, nuclear engineering, aerospace engineering, and automotive design. The major is expected to launch this fall.

## Thanksgiving auction benefits disaster

**U**ntil the pandemic struck, a congregational Thanksgiving dinner was a tradition for Beaver Creek (Ohio) Church of the Brethren. For the first Thanksgiving meal together since 2019, a simpler carry-in dinner was followed by an auction for Brethren Disaster Ministries.



Despite the glitch of a furnace failure (lots of space heaters were pressed into service), the event provided both fellowship and fun led by congregation member Tom Esterline as volunteer auctioneer ("I don't talk fast," he said).

Hand-crafted quilts, a crocheted scarf, a purse, an apron and potholder, a knit blanket, a doll, a teddy bear. One member created three seasonal table centerpieces. A grandfather and

grandson built a wren house with a Rudolph theme: twigs for antlers and a red pompom nose. There were books, puzzles, gingerbread house kits, an Advent calendar, and food like pecan pie, jelly, and snack mix. A son bought the chocolate chip cookies his mother contributed "because they are so good." Bidding was fierce on a jar of honey from a bee-keeping member. The total raised came to \$800. —Sylvia Hess

## REMEMBERED

**H. Lamar Gible, 91, an ecumenist and peacebuilder** known among colleagues as "the Church of the Brethren secretary of state," died on Oct. 29, in Elgin, Ill.

His remarkable life journey took him from Manheim Township, Pa., where he grew up on the family farm and attended White Oak Church of the Brethren; to Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and Bethany Theological Seminary; to several pastorates; and to the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, where he was Peace and International Affairs Consultant/Europe and Asia Representative for nearly three decades from September 1969 to retirement in March 1997.

He traveled to nearly 40 countries, worked with 32 different ecumenical organizations including the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), and was a driving force in Church of the Brethren agricultural exchanges with Poland and China. In 1989, he carried a half-time role as executive secretary of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

His accomplishments included placing and supporting Brethren Volunteer Service workers in European conflict zones; being a delegate to the First National Inter-Religious

Conference on Peace; visiting Vietnam in 1977 as part of a delegation from the Christian Peace Conference; taking part in a delegation of church leaders who met with President Carter; and speaking for the WCC at the United Nations Third Special Session on Disarmament.

A series of WCC conferences in which he was engaged led to his chairing a consultation on the Program to Overcome Violence in 1995. He was lauded for "his quiet, but dogged efforts since the early 1970s to bring such a program to life within the World Council of Churches."



H. Lamar Gible (right) with a Church of the Brethren group in New York in May 1978.

# Light





"Maumee morning," by Melinda Long

## *The beginning of the world*

The beginning of the world . . .

Silence

Darkness

Awakening sounds of nature

And with the coming of the sun . . .

Light!

Living our lives . . .

Aloneness

Despair

Confusion

Interaction with others

And with the coming of the Son . . .

LIGHT!

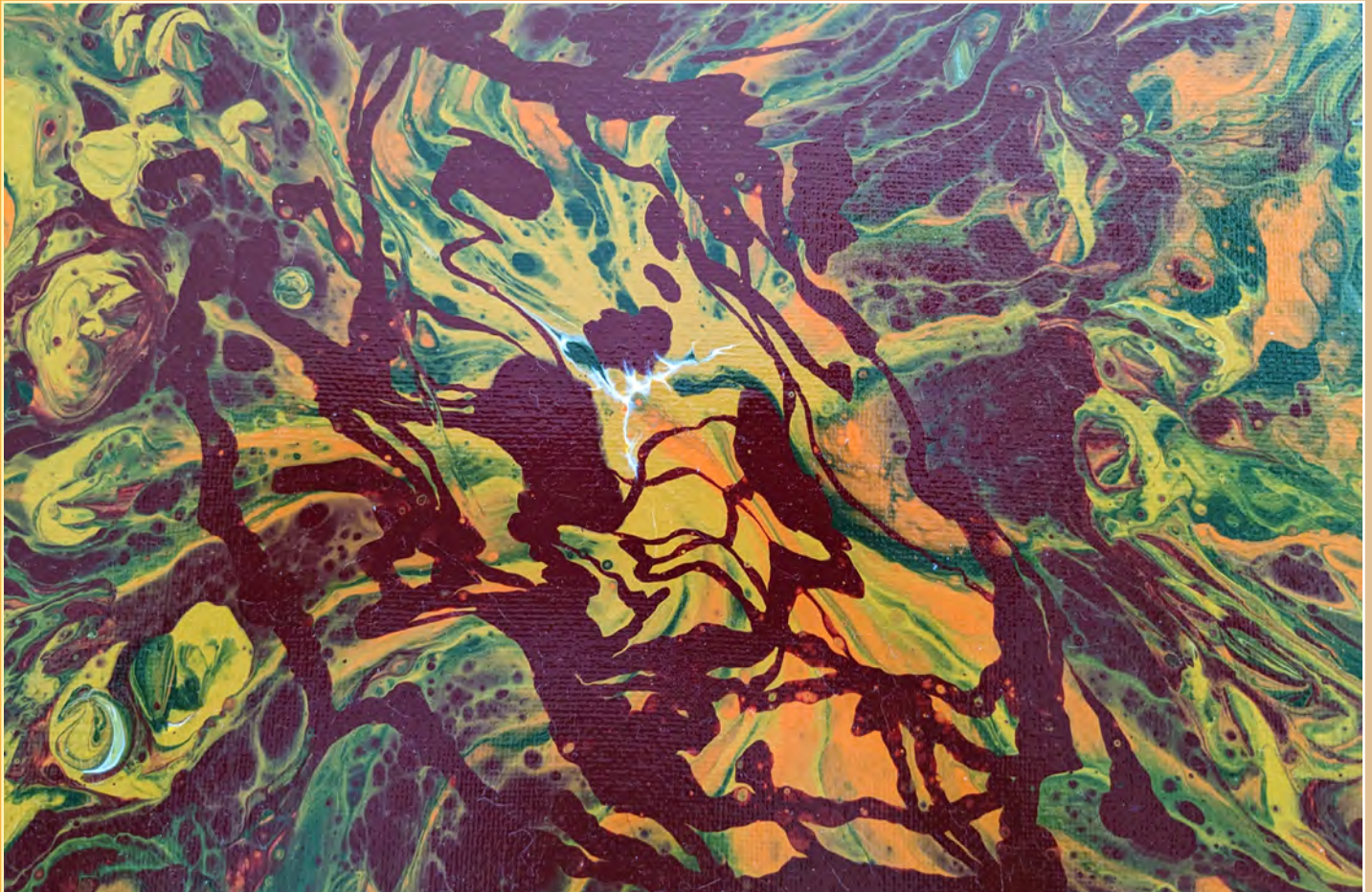
—Mary Rosborough

# Light



Becky Maurer

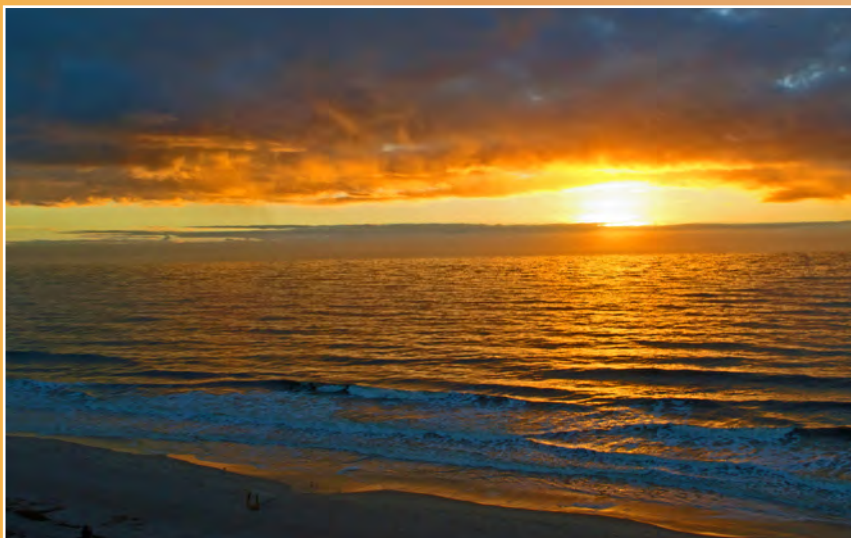
“ *The light on this rose captured my attention one evening while I was washing my dishes at the kitchen sink. Even though the rose is past its prime, its beauty is revealed by the light flowing through it—just like any of us can continue to shine with God’s love at any age and at any stage of life.* ” —Becky Maurer



"Light" painting by Nancy Lantz

“ After the shooting deaths last year of two security officers at Bridgewater College in Virginia, this “acrylic pour” painting shows that God was in the center of the tragedy and chaos. Bridgewater College colors of crimson and Vegas gold are depicted in the pour. God is the white in the center of the painting. ”

—Nancy Lantz



Myrtle Beach awakening by Ron Martin-Adkins

“ Divine Grace, You call out from the darkness into the light, then return the light into the night, repeating the cycle: day in and day out. ”

—Ron Martin-Adkins



## *A true story*

**A man—we'll call him John**—was a member of the Church of the Brethren. He had worked hard at responsible jobs for many years to achieve a comfortable life. But an unforeseen medical problem attacked him, cost him his good job, and drained all his financial resources.

Though ill, he was able to find a low-paying job to help make ends meet and offer a bit of hope in the form of a promised pension at retirement. But when the owner closed the business at the end of his career, there was no money in the “pension plan.”

John and his wife struggled to make ends meet, sometimes receiving limited assistance from the church's deacons' fund. When John lost his ability to drive, his wife regularly drove him to and from church in their car. Despite the hardships, the man contributed to the Sunday collections as he was able.

Then misfortune struck again. The car developed problems that would cost \$6,000. They had no money, but the car was essential. What to do?

The man had already received all the help he was allowed from the deacons' fund, and he shared his desperation with one friend who was also a member of the church. Upon review, the deacon chair determined that additional help could be provided after all, but not nearly enough to pay for the car repairs. Other members of the church who learned privately of John's dilemma made personal contributions to ease the situation, but a significant amount of the repair bill was still left outstanding.

Suddenly John died. His medical

“Light,” by Anne W. Petry

“ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* ” (John 1:5).

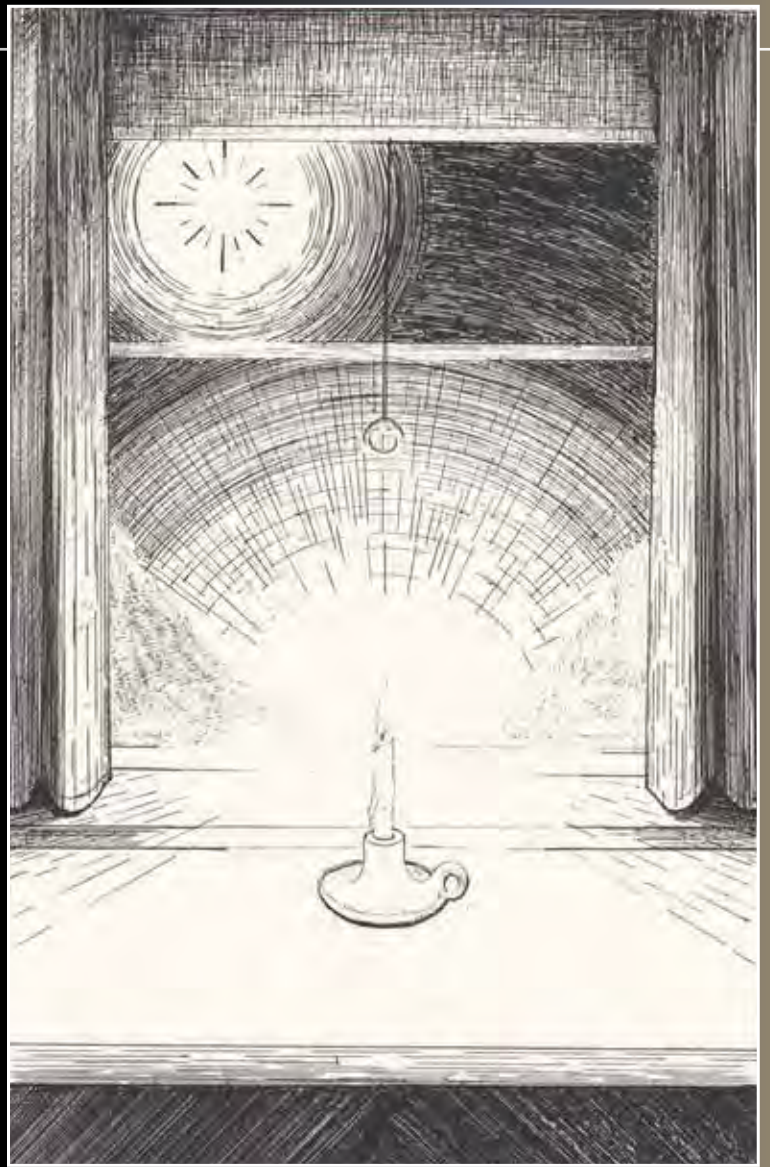
problems and financial woes were out of the way. But what was his wife to do? At John's death, the monthly Social Security payments they depended on suffered a significant decrease.

John's wife was not a member of the church, but she was aware that efforts had been made to raise funds to help her husband. She didn't know how much the church would be able to do, but learned that the collected money would be paid toward the car repair bill. She decided that when a small amount of money came to her at the end of the month, she would go to the repair shop to see if it would be enough to release the car for use while she endeavored to pay the remaining balance as best she could. How to pay for food and housing still had to be faced.

When her small check arrived, John's widow got a ride to the repair shop and asked how much she would have to pay, dreading the answer. The manager's answer: "Nothing. The entire bill has been paid."

Can you imagine her astonished joy in that moment! She called the only church friend she knew to express her deepest appreciation and to ask who had been kind enough to bear the remaining amount. The friend didn't know. The deacon chair didn't know. But one person did know—the person who had secretly gone to the repair shop and paid the remainder of the bill. That person has never revealed his or her identity.

Like the donor, the author of this story prefers to remain anonymous.



"Frosted window" pen and ink by Tom Wagner

## *Too Bright White Snow Sun Glint*

Too bright white snow sun glint  
makes me now squint.  
I cannot see blinding beauty.

Overpowered I am  
reduced to shadow cave dwelling—  
learning again the joy of dark.

We are not meant to live in all bright light  
nor condemned to grave night.

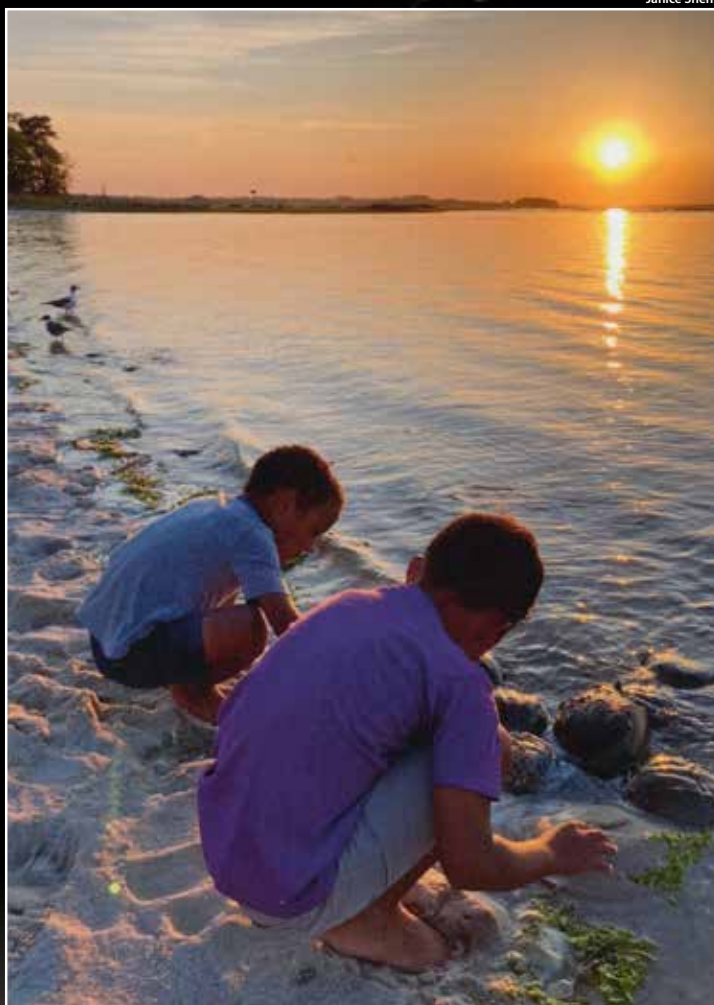
Both have their trials and delight,  
and both we must experience,  
claiming from each blessedness.

—Mary Helfrich



photo by Joyce Albin

Janice Shenk



## Two lights

*“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night” (Genesis 1:16).*

On a full moon evening, we went to Delaware Bay to watch the sun set. On moonlit nights in May and June, thousands of horseshoe crabs crawl ashore at high tide to lay eggs, continuing a cycle of life. Horseshoe crab eggs provide a critical food source for migratory bird species. The threatened red knot, for example, flies each spring from wintering grounds in South America to the Arctic, stopping in Delaware to fuel up on horseshoe crab eggs. Without the food, the red knot cannot complete its journey. Watermen use the horseshoe crab as bait for eel and whelks. The crab is also harvested for medical use.

Thank you, God, for providing these lights to perform your purposes. Praise God for your creativity!

—Janice Shenk

For more reader submissions about "Light," go to [www.brethren.org/messenger/light](http://www.brethren.org/messenger/light).

# Talking to God when you're nonverbal

**I hear people praying in the night. I hear them praying together in church.** I want to pray with them, but I have a problem: I cannot talk! I communicate by typing or pointing to a letter board and spelling words out. I once tried to spell while they talked but got way



ANN HAMLIN

behind. They were saying “Amen” when I was at “Dear Heavenly Father.”

I am often asked by my parents and others if I pray. I tell them, “Definitely, yes!” I did not learn how to communicate by spelling until I was 18, so God was the only one I could talk to! People thought I was in my own world, but I was only praying that I could talk. Passing the time would often be boring because I needed help with most things. I

was so dependent on others that I talked to God while waiting for their assistance. I talked to God many times during the day. It is easy to talk to God.


I would often complain to God, but I know he heard my thoughts. It was not that I didn't have a lot to be thankful for—I did. Despite having autism, being unable to communicate (verbally), and people thinking I was not smart, I still had many blessings. I had parents and family who loved me, and a school of nice people.

I would ask God questions that were of concern to me. Some of the questions were about autism. Others were

about world events, and some were about my family. God knows my thoughts and listens to me. I once asked my dad's minister a tough question. The minister was a very nice man who liked listening to me and even made a sermon about a poem I wrote. I asked him if God loved those of us with autism. He said “yes,” and gave me a nice explanation.

I do believe God loves us with autism. He loves us by listening to us. He also loves us through the kindness of his people in the church. God can talk to us through the church. The Church of the Brethren in Boulder Hill once played a speech I wrote and gave me a standing ovation! I felt God's love and his voice that day. I think it is important for nonverbal individuals to also speak God's love to other people.

The love from God is a lot like the love from your parents. Both parents and God love you no matter what happens. They are always there for you. They love you even when you get in trouble or make bad decisions. They love you even when you are not really listening to them. Way too often, we are not listening to them, and we expect to ask for help when we need it.

God listens to you and knows you. Hope for the future is one of God's gifts. He talks past both disability and silent words. Yes, you can talk and be heard by God when you are nonverbal. He will listen and give you hope. 

Ann Hamlin is autistic and nonverbal. She uses an iPad and talking board to communicate. Her dad, Bob Hamlin, attends Neighborhood Church of the Brethren in Montgomery, Ill., where she feels warmly welcomed. This article originally appeared in the Anabaptist Disabilities Network newsletter and is reprinted with permission.

“ People thought I was in my own world, but I was only praying that I could talk. Passing the time would often be boring because I needed help with most things. I was so dependent on others that I talked to God while waiting for their assistance. I talked to God many times during the day. It is easy to talk to God. ”

## LOWER MIAMI

# A long history of welcome

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**L**ower Miami Church of the Brethren in Dayton, Ohio, in Jefferson Township, has a long history of welcome. This has included intentional work, beginning in the 1950s, to become a multiracial, intercultural congregation.

In decades past, that work created the church home in which Robert Jackson grew up.

Today, it is creating a home for the children of asylum seekers from Colombia and Nicaragua.

### Welcome for the Black community

When his family moved to Dayton around 1965, Jackson was a young boy. Lower Miami had integrated long before—in 1954—one of the first two churches in Dayton to integrate. His parents, Robert C. and Mattie Jackson, didn't know Lower Miami and didn't know that his mother's sister and husband, Minva and Tom Reid, were already attending.

Mattie Jackson's uncle was a minister at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Dayton. The Rev. Broaddus was well known, a respected leader among the Black Baptist ministers in the city. "If you were high in the Black society in Dayton, you went to Tabernacle Baptist," Jackson said.

However, Robert C. Jackson's job coaching high school football in Jefferson Township meant a long commute. "Dad was living with his sister in Middletown, 20 miles away, until we found a house about two miles from Lower Miami and a half mile from the school."

It happened that one of the football

players was from Lower Miami and repeatedly asked "Coach Jackson" to come to church with him. "Dad told Mom he would have to check out the church to stop Donny Noffsinger bugging him," Jackson remembered.

The Jacksons liked Lower Miami right away. Their family is musical, and the children were immediately invited into the children's choir. So they attended again. And again. Jackson's parents went on to become deacons and leaders in the church. His father served a term as moderator.

"If you went to the church, you were family," Jackson said. "I was in first or second grade. Some of the kids were picking on me in the playground. It wasn't my friends who stopped them, it was the people in my Sunday school, who were older, who were saying, 'That's my little brother, you don't mess with him.'"

Jackson grew up mentored by role models in the congregation. "We had so many high-quality people, is the best way to describe it," he said. "If someone at Lower Miami accomplished something, it was like we all accomplished something."

His memory is of being "taken along to everything." A leading Black physician in the community, Dr. Munson, would take care of him after school. A member of the Foust family, who

were in construction and plumbing, showed him how to change a faucet. One church member became head of a premiere medical lab. Another worked at Wright Patterson Air Base with one of the Black women mathematicians featured in the movie *Hidden Figures*, before she went to work for NASA. The congregation had electricians, builders, teachers—all contributing to Jackson's informal education and personal growth.



### Lower Miami timeline

**1805** A congregation is established in a farming area on the outskirts of Dayton, founded by elder Jacob Miller. It is the first Brethren congregation west of the Miami River. Meetings are held in homes and outdoors.

**1811** After some contention, a committee of elders from Virginia is asked in to help. The congregation is divided into four churches: Lower Miami, Lower Stillwater, Bear Creek, and Wolf Creek.

**1840** Preaching begins to shift from German to English.

**1845** Land is donated for the first church building.

**1880s** Miami Valley is "ground zero" for a three-way split of the Brethren movement. Progressive leader Henry Holsinger preaches from Lower Miami's front steps one Sunday afternoon.

**1912** A pulpit replaces the ministers' bench.

**1937** The church votes to have musical instruments on special occasions.

**1940s** The area shifts from rural to suburban.



A particular morning spent with “Mr. Noffsinger,” owner of a large real estate business, is a vivid memory. Jackson’s mother was at a women’s meeting at church, and Ray Noffsinger took him along on errands around town. It was at the bank that a teller asked, “Whose little boy is that?” using the N word. Noffsinger said, “It’s my son, a boy from church,” then instructed the teller to pull his accounts and immediately took them to the bank’s chief competitor.

As a child, Jackson didn’t understand what had happened—he was just happy to get two lollipops in one day. His parents later explained it to him.

During the 1970s, at a time when the Dayton city schools were under a court order to desegregate, a Dayton newspaper looking for successful examples of integrated communities interviewed Lower Miami pastor Robert Martin. Asked how many Black and white families were in the church, “the Reverend said, ‘I don’t know. You don’t seem to understand one thing: it’s just Lower Miami families,’” Jackson recalled. “Finally, the Reverend had to pull out the church directory and had to look through it to see who was white and who was Black.”

Martin’s response to the reporter exemplifies the Lower Miami identity for Jackson. That identity continues today, he said. It includes the relatively recent decision to become open and affirming, which Jackson said is part and parcel of the practice of updating the church’s mission statement every decade. It is illustrated by the way the church “adopted” and prayed for one of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram. The church has flown a Nigerian flag. It has flown a rainbow flag.

Such displays of inclusion have attracted animosity, even vandalism—but they also attract new people to the church.

It’s a deeply Brethren identity, with an attitude of Christian humility. Jackson likens Lower Miami to “that old Ford pickup that has none of the fancy stuff, but it still starts, kicks over, and runs even on the coldest day of the year.”

As he overheard a township trustee say, “Those folks at that church are so different. They do it, but they never talk about it.”

### Welcome for refugees and asylum seekers

Although the Ohio winter was a shock for people from Colombia, Luciano and Karen and their boys have settled in. The week after they arrived, in late 2021, the oldest boy had his 10th birthday and the youngest his 6th. “Lots of love surrounded them,” the church reported in the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District newsletter.

The Miami Valley Immigration Coalition (MVIC) and district churches helped meet the family’s basic needs—food, housing, utilities, transportation, education, work, an immigration lawyer, and perhaps most importantly, friendship and community. The boys are attending school, their parents have been taking ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, and official papers requesting asylum and work authorizations were filed.

“Karen and Luciano moved into their housing in July, a next step towards independence,” said Jan Futrell, one of those leading the effort. “They have work authorization and fulltime jobs and continue their long, challenging asylum process.”

The urge to provide the family with a proper welcome inspired church members, neighbors, and the MVIC team to learn Spanish. There is now a Spanish class at the church, currently taught by Karen, who also translates for children’s



**1950s** Black families begin attending. Pastor Edward Angeny is key in integrating the church. The church hosts refugees from Eastern Europe and the Netherlands.

**1955** Ten members are delegates to the Church and Race Institute.

**1958** Loren Blackwell is Lower Miami’s first Black delegate to Annual Conference.

**1964-1966** Lower Miami participates in a “Comparative Case Study of Church Desegregation in a Midwestern Metropolitan Area.”

**1970s** The congregation resettles a Vietnamese family.

**1975** René Calderón, of Ecuadoran descent, is Lower Miami’s first minority pastor.

**1977** Karen Calderón is the first woman pastor.

**1984** The church joins the Sanctuary Movement and shelters a family from Guatemala.



messages and takes a turn helping in the nursery. Luciano made flan for a fiesta the Spanish class held for the congregation. Although Catholic by background, Luciano and Karen and their sons have become fixtures at Lower Miami.

The church respects the asylum seekers' determination to become independent, while continuing to maintain a loving relationship.

All of this is not new to Lower Miami. The church has hosted refugees many times in past decades, from Vietnam, Guatemala, Bosnia, Rwanda. Jackson recalled stories about a Hungarian family taken in after the uprising following World War II. Phyllis Angeny Hochstetler, whose father, Edward Angeny, was instrumental in integrating the church as a pastor in the 1950s, remembered hosting refugee families from Eastern Europe and the Netherlands. In 2019, the congregation declared itself a sanctuary church for a second time, the first having been in 1984.

Before the family from Colombia arrived, the church had been preparing to host asylum seekers from Honduras. However, José and Nancy and their children were returned to Mexico under Title 42, after presenting themselves at the border asking for asylum. Said Futrell, "They continue to live in the challenging reality of Tijuana as they wait an opportunity to carry their asylum request forward in the US. The MVIC is able to send a small monthly offering to help them pay for safe housing."

In the meantime, a Nicaraguan man named Hansell and his two young children were welcomed last August. They are living in the Lower Miami guest space and participate in worship and other activities, Futrell said, "bringing a strong faith witness into the community" as well as "many challenges and boundless energy with very young children." More celebrations have ensued, with one of the


children celebrating her second birthday during an after-worship gathering.

### God's family

The welcoming nature of the congregation and its strong peace and justice stance are why Futrell became a member. She first encountered Lower Miami when she was involved with migration advocacy and worked at the Dayton Peace Museum. "I walked in, and here was this church that was deeply integrated," she said. "I had never seen a church so deeply interconnected across those boundaries."

Futrell has marveled at the growth and change in the congregation because of relationships with asylum seekers. The experience has ranged from joyful witness to a family's growth, to shared grief at the dangers asylum seekers face, to anger at the invisibility of asylum seekers in the US. The church has learned to live in the moment and be patient, because "nothing's clear" about the asylum process.

Futrell remembers the first day she visited Lower Miami as a watershed moment for her. It also was a watershed moment for the church, the day Lower Miami decided to become open and affirming. At the church business meeting that day she observed "an amazing process" and asked, "What did you guys do to get to this moment?" It was clear to her that church members had arrived at that decision from very different starting points.

"This is what God's family looks like, it has all kinds of wonderful variety," said Futrell. 

Robert Jackson, a member of the Racial Justice Team of Southern Ohio and Kentucky District and the Standing with People of Color Committee of Annual Conference, and Jan Futrell, a Lower Miami member on the MVIC asylum team, gave interviews for this article. Former pastor Nan Erbaugh and associate member Phyllis Angeny Hochstetler contributed photos and information about Lower Miami history.

**1992** Lower Miami partners with the Interfaith Hospitality Network to serve homeless families.

**1995-1997** The church hosts families from Bosnia and Rwanda.

**2002** Edward Pugh is Lower Miami's first Black pastor.

**2005** The church celebrates its 200th anniversary.

**2019** Lower Miami again declares itself a sanctuary church.

**2021** It welcomes asylum seekers from Colombia.

**2022** The church welcomes asylum seekers from Nicaragua.

*Sources include a history of Lower Miami written by Diana Wheaton, including sections of a 1920 Southern Ohio District history.*

# Dear White Peacemakers

In *Dear White Peacemakers*, Osheta Moore weaves together current events, biblical and theological reflection, and personal stories from her own life as an African American woman. Citing Ephesians 6:12, she identifies racism as a “principality and power” that Christians must resist. She offers guidance and encouragement for readers who seek to dismantle the racism that exists in our culture. Brethren and other peace-oriented readers will appreciate her frequent references to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and to peacemaking and nonviolent practice.



CHRISTINA BUCHER

In her blog, Moore describes herself as “Author. Speaker. Everyday Peacemaker.” She is community life pastor at Roots Covenant Church in St. Paul, Minn., which identifies itself as “an intentionally multiethnic community of misfits on a mission, finding identity in Jesus.” Some Brethren may know Moore from her presentation at the 2022 National Youth Conference. She is also scheduled to speak at National Older Adult Conference in September.

Since Moore is a pastor, it is perhaps not surprising that her tone is both encouraging and challenging. She strives to connect directly and personally with her readers. For some, the title may call to mind Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Like King, Osheta Moore knows the audience to whom she writes: They are “white peacemakers,” a group that overlaps significantly with readers of *Messenger*. Another connection to King is Moore’s reference to “the Beloved Community,” a term he used to describe his vision of a nonviolent community characterized by agape love. The book’s subtitle, “Dismantling Racism with Grit and Grace,” identifies the book’s subject and approach.

The preface contains the first of many personal stories, and it is these personal reflections that make readers feel welcomed into the difficult subject of racism. In the section titled “Come to the Table,” we get to know Moore and learn her reasons for writing this book.


The book’s chapters are divided into four parts, each bearing the title of a traditional African American spiritual.

In “Wade in the Water,” we get our feet wet as we are troubled by the reality of white supremacy. The phrase “troubling the water” comes from the King James Version of John 5:4, where an angel troubles the water of the pool of Bethesda. “Troubling the waters” means stirring them up and, in the Gospel account, the troubling of the waters leads to healing. We need to be stirred up before healing can occur.

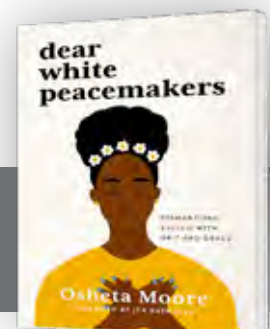
In “There is a Balm in Gilead,” the author reflects on the painful reality of racism and challenges her audience to acknowledge the pain and share in the grief process. This is an especially powerful and moving section, because she writes so personally and honestly about trauma within the African American community—from the Middle Passage to George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. “To be black in America is to be constantly grieving,” she writes.

In “Down by the Riverside,” a spiritual about “laying down our swords and shields,” the author addresses the concept of “white fragility.” In a gracious, pastoral way, she invites her audience to acknowledge fears and insecurities, disarm defensive postures, and respond to injustice nonviolently.

In “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around,” we learn about the “grit” needed to do the work of antiracism. Moore offers practical advice. This is hard work, and it is easy to get discouraged. She reminds us that the kingdom to which Jesus calls his followers is one that requires courage, perseverance, and stamina.

Most chapters end with a short prayer and a Bible verse, which make this book ideal for use in personal devotions. It would also be an excellent choice for a book group or a Bible study group that wants to focus on the application of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Because of the book’s emphasis on peacemaking and because the author places Jesus squarely at the center of antiracism work, it is especially recommended for Brethren and other Anabaptist-oriented followers of the Prince of Peace. 

Christina Bucher is professor emerita of religion at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Dear White Peacemakers*. Author: Osheta Moore. Publisher: Herald Press, 2021. Available at [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com).



# PRACTICING RESILIENCE

What can BVSers teach us about getting through tough times?

by Michael Brewer-Berres

**E**veryone has the capacity to be resilient, but what does that mean? Most definitions of the word include terms such as “bounce back,” “overcome,” and “adapt.” It is true that resilience is an ability to bounce back, overcome, and adapt to adversity and tragedy, but what many definitions don’t cover is this: Though resilience might not come naturally to everyone, it can be built and made stronger through practice.

Through Brethren Volunteer Service, volunteers learn—sometimes the hard way—how to handle stressful and intense situations. BVSers give selflessly but, without proper care and

attention to their own well-being, can get worn thin. Resilience is integral to service. But how does one build stronger resilience while serving? Hear it in BVSers’ own words.

“Resiliency to me is not the end product, but the formidable journey to testing your limits,” says Claire Horrell, who’s serving at El Centro Arte para la Paz in Suchitoto, El Salvador. Much of resilience is about the challenge, and the journey of getting through that challenge.

For many volunteers, the biggest challenge can be the decision itself to join BVS. They leave the comfort of home for a year to serve in unfamiliar communities. Up until recently, they

have not even known where they were going before heading to orientation. This is just the first hill to climb on their journey of resilience.

Volunteers meet many more challenges along the way. Sometimes they successfully adapt. Other times they have trouble bouncing back. Those failures, though, can be just as important to the resilience journey as the successes.

Former BVSer Judy Stout, who served at EYN Comprehensive Secondary School in Kwarhi, Nigeria, explains, “I had the opportunity to take risks, try new things, and experiment with new working experiences in a role that was less ‘high stakes’

“Parasites, heat, disease, language barriers, work balance, everything is a battle to be resilient. Volunteer service has tested my fears, weaknesses, and everything in between to show me what resiliency looks like.” —Claire Horrell

“ Starting a new life in a new country was incredibly helpful to my resilience. I always figured that, if I could do that, I could do anything! ” —Judy Stout

“ One of the biggest ways volunteering has made me more resilient is by teaching me who I truly am. ” —Erika Clary

than a paid position. Some things worked and some didn't, but realizing I could bounce back from things that didn't work gave me a strong sense of resilience.”

Trying and failing can have an immense impact on the way we build our resilience, and service gives volunteers an opportunity to make those mistakes in a safe and supportive environment. Adapting to a new culture, language barriers, and the COVID-19 pandemic are a few of the challenges that test the limits of BVSers.

For Kara Miller, former assistant FaithX coordinator and BVS orientation assistant, the challenge of volunteering during the pandemic was a significant part of her resilience journey. “While things were canceled and doors were slamming shut, we had to push open a window and look into other options.”

Figuring out how to get through challenges is just one part of building resilience, however. As Malachi Nelson, who served at La Puente Home in Colorado and is now at the World Friendship Center in Japan, puts it: “Challenges do not always encourage resilience. A groundwork must be laid for resilience to spring from challenges.” What does that groundwork look like, and where does it come from?

Taking care of oneself is an important part of that. Claire Horrell uses the metaphor of being unable to give from an empty cup. How do you care for others and help them fill their cups if your own remains empty? If they continue to give and serve without taking time for rest and recovery, volunteers will not

have anything left to give.

Techniques such as resourcing and grounding can overlap with self-care tactics. When feeling overwhelmed, those serving can take time for themselves, read a book, or reach out to friends and family. Grounding is a way for volunteers to take a breath and be in the moment, rather than stressing out over past mistakes or future failures.

Erika Clary, coordinator of the 2022 National Youth Conference, points out that “service is truly not easy and it is thankless most of the time. It is important to remain resilient so we can take care of ourselves, which will then help us take the best care of the people we are serving.”

To make sure that volunteers take care of themselves, they will need to communicate. Communication can be a challenge in and of itself, but doing any kind of service requires strong communication. BVS volunteers find that when they are open and honest with their service projects, it leads to stronger resilience.


“A supportive site will support you in short-term difficulties so that you can continue to be a healthy volunteer,” says Malachi Nelson. “So in the end, openness and vulnerability are important aspects of true resilience.”

Sometimes volunteers spend so much time seeing to others' needs that they fail to communicate their own. However, when others—such as supervisors or family and friends—know what volunteers need to best serve others, they can help keep volunteers healthy.

Being in communication with one's own self is important too. After learn-

ing resilience techniques at BVS orientation, Erika Clary realizes, “I've found myself much more aware of how different things make me feel. Now I can tell when I'm starting to feel low and I'm able to more readily pick myself back up.” Taking time to check in with oneself can help volunteers understand themselves better and restore the energy needed to serve others.

Resilience can be tough to practice, and it takes time to build it. When it wears thin, it can feel impossible to build it back up again. But it is necessary for getting through the struggles of life. As BVS volunteers have learned, building resilience is a process and a journey.

Kara Miller sums it up: “Without resilience while serving others, I believe that you give too much. You're not only draining yourself, but all of the things you are going through have no place to turn. All of those experiences are moments that you should respect and acknowledge. But they don't define you. They're only a piece of your experience.” 

Michael Brewer-Berres finished up in December as interim program assistant for Brethren Volunteer Service.

## SERVICE SUNDAY

Feb. 6 is Service Sunday, sponsored by BVS, FaithX, Brethren Disaster Ministries, and the Brethren Service Center. This year's theme is “Voices for Peace,” based on Romans 15:1-3a (*The Message*). For worship resources, go to [www.brethren.org/bvs/service-sunday](http://www.brethren.org/bvs/service-sunday).



# Compelled to speak the truth

by Donald B. Kraybill

I stumbled across a reference to **Christian nationalism** in mid-July 2022. I had never seen the phrase before. It intrigued me. So, I took a deep research dive into Christian nationalism.

Three months later, our Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren in western Lancaster County placed a full-page color ad, “The Perils of Christian Nationalism,” in the *Lancaster Sunday News*. In nearly 50 emails, calls, and public letters, people applauded the statement.

We received numerous requests to post it in other newspapers, churches, and media, and in some cases to adapt it. A Catholic prayer group in Idaho asked permission to place the statement in their local newspaper. Brethren justice advocates in the Roanoke and the New River valleys of Virginia adapted it for publication in the *Roanoke Times*. A German journalist, writing a story on the midterm

elections in the US, linked to the statement on the Church of the Brethren Newline.

## So how did this story unfold?

Exploring Christian nationalism energized me—so much so that I taught a four-week faith formation class at the Elizabethtown church titled “Christian Nationalism: What It Is and Why It Matters.” The class attracted 60 to 70 people each Sunday, including visitors from other congregations.

Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness is a network of peace proponents (pastors and lay members) in our area. In mid-August, the group organized a well-attended lecture, “The Dangers of Christian Nationalism,” taught by a professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary. A few members of our congregation attended the lecture, which inspired them to act.

The following Sunday, a handful of

members approached me following our worship service. One of them said, “Why don’t we put a statement about Christian nationalism in the Lancaster paper?” Our congregation had posted occasional public statements over the years. One, for example, protested the American invasion of Iraq, and a recent one testified against racism. With that DNA in our history, it only took a few minutes to get started. The chair of our witness commission enthusiastically supported the project. One member offered some financial support. And I agreed to draft a few lines of text.

Fortunately, Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness supported and endorsed the ad. This demonstrated that worries about Christian nationalism spread much further than our congregation. Even though we had no references to politics or voting in the statement, we wanted to publish it at least two weeks before the midterm

“ Instead of speaking harshly and condemning adherents of Christian nationalism, we spoke graciously. ”



# ELIZABETHTOWN CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

## The Perils of Christian Nationalism

"Our Christian faith is too expansive to be defined by any national identity—even a nation as beloved as America—and our embrace of American values of equality and inclusion are too profound to privilege any religion, even one as beloved as Christianity."

— Bishop W. Darin Moore, Presiding Prelate, Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District of the AME Zion Church

"Christian nationalism is the single biggest threat to religious freedom in America."

— Amanda Tyler, Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Freedom

### America's Promise: Freedom of Religion

The founders ensured our freedom of religion in the First Amendment of the Constitution. They declared that our government cannot establish a religion, and that every religion can be freely exercised (practiced). The First Amendment says that all religions are equal; the government has no favorites. Regardless of where people worship—in a cathedral, mosque, synagogue, church or temple—all religions enjoy the same status and protection in the eyes of the government.

**Christian Nationalism** is a movement whose followers advocate a particular brand of Christianity, which they believe is superior to other religions.

### Key Beliefs of Christian Nationalists

- America is God's chosen nation.
- America was established as a Christian nation.
- Christianity is woven into the fabric of America.
- Governments should make laws to keep America Christian.
- Christianity should be privileged above other religions.
- Christian symbols should be dominant in public places.

A small minority of Christians, mostly white, hold these beliefs. Some of them decry the waning influence of their views of Christianity in American life and what they see as the increasing persecution of Christians. And some fear being outnumbered by non-white people. Christian nationalism gives extremist groups a license for bigotry and violence. Some politicians exploit its sentiments for political gain. And for others, it is a strong heartfelt conviction.

### Transforming and Fighting

Christian nationalists want to transform society by infusing their values and policies into all levels of government. This vision energizes some politicians, who believe they are called—even anointed by God—to promote Christian nationalism. They say that the separation of church and state is an old myth. In their mind, church and state blend together.

Christian nationalists have a crusading mentality. Believing that God is by their side, they feel empowered to fight a cosmic battle between Good and Evil. This sense of Christian superiority may incite some to use violence in the name of God.

### Christian Nationalism Threatens Religious Freedom by

- Eroding the principle of the separation of church and state.
- Defying the First Amendment (establishment and free exercise clauses).
- Treating non-Christian religions and their members as second-class.
- Restricting the rights of non-Christian religions.
- Threatening to impose Christian nationalist policies on all U.S. citizens.
- Overturning America's promise of religious pluralism, justice, and equality.

### Which Jesus?

Christian nationalists prize power, domination, and exclusion. Their American-made Jesus is militant, hard nosed, and domineering. He's a Jesus who carries a sword and attacks his foes. This movement distorts the biblical Jesus and flips the core values of Christian faith upside down. The Jesus of the Gospels rejected nationalism. He refused to retaliate when beaten and nailed to a cross. He preached love for enemies. He blessed peacemakers and urged his followers to love their neighbors as their selves. He emphatically replaced domination with service to others. Jesus invited everyone to love their Jews and non-Jews, prostitutes and tax collectors, outcasts and religious leaders. All were welcome. Jesus established a global kingdom that goes beyond national boundaries. The God of Jesus has no favorite nation. His sun shines on the evil and the good; his rain falls on the just and unjust. So to whom do we pledge our allegiance? To the "Jesus" of Christian nationalism, or the Jesus of the Gospels?

### Protecting America's Promise

The cost of silence compels us to speak out. We deplore Christian nationalism. Our understanding of Jesus calls us to stand strong for the country we love and for the faith we cherish. We applaud America's promise to protect religious freedom—so that every faith is treated with dignity and equality.

Sponsored by the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren <https://www.ewtowncob.org>  
adopted by the congregation on October 9, 2022.  
Endorsed and supported by Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness <https://lancasterinterchurchpeacewitness.org>

Resources:  
Statement by Christian Agency Against Christian Nationalism: "Yes, We're in Christian Nationalism!"  
Article by Professor Greg Gandy, Lancaster Theological Seminary: "The Dangers of Christian Nationalism"



election. Public discussions about Christian nationalism were already swirling in the media because Doug Mastriano, an exemplar of Christian nationalism, was a gubernatorial candidate in Pennsylvania.

The \$17,000 cost for a one-page color ad stunned us. We decided that private donors should pay the cost of the ad so it would not tax the church budget. The church board took the project to a special church council meeting. To the surprise of many, the 110 attendees unanimously approved the witness commission's recommendation. Three dozen donors contributed gifts ranging from \$25 to \$2,000. Private donations were a key to receiving the church council's support.

### **Our proclamation of the truth**

As we explored Christian nationalism, we became convinced that its beliefs distort the teachings of Jesus. The statement notes that Christian nationalism's American-made Jesus flips the values of the biblical Jesus upside down. In short, it's a false religion.

Christian nationalism's beliefs call

to mind the words of Jesus, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).


Why did we pay so much to place an ad in the newspaper? For two reasons. First, because we wanted to tell the truth. It was our witness, our proclamation of the truth. It was a public announcement: Here we stand. As we say in the statement, "The cost of silence compels us to speak out." Second, we did not expect to affect the voting or influence the outcome of the election, but we did hope to educate readers. We hoped to stir curiosity and spur conversation. Hundreds of anecdotes suggest that happened.

One of our church members faulted us for spending so much money on an ad. In his view, "We should be doing what Jesus taught us to do, helping the poor and needy." We reminded him that Jesus also taught us to tell the truth. Ironically, one of the email writers asked us rhetorically, "What would Jesus say about CN [Christian nationalism]? Exactly what you said. Thank you for saying it."

One dilemma we faced was how to

speak the truth to those with whom we disagree—the proponents of Christian nationalism. Instead of speaking harshly and condemning adherents of Christian nationalism, we spoke graciously. We didn't link them to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the US Capitol, nor did we claim that Christian nationalism was a threat to democracy. After explaining how politicians exploit Christian nationalism for political power and noting that Christian nationalism provides a license for bigotry and violence, we added this empathetic line, "... and for others, it is a strong heartfelt conviction." Moreover, we explained that God's sun shines on the good and the evil and that God's rain falls on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45). We were careful not to vilify those with whom we disagree.

Several of our members said we were too gracious; we needed to explicitly reject Christian nationalism. So we inserted this sentence: "We deplore Christian nationalism." And to clarify that we weren't anti-American flag burners, we concluded the ad with these words: "Our understanding of Jesus calls us to stand strong for the country we love and for the faith we cherish."

Finally, the project reminded us, as members of the congregation, who we are and what we stand for. 

Donald B. Kraybill, a member of Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, helped to organize the project and craft the statement. He is senior fellow emeritus of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College.

### **Keys to our success:**

- Strong support from lay leaders and pastors
- Visionary leadership from our witness commission
- A faith formation class that built support among our members
- Support and endorsement from Lancaster Interchurch Peace Witness
- Securing financial contributions from individual donors
- A socio-political climate that sensitized people to Christian nationalism and the midterm elections

“ We concluded the ad with these words: “Our understanding of Jesus calls us to stand strong for the country we love and for the faith we cherish.” ”



# The historic struggle to control American Christianity

by David A. Hollinger

*This article is a summary by David A. Hollinger of his most recent book, *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular* (Princeton University Press, 2022).*

**D**onald Trump had good reason, on June 1, 2020, to stand in front of a church on Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C., holding a Bible aloft while cameras recorded the moment. As police and government troops forcibly cleared peaceful civil rights protestors from the square, he proclaimed his connection to the white evangelical voters he knew would appreciate this gesture. Millions of others dismissed it as a cynical caper, but he understood his dependence on a segment of the electorate who stood for a Christian America and believed the Bible belonged to them. Few knew that the church was St. John's Episcopal, a bastion of the “other Protestants,” the liberal, ecumenical Protestants known for their more inclusive vision of the gospel and of the nation.

These “other Protestants” have played a much larger role in American life since World War II than is recognized today. The leaders of these mainline Protestant denominations participated in the founding of the United Nations, led the World Council of Churches and Church World Service, and sought through smaller international initiatives—such as Heifer Project—to unify humankind. The “ecumenicals” recognized the value of non-Christian religions and, amid escalating concerns about cultural imperialism, revised their missionary projects to focus on service. In virtually all of their endeavors, the mainline churches

practiced a “Christian globalism” that has now been pushed aside by “Christian nationalism.”

The most active and influential confessions in this movement for a more cosmopolitan Protestantism were Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Northern Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and several Lutheran bodies, joined by a handful of smaller groups including the Dutch Reformed, the Church of the Brethren, and the Quakers. All of these groups encouraged education at every level and put distance between themselves and their intellectually narrower fundamentalist neighbors.

The ecumenical leadership officially opposed Jim Crow as early as 1946. Long before other organizations were willing to boycott cities where hotels refused service to Black people, the national meetings of the Federal Council of Churches—the predecessor to the National Council of Churches—were held only in cities whose hotels promised to treat African American delegates equally. Sex education in public schools was overwhelmingly an ecumenical Protestant project.

These “other Protestants” also set the terms in which their more conservative rivals achieved definition. Modern evangelicalism, building on a fundamentalist foundation, came to prominence not as an autonomous movement but as a point-by-point reaction to ecumenical initiatives. The National Association of Evangelicals was founded in 1942 as a lobbying organization opposed to the Federal Council of Churches. Fuller Theological Seminary, founded in 1947, became a concentrated intellectual force against the influ-

ence of liberal seminaries. *Christianity Today* was founded in 1956 to counter *The Christian Century*, and thanks to financing by conservative oil magnate Howard Pew—who paid for the sending of free copies to thousands of Protestant clergy—immediately outpaced the *Century* in circulation. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, evangelical writers accused ecumenical leaders of being communist dupes, serving the interests of the Soviet Union.

**The dynamics of the ecumenical-evangelical relationship:** Too often, we understand the rise of evangelicalism in a vacuum, apart from the history of ecumenical Protestants. If we examine the dynamics of the ecumenical-evangelical relationship, however, we are confronted with a very important truth: evangelicalism flourished as a safe harbor for white people who wanted to be counted as Christian without having to accept what ecumenical leaders said were the obligations demanded by the gospel in an ethno-racially diverse society and a scientifically informed culture.

This shows the falsity of the popular theory that evangelical churches flourished because they made greater demands on the faithful, while liberal churches declined on account of not demanding much of anything. The opposite is true. While ecumenical leaders were making Christianity more demanding, Billy Graham and his kind were making it simpler.

What did Billy Graham mean by “accepting Christ”? It turned out that it could mean remaining within the confines of the inherited culture depicted in Norman Rockwell’s *Saturday Evening Post* covers while simply promising to be better at it. To be better, that is, at living up to that culture’s self-image. Practicing the Golden Rule, being faithful to one’s spouse, eschewing pornography and same-sex intimacy, avoiding the abuse of alcohol and drugs, extending a helping hand to less well-off neighbors, praying on a daily basis, and supporting the essentials of the American economic and political order while its injustices were corrected by gradual changes in the human heart, were not necessarily signs of God’s grace. But these behaviors were expected of those who came to Graham’s altar. That was enough.


It was not enough for the leaders of the mainline organizations, who called on the faithful to renounce a number of inherited ideas and practices that had come to seem rac-

ist, sexist, imperialist, homophobic, unscientific, and chauvinistic. But these ideas and practices remained popular with much of the white population, within and beyond the churches. How far could the leadership go without losing the people in the pews? How little change would suffice to remain true to the gospel as the ecumenical leadership was coming to understand it?

These uncertainties were given point by the national conflicts of the late 1960s and 1970s over Vietnam, feminism, civil rights, and the increasing acceptance of same-sex relationships. Church leaders were going too far and too fast for some churchgoers, but not far and fast enough for others, especially young people, who left the churches in droves. Between the late 1960s and the end of the 20th century, membership in most mainline denominations declined by nearly one-third. This decline has continued in the 21st century. Although much of this decline resulted simply from a falling birthrate responsive to ecumenical support for family planning and for women’s careers outside the home, the decline also reflected the feeling of many of the maturing “cradle ecumenicals” that churches were weak instruments for advancing even the soundest of the values taught by their the Methodist and Presbyterian tutors.

A major historic function of ecumenical churches was to serve as stepping stones to post-Protestant secularism. These flexible and commodious churches created and sustained an environment in which it became more possible to engage sympathetically with a vast panorama of ethno-racial, sexual, religious, and cultural varieties of humankind. These varieties threatened to destabilize inherited practices and beliefs, but the ecumenical churches were brave enough to provide a community and an orientation that facilitated these engagements for people who might otherwise have avoided them. That many millions continue to be at home in ecumenical churches does not render any less significant, historically, the transit-assisting function for other millions. Not everyone driven in the same direction by the same circumstances ends up in the same place.

**Did the ecumenicals win the country while losing the church?** Not quite. But this hyperbole contains an element of truth. The diversity-preoccupied, inclusive-striving public life of the United States today looks much more like what ecumenical leaders wanted



“ Modern evangelicalism . . . came to prominence not as an autonomous movement but as a point-by-point reaction to ecumenical initiatives. ”

in 1965 than what was advocated by their evangelical rivals. The ecumenicals yielded a substantial portion of the symbolic capital of Christianity to their evangelical rivals, but they served as “earthen vessels,” one might say, for values that transcend Christianity. Yet the departure of massive numbers of Protestants and Catholics left the hollowed-out edifice of American Christianity more easily occupied by evangelicals and their conservative Catholic allies.


The recent history of Christianity indicates that its American fate is, in part, to serve as a way station to something else. But the remainder of Christianity’s American fate depends on who controls what is left of it.

From ancient times to the present, the Christian project has been a movement of sensibilities, impulses, ideals, perceptions, loves, hatreds, and programs that are brought into it and are processed by distinctive groups who manage to build a critical mass of people willing to recognize them as Christian. Even Christianity’s original, movement-defining documents are themselves of disparate ancestries in the ancient Mediterranean world, selected for scriptural status by historically situated individuals and groups often at

odds with one another. The purposes advanced in the name of Jesus of Nazareth are not infinite, but they are staggering in their diversity and range. What counts as Christian is always achieved, never given. It all depends on who manages to get and retain the local franchise.

**The struggle to control American Christianity is not over.**

Protestants of various persuasions are not the only players. Catholics, too, are divided between progressive and conservative dispositions, but are now the most conspicuous in their specific role as suppliers of Supreme Court nominees who can serve the interests of the evangelical Protestants allied with the Republican Party. But the major conflict is between the evangelicals to whom Trump played that June evening in 2020, and the “other Protestants” for whom St. John’s Episcopal is an emblem.

An accurate narrative of ecumenical-evangelical divide enables us to better understand today’s enactment of this historic conflict. 

David A. Hollinger is professor of history emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. His memoir of his Brethren family, *When This Mask of Flesh Is Broken*, was reviewed in MESSENGER in November 2019.



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# Light in the darkness

**Isaiah 58:1-14**

by Duane Grady

**T**he biblical message for living during troubling times is clear and specific. We must love God and serve our neighbors. The question of who our neighbors are is also clearly defined. Isaiah expands upon these themes and clarifies what we must do to see a positive difference in our world. Following this advice will improve our personal lives as well.

### Teenage thoughts

When I was a teenager, I had questions about the Bible and how much of its wisdom to take seriously. It's not uncommon for young people to question and wonder about religious matters. What was less clear to me then but has blared like a trumpet to me in my older years is that we should rejoice and be glad when young people question such things! The church should celebrate these youth simply because they care enough to ask questions. The more common pattern among our young is that they are not interested in discussions about biblical values. Worse yet, many of their peers are ignorant beyond their disinterest. That was true then and it is true now.

Sadly, this lack of interest in biblical things is growing throughout our population and is a uniting theme between young and old. If you have ever watched the popular quiz show *Jeopardy!* you might have noticed that categories involving the Bible are usually the last to be called, and the highly intellectual contestants often fail to do well on the subject. Given the state of affairs in our nation's religious and spiritual life, we should not be surprised, but we should be troubled. The educational role of the church is in desperate need. Here, there is a role for many of us.

The reality of biblical illiteracy began long before I was young. The Bible itself records a time when the book of Deuteronomy was lost. On more than one occasion, Jesus exclaimed to his followers, "Do you not understand?" What might Jesus say to people who seldom open their Bibles? These trends are more troubling than a teenager's attitude of reluctant acceptance. Many of us learn through pondering, questioning, and wonderment.

As a teenager my questions were not because I did not believe but because I wanted to understand more deeply.

Paul prays for us in his letter to the Ephesians that we may have the power to "comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18-19). As a teenager, I could also be argumentative with a touch of orneriness. Not all these qualities were productive or positive. As a teenage image of myself might have said, "Let's get real."

### Isaiah's thoughts

Isaiah 58 takes me on this little jaunt down memory lane because these words made good sense in the deepest part of my teenage angst. They are specific and clear, and I have never questioned them. The call to justice and service was evident to me then, and this same call remains obvious to me now. These are things we all can do:

- share bread with the hungry,
- bring the homeless into our homes and churches,
- provide clothing, and
- stop pointing the finger and start speaking words of peacemaking.

“ When we respond in this way from the depth of humility, we are pushed toward our most excellent possibilities. It will be like the dawning of a new day. ”



Then there are the aspects of this reading that we need to work at together so that justice can roll down like an ever-flowing stream:

- loosen the bonds of wickedness,
- undo the thongs of the yoke, and
- free the oppressed and break every yoke.

Having worked at these things over a lifetime, I have discovered that our collective justice-making efforts expand when we become active in acts of service and kindness. Justice comes when we share our wealth of time, money, and resources (i.e., bread) with others and learn to know their names and stories. In this way, the invitation becomes a call, which becomes a life-changing commitment and is life-giving. Indeed, it is possible for light to overwhelm the darkness and to shine like the noonday sun.

A spiritual practice I began as a teenager and have continued for more than 50 years is fasting. My mode and method of fasting have changed and adapted, but the practice as a spiritual discipline has remained constant. Thus, I have firsthand experience with the criticisms found in our reading from Isaiah.

### The spirit of fasting

Fasting as an idea is simple and easy. In real-time experience, we might discover how easy it is to quarrel with and oppress others. In our discomfort, we might not be the kind and generous souls we pretend to be in the abstract. I can honestly say that I have never struck another person with my fists during a fasting period, but I haven't always been kind and considerate.

Fasting as a spiritual discipline has, as its heart, a yearning for humility. Its purpose is to turn our full attention to God and God's wishes. We are invited in our discomfort and need to understand the needs of others better, especially those who might be hungry—not as a spiritual behavior, but because they don't have any bread.

Spiritual fasting might enable us to identify our limitations more clearly. None of us can provide all the bread that the hungry are seeking. Our understanding of our limitations might show us the value of strengthening our reliance on scripture, prayer, or relationships that help.

Isaiah 58 forms the perfect backbone for solidifying the union between Anabaptist views and Pietism. These two worldviews, which have shaped the Church of the Brethren into its unique position in Christendom, are found in Isaiah's message. We cannot do justice work alone, nor can we develop sincere piety without practicing it fervently.

Our world provides many examples of bogus piety, and it is tempting to discuss these at length. We should avoid such temptations and develop our own pious lives more honestly.

### Spiritual practices for us all

Once upon a time, a newly installed pastor preached a first sermon from Isaiah 58. The pastor fasted 48 hours before the Sunday service to be spiritually prepared. Fasting was a surprisingly easy

task until the time arrived for the sermon. Suddenly light-headed and with stomach growling, the pastor struggled to start and finish the sermon without much content in the middle. Worse yet, an emotionally needy person requested a prayer meeting in the pastor's study along with several deacons following the worship service. The pastor found it nearly impossible to focus attention on the tasks at hand, and the prayer offered was curt, defensive, and devoid of empathy.

Imagine that this pastor is you. What is the spiritual lesson for you to learn? If you conclude that eating a good breakfast before the Sunday service is the prime lesson, I will encourage you to keep thinking. I would encourage you to continue fasting before preaching—not only on the following Sunday but for the next 10 years—before concluding whether this practice is suitable for you or not.

In this way, you will have plenty of time and experience to justify an informed decision. Yes, you will likely fail a few more times, but failing in the biblical sense is not often a disappointment. The kind of commitment that I'm suggesting will reveal devotion and pave the way for humility to take control. Then we might separate our true pious selves from ego and power-driven desires.

Isaiah's words are rich and authentic, and nowhere does the prophet suggest they are easy. The call of God remains upon us, and who are we to tell God to choose someone else, when God's inviting heart yearns to hear from us, "Here I am." When we respond in this way from the depth of humility, we are pushed toward our most excellent possibilities. It will be like the dawning of a new day. ❧

Duane Grady is a retired Church of the Brethren minister living in Goshen, Ind.

## Turmoil in Haiti prompts concern

**P**rayer was requested for the country of Haiti and l'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) by the Global Mission office last fall. The request came during a time of continuous threats of gang violence and after gangs blocked a major port, leading to fuel shortages across Haiti. Adding to the crisis was a lack of clean water and outbreaks of cholera. The United States and United Nations at the time were considering armed intervention.

Despite the difficulties, construction continued by the Haitian Brethren including a new church built in the com-

munity in southwest Haiti that was hit by an earthquake in 2020, as well as a temporary headquarters for the church and the Haiti Medical Project in a safer place outside of the capital city.

Interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, Jeff Boshart of the Global Food Initiative explained the difficulties facing the Haitian church: "It had a main base in Croix-des-Bouquets, near Port-au-Prince, but the area has been an epicenter of gang activity. . . . Earlier this year one of the program's drivers was kidnapped—though later released—and his vehicle stolen, Boshart said, prompting the church to suspend all its activities in the Port-au-

Prince region. The remaining programs, involving agriculture, drinking water projects and home construction, are mostly in rural areas far from the capital and staffed entirely by Haitians. Boshart said the church also has sharply curtailed a mobile medical clinic program because several of the Haitian doctors who participated have fled to the U.S."

Ilexene Alphonse, who pastors in Miami, Fla., and who has been working with the churches in Haiti, reported from a visit made last fall that "the crisis in Haiti is worse than ever." About the rebuilding of earthquake-damaged homes, he wrote, "Five of the houses are completely done except for painting and 5 of the first 10 houses need roofing and doors. Now, we are about to start with 11 new houses. . . . There is a lot more to be done but what the Church of the Brethren is doing here no one has done before. . . . God has a way of taking people to places that he only can do."



**Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 332 completed orientation in October:** (back row, from left) **Ben Brubaker** of Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind., is serving at New Bethany Ministries, Bethlehem, Pa.; **Dan McFadden** (staff); **Silas Seil** of Kiel, Germany, is placed at Creation Justice Ministries, Washington, D.C.; **Elisabeth Berthel** of Berlin, Germany, has gone to Camp Stevens, Julian, Calif.; **Clara Grabenhorst** of Westfalen, Germany, is serving at Creation Justice Ministries; **Kurt Malchow** of Cologne, Germany, is at Camp Stevens; (front row) **Caleb Samland** of McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren is working at La Puente Home, Alamosa, Colo.; **Emily Bowdle** (staff); **Patrice Rupp** of Württemberg, Germany, is working with WATER in Washington, D.C.; **Pauline Liu** (staff); **Michael Brewer-Berres** (staff); **Emma Dowd** of West Hartford, Conn., will serve with Corrymeela in Northern Ireland as of January 2023; **Val Brubaker** of Crest Manor church is at New Bethany Ministries.

## Committee begins work on covenants with agencies

**T**he Standing Committee of district delegates to Annual Conference met Oct. 25, via Zoom, to make plans for how to move forward with developing covenants of agreement with the three Conference agencies—Bethany Theological Seminary, Eder Financial, and On Earth Peace.

New polity regarding agencies, adopted at Annual Conference last summer, assigned this task to the Standing Committee. The committee was to call a subcommittee to create a structure for the covenants, to ensure consistency, and to work with each agency to develop the agreements.

# Heifer International welcomes CEO Surita Sandosham

Last fall, the board of Heifer International gathered in Little Rock, Ark. Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, represented the Church of the Brethren. In addition to meeting in person, the board met new Heifer CEO Surita Sandosham, who had joined the organization only 20 days earlier.

Heifer has grown both in size and complexity since Dan West began the work over 75 years ago. As such, the work of a new CEO requires vision as well as understanding an organization that spans many countries and regions with hundreds of staff.

Sandosham discussed her apprecia-

tion of the 12 cornerstones of Heifer and engaged the board in dynamic discussions of strategy, board develop-

ment, and Heifer's core work of addressing food insecurity by working with small-holder farmers.



courtesy of Heifer International

## Church funds distribute grants

### From the Emergency Disaster Fund:

- \$47,250 financed completion of a Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding project in Waverly, Tenn. The project rebuilt homes affected by flooding in August 2021.
- \$49,500 supported the work of Puerto Rico District to put in place a small farmer recovery program following Hurricane Fiona, assisting 32 farmers with small grants of up to \$2,000.
- \$20,000 went to flood recovery work by the Christian Solidarity Program for Honduras last fall. Food, drinking water, hygiene supplies, and medicines were distributed to 1,000 families.
- \$17,500 was given for a flood relief program of the Church of the Brethren in Uganda, following heavy rains last fall. The church helped meet needs of the most affected 300 households.
- \$10,000 supported the landslide and flood relief program of ASIGLEH (the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela), after heavy rains last fall. Affected families received food, drinking water, clothing, and psycho/social support.
- \$5,000 supported the response to

Hurricane Ian by Children's Disaster Services and Brethren Disaster Ministries.

- \$5,000 was given to North Fort Myers (Fla.) Church of the Brethren for its Hurricane Ian Relief Program, a feeding ministry.
- \$5,000 supported the food pantry at Sebring (Fla.) Church of the Brethren following Hurricane Ian.

### From Brethren Faith in Action:

- \$5,000 helped Alpha and Omega Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pa., construct a driveway and street entrance to enable food deliveries for a food outreach ministry.
- \$5,000 was given to Camp Pine Lake near Eldora, Iowa, to help fund a community meal program using the camp kitchen.
- \$5,000 was received by Daleville (Va.) Church of the Brethren to upgrade audio and video equipment for streaming worship and meetings.
- \$5,000 helped Eden (N.C.) First Church of the Brethren as its soup kitchen ministry became a USDA Soup Kitchen Partner.
- \$5,000 was granted to Eglise des

Freres Haitiens in West Palm Beach, Fla., for a van to transport community and church members.

- \$5,000 went to Living Faith Church of the Brethren in Concord, N.C., for its food pantry and blessing box.
- \$5,000 was given to Tabernacle the Restoration, a Church of the Brethren congregation in Lauderdale Lakes, Fla., for a food pantry and grocery distribution.
- \$4,999.65 went to the WildWood Gathering in Olympia, Wash., for tech upgrades, community garden enhancement, signage, and a monthly food and educational gathering.
- \$3,325 supported Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren in Scottsdale, Ariz., in its community outreach events.
- \$1,500 was granted to McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren to host a performance of *We Own This Now* by Ted and Co.
- \$1,000 went to Roaring Spring (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren for the Recharge Program for children and families.
- \$755 given to Hanover (Pa.) Church of the Brethren paid for an automated external defibrillator.

## Is your congregation prepared to be its best in 2023?

Sometimes our congregations and their leaders need a little boost. I can help with that through workshops, retreats, congregational studies, and leadership coaching for pastors and lay leaders.

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- Tame the Bear....Resolving Conflict, Moving Forward
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References available



### On slavery and the Brethren

As an enthusiast of Brethren history, I welcome Gimbiya Kettering's article "If Only It Were True," in the September 2022 issue. She's a good writer, thoughtful and scholarly, and besides, the voices of women of color haven't always been heard or welcomed. It never hurts to have our basic assumptions challenged.

On the other hand, the historical record is clear that Brethren unambiguously opposed slavery, a stance that resulted in persecution and even martyrdom for southern Brethren during the Civil War.

Stephen Longenecker's book *Gettysburg Religion* is especially illuminating in this regard. Unlike the other churches in that fabled Pennsylvania town, the Marsh Creek Dunkers included African Americans as members. The fact that Marsh Creek sent more than one query to Annual Meeting regarding sharing the holy kiss with African Americans demonstrates the Brethren struggled as they pushed boundaries that other denominations did not even consider.

The grace extended to those who were reconciled after "visits, warnings, and forgiveness," only occurred after a change in behavior. Slave owners who joined the Brethren had to free their slaves. No exceptions. The supposed exception to emancipation that Kettering mentions, involving boys younger than 21 and girls younger than 18, was so that their former owners would "bring them up in an orderly manner, teach them also to read . . . and with the counsel of the church, emancipate them, with a good suit of wearing apparel" (Annual Meeting of 1812, Article 1). To set children adrift without an education or training for a trade would have been cruel. An "orderly manner" does not suggest they were to be treated like slaves in the interim.

While it is true that Brethren did not



Biblical Studies  
for Anabaptists and Radical Pietists

# LUKE and ACTS

Christina Bucher and Robert W. Neff



  
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staff the field hospital at the Dunker Meeting House on the Antietam battlefield, both sides abandoned their seriously wounded and left them to the care of the area residents. Brethren were counted among that number.

No one would suggest that 18th and 19th century Brethren measured up to the best of the 21st century Brethren. But as one who has studied Brethren history for 51 years, and as a person of color, I don't think there's any question

we Brethren have as much or more to be proud of with regards to slavery and civil rights than many denominations. Nor can we deny there is plenty of room for improvement.

**Frank Ramirez**  
Nappanee, Ind.

## TURNINGPOINTS

### Centenarians

**Hillgoss**, Betty, 102,  
Columbia City, Ind., Oct. 17

### New members

**Big Creek**, Cushing, Okla.:  
Don Patterson, Susan  
Patterson

**Columbia City**, Ind.:  
Pauline Bruch, Jerilyn  
Geiger, Junior Geiger

**Evergreen**, Stanardsville,  
Va.: Stephen Hensley,  
Adam James, Rowan  
Morris

**Harrisonburg**, Va.:  
Christine Legg, Michael  
Legg

**Nokesville**, Va.: Janet Clark  
Myers, Clara Nelson

**Olivet**, Thornville, Ohio:  
Ron Fleming, James (Jake)  
Walker

**Palmyra**, Pa.: Don Martin,  
Addy Smith

**Peace**, Portland, Ore.: Bill  
Coblentz

### Wedding anniversaries

**Breidenstine**, Glenn and  
Patricia, Lititz, Pa., 67

**Brown**, Donald and Jean,  
Harrisonburg, Va., 55

**Flora**, Willard and Sylvia,  
Roanoke, Va., 60

**Gillette**, Allen and Mary,  
Bridgewater, Va., 55

**Holmes**, Frank and Betty,  
Tonasket, Wash., 60

**Karn**, Gene and Jean,  
Medway, Ohio, 50

**Kussart**, Glen and Carol,  
Cerro Gordo, Ill., 50

**McDonald**, Robert and

Shirley, Roanoke, Va., 60  
**Miller**, Paul and Patricia,  
Harrisburg, Pa., 67  
**Myers**, James and Cindy,  
Martinsburg, Pa., 50  
**Rutherford**, Michael and  
Vicki Helser, Rushville,  
Ohio, 50

**Seilhamer**, Larry and  
Carolyn, Bridgewater, Va.,  
55

**Smith**, Edward and Betty,  
Rockingham, Va., 55

**Strycker**, Brad and Dee,  
Goshen, Ind., 50

### Deaths

**Anderson**, Albert Andrew,  
84, Ridgely, Md., Nov. 2

**Brown**, Juanita Lee Rotruck,  
87, Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 9

**Clift**, Lois M. Edwards, 86,  
Sebring, Fla., March 9

**Clift**, Samuel Roe, 85,  
Sebring, Fla., March 30

**Crumpacker**, Irene,  
Roanoke, Va., March 2

**Cunningham**, Ruth  
Musselman, 87, Lititz, Pa.,  
Aug. 14

**Diebus**, Adam, 82,  
Lebanon, Pa., Sept. 6

**Eutzy**, Marie (Joyce) Miller,  
78, Palmyra, Pa., May 31

**Evans**, Warren E., Jr., 92,  
Lititz, Pa., Oct. 27

**Farringer**, Leland Dwight,  
95, North Manchester,  
Ind., Nov. 7

**Gesford**, Martha D. Kipp,  
91, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 2

**Gibble**, Hiram Lamar, 91,  
Saint Charles, Ill., Oct. 29

**Glisson**, Richard E., 91,  
Quarryville, Pa., June 20

**Graham**, Fred A. (Eif), 78,  
Gap, Pa., Aug. 16

**Graham**, Peggy, 85,  
Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 4

**Griffith**, Helen Eileen  
Wilson, 86, Thornville,  
Ohio, Aug. 18

**Groff**, Mildred J. Gish, 90,  
Quarryville, Pa., Jan. 28

**Groff**, Robert C., 95,  
Quarryville, Pa., May 7

**Hardy**, Richard Wayland,  
94, Salisbury, Md., Oct. 8

**Hash**, Marguerite (Margie)  
Alma Hamblin, 96, Sands  
Spring, Okla., July 15

**Hoffman**, Paul Willis, 90,  
McPherson, Kan., Sept. 30

**Holmes**, Fredric Wayne, 92,  
Tonasket, Wash., April 8

**Honaker**, Lula Mae Belle  
Hall, 94, Roanoke, Va.,  
Aug. 28

**Jones**, Richard Lee, 86,  
Polo, Ill., Oct. 28

**Kieffaber**, Alan George, 85,  
North Manchester, Ind.,  
Nov. 2

**Kipp**, C. Wilbur, 95,  
Haxtun, Colo., Aug. 6

**Kreider**, Elizabeth Bard, 95,  
Quarryville, Pa., May 23

**Landis**, Paul D., 88,  
Souderton, Pa., Nov. 14

**Leake**, Joyce Dwayne Cupp,  
81, Harrisonburg, Va.,  
Dec. 9, 2021

**Lew**, Stephen Robert, 63,

Palmyra, Pa., June 29

**Liskey**, Elaine Frye, 93,  
Harrisonburg, Va., Jan. 22

**Long**, Thelma D. (Blondie),  
95, Roanoke, Va., June 30

**Lyle**, Charles Steven, 64,  
Thornville, Ohio, Aug. 23

**Marshall**, Georgia Frances  
Hurt, 96, Roanoke, Va.,  
April 27

**Martin**, Aaron L., Jr., 87,  
Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 10

**Millhouse**, Ruth I. Andrus,  
83, Troy, Ohio, Nov. 1

**Moore**, Miriam Alexander,  
98, Hollansburg, Ohio,  
Feb. 2

**Moyers**, Sarah Elizabeth  
Mason, 92, Harrisonburg,  
Va., May 30

**Paxton**, Robert Edward, 80,  
Salem, Va., July 20

**Schechter**, Ferne G., 96, La  
Verne, Calif., May 17

**Schletzbaum**, Bernice Helen  
Heidebrecht, 94,  
McPherson, Kan., Oct. 7

**Shoemaker**, John Robert  
(Jay), 84, Bridgewater, Va.,  
June 19

**Simmons**, Keith W., 65,  
Centerville, Ind., Oct. 9

**Spears**, Gladys Kay, 76,  
Conowingo, Md., March  
25

**Texiere**, Hobert Gordon  
(HG), 89, Harrisonburg,  
Va., Nov. 23, 2021

**Thompson**, Wendell S., 86,  
Bellville, Ohio, July 18

**Turner**, W. Neil, 93,  
Harrisonburg, Va., Oct. 12

**Wallace**, Edward, 81,  
Elizabethtown, Pa., May 3

**Weaver**, Mary E. Kipp, 93,  
Palmyra, Pa., Aug. 25

**Wenger**, Donald Lee, 83,  
Port Republic, Va., Sept.  
19

### Ordained

**Flores**, Rita, Pac. S. W. Dist.  
(Iglesia de Cristo Sion,  
Glendora, Calif.), Oct. 30

**Peterson**, Staci, S. Ohio &  
Ky. Dist. (Cincinnati,  
Ohio), Oct. 2

### Licensed

**Gresh**, Mycal, Mid-Atl. Dist.  
(Long Green Valley, Glen  
Arm, Md.), Oct. 30

**Monnin**, Terri, Ill. & Wis.  
Dist. (Milledgeville, Ill.),  
Oct. 30

### Placements

**Dubble**, Christopher, pastor,  
Myerstown, Pa., Oct. 17

**Dubble**, Kirby, interim  
pastor, Paxton, Harrisburg,  
Pa., Nov. 1

**Gamboa**, Selma, pastor of  
special ministries,  
Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 31

**Myers**, Janet, from pastor,  
Paxton, Harrisburg, Pa., to  
pastor, Nokesville, Va.,  
Oct. 2

**Ream**, Kim, from interim  
pastor to pastor, Green  
Tree, Oaks, Pa., Oct. 17

# An uncomfortable cadence

**B**ack when Brethren balladeer **Andy Murray** was making the denominational concert rounds, he was best known for songs that told the stories of forebears like Anna Mow and Ted Studebaker—songs that still resonate for many generations of Brethren. But he also often mixed in some fun songs about things as random as school buses, watermelon juice, and chickens.



WALT WILTSCHKE

In that latter category was his own creative take on the classic “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” which he intentionally threw off its normal cadence by singing the usual tune but starting out on the second word instead of the first. Every word in the song thus fell a note

earlier than it usually did, leaving an unresolved note hanging as it ended on the rousing “old ball game.”

It messed with my head as a youth, but that Murray melody has stuck with me. Even now, those lopsided lyrics will occasionally echo in my brain during the seventh inning stretch of baseball games.

They also came to mind recently in a less-expected environment, while talking about current church realities with a local pastor. Like others I’ve heard recently, they mentioned how different things feel in the church these days, as many congregations experience decreased attendance, a lack of children and youth, the difficulties of navigating hybrid worship, tight budgets, shifting models of pastoral leadership, and other challenges.

The general shape and pattern look familiar from what we’ve known, but our cadence has been thrown off. We’re trying to sing the same song, but the notes often don’t feel like they’re falling in quite the right places.

An article on the music site FretJam observes that unresolved chords in music create tension, and those places leave you “with a hanging feeling, as if there’s no closure” to the sequence. And in a 2018 American Psychological Association article, German psychologist Tom Fritz said, “Permanently dissonant music is really hard to bear.” He connected hearing it to a German

expression that translates to, “It tears my socks off.”

Perhaps that’s what we’re experiencing as a church. It feels like an era is ending, and that unresolved note is a hard place to be. But as my pastor friend observed, that also gives us the opportunity to help shape the next stanza of the church’s story. What do we want the church to be? The new rhythms that emerge—perhaps jarring at first—can also entwine themselves in our hearts and communities over time.

Where do we begin with that? Some congregations are already taking steps in that direction: Having hard but meaningful conversations about their future vision, selling physical buildings to enable ministry elsewhere, looking more outwardly into their communities, reviving new takes on our “house church” heritage, calling pastoral leadership teams from within, and more.

Our youth could also help point the way for us. At National Youth Conference this past summer, small groups were asked what they appreciate about their congregations. Answers included “never feeling like an outsider,” “having role models,” “the pastor,” “authenticity,” “singing together,” “a welcoming culture,” “a family feeling,” “generosity,” “open to questions,” “service,” “loving people,” and “a sense of community.”

Some form of those last two, in particular, came up again and again. One respondent put it all together, saying they appreciated “how the congregation loves Jesus, each other, and the people in our community.” Not a single answer included the sermons or Sunday school or church boards or specific programs, but it seems the caring pastors and leaders and mentors and others behind those things are essential, with Christ weaving through them all.

We need loving communities. That’s what Jesus consistently modeled. And if our youth value that so highly, odds are others do too. Our cadences in the coming decades will likely need more of that, as well as creativity in how we “do church,” letting go of some conceptions of what church should look like.

The Spirit keeps singing, even in our dissonant places. But finding our way to the next song might tear our socks off at times until we get there. 

“ We need loving communities. That’s what Jesus consistently modeled. And if our youth value that so highly, odds are others do too. ”



# SAVE THE DATE TO JOIN US

## Annual Conference 2023

### July 4-8 ■ Cincinnati, Ohio

Viviendo el amor de Dios  
Viv Lanmou Bondye A  
Rayuwan Kaunar Allah  
Living God's Love

— Ephesians 5:1-2 —  
Languages: Spanish, Creole, Hausa, English

*It was great getting to share in worship with everyone and to experience the diversity of the membership. It was good to hear what things the denomination is highlighting. I will carry home with me the sense of fellowship and the need to love others the way Christ call us to do...even if it is not easy.*

—Annual Conference 2022 participant

inspiring worship ■ communal discernment ■ empowering breakout sessions  
energizing exhibits ■ engaging witness ■ nurturing fellowship ■ meaningful connections

Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.



## National Older Adult Conference 2023

Join us at  
**Lake Junaluska**  
and celebrate that




**September 4-8, 2023**

**Lake Junaluska, NC**

**Preachers:**

**Jeremy Ashworth | Christina Singh | Deanna Brown | Lexi Aligarbes | Katie Shaw Thompson**

National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) is a Spirit-filled gathering of adults 50 and older who love learning and discerning together, exploring God's call for their lives and living out that call by sharing their energy, insight, and legacy with their families, communities, and the world.

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