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SEPTEMBER 2023 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



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On the cover: When the children's choir sang "This Little Light of Mine," worshipers spontaneously let it shine by waving their cellphone flashlights. Photo by Keith Hollenberg.

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Trinity

It was Aug. 6 when I saw the movie *Oppenheimer*. That wasn't intentional; the movie was sold out the day we planned to go, and Aug. 6 was the next available time.

On that same date 18 years ago, my family and I were in Hiroshima for the ceremony remembering the day the US dropped the atomic bomb. At 8:15 a.m., the crowd marked the moment with a silent prayer and then the tolling of the Peace Bell. As is true every year, the ceremony was a plea for worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons and a call for building a world at peace.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

"We are all *hibakusha*," said a speaker representing the secretary general of the United Nations. He was not saying that everyone in the audience had suffered the way the survivors of the bomb, *hibakusha*, had suffered. Rather, he was saying that all us living on the planet have survived this terrible moment in human history and share a common plight.

That evening, we and thousands of others lit paper lanterns and floated them down the river. We could hear strains of Mozart's *Requiem*.

That visit back in 2005 was for the 60th anniversary of the dropping of the bomb and the 40th anniversary of the World

Friendship Center, a long-time Brethren Volunteer Service project site. Brethren longings for peace were represented at the center's anniversary event by more than 1,200 origami cranes that had been folded the month before by children and adults at Annual Conference.

The World Friendship Center hosts visitors from around the world who travel to Hiroshima to reflect upon peace and hear the stories of *hibakusha*. When I watched *Oppenheimer*, I thought of those survivors.

The movie takes the viewer into the mind and experience of J. Robert Oppenheimer, who oversaw the test blast for the atomic bomb—an event he gave the code name Trinity. While the movie doesn't show the devastating results of the use of that weapon, there's evidence of his own wrestling between two realities—the theoretical physics that his brilliant mind could employ and the horror that he knew had been unleashed on an unprepared world.

Relatively few people possess the knowledge and power of an Oppenheimer, but collectively humanity wrestles with life-and-death decisions that should take our breath away. Let us listen and then bear witness, animated by the triune God who creates, saves, and sustains us.

Wendy McFadden

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“Point your kids in the right direction—when they’re old they won’t be lost.”

—Proverbs 22:6, *The Message*

Annual Conference 2023, Kerith Hollenberg

“Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”

—Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai

“You must read to lead. Reading feeds. It opens our souls to a long line of counselors.” —pastor and author Dave Harvey, in *Am I Called?: The Summons to Pastoral Ministry*

“Children are likely to live up to what you believe of them.” —former first lady Lady Bird Johnson

“A good teacher is like a candle—it consumes itself to light the way for others.”

—former president of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

HEIFER HELPERS

In this month’s issue, Nate Hosler of the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy interviews Surita Sandosham, the new CEO of Heifer International (which traces its roots to Church of the Brethren leader Dan West’s development of Heifer Project in the 1940’s). Can you put these gifts of Heifer animals in order from least expensive to most? Answers are below. Learn more at heifer.org.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| GOAT | “ARK” OF ANIMALS |
| MATING PAIR OF CATTLE | HEIFER |
| HIVE OF HONEYBEES | FLOCK OF CHICKS |
| | HONEYBEE FARM |
| | GARDEN SEEDS |
| | WATER BUFFALO |



ANSWERS: Flock of chicks \$20; Hive of honeybees \$30; Garden seeds \$60; Goat \$120; Water buffalo \$250; Heifer \$500; Mating pair of cattle \$1,000; Honeybee farm \$2,500; “Ark” of animals \$5,000.

BY THE NUMBERS

250,000

Approximate number of people who participated 60 years ago, on Aug. 28, 1963, in the March on Washington. Led by Martin Luther King Jr., the group gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial to advocate for greater economic and civil rights for Black Americans.

THE WCC TURNS 75

“Prayer is at the very heart of the ecumenical movement.”

—from the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Prayer Cycle resource

The World Council of Churches

(WCC)—the world’s largest ecumenical body of Christian faith communions—began in August 1948 at a meeting in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. It was supposed to launch in the late 1930’s, but World War II forced a delay.



The WCC characterized itself at that beginning moment as “a fellowship of churches which accept the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour.” It grew out of various movements that had become active in the previous decades. The Church of the Brethren was one of the WCC’s charter members and remains an active participant 75 years later—one of 352 faith communions from more than 120 countries that are current members. Those groups represent more than half a billion Christians worldwide.

Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the WCC’s focus areas include ecumenical solidarity, Faith and Order, Mission from the Margins, Mission and Evangelism, sustainability and climate justice efforts, peacebuilding and reconciliation work, consultation with other religious groups, and advocacy.

The WCC holds a large global assembly every seven or eight years, most recently in Germany this past year. Its work in between assemblies is governed by the Central Committee, on which the Church of the Brethren has often had a voting member (most recently Bethany Theological Seminary president Jeff Carter). The Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, from South Africa, serves as general secretary. His term began in January.



Neighbors invited

Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren has invited neighbors to four community meals in 2023. Following the meal, a program for children, youth, and adults is offered.

In January, everyone helped to assemble 46 infant care kits for the Parish Resource Center in Lancaster, Pa.

In February, “character juggler” Chris Ivey and his son amazed with a juggling show and shared the message of trust in God.

For March, the activity was making resurrection gardens to explain the true meaning of Easter.

In May, Liz Bidgood Enders, pastor of Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren, told stories on the theme “We Are Family.” —Janice Sommerhoff

Strangers welcomed

One warm August day, a young man appeared on the steps of South Waterloo (Iowa) Church of the Brethren, crying. A funeral was about to start but pastor Dave Kerkove took a moment to speak with him, arranging to visit after the service. Thus started a semester-long relationship with Mateus from Brazil, who was attending the nearby community college.

Fast forward a few years. In the fall, the congregation had a booth at the college’s “Welcome to Campus” activity. Church members met new students including Pedro, also from Brazil. The following Saturday, Pedro texted several pastors to see if he could receive a ride to church on Sunday morning. Only Kerkove responded.

Thus began the congregation’s nine-month relation-

ship with Pedro who became very involved in the church. He was a worship leader, sang in the choir, participated in Bible study, shared special music, washed dishes after potlucks, and played volleyball.

When his family in Brazil had health concerns, the congregation lifted them up in prayer. When Pedro called on friends from the congregation to take him to the emergency room, they waited with him through surgery and he stayed at a church member’s home to recover. When he left for a summer internship in South Dakota, a couple from the church drove him there.

We do not know what opportunities God will present in the future, but we have learned that Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,” does indeed lead us to “entertain angels.” —Barbara Miller

150 years of the Bucher Meeting House

The Bucher Meeting House near Cornwall, Pa., will be open to the public on Sept. 10 for its 150th anniversary. The building was constructed in 1871. Since the mid-1930s, only occasional services have been held there. Atlantic Northeast District recently took ownership. Events, including tours of the building and cemetery, with marked graves dating back to 1842, begin at 4 p.m. —Kathy Hackleman



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.



The “Plant Justice Grow Peace” group at Spirit of Peace Church of the Brethren in East Lansing, Mich., held a vigil against gun violence on June 2, for National Gun Violence Awareness Day. A mass shooting on Feb. 13, 2023, killed three students at Michigan State University (MSU) and injured five. The church’s rented sanctuary is in the University United Methodist Church, across the street from campus. After a discussion during a Gun Violence Campaign Meetup with On Earth Peace, the group purchased orange T-shirts featuring the church logo and the slogan “No More Silence, End Gun Violence” and wore them for the vigil in front of the state capitol building in Lansing. —Beverly Leaf

Mystery solved

One of the newest members of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren in Ashley, Ind., 82-year-old Floyd (Fuzz) Stutzman, moved into the neighborhood decades ago after he heard about a job opportunity. Along with his wife and young children, he moved to Ashley from LaGrange, Ind., so that he could be a farmhand for one of the farming families in the church.

He also brought with him a mystery he had carried since he was eight.

He and his brother had been doing chores on the family farm with their father, Ralph, one morning. Their father told the

boys to go to the house for breakfast, and that he would be in shortly. That was the last time they saw him. It was Aug. 17, 1952.

Stutzman, his family, and the LaGrange community have wondered what happened to Ralph for more than 70 years. There were all kinds of theories and speculation. There also was an emptiness in the hearts of Stutzman and his 12 siblings.

Just in the past few months, the mystery was solved. Thanks to a lot of persistence by many different people, and DNA testing, it was discovered that Ralph left his family, moved to Florida, and started a new life and a new family. He took the name Delbert Schrock and had six more children. He died in 1968.

To say the news was a shock would be an understatement. Stutzman gave permission for the news to be shared with the congregation. Knowing that the days ahead would be challenging, he received anointing surrounded by the love and grace of his church family.

Instead of being bitter, the Stutzman family has chosen to be positive. There are six half-siblings in Florida they have now met online and plan soon to meet face-to-face. —Valarie Kline



\$1.5 billion for McPherson

McPherson (Kan.) College has received the largest financial gift for any small liberal arts college in the US. The gift is \$1 billion, and additional gifts to match the initial challenge bring the total funding to \$1,592,000.

The anonymous donor had originally offered a \$500 million endowment double match challenge, and then chose to double the gift to \$1 billion.

The college’s board of trustees has named the endowment the Ward-Burkholder Endowment after two late alumni and professors, John Ward and John Burkholder. Both were active in the Church of the Brethren.

“Today is historic, not just for McPherson College, but for all small liberal arts colleges in America,” said college president Michael Schneider. “I am incredibly grateful to our anonymous donor for giving us an unprecedented opportunity—and responsibility—to build and implement our strategic vision of becoming a destination learning community. We have also been given an amazing opportunity to honor two legendary alumni and professors, Dr. Ward and Dr. Burkholder.”

The college said its plans include “a renewed collaboration on rural health initiatives, plans for state-of-the-art science and engineering facilities, and a huge boost for students facing challenges affording college.”



Glenn Risgel

The centennial of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) was celebrated by the delegate body. President Joel Billi, who brought remarks, was welcomed to the stage by Carl Fike, chair of the Mission and Ministry Board, David Steele, general secretary, and Eric Miller, executive director of Global Mission. Other members of the delegation were Salamatu Billi, Daniel Mbaya, Anthony Ndamsai, Yuguda Mdurvwa Zibagai, Elisha Shavah, and Ruth Shavah. Dedan Shavah attended children's activities.



Glenn Risgel



Keith Hollenbeck

“You have never been apart from us.”

Just before the opening service of Annual Conference, moderator Tim McElwee and moderator-elect Madalyn Metzger met with visitors from EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

President Joel Billi expressed his heartfelt thanks for the moderator’s visit to the EYN centennial celebrations in Nigeria in March. He also expressed gratitude for the great outpouring of support from the Brethren following attacks by Boko Haram.

Billi noted the continued relationship between the US church and the Nigeria church: “Since 1923 you have never been apart from us. We would not be who we are today without you.” Though Nigeria is far away and has a foreign culture and languages, he noted, “yet you have loved us.” McElwee responded, “Never have you been far apart from us and we need you.”

EYN general secretary Daniel Mbaya shared that the EYN has been in prayer and fasting for the US church, but would like to do more to help the US church to grow. Vice president Anthony Ndamsai shared a hope that the EYN and US Church of the Brethren work together to send out missionaries, to expand the kingdom of God globally.

Salamatu Billi said it will be very inspiring for the Nigerians to see a young woman in the role of moderator of the US church who is also a successful professional. A woman moderator previously visited Nigeria, she said.

Resolution lamenting Doctrine of Discovery leads Annual Conference deliberations

Delegates approved “With Actions and in Truth: A Lament on the Doctrine of Discovery.” The doctrine is a rationale for historical colonialism by Europeans around the world, which originated in a series of Christian writings and papal decrees particularly from the 15th century.

Brought by the Mission and Ministry Board, the resolution addresses injustice, even if indirect, in the church’s history with Indigenous people. It encourages Brethren to learn the history, name the wrongs, recognize ways in which we have benefitted, and take time to lament that wrong. The church is called to develop relationships with Indigenous communities and seek ways to bring healing and reparation to Native people. Delegates spent more than the scheduled time discussing the resolution, ultimately passing it by a large margin.

Silent confession and repentance: Following a decision last year by the Standing Committee of district delegates, the Conference observed a time of silence for “confession and repentance concerning our mistreatment of one another in our discussion of human sexuality.” The time began with the reading of a statement from Standing Committee, continued with several minutes of silence, and concluded with these words: “We know our God hears us and will help us move forward together, and that fruit will be born out of this time of confession, for the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

Yaguda Mdurwaa





Chelsea Skillen

It was 75 years ago at Annual Conference when Ted Chambers carried an orange crate to stand on and made a motion to start Brethren Volunteer Service. The anniversary was celebrated with a new book from Brethren Press, a luncheon with speaker Jim Lehman, and a photo op where people were invited to climb aboard the BVS bus and get their picture taken.

Calling leadership: A Standing Committee request for a study committee to research the process of nominating and calling church leadership was approved. The request named the challenges around assembling the ballot that is voted at Annual Conference. Named to the committee were Eric Bishop, Erika Clary, and Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred.

Process for nominations from the floor: Delegates approved a new two-step process for nominations from the floor, brought by Standing Committee. The change requires those making nominations to first state reasons why the ballot for a particular position is inadequate. Before a nomination is offered, delegates must agree to accept the nomination based on the reason offered.



Demonstration against gun violence:

About 100 people wore orange and walked to Cincinnati's city hall to stage a peaceful protest of gun violence. The event was planned by On Earth Peace and the Church of the Brethren Gun Violence Prevention Action Team. Brethren speakers were joined by the vice mayor of the city, and three TV stations aired reports on the event.

Donna Percell

Eder articles of organization: Delegates approved restated and amended articles of organization for Eder Financial, formerly Brethren Benefit Trust..

Ministers continuing education: Since 2002, ministers have been required to do continuing education. The Conference adopted a 2023 version of the document that clarifies guidelines, adds financial responsibility and leadership as a focus area, and pro-rates the number of continuing education units needed.

Standing Committee actions: The district delegates approved the inclusion of “Polity, Position, Policy, and Practice” in the next revision of the Standing Committee



Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel

Worship

“We too, of course, have experienced a time of division and separation. And like this first-century church, Christ calls us to keep our focus on living God’s love.” –Tim McElwee

“Loving God and our neighbors as ourselves is more important than all the ‘stuff’ we do.” –Sheila Wise Rowe

“Four words. Ordinary words. And they can be extraordinary words: ‘The Samaritan came near.’” –Deanna Brown

“The banquet is set. May we see like Jesus. May we love like Jesus. Till every child of God comes home.” –Jody Romero

“In Jesus’ broken body, we see our own brokenness reflected, and we are enabled to recognize the same brokenness in others.” –Audri Svay



Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel



Keith Hollenberg



Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel

By the numbers

1,393 total registration, including 441 delegates and 952 nondelegates.

\$29,330 received in offerings including \$14,431.72 for Core Ministries offerings that highlighted Global Mission, Brethren Volunteer Service, and Discipleship and Leadership Formation; \$8,556.23 for Annual Conference operating expenses; \$6,342.22 for Annual Conference translation.

\$12,698 given for Found House, this year's Witness to the Host City.

\$12,895 raised by the silent auction, with one-third of the proceeds supporting Annual Conference and two-thirds supporting Brethren Disaster Ministries.

\$3,741 raised by the quilt auction of the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren, benefiting the Nigeria Crisis Fund.

120 units collected by the blood drive.

5.3 percent increase approved for the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors.

1 project, 1 fellowship, and 1 congregation welcomed: Madtown Church of the Brethren in Madison, Wis., a project of Illinois and Wisconsin District; East Dayton (Ohio) Fellowship in Southern Ohio and Kentucky District; Gordonsville (Va.) Chapel, a congregation in Shenandoah District.



Laura Sellers




Donna Parcell



Bread-and-cup communion, offered at stations around the hall, was part of the closing worship service.

Manual, and approved review of the Special Response Process “A Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues” to be carried out in 2024.

Interim reports: Delegates received progress reports from two Annual Conference study committees—“Standing with People of Color” and “Breaking Down Barriers: Increasing Access to Denominational Events”—and two Standing Committee subcommittees working on implementation of last year’s polity changes related to agencies.

Anniversaries: The Conference celebrated the 100th anniversary of Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) and the 75th anniversary of Brethren Volunteer Service. 

Serving on the Annual Conference press team—overseen by news services director Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford—were photographers Keith Hollenberg, Donna Parcell, Glenn Riegel, and Laura Sellers; writers Karen Garrett, Wendy McFadden, and Frances Townsend; and website staff Jan Fischer Bachman and Russ Otto. Walt Wiltschek and Eric Miller contributed articles.

For more coverage of Annual Conference see www.brethren.org/news/coverage/annual-conference-2023. Order Wrap-Up and Sermon DVDs and downloads at www.brethrenpress.com.



Glenn Riegel

A wide range of ages participated in Annual Conference, including young adults (far left) and children (left).

Living God's love

by Tim McElwee

The beautiful passage found in 1 John 4:7-12 was written to and for a community in disarray. The three epistles from John the apostle were written near the close of the first century to a Christian community that had recently experienced a painful division.

A couple of chapters before, the elder refers to some members who had left their faith community. They had been one community, but a separation had taken place. Each group claimed to be the true stewards and faithful practitioners of the tradition of the apostle, the authentic guardians of the Christian faith. Because their sense of communal identity was under duress, John seeks to reassure and console them.

But despite this distressing identity crisis, the focus of this first book of John is on remembering and following Jesus' way of love. John, the beloved elder, doesn't dwell on division and competition. Instead, he emphasizes reliance on God and renewing their identity through appropriate behavior toward one another.

As biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson put it, "The remarkable thing about 1 John is that it does not consist of a bitter polemic against those who departed or a sustained refutation of their claims. The focus of this writing is not on the outsiders but on those who remain." The elder compels the believers to strengthen their communal bonds of love.

Elections and appointments

Annual Conference moderator-elect:

Dava Cruise Hensley, Roanoke (Va.) First Church of the Brethren

Program and Arrangements

Committee: Gail Heisel, La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

Pastoral Compensation and

Benefits Advisory Committee: Lori Hurt, Boones Mill (Va.) Church of the Brethren

Mission and Ministry Board—

Area 2: Tina Hunt, Mansfield (Ohio) Church of the Brethren; **Area 3:** Deirdre Moyer, Eden (N.C.) Church of the Brethren; **affirmed:** Meghan Horne Mauldin, Mill Creek Church of the Brethren, Tryon, N.C.; Robert Jackson, Lower Miami Church of the Brethren, Dayton, Ohio

Bethany Theological Seminary

trustees—representing laity: Mark Gingrich, Open Circle Church of the Brethren, Burnsville, Minn.; **clergy:** Jennifer Hosler, Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren; **affirmed:** Susan Stern Boyer, La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

Elder Financial Board:

Dennis Kingery, Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren, Littleton, Colo.;

board/constituency-elected: Russ Matteson, Pacific Southwest District, representing the Ministers' Association and Council of District Executives;

Eunice Erb Culp, Indiana; Audrey Myer, Pennsylvania.

On Earth Peace Board: Audrey Zunkel-DeCoursey, Living Stream Church of the Brethren; **affirmed:** Jennifer K. Scarr, Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren





We too, of course, have experienced a time of division and separation. And like this first-century church, Christ calls us to keep our focus on living God's love.

At the heart of the 1881-1883 split were the firmly held and contrasting positions of the Old Order Brethren, who wanted strong centralized control and less freedom for local innovations, and, at the other extreme, the Brethren Church, which encouraged local initiatives with less regulation at the denominational level. The Church of the Brethren, as we became known in 1908, walked a middle path. Since the late 1880s we have emphasized a balance between local autonomy and denominational authority.

One of the most often cited summaries of this balanced approach—which has been quoted in several other Annual Conference statements—is from a statement adopted by the 1968 Conference. It reads in part: “The actions of Annual Conference are directives for the whole life of the church and implementation is assumed to take place within a reasonable span of time. This implementation does not depend on acts of enforcement by decree. Rather, education, consultation, and patience are characteristics of Brethren polity.”

The 1979 statement on “Biblical Inspiration and Authority,” among other affirmations that emphasize the importance of honoring the validity of varying biblical perspectives, states: “Different ways of speaking for God may be necessary in different generations. Neither the people of God nor the flow of history in which they live stands still.”

So much of our continuing struggle, of course, pertains to the 1983 “Statement on Human Sexuality.” It includes both the often-quoted denunciation of covenantal relationships among those who identify as LGBTQ. And it includes the

explanation that the biblical texts often used to condemn homosexuality “do not deal explicitly with contemporary questions about various forms of homosexuality.” It also charges us to “challenge openly the widespread fear, hatred, and harassment” of those who identify as LGBTQ.

The 2004 statement “Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions” points out that “one cause of congregational disagreement with Annual Conference decisions is the lack of understanding that the Church of the Brethren is both congregational and presbyterial in structure.”

The presbyterial structure is situated between the hierarchical structures associated with the Episcopalian and Roman Catholic traditions, through which bishops and other denominational officials exercise ultimate decision-making authority, and a congregational structure through which each congregation is independent.

In a presbyterian structure, polity flows both from the top down, as seen in our district conferences, Annual Conference, and Standing Committee, as well as from the bottom up, as illustrated by the way in which moderators and Standing Committee members are elected by church members, rather than being appointed by church leaders.

Our 2008 resolution “Urging Forbearance” affirms this summary statement: “We accept Annual Conference positions as invitations to agree rather than mandates to obey.” This paper points out that, even though the Church of the Brethren has emphasized since our founding that all war is sin, we welcome and respect members of the church who do not agree with this conviction and choose to enter military service. Many of our congregations include active and beloved members who served in the military.

“Like the Israelites, we’ve been trying this same approach, and we’ve been wandering outside the promised land, for more than 40 years—the equivalent of a biblical generation.”

And, although Annual Conference approved the ordination of women in 1958, we do not take punitive action against congregations that refuse to consider women for pastoral placement. Many of our districts, some with women district executives, have congregations that routinely and consistently hold this faith perspective and adhere to this belief and practice.

Also in 2008—which was 15 years ago—Standing Committee adopted a “Statement of Confession and Commitment.” It begins with this insightful observation: “The issue of homosexuality continues to bring tension and division within our Body. We are not of one mind on this matter. We believe it is time to name the brokenness. Too often discussions in the life of the Body on this issue are marked by disrespect, meanness, and anger.”

A two-year Special Response process was put in place after Conference received this statement, after which Standing Committee reported to Annual Conference: “It is clear that good people of faith, through Bible study and prayer, are not of one mind in how we as a church interpret the Bible or how the Bible is understood concerning homosexuality and same-sex unions.”

This Standing Committee statement, which was adopted by the 2011 Annual Conference, includes this concluding recommendation: “Standing Committee urges the Church of the Brethren to continue to wrestle with our tension, to truly listen to one another, to disagree in love, to avoid unkindness toward those with whom we differ, and to continue to seek the mind of Christ together.”

But beyond all these Annual Conference and Standing Committee statements, the decision I want to emphasize is the 1990 Standing Committee decision regarding flags on church property. The concluding statement reads: “the delegate body adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee ‘that the query ‘Use of Flags on Church Properties’ be respectfully returned and that the issue of flags be left to the discretion of the congregations.’” We decided to entrust this decision to our congregations.

From the perspective of these past two years, my most important and serious observation is this: I believe it is time to do more than name our brokenness over issues pertaining to human sexuality. I think it is time to do more than repent of the harm we inflict on each other over this issue. I think it’s time to stop trying to resolve our disagreements on matters of human sexuality

through Annual Conference statements.


They say the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Like the Israelites, we’ve been trying this same approach, and we’ve been wandering outside the promised land, for more than 40 years—the equivalent of a biblical generation.

We weren’t of one mind in 1983. This is illustrated by the fact that the amendment that declared covenantal relations among homosexual siblings and kin unacceptable was approved by a vote with about a 10 percent difference between those who favored and those who opposed it. We still are not of one mind over matters of human sexuality.

In light of the fact that our ecclesiological makeup is a blend of presbyterian and congregational structures, and given our decades-long failure to reach agreement on matters of homosexuality at the denominational level, I believe it would be well for the church to consider adopting the same approach to matters of human sexuality as we have regarding the use of flags in our sanctuaries.

I think it’s time to stop wrestling with this tension and instead disagree in love. Let’s stop trying to resolve this decades-old dispute at the denominational level. Instead, let’s allow congregations to reach their own conclusions based on their biblical interpretation of relevant scripture and their prayerful discernment of this matter. We’ve followed this practice regarding military service at the congregational level. We’ve done so at the district level regarding the role of women in ministry. We can lovingly agree to disagree regarding matters of human sexuality at the denominational level.

In fact, we achieved this resolution almost 20 years ago with our statement “Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions.” We just haven’t honored the concluding recommendation. It provides a list of instructions a congregation should follow when it finds itself in disagreement with Annual Conference. And it concludes that if, after following these steps, there still is a lack of reconciliation, “an acknowledgment should be made that the congregation continues supporting the larger church in other aspects of its life while disagreeing with Annual Conference in the particular matter.”

I believe the wisdom and grace of this approach could lead us out of the divisive wilderness regarding matters of human sexuality and into a promised land of loving mutual respect for one another. That is my hope and fervent prayer. 

Tim McElwee was moderator of the 2023 Annual Conference. This article is adapted from the sermon he preached in Cincinnati.



Dear Annual Conference

by Audri Svay

Dear Annual Conference
Dear loved, feeling unloved, heard, feeling unheard
Dear Brethren

We gather
Broken, Breaking, or Seemingly Unshatterable

We gather
Together

Seeking
What
Dear Lord, do you know?

All I know is
It's alright to be angry.
It's alright to be anxious.
It's alright to admit we are broken.
Broken is not banished.
Broken is ready to be remade.

We have all broken
each other at one point or another.
Because when we are broken,
our jagged edges catch and tear the ones who stand closest.

Sorry means you won't do it again.
But it's difficult to make promises when
feeling unheard
feeling unloved
feeling enraged
because Brethren
means something different to me and to you yet
means so much to us.

Dear Annual Conference
Dear Sisters and Brothers

There is time to be tired.
There is time to be at the end of our ropes—
holding and holding and holding
Onto what
Dear Lord, do you know?

All I know is
There is time—
A time for every matter or purpose under heaven.
A time for loving the least of these—
Which is who?


Is it I, Lord?
Is it my neighbor?
Is it my enemy?
Is it those without food?
Or those without hope?
Is it the underpaid?
Or the overlooked?

When we break bread together,
will we learn to know you better?
Or will we sit stiffly,
repeating a ritual,
mistaking common action for community,
rather than reaching
for your spirit in this place?

Dear Annual Conference
Dear Brethren

Can we sense the holiness?
Can we cast our nets over the chasm?
Can we bridge the divide?
Can separation become solidarity?

If we all love the least of these,
the goats become sheep.
Do you see the hope in that?

Let us lament.
Let us love.
Let it be so. 

Audri Svay is pastor of Eel River Community Church of the Brethren in Silver Lake, Ind., and teaches writing courses at the University of St. Francis. She wrote this poem as part of her sermon for the closing worship service at Annual Conference.

The Church of the Brethren around the world







The Church of the Brethren around the world

by Eric Miller

Unlike many mission organizations, the Church of the Brethren Global Mission office works mostly with local Brethren to share the good news of Jesus Christ rather than sending US missionaries overseas. We learn from their faithful witness while sharing our heritage and blessings with them.

Each in their own way, these churches are striving to follow the Bible and the example of Jesus. They see the Brethren as having been given a special gift and are drawn to the idea of continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.

In countries filled with Pentecostals, Catholics, mainline Protestants, and independent evangelical churches, these churches find that doing church together in simple ways with humble leadership is compelling. They all share the gospel in both word and deed, finding ways to lift up communities from poverty into self-sufficiency. Many promote peace in the face of great violence.

Global Church of the Brethren Communion

For the Global Mission office, an area of particular energy and growth is the Global Church of the Brethren Communion, a fellowship of Church of the Brethren denominations in various countries. Here are brief descriptions of the current members of the communion beyond the United States:

Brazil: One fellowship. Community outreach programs and family therapy.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): 32 churches, 8,000 members.

Dominican Republic (DR): 15 churches, 10 fellowships, 2,800 members (including two districts).

Haiti: 22 churches, 8 stations, 4,500 members. Haiti Medical Project.

India: 29 churches, 39 worship centers, 10,000 members.

Nigeria: 605 local church councils (congregations), with additional preaching points and church plants under most councils, 750,000 or more members. A full denominational program including women's and youth programs, agriculture program, educational institutions and a seminary, missions in neighboring countries.

Rwanda: 4 churches, 724 members, 12 choirs, 2 schools. Significant outreach to the Batwa community, preschool, and Bible school.

Spain: 6 churches, 275 members. Open-air revivals, community gardens.

Uganda: 15 churches with 732 members. Orphanage.

Venezuela: 40 churches, 1,611 members. Outreach to Indigenous people.

Project sponsored by the Church of the Brethren in the US

South Sudan: This mission project sponsored by the Mission and Ministry Board has one full-time Global Mission staff person working in the areas of agriculture, reconciliation, trauma healing, prison ministry, evangelism. The first church is being planted.

Emerging missions and projects

In addition to the countries where churches are members of the Global Communion, there are emerging missions and projects in the following places:

Burundi: 50 churches and 6,000 members since 2006. Registered in Burundi but not yet formally recognized by the Global Church of the Brethren Communion.

Cameroon, Chad, Niger Republic, and Togo: Missions of EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

China: Hospice and autism projects (China is a former Church of the Brethren mission).

Colombia: Churches started by refugees from Venezuela.

Ecuador: Agriculture project (Ecuador is a former Church of the Brethren mission).


Kenya and Tanzania: Two churches each planted by the emerging church in Burundi.

Honduras: Emerging connection with an existing congregation. Community development organization with connections to the Church of the Brethren in the US.

Mexico: Emerging churches. Long-term Church of the Brethren-founded community project in Tijuana (Bittersweet Ministries).

Ukraine: One fellowship.

Vietnam: Vision project for retinopathy of prematurity (former Brethren Volunteer Service location).

Other worldwide connections not listed here are Brethren Volunteer Service projects and disaster grants given through the Emergency Disaster Fund. Global Food Initiative partnerships are located in many of the countries named above. 

Eric Miller is executive director of Global Mission for the Church of the Brethren.



Bimala Bogati of the Bajureli self-help group shows Heifer CEO Surita Sandosham some of the goats she keeps.

Heifer International

Taking the long view

An interview with Surita Sandosham by Nate Hosler

Surita Sandosham began last October as president and chief executive officer of Heifer International, an organization begun by Dan West of the Church of the Brethren. She is interviewed here by Nate Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, who represents the Church of the Brethren on the Heifer board of directors.

Nate Hosler: You have been doing a lot of listening. What have you been hearing and what excites you as you engage with partners around the world?

Surita Sandosham: It is such a privilege to be the CEO of Heifer International. At this initial stage of my tenure, the balance of listening versus action will certainly bend more towards the former. I want to understand the rationale for our decisions, strategy, goals, and operations. I want to also

honor and value the wisdom in the organization, which has existed for almost 80 years and supported 43 million small-holder farming families. I also want to absorb the values and culture by meeting and interacting with as many different stakeholders as I can—board, staff, donors, volunteers, partners, the farmers, and their families.

What we are attempting to do—end hunger and poverty and ensuring we take care of our planet—requires understanding all the multidimensional factors that cause hunger and poverty today. People adversely impacted by them today are dealing with the shocks of COVID-19, the ongoing ravages caused by climate change, the invasion of Ukraine, a volatile global economy, high fertilizer and food prices, among a myriad of other social and cultural issues.

Heifer is unique in that we build trusting relationships with the communities we serve. And because we take a long



Surita Sandosham meets seagoing cowboy Don Goodfellow.

view to addressing the problems, we are able to pivot and support our communities when an unexpected shift like COVID occurs. I heard and saw this from communities in Ecuador and Mexico. They related how during COVID the work did not stop. Our staff worked to support communities in rural areas to feed more vulnerable populations in the cities and how the communities were grateful that we did this.

What I have learned is we have an ambitious goal to help 10 million smallholder farmers get to earning sustainable living incomes by 2030. We take a holistic and systems approach to addressing hunger and poverty. We partner with farmers, mostly women, and focus on value chains that are market-driven and can support these farmers in reaching a sustainable living income.

We also understand that women smallholder farmers face more social barriers and attempting to surmount these barriers can lead to ostracization and even violence. Heifer understands the contexts in which women face these barriers. In addition to the technical solutions and training provided in livestock and agricultural production to support these women and their families, we build up their confidence and self-esteem. We do this through our value-based community development training, which is integral to equipping them with technical knowledge and supporting their collective efforts to create savings and build their overall resilience. We ensure a high level of trust is built and agency is derived from this combination of technical and social interventions.

In countries where we have been present for more than 30 years—Nepal and Ecuador—I witnessed the leadership of

our staff and how they meet the participants where they are, being nimble and agile to make shifts that support our smallholder farmers. It is exciting to be with colleagues around the world who are deeply committed to the mission and to our participants.

Q Why do you do this work? What got you involved and why do you persist in such a difficult task?

A Having now worked in different kinds of organizations all focused on helping the most vulnerable in different ways—advocating for human rights, using philanthropy to make the necessary shifts in global poverty and building partnerships across sectors—I am convinced that finding sustainable solutions to the complex problems of ending hunger and poverty necessitates bringing stakeholders in the whole system together and being open to working with diverse perspectives from government, corporates, civil society, and in partnership with communities.

I enjoy problem-solving difficult, knotty issues with others. The flow comes from being with individuals and partners at all levels who care deeply about people wherever they are in the world, who share the same core values, recognizing that the collective provides the wisdom to solve these seemingly intractable problems. I enjoy connecting the dots in a non-linear fashion to figure out the leverage points to make shifts within the system we are trying to change. I have this deep sense of knowing that, if we can see we are part of the problem we are trying to solve, we can find the necessary solutions.

I also believe the complexity of addressing hunger and poverty requires a seventh-generation approach—that what you do today with others will lead to sustainable solutions in time, and you have to view what it means for the communities we are supporting and the land that needs to be regenerated for future generations. These, now deeply held, beliefs derive from lived experiences in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

Q Many Church of the Brethren members have a long connection with Heifer. For example, one of my pastors growing up, Becker Ginder, was a seagoing cowboy in 1955. Heifer is a much different organization now than it was in those early days. How do you see the Heifer of today connecting with community/grassroots folks? Where do you see continuity and also change from the early work?

A I just met a seagoing cowboy at the Heifer ranch, Don Goodfellow. What a joy that was to hear his story and be able to share with him how we just facilitated a gift of 101 heifers from Korea to Nepal.

I often think about our founder, Dan West, his spirit and

“ We have come a long way and we have adapted to a changing world. My hope is that Dan West and others would be proud of these efforts, because at our core we are being of service to others. ”

founding principles. He comes alive for me in my conversations with former staff and volunteers like Rosalee Sinn and Peggy Reiff Miller. I was so sorry not to have met Jan Schrock, and yet Rosalee did a lovely job in introducing me to her through their many trips they made for Heifer. I think that is what is important, recognizing the past and how it has shaped the organization and staying true to being of service to others, because at Heifer we believe in sharing and caring and are focused on the wellbeing of humanity and our planet.

The organization has grown in leaps and bounds and it has stayed true to its original values and made changes to adapt to the needs of its participants. Our 12 cornerstones are the bedrock by which we do all our work. The way we build the scaffolding to support smallholder farmers through our 12 cornerstones training, the way we take a long view to problem-solving, hire local staff and work in partnership with our participants, the way we build partnerships with government to ensure sustainability—all these signify our true purpose to be of service and be in partnership with our participants so they lead healthy and productive lives.

The focus of Heifer for the 21st century is to recognize locally led sustainable development, to operate on the basis that the decision-makers must be those closest to the problems. We operate in 19 countries and have country offices with local staff who know in depth the context and their farmers.

We still believe in passing on the gift, and that means more than just the firstborn of animals. With sustainable living income we are looking at market solutions, providing relevant technical training, and creating social capital so that women have the self-confidence to carry out their work on behalf of their families and their communities.

We have come a long way and we have adapted to a changing world. My hope is that Dan West and others would be proud of these efforts, because at our core we are being of service to others.

Q You have visited many program sites already in your first months. Where have you gone and what are some examples from projects?

A I have now visited our programing in the US, Rwanda,

Nigeria, Nepal, Ecuador, Bangladesh, and India. Our focus in all these countries has been to support smallholder farmers in their value chains of choice and intervene in market-based agricultural systems so that the farmers earn a sustainable living income.

In Nigeria and Africa more broadly, we are focused on supporting youth in developing their entrepreneurial acumen in agricultural enterprises.


In Nepal we have created 43 cooperatives owned mostly by women, focused on livestock and other agricultural enterprises. I learned that Nepal does not have to import goats to meet the demand in the country and that was due in large part to our support—working with the farmers and municipal governments.

In Ecuador I met our agro-entrepreneurs operating in diverse ecosystems (Andean forest, dry forest, coastal marine) who are promoting healthy food production while increasing their incomes.

In Bangladesh and India, I met with self-help groups focused on livestock and crop value chains who spoke movingly about how the Heifer 12 cornerstones training, which is an integral part our values-based community development approach, has given them the agency and autonomy to learn and make their own decisions regarding their value chains.

Q What are your hopes for Heifer in the future and in the next several years?

A Given the world we live in and the issues of climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and displacement due to the global economy, my hope is that, as an organization that takes a systems approach to addressing hunger and poverty, we continue to pay attention and continue to focus on working with 10 million smallholder farmers to reach a sustainable living income by 2030.

We are not alone in this pursuit and should lean in on building partnerships that ensure we reach the goal and that we find ways of elevating how we work with smallholder farmers in the different contexts through our values-based development approaches. 



Mamadou Sawa Bih

THIS IS HOW WE CAN DO CHURCH

Chicago church connects with the community

An interview with Erma Purnell and Mary Scott-Boria by Heidi Gross

When First Church of the Brethren in Chicago hosted a dramatic performance last spring, church members renewed connections with people who had grown up in the community.

The show was *Ladies Ring Shout 2.0*, by Honey Pot Performance, a Chicago-based collective of Black women. Their performances incorporate spoken word, music, movement, images, and video. *Ladies Ring Shout 2.0* focuses on themes critical to Black women's lives such as representation, love and relationships, scars/trauma, work-life balance, quality of life, nurturing and parenting, spirituality, healing, and defining communities of care.

Heidi Gross interviewed fellow church members Erma Purnell and

Mary Scott-Boria about the performance and the group's involvement with First Church. Purnell and Scott-Boria have each been members of the congregation for decades. They raised their children there, and many of their children and grandchildren are members.

Heidi Gross: What are some moments that stood out to you?

Erma Purnell: I liked the white outfits that they dressed in. There was so much singing. It all took you way back, and then brought you back to the present. I grew up in Mississippi, and a lot of the child's songs and games in the performance reminded me of my childhood in Mississippi.

Mary Scott-Boria: I liked all of it, but I really liked the beginning where



Erma Purnell

Kerry Brown



Mary Scott-Boria

Kerry Brown



Mamadou Sawa Bah



Mamadou Sawa Bah

the women each individually came out and they were moaning. It reminded me of childbirth. And then, at the end, they did a piece that was playful and joyful. The final part of the performance ended with moaning and so it was sort of like a mourning.

The pianist had the most glorious, deep voice, and I resonate with her because my voice is very deep too. I'm like an alto, almost tenor, now. And her voice. She was one of the smallest actresses, but had this really deep, very soulful voice. I love the fact that she had command of that piano.

Gross: What does it mean to you that we were able to host that performance here in our space?

Purnell: It was nice to get people who don't know about the church in

this community to see what kind of things are happening here. Hopefully we can continue to interest the community in what's going on here now. Who knows, we might end up getting some weddings or something!

Scott-Boria: They gave honor to us several times. They were so respectful of the space.

They also used our stained-glass windows in a unique way. For example, at one point the women were like

“I think being in the church gave people the idea that church is not just a place for some people, but a place for all people.”

shadow puppet-type things in the windows. They projected the windows in a faded way on this wall and then had these black shadows of the women doing children’s songs, and it was really a beautiful scene. It was very womanist [Black feminist] performance. It was sort of a timeline in terms of genealogy and ancestry. It kind of flowed, and that felt very spiritual.

And then the other thing that was a very spiritual moment was when Meida [McNeal], the director of the play, did a piece about her mother and spoke about her relationship with her mother particularly at the time when her mother died. It all flowed very seamlessly, from these moments of mourning to funny moments.

I think being in the church gave people the idea that church is not just a place for some people, but a place for all

people. You don’t have to stick with the time-tested rituals—you can do unique, creative things in the church and people still feel the spiritual moment. I thought that was really important.

Gross: How did this group get connected with First Church originally?

Scott-Boria: Well, a few years ago I went to a performance about Martin Luther King that Meida and Abra [Johnson, co-founders of Honey Pot Performance] had created. Meida grew up in this neighborhood where our church is, and her parents met in this neighborhood. So she has these very fond memories of growing up here and living here. She did the Martin Luther King one-woman performance in honor of her time in this community and her parents’ time in this community.

When I saw her performance about King, I approached her and said, “Look, we hosted King at our church during his time in Chicago, and wouldn’t you like to do that performance at our church?” Originally she was going to do that performance here. But this play, Ladies Ring Shout 2.0, was about 10 years in the making, and they wanted to finalize it. So that’s how it all came together.

Gross: Maybe she’ll still do the Martin Luther King one in the future?


Scott-Boria: Yes, she’s still working on that. That one would have come with a weekend of workshops about the East Garfield Park neighborhood. That was supposed to happen in April 2020, and it got canceled because of the pandemic. But we still plan to do it in the future.

Gross: Do you have any other reflections?

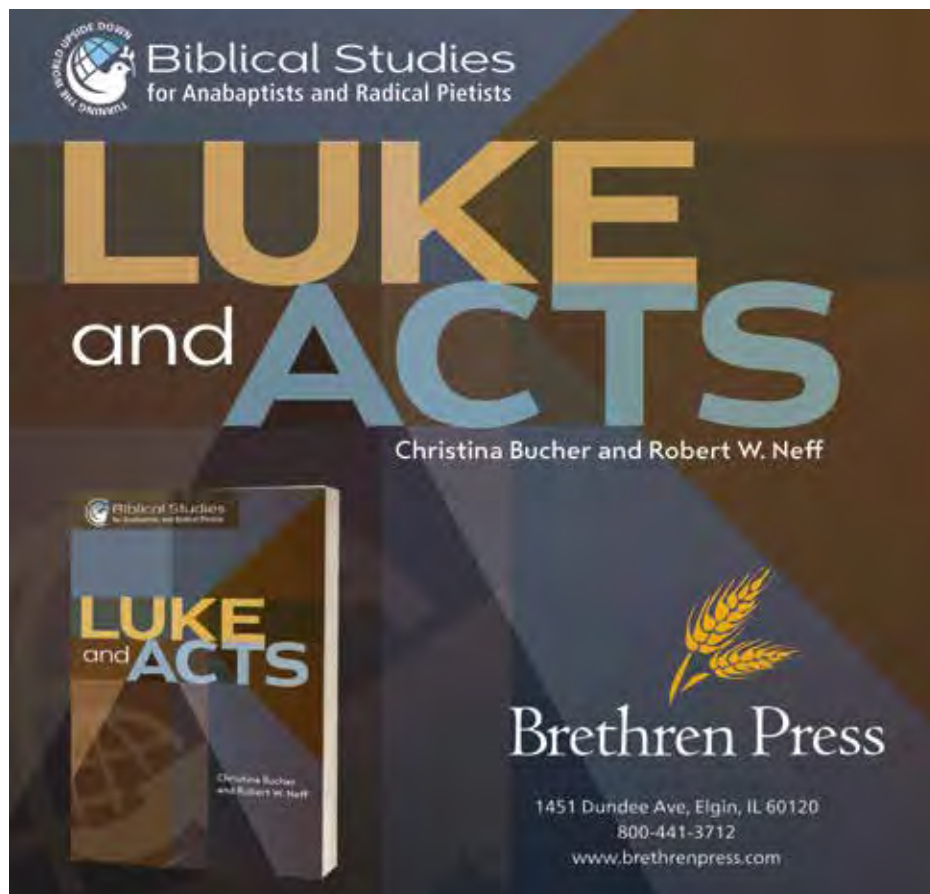
Purnell: They decorations are marvelous. So beautiful. The sanctuary is transformed. They did really creative things with this space.

Scott-Boria: I saw the brother of one of the co-writers of this performance. When he was a child, he did performances of the “I Have a Dream” speech, and I recognized him from that time. I welcomed him and he said, “We’ve been to this church before.” So there were several people who said that they been to this church in the past. Hosting this performance brought back a lot of people who have connections to First Church.

Gross: So this was a way to remind them that we’re here, remind them of the memories that they’ve had from here, and reconnect with them.

Scott-Boria: And this is how we can do church. We can do church like this. 

Heidi Gross, a member of First Church of the Brethren in Chicago, is managing editor of Brethren Press.



Simon's *Seven Psalms*

It all began with a dream.

Singer/songwriter Paul Simon, who has shaped our lives over the past 60 years with songs such as “The Sound of Silence,” “Bridge Over Troubled Waters,” and “The Boy in the Bubble,” woke up one night a couple years ago from a dream where he learned he would write an album titled *Seven Psalms*. Simon drew upon his Jewish background from growing up in Queens and his love for music, baseball, and poetry to craft lyrics that explore the wisdom, peace, and fears that come with age.



FRANK RAMIREZ

Though “Psalms” refers to the songs of the Hebrew Bible, the word is actually Greek, referring to a stringed musical instrument, making it especially appropriate for this largely acoustic, not-quite-solo album. Simon plays various guitars, bells, drums, and harmonica, joined occasionally by his spouse, Edie Brickell,

and others in backing vocals and instruments.

The seven psalms are crafted into one continuous 32-minute song. The first movement, “The Lord,” is the most psalm-like of the set, opening with the evocative line, “I’ve been thinking about the great migration,” grounding the song in that historical moment when African Americans migrated north seeking jobs and escape from Jim Crow. From there he describes an ultimately unknowable God.

The Lord, we learn, is both “a virgin forest” and “a forest ranger,” a tenuous “face in the atmosphere,” but also the COVID virus. I especially enjoyed the couplet: “The Lord is a meal for the poorest of the poor / A welcome door to the stranger.”

And just as the themes of biblical psalms are repeated, revisited, and reassessed throughout the cycle, “The Lord” is repeated twice more in the body of *Seven Psalms*.


In “Love is Like a Braid,” he draws—I think—upon the

three-fold cord of Ecclesiastes 4:12 to suggest that love and devastating sorrow are necessarily intertwined with joy. The arch “My Professional Opinion” strives for objectivity but concludes “All that really matters / Is the one who became us / Anointed and gamed us / With His opinions.”

The theme of doubt, and the inability to resolve the sins of youth, are intertwined in “Your Forgiveness.” The spare poetry of “Trail of Volcanoes” laments the brief window for receiving and granting that forgiveness, summarizing “The pity is / The damage that’s done / Leaves so little time / For amends.”

Simon struggles with life’s unresolved actions and omissions, sharing the *Confiteor*’s admission of what we have done and what we have failed to do, underlie “The Sacred Harp.” The title is a direct reference to both David’s psalms and a classic shaped-note hymnal. Simon recalls an incident when he and a companion offered a ride to a mother and her possibly autistic son, self-described “refugees of sorts / From my home town / They don’t like different there / They would have mowed us down.” Unresolved but revisited, what little resolution that’s experienced is expressed with “The thought that God turns music into bliss . . .”

Finally, the poet addresses some unseen visitor with, “Wait / I’m not ready / I’m just packing my gear / Wait / My hand’s steady / My mind is still clear.” Yet even in doubt, Simon concludes, “Heaven is beautiful / It’s almost like home / Children! Get ready / It’s time to come home.”

In an era when some self-appointed Christians claim to speak for an angry, judgmental, hate-filled God, it’s comforting to hear from an old friend (or “Old Friends,” another old Paul Simon song)—one who doesn’t claim to have all the answers, but who’s asking the same questions we’re all posing. 

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.



ABOUT THE ALBUM

Title: *Seven Psalms*. **Artist:** Paul Simon. **Producer:** Angel Studios. **Release date:** May 19, 2023. **Label:** Owl; Legacy. The album is a seven-part piece meant to be listened to in its entirety. Available electronically and on vinyl record.

Giving God the glory

John 7:14-24

by Bobbi Dykema

From time to time, humanity produces savants who have an incredible inborn natural gift for activities that the rest of us would have to struggle long years to acquire. For example, in April 2022, the *Washington Post* ran an article about a 46-year-old man who has conversational fluency in 45 different languages.

Vaughn Smith is a hyperpolyglot, self-taught or having learned informally from native speakers a mind-boggling list of languages in which he is capable of a conversation—while many of the rest of us struggle to remember even snippets of our high school French or Spanish. We marvel at such people, whether their facility is with language or music or in some other arena of human endeavor, just as the crowds in Jerusalem marveled at Jesus' preaching.

In Jesus' time, Jewish religious practice consisted primarily of temple worship, focused on sacrifices

brought by worshipers and offered by the priests, and synagogue worship, where preaching and singing took place. While any adult male Jew could, theoretically, offer a meditation on the scriptures, it was most common for the assembly to hear from rabbis trained in theological discourse. So when Jesus, an untrained itinerant teacher, takes the *bimah* (the podium or platform in a synagogue from which the Torah and Prophets are read), it caused a certain amount of astonishment and concern.

First-century Judaism was diverse—neither monolithic nor necessarily rigidly legalistic; the Jesus movement was part of that. While Jesus had disagreements with *some* other Jews, some Jews followed him.

Whose authority?

The festival referred to in John 7:14 was most likely Sukkot, or the Festival of Booths. This was one of the three pilgrimage festivals (the others being

Passover and Pentecost), for which the Jews of Jesus' time were expected, if at all possible, to travel to Jerusalem. The city would have been filled with many pilgrims from around Palestine and beyond, as well as those resident in Jerusalem.

Those who had been making the pilgrimage for many years would have been used to hearing certain authoritative rabbinical voices. Seeing an itinerant, quite possibly illiterate teacher from the rustic backwater of Galilee would have been a surprise—especially since the teacher displayed a deep understanding of the scriptures! Jesus' listeners wanted to know how he had acquired his wisdom and knowledge.

But the reaction to Jesus' preaching carried an undertone of suspicion: not just, "how does he?" but also, "how dare he?" Even if Jesus spoke well, what gave him the right to speak on God's behalf without having gone through proper vetting and training? By whose authority did he speak?

“But the reaction to Jesus’ preaching carried an undertone of suspicion: not just, “how does he?” but also, “how dare he?””

Jesus responds to these unspoken questions by asserting that those who are resolved to do the will of God will be able to recognize the soundness of his teaching. He proclaims that he is speaking in order to glorify God; he does not desire to acquire prestige for himself.

The law of Moses

Jesus goes on to respond to the unspoken challenge in his audience’s question with a challenge of his own: “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law” (v. 19). He goes on to inquire why they are looking for an opportunity to kill him, which understandably takes the crowd aback. They respond by, essentially, accusing him of being out of his mind: “You have a demon!” (v. 20)

It is a foretaste of the events of the first Holy Week, when the crowds first praised Jesus for his deeds of power on the first Palm Sunday and then four days later were calling for him to be crucified. The crowd here during the Festival of Booths first marvels at Jesus’ preaching and then, when he asks a few pointed questions, decides he’s dangerous and crazy.

Jesus’ sabbath practice was a point of contention for some of his listeners, especially the Pharisees. Jesus performed several healings on the sabbath: a man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14), a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6), and a crippled, bent-over woman (Luke 13:10-17). He and his disciples had also been observed picking grain to eat on the sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8). In each instance, the Pharisees objected strenuously to what they saw as Jesus breaking the sabbath as given in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11).

While the point of contention in

this passage is Jesus’ authority to preach, rather than his sabbath practice, he responds with a word about sabbath practice. Even though no work is to be done on the sabbath, since it is also part of the law of Moses that baby boys be circumcised on the eighth day after they are born, any boy born the day before sabbath would need to be circumcised on the next sabbath, thus making work for the *mohel* (the person who performs the Jewish rite of circumcision).

Yet this is allowed, as it is deemed more important to keep the eighth-day rule than to scrupulously avoid the work entailed in performing a circumcision. Therefore, Jesus says, healing someone on the sabbath should not be considered breaking the sabbath, since, if circumcision is right and necessary, how much more so the making whole of a broken and suffering body?

The will of God

Jesus tells his listeners that anyone who is resolved to do the will of God will be able to discern whether any particular teaching comes from God. Here, Jesus is trying to teach his listeners that they are called and created to be in relationship with God, a relationship that involves listening for and discerning God’s leading, and that these relational practices are foundational to the journey of a life of faith in a way that scrupulously keeping every jot and tittle of the law may not be. Overscrupulousness, also known as legalism, can be a pitfall of the life of faith, because it shifts our focus away from relationship into rule-keeping.


The scriptures give us guidance on discerning the will of God so that we might resolve to do it. The prophet Micah proclaims that what the Lord requires is “to do justice, to love kind-

ness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 give us our ethical foundation. When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus recited from the Shema, the Jewish confession of faith, in Deuteronomy 6: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). And throughout Jesus’ teachings, from the Beatitudes to the Lord’s Supper, Jesus showed us what it means to do the will of God.

To God be the glory

Jesus offered a second criterion for determining whether someone speaks with authority from God. The first was that those who are resolved to do the will of God would recognize which messages are from God. The second is that those who speak God’s truth are not seeking their own glory, but God’s glory.

Jesus lived his entire life this way. As the apostle Paul put it in Philippians 2, Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness . . . [and] humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). Theologians call this ongoing self-emptying on Jesus’ part *kenosis*.

When Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him (Matthew 16:24), he is calling us to the work of *kenosis* as well. God’s will for us is that, by God’s grace, we die to ourselves and live for Christ. When we do this, God is glorified in and through us in all the ways that we love and serve God and neighbor. 

Bobbi Dykema is pastor of First Church of the Brethren in Springfield, Ill.

Chris Brumbaugh-Cayford

Chris Brumbaugh-Cayford



Junior highs gather at Juniata

For the first time since 2019, National Junior High Conference met at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., with 11 districts represented among the 164 participants. The event is sponsored by Youth and Young Adult Ministries, led by director Becky Ullom Naugle.

Worship invited participants to ask, “What does God want from me?” Ecumenical guests Hyacinth Stevens and Damien Feyjoo focused on celebrating the joy of our faith and understanding the depth of mercy God offers. Amber Harris,

ordained in the Church of the Brethren and executive director of SPARK (Share Peace and Rekindle Kindness Inc.), encouraged participants to hope and act courageously while watching for the Holy Spirit’s movement.

The group also traveled to the college’s field station, an environmental research and education center at Raystown Lake. Learning stations included “greening your church,” planting a pollinator garden, and considering our place in God’s creation.



Jeff Boshart/GFI

Meetings address divide in DR

From June 9 to 11, as part of ongoing work to encourage unity and reconciliation in Iglesia de los Hermanos Republica Dominicana (Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic), retired pastor Alix Sable of Lancaster, Pa., and Global Food Initiative manager Jeff Boshart met with church leaders.

Meetings were held with the board of the DR church and with leadership of Comunidad de Fe (Community of Faith) made up of Kreyol-speaking congregations of Haitians living in the

DR and Dominicans of Haitian descent. The two groups separated nearly five years ago, during an annual conference when a proposal seeking equal representation in board positions from the two sides of the church failed to be ratified.

A draft plan calling for two separate districts was developed by Dominican American pastors who are members of Global Mission’s country advisory team for the DR. Church leaders in the DR requested more time to discuss the plan.



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Church leaders respond to reporting of abuse by former employee

Church of the Brethren leaders have received new reporting about sexual abuse by a former member of the denominational staff, which occurred in a work setting several decades ago. The book *Her Words, My Voice* by Heidi Ramer has brought new attention to the events. Victim and alleged perpetrator were adults at the time, and both are now deceased. Action was taken by church leaders at the time.

The General Secretary's office and the denomination's Mission

and Ministry Board have been part of the response. A meeting was held with family of the abused person. More actions related to past practices and current policies and procedures are expected, in order to ensure a safe workplace and to improve organizational responses. Currently, a process for responding to sexual abuse allegations is incorporated in the *Employee Handbook* and denominational staff are required to complete an annual training for prevention of abuse and workplace misconduct.



Albin Hillert/WCC

The World Council of Churches (WCC) celebrated its 75th anniversary on June 25 during meetings of its Central Committee. The Church of the Brethren is a founding member. Among significant actions taken by the committee were adoption of bylaws for a new Commission on Climate Change and Sustainable Development, appointment of 17 youth advisors to strengthen the voice of young people in the WCC, and approval of a Strategic Plan 2023-2030 with "Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity" as the theme. Numerous statements addressed global concerns ranging from endorsement of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to ecumenical solidarity with Africa and people of African descent to artificial intelligence.

Personnel

Sam Carter began July 17 as sorter and packer of medical supplies for Material Resources at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

Shelly K. Haas of Roanoke (Va.) Oak Grove Church of the Brethren began July 15 as part-time financial services coordinator for Virlina District.

Hannah Jarrett began June 5 as director of Camp Bethel in Fincastle, Va. She succeeds **Barry LeNoir**, who retired June 30. Over the years, Jarrett has worked for the camp as a counselor-in-training, senior counselor, summer program coordinator, and administrative assistant. Camp Bethel also hired

Elizabeth Brancati as guest services coordinator and **Becca Duncan** as food services coordinator.

Michael B. Leiter, a Church of the Brethren mem-

ber from Frederick, Md., started May 15 as client services manager for Eder Financial. He holds a bachelor's in business administration from Messiah University, Grantham, Pa., and a master of business administration from Hood College in Frederick.

Pardis Mahdavi has been named the 19th president of the University of La Verne, Calif. She brings more than 20 years of scholarship, experience, and leadership in higher education, most recently serving as provost and executive vice president at the University of Montana. Mahdavi succeeds **Devorah Lieberman**, who has retired after serving as ULV president since 2011.

Carolyn Neher of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill., began June 5 as associate director of Children's Disaster Services. A CDS volunteer

since 2014, Neher has deployed to six disasters, is trained as a project manager and critical response childcare volunteer, and is a volunteer trainer. She holds a bachelor's in psychology from McPherson (Kan.) College and a master of education in early childhood leadership and advocacy from National Louis University.

Stanley Noffsinger retired May 31 as chief executive officer of Timbercrest Senior Living Communities in North Manchester, Ind. He began at Timbercrest in February 2019 as long-term interim executive. Noffsinger is a former general secretary of the Church of the Brethren. **Christine Huiras**, most recently chief operating officer at Timbercrest, has been named executive director.

Traci Rabenstein, director of Mission Advancement for

the Church of the Brethren, was promoted to executive director of the department.

H. Kendall Rogers has retired as professor of historical studies at Bethany Theological Seminary, completing his final courses this spring. He taught at Manchester College (now Manchester University) in North Manchester, Ind., for 30 years, then joined the Bethany faculty in 2008. He has been ordained in the Church of the Brethren to the ministry of teaching since 1984.

Riley Rowan began June 12 as business development director for Eder Financial. He holds a double major in marketing and management from Judson University in Elgin, Ill.

Winni (Sara) Wanionek resigned May 31 as sorter and packer of medical supplies for Material Resources.

Lessons from South Sudan

Fletcher Farrar's article in the July/August issue draws attention to the current initiative led by Athanasus Ungang and provides a synopsis of Church of the Brethren long-term mission in South Sudan. In addition to the history, I draw attention to the importance of discerning lessons relevant to our ongoing mission.

I served the Church of the Brethren on a part-time basis for a decade, 1994 to 2005, as strategic advisor to the New

Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) and its executive director, Dr. Haruun Ruun. In 1994, church leaders adopted this phrase: "Our pleas for food and aid will never end until our prayers for peace are answered." This decision signaled a significant shift of priorities from development aid to peacemaking.

The NSCC's "People-to-People Peacemaking" maintained a non-political stance and brought various Sudanese groups together to restore relationships and resolve conflicts, as

documented in NSCC publications. RECONCILE was formed in 2003 to organize communities for peace and development.

In 2003, Ruun received the prestigious Spirit of Raoul Wallenberg Humanitarian Award for "courageously accepting the danger of being a peacemaker so that others can live and have genuine hope of peace coming some day to Sudan." He often emphasized that the peace emphasis was rooted in the witness of the Church of the Brethren, which supported

Centenarians

EGGE, Doris Cline, 100, Roanoke, Va., Aug. 28
LOVELACE, Graham, 100, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 26
ROBERTSON, Jane B., 100, Winston Salem, N.C., May 19

New members

BEAR CREEK, Accident, Md.: Annalynn Kreighbaum, Joey Sizemore
BROWNSVILLE, Knoxville, Md.: Annalena DiPietro, Jack Galpin, Travis Knode, Asher Park
BUSH CREEK, Monrovia, Md.: John Flook
COLUMBIA CITY, Ind.: Joan Downing, Becki Jacquay, Evan Peterson, Marta Stender, Mason Sutton, Morgan Sutton
DIXON, Ill.: Sharon Buckley
EVERETT, Pa.: Liam Berry, Natalie Guelich, Avery Hafer, Amber Musselman, David Musselman
FIRST, Peoria, Ill.: Mark Bean, LaVerne Shanahan, Cheryl Spence
FIRST, York, Pa.: Becca Miller, Lyn Miller, Ralph Miller
GETTYSBURG, Pa.: Ted Carpenter
LITITZ, Pa.: Gayle Bryan, Grant Good, Allegra Hess, Deanna Myers, Rick Sauder, Sharon Sauder, Barbara Showers, Jill Keyser Speicher, Tim Speicher, Doug Wenger,

Louise Wolgemuth
MECHANIC GROVE, Quarryville, Pa.: J. R. Holzhauser, Colton Houghton, Charlotte Kreider, Ann Shelley, Jeremy Shelley
MIDLAND, Va.: Wesley Cooke, Johnny Hitt, Cassandra Hooper, Lucinda Mangus, Marlo Mangus, Jake Messick, Timothy Wehrle
PINE GLEN, Lewistown, Pa.: Amy Traxler, Randy Traxler
SOUTH WATERLOO, Waterloo, Iowa: Craig Heise, Kathy Heise, Don Miller, Gail Miller, Ellen Rogers, Mike Rogers, Cindy Stentiford, Dave Stentiford
SUNRISE, Harrisonburg, Va.: Alex Blewett

Wedding anniversaries

ANNA, Roger and Sandy, Pingree Grove, Ill., 55
BOUWMEESTER, Paul and Gay, Elgin, Ill., 50
BROWN, James and Onie, Ashley, Ind., 70
BUNCH, John and Zemora, Muncie, Ind., 66
DOWNING, Cleon and Joan, Columbia City, Ind., 65
DUNCAN, Howard and Janice, Evergreen, Colo., 65
HARVEY, Tom and Jo, La Porte City, Iowa, 67
JORDAN, Don and Joyce, Fort Wayne, Ind., 60
KETTERING, George and Annabelle, Ashland, Ohio, 67

KLINGAMAN, Steve and Deb, Waterloo, Iowa, 50
LESH, Larry and Donna, Fort Wayne, Ind., 60
LINGLE, Robert and Wendy, Bethel, Pa., 50
MARTIN, William and Alice, Wilmington, Ohio, 60
MEGERS, Leslie and Linda, Traer, Iowa, 60
MORRISON, Donald and Eileen, Plymouth, Ind., 60
NELSON, Bobby and Ferald, Winston Salem, N.C., 72
PETRY, Ed and Pauline, Beavercreek, Ohio, 60
ROOP, Eugene and Delora, North Manchester, Ind., 60
SANBLOOM, Robert and Joan, Lafayette, Ind., 67
SCHLABACH, John and Charlotte, Hartville, Ohio, 55
SHERRED, Lyall and Vivian, Denver, Colo., 65
SITTIG, Kevin and Diane, Waterloo, Iowa, 50
STACKHOUSE, Myron and Mary Jane, Waterloo, Ind., 60
STRYCKER, G. Brad and Jo, Goshen, Ind., 70
STURGILL, Owen and Ruth, Hartville, Ohio, 65
WENGER, Clyde and Shirley, Lancaster, Pa., 68

Deaths

ADKINS, Ellen Elizabeth Shaffer, 102, Camp Hill, Pa., July 7
BAILIE, Kathy A. Kaufman, 63, Thomas Mills, Pa., April 18

BALLINGER, Katherine Marlene Brody, 48, Bremen, Ind., Jan. 19
BASHORE, Christine Marie Gerhart, 84, Myerstown, Pa., May 4
BERRY, Nancy Louise Smail, 76, Luxor, Pa., Jan. 21
BOWMAN, Evelyn Jean Wales, 91, Polo, Ill., April 14
BREIDENSTINE, Glenn S., 89, Lititz, Pa., May 18
BROWN, Ruth, 102, Trotwood, Ohio, May 8
CARTER, Karen Spohr, 87, Daleville, Va., May 24
CLANNIN, Lynn, 75, Lakewood, Colo., May 19
CLARK, Nelda Rhoades, 72, Tucson, Ariz., June 27
CLOUSE, Wendell La Mar, 88, Goshen, Ind., June 7
CONKLE, Mary Shirk, 97, Annville, Pa., Feb. 6
COX, Grace Buckwalter, 94, Lititz, Pa., May 12
CREWS, Victor Otto, Jr., 92, Winston Salem, N.C., Jan. 20
DADISMAN, Avis Emma Smith, 105, Chatham, Ill., May 7
DEARDORFF, Robert O., 86, Fayetteville, Pa., May 4
DIEHL, William Lee, 83, Port Republic, Va., May 16
DILLING, Peggy Sue Eads, 83, North Manchester, Ind., April 23
ELLIOTT, Geraldine, 87, Bremen, Ind., March 21
FISHEL, Hazel Robertson, 90, Winston Salem, N.C., Dec. 25

FISHER, Donna Dean Showalter, 86, New Enterprise, Pa., May 4
FOLEY, William Leonard, 81, Vinton, Va., May 13
GALLAMORE, Norma Jean Hill, 94, Anderson, Ind., May 13
GARBER, Carl, 88, Manheim, Pa., Feb. 8
GARRETT, Joyce, Palmyra, Pa., March 5
GOOD, Steve, 55, Eden, Md., April 16
GOTTSHALL, Doris Hoffman, 99, Roanoke, Va., May 5
GRABER, Glenn Thomas, 69, Hartville, Ohio, Dec. 21
GRABLE, Eleanor J. Tanner, 95, Columbia City, Ind., June 21
GREEN, Misti Lynne, 76, Saint Michaels, Md., April 26
GRUBB, Doris J. Calhoun, 85, Palmyra, Pa., April 16
HALFERTY, Melinda S. Carlson, 65, Grapeville, Pa., April 23
HARTLE, Gloria Stouffer, 84, Mount Morris, Ill., April 30
HAYCOCK, Cecil Lee, 97, Wardensville, W.Va., June 21
HECKMAN, Faye Stouffer, 88, Chambersburg, Pa., June 3
HENDRICK, Charles, Palmyra, Pa., March 20
HESTER, John Morris, Jr., 82, Waynesboro, Va., June 28
HIRONIMUS, Bertha Horton, 84, Ligonier, Pa., May 17

the NSCC in a consortium with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Reformed Church of America. At Annual Conference in 2004, Ruun and I were recognized for our peacemaking work in South Sudan.

Among significant lessons from this legacy:
 —the foundational significance of giving priority to peacemaking,
 —that building and maintaining relationships for the long term is a critical commitment,

—the need to partner with sufficient finances to support local leadership and initiatives, and
 —the importance of empowering and awarding local leadership and achievements.

May these lessons be kept in mind as we pursue our commitment to “Continue the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.” Our work is not done.

Merlyn Kettering
 Takoma Park, Md.

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TURNINGPOINTS

Hoover, John Zimmerman, Sr., 88, Myerstown, Pa., April 26
Hullihen, Jim, 52, Shirleysburg, Pa., June 11
Humes, Jerry E., 86, Elgin, Ill., March 6
Jernigan, Acia, 63, Pomona, Calif., April 23
Johnson, Daniel Austin, 38, Winston Salem, N.C., Dec. 23
Johnson, Nancy Fisher, 75, Union Bridge, Md., April 11
Kennedy, George J., 85, Ruckersville, Va., June 19
Kensinger, Dona Kauffman, 95, Martinsburg, Pa., Oct. 29
Kinsey, Lois Ankney, 88, Ligonier, Pa., May 18
Klinger, Pearl McQuate Cassel, 97, Palmyra, Pa., July 10
Mecum, James Michael, Sr., 78, Winston Salem, N.C., May 3
Miller, Kenneth F., 85, York, Pa., June 26
Miller, Mary Ann, 84, Warsaw, Ind., June 1
Miller, Susie Gilbert, 84, Chambersburg, Pa., June 17
Miller, Walter F., Jr., 66, South Elgin, Ill., Jan. 17

Mishler, Ruth Hunter, 88, Boswell, Pa., July 2
Mitchell, Mikel Kent, 73, Mishawaka, Ind., April 24
Mock, Virginia Yohn, 91, Goshen, Ind., July 4
Morgan, Daniel Douglas, 54, Harrisonburg, Va., March 30
Morgan, Edward T., 66, Troy, Ohio, Feb. 16
Myers, Thurston Sager, 99, Taneytown, Md., May 8
Newburn, Kathleen, 80, Manheim, Pa., March 24
Nisewarner, Donald Eugene, 90, Martinsburg, W.Va., April 17
Norris, Esther Lebsack, 90, Columbia City, Ind., May 27
Norton, Florence May Myers, 96, Hartville, Ohio, March 25
Oltman, Berwyn Lee, 91, Winter Garden, Fla., June 20
Oltman, Kathryn Ann Forsyth, 90, Winter Garden, Fla., June 21
Pickett, Carolyn Frances, 82, Winston Salem, N.C., Oct. 14
Pierson, Esther Marie Smith, 89, Onekama, Mich., May 6, 2022
Read, James Allen, 84,

Midland, Va., April 21
Rhodes, Douglas T., 60, Hollidaysburg, Pa., April 19
Rhodes, JoAnn Rebecca Whitacre, 88, Bridgewater, Va., Oct. 25
Rhodes, Pauline, 89, Roaring Spring, Pa., May 27
Ridenour, Carolyn Kay Moser, 85, Middlebury, Ind., May 29
Rousselow, Mildred (Maxine) Raudabaugh, 99, Waterloo, Iowa, April 9
Royer, Paul, 84, Accident, Md., June 20
Rutko, Sally Mae Umlauf, 88, Harleysville, Pa., April 15
Sanbloom, Robert Eugene, 91, Lafayette, Ind., June 2
Sanders, Dennis Lawrence, 80, Mountain Lake Park, Md., June 24
Saunders, Harry White, Jr., 93, Martinsburg, W. Va., March 9
Saxby, Donald, 91, Freeport, Ill., April 28
Shelton, Cletus, 89, Winston Salem, N.C., Sept. 5, 2022
Snider, Helene Blough Crill, 100, North Manchester, Ind., March 30
Stevens, Owen G., 98, Davidsville, Pa., June 5
Stough, Eleanor Marie Straub, 97, Boonsboro, Md., May 17

Stutzman, Sally L. Eppley, 89, Hollsopple, Pa., June 25
Swigart, Joan Elizabeth Whitmoyer, 70, Lebanon, Pa., June 30
Swisher, Carolyn Calland, 90, April 29
Tannreuther, Ann Leone, 70, Waterloo, Iowa, May 13
Thomas, Cloyd Leroy, 82, Moundridge, Kan., March 13
Thomas, Emma Louise Erisman, 98, Jenner Township, Pa., June 22
Velazquez, Barbara, Elgin, Ill., June 21, 2022
Velev, Anna May Sonnenberg, 84, Garden City, Kan., June 30
Wadel, Ralph A., 85, Scotland, Pa., May 21
Walker, Larry Edward, 85, Jeannette, Pa., April 13
Walz, Dusia, 97, Freeport, Ill., June 18
Wenger, Kenneth R., 91, Hamburg, Pa., May 30
Werner, Donald P., 89, Mount Morris, Ill., May 31
Wertz, Geraldine Irene Voight, 91, Harrisburg, Pa., June 24
White, Carol Compton, 87, Aurora, Colo., May 31
Wood, Phyllis, 82, Trotwood, Ohio, March 3
Wrightsmann, Susan Josephine, 91, Anderson, Ind., April 19
Zilmer, Rita Marie

Brandhorst, 73, Waterloo, Iowa, April 25

Ordained

Svay, Audri, S/C Ind. Dist. (Eel River, Silver Lake, Ind.), June 11

Licensed

Antoine, Myrsa, Atl. S. E. Dist. (West Palm Beach Haitian, Riviera Beach, Fla.), May 21
Luckenbill, Craig, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Sebring, Fla.), April 16
Matarese, Phillip, S/C Ind. Dist. (Buck Creek, Mooreland, Ind.), May 24

Placements

Aikens, Larry, Jr., from pastor, Bethel, Broadway, Va., to pastor, Crab Run, Mathias, W.Va., and Damascus, Criders, Va., June 1
Driver, Brent, interim pastor, Eversole, New Lebanon, Ohio, June 1
King, Kenneth, pastor, Smith Mountain Lake, Wirtz, Va., June 15
Maclay, Connie, interim pastor, Pine Glen, Lewistown, Pa., June 1
Street, Don, pastor, Lighthouse, Boones Mill, Va., May 15
Wright, Andrew, from interim pastor to pastor, Oakland, Bradford, Ohio, May 15

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

Of slowness and buoyancy

by Jan Fischer Bachman

What do planks and underwater mountain climbers have in common?

Both exercises appear in classes at my local gym, which is walking distance from my house and offers a low monthly fee and a wide range of activities.

When getting to know the place, it took me a while to try “Aqua Fitness.” I wasn’t sure that was really exercise. Participants look like bobbing heads above slightly rippling water. They don’t seem to be doing anything. There is no sweat involved.

I learned differently once I finally went to a class. Water offers a lot of resistance, so underwater motion requires effort. Walking and kicking can only be done in a weird slow-motion fashion.

Water reduces body weight, making exercise easier on feet and joints. It lifts. It also provides resistance, making actions happen . . . slowly.

What do aqua aerobics and Annual Conference have in common?

When we meet together as the body of Christ, we bear one another’s burdens. Annual Conference participants do this through offerings, worship, encouraging words, and simply showing up and smiling.

This year the Church of the Brethren news director unexpectedly could not attend Conference because of illness. In trying to cover Annual Conference news, I was lifted by writers and photographers Karen Garrett, Keith Hollenberg, Wendy McFadden, Donna Parcell, Frank Ramirez, Glenn Riegel, Laura Sellers, Frances Townsend, and Walt Wiltschek. I did not bear the full weight of expectations alone.

That week the news team experienced many instances of kindness. Someone helped carry press room supplies. Others shared photos and videos of meals and equipping

sessions. When there was a quick request for a picture of all the volunteer photographers, someone interrupted a busy morning to take the photo.

I gratefully observed the apostle Paul’s instructions put into action: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

The image of exercising in water provides a tangible goal for how to be, whether in fellowship with one person or one thousand. How can I embody the living water? How can I lift people up? How can I lighten the heavy loads pressing them down?


Water buoys up, protecting joints, the vulnerable places where disparate parts come together. Its resistance forces muscles to strengthen.

During Annual Conference business, I saw the slow-motion pace, the resistance, that happens when disparate people make decisions together. Sometimes the amendments to amendments to amendments created an almost comedic “Who’s on First?” effect.

What if, instead of inwardly criticizing the lengthy discussion, we recognize that it could be protecting parts of the body? The right kind of slowness demonstrates love toward others, giving time for people starting from many different world views to reach agreement together.

This is countercultural and perhaps even radical in a society where tech companies have grown precipitously with the motto “Move fast and break things.”

Deliberation can frustrate—but it can also strengthen us. The book of James seems to agree: “And let endurance complete its work, so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing.” Could painstakingly careful time together contribute to making us whole?

What do the living water and the Church of the Brethren have in common? What *could* they have in common? 

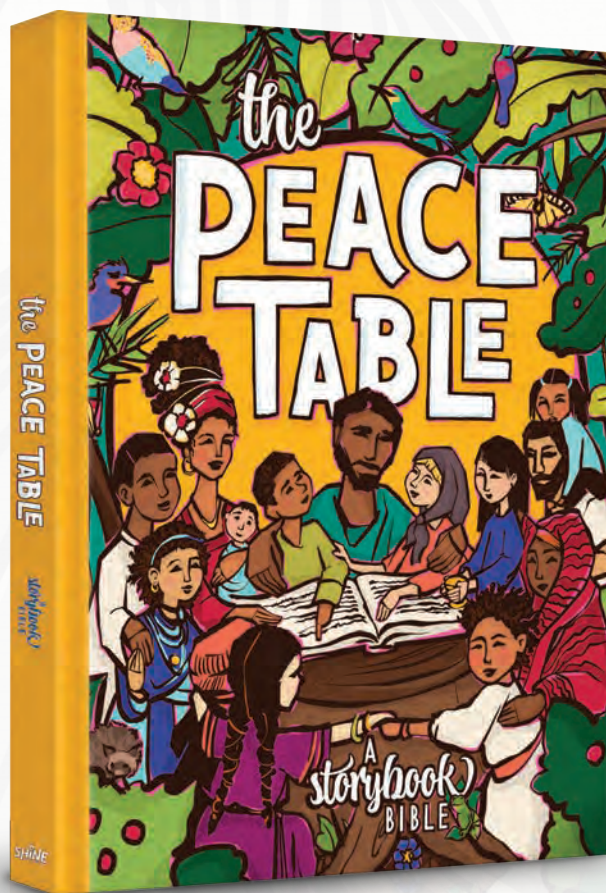
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