

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

DECEMBER 2021 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



My soul magnifies
the Lord —Luke 1:46b

Boundless Faith

— 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NRSV)

We are told that we walk by faith, but what does that mean?

What does our faith look like and how do we make sense of it?

Let us find out together and imagine a bigger and bolder faith to go with the big and bold God that we serve. Faith is more than a feeling – faith is an adventure. With the Bible as our map, let us plot a route towards a fuller understanding of ourselves, our neighbors, and our God. For every spiritual mountain climbed and valley crossed, three more await. So, what are you waiting for? Let's go! Push past the usual answers and uncover deeper truths as we venture forth. Serve outside the safety of normality and follow the radical path laid out before us. Come alongside us as we move beyond the mundane and walk, together, in boundless faith.



Anonymous



Matt DeBall



Alison Gernand

Schedule:

Adults (ages 18+)

June 2-13: Rwanda

June 20-23: We Are Able
Assistants – Bethel, PA

Junior High (completed 6th-8th grade)

June 12-16: Roanoke, VA

June 19-23: Harrisburg, PA

June 27-July 1: Milford, IN

July 6-10: Lincoln, NE

August 1-5: Winston-Salem, NC

We Are Able (ages 16-30)

June 20-23: Bethel, PA

Registration Opens:

January 13, 2022 at 7 p.m. (central time)

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Outside the box

I've been sorting through lots of boxes.

It began in the summertime helping my sister deal with family stuff stored in her basement long after our parents had died. She and her husband are missionaries overseas, so there had been few opportunities to process photos, letters, furniture, and other memorabilia.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Years in a North Carolina basement had not been kind to the cardboard boxes and their contents. But after a week of hot work and multiple trips to the recycling center, the donation center, and the dump, finally everything was clean, organized, and slimmed down.

That inspired me to tackle my own basement, where I'm making headway even though the end is not yet in sight.

Now it's time for the same process at work, where there's a major rearrangement of offices taking place. I'm trying hard to keep from moving anything that should instead be recycled, pitched, or sent to the archives. It's a good end-of-year activity.

Why do I find all this organizing so satisfying? I think it's the pandemic. With little control over anything right now, it feels good to establish order, one box at a time.

Some of the things I've been able to shed were easy because they had gotten outdated and no longer mattered. The one that made me chuckle was a thick folder marked, in a coworker's handwriting, "Rainy day project." I don't know how it traveled years ago from her office to mine, but the contents had aged enough to be thrown away guilt-free, rain or shine.

As I look at the world around me, I sense that there's a lot of sorting and evaluating going on. As we go about church—and life—we are trying to figure out what to keep and what to let go of. The process was already on its way, to be honest, but the pandemic has moved it into warp speed.

While sorting through my office, I've found a few artifacts that I plan to keep. So far the collection includes a pica ruler, printer's lupe, T-square, floppy disk, 3.5-inch diskette, and Rolodex—all tools of an earlier era. They remind me of the ways we used to write, edit, design, and publish. I don't need them anymore, but they show me that methods change all the time. Even while the message survives.

Wendy McFadden

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Laundry as outreach

In the spring of 2019, Troy (Ohio) Church of the Brethren began a laundry outreach program. This need was discovered through the local Partners in Hope. Some folks in the community were unable to do laundry due to lack of funds, transportation, unemployment, illness, etc.

The program is funded by the church, grants from the Troy Foundation, Southern Ohio and Kentucky District, and individuals who have recognized this vital need and contributed.

Currently the program operates in a laundromat one day a month. Detergents, softeners, and quarters are provided, and all COVID-19 rules are observed. Church members are there to assist and offer encouragement. Often people arrive with as many as 10 bags of laundry.

Bev Johnston of the Outreach and Evangelism Committee and coordinator of the Laundry Outreach shares



these stories:

A young mother came to launder bedding for her children, which she admitted she had not been able to do for two years. She

sat and cried as Johnston helped her clean and fold her laundry.

Another woman came in with bushels of laundry. When Johnston explained what the church was doing, she told her story. Her mother had died

and was buried just the day before. She herself had delivered a baby who was just six weeks old. Joyfully, her mother had been able to hold her new grandchild before she died. The woman telling the story had very little funds because she had taken off work to care for her mother and her newborn child. When Bev explained that they were there to help in any way they could, the woman looked at her and said, “I need a hug.” Johnston responded and everyone cried happy tears. —Mary Ann Cornell



Storytelling for 50 years

Fellowship Church of the Brethren south of Martinsburg, W.Va., celebrated its 50th anniversary on Sept. 12—one year late because of COVID-19. The congregation began meeting in September 1970.

Robert Alley, the first fulltime pastor from January 1971 until October 1981, was the keynote speaker. He is a member of the Shenandoah Valley Biblical Storytellers and delivered the message through storytelling. Alley closed with this responsive benediction:

“Fifty-one years ago, a few families decided to start a new church.

God called them to take a risk.

The church was built on relationships.

Relationships with God and with one another.

We continue the work to which we were called.

To love, to serve, to grow, and to evangelize.

We are Fellowship Church of the Brethren.

We are Fellowship Church of the Brethren

Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully.

Simply. Together.” —Carolyn Graham

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.

Todd Hammond



25 back-to-school kits for Church World Service were collected by youth at Agape Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., in a recently concluded outreach service project, reports pastor Todd Hammond.

Lititz congregation resettles Afghans

Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren is one of the groups helping the Lancaster County chapter of Church World Service resettle Afghan evacuees, gaining media attention from CBS Channel 21.

The chapter in mid-October began resettling more than a dozen Afghan refugees, with plans to welcome up to 30 more each month for the next few months, said the report.

Lititz minister Jim Grossnickle-Batterton told the TV channel that the congregation was to welcome three refugees on Oct. 15.

New worship space for new church plant

Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Vida, a new church development in Floyd County, Va., has relocated to the former Parkway Church of the Brethren near Meadows of Dan. It formerly met at Greasy Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Willis, Va.

More college news

Mary M. White is the first female chair of the board of Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa. A 1973 graduate, she has served on the board since 1999. She is vice president of resource management at HCA/HealthOne in Denver, Colo.

Also at Juniata, two professors grew a “ginormous pumpkin” that was displayed before Halloween. Vince Buonaccorsi, professor of biology, and Neil Pelkey, professor of environmental science and studies, grew the 300-plus pound pumpkin in a garden beside the college’s Brumbaugh Academic Center.



Manchester University adopts anti-racism statement

An anti-racism statement has been adopted by the board of Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind. The board in 2020 began identifying diversity, equity, and inclusion as one of its five strategic imperatives and created a permanent committee to focus on these issues. The board also heard from a panel of undergraduate students about their personal experiences at the school.

Trustees on the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee are all alumni: co-chairs Madalyn Metzger and Mark Rosenbury, Jim Colon, Chris Craig, Ding-Jo Currie, and Lily Qi. Also contributing to the statement were trustees Cheryl Green and Jeff Carter, president of Bethany Seminary.

Anti-Racism Statement, Board of Trustees, Manchester University, Adopted Oct. 15, 2021

The Manchester University Board of Trustees stands against racism and systems that perpetuate racial injustice, and we commit to standing against all forms of racism, discrimination, bias, privilege, abusive power, supremacy and racial/ethnic hierarchy.

In living out our mission to respect the infinite worth of every person and graduate individuals of ability and conviction who will make a positive impact on the world, it is our responsibility to recognize, understand and dismantle all the ways systemic racism and oppression impacts under-represented, underserved and marginalized students, faculty and staff. To fulfill this responsibility, we will ensure that all inequitable and unjust systems, policies, practices and institutional norms identified are replaced by those designed to cultivate a more diverse, equitable and inclusive Manchester University community.

Manchester University has long valued and respected racial, ethnic, cultural and religious differences. But, we acknowledge our missteps and complicity along our journey. More work is needed to confront inequalities and we unequivocally embrace the institutional change necessary to make the world a more just and inclusive place, as we build peace amid strife, and model lives of agape (selfless love), tikkun olam (repairing a broken world) and salam (peace).

We commit that our diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism work will be open, transparent and accountable. We will listen and learn from each other. We will hear and amplify the voices of those who have been marginalized. And we will create opportunities to generate individual and institutional transformation.

It is our responsibility to work together with intentionality and clarity and to advance true progress for the Manchester University community and our world. This work will not be easy or quick, but it is imperative for our future. We invite all who are part of our institution to join us in this call, so that—together—we are better able to improve the human condition.

A concrete way of sharing love

by Walt Wiltschek

Sometimes the best ideas don't require a lot of work—just a spark of creativity.

When deacons at York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren decided not to hold their regular love feast on World Communion Sunday this year due to pandemic concerns, they made alternate plans as best they could. Rather than doing footwashing and a meal, they would simply do communion during worship instead.

Then deacon Diane Gibble had an idea. She contacted pastor Joel Gibbel

and wondered if they might not find another way to express some love instead.

“She got in touch with me and said, ‘We’re called to be Jesus in the neighborhood, so let’s go outdoors and do some sidewalk art. It could be inspiring and a welcoming message to our neighbors and express our faith publicly, and the kids will have fun with it. Maybe we should do that!’”

Gibbel quickly agreed, and a new plan went into motion.

“Out of the disappointment of not doing love feast came a new idea,”




Gibbel said. “We just put a little invitation in the weekly newsletter and said, ‘Hey everyone! After worship stick around if you want for some sidewalk chalk art. Come and join us.’ It all happened within a couple of days.”

So that’s what they did. When Oct. 3 came around, about two dozen people—mostly families with children—followed up worship with some art time and fellowship. The church sits on a large corner lot in a residential neighborhood, so there was plenty of concrete to cover over the course of the hour.

“We did probably 200 feet of sidewalk with writing and images and pictures: Faith and hope and love and ‘Jesus loves you and so do we,’ and things like that,” Gibbel said. “We all knew that it wasn’t just something we were doing at that moment, but that the messages would stick around all day long or more. A lot of people in the neighborhood walk their dogs and travel past there. Anyone going by was going to see this, and that was probably the neatest thing. The message was going to keep on speaking.”

He was surprised by the amount of buzz the event generated, with people commenting on the congregation’s Facebook post from spots around the country and picking up on the idea.

“To me, it was a small thing that we did, and it became this cascade of public reception for it,” Gibbel said. “I’m glad we were able to share it, and it became a little bit contagious.” 



Subversive Witness

by Josh Brockway

The grainy black and white pictures of segregation-era water fountains give us a sense of distance from the days of Jim Crow. That distance allows us the comfort of saying, “That was back then.”

In the International Civil Rights Museum in Greensboro, N.C., a Coca-Cola machine doesn’t allow us that kind of historical distance. While this machine does not carry the words “Whites Only,” it literally has two faces. On the side for white consumers, the sign says a bottle is a nickel. On the other side, the same bottle is a dime.

The machine is a full-color witness to the structured racism of American culture. Whether it’s a bottle of Coke or a house or the justice system, America’s racialized culture has actively privileged one group of people over another.

That word, “privilege,” has become much more prominent in our everyday vocabulary. It evokes a range of emotional responses, even though its simple meaning is demonstrated plainly in the two-sided Coke machine. Privilege, as Dominique Gilliard writes in *Subversive Witness*, is the social currency often granted people based on race, gender, citizenship, class, education, sexual orientation, and ability. Privilege is the benefits of social standing that translate into influence and power, as well as access to resources, education, and wealth.


In naming the realities of privilege that emerge from structural sin, Gilliard has penned an important book that helps us not get stuck in the games of privilege measurement or privilege shaming. He invites us to see how our discipleship demands a leveraging of that social currency toward God-honoring ends. Through fresh readings of biblical stories, he shows how God continues to place faithful, complex, and socially complicated people in moments where their faithfulness—and privilege—transforms unjust realities.

Gilliard argues that privilege simply is part of our cultural reality. In fact, he says, social capital can be layered in complex ways. For example, a man paralyzed from the waist down still benefits as a man even as his disability affects his social abilities and standing. Likewise, a Black woman with a doctorate experiences a whole range of hurdles because of gender and race, though she still benefits from her educa-

tion. In other words, a layered understanding of privilege can help us see that we all are able to subvert the dominant culture so that God’s grace might reach all.

Gilliard’s exploration of the book of Esther is a key example of how privilege is complicated, can be overlooked, and can even emerge from trauma. The violence within the story is not glossed over in favor of simple quotations about “such a time as this.” The whole book presents women—Vashti in the opening and Esther in the remaining story—as both victims and powerful agents. The result is a challenging understanding of position and power that does not negate the impact of sexual violence or imperial oppression. In fact, the women of the story stand out as wounded witnesses subverting the indulgent self-interest of the powerful.

Gilliard’s treatment of Moses, Pharaoh’s daughter, Paul, and ultimately Jesus offers the reader refreshing interpretations of how the people of God have not stepped outside their social location but have used their privilege in ways that honor God and love their neighbors. Typical readings of these biblical stories often offer summaries that miss power dynamics and the marginalized status of the protagonists. Gilliard, however, foregrounds the very parts of the stories that the most privileged of readers ignore.

Despite the current partisan rhetoric about privilege and social power, Gilliard does not leave us with a positivism that glosses over sin or a posture of privilege paralysis. He is clear that discipleship to Jesus and God’s grace gives us a new way of being in the world. While some writers may leave us with the impression that privilege is a zero-sum game, Gilliard prompts readers to ask what God-glorifying act we might participate in because of the privilege we carry. To that end, *Subversive Witness* is a book that engages scripture in a way that fuels our imaginations so that we might love God and love our neighbor with subversive abandon. 

Josh Brockway is director of spiritual formation and co-coordinator of Discipleship Ministries for the Church of the Brethren.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege*. **Author:** Dominique DuBois Gilliard. **Publisher:** Zondervan (2021). The book is available for purchase through www.brethrenpress.com.



When Grandma Prays

A journey of faith with Bittersweet Gospel Band

by Scott Duffey

I was 44 years old when I joined a rock band.

The Bittersweet Gospel Band had just done a worship concert at Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren. Founder and lead singer Gilbert Romero walked up to me and said, “I want you to come with us in the fall.”

I hardly knew this man, let alone the history and the needs of the band, but that fall 1997 I went on the road with them on a 10-day tour of churches in Indiana. I was expecting to play rhythm guitar and add vocal harmonies—at least that was my preparation. A week before the tour, the lead guitarist (the only other guitarist) called to say that he couldn’t go. I was now *the* guitar player.

Over time, I became a musician, singer, songwriter, and tour manager. But it’s not about me. It’s the bigger story of the Bittersweet Gospel Band.

Gilbert Romero, when pastor at Bella Vista Church of the Brethren in East Los Angeles, Calif., had suffered a tragedy. One of his sons had been arrested and jailed for 25 years to life for driving a car while a friend pulled out a gun and started shooting at passersby. A parent’s worst nightmare. In the aftermath, Gilbert vowed to reach out to young people in his church and throughout the country to grow in faith and make good choices so that this wouldn’t happen to anyone else’s family.

One way to reach his goal was through music. He had always been a musician and a singer, and he soon gathered other musicians to join him in his cause. The Bittersweet Gospel Band was created.

In those early years, Gilbert stayed close to home, playing and testifying in churches, schools, and rehab shelters. Then, in 1991, he received an invitation from Neal Harvey, Camp Harmony administrator, to go east and work with summer campers. That grew into a ministry to churches and public schools throughout western Pennsylvania. Opportunities to speak at national events and to play at National Youth Conference followed, and the ministry grew.

The first musicians were people in rehab for their own problems. Many others came along as Gilbert would meet people at various events and invite them to join him. The band has been recreated many times.

Since I joined, we have traveled all over the continental US, as well as to Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. We have shared music and testimony in venues large and small. We’ve written much of our own music in order to reinforce faith and justice messages, and have adapted favorite



“ I’ve listened as Gilbert has talked to young men and women in prisons about how their grandmas are praying for them. ”



oldies. And we have promoted and supported Bittersweet Ministries, a mission in Tijuana, Mexico, that does faith development, builds housing, and provides food and childcare.

In 2001, we started recording. We gathered in Los Angeles to record an album called *Through My Lord’s Eyes*, joined by a chorus of voices from Gilbert’s church.

In 2011, we recorded *Bittersweet Lane*.

Two years ago, pre-COVID, the band got together to record again. Part of the inspiration was urging by friends in Puerto Rico, where we have toured several times. On our last trip there we shared a new song called “When Grandma Prays.” I had written it in English and received some help translating it into Spanish. After singing it at Castañer Church of the Brethren, Gilbert said, “Did you see the older ladies crying? Some of them are in tears.” Jose Calleja, Puerto Rico District executive, encouraged us to record it. “They want this in Puerto Rico,” he said.

There is a lot of inspiration behind “When Grandma Prays.” I’ve listened as Gilbert has talked to young men and women in prisons about how their grandmas are praying for them. He has told a personal story about how grandparents prayed for him and helped to change his life. I have had my own grandparents as major encouragements in life.

*When grandma prays,
the doors of heaven open.
My grandma prays
and I don’t understand.
’Cause when grandma prays,
God hears her every petition,
and responds with love’s compassion,
and gives me some new direction.
When grandma prays.*

So the band gathered again at Blue Sprocket Recording Studio in Harrisonburg, Va.: Trey Curry from Staunton (Va.) Church of the Brethren was the drummer. Trey had toured with the band for a number of years, from Puerto Rico to Indiana. Leah Hileman was the pianist and also shared vocals. Leah pastors Luray (Va.) Church of the Brethren. Dan Shaffer was the bass player. Dan hails from Pennsylvania and is pastor at Morrellville Church of the Brethren, moving to Rummel Church of the Brethren in January. Andy Duffey, my oldest son, played bongos and congas and also added some vocals. Andy serves at Antioch Church of the Brethren in Callaway, Va. David Sollenberger was the lead guitarist. Now

he is the Annual Conference moderator. Gilbert shared his smooth vocals. He flew in from Montebello, Calif., where he now works for Pacific Southwest District. I played guitar, sang, and produced the album. I retired as pastor of the Staunton church in 2019.

The new album, *When Grandma Prays*, includes an updated version of “Beans and Rice and Jesus Christ,” a Bittersweet classic written by Gilbert. Also “Mary’s Glory,” a song I wrote for Christmas one year at Staunton, as Mary’s reflections on Jesus’ birth. Leah Hileman sings lead, and David MacMillan of the Staunton congregation created a cello part that is played by Nancy Canter. Another song, “From Fear to Freedom,” was my response to the 9/11 disaster, and serves as a faith response to most any disaster including the COVID crisis. “We Kneel Together” was written as a prayer of solidarity with the Brethren in Nigeria—I wanted it to feel like a journey following the beat of the *djembe*, as we realize we are one in Christ Jesus. We were blessed to have the Bridgewater (Va.) College Chorale, under the direction of Curtis Nolley, to be our chorus.

The recording went great. The plan was for me to meet with our sound engineer, Taylor Bess, in the coming months to do the mixing and mastering. Then, on Oct. 17, 2020, Blue Sprocket blew up—literally! A gas leak ignited and destroyed the whole row of businesses. Blue Sprocket was gone, and quite possibly our music.

I found our sound engineer, who had moved to a studio in Richmond, Va. He was able to secure our recordings. They had been saved on the cloud. Amazing!

At Richmond’s In Your Ear Studios we were able to mix and master the album and get it released on a number of websites including Spotify. We made a limited number of CDs available for purchase.

The songs live on and continue to grow in significance. God is good and continues to speak in words and melody. And the Bittersweet Gospel Band continues to sing and testify to the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus.

*We’re on a journey of life;
it’s a journey of love;
a journey of joy and celebration.
It’s a journey of hope;
it’s a journey of peace;
a journey of faith in Jesus our Lord. ❧*

Scott Duffey is a retired pastor and ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren.

CHAPLAINS

ANOTHER KIND OF MINISTRY

Church of the Brethren chaplains are both invaluable and overlooked members of the ministerial body. And yet while serving in a variety of non-congregational ministry settings they face significant challenges that require them to deal skillfully with trauma, grief, loss, and critical crisis situations on a daily basis.

The recent pandemic experience has tested their capacity as never before, and there is much to learn from their stories. Office of Ministry director Nancy Sollenberger Heishman asked a few chaplains to share what the ministry of chaplaincy has been like in these times and how they have seen God at work.



Holy moments

by Daniel J. Finkbiner

Chaplains live and move in an apocalyptic zone, a liminal space between worlds.

Between sacred and secular, chaplains offer presence and care in a variety of



ways. Between the here and the hereafter, chaplains facilitate expression of grief for the dying and their loved ones. Between the many human

divisions, chaplains facilitate rituals that fit the moment of need.


Five nights a week from midnight to 8:30 a.m., I go to my shift at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in

Wilkes-Barre, Pa. It is a mid-sized regional medical center, level 2 trauma center, heart center, and stroke center. Every shift is unique, and I never know what awaits.

One night, I learned that a young adult was dying of COVID-19. Before the transition to end-of-life comfort measures, the family requested a blessing including holy water. In their Roman Catholic tradition, holy water serves as a tactile reminder of Christian baptism. I searched through the supplies in the spiritual care office and found holy water in a plastic bottle. Wanting a more official looking vessel, I found an empty saltshaker.

Since people in my department do not enter COVID rooms, I worked closely with the bedside nurse to pro-

vide a blessing from the doorway while the nurse sprinkled the holy water on the patient. A speaker phone connection allowed family at the bedside and family outside the room to hear the words of blessing and prayer.

It is these holy moments in the in-between that fuel and sustain my work as a chaplain. One thing that drives me is a conviction that human beings can encounter God and grow in faith and understanding during times of difficulty and crisis. That process is ultimately out of my hands, but it is an honor and a privilege to offer presence and care in such times. 

Daniel J Finkbiner is staff chaplain at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. He is a member of Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Fort Wayne, Ind., and an associate



“ It is these holy moments in the in-between that fuel and sustain my work as a chaplain. ”

Planting gardens

by Laura Stone

People ask about how we are doing here at Timbercrest, and here's what I've been saying: We are coming out of crisis mode, and we are starting to



find our way into new rhythms, but those rhythms are still strange. This pandemic is temporary, but we can't stay in the heightened anxiety and chaos of crisis mode indefinitely. Our bodies and spirits are tired of the alertness and worry. So, we are settling in, but settling in is hard; even the little things take intention right now. Regulations and guidance change weekly. Grief over what has been lost is catching up with us.

The prophet Jeremiah has a message in chapter 29 that comes to people newly in exile. "Build houses and settle down," God says through the prophet; "plant gardens and eat what they produce." I can imagine people in exile saying, "How long are we going to be here? We don't want to be here long


enough to plant a garden and eat its produce!" Planting a garden in exile takes a radical acceptance of what is, when it can seem easier to close our eyes and just wait for everything to go back to normal.

So, we came to a turning point. We could choose to stay hunkered down, hyperalert to threat, counting the days until this is over. Or we could choose to pursue peace, beauty, love, health; to release fear and find a sense of home, even here.

In all the uncertainty, we found ways to really live in this place of exile, because God knows the plans God has for us. We may not know what's next, but God's plans for us are to give us a hope and a future.

In these 18 months, I have seen elders, family members, employees, volunteers, churches, friends do various courageous and sustaining acts to plant gardens in exile. A pen pal program between school kids and residents developed lasting connections across miles and generations. Extra produce from the community gardens appeared as a day-end treat for health-care workers. Delightfully creative

snowmen graced windows, and hymns were sung through screens. The Spirit flowed over Zoom, and friends called just to check in. Whole neighborhoods formed mask-making assembly lines. Staff put their hearts and lives into keeping beloved residents safe. Peace poles were rededicated in the fall air. Worship opportunities on TVs and computers kept us connected. Residents wrote and shared meaningful poetry. The memoir writing group added precious stories to a common journal. We found sources of resilience and strength we did not know we had. We found that networks were more tightly woven than we had noticed; they managed not to fray too much in the stress of the isolation.

Life has not been easy in this longterm-care pandemic exile. Death, isolation, and fear have been close. But community, resilience, hope, and even joy have been vivid and lasting reminders that God's plans for us, even in exile, are for good, for us and the whole world. 

Laura Stone is chaplain for Timbercrest Senior Living Community in North Manchester, Ind., and a member of Manchester Church of the Brethren.

“ The emotional and spiritual toll that takes on healthcare staff and chaplains is profound. ”

Time stopping

An interview with Kelly Burk

Q: Where have you experienced God in these extraordinarily difficult months?

A: The grace of colleagues. The resilience of young adults. The unexpected opportunities that emerged. For example, “way opened” (a Quaker phrase) for me to complete the practicum portion of a graduate degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling while still working in full-time campus ministry when all requirements moved online due to the pandemic. Given the increased prevalence of mental health concerns in recent times, this additional skill set has proven to be invaluable in my ministry as a chaplain.

Q: What do you believe is the contribution that chaplains uniquely make to a hurting world?

A: Chaplains are in a good position to meet people wherever they find themselves. We have opportunities to make


deep connections quickly, in part because we can offer ministry without strings attached.

Q: Where has God sustained you and where have you found yourself privileged to offer sustaining hope and healing to others?

A: I learned a great deal about my own limitations in these difficult months. This, in turn, has helped me to offer grace and compassion toward others confronting their own limitations.



Q: Can you share a story of campus ministry during the pandemic?

A: When Earlham College’s campus closed with very little warning in March 2020 due to COVID-19, it was a traumatic experience for many students. Receiving word that with urgency they needed to leave campus or fly back from an off-campus program and return “home” (a complicated concept for many young adults) was an experience of time stopping for this generation of college students. They remember exactly where they were and who they were with when their confidence in the stability of the world significantly changed. Before the seniors left campus the following day, I worked throughout the night to assist them in planning a very meaningful “mini-graduation.” 

Kelly Burk is chaplain and director of Quaker Life at Earlham College, Richmond, Ind. She is an ordained Church of the Brethren minister.



A chaplain to chaplains

Anna Lee Hisey Pierson, an advance practice chaplain and member of the Church of the Brethren, is this year’s recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC).

Hisey Pierson was recognized for her extraordinary contributions to the chaplaincy profession. She helped create the Palliative Care and Hospice Advance Certification (PCHAC), a specialty certification process that recognizes the unique skills and gifts needed when providing spiritual care to patients and families living with chronic illnesses and coping with end-of-life dynamics.

Recognized as a “chaplain to chaplains,” Hisey Pierson is the fourth person to receive the advanced practice certification in palliative care and hospice chaplaincy. Through her efforts, more than 50 people have been certified in advance practice chaplaincy through APC and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. —Kathy Gingrich

Kathy Gingrich is an on-call chaplain at Rush Copley Medical Center in Aurora, Ill., and a member of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill.

Heading into the unknown

by Becky Baile Crouse

When the pandemic began, I immediately began seeing photos of healthcare workers in China in protective gear that looked like space suits. I manage nine chaplains at a pediatric hospital and, after much discussion, our chaplain group opted to stay “in the house” to cover our 300-bed facility.



Our anxiety and fear for our own health as well as that of our loved ones was a constant concern. I recall chaplains putting their cell phones in plastic bags for fear they would take the virus home. To this day, I use hand sanitizer upon arrival at work and wipe down my light switch, door knobs, phone, and computer keyboard. After many months, we were finally approved to get N95 masks to use when responding to traumas, codes, and deaths.

Reframing

After 18 and a half years at Children’s Mercy, I had decided to take a three-week break to celebrate my milestone birthday. For the past 10 years, my cousin and I had been talking about walking a portion of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. We had purchased plane tickets.

By the end of March I knew that I would not be going to Spain. I would not be taking my much-anticipated break from both my chaplain position and my part-time work on the pastoral team at Warrensburg Church of the Brethren.

Deep grief set in, and it took me much of April to “reframe” and find gratitude for my situation. Having worked with many people living on the

edge of existence, it was hard for me to feel sorry for myself because I do have hot water and electricity around the clock. In an effort at humor and reframing, I scheduled my 10-year colonoscopy on May 22, the day I was to have flown to Spain. My cousin and I reframed our plan and “walked” around Warrensburg in our masks and hiking gear on our “Cami-MO” (Camino in Missouri).

Beyond fatigue

By mid-summer 2021, we were all hopeful the pandemic was going to soon be history, and then the delta surge hit. Maintaining hope and resilience while battling extreme fatigue has taken on new meaning.

Unfortunately, 2021 has been a more difficult year in our pediatric setting. We have experienced an increase in patient deaths, especially sudden deaths in our emergency room, and have seen a dramatic increase in the number of COVID-positive children needing hospitalization. A newly hired chaplain who just completed clinical pastoral education told me that, in just one shift, she held the hands of seven adult patients who died of COVID. Family members were not permitted to be present, and so the chaplain held the phone as family members shared their final goodbyes. The emotional and spiritual toll that takes on health-care staff and chaplains is profound.


Time for self-care and renewal

Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, author of the book *Trauma Stewardship*, offers reminders to “protect our mornings” and “nurture gratitude,” as well as get

enough sleep. I have encouraged the staff to have work-life balance during the pandemic. We have transitioned to four 10-hour days and have taken paid time off regularly. Having a firm faith that God will make a way through this wilderness continues to help me keep coming back to work each new day.

One Sunday last year I led our congregation in a time of lament. Each of the 30 households on Zoom shared their laments and losses: The loss of touch with social distancing. The loss of family gatherings and celebrations. The loss of what used to be simple becoming life-threatening. My prayer is that God will indeed give us all a wise heart and that we can continue to foster humility and extend grace to those in our care.

During the pandemic, our daughter, Christy, ended up spending five and a half months studying remotely from our home and my husband, Jerry, was sick twice with COVID before we were all fully vaccinated. I’m grateful for God’s protection and healing.

As a chaplain who walks with families through grief, loss, and death, I am mindful of thanking God for each new day that we have to share God’s love and compassion. For me, watching the monarch butterflies migrate, or harvesting tomatoes and butternut from the garden, are part of God’s good gifts around us. May we emerge from the cocoon of this pandemic with new insights that will make our world a better place for all creation. 

Becky Baile Crouse is assistant director of Spiritual Services at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., and a member of the ministerial team of Warrensburg (Mo.) Church of the Brethren.

For more reflections from chaplains and resources for chaplaincy ministry, see a new webpage at www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/chaplains.

Forbearance, diversity, and disunity

by Nate Polzin

In his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul starts off chapter 14 with the admonition that we are to accept a person whose faith is weak without arguing about “disputable matters” (Romans 14:1, NIV). That same chapter wraps up with the command to keep what we believe about those things between ourselves and God. So we are not supposed to argue about disputable matters, and we are supposed to keep what we believe about them private.

That chapter provides a lot of room for diversity—a topic central to the 2008 Church of the Brethren resolution on “Urging Forbearance,” which talks about the goodness of diversity in God’s creation. It also points out that in following Jesus, we learn how to find “unity in diversity.”

Diversity is a good thing, and it helps ensure that we hear and see more of what God is doing around us and in the world. We witness to the power of the gospel when we cultivate deep and loving relationships with people who think, live, look, and experience life differently than we do. Over and over again, the New Testament teaches us how to do this hard but crucial work of being the church of Jesus Christ. We need a healthy dose of forbearance if we are to maintain and foster the healthy diversity we need in order to be the body of Christ.

But there’s a sneaky and sinister counterfeit of diversity: *disunity*. Disunity masquerades as diversity (often even using the same vocabulary), but it is not the same thing. Diversity brings a bigger picture of what God is doing and makes the body stronger. Disunity confuses the church’s mission and divides the body. Paul tells us to practice forbearance on disputable matters in order to protect diversity. But he has very different things to say about issues that bring disunity and division.

In his first letter to the Corinthians (11:18-19), Paul chastises the church and says he believes the rumors he’s heard about their divisions. And in Romans 16:17, he says “to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way” contrary to what had been taught. “Keep away from them.”

So how do we know which things are “disputable matters” about which we must practice forbearance, and which


are non-disputable matters disapproved of by God? How do we know when it’s time to keep what we believe private and agree to disagree, and when it’s time to “keep away from” people teaching ideas outside the gospel?

As is often the case in the life of faith, we look at the fruit that the issue bears in the life of the body. The Church of the Brethren has adopted many positions and statements over the centuries. Almost no one agrees with every word of all of them. Some statements seem to contradict other positions the church has taken. Some may even seem to contradict themselves!

For decades the church has continued with a diversity of practice and even belief about many of these positions, and we have done fine. That diversity has been good for the church, and fruitful ministry continued.

However, there are other, more divisive issues that have not borne the good fruit of a stronger and more diverse body. Instead, for years a lack of unity has caused a festering ulcer. Instead of healthy and fruitful ministry, the disunity has slowly but incessantly been gnawing at and dividing us.

We can know when we need to keep forbearing with those brothers and sisters of ours who practice some part of the faith differently than we do when we see that the body is still healthy while we practice those differences. And we can know that something different is called for when we see the body torn apart by divisiveness.

In my opinion, we have too long been misdiagnosing “disunity” by calling it “diversity.” The natural struggles involved in fostering healthy diversity are very different from the destructive fruit harvested from disunity. The ability to practice faithful forbearance involves discerning which is which. Blanket forbearance encourages disunity; discerning forbearance leads to diversity. Let’s make sure we inspect the fruit of our forbearance so we know what we are reaping. The health and vitality of our body depends on it. 

Nate Polzin is church planter of The Church in Drive, a Brethren congregation in Saginaw, Mich., and pastor of Midland (Mich.) Church of the Brethren, and is active in campus ministry.

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The natural struggles involved in fostering healthy diversity are very different from the destructive fruit harvested from disunity.

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“A way opened that we could not see in the lush summer.”

Winter

Unearthing God's eco-blueprint

by Randall Westfall

The morning air was cold enough that the warm vapors of our breath appeared thick as smoke. And the crunch of our feet on the snowpack was the only sound we heard all morning. It appeared the whole of creation lay in hibernation as our family hiked out toward the wilderness area at camp.

As we walked across the footbridge at camp that acts as the wilderness gateway, my daughter stopped us and pointed upstream. “Wow,” she said. “You couldn’t see that far into the forest this summer when we did our nature hikes at camp.”


We turned and faced the direction in which she was pointing and realized that it was true. We could see much deeper into the forest now that the deciduous trees had dropped their leaves and the understory brush was buried in snow. Deer trails that had been hidden in the thick foliage of summer were now highly visible. We could see the bobcat tracks on the frozen stream. The snow-covered landscape amplified the quiet. What was once hidden in summer’s lush foliage now had given way to winter’s emergence. Only then did it dawn on me that my daughter’s statement held a deeper meaning.

The eco-blueprint encrypted within God’s creation comes full circle with the cold, dark, dreary season of winter. At the winter solstice, the earth begins its long journey toward light. In the life of creation, it is midnight. The activity of summer has given way to the stillness of postponed activity. In that stillness and solitude, we rediscover what it means to be contemplative and to explore not only the dark nights of winter but also the deepness within our souls.

The stillness of the season that we experience does not equate with death. For nothing is dead, only dormant. A *wintering time* is one of germination, a process of growth and transformation that we are unable to see with our own eyes. Yet deep within the soil, life is beginning the process of reactivating.

We miss the point if we do not recognize that it is a season for spiritual germination, too, as we deepen our prayer and meditative life in Christ. We might seek a spiritual director to help integrate all the aspects of our life and take stock of our discipleship. This is where we learn resiliency: not by being tested physically (although that does not hurt), but rather by being tested spiritually. Why else do we say, “I’m experiencing a winter season in my life.”

This is a season where we see our breath. The word “breath” in both Hebrew (*ruah*) and Greek (*pneuma*) also means *wind* and *spirit*. For many of us, we look back at the “winters of our lives” and realize that is where we felt the presence of the Spirit. Those were the “thin spaces” where the Spirit breathed life back into us. Those were the moments when we realized that we were not dead, only in a state of dormancy where something new was germinating deep within us and we just could not see it. It was in the winter where it was quiet enough to amplify the still, small voice. It was in the dark, dreary season where a way opened that we could not see in the lush summer of our lives.

It is all too easy to lose sight of the eco-blueprint found within wintertime and give into the shadow form of the season (depression, dismay, loneliness). When that happens, take a moment and step outside, and exhale those feelings into the cold air. As you see your breath, remember that this is a time for seeing the Spirit alive and active in our lives. 

Randall Westfall has been mentoring youth and adults in creation connection awareness and practices for more than a decade. He serves as director of Camp Brethren Heights near Rodney, Mich.

Pondering

by Lauren Seganos Cohen

Multiple times throughout the Christmas story

in Luke's Gospel, we read of Mary "pondering" or "treasuring" something in her heart.

When the angel Gabriel appears before her, exclaiming, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!" we are told that Mary was "much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (1:28-29). After the birth of Jesus and the shepherds arrive in Bethlehem to worship the child and to tell the family of their angelic visitors, we read that "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). And in the only canonical story we have from Jesus' childhood, after the boy is found in the temple conversing with the teachers and elders, his mother is described as having pondered and "treasured all these things in her heart" (2:51).

Last Advent season, the idea of quietly pondering and treasuring something in my heart resonated with me in a new way. At that point I was a few weeks pregnant and, other than my spouse, no one else knew that I was expecting.

Earlier that year, I had lost my first pregnancy after just a few weeks, so we held this news of another positive pregnancy test gingerly and with caution.

I found myself pondering in my heart questions like: "What's going on inside of me? Will this pregnancy survive? What if it doesn't? Or what if it does?" It wasn't until early December when the heartbeat was audible that we felt comfortable releasing the proverbial breath that we had been holding together. But we still wanted to hold our news privately for a few more weeks.

As a couple living 3,000 miles across the country from our families, my spouse and I were easily able to keep the news quiet from our parents and siblings until we were ready to share. And as a pastor who was still leading worship services primarily on Zoom due to the pandemic, the news was also easy to hide from my congregation until the time felt right to disclose.

But it was a strange phenomenon being in the early weeks of pregnancy during a season when so much is made of "waiting," "expecting," and "preparing" for the birth of the child Jesus. Like Mary, I was pondering my own pri-

vate and joyful news as I prepared for both the birth of the child Jesus and the birth of my own first child.

Obviously, we did eventually share our excitement with our immediate families (as a Christmas surprise!) and then later with my congregation and our wider friends and families. But there was something intimate about holding this knowledge of new life close to the chest for those early weeks, pondering and treasuring this reality known only by God, my spouse, and me.

The Christmas story is filled with a lot of excitement and drama: a heavenly host of angels appearing to shepherds, magi traveling vast distances, a remarkable cosmic phenomenon, a jealous king, and a birth in an unusual (and unsanitary!) location. It can be easy to miss Mary quietly treasuring beautiful things in her heart. It can be easy to miss the private pondering of this young girl witnessing the ways that God is at work in her life and in the life of her newborn child. It can be easy to miss this intimacy within the Christmas story.

In our modern Christmas preparations, our days are often filled with our own excitement and drama—decorating



Hands in Repose, by Vincent Van Gogh

Waiting

by Heather Gentry Hartwell

Two days after my grandmother's funeral, my husband and I found out we were expecting our first child. We had just started trying for a child a few months before, and I actually had my grandmother pray over me a month prior, during my first in-person visit to her as COVID restrictions eased.

As I processed this new life inside of me, I remember praying to God that nothing would go wrong. "Please, God, just let us have this one good thing." The pandemic had been hard for us, as it had been for many. My husband and I had each lost a parent in the last year and a half in addition to my grandmother. I was terrified that I would somehow lose this new life that I had just found out about.

I have just hit the 20-week mark as I write this, and the baby girl that we are expecting has started to kick. We plan to name her for my grandmother, and we are grateful for this blessing as we approach a time of Thanksgiving and then Advent. During Advent, I am reminded of how the Messiah was hoped and longed for. While many people in Jesus' time had a different idea of what the coming of the Messiah would mean for themselves and Jewish people, they still longed for that hope. Babies are hope. They awaited this one good thing that they believed would come.

Christmastime has also become a nostalgic time for me, as my husband and I anticipate bringing a child into the world and thinking about all that we will teach her. It was nostalgic also during the past few years as I watched my grandmother age. Mostly it has been a time of joy in reminiscing and singing Christmas hymns, rooting myself in what I know to be true during the cold winter months.

I am reminded of being raised in the Lord by my grandmother. I am reminded of learning the birth story of the babe that we now celebrate. As we enter the season of waiting for our Savior's birth, I am reminded that the coming of the baby means Emmanuel. God is with us. And I know that my grandma is too.

We commemorate the start of our good news with every Advent season. For all of us who have hurt this past year and a half through the pandemic, let us be reminded that, when everything else seems dark, we still have this one good thing. The babe in a manger.

I have to wait until March for my little one to come along. Until then, I draw upon the promise, the hope, and the symbol of the Christ child. ❧

Heather Gentry Hartwell, a member of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren, teaches English learners at the local high school. She is a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board.

our homes, purchasing gifts, baking cookies, planning parties, or traveling to visit family and friends. In the church, the season of Advent and Christmas is often the busiest one of the year.

Pageants, cantatas, mission projects, and extra services and events fill our congregational calendars each December. But do we find time to consider the quiet treasures of this season? Do we recognize opportunities to ponder and listen for the still, small voice of God?

What do you find your heart quietly pondering this season? What quiet things are being revealed to you—and you alone—about how God is at work in your life? I pray that this Advent and Christmas, you would ponder these things in your heart, just like Mary. ❧

Lauren Seganos Cohen is pastor of Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren. She is a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board.

“What quiet things are being revealed to you—and you alone—about how God is at work in your life?”



Christmas bells

By Karen Garrett

As we journey toward Christmas day, moving through the moods of Advent, anticipating times with family, lighting candles and singing carols, other thoughts are near at hand. We continue living with a pandemic, the political scene remains polarized, and our denomination continues to feel the effects of division and decline.

Perhaps this is an appropriate time to ponder the words of a Christmas hymn written during another time of division—the Civil War.

In 1864 (although some scholars say 1863), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the poem “Christmas Bells.” Belfries across Cambridge, Mass., greeted the day with peals of joyful tones.—a

bit of hope during a bleak time of war. Later, in 1872, five of the seven stanzas were re-ordered and set to music by Baptiste Calkin. We continue to sing those five stanzas as the carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.”

Why only five of the verses? As you read the original poem, I think you will realize why we do not sing two of the verses. One quickly hears sounds from the Civil War. Black cannons thunder so loudly they drown out the sound of the bells.

Christmas Bells

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,*

“As Longfellow pondered his tragedies and sadness, the sounds of the bells rang louder and deeper into his soul.”

nephew of a Revolutionary War general, his soul was distressed that the country was divided, fighting each other. The conflict came very close to home as his son Charles joined the Union army. Charles was wounded in battle and was able to recover at home. Some of the boys who left for war did not come home alive. The “earthquake” destroying the unity of the country was devastating families.

His son survived his wounds. However, this was not the only tragedy on Longfellow’s heart. In 1861, as the war began, tragedy struck the Longfellow household when his dear wife, his second wife, burned to death after her clothing caught fire when she lit a match. Longfellow suffered burns to his body in his attempt to save his wife. His first wife, Mary, had died following a miscarriage.

Personal tragedy seemed to pile one on another for Longfellow. He was not feeling peace. The war magnified the divisions in the country, with no end in sight. How could the church bells peel the songs of peace?

Verse six—which we sing as the middle verse in the hymn—reflects Longfellow’s despair. I picture his head bowed in great sadness, and in prayer. His words remind me of Job 3:25-26: “What I have feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil” (NIV).

For some, the constant songs of holiday cheer, often secular these days, and the rush to celebrate with family and friends become almost painful. The days of Advent, the waiting for the coming hope, are healing in the midst of anticipation of Christmas day when we will be forced to smile through our pain. The poem reflects that at the initial ringing of the bells, Longfellow welcomed the ring-

ing, singing bells. Then reality and his thoughts turned to great sadness.


Fortunately, the poem does not end in despair and depression. If Longfellow had not written stanza seven, I doubt we would ever have read it or sung it. The poem reflects words similar to Psalm 18:6 (NRSV):

*“In my distress I called upon the Lord;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached
his ears.”*

And Psalm 121:3-4 (NRSV):

*“He will not let our foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber,
He who keeps Israel will neither
slumber nor sleep.”*

As Longfellow pondered his tragedies and sadness, the sounds of the bells rang louder and deeper into his soul. God is not dead. God is not sleeping. God is aware of painful divisions. God is present in the painful events in our lives. God’s will shall be done on earth. God’s peace shall come.

I encourage you to sing this hymn this year. Sing all the stanzas. Resist the temptation to sing only the familiar ones. Sing the original verse 3, and name your despair. Acknowledge that along with despair we can also feel joy. Along with sad, troubling memories, remember times of health and wholeness. Remember that God is God through all our times. The assurance that God does not sleep points us to seek rest. Allow the cadence of the rhythm and reassurance of rhymes blend with the cadence of your heartbeat. May peace and good will sink deep into our souls. 

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

*And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
“There is no peace on earth,” I said;
“For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”*

There was no battle in Cambridge that day; it was in Longfellow’s mind that he heard the sound of cannons. A descendant of the first Puritans in the new world, and



Jenn Dorsch-Messler

We're not there yet

Four words that began the church in Saut Mathurine

by Jenn Dorsch-Messler and Ilexene Alphonse

In the community of Saut Mathurine, in southwest Haiti, the foundation of both the Church of the Brethren and all disaster response and recovery began with four words that were repeated multiple times in the fall of 2016: “We’re not there yet.”

On Oct. 4, 2016, when Hurricane Matthew made landfall in southwest Haiti as a category 4 storm with reports of wind speeds up to 145 miles per hour, there was no Church of the Brethren in that area. There was widespread damage across the country after between 25 and 40 total inches of rain fell, including areas where Church of the Brethren churches were located farther north, but not the same level of wind destruction that came with landfall in the southwest.

A group of leaders from L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) including Ilexene Alphonse, who was serving there with Global Mission at the time, felt the Lord calling them to go visit the southwest and see where help might be most needed. This was a difficult journey over rough, damaged roads on overcrowded public transportation called tap taps. It took many hours to travel from the Croix-des-Bouquet headquarters of the church, located east of the capital city of Port-au-Prince.

When they arrived in the city of Les Cayes, they saw

much damage, but it was evident that there were organizations there providing relief for survivors. This was where they first said, “We’re not there yet.”

They traveled to a smaller nearby community, but there still seemed to be assistance and support reaching the families there. This prompted a second, “We’re not there yet.”

Shortly after, they spotted a woman they knew had traveled from Port-au-Prince getting onto the back of a motorcycle. They waved and asked where she was going. She was heading to her home to check on her family and so they followed her on what became the first Brethren visit to Saut Mathurine.

It was very evident that no relief had reached this small, poor community that was in desperate need of everything from basic food and water to shelter. Homes were destroyed. Looking around at the destruction and great need, the Haitian Brethren group knew that this was where God had been calling them to provide support.

In the end, L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti partnered with Brethren Disaster Ministries for early relief programs that provided almost \$30,000 for emergency food and clothing distributions. This was followed by medical clinics and distributions of seeds, fertilizer, and goats in partnership with the Global Food Initiative and the Haiti Medical Project.



The destroyed Church of the Brethren building in Saut Mathurine is on the left, with the location of the congregation's temporary worship space on the right.

Most homes in the community of Saut Mathurine look like this one after the earthquake. The family has created a small shelter on the left with the remaining materials. A portion of one of the houses built after Hurricane Matthew can be seen standing on the far right.

Jenn Dorsch-Messler



“ It was very evident that no relief had reached this small, poor community that was in desperate need of everything ”

Eleven homes were built using plans created after the 2010 earthquake, including proper amounts of cement, foundations dug to an appropriate depth, and other building practices and materials used to mitigate future damage.

Out of this response and recovery work, the community at Saut Mathurine made repeated requests for L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti to plant a church there. Community members told

L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti



Alphonse that they wanted to be part of the only church that came to help them after Hurricane Matthew. From the start of that church plant, attendance has been strong and growing.

Earthquake response

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest countries in the world. The challenges of everyday life are further affected by a weak economy, a high rate of poverty, and a fragile political situation—which in turn has been compounded by the July assassination of the president. The country has not fully recovered from the massive earthquake in 2010, which caused up to \$14 billion in damage and killed more than 200,000 people.

Now complicating everything are the armed gangs that create widespread safety concerns across the country, such as the gang that this October kidnapped 17 missionaries, including children, from longtime Brethren Disaster

The construction on the storage depot building began in October. Plans are for this building to include a basement with rooms for storage of construction materials for the homes and overnight accommodations for visitors helping with the long-term recovery.

“ Long-term earthquake recovery plans are in place and include building dozens of houses for families who lost their homes in the earthquake. ”

Ministries partner Christian Aid Ministries. Haiti’s instability and insecurity have continued to hinder relief and development efforts in the country.

The latest natural disaster was the magnitude 7.2 earthquake that struck southwest Haiti on Aug. 14. Saut Mathurine, where L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti has its only congregation in the southwest, lies less than 50 miles away from the earthquake’s epicenter. Local church leaders estimated that nearly 90 percent of the homes in the area were badly damaged or destroyed. Eight residents were killed including two cousins from the Church of the Brethren, one of whom was a seven-year-old girl. There are countless stories of survival from individuals recalling how they had just stepped out of their home when it fell flat to the ground. Most families began salvaging pieces from their broken homes to create shelters to live in.

In a testament to faith and faithfulness, the church in Saut Mathurine emerged from this latest disaster standing on the firm foundation that was built when the Spirit guided Brethren leaders to the community to help with recovery after Hurricane Matthew. Also standing firm were the 11 houses built during that recovery, which survived the earthquake with little or no damage. Yet another testament to the power of following the voice of God.

The temporary church structure in Saut Mathurine was destroyed in the earthquake, but this resilient church family has not stopped worshipping. Soon after the earthquake, they

L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti




built a small structure nearby, with a canopy for shade. It was reported that pastor Moliere Durose was the only faith leader remaining in the community to lead services, so even members of other churches were joining the Brethren on Sundays.

L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti believes strongly in and demonstrates the concept of service. National church leaders immediately began making plans to bring assistance to Saut Mathurine, supported by Emergency Disaster Fund grants from the US Church of the Brethren, facilitated through Brethren Disaster Ministries. The experience of offering distributions of food, water, and medical support in 2016 proved useful and allowed the Haitian church to respond quickly and efficiently to needs in Saut Mathurine after the earthquake.

Long-term earthquake recovery plans are in place and include building dozens of houses for families who lost their homes in the earthquake. These houses will be similar to, and will be built to the same standards as those built after Hurricane Matthew. The new homes will cost about \$7,000 each from the funding provided through the church, plus about \$1,400 worth of building materials and labor contributed by the families.

Within two months of the earthquake, work had already begun on five new homes as well as a building to be used as a storage depot for relief and building supplies and for housing for guest workers. Plans are for the depot building to eventually include a permanent church facility.

L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti continues to faithfully follow the Spirit’s call. The commitment to service for the least of these allows it to be alive and well, even amid repeated natural, political, and man-made disasters. May we follow their lead and follow where the Spirit leads! 

Ilexene Alphonse, pastor of Eglise des Freres Haitiens in Miami, Fla., is helping coordinate the earthquake response in Saut Mathurine. Jenn Dorsch-Messler is director of Brethren Disaster Ministries.

Support the Haiti earthquake response

- \$75 provides a monthly food kit for a family
- \$30 provides a water filter for a household
- \$7,000 provides materials and labor for a new home
- \$38,000 provides a new 4-door truck for project use

Give online at www.brethren.org/give-haiti-earthquake or send checks to: Emergency Disaster Fund, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Make the check out to Emergency Disaster Fund with “Haiti Earthquake” in the memo line. For more information contact Brethren Disaster Ministries at 800-451-4407.

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*"I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies."
- Psalm 57:9-10, NIV*



Ecuador



Haiti



Nigeria

We give thanks for the faithfulness of God and your partnership in the Global Food Initiative! Together we serve our neighbors near and far in the name of Jesus. Support our ministry today at www.brethren.org/givegfi

Global Food Initiative - Church of the Brethren 1-800-323-8039 ext. 332 www.brethren.org/gfi

The Bible studies this year come from *Shine: Living in God's Light*, the Sunday school curriculum published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. Each month, MESSENGER is publishing two of the Bible essays that help teachers prepare. These essays are written by Sheila Klassen-Wiebe. The illustrations are by Gabhor Utoma.



Mary shares her joy

Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

Priests like Zechariah were called upon to serve in the temple for two weeklong periods every year. During the particular term of service described in our text today, Zechariah's name is drawn by lot to perform the special task of burning incense in the holy place, a space second in holiness only to the Holy of Holies. In this sacred space, an angel visits Zechariah with news that his wife, Elizabeth, will bear a son, and that he should name the boy John, meaning "Yahweh has shown favor." This announcement is an answer to

Where do you need to be silent today, like Zechariah before John's birth, and marvel at what God is doing in your life? Where do you need to burst into song, and share good news with anyone who will listen?

God, quiet my voice when needed so I can become more aware of where you are at work in and around me. Amen.

Zechariah's prayer for a son and the people's prayer for redemption.

The angel's words outline the role John will have in God's saving purposes. The command to abstain from alcohol signals consecration for a divine task. Like God's agents in the past, John will be filled with the Holy Spirit. His vocation will be to prepare people for the Lord's coming by calling Israel back to God, thereby fulfilling expectations for Elijah's return on the last day.

Here the language of *turning* is used in verses 16 and 17. Later we learn that John will carry out his mission by preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In response to Zechariah's incredulity, the angel identifies himself as Gabriel, the revealer of divine mysteries (see Daniel 8-9), who comes from the very presence of God. As a sign to Zechariah that his words are true and as reproof of Zechariah's unbelief, Gabriel pronounces that Zechariah will be mute until the events have come to pass.

Luke mentions John's birth briefly, focusing instead on his circumcision and naming. The theme of joy, so prominent throughout Luke's narrative, reappears here. Zechariah's nam-

ing of the child in accordance with Gabriel's command acknowledges his acceptance of the divine message, and he regains his speech and praises God.

The crowd's wondering question, "What then will this child become?" (1:66) anticipates John's divinely given commission and leads into Zechariah's song. The Benedictus (1:68-79) reiterates previous themes and introduces others that are equally pivotal in the Gospel of Luke. The first part of the hymn praises God for great acts of deliverance in the past. It highlights God's restoration of David's kingdom and the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.

The language of salvation is prominent here, envisioning a time of freedom from enemies and freedom to serve God without fear. In the second part of the hymn, Zechariah addresses John directly and looks to the future. He echoes Gabriel's message that the child will prepare the way for the Lord, anticipating the coming of God's Messiah. The themes of peace and light, which appear as salvation language elsewhere in Luke and Acts, conclude this hymn of praise. **W**

Jesus is born

Luke 1:26-56

The angel **Gabriel**, who visited Zechariah, now comes to Mary with remarkable news of another impending birth. In contrast to Zechariah, an elderly, male priest, Mary is female and probably young and poor. Yet Gabriel declares she is favored by God, a God who graciously lifts up the lowly and overturns social conventions.

Although both Zechariah and Mary wonder how such a birth can be possible, only Mary responds with trust and obedience. She is a model of discipleship in the Gospel of Luke. The parallels and distinctions in these two stories communicate that both John and Jesus are unique agents of God's saving purpose. But of the two, Jesus has much greater significance and stature. John will prepare the way for the Lord by preaching repentance. Jesus comes from the royal line of David and will reign over his people forever, fulfilling God's promise to David of an eternal dynasty. He will be called Son of God,

recalling God's words to David in 2 Samuel 7:14; and he will be holy, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.

Before leaving, the angel gives Mary a sign that indeed nothing is impossible with God: her aged relative Elizabeth is also pregnant. Mary rushes off to visit Elizabeth, confirming the truth of the angel's news. When the baby in Elizabeth's womb stirs with joy, Elizabeth praises God and blesses Mary.

Mary responds with her own hymn of praise, known as the Magnificat, after the first word in the Latin translation of the text. Her song has echoes of Hannah's song at Samuel's birth, with its emphasis on divine reversals and compassion for the needy (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Mary's song is thoroughly theological, in that it focuses almost entirely on who God is and how God acts. Mary's song also anticipates the ministry of Jesus, who will be God's agent for salvation on earth.

Read along

- Dec. 5 Zechariah and Elizabeth
Luke 1:5-25, 57-80
- Dec. 12 Mary shares her joy
Luke 1:26-56
- Dec. 19 Jesus is born
Luke 2:1-20
- Dec. 26 Simeon and Anna
Luke 2:21-40

The hymn divides roughly into two halves. The first half is a personal thanksgiving for God's gracious initiative on behalf of a particular, humble woman. In the second half, the scope of God's action expands to include the poor and oppressed in general. The song celebrates God's actions in the past but also anticipates what God will do for the poor and needy in the future through the Savior who is soon to be born.

The Magnificat characterizes the God of Mary and Jesus as powerful, merciful, and faithful. It also introduces a theme that is prominent in the rest of the book of Luke—namely, that God overturns human expectations and unjust power structures and delivers the oppressed. Thus, the hymn is both revolutionary in addressing the reversals God will provide and conservative in its insistence that God remains faithful to God's age-old promises to Israel.



Who offers you unconditional welcome and embrace? Who celebrates with you when you have good news to share? Spend a few moments thinking about and giving thanks for the people who have supported you on your journey.

God, may I be challenged by Mary's costly response to your call, inspired by Elizabeth's joyful recognition of your presence, and compelled toward justice by Mary's song. Amen.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Students from Bethany Seminary lead worship for the Mission and Ministry Board.

Mission and Ministry Board approves 2022 budget

At its fall meeting on Oct. 15-17, the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board approved a 2022 budget and moved Brethren Press into Core Ministries, among other business.

The meeting was held online and in-person at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. Chair Carl Fike, who served previously as chair-elect, was assisted by new chair-elect Colin Scott and general secretary David Steele.

Students from Bethany Seminary attended and led Sunday morning worship. Dan Ulrich, Weiland Professor of New Testament Studies at Bethany, led a session on "New Testament Models of Giving."

2022 budget: The board approved a total budget for all denominational ministries of \$7,822,300 in income and \$7,840,330 in expense. The decision included Core Ministries as well as "self-funding" budgets for Brethren Disaster Ministries, Annual Conference, Global Food Initiative, and Material Resources. The board approved a Core Ministries balanced budget of \$4,959,000.

Brethren Press: The board moved Brethren Press into Core Ministries, ending many decades of self-funding status. The financial situation of the publishing

house has been under discussion for some years, with the pandemic putting more pressure on sales figures.

In other business

- The board made changes to the denomination's bylaws, which will be brought to Annual Conference for approval. The changes update language and titles, clarify duties of various positions and groups, and make other non-substantial changes.

- A new five-member Stewardship of Properties Committee was called including board members Dava Hensley (chair) and Roger Schrock, staff representative Shawn Flory Replogle, and Church of the Brethren members Miller Davis and Brian Messler.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Leading the board meeting are chair Carl Fike (right) and chair-elect Colin Scott.

Five to preach for 2022 Conference

Preachers have been announced for the Annual Conference to be held in Omaha, Neb., on July 10-14, 2022: moderator **David Sollenberger**; **Leonor Ochoa**, a church planter in Atlantic Northeast District; **Eric Bishop**, chair of the board of Bethany Seminary; **Nathan Rittenhouse**, a Standing Committee member from Shenandoah District; and **Belita Mitchell**, a past moderator and retired pastor.

The worship team includes Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Paula Bowser, and Tim Hollenberg-Duffey, with Carol Elmore as chair. Scott Duffey is music coordinator. Find out more at www.brethren.org/ac.



Students receive nursing scholarships

Three students have received nursing scholarships for 2021: **Kasie Campbell** of Meyersdale (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, **Emma Frederick** of Roaring Spring (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, and **Makenzie Goering** of McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren. The Health Education and Research Endowment awards up to \$2,000 for RN and graduate nurse candidates and up to \$1,000 for LPN candidates.



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Material Resources sees banner week

October included the busiest week in years at the Material Resources warehouse. More than 100,000 pounds of donated materials were received in one day, when staff unloaded six trailers—from Ohio, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania—and three U-Haul trucks, cars, pickup trucks, and a bus filled with donations for Lutheran World Relief (LWR). Other days saw a trailer arrive from Illinois with 17,500 pounds of LWR donations, a half trailer and a U-Haul truck of LWR donations from Pennsylvania, and a staff driver picking up more donations for Church World Service.

GFI grants aid Haiti, DRC, Honduras, New Orleans

The Global Food Initiative (GFI) announced four grants recently:

- \$15,000 to help L’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) establish an agriculture supply store.
- \$11,000 for an urban poultry and vegetable garden project of the Viviendo en Amor y Fe church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.
- \$6,262 for a pig breeding project of the Congolese Brethren at the Lusenda congregation in Fizi.
- \$1,000 for the goat enterprise of Capstone 118 in the Lower 9th Ward.

Brethren survey affirms essential characteristics

Outcomes of an international survey asking what characteristics are essential to be Church of the Brethren have been released. A committee of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion (an organization of the 11 registered denominations around the world) developed the survey and provided it in English, Spanish, Haitian Kreyol, and Portuguese.

The committee hopes the survey will lay a foundation for ongoing dialogue among the worldwide church bodies and will help develop criteria for new churches to join.

There were 356 “valid participations” with ages ranging from under 20 to over 80. The participation by country was 76 percent US—with 1 percent “Hispanic in the US,” 11 percent Dominican Republic, 4 percent Brazil, 3 percent Spain, 2 percent Uganda, with smaller percentages from other countries.

Respondents strongly affirmed all of the named characteristics, with majority responses for all being “essential,” followed by “important”:

- Being a church that identifies with the Radical Reformation
- Being a noncreedal New Testament church
- Being a church that practices the universal priesthood of all believers
- Being a church that practices community interpretation of the Bible
- Being a church that teaches and exercises freedom of thought
- Being a church that practices voluntary association as an exercise of individual freedom
- Being a church that teaches and lives the separation of Church and State
- Being a pacifist church
- Being a church that teaches and exercises conscientious objection
- Being an agape church
- Being a church that practices baptism by triple/trine immersion
- Being a non-sacramental church
- Being a church that promotes a simple lifestyle
- Being a church that practices loving service to the needy neighbor
- Being a church where fellowship supersedes the institution
- Being an inclusive church, welcoming the different
- To be an ecumenical church
- To be a church that works for the preservation of Creation

Download the detailed report from www.brethren.org/global.

Personnel

Kim Gingerich began Oct. 25 as program assistant for the rebuilding program of Brethren Disaster Ministries, based at the Brethren Service Center. She was interim program assistant starting May 17, 2021. Previously, beginning in January 2014, she was a

longterm disaster project leader at rebuilding sites.

Jenna Stacy Mehalso leaves her role as program coordinator at Camp Bethel, in Virlina District, on Dec. 31. She has given eight years of leadership to the camp.

Merry Moments Are Upon Us Once Again.

For over 135 Decembers, Mutual Aid Agency has been blessed with the opportunity to serve those who value mutuality. We're especially thankful at Christmastime, when we're reminded to give generously, love widely, and bear each other's burdens—not just once a year, but always.

Mutual Aid Agency wishes you love, light, and peace this Christmas season.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

JOHN 1:5



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Inspiring to our members

I have been enjoying the MESSENGER. I think it's truly an excellent and important magazine that is inspiring to our members and is something the Church of the Brethren can be very proud of.

Claudia Hanson
Washington, D.C.

Grateful for internet access

I am so grateful for the “click on” access to so many great MESSENGER articles on the web. I am very technologically illiterate and do no web searching; email is my limit. Others instruct the reader to go to the web and look for what they want, and lose me. You make it easy by simply having a click for whatever is needed to get the reader to the right place.

And the printed MESSENGER is treasured . . . whenever it gets here. I always look forward to its arrival.

Emily Mumma
Lorida, Fla.

A heart after God's heart

The Bible study on 1 Samuel 16 in the October issue was helpful and well writ-

CLASSIFIEDS

New CD: PEACE by Harriet Fraser. Shawn Kirchner's settings of 12 songs of peace and comfort including *Peace Pilgrim's Prayer*, *Abide With Me*, *All Through the Night*, and *O Shenandoah*. Give peace of mind, through music! Order CD at www.harrietfraser.com or listen on all digital platforms. Sheet music of a cappella settings available at www.ShawnKirchner.com

If a broad, inclusive, diverse, and accessible congregation appeals to you, check us out! Living Stream Church of the Brethren has been offering live participatory worship online every Sunday evening since 2012, connecting people in real community from all over the US and beyond. We worship at 5:00 p.m. Pacific / 8:00 p.m. Eastern. For more information or to see for yourself, go to www.LivingStreamCOB.org.

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ten. One sentence, however, triggered my response: "In this passage, David is selected by God; we are not given any indication why." "The Lord looks on the heart" is offered as the central theme.

In 1 Samuel 13:14, God's reason is clear: "The Lord has sought out a man

after his own heart." I have tried to direct my life and make choices with that theme: to have a heart after God's own heart. It means to choose a love-oriented life. Failure to do so happens too frequently, for sure. But getting back on track is at the center of forgiveness,

respect for others and other cultures, plus a loving involvement with creation, wherever I may be.

May it always be a goal, to have a heart after God's own heart!

John Braun
Seattle, Wash.

An online form is now available to submit information for Turning Points. Go to www.brethren.org/turningpoints.

Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at dstroyeck@brethren.org or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published. Individuals are not listed under both Centenarians and Deaths in the same issue.

Centenarians

Coffman, Flora, 105,
Woodstock, Va., Aug. 5
Ledford, Henry, 102, Flat
Creek, Ky., Sept. 22
Schwanger, Doris, 100,
Trappe, Md., Oct. 13
Sherman, Ruby, 101,
Columbia City, Ind., Sept. 6

New members

Ambler, Pa.: Keith Scholtz
Beaver Creek, Hagerstown,
Md.: John Evans, Kathy
Helm, Adam Lane, Rose
Minnick, Deb Tamburo,
Aubrey Wilhide
Brownsville, Knoxville, Md.:
Audrey Tritapoe, Tammy
Tritapoe
First, Roaring Spring, Pa.: JD
Barry, Crystal Burns, Mike
Burns, Erik Kressler, Jocelynn
Kressler, RJ Kressler, Cassidy
Smith, Vada Thompson, Kim
Unger
Hanover, Pa.: Mildred Baker,
Darren Dickensheets, Kristin
Dickensheets, Brenda Kneller
Nokesville, Va.: Clara Nelson
Oakland, Bradford, Ohio:
Norma Best, Randy Mullins,
Jim Oswalt, Susie Oswalt
Philadelphia First,
Wyndmoor, Pa.: Kevin
Broderick Derr
Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.:
Ed Preston, Judy Preston

Wedding anniversaries

Copenhaver, Jere and Bonnie,
Annville, Pa., 50
Diehl, Bill and Nancy, Port
Republic, Va., 60
Geisert, Greg and Margaret,
Keetzletown, Va., 50
Groff, John and Mary Sue,
Lancaster, Pa., 55
Long, Mac and Margie, Mount
Crawford, Va., 50
Smith, Louis and Peggy,
Portland, Ore., 60
Spitler, Dale and Esther, Troy,
Ohio, 72
Wenger, J. Calvin and Shirley,
Manheim, Pa., 67

Deaths

Albaugh, Ira Robert, Jr., 90,
Westminster, Md., Oct. 8
Anglemyer, Dorothy A. Conrad,
99, Wakarusa, Ind., April 17
Bohrer, Bonnie Jean Rager,
68, Murrieta, Calif., Sept. 29
Boyd, Donovan, 73, Greenville,
Ohio, Feb. 8
Brown, Dale Weaver, 95,
Clarks Hill, Ind., Aug. 30
Brown, Edith, 94, Wyndmoor,
Pa., Oct. 8
Butterbaugh, Dean Davis, 97,
Mount Morris, Ill., Sept. 26
Campbell, John Everette, Jr.,
87, Fishersville, Va., Oct. 13
Carter, Tracy David, 60,
Nappanee, Ind., July 28
Closson, Beth A. Johnson, 65,
Martinsburg, Pa., July 8

Coblentz, Ronnie Dean, 70,
Greenville, Ohio, July 12
Coppess, Lowell, 91, Bradford,
Ohio, Oct. 4
Cox, Mary Margaret, 90,
Cushing, Okla., Oct. 10
Croushorn, Helen Hunt House,
93, Nokesville, Va., Sept. 8
Deppen, Mabel M. McCorkle,
92, Elizabethtown, Pa., Sept. 28
Drawert, Carl Otto, 82, South
Bend, Ind., Nov. 5, 2020
Elza, Roger Lee, 76, Elkins,
W.Va., Aug. 25
Flora, Lucille M. Pearson, 94,
Tipp City, Ohio, Sept. 29
Foust, Richard Dean, 89,
Union, Ohio, Sept. 9
Garrison, Alfred Donald, Jr., 74,
McGaheysville, Va., June 18
Good, Carson Clifford, 80,
Port Republic, Va., March 2
Haag, Max Edwin, 91, South
Bend, Ind., March 26
Hall, Claude B., 91, Lancaster,
Pa., Sept. 26
Hartranft, Kathryn Yost, 92,
Bernville, Pa., Oct. 15
Hartranft, Leroy, 94, Bernville,
Pa., Oct. 14
Hess, Anna Mary Weik, 95,
Schaefferstown, Pa., Sept. 27
Hoover, Ruth J. Gible, 85,
Lebanon, Pa., July 11
Howell, Irma Ruth Beery Giles,
96, McPherson, Kan., Oct. 5
Keiser, Thyra René Snider, 92,
West Lafayette, Ind., Aug. 29
Kerns, Dolores Jacqueline
(Dee) Thorne, 85,
Waynesboro, Va., Oct. 22
Lambert, William Otho, 89,
Fishersville, Va., Oct. 6
Lipscomb, Kreston Rae, 68,
Springfield, Ill., Sept. 28
Marshall, Richard Melvin, 73,
Easton, Md., Sept. 29
McRoberts, Pearlletta Bellows,
97, Greene, Iowa, Dec. 14,
2020
Mullenix, Sylvia Dolores Nokes,

87, Knoxville, Md., Sept. 17
Nutting, Homer L. (Buddy), Jr.,
82, Finksburg, Md., Sept. 30
Petry, Philip Kent, 74, Old
Fields, W.Va., Aug. 27
Pyle, Cecil L., 83, North
Manchester, Ind., Aug. 13
Riethof, Thomas Robert, 94,
Harleysville, Pa., Sept. 12
Shultz, Ruth G., 85, Lititz,
Pa., Sept. 14
Slater, Barbara Arlene
DeLaughter, 88, Claypool,
Ind., Sept. 19
Smith, Marjorie Frances
Whitecotton, 99, Grottoes,
Va., Sept. 29
Stickel, Barbara Kay Nesemeier,
85, Elkhart, Ind., Aug. 25
Tusing, Franklin Charles, 70,
Broadway, Va., Sept. 2
Walter, Donald E., 84,
Goshen, Ind., March 11
Willis, Evelyn Lee Dulin, 79,
Easton, Md., Oct. 4
Witmer, Margaret Lucille
Renalds, 87, Oxford, Ohio,
Sept. 21

Ordained

Myers, Janet, Atl. N. E. Dist.
(Paxton, Harrisburg, Pa.),
Sept. 19
Rhodes, Jamie, S. Pa. Dist.
(Chambersburg, Pa.), Oct. 3
Scott, David, Mid. Pa. Dist.
(Woodbury, Pa.), Aug. 29
Ulm, Adam, Atl. N. E. Dist.
(Spring Creek, Hershey, Pa.),
Oct. 17

Licensed

Coughenour, Kaitlyn, W. Pa.
Dist. (Hostetler, Meyersdale,
Pa.), Sept. 12
Noel, Phillip, Shen. Dist.
(Antioch, Woodstock, Va.),
Aug. 22
Stanton, David, W. Pa. Dist.

(Somerset, Pa.), Aug. 29
Wilson, Kristie, Southeastern
Dist. (Cedar Grove,
Rogersville, Tenn.), Aug. 29

Placements

Bean, Ruby, team pastor,
Conewago, Hershey, Pa.,
Oct. 10
Christophel, Sandy, team
pastor, Conewago, Hershey,
Pa., Oct. 10
Curling, Jeffrey, from interim
pastor, Long Green Valley,
Glen Arm, Md., to interim
pastor, Trotwood, Ohio,
Sept. 16
Davidson, Jeffrey, from pastor
of special ministries,
Washington City,
Washington, D.C., to pastor,
Polo, Ill., Oct. 1
Eisenbise, Debra, from interim
pastor, Goshen City, Goshen,
Ind., to interim pastor,
Middlebury, Ind., Sept. 13
Jarrett, Mary Elizabeth, from
pastor, Harrisonburg, Va., to
pastor, Staunton, Va., Sept. 1
Jenkins, Sandra, interim
pastor, Beaver Creek, Ohio,
Sept. 19
Koontz, Gary, interim pastor,
First, Altoona, Pa., Sept. 12
Laszakovits, Greg, interim
pastor, University Park, Md.,
Sept. 1
Stover, Paul, Jr., from pastor
Christiansburg, Va., to pastor,
Jeters Chapel, Vinton, Va.,
Oct. 1
Stultz, Adam, from associate
pastor to pastor,
Summerdean, Roanoke, Va.,
Aug. 16
Weaver, Kay, interim pastor,
First, Brooklyn, N.Y., Oct. 3
Wilson, Kristie, pastor, Cedar
Grove, Rogersville, Tenn.,
Aug. 29

TURNINGPOINTS

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A word to the church on hope

This year’s National Older Adult Conference continued my love for that conference—even virtually. One of the most poignant moments for me came while listening to Karen González talk about hope. In Spanish, the word meaning “to hope” is the same word that means “to



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wait”—*esperar*. She spoke of engaging in a “participatory” hope—not just a “clicking your heels” hope. To participate in the waiting instead of just sitting back and watching it pass by.

Weeks have passed since hearing González’ encouragement to NOAC participants, and I keep finding myself flipping back to the page in my notebook where I wrote down her words. How can I engage in a “partic-

ipatory” hope as we (both in Brethren Volunteer Service, where I work, and in the wider Church of the Brethren) begin to look forward past the chaos, transitions, hurts, and disappointments of the last year and a half?

Author Brené Brown, a research professor who studies courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, has focused a lot of her work on what she calls “wholeheartedness.” In an interview once with Krista Tippett, she said, “One of the most interesting things I’ve found in doing this work is that the wholehearted share in common a profound sense of hopefulness.”


Referencing C. R. Snyder’s work showing that hope is a function of struggle, Brown said that “hope is not an emotion. Hope is a cognitive, behavioral process that we learn when we experience adversity, when we have relationships that are trustworthy, when people have faith in our ability to get out of a jam.”

She went on: “The most beautiful things I look back on in my life are coming out from underneath things I didn’t know I could get out from underneath. The moments I look back in my life and think, ‘God, those are the moments that made me,’ were moments of struggle.”

What I heard Brown say is that hope is brokenhearted on the way to wholehearted. Hope is a function of struggle.

But Brown isn’t the first to put this thought out there—even though I feel like every time I read something of hers it’s a revelation. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he says, “We boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:2-5). For Paul, hope comes from struggle—through our suffering, we can grow and learn how to move forward with hope.

I don’t point this out to say that “everything happens for a reason”; I’ve learned that those words can sometimes come across as dismissive of the struggles that we each face and can make our pain sound prescribed. But I do offer it as an encouragement for each of us to take hold of the hope that we have developed through struggle, perseverance, and character, and truly participate in it. How can we shift from a “clicking your heels” hope to that “participatory” hope that Karen González challenges us with?

I pray that, by participating in our waiting and in our hope for what may be, we can begin to do the work of healing wounds of division and building back bridges of love and acceptance. 

Emily Tyler is director of Brethren Volunteer Service.

“Take hold of the hope that we have developed through struggle, perseverance, and character, and truly participate in it.”

And she gave birth to her firstborn son
and wrapped him in bands of cloth,
and laid him in a manger.

—Luke 2:7a, NIV



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