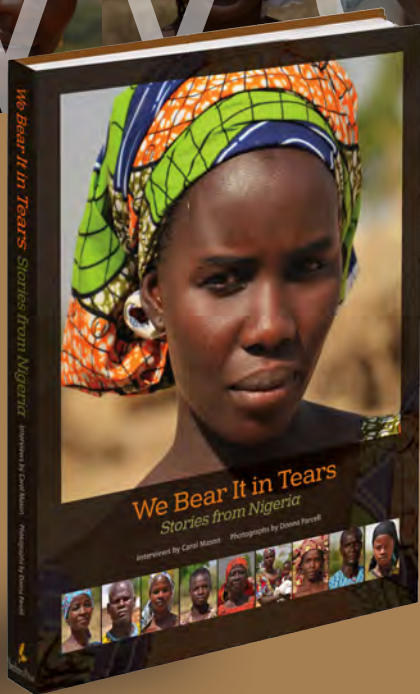


# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

MAY 2021 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)



**A PLACE FOR  
EVERYONE  
TO PLAY**



When Boko Haram attacked  
*We Bear It in Tears: Stories from Nigeria*



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Glenn Riegel

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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## on the cover

*A playground raising by volunteers in Lititz, Pa., transforms an empty lot into a play area for children of every ability. Photo by Glenn Riegel.*



**MESSENGER** has won three awards from the Associated Church Press: award of merit for theological reflection for "The Wounds of War and a Place for Peace," by Wendy McFadden; award of excellence for the department The Exchange, by Walt Wiltschek; and award of excellence in biblical interpretation for "Compassion," by Bobbi Dykema.

# Asian and American

**O**n a form I once filled out, the demographic choices were White, Black, Hispanic, and Other. Over the decades, that disheartening message of invisibility remained true. That is still the list I often hear.

Asians in America occupy territory that is both quietly unseen and perpetually foreign. As “others,” Asian Americans are not always considered minorities, but we are not white. (Does the shorthand term “Black and brown” include me? I honestly don’t know.) People ask, “No, where are you *really* from?” We’re complimented on our ability to speak English, even if it’s the only language we know.

During the pandemic, Asian Americans are once again the scapegoats the country seems to require. In 1871, Chinese were massacred in Los Angeles, in one of the largest mass lynchings in America. In 1942, Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps. Now we have COVID-19. For 150 years, Asian Americans have been told to go back home.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

This past year, Asian Americans have been verbally assaulted, spit on, kicked, punched, stabbed, and killed. Then came the mass shooting in Atlanta.

The term Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) feels complicated to me: I’m grateful to have a category. But it’s a bit like a garment that someone else chose. As a child who was commonly asked, “Are you Japanese or Chinese?” I didn’t grow up thinking I was just like people from India,

Pakistan, Cambodia, or Guam. But somewhere along the way, I became Asian/Pacific American, which came to mean anyone from East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

Now Asian/Pacific Americans realize we’re all in this together: To those who spit, we look the same.

We’re not the only ones who are in it together. After the death of George Floyd, the Asian American Christian Collective marched with Black Americans and, after the shooting in Atlanta, Black and Asian American Christians increased their efforts to fight racism together. Suffering communities are holding each other up.

“Anti-Black racism and anti-Asian racism are different fruits of the same poisonous tree of white supremacy,” writes Esau McCaulley, a Black assistant professor at Wheaton College. “Both are rooted in a hierarchy of persons based on the color of their skin. This hierarchy was designed to keep one group in power at the expense of everyone else.”

This poisonous tree does not have to be the tree that feeds us. Don’t believe that life is a zero-sum game. America’s caste system harms everyone, but God’s abundance is a system that heals.

## HOW TO REACH US

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**“Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fatted calf with hatred.”**

—Proverbs 15:17

**“Food is a gift of God given to all creatures for the purposes of life’s nurture, sharing, and celebration. When it is done in the name of God, eating is the earthly realization of God’s eternal communion-building love.”**

—author Norman Wirzba, in *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*

**“In Luke’s Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”**

—author Tim Chester, in *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table*

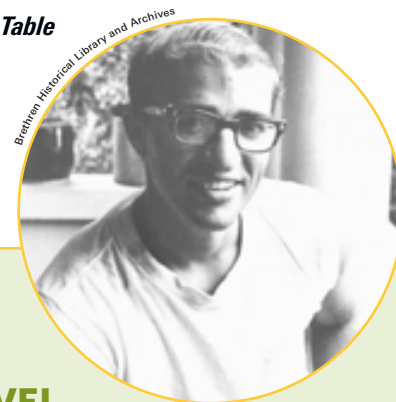
## Did you know?

- The Church of the Brethren Global Food Initiative has raised more than \$8 million for community development projects around the world since 1983. One of its major aims is helping those in need develop food security.
- Farmers make up about 1 percent of the US population.
- Small-scale family farms represent about 90 percent of US farms, but just over 21 percent of production. Just 14.6 cents of each dollar spent on food in 2018 went back to the farm, down from 40 cents in 1975.
- Corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton, and hay make up about 90 percent of harvested acreage in the US. Corn is by far the largest agricultural crop; the majority of it is feed corn.
- About one-third of all grains grown are used to feed animals.
- Americans throw away about 80 billion pounds of food annually.

*Sources:* USDA, [brethren.org](http://brethren.org), University of Michigan Center for Sustainable Systems, [rts.com](http://rts.com), University of Hawaii Cross Currents.

## COME TO THE TABLE

The *Shine: Living in God’s Light* curriculum series, jointly published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia, focuses its 2021 vacation Bible school materials on stories of Jesus sharing meals with others. Titled *Come to the Table*, it offers lessons built around five Gospel stories. Learn more at [shine-curriculum.com](http://shine-curriculum.com).



## GIVE ME A SHOVEL . . .

April 26 marked 50 years since Ted Studebaker, a Church of the Brethren member from Ohio, was killed at age 25 while serving as an agricultural volunteer in Vietnam. A conscientious objector during the war, Studebaker entered alternative service and served through Vietnamese Christian Service. He aided local farmers with technology and production enhancements, and he married fellow volunteer Lee Ven Pak just over a week before his death.

His story later inspired a memorable song by Brethren folksinger Andy Murray, “Brave Man from Ohio,” with a chorus that said: “Give me a shovel instead of a gun, and I’ll say so long for now. And if I die, I’ll die making something, instead of tearing something down.”

In a letter to his hometown *Troy (Ohio) Daily News* written the week of his death, Studebaker said: “I believe strongly in trying to follow the example of Jesus Christ as best I know how. Above all, Christ taught me to love all people, including enemies, and to return good for evil, and that all men are brothers in Christ.”

*Sources:* Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Dayton International Peace Museum

## And there is hope

**D**uring Lent, University Park (Md.) Church of the Brethren offered an interactive community wall of prayer in its front yard, in the form of an ampersand—the symbol for the word “and.”

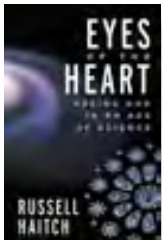
“The ampersand expresses hope for more, for what is yet to come,” wrote pastor Kim McDowell. “After a year of pandemic and of division, and in the face of our need, Lent invites us toward new life. For each,

that will mean different things— healing, forgiveness, justice, peace, freedom from suffering, or other things. Our hopes and prayers are addressed to the One who opens new paths again and again, who always has an ‘AND’ to offer!”

The prayer wall invited people to write prayers on strips of plastic and weave them into the mesh fabric of the sign. The project came from resources provided by A Sanctified Art.



## New books by Brethren



**Eyes of the Heart: Seeing God in an Age of Science** (Fortress, 2021) by Russell Haitch offers a model for unifying Christian convictions and mainstream science, with the conviction that science and faith complement each other.

Haitch is professor of theology and human science at Bethany Theological Seminary.

**Preaching the Fear of God in a Fear-Filled World: Proceedings from the Conference of Societas Homiletic, Durham 2018** is edited by



Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm. This collection of conference presentations highlights rhetorical, biblical, political, and spiritual dimensions of fear. Ottoni-Wilhelm is Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship at Bethany Seminary.



**The Highest of All Mountains: A Guide for Christians Seeking Peace and Becoming Peacemakers** (Wipf and Stock, 2021) by

Samuel K. Sarpiya is a book “for people who believe that the gospel is a message of peace and this gospel of peace is relevant for our time,” said the publisher’s description. Sarpiya served as moderator of Annual Conference in 2018.

**Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A Poem Book: Messages on the Journey from the U.S. to South Africa and**



**Back Again** by LaDonna Sanders Nkosi is a collection of her poetry. Nkosi is director of Intercultural Ministries for the Church of the Brethren.

**Love Has No Borders: True Stories of Desperation as Seen by a Social Worker** (Covenant Books, 2020) by Phyllis Yvonne Dodd is a nonfiction account of 40 years of work with refugees and immigrants. Dodd is a licensed bilingual clinical social worker who lives on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and attends Ridgely Church of the Brethren.



**Myrtle the Orange Turtle** (Christian Faith Publishing, 2020) by Penny Burket Henry is an illustrated storybook for children. Henry is a member of Yellow Creek Church of the Brethren in Hopewell, Pa., and a resident at the Village at Morrison’s Cove.

**Together: Memoirs of a Pastor’s Wife** (independently published, 2020) by Phyllis Leininger shares stories from her life and her husband’s pastorates. Leininger, of Goshen, Ind., spent 25 years working in the office at Camp Alexander Mack.



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.



## Books, and more books

**T**he Harsh-Neher Library at Yangquan You'ai Hospital in Pingding, China, received a donation of Brethren books from Eric Miller (above, left) and his wife, Ruoxia Li, co-executive directors of Global Mission.

The 18 books include older books that “are about the Brethren mission in China that began in 1908 and centered in Pingding,” said Miller. “A few are about the global mission. The newer books are more general books on Brethren history and theology, such as Willoughby’s *Count the Cost*. One book, *In Memoriam: Minneva J. Neher, Alva C. Harsh, Mary Hykes Harsh*, remembers the three Brethren missionaries who disappeared and were murdered on Dec 2, 1937, in Ruoxia’s hometown, Shouyang, also in Shanxi Province. The library is named for them.”

Miller reported that the Brethren Historical Library and Archives generously offered to donate replacement copies to their family, once they return to the US.



**The full MESSENGER archive is now online.** Issues from 2000-2019 are at [www.brethren.org/messenger/archive](http://www.brethren.org/messenger/archive), where there is a link to the issues of *Gospel Messenger* and MESSENGER from 1883-2000 in the Brethren Digital Archives. The most recent two years of the magazine are reserved for subscribers, who receive a password by email giving them access to digital copies. For questions contact [cobweb@brethren.org](mailto:cobweb@brethren.org).

## Sharing space

**Iglesia Cristo Sion** Church of the Brethren in Pacific Southwest District is moving to Glendora (Calif.) Church of the Brethren from its former location at Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren. The congregation pastored by David and Rita Flores has accepted an invitation from Glendora to share space and explore ways to partner in ministry.

## Living peace in Shenandoah

**The 2021 Living Peace Award** from Shenandoah District’s Pastors for Peace has been given to Robbie Miller, chaplain at Bridgewater College. The award event took place via Zoom on April 15, and also included a presentation on peacemaking by Carol Scheppard. Each year, Pastors for Peace recognizes a person or group for embodying the vocation of Christian peacemaking in the district.

## College news

**Manchester University has launched two nursing programs:** Accelerated BSN Second Degree for those who already have a bachelor’s degree in another field and want to pursue a bachelor’s in nursing; and Traditional BSN, a four-year program for recent high school graduates seeking a bachelor of science in nursing. The BSN Second Degree track is a fulltime, 16-month program at Manchester’s campus in Fort Wayne, Ind., offering an immersive nursing education to quickly meet the increasing demand for health care professionals. Traditional BSN students will start with two years at the North Manchester campus before moving on to more advanced work at the Fort Wayne campus. Nursing classes begin this fall 2021.

**Bridgewater (Va.) College has announced its first endowed, named school:** the Bonnie Forrer and John Harvey Rhodes School of Arts and Humanities. It combines the existing Division of Communication Studies, Fine Arts, and Literature with the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences. This development is the result of a \$5 million gift from Bonnie Forrer Rhodes (’62) and the late John Rhodes. The endowed fund will enhance faculty development; strengthen investment in equipment, digital resources, specialized software, and computer hardware to support teaching and learning in lectures and studios; provide more opportunities for student research and conference travel; establish a new pre-tenure sabbatical program; and establish an endowed chair. “As a couple, our lives were so much richer because of our passion for literature, art, music, and culture,” said Bonnie Rhodes. “I’m so pleased to be part of broadening students’ horizons.”



# A PLACE FOR EVERYONE TO PLAY

photos by Glenn Riegel

**T**ake a creative vision, an empty lot next to a church, abundant community participation, many corporate and private donations, and countless volunteer hours, and what comes out? For one Pennsylvania congregation, the result was the Tree House of Lititz, a one-acre playground “where anything is possible for every child of every ability.”

Eric Landram, pastor of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, says the project “has been a lot of amazing pieces coming together.”

Three years of brainstorming, fundraising, and planning came to fruition this past fall, when the fully accessible playground opened following a two-week blitz build by a host of volunteers. It includes features like a boat with a moving platform to simulate sailing, an Australian-built “liberty swing” that accommodates wheelchairs, ziplines with a bucket seat for transport, a ground-level merry-go-round, a unique climbing wall, four towers representing the seasons—and, of course, a tree house.

The church and community partners worked with design firm Play by Design to create their dream, and many of the ideas came from the kids who would use it. They asked dozens of elementary-age students in the local school district what they would like to see in the playground, and those concepts shaped the final result.

“They all feel like they own a little piece of it,” Landram says. “It’s great to see so much community involvement and commitment.”

A pavilion, kitchenette, and accessible restrooms add possibilities for birthday parties and other events, making it a “destination spot” in the town. A safe, poured-rubber surface undergirds it all.

The Church of the Brethren’s proposed compelling vision statement calls congregations to share Jesus Christ “through relationship-based neighborhood engagement,” and for Lititz, “This is how we’re doing it,” Landram says.

Learn more at [treehouseoflititz.com](http://treehouseoflititz.com) or visit the Tree House of Lititz Facebook page.—Walt Wiltschek





**THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS WORKED WITH DESIGN FIRM PLAY BY DESIGN TO CREATE THEIR DREAM, AND MANY OF THE IDEAS CAME FROM THE KIDS WHO WOULD USE IT.**





# DISABILITY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

by Jeanne Davies

*In the Style of Kairouan, by Paul Klee, 1914*

**W**hen the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted by the federal government in 1990, religious organizations were granted an exemption.

Unfortunately, that has meant that many congregations have been slow to make the changes that would make them more accessible to people with disabilities. These include some basic physical accommodations such as wheelchair ramps, automatic doors, accessible bathrooms, and elevators.

But it also includes making accommodations for people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, or other disabilities that create barriers to full participation in the life of a congregation.

Although the church is not compelled to include people with disabilities in our congregations by a government mandate, Christians can be inspired by the example of Jesus. Jesus embraced people with all kinds of impairments—physical, emotional, and social—and welcomed them into relationship with himself and others. His acts of healing often included restoring people to life in community.

If we are following in Christ's footsteps, we should be leading in the effort to create communities that include everyone. Unfortunately, many barriers to belonging for people with disabilities still exist.

One in four (26 percent) of adults in the United States has some kind of disability, according to the Centers for Disease

Control (CDC), and one in six children has a developmental disability. Most of us will acquire a disability related to sight, hearing, or mobility as we age. It is likely that we all have several disabled people in our congregations. And if we don't, we must ask ourselves why they are not present. What is keeping them away?

When I served as pastor for Parables Community, a congregation that welcomed people with intellectual disabilities and their families, I met a young man who had cerebral palsy. He sometimes used a walker or a wheelchair. He told me that when he attended church as a child he was taught that everyone was included, everyone belonged, and he believed that.

But when he got older, things changed. As a teenager, he was not able to drive. The youth would make plans but forget to give him a ride. Or if he made it to a youth event, they would often walk quickly and he would not be able to keep up. He said, "It was easy to leave me behind."

It's important that we not leave anyone behind, nor leave anyone out—not only for the good of people who are disabled but for the good of us all. At the 2016 Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, held at Hope College in Holland, Mich., Rabbi

## THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO

1. Listen, spend time, and be a friend to those in your congregation with disabilities. What accommodations might be helpful? What gifts do they have to share?
2. Consider who is not present and how you might better set the table.
3. Do an accessibility assessment of your congregation using a survey tool, [canaccess.org/accessibility/quick-checklist](https://canaccess.org/accessibility/quick-checklist). Then start with one change at a

## WE ALL HAVE WEAKNESSES. WE MAKE MISTAKES. WE ARE MORTAL. BUT THE BLESSING OF HUMAN LIMITATIONS IS THAT WE ALL NEED GOD AND WE NEED ONE ANOTHER.

Darby Leigh, who is deaf, said that we don't provide an ASL interpreter or build a ramp up to the *bima* (or the chancel) for disabled people. We do those things because we need disabled people to be part of our faith communities. Because if they are not there, we are incomplete.

The truth is that to be human is to be limited. God, in divine wisdom, created human beings with all kinds of limitations. We all have weaknesses. We make mistakes. We are mortal. But the blessing of human limitations is that we all need God and we need one another. We cannot make it alone. God designed us for relationship.

Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 12 when he describes us collectively as the body of Christ. Paul tells us that each member of the body is necessary to the functioning of the whole. And the parts that some consider less important are *especially* needed. It makes me wonder if we often overlook important qualities that God values. It would be wise for us to take ample time to consider the spiritual gifts that each individual brings to the whole.

Rebekah Taussig, a wheelchair user and author of *Sitting Pretty*, wrote on Facebook, "Being in a relationship—of any sort—is hard. And while each one will be unique, while disability adds and takes away in its own ways—every single lasting relationship involves caretaking. I would like the whole world to please stop assuming that being disabled is some kind of alien experience planets away from the rest of humanity. You need some version of care, I need another, and we're all here just trying our best to sort it out and find connection and love the best we can, forever and amen."


What's needed is deeper than accessibility, more profound than inclusion. We all need a place to belong. When we belong, people know our names. When we belong, we'd be missed if we were gone. When we belong, our gifts are valued. When we belong, we have friends who know us and love us.

"Belonging is rooted in relationships," says Erik Carter, who has written widely on including people with disabilities in faith communities. "Having people in our lives who know us, like us, need us, miss us, and love us is at the heart of our well-being. The same is true for individuals with significant disabilities. Their need for friendships and other supportive peer relationships is a universal need, one grounded in the core belief that humans were created for community."

It may seem daunting for congregations to make the changes necessary to accommodate people with disabilities. Where to begin? Perhaps begin by considering people with disabilities who are already in your congregation:

What do they need? What might make it easier to participate? What gifts might they like to share? Then consider those who are not in your congregation: What might make it easier for them to come?

Some changes could be simple, such as offering gluten-free communion bread. Others might be a little more complicated, such as installing an audio induction loop that feeds the sound system directly into hearing aids during worship. We might even make grand, collaborative plans with the larger community, such as building a community playground with both accessible and typical equipment so that all children can play together side by side.

One thing we know is that when we create an environment that is more welcoming and comfortable for people with disabilities, we create one that is better for all. 

Jeanne Davies, an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, is executive director of the Anabaptist Disabilities Network.

### RESOURCES

Anabaptist Disabilities Network is an organization supported by the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonites churches. Rebekah Flores, one of the ADN field associates, is disabilities advocate for the Church of the Brethren.

*Making Church Accessible to All: Including Disabled People in Church Life*, by Tony Phelps-Jones.

*Amplifying Our Witness: Giving Voice to Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities*, by Benjamin T. Conner.

*Helping Kids Include Kids*, by Barbara J. Newman.

*From Longing to Belonging: A Practical Guide to Including People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions in Your Faith Community*, by Shelly Christiansen.



Kathy Yoder

# A SOIL REPUTATION

**Kathy Yoder keeps her education and advocacy work down to earth**

**by Walt Wiltschek**

**W**ant the dirt on Harrisonburg’s Vine and Fig Sustainable Living Center? Kathy Yoder would be happy to give you some.

In fact, if you stop by Vine and Fig’s downtown site in Harrisonburg, Va., don’t be surprised if you see Yoder poking around in some compost. She might be measuring the temperature of compost piles, teaching volunteers how to turn over compost in their three-bin system, or helping to add humus to urban garden beds.

More likely, though, she’ll be on a Zoom meeting or phone call with a teacher providing outdoor education resources or coordinating with teachers and staff about using their school garden as a teaching tool, as the pandemic spurred a strong need for outdoor education.

“Getting kids into nature when they’re young is so

important,” says Yoder, coordinator of the organization’s Educational Outreach Program (until recently known as Rocktown Sprouts) since 2019. “Even if it’s just a small green space or a small school garden—if they can relate to and name something there, research shows they’re more apt to take care of the environment when they’re adults.”

Yoder has a good foundation for the work, serving for five years as the Farm to School Week project coordinator for Harrisonburg City Schools (a role she continues), as well as eight years as a public school teacher. Those connections have allowed Vine and Fig—part of Virginia-based New Community Project—to build creative projects with local educational partners, such as leading garden clubs and supporting vibrant school gardens at two elementary schools.

In one recent learning session, dirt took center stage.

*Left: Kathy Yoder takes a selfie with other staff and university student volunteers, celebrating the completion of packing 500 bags of fresh produce at a local farm.  
Below: Students explore what makes dirt healthy or unhealthy in a hands-on lesson.*

“We were talking to students about healthy soil versus poor soil,” Yoder said. “A local landscaping company delivered some poor, clean clay soil we ordered so the kids could search for any signs for life. They looked, and they didn’t see any living creatures.

“Then we went to some frozen compost we had at the school and dug down and applied it to a big mound of the clay soil,” she continued. “They could see the rich humus and all the critters that lived in it. Then the children identified and labeled their critters using a ‘compost critter view finder’ and outdoor bulletin board. They all left class being able to identify at least two critters—like roly-polies, red wigglers, or the top predators in the compost, centipedes. It’s just such a beautiful thing for the kids to see that living soil is so important. I always tell them, ‘Soil is living, and dirt is non-living.’”

That activity was followed by a robust game of “decomposition tag,” where kids could learn more about the role various organisms play in breaking down plant and animal material to bring new life.

Yoder has also been working with schools to obtain locally grown produce for their curbside meal program during the pandemic, working with the schools’ executive director of nutrition to add varied veggies. Volunteers assist in bagging it all.


“Everyone has the right to have access to fresh, healthy, nutritious food,” Yoder says, “and that’s why we help get the produce bagged and assist with delivery to the schools.

The bagging of produce helps the farmer and the cafeteria staff. It allows the food to go that last mile—the mile that usually causes havoc and chaos and extra labor to arrange everything.”

She is always on the lookout for other ways to spread both education and healthy eating, too, to both children and adults. Vine and Fig hopes to partner with a local minority-owned taxi business to provide free veggies that drivers can then supply to those they learn might need them. Residents at a local trailer court could receive fresh produce along with simple recipes to use it. The program also provides videos for virtual and in-person learning to help teachers promote sustainability and environmental stewardship, and a composting handbook is available. The list goes on, and new ideas are always hatching,

Field trips to local farms and to Vine and Fig’s urban garden oasis are being scheduled, too, including a three-day workcamp experience in July for a local Church of the Brethren group.

Tom Benevento, the onsite director of Vine and Fig’s wide-ranging efforts in Harrisonburg, says that Yoder’s work “is vital in connecting our youth to the issues around food and all its implications, including justice, access for all, health, and care for our planet. We’re excited to grow and connect schools to healthy food and get students outside in the fresh air and get them happily dirty.”

That’s the dirt. And Yoder will always be happy to add some compost to it. 

Kathy Yoder



Theophylla Lienardy



Theophylla Lienardy



**THEY COULD SEE THE RICH HUMUS AND ALL THE CRITTERS THAT LIVED IN IT. THEN THE CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AND LABELED THEIR CRITTERS USING A ‘COMPOST CRITTER VIEW FINDER’ AND OUTDOOR BULLETIN BOARD.**



# Feeding our faith

Food helps us to create community and meaning

by Julia Largent

**G**rowing up at Union Grove Church of the Brethren (Muncie, Ind.), carry-in Sundays were among my favorites. Not only did it mean that I got to hang out with my friends for a few more hours, but it meant delicious food.

Union Grove is a small congregation—one of those where you know everyone, and everyone brings the same items to carry-ins. My mom brings cheesy hash brown casserole. Cindy brings BBQ sausages. Linda brings homemade apple dumplings. Joan brings fruit slush. Sharon brings pan cookies. It was a day of delicious smells wafting up to the sanctuary from the fellowship hall below as lunch cooked. You hoped the sermon would be short so you could rush down for the delicious food about to be piled high on your plate. Or at least that's how it was where I grew up.

When I moved to McPherson, Kan., I was excited to join McPherson Church of the Brethren. I was anxious, but enthusiastic, about joining such a large congregation. I'm an outgoing person, but only when I have someone else with whom to be outgoing. I was nervous to attend my first potluck, as I didn't know whom to sit with or how it worked. In

fact, I think I skipped the first one or two during my first year living in McPherson. But I worked up the courage and sat down at a table by myself. Others joined, conversations were held, and connections were made, all over food.

As I have ventured out more on my own to cook, bake, and experience the fun of the kitchen, I find myself frequently turning to different editions of the *Inglenuok Cookbook*. The Church of the Brethren is not unique in having a denomination-wide cookbook, but its longevity and many editions make it a valuable artifact of our church culture. The short anecdotes throughout the book add personal stories and connections to the recipes. It connects us denominationally, not just congregationally or at the district level. I get to read about traditions of Brethren families in other places and connect with individuals whom I've never met but now know through their recipes and my taste buds.

Food is used to create community—either by ourselves in our kitchens, with friends around tables, or in large gatherings at church. However, COVID-19 has not allowed my congregation to gather in person to share a meal in over a year. Our weekly Wednesday evening meals and fellowship haven't happened

since March 2020. I feel disconnected from the congregation in a way that I never thought would happen.

At a recent McPherson College faculty meeting, professor Jd. Bowman shared the opening reflection. It was right before the official one-year mark of the pandemic. He reflected on the year and how he has had his ups and downs, as many of us have had. He briefly reflected on the inability to share and connect over food with students. Many of us bring in goodies to class, and we've not been able to do this since the start of the pandemic. Faculty and staff aren't supposed to eat in the cafeteria—something many of us miss dearly as it's a place to connect with both our colleagues and students. Over the past year, I've realized that food isn't for just physical survival but for social sustenance too. I connect with people over coffee, lunch, and dinner.

Ironically, amid all of this, I co-edited an anthology titled *Eating Fandom: Intersections of Fan and Food Cultures*, published in October. It was a project two colleagues and I started well before COVID-19 existed, but its arrival was a bitter reminder of how much we use food—both in the church and in our lives—to connect.

The book covers a myriad of foodie fans: fans of celebrity chefs, of theme park food, of media that have adapted food recipes (e.g., *Harry Potter*-themed foods), and of cultures around food and beverages. For some, food is one way they connect to a text. By making butterbeer (a butterscotch beverage in *Harry Potter*), for example, fans can taste what their favorite characters are tasting—creating a connection to the text through their taste buds. The crux of their activities is to connect with other fans and with the media texts they love and devour through food—literally and figuratively.

But fandom is not the only way we use food to connect to a text. For many Brethren, participating in love feast—which features a simple meal at many congregations—connects us to the last supper and the last days of Jesus. Year-round, and in most Christian denominations, we use bread and wine or grape juice to symbolize the body and blood of Christ during communion. In these instances, food is not just something we consume while connecting with each other, but it is used to demonstrate our faith and connect to God.

*The Brethren Encyclopedia* describes the agape meal this way: “Christianity started as a fellowship of love. That fellow-

ship turned a band of Galileans in an upstairs room in Jerusalem into a body which soon was ‘turning the world upside down!’ The shift from stranger to family (kinship) occurred in the agape meal, at which persons were known as brothers and sisters. In their love feast Brethren have wished to express that fellowship of love.” There's a simple reason why food is so central to church and our faith: The community formed over breaking bread is a community that helps propel us forward in love and in faith.


But how can we share this community with our neighbors, especially as many congregations are re-evaluating themselves post-COVID-19? How, in a time when our nation—and our own denomination—has many disagreements, do we invite everyone to the metaphorical, and literal, table? Much like the classic joke of eating an elephant one bite at a time, we can start forming this community one bite, one meal, one friendship at a time. Slowly, that community will build, and bridges will be made.

As Rachel Held Evans said in *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*: “But the gospel doesn't need a coalition devoted to keeping the wrong people out. It needs a family of sinners, saved by grace, committed to tearing down the walls, throwing open the doors, and shouting,

‘Welcome! There's bread and wine. Come eat with us and talk.’ This isn't a kingdom for the worthy; it's a kingdom for the hungry.”

COVID-19 forced many of us to miss love feast in person last spring and again this year. Last year, I took a stab at making communion bread and sop in my own kitchen (pulling out those *Inglenuok Cookbooks* for guidance) and celebrating with my roommate while having both McPherson's

love feast service and the denominational service streaming on my laptop. As we journey through another spring, it appears we are rounding a corner. It remains unclear, however, when we may be able to gather to eat in large groups inside.

I will be thankful when I can connect with others over food, breaking bread, and catching each other up on our lives from the past year. I encourage all of us to savor these future moments: to savor the taste of friendship, our connection to God and to each other, and, of course, that delicious food. 

Julia Largent is an assistant professor of communication at McPherson (Kan.) College. She earned her undergraduate degree from Manchester University in Indiana and her doctorate from Bowling Green (Ohio) State University.



**FOOD IS USED TO CREATE COMMUNITY—EITHER BY OURSELVES IN OUR KITCHENS, WITH FRIENDS AROUND TABLES, OR IN LARGE GATHERINGS AT CHURCH.**

# Getting to the end... safely

*In late March 2021 Jan Fischer Bachman interviewed Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen for MESSENGER. A professor of epidemiology and global health at George Mason University, Jacobsen has provided technical expertise to the World Health Organization and other groups. Her research portfolio includes analyses of emerging infectious diseases, and she frequently provides health and medical commentary for print and television media. She is a member of Oakton Church of the Brethren in Vienna, Va.*

**Q** It has been more than a year since the first COVID-19 stay-at-home orders were issued, and many congregations are still meeting virtually. When is the pandemic going to be over?

**A** Based on current trends, most epidemiologists expect that most communities in the United States will be back to normal—or at least mostly normal—by the time the next school year begins in August or September 2021. That is good news after a long year apart!

**Q** How can a congregation know when it's safe to meet in person?

**A** The decision to pause in-person meetings a year ago was an easy one for many congregations, especially in places where state and local governments put strict restrictions on how many people could gather in one place.

It is much harder to know when to start easing back into our old routines. Those decisions will need to be based on local circumstances, because one county might have a high rate of local transmission even if neighboring counties have low rates. The CDC's COVID data tracker ([www.covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view](http://www.covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view)) assigns each county to one of four transmission levels: high, substantial, moderate, or low.

The CDC's recommendations for churches are in the process of being updated, but for now the general advice is that indoor in-person events should not resume when the transmission level in

the county or counties that a congregation serves is high or substantial. If the level is moderate, small group meetings may be acceptable as long as there is good ventilation, everyone wears masks, and distance is maintained. If the level is low, congregations can begin inviting more people to gather, as long as they continue to follow state and local health department guidelines. Most places in the United States are still at high or substantial transmission levels, but a growing number now have moderate or low levels.

**Q** A lot of congregations already are meeting indoors or are getting ready to resume indoor worship services soon. What can they do to reduce the risk of transmission?

**A** Coronavirus is a respiratory infection, so the most important prevention methods are ones that reduce the risk of breathing in viral particles.

One set of actions is “behavioral,” like congregations encouraging everyone to wear a mask or other face covering, maintain distance from other households, minimize indoor time, and stay home if sick.

Another set of actions is “environmental,” which means having a plan for how each room and hallway will be used, ventilated, and cleaned. For example, if a room has windows and doors on multiple walls, opening them can enable cross-ventilation. In other spaces, fans and filters may be useful for reducing risk. The EPA provides guidance about indoor air and coronavirus that can be used to make a site-specific plan ([www.epa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.epa.gov/coronavirus)).

It is good to disinfect high-touch surfaces like doorknobs, handrails, and faucet handles regularly, but “deep cleaning” is no longer considered to be critical for coronavirus prevention because surface contamination is not the primary way the virus is transmitted.

**Q** Wouldn't it be easier to just meet outdoors?

**A** If singing together and eating together are important parts of congregational life—and they are for most Brethren!—outdoor events are the best option for now. As warmer weather arrives this spring, more congregations will have the option of gathering outside. A few more months of being careful will help our communities achieve low transmission rates, and that should allow indoor gatherings to be safe for almost everyone by the time cooler weather returns in the fall.

**Q** Do we need to worry about new variants of coronavirus?

**A** The pandemic has taught us to expect the unexpected, but thus far the vaccines are reasonably protective against new variants.

**Q** Is vaccination the main reason the infection rates are decreasing in our country?

**A** The number of new infections per week has been decreasing across most of the US since the peaks in December and January, and vaccination is definitely playing a role in that improvement. However, since most Americans are not yet vaccinated, we are not yet to a stage when we can assume that transmission rates will continue to decrease if we stop the behavioral and environmental prevention methods we're using now. In some states and counties that have lifted restrictions on indoor gatherings, transmission rates have plateaued or even risen.

**Q** I've heard people say that all churches should be open now that a vaccine is available. What do you think?

**A** Decisions about when to restart indoor meetings should prioritize the health and wellbeing of church staff and others who are expected to be present once in-person events resume.

It is amazing that several safe and effective vaccines were able to be devel-





oped, tested, approved, and manufactured so quickly. However, many people are not yet eligible for a COVID vaccine, and many adults who are eligible have not yet been able to schedule vaccination appointments because the demand for vaccines is currently much greater than the number of available doses. The distribution process is improving after a slow start, but some pastors and other church leaders will not be able to get an appointment before summer.

**Q Do churches need to stay online until children are vaccinated?**

**A** The FDA already approved COVID vaccines for older teens, and several ongoing clinical trials are testing the safety and efficacy of COVID vaccines in children and younger adolescents. If those studies have favorable results, the FDA may approve younger age groups for vaccination this summer.

Being able to vaccinate more community members will help lower community transmission rates, and lower transmission rates will help protect unvaccinated community members—including children—as schools, businesses, community organizations, and churches reopen. Some families with unvaccinated children may opt to limit in-person activities until community transmission rates are very low, so congregations should be thinking about how to enable all of their members to remain active participants as in-person church activities start up again.


**Q It sounds like you are recommending that** congregations plan for “hybrid” experiences that allow people to participate in person or online.

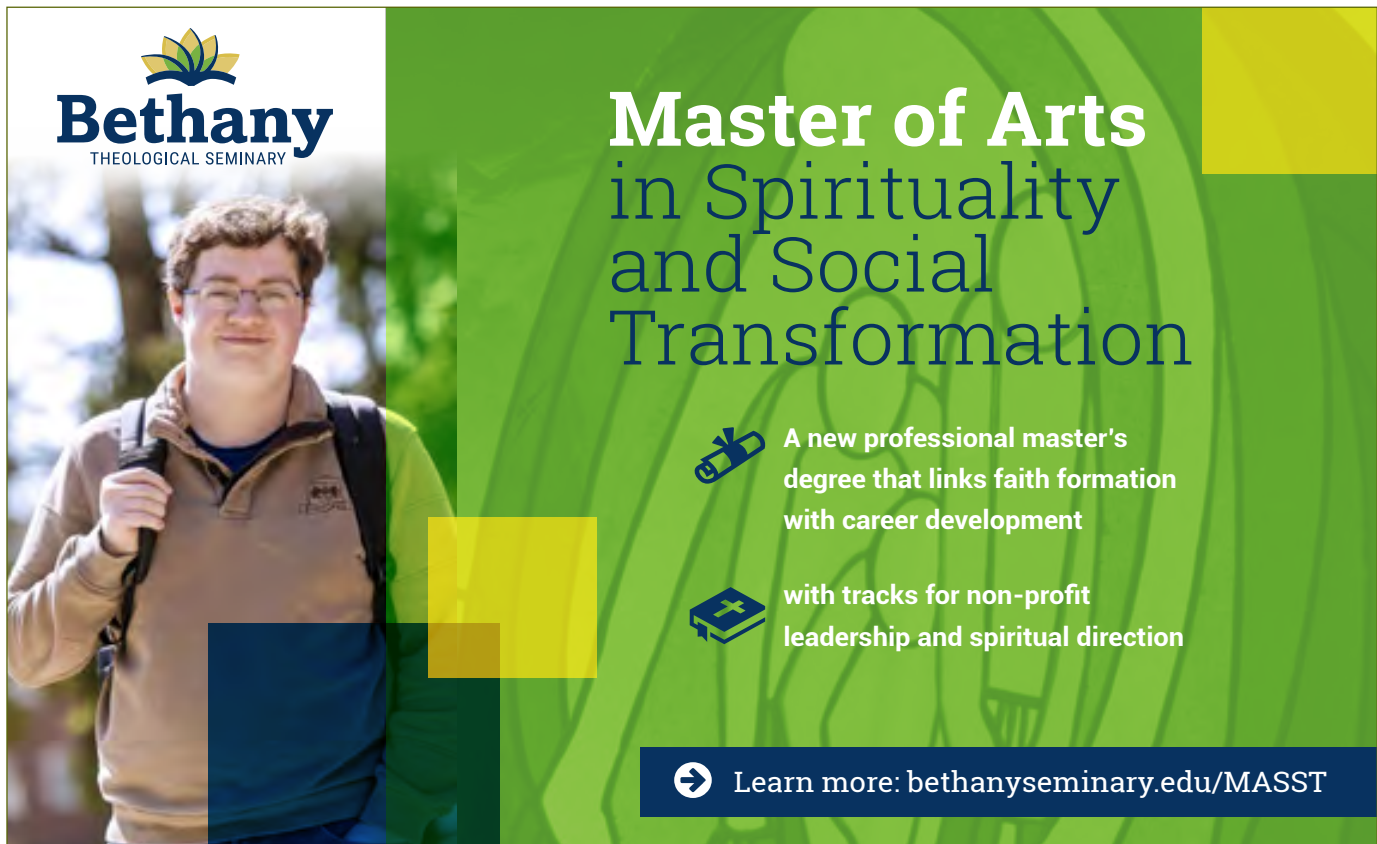
**A Yes, and we can choose to see that as a good thing rather than** a burden. Online worship services, Bible studies, committee meetings, and other

activities were challenging for a lot of church members, especially those who aren’t used to using computers and those who don’t have Internet access at home. But they also made church events more accessible to many people with disabilities as well as those with variable work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, and other barriers to full inclusion in church life.

Every congregation should be having conversations about how to support accessibility and inclusion during the transition back to in-person activities and in the post-pandemic years.



**Q Any final word of advice?**

**A Pandemics tend to start fast but end slowly. The coming months** of transition and healing will require continued patience and gentleness, but it is a joy that we can begin planning for a return to normal human interactions. 



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# RENEWED RESILIENCE

## History provides lessons of hope for the church

by Paul Munday

**W**hat a ride it's been to serve as Annual Conference moderator over the last two years. During this season, we've experienced the first pandemic in the US since 1918, the first significant schism in our flock since 1926, and the first time a moderator has served two consecutive years in over a century.

In this case the extended term resulted from the first-ever cancellation of Annual Conference, as the 2020 gathering was called off due to the pandemic. It led me to wonder who had been the last moderator to serve two years in a row and the context for their tenure. I discovered it was Enoch Eby, leading as moderator in 1894 and 1895—the last of 11 total Conferences over which he presided. His tenure occurred around another unsettling season for the church—the three-way division of the 1880s.

Once while Eby preached at the Chelsea meetinghouse in Illinois, a man arose from a rear seat and disputed one of Eby's statements. With that, Eby drew back his coat (because of the oppressive heat) and replied to his critic that he'd see him after the meeting. Eby's response so frightened the man that he jumped out a window and ran home. I have yet to have that result from any of my interventions, but I pray I've been able to speak into this disquieting time in the life of our church.

I've sought especially to call us to adventure, underscoring that the faith

journey includes not only level terrain but seasons of wilderness and exile. Through it all, God accompanies us: "In the wilderness, [God carried] you along like a man carries his son. This he did everywhere you went until you came to [a place of refuge]" (Deuteronomy 1:31, NET). God is "carrying" the Church of the Brethren during our wilderness/exile time to a new place of sanctuary and transformation. And in that time we're called not only to hope, but also to advance to new expressions of maturity.

When the Israelites lingered in exile, God expected not just faith but faithfulness and productivity: "Build houses and settle down. . . . Grow in number; do not dwindle away. Work to see that the city . . . enjoys peace and prosperity. Pray to the Lord for it" (Jeremiah 29:5-7, NET). In our wilderness/exile season, how might we multiply and not dwindle, growing in outreach and prayerful mission? Let me suggest some possibilities:

### **For starters, voice new candor.**

We tend to limit truth-telling to 90 percent of what needs to be said, failing to tell the last 10 percent, at least face-to-face. In its place we opt for gossip, social media jabs, and "meetings after the meeting" in the church parking lot. The result is a disregard for the God-honoring path of Matthew 18:15ff that calls us to confront each other directly with concerns.

We also lack candor before God,

failing to disclose the truth of our lives to the Almighty. Thus, a needed renewal step in wilderness/exile is confession and repentance. Daniel models such transparency: "I prayed to the Lord my God, confessing . . . 'We have sinned! We have done what is wrong and wicked; we have rebelled by turning away from your commandments and standards . . . O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive!'" (Daniel 9:4-19, NET).

It is critical to clarify that such disclosure not only relates to personal sin but to systemic, social sin. Thus we confess not only the sin of pride but also the sin of racism; not only the sin of dishonesty but also the sin of violence—and the sin of delay and indifference. As Martin Luther King Jr. observed: "It may well be that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and violent actions of . . . bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say wait on time."

### **Second, jettison binary thinking.**

The gospel in Jesus is not "either/or" but "both/and." Thus truth is neither conservative nor progressive, but a fusion of certainty in Jesus.

In 1981, Myron Augsburger founded the Washington Community Fellowship in Washington, D.C. Eager to reconcile the partisan divide rampant in the nation's capital, Augsburger coined the concept of the "third way"; as a result, a reconciling spirit came to



**MUCH IS DUMPED ON US THESE DAYS. BUT I PRAY WE'RE RESILIENT, VIEWING OUR HARDSHIP NOT AS A TOXIN BUT AS FODDER FOR EXPANDING FAITH AND MISSION.**

the congregation. “Our people came from both sides of the political and social spectrum,” Augsburg observed, “yet many became less partisan, not identified with either right or left but with the way of the kingdom of God [a third way]. . . . [Thus] we [were] given freedom amid the partisanship of our society.” I pray for freedom amid the partisanship of our denomination as we jettison the categories of left or right, affirming that the heart of the Gospel is a third way in Jesus.

### **Third, prioritize intimacy with**

**Jesus.** Christ’s third way unfolds as we continue the work of Jesus *with* Jesus, welcoming divine occupation. Such union with Jesus (John 15:4-5) results from dying to self, in tandem with Paul’s testimony in Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:19-20, NRSV).

Such intimacy, however, is not to be confused with individualism or neglect of societal concern. As biblical scholar Michael Gorman has stressed: “To be in the Messiah is to be in community, . . . in mission, and . . . in trouble—simultaneously.” In essence, such divine indwelling results in “becoming the gospel, . . . embodying the missional practices of love, peacemaking, reconciliation, restorative justice, forgive-

ness, nonviolence . . . that correspond to what God has done in the Messiah.”

### **Fourth, manifest renewed resil-**

**ience.** A pandemic, gun violence, church decline, racism, ageism, and post-modernism, overlaid with the ache of wilderness/exile—of being far from familiar territory—take their toll. We are weary, lamenting, often discouraged. We cry, “O Lord, how long? . . . Why do you make me . . . look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise” (Habakkuk 1:2-3, NRSV).

During seasons of anguish, I reach for Viktor Frankl’s classic, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl reminds us: “Everything can be taken from a man [or woman] but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Thus we can be resilient in times of suffering, viewing such seasons as fodder for a maturing life rather than a toxin that taints life.

African American theologian Howard Thurman tells of the harassment his grandmother endured from a white neighbor. The neighbor detested with racist ire that Thurman’s grandmother was a landowner adjacent to her property. And so, in disgust, the neighbor for years threw droppings from her chicken coop over the fence into the grandmother’s backyard.

Eventually, the neighbor became ill. Thurman’s grandmother visited her,

bringing along some homemade soup and roses picked from her garden. The neighbor was shocked; nevertheless, she let the grandmother in. As the neighbor ate the soup, the grandmother found a vase for the roses she had brought.

“Oh, they’re beautiful!” the neighbor exclaimed. “Where did you get them?”

“Actually, you had something to do with that!” the grandmother replied. “Remember those chicken droppings you’ve been throwing over my fence for years? Well, I took them and used them as manure for my garden vegetables and flowers, including these roses!”

Much is dumped on us these days. But I pray we’re resilient, viewing our hardship not as a toxin but as fodder for expanding faith and mission.

Before leaving to join the Brethren outreach in Denmark in 1877, Enoch Eby assisted in the love feast of the Waddams Grove congregation.

Members grieved his departure, fearful for his safety and the future of the church. Sensing their apprehension, Eby spoke into the moment: “We now ‘commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified’” [Acts 20:32].

I, too, commit us to God, confident of God’s grace, for God *can* build us up, crafting out of angst and mire a future of redemption, strength, and beauty.

Paul Munday, moderator of the 2021 Annual Conference, is an ordained minister and retired pastor in the Church of the Brethren.

# 'A KIND OF TIPSY UNITY'



In March, William Willimon and Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday led an online town hall: "Peacebuilding When We're So Divided." Following are excerpts from Willimon's sharing. The full recording and a study guide are available at [brethren.org/webcasts/archive](http://brethren.org/webcasts/archive).

**P**aul opens up his first letter to the Corinthians by saying, "Be united! Remember, we're one!" Just 11 verses later, Paul says: "I hear that there are divisions among you. It's important that there be factions"—*haireseis*, where we get our word heresy from—"so you can tell who in the congregation is genuine."

Paul appears to be talking out of both sides of his mouth: "Let's be a united community." And then, "There *should* be divisions because divisions are where you find out who is really on board."

Which is it, Paul?  
Maybe it's both.

Jesus Christ draws to him diverse kinds of people. And those of us who have nothing in common except Christ—he brings us together in unity. At the same time, Jesus Christ and his mission produce differences of opinion about how best we ought to be faithful.

Because of Jesus Christ,

there is a possibility of peaceful union and, because of Jesus Christ, there is inevitably a division and a difference of how we serve.



**U**nity can be ugly. It depends on how it's achieved and for what purposes. Sometimes unity is achieved by saying, "We're going to suppress dissident voices. We're going to only listen to one group."

Years ago when the Soviet Union was breaking apart, someone said, "I didn't know the Soviet Union was so fragmented." And another replied, "The minute the Soviet army leaves town, suddenly the fragments that have always been there, that were suppressed, come forward."

Unity can be a way of exercising power.



**I** love that moment in the Gospel of John, where Jesus has been talking

**William H. Willimon** is currently professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., after eight years as bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. He is the author of around 100 books, and his "Pulpit Resource" is used each week by thousands of pastors in the United States, Canada, and Australia.



to his disciples: "You're my sheep. I'm your shepherd. Stay with me; stay in the fold. I'm going to protect you against false shepherds." Then almost casually, Jesus says, "And I tell you what, I've got other sheep, who are not of this fold. You don't know them, do you? Well, I know them, and I'm going to bring them in, too."

And we say, "What? What other sheep? We're supposed to be the apple of your eye."

I love it that that passage

is the prayer that is read in the Episcopal Church at funerals for people who are not members of the church. And so maybe that's my big point:

It's Jesus that makes unity complex and challenging.



**U**nity in Christ is a curious kind of tipsy unity. Christ prays that we be one. Paul says, "There's one Lord. One faith. One baptism. And there's neither

"I love it when Christians find a way to say, 'In the name of the Lord we're going to talk about this.'"


"You have taken quite a role for yourself, to be a church of peace in a world at war."

Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. You're *one*."

And yet you know Paul is saying that because that early congregation is not fully united. Maybe unity in Christ is always an aspiration for God's people.

We're not free to say, "Look, we've all got our differences. We will never bridge those differences; that's the way we are. That's called the human race."

On the other hand, we're not free to say, "This church is so united." Check that out with people who feel they're not being heard and their voices not appreciated.

It's the nature of the modern world to applaud unity: the United States, the United Nations. And yet sometimes a lot is lost when unity is your only value. That's why I think it's important for us to struggle with: it's unity *in Christ*. 

## LEARN MORE

Books by William Willimon include the following:


- Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership* (2020)
- Preachers Dare: Speaking for God* (2020)
- Accidental Preacher: A Memoir* (2019)
- Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love* (2016)
- Why Jesus?* (2010)
- Undone by Easter: Keeping Preaching Fresh* (2009)
- Proclamation and Theology* (2005)
- Shaped by the Bible* (1990)
- Resident Aliens* (with Stanley Hauerwas, 1989)
- Remember Who You Are* (1980)
- Worship as Pastoral Care* (1979)

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# A FIRST: THE BRETHREN ANNUAL MEETING ONLINE

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**T**he 2021 Annual Conference, scheduled for June 30 to July 4, will be the Church of the Brethren's first-ever fully online annual meeting.

It is both an opportunity and a challenge, as planners have discovered.

The opportunity is to make the Conference experience—or at least the major part of it that does not rely on in-person participation—available to potentially thousands of new people.

Although business sessions and worship services have been livestreamed in recent years, available for anyone to view online, the rest of the Conference schedule has not. And delegates have never had an online option to participate in business.

Many church members will never attend an in-person Conference for a number of reasons, such as the travel and expense involved and the time commitment at the height of the summer during prime family vacation time. But going fully online means that the bulk of the Conference is now available to people across the country—and around the world—from their own homes.

The challenges, however, are many. Not least is how to schedule events. During an in-person Conference, the whole day is available from 7 a.m., when breakfast events start, to 10:30 p.m. or

later, when many youth and young adult activities end. This virtual Conference, however, will involve people living in all four time zones across the United States—Pacific, Mountain, Central, and Eastern. Events can't be scheduled to start too early for those living on the Pacific coast, and can't run too late for those living on the Atlantic coast.

Other pressing questions that had to be answered very quickly in the planning process included which webhosting companies are able to run such a complicated and large online event. The decision was to return to Covision, the company that hosted and provided the online platform for the highly successful compelling vision conversations that took place at the 2019 Conference.

When it came to how business sessions would work, concerns were many—for example providing a way for each delegate to log in individually to ensure accurate vote counts.

The question of costs and fees also had to be dealt with up front. What is a fair price to ask delegates and nondelegates to pay for a Conference with no convention center fees, for example, but real expenses for web hosting and other intangible services difficult to explain to participants? Registration fees also pay for the regular expenses related to Annual Conference, including salaries for

the Conference Office staff.

Should there be a Conference booklet this year? The decision was for a booklet, offering the choice of a downloadable pdf or a paper copy at an increased cost that includes mailing.

The Conference booklet will list events in both Pacific and Eastern times. The Conference Office is advising participants to mark their booklets with their own time zone, in order to keep track of when to log in.

One decision that was easy to make: worship is free and open to the public—as always. To register for the full Conference, find a link for the worship services on June 30-July 3, and for more detailed information go to [www.brethren.org/ac2021](http://www.brethren.org/ac2021). #cobac21.

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**THEME:** “God’s Adventurous Future”

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## LEADERSHIP

Moderator Paul Munday will preside, assisted by moderator-elect David Sollenberger and secretary James Beckwith. Also on the Program and Arrangements Committee are Emily Shonk Edwards, Carol Elmore, Jan King, and Conference director Chris Douglas.

The leadership, theme, and business agenda for 2021 were “rolled over” from 2020 after last year’s Conference was canceled because of the pandemic.



Paul Munday



Richard Zapata



Chelsea Goss



Tyler Goss



Beth Sollenberger



Patrick Starkey

## HOW TO ATTEND

Worship is free and does not require registration. Registration and a fee are required to access the full Conference including business sessions, concerts, insight and equipping sessions, networking groups, and more. Online registration continues through July 4 at [www.brethren.org/ac2021](http://www.brethren.org/ac2021).

## WORSHIP

Daily worship services will be online at 8 p.m. (Eastern time) from June 30-July 3. The Sunday morning worship service takes place at 10 a.m. (Eastern) on July 4.

Special offerings will be received for a variety of needs. Credit card payments may be made at a link that will appear on screen during worship or checks may be mailed to Annual Conference, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120.

The preachers, sermon topics, scripture texts, and special offerings:

June 30: Moderator **Paul Munday**, "A Future Grounded in Jesus," Revelation 1:1-9. Offering for church rebuilding in Nigeria

July 1: **Richard Zapata** of Anaheim, Calif., a pastor of Santa Ana Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren, "A Future Informed by Scripture," 2 Timothy 3:10-17. Offering for expenses of children's activities volunteers during in-person Conferences.

July 2: Virginia-based siblings **Chelsea Goss and Tyler Goss**, "A Future Sharpened Through Risk," Matthew 14:22-33. Offering for Conference expenses for translation into Spanish.

July 3: **Beth Sollenberger**, executive minister for South Central Indiana District, "A Future Dependent on Prayer," Ephesians 3:14-20. Offering for new furniture for children's activities during in-person Conferences.

July 4: **Patrick Starkey** of Cloverdale, Va., chair of the Mission and Ministry

Board, "A Future Filled with Promise," Revelation 21:1-6. Offering for Church of the Brethren core ministries.

## BUSINESS

Registered delegates and nondelegates will receive a link for the livestreamed business sessions, available in English and Spanish translation. Business is scheduled July 1-3, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 3-5 p.m. (Eastern).

Business will be livestreamed from the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., where the Conference officers will be based. Assisting onsite will be denominational staff and volunteers, a video crew, livestreaming techs, and consultants from Covision.

The agenda will focus on the compelling vision proposal, along with reports and the ballot.

Business sessions include Bible studies led by **Michael Gorman**, Raymond E. Brown Chair in Biblical Studies and Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Md.

A plenary session on July 2, 10:40 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. (Eastern), will be led by **Tod Bolsinger**, vice president and chief of leadership formation at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., and author of *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*.

## CONCERTS

Christian recording artist **Fernando Ortega** will give a concert on June 30, at 9:15 p.m. (Eastern).

An organ recital will be given by **Robin Risser Munday** on July 2, at 2 p.m. (Eastern).

## WORKSHOPS AND NETWORKING

Insight sessions, equipping sessions, and networking groups are planned for July 1-3 in three time slots: 12:30-1:30 p.m., 5:30-6:30 p.m., and 9:15-10:15 p.m. (Eastern).

## CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

An online "Children's Corner" suitable for ages 4-7 will welcome children and help them learn about this year's theme through songs, stories, and activities. Children do not need to be registered.

## PRE-CONFERENCE EVENTS

The **Standing Committee** of district delegates will meet June 27-30.

The **Ministers Association** continuing education event will be held June 29, from 6-9 p.m., and June 30, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon and 1-4 p.m. (Eastern). Michael Gorman will speak on "The Church in 1 Corinthians: Challenges for Today." Registration is at [www.brethren.org/ministryoffice](http://www.brethren.org/ministryoffice).

## THREE HOW-TOS FOR DELEGATES

### 1. HOW TO DO TABLE TALK

"Table talk" that usually happens at round tables on the business floor will be online in small groups. When it comes time for conversation, delegates' screens will shift from the livestream of business to their assigned group. Small groups will be able to see and speak with each other using the cameras and microphones in their devices.

### 2. HOW TO GO TO THE MICROPHONE

Questions and comments ordinarily spoken at the microphones on the business floor may be written to the moderator in a box that will display on delegates' screens.

### 3. HOW TO VOTE

When it comes time for a vote, options will appear on delegates' screens. Delegates will click on the button for the option they choose. The ballot also will appear on screens and delegates will click to vote for candidates. The tellers will receive vote tallies via this computerized program.

# Where the church is growing

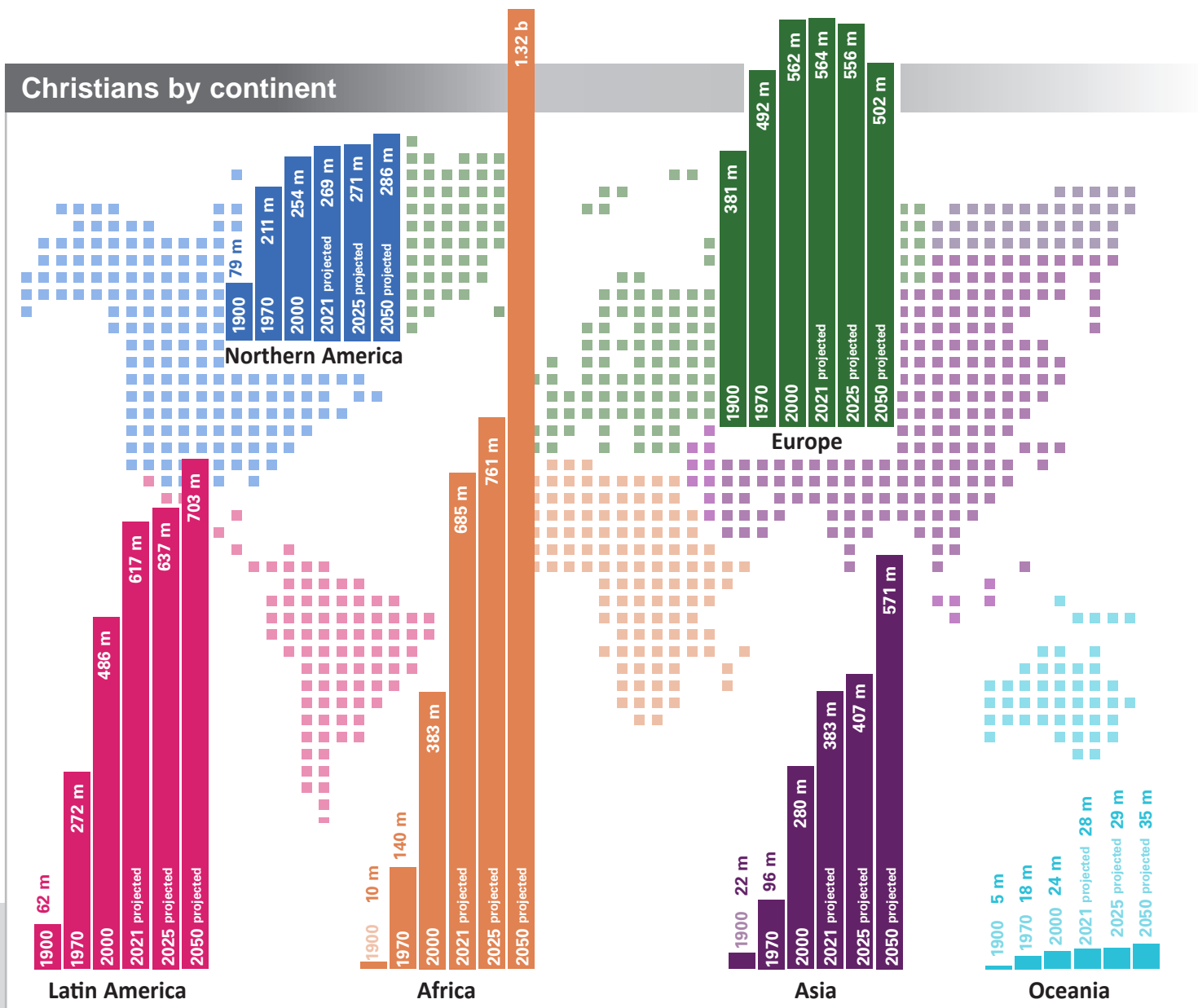
by Wendy McFadden

In previous issues, MESSENGER has examined statistics in the Church of the Brethren and, more broadly, the religious landscape in the United States. This month, we take a look at Christianity in a global context.

**F**or Christians in the United States, it might be easy to think Christianity itself is waning. There's no question that membership among mainline Protestants and evangelicals is on the decline, and those who identify with no

particular religion are on the rise.

But when we look beyond our borders, we see that the opposite is true. While Christianity is declining in the West, "Simultaneously, there has been an explosion of the church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America along with the





“On any given Sunday, it’s estimated that there are more Christians worshipping in congregations in China than in the United States.”

“By 2025, 40 percent of all Christians worldwide will be living out their faith in Africa.”

“Attention must be placed on the startling fact that world Christianity has now become a non-Western religion.”

growth of Christian communities of color in North America,” writes Soong-Chan Rah in the foreword to *Future Church*, by Wes Granberg-Michaelson.

“The world is, in fact, becoming more religious, not less,” says Granberg-Michaelson. “For the first time in more than one thousand years, a majority of the world’s Christians are living in the Global South.”

This means that “a majority of the world’s Christians today live in cultures where they put on a different set of glasses to view and interact with the world, in contrast to those worn over the past four hundred years by most Christians in modern Western culture.”

Gina A. Zurlo of the Center for Global

Christianity, says: “Remember that the majority of Christians in the world live in a different cultural context than you; they ask different questions and expect different things from the faith. How do we reconcile our faith with the fact that the majority of Christians live outside of America? We begin by embracing our belonging to a global Christian family.”

Some of the growth in US churches is due to migration, says Granberg-Michaelson, who has written extensively about worldwide shifts in Christianity. About two-thirds of immigrants coming to the United States are Christians, he reports.

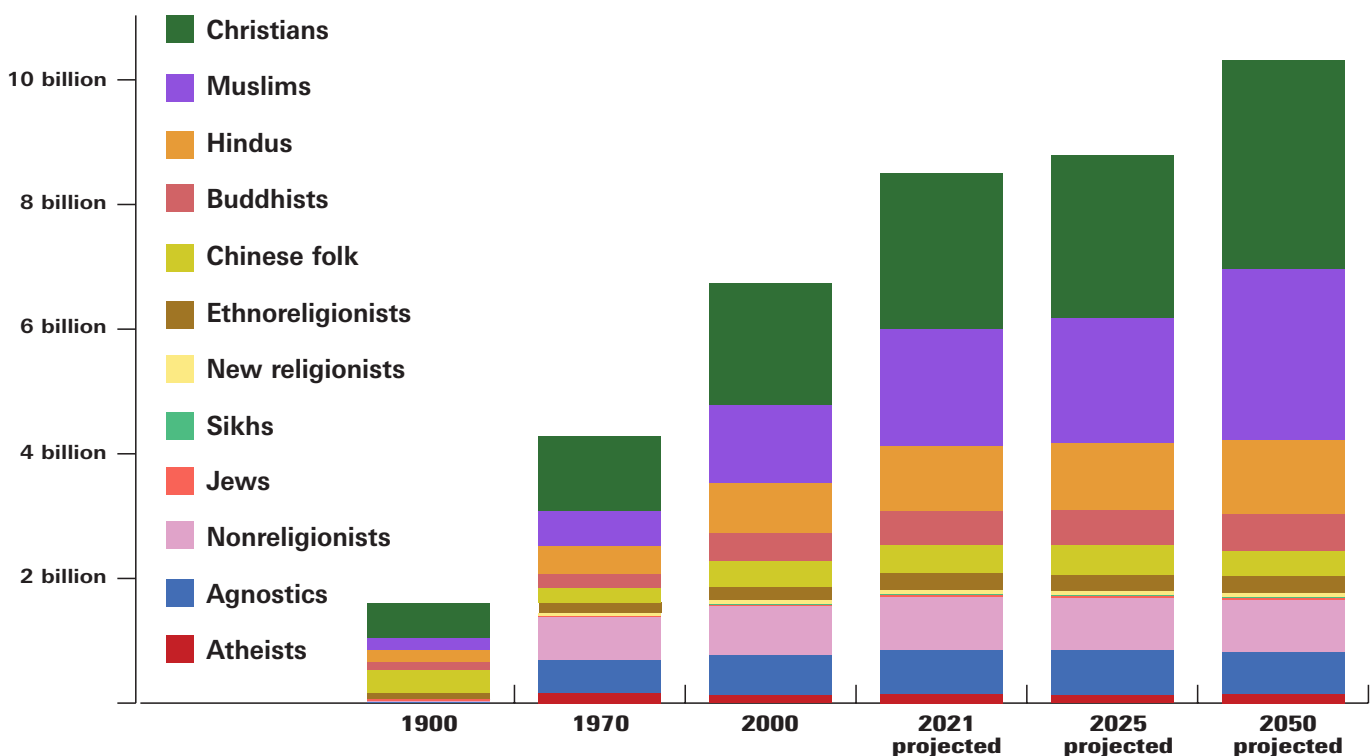
What does this mean for people who place a priority on sending and serving? “It

may be that the most important task for American Christians to perform with their brothers and sisters from the Global South is not charitable service but intentional listening,” says Granberg-Michaelson.

“For many established US congregations, de-Americanizing the gospel can begin with discovering and listening to brothers and sisters who have arrived in our communities and neighborhoods as migrants—and, if we listen, as missionaries to us.”

Statistics are from the Center for Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Quotes are from *Future Church: Ten Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century*, by Wes Granberg-Michaelson. His article “Where is Christianity headed?” appeared in MESSENGER in March 2019.

## Global religion



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 Joanna Harader. David Huth's illustrations come from *All of Us: God's Story for You and Me*.



# Philip and the Ethiopian official

Acts 8:5-6, 26-40

**A**s we move through the book of Acts, we see the story of Jesus spread—both in terms of geography and the types of people invited into the new community of believers. After Stephen's stoning (Acts 7), Jesus' disciples begin to feel unsafe in Jerusalem and scatter to the countryside.

Philip goes to Samaria, which brings to mind Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4). Because of her ethnicity, religion, gender, and marital status, a respectable rabbi such as Jesus had no business talking to this woman. Yet, the significant theological conversation he has with her is the longest one-on-one conversation with Jesus recorded in scripture.

Philip also encounters a marginalized person; an angel has sent him to the "wilderness road" between Jerusalem and Gaza where he meets the Ethiopian eunuch. This non-Jewish Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem to worship and is reading from the book of Isaiah, which suggests that he may have been a "God-fearer"—a person who honored the God of the Jewish people, even though he himself was not a Jew. Philip reads scrip-

ture with him, shares about Jesus, and finally baptizes the Ethiopian.

With this baptism, the community of believers expands beyond Jewish people to also include a "God-fearer." This is a necessary step on the way to including Gentiles in the growing Christian church. And so, with Philip's teaching, the gospel crosses lines of ethnicity, nationality, and religion.

The man's status as a eunuch is also significant. This person is a sexual minority, not functioning in the world according to traditional norms of masculinity or femininity. In baptizing the Ethiopian, Philip lives out the reality that Paul will later proclaim to the church in Galatia: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The Holy Spirit continues to call Christians to these types of "wilderness road" experiences—to be in relationship with people who are different from us as we teach and learn, as we give and receive the Good News. We may find ourselves on the road with people of different genders, ethnicities, or from different cultures. The most

challenging conversations we have may be with people who look a lot like us but seem to view the world from an entirely different perspective.

The wideness of God's welcome can feel overwhelming at times; the road we're on may be more wilderness than we would like. But we know, from the book of Acts, that this is church at its most faithful: to go where the Spirit leads and share Jesus with whoever we find there.

**Think about a relationship you have with someone significantly different from you. What are the gifts of that relationship? The challenges? What uncomfortable situations has the Holy Spirit called you into in the past, and where might the Spirit be sending you now?**

*God, thank you that the story of your love in Jesus was shared so broadly that it was able to reach me. As I seek to follow Jesus, give me ears to hear the prompting of your Spirit and faith to follow where you lead. Amen.*

# Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10:1-48

**I**n reading through Acts, we have seen the good news of Jesus spread out from the original disciples to those gathered at Pentecost and on to other Jewish people who witnessed the signs and wonders of the apostles. We have even seen the good news come to the Ethiopian eunuch who is Jewish by faith but not by ethnicity, and to Paul, a passionate opponent of those who follow Jesus. For the earliest Christians, this would seem to be as far as the gospel could travel—the entire Jewish world.

As unexpected as the Spirit's movement is in the first nine chapters of Acts, it is the events of chapter 10 that are truly shocking: Peter baptizes the first *Gentiles* into the new faith community. With Cornelius' baptism, the path is set for the early Jesus-followers to form a distinct faith rather than continue to function as a Jewish sect.

This radical shift in the early church requires *two* heavenly visions

sent to two people who are faithful in prayer. We are told that Cornelius “prayed constantly to God” (verse 2), and Peter sees his vision when he has gone “up on the roof to pray” (verse 9). God speaks to these men because they are listening. But God speaks in distinct ways.

Cornelius' angelic vision gives him strikingly specific directions: send men to Joppa to Simon the Tanner's house by the seaside (verses 5-6). Peter's vision, in contrast, needs some interpretation. At first, it's not clear to Peter what the vision means; it's not even clear what it *is*: he saw “*something like a large sheet*” (verse 11). Though this vision initially puzzles Peter, when Cornelius' men invite him to Caesarea, he agrees to go with them.

Afterwards, when Peter is criticized and questioned about why he ate with uncircumcised men, he tells the story of his vision (Acts 11:2-

18). In trusting God and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter learns that he should “not make a distinction between them and us” (Acts 11:12).

Peter and Cornelius both take risks to follow the vision that God gives them. Peter deeply valued the Jewish laws and customs, yet he is called beyond them into the unfamiliar. Cornelius is clearly a man of power and means, yet he is baptized into a community that insists on equality and sharing of resources. We don't know the rest of his story, but we can imagine his life changed after his baptism.

This story of Peter and Cornelius is a reminder to us—as individuals and as a church—that prayer is risky business. Sometimes when we talk to God, God talks back. And sometimes what God says will change our lives, will change our families, will change our communities.

**Read along**

- May 2: Acts 8:5-6, 26-40
- May 9: Acts 8:1b-3; 9:1-31
- May 16: Acts 10:1-48
- May 23: Acts 16:11-15, 40
- May 30: Acts 18:1-11;  
2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 12-15; 9:6-8



**When and how do you usually pray? How might you expand or deepen your prayer practice? What risks have you taken for God in the past? Is there a risk God is calling you to right now?**

*God, give me not only a voice to speak to you, but also ears to listen. May my mind and my heart be open to any visions you might send. And may my spirit be willing to take the risks needed to follow your call. Amen.*



# The No. 1 question

by Jeremy Ashworth

**W**hen I moved to Phoenix in 2013, I started meeting with as many people as possible. “Let’s have coffee,” I’d say to anyone and everyone, and almost always they’d agree. I met about 100 new folks a year. Once I racked up 500 coffees I quit counting, but kept meeting.

I’ve consumed caffeine with an incredible range of human beings. Walmart greeters and SWAT team snipers and one gang member turned bank executive. I’ve learned—and unlearned—a lot.

In these conversations one question rises to the top. It is the lone inquiry I encounter more than any other. There is no close second. Once people learn that I am the pastor of a local church, the No. 1 question is: “So what kind of a church are you?”

This must be incorrect English, but these are the exact words. Different people, different backgrounds, hundreds of times, perfectly on cue: “What kind of a church are you?”

At first I gave what I thought were good answers. Big, brainy, theological answers. That didn’t work. Passionate, earnest, informative answers. That didn’t work either. Despite giving it my best, I was failing every time. The more I would talk, the more suspicious or uninterested they would become. Faces would contort. One woman walked away from the conversation when I was mid-sentence. I wrecked my first 30 or 40 coffees and unintentionally alienated dozens of my neighbors.

I began to sense that there was a question beneath the question, but my attempts to clarify got me nowhere.

“What do you mean ‘What kind of a church?’” I’d ask gently.

“You know,” they’d respond, some-

times defensively. “Like, the kind. The kind of church.” I was struggling to answer a question they were struggling to articulate.

Then one day I was rescued. A new friend asked the inevitable, “What kind of a church are you?” I tried again. Failed again. They paused, looked me in the eye and said, “I don’t understand. Are you Christian or not?”

Taken aback, I blinked. “Are . . . we Christians? Uh, yes.”

“Okay, that’s all I was asking,” they replied casually. They came to church the next Sunday.

From that moment, the code was cracked. The words are: “What kind of a church are you?” But the translation is: “Are you Christians or not?” For my neighbors, this is the question beneath the question. It’s that simple.

I was relieved, but also newly confused and a little insulted. Are we Christians? Seriously? Isn’t it obvious? But the painful answer is no. If hundreds (thousands?) of people are asking the question, it’s not obvious at all.

My neighbors do not know I am a Christian.

Unfortunately, some of this confusion is due to our name. One day a Phoenix friend said, “Jeremy, I hate to break it to you, but . . .” (deep breath) “. . . think about it. ‘Circle of Peace’


‘Church of the Brethren’ sounds like ‘New Age’ ‘old men.’”

That stung. Still does. But I have to accept that unusual titles and terms will be misunderstood. There’s an old camp song that says, “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” I hope so, because they can’t tell we’re Christians by our name.

Names aside, my neighbors do not know that I am a Christian.

I have been asked directly if my church is a cult. A fellow preschool parent noticed the labyrinth on our church property and cautiously asked if we performed animal sacrifices there. It was a sincere question.

My neighbors do not know that I am a Christian. Now what?

I can mock someone’s ignorance, but that’s not Christlike. I can choose to be offended because someone is uninformed, *or I can choose to inform them.* This is what I do. This is what Christians do. This is evangelism. We cannot assume our neighbors are knowledgeable. We are not entitled to generous assumptions. It’s not their job to *know*. It’s our job to *show*. It’s our job to *tell*. It’s our job to embrace the reality and welcome the calling that our neighbors do not know we are Christians . . . yet. 

Jeremy Ashworth is pastor of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren, Peoria, Ariz.



## Board meeting focuses on strategic plan, finances

**T**he Mission and Ministry Board held meetings via Zoom on March 12-14, focused on a new strategic plan and year-end financial outcomes for 2020.

The strategic plan is intended to guide a reshaping of denominational ministries. Two new initiatives were approved: “On the Road to Jericho (Plan for Defining Neighborhoods)” to create a resource for congregations to discover and define their “neighborhood” for missional focus; and “Each in Our Own Language (Plan for Recognizing Injustice)” to create a curriculum to help congregations identify racial injustice in their own settings.

The board also approved the Brethren Faith in Action Fund to extend through 2021 the eligibility of church camps to receive grants, as well as the option for camps and congregations to request a waiver of a matching funds requirement.

Drew G. I. Hart and LaDonna Sanders Nkosi led a two-hour “Healing Racism” training. Nkosi is director of Intercultural Ministries. Hart, a member of Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, is assistant professor of theology at Messiah University and author of *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*.

The resignation of board member Paul Liepelt was received.

### Financial outcomes for 2020

A year-end report for 2020 was presented by treasurer Ed Woolf, covering the Core Ministries Fund; the “self-funded” ministries including Conference Office, Brethren Press, and Material Resources; and special-purpose funds including the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF, which supports Brethren Disaster Ministries), Global Food Initiative (GFI), and Emerging Global Mission Fund.

**Core Ministries** ended 2020 with a surplus of \$127,500, almost \$235,000



Nancy Miner

*Leaders of the Mission and Ministry Board met in person at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., accompanied by a few staff, while most board members joined in by Zoom.*

ahead of a budget that had been revised mid-year to make adjustments for the pandemic’s effects. Cancellation of staff travel and some large events, moving other events online, and decreased use of office space and utilities—as most staff worked from home—helped account for the surplus. The amount of \$200,000 was set aside for future budget shortfalls and \$50,000 for costs of implementing the strategic plan.

**Brethren Press** received more than \$117,000 in donations through a special fundraising campaign, making it possible to end the year with a small deficit of just over \$4,600 despite gross sales falling by more than \$150,000 from 2019.

In 2021, Brethren Press will receive a one-time special distribution of \$100,000 from the Gahagen Trust. The money will pay for Brethren Press expenses related to production of the Christian education curriculum Shine.

**The GFI and EDF** experienced decreased donations in 2020. For the EDF, the decrease related in part to cancellations of disaster auctions that often raise more than \$500,000 each year. In total, donations to the EDF decreased more than \$860,000 from 2019.

**Material Resources** ended the year with a deficit of almost \$122,000, experiencing many difficulties during the pan-

demie, including the need to close warehouse facilities for a time, cancellation of volunteer groups, and a slowdown of activity by partner organizations.

**The Conference Office** ended the year with a deficit of \$116,000, after having had to cancel the 2020 Annual Conference because of the pandemic. More than \$70,000 in donations helped to offset a loss of income from registrations.

**Combined giving** from congregations and individuals to the Core Ministries finished ahead of the 2020 revised budget but total giving to all denominational ministries decreased. The number of congregations giving to the denomination also decreased, with only 528 of the 900 congregations financially supporting the Core Ministries in 2020. However, there was an increase in giving from individuals to Core Ministries, and the number of people who donated increased. The 1,500-plus number of individual donors to Core Ministries was well above the 2019 total.

**The net asset balance**—the denomination’s total value including all funds and capital assets—grew again in 2020, continuing a positive trend seen over four of the past five years. The Church of the Brethren’s current net asset value is \$42.3 million.



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## Funds to South Sudan aid trauma recovery

A plan to expand agriculture and trauma recovery programing in South Sudan is receiving support from Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Global Food Initiative (GFI). A joint allocation gives \$29,500 including \$24,500 from the Emergency Disaster Fund and \$5,000 from the GFI.

The plan was developed by a group of staff and volunteers including mission staff Athanasus Ungang. The trauma recovery and resiliency work will be done through a partnership with Reconcile, an independent NGO with roots in the ministry of former Brethren mission workers.

## Healing workshop held for Nigerian teachers

The peace program of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) held a Trauma Healing Workshop on Feb. 21-24 for 42 Sunday school teachers from 15 church districts. The training used the Healing Hearts curriculum from Children's Disaster Services.

The training encouraged teachers to become advocates for traumatized parents and children in their communities. Participants learned about trauma and how it affects the brain and human behavior, with an emphasis on children, and how to handle complex situations to avoid creating more trauma. The curriculum uses selected Bible passages and storytelling that speak of peace, comfort, and love.



## Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 328 completes winter orientation online.

*Top, from left:* Pauline Liu, coordinator of volunteers for BVS; Emily Tyler, director of BVS; Kara Miller, orientation assistant. *Middle row:* Claire Horrell of Jackson, Mo., assigned to El Centro Arte Para la Paz in Suchitoto, El Salvador; Sam Zientek of Wyomissing (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, assigned to L'Arche Chicago, Ill.; Matthew Bateman of Seattle, Wash., assigned to the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan. *Bottom:* Ronah Kavumba of Kampala, Uganda, awaiting project placement.

## Grant programs are extended

Intercultural Ministries has extended the deadline to apply for a **Healing Racism mini-grant**. Applications will be received through June 30. Congregations and communities officially affiliated with the Church of the Brethren in the United States are encouraged to apply. See [www.brethren.org/intercultural](http://www.brethren.org/intercultural).

Brethren Benefit Trust is extending **COVID-19 Emergency Grants for church workers**. The first round of grants became available March 20, 2020. Since then, the program has been extended three times, in four-month blocks. The new round of grants runs through the end of July. See [www.cobbt.org](http://www.cobbt.org).

Grants awarded: Traditional vs COVID emergency grants

2020	Traditional Church Workers' Grants	COVID-19 Emergency Grants
Dollars distributed in 2020	\$290,057.66	\$215,571.26
Number of recipients	45	73

2021 YTD	Traditional Church Workers' Grants	COVID-19 Emergency Grants
Dollars distributed year-to-date	\$67,540.75	\$64,111.59
Number of recipients	32	21

## Letters oppose 'bloated Pentagon,' support refugees

The general secretary and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy have signed letters opposing excessive military spending and supporting refugees.

A letter to Congress from 31 faith-based organizations urged cuts to "the bloated Pentagon budget." Said the letter: "Instead of spending money on

weapons and war, we need to be investing in things that address the urgency of climate change and build resilient communities. . . . We also need reductions in the Pentagon budget in order to invest in public health—an especially essential investment in this time of pandemic."

Letters sent to the president called for increased refugee admissions and refu-

gee allocation numbers. An interfaith letter organized by Church World Service also expressed concern over cancellation of flights into the US that were to carry refugees seeking asylum. A letter organized by the Refugee Council USA and signed by more than 200 organizations urged a refugee admissions goal of 62,500 for fiscal year 2021.

# 'Muslims, Christians, others cried out for me'

## An interview with Bulus Yukura

by Zakariya Musa

*Bulus Yukura is a pastor of the Jerusalem church of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) in the village of Pemi, near Chibok. He was released from captivity after crying for help in three different videos circulated by Boko Haram.*

### Q: What happened to you?

**A: On the 24th of December 2020**, at about 5 p.m., the Boys' Brigade were rehearsing for a ceremonial parade for Christmas day. I was watching them, talking with Ali Dauda, a student at Kulp Theological Seminary who was going to lead the Christmas service. We sighted some people coming in military uniform. We heard "Allahu akbar" [a rallying cry for Islamist extremists] followed by shooting. Then I started running, holding the Bible in my hand. Sadly, Ali Dauda, who was crippled, could not run and was killed on the spot.

As I was running, I got stuck on a farm harrow and fell down. Boko Haram men surrounded me and a boy of about 8 years old. The boy hugged me so tight because he was afraid that they would shoot him.

The boy did not want to leave me. I asked him to go home, but he was terribly afraid. Then I pleaded with them to leave the small boy and do whatever they wanted with me. The boy put his hand in his pocket and brought a one thousand naira note and gave it to one of them, who let the boy go.

They took me around Pemi village in their car. I saw them burn cars, the hospital, and the church. They took drugs from the hospital, broke into shops, and

ran after some community members. It was afterward, when I returned, that I heard that they killed seven people.

### Q: Where did they take you?

**A: They took me around the Sambisa forest.**

### Q: How was life for you there?

**A: Humanly speaking**, I dreamed of so many things.

They provided food according to what they had, in my case. Even those who guarded me wondered why my case was different.

I could hear gunshots at different locations. Gun sound was like the national anthem to them. Shooting artillery is like a joke.

They kept me like a parrot in a cage, until they wanted to change the location. You can only be allowed to move freely when you become Muslim.

### Q: Did they try to force you to become a Muslim?

**A: If they had used force**, when I refused what do you think would have happened to me? But they tried several ways, they sent me different Quranic teachers to preach and tell me what the Qur'an says.

On refusal to denounce the faith, they may decide to kill or let one live. They either sell, slaughter, or shoot one. They said, that is what the Qur'an commanded them.

They tried to misinterpret what Jesus said. I could not just keep quiet. I tried to tell them what I know of the Bible. I



Bulus Yukura

thought God was encouraging me to tell them, so that God will judge them with what I told them.


### Q: Do you have an idea if a ransom was paid?

**A: Whether ransom was paid** or not is not the issue. If God did not approve my release, no amount of money could free me.


### Q: What do you have to say about your release?

**A: This is just beyond human understanding.** I don't know what to say, because this is the power of God.

I felt people praying for me. Whenever there were prayers, I felt it. It marvels me, the love that the entire world showed to me. Muslims, Christians, and others cried out for me.

I pray for the strengthening of such love among us worldwide. I think I am not worthy of such love, it is beyond my expression. Only God knows my heart. May God reward all. 

Zakariya Musa is EYN's head of media.



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**CLASSIFIEDS**

**Newly Published Reading Guide to the Book of Isaiah** Charles Thomas, two of whose great-great-grandfathers were Brethren ministers in Floyd County, Virginia, has self-published via Barnes & Noble Press a book entitled *Yeshayahu Isaiah: 30 Days with the Text in Context*. It is available for \$6.00 in paperback or ebook format from [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) and elsewhere.

**Myrtle the Orange Turtle** by Penny Burket Henry. Some years ago, a turtle kept coming to the compost pile, where it seemed to enjoy the cantaloupe that was left on the rind. Though it was not a large amount, she gobbled up what was there. Since this turtle seemed to really like this orange fruit, more cantaloupe was left on the rind for her to enjoy. Eventually, her shell became a beautiful orange color from her devouring so much cantaloupe. Hence, Myrtle the Orange Turtle. This paperback children's book is available for \$13.95 from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

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## Jesus taught inclusion

I appreciated letters by Ron Lutz and Ruth Lininger in the October 2020 issue, questioning our denomination's positions related to the LGBTQ community.

Annual Conference and our denomination as a whole have spent several years promoting unity. The word "unity" is found in the Bible in one place, Ephesians 4:3-13. While unity is certainly an important goal for our church, I suggest the word "inclusion" should be an even more important goal—even though it is not found in the Bible at all. It is, however, one of the key ministries of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapters 4 through 10, there are over a dozen stories of Jesus including people suffering from medical and social issues in his ministry. He does so in word and deed. He meets with the down and out. He eats with a tax collector in the tax collector's home. He includes all of God's people in his ministry. He also suggests we should not judge others, in Luke 6:37. Religious leaders were angry with him because of his mission of inclusiveness.

In 1983, our denomination approved a document titled "Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective." This document excludes LGBTQ persons from full involvement in our church. Brethren

have always tried to follow Jesus' teachings and actions. To follow his mission of inclusion without judgment, we need to either completely do away with the human sexuality paper (I ask, do we really need it?) or eliminate all words of exclusion in the paper's section on homosexuality. This action would allow for all LGBTQ persons to be full members of the denomination, include marriages of LGBTQ persons, and make LGBTQ persons eligible to be pastors and denominational leaders.

Making those changes would bring our church into the inclusive ministry Jesus taught so many years ago.

**Felton Daniels**  
Modesto, Calif.

An online form is now available to submit information for Turning Points. Go to [www.brethren.org/turningpoints](http://www.brethren.org/turningpoints).

Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at [dstroyeck@brethren.org](mailto:dstroyeck@brethren.org) or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published. Individuals are not listed under both Centennarians and Deaths in the same issue.

## New members

**Codorus**, Dallastown, Pa.:  
Doris Marsh, Hadley  
Marsh, Scott Naylor  
**Lancaster**, Pa.: Joe Graeff,  
Karen Graeff

## Wedding anniversaries

**Daugherty**, Timothy and  
Shirley, Codorus, Pa., 50  
**Downhour**, Richard and  
Shirley, Scottsdale, Ariz., 55  
**Fike**, J. Rogers and Elizabeth,  
Oakland, Md., 69  
**Gibble**, Marvin and Nancy,  
Seven Valleys, Pa., 60  
**Godfrey**, Mahlon and Mary  
Jane, York, Pa., 65  
**Harsh**, Arvin and Rita, Eglon,  
W.Va., 68  
**Hartranft**, Leroy and  
Kathryn, Bernville, Pa., 70  
**Oyhus**, Jon and Rebecca,  
Frederick, Md., 50  
**Sweitzer**, Samuel and Kathy,  
Codorus, Pa., 55  
**Sweitzer**, Wayne and Sharon,

York, Pa., 50  
**Wilson**, Jack and Floretta,  
Lititz, Pa., 70

## Deaths

**Adams**, Harry G., 92,  
McVeytown, Pa., Jan. 31  
**Ament**, Betty B., 91, Mount  
Joy, Pa., Feb. 10  
**Ayers**, Sarah Catharine  
Buckingham, 86, Prairie  
City, Iowa, Feb. 2  
**Bassett**, William Howard, 95,  
Lima, Ohio, Dec. 1  
**Berg**, Clarence C., Jr., 94,  
Hanover, Pa., Feb. 21  
**Black**, Roger Gilbert, 87,  
McPherson, Kan., Jan. 21  
**Bomgardner**, Betty L. Fessler,  
74, Annville, Pa., Aug. 11  
**Boose**, Raymond R., 98,  
Martinsburg, Pa., Feb. 26  
**Brant**, John S., Jr., 98,  
Dallastown, Pa., Jan. 22  
**Brown**, J. William, 95, Wynd-  
moor, Pa., April 1, 2020  
**Brubaker**, Leon R., 88,  
Myerstown, Pa., Dec. 17  
**Brungardt**, Kathy Lynn Zeiler,

68, Loveland, Colo., Feb. 5  
**Daubert**, Richard A. (Dutch),  
76, Lebanon, Pa., Dec. 21  
**DeLong**, Mary Lou, 88,  
Mansfield, Ohio, Dec. 9  
**Dietz**, Richard C., 81,  
Freeport, Ill., Feb. 7  
**Dundore**, Ruth, 89,  
Myerstown, Pa., Jan. 1  
**Early**, Jean McLennan, 94,  
Harrisonburg, Va., Feb. 20  
**Edmonds**, Catherine Marie,  
58, Maurertown, Va., Jan. 28  
**Espigh**, Robert P., 91,  
McVeytown, Pa., Jan. 28  
**Flory**, Brenda E. Teahl, 71,  
Manheim, Pa., Jan. 14  
**Flory**, Walter Ray, Jr., 72,  
Manheim, Pa., Aug. 7  
**Godfrey**, Donald E., 93,  
Shrewsbury, Pa., Sept. 18  
**Guise**, Larry S., 74, York,  
Pa., Dec. 17  
**Hall**, Mary Lou Traugh, 85,  
New Oxford, Pa., Feb. 21  
**Harshman**, Patricia Ann Fox,  
70, Mount Airy, Md., Feb. 5  
**Hartman**, Barbara Lou Taylor,  
84, Dallastown, Pa., Dec. 5  
**Hartman**, Jeanette M., 89,  
Myerstown, Pa., Sept. 18  
**Heidelberg**, Ruby Nell Boyd,  
66, Harrisburg, Pa., Feb. 18  
**Herr**, Ruth L., 71, Palmyra,  
Pa., Nov. 29  
**Hoover**, John Russell Eugene,  
95, Glenside, Pa., Sept. 1  
**Houghton**, James Edgar, Jr.,  
85, Johnstown, Pa., March 4  
**Hunn**, George Arthur, Jr.,

88, North Manchester, Ind.,  
Feb. 28  
**Kemp**, Sherry E., 69,  
Frederick, Md., March 6  
**Lose**, Eleanor Grace  
Stephens, 88, Johnstown,  
Pa., Oct. 7  
**Mack**, John E., 88,  
Greenville, Ohio, Nov. 7  
**Marshall**, Doris Jean Black,  
85, Shelocta, Pa., Dec. 18  
**McGinnis**, Eileen M. Cannon,  
85, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 15  
**Miller**, Leighton Busey, 83,  
Shepherdstown, W.Va.,  
Jan. 31  
**Miller**, Margaret J. George,  
93, Shelocta, Pa., Feb. 6  
**Ness**, Anna A. Hartman, 97,  
York, Pa., July 15  
**Roudabush**, Allen John  
(Jack), 91, Waterloo, Ind.,  
Feb. 20  
**Ruger**, Jack V., 88, Garrett,  
Ind., Jan. 14  
**Schindel**, Hugh Hammond,  
78, Hagerstown, Md.,  
Jan. 11  
**Singh**, James Sukhraj, 94,  
Modesto, Calif., Feb. 17  
**Strickler**, Duane Lee, 79,  
Falling Waters, W.Va., Feb. 23  
**Strom**, Jay, 83, Guelph,  
Ontario, Canada, Oct. 25  
**Taonus**, Roger, 81, Flint,  
Mich., Jan. 5  
**Teets**, Mildred Lorene  
Donham, 96, Aurora, W.Va.,  
Nov. 6  
**Thomas**, Jerry Allen, 73,

Greenville, Ohio, Sept. 29  
**Tomes**, Arlene Elizabeth  
Hess, 94, York, Pa., Jan. 8  
**Walthour**, Robert K., 69,  
Kittanning, Pa., March 3  
**Warvel**, Sheryle Lyn  
Brumbaugh, 60, Greenville,  
Ohio, June 11  
**Williams**, Marie E. Bostdorf,  
86, Elizabethtown, Pa.,  
Feb. 26

## Ordained

**Carter**, Rita, Atl. N. E. Dist.  
(Mechanic Grove,  
Quarryville, Pa.), Feb. 21  
**Woods**, Thomas, Jr., W.  
Marva Dist. (Living Stone,  
Cumberland, Md.), Feb. 21

## Licensed

**Funk**, Richard, W. Marva  
Dist. (Bean Settlement, Rio,  
W.Va.), Feb. 28  
**Svay**, Audriana, S/C Ind.  
Dist. (Eel River, Silver Lake,  
Ind.), Feb. 21

## Placements

**Caldwell**, Rodney, from  
pastor, Cherry Grove,  
Lanark, Ill., to pastor,  
Mount Morris, Ill., Jan. 16  
**Krouse**, Robert, from interim  
pastor, West York, York, Pa.,  
to interim pastor, Codorus,  
Dallastown, Pa., Oct. 1

## TURNINGPOINTS

# Canceled

**A**t one time, “cancel” was something that happened to a check, a flight, or a TV show. These days, it seems, it describes a whole way of life.

In just the past few months, the term “cancel culture” has been applied to issues as diverse as Dr. Seuss



WALT WILTSCHKEK

Enterprises ending some titles over insensitive imagery, calls for New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo to resign over sexual assault allegations, and even Hasbro’s rebranding of Mr. Potato Head.

Some things deserve to be canceled: racism, sexism, violence, and other forms of oppression, for example. Boycotts and protests are tools that have been used by marginalized and voiceless groups for many years. Often what is deemed “cancel culture” now, however, is merely cover for anger and righteous indignation over changes we don’t like—things that bump against deeply held beliefs and assumptions. We become “the self-appointed guardians of political purity,” as professor Loretta Ross wrote in *The New York Times* last year. And let’s be clear, it can happen on both ends of the political and theological spectrum.

We constantly need to ask ourselves: Is what’s happening actually injustice, or is it just inconvenient to my worldview? We can debate how much change should occur, or how fast, if at all, but simply slapping a “cancel” label on something (or someone) is a convenient way to avoid the challenging conversations that come with engaging different perspectives or problematic issues.

When Jesus turns over the tables of the temple-yard moneychangers, did that constitute cancel culture? Or when he challenged the Pharisees over hypocritical behavior, or when he pushed long-time boundaries to show the absurdities of narrow legalism?

Were the first Brethren guilty of this when they left a state church in Europe they felt had lost its New Testament roots? Or when they took an early stand against the practice of slavery in this country, or in practicing conscientious objection?

Were Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. and Susan B. Anthony and Desmond Tutu and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and countless others proponents of this practice long before the term was coined?


History’s reformers are often today’s feather-rufflers.

As CNN writer A.J. Willingham observed in a recent analysis piece, much of what is labeled “cancel culture” is just the free market and public opinion at work as society and understandings change, and quite often it’s holding people accountable for things that are illegal, immoral, or unjust.

As followers of Christ, we always extend grace, but we also require accountability. The 2008 Annual Conference Ethics in Ministry Relations paper, for instance, says those called to ministerial leadership are “to be accountable to one another in the body of Christ,” citing Colossians 3:12-13 and 1 Peter 5:2-4. It later continues: “Through any proceedings designed to deal with unethical behavior, we must exercise compassion as well as judgment,” before adding, “Ethical misconduct requires serious response.”

On the one hand, we are called to resist jumping to conclusions and automatically questioning the motivations of others without evidence. In an email interview with Vox last year, corporate diversity and inclusion consultant Aaron Rose told reporter Aja Romano that instead of simply “blaming and shaming” on social media or elsewhere the goal should be “to create more stories of transformation rather than stories of punishment and excommunication.” We call out bad behavior, but we don’t let rage define us.

On the other hand, we are also called to act when it is clear or likely that a wrong is occurring. Preserving the status quo merely to make life more comfortable or to maintain a façade of stability is never acceptable. When engagement doesn’t bring transformation, as Jesus famously outlines in Matthew 18, then we treat those with whom we disagree as we would “a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Is that “canceling”? Perhaps. But then we remember, too, how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors and various others—always holding the door open for change. 

OFTEN WHAT IS DEEMED “CANCEL CULTURE” NOW, HOWEVER, IS MERELY COVER FOR ANGER AND RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION OVER CHANGES WE DON’T LIKE — THINGS THAT BUMP AGAINST DEEPLY HELD BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS.

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