

# MESSENGER

DECEMBER 2020 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



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

*—John 1:5*

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

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# Like trees planted by streams of water

**W**hen Brethren Press began a fundraising effort in the fall, one of the many beautiful notes received said this: “Thank you for asking.”

Those simple words communicated so much: “Giving is a privilege, not an obligation.” “I’m glad to know where my gifts can make a difference.” “Thank you for telling me about your need.”



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

Henri Nouwen has said, “When those with money and those who need money share a mission, we see a central sign of new life in the Spirit of Christ.”

That’s an inspiring way to look at financial need, which sometimes can feel like failure.

In the midst of this difficult year, I was surprised to learn that a number of my sister publishing houses in other denominations have been fundraising for years; some of them have full-time staffs to raise the money needed to carry out their publishing mission.

Like Brethren Press, they are passionate about that mission—to feed the church with the daily manna of the Word

of God. Whether the denomination is very large or as small as ours, its members need that sustenance. I heard a publishing colleague speak eloquently about her reason for shifting from the editorial department to fundraising; now I know that it’s her house that published those words by Henri Nouwen.

“Our invitation is clear and confident,” says Nouwen, “because we trust that our vision and mission are like ‘trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither’ (Psalm 1:3).” What a refreshing image in a year of drought.

That means, “whether we are asking for money or giving money we are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration,” says Nouwen.

And so I invite you to collaborate with Brethren Press by investing in resources that grow faith. You are planting today for a harvest in the future, perhaps beyond our own lives. Did those who began the Brethren Publishing House in 1897 imagine us today? Perhaps they did.

**A generous donor has offered to match all gifts through the end of the year, up to \$25,000. You may give online to Brethren Press at [www.brethren.org/givebp](http://www.brethren.org/givebp). Or send a check to Brethren Press at 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 (write “gift” in the memo line). The staff of Brethren Press thank you. And so does the future Church of the Brethren.**

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**“For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given, and  
the government will be  
on his shoulders.”**

—Isaiah 9:6a, NIV

## A BRETHREN CHRISTMAS

*This story is excerpted from Frank Ramirez’s book *The Meanest Man in Patrick County* (Brethren Press, 2004). It paints a picture of the first Brethren baptisms in the US, which occurred on Dec. 25, 1723, near Philadelphia.*

**T**he group walked carefully down the little roads that made up Germantown, until soon they were beyond the buildings and nearing Wissahickon Creek. At the water’s edge, or rather at the edge of the ice, all was still, except for the flutter of a few small birds watching the people and hopping from branch to branch.

At a signal from Peter Becker, the six who were to be baptized knelt down, and he laid his hands on them one by one and prayed aloud. As they all shivered together and huddled close for warmth, he then began to crack the ice with a long stick.

The sound of rushing water greeted them. “See, even in the cold of winter, God’s Spirit is bright and alive,” Peter said.

Anna (Gumre) watched Peter take a very deep breath and shudder as he stepped into the water. After that he did not hesitate, but walked until the water reached his waist. Quickly, one by one, Martin Urner and his wife, Catherine, and Frederick Lang and John Mayle and Henry Landis with his wife took

their turn in the stream while the others on the shore sang Alexander Mack’s hymn, “Count Well the Cost.”

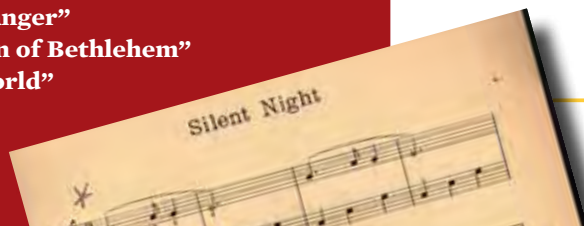
As quickly as he could, Peter asked the six their baptismal questions and then quickly dunked them three times beneath the water. They sputtered and spluttered in turn, struggling to catch their breath as they were helped to their feet. . . . It occurred to Anna as she watched that there was something old about this, like the first Christians who were baptized, and something new, for it was the first Brethren baptism in America—and not illegal!



## AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING

*Southern Living* magazine in 2018 ranked these as the top 10 Christmas carols. How do they compare with your favorites?

- “Silent Night”
- “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”
- “O Come All Ye Faithful”
- “O Holy Night”
- “What Child Is This?”
- “We Three Kings”
- “The First Noel”
- “Away in a Manger”
- “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
- “Joy to the World”



**“Christmas isn’t just a day; it’s a frame of mind.”**

— *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947 version)

**“‘Maybe Christmas,’ he thought, ‘doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more.’”** — *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

**“Seeing is believing, but sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can’t see.”** — *The Polar Express*

**“That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”** — *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (spoken by Linus after reciting sections of Luke 2)



Sammy Deacon



Sammy Deacon

## Beard shaving for disaster relief

**D**oug Campbell, a disaster project leader from South Central Indiana District, had the idea for a beard-shaving fundraiser for Brethren Disaster Ministries while working on a project site in Ohio.

He took bids from the volunteers at the site that week, who were from Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren, as well as others from Mid-Atlantic District. Bids were

made for cutting off portions of Campbell's lengthy "COVID beard." When the idea was shared with Campbell's wife, Alice, she said she would match all donations.

The volunteers cut and shaved Campbell's beard for a total of \$1,100 in donations to the Emergency Disaster Fund. When he had the idea, he hoped to raise around \$75, and never thought it would be so much! —Jenn Dorsch-Messler

*Before and after pictures of Doug Campbell, who offered his "COVID beard" as a fundraiser for Brethren Disaster Ministries.*

## 'Connection circles' help children with pandemic

**D**ealing with feelings" was the focus of the Rowan Elementary School Community Connection Circles offered via Zoom for children at the school in San Diego, Calif., over five weeks this past summer. The voluntary sessions were a free resource to deal with difficult feelings during stay-at-home orders in southern California. They featured music by Linda K. Williams, an educator, peace activist, and member of San Diego Church of the Brethren.

The effort was a collaboration with the school's principal and counselor and the San Diego Trauma-Informed Guide Team (ACEsConnection.com), which provided a \$500 grant. Williams gives credit to pastor Sara Haldeman-Scarr for the idea of using the grant for Zoom sessions with children, and credits Brianda Vargas and Louise Mettler of cOMmmunity Yoga and Mindfulness for putting the plan together. Vargas and Mettler have led community building restorative circles and have done mindfulness work with children.

Although just a handful of students participated, Williams felt the online sessions were valuable for all concerned. "Even if we had only had one precious child of God participate and be blessed by the circles, it would have still been well worth the time and effort," she said.

The sentiment was shared by principal Nicole Weber, who expressed her gratitude for the program. In an email to Williams, Weber emphasized the benefit of a "bridge" for students facing the difficult shift from school to a summer break with few positive connections available outside of the home.

The children who attended agreed. "I loved them," said one

during a feedback session.

The Zoom "circles" encouraged children to identify and respect their feelings and express them in a wide variety of ways: talking, writing, drawing, dancing, singing, playing instruments, and listening to music. They also emphasized the benefits of exercise, relaxation, and "green time" spent outdoors or with plants and animals.

Williams has been a regular volunteer at Rowan Elementary for the past 10 years, doing literacy assessments, tutoring, teaching guitar lessons, and supporting the school's Restorative Practices/Restorative Justice activities. She attended Rowan Elementary herself, "graduating" from the school in 1963.

Rowan Elementary is located close to the church and has many connections with the congregation. The church, with its five-acre campus, is the school's official disaster evacuation site. Pre-pandemic, Rowan students made regular walking field trips to the Peace Resource Center, located in the Friends Center building on the church campus.

Williams put much time and energy into the online "circles." The music came from her albums of children's songs called "Caring and Capable Kids" and "Caring and Sharing" (available on YouTube, Amazon, and elsewhere, and available for free download from [www.betterworld-resources.com](http://www.betterworld-resources.com)).

Now that the framework is in place for Community Connection Circles for elementary students, Williams is eager to share it. "The plan is to use it more widely to benefit as many others as possible in both English and Spanish." —Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

## ULV president joins Hague Institute panel

**D**evorah Lieberman, president of the University of La Verne, Calif., has been appointed to the honorary senior advisory panel of the Hague Institute for Global Justice. The institute is an independent, non-profit organization based in the Netherlands that aims to shape discourse and bridge gaps between research, policy, and practice on global issues at the critical intersection of peace, security, and justice.

Lieberman's appointment "extends ongoing collaboration between the university and the institute," said a release from the university. "In November 2019, Lady Sohair A. Salam Saber, president of the Hague Institute, spoke at the launch of the university's Ludwick Center for Spirituality, Cultural Understanding, and Community Engagement.

"As a member of the senior advisory panel, Lieberman will collaborate with distinguished former leaders from around the world, including ambassadors, religious leaders, and politicians."



## Bike & Hike—social distancing edition

**C**OBYS Family Services successfully held a modified version of its annual Bike & Hike fundraiser on Sept. 13, with hosting from Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. In the midst of a pandemic, with an altered format to conform with group gathering guidelines, more than \$135,000 was donated and pledged—the second highest amount in the 24-year history of the event.

A huge boost toward the total came from 23 corporate and supporting business sponsors. Participants adapted to take part in one of three ways: "On Their Own" before the event; on the modified "Day Of" event; or by sponsoring executive director Mark Cunningham, who raised over \$25,000. He exceeded the goal of covering 40 miles, one for every year of COBYS' existence serving the community, the week before the event.

Said Cunningham: "We are overwhelmed and humbled by the generous support for the Bike & Hike this year, especially during these uncertain times. The funds raised go a long way to helping COBYS continue to provide compassionate care beyond basic services to children and families at risk in our community."

COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults, providing a range of services from foster care to adoption to family life education and counseling. COBYS is affiliated with the Church of the Brethren's Atlantic Northeast District. —Doug May

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.

# writings

# Good ~~tidings~~

# of great joy



A fresh look at the Christmas story

by Walt Wiltschek

## GABRIEL

*[Gabriel enters, stands inside the doorway, leaning on top of cutaway door.]*

*Did you ever have a dream like that? One that was so real that you could swear it actually happened? Sometimes a dream like that is because of worry. It's the last thing you were thinking about right before you went to bed. Sometimes, a dream like that is because of diet. It's the last thing you ATE right before you went to bed. But sometimes, in the middle of that crazy soup is a crumb of something. A hint toward a solution, a nudge toward a path. Sometimes, if you listen hard enough, you can even hear the voice of God.*

—from Scene Four to Scene Five transition,  
following Joseph's dream

**DoveTale began as a dream of sorts**, part of a vision by Mennonite actors Ted Swartz and Lee Eshleman to dig deep inside the scriptures and see them in a fresh way. They would use a comedic but very theologically perceptive lens to peel away people's preconceptions and explore the very relatable personalities within the well-worn stories of faith.

They had portrayed Jesus' disciples and poked around the Old Testament. And then one year in the mid-1990s Swartz was leading a class at Community Mennonite Church in his home of Harrisonburg, Va., during Advent. Over the course of five Sundays, they explored the Christmas story in all its unexpected angles, collaborating to create a piece they eventually performed.

That effort provided a spark the following year, as Swartz and Eshleman connected at Eastern Mennonite University with a young theater professor named Ingrid De Sanctis. The three had been acquainted before that, but they hadn't ever worked together. The idea of developing a unique, full-scale play about the Christmas story, though, was irresistible.

"We wanted to illuminate the humanity of the story," says De Sanctis, now an associate professor of playwriting at James Madison University in Harrisonburg. "God has a terrific sense of humor, and the Bible is just full of hilarious stories. God's going to pick this girl and this guy to do this thing? It's just astonishing, but we're so used to it we often don't see it."

And so they wrote. They divided up tasks, each worked on various parts, and periodically brought them back together. Sometimes ideas collided and patience frayed, but they continued to find a significant synergy and artistic inspiration.

"I was still unsure of myself as a writer at that point," Swartz says. "But sometimes the process is so invigorating



and worthwhile. It makes it better.”

They eventually tried out a script before some test audiences, tinkered with some pieces of it, and added a scene with Elizabeth and Zechariah. Ultimately *DoveTale: How the First Christmas Finally Came Together* was born.

Photos courtesy of Ted Swartz



**MARY** *Reservations, I said! We should be sure we have a reservation. But NO! You said, we don't NEED reservations. Reservations are for people who don't trust in God. There will be room.*

**JOSEPH** *Okay, okay. I should have made reservations.*

**MARY** *A map, I said. Couldn't we bring a map? But, no, you'd rather wander around half of Judea than depend upon something so insulting as a map.*

**JOSEPH** *Okay, you're right. We should have made reservations and we should have had a map!*

—from Scene Six

The show went on the road. Beginning with a performance at Community Mennonite Church, *DoveTale* soon found its way across the country each Christmas season: on campuses, in congregations (including many in the Church of the Brethren), and at other events—including a run of several years at the Blue Gate Theatre in Shipshewana, Ind., in the early 2000s.

Swartz recalled a moment at Shipshewana when Eshleman—in one of the last shows they did together before Eshleman's untimely death in 2007—appears as Gabriel to make the grand proclamation to Mary accompanied by the blast of a trumpet. Swartz circled behind the audience to

blow a rather sorry-sounding warble, prompting laughter as Gabriel reacts.

“I think it's some of Lee's best work, that first scene,” Swartz says. “I think in this show he learned to react even more so to truth and the emotion that comes from a deep well.”

De Sanctis says being on tour “was just marvelous,” full of the wacky stories and funny incidents that come with any group road trip, sometimes doing performances amid Santa Claus decorations or cotton ball “snow” in Florida.

Swartz estimates they performed the show at least 100 times over the course of a decade.

“It was a delight to do every year,” Swartz says, “to write it and hear it and then see it hit. Not every show goes well—we had some real clunkers—but we had so many magical moments and just plain fun. We had people say it doesn't feel like Christmas until we see *DoveTale*.”

**GABRIEL** *BEHOLD!! I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY!!*

**MAGGIE** *Great sheep scab and lamb livers, it's an ANGEL!! I am sore afraid!!*

**EGAN** *What did you say?*

**MAGGIE** *I said I am sore afraid.*

**GABRIEL** *For unto you. . .*

**EGAN** *What do ya mean you are “sore afraid”? Ya don't know what you're saying. You can be sore and you can be afraid but you CAN'T be sore afraid.*

**MAGGIE** *Well, I can, too, and I am sore afraid.*

**EGAN** *You're making no sense at all.*

—from Scene Eight, imagining Gabriel's proclamation to two rather Irish-sounding shepherds





Re-imagining and taking a humorous look at one of Christendom's most treasured stories could be a daunting task. How do you illuminate rather than infuriate?

"Lee and I rolled toward the comedic," Swartz says. "That was our main impulse to do these kinds of stories—to poke holes in the perception. I know we got more pushback from *DoveTale* than any other show we did. It's so sacred to people. Some of the strongest pushback came from people who don't even go to church. They said, 'Don't mess with it.'"

They did adjust and soften some things over the years, responding to feedback they received from audiences, but at the heart the irreverent reverence endured.

Swartz says he is often reminded of a story that the late religious author Phyllis Tickle would tell: She was "working with a group of older women on a Bible study in the basement of a church somewhere, and a young man was working nearby in the kitchen. They were talking about the Christmas season and the story itself. After everyone left he came up to her and said, 'Is that story true?' And she said, 'A lot of people think so.' 'If it isn't, it should be,' the young man replied. 'It's such a good story.'"

#### LEARN MORE

Performance packs for congregations and other groups to put on a show of *DoveTale* are available at the website for Ted & Company TheatreWorks—Ted Swartz's production company. Visit [tedandcompany.com/store](http://tedandcompany.com/store).

Donations to assist Ted & Company during this time when most live performances are not possible due to COVID-19 can be made through the nonprofit Center for Art, Humor & Soul. Visit [arthumorsoul.com/donate](http://arthumorsoul.com/donate). Choose "Other" under "Designation," and in the comments area write "for Ted & Co."

In the same way, he says, *DoveTale* might not be "exactly the way it went in your mind, but it sure could be. It opens up a sense of wonder. That's the power of story, and it's an amazing story. One of my favorite moments in the whole biblical story is that this is obviously a seminal moment in the arc of the Bible, and the first people who get to hear it are the shepherds. That's just so powerful. And that never gets old for me. It turns it all upside-down."

And, De Sanctis says, the very fact that people *do* know the story so well adds to the experiences for audiences.

"We had these jewels of these lines for people who really knew the story," she says. "Of all the stories in the Bible, a lot of people know the details of the Christmas story—even people who aren't Christians. It's an insider's show. It's new—but remember! People really enjoy a play like that. You surprise them, and you respect them. We know you know it, so we're going to give you jewels throughout."

Mary, for example, says in one scene that she's "pondering." Gabriel misspeaks and calls Mary the "highly flavored one." Zechariah can't talk on the phone. Joseph makes regular carpentry references. And they're all very, very human.

De Sanctis says she always hoped that the play would "awaken Christmas in (the audience) in a new way—deeper, richer, revealing the humanity of our whole faith. If we see ourselves in a character on stage, I always feel that's the thing."

"Our intention as actors and writers was that you still see the charm of this couple, but they're so far in over their heads," she says. "I had so much love for the characters—for their courage, so human it was unbelievable. They're thinking, 'You're at the wrong house, God!' And how many times in my life have I said that? The storytelling is about Mary being the mother of God, but also about God's calling in our own lives."

## GABRIEL

*Oh, there was one other voice. There was this little baby, This wrinkled, tiny-fisted little boy. And the kid could cry. He cried like his lungs were forever. He cried like someone who just fell off a porch swing onto hard earth. But it was a beautiful night. A holy night. All nights in God's universe are.*

—from Scene Nine



Swartz and De Sanctis did the show for two more seasons after Eshleman's death, with Trent Wagler stepping into the big shoes of Gabriel. They felt they needed that psychologically to recover after the trauma of losing a close friend. And then they brought it to a close more than a decade ago.

Swartz's company still licenses the rights to *DoveTale*, and congregations and other groups will sometimes do performances. Eastern Mennonite University staged a production with younger actors in December 2017 to mark the 20th anniversary of the show's debut, and Swartz and De Sanctis did a cameo as Elizabeth and Zechariah rather than their usual starring roles.


But while they no longer reprise the roles of Mary and Joseph on the stage, the production still holds magic for them.

Swartz, who grew up near Philadelphia, confesses that he had "been a bit of a curmudgeon about Christmas for many years." His family owned a meat market where he worked, and the hardest, busiest time of the year was around the Christmas season.

"That's what it meant to me—long hours," Swartz says. "It was good for business, but please don't tell me anything about roasting chestnuts!" But later, in doing *DoveTale*, he says, "We got to tell something in a way that gave us great joy, and being on the road was such a hoot. This kind of saved Christmas for me."

De Sanctis, meanwhile, cherished the opportunity to bring Mary to life for people, helping to see her as a real woman and showing this "love story" between Mary and Joseph in the midst of it all.

"Doing this show and traveling with those guys, it changed the way I looked at Christmas for the rest of my life," she says. "It's really holy. . . . I was so in touch with Christmas those 10 years in a very different way."

"It was just a special season of our lives." 

*"In so many paintings (Mary and Joseph) look so serene, topped off with a halo. I wish I could be that serene after giving birth. I've yet to give birth but from what I hear, natural childbirth is uncomfortable. I mean, just a bit. And that halo that reminds me of the television show Touched by an Angel. . . . But something made us all want to find ourselves in the stories of the Bible. To find the humanity of the characters. And that is what we did. We started to ask a lot of questions."*

—co-author Ingrid De Sanctis, writing about "The Back Story" of how they created the play for the original production's script book

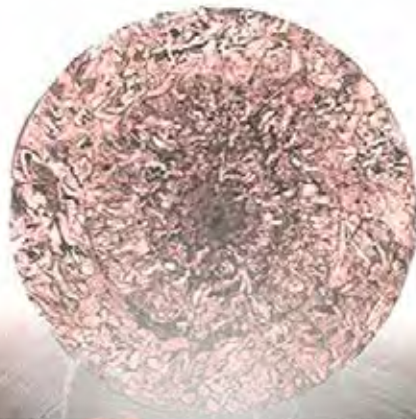
**MARY** *Do you think we can do this?*

**JOSEPH** *Yes, Mary, we can.*

**GABRIEL** *Yes. You can.*

—from Scene Ten, in the barn

**NOTE:** As a way to bring some joy to the Christmas season in this year of pandemic, Ted Swartz and Ingrid De Sanctis plan to do a special online reading of *DoveTale*. Watch [tedandcompany.com](http://tedandcompany.com) for announcements and details.



# THE LIGHT OF HOPE RETURNING

by Shawn Kirchner

*It came a floweret bright,  
amid the cold of winter  
when half-spent was the night.*

**W**hat beautiful words from “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming,” one of our oldest carols, and my sister’s favorite. And what a beautiful image for the Christchild—a “floweret bright,” miraculous in the middle of winter—a sign of hope when hope seems out of the question.

Throughout scripture there is an analogous metaphor to the rose in winter: a child born to a woman of great age. In the Old Testament there is Sarah, who laughs at the thought. In the New Testament there is Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, whose husband—aghast at the possibility—is struck dumb by the Lord. Yet in both cases a child is born when a newborn child is out of the question.

A third “woman of great age” is Anna the Prophetess, who appears at the very end of Luke’s nativity narrative. We find her nearby as Mary and Joseph bring their newborn to the Temple to be dedicated. Scripture records none of her words, but we know that she lifts her voice in praise and thanks, her joy overflowing to touch all those around. We are told she was widowed at a young age, perhaps before she could raise a family of her own, yet for many years, she has abided in the Temple night and day, waiting for the promised Messiah. And in her old age—84!—the promised Child of hope comes.

For the last year I have “journeyed” closely with Anna, writing *The Light of Hope Returning*, a concert-length Christmas work for women’s choir. As I began to write in the fall of 2019, I imagined a matriarch figure who would anchor the work as a soloist. Because we have been in such tumultuous and contentious times, I wanted to let the audience lean on the strength of an old woman who had “seen it all,” and lived to tell about it. I imagined her welcoming each one to her fireside, sitting with them as they told of their troubles. I gradually realized my matriarch could be Anna, someone who had lost—but regained—her hope. Someone with deep patience and faith who could sit with others until their own “light of hope” returned.

A moment of serendipity soon reinforced the “Anna” connection with my project. On a lark, I reached out to a favorite childhood author, Susan Cooper, knowing her output included some Christmas writings. Famous for her award-winning *The Dark Is Rising* series, Cooper is still busily creating in her elderhood. To my amazement and delight, she wrote back, offering several Christmas lyrics. One contained a line that became the perfect title: “The light of hope returning.” Another, called “Remember,” was from the perspective of an old woman looking back through many years to an earlier time of joy. Here I was, receiving Anna-esque material from another wise, old woman. And to top it all off, Cooper was even 84—Anna’s age—as we made our connection.

Further journeying with Anna was in store: the night that COVID-19 quarantine began for us in California, I offered a


vesper hymn improvisation on the piano to my Facebook community. I knew people were anxious, and I felt that hymns would bring them a “blessed assurance.” I continued to offer hymns for the next 60 days and, as I reflected on the ongoing process, I thought of Anna as I remained at home, night and day. I was learning that we must nurture what we need, and that we must cultivate what is worth keeping. I also learned that, while tending the hymns for others, I was being tended by the hymns myself—just as the keeper of the fire is blessed to find their own spirit kindled by the fire.

I love to number Anna among our “great cloud of witnesses” in the epic 2,000-year-old story of our faith. In her own life she knew great loss, but she sought and found refuge in the creator, “for whom nothing is impossible.” I like to think that Anna is also symbol of the soul, the part of us that never leaves the Temple, but abides in God’s presence, night and day.

And surely there are “great souls,” those saints among us in our time, such as my Grandma Lois, whose outward activity was greatly diminished in her old age. Yet she, like Anna, abided in prayer and praise, and her tiny frame belied her iron-strong anchoring presence. How many times in her later years were we filled to overflowing on special visits with her as she sat in her “prayer chair,” her many devotional books resting on its wide arms.

In the opening carol of *The Light of Hope Returning*, Anna asks each audience member how they are, truly:

*“How have you come this night?  
Robed in shadow, or robed in light?  
Welcome here, howe’er you be—  
Won’t you sit a while with me?”*

What can we learn this year, and who can we become—drawing close to this matriarch of our faith, this godmother of our Lord, as we wait for our “floweret bright” to appear again? Even if hope seems out of the question, let’s sit with her a while, and see. 

Shawn Kirchner is a composer and professional choral singer, and serves on the music staff at La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren. His denominational music leadership includes Annual Conferences in 2003 and 2016 and National Youth Conferences in 1998, 2002, and 2006.



**T**his year on **December 21**, the winter solstice, a ground-breaking virtual choir performance of my Christmas choral work *The Light of Hope Returning* will stream live at 8 p.m. Central Time (see [thelightofhopereturning.com](http://thelightofhopereturning.com) or Newsline).

This work has a special tie-in with the Church of the Brethren: Two carols—a bluegrass-style “Brightest and Best,” and a gospel “Lo, How a Rose”—that I first arranged for our denomination’s 2004 CBS Christmas Eve special “Enter the Light of Life” are featured afresh.

This project—which would never have come to be without the pandemic!—combines an international team of choirs, instrumentalists, writers, and visual artist Kevork Mourad. Mourad, an Armenian artist living in New York, has built his reputation through unique live drawing and animation collaborations with classical music ensembles worldwide.

Newbery Medal-winning author Susan Cooper is represented in several lyrics and a dramatic reading. Rounding out the roster are Canadian soloist Allison Girvan with her gossamer voice, principal players from the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, the Bay Area women’s choir WomenSing and Elektra Women’s Choir of Vancouver, B.C.

I am thrilled to play the piano for the project, and to try my hand at a new instrument: hammered dulcimer. I warmly invite you to enjoy this Christmas special, and to find new light on the darkest day of the year. —**Shawn Kirchner**

ADVENT IS A TIME FOR HEIGHTENED ANTICIPATION. IT IS A TIME TO REMAIN ALERT TO THE REALITIES OF THIS LESS-THAN-PERFECT WORLD AND AWAKEN TO NEW POSSIBILITIES.

# Arise and shine

by Tom Wagner

I often hear our roosters crowing while I'm getting ready for work. Mind you, this is around 4 o'clock in the morning. Popular culture has commonly portrayed roosters crowing at sunrise. In my experience, however, their boisterous morning song begins long before daylight.

I've wondered if they detect some nearly unperceivable changes in the air or light as dawn approaches, or if they rely on some form of intuition. Poultry experts suggest it is closer to my second guess. Like many birds, their circadian rhythms help them anticipate sunrise. Their cry announces the arrival of a new day. It is time to wake up! Arise and shine!

The wakeup call is one of the themes that compose the prophetic voice in scripture. It's common to think of biblical prophecy primarily as prediction. That perspective is especially prominent in the way the Gospel writers apply quotes from the Hebrew prophets to the life and ministry of Jesus.

There is much truth to that approach, but we need to be careful not to ignore the original context of these passages. Overall, scripture speaks in the rhythm of promise and fulfillment to encourage faith in the present and the future. While hope is always part of the story, it requires facing unpleasant truths about our society and ourselves.

Prophecy in this light is less about forecasting and more about truth-telling. The wakeup call comes as warning: If we remain on this path, danger lies ahead. The prophetic voice speaks from a position between the world as it is and as it should be and can be. It offers a clear-eyed account of the past and present from a spiritual perspective.

Those insights are often at odds with the official proclamations of powerful institutions in our society—public, private, or even faith-based. However, the message is not only addressed to people in positions of concentrated political and

economic power. In the context of a pluralist democratic society, their words are addressed to any and all of us who have agency to make choices in our collective and individual lives.

Yes, hope remains even in the midst of the direst consequences of our worst choices. However, hope does not instantly dispel the gloomy circumstances. We will live with the scars of our scratches and scrapes. Prophetic hope simply points us in the right direction—a way to crawl out of the pit. This new direction can lead us to a more faithful, just, and loving society.

Advent is a time for heightened anticipation. It is a time to remain alert to the realities of this less-than-perfect world and awaken to new possibilities. John the Baptist issues a wakeup call. It's not enough to be "woke." We have to get out of bed and get to work—"Prepare the way of the Lord."

Part of John's preparatory work was to question the motives of those who presented themselves for baptism. While Matthew's account (3:1-12, NKJV) quotes John's basic message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," Luke 3:1-20 gives three concrete examples of what repentance—changing direction—should look like. His instruction in each case was to live honestly and justly with each other. John was well aware that his ministry was merely a prelude to something greater. While John's baptism intended to purify those who came to him, Jesus would empower them—set them on fire, kindle God's love in their hearts—with the Holy Spirit.

As we ponder the meaning of "God with us" in this season, let us consider how each of us can in turn incarnate the love of God in this world. That would truly be the beginning of a new day. ❧

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren and serves Muskegon (Mich.) Cooperative Churches as clerk and archivist.

# Find new ways to celebrate Christmas

by Frances Townsend



**O**h, you COVID! You have a lot to answer for.

We have lost so much, especially those who have gotten sick and those who have lost loved ones. We also regret all of the now-canceled events that give us joy, not the least our Christmas activities.

I have participated in church Christmas festivities my whole life, but the depth of their meaning to the community became apparent my first year as a solo pastor at Root River Church of the Brethren in Minnesota. On Christmas Eve, the temperature was 15 below zero, with icy roads, so I called the church board chair to discuss how to cancel the evening worship service. “We can’t do that!” I heard. Indeed, the little church filled with people that night, the largest attendance of the year. Christmas Eve was homecoming, with extended families coming from a distance to celebrate together.


Here at the Onekama church in Michigan, the Christmas Eve service also is heavily attended. Besides being a time of reunion of extended families, people from the community come to that service once a year.

But with the pandemic, we will lose that Christmas Eve celebration. How can we keep connecting our people and how can we help the rest of the community celebrate Christmas?

This question came up when the Onekama community realized it is going to miss the annual Women’s Christmas Tea this year. Since the 1970s, the women of the church have spent months every year making it happen. A women’s choir that includes friends from outside the church prepares several pieces to perform. A committee goes to great lengths to decorate the church basement. Another committee prepares the treats. Last year, they spent weeks collecting enough

matching china tea services for 4 to set 25 tables, with lace tablecloths and tiered servers for tiny cakes. The men of the church suited up in white shirts and dark vests to serve. For the Victorian theme in 2019, we performed an original play set in 1888 with Miss Jane Addams, the social reformer, coming to town and shaking up society, recalling the ideals of the Gospels. It was ambitious enough that we had to recruit a couple of actors from other churches to help. Every year, everything comes together for just one lovely night, shared with neighbors and friends.

One of our neighborhood friends was saddened by our decision to cancel the tea, so much so that she said, “Wait. I have an idea.” The annual Christmas tea can shift to Zoom! It would be BYOT, “bring your own tea,” but it can include music and scripture and we can create a play that happens between participants in the midst of a Zoom meeting. It needs to be engaging and funny and yet carry a spiritual message, like all the original plays we have done in previous years.

So much has changed or been lost, but Dec. 25 will come and go just the same. It may take more work, creativity, and some altered traditions, but we will keep finding new ways to celebrate Christmas together. 

Frances Townsend is a pastor in Michigan serving Onekama Church of the Brethren and Marilla Church of the Brethren.

IT MAY TAKE MORE WORK, CREATIVITY, AND SOME ALTERED TRADITIONS, BUT WE WILL KEEP FINDING NEW WAYS TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS TOGETHER.



# THE USES OF ANGER

by Ken Gible

**T**he title of this piece raises an important question.

Isn't anger something Christians should avoid?

It's certainly true that anger has led to all manner of unhappy things—from hurtful words to physical violence. It is also true that one of the better known sayings of Jesus is this: "If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:22a).

This statement from the Sermon on the Mount is part of Jesus' teaching about the law. He prefaces it by saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill." In other words, Jesus intended his teachings to

enlarge, extend, and complete the ancient laws that the Jews traced back to Moses.

In what sense did Jesus do that? He did it by dealing not simply with human actions, but also with the thoughts and motives that led to those actions. Jesus said that if you live by the letter of God's law, but violate the spirit of it, you've missed the boat.

With this in mind, we can see what Jesus is driving at in that verse about anger. First he says, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'" Then he adds, "If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be lia-

ble to judgment." God looks into the human heart.

So Jesus isn't really talking about anger here so much as he's talking about the murderous possibilities we all have inside us. It is possible, after all, to be angry at something or someone without wishing harm to anyone. Jesus does not condemn anger itself, but rather the kind of anger that leads to hurtful intentions. It follows that when I "nurse" my anger, keep feeding it and taking a perverse pleasure in it, then I am well on the way to the kind of murderous attitude Jesus warned against.

It's also good to remember that Jesus himself got angry. We have



## JESUS TURNED HIS ANGER AGAINST WRONG. WHEN HE SAW PEOPLE BEING VICTIMIZED BY EVIL OF ANY KIND, WHEN HE SAW GOD'S WILL BEING THWARTED, JESUS GOT ANGRY, AND HE ACTED.

ample evidence of that in the Gospels. Probably the most dramatic example was his driving out the money changers in the Temple. I once heard a sermon in which the preacher said that Jesus threw out the money changers without getting angry. Sorry, but I can't buy that.

Injustice and hypocrisy made Jesus angry, angry enough to do something about it. You won't find more scathing language anywhere in the Bible than in the 23rd chapter of Matthew, where Jesus lit into the scribes and the Pharisees. "Blind guides," he called them. "You are white-washed tombs" full of bones and rotting corpses. He called them snakes fit for hell. It's hard to believe Jesus said all that without getting angry. No indeed; he was mad, mad as ... well "mad as hell" doesn't quite fit, I suppose, so how about "mad as heaven"? That is, he expressed divine anger, and there's lots of evidence of divine anger throughout the Scriptures.

What's more, there is a verse that actually tells Christians they *should* get angry. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul the apostle urges his Christian friends to put into practice the faith that is in them. "Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Then come these words: "Be angry but do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

That is, it's okay to get angry. In fact, you can't be human without getting angry. It's the way God made us. To deny anger, to pretend you aren't angry when you really are, is to thumb your nose at the wisdom and goodness of God's creation.

I think we Brethren have a special need to hear this permission to be angry. Our religious tradition has placed high

value on reconciliation and peace. If you are taught not to fight, then what do you do with anger when it inevitably comes along? Some of us have answered that question by trying not to feel anger. We may deny it, push it away, tell ourselves it's wrong to be angry.

What happens, of course, is that anger denied and repressed does not just evaporate. It goes underground, and it can emerge in destructive ways. Sometimes anger that is not acknowledged goes so far underground that it causes physical or emotional illness. Or it can cut us off from being able to express other emotions. Putting a lid on negative feelings can produce the unhappy result of keeping the lid on positive feelings as well.

So let's take seriously the first part of Paul's advice: "Be angry." But we need to take just as seriously the second part of that advice, "but do not sin." Anger can boil over and get us into all kinds of trouble. Whenever anger leads me to do or say hurtful things to another or to myself, I am sinning. It's all right and it may even be helpful for me to say to someone, "I'm angry with you." But if I say or imply that you are a terrible individual or if I reject you as a person or as a member of my family or my community, then I am sinning. Anger leads to sin when we allow it to inflict pain, to cause suffering.


Time now to return to how we began and ask: what are the uses of anger? We've seen that anger is itself not bad, and we've seen that anger can lead us into sin, but what value does anger have? Here again, the example of Jesus is helpful. Jesus turned his anger against wrong. When he saw people being victimized by evil of any kind, when he saw God's will being thwarted, Jesus got

angry, and he acted. Anger serves a useful purpose when it leads us to life-giving action.

There are many things we should be angry about. The list these days can be lengthy. My list starts with mass incarceration, economic inequality, racial injustice, policies that contribute to climate change, billions spent for military purposes that could be used to make life better for the disadvantaged. You probably have a list of your own.

So, when the situation demands, be angry. That can be a good thing. But only if you take action. You can volunteer your energy, your time, and your money to support organizations that act for positive change. You can contact your local, state, and national representatives to register your concerns. Use your anger to make a positive difference in your community, your world.

What about those times when our anger serves no useful purpose, when it leads us into sinning against others or against ourselves? What then?

Well, that's where the good news of the gospel comes in. The grace of God reaches out to us to forgive and to restore. Sometimes we will need to ask those whom we have sinned against to forgive us. Sometimes we will need to forgive ourselves. But one thing is certain: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Through the power of God, we can transform our anger into compassion and energy to work for justice, mercy, and peace. 

Ken Gible is a writer and retired Church of the Brethren pastor living in Camp Hill, Pa.

# Lost and found

by Wendy McFadden


**W**hat a year. As all the usual ways of worshiping, learning, meeting, working, celebrating, living, and dying have had to be reimagined, so much has been lost. There have been months of hardship and grieving, and the way forward is not clear.

But the resilience has also been remarkable. We have made the path by walking. Here are a baker's dozen ways the Church of the Brethren has

persevered, all with the involvement of a vast array of people—staff, volunteers, participants. Thousands of hours of screen time have been logged in worshiping and working, learning and leading.

There's another group of participants, and that's those whose tithes and offerings have built a foundation for such a time as this. Some of the funds for these efforts were given long ago, some are the fruits of former ministries, and others were given this year by those who are reading these words.

These are highlights of denomination-wide ministries. How many can you list in your local setting? In a year of loss, what is our church finding? What can we celebrate?

Like you, those caring for the ministries of the Church of the Brethren are approaching the end of 2020 with a mixture of feelings. But in a season of waiting and worship, above all there's a deep sense of gratitude for every member of the church we serve—and for the God who walks beside us. 



## Worshiping together

Brethren met online for a first-ever denominational love feast. And when Annual Conference couldn't meet, the whole church gathered online for a worship service, children's time, and concert.



## ¡Felicidades!

Six students constituted the first graduating class of Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano de la Iglesia de Los Hermanos (SeBAH-COB). They celebrated with others who were completing training through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.



## \$500,000 in PPE

Half a million dollars from designated health funds were rushed to Brethren homes in need of personal protective equipment.



## Virtual interns

It wasn't what they expected, but seven interns in Ministry Summer Service got a crash course in how to be adaptable.



## BVS orientations

How Brethren Volunteer Service made creative use of quarantine time: Travel to projects first and then spend two weeks in online orientation.



## Workcamps move online

A summer's worth of workcampers couldn't meet for the physical work, but they could still deepen faith together through weekly online sessions for reflection and fellowship.



## Healing racism

When the virus of racism seized the nation's attention, opportunities for online prayer and study drew people from across geographical boundaries. Brethren from many places met together and renewed their commitment to learn and act.



## Mission connections

After travel was halted, Global Mission took the opportunity to create country advisory teams to strengthen relationships with Brethren in other countries.



## Digital teacher resources

When Sunday school had to move online, Brethren Press offered Shine curriculum resources that were redesigned for classes meeting on screens rather than in classrooms.



## Webinars for church leaders

A wide range of webinars from multiple departments made it possible for people to meet across the miles for professional growth and mutual support.



## Long-distance hugs

Once volunteers could no longer travel to project sites, Children's Disaster Services thought of a new way to be present. CDS distributed more than 2,500 hand-assembled Individual Kits of Comfort for children affected by disasters.



## Brethren Faith in Action

Through the Brethren Faith in Action Fund, the Church of the Brethren by Nov. 1 gave \$83,066 in COVID-19 relief to congregations and camps—while still making regular BFIA grants.



## Pandemic grants

By Nov. 1, the church had made 20 Emergency Disaster Fund international grants totaling \$237,550 for COVID-19 response to 10 countries. Disaster grants were opened up to the US, where 31 grants totaled \$148,562.

# Compassion

by Bobbi Dykema

*This year Messenger has been focusing its Bible studies on 10 words that rose to the top during church-wide conversations toward a compelling vision. This installment concludes our series.*

"Mothers," drawing by Käthe Kollwitz, 1919

*"And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her." —Luke 1:38, KJV*

**I**n the month of December, we celebrate the birth of the Christ child, the incarnate Son of God. And as is proper in celebrating a birth, some of our focus is on the child's mother, whose gracious sharing of her body for nine months and beyond—and her athletic accomplishment of labor and delivery—are necessary for the successful birth of a newborn.

The birth of the Incarnate One, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, was and is an extraordinary demonstration of the compassion of God: willingness to take on human flesh, human life,

human suffering, that all of humanity might share in the eternal life of God.

But the compassion demonstrated by the birth of Christ was not just the compassion of Christ alone. Mary, Christ's mother, also demonstrated extraordinary compassion, risking her health, life, and reputation to bear the Son of God into the world.

The Hebrew language recognizes this extraordinary compassion not just of Mary, but of all mothers. In an association that we miss in English translation, one of the Hebrew words for compassion is *rechemim*, directly derived from *rechem*, the Hebrew word for "womb."

Bearing a child in one's womb, one's inner parts, is an extraordinary act of compassion. Even when a child is desired, anticipated, loved, and wel-

comed, nine months of pregnancy is no mere inconvenience. The list of potential health complications associated with pregnancy, many of them permanent, is long and terrifying: gestational diabetes, anemia, depression, pre-eclampsia, hyperemesis gravidarum, problems with hip and other joints, fluid retention, and more. And yet many an expectant mother graciously accepts the risks and suffering her pregnancy may bring in light of the joy that she anticipates with the birth of her child.

Even in English, the word "compassion" points to a willingness to suffer on others' behalf. The Latin *com* plus the root word *passio* literally means "to suffer with." The compassion of God lies in God's willingness to suffer with and for us; the compassion of Mary in her will-

EVELYN LAID HER BODY ON THE LINE IN AN ACT OF GRACIOUS SELF-GIVING THAT SUSTAINED THE LIVES OF MANY ARMENIAN CHILDREN. SHE LIVED OUT HER CALLING AS ONE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF THE NURTURING, SUSTAINING, COMPASSIONATE GOD.

ingness to suffer to bring forth the Christ child.

For many mothers, the gracious sharing of her body to give life to her child does not end with the birth, as she feeds her infant from her own breasts. Again, willingness to breast-feed a child involves a willingness to suffer, as complications such as mastitis and even the pain of being bitten are not uncommon. Here again, the Hebrew language connects this gracious maternal self-giving with the compassionate providence of God.

*El Shaddai* as a name or title for God appears 48 times in the Hebrew scriptures and appears to be derived from the root word *shad*, the Hebrew word for “breast.” *El Shaddai* is often translated “God Almighty” in English, but perhaps it might be better translated “The Nurturing One” or “The One Who Sustains Our Life,” or simply, “Sustainer.” The mightiness of God lies not in supernatural, cosmic, muscular power, but in the fact that our lives are sustained moment by moment and day by day through God’s nurturing compassion.

There is a place in the Holy Land that honors the self-giving compassion of Mary in breastfeeding the infant Jesus. In Bethlehem, on the West Bank of the Palestinian Territories, is a Roman Catholic shrine called the Chapel of the Milk Grotto. According to tradition, this site was a cave where Mary and Joseph stopped on their flight into Egypt from the murderous King Herod, in order that Mary might feed the baby. As she was doing so, a drop of her milk fell to the ground and, legend has it, turned the floor of the cave white. The chapel has become a pilgrimage site, especially dear to the hearts of infertile couples, expectant and nursing mothers both Christian

and Muslim, and those who come to pray for peace in the name of the Prince of Peace.

The men and women of ancient Israel and Judah saw in expectant and nursing mothers an image of Almighty God, the One whose gracious self-giving sustains the life of each individual and of the people as a whole. The wombs and breasts of human women, employed to nurture new life, were related to the ancient Israelite understanding of God, in whose image both female and male persons are made.

How might our understanding of God, and of compassion, be challenged and even transformed by reclaiming the pregnant womb and the milk-swollen breast as ways of imagining God’s compassion? How might we view and support human mothers differently if we truly saw in them the image of our compassionate God? How might we, in our North American and global contexts, make pilgrimage to the Chapel of the Milk Grotto in our imaginations to pray for new and expecting parents, healthy infants, and the peace of the world into which they are born?


Perhaps seeing God as the Nurturing Compassionate One, and all humans, male and female, as made in the image of God, might lead us toward an understanding of self-giving nurture and compassion as a call for all Christians, male and female. Perhaps sharing the gender of Christ and the apostles should be considered no more a mark of fitness for set-apart ministry than dwelling in bodies capable of nurture as a mirror of God’s compassion.

Even more importantly, seeing the compassion of God imaged in the gracious self-giving of pregnant and nursing mothers should lead us toward a

radical new understanding of compassion itself. If compassion means “to suffer with,” perhaps it is not enough to simply give of our excess to those in need and move on. We see this in the lives of Mary, of Mother Teresa, and in the life of our own Evelyn Trostle.

Evelyn Trostle served as a Brethren relief worker in the city of Marash during the Armenian genocide of the early 20th century, caring for children who had been orphaned. When the French arrived to evacuate the city, Evelyn wrote to her family in McPherson, Kan., that she had decided to stay with her orphans. Evelyn felt called and was willing to continue to suffer with these small, frightened, motherless and fatherless children, those whose parents had been murdered in a horrifying ethnic cleansing carried out by the Turks that took the lives of more than 1.5 million people.

As all expectant and nursing mothers do, but in a much more dramatic way, Evelyn laid her body on the line in an act of gracious self-giving that sustained the lives of many Armenian children. She lived out her calling as one made in the image of the nurturing, sustaining, compassionate God.

Perhaps we, too, need to enter into the suffering of those whom Jesus referred to as “the least of these,” to give not simply handouts but hands: hands of love, hands of compassion, hands of caring, hands to hold through the night. We walk, walking together even through the valley of the shadow of death, accompanied by The One Who Sustains Our Life. 

Bobbi Dykema is pastor of Springfield (Ill.) First Church of the Brethren. She previously served as a pastor and youth pastor in Pacific Northwest District and as instructor of Humanities and World Religions for Strayer University.

# The taste of God's word in their own tongue

## A BIBLE FOR THE KAMWE

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



*Mark Zira Dlyavaghi (left) shows a book in the Kamwe language to Jay Wittmeyer in late 2018. Dlyavaghi is a main translator and coordinator for the project to translate the Bible into Kamwe. Wittmeyer was then executive director of the Church of the Brethren Global Mission and Service.*

**A** Bible translation for the Kamwe people of northeast Nigeria is nearing completion and is awaiting funding to print. The Kamwe ethnic group lives in the Michika area of Adamawa State, Nigeria, as well as portions of northwestern Cameroon.

“The Bible in our language is a pride for us all and a heritage we will leave behind for all generations of Kamwe born and unborn,” says Mark Zira Dlyavaghi. “When it is published, let all see it as theirs and use it to have the taste of God’s word in their own tongue.”

The translation is a decades-long project of the Kamwe Bible Translation Committee, which has connections to Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), the Church of the Brethren, Wycliffe Bible Translators (or SIL International), and its affiliate the Seed Company.

Dlyavaghi is a main translator and coordinator of the project from EYN. The executive officers are Peter Audu, chair; Daniel S. Kwaga, secretary; and Hanatu John, treasurer; who serve on the committee with Stephen Sani, James Mbwenye, Hale Wandanje, Stephen H. Zira, and Goji Chibua, all from EYN. Committee members from other denominations include Bitrus Akawu from Deeper Life Bible Church, Abanyi A. Mwala who is worshiping with International Praise Church, and the legal advisor.

The translators include Luka Ngari, B. B. Jolly, Irmiya V. Kwaga, Samuel T. Kwache, Dauda Daniel, Elijah Skwame, and Luka T. Vandi, among others. The reviewers, manuscript checkers, and typist James D. Yaro are from EYN, and a few others are from other denominations.

Consultant to the committee is Roger Mohrlang, professor emeritus of biblical studies at Whitworth University in Spokane, Wash.

### The people and language

“Our people live in Nigeria and in Cameroon and the population is about 750,000 for both countries,” says Dlyavaghi.

Kamwe translates as “people of the mountains,” says

## THE DIFFICULT WORK OF TRANSLATING THE WHOLE BIBLE INTO KAMWE HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT BY MANY PEOPLE OVER SOME 50 YEARS.

Mohrlang, who lived in Michika 1968-1974 while working with Wycliffe Bible Translators. “Ka” means “people” and “mwe” means “mountains.” (The group also is known as Higgi, but that is considered a pejorative term.)

“The Kamwe are the group of people who occupy the central slopes of the Mandara Mountains,” writes Iliya Yame Kwache in his 2016 book *Kamwe People of Northern Nigeria: Origin, History, and Culture, Vol. 1*, available online at Academia.edu.

Famed Kamwe ancestor Kwada Kwakaa might have founded Michika as early as the 16th century, Kwache writes, but tradition often traces the Kamwe origins over many centuries back to the Middle East. “Because of the fact that there are many dialects of the Kamwe language and virtually most of the information is through oral traditions and interviews, there are many variations of the origin of the Kamwe people. However, the places called Mchekili and Cush have featured consistently in all the various accounts of the origin.”

Like most Nigerian languages, Kamwe is spoken only in a particular area of the country and is connected strongly with a specific ethnic identity. It is just one of hundreds of languages in Nigeria, a number that some put at more than 500, while others say exceeds 700 or 800. Such a count is difficult because most of Nigeria’s languages have several dialects.

Christianity began to be accepted among the Kamwe in 1945, according to the translation committee. Mohrlang says

that it was a few Kamwe people who had leprosy who became Christians while receiving treatment at the leprosarium of the Church of the Brethren Mission. They then returned home and shared the gospel. “It was the Church of the Brethren Mission that came and settled in the area to support their work,” says Dlyavaghi.

Now the majority of the Kamwe people are Christian. In addition to EYN churches, all sorts of other congregations have grown up in the area as well.

Even as Christianity has grown and strengthened in Michika, it is located somewhat less than 50 miles from Boko Haram strongholds. The violent Islamist insurgent group has attacked the Michika area multiple times, and people have lost their lives or have had to flee the area. In 2014, many of Michika’s churches were burned or destroyed. In the last couple of years churches have been in the process of rebuilding, but Michika is still considered at risk.

### It took 50 years

The difficult work of translating the whole Bible into Kamwe has been carried out by many people over some 50 years. Although Mohrlang started the work in 1968, when part of his job was to help put the language into writing, the Kamwe translators and the translation committee are the ones who have kept the project alive for decades.

“It’s been a privilege to serve the people of God among the Kamwe,” Mohrlang says. “It was their initiative, their desire to get the whole of the Bible in their mother tongue.” Mohrlang applauds Dlyavaghi for his leadership of the translation, and his commitment to a lengthy project. “He and the other translators and reviewers been very faithful all these years.”

By 1976, the translators completed the first edition of the Kamwe New Testament. In those pre-computer days, Mohrlang remembers, the first drafts were done in pencil, then typed for checking and proofreading, each succeeding draft having to be retyped and reproofed, with the final manuscript sent to England for typesetting and printing using Linotype.

“The work on the New Testament was finished when we were children and in primary school,” says Dlyavaghi. “I joined in the revision of it in 1993 when we started the editing, after I completed my first degree from seminary, until 1997 when it was published. Work on the Old Testament



## Raising funds

Funds are being raised to print 30,000 copies. Mohrlang notes that “Kamwe Christians must raise the daunting amount of over \$146,000—their half of the cost. The Seed Company is raising the other half.”

Throughout the project, Kamwe Christians have been contributing to the expenses of translation. “Most of those within Kamwe area have been giving financial support as well as moral support, including the EYN president,” says Dlyavaghi. EYN president Joel S. Billi was pastor of the most prominent EYN church in Michika before being named president of the denomination.

As a denomination, EYN is giving moral support to the project says Zakariya Musa, head of media for EYN. “Different tribes are engaged in translating the Bible into their dialects,” he says, and EYN “welcomes support from any individuals and organizations.”

The Global Mission office of the Church of the Brethren has contributed \$10,000 out of designated funds for the printing costs.

SIL International is receiving donations toward the printing of the Kamwe Bible. Tax-deductible gifts are received online at SIL.org (choose “Donate: online,” then select “Specific project” and add comment: “For scripture publication #4633, Kamwe Bible”). Donations by check may be payable to SIL International and mailed to SIL International, GPS, Attn: Dave Kelly, 7500 W. Camp Wisdom Rd., HNT 144, Dallas, TX 75236. On a separate paper write “Preference for Scripture Publication #4633, Kamwe Bible.”

Mohrlang is keeping track of giving to the project and asks donors let him know of the amount of their gift. Contact him at rmohrlang@whitworth.edu.

was started after my second degree in 2007, when we started drafting with pencil until I got a laptop the following year.”

Mohrlang remembers receiving word in 1988 that the Kamwe New Testament was sold out. “I got a wonderful letter that all 5,000 copies of the New Testament had sold out and they needed 10,000 more,” Mohrlang says.

At that point, as people realized the need to get it into computerized form, volunteers in England spent 1,000

hours keyboarding the New Testament into digital form. That in turn led to five years of work on a second edition of the New Testament. The work included the exchange of some 6,000 questions between the Kamwe Bible Translation Committee and Mohrlang. For the Old Testament translation, the committee and Mohrlang dealt with more than 70,000 questions.

## High expectations

The goal of the project has been to produce a translation that is accurate, clear, stylistically natural, and acceptable to the community.


“As to our feelings,” says Dlyavaghi, speaking on behalf of the committee, “we are really happy that our goal of having the whole Bible in our tongue is on the way to its achievement, while the Kamwe entirely are full of expectations of having that printed.

“Many elders have been asking when the published copy will be handy and are hoping to have it before they die—especially Baba Mai Kyau, who died early this year. He had been hoping, but he unfortunately died without seeing it,” says Dlyavaghi.

Among the many who “are asking when the copies will come from warehouse” are youth who “are also eagerly waiting to have copies,” he adds. “They prefer to attend vernacular services, especially at EYN Michika, to have services in the local language other than English or Hausa.”

The benefits of the Kamwe Bible for the community are numerous, Dlyavaghi says. “The word of God in our mother tongue will expose the message of God more than English or Hausa. People will like it most especially in rural places where the majority of our people live. People will know and understand the Bible more than before since it is in Kamwe.

“Youths will learn their language more than before since they will have many terms and vocabulary they may not know now that are in the scripture. This will engage them in going further in study and will lead them to further research of words and to write books in the language. The translators and reviewers have been testifying that their being in the team for years has broadened their understanding of the Bible and the language, which they didn’t have before joining the team.”

The Kamwe Bible is in its final stage of “endless consistency checks,” Mohrlang says. He expects it to be ready to print in a few months. It will be copyrighted by Wycliffe, printed in South Korea, and shipped to Nigeria. 

THE WORD OF GOD IN OUR MOTHER TONGUE WILL EXPOSE THE MESSAGE OF GOD MORE THAN ENGLISH OR HAUSA. PEOPLE WILL LIKE IT MOST ESPECIALLY IN RURAL PLACES WHERE THE MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE LIVE.



## Mission and Ministry Board approves 2021 budget

**T**he Mission and Ministry Board held fall meetings via Zoom Oct. 16-18. Three sessions were open to the public via a published link. The main item of business was the 2021 budget.

Board chair Patrick Starkey led the meetings from the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., where he was joined by general secretary David Steele and a few staff. The rest of the board joined via Zoom from across the country. Over the course of the weekend 37 people attended via the public link, including denominational staff.

“We meet because the gospel goes on, the pandemic cannot prevent resurrection, the grace of God is sufficient at all times, and the work of the church goes on at this time,” said Starkey.

### Budget and finances

The board approved a total budget for all denominational ministries of \$8,112,100 income and \$8,068,750 expense, representing an anticipated net income of \$43,350 for 2021. The decision included budgets for the Church of the Brethren’s Core Ministries as well as “self-funding” budgets for Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Conference Office, Global Food Initiative (GFI), and Material Resources.

The Core Ministries budget of \$4,934,000 (income and expense) is close to the amount of the 2020 budget of \$4,969,000 approved by the board last October, but about \$300,000 more than the budget revision of \$4,629,150 made by the board in July in response to the pandemic.

Treasurer Ed Woolf reported factors that went

into the budget for Core Ministries including estimated giving from congregations and individuals; draws from the Bequest Quasi-Endowment and other funds; ministry enablement contributions to Core Ministries from the Emergency Disaster Fund, GFI, and other restricted funds; Brethren Press gross sales contributions to Core Ministries; transfer of \$140,000 to Core Ministries from designated funds; and a 2 percent reduction in most departmental budgets. The budget includes no cost-of-living increase for employees but does continue employer contributions to health savings accounts and a smaller-than-expected increase in medical insurance premiums.

In 2020 financial results as of September, Woolf noted that giving to Core Ministries was ahead of the revised budget and staff have done a good job of managing expenses. It is in restricted giving to funds like the Emergency Disaster Fund where a serious drop is seen. The pandemic also has caused major losses for the self-funding ministries, especially Brethren Press and Material Resources.

Woolf reported that investment balances were in a good position as of September and net assets were up over 2019.

An update on Brethren Press was given by Steele. The financial situation of Brethren Press was the subject of discussion by the board in July. Since then, sales figures have worsened. Steele reported some interventions for 2020 that will give time to work on a systematic plan for the publishing house. Brethren Press also is doing fundraising.

### Healing racism training

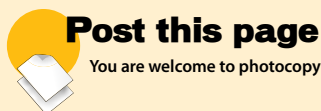
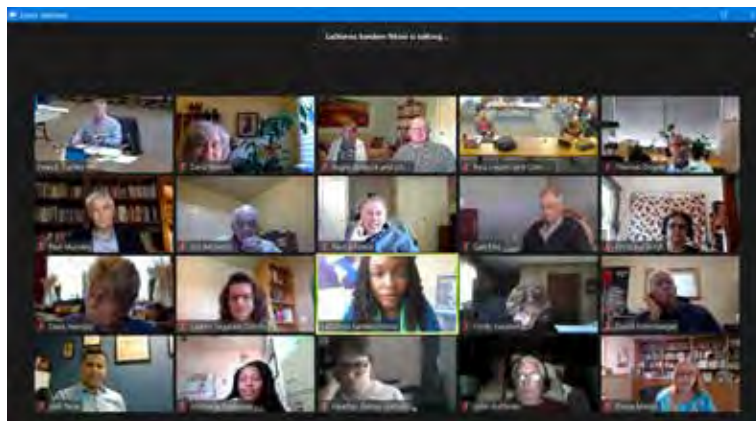
A training on “Healing Racism and the Ministry of Jesus in This Time” was led by Intercultural Ministries director LaDonna Nkosi. Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren pastor Michaela Alphonse reviewed “Separate No More,” a paper adopted by Annual Conference in 2007. “Wherever this plan got lost we have to pick it up again,” Alphonse said, adding that, if the paper’s recommendations had been taken seriously, the church would have been prepared for the events of 2020. “We would have been powerful, Spirit-filled, colorful witnesses in this season.”

### In other business

The board called David Steele to a second five-year contract as general secretary.

Board member Colin Scott was chosen as chair-elect, to begin after the 2021 Annual Conference. After serving two years as chair-elect, he will serve two years as board chair.

Work to shape the new strategic plan was reported by task teams of board and staff. The plan is designed to align with the compelling vision that will come to the 2021 Annual Conference.



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## Calling for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh

**A** statement issued in early October by general secretary David Steele and Nathan Hosler of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy expressed Church of the Brethren concern about escalation of warfare in Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed region between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“As a peace church, we lament the violence of war and work to end conflict globally,” the statement said, in part. “In Nagorno-Karabakh, we are concerned about the deaths and displacement of civilians, the presence of proxy conflicts involving Turkey and fighters from Syria, and the unfettered arms sales into the region.”

The statement reaffirmed support for the Armenian people, which dates to 1917 when Brethren began responding to the needs of survivors and refugees of the Armenian genocide. “That aid effort has particular significance for us, marking the start of our denomination’s focus on Christian service and disaster relief that continues to this day,” the statement said.

The statement referenced a 2015 Annual Conference paper committing the Church of the Brethren “to stand with targeted minority groups across the world and call not only for increased awareness of their persecution, but for renewed efforts by the church and the international community to build solidarity and protect minority religious groups who are under threat.”

## Brethren Volunteer Service units are placed

Brethren Volunteer Service summer and fall units have been placed at project sites, having received orientation online, in a virtual process.

### Unit 325

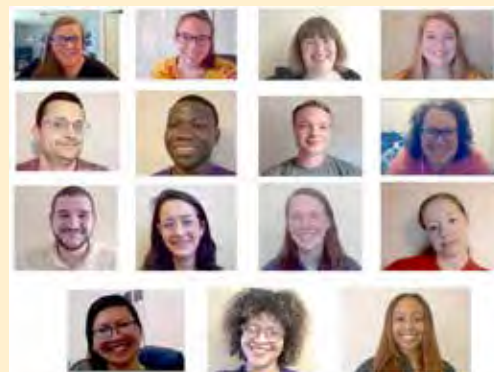
*Top row, from left:* **Emily Tyler**, staff. **Hannah Shultz**, staff. **Michael Brewer Berres** of Luxemburg, Wis., serving at Quaker Cottage, Belfast, Northern Ireland. **Amelia Gunn** of Easton Church of the Brethren, also serving at Quaker Cottage.

*Second row:* **Daniel Wright** of Pryor, Okla., serving at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren. **Eric Joloka** of Philadelphia, Pa., Harrisburg First Church. **Evan Ulrich** of Homer, N.Y., serving with Brethren Disaster Ministries. **Kara Miller**, staff.

*Third row:* **Chad Whitzel** of Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren, serving with the Workcamp Ministry of the Church of the Brethren. **Rose Harvey** of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren, serving at SnowCap Food Pantry, Portland, Ore. **Alton Higgs** of Bridgewater (Va.)

Church of the Brethren, serving with the Workcamp Ministry. **Kylie Mountain** of Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, serving at Lancaster (Pa.) Habitat for Humanity.

*Bottom row:* **Pauline Liu**, staff. **Alexa Henry** of the Bronx, N.Y., serving at Bernardo Kohler Center, Austin, Texas. **Naomi Yilma** of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, serving at the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.



### BVS-BRF Unit 326

**Bryce Ocker** (left) and **Aubrey Copenhaver**, both from Pennsylvania, serving at the Root Cellar in Lewiston, Maine.

### Unit 327

*Top:* **Claire and Rusty Orner** of Brookville, Pa., will serve at the Asian Rural Institute, Japan, traveling in 2021.

**Deb Wilson** of Louisville, Ky., serving at Project PLASE, Baltimore, Md.

*Bottom:* **Kinny Paw** of Lititz, Pa., serving at SnowCap Food Pantry. **Saudah Nassanga** of Kampala, Uganda, serving at L’Arche Belfast, Northern Ireland, pending a visa.



## Planning continues for 2021 Annual Conference

**A**lthough uncertainty remains due to the pandemic, the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee is planning for the 2021 Conference to be held June 30-July 4 in Greensboro, N.C.

“We hope that by then we may all gather in person, but if CDC and/or state social distancing guidelines limit the number of people who can meet in the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, we are making contingency plans for a hybrid event,” said the committee.

The 2021 theme remains the same as for the Conference that was canceled this year: “God’s Adventurous Future.” Leadership continues from 2020, as do the items of business and registration fees.

# Service is never unbearable

## A BVS volunteer reflects on love

**D**ayton, Ohio, was never on my radar for places to live after I graduated from Juniata College. However, as a member of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) Unit 325, I found myself signing up to spend my year of service with Brethren Disaster Ministries' (BDM) Rebuilding Program.

And I am so glad I did. BVS helped steer me toward volunteering with BDM—an organization that allows Brethren (and anyone else willing to pick up a hammer) to act upon our shared belief of serving others. In that case, that means serving others by rebuilding homes that were destroyed or damaged by natural disasters.

What I find unique and remarkable about BDM is its long-term goal. Each site focuses on long-term recovery. After all the media coverage and initial assistance has died down, BDM comes in to pick up where others left off.

Sometimes even years after a disaster there is still much work to be done.


As I write this there are two sites open for volunteers—one in Bayboro, N.C., to assist those hit by Hurricane Florence in 2018, and the other here in Dayton. Our site is located a few miles east of downtown, in a recently closed Presbyterian church. Our work encompasses the greater Dayton area as we help rebuild homes damaged when 15 devastating tornadoes ripped through the area on Memorial Day in 2019.

Due to the type of disaster, the majority of our work involves repairing damaged roofs, installing new siding, and performing interior repairs due to water damage. Hanging and finishing drywall seems to be a never-ending project. I'm getting lots of practice! The work can sometimes be tedious, hot, cold, and occasionally quite odorous. Added on top of this is the duty to keep everyone safe during the pandemic and adhering to all COVID-19 safety precautions.

But helping fellow humans through love is never unbearable. It is a true blessing and the highest privilege to lay your needs down and pick up the needs of a stranger. I am grateful for being able to see this occur every day with the

volunteers who come out.

Being a part of the site long-term, I have the opportunity to see the timeline of recovery over its full span. Each week brings something new: a different set of volunteers, and a different energy. But what never ceases to amaze me is the amount of quality work that gets accomplished by even the most inexperienced group of volunteers. Everyone has an important job, no matter the skill set.

One survivor of a disaster expressed his gratitude by simply saying how nice it was to not have rain coming into his house. This short statement made me step back and realize how many comforts we take for granted—and how important it is for us to safely serve others through love. 

Evan Ulrich is a member of Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 325, which held its orientation virtually. Originally from Homer, N.Y., he graduated in May from Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa. He has attended, worked at, and volunteered at Camp Blue Diamond in Middle Pennsylvania District.



EVAN ULRICH



### LEARN MORE

For more information about Brethren Volunteer Service, which has placement opportunities across the country and in some international locations, visit [brethren.org/bvs](http://brethren.org/bvs). The next scheduled orientation is July 18-Aug. 6, 2021, at Camp Harmony in Hooversville, Pa. For information on Brethren Disaster Ministries, visit [brethren.org/bdm](http://brethren.org/bdm).



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



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**A treasure chest**

Sure appreciated Kaylee Deardorff sharing about the Ministry Summer Service program and the new insights she gained, in the October issue. I quickly went for it!

Usually by mid-month my issue has been read in total. October presented so many different and complex issues at this house, MESSENGER was laid aside. Back to it tonight! Often it is read cover to cover in the first couple of days—it is so full of really inspiring, challenging, uplifting, and informative material. Quite a treasure chest.

**Emily Mumma**  
Lorida, Fla.

**More questions**

In reading Ruth Lininger’s letter in the October issue more questions arose in my mind.



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## Merry Christmas from 'The Church by the Pond' Good Shepherd Church of the Brethren

Bradenton, FL [www.goodshepherdchurchbradenton.com](http://www.goodshepherdchurchbradenton.com) Sundays 10:30 a.m.

Tucked in from pristine beaches in FL's Gulf Coast, a growing Church of the Brethren invites you to join us in our casual, joyous & uplifting worship of God in Christ! (Facebook live at: Bradenton FL Good Shepherd Church of the Brethren)

**STOCKINGS** by Pastor Stephen Reyner

A young middle-American man smiled, but inside was quite forlorn. He waved at the store's laughing Santa, but his heart had repeatedly been torn. He had eggnog, a cold, presents and lights. But he looked down, not up, found that loneliness bites.

The people in the mall were so busy buying things that soon would be gifts of love, with paper, bows and strings. A gift could say so much, could even communicate. The children get so excited, and Santa is never late.

Yet somewhere he wondered why life was shallow and not deep. Why everybody used everyone, yet he couldn't attempt to weep. Apathy comes, and compassion goes. Rejection, he remembered, rejection killed his rose.

So many messages, every day more headlines. The advertisers pressure, the Salvation Army wants your dimes. Walking down the storefronts he stopped to behold the serenity of a small Mary & Joseph, in a hand-carved nativity.

"Jesus, do you care?" he cried down deep in his heart, as up against the streetlights a gentle snow did start. "Merry Christmas, son!" his former pastor caught him with a hug and grin. "You're looking well, downright well!" he exclaimed, but didn't begin

to address his failures or his past (and even present) pain. "Let me buy you a cup of coffee, it's all that keeps me sane." So the two men huddled over donuts, and in coffee-mug steam they warmed up talking of Christmas, coming events and even dreams.

"You know I, I've given my life to that one in the manger...", the old man said, dispelling any danger. "World War II had left me hurt and quite forlorn, but I've learned to that it was indeed God's son, so humbly born..."

"Well, I, uh, I've been so pushed Pastor, I hardly even care. And yet I have so much. All in all, it is not fair." "I lived through the war, son, and found I had something to give. Just love, listening and encouraging, just love in which to live."

He left me there, in my coffee and thoughts with words and concern, which weren't even bought. Giving up had been a deserved response, yet was a real kind of dope. I bowed my head. I said a prayer. That Christmas I found hope.

Jesus Christ said that he came not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfil the law (Matthew 5:17).

We have been taught that Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law in his death

on the cross. That means no more sacrificing bulls, goats, lambs, or turtle doves. Dietary restrictions have been relaxed and the dress guidelines specifically addressed to the children of Israel

are not imposed on the followers of Jesus Christ today.

It seems that some of the sanitation and disease control procedures continue as valid principles still underlying current practices.

Christ fulfilled the moral aspects of the law in that he did no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22).

Does God's moral law still stand today? Are things that were declared morally wrong in Exodus and Leviticus still wrong today?

Isn't it wonderful that we can be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11, KJV)?

Shouldn't we joyfully share the good news? All of our sinful behaviors, including those itemized in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, do not need to continue to bar us from the kingdom of God. They become past tense, "Such were some of you."

**Walter Heisey**  
Newmanstown, Pa.

## Ministry Summer Service

challenges Church of the Brethren college students and congregations/ministry sites to consider God's call on their lives.

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**Ministry sites:** Send a pastor/mentor to three days of orientation; create an atmosphere for learning, reflection and discernment for the intern; provide food and housing, transportation on the job and a small monthly stipend.

**Mentors:** Join your intern for three days of orientation; spend at least one hour each week offering intentional supervision and mentoring; help to plan and prepare good, engaging work for the intern to invest in during their nine weeks.

Apply online between now and January 8, 2021!  
[www.brethren.org/mss](http://www.brethren.org/mss)



### CLASSIFIEDS

**Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren Celebrates 50 Years in Current Building** on Sunday, June 6, 2021, the Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, will be celebrating 50 years in their current church building. You are invited to attend a special Sunday morning service, followed by a noon meal and the opening of the time capsule. A video documentary is being created to chronicle the church's history from its earliest beginnings to the present day. The planning committee would like to invite you to share your stories, photos, videos, and keepsakes. If you have something to contribute, please contact committee chair Sharon Bledsoe at [sbb212@hotmail.com](mailto:sbb212@hotmail.com), or the church office at 1-937-676-2281 or Pastor Nick at [phillcob@gmail.com](mailto:phillcob@gmail.com)

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## TURNINGPOINTS

**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.

### Centenarians

**Early**, Catherine, 100, Lima, Ohio, May 9

**Ledford**, Henry, 101, Flat Creek, Ky., Sept. 22

### New members

**Chambersburg**, Pa.: Loretta Funk, Linda Ross, Donna Russell, Laura Shank, Robert Shank, Vivian Statler

**Easton**, Md.: Cheryl Dayton

**Hagerstown**, Md.: Christine Ellis, Jenny Ferguson, John Ferguson, Jack Finniff, Barbara Harrell, Sharon Keesecker, Kathy Kelsey, Debra Long, Carolyn Motz, David Motz, Edwin L. Plank, Eunice Plank, Brenda Shane, Diana Shepherd, Elaine Smith, Ronald Lee Smith

**Clover Creek**, Martinsburg, Pa.: Jason Dell, Logan Keith, Maddalyn Rupp

**Columbia City**, Ind.: Jenny Frank, Endymion Love, Ryan Mayer, Sarah Mayer

**First**, York, Pa.: Brianna Herbst, Matthew Herbst, Daniel McEvoy, Katie McEvoy, Tanya Sepe, Vincent Sepe

**Lebanon**, Mount Sidney, Va.: Emma Turner, Samantha Turner, Sara Turner

**Live Oak**, Calif.: Sue Linder

**Nokesville**, Va.: Benny Korzendorfer, Brenda Korzendorfer

**Spring Run**, McVeytown, Pa.: James Stewart

**Waynesboro**, Pa.: Mary Ann Stitely, Ron Stitely

**West Charleston**, Tipp City, Ohio: Julie Brewer, James Cosby, Jena Cosby, Isaac Zika

### Anniversaries

**Ashenfelter**, Larry and Karol, Keyser, W.Va., 50

**Bollinger**, Harold and Nancy, Akron, Pa., 60

**Bowden**, Ronald and Carmen, Douglassville, Pa., 60

**Brumbaugh**, Bill and Joyce, Columbia City, Ind., 55

**Clem**, Richard and Gloria,

Hagerstown, Md., 60

**Craig**, Joe and Sherry, Hagerstown, Md., 55

**Crouse**, Merle and Jean, Saint Cloud, Fla., 65

**Fake**, Harry and Elizabeth Liskey, Palmyra, Pa., 70

**Glick**, Ray and Sandra, Bridgewater, Va., 55

**Kochler**, David and Marilyn, Udell, Iowa, 65

**Patterson**, Ivan and Clara, Greenville, Ohio, 70

**Ranck**, Richard and Charlotte, Leola, Pa., 50

**Thomas**, Michael and Kathryn, Mount Joy, Pa., 50

**Wenger**, J. Calvin and Shirley, Manheim, Pa., 66

### Deaths

**Bachman**, Sandra D. Krepps, 80, Lewistown, Pa., Sept. 11

**Batz**, Barbara E. Miller, 77, Myerstown, Pa., Aug. 14

**Cable**, Lowell Mack, 72, Houston, Texas, Sept. 4

**Casteel**, James C., Sr., 90, Greensburg, Pa., Aug. 16

**Cline**, Charles Robert, 88, Fishersville, Va., June 29

**Coulson**, Dorothea J. Crozier, 84, New Cumberland, Pa., Oct. 22

**Davis**, Joan Anderson, 82, Greensburg, Pa., Oct. 15

**Dugan**, Ronald L., 84, Hershey, Pa., Oct. 16

**Epigh**, Dorothy M. Buchanan, 95, Belleville, Pa., Oct. 13

**Fergus**, Karen E. Jenkins, 80, Akron, Ohio, Sept. 2

**Geib**, Audrey L. Nichols, 90, Easton, Md., Aug. 3

**Hauger**, Sarah Smith O'Bryan, 89, Greensburg, Pa., Sept. 12

**Keller**, Alice Mae Sampson, 80, Greenville, Ohio, March 19

**Liller**, Paul Giffin (Diddy), 89, Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 14

**McCann**, Chauncey B., 94, Norvelt, Pa., Aug. 29

**Michael**, John William, 76, Mount Sidney, Va., July 29

**Miller**, Sarah Anne, 94, Lake Odessa, Mich., Sept. 6

**Moyer**, Naomi K., 81, Myerstown, Pa., Aug. 6

**Murphy**, James Franklyn, 84, Manassas, Va., June 10

**Naill**, William E., Sr., 92, Muskegon, Mich., Aug. 30

**Nesbitt**, Jean H., 77, Mogadore, Ohio, Sept. 24

**Pettit**, Phyllis Mae Harms, 87, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 15

**Rosenberger**, MarySue Helstern, 80, Westerville, Ohio, Oct. 11

**Shaffer**, Robert E., 94, Hershey, Pa., Oct. 3

**Shoemaker**, Gary K., 85, Nampa, Idaho, Aug. 3

**Shonk**, H. Elaine Bollinger, 80, Manheim, Pa., Aug. 28

**Spencer**, Harry Verne, Jr., 87, Greensburg, Pa., Aug. 31

**Stafford**, Cheryl Elaine Jones, 70, Greenville, Ohio, May 16

**Stockslager**, Donna Lee Bowers, 75, Hagerstown, Md., Oct. 17

**Thomas**, John M., 75, Aurora, Ill., Oct. 9

**Wade**, Daniel Lawrence, 76, New Haven, Conn., May 28

**Wilson**, Gregory Daniel, 73, McClellandtown, Pa., Sept. 14

**Wilson**, Leland, 90, La Verne, Calif., Sept. 1

**Young**, Doran D., 86, Medina, Ohio, Aug. 29

### Ordained

**Baer**, Rose, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Elizabethtown, Pa.), Sept. 20

**Bailey**, Dallas, Virilina Dist. (Henry Fork, Rocky Mount, Va.), Sept. 13

**Frado**, James, Jr., N. Ohio Dist. (Richland, Mansfield, Ohio), Sept. 20

### Placements

**Gresh**, Gieta, interim pastor, Denton, Md., Aug. 1

**Rogers**, Sandi, interim pastor, Grossnickle, Myersville, Md., Aug. 3

**Staggs**, Kevin, from pastor, Bear Creek, Accident, Md., to pastor, Locust Grove, Mount Storm, W.Va., Oct. 1

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# It's complicated

**M**ephibosheth appears in an easily ignored story in 2 Samuel. An exhausted, terrified messenger arrived at a royal residence. He stammered out tragic news: Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, and grandfather, King Saul, were dead.

In those brutal times, warriors cut off hands and feet and heads, eliminating entire families.



JAN FISCHER BACHMAN

Mephibosheth's nurse picked up her five-year-old charge and fled.

The story does not mention Mephibosheth's mother. It seems likely that the nurse could have left without the boy, slipping away and saving herself. Against her own self-interests, she fled with him, and, in her haste, he fell and became "crippled in his feet."

She rose to the challenge of a terrifying moment. She fell and broke the center of her existence. She saved his life. She irrevocably altered his life.

The root of the Hebrew word "nurse" is translated 26 times in scripture as "believe": Abram "believed in the Lord" (Genesis 15:6). We can love, believe, act valiantly—and still cause harm.

In this year of drastic change and unexpected death, congregational leaders agonize over how to carry people and preserve treasured practices, at times without visible success.

How do we live with trying to save someone—or something—we love, only to see it fail and fragment, *because of our actions*?

Turning to Mephibosheth's point of view, what happens when someone who should care wounds me? How do I live remembering the pain, the fall?

In a recent MESSENGER Radio podcast episode, Eric Bishop said, "Telling truth to power means telling the larger church how much it is *not* on the forefront of justice. Why are you not out front calling out the injustices that we are seeing across the board?"

Who has been dropped and damaged? How have our

words, structures, priorities, and omissions caused harm? How have others limited and injured us?


Mephibosheth's story contains a lengthy gap. We know he grew up and had a son. He lived in Lo-Debar, literally "no pasture, no word, no thing": the middle of nowhere. When the Bible returns to the story, King David's reign had reached a point of peace. David asked if any children of his dear friend Jonathan survived. When Saul's former servant, Ziba, mentioned Mephibosheth, David ordered Mephibosheth to Jerusalem, gave him land, assigned Ziba's family as his servants, and insisted that Mephibosheth regularly come to dinner.

Mephibosheth returned to the king's house, gaining his grandfather's extensive former holdings. Was that redemption? He still could not walk. The change condemned Ziba's family to servitude. Presumably, people had been using Saul's land; what happened to them?

Ziba later obtained the property. Mephibosheth ended up valuing most his relationship with David. Was that, at last, the happy ending?

We learn from Bible stories by identifying with people in them. White American Christianity encourages believers to imagine ourselves as the Israelites, enslaved and freed, or Mephibosheth, restored to the king's table. But at an Annual Conference Dikaiois event, local Black pastors shared that they saw white Christians as the Egyptians, defending slavery in the past and failing to support racial justice in the present.

Who might I be in this story? The nurse, throwing my heart and soul into ministry with dismaying results? Mephibosheth, injured by people who love me? Ziba, trying to be helpful only to be saddled with years of servitude? David, feeling entitled to control property, assuming that my voice should be heard, doing good in a thoughtless, offhand way that causes collateral damage? (As "Davids," do we even recognize the consequences of our choices?)

In a year scarred by racial unrest, police brutality, painful divisions, and COVID-19, this ancient story proves remarkably relevant. 

IN THIS YEAR OF DRASTIC CHANGE AND UNEXPECTED DEATH, CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS AGONIZE OVER HOW TO CARRY PEOPLE AND PRESERVE TREASURED PRACTICES, AT TIMES WITHOUT VISIBLE SUCCESS.



For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Thank you for supporting the Church of the Brethren in 2020.  
May the good news of the Savior's birth fill you with joy and hope.  
May the love and peace of Christ reign in your heart today and always.



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