

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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The roots of hunger



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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
MESSENGER

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Web editor: Jan Fischer Bachman At-large editor: Walt Wiltschek Design: The Concept Mill

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Return

In the movie *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the plucky warrior princess sets off to retrieve the shards of a dragon gem in order to restore the shattered land of Kumandra. She's propelled by determination—but also by disillusionment, resentment, and grief. Betrayal by a friend has unleashed the sinister Druun, a chaotic,



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

plague-like force that turns her father and the rest of her people into stone. She must leave her tribe, named Heart, to find the gem pieces. Then she will return.

The theme for many of us this year is “return.” Not that we thought this theme would last so long. At the beginning of the year, returning seemed like an event. Dates were set, and trips were booked. Organizations crafted return plans for workers. Businesses hoped customers would come back. “Back to school” took on extra meaning. Churches made plans to worship and sing and study together.

We all remembered life before the pandemic and longed to find out what “post-pandemic” would look like. But chaos continues with illness and death, and also division and

calamity. The return hasn't happened yet.

If returning is a long process rather than a date on the calendar, what does that mean? And, if we recognize that we can't go back to the past, what are we returning to?

The Hebrew word *teshuvah* means returning. It also means repenting. This repentance is about confessing one's shortcomings, yes, but also about turning back to God. It's returning to the path of righteousness. It's returning to each other.

Plot spoiler: *Raya's* story has a happy ending. When the situation turns dire, she recognizes her complicity, makes a selfless act of repentance, and eventually sets into motion what might be described as resurrection. Her ragtag helpers are reunited with the family members they had lost. *Raya* returns to Heart and brings about her father's vision of a united land. All the tribes rejoice.

The process of returning seems slow, but while we wait we can spend our time turning toward wholeness. *Teshuvah*. Now is always the right season for returning to God and to each other.

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

Diane Stroyeck
messengersubscriptions@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 327
Fax: 847-742-1407

Advertising:

Karen Stocking
messengerads@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 308
Fax: 847-742-1407

Editorial:

messenger@brethren.org
Phone: 800-323-8039 ext. 326
Fax: 847-742-1407

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“Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” –Isaiah 1:16b-17

“We have one goal: building a world where there is enough for all.”

—CWS tagline from its website home page

“As I look to the future of Church World Service, I see tremendous opportunity to expand our work with refugees and displaced people while also tackling the challenges that force people from their homes.”

—Rick Santos, in remarks upon becoming the new president and CEO of CWS in January 2021

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE (CWS) turns 75 this year! The global relief organization began in 1946, with the Church of the Brethren among its founding members. Today it works on issues including global hunger, disaster response, working with migrants and refugees, and more. CWS plans to celebrate the diamond anniversary with a special event on Oct. 27, and we celebrate alongside them in this month’s issue of MESSENGER.

17 Number of denominations that came together in 1946 to form Church World Service “to do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone.”

37 Current number of Christian denominations and communions that participate in the cooperative ministry of CWS

1969 Year of the first CROP Hunger Walks, organized and held by youth in Bismarck, N.D., and York County, Pa. More than 50 years later, the walks continue each year across the country and are a significant fundraiser for CWS ministries.

11 million Pounds of food, clothing, and medical supplies sent to post-World War II Europe and Asia by US churches in 1946-1947

23 Number of CWS immigration and refugee offices across the United States

500,000 Approximate number of refugees the CWS Immigration and Refugee program has resettled since its inception

\$73.7 million Total CWS expenditures in 2020, including \$43.5 million in services for displaced people, \$10.8 million in global relief and development work, and \$6.7 million in emergency response efforts



DID YOU KNOW?

A CWS Hygiene Kit includes a hand towel, washcloth, wide-tooth comb, nail clippers, bath-sized bar of soap, toothbrush, and 10 Band-Aids. The kits, costing about \$15 each, are sent to disaster areas and other areas of need around the world each year. Specific details are on the CWS website. CWS also collects school kits and emergency cleanup buckets for distribution.



Garden cultivates relationships, peace, and love



Marianne Fitzkee

Harrisburg (Pa) First Church of the Brethren has been tending a community garden for about five years, thanks to the initiative of former pastor Belita Mitchell. Along with fruits and vegetables, this garden cultivates relationships, peace, and love.

The garden, which can be found tucked behind a garage in the church's

back parking lot, is home to six raised beds growing tomatoes, greens, cauliflower, peppers, herbs, berries, and more. This year, the gardeners—mostly church members who live in the surrounding Allison Hill community—will enjoy their harvest with their families. Pre-COVID, the church had hosted a baked potato dinner to share the bounty. In addition to the raised beds, there is a bench with

decorative flower boxes where people can relax and soak up the scenery.

Garden coordinator Waneta Benson cites this year as the best year yet. She came to Harrisburg First as the church's second Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) worker and has been serving faithfully ever since through developing the children's ministry, playing organ for worship, and now spearheading the gardening effort along with her son—a role she's very qualified for, having lived around gardens for 80-plus years.

"Grandma Waneta" loves to see children get involved and notes how community gardens are a great way to utilize vacant lots to create green space in the city. In future years, she hopes to relinquish some responsibility for the garden but looks forward to seeing how it continues to evolve. Future projects may include a mural and growing vines and flowers on the surrounding fence to add beauty and attract pollinators. —Marianne Fitzkee

Prayer walking the neighborhood

On a Saturday morning in June, some members of Celebration of Christ Church of the Brethren in Saint Petersburg, Fla., met to go on a neighborhood prayer walk.

Three small groups took different routes. The goal was not to knock on doors, and only to speak if spoken to. In most cases, the walkers simply prayed God's blessings on each home, although, by and large, they did not know who lived inside. In a few cases, neighbors who were out in their front yards greeted the walkers. At that point, the church members would ask if they had any needs for which they would like prayer. At least one shared a need and was prayed for. Several others conversed with the walkers and were given brochures with an invitation to attend the church.

The only negative lesson was to avoid future walks in summer—it's just too tropical in Florida! But the church intends to go out again in the fall and winter to continue this ministry. —Ray Hileman



Crest Manor collects cleanup kits

Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind., recently completed 28 cleanup kits for Church World Service (CWS). The project was delayed from 2020 due to the pandemic. Some families chose to fill one of the five-gallon buckets that serve as containers for the kits, while others brought assorted contributions and cash donations.

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.



Paul Grant

Dale Brown (at right) in conversation with a Young Republican during Oliver North demonstrations in Orlando, outside the 1989 Annual Conference. He helped plan a vigil in response to the Young Republicans' meeting supporting North and the Contra War, held in a hotel right across from the Conference. Brown wrote in his *Messenger* story about the event: "Kneeling for prayer took on new meanings in this setting."

Remembering Dale Brown

Dale Weaver Brown, 95, professor emeritus at Bethany Seminary and a leading theologian in the Church of the Brethren, died on Aug. 30.

He held degrees from McPherson (Kan.) College, Bethany Seminary, and Northwestern University. He married McPherson classmate Lois Kauffman and they were a part of a workcamp in Italy in 1948 as part of a Brethren Service Unit—an experience that propelled their convictions and future work to alleviate poverty and war. During 68 years of marriage, their home welcomed people from around the world, for long and short stays alike, including being a host family for a post-World War II German high school exchange program.

Brown was ordained in 1946 and spent several years as a pastor. His teaching at Bethany started in 1956-1958, while in a doctoral program at Northwestern. From 1958 to 1962 he directed religious life and taught philosophy and religion at McPherson. He returned to Bethany as a professor of history and theology for more than 30 years, in 1962-1994. Later, he was a fellow at the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College.

He authored six books and wrote for *MESSENGER* as well as *Sojourners*, *The Christian Century*, *The Other Side*, and other publications. His first book, *Understanding Pietism*, was published from his doctoral dissertation in 1978, with an updated edition in

1996. *Biblical Pacifism* recently was republished in a second edition by Brethren Press. *Another Way of Believing* also is published by Brethren Press in English and Spanish.

When a collection of his papers was dedicated at the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, the program noted that his 1970 book *The Christian Revolutionary* anticipated "many of the themes later made famous by John Howard Yoder and the Sojourners community."

His leadership positions in the Church of the Brethren included Annual Conference moderator in 1972, two terms on Standing Committee, service on the General Board 1960-1962, chair of the board of On Earth Peace 1997-2000, and observer to the Consultation on Church Union.

Brown was an important figure in opposing the Vietnam War and in Cold War peacemaking, participating in draft counseling, the first Brethren-Russian Orthodox exchange in 1963, and the 1969 peace seminar between the Church of the Brethren and the Russian Orthodox Church. He helped found the Brethren Action Movement and New Call to Peacemaking, was active with Christian Peacemaker Teams, and helped train Youth Peace Travel Teams.

He is survived by daughter Deanna (Brian Harley), son Dennis (Dorothy Brown), son Kevin (Kim Pece), and granddaughters. Memorial gifts may go to On Earth Peace and Bethany Seminary.

Congregations celebrate milestone anniversaries

Pleasant View Church of the Brethren near Burkittsville, Md., celebrated its 245th anniversary. The *Frederick News Post* announced that a Sunday service on Aug. 15 initiated festivities leading up to the church's 250th anniversary in 2026, with descendants of founding members as guests.

Stone Bridge Church of the Brethren in Hancock, Md., held a 150th anniversary celebration on Sunday, Sept. 12, titled "Yesterday's Tomorrow Is Today." The event included the Old School Vocal Quartet, organist Nathan Strite, guest speakers Roger Truax and Garnet Myers, and a lunch.

Cedar Run Church of the Brethren in Broadway, Va., celebrated 125 years on Sept. 18-19. The weekend included an open house, music by Seldom Serious and Trista Pence, worship with a message from former pastor Bill Zirk and a guest sermon by Paul Roth, and a meal.

COBYS celebrates 25th Bike & Hike

COBYS Family Services, affiliated with Atlantic Northeast District, held its 25th Annual Bike & Hike fundraiser on Sept. 12, anchored at Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. Participants chose a 3-mile walk through Lititz, 10- or 25-mile bicycle rides through Lancaster County scenery, or a 65-mile motorcycle ride through northern Lancaster County. This year, people could also choose the option "Walk or Ride Where You Are." COBYS set a goal to raise \$25,000. —Douglas May



We've come a long way

Church World Service celebrates 75 years

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

We've come a long way since 1946," said a Church World Service (CWS) announcement of its 75th anniversary in 2021. Over more than seven decades, many thousands of lives have been touched by CWS ministries in which the Church of the Brethren takes part.

In 2016, Annual Conference was presented with a Founder's Award acknowledging Brethren participation in and support of CWS. Citing the words of Jesus, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me," the award noted Matthew 25:40 as the historical and biblical reference that helped inspire the movement.

Many Brethren have made major contributions to CWS over the decades: M.R. Zigler, John Metzler Sr., Ruth Milner, and Bill Cline, who were prominent in the formation and incorporation of CWS; Ken McDowell, who served on the CWS Unit Committee; Dennis Metzger, who gave 42 years of service with CWS including years of

work in Southeast Asia; recent members of the CWS Funds Development team, Jordan Blevins Bles in Iowa and Megan Miller in New England; former general secretaries and executive staff such as Stan Noffsinger, Dale Minnich, and Jay Wittmeyer.

Church of the Brethren staff who currently work closely with CWS include Roy Winter, executive director of Service Ministries, who has served on the CWS board; Jenn Dorsch-Messler, director of Brethren Disaster Ministries; and Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.

A far-reaching partnership of the Spirit

"Church World Service is about a spiritual journey," said John L. McCullough when he addressed Annual Conference in 2013 as then-president and CEO of CWS. "It is about responding to and serving a hurting world in need of healing, not because of personal volition, but because of the Spirit that moves within us."

CWS got its start in 1946 when the Federal Council of Churches, the Foreign Missions Conference, and the American Committee of the World Council of Churches jointly established a global relief and service provider of the US churches. The agency was formed "to do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone." The Church of the Brethren was one of the 17 founding denominations.

Said McCullough, "This did not happen because any one person decided it was a good idea, but because of the rousing of the Spirit, eliciting a deep emotional response to the sufferings of God's people. Following World War II,



Brethren Historical Library and Archives

“Service is our witness.”



Every day the world's poor are faced with the challenge for clean water, a sustainable food supply, and other basic elements for staying alive and healthy. The numbers are devastating, and they have not gotten better. The cries behind these facts make us bold so that we equip ourselves to serve. In spite of the complexity of geo-politics and religious rancor, we are called to build trust between diverse groups, to show true compassion and courageous hospitality, not to vacillate but to facilitate, not to wish but to work. Service is our witness—our testimony of faith at work.

—Excerpts from Church World Service's longterm vision document, CWS 2020

CWS was formed as an intentional expression of our collective spiritual journey: to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty; to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked; and to visit those in prison, the widows, orphans, and the poor.”

A primary point of connection has been the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., where CWS relief materials and disaster kits are collected for warehousing and distribution and where, in previous decades, refugees were given temporary housing on their way to resettlement coordinated by CWS.


The CWS kit program continues to engage Brethren. CWS director of congregational giving Matthew Stevens said that each year, Brethren “put their faith in action and make thousands of CWS Emergency Cleanup Buckets, CWS Hygiene Kits, and CWS School Kits to respond to the needs of our neighbors. I am so thankful for their generosity and their heart of mission.”

Others connect through CROP Hunger Walks in their local communities, one of CWS's most well-known ministries.

For staff and supporters of Brethren Disaster Ministries, connection continues through partnership in disaster relief, in the US and internationally. CWS is a trusted partner agency that helps direct Brethren disaster relief money to the people who need it most.

This fall, congregations have a new opportunity to connect via refugee resettlement. With many decades of experience and expertise, CWS is one of the organizations assuming a leading role in aiding the thousands evacuated from Afghanistan.

“Throughout the history of CWS,” said Rick Santos, CWS president and

CEO, “faithful members of the Church of the Brethren have seen the needs of their brothers and sisters worldwide and have chosen to act. As we look to the next 75 years of our shared ministry, I am confident that we can continue to make great strides toward our common vision of a just, peaceful world.” 

Our common mission

Our faithful collaboration as Church of the Brethren and Church World Service has necessarily confronted us with the atrocities of Biafra and the American wars in Vietnam and Korea; together we have stood in solidarity with the Civil Rights, anti-Apartheid, and Palestinian movements. We raised our voices in opposition to the American embargo of Cuba; and supported the virtues of Liberation Theology.

We have been living in and responding to the moment, and along the way we have found ourselves accompanied by Africans crying out for peace, justice, and human dignity; by the Roma looking for stability and acceptance; and by Pakistanis and Afghans yearning for an end to decades of wars, disasters, and trauma. We have lived in the moment, in real time with Archbishops Óscar Romero and Desmond Tutu, and with perhaps two of the most important global citizens to ever grace the earth, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Nelson Mandela.

When we think about all of these interactions with grassroots movements and complicated personalities; about how our working together has taken us from Western Europe to Asia, to Africa, to most of the Americas, and back again to Europe; and how our thinking about peace and justice has been refined in the branding fires of time, can it not be argued that this activity has been about a continuous refocusing, restoring, and renewing of our relationship with God and with one another?

—An excerpt from former CWS president and CEO John L. McCullough's address to the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2013



Digging into the roots of hunger

Q&A from around the world

Global Food Initiative manager Jeff Boshart posed a series of questions to several partners in the work against hunger and food insecurity.



Jeff Boshart

Mirlande Louis

**Agronomist
Haiti**

I received an agriculture degree at the University of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. My belief in God and Christian faith led me to work for L'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti [the Church of the Brethren in Haiti] in a program for income generation as part of the community development work of the Haiti Medical Program. In my community work, I always start with a moment of prayer to encourage participants to trust in God. I always teach them to be positive that they can change their living conditions.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Alfredo Merino

**Fundación Brethren y Unida
Ecuador**

I am a 55-year-old lawyer with a track record of working as a special judge in the public sector, a lawyer for indigenous and women's organizations, a member of the board of the Ecumenical Commission on Human Rights of Ecuador, and currently executive director of the Fundación Brethren y Unida (Brethren and United Foundation) in Ecuador. My vocation and work have always been related to my deep Christian faith, and my way of encountering meeting our Lord through serving others.



David Niyonzima

**Trauma Healing and
Reconciliation Services
Burundi**

I founded the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services in 2000, when I was general superintendent and legal representative of the Burundi Quakers. As a teacher and psychotherapist concerned with community resilience, I am convinced that economic development and healing are necessary for the promotion of social wellbeing, lasting peace, and reconciliation. Since 2016, I also have been vice chancellor of the International Leadership University–Burundi, which develops leaders of integrity for a holistic transformation of communities.

“ Everyone in that region has an annual “hungry season” of two to four months. ”

Laura Meitzner Yoder
Human Needs and Global Resources, Wheaton College United States

For several decades, I've worked with smallholder farmers and people who hunt and gather most of their food in forest areas, most recently in Southeast Asia. Now I direct Human Needs and Global Resources at Wheaton College, an international internship program that focuses on learning from the global church how they respond to the needs in their midst, with a focus on justice and flourishing of both human and natural communities.



Why are people hungry?

Louis: Haiti is an agricultural country, but the people lack education. They don't understand the riches that can come from the soil. They are discouraged from planting in some cases. People who want to work in the fields do not have enough money to cultivate, which means that they are limited to small backyard gardens, often not providing enough sustenance for a family. Agriculture has many input costs, including land rental fees for farming. Haitians who have more money don't often invest in farming. There are no large farms to provide food for the population. The state does not take responsibility to help farmers. People lack technology to increase from small-scale agriculture to large-scale production. Lack of credit and quality seed sources cause great hunger.

Merino: In Ecuador, we have historically high rates of extreme poverty, unemployment, and child malnutrition. This is a consequence of the series of populist governments that have not established state policies to combat these scourges, the waste of resources where the main intention has been the accumulation of wealth for a few through corruption with state money, and the manifest inhumanity of not considering the enormous needs of the vast majority of the population. Education and health budgets have been reduced, as have school breakfasts. Thirty percent of the population have less than a dollar a day for food, when

the basic food budget is around 400 dollars per month

Niyonzima: Burundi's long-running ethnic conflicts between Hutus and Tutsi since independence in 1962, and which continued into the late 1990s, could be one of the reasons for hunger. In addition to trauma that caused the community to be hopeless for the future, and therefore not engaged in productivity, many have fled or became displaced, which means they relied on handouts. Even though significant progress toward lasting peace occurred when a new democratic government began on Aug. 26, 2005, Burundi remains among the world's poorest countries with a per capita annual income of just \$140. Burundi is the fourth least developed country in the world, with almost 68 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Over 94.3 percent of the population is dependent on smallholder agriculture.

Are there hungry people in the world because farmers don't produce enough food?

Yoder: This is true in some places I've lived—especially in drought-prone areas or those that experience disasters such as typhoons, which sometimes tragically hit just before harvest time and destroy the crops.

The area where I've lived and worked in Timor-Leste (East Timor) is an isolated island region with absolute food shortages. There's not enough food to last all year, and even



“ Climate change has been causing marked changes in rainfall patterns globally, and this greatly affects smallholder farmers. ”

people with money cannot find enough to buy. Everyone in that region has an annual “hungry season” of two to four months, depending on the year, when people have to eat wild foods or boil grasses or even make broths from things like leather, grasses, and chili peppers to get through until harvest time. Because of a border situation, food grown elsewhere cannot be brought in from the outside.

On a global level, overall grain production (including corn and soy production grown with input-intensive methods in the US Midwest) could feed more people than is currently done because grains are often used for animal feed.

How is it that farming families may not have enough to eat?

Merino: Many peasant families in Ecuador do not own their land. Others cultivate very small plots, which does not allow them enough diversity of food or the possibility of marketing surpluses to have additional family income. There are also factors such as climate change that affect crop cycles, and many families without access to irrigation water or basic services.

Niyonzima: Economic activity and farming have been hampered by the lack of a sufficient level of political and social stability in Burundi. Added to this is ignorance of farming techniques to cultivate in small plots and lack of understanding that, as many children are added, families might not match productivity with the growth rate. Women represent the majority (51.5 percent) of the population, and nearly half (45 percent) of the popu-

lation is aged 15 or under, constraining household resources.

Yoder: It’s an important and sobering reality that some of the people who experience high degrees of food insecurity are the very people who farm for a living. But in many locations where I’ve lived, the land is not available to them—sometimes taken from them or used by more socioeconomically or politically powerful interests, such as the fertile valleys of Honduras being used for export banana production while smallholder farmers eke out their living on less fertile hillsides that do not have the irrigation or marketing access of the lowlands. In many places where land has been eroded or degraded, production can decline and people then do not have enough land to produce enough for the whole year.

What barriers prevent people from getting out of poverty?

Merino: The main one in Ecuador is the lack of access to equal opportunities in education, health, basic services, housing, and food. Extreme inequality between the haves and the have-nots. The absence of state policies for access to sources of work and a dignified life. During the pandemic, 35 percent of students in rural areas abandoned their studies to work in support of their families. A high percentage of the poor do not complete their education and become part of those who are illiterate and do informal, dangerous work from a very young age. Appropriation of agricultural land by large companies has led many families to migrate to cities in search of survival.





Proyecto Aldrea Global

Yoder: Access to sufficient or sufficiently fertile land is a problem for many smallholder farmers. Those in isolated areas may not be able to get inputs they need in a timely way, lack the resources to sell excess production above subsistence, or sometimes lack market access for value-added production of some of their products. An important factor is extended or recurrent conflict that causes people to migrate. People who need to migrate to escape violence can lose their seeds or miss a harvest season, and sometimes opposing factions burn crops as part of their strategies of attack or retaliation.

What is the connection between environmental degradation, climate change, and hunger?

Louis: The degradation of the environment is produced by the misuse of land as we farm, by the misuse of resources, by industrial development, to name a few. Climate change is the product of environmental degradation that gives birth to hunger and starvation—because with climate change, many farmers will not plant crops as they are not guaranteed enough rain for successful harvests. We can say environmental degradation gives rise to climate change and finally it increases hunger.

Merino: This connection is absolutely direct. On a planetary level, desertification continues to advance; access to fresh water continues to decrease, with all the consequences in terms of health and land productivity. The use of chemicals and genetically modified seeds have contributed to environmental abuse.

Niyonzima: We have made some connections through the project Farming in God’s Way in Burundi. Poorer communities are trained how to farm with respect for the creation. These farmers ensure that the environment is taken care of and not destroyed. For example, they learn that when they burn the grass instead of mulching it, they further contribute to environmental degradation. Those who do terracing fight soil erosion. Of course, the fight against climate change is a collective initiative, but the population has to be sensitized on how to do their part.

Yoder: Climate change has been causing marked changes in rainfall patterns globally, and this greatly affects smallholder farmers whose livelihoods are dependent on reliable rainfall. An important example of this would be the extended droughts in Central America that have wreaked havoc on basic corn and bean production seasons and resulted in crop failure across many years.

Are there connections between governmental or international politics and hunger?

Louis: Hunger in Haiti is the product of many facts that we must analyze properly. Haitians do not use resources well, and our population is growing. Agricultural families do not have a guide to help them with new technology; there are no agronomists to visit their fields, as they stay mainly in their offices. Also, the importation of agricul-

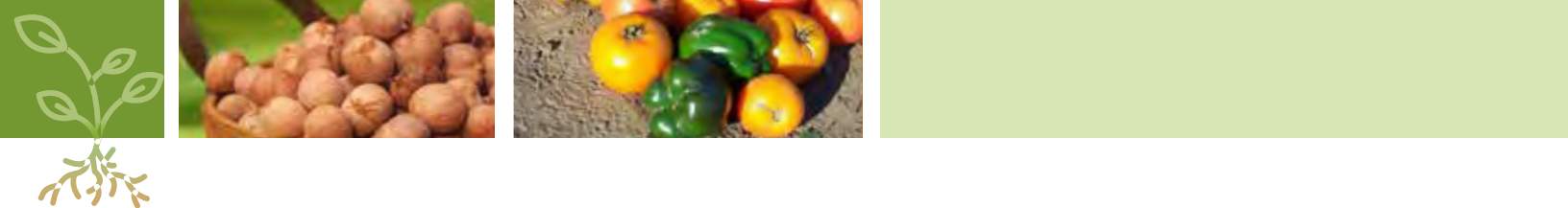
tural products allows other countries to gain the advantage of creating markets in Haiti. For example, if the Haitian market were closed to the Dominican Republic for one month, it would hurt Dominican producers.

Merino: All the recent Ecuadorian governments have promoted conventional agriculture, that is the use of agrochemicals, *latifundia* [large parcels of privately owned land], mining that has devastated community lands and polluted water, the introduction of genetically modified seeds that have replaced heirloom seeds, as well as complete neglect of small peasant producers with ancestral knowledge, not granting them operating loans, training, or access to any subsidies.

Niyonzima: Burundi’s and the international community’s initiatives and mechanisms related to war prevention and peacebuilding are key to reducing hunger in our country. We have experienced, for example, that the burning of houses and refugee situations contribute very much in increasing hunger.

What are solutions to end hunger?

Louis: In Haiti, training the people to show them that there are great riches in cultivating the land. Then, the government has to take responsibility for changing the country’s agricultural policy and encourage farming and reforestation. The private sector must invest in agriculture or large farms.



“ The Burundi communities may not say boldly that they have come out of poverty, but they can testify that they have enough to feed their families today. ”

Merino: It's a very difficult question. Personally, I believe that education is the fundamental basis to get out of poverty, but serious public policies will lead to helpful laws, applied impartially—and more of the state budget should be invested in employment, housing, health, and education. In addition, the fight against corruption at all levels is very necessary, which I think should include ethical training from an early age. Also fundamental is the commitment of faith and the conviction that there can be no spiritual tranquility if we do not do something for those most in need.

Niyonzima: Hunger can be ended in Burundi. The environmental degradation has to be stopped, as a joint effort of national and international bodies with some efforts done on higher levels, like the international lobbies on climate change, but others on local levels, like stopping use of chemical fertilizers that destroy nutrients which help the soil produce enough to feed communities. Appropriate farming technologies must be introduced in alignment with farming that respects the creation, and communities must be sensitized to get involved wholeheartedly. Non-governmental organizations like THARS should be supported to continue making a difference in this regard. Burundians themselves will have to stand up and change their mentality. The government needs to help encourage the population through intensive sensitization that hunger can be ended if everyone tries to remove causes of war and conflicts. Trauma must be healed, because no trauma healing means no wellbeing.



Do you have any hopeful stories of people who have come out of poverty and are now thriving?

Louis: I will tell the story of a young man in the community where I have been working for over five years. This brother walked into one of the Brethren churches when his economic situation was very difficult. He asked to participate in my program, which is income generation. I gladly accepted him, and he came to the trainings. He learned to prepare corn wine, enriched peanut butter, liquid soap, and household cleaner, and how to do business, to name just a few skills. He started his own small business with 1,750 gourdes (approximately \$200 US) that he borrowed from his school money. God blessed the business. After three years, he had a business valued at 1 million gourdes (over \$10,000 US).

Merino: The community closest to our foundation, Picalquí. Based on a lot of unity, coordinated work, and sacrifices they have been making progress in the fight against poverty. A good percentage of the young people have man-

aged to finish their university studies and currently support their families and the community. Additionally, with the support of local organizations and NGOs, they have built good irrigation water supply systems and practice agro-ecology.

Niyonzima: The Burundi communities that have been introduced to the Farmer Field School for Sustainable Development may not say boldly that they have come out of poverty, but they can testify that they have enough to feed their families today.

I have in mind Adelaide. After participating in Farming in God's Way, she applied all she learned. She was widowed in 1993. Her husband was murdered, leaving her with one daughter. Her daughter and three children live with Adelaide, who is building her own house from the money she made as she sold her harvest. She also learned sewing and makes quilts, tote bags, and other clothes, which she is selling to get her out of poverty. As a devout Christian, she thanks God for saving her life, both spiritually and physically.

The hunger problem

Seeking a deeper involvement

by Jeff Boshart

As the manager of the Global Food Initiative (GFI)

for the past nine years, I've made many friends and acquaintances across the world. Recently, I received a call from a friend from Ohio. It is always a pleasure to speak with GFI friends and volunteers, as they offer great insights and encouragement. They also stretch my knowledge of food and agricultural issues. This caller began by referring to an article he read in a local publication that proclaimed: "We can't 'food bank' our way out of this crisis." America has a hunger problem, and COVID-19 made it worse.

One definition for the word "hunger" relates to that feeling in the stomach one experiences when missing a meal or two. The article my friend referred to was not talking about that. It was speaking more about hunger as food insecurity. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations defines food insecurity on the individual level as when someone lacks regular access to enough safe and nutritious

food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.

My experience living and working in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nigeria, along with my studies in international agriculture, mean that I usually have more to say about international food and agriculture topics. However, I have grown (no pun intended) more intimately involved with domestic food issues through my second job, which is working for my wife who is a market gardener. We sell eggs, lamb, vegetables, fruits, and cut flowers at a local market near our farm in southern Wisconsin.

The crisis my friend was referring to is the increase in the number of people who are looking to food banks or food pantries for help feeding their families. In short, hunger in America stubbornly hangs on while food production continues to increase.

How can this be? A 2016 publication by Reinvestment Fund, titled *Feeding the Line or Ending the Line: Innovations Among Food Banks in the United States*, traces the history of food banking in

the US to the 1960s and points out that it was never meant to be a solution to hunger, but an extra help during economic downturns.

In the 1980s, cuts in federal food assistance caused more people to rely on food banks and food pantries. The Great Recession of 2008 and COVID-19 each swelled the ranks of families and individuals who found themselves seeking food assistance.

Lots of extra free time due to the COVID-19 pandemic got me thinking (and reading!) about the complex food system here in the US—a system that starts on the farm in rural areas and ends on consumers' plates in cities and towns across the country, although one might argue it ends with consumer waste in various forms.

Hunger anywhere is a symptom of poverty. Poverty can be a result of a lack of economic opportunities, low wages, limited access to affordable health care, underfunded schools, armed conflict—any of which can be exacerbated by racial or ethnic discrimination.



Alyssa Parker



“How can this country’s farmers produce so much food, and yet their own neighbors are still going hungry?”

Hunger in farm country

When thinking of poverty in America, images of blighted urban neighborhoods may come to mind, but something is amiss in farm country as well. How can this country’s farmers produce so much food, and yet their own neighbors are still going hungry? Why are farmers leaving farming? In 2019 in my state of Wisconsin, 800 farms were lost—that’s more than 2 per day!

One day, while waiting for my order at a local pizza restaurant, I struck up a conversation with the cashier. She began working there so her family wouldn’t have to sell their farm. It turns out she’s not alone. Very few farm families can support themselves without at least one member of the family taking a job off the farm.

In 2019 the median farm income for US farm households was a negative number, reports the USDA’s Economic Research Service. When I was studying agriculture at Cornell University in the 1990s, not much was said about this in the animal and crop science classes where the emphasis was on increasing farm productivity. One had to go to the rural sociology department for that conversation.

The reasons for negative incomes are complicated. Some farmers make major capital improvements in the form of equipment, for example, and then use those costs to offset income, all to avoid taxes or pay lower taxes. Many farmers are land rich and cash poor, reliant on a second job or a spouse’s job for income and benefits like health insurance.

Wall Street Journal writers Jacob Bunge and Jesse Newman reported in July that “most US farm households can’t solely rely on farm income, turning what was once a way of life into a part-time job. On average, 82 percent of US farm household income is expected to come from off-farm work this year, up from 53 percent in 1960, according to the US Department of Agriculture.”

Likely these farmers do not have much in the way of retirement savings, as their plan is to sell some land to support their retirement. That might work for them, but not for the next generation. Beginning farmers who do not inherit land find it almost impossible to get a start in farming. The USDA reports that the average age of farmers (according to its 2017 Census of Agriculture) was 59.4 years old—up from 50.3 in 1978.

A trend that began decades ago and was written about extensively by Shantilal Bhagat, one of my predecessors with the GFI (formerly the Global Food Crisis Fund), has continued. Larger and larger farms equal fewer and fewer farmers. That translates to fewer customers at small-town businesses and increased rural to urban or suburban migration, and its ensuing brain drain of young people.

As an aside, this is certainly one factor among many for the decline of rural Brethren congregations. As agricultural economist Richard Levins would say, “Cows don’t go to hardware stores”—or churches, I might add.

How is it that fewer farmers leads to a hunger crisis in rural America? Is there a connection to America’s rural economic woes and its simultaneous growth of farm size?

Fewer farmers lead to fewer small businesses, fewer small business owners, fewer jobs, a shrinking rural population, school closures or consolidations, and fewer rural hospitals. Data collected by the Food Research and Action Center shows that in many rural counties in the US, service industries now represent the largest percentage of jobs. These are predominantly minimum-wage jobs or seasonal jobs, with better paying manufacturing jobs disappearing along with the loss of local businesses over the past few decades. The USDA reports that the number of jobs in rural communities still has not recovered to pre-Great Recession levels of 2007, while jobs in metro areas have increased nearly 10 percent.

An article in the August *National Geographic* titled “America’s Hunger Crisis” has a dramatic, county-by-county map illustrating food insecurity in America. Rural communities, particularly communities of color in the Deep South,

When donating items to a food pantry

- Make sure the food items aren’t expired or have packaging concerns. If you wouldn’t buy it, don’t donate it.
- Opened food items can’t be used. Instead, see if a friend or neighbor can use them.
- No alcohol or anything related to alcohol may be donated. Neither can medicines or home-made food.
- Check to see if your pantry accepts perishable food. Some pantries don’t have access to refrigeration or freezers.
- Find out what is needed. Most food pantries have a wish list.
- Monetary donations are always appreciated.
- Remember that food insecurities are year-round and not just at the holidays.

— Karen Stocking

are illustrations of how the pandemic exacerbated chronic hunger in the region. Due to racial discrimination and its accompanying lack of infrastructure (in the form of government services and business investment), the highest levels of food-insecure households are among Native Americans (1 in 4 households), African Americans (1 in 5), and the Latino/Hispanic population (1 in 6).



Ralph Miner

Why volunteer? by Karen Stocking

It started about 10 years ago, when my son's Boy Scout troop was volunteering at the Northern Illinois Food Bank and they needed another adult. Once his troop wasn't volunteering as often, I decided my New Year's resolution would be to volunteer once a month. A couple of months into my resolution, I saw the need and became a weekly volunteer.

It's not just about helping. It's also about learning. One of the first things I learned is the difference between a food bank and a food pantry. A food bank is a food storage and distribution depot for smaller frontline agencies. A food pantry is an individual site that distributes food directly to those in need. Food pantries usually get their food from a food bank.


Another thing: who knew that cardboard boxes actually have an official top and a bottom?

It's not just about giving clients food, but it's also about helping them think outside their box. Some clients are so focused on surviving and making it through the day that a simple suggestion is a new idea. At a mobile food pantry (a pantry that travels into neighborhoods that have a high need), I was at the bread station and all that was left were hot dog buns. A client said "no, thank you" since they didn't have hot dogs. When I suggested that they could use the buns like a sub and make sandwiches, they were thankful as they hadn't thought of that. At another station, they were handing out two bags each of frozen chili and macaroni and cheese. One client said she had room in the freezer for only one bag of each. When we said she could take the other bags and start thawing them out to make chili mac, she hadn't thought of mixing the two items.

She was thinking of chili as one meal and macaroni and cheese as another.

There are many different projects at a food bank: bagging fruits or vegetables, labeling cans (those letters and numbers on the bottom of the can actually tell what's in the can), bagging cereal, or making senior boxes, backpack kits for school children, COVID relief boxes, and holiday boxes. We volunteers usually ask questions about what we are doing and how the food is being used or where it came from, so that we can learn more about what our food bank does and how it receives its food.

Working with the volunteer groups that include children is always interesting. One of the ongoing jobs is labeling canned vegetables; a local company donates the canned vegetables, but the food bank must put on the labels. One set of labels were a bit too long, so we had to make sure that we didn't cover the end with the directions. A couple of the kids said, "Who doesn't know how to make a can of vegetables?" When I asked them how they would do it, one replied, "I'm not allowed to use the stove." Another said, "Ask Mom to make them." I explained that some people never were taught how to cook, so they don't know how. Then they understood why the directions needed to show.

Over the years, my work at the food bank has become my Monday job. Helping others is a great way to start the week. It's also a reminder that, no matter what is going on in my life, others have it worse. 

Karen Stocking is finance and production assistant for Brethren Press and Communications.



“community gardens allow church people to get to know their neighbors and become involved in meeting both physical and spiritual needs.”

Hunger also is increasing in Appalachia, particularly Kentucky, where 7 of the 15 most food-insecure counties can be found. Across America’s heartland, and on the coasts, food insecurity also is on the rise, with 1 in 9 Americans facing food insecurity, and that was pre-pandemic.

Deeper involvement

No quantity of donated canned goods will reverse the underlying causes of food insecurity among America’s poor, whether rural or urban. That doesn’t mean we should stop donating, but maybe a deeper level of involvement is called for.

It turns out that those running America’s food banks are keenly aware of the issues at hand and are leading

the way to reduce demand for their services through unique partnerships and creative solutions. Connections are facilitated between local policy makers, health care providers, farmers, job training programs, and schools to provide community-specific interventions to reduce hunger among those they serve. For greater detail on some of these creative ideas I recommend the document from the Reinvestment Fund, which is available online.

Statewide programs like Michigan’s Double Up Food Bucks program, which matches federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars at farmers’ markets, benefit both SNAP recipients and local small farmers.

Across the Church of the Brethren,

church-based community gardens allow church people to get to know their neighbors and become involved in meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Some efforts are at the level of entire neighborhoods, any number of which have been highlighted in GFI newsletters. Others are more personal, as when a vendor at a farmers’ market adds extra items to a customer’s bag who has presented her with SNAP dollars.

Frequently we hear entrepreneurs using the language of trying to “scale up” an idea, but I firmly believe that when combating hunger there is no single, one-size-fits-all solution. To quote American journalist Henry Louis Mencken, “For every complex problem, there’s a solution that’s simple, neat, and wrong.”

Feeding the body of Christ by Alyssa Parker

In Harrisburg, Pa., 30 percent of families are classified as food-insecure. In our church neighborhood, nearly 50 percent of families fall below the poverty line.

In our Agape Satyagraha graduate program, we spent a month discussing food insecurity and the intersections of its effects on our lives. We discussed how food insecurity affects our community including children, their education, and mental health. We incorporated videos and statistics into the discussion to help us connect with the issues and really wrestle with the reality of the system.

Food insecurity was a term our participants had never heard of, let alone understood. After about a month of discussions, Dinesti Owens said, “I learned that any and everybody can go through food insecurity, even if you are wealthy. It can also really affect your mental health. I should know.”

Others shared that they didn’t realize that it can affect a child’s growth socially and even their grades and attendance in school. They also said it can be embarrassing for children when they have to eat the dreaded “cheese sandwich” given to

those who can’t afford to purchase lunch. Even if they pack a lunch, it’s clear to everyone that these children do not have the same food as their classmates. Food insecurity creates a division between those who have and those who have not.

We also shared with one another our own struggles about growing up food-insecure and what it was like to penny-pinch. We found this is an ongoing issue for some college students who are food-insecure and discussed what they do to bring attention to the issue on their own campuses. Mylea Coles and Dinesti Owens said the discussion brought back negative memories, but it also showed how far they have come. “We do this for ourselves and to get a handle on it in our own lives.”

So what can we do?

What are we doing to bring attention to this issue? At bcmPEACE, a weekly Wellness Hub gives out meat, milk, eggs, pantry items, and fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition to the produce, we often hand out recipes with suggestions on how to use the lesser-known produce items.


When working with communities anywhere in the world and trying to bring about change, I trust that solving complicated problems begins with a process of reflection that involves stakeholders who are most affected by the problems and ends with a proposal or plan of action. I've seen how efforts by GFI partners have truly brought hope and reduced hunger for people both domestically and internationally.

I recall a field trip to a farming community in upstate New York that inspired me when I was a graduate student. This community had reversed the exodus of people and businesses. What was its secret? The influx of conservative Mennonite farmers who brought with them their communal decision-making and small-farm lifestyle.

We met with an older farmer who explained their philosophy: "Where agriculture flourishes, the other arts will follow." He pointed out that what may seem like ridiculous rules about wheth-

er a farmer could have rubber tires on a tractor, or presumably the size of a tractor, had a communal logic to them. Someone in the community could manufacture a metal tractor wheel, but not a rubber one. It also limited the size of the farm and dictated the types of crops being grown. It was at once an economic and a religious decision.

I'm not saying that we all must become rural farmers, although I do think that more of us could become

involved with community gardening. I pray that we will join together to imagine and work for a world without hunger through intentional reflection and effort, led by a small group of believers coming together to start a movement to change the world—one community at a time. If the Holy Spirit is in it, it wouldn't be the first time. 

Jeff Boshart is manager of the Global Food Initiative for the Church of the Brethren.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford



We also offer opportunities for community engagement and opportunities for further success, such as information about businesses that advertise affordable healthcare, voter registration, cooking and nutrition classes, and more. We recognize that food security is multifaceted and intersectional.

In addition, our church has a small urban garden where we encourage community members to cultivate their own vegetables in raised-box beds each summer.


We are working to educate as well as engage, so we can be a part of breaking a cycle that so often harms our brothers and sisters.

What does this have to do with our faith?

I am reminded of the popular story when Jesus fed the 5,000. Their needs were met. We have to acknowledge first that there is a need to be met, but there's also an abundance of food available. How are we, as the hands and feet of Christ, making sure people are receiving that abundance of food that is available in America? It all started as one young boy shared his lunch for

the good of others.

What if our social systems had this same moral motivation to feed our neighbors? I've attended a number of churches that have regular fellowship meals. That is a tradition in which the church bonds over food—feeding the body and feeding the spirit. When those are the only moments when some people can be full physically, how does that affect us spiritually and emotionally?

It is written in James 2:15-17, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" We often remind ourselves that we are part of the body of Christ, but when another part of the body is hungry, it cannot function properly with the rest of the body. So we must lift them up—and in this case, that means we need to feed them. 

Alyssa Parker works with Brethren Community Ministries (bcmPEACE), a ministry related to First Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa.



Carrying our trauma umbrellas

How to walk together as the
pandemic lingers on

by Janelle Bitikofer



This fall the rain clouds have thickened once again. Here are some key strategies to prepare. . .



Most of us thought it would be over months ago. But as the pandemic lingers on and hospitals fill up again this fall, our lives remain on a roller coaster. We hold our breath, unsure what tomorrow will bring.

This uncertainty, change, stress, and loss have left many of us with ongoing and residual trauma. An increasing number of people in our families, churches, and communities are experiencing clinical depression, anxiety, anger, and grief.

As the pandemic continues to affect us, here are ways that we can respond to the emotional needs in our own lives and the lives around us, and ways that our churches can be a light.

The trauma rainstorm

To understand the emotional impact of the pandemic, it's helpful to think of it as a rainstorm. It came upon us unexpectedly in March 2020. We didn't have our umbrellas with us. We were shocked and unprepared—emotionally and in all other ways. As a result, we've all become thoroughly drenched. We've experienced upheaval, constant change, losses, and fears. The storm has been overwhelming.

And then the clouds began to clear. The vaccine became an option. Hospitals began to see fewer cases of COVID-19 and fewer deaths. Schools, businesses, and churches re-opened, and mask mandates became less strict. We caught a glimpse of the rainbow and thought we'd soon be back to sunny days.

But this fall the rain clouds have thickened once again. Hospitals are filling up. Churches and schools are saying, "Bring your mask." The rainstorm continues.

Emotional safeguarding

Fortunately, the difference now is that this fall is not our first time living in a pandemic. We've already done that for a year and a half. We're still living with losses and trauma from that experience, but in many ways we are now pros. This time we have our trauma umbrellas. We've learned what to expect—even if that is just to expect the unexpected. We've learned that things may change from day to day and we will just need to roll with that. This puts us in a better position to prevent and reduce emotional distress. This is good news for our mental health.

Here are some key strategies to prepare for the rain and reduce negative emotional experiences from the pandemic:

Acknowledge the rain. Identify and acknowledge stress that comes to you as a result of the pandemic. Talk about that stress and those changes, struggles, frustrations, or losses with friends or loved ones when or before they happen. Provide each other with mutual support. Preparing for stress before it

comes and talking about our stress when it happens help prevent long-term negative effects of built-up stress or trauma that can lead to more severe mental health conditions like depression or PTSD.

Prepare your family. Talk about each person's fears and frustrations related to the changing pandemic situation and other stress this fall. Help each family member identify strategies for dealing with those changes and emotions. Check in regularly and provide support for each other.

Encourage each other

As broader groups of Christians we can also support each other. We Anabaptist Christians value living out the practice of mutual support—walking together through the ups and downs of life. This mutual support includes meeting each other's spiritual, emotional, and social needs.

This past year we've seen congregations hop on to Zoom to attend weddings, put on masks to help unload someone's moving truck, send a shower

These people may need extra support right now:

- People who never experienced depression or anxiety before the pandemic but are experiencing these things now. If this is true for you or a loved one, you can take a confidential depression quiz at https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/depression/#gf_1. Use that same website to locate a local counselor.
- People who were previously living with a mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, or PTSD. They may need more support or a listening ear, and some may need assistance reconnecting with counselors or doctors whose care was disrupted by the pandemic.
- People in addiction recovery who may need alternative coping mechanisms to help maintain their sobriety.

“As the sun does begin to shine again, be aware that many people are carrying unresolved stress and grief.”

of birthday cards, and pray outside people's houses during difficult times.

During this second year of the pandemic, providing mutual support is just as important as ever. Those who were lonely last year during lockdowns may be lonely again this year. Those who struggled financially due to job or business loss may be afraid of what the next economic phase will bring. People who lost loved ones are still dealing with that sadness and the empty place at the table. It's important for us to be intentional—asking about each other's needs and working together to meet those needs, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Galatians 6:2 (NIV) reminds us to “carry each other's burdens and in this way ... fulfill the law of Christ.”

Sometimes little acts of mutual caring can make someone's day. The other month while I was away traveling, I opened my house to missionaries who were in the US on sabbatical. I checked in with them, saying, “I'm sorry to have to ask this, but would you mind mowing the lawn? The city fines homeowners if the grass gets too long.” The missionaries replied, “We would have been glad to mow your lawn, but two guys from your church stopped by this morning and already did it. Didn't you know they were coming?” I didn't. In fact, I hadn't asked the church for help. But that unexpected act of service made my day!

This morning, as I swung by Starbucks to sit at an outside table and write this article, I took the opportunity to buy an extra coffee to drop off on my

Resources for churches

Streetlights: Empowering Christians to Respond to Mental Illnesses and Addictions, by Janelle Bitikofer. Available from Brethren Press.

Churches Care, an advanced training program to empower church leaders and congregations support people who are experiencing mental illnesses or addictions. Learn more at www.emu.edu/lancaster/churches-care.

way home for a friend from church who's having a stressful day. As a faith community, there are so many ways we can make each other's load a little lighter.

What churches can do

During this phase of the pandemic rainstorm, our church programs and resources can also be a shelter and a light. Churches can provide intentional spaces and opportunities, in person or online, for listening, sharing, supporting, and encouraging each other; reducing and normalizing stress; grieving our losses; and laying our burdens at the feet of Jesus.

Strategies that can help meet emotional, spiritual, or social needs include:


- Small groups for regular sharing of life and prayer needs.
- Social activities to reduce isolation and loneliness.
- Support groups for those experiencing grief and loss, anxiety, or depression.
- Information and referrals to local mental health counseling resources.
- Memorial celebrations to remember

loved ones lost during the pandemic.

- Social support and outreach for people who live alone.

One of the most important ways that congregations can help members weather this rainstorm is to talk about it from the front of the church. Acknowledge that we're all having stress at various levels and that it's essential to reach out to both God and each other for support as we walk this road together.

As the sun does begin to shine again, be aware that many people are carrying unresolved stress and grief built up over the past year and a half. Creating intentional opportunities for people to talk about that stress and grief will begin to relieve it. This can prevent depression and other mental health struggles that can arise from burdens carried alone for too long.

As we walk together through this phase of the pandemic and into the future, let's remember to carry our trauma umbrellas. Let's talk about the stress and grief we've already experienced and support each other through mutual care, as we the church shine light in tough times for ourselves and those around us. 

Janelle Bitikofer is executive director of We Rise International and lead mental health trainer for Churches Care, a mental health and addictions training program for congregations. A licensed mental health and addictions counselor, she is adjunct faculty at Eastern Mennonite University.

Janelle Bitikofer is leading a second webinar on mental health for the Church of the Brethren on Oct. 7. The event is sponsored by the Anabaptist Disabilities Network and Discipleship Ministries. Find information on registering (plus a link to the webinar archive) at www.brethren.org/webcasts.



The ministry of

presence

Filling our toolbox with tools of compassion

from the Listening Team for Annual Conference

After being inspired by the call to follow God into an adventurous future, issued by Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday, the church is now urged by 2022 moderator David Sollenberger to take the compelling vision seriously and join Jesus in our neighborhoods—and, even further, to embrace one another as sisters and brothers.

During this year's Annual Conference, our seven Listening Team members offered a ministry of presence. The Conference officers invited attendees to contact us to seek help with deep feelings or challenges in processing disagreements during the Conference.

There has been a ministry of presence during Annual Conference for many years. For this year's virtual Conference, the officers invited Barbara Daté to assemble a team of volunteers. The team was available by phone or in the virtual "listening room." We also took the initiative to nurture those we encountered in various sessions.

There was real joy in being able to offer the listening room to those who experienced things they deeply wanted to discuss. We appreciated the officers offering our services to delegates and nondelegates alike. It reinforced our understanding that listening to

each other is not just a treasured concept but is recognized as important for people in the church to feel safe and cherished.

The care taken by denominational leaders leading up to Conference this year was a good example of healthy practices of listening and caring for our people. However, this care must continue in an intentional way. When our team expressed concern for the delegates who were not in the majority during the affirmation of the compelling vision—those who disagreed and also those who set aside their reservations in order for the process to move forward—technology and time prevented their giving feedback at that juncture.

Later, we were somewhat reassured when general secretary David Steele invited every delegate to express their input after the vote. We also were reassured to hear that the Compelling Vision Working Group plans to explore the reasons behind people's reservations and then discern how to best respond and reach out.

The range of concerns we responded to varied, and the emotions ranged from dismay, pain, and worry to anger and confusion. One perspective was constant: concern for self and one another as kindred folk—despite harm

felt or caused—and hope for the future of our beloved denomination.

How do we move forward?

Life in the church is complex, and there is a history of pain and misunderstanding that goes back more than four decades—maybe even 140 years to the last large schism among the Brethren in the 1880s. Our culture of historic pain and unresolved disagreements, often emerging between regional cultures within the church, has enormous impact on our current life together, passing even from generation to generation.

How do we move from "here to there"? From brokenness, and even hostility, to healthy person-to-person relationships and mutually engaging relationships within the body of the church? And what does Jesus teach us about these kinds of relationships?

Since 1708, the Brethren have been a people committed to follow Jesus. We need not dig far to find lessons that Jesus taught about what to do and how to live together. For example, are we ones who are without sin to cast the first stone (John 8:6-8)? Can we turn the other cheek and stand with dignity and humility without undergoing humiliation (Matthew 5:38-41)?

An Algonquin writer, Virginia

The components of the Chinese character for "listen" capture important aspects of deep compassionate listening



Maracle, shares this poignant word from Sister Theresa, a nun from Winnipeg: “Pain we experience comes from not being seen, heard, trusted, recognized, or feeling safe and secure.” Deep compassionate listening is one way we can experience what Daté calls the “softening of the heart,” one to another. New and deeper understanding yields the possibility of transformation and breakthroughs in strained relationships. It is definitely worth the effort.

There are two recent models in the Church of the Brethren that were designed to immerse church members in this vision. Atlantic Southeast District’s Peace Camp, held virtually this summer and led by two members of our team—Daté and songwriter Linda K. Williams—met on the theme “Tools for Compassion,” and helped participants learn skills for deep, compassionate listening. Participants learned “micro-paraphrasing” to impart empathy and compassion. They explored how to view our denomination through the lens that Mennonite John Paul Lederach outlined

with these questions: What is truth? What is mercy? What is justice? And what is peace?

These four perspectives can help us understand one another better and be catalysts to put into practice “another way of living.” Together, Williams and Daté wrote a new refrain to Williams’ “Forbearance Song,” quoting the late Roger Fisher of “Getting to Yes” fame: “Even when we don’t see eye to eye, we can walk arm in arm” (see the 2008 Annual Conference Resolution on “Urging Forbearance”).

In the second model, Western Plains District spent a year exploring and preparing for challenging topics through a series of small sharing and listening circles. Two members of our team, Gail Erisman Valeta and Gary Flory, helped design the process.

One thing the district learned is that compassionate listening makes a big difference—inviting our “hearts to listen” deeply to one another and attempt to understand one another before sharing in discussion and later in discernment.

Erisman Valeta highlighted Paul’s question in Romans 8:35: “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” In a very divided America, there are many points of view and perspectives that encourage us to stay divided.

It was encouraging to hear that a priority of transforming conflict has emerged from the Mission and Ministry Board. Our world is looking for another way of living. It is vitally important that we Brethren explore what we can offer to the world for such a time as this (Esther 4:14) and that we look at processes that help us walk together and remain in community while still being true to our conscience.

The power of compassionate listening

Members of our team have witnessed at recent Annual Conferences how compassionate listening has made a world of difference. In one example, there was an emotionally charged disagreement at a table on the business floor. During break times and meals together, two of the

“New and deeper understanding yields the possibility of transformation and breakthroughs.”

people had long discussions in which they really listened to each other. Some pre-judgments were replaced with a degree of mutual respect and understanding. Although positions did not necessarily change, except to soften, a friendship was formed.

Another table group engaged in deep listening about how they and their loved ones were hurt by interpretations of the church's positions. Rather than trying to compel others to align with their points of view, members of the group took the opportunity to get to know others as people. They expressed empathy about the hurt and harm that had occurred.

While these examples were specific, the situations are universal. When one offers compassion to another through deep listening, such breakthroughs are not unusual.


We want to name arenas where further attentiveness is needed. There are vulnerable members across our denomination whom we continue to pray for and reach out to. Among them are young adults, many who have grown up in the Church of the Brethren and have enjoyed living simply, peacefully, and in community. On their own journeys, some have come to feel invisible within the denomination.

This summer they organized themselves into an affinity group under the initial inspiration of Jessie Houff, community arts minister at Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren. They invite us to nurture and support them anew. They remind us that most were active in their youth groups, or went to National Youth Conference, perhaps went to Brethren colleges or Brethren Volunteer Service, and are now gifted adults in their congregations. They seek fuller participation, but mostly feel the pain of being unwelcome.

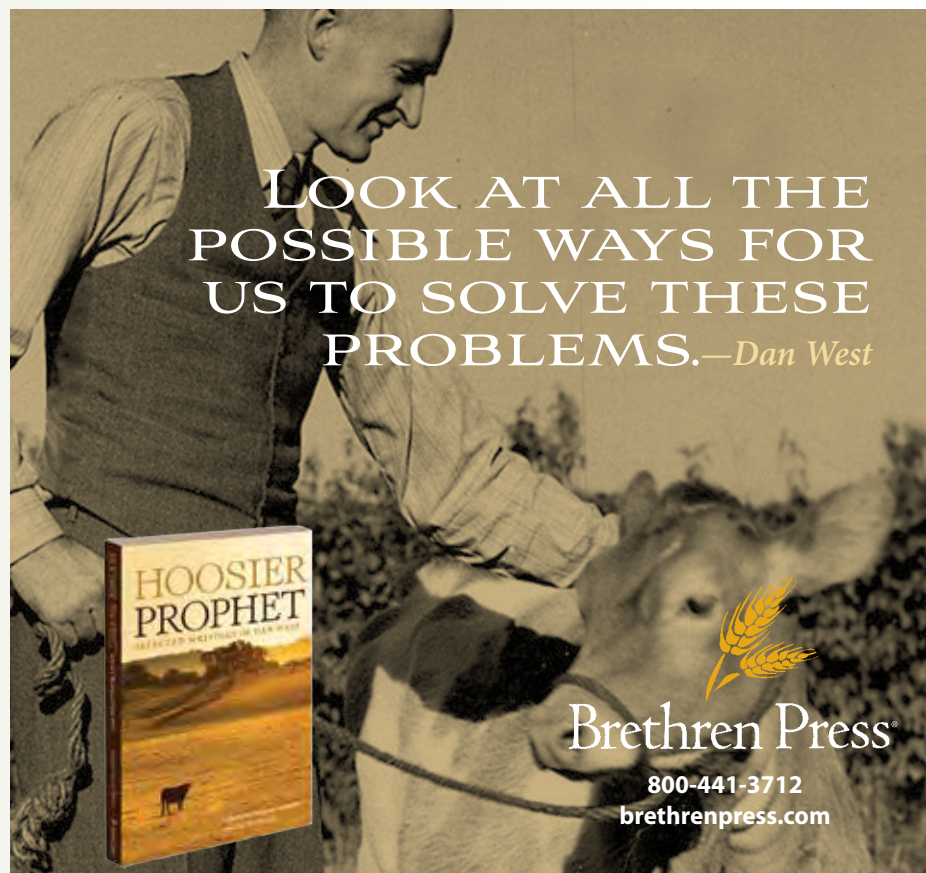
Young adults are “trailblazing” some paths for us right now, observed LaDonna Sanders Nkosi, director of Intercultural Ministries, during a panel discussion at National Older Adult Conference. The church might benefit greatly from being more mindful of those trails and those who are blazing them.

It is the hope and prayer of our team that our denomination will intentionally, prayerfully, and fully live into Sollenberger's invitation to truly embrace each other within the church, as Christ has embraced each of us. When we who call each other “sister” and “brother” use the unconditional love of Christ as our model, we will see a new era for our beloved Church of the Brethren where we work side by

side, arm in arm, embracing one another because we understand one another.

Our work is not yet done; we have much more to do together as a historic peace church. We can move away from pain, darkness, and lament by deeply listening for understanding of each of our journeys. It is then we will be able to remove the fetters and continue building the new world we seek. 

The Listening Team for the 2021 Annual Conference was coordinated by Barbara Daté of Pacific Northwest District. She is a member of the Intercultural Ministries Advisory Committee and newly elected to the Mission and Ministry Board. Also on the team were Gary Flory of Western Plains, Carol Mason of Pacific Northwest, Don Mitchell of Atlantic Northeast, Rick Polhamus of Southern Ohio and Kentucky, Gail Erisman Valeta of Western Plains, and Linda K. Williams of Pacific Southwest.



LOOK AT ALL THE POSSIBLE WAYS FOR US TO SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS.—*Dan West*

Brethren Press
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The Bible studies this year come from *Shine: Living in God's Light*, the Sunday school curriculum published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. Each month, MESSENGER is publishing two of the Bible essays that help teachers prepare. These essays are written by Steven Schweitzer and Robert Bowman. The illustrations are by Brian Dumm.



David, the shepherd boy

1 Samuel 16:1-13

After God's rejection of Saul as king, God tells Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as Saul's replacement. Samuel has been grieving over Saul, but God will not allow him to remain in this state. God instructs Samuel to journey to the small village of Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, so that God can reveal to Samuel which of the sons will become the new king.

When Samuel sees Jesse's firstborn, he feels certain that Eliab is God's choice. God, however, rebukes Samuel,

Take time to reflect on each of your children or youth and their potential part in God's plans for the world. What might God see in each child's heart that you also need to see and nurture?

God, you see deep into our hearts, and you love us completely. Help me attend to the hearts of those I teach so that I may nurture and encourage them to grow into the likeness of Christ. Amen.

warning him not to consider appearance or height. These are the attributes that made Saul seem like a good choice for king (1 Samuel 9:2 and 10:23). God tells Samuel that "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (16:7).

Finally, after Samuel has seen and rejected seven of Jesse's sons, David is brought before him. David is the youngest and the one ignored in the original call to come before the prophet.

Shepherding was commonly used as a metaphor for kingship throughout the ancient world. The shepherd/king must lead the sheep/people, care for them—especially for the weak and powerless—and put himself in danger to protect them. So, it is not surprising that a king should be compared to a shepherd. What may be surprising is that a shepherd would actually become a king. From this humble beginning will come one of the most influential figures in the entire Old Testament.

The condition of the heart is a recurring theme in the book of Samuel, as in many other biblical texts. David becomes known as one after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He will be the

standard by which the book of Kings evaluates all subsequent kings of Israel and Judah. Even though David, like Saul, will commit some grievous sins and make terrible mistakes, God does not abandon David. Why the two are treated so differently is never stated. In this passage, David is selected by God; we are not given any indication why. The reasons for God choosing certain individuals are often not revealed in the Bible: see, for example, the calls to Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, and the apostle Paul.

We often have mistakenly thought that inner spirituality is a concern of only the New Testament and that the Old Testament emphasizes only physical manifestations of spirituality and devotion. This view, as with many of our ideas about differences between the Old and New Testaments, does not reflect what the texts actually say. Many of the Hebrew scriptures, including most of the prophets, Psalms, Chronicles, and Deuteronomy, celebrate the condition of the heart and the one who seeks God. Jesus clearly builds on this part of the tradition and makes it a priority in his understanding of what it means to follow after God. **M**

Abigail

1 Samuel 25:1-35



The intriguing story of David, Abigail, and Nabal is set in the early days of David. Insane jealousy or paranoia has caused King Saul to make several attempts on David's life. At the time of this story, David has fled from the king and, as a fugitive, is seeking to support himself and several hundred followers. David's followers are described in 1 Samuel 22:2 as the poor, the discontented, the distressed, and those in debt.

David is shrewd. Although fleeing from Saul, he also is seeking to strengthen support from the tribe of Judah. He and his ragtag band of men have been roaming the Judean hills providing protection against thieves and wild animals. This is the setting.


The story itself seems straightforward. David asks rich Nabal for some compensation for protecting Nabal's flock. Nabal refuses, insulting David. David is enraged and starts on a mission of vengeance, vowing to exterminate every male in Nabal's company.

At this point, Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervenes. She provides the supplies David has requested and persuades David to turn back from his mission of revenge. As a postscript to this story, Nabal dies and David marries his widow, Abigail.

In this story, we are tripped up by a few factors. The first is that biblical stories often do not tell us immediately if an action is good or bad. If one follows the whole biblical story, however, a later episode will often come up that

can be read as a judgment of the earlier story. Similarly, just because a person like David is sometimes presented as a hero does not mean that he is perfect or that his motives are pure. David could be vindictive, rash, and manipulative as well as generous, thoughtful, and graceful. This story does not come out and tell us whether David's actions are justified.

Commentators often say that Abigail "rescued" her husband from the anger of David. Nabal refuses to recognize that David had any right to compensation. Abigail does not mention the issue of compensation and whether David had a right to ask for it. She simply apologizes for her husband's behavior and speaks of what vengeance will do to David's conscience. One decision the reader must make is whether Abigail's primary motive is to rescue her husband from the anger of David or to rescue David from himself. David's life, says Abigail, lies in the hand of God. If David's enemies need to be dealt with, leave it up to God and not to David's sword.

Of course, perhaps Abigail's motives are not purely to protect either David or her husband. Perhaps she is maneuvering events for her own future. She ends her speech with a peculiar request that when David has won his throne, he should remember her. It is possible that the final result may not be completely to her satisfaction, but she succeeded in her primary goal: she prevented war between David and Nabal. 

This story is timely in our polarized society. Think of times when you have needed the creativity and resilience of Abigail. In what ways can you foster those qualities in your own life and in the lives of those you teach?

God, I never know when I will have a chance to embody your love and work for peace in the world. Help me notice and take advantage of those opportunities this week. Amen.

SHINE
LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT

Read along

- Oct. 3 The family of Ruth
Ruth 1-4
- Oct. 10 Samuel the prophet
1 Samuel 3
- Oct. 17 David, the shepherd boy
1 Samuel 16:1-13
- Oct. 24 Abigail
1 Samuel 25:1-35
- Oct. 31 King David
2 Samuel 5:1-5; 8:15-9:13



Pastor Malena Duran

Haitian Brethren receive earthquake relief

Brethren Disaster Ministries directed \$125,000 in grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to Haiti following the earthquake on Aug. 14.

A grant of \$75,000 was given to L'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) for emergency relief programming, with support from Brethren Disaster Ministries. A grant of \$50,000 supported the response by Church World Service (CWS).

An initial \$5,000 grant was used to distribute food, household items, and tarps for temporary shelters by the National Committee of the Haitian church when the group traveled to Saut Mathurine on Aug. 19 to support church members.

Additional grants:

- \$50,867 from the EDF completed the Brethren Disaster Ministries tornado rebuilding project in Dayton, Ohio.
- \$40,000 from the EDF supported the CWS program in Honduras for families affected by Hurricanes Eta

and Iota. A grant of \$30,000 was given concurrently to Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG).

- \$25,000 from the EDF continued response to the volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo through the Goma congregation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- \$15,000 from the EDF aided the COVID-19 response of IMA World Health in India.

- \$2,334.39 from the EDF helped Northern Plains District do rebuilding following the 2020 derecho in Iowa.

- \$3,000 from the Global Food Initiative (GFI) helped the agriculture program of the church in Haiti transition to a self-sustaining ministry. A grant of \$5,000 covered costs of an evaluation of the program.

- \$2,000 from the GFI went to a food distribution program of the Alpha and Omega Community Center in Lancaster, Pa.

- \$2,000 from the GFI supported the community garden of GraceWay Community Church of the Brethren in Dundalk, Md.



The National Youth Cabinet gathered Aug. 6-10 in Fort Collins, Colo., at Colorado State University for an onsite visit preparing for National Youth Conference (NYC) 2022: (front row, from left) NYC coordinator Erika Clary, Luke Schweitzer of Southern Ohio and Kentucky District, Youth and Young Adult Ministries director Becky Ullom Naugle; (back, from left) adult advisor Jason Haldeman of Atlantic Northeast District, Hayley Daubert of Shenandoah District, Bella Torres of Atlantic Northeast District, Ben Tatum of Virgina District, Geo Romero of Illinois and Wisconsin District, adult advisor Kayla Alphonse of Atlantic Southeast District. Not pictured: Elise Gage of Mid-Atlantic District, who attended via Zoom.



Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 329 completed orientation at Inspiration Hills Camp in Burbank, Ohio, from July 18 to Aug. 6: (from left) Lydia DeMoss of Bolingbrook, Ill., who will serve at L'Arche Syracuse, N.Y.; Malachi Nelson of McMinnville, Ore., who will serve at La Puente Home in Alamosa, Colo., on an interim basis before traveling to the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan; LeRae Wilson of Denton, Md., who will serve at L'Arche Dublin, Ireland; Erika Clary of Brownsville Church of the Brethren who will serve as National Youth Conference coordinator; and Galen Fitzkee of Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren who will serve at the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.



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Mission staff released from custody in South Sudan

Athanasus Ungang, Global Mission staff in South Sudan, was released from prison in August, and his colleague Utang James was released in early September. Ungang and James were among church leaders held for questioning following the murder of a church leader in May, although none were suspects and the authorities did not press formal charges. Although Ungang was released, his US passport was not returned so he has been unable to leave the country. He is a US citizen.



Edgar Gamito

Nigerian church destroyed

The Maduganari congregation of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) lost its church building in the Maiduguri area when it was demolished by authorities. The demolition occurred despite the church having a valid permit. During the demolition, security forces fired shots into the air killing one church member and injuring others.

EYN also is grieving the death of the chairman of its Board of Trustees, Maina Mamman, a minister who died in mid-August.

CDS responds to hurricane and Afghan evacuation

Children's Disaster Services in September sent volunteers to respond to Hurricane Ida and the Afghan evacuation.

Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana on Aug. 29. By that evening, CDS was planning a deployment. The first CDS team of six traveled to a Red Cross shelter in Baton Rouge, La., Sept. 1-2.

As events in Afghanistan unfolded, of particular concern for denominational staff were the evacuees. Many thousands entered the US through specific airports and then traveled to one of seven military facilities for processing. CDS partnered with Save the Children to send a team of seven to New Mexico to care for Afghan children in a military facility, and sent volunteers to help care for children of Afghan families arriving at Dulles International Airport.

Personnel

Brian Bert begins in January as executive director of Camp Blue Diamond in Petersburg, Pa. His appointment follows a 30-year term of ministry at the camp by **Dean and Jerri Heiser Wenger**, who retire at the end of this year. Bert has served as the camp's program director since 2008.

Michael Brewer-Berres began Aug. 23 as orientation assistant for Brethren Volunteer Service at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. She was part of BVS Unit 325. Her first BVS assignment was at Quaker Cottage in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Dana Cassell, pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C., resigned as program manager of the Thriving in Ministry Initiative for the Office of Ministry, effective Sept. 16. She has served in the role since Jan. 7, 2019, managing the Part-time Pastor; Full-time Church program. Previously she was contract staff

for Ministry Formation in the Office of Ministry, coordinating the 2014 Clergy Women's Retreat, helping with a revision of the Ministerial Leadership Polity of Annual Conference that was approved in 2014, and coordinating planning for Ministry Summer Service.

Galen Fitzkee began in August as associate in the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, serving through BVS. He recently graduated from Messiah University. He is a member of Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

Alton Higgs and **Chad Whitzel** completed a year Aug. 13 as assistant coordinators for FaithX, formerly the Workcamp Ministry. They served through BVS.

Kara Miller completed two years serving as a volunteer in the BVS office, first as assistant coordinator for the Workcamp Ministry and more recently as assistant orientation coordinator for BVS.

Doug Phillips has announced his

retirement as director of Brethren Woods, a camp and outdoor ministry center in Shenandoah District, effective Nov. 30. During his 39 years at the helm of Brethren Woods, the camp has accomplished growth in programming and in facilities despite challenges including the ash borer damaging and killing hundreds of trees and the COVID restrictions that preempted the 2020 camping program.

Joshua Rowan began Aug. 9 as IT specialist for the Church of the Brethren at the General Offices. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago with a degree in computer science.

Naomi Yilma finished July 16 as associate with the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, serving through BVS. Her work focused on COVID-19, Advocacy Network on Africa, economic peacemaking, and coordination of the Nigeria Working Group.

Journey toward racial justice

by Jan Fischer Bachman

How to Fight Racism: *Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice* offers theological reflections and practical suggestions for individuals, organizations, and congregations. Jemar Tisby is an author, teacher, theologian, historian, and co-founder and president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective.

Tisby describes a helpful three-pronged “ARC of racial justice”: awareness (“head”), relationships (“heart”), and commitment (“hands”).

He acknowledges potential difficulties: “Undoubtedly, some people who are beholden to the binaries of ‘left’ and ‘right’ or ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ will criticize the suggestions and practices I propose. . . . Instead of reflexively rejecting recommendations, test the ideas themselves for their impact on racial and ethnic minorities. Let mutual respect, humility, and solidarity with the oppressed lead you to your conclusions about what must be done.”

He notes that “listening to others and even coming to appreciate one idea or part of a system of thought, philosophy, or theology does not necessarily mean you are endorsing every aspect of that system.”

Why the three-sided approach? “There is no amount of books you can read that will reduce the disproportionate rate at which people of color are incarcerated. There is no amount of probing coffeeshop conversations you can have that will shift the racial segregation present in our public schools.”

Tisby suggests reading the book in community; there is an associated study guide, as well as related videos.

Awareness

He begins with a theology of race:

“All people equally bear the likeness of God and thus possess incalculable and inviolable value.”

“No single people group can adequately reflect the glory of God. Rather, we need the diversity present in the multiplicity of nations and tribes to paint a more complete portrait of God’s splendor.”

This section invites readers to seek out theologians of color. If you chafe at the idea of taking race into account in your reading, ponder how often “theology is simply called ‘theology’ if it comes from European or white sources, but it is ‘Latin American’ or ‘Black’ theology when it comes from a

minoritized racial or ethnic group.”

Tisby offers suggestions for people at all life stages:

- Explore your racial identity.
- Consider how to teach kids about race.
- Promote the training of mental health therapists of color.
- Study the history of race.
- Learn the history of where you live as it relates to race.
- Capture oral histories.
- Consider your institutional history.
- Commemorate Juneteenth.

Relationships

“Why are there four gospels in the New Testament?,” asks Tisby. “They all tell essentially the same story, but from different viewpoints. . . . Old truths can stand out in fresh ways when we hear them from new voices.”

This section addresses racial reconciliation and includes practices for congregations, such as incorporating lamentation, as well as tips on preaching.

Tisby points out that “race is felt. . . . To approach race as if it only exists in the realm of theory and thought is to bring an arrogant pride into interactions that require sober humility.”

Suggested actions range from the predictable (“adopt a statement”) to the complex (“hire in clusters”).

Commitment

“Love for neighbor requires critiquing and dismantling unjust systems of racial oppression,” says Tisby. “If Christians claim to be concerned for their neighbors, then they must also be concerned about the structures and systems that enable or inhibit their neighbors’ flourishing.”

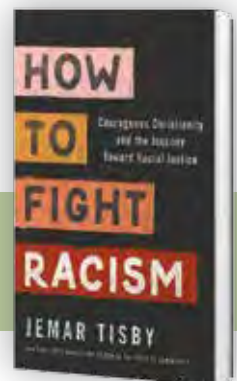
He adds: “Love is the fiery heart beating at the urgent call for justice in our world. . . . Without love there can be no justice.”

Dozens of ideas on how to work for change fill this section. Consider which ones match the energy and enthusiasm of your congregation, community, or organization. Take a step, no matter how small. As Tisby writes, “Often throughout history, people became activists because they took a single action.”

Even one as simple as reading an idea-packed book. 

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice*. **Author:** Jemar Tisby. **Publisher:** Zondervan (2021). The book is available for purchase through brethrenpress.com.





All in on evangelism

by Jeremy Ashworth

When it comes to size, different people have different preferences. Some seek out small towns and tight circles of intimate friends. Others go for the dynamism of big crowds and big cities. But Christians take this a step further: We spiritualize size.

Christians often talk as if volume is an absolute indication of faithfulness. I've heard some reach for Matthew 18:20 and cheer, "Where two or three are gathered! Small is sacred!" I've heard others point to Acts 2:41 and announce, "Three thousand saved in a day! Huge is holy!" But our one-sided enthusiasm is revealing. Most of the time we're just proof-texting our preferences.

So before we go further let's just admit that we all have different personal inclinations when it comes to quantity, and that our preference is just that. A preference.

Now on to my main point: *Volume helps evangelism.*

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 is endlessly helpful. The evangelist-farmer sows the gospel-seed. Then things get interesting. The would-be crop that falls on hard ground becomes bird food. The seed that roots in shallow earth grows fast and dies faster. The kernels that land on thorny patches soon get the life choked out of them.

Let's pause here. So far, the parable of the sower is a story of unfruitfulness. Three swings, three misses. But thank God there's more to the story. When the

good news finds good ground, the outcomes are miraculous.

Notice two realities. First, notice the wild fruitfulness bursting from the ready soil. A hundredfold return is explosive. But second, notice the devastating failure rate that precedes it. The sower experiences 75 percent failure. I repeat: 75 percent failure. Why should our evangelistic expectations be any different?

This is where *volume helps evangelism.*

I am not advocating an impersonal, mass-market-only approach. Scatter the gospel as a labor of love, and personalize every effort at outreach. Just don't go to pieces when your heart-work seems to evaporate. Yes, it hurts to put yourself out there and be rejected. But Jesus is realistic about resilience. He didn't experience 100 percent success in his evangelistic efforts, and neither will we.

Volume helps evangelism.

I am not saying that evangelism is a 1:1 investment. It's clearly not. I am saying that good farmers don't expect a high-volume return from a low-volume investment. The apostle Paul said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (2 Corinthians 9:22). See that word "all," four times! Paul went all in, knowing that his total commitment would yield a partial response.


Volume helps evangelism.

I am not implying we should turn our back on small towns. My life was changed by small-time, small-town ministry. I am saying that many Christians have committed the opposite error and somehow

ignored major population centers. I live in Phoenix, which at 1.6 million people is the 5th largest city in the US. Maricopa County is the fastest-growing county in the nation. There are only two Church of the Brethren congregations in the entire state of Arizona. I am in a high-volume environment because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Volume helps evangelism.

Volume helps evangelism.

I know one committee that began planting new churches. Some succeeded, some did not. Faced with the failures, the committee was despondent and considered giving up completely. But then someone asked, "What are we comparing ourselves to? What's the average success rate for new church plants?" They asked around and discovered that their success rate was in fact double the national average. They were a model of success and almost quit.

Is there more to evangelism than volume? Absolutely. But let's be realistic about economies of scale and laws of average. Will the Holy Spirit do big miracles with small seed? I've seen it happen. But the Holy Spirit will not be diligent for us. God makes the miracles; we provide the persistence. We internalize the good news of Jesus, scatter with the heart of a generous sower, and joyfully remember the words of that famous theologian (Wayne Gretzky) who said, "100 percent of the shots you don't take don't go in." 

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



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The elephant in the room

Wendy McFadden wrote in June, "What does it mean for the church to truly welcome? For starters, we need to remind ourselves that the house is not our own. When we extend the welcome, we are standing in for the true owner."

It reminded me of something very wrong that is happening across our denomination. Let's talk about the elephant in the room that is tarnishing our beloved Church of the Brethren, causing strife, anger, and exclusive, club-like

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behavior that is not welcoming to others who believe different interpretations of the Bible.

The Covenant Brethren Church includes ultra-conservatives who are pretending to follow Annual Conference decisions and polity so they can remain within the Church of the Brethren for the benefits, such as pastors' insurance. One by one, dozens of pastors set on proselytizing have caused division among churches they were called to lead.

My congregation has split pretty much down the middle, half wanting to follow such a pastor. On my last Sunday there, only two of the 80-plus people welcomed me and talked to me. Others stared, frowned, and whispered in small groups. Why? I filed a formal complaint with the

district about a sermon saying that women have no place in leadership and that the denomination has no leadership. I am now a pariah, no longer welcome.

McFadden's words repeat themselves to me in my grief: "Does God watch sadly at our fumbling efforts to decide who we welcome into the house that we don't own?" Let's talk about it, peacefully, simply, and together.

Deb Peterson
North Webster, Ind.

May MESSENGER live on

I can remember my mother taking the MESSENGER long ago, when I was just a little girl, but it was not the nice maga-

zine with the full-color cover that it is today. I remember the white pages with MESSENGER typed in black letters on the outside and trying to learn to read what my mother found so interesting.

I guess the printed word is going by the wayside because of the quickness of seeing things on a computer. My friend has been trying to get me to read books on the computer. I think I finally convinced her I like holding books and magazines in my hand. Sure, you can swipe pages on a computer, but it's much more satisfying to actually touch the page and turn it.

Hopefully the MESSENGER will continue on as our Brethren magazine for many years.

Nancy Mathews
Frankfort, Ind.

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

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

Centenarians

Eisemann, Mildred, 100, Lititz, Pa., July 13
Eshleman, Helen, 100, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 18
Metzger, Leo, 101, North Manchester, Ind., Oct. 24

New members

Chambersburg, Pa.: Emma Garnes, Paige Garnes
Conestoga, Leola, Pa.: Joe Hojnacki, Pat Hojnacki
Freeport, Ill.: Gregory Spengler III
Maple Spring, Hollsopple, Pa.: Jeremy Stultz
Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.: Daniel Auker, Josh Auker, Karl Auker, Sue Auker, Alyssa Herr, Maura Housekeeper, Kevin Landis, Logan O'Donnell, Dawn Wray
Oakton, Vienna, Va.: Sary Burket, Monika Kluczyk, Matthew Lush, Deb Rudd

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Mock, Gordon and Virginia, Middlebury, Ind., 66
Savage, Harry and Miriam, Plymouth, Ind., 66
Sayler, Sterling and Bertha, Westminster, Md., 55
Shultz, Glenn and Ruth, Lititz, Pa., 65
Snider, Dana and Nelda, Middlebury, Ind., 67
Snyder, William E. and Sharon, Plymouth, Ind., 60

Strycker, Brad and Jo, Goshen, Ind., 68
Unger, John and Sue, Hollsopple, Pa., 50
Wojtaszek, Robert and Sherry, Hollsopple, Pa., 55
Wright, Herbert and Pauline, Sykesville, Md., 75
Ziegler, Earl and Vivian, Lititz, Pa., 70

Deaths

Bastin, Ruth Adele Sherman, 86, Oak Grove, Mo., July 18
Bohn, James Earl, 88, Bensalem, Pa., July 23
Butler, Donald Lee, 87, Grundy Center, Iowa, July 22
Chancy, Yvonne E. Overholser, 96, Troy, Ohio, July 26
Colvin, Harold Burton, 91, Waynesboro, Va., Aug. 15
Csukker, NoraJean Graham, 74, Waterloo, Iowa, July 23
DeWall, Scot James, 50, Polo, Ill., Feb. 16
Ferguson, John Gregg, 76, Argos, Ind., July 2
Frantz, Elvin D., 99, Buena Vista, Colo., Aug. 12
Funkhouser, Gordon Cecil, 71, Warrenton, Va., July 28
Garland, Wilma June Stambach, 90, Lititz, Pa., July 17
Garrison, Roger Dale, 71, Polo, Ill., Oct. 2, 2020
Helfrick, Joanna Lee Lewis, 90, Waynesboro, Pa., Aug. 1
Howell, Mary Ellen Yoder, 89, McPherson, Kan., July 27
Hummer, Roy S., 90, New

Holland, Pa., March 10
Isaacs, Jeffrey Allen, 71, Waterloo, Iowa, Aug. 5
Johnson, Fonda I. Peterson, 91, Dixon, Ill., Nov. 21
Johnson, Herbert, 85, McPherson, Kan., Aug. 6
Jones, Marilyn J. Whitmore, 83, Polo, Ill., Jan. 19
Keeny, Janis M. Spangler, 72, York, Pa., July 3
Kitchen, Otis D., 90, Lititz, Pa., July 20
Mason, Dorothea Winger Fry, 94, North Manchester, Ind., June 24
McCorkle, Charles Edward, Jr., 89, Sagle, Idaho, Feb. 2
Miller, Dorothy Jean, 86, Bealeton, Va., April 22
Monji, Beverly Jane Varner, 84, Bakersfield, Calif., March 17
Monn, Benjamin Roy, Jr., 90, Shippensburg, Pa., July 26
Moore, William Jay, 91, Ridgely, Md., July 1
Schutz, Caroline Elizabeth Zimmer, 85, Greenville, Ohio, Aug. 4
Shanks, Ernest Duane, 88, Astoria, Ill., May 5
Shoemaker, Thomas Everett, 92, Waynesboro, Va., Aug. 10
Silvius, Peggy Jean, 60, Rockford, Ill., July 14
Snyder, Bertha P. Myers, 99, Chambersburg, Pa., July 3
Taylor, Barbara Alice, 94, Denton, Md., July 19
Wadkins, Virginia F. White, 71, Grove City, Ohio, July 19
Wickert, Violet L. Klinedinst, 101, Astoria, Ill., Aug. 1

Witmer, Melvin Paul, Sr., 80, Henderson, Nev., Jan. 26

Ordained

Balmer, David, S. Ohio & Ky. Dist. (Flat Creek/Mud Lick, Big Creek, Ky.), July 25
Nace, Jamie, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Lancaster, Pa.), June 27

Commissioned

Ansley, David, Virilina Dist. (Fraternity, Winston Salem, N.C.), July 11

Licensed

Kramer, Matthew, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Lancaster, Pa.), June 27
Reed, John, Sr., Virilina Dist. (Cloverdale, Va.), July 25

Placements

Detrick, Mary, interim pastor, Nokesville, Va., July 1
Garvey, Mary, from interim pastor to pastor, Stoners-town, Saxton, Pa., July 4
Grew, Dottie, from associate pastor to team pastor, Meyersdale, Pa., June 1
Johnson, Daniel, from pastor, Copper Hill, Va., to pastor, Grossnickle, Myersville, Md., July 1
Shaulis, Eric, from associate pastor to team pastor, Meyersdale, Pa., June 1
Swick, Michael, from associate pastor to team pastor, Meyersdale, Pa., June 1

TURNINGPOINTS

Remembering *Healing in the body of Christ*

When Jesus healed people, he didn't restore only their health; he restored them to community. Jesus invited people back into relationship and communal life. As the body of Christ, we have a unique role to play in healing.



JEANNE DAVIES

It's not surprising that many people resist a diagnosis of mental illness or are reluctant to disclose their diagnosis to others. Nor is it surprising that they hesitate to share their experience of mental illness. A diagnosis of mental illness can loom large, eclipsing identity and reducing the fullness of a person to their diagnosis and treatment.

In Christian community, we can help each other remember who we are. People who experience mental illness are not merely their diagnoses but are people with unique histories, wisdom, passions, and gifts. Those going through an acute phase of mental illness can find it healing to have someone talk about something other than their mental health condition. We can give one another the gift of friendship—of recalling each of us to our whole selves.

An important aspect of our whole selves is our own giftedness. Scripture tells us that each member of the body has gifts that can contribute to the whole. Part of healing is having a place in the community of faith—being appreciated for the gifts we bring. Those who experience mental illness can also experience isolation and loneliness, a feeling that they don't belong.

Congregations can help each of us remember our unique place in the body. Belonging means we would be missed if we were gone. There would be a hole that only we can fill in the community. The community can promote healing by intentionally appreciating and employing the gifts of each person—not only for their sake but for the good of us all. We need to include everybody for the body of Christ to be complete.

Remembering the traditions of our faith in worship and in life can be healing. The Christian tradition includes a wide breadth of experience, not only joy, celebration, and

RESOURCES

Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges, by John Swinton, Eerdmans Publishing, 2020


"Anabaptist Disabilities Network Mental Health Resource for Congregations," <https://bit.ly/ADNMentalHealthResource>

faithfulness but uncertainty, abandonment, and grief. When we include the full range of human feelings in our worship, Bible study, and conversation, we embrace the whole human experience. The practice of lament not only helps us understand those who are troubled but prepares us all for living faithfully in difficult times. Celebrating joyfully can sometimes give hope to people who struggle.

John Swinton tells the story of a woman who experienced depression who said, "I needed other people to hold my joy for me." She took comfort in being in the company of those who felt what she could not.

We don't need to know someone's diagnosis to embrace them as our siblings in the family of God. We are not a therapeutic organization that treats and cures. Our call is to heal through mutual care in community—to restore by remembering.

I am reminded of the "Servant Song" by Richard Gillard: "Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I will have the grace to let you be my servant, too. I will laugh when you are laughing. When you weep, I'll weep with you. We will share our joys and sorrows, 'til we've seen this journey through."

Thanks be to God who heals us all through the gift of life in the body of Christ that makes the broken whole again through our relationship with God and one another. 

Jeanne Davies serves as executive director for Anabaptist Disabilities Network. She has a master of divinity degree from Bethany Theological Seminary and is currently studying disability and ministry at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich. She is indebted to the work of John Swinton for her thoughts on mental illness, faith, and the healing power of the church.



Our call is to heal through mutual care in community—to restore by remembering.





The Lord is in our midst

“The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.” -Zephaniah 3:15b, NIV

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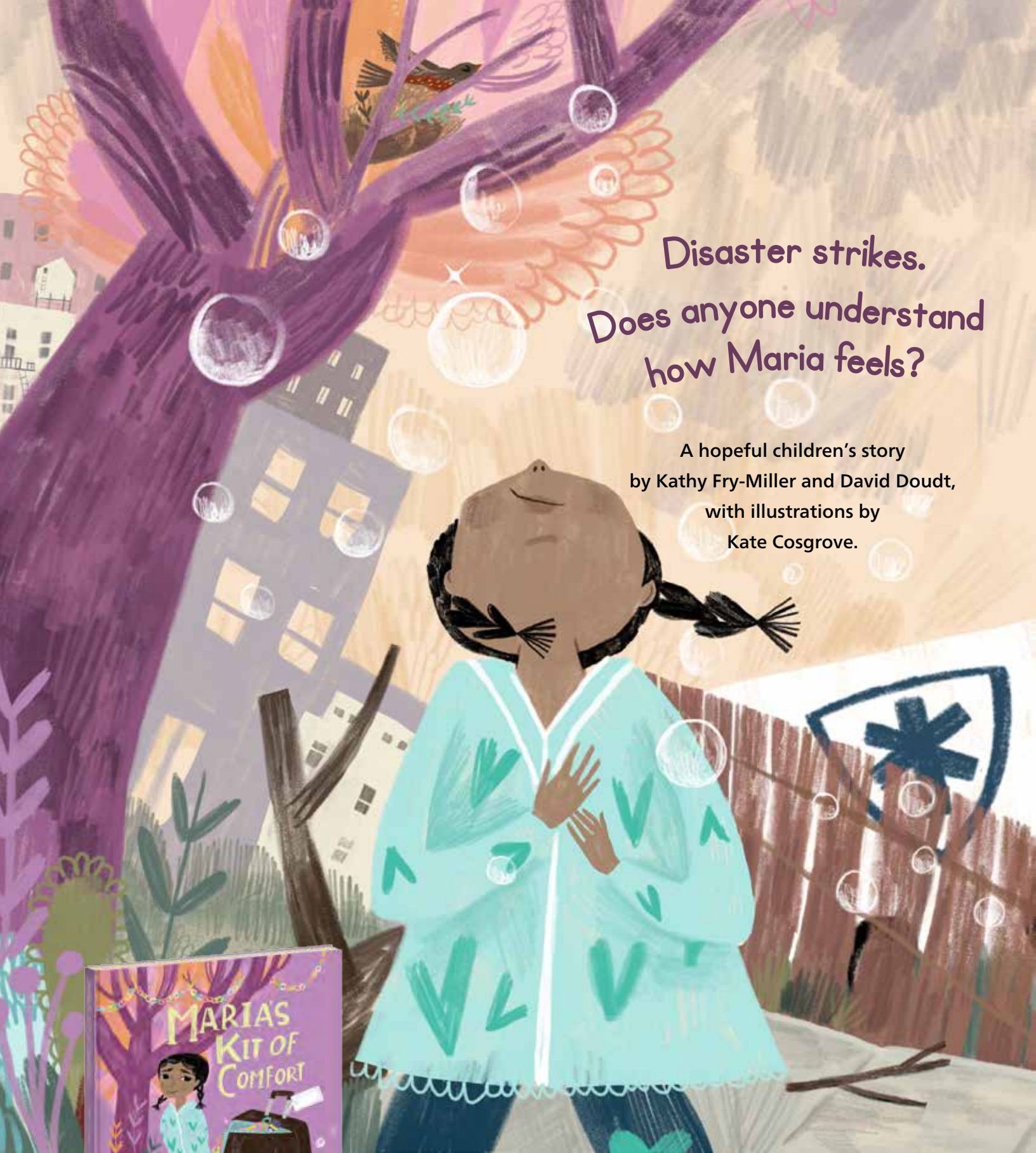


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