



# MESSENGER

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

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

## Down by the river

DEVELOPING A BRETHREN ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY





# Testifying to the work of Jesus

“When the Advocate comes,  
whom I will send to you,...  
the Spirit of truth...  
will testify on my behalf.  
You also are to testify.”  
~John 15:26-27a

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# May 23

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Global Mission

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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### on the cover

*Rivers hold special significance in the Church of the Brethren, writes William L. Miller. Through the waters of baptism we seek to restore right relationship with God and each other—and also with creation. On the cover, campers (pre-pandemic) study one of the marshy areas off Watts Creek at Camp Mardela in Denton, Md. Photo by Ernie Dennison.*

# Human flourishing

**F**rancis Su's passion is not math alone, but how math can make us better people. In *Mathematics for Human Flourishing*, his chapter titles sound less like math and more like philosophy: truth, beauty, power, justice, freedom, community, love. . . . The epigraphs at the beginnings of the chapters are from a French philosopher, Jewish thinker, dance choreographer, playwright—even Pontius Pilate and the apostle Paul.

These quotes are from recognizable people who cover a wide range of human experience. But Su begins the book with someone less important. He introduces us to Christopher Jackson, an inmate who is serving a 32-year sentence for his involvement in a crime when he was a teenager. He had written to the professor because he was spending his time in prison teaching himself advanced math and wanted to learn more.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

The two struck up a correspondence, and now Jackson's letters appear in the book, one per chapter. Over the writing of the book, Su sent him each of his chapters for review and comment, and Jackson is named as co-author.

Jackson is African American. Su is Chinese American, and the first president of the Mathematics Association of America who is not white. The book is not about race, though it grapples with race. It's about welcoming and encouraging all kinds of people, especially those who don't match your preconceptions. It's about education that causes students to

grow and flourish. The reader sees how exploration is better than rote memorization, and can prepare you to solve problems you've never experienced before.

Today almost everything is something we've never done before. In a year when just maintaining and surviving is success, "flourishing" sounds like a shining beacon.

The other personality who shows up throughout the book is Simone Weil, the French philosopher who lived in the first half of the 20th century. Weil said, "Every being cries out silently to be read differently." For her, to *read* someone meant to interpret or make a judgment about them. So she was saying, "Every being cries out silently to be *judged* differently."

Each of us wants to be seen, and we can't fully be seen until the other recognizes the limits of their experience and point of view. And we can't fully see others until we recognize our own limits. How can we all learn to see each other better?

The challenge can feel large, but what I love about Francis Su is his joyful encouragement. Once we know that our viewpoints are limited, we can do something about that. We can become explorers and wayfinders. We can grow. We can welcome. We can love.

*Wendy McFadden*

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**“O Lord, what a variety of things  
you have made! In wisdom you  
have made them all. The earth  
is full of your creatures.”**

—Psalm 104:24, NLT

**“Our chosen energy sources touch God’s creation—all people and living things—and therefore should be considered a part of our faith witness.”**

—from the 2018 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statement on Creation Care

**“The Bible knows nothing of a right relationship with God the Creator that does not include a right relationship with the creation: with land and mountains, oceans and skies, sun and moon, plants and animals, wind and rain. Our vocation is to walk with God in gently tending God’s wonderful, strong, fragile, and enduring creation.”**

—from the 1991 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statement, “Creation: Called to Care.”

## Earth Day

- **Earth Day is observed** annually on April 22. The first US celebration was held 51 years ago, in 1970, and it became a global occasion by 1990. It was initially championed by Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson.
- **The Earth Day Network** organizes events for the occasion in more than 190 countries around the world.
- **The 2021 Earth Day** theme is “Restore Our Earth.”
- **Faith groups are encouraged** to celebrate an “Earth Day Sunday.” The ecumenical group Creation Justice Ministries has resources with the theme “A New Heaven and a New Earth” at [creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.html](http://creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.html).
- **Resources from the Brethren Creation Care Network** are available at [www.brethren.org/creationcare](http://www.brethren.org/creationcare).

### A WALK IN THE PARK

Can you unscramble the names of the following US national parks?

National Park Week is April 17 to 25

(with free admission to all National Park Service sites on April 17 and special events and programs at many of the national parks).

NOELWELSTOY

VADERLEEGS

MYTIESOE

LICERAG

AADINNI SUNDE

DICAAA

CORKY INNMATOU

LEIS YELARO

SLABNADD

LAIDEN

MMMHOTA VCEA

CRYBE YONNCA

RATREC LEAK

SUHOJA RETE

HONDAHANES

Answers: Yellowstone, Everglades, Yosemite, Glacier, Indiana Dunes, Acadia, Rocky Mountain, Isle Royale, Badlands, Denali, Mammoth Cave, Bryce Canyon, Crater Lake, Joshua Tree, Shenandoah.

## Webinars on racial justice

**Westminster (Md.) Church of the Brethren's peace and justice committee**

presented a webinar series on racial justice in March, funded by a mini-grant received through the Church of the Brethren's Intercultural Ministry.

Said an announcement: "Our speak-

ers include Ms. Judy Saunders-Jones and Dr. Richard M. Smith, the co-founders of the Racial Healing Clinic in Baltimore, Md., . . . [and] Rev. Dr. Marty Kuchma of St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Westminster. Our series will conclude on March 30 with Dr. Raza Kahn, the President of the Islamic

Society of Carroll County, Md."

Topics included "Healing the Racial Divide: What and Why," "Healing the Racial Divide: How," "Discovering Racism in the Teaching and Learning of History," and "Transformation of a Belonging: Healing the Wounds of Injustice and Racism."

## May peace prevail

**A few days after Christmas**, an emotionally distraught young man ran from police and into our church courtyard at Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren. He was shot and killed there by a Modesto police officer responding to his family's frantic call for help.

Although the young man did not actually have a gun, information that he claimed to have purchased one may have influenced the officer's decision to shoot.

How sad and ironic that this violent and disturbing incident took place at our labyrinth site, the very place set aside for prayerful walking and meditation. Momentarily, this peaceful place had become a killing place.

This very tragic act of violence inflicted pain on the community, not only for the victim's family but also for the police officer, his family, the police department, our congregation, and the larger Modesto community.

Many in our faith community felt a strong need to respond and did so in a variety of ways. The message, "We grieve and pray with you," was posted on our church marquee. Letters

were written to our local newspaper. Individuals in our congregation and beyond came to the labyrinth for private or group prayer.

A group of six met on a recent Sunday afternoon to pray, sing, and walk together. On the central rock, they burned a bundle of sage to symbolically release negative energy in a Native American tradition, and to reclaim this area as the sacred space it was designed to be. Freesia bulbs were planted to symbolize the hope of new life beyond death.

The victim's family held a small vigil in his honor, leaving behind a simple memorial. In conversation with the family, we learned that their son had come to the labyrinth several times earlier in hopes of finding peace in the midst of his emotional struggles. Later, they posted yard signs on our property requesting justice for their son. Willingness to share their contact information has opened the door to further connection with our congregation as needs rise.

Community organizations are now in the process of presenting a plan for establishing a police review board, working toward justice for victims of crime and accountability for police.

We don't know what the future may bring, but we have faith that our labyrinth can continue to serve its intended purpose as a contemplative place for quiet reflection. Hopefully, many will continue to be drawn to this peace-filled place during these uncertain and troubling times. May peace prevail over acts of destruction and loss. —Felton Daniels, Elaine Forcier, Linda Owen, and Andrew Sampson of the worship and spiritual life commission of the Modesto Church of the Brethren.



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](mailto:messenger@brethren.org).





## Flamingos bearing gifts in Martinsburg

**V**isits from flamingos surprised members of Fellowship Church of the Brethren (www.fellowshipcob.org) in Martinsburg, W.Va., last fall. Two pairs of lawn flamingos wearing masks and carrying a gift bag with masks, hand sanitizer, and a letter of introduction arrived unannounced at members' homes. They stayed socially distanced! After a short visit, their "Fluber" driver arrived to take them to their next stop, leaving a small gift of candy, hand lotion, and a gift for children.

The flamingos brought joy and smiles during a challenging time, helped minister to the congregation, helped us stay connected, and also witnessed to neighbors as they questioned what the flamingos were doing. —Roger Templeton

## Earth Day 2021

**T**his year's Earth Day resources from Creation Justice Ministries are edited by Susu Lassa, a Bethany Seminary student and former Brethren Volunteer Service worker at the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.

Earth Day is observed April 22 on the theme "A New Heaven and a New Earth." Resources focus on health, environmental racism, and eco-justice and include Christian education materials, sermon starters, case studies, actions to take, and more. Sign up to receive the download link at <https://creation-justice.salsalabs.org>.



## Black History Month and theopoetics

**Canton (Ill.) Church of the Brethren** embraced Black History Month in Sunday worship services through theopoetics. Members took an active part in sharing poetry, storytelling, music, and moments of silence to celebrate people who have changed the world. The services united theopoetical works with the words and actions of Jesus.

In one service, the theme came from a West African philosophical concept. Pastor Kevin Kessler asked this opening guiding question: "After all that they endure, why do the people represented in this service never give up hope?"

## A choral family portrait

**Debra Lynn has issued a special invitation** to singers as well as community, school, church, and other choirs to join the university's A Cappella Choir in performing her oratorio, "A Family Portrait," at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2022. The five-day residency May 27-31 includes the concert on Memorial Day 2022.

A collection of a family's letters from the Civil War era inspired Lynn to write "A Family Portrait," which debuted at Manchester in 2017. Lynn, who is professor of music at the university, will conduct the Carnegie Hall performance of combined festival choirs including the A Cappella Choir, its alumni and friends, and the New England Symphonic Ensemble.

"It was intentionally composed with the intent of being accessible

to non-professional singers," Lynn said. "It also has wonderful educational value because much of the multi-layered musical material is derived from folksongs, hymns, and children's songs from the Civil War era. If you're an American history buff, you'll be in heaven learning and performing this piece."

Singers and choirs must register by mid-September. Find out more at [www.manchester.edu/about-manchester/news](http://www.manchester.edu/about-manchester/news), look for the December 2020 release.

## Drum major for the community

**Dr. Michelle Migliore of Crest Manor Church** of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind., and director of the Mishawaka clinic for city employees, was presented with the Drum Major for Community Service Award on Jan. 18. This award recognizes individuals and organizations who unselfishly give their time and resources to improve St. Joseph County in Indiana. She was honored for her attention to detail, listening, and caring.

## Salkum church closes

**Pacific Northwest District** has announced the closure of Salkum (Wash.) Church of the Brethren as the district mourned the death of one of its last members, Glenn Keenan. The district assumed responsibility for the building and grounds in June 2020 and renegotiated the contract with East Lewis County's Headstart program, which is housed in the building's basement.



Camp Bethel

# SPIRITUAL LESSONS OF THE wilderness

by Tim Harvey and Emily Harvey Bender

**T**he **Sermon on the Mount** has long been a source of spiritual formation for Brethren.

And while we often struggle with Jesus' challenge to turn the other cheek and love our enemies, the invitation to prayer in Matthew 6:26-28 doesn't seem all that difficult: *Look at the birds of the air. Consider the lilies of the field.*

Set in the context of a larger discussion about allowing our trust in God to replace our habit of worry, Jesus invites us to a new perspective of life and faith that is achieved through the careful examination of nature. It is part of the sermon's larger call to trust that the life Jesus describes is the best way to live.

These are crucial matters. In the face of very real challenge and risk, Jesus invites us to slow down and take a long look at creation: the birds of the air and lilies of the field have much to teach us about God.

But what if the birds of the air and

lilies of the field were no longer there?

Jesus' guidance describes the critical relationship that exists between humans and creation. Having been instructed in Genesis to *subdue, have dominion over, till, and keep* the earth, we should ask whether birds and lilies—and the pasturelands and forests they call home—have value on their own, or if they are only scenery that ultimately serves more utilitarian purposes.

Take a careful look at the picture from Camp Bethel. As beautiful as this view is, there are many overlooks and hidden waterfalls throughout the Roanoke and Shenandoah valleys that we call home that offer more stunning views than this. But beautiful views like this one are both more accessible for enjoyment and within the easy grasp of economic development. How do we measure the importance of undeveloped spaces like these against the economic potential of a subdivision, fast

food restaurant, or shopping center?

We can imagine and even predict what might be gained through economic development, but is there a column in the accountant's ledger for the impact a place like this has on our soul? Beyond the grass, trees, and contour of the earth, how might our souls be strengthened through careful observation of the birds, lilies, and other forms of life that exist here?

Exercising dominion over the earth comes in many forms. Two options are blasting and bulldozing open wild spaces to make room for a new shopping center or preserving tracts of rural land through permanent land easements. When we choose to protect rural and wilderness places, we are protecting much more than scenic vistas; we are recognizing that creation has a value beyond scenic beauty with important lessons—even spiritual lessons—to teach us.



## JESUS' WORDS TELL US THAT, WHEN THINGS LIKE SALAMANDERS ARE LOST, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS LOST WITH IT.

A recent project of Valley Conservation Council revealed the significance of preservation in an unexpected way. A landowner in Highland County, Va., chose to protect his family farm with the hopes that it will become an educational center for future generations. This choice has already borne fruit: in the summer of 2019, a researcher from James Madison University discovered a new species of salamander in one of the creeks on this property. Throughout human history, this salamander had gone unnoticed until someone chose to preserve their land, allowing someone else to take a closer look. What other wonders of creation exist that are as yet unknown, and what lessons do they have to teach us?

Jesus' call to look at the birds of the air and consider the lilies of the field is an invitation to understand a connection between nature and our spiritual development. As creation's

groaning is expressed through climate change, humans are being forced to recognize a dependency on creation that previous generations could overlook. The impacts of the loss of rural and wilderness places may not feel immediate for us: what does the loss of one farm that we have never seen have to do with me?

But to the small salamanders who call a bog in Highland County home, such a loss would be everything. When a farm becomes a housing development and a small stream dries up, everything the salamander knew is gone. The habitat and food supply dry up with the stream, and the salamander can no longer exist.

Jesus' words tell us that, when things like salamanders are lost, an opportunity for spiritual growth is lost with it. We lose an opportunity to learn that we do not have to hoard the resources necessary for living; God will provide. These

## Wild spaces around us

**I**n land conservation, it is often said that connection drives the work that we do. For me, this connection was driven by 14 summers at Camp Bethel. For the landowners I work with, the connection to place is the land that they work every day or the place that serves as a retreat. Whatever this connection may be, it drives our desire to see the landscape remain.

As our initial COVID-19 quarantine began, I read that state and national parks were having to close hiking trails because they were being flooded with people. When we were forced to go inside and our original plans for the year were set aside, we turned to nature for relief. At that time, we knew exactly what it meant to feel connection to a place and appreciate that space for what it meant, not just what it was. Outdoor spaces started to represent more than trees and dirt and mountains. They were places of respite, a distraction from the chaos of our lives. We built connection to these places.

As we find new routines in this changed world, it is my hope that we continue to seek out connection to the wild spaces around us, that we take time to discover what lies within the mountains that we see from the interstates, and take time to cherish the details. —Emily Harvey Bender



David Weisenback


**IF WE LOSE THE ABILITY TO LOOK AT THE LILIES OF THE FIELD AND SEE HOW THEY ARE CARED FOR BY THEIR CREATOR, WE LOSE THE ABILITY TO SEE A REFLECTION OF OUR CREATOR'S CARE FOR US.**

are critical lessons in a time when we are losing our connections to creation. Writer Terry Tempest Williams says we are becoming a people for whom “an apple is not just a fruit but a computer. A mouse is not simply a rodent but a controlling mechanism for a cursor . . . nature is no longer a force but a source of images for our screensavers” (*Erosion: Essays of Undoing*, 39).

Having close physical connections to creation provides opportunities to move beyond both the immediate and the individualistic forces that characterize our culture, opportunities that are largely unavailable through virtual connections.

Jesus knows us well. These words from the Sermon on the Mount are significant because our desire to secure things to “eat, drink, or wear” (Matthew 6:31) will always tempt us to seize the resources we need to live at the expense of others. Whether we measure this in terms of rural acreage lost to economic development or in the cost of resource wars over oil and water, the immediate needs of the individual will always compete against the call to “strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:32).

Both creation and our souls are at stake. If we lose the ability to look at the lilies of the field and see how they are

cared for by their Creator, we lose the ability to see a reflection of our Creator's care for us. But a careful plan for creation also makes possible a plan for our own spiritual growth. We have the possibility of saving open spaces for our future enjoyment and caring for birds, lilies, and salamanders. These actions can't happen without us; without our consistent effort, we will see the landscape around us start to change, and we will start to feel that loss in our very souls. 

Tim Harvey is pastor of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va. Emily Harvey Bender, his daughter, is director of Land Protection at Valley Conservation Council. She lives in Staunton, Va., and is a member at Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Port Republic.



## Peace Essay Contest

The Peace Studies program at Bethany Theological Seminary is now accepting entries for its 2021 Peace Essay Contest. Made possible by the Jennie Calhoun Baker Endowment, the contest has a deadline of May 15, 2021. Essays should be 1500-2000 words and written in response to the following theme:

**CIVIL RESISTANCE AND NONVIOLENT SOCIAL  
CHANGE IN AN INCREASINGLY VIRTUAL WORLD**

The contest is open to students in high school, college, seminary, or graduate school.

**PRIZES OF \$2000, \$1000, AND \$500 WILL  
AWARDED TO THE TOP THREE ENTRIES.**

**Learn more:** [bethanyseminary.edu/2021-peace-essay-contest-launched](https://bethanyseminary.edu/2021-peace-essay-contest-launched)



*Wissahickon Creek outside Philadelphia, Pa. The first Brethren in America were baptized in these waters.*

# Down by the river

## DEVELOPING A BRETHREN ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

by William L. Miller

**R**ivers hold special significance in the life and history of the Church of the Brethren. Baptismal waters represent the spiritual identity of our church. We wade into these waters to commune with the Creator, and when we emerge we enter the fellowship of believers. We join with those who wait on the banks, those who went before us, and those who will wade into the waters after us. It is through the ordinance of baptism that we seek to restore right relationship with each other and with God. Rivers truly are our lifeblood.

Many of us have fond memories of

the rivers where we were baptized. For me, it is the Bermudian Creek, a creek I have known my whole life. The Bermudian flows through my family's small farm, located in the rolling hills of northern Adams County, Pa. My church is located several miles downstream.

Our congregation's baptistry is a small pool next to a rock outcropping in the middle of the creek. Immediately downstream, the creek passes through a series of shallow riffles as it carves its way through steep sandstone banks. Looking up from the water, you can make out a wooden cross on the top of the steep banks. It is at this point where

congregants gather to watch the trine immersion of their brothers and sisters, eagerly waiting to welcome them into the covenantal community.

I find the ordinance of baptism so special because it establishes a sense of place and connection. When I was baptized on a cold spring morning, I was overwhelmed by the grace and serenity of the moment and the goodness of creation. The cathedral of oaks and maples arching over the stream have likely witnessed most, if not all, of the baptisms since the establishment of our congregation. They record the history of the land by faithfully transcribing new

**FOR THE BRETHREN, BAPTISMAL WATERS PROVIDE GLIMPSES OF SHALOM—OF PEACE, OF WHOLENESS, AND OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CREATURES AND ELOHIM, CREATOR GOD.**



*Sediment in Plaster Creek,  
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

growth rings each year.

A keen eye may notice the presence of other observers—mourning doves—moving through the tree canopies. My mind is drawn to Matthew 3:16: “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove. . . .”

For the Brethren, baptismal waters provide glimpses of shalom—of peace, of wholeness, and of right relationships between creatures and *Elohim*, Creator God. They provide a vision of the Garden of Eden.

Rivers also represent the ecological identity of the Brethren. In its most basic sense, the study of ecology explores the web of relationships among creatures, both human and non-human, and between creatures and their environment. Rivers nourish the land, give drink to the beasts of the field, and provide refuge to the birds of the air (Psalm 104:10-13).

A Christian view of ecology recognizes the relationship between the Creator and the creation. The creation gives its testimony to the goodness

and sovereignty of Creator God (Romans 1:20).

An ecological understanding also leads us to recognize the far-reaching consequences of human sin. Sin is antithetical to shalom and corrupts the goodness intended in creation.

I now live on the banks of a small river considered to be the most polluted waterway in western Michigan. It was not always that way. The first residents of this watershed were the Odaawaan people, who called this creek *Kee-No-Shay*, meaning “water of the walleyed pike”—an ecological name reflecting the relationship between the residents of the waters and its banks.

Colonists would give this river a new name, Plaster Creek, reflecting a relationship based on exploitation rather than shalom. The name refers to the gypsum deposits that were wantonly scoured from the banks of the creek to make plaster. The resulting pollution and urbanization eliminated the walleye and drove the Odaawaan people from its banks. *Kee-No-Shay* joined the painful groans of a sick creation (Romans 8:20-22).

The consequences of environmental degradation reach far beyond the health of the creatures in God’s rivers. The health of these waters is intricately linked to human flourishing.

Two years ago, I took my college biology class on a tour of the watershed. We followed a small tributary of Plaster Creek from headwaters to confluence. The channel of this tributary is boxed into an underground culvert as it runs through an affluent suburb—an attempt to minimize flood damage to homes that were built too close to the creek. We followed the stream as it flowed underground for four miles until finally it emerged in a lower-income neighborhood near downtown Grand Rapids. The water spilling out of the culvert was coated in an iridescent sheen, a sign of a sick stream. The air was fouled with the pungent odor of oil. Bacterial loads were high.

Sin not only corrupts our spiritual lives but breaks our ecological identity. Baptisms can no longer be safely performed in Plaster Creek.

As we mourn the sickness of creation and lament the loss of God’s majestic rivers, however, it is important to remember the good news of the gospel. The gospel message is a message of hope, not just for our spiritual redemption, but for the redemption of all creation (Colossians 1:20). Creation eagerly anticipates its freedom from the bondage of sin and decay (Romans 8:21), and the fulfillment of God’s promise to restore all things (Revelation 21:5).

I think back to the Bermudian Creek and wonder what my baptismal waters will look like once restored to their full glory. And as I walk along the eroded banks of Plaster Creek, I wait in eager anticipation for the





Eder River in Germany

return of the walleye. God provides us with a glimpse of what *Kee-No-Shay* may look like in the coming Kingdom in Revelation 22:1-3:

*Then an angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as a crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. . . .*

Just as we are to go out and baptize members of all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20), so too are

we tasked with being agents of renewal for all creation (Mark 16:15). We are called to be caretakers of God's good creation (Genesis 2:15) and restore shalom where it has been lost.


We can draw inspiration from the banks of *Kee-No-Shay*, where there is a movement toward renewal. My colleague Dave Warners affectionately refers to this movement as *reconciliation ecology*. Over the past decade, he has helped form and lead a community-based effort, called the Plaster Creek Stewards, to restore shalom to the waters. This group engages local churches, schools, neighborhoods, and businesses to restore health and beauty to the river.

Through their efforts, *Kee-No-Shay*

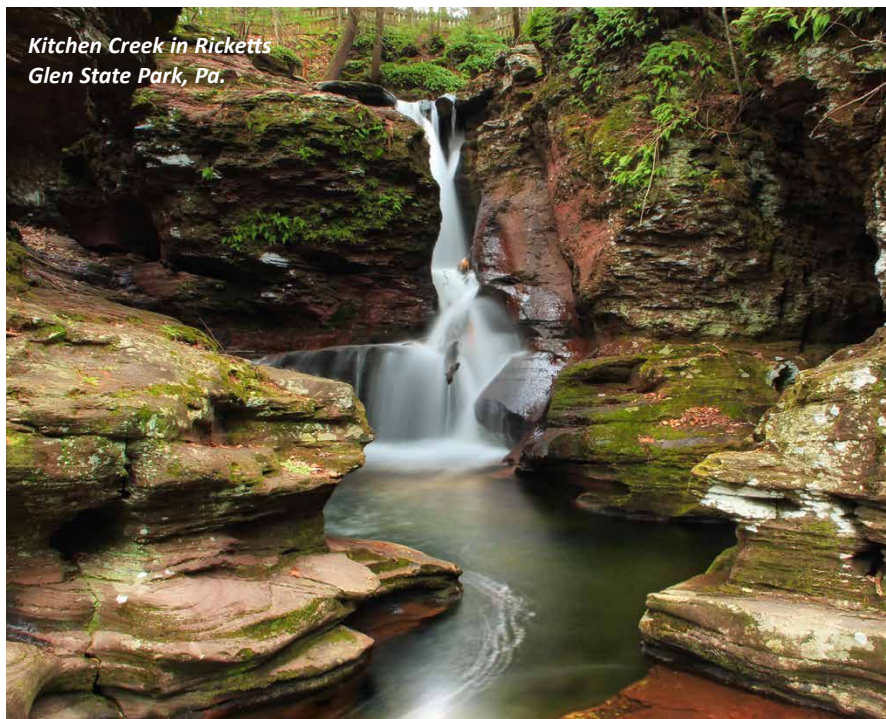
is showing improvements. Just this past year, beaver have returned. The ribbed sedge, a rare plant found in only nine Michigan counties, was discovered along the creekbanks. This new life provides hope that baptisms may one day be possible in *Kee-No-Shay*.

I believe there is a reason that God told Adam to name all living creatures (Genesis 2:19). It is impossible to fully value the creation if we do not know it. Thus, the first step of guardianship comes with developing fellowship. Make it a regular habit to spend time on the banks of whatever river you call home. Explore your ecological identity and connections. Learn the names of the creatures that provide testament to God's sovereignty (Job 12:7-10).

With knowledge comes empathy, with empathy comes compassion, and with compassion comes responsibility. Individually or as a congregation, seek out and partner with organizations to steward local rivers. Plan a river clean-up Sunday. Install rain gardens to reduce runoff and pollution.

Baptism is an expression of Christ's restorative grace in our lives, and water is an instrument of healing and salvation. Let us reciprocate and extend Christ's grace and peace to the entirety of creation through restoration and care of the rivers we call home. 

William L. Miller, assistant professor of biology at Calvin University in Michigan, is a member of the Brethren Creation Care Network.

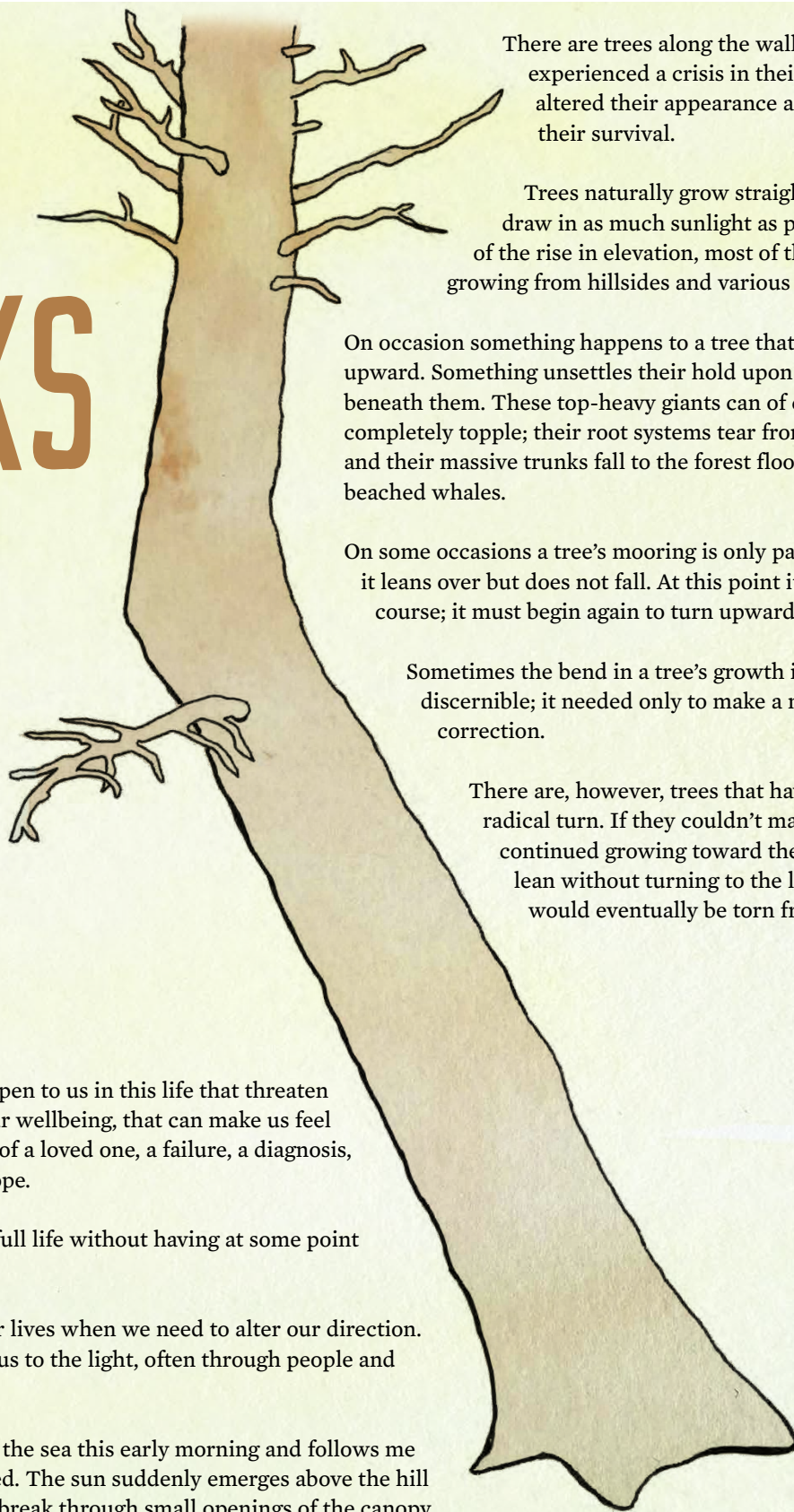


Kitchen Creek in Ricketts  
Glen State Park, Pa.



# BENT TRUNKS

by Paul Grout



There are trees along the walk that have experienced a crisis in their lives that has altered their appearance and challenged their survival.

Trees naturally grow straight upward to draw in as much sunlight as possible. Because of the rise in elevation, most of the trees here are growing from hillsides and various degrees of slope.

On occasion something happens to a tree that alters its course upward. Something unsettles their hold upon the ground beneath them. These top-heavy giants can of course completely topple; their root systems tear from their mooring and their massive trunks fall to the forest floor to die like beached whales.

On some occasions a tree's mooring is only partially loosened; it leans over but does not fall. At this point it must alter its course; it must begin again to turn upward.


Sometimes the bend in a tree's growth is barely discernible; it needed only to make a minimal correction.

There are, however, trees that have to make a radical turn. If they couldn't make this turn and continued growing toward the direction of the lean without turning to the light their roots would eventually be torn from the earth.

There are things that can happen to us in this life that threaten our mooring, that threaten our wellbeing, that can make us feel like we could topple: the loss of a loved one, a failure, a diagnosis, an illness, a loss of faith, of hope.

It would be unusual to live a full life without having at some point been shaken.

There come to be times in our lives when we need to alter our direction. The source of all light brings us to the light, often through people and circumstances.

A low misty fog rises up from the sea this early morning and follows me up the trail. Visibility is limited. The sun suddenly emerges above the hill I am climbing. Shafts of light break through small openings of the canopy and fall upon the path ahead. 

Paul Grout, a retired Church of the Brethren church planter and pastor and moderator of the 2002 Annual Conference, founded the A Place Apart community in Vermont. He now lives in Bellingham, Wash., where he takes a hike in the surrounding mountains several times each week. He used that hike as the focus for a series of A Place Apart devotional reflections to mark the start of 2021. This reflection was part of that 12-part series. For more information on that series or upcoming devotionals and reflections, contact [apartvermont@gmail.com](mailto:apartvermont@gmail.com).



# The grieving garden

by Anna Lisa Gross

**W**e rang the bell, one month at a time. We had no words to soothe all the suffering, heal all the illness, comfort all the grief. We passed the bell: Kay Bates rang once for the person who died of COVID-19 in March. Jim Bates rang once for the person who died in April. Then twice in May. By the time we got to November, Molly Cripe-Birt rang 16 times for the 16 people who died in Tippecanoe County. There were 57 in December, rung by the Belser Brown family. Already there had been 43 people lost in January (now more than 50), rung by Pastor Steve Crain.

The bell rang faster as the deaths sped up. We felt the ringing in our bodies, and we shared the vibrations with the ground on which we stood. We witnessed the loss—not fully, not sufficiently, but we felt the loss as it rang through us.

We had been longing for a public space for mourning throughout this pandemic. As many religious services, funerals, and other essential social/spiritual communities and rituals have moved online, we carry un-tended grief.

Grieving is not something we all know how to do—just like we don't all know how to have meaningful social/spiritual interaction on Zoom.

How can we encourage mourning during a pandemic, without risking viral spread?


How can we begin to understand the reality of hundreds of thousands dead in the US alone? The numbers rise and just become . . . numbers.

This grieving garden seeks to offer a safe place for people

to mourn, without necessarily having any religious tradition or expertise in grief. We have a prayer flag for each person who has died of COVID-19 in Tippecanoe County, a number still too high to really comprehend. It's 138 as of our first vigil on Jan. 24. That's 138 sets of families, coworkers, friends, classmates, who are missing someone.

Initially we hoped that the grieving garden would have one empty chair for each person. An empty chair symbolizes the empty space left behind when someone dies. A yard full, a "garden" full of empty chairs, would demonstrate how many people we are missing. Passersby could sit down and reflect, pray, and mourn.

As the deaths climbed, we realized we couldn't pull this off with chairs and we considered other options. We chose prayer flags. We've been painting the date of death on each flag, to personalize the death with the public information we have about those who have died in Tippecanoe County. We don't want to infringe on anyone's privacy. We do want families and friends to be able to visit the grieving garden and recognize that their loved one is represented, that their loved one is remembered in this small but tangible way.

Lafayette Church of the Brethren, which has a yard along busy 18th Street, hosts the garden. We are grateful to see people come by to pray, remember, reflect. 

Anna Lisa Gross is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren living in Lafayette, Ind. She has served as a hospital and hospice chaplain and interim pastor of several congregations.



*On the grieving garden sign, yellow chrysanthemums represent mourning the dead, purple hyacinth represent sadness, and pink lilies represent resurrection.*



# A basket of *grief*

by Kurt Borgmann

**T**he first death in 2020 was in early February. I sat with Byron and his daughter in his room in healthcare at Timbercrest Senior Living Community as he came to the end of his life, just 11 days short of his 106th birthday. His daughter told me stories across the bed, and perhaps he heard us even when he could no longer show any awareness.

The funeral that followed was in the assembly room because the family was certain the chapel wouldn't have enough space for all the people who would show up. And they were right. The celebration of life was crowded with people, and it was full of faith expressions and vibrant memories.

That was February. By mid-March everything had changed.

The deaths in our congregation in the spring and summer were different. I could go in to visit in Timbercrest only when the end was near. Clothed as I was in gown and gloves and mask and face shield, I am not sure some of these dearly beloved elders even knew for certain who I was. It was hard to

communicate. One woman had dementia. The best thing I could have done would have been to hold her hand as the end came near. I couldn't even do that.

Funeral services were moved outdoors during those months, with limited participation. It felt like many of the people in the congregation missed, not only saying goodbye, but the opportunity to give the full expression of comfort so needed by the families.

In the early fall, I had a funeral in a small funeral home in southern Ohio because it was where the family burial plot was located for one of my church members. I felt unsafe in that small space. When I got home, I found out that the funeral home's livestream feed had cut out part way through the service. The congregational members who wanted to watch the service felt cut off.

Later in the fall, we started using the same set-up we've used for worship to livestream funerals from our own sanctuary. For a couple of those services, immediate family members

came in. The tech crew, the pianist, and the pastors were the only other ones physically present. But the services were meaningful and accessible: pre-recorded pieces were integrated with live elements, and people watched on YouTube. Families were grateful to be able to share the service across the miles.

In a typical year, my congregation has about 15 deaths. This year it was 10. Ironically, the pandemic and all the precautions it forced at the nearby senior living communities kept some of our elderly members from being exposed to much of anything, much less COVID-19. But at what cost? There are members of my congregation I haven't laid eyes on for coming up on a year now. They are the same ones who couldn't come out for any of the outdoor activities we planned over the summer. I've talked to some on the phone and seen some on Zoom calls, but the most limited ones (by frailty of age, by technological ability, by mental awareness) have stayed out of reach.

Pastoring in the pandemic has



**BUT WHAT I REALIZED IS THAT WHEN YOU DON'T GET TO PROCESS THE GRIEF IN THE WAY YOU NEED TO PROCESS IT, YOU FIND YOURSELF HOLDING A WHOLE BASKET OF GRIEF IN YOUR LAP, AND IT IS SPILLING OVER.**

involved a lot of adjustments. It's meant that we have become more creative. Our programing has changed, our ways of connecting have been reimagined, worship has not only shifted, but in some way, blossomed online. But pastoral care. . .

As their pastor, I need to see people. I need to touch them. I need to hear what they say after we have been sitting in silence together for a minute, and then two minutes, and then five minutes. I need to see their faces. I need to see the tear that slips down the cheek. I need to hear their laughter when they ask how my family is doing, and I tell them the latest crazy thing one of my children is up to.

And the grief. . . It is never finished, of course, but it's even harder to process now. When you haven't seen someone in months and months, and then one day they are gone from this earth, it seems even less real than if you saw them yesterday and they were gone today.

In a worship service a couple of weeks into the new year, we have begun to show a video review of the previous year: the ministries of the church, the special moments we shared together, the children in action, the witness and service of the congregation in the community, and the pictures of those who have died.

This is only the second year we've created this special "year in review" video, but this year I found myself

especially moved. As I watched the pictures of those who died in 2020, I felt my sadness welling up and tears beginning to spill out. I wondered: Why such strong feelings? I had touched each of those deaths along the way. None of them were surprises at this point.

But what I realized is that when you don't get to process the grief in the way you need to process it—with conversation and touch, with crowds of sympathy and voices lifted together in song, with a funeral dinner and those conversations after the service about which family member will take which flowers home—the grief stacks up. And some time later on, you find yourself holding a whole basket of grief in your lap, and it is spilling over.

When this pandemic is over, there will be a lot of things that I will do differently as a pastor and that we will do differently as a congregation. Perspectives have shifted about what needs to be done in a certain way and what can be done in a new way. Worship will be in-person again, but it will continue to be online as well. Activities we had never thought of as outdoor activities will take us outside again when the weather agrees. We will continue to nurture connections we have made beyond our local community through our online presence.


So many things will not go back to the way they were. Some things have been changed for the better. Some

things have changed forever.

But the personal part of pastoring? The caring? The touch? The accompaniment through grief? The sitting together and praying together? The delight of dropping in? The "you don't have to come to me, I'll come to you" part? The care that I am prompted to do when I am walking through the narthex before or after worship and the look on someone's face catches my attention? The hospital visits? The healthcare visits? The sliding into the pew for a few moments to sit with someone who came early to worship? The attending a youth sporting event or a musical theater performance, just so I can tell them how proud I am of them afterwards, how much I admire their effort and their talent? The pastoral visits in the grocery store aisle or by the gas pump?

All of that better come back. I need it to come back. We need it to come back.

Why? Because community is our context for caring, for faith, for compassion, for connection. Pastors need to have hands-on opportunities for ministry, and we need our pastors to be hands-on.

For now? We hang in there. We continue to make what connections we can. And we wait for a new day, a better day, a healthier day. 

Kurt Borgmann is pastor of Manchester Church of the Brethren, North Manchester, Ind.

# GLOBAL MISSION IN 2020

## What a year!

by Roxane Hill



Jay Wittmeyer

### Securing land

*The Delmas congregation in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, has been worshipping in a temporary structure since the 2010 earthquake that devastated much of the country. Global Mission and the National Committee of Eglise des Freres have approved the priority of securing a piece of land with an existing building that can be remodeled to serve as a church. Total project cost is estimated at \$80,000, of which \$20,000 has already been raised in 2020.*

Global Mission



Pastors retreat in the Dominican Republic

### The Church of the Brethren in the United States of America

now has 950 congregations and fellowships, with over 99,000 members. They appreciate prayers as the country deals with political and cultural divisions in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.



### Eglise des Freres in Haiti

has 21 congregations and an additional 8 preaching points with 3,000 believers. Ministries include the Haiti Medical Project. They pray for God's intervention in trying times.

### Iglesia de los Hermanos in Venezuela

includes 2,100 believers in 21 congregations, 5 of these in indigenous ethnic areas. They are concerned for the faith and maturity of believers facing difficult times. They continue to provide food and address emergency needs.

### Igreja da Irmandade in Brazil

meets for worship and Bible study in small groups. Ministries include a newspaper column and website, family therapy with 25 families, and training on family violence.

### Preaching on the river

*A special project was undertaken by the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela to take the gospel to indigenous tribes living along the Orinoco River. Funds raised provided the boat, outboard motor, life vests, a generator, and sound system, which allowed the evangelists to embark on the project. Leaders from Iglesia de los Hermanos visited 16 preaching points along the river, presenting the gospel and providing encouragement.*

Global Mission



**T**he Church of the Brethren has a long history and rich tradition of supporting missions around the world. Despite the small budget and difficult circumstances, the office of Global Mission continued to

get things accomplished in 2020. A big thanks goes out to individuals, churches, districts, and organizations who donated their resources in order for this important work to go forward.

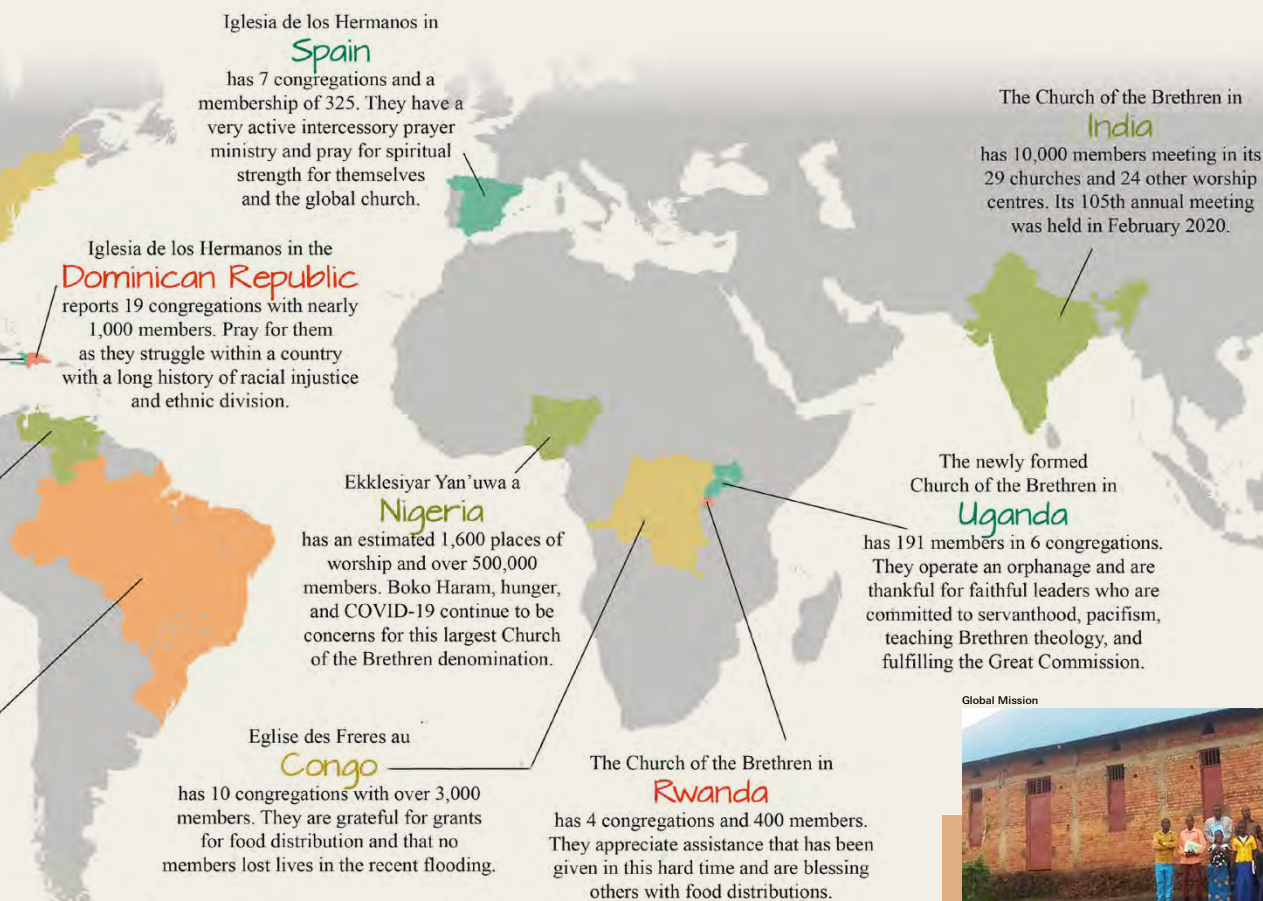
A structural change took place in

2020. The office of Global Mission and Service was divided into two entities—Global Mission and Service Ministries—that still work closely together. After the resignation of executive director Jay Wittmeyer in January 2020, Norm and



## Church for the displaced

*A church building for an IDP (internally displaced people) camp near the city of Yola has been completed with pews and a sound system. The camp, built for EYN members affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, is home to 400 people from 59 households. This project was completed entirely by funds donated in memory of Chrissy Kulp, granddaughter of H. Stover Kulp, one of the first Brethren missionaries to Nigeria.*



Global Mission



Gasiza church in Rwanda

Carol Waggy began in early March 2020 as interim directors of Global Mission. Roy Winter became executive director of Service Ministries.

Eleven countries around the world are registered Church of the Brethren

denominations. More than 2,700 churches and preaching points make up this Global Church of the Brethren Communion. In 2020, several Zoom meetings were held with these global leaders in an effort to keep lines of

communication open. These meetings began the process of officially organizing the group and exploring how to support and encourage one another.

Global Mission continues developing partnerships in additional



Global Mission

**Sudan foot pump for irrigated farming.**

countries. During 2020, Global Mission supported personnel in four countries: Brazil, China, Honduras, and South Sudan. The level of support varied from monthly stipends to simply providing health insurance.

Additionally, Global Mission is assisting efforts in six countries through grants. These grants are helping to support the Church of the Brethren denominations in Haiti, Dominican Republic, Spain, and Venezuela. In South Sudan, grants go to operation and maintenance of the Peace Center in Torit and help with agricultural programs. In Nigeria, grants help support liaison personnel

and maintain housing for volunteers.

Grants for education in developing and emerging countries provided support at many levels. In the Africa Great Lakes region, much-needed school supplies aided elementary children. Three scholarships went to college fees for Batwa students in Rwanda. Tuition fees were awarded to two Nigerians for post-graduate studies. Computers were donated for students in Mexico. Nine students in the Dominican Republic received scholarships to conclude their theological studies. A student from India has received financial assistance to attend Bethany Seminary over the last year several years.

Global Mission continued to provide construction funding that aided four countries in building churches or improving facilities. In Rwanda, new regulations due to COVID-19 require that churches pass the country's stringent building codes and funds are helping with this construction. At last report, the Rwanda church is still in need of more funds. In Nigeria, under the constant threat of attacks from Boko Haram, a church was built in a new village that serves as a haven for displaced people. In the Dominican Republic, funds covered upgrades made to church headquarters and offices. At the main offices of the denomination in Haiti, the Internet system was

upgraded, helping the church, its leaders, and the Haiti Medical Project conduct their ministries.

One of the most discouraging aspects of 2020 was not being able to travel freely and visit with global partners. One trip that did take place was that of Galen Hackman and Chris Elliott to the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Their trip, endorsed by Global Mission, included visits to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, where they held workshops for the churches, ordained pastors, and followed up with some agricultural projects supported by the Global Food Initiative.

The Global Food Initiative (GFI) and the Haiti Medical Project are under the umbrella of Global Mission. Last year, GFI gave grants for agriculture improvements in 11 countries and to support gardening efforts by churches and communities in the United States. The Haiti Medical Project continued to provide medical assistance to the hemisphere's poorest country. It also assisted with nutrition for mothers and babies and worked at providing sources for clean water.

Global Mission also serves as the fiscal agent for the work of the Global Women's project and the infant eye program in Vietnam.

Brethren Disaster Ministries, now under the sole guidance of Service

## A gift for Mexico

*The COVID-19 virus has created problems for children throughout the US. There are many areas where the Internet is not available for online school. A similar tragedy has occurred in Tijuana, Mexico, where without a computer or Internet access, children were not able to continue their education. Financially, most families hardly have enough money to purchase food each day, so the purchase of a computer is not possible. Thanks to Global Mission and Brethren World Mission, a gift enabled the purchase of five used computers that were repaired by a volunteer technician. Each school day, children use these computers to attend class at the building of a woman who also provides food to them on a daily basis. Our gift was very necessary and has been received with gratitude.*

Global Mission







Global Mission

**Children receive meals in Burundi**

Ministries, has continued to support the Nigeria Crisis Response, through donations to the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF). The work in Nigeria is carried out through a strong partnership with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), which is continuing its recovery from the ongoing Boko Haram violence. The global COVID-19 grant program of Brethren Disaster Ministries and the EDF has provided seven global Brethren communions and four Church of the Brethren mission points with \$208,550.

It is amazing to watch how God gives churches and organizations the passion for different types of projects. God also is faithful to provide the necessary funds. Global Mission is privileged to act as the conduit for many such projects. Brethren World Mission and the Brethren Revival Fellowship are auxiliary groups that raise funds to supplement the work of Global Mission.

Through all these efforts, theological training was provided in Spain. An Orinoco River evangelism project was supported in Venezuela. A motorcycle was provided in South Sudan. Pastor retreats gave encouragement in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Funds continued to be raised for the Delmas congregation in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. In Nigeria, funds were allocated to help print the Bible in a language in which previously only the New Testament had been available.


Seed money was given to print the book *We Bear It in Tears*, sharing the stories of Nigerian Brethren affected by Boko Haram violence (available at [brethrenpress.com](http://brethrenpress.com)).

Was 2020 a tough year? Yes, but look at all the amazing things that were done worldwide! We should pat ourselves on the back for all that has been accomplished—but, as my mother used to say when we children bragged about our good deeds: “Don’t break your arm.” This was a way of reminding us that we take only a moment to congratulate ourselves, and then we get back to work.

The year 2021 is upon us and we have more work to do, more projects to

### New Global Mission executives

Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller began March 8 as co-executive directors of Global Mission. Read the full personnel announcement in the Newsline Digest on p. 27.

be a part of, and more funds to raise. Financial support for Global Mission is received at [brethren.org/global/give](http://brethren.org/global/give) or may be mailed to Global Mission, Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. 

Roxane Hill is interim office manager for the Church of the Brethren Global Mission. She previously served with the Nigeria Crisis Response.

Chris Elliott



**Galen Hackman speaks in Bujumbura, Burundi, to the first joint gathering of the two house churches that were started there by David Niyonzima.**

# Blind spots clouding our vision?

## HOW OUR EYES WERE OPENED

by Julia Wheeler

**A**re you aware of your blind spots? Of course not! Most of the time you don't even know you have a blind spot, thus the term. I have discovered that not only can a person have blind spots, but churches can too. This is the story of how my church and I were given the gift of seeing, the veil pulled back.

Although it is only four miles from my previous home in La Verne, Calif., the city of Pomona seems a world away. La Verne is quiet, upper- to middle-class, predominantly white, and home to the Brethren-founded University of La Verne. It contrasts sharply with the sprawling, urban Pomona with diverse neighborhoods, where many eke out a living just to make ends meet.

When I first moved there, I looked at Pomona through my blind spot. Seeing the homeless sully the neighborhood park, I just wanted them gone. I gave no Christian thought to their plight or circumstance.

The Church of the Brethren congregation in another area of the city also did not have a clear vision of its hometown. Established in 1907, the congregation has stood for more than 100 years in the city as Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren.

The church struggled for many years with a declining, aging congregation and a large, empty building needing more care than the congregation has energy for. The majority of church members have lived outside city limits. A unanimous decision was made to sell the building and maybe relocate to a more manageable space.

The church at one point in its history had held much sway in Pomona, and still had visions of that reputation in its corporate memory. However, when their new, young, and energetic pastor, Lauren Seganos Cohen, went to city meetings and said she was from Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren, most people had not heard of the church.

Church members began raising searching questions about

what their congregation had become, and how they might relate to and serve the community as it is now.

In the meantime, I too began to get involved with the people and activities of city life in Pomona. Surprisingly, it is one of a handful of cities nationwide that has declared itself a City of Compassion, addressing the holistic wellness of its community, especially as it relates to those most at risk. Compassionate Pomona is an inclusive community group that attracts participants from nonprofit leaders to city officials, artists to school superintendents, pastors to police officers, and everyone in between. I began to see the vast interwoven network of care and community love.

My experience with the city exposed my own blind spot. I had fears, and doubts, and uncomfortable moments that made it difficult for me to see the "something new" God seems to be creating. I felt my own call from God, not to something cushy but to disturbingly uncomfortable spaces.

More and more, I find myself drawn to Pomona as a place

Stephen Yorba



*A bountiful harvest of cabbage at the community garden run by Community Partners 4 Innovation.*





*Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren.*

where the Kingdom of God is becoming manifest. I became involved in a Restorative Practices Collaborative, having attended a four-day training with the city manager, mental health professionals, and the police chief and his deputy. The city government wants to create pathways to encourage the community to prevent, address, and rectify the struggles of those disconnected and disenfranchised, in a holistic and restorative way. Isn't this what Jesus came for?

In a sense, a new me is being born in the city of Pomona. Now, when it rains, I say a prayer for my unhoused friends. I shop in the dilapidated downtown and make a priority of patronizing the local eateries. My Bethany Seminary education has offered some courses that have helped me evaluate my charitable intentions and focus my public theology. I have come to see that proximity to community needs calls me to action and shapes and guides my actions. I remind myself that Jesus walked among people such as these. He ate with them, he ministered to them, he came for them. It's not merely what Jesus came for, but what the church itself is for in the world.

Strangely, I often find myself on the outside of the needs of my city, looking in with wonder. I am the learner here, finding a vision beyond my blind spot. I am one being given new sight, and being blessed.

Pastor Lauren, in order to help her congregation get to know their city and think outside the box, held a series of "Know Our Neighbors" meetings, with speakers who gave presentations about their good works. The congregation began to see the great need and enormous possibilities in the city. They began to envision ways to serve the city and bring new energy and vitality to the community—and to themselves. One might say the congregation began to see itself differently, bringing into focus the vision of Jesus for his church in its real-life setting.

Pomona Fellowship Church, with its new insight, had to decide what was important in its ministry, beyond meeting for worship. How would the congregation define its mission?

The congregation had to confront powerful internal conflict, including:

**Fear.** Not only was the congregation contemplating doing a new thing, but it was going to engage more deeply with the city. Weren't there gangs down there?

**Self-doubt.** Church members questioned themselves. "We haven't done anything like this. Are you sure we'll be able?"



*Volunteers sort produce at the community garden.*

**Comfort.** The term "restorative justice" implied conflict, something that this fellowship and its denominational roots have sought to avoid. The whole idea seemed unsettling.

But they were informed and inspired by the needs of the city, and they saw good people already at work. Collaboration seemed to be an answer to their prayers.


Two of the nonprofit organizations that gave presentations to the church became a focus of attention. One, Inland Valley Hope Partners, provides food, shelter, and supportive services to thousands of people in the valley. A second, Community Partners 4 Innovation, works actively with the community through gang intervention, prison re-entry, an abundant community garden, and community wellness promotion.

The ministries of these two nonprofit groups opened unfamiliar and uncomfortable new territory for the church members. The prophetic words of Isaiah, "I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?" (43:19, NLT), gave them the courage they needed. A collaboration with these agencies was approved by the congregation.

Inland Valley Hope Partners hopes to collaborate with Pomona Fellowship to use some of the church space to see clients and have a food pantry.

Urban Mission is seeking a place where its urban garden can thrive and have neighborhood influence and impact. They collaborate with a medical college and would like to open a wellness center in the neighborhood. Urban Mission also is known for Sunday community dinners, where executive director Nora Jacob says, "We are all invited to be co-creators in bringing God's world."

Pomona Fellowship Church has responded to the call of God into discomfort. The church has made a choice to "live, really live" (Luke 16: 9, The Message).

The new vision of the church is still coming into focus, as is my own. Thus far, the Spirit has seemed to lead us into new moments of being "smart for what is right," and not just getting by "on good behavior" (Luke 16:8, The Message). We believe we are being given a clearer vision, beyond our blind spots, to be the church where we are—with bravery, creativity, purpose, and self-sacrifice. 

Julia Wheeler is associate director of development and director of church relations at the University of La Verne in La Verne, Calif.

# Aging, and the 'nones'

by the MESSENGER editorial team

**T**he Church of the Brethren is not alone in losing members and experiencing falling worship attendance in recent years, as we learned in last month's analysis of

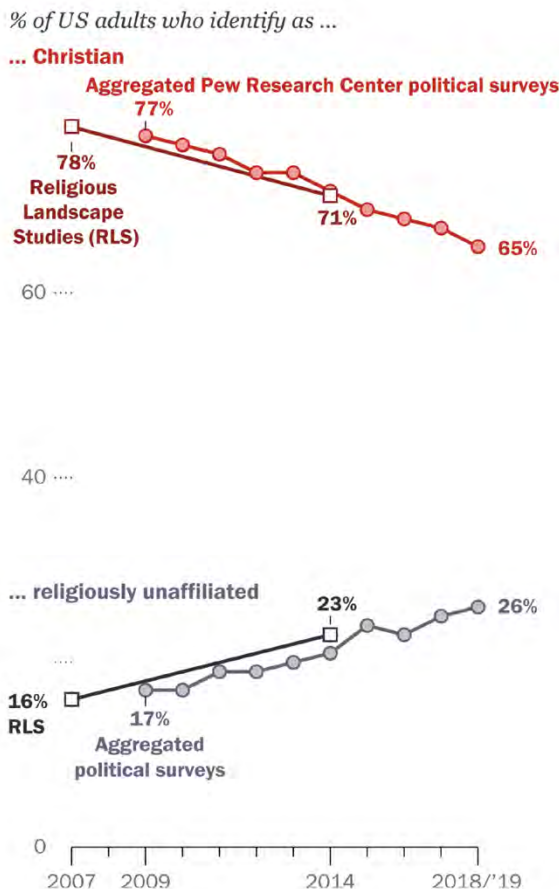
membership and attendance numbers. Now we open the lens wider to take a look at some societal trends, beyond current pandemic conditions, that are changing our religious landscape.

## Rise of the 'nones'

More Americans are turning away from organized religion—people often called the “nones” or “the religiously unaffiliated.”

## Rise of the “nones”

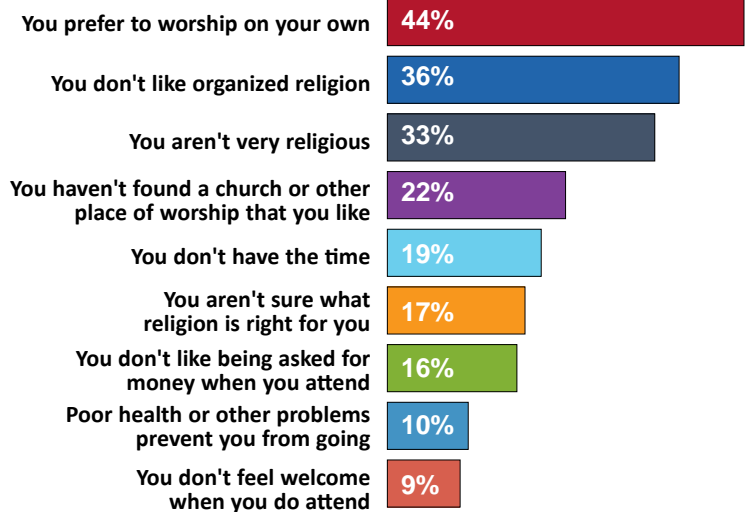
### Smaller share of adults identify as Christians, while religious ‘nones’ have grown



Pew Research Center, “In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Oct. 17, 2019, [www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace](http://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace)

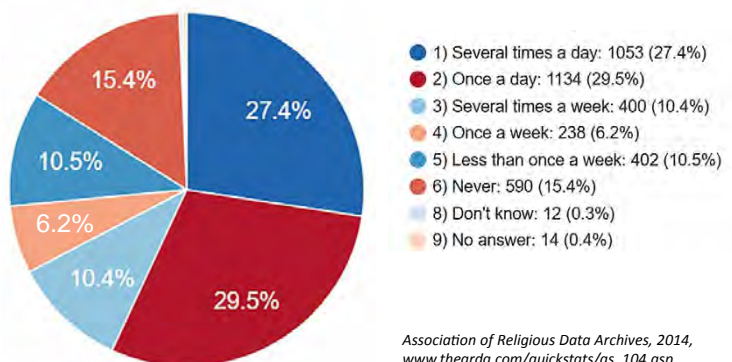
## Reasons you do not attend church

Selected as major reasons by adults who seldom or never attend church but attended monthly or more often while growing up



Gallup, “In Depth Topics A to Z: Religion,” 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>

## Frequency of prayer



Association of Religious Data Archives, 2014, [www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs\\_104.asp](http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_104.asp)



Pew Research Center surveys from 2018 and 2019 found that “the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic, or ‘nothing in particular,’ now stands at 26 percent, up from 17 percent in 2009.”

At the same time, the surveys found that “65 percent of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade” (“In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Oct. 17, 2019, [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)).

The “nones” are a wide spectrum of people, with varying attitudes about religion and the church. Some consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Some prefer to worship alone or find the presence of God in nature. Some have found spiritual nurture in communities other than religious congregations. Some experience real discomfort in worship

**What's working for you?** You are invited to share brief stories, just 200 words, about how Church of the Brethren congregations are addressing these trends. Submit by email to [messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org).

settings or in church buildings.

However, in other studies more people report praying more often. What this means, in part, is that going to church is no longer the prime indicator of the state of a person's faith.


### Aging and the loss of young people

Church of the Brethren congregations are seeing the same rise in average age of members and clergy that is seen in many other denominations.

“The average age of congregational members and their religious leaders is rising considerably (especially in the Protestant Mainline),” wrote Scott Thumma of Faith Communities Today and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. “Based on our 2015 survey, religious attenders over 65 years of age

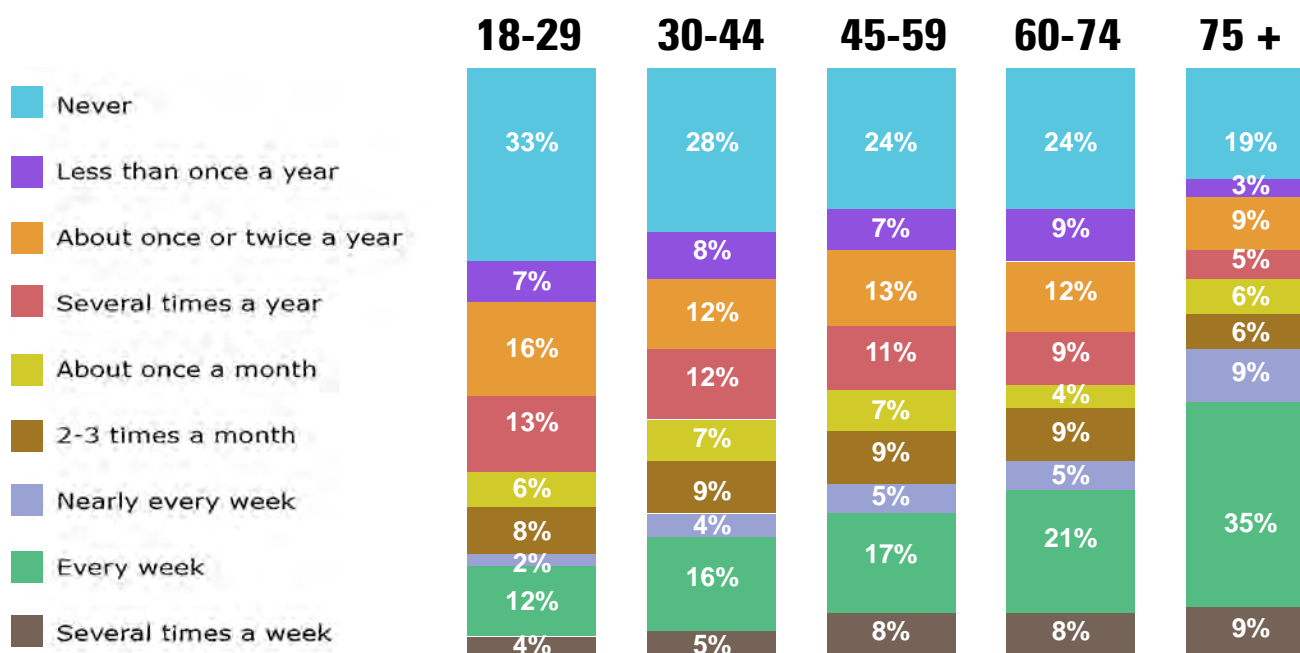
make up nearly 30 percent of an average congregation.”

Thumma noted aging congregations are less willing to undergo adaptive changes, work toward innovative worship, reinvent themselves, attract younger participants, or have a children's program.

The church's aging connects to young people's perceptions of theology and church doctrine as irrelevant, according to Robert P. Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute. The politicization of evangelical churches and changing attitudes about sexuality also are factors that young people take into account, Jones said, as is whether a church actually lives out its values. 

*Sources: Association of Religious Data Archives, Gallup, Pew Research Center, Faith Communities Today, Public Religion Research Institute, Hartford Institute for Religion Research.*

## Religious service attendance by age



Association of Religious Data Archives, 2014, [www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs\\_105\\_p.asp](http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_105_p.asp)

These Bible studies come from *Shine: Living in God's Light*, the Sunday school curriculum published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. Each month this year, MESSENGER is publishing two of the Bible essays that help teachers prepare. The first essay is written by Laura L. Brenneman and the second by Michael McKeever. The illustrations, by David Huth, come from *All of Us: God's Story for You and Me*.



# Jesus is risen!

## Mark 16:1-8

**I**n Mark's account, Jesus is killed on the day of preparation for the Sabbath. This meant that the women who watched his crucifixion from a distance didn't go to the tomb until after the Sabbath. But very early on the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome go to anoint Jesus' body.

They go expecting to find the tomb intact. They are worried about how to remove the large stone from the entrance; they expect to find a body within it. But *why* do they expect these things?

The women have been, by far, the most faithful of Jesus' disciples in this story. Although Mark's audience is not introduced to Jesus' female followers (Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses) until chapter 15, we are informed that they and "many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem" (15:41). Unlike Jesus' male companions, they are with him at the crucifixion. They are at a distance, to be sure, but they are there and they return to honor the body. However, they are—surprisingly—surprised that the large stone has been rolled back and that Jesus' body is gone.

Why shouldn't they be surprised? As Mark's readers know, Jesus

repeatedly told the disciples that he would go to Jerusalem, be betrayed, suffer, be killed, and be resurrected by God. In the journey to Jerusalem in chapters 8–10, Jesus laid out the whole plotline, even though the disciples did not want to hear about it. But Jesus wouldn't drop it; he talked about it in parable form (12:1–12), mentioned it when the unknown woman anointed him (14:8), and instructed the disciples to meet him in Galilee after they desert him and he is raised (14:28).

So, this unexpectedly empty tomb should, in fact, be expected. We identify with the women because surprise seems so natural. We do not expect dead bodies to be resurrected. Mark's readers, however, are supposed to do more than the women, who fled in terror and told no one about their experience.

The earliest manuscripts of Mark end this way: "So they [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." This ending seems at first abrupt and unsettling. Nonetheless it can encourage fruitful theological reflection. Instead of narrating an encounter between the disciples and Jesus in Galilee, the shorter ending seems to

be showing that the disciples already knew everything they needed in order to do what they should.

Mark's readers also have enough information. We don't actually have to *see* Jesus to have confirmation of God's power and the truth of Jesus' teaching. The story of the women gets out, so they must have eventually talked. The early church embraced Jesus' resurrection as a given. The narrative is open in the sense that it is invitational. How will we respond? One option is to run away in silence. Another is to proclaim what we believe even if we have not seen it. This stark ending of Mark pointedly puts the choice to readers: What will you do?

**Why do you think the women were afraid to tell what they had seen and heard at the tomb? What keeps us from sharing Jesus' story today? Who needs the good news of the resurrected Christ in your community?**

*Risen Lord, thank you for the new life you bring to all of creation. Fill me with courage and joy as I share your good news with others. Amen.*



**Read along**

April 4	Mark 16:1-8
April 11	Acts 1:1-11
April 18	Acts 2:1-12; 37-39
April 25	Acts 2:41-47

# Jesus' ascension

**Acts 1:1-11**



**I**t is commonly understood that the writer of the Gospel of Luke also authored the book of Acts. As Luke begins this second volume, he sets the stage for God's people to take on an outward and inclusive mission. Luke is the only Gospel writer to tell the story of Jesus' ascension to heaven. In fact, because Acts overlaps chronologically with the end of Luke's Gospel, Luke narrates the ascension twice. From the perspective of Luke-Acts, the ascension is the center of the story, and, indeed, the focus of history as well.

Jesus' ascension takes place on the Mount of Olives, the place where Jesus struggled in prayer before his suffering and death, also known as the passion (see Luke 22:39-46). Jesus' ascension to heaven signifies his triumph and vindication, and underscores his position as universal Lord. Salvation in all its fullness may now be proclaimed to all peoples in his name.

The preparatory nature of Acts 1 points to the role and significance of the 12 apostles in Luke's two volumes. Like the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12

apostles are representatives of a new people of God. Although individual apostles, such as Peter, do come into their own in Acts, the 12 as a whole do not play a prominent role. Still, their symbolic function helps us to understand God's purpose as the story progresses. When Peter speaks, he speaks as a representative of the new leaders of God's people and, like Jesus, he will encounter opposition from the Jewish leadership.

Because of the symbolic significance of the 12 apostles, the death of Judas means that he must be replaced. In verses 15-26, Peter states that the replacement must be one of those who accompanied Jesus and the apostles from the time of Jesus' baptism to his ascension. Two qualified candidates are selected, and Matthias is chosen by lot. Matthias is never again mentioned in Acts, but his selection completes this symbolic number and reconstitutes the 12, which must happen before the new era arrives at Pentecost.

Some have suggested that this

book, the "Acts of the Apostles" be called "Acts of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the opening of Acts. In chapter 1, this role is emphasized in the past, present, and future as David, Jesus, and Peter are all characterized as having spoken by the Spirit. In verse 8, Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive the Spirit and move out from Jerusalem. The Spirit will also play the key role in affirming and expanding the Christian mission.

To experience the Spirit is to be immersed in and empowered by God's very presence. Unlike the exclusive holiness symbolized by the Jerusalem temple, where certain people were kept from direct access to God, God's presence through the Spirit is inclusive. The work of the Spirit begins in Jerusalem and moves outward. As Luke's second volume unfolds, we shall see that the mention of going out "to the ends of the earth" in Acts 1:8 does not merely speak of journeying across physical distance. It speaks more broadly of crossing cultural and social boundaries for God's saving purpose.

**How can we encourage one another to wait upon the Spirit? How can you help children and youth create spaces for reflection and prayer? Where do you see the Spirit moving in new places and crossing boundaries today?**

*Holy Spirit, come and work through me as I teach. Help me to watch for your movement in new ways and in new places. Amen.*



## BDM rebuilds in North Carolina

**A**n allocation of \$37,850 from the Emergency Disaster Fund supports the coastal North Carolina rebuilding site of Brethren Disaster Ministries. The project in Pamlico County is rebuilding and repairing homes affected by Hurricane Florence, which hit the area in September 2018.

The North Carolina site is scheduled to continue through April, when Brethren Disaster Ministries reopens a tornado rebuilding site in Dayton, Ohio.

## EYN ministers meet

**Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria** (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) held its Annual Ministers' Conference Feb. 16–19 with a smaller-than-usual number of ministers from across the denomination. The event at EYN headquarters in Kwarhi usually attracts around 1,000 pastors, but this year 220 attended, under strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols. The Disaster Relief Ministry provided face masks, sanitizer, and hand washing items. EYN vice president Anthony A. Ndamsai was the featured speaker.

## Answered prayer in Nigeria

**Prayers for EYN pastor** and evangelist Bulus Yukura were answered when he was released from Boko Haram captivity on March 3. Yukura had been kidnapped from the village of Pemi, near Chibok in northeast Nigeria, on Christmas Eve. Media in Nigeria had published a video made by his captors, threatening his execution by March 3 if ransom demands were not met.



## Faith in Action grants go to three churches

**The Brethren Faith in Action Fund** awarded its first three grants of 2021:

- \$5,000 to the food pantry at Living Faith Church of the Brethren in Concord, N.C.
- \$5,000 to Spring Creek Church of the Brethren in Hershey, Pa., for a new roof and gutters for its parsonage, used in partnership with Love INC of Greater Hershey.
- \$5,000 to Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren for flood damage in its basement and fellowship hall, used in partnership with the Interfaith Housing Alliance.



## Youth Fellowship Exchange launches

**The Youth and Young Adult Ministry** has launched a Youth Fellowship Exchange to provide pandemic-safe fellowship opportunities. The program matches youth groups from different congregations through video calls including ice breakers, community building games, and options for youth advisors to create their own activities for the online gatherings. Contact [bullomnaugle@brethren.org](mailto:bullomnaugle@brethren.org).

## Rwanda pig project passes on the gift

**The Global Food Initiative** announced its first grants for 2021:

- \$3,500 to purchase feed for a pig project of the Church of the Brethren in Rwanda. This year the “passing the gift” phase of the project begins, in which 180 animals from a central farm established in the project’s first year will be given to 90 Twa families over the next three years.
- \$1,000 to St. Peter Lutheran Church Community Garden in Southport, N.C. The garden is designed to connect the senior citizens and youth of the community while promoting fresh vegetables.

## Compelling vision Bible studies are available

**A 13-session Compelling Vision Bible Study Series** is available in English and Spanish at [brethren.org/compelling-vision](http://brethren.org/compelling-vision). A project of the Compelling Vision Working Group, the series will help church members study the compelling vision statement coming to Annual Conference this year.



## Personnel notes

**Chris Douglas**, Annual Conference director, retires from the Church of the Brethren staff on Oct. 1, after working for the denomination for more than 35 years. She began as staff for Youth and Young Adult Ministry and Urban Ministry in 1985. She went on to serve as full-time director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry 1990-2009. During that time, she took on expanded responsibilities for leadership development events, increased attendance at National Youth Conference, and expanded the youth workcamp program. She mentored numerous Brethren Volunteer Service workers as they coordinated six National Youth Conferences. She became Annual Conference director on Sept. 6, 2009, and by the time of her retirement will have directed 11 Annual Conferences (the 2020 event was canceled because of the pandemic). As the first ever to be held virtually, the 2021 Conference represents a culminating challenge in Douglas' career.

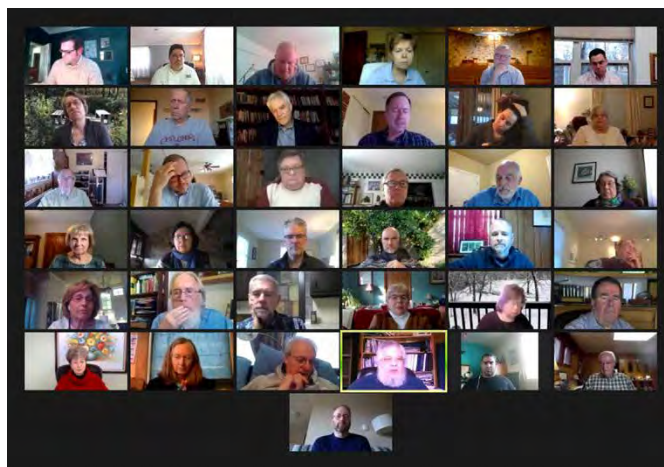
**Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller** began March 8 as co-executive directors of Global Mission, working remotely from China until able to relocate to the US. Since January 2020, they have been Global Mission and Service workers at Yangquan You'ai Hospital in Pinding, Shanxi Province. The hospital takes its name from the original hospital

founded in 1911 by Church of the Brethren missionaries in China. Li is founder and president of You'aiCare, a managed hospice and home based care service in partnership with the hospital. Miller has worked since 2012 as consulting director for International Partnerships at the hospital. He grew up in York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren while Li grew up in Shouyang, the location of another past Brethren mission post in Shanxi Province.

**Norman and Carol Spicher Waggy** have concluded a year of work as interim directors of Global Mission, starting on March 2, 2020.

**Debbie Noffsinger** began Feb. 15 in a newly restructured, salaried position of part-time Annual Conference assistant. Since 2010, she has worked on a seasonal basis as registration assistant. She is a freelance graphic designer who has created many logos and publications for church programs, and is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.

**Victoria Crouter** has begun as accounting associate for Brethren Benefit Trust. She holds a bachelor's degree from Trinity International University and started her career in the finance department of another Church Benefits Association organization.



## District executives meet virtually

**The Council of District Executives** started off the year with the first of two annual meetings, in a virtual format. The meeting Jan. 25-28 included worship, reports from Annual Conference agencies and the Mission and Ministry Board, and conversation with the denomination's Leadership Team.

The group also thought together about the future of district ministry and how districts can adapt and transform in order to continue providing support, encouragement, and connection to congregations.

Time was spent remembering Terry Grove, former executive of Atlantic Southeast District, who passed away suddenly in December 2020. Sonja Griffith, who retired in March as executive of Western Plains District, led the closing worship.

## Board publicizes strategic plan

**The Mission and Ministry Board** has published interpretive documents for its new strategic plan in three languages—English, Spanish, and Haitian Kreyol. "We pray that congregations and districts will be energized by understanding how the Mission and Ministry Board and Church of the Brethren staff will be guided by this plan in the years to come," said Lauren Seganos Cohen, a board member on the Strategic Planning Committee. Go to [brethren.org/strategicplan](http://brethren.org/strategicplan).

### JESUS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

*Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.*



## Post this page

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# The Post-Quarantine Church, an essential guide to thrive

**T**he *Post-Quarantine Church*, by Thom S. Rainer, is an essential guide for any congregation working to thrive in a post-pandemic world. The book's subtitle, *Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation*, sums up the importance of the church's response to a world that will be fundamentally changed.



TODD HAMMOND

Rainer explores these six challenges in a thoughtful and straightforward fashion throughout the middle chapters of his book. He encourages church leaders to see each challenge as an opportunity. He argues that for the church to survive—let alone thrive—in a post-pandemic world, we need to meet these challenges head-on. He concludes:


“Churches that refuse to change will inevitably decline or even die. Blunt but true.”

The changes that Rainer suggests pastors and lay persons explore include: 1) gather differently and better, 2) seize your opportunity to reach the digital world, 3) reconnect with the community near your church, 4) take prayer to a new and powerful level, 5) rethink your facilities for emerging opportunities, and 6) make lasting changes that will make a difference. He lays out the challenges in each chapter and suggests practical responses that can turn each of them into an opportunity to share the gospel in a new and effective way.

Many congregations had already begun the process of implementing a number of these changes before anyone had heard of COVID-19. Living Stream Church of the

Brethren has been offering a virtual-only worship experience for people across the country for several years. Even before the pandemic, a few other congregations had begun livestreaming their services. Glendale (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, where I served for many years, has—like most congregations in southern California—maximized use of its facilities by hosting multilingual services for decades. Rainer makes the case, though, that the “pandemic was a wake-up call like none other . . . to make the necessary positive changes to move our churches forward.”

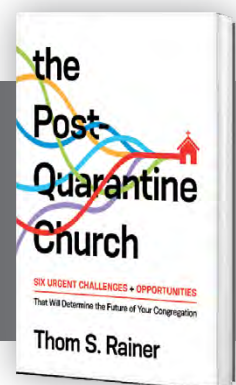
In the conclusion, Rainer offers some clear plans of action. He enumerates nine specific changes that pastors and laypeople can make to transform post-quarantine challenges into opportunities for the post-pandemic church. While some shifts might be difficult for some church leaders to accept, particularly pastors, embracing change can offer the post-pandemic church a blank slate. The first apostles faced a similarly daunting challenge of bringing the gospel to a diverse and changing world.

Rainer's tone throughout the book is optimistic. He takes a frank look at the challenges facing the church in the future. He affirms that while the world is changing at an accelerated pace, God remains steadfast. He reminds us that even amid the turmoil of our modern world, Christ promised to be with us always. Ultimately, he presents these challenges as opportunities for a faithful response to Christ's great commission. The book is an excellent guide for congregations as they consider post-quarantine church life. 

Todd Hammond is pastor of Agape Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**Title:** *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation*. **Author:** Thom S. Rainer. **Publisher:** Tyndale Momentum (September 2020). **Pages:** 128 (hardcover). **List price:** \$12.99. The book is available for purchase through [brethrenpress.com](http://brethrenpress.com).





## Make our world a better place

We have been wanting to write something like this for some time now, and with the Capitol assault, this was the right time.

There is no question that good folks—friendly, charitable, admirable folks—can be misled and ill informed. But what happened to basic high school social studies, civics, elementary logic, simple entry-level ethics and morality?

Our children grew up, as did we, looking to adults as mentors, leaders, sometimes idolized for their abilities. If we can be so easily brainwashed and fed gobbledy-goop that we hear and see on radio and TV and read online, hear from Congressmen, plus many others, if we can't see through and evaluate these ideas, then we are—some of us, anyway—lost. To take what we hear and see at face value without analysis? For that there is no excuse.

We are too busy? We are caring for our family or others? All of that is admirable and necessary, but that doesn't mean we stop thinking critically and learning.

It is time for everyone to take a look, a different look, at the world around us and our place in it. Ask what kind of world we are creating, what kind of world do we want to be a part of, leave to our children and grandchildren.

Can we deny climate change? What weather have we been experiencing?

Tell me “what would Jesus do” with children and babies separated from their parents at the border?

Let's try to understand Black Lives Matter, white privilege, and “de-fund the police.” Not what we think they mean, but what they mean to those who came up with these words.

Do we understand the phrase “false equivalency”? And how it has been utilized by right-leaning propagandists and so many conservative groups? White supremacy has been around for over 400 years and it is still with us,

and governs the lives of us all.

With patience, let us enter 2021 with strength and courage. Let's give sensibility, thoughtfulness, consideration, and compassion a chance. Let's support our elected officials when we see that they are accepting of facts and science, respectful, comprehensive, and mindful of others, and get on with the business

of making our world a better place for all of us.

**Kurtz and Reva Hersch**  
Monee, Ill.

## Questions about statistics

Thank you for the statistical analysis of the Church of the Brethren. Very

## National Older Adult Conference

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September 6-10, 2021



### Online NOAC will include:

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Paula Bowser  
Don Fitzkee  
Christy Dowdy  
Eric Landram

### Keynotes Speakers:

Karen Gonzalez  
Lisa Sharon Harper  
Ken Medema and Ted Swartz

[www.brethren.org/NOAC](http://www.brethren.org/NOAC)

1-800-323-8039 ext. 303  
NOAC@brethren.org

Registration fees:

**Individual: \$100**

**Couple: \$150**

For a paper registration form call:  
1-800-323-8038 ext. 303

**Registration opens online May 1st**

[www.brethren.org/NOAC](http://www.brethren.org/NOAC)

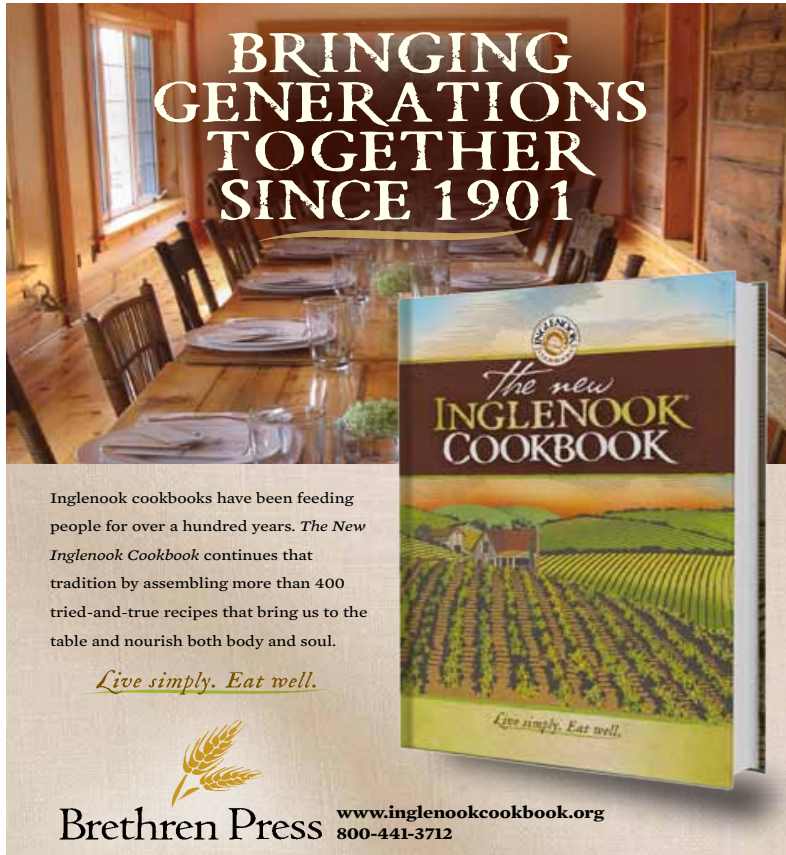


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Church of the Brethren NOAC



Church of the Brethren

National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) is an event for folks over fifty who want to worship, learn, reflect, pray, serve, rest and enjoy fellowship with others in a virtual setting.



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informative, interesting, and frightening.

I am interested in some other stats as well.

How many of the congregations that left our denomination over the past few years were from the Supportive Communities Network (SCN) of the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC)? I would guess none.

There are around 40 Church of the Brethren SCN congregations. How many of them financially support our denomination? What percent of the total annual denominational program budget do they represent? How does that compare to conservative congregations?

If we support or encourage the development of the Covenant Brethren Church, how many more congregations and how much financial support would the Church of the Brethren lose?

Frankly, I encourage the support of the Covenant Brethren. Over the course of our history, that will be healthier for the Church of the Brethren and the Covenant Brethren.

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Commitment to peace and justice, worldwide ministries working on poverty, catastrophic events, ignorance, and exploitation, and Brethren Volunteer Service, etc., are the heart and soul of the Church of the

Brethren. I am thankful for these ministries. And I am thankful for the work of BMC with a mission to cultivate an inclusive church and society.

BMC and SCN are not trying to become a separate denomination.

They are part of the ideals—historically and currently—of the Church of the Brethren.

**Ralph McFadden**

Elgin, Ill.

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

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

## Centenaries

**Anglemyer**, Dorothy, 100, Wakarusa, Ind., Oct. 4  
**Johnson**, Joy, 100, Bremen, Ind., June 21  
**Warner**, Vivian, 101, Frederick, Md., Jan. 20  
**Wickert**, Violet, 101, Astoria, Ill., Jan. 13

## New members

**Donnels Creek**, Springfield, Ohio: Hope Baughman, Krista Smith, Ricky Smith, George Thomas  
**Hagerstown**, Md.: Susan Hughes, Jeremy Springer  
**Linville Creek**, Broadway, Va.: Joel Ballow, Linetta Ballow, Beverly Butterfield, Janna Grandle, Whit Grandle, Bobby Mongold, Crystal Mongold, Raven Mongold, Emily Morris, Henry Morris, Chris Reedy, Emily Reedy, Jessica Strawderman, Logan Strawderman  
**Mill Creek**, Port Republic, Va.: Emily Bender, Jeremy Bender, Cheryl Foley, John Foley, Bill Hain, Nancy Hain, Gene Layman, Kara Dee Layman  
**New Enterprise**, Pa.: Nickie Baker, Riley Cottle, Earl Eshelman, Betty Sue Laird, Tim Laird, Miriam Loose, Vaughn Loose, Kaden Rightenour, Cristy Strayer  
**Poplar Ridge**, Defiance, Ohio: Connor Steffes  
**Union Center**, Nappanee, Ind.: James Yoder, MaKayla Yoder

**Behnke**, Paul and Margie, Waynesboro, Pa., 50  
**Bourne**, Francis and Jenny Sue, Walkersville, Md., 55  
**Davis**, Jim and Phyllis, Warsaw, Ind., 55  
**Detwiler**, Carl and Evelyn, Bremen, Ind., 55  
**Everest**, Dean and Lorita, New Paris, Ind., 65  
**Freels**, James and Jane, New Carlisle, Ohio, 55  
**Garl**, Harley and Betty, Nappanee, Ind., 70  
**Jarrels**, John and Helen, Harrisonburg, Va., 66  
**Klotz**, Larry and Vicki, Milford, Ind., 50  
**Renfrew**, Bob and Sue, Clarksburg, Md., 60  
**Searer**, Glenn and Bonnie, Elkhart, Ind., 55  
**Shank**, Ernie and Jeannine, Astoria, Ill., 70  
**Sheets**, Vernon and MaryLou, Nappanee, Ind., 65  
**Smith**, Byron and Eloise, Bourbon, Ind., 50  
**Southerly**, Norman and Mary, Port Republic, Va., 65  
**Specht**, Donald and Martha, Frederick, Md., 60  
**Stansbury**, Leighton and Dorothy, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 70  
**Stemen**, Cliff and Marlene, New Paris, Ind., 55  
**Weaver**, Wallace and Mary Alice, Harrisonburg, Va., 60  
**Weber**, Dick and Lana, Milford, Ind., 55

## Deaths

**Baer**, Maurice F., Jr., 46, Broadway, Va., Oct. 23  
**Biller**, Edward Wilton, 90, Rockingham, Va., Dec. 22  
**Blaine**, Wilda Lantz, 89, Bridgewater, Va., March 15, 2020  
**Blalock**, Polly, 98, Frederick, Md., Dec. 23  
**Bontrager**, Philip E., 73, Nappanee, Ind., Aug. 3  
**Boyd**, Laurence Martin, 76, Frederick, Md., Dec. 21  
**Branner**, Frances Evelyn Holsinger, 100, Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 2, 2020  
**Buirley**, Sarah E. Sentman, 96, Troy, Ohio, Jan. 26  
**Claar**, Kenneth E., 80, Martinsburg, Pa., Jan. 6  
**Coffman**, Edward Preston, 84, Timberville, Va., July 18  
**Cronk**, Edwin Monroe, 102, Frederick, Md., Sept. 1  
**DeLauter**, Letha Naomi Hoover, 98, Frederick, Md., Jan. 20  
**Dellinger**, Joseph Brisco, 88, Broadway, Va., Sept. 16  
**Detwiler**, Robert W., 84, New Enterprise, Pa., June 27  
**Dove**, Juli Varsha, 32, Harrisonburg, Va., Feb. 4  
**Dove**, Mary Katherine Dellinger, 86, Broadway, Va., May 1  
**Ferry**, Helen Joanne Smith, 90, New Enterprise, Pa., Nov. 4  
**Fogle**, Darlene Gaynel, 71, Frederick, Md., Jan. 27  
**Frye**, Janice Marie Poffenberger, 85, Boonsboro, Md., Jan. 8  
**Furry**, Fay A. Campbell, 96, New Enterprise, Pa., Nov. 24  
**Gingrich**, John H., 79, Claremont, Calif., Dec. 7  
**Gross**, Donald G., 90, Springfield, Ohio, Nov. 5  
**Grove**, Ardella (Jean) Haupt, 94, Frederick, Md., Dec. 26  
**Ham**, Ray F., 88, Ipava, Ill., Nov. 20  
**Harris**, Sally Rue Bantz, 84, Ashland, Ohio, Jan. 28  
**Harshman**, Mary Louise Shafer, 90, Middletown, Md., Jan. 2  
**Higgins**, Suzan, 73, Nappanee, Ind., March 21, 2020  
**Holt**, Sarah J. Clagget, 79, Frederick, Md., Jan. 19  
**Kristaponis**, Gail, 82, Chapala, Mexico, Dec. 17  
**Litten**, Norman S., 90, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 4

**Loving**, Burl Lee, 93, Garden City, Kan., Dec. 14  
**Lucernoni**, Anthony James, 82, Jefferson, Md., Dec. 16  
**Mangus**, John Paul, 75, Stoystown, Pa., Jan. 20  
**May**, Bernard Thomas, 90, New Market, Va., Oct. 8  
**McBride**, Carol May Karn, 90, Plymouth, Ind., Jan. 5  
**McSherry**, Susan K. Lightner, 67, Rheems, Pa., Jan. 17  
**Messick**, Dee Wayne, 72, Grandview, Idaho, Sept. 7  
**Messick**, Elva Holsinger, 93, Broadway, Va., Jan. 23  
**Miller**, Sara K. Stapleton, 89, Roaring Spring, Pa., Dec. 7  
**Mishler**, Helen L., 94, Nappanee, Ind., Dec. 21  
**Moser**, Geraldine Marie Betts, 86, Frederick, Md., Jan. 6  
**Myers**, Lucille Marjorie Shoemaker, 88, Tipp City, Ohio, Jan. 22  
**Painter**, Ruby Florine Lam, 91, Lynchburg, Va., Jan. 15, 2020  
**Price**, Kathleen Homan, 76, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 11  
**Reisinger**, Ernest L., 87, Manheim, Pa., Oct. 18  
**Rice**, Betty Lou Walker, 86, Charlottesville, Va., Jan. 11  
**Rohrer**, Tamara Graves Haugh, 84, Frederick, Md., Oct. 6  
**Rosenberger**, W. Clemens, 88, Lititz, Pa., Jan. 27  
**Shaw**, Irene, 88, Astoria, Ill., Dec. 17  
**Skabla**, Patricia L. DuVal, 89, Springfield, Ohio, Jan. 29  
**Smith**, Iris A. Seymour, 103, Plymouth, Ind., Jan. 16  
**Sollenberger**, Naomi J., 66, New Enterprise, Pa., Nov. 4  
**Spangler**, Clarence William, 87, Mercersburg, Pa., Jan. 27  
**Stoltz**, Mark W., 67, Springfield, Ohio, Jan. 8  
**Taylor**, Larry A., 79, Walkerton, Ind., Jan. 25  
**Thomas**, Gloria, 92, Frederick, Md., Dec. 24  
**Thomas**, John E., Sr., 90, Leeton, Mo., Feb. 1  
**Thomas**, William Cephus, 76, Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 5  
**Thompson**, Margaret May Sherman, 97, Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 24  
**Tipton**, Charles Lincoln, 74, Bel Air, Md., Jan. 17  
**Turner**, Jessie Bennett Stultz, 99, Harrisonburg, Va., June 13  
**Vaughan**, Leonard Robert, 80, Broadway, Va., July 1  
**Wanger**, Michael Landon, 55, McGaheysville, Va., Jan. 27  
**Ward**, Betty J. Ish, 85, Mishawaka, Ind., Dec. 12  
**Warrenfeltz**, Eugene Wayne, 82, Frederick, Md., Sept. 16  
**Wheeler**, Shirley I., 82, Garden City, Kan., Nov. 29  
**Yinger**, Charles (David), 72, Frederick, Md., Jan. 22  
**Yost**, Eric Walter, 60, Windber, Pa., Jan. 6  
**Zerger**, Myron, 91, Dearborn, Mich., Jan. 5  
**Zimmerman**, Robert D., 73, Ligonier, Pa., Jan. 15

## Ordained

**May**, Timothy, Sr., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Pleasant View, Jefferson, Md.), Dec. 13

## Licensed

**Poteat**, Eric, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Koontz, New Enterprise, Pa., and Waterside, Woodbury, Pa.), Jan. 3

## Placements

**Clift**, Ryan, co-pastor, Conewago, Hershey, Pa., to pastor, East Fairview, Manheim, Pa., Jan. 1  
**Farmer**, Jonathan, pastor, Elk Run, Churchville, Va., Jan. 2  
**Kettering**, Robert, from interim pastor, East Fairview, Manheim, Pa., to interim pastor, Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa., Feb. 1  
**Ruff**, Jerry, interim pastor, Mountain View, McGaheysville, Va., Jan. 2  
**Scrogg**, Cole, from interim pastor, Elk Run, Churchville, Va., to interim pastor, Briery Branch, Dayton, Va., Jan. 2

## Anniversaries

**Anglemyer**, Wayne and Charlene, Nappanee, Ind., 55

# TURNINGPOINTS

# A year of sabbath justice

**O**ne year ago, a new virus stopped our world as we knew it. One minute we were flying on planes, traveling to conferences, and going out to dinner with our families, and the next we were confined to our homes. We canceled plans, traded in



HANNAH SHULTZ

suits for sweatpants, and reminded ourselves how to be content staying at home.

While many of us were restless during this time of forced rest, the earth rejoiced. During 2020, global greenhouse gas emissions dropped by 2.4 billion tons, a 7 percent decrease from 2019 and the largest decline in recorded history.

Although carbon emissions surged again in the second half of 2020, and

scientists predict that they will continue to rebound during 2021, the reduction early last year showed that when we rest the earth is rejuvenated as well.

In a world obsessed with consumption and frantic busyness, how important this year has been as a reminder of what happens during times of sabbath. At its core, sabbath is a reminder that it is okay, and even necessary, to slow down. Humanity and the earth need to rest. The biblical creation account establishes sabbath as part of the natural order of the world.


Sabbath practices are not only a reminder for God's people to rest, but they also establish social and ecological justice. In the Old Testament, obligations toward the land and others stand at the center of God's covenant with Israel. Social and ecological justice are intertwined in such a way that, when the agreement to care for those in need is broken, both people and the land suffer. Sabbath, as it extends to all people—free or enslaved, Israelites or foreigners—demands justice through rest, liberation, and

provision to those in bondage and in need.

In the earliest mention of the sabbath year (Exodus 23:10-11), the Israelites are told to stop working on the land so that the poor and wild animals may glean from the fields. Sabbath is a time for social relations to be restored and for society's outcast to be given resources. It is an interruption from the hurried work of building, cultivating, and exploiting. Sabbath reminds us that land is a gift from God. The earth is revived from abuse and overproduction when it is allowed to rest.

In a similar way, this year of rest has awakened us to the social and ecological impacts of our hurried lifestyle and has challenged us to address the widening disparities in our world. Overproduction and exploitation disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized populations. Food disparities have worsened during the pandemic, as the failing economy has forced 54 million Americans into food insecurity. The same systems and structures of oppression that prioritize money and power over sustainability also perpetuate economic, racial, and social injustices.

This year, a year that has shaken us out of our routines and forced us to rest, has reminded us of the social and ecological demands to care for the land and the people on it. After the pandemic, may we remember that the earth is a gift from God and we are called to be stewards of that land. May we not return to a state of complicity, but stay awakened to the needs of the least of these among us.

Sabbath gives us the opportunity to step back and take a new look at the world around us. During our time of rest, may we reevaluate our habits and invest ourselves in new ways of thinking and doing that lift up compassion, equality, and the work of social and ecological restoration. 

Hannah Shultz, until recently coordinator of short-term service for Brethren Volunteer Service, is program associate for Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, a religious response to global warming.

AT ITS CORE, SABBATH IS A REMINDER THAT IT IS OKAY, AND EVEN NECESSARY, TO SLOW DOWN. HUMANITY AND THE EARTH NEED TO REST. THE BIBLICAL CREATION ACCOUNT ESTABLISHES SABBATH AS PART OF THE NATURAL ORDER OF THE WORLD.





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—Sue Ranson, Roanoke First CoB

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