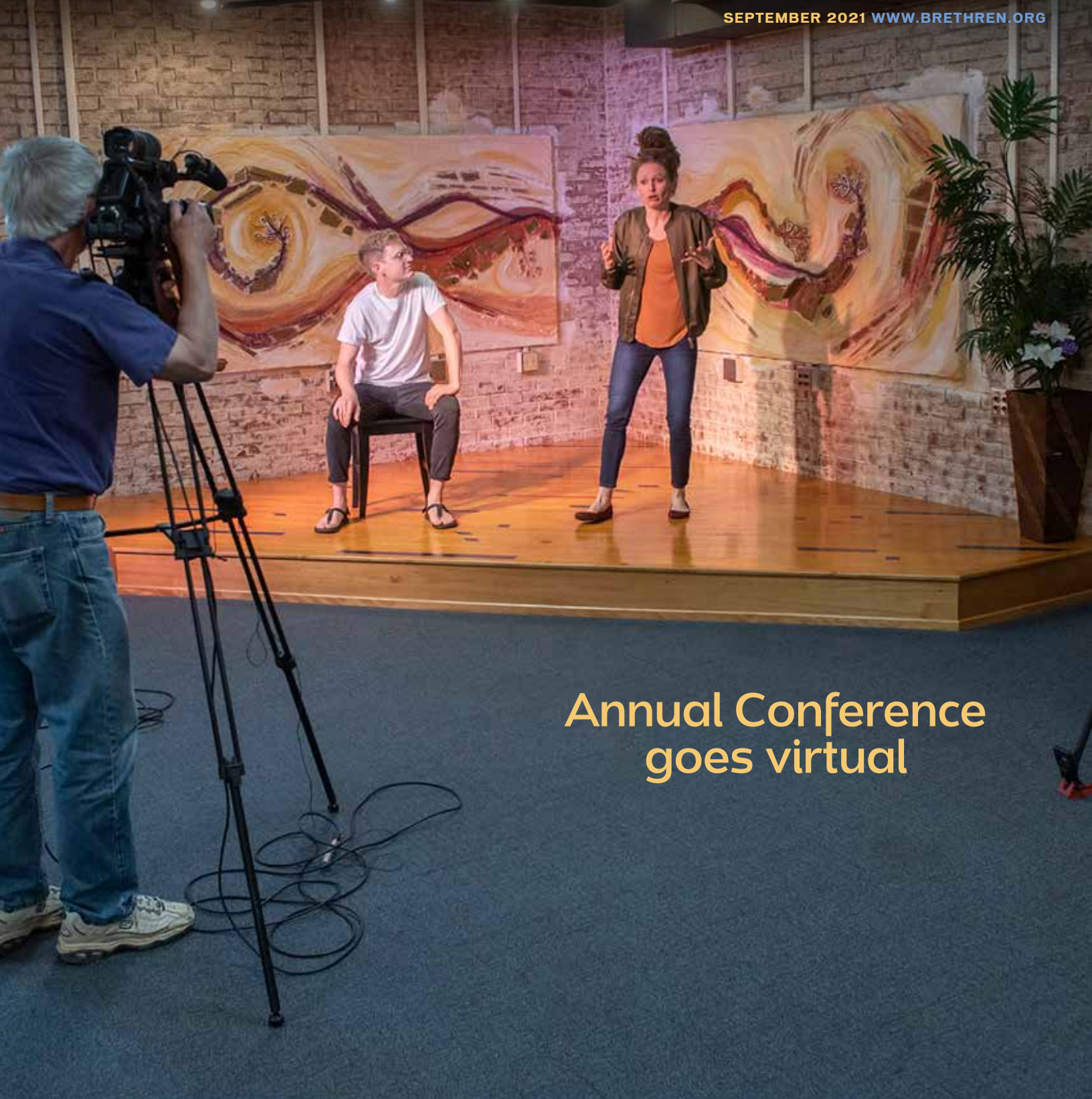


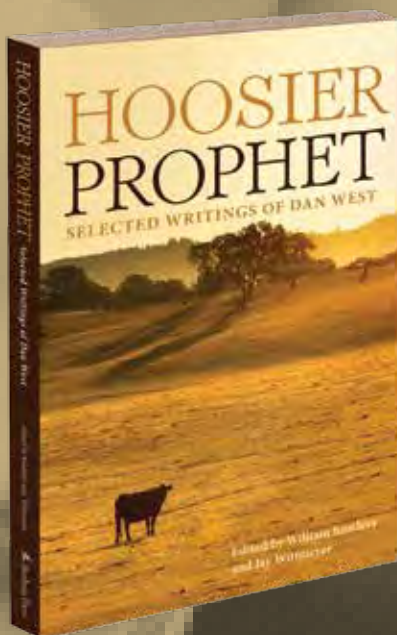
# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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



Annual Conference  
goes virtual

WE CANNOT HOPE TO DIGEST  
ALL THE SMORGASBORD OF  
PROBLEMS, BUT CAN DEAL  
WITH A FEW BASICS SUCH AS  
THE HOME AND PEACE ON  
EARTH. —*Dan West*



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Margaret Landis

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
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**6 Annual Conference 2021**  
by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Frances Townsend, Frank Ramirez, and Traci Rabenstein

**14 The chat is the liturgy**  
by Bobbi Dykema

**16 What we can do**  
by Dan West

**18 Remembering 9/11**  
by Doris Abdullah and Brian Bachman

**21 Footwashing: A Chinese connection**  
by Eric Miller and Ruoxia Li

**22 A time to mend**  
by Joan Daggett

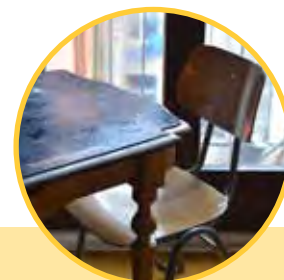
**28 Autumn: Unearthing God's eco-blueprint**  
by Randall Westfall

## departments

- 2** FROM THE PUBLISHER
- 3** THE EXCHANGE
- 4** IN TOUCH
- 24** BIBLE STUDY
- 26** NEWSLINE DIGEST
- 29** LETTERS
- 31** TURNING POINTS
- 32** POTLUCK

## on the cover

Photo by Glenn Riegel



**Table** Readers are invited to submit short reflections in prose or poetry or digital copies of art and photography on the idea of *table*. Written pieces can be as brief as a single paragraph or stanza. The items selected may be used in the November print issue or in MESSENGER Online. Please send your submission to [messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org) by Sept. 20.



# From generation to generation

**W**hen my church sponsored a late summer outing on a paddle-wheel riverboat, everyone seemed a bit giddy to be together. That's understandable, since opportunities to be in person had been sorely limited for so long.

While the number of people who climbed aboard was more than I expected, even more surprising to me was the age range—from 2 to more than 82, with just about every decade between. Who knew that a tranquil cruise up our local river would have such broad appeal?

Nowadays, church is one of the few places where all the generations belong to the same community. Babies are snuggled by older adults. Teenagers play with toddlers. Young adults counsel campers. Mentors pair up with mentees. Even the National Older Adult Conference is multigenerational, with an age range of some 40 years. In a world where individuals sometimes feel separate from each other, a place to belong is a true treasure.

The apostle Paul, a mentor to young Timothy, celebrates the way faith is passed down from one generation to another: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you” (2 Timothy 1:5). This is so important that we know the names of Lois and Eunice.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

One of the littlest ones on the riverboat cruise was Fae, not yet four years old. She and her siblings were there with their parents and grandparents. For some reason, she remembers me as her friend, even though we've barely met and she hasn't seen me for at least the length of a pandemic. But I'm thrilled to be Fae's friend—and to see that her church family makes her smile.

Even congregations that don't have multiple generations within their walls have other generations nearby. Even those of us who aren't teachers or mentors or counselors can engage in the “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). We belong to each other. Let's not miss the boat!



*Wendy McFadden*

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**“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?”**

—Job 12:12, NIV

**“Young people need something stable to hang on to—a culture connection, a sense of their own past, a hope for their own future. Most of all, they need what grandparents can give them.”** —author and former university president Jay Kesler

**“The old are the precious gem in the center of the household.”** —Chinese proverb

**“When she smiles, the lines in her face become epic narratives that trace the stories of generations that no book can replace.”** —author Curtis Tyrone Jones

**“The very old and the very young have something in common that makes it right they should be left alone together. Dawn and sunset see stars shining in a blue sky; but morning and midday and afternoon do not, poor things.”** —author Elizabeth Goudge

## NOAC '21

**The Church of the Brethren's biennial National Older Adult Conference (NOAC)** is taking place virtually this year, running Sept. 6-10 online with the theme “Overflowing with Hope,” drawn from Romans 15:13. Christy Waltersdorff is the NOAC coordinator, working with a team of Glenn Bollinger, Karen Dillon, Jim Martinez, Rex Miller, Pat Roberts, Paula Ziegler Ulrich, and staff members Josh Brockway and Stan Dueck. Look for coverage of the conference and updates at [www.brethren.org/noac](http://www.brethren.org/noac).

### TRIVIA

Who were the only grandfather and grandson to both serve as US presidents?

Answer: William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Grandparents Day is celebrated on Sept. 13** in the United States. West Virginia was reportedly the first state to declare an official Grandparents Day, in 1973, and other states gradually followed. President Jimmy Carter declared a national Grandparents Day in 1978, and it was first officially observed the following year.

Carter's proclamation said, in part: “Grandparents are our continuing tie to the near-past, to the events and beliefs and experiences that so strongly affect our lives and the world around us. Whether they are our own or surrogate grandparents who fill some of the gaps in our mobile society, our senior generation also provides our society a link to our national heritage and traditions.”



### PRAYERS FOR PEACE

**The International Day of Peace** is observed annually on Sept. 21, first established in 1981 by the United Nations General Assembly. The 2021 theme, shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, is “Recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world.”

The World Council of Churches built on this observance in 2004 by calling for the day to be an International Day of Prayer for Peace among churches everywhere.

# Walking the Richmond Slave Trail

**O**n a warm Saturday morning in June, 11 people from West Richmond (Va.) Church of the Brethren gathered downtown to walk the Richmond Slave Trail. The trail along the James River follows a route that enslaved Africans walked from docked ships to slave holding jails and then to slave market auction blocks. Seventeen interpretive markers along the trail document the slave trade in Virginia from 1619 until 1865.

Walking the trail was an idea that grew out of an adult book study group—a virtual replacement for in-person Sunday school during the pandemic. Pastor Dave Whitten organized the book group as a way for interested members of the congregation to learn about and recognize systemic racism and how to confront the inequalities between whites and African Americans in educational opportunities, housing options, employment, medical care,



and the justice system. Eyes were opened with *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby, which provoked shame with its history of the complicity of churches in racism, and by Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*, which helped the group recognize all forms of racism and how to fight it.

Dr. Benjamin Campbell's *Richmond's Unhealed History* hit close to home with its documentation of the many deliberate and insidious ways that Virginia denied equality for African Americans while assuring the survival of white supremacy through legislation, law enforcement, and custom.

While the readings often triggered discomfort, the group values the awareness gained through them. Of equal value have been the open discussions and personal sharing—even in a virtual setting—coming out of the learning process. The group is now exploring opportunities to join other white and Black churches in community-building activities. —Ann Miller Andrus

## R. Kermon Thomasson, MESSENGER editor 1977-1997

**R. Kermon Thomasson, 85, died on July 12** in Martinsville, Va. In addition to 20 years as MESSENGER editor, his



work for the Church of the Brethren included 13 years as a mission teacher in Nigeria.

Born Feb. 6, 1936, he was raised in Henry County, Va. He earned a bachelor's degree in education from Bridgewater (Va.) College. In 1960, as a Brethren Volunteer Service worker, he was assigned to teach in Waka, Nigeria. He went on to teach and serve as vice principal at Waka Teacher's College from 1963-1971, and was a stewardship educator in Garkida from 1971-1973.

Returning to the US, in 1974 he started as managing editor of MESSENGER. He became acting editor in 1977 and was named editor in 1979. During his tenure, he was involved in ecumenical publishing organizations including the Associated Church Press, where he served as treasurer. He received com-

mendations from Inter-Church Features and awards from the Religious Public Relations Council for editorials and feature stories.

He also did other types of writing as well as artwork for the church. He wrote a short paperback, *The Old, Old Story . . . Anew: The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria*, as the product of a sabbatical in Nigeria in 1983. His cartoons and line drawings appeared on the pages of MESSENGER and other Brethren publications. Most recently, he illustrated a book of stories by Frank Ramirez called *Brethren Brush with Greatness*.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret, and son Galen (Holly), and grandchildren. A memorial service was held July 19. Memorial gifts may be given to Brethren Volunteer Service.

Do you have district or congregational stories that might be of interest to MESSENGER? Short items with a photo are best. Send them to MESSENGER, c/o In Touch, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or messenger@brethren.org.





Paul Brubaker



Paul Brubaker

*Sandy Brubaker and Trina Hollinger (above) prepare baked beans and Kevin Karr (right) bakes potatoes for the Haiti Medical Project fundraiser at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.*

## Supporting the Haiti Medical Project

**Z**oom became the alternative method to conduct adult Sunday school at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren during the 15-month in-person shutdown caused by COVID-19. Pastor Jason Haldeman arranged for individuals from across the country to lead these meetings, and varied topics were addressed.

In early January, Paul and Sandy Brubaker provided a Sunday school Zoom program about the Haiti Medical Project. The project, in association with congregations of L'Église des Freres d'Haiti (Church of the Brethren in Haiti), brings medical care, medical education, and community health projects such as clean water and latrines, managed by Haitians for people in Haiti.

Asked how they envisioned the Elizabethtown congregation becoming involved with the project, the Brubakers suggested the congregation consider fundraising for the ministry, possibly a meal to raise funds to help cover financial deficits the pandemic created. The Witness Commission expressed interest, volunteers were engaged, and a pick-up chicken BBQ dinner was planned.

On May 22, approximately 25 volunteers put together 400 dinners. Each dinner consisted of half of a BBQ chicken, baked potato, home-made baked beans, home-made cabbage pepper slaw, bun, applesauce, and home-baked cookies. The dinners were distributed at a drive-through pick-up line. In the first 25 minutes, 125 dinners were picked up. All of the dinners were sold in less than 2 hours.

There was no set price for the dinners, but donations were received. More than \$15,000 was received from the generosity of the meal recipients, and all of the proceeds went to the Haiti Medical Project. It was encouraging to see God use this event to bless lives in a distant place. —Paul and Sandy Brubaker

## Estate gift to fund scholarships

Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind., has announced a large estate gift that will provide scholarships to students.

“The widow of a 1947 Manchester graduate has left a \$1.2 million gift to the University in memory of her husband,” said a release. “The Keith Kindell Hoover Memorial Scholarship Fund will provide scholarships to any worthy Manchester students at the direction of Gerda W. Hoover, who died in 2019.”

Keith Kindell, who died in 2003, studied communications at Manchester, earned a bachelor of divinity from Bethany Theological Seminary and a doctorate in psychology from Northwestern University, and studied at the University of Hamburg, Germany. It was there that he met Waltraud Gerda Wolff. They married in 1952, settling in Lombard, Ill. He maintained a clinical psychology therapy practice and taught college-level classes. Gerda Hoover earned a master’s degree in German literature from Northwestern and taught high school and college German. She also published four books of poems and stories.

## Healing Racism Mini-grants still available

The Healing Racism Mini-grant program of Intercultural Ministries has been extended to Oct. 15. “Have an idea with your church or community?” said an invitation. “Don’t hesitate to contact Intercultural Ministries if you’d like to talk through your ideas or to brainstorm possibilities.” Contact [LNkosi@brethren.org](mailto:LNkosi@brethren.org). More information is at [www.brethren.org/intercultural](http://www.brethren.org/intercultural).





# Annual Conference affirms compelling vision statement

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**T**he 2021 Annual Conference affirmed the following compelling vision statement for the Church of the Brethren:

*“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.”*

The affirmation of this vision statement, which was the only substantive business item before the delegate body this year, ended a process of conversation and data gathering that involved some 3,000 church members in numerous gatherings and venues across the denomination over several years. Conversations about the compelling vision were held around the tables at previous Conferences and continued this year in small groups that met in virtual breakout rooms. Both delegates and nondele-

gates who registered for the full Conference were invited to participate.

The “tables” discussed and submitted responses to a number of questions posed by Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, co-chair of the Compelling Vision Team along with general secretary David Steele. Also on the team were Michaela Alphonse, Kevin Daggett, John Jantzi, Brian Messler, Colleen Michael, Alan Stuckey, Kay Weaver, former moderators Samuel Sarpiya and Donita Keister, 2021 moderator Paul Munday, and Conference director Chris Douglas.

A discernment process was used to affirm the vision statement. Delegates were offered the choice of four responses: first, “I feel inspired and wholeheartedly affirm the vision”; second, “I affirm the vision”; third, “I have reservations, but will set them aside and affirm the vision for the good of the body”; and fourth, “I cannot affirm the vision.”

Of the 519 registered delegates, 450 participated in making the decision. When results were tallied, the statement was affirmed with 82 percent of those participating choosing one of the

affirmative options.

Presiding at this year’s first-ever fully online Conference were moderator Paul Munday, assisted by moderator-elect David Sollenberger and secretary James Beckwith. The Conference officers also presided over the online meeting of the Standing Committee of district delegates June 27-30.

## Standing Committee to continue conversation with On Earth Peace

Garnering the most discussion from the district delegates was a report from a team tasked with posing questions to On Earth Peace, in the most recent of many rounds of interaction over recent years. Standing Committee initiated this latest interaction some months ago, after On Earth Peace joined the Supportive Communities Network of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests (BMC).

After receiving lengthy documents and a verbal report from the task team, Standing Committee voted to continue conversation with On Earth Peace. The task team emphasized the positive nature of the conversation, and On Earth Peace staff Matt Guynn also expressed the agency’s desire to continue the conversation.

The continuing conversation will be based on already agreed-upon dialogue questions and will take place at several meetings over the next year. The decision included encouragement for “a collaborative conversation with On Earth Peace that lays the foundation for increased understanding and future conversations regarding the relation-



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

1994



1995



1996



ships between On Earth Peace and the larger denomination.” The task team will report back to Standing Committee next summer.

A separate vote allowed the same task team to continue, setting aside precedent that only current Standing Committee members serve on subcommittees. On the team are Donita Keister (chair), who was serving as immediate past moderator; Susan Chapman Starkey (secretary) from Virgina District; Bob Johansen from Northern Indiana District; Craig Stutzman from Mid-Atlantic District; and John Willoughby from Michigan District.

The conversation process so far has included correspondence and a face-to-face meeting on June 8 that brought together the task team with a delegation chosen by On Earth Peace: Gynn, board co-chairs Melisa Leiter-Grandison and Irvin Heishman, Carol Wise representing BMC, and Brian Flory representing the Supportive Communities Network. Christian Peacemaker Teams provided two people who served as facilitators and process observers.

**Amendments to the “Appeal” section of the “Ethics in Ministry Relations” document of Annual Conference** were recommended to Standing Committee by a subcommittee reviewing judicial roles and the appeals process. The amendments align the document with process changes made in 2019, provide more time to prepare for appeals, and encourage appeals not to be brought until all means of resolution or reconsideration by districts are exhausted. The amendments will be brought to Annual Conference for approval.

**The subcommittee also proposed a new listening process**, giving guidance and structure for accepting requests from those who want to speak with Standing Committee. The process

## Elections and appointments

Two ballots were elected: the 2021 ballot and a 2020 ballot deferred from the Conference that was canceled because of the pandemic. Those elected from the 2020 ballot, except for the moderator-elect, serve a year less than the usual term. Also below are additional appointments. Two appointments to unexpired terms on the Mission and Ministry Board already are completed and are not included below.

**Annual Conference moderator-elect:** Tim McElwee of Wolcottville, Ind.

**Church of the Brethren Leadership Team:** Torin Eikler, Northern Indiana District executive

**Program and Arrangements Committee:** Nathan Hollenberg, Broadway, Va.; Beth Jarrett, Harrisonburg, Va.

**Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee:** Arthur Fourman, Dayton, Ohio; Gene Hagenberger, Mid-Atlantic District executive; Robert S. McMinn, Huntingdon, Pa.

**Mission and Ministry Board:** Lauren Seganos Cohen, San Gabriel, Calif., Area 5; Barbara Daté, Eugene, Ore., Area 5; John Michael Hoffman, McPherson, Kan., at-large; Josiah Ludwick, Harrisburg, Pa., Area 1; Kathy A. Mack, Rochester, Minn., Area 4; Meghan Horne Mauldin, Columbus, N.C., Area 3; Karen Shively Neff, Gotha, Fla., Area 3; Joanna Wave Willoughby, Wyoming, Mich., at-large; Rebecca Miller Zeek, Duncansville, Pa., Area 1


**Brethren Benefit Trust:** Sara Davis, La Cañada Flintridge, Calif.; Janis Fahs, North Manchester, Ind.; Donna March, Carpentersville, Ill.; Gerald (Jerry) Patterson, Fairfax, Va.; Wayne T. Scott, Harrisburg, Pa.; David L. Shissler, Hummelstown, Pa.; Kathryn Whitacre, McPherson, Kan.

**Bethany Theological Seminary:** Chris Bowman, Manassas, Va., representing clergy; Mark A. Clapper, Elizabethtown, Pa., at-large; Karen O. Crim, Dayton, Ohio, at-large; John Flora, Bridgewater, Va., at-large; Drew Hart, Harrisburg, Pa., representing laity; Jacki Hartley, Elgin, Ill., representing laity; Steve Longenecker, Harrisonburg, Va., representing the colleges; Richard Rose, Claremont, Calif., at-large

**On Earth Peace:** Rudy Amaya, Pasadena, Calif.; Ruth Aukerman, Union Bridge, Md.; Irvin R. Heishman, Tipp City, Ohio; Alyssa Parker, Harrisburg, Pa.

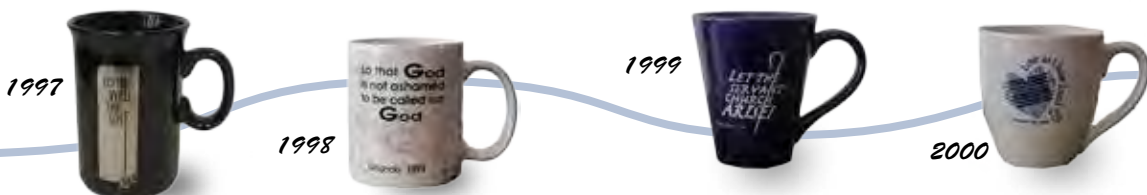
will be added to the *Standing Committee Manual*.

### The Nominating Committee proposed options for procedural changes for nominations from the floor of Annual Conference.

Discussion touched on the lengthy and deliberative process to prepare a ballot and how nominations from the floor circumvent that process and cause confusion, while acknowledging that nominations from the floor have value when there are valid concerns about choices for leadership. Standing Committee decided to continue working on the concern next year. 



*Incoming moderator Dave Sollenberger and moderator-elect Tim McElwee are consecrated during closing worship.*

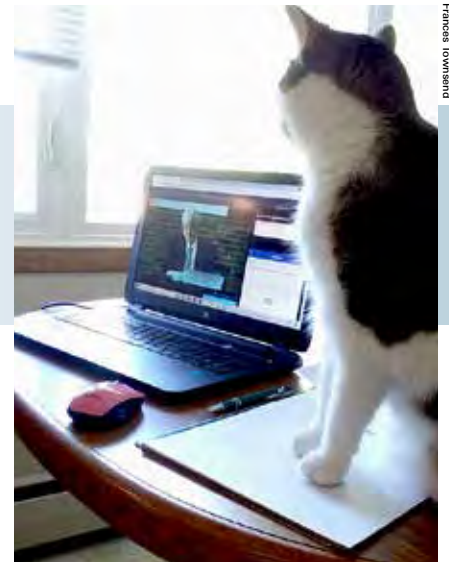






# Journal notes from a virtual table

by Frances Townsend



Frances Townsend

## Thursday, July 1

Sitting at my kitchen table with my laptop just isn't the same as being at a table in the Annual Conference business session. There is such richness to in-person connections. I look forward to being together, however.

When we introduce ourselves in my small group, one participant says, "Where we make connections is where we overcome our fears."

The compelling vision should create rich discussion tomorrow. Today the Compelling Vision Team is presenting a video describing the multi-year process. They break down several key parts of the statement, commenting on some of the most common areas of remark or concern.

One concern is that focus on the "neighborhood" will undermine world mission. We are reassured that Jesus did not define "neighbor" narrowly. This is not meant to take us away from more geographically distant mission.

A part of the statement that invites more thought: the encouragement to call and develop leaders, but also to call every person to a life of courageous, radical discipleship.

## Friday, July 2

Today's table talk will take up two solid hours, with discussion of five questions posed by Compelling Vision Team co-chair Rhonda Pittman Gingrich.

One of the reasons table talk is being used is so that people can arrive at their own deeper understandings through the process. We know in an abstract sense that other people notice

different things in the vision statement because of their different life experiences. It is so powerful to have real-life examples of that as we share our perspectives, even if only in little boxes on a screen.

Gingrich begins by describing what can be called the "soul" of an institution and asks, "How does this compelling vision reflect the soul of the Church of the Brethren?" My group's discussion begins with an uncommon amount of silence for Brethren, but eventually we come up with answers.

One person allows that making disciples is a core value, but "innovative, adaptable, and fearless" has not traditionally characterized us. We name stories about early Brethren being much more fearless than the current generation.

We think about key words in the statement and how they match up with the Brethren soul. Words about relationship, the use of "together," make us think of the strong value Brethren place on the church as a family of faith.

The statement can be read that we are supposed to call innovative, adaptable, and fearless disciples even if we ourselves are not those things. That will require humility and willingness to trust in God to lead us all.

The second question, "What are the needs in your community that might be healed through radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ?" gives us less difficulty. All of us name big problems common to our communities including racism, poverty, addictions, mental illness, and the church's

unwillingness to openly discuss so many concerns including gender and sexuality. So often the church fails people by not owning problems as "ours" but pretending they are outside the church, so that those who are affected feel shame and stay quiet. It is not only the community outside the church that needs Jesus' radical transformation, but also the people inside the church. Humility comes into play.

The word "listen" is key—as in, take seriously the newest people in the church—in response to the third question, "How might we work at calling and equipping innovative, adaptable, and fearless disciples to live out the Jesus in the neighborhood vision?" New people are the most likely to bring in other people, partly because their biggest relational ties are outside the church.

One of our group has been with the church for about five years and is frustrated with how Brethren treat new people as visitors for too long. Another says her teenager is thinking of leaving the church because of "take it or leave it" speeches about what Brethren should believe. Disciples need guidance, but we are all disciples together. Again, humility.

The fourth question invites us to name roadblocks: "What are the chal-



2001



2002



2003



2004

lenges we might face as we live into the Jesus in the neighborhood vision in our various contexts and communities?" Our group bucks the usual Brethren trend; we tell stories of how our congregations overcame such challenges.

Finally, we are asked, "What new steps could your congregation take to more closely align your way of life with the 'Jesus in the neighborhood' vision?" We think of new programs a congregation could initiate and wonder what an already engaged congregation could possibly add. Then we realize that more is being asked. We begin to look at concepts like focus—how this vision asks congregations to shift focus from institutional maintenance and survival to the neighborhood and mission.

As we talk, one person in every group tries to capture our thoughts, type them into a computer, and send them to the committee. Each person can send in their own words, as well. Our most useful insights will find their way to more people.

Other groups are coming up with very different answers. This process

gives a way for every voice to be heard, and for us to influence one another's thinking. When we find a tool that allows more of us to be used by the Holy Spirit to build up the body, we are on the right path.

### Saturday, July 3

As we gather around our virtual table this morning, we are presented with the question, "How might we be known—both as congregations and as a denomination—if we truly embrace and live out the vision of Jesus in the neighborhood?"

After a long silence, conversation begins around how churches are less noticed, let alone known, than we think. How would living out this vision turn that sad truth around? One person uses the biblical image of the light on the hill, a place people turn to when help is needed. Another challenges us to consider what unique gifts the Brethren bring, naming a deep understanding of peace as one. Someone says, "If you don't do something important, you're just another building."

More than one person admits their

## By the numbers

### Registration:

**1,224** including **519** delegates and **705** nondelegates

### New fellowships and church projects:

**1** fellowship: Centro Ágape en Acción (Los Banos) in Pacific Southwest District  
**3** projects: Nueva Visión la Hermosa Iglesia de Los Hermanos, Pacific Southwest District; Conexión Pasadena, Pacific Southwest District; Light of the Gospel Fellowship, Atlantic Northeast District

### Offerings received:

*(as of the end of July, totals still to be finalized)*

**\$9,624** for the denomination's Core Ministries

**\$10,309** for church rebuilding in Nigeria

**\$12,556** for the Conference budget

**\$4,889** for Conference translation services

**\$8,423** for Conference children's activities

**\$250** for the Ministers' Assistance Fund

**\$250** for Intercultural Ministries

**\$200** for Global Mission

**\$150** for Discipleship Ministries

**\$100** for the Global Food Initiative

**\$55** for the Haiti Medical Project

**\$200** to be divided among offerings

### Virtual blood drive:

**77** units of blood, including **6** "double reds" and **14** donations of platelets

### Minimum Cash Salary Table

for pastors:

**2** percent cost-of-living increase for 2022



2006



2007



2008






congregation may have difficulty coming up with a unified vision to pursue.

Time runs out and we are called back to the business session, where various table responses are read. Some are inspiring—that we may be known by our love, our compassion, our welcoming, as healers. Others are challenging—that we may be known as risk takers, peculiar people who actually live out our faith. One is sobering—by living

out the vision, we may be known but not popular. Jesus told his disciples much the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

Moderator Paul Munday leads the delegates through the process of adopting the vision. Prayer and hymn singing fill the time while delegates make their decisions in an online vote. When results are tallied, the statement is adopted.

Tables are convened one more time: “As you consider your gifts and passions, what is one thing you personally can do to better align your way of life with the Jesus in the neighborhood vision?”

It is a question that cannot be answered so quickly. 

Frances Townsend is a pastor in Michigan serving the Onekama and Marilla congregations.



## Annual Conference on one screen: What's so difficult about that?

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

**Y**ou can't put the genie back in the bottle," said David Sollenberger, pausing for an interview during the first-ever fully online Annual Conference. He was moderator-elect this year, while keeping an eye on the videotaping that was live-streamed from the General Offices—a task that ordinarily would have taken up all of his time but this year was carried by his crew of Larry

Glick, Chris Brown, and Adin Replogle.

For many years now, the Conference business and worship have been livestreamed, but people could not be delegates or attend insight sessions and other Conference events without being onsite. The “genie” is the expectation that, after a successful fully online Conference, we will do it again.

Accomplishing a fully online Conference is easier said than done,

however, according to those who put together this year's event.

### What's so difficult?

Christian Saucedo is one of three partners at Covision, the company that provided the online platform for the Conference. He and other Covision staff worked closely with the Program and Arrangements Committee and Conference staff, holding weekly meetings starting in January.

Those meetings were indispensable, according to Conference director Chris Douglas. Without help from people like Saucedo and Enten Eller, who regularly livestreams worship and business, “I didn't know enough to know what questions to ask,” she said.

Prior to the pandemic, Douglas would never have imagined putting together an online Conference. She wondered, “Could we really do it? It felt like driving down the interstate blindfolded at 60 miles per hour.”

Here are some of the difficulties:

**1. Pick an online platform.** There are many platforms and program options, with differing bells and



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

2009



2010



2011



2012





Glenn Resigel

Left: Dave Sollenberger videotapes musicians at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. Below: Susan Starkey holds up cue cards for her children, who were videotaped at Camp Bethel in Virginia.

whistles, wide variations in cost, and a range of skills required of presenters and attendees. For example, many platforms could provide a virtual exhibit hall, but it would have been complicated to set up. Instead, groups that usually have booths, exhibits, or meal events were offered online networking sessions.

The Covision platform created the different views that participants had and provided for “table groups” to meet for discussion and to submit responses. This conference did not differ technically from Covision’s usual corporate clients, Saucedo said. What did differ was how Annual Conference works at building relationships and church community. Making a fully online event meet that goal “was a real challenge,” he said. “The sense of community that you guys are building is not what a lot of events are doing.”

**2. Connect people virtually.**

Meeting virtually allows no in-person contact, no hallway conversations, no hugs for old friends or handshakes for new acquaintances, and no option to go to the microphone on the business floor. So additional networking sessions were offered as Q&A opportunities to interact with groups that reported to the delegate body.

**3. Help Brethren who are unfamiliar with digital technology.** Staff and committee members spent a lot of



Glenn Resigel

time helping attendees participate in an online event. The volume of phone calls before and during the Conference made apparent “real differences in our constituency,” Douglas said. “Some people were stretched really hard.” This shows “a new divide in the church: those comfortable with digital technology and those for whom it is not familiar and is overwhelming”

In addition to those who did not have cameras and microphones on their computers, said Eller, some congregations are in “internet-underserved areas.” He regretted that some were not able to participate as much as others, but felt the staff and committee “worked hard at making it accessible to everyone, even if they

didn’t have the latest tech.”

**4. Make a virtual Conference feel familiar.**

The organizers wanted the event to feel familiar to those who have been to Annual Conference in person. This was especially difficult for the insight sessions, in part because Douglas and the committee did not know what the end product would be when they started working on it.

The effort also was hampered by having to “limit everything to the one screen that online participants saw,” Eller explained. In the business hall, for example, people see many things at once—the head table, large screens on each side, subtitles for the hearing impaired, information provided on





paper. But online “the window to your world is one screen.”

Sollenberger, who with his team pre-recorded much of the worship, said he tried to simulate the in-person experience. He wanted the same level of visual quality that Conferencegoers would see if they were sitting in the audience.

Videotaping worship required lots of travel and time spent in editing “so the visual would be pleasing and not like a Zoom call,” Sollenberger said. Starting in April, he and his crew taped in a dozen places, and additional footage came from various other people. Sollenberger praised music coordinator Josh Tindall and all of the musicians, who were “an incredible addition,” and Nohemi Flores, who coordinated Spanish translation for worship.

**5. Keep tabs on the cost.** “Brethren have no idea of the cost involved in

doing online conferencing,” Douglas said. “In our culture people still expect online to be free.” Digital technology is expensive but “invisible and in the background.” While Covision is one of the least expensive companies offering online conferencing, the costs for audiovisual and streaming services were as much as they would be for an in-person Conference.


Eller saw this Conference as shifting resources toward digital technology and away from hotels and travel. It is “a lot cheaper when you think about all the participants in the event, not just leadership,” he said. “So many people have difficulty getting to Annual Conference. We don’t realize how exclusive it has become.”

### So what’s next?

Douglas was heartened by the numbers of table groups that want to keep in

touch. By the end of the event, at least 20 groups had asked for email addresses. This “shows that, for some, the online format really worked.”

Eller was pleased with reaching “people who have never even tried to do this kind of thing before.” There are blessings of technology that the church could choose to embrace, he noted. We have been uprooted by the pandemic, and now must ask, “What are we going to do differently? Or even better?”

Sollenberger, who will be moderator next year, hopes for a repeat of some of the online components, in combination with an in-person event. He has new ideas about how to use video and multimedia technology creatively to “illuminate” the event. “It’s going to be an entertaining as well as inspirational Conference. There will be an entertainment value next year, I promise!” 



## ‘And now, it’s time to go home!’

**Chris Douglas’ 35-year career** in church leadership started with a pastorate at Northview Church of the Brethren in Indianapolis and ends with her retirement this fall as Conference director.

In between, she joined the denominational staff in the 1980s to take on two half-time positions—in urban ministry and youth and young adult ministry—and then shifted to fulltime youth and young adult ministry for some 20 years. She became Conference director in 2009.

For a few years, she has been asking herself, “Is this the right time to leave? It became real clear this winter that it is time—a *kairos* time,” she said. “The church is wanting to do something new.”

Douglas is pleased to pass the baton to someone younger. She and Rhonda Pittman Gingrich have worked together off and on for 32 years, ever since she interviewed Gingrich for the job of 1990 National Youth Conference coordinator.

“I feel the highest level of confidence in her being the next director,” Douglas said. “This is in great hands. You go, Rhonda!”



2017

2018



2019





# Recapture your church's DNA

by Frank Ramirez

**T**oward the end of his presentation on “Doing Church in Uncharted Territory,” Tod

Bolsinger challenged Conferencegoers to think of a story from their congregation's history. It could be about a hero, or perhaps “a cherished moment that is retold over and over again. One that says, “This is what we are really all about.”

He called that type of story a “charism,” a Catholic term he defined as the grace-filled characteristic that serves the pain and needs of the community each church inhabits. That's where a church should pour its energy, and that provides the framework for what it means to “do church.”

The pandemic is allowing congregations to transform themselves to serve a changed world, but churches must determine who they really are. “For change to last it must be a healthy adaptation of the DNA of the group, our core values.”

“Adaptation is everything. What are we going to carry with us and what are we going to leave behind?” Bolsinger asked. “When we offer ourselves not as colonizers or people of great power or

imposing our will on others around us, by acts of generosity and love we come to an understanding of how our congregation can make an impact on our world for good.”

## Adventure or die

Bolsinger, vice president and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, also presented at a forum sponsored by moderator Paul Munday. There he bolstered many of the ideas he presented to the Conference plenary.

The choice in the current climate is stark, he said: change the way we do church, or die. Most church leaders have been trained to work in the Christendom of a half-century ago when Christianity was the default setting. Today we are in a post-Christendom world and a different sort of leadership is necessary.

Many church leaders “go into deep denial,” Bolsinger said, or they seek out popular techniques to change—fear, facts, and force. These actually don't work. Bolsinger cited studies by Alan Deutschman, author of *Change or Die*, and others: “Fear will make people



change temporarily. Fear doesn't produce lasting change. Facts don't produce change. We can find ways to argue around facts.” And as for force, “You can't make people change.”

What does work? Bolsinger said churches need to “relate, repeat, and re-frame”: relate to new communities, recognizing that immigrant communities are vital and alive; repeat new practices, growing with each other and supporting each other; and re-frame the way we see the world, adopting new ways of thinking.

And lean into the discernment of the Holy Spirit, he advised. This requires “a kind of humility and openness. . . . In your heart, deeply believe God's Spirit has been at work.”

Frank Ramirez pastors Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.



2021

# More than a mug

by Traci Rabenstein

**My collection of Annual Conference mugs** represents 25 years of conferences. Here they are, with five photos filled in by Brethren Press.

I recently acquired this set from my grandmother, Ruth Covert (lovingly known as Meem). This collection exists because she attended many Annual Conferences as a delegate for Rockhill Church of the Brethren in Middle Pennsylvania District.

The mug most special to me is from Peoria, the first Conference I ever attended and one of the last that she was able to attend. She and I drove there together. After she became unable to travel, people from her congregation, district office, and family picked up mugs for her.

For me, these are more than mugs. This collection is a legacy of servant leadership by someone who understands the importance of staying connected and informed, and encourages others to do the same.

When I look at an Annual Conference mug, I think about how God calls me to use my gifts to serve in leadership within my congregation, my district, and the denomination. I think about being part of the body of Christ.

Traci Rabenstein is director of mission advancement for the Church of the Brethren.

**Collectors:** Brethren Press has a few mugs from 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021. Visit [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com).





# The chat is the liturgy

## Thinking theologically about online worship

by **Bobbi Dykema**

A few months ago, Debbie shared in a Living Stream pastoral team meeting that while her mother sometimes watches our Sunday evening services, as a Presbyterian she finds them somewhat baffling. “Where is the liturgy?” she wanted to know.

Liz responded almost immediately. “The chat is the liturgy,” she proclaimed.

What does that mean? While most churches in this past pandemic year and a half have shifted to wholly or partially online worship, at least for a season, most of the energy around this radical change in worship format has been focused on what happens “up front.” Live or recorded music? Our own recordings or video? What permissions do we need? What works best in terms of audio? What kind of microphone and camera should be on the preacher and worship leader? And so forth.

Most of the platforms used for online worship, including Zoom, YouTube, Facebook Live, and Vimeo Livestream, have a chat feature. I’ve noticed that in denomination-wide online worship services, such as those from our recent Annual Conference, the chat has a lot of folks saying hello and greeting one another, positive comments about the music, the message, and so forth—very similar to the kind of chatter that takes place before and after worship in brick-and-mortar settings.

Living Stream Church of the

Brethren has had a little more time to think about the relationship between the chat box and the worship service, having been fully online since the first Sunday of Advent in 2012. Our pastors and participants have put a lot of thought into how to create and build community in an online setting, and how to make worship meaningful when the faces of worshipers can’t be seen.

We’ve done a lot of this work via creative use of the chat box. For several years, we’ve had designated greeters each Sunday, but usually the pre-worship gathering time involves just about everyone greeting everyone else. Early in the worship service, the worship leader shares the names and locations of everyone who has logged into the chat, welcoming them by name. It’s a huge part of making people feel seen and valued. Often, prayer requests flow organically from the greetings, as participants follow up with one another or share what is pressing on their hearts.

When it comes to sharing the message, Living Stream has long made it a practice to have dedicated sermon talkback time, when participants can offer reflections and ask questions in the chat box. Some Sundays, the worship leader will include within the message a question or series of questions to which participants are invited to respond during the course of the message time. The most powerful

sharing in any given worship service frequently happens during the lifting up of these thoughts and reflections. Participants connect what they’ve heard in the message with something they’ve been sitting with recently, whether experience or text, and the weavings of thought and connection become richer and richer.

Apart from the online platform, none of what Living Stream does is terribly different from worship in a brick-and-mortar setting. But what if worship is less about the pieces coordinated and shared by the worship leader—prayers, music, scripture, message—than the parts of the service that are happening in the chat box? What if the part we might be inclined to consider background is really the foreground, or even center stage?

In Greek, the word *litourgeia* means “the work of the people.” Liturgy isn’t supposed to be something that one or a few people put on for an attentive audience. It’s not a concert or play. When people gather to worship God, whether online or in person, everyone who is present contributes to the liturgy, often in many different ways: by silently praying, singing the hymns and songs, sharing prayer requests, and reflecting on the message.

We’re used to thinking of teaching in this way. Teachers, whether in kindergarten, seminary, or somewhere in

WHEN PEOPLE GATHER TO WORSHIP GOD, WHETHER ONLINE OR IN PERSON, EVERYONE WHO IS PRESENT CONTRIBUTES TO THE LITURGY, OFTEN IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS.

between, are not putting on a show for students, but calling forth action on the part of students, helping them to connect dots, build knowledge and skills, and think critically. Maybe the task of worship leaders is akin to this.

In his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Martin Heidegger describes a Greek temple as a space that facilitates the movement of the hearts, minds, and spirits of those within toward God. Contemporary ecclesialogists might describe the work of worship leaders as “holding space” for worship. Worship is both communal and intimate, and creating and curating a space where true and meaningful worship can happen is a task that requires serious thought, preparation, and prayer, whether for online or in-person gatherings.

The resources at the back of the Brethren hymnal walk us through the movements of liturgy: gathering, praising, confessing, praying, witnessing, and sending. Each component involves the members of the gathered assembly.


The liturgy of gathering sounds like this: “Julie! How was your trip? How’s your sister doing?” In these ordinary words of connection, we remind ourselves and one another that we are not strangers gathering passively in a concert or lecture hall; we are members of the body of Christ, attending to one another’s needs and expressing love and care. Praising and adoring happen most vividly in song, but also during joys and concerns: “I’m so grateful that my uncle’s surgery was successful.” “We had a beautiful day with our grandson yesterday.” Confessing and reconciling happen in lots of ways, but I hear it most often in board meetings: “I’m

sorry, I didn’t have time to run the reports until this morning. I’ll try harder to give you more lead time next month.”

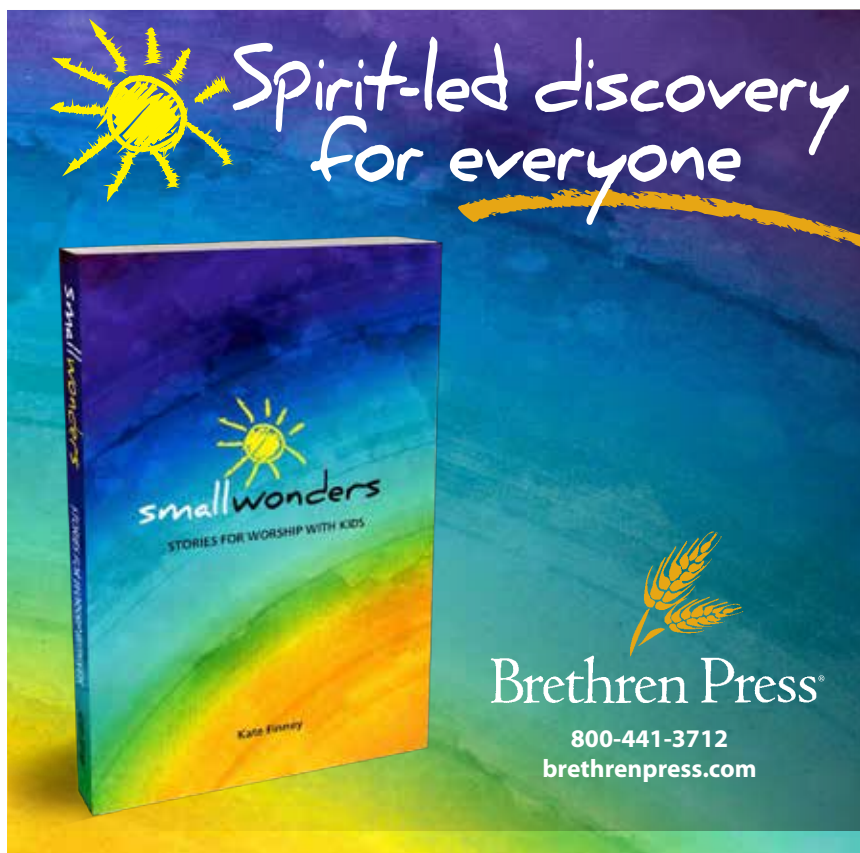
Sermon talkback time and sharing the work of leading Bible studies and devotions give folks a chance to witness: “I’ve been thinking a lot about this verse from James.” “Seeing a shooting star last night made me think of the heavens declaring the glory of God.”

Sometimes, online worship makes certain components of worship easier: not just the worship leader, but anyone present can offer a blessing to all those gathered. “Have a blessed week, everyone!” is a pretty typical chat to see near

the end of a Living Stream service, as well as messages publicly thanking the preacher and worship leader.

What if worship leaders and preachers thought about our work as holding space for and eliciting sharing from the congregation? Creating a space where people feel safe being vulnerable and attuned to the workings of God? “Adam, how’s your mom?” might not be the high poetry of the Psalms, but it is the real poetry, the real work, of our lives together as the body of Christ. 

Bobbi Dykema is pastor of Springfield (Ill.) First Church of the Brethren and also serves on the pastoral team of Living Stream Church of the Brethren.



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# What we can do

by Dan West

*This article is excerpted from Dan West's moderator's address of 1966, "Not To Destroy, but To Fulfill." The address appears in the forthcoming Brethren Press book Hoosier Prophet: Selected Writings of Dan West. West was a Church of the Brethren peace educator, activist, prophet, and visionary. He is especially known as the founder of what is now Heifer International.*

**A**nnual Conference is our big family reunion, and I am glad we are here. Fellowship has been one of the specialties of Brethren and must continue if the church is to endure. Mutual love is a valid badge of discipleship, Jesus said. But there are purposes beyond this: hard problems to be solved. Problems too big to be handled locally are being dished up increasingly by our rapidly changing world. Some Brethren are gloomy, but I am a sober optimist.

### **We live in a perilous world**

There are many forces which are playing hard on our lives, our homes, our churches, and the larger world we live in. One of these is increasing change. The changing church is much more influenced by the changing world than ever before. No wonder. The world is crowding in on us harder than ever. There is no hiding place. The farm home is not what it used to be. The racial problem in the United States and South Africa and the war in Vietnam are just two of the insistent problems. But others may loom before 1970; possibly World War III, a depression, a degenerating Western culture, and certainly hunger on a bigger scale. We are not yet ready to meet these or other problems. But we must get ready.

Another force is increasing awareness. The church is becoming aware that many other people are concerned too—both Christians and non-Christians. I will guess that nobody here believes that Brethren have a corner on God. We need

the help of everyone who will work with us if we are to have peace on earth. How to relate to other Christians and other people is a real problem.

A third force is confusion. The church is more confused than I have ever seen it before. Some Brethren seem to believe that everything is changing. I can see why some good pastors become discouraged. Unless more of us become more honest and responsible with more nerve to act out what we claim to believe, the church is headed for greater confusion.

### **We have abundant resources**

One of our resources is our Brethren culture. If anyone present wants to ignore the past and deal only with the here and now, I want to speak to you here and now. Maybe you hate down deep the culture which produced you. Because that was once true of me, I can understand. For a long time it was mainly subconscious. If I can help you, I want to.

Here is a start: It could not have been *all* bad, since it produced you. I have no doubt about your finding valuable assets in your home, as well as some liabilities. No, I am not favoring ancestor worship, just honest bookkeeping. If we fulfill the best from our home culture, we can look our children in the eye and urge them to do better than we. Then they can urge their children to improve on that. From now on there will be plenty of room for improvement. Hard work? Certainly.

Another resource much more ancient

“Some Brethren are gloomy,  
but I am a sober optimist.”

than our church is the Bible. Many have tried to use this resource fully, even though most of us are very ignorant of it. It has been compared to a signpost for travelers. But we Christians have spent more time worshiping the signpost than following the road. For me the New Testament is a gambler's handbook giving rules for betting our lives that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life in our changing and confusing world.

A third resource is our record as a church. Honest bookkeeping here is also appropriate:

**Our mission work.** Begun in the 19th century, it has been a good thing for the kingdom. I never became excited about missions until I saw our work in several Indian villages.

**Workcamps.** They were started in the United States in 1934 by the Quakers; we worked with them a little and have done something on our own.

**Conscientious objectors.** The trees planted in the early 1940s are very beautiful now—those that survived.

**Heifer Project.** The Brethren began it, but 20 years ago we did more for it than now.

**Cooperation with other churches.** This includes such organizations as Church World Service, CROP, Agricultural Missions, Fraternal Relations. Of course, there are frustrations.

**Brethren Volunteer Service.** This was sparked by the youth themselves. There have been some casualties, but the net value has been high. Here is a great resource for the changing world.

**The people in our church** right now, especially the laymen, are a resource.

If we had conserved without any force in religion our own youth, the little Church of the Brethren would be

much larger than it is. It is good that some did stay by. I am convinced that the present shrinkage could be stopped. In a number of places from Pennsylvania to California I have asked groups of youth the same question, “Do you feel that the older folks in your church really care for you?” In only one place, a small church in Michigan, was there a unanimous yes. But in every other place there was a plurality of favorable responses. One girl added, “Yes, they care, but they don't know how to show it.”

**Then there are our churches.** For many years the urban forces have pulled too many of our ablest people away. But some are still in rural areas. And the large majority of our churches are in rural areas. In the past 15 to 20 years we may have bargained for some white elephants in suburbia. Well, let us finish paying for them if we can harness them up to the world's problems, heeding the warning of Paul Tillich some years ago, “If the church ever dies in America, it will die in suburbia from its own respectability.”

**Organizations are part of our resources.** For many years I have been critical of a number of things in the Church of the Brethren including our organizations and their functioning. And I still am. But also I am increasingly grateful for some new developments

which I have had a good chance to know first-hand. In the 38 years since

I began to work with “Elgin,” my respect for the General Brotherhood Board is higher now than ever before.


### We can minister in the world

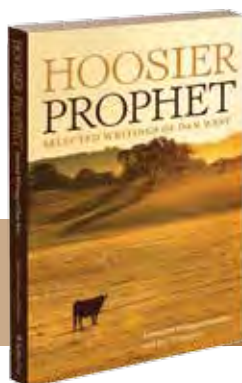
I am offering some concrete recommendations here, maybe for the Conference, but certainly for local churches and districts and possibly for future Conferences before 1970.

- Select a few major problems in addition to the prescribed duties we have to care for. We cannot hope to digest all the smorgasbord of problems, but can deal with a few basics such as the home and peace on earth.

- Look at all the possible ways for us to solve these problems. One university professor of mine regrets that “we suffer from a poverty of alternatives.” We must become increasingly intelligent in our planning.

- Select the best from Brethren and other heritages (the measure is always the mind of Christ) and bid steadily for the hearty cooperation of all other groups “going our way.” This would increase our resources and make a clearer witness. If that should lead to merger with one or more churches someday, we could thank God.

- Get into action as fast as we can plan and then mobilize our resources to witness that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” for us in the rapidly changing world. This would certainly mean stress and sacrifice, maybe even ridicule or stronger opposition. But Jesus never promised anybody an easy life. 



*Hoosier Prophet* will be published later this fall. Pre-order at [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com) or 800-441-3712.



# Light shines in darkness

by Doris Abdullah

**T**wenty years have come and gone and yet, when looking from my window, my eyes drift toward Manhattan and I see the empty space. The smell and visions of black smoke that haunted my senses for years have finally disappeared, but my eyes still see the empty space in the skyline.

An empty, undefined space remains in my heart. I never knew a single individual who was lost on 9/11, yet I observe the day quietly in my home, listening to each of the names as they are called and displayed on the television screen, in expectation of hearing one that is familiar.

The smell of that smoke was a signal for me of isolation, loneliness, fear, and a host of other emotions, including being out of control. But through the smoke, the city lights never went off. Crime plummeted, the theater district and the museums became even more crowded, as we went about our lives feeling humbled by what had transpired. We reentered Central Park and went among the tourists just to walk on grass. We ran into St. Patrick's Cathedral to pray when we were on Fifth Avenue. The Bronx Zoo and Yankee Stadium were opportunities to return uptown to the Bronx and remember the days before.

When disjointed, disorganized, or just plain feeling low, I am lifted by

reminding myself, *"the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it"* (John 1:5).

The light shone in the darkness after Sept. 11. I tear up as I remember the sunshine filled with ashes falling from the sky.

## A different story

On 9/11, 2,753 people from all over the US and the world, from janitors to executives, died in the Towers. At least 33,450 people have died of COVID-19 in New York City, as of mid-July this year.

In March 2020, the city moved from being alive with life to being closed in death. Doors closed with lights blazing. No subways, buses, cars, Broadway, big business, or people in the street. For a time, even the homeless could not be found in the streets or in the parks.

A couple of days after the pandemic hit, I opened the door to my neighbor's knock and took the bundle of bananas from her. What would she and her husband do with two boys, locked up and not even allowed to go in the backyard?

During the second week, I went to the drug store—not for drugs but for shampoo, wax, and hair dye. No beauty parlor or manicurist would be available for months. The air was thick with Clorox in the drug store. I smelled like


Clorox, as did my entire apartment.

The email from NYU Langone Hospital, where I am a chaplain, asked all volunteers to remain home until they figured out what was going on. Brooklyn First Church of the Brethren closed, along with all houses of worship.

I looked out the window and saw a white ship with a red cross on its side, going up the harbor. A Navy hospital ship had been sent at the request of our governor because our hospitals were overflowing with the sick and dying. New York 1 television spoke of refrigerated trucks for the dead outside the hospitals.

No black smoke or ashes came across the waters, but death was all around, as was silence.

Now, more than a year later, when the sun goes down a barrage of light emanates from the skyline of New York: The lights of Broadway, the museums, the ballet, opera and jazz at Lincoln Center, past and present poetry, fiction, philosophy, and ideas found in the libraries of the city—and most of all the hope of its people ablaze on the Statue of Liberty.

The darkness has not overcome the light of the city. Thanks be to God. 

Doris Abdullah is a member of First Church of the Brethren in Brooklyn. For many years, she has served as the denomination's representative to the United Nations.



# The cost of fear

by Brian Bachman

**F**ear. Twenty years later, that is the main thing I think of when I ponder the lasting influence of Sept. 11.

On that day, when nearly three thousand Americans died either from the initial attacks or from resulting injuries and illnesses, we learned to be afraid. Learned that we were not invulnerable after all. That not only were there people who wished to do us harm, but that those people could reach us where we lived.

It was a cold awakening for a lot of Americans. Sure, everyone knew that terrorism existed, and everyone saw its dramatic effects in other parts of the world. And sure, we kind of remembered the attack on our embassies in Africa in 1998, and Timothy McVeigh and his attack in 1995 on a federal office building in Oklahoma City, where I live now. Intellectually, we knew it could happen again and could happen in America, but as a people we

didn't *feel* it. We weren't afraid.

After Sept. 11, we certainly were afraid, and that fear has become part of our lives, even been institutionalized, ever since.

Fear is both a necessary and a dangerous emotion. It is a part of our survival instincts, helping us to recognize and steer away from danger. But it is dangerous because we tend not to make the best decisions when we are afraid. We overreact. Fear can all too easily become anger and hate.

In his finest hour as president, George W. Bush rallied the country after the attack of Sept. 11 and tried to make clear to all Americans that our enemy was not all Muslims, but merely those few radicals who used their religious identity to mask a hateful political ideology. His visit to a mosque in the days after 9/11 is one of the best examples of true presidential leadership in my lifetime.

But not all followed his example, and, as is depressingly common in

human history, some politicians saw an opportunity to weaponize the fear for political purposes. So, fear became something that American Muslims learned to live with too, as attacks against them and incidents of intimidation and discrimination surged dramatically. Over the years, those numbers never quite dropped to pre-9/11 levels, and they surged even higher in 2016, as American Muslims were again targeted by politicians.

Fear also had dramatic effects on how we travel. To this day we experience long security lines at airports, increased and more intrusive screening procedures, and other measures that seem prudent but that have made air travel much less convenient and enjoyable than it was previously.

We also voluntarily gave up a significant portion of our civil liberties with the passage of the Patriot Act and other legislation, giving our intelligence services increased powers and vastly increased budgets to snoop

**AFTER SEPT. 11, WE CERTAINLY WERE AFRAID, AND THAT FEAR HAS BECOME PART OF OUR LIVES, EVEN BEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED, EVER SINCE.**





**I WONDER HOW HISTORY WILL VIEW THE DECISIONS WE MADE IN OUR REACTION TO THE FEAR. I WONDER HOW GOD WILL VIEW THEM.**

not just on our enemies abroad, but on our own citizens, looking for threats. All in the name of making us feel safer.

We launched two wars to try to engage our enemies abroad before they could threaten the United States. One of these wars, in Afghanistan, was strongly supported by the rest of the world and seen as necessary, and we fought as part of a large coalition of other nations eager to help us. The other, in Iraq, was seen as unnecessary and was very unpopular overseas, and

few nations joined us there. The war in Iraq was largely responsible for a huge drop in sympathy and support for America overseas, support that had reached record levels right after 9/11.

In those wars, more than six thousand Americans died, along with several hundred thousand Iraqis and Afghans—more than a hundred thousand of whom were civilians, according to the most conservative estimates. As the longer of those wars ends just this year (or at least the American direct involvement

in it does), terrorism and political Islamic extremism have arguably been significantly diminished as threats, but certainly not eliminated.

I wonder now, 20 years after the fact, if we will ever be free from fear again. I also wonder how history will view the decisions we made in our reaction to the fear. I wonder how God will view them. ❗

Brian Bachman retired from the career US Foreign (diplomatic) Service in 2017. His favorite assignment was as acting director of the International Religious Freedom office, advocating on behalf of persecuted religious minorities around the world. Though recently relocated to Oklahoma City, he has been a member of the Oakton (Va.) Church of the Brethren for more than 25 years.

## My own 9/11 experience

**O**n Sept. 11, 2001, I was working in my office in the US Embassy in Nassau, reading routine intelligence and diplomatic reports as part of my job advising the US ambassador on political relations with the government of The Bahamas. When someone came in to tell me that a plane had struck the World Trade Center (no televisions were allowed in the secured section where I worked), I just kept right on working, thinking it had been a small civilian plane, like one that had struck the White House several years earlier.

It was only after my wife called to get my reaction that I left my office to find a television in the office of the naval attaché. Then, like much of America, I sat and watched the tragedy unfold.

The aftermath was an eerie and unsettling time. For the first and only time in my almost 30-year career, we completely lost contact with Washington, as the State Department was evacuated. I had no more access to information than anyone else watching TV. Rumors were rampant that the White House had been hit, or the Pentagon

(which had), or the State Department. For almost a day, we had no contact.

We felt isolated, as all travel to the US was suspended indefinitely. Everyone waited anxiously to see if there would be more attacks.

In one way, however, it was a good time to be overseas. The outpouring of love and support from the Bahamian people was both moving and humbling. American flags and banners proclaiming “God Bless America” appeared practically overnight all around the islands. Businesses and individual Bahamians jammed our phone lines with calls to give their support and ask what they could do help. Dozens of young Bahamians called to ask if they could join the American military to fight terrorism.

This support lasted for some time before gradually dissipating in the face of an unpopular war in Iraq, but I will always remember how deeply it touched me at the time. While we have enemies abroad, we also have friends, and we cannot forget the latter in our zeal to oppose the former.

—Brian Bachman

# Footwashing A Chinese connection

by Eric Miller and Ruoxia Li

**D**id you know that the *Guinness Book of World Records* includes the most people washing feet? The record holder is not the Church of the Brethren but is reported to be an event in Jiangxi, China, where 10,289 people washed feet.

It was not a singular occurrence. The Republic of China Sports Federation organizes annual footwashing events, which attract as many as 20,000 participants (not confirmed by Guinness), who wash the feet of parents, coaches, mentors, and elders. The ritual calls for “children to bow to their parents, kneel to present them a cup of tea, massage and pound their backs, and then kneel on one knee to wash their feet.”

As Brethren serving in China, we also encountered footwashing. At its most basic, we would prepare water for a parent or spouse to soak their feet before bed. People often wash the feet of elderly parents. At the hospice we established in China, an elder specifically requested a member of



Global Mission




Global Mission

the hospice team wash his feet since no one had done this for him for a long time. He reported that it was the best footwashing he had received, even compared to his own family. A hospital we partnered with from Taiwan uses footwashing as its logo.

We also introduced love feast with footwashing to Christians in our organization and community. As in the US, some were more comfortable with the footwashing service than others.

One participant said, “I am not used to having other people serve me. I felt nervous. But saw that other people knelt down to wash other’s feet, and I felt thankful and full of respect.”

Another said, “This was my first time footwashing. At first, I felt awkward, but when I saw others were comfortable and at peace, then I felt peaceful, too.” A longtime Christian said, “Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. He gave us an example. When I participated in footwashing for the first time, I felt a humble heart.”

The purpose of footwashing in Christian tradition and Chinese tradition is not the same, yet there is a shared sense of discomfort as well as a notion of humble service. Brethren practice footwashing in obedience to Jesus’ command, and a reminder of our call to humility and service as Christians. For the Chinese, footwashing is normally only practiced among family, but can find powerful expression in Christian worship and service. 

Eric Miller and Ruoxia Li are co-executive directors of Global Mission for the Church of the Brethren.





# A time to mend

## How adults can minister to children

by Joan Daggett

**O**ver the past year, our social media feeds were filled with articles and posts that told us how to stay sane during the months of the pandemic. Now articles are popping up with advice about staying sane as we venture out into society and reconnect with friends, family, and co-workers!

One thing most of these articles have in common is the notion of maintaining a normal routine. In a time that is certainly not normal, that is good advice—for adults and children. Whether it's keeping a regular bedtime, writing down our experiences in a journal, or setting a time and place to pray each day, establishing habits is good for the body and the soul.

Among the routines that have been upended are practices of worship and faith formation with our church families. As you re-gather this fall, take the time needed to mend the fabric of your life together that has been frayed by separation and loss. Give special attention to the children in your midst.

For those of you who are teachers, think about practices and routines that help build and strengthen relationships. It can be as simple as an opening greeting or a closing blessing that you repeat each week. Here are some ideas to help you set a positive and nurturing spirit with your group.

If you're not a teacher, translate these values into your everyday interactions with the young people in your midst.

**Welcome.** Be present at the beginning of a session to welcome children and youth to the space, just as you might to welcome guests into your home. If you have last-minute preparations as your guests are arriving, make sure to have something for them to do, such as listening to music or coloring a picture, and engage them in conversation as you complete your preparations.

**Build relationships.** Your relationship with the children is more important than any planned activity. Children learn best when they are with adults who genuinely like them. They are observing and learning from you, even if it doesn't always seem like it! They are affected by the way you pray and the enthusiasm you show as you tell a story, sing a song, or lead a game. When you talk about your favorite Bible story or name things that you're grateful for, this is a model for the children. When you smile at a child and say something kind, this conveys the love of God.

**Form community.** Your warmth and care are key elements of building community with elementary age chil-

dren. At this stage in children's lives, friendships are taking on more importance. Children are beginning to realize how their actions affect others—both positively and negatively.

Nurture your time together as one of kindness and acceptance. Create a space that gives children confidence to work out and develop their relationships as they grow in the church.

Junior youth may at times feel invisible, forgotten, or lost. They worry about belonging and being noticed, so building community is extremely important. The community of faith should be different from the other groups to which youth belong. Work at creating a place where relationships are built on equality not superiority, cooperation not competition, and vulnerability rather than bragging. And don't forget to have some fun! Show your enthusiasm for and genuine interest in the lives and experiences of youth. Laughing together is good for the soul!


**Respect and honor differences.** Make space for different experiences, remembering that each person comes with a unique story. This means different socioeconomic backgrounds, church experiences, educational contexts (including homeschooling), racial-ethnic identities, family structures, physical abilities, and so on. Like the

disciples, we are a diverse group of people who act out of our own personal stories, and all of us are welcome in Jesus. Learning to know everyone may take some time, but be inspired by the blessing that each one brings.

**Encourage participation and leadership.** Look for opportunities for your children or youth to work together and help out. They can prepare the room, set up chairs, and distribute supplies. Each person's contribution demonstrates care for the other people in the group and helps create a positive space for worship and learning. They can also lead during prayers, songs, and readings. People of all ages thrive when they know that they have a place and that their participation and leadership is valued.

**In Matthew 4:21,** Jesus notices two men in a boat mending their fishing nets. Cleaning and mending nets are necessary tasks for people who fish for a living. Nets catch not only fish but also debris that can cause damage. Mending requires carefully checking for weaknesses in the net, retying knots, and replacing worn or torn sections with new rope. Taking the time to check and mend the nets after a long day of fishing can seem like a meaningless task, but that simple routine prepares the fishers for another day of work.

Our world right now seems broken and in need of mending. Our children and youth are watching to see how we respond. Model what it means to mend: listen carefully to each other's stories and experiences, attend to those who need special care, encourage kindness, strengthen relationships, and try something new when the old unravels.

Blessings as you engage your children and youth in routines and practices that mend and inspire hope for the future. 

Joan Daggett directs the Shine curriculum project.

# Love Jesus. Grow in faith. Change the world.

## A blessing for teachers and learners

**One** God, you sent Jesus into the world to show us how to live as God's people.

**Children** Who will tell us about Jesus?

**Teachers** We will tell you about Jesus! We want to share the story of Jesus so that you may choose to love him and follow in his way. As we worship, pray, and share the Bible story, may you be inspired to love Jesus and live like him every day.

**All** As we hear and share God's story together, may our hearts be opened to *love Jesus*.

**One** We are all created, known, and loved by God, and each person's faith journey is unique. The Bible offers guidance for this journey, revealing God's work in the world and how to be part of the ongoing story of the people of God.

**Children and youth** Who will guide us on this journey of faith?

**Teachers** Along with your family and this congregation, we will guide you! We will lead you in practices of prayer and worship that will help you develop a relationship with God that will sustain and encourage you throughout your life. Faith is not only a personal connection to God; it grows within community. We will learn from each other and discern together how to faithfully follow God.

**All** As we discern God's will together, may we *grow in faith*.

**One** Beyond these walls lies a hurting world. God, your love transforms us so that we can participate in the healing of that world.

**Youth** There are so many problems. Where do we start?

**Teachers** As we seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, together we make God's kingdom a reality here and now. We will study God's word together and talk about how it connects to our lives. We will challenge you to share God's love and peace with everyone you meet.

**All** Seeking God's kingdom together, we can *change the world*.



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

# God tends the earth

## Psalm 104

**I**n 1848, Cecil Frances Alexander wrote the words to the hymn we know as “All Things Bright and Beautiful.” This great hymn reminds me of the tone and text of Psalm 104. The hymn’s chorus says, “All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.” Then it goes on to specify what God has done, with verses like “The purple-headed mountain, the river running by, the sunset, and

**How often do we see ourselves as separate from God’s creation, independent and self-sufficient? What choices in our lives give us that impression? How can we be more intentional about how we care for God’s creation?**

*God of heaven and earth, God of butterflies and bees, we acknowledge and appreciate all that you continue to create and to manage out of your great love. Show us the work you would have us do with you, and empower us to make it happen. Amen.*

the morning that brightens up the sky.” In much the same way, we are reminded in the hymn we know as Psalm 104 that our Creator God “set the earth on its foundations.”

The writer of Psalm 104 gives us a sense of the interrelatedness of God’s creation. God has a plan; from the waters rushing from the mountains to the valleys to feed the animals and us human beings, to the cattle eating the grass cultivated by man, along with other foods and wine and oil “and bread to strengthen man’s heart.” God also waters the trees and cares for the birds. Everything has its place in God’s good creation. God not only made it all happen “in the beginning,” God is the caretaker of it all.

This is important news for Israel and her neighbors. Ancient civilizations had many “gods” that ruled each day. Egypt, Persia, and Rome each had their own gods for the sun, the harvest, fertility, local dwellings, and more. Psalm 104 makes it clear that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, is a one-stop God. No others are needed. God, indeed, makes this very clear in the commandments given to Moses: “You

shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

In the psalmist’s list of things that happen as a natural part of creation, we find verse 23: “People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.” We are part of God’s plan to care for creation. In Genesis 1, humans are told to “have dominion,” but that does not mean that creation belongs to us. In Psalm 24, humans are given a more supporting role. This affirmation continues in Psalm 104. The heavens and the earth belong to God, who is still creating. Yet, we are in a relationship with God, adding our work and labor to care for what God has created. What might this mean for our relationship with the land, rivers, and oceans, with the air, plants, animals, and each other? As part of creation, we are to join with God in caring for and tending creation.

The psalm begins and ends with praise. “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” The worship of the Lord is the source of our strength for all our labor, our starting point for each new day.



# A new creation

Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5

**T**he book of Revelation has been interpreted and reinterpreted since the time of its writing in the first century. It is a book full of visions received by “his servant John” from an angel who received them from God as “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In the Bible, Revelation is the end of the story of God’s creation and redemption of the world, but it is only the beginning of God’s ongoing gift of eternal life. The Revelation story is one of persecution and judgment, as well as redemption and new life.

John is sent to Patmos, a Greek island of only 13 square miles in the Aegean Sea, as punishment for his ongoing ministry in the name of Jesus Christ, which ran counter to the emperor worship of the Roman empire. John’s persecution for his faith and service becomes the background for his visions, which are full of threat and judgment for those who are unfaithful to God.

John’s visions are circular, moving from the worship of God to persecution and judgment and back to worship again until finally reaching a climax in chapters 21 and 22, when there is only worship. The end will come when God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes, [and] death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (21:4).

In these closing chapters, we find the picture of “a new heaven and a new earth.” God created everything “in the beginning,” and now God is making all things new. It is a new beginning, with a “new Jerusalem,” defined as “the dwelling of God . . . with men.” It is essential to see that this is the salvation of all creation, not just human souls. “See, I am making all things new” (21:5). The apostle Paul alluded to this when he wrote in Romans 8:22, “We know that all that God created has been groaning. It is in pain as if it were giving birth to a

**Read along**

- Aug. 29 God creates the world  
Genesis 1:1–2:3
- Sept. 5 In the garden  
Genesis 3
- Sept. 12 God tends the earth  
Psalm 104
- Sept. 19 Lift up your eyes  
Isaiah 40:12-31
- Sept. 26 A new creation  
Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5

child. The created world continues to groan even now” (NIRV).

We will no longer ask, “where is God?” God and Jesus Christ, the lamb, will be with us, and we will live in the city with “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1). The time in which people are constantly being drawn away from God to worship other gods will be over. The end is as it was in the beginning—a restored garden, a place for all humankind. Then we shall see God face to face, thanks to God’s everlasting mercy and love.

Once more, we see the interrelatedness of God’s creation and humankind. We can all experience new life with God because of God’s faithfulness. This is John’s vision and God’s promise.



**How can we live now as if the new creation has already come? How can this vision and promise affect how we treat others and the rest of God’s creation? Are others able to see God alive in us now? What can they see?**

*God, who makes all things new, help us to see the ways we have been faithful and how we have fallen short. Guide us to seek new life in you. Amen.*



## Priorities set for denominational ministries

**T**he Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board met June 26-27 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., with a handful of board members attending via Zoom. The board continued working to align denominational ministries with its new strategic plan. Other agenda included a 2022 budget parameter for Core Ministries, recommendations from a team re-imagining Brethren Press, and the calling of a new Executive Committee.

This was the last meeting of Patrick Starkey's term as chair. Assisting him was chair-elect Carl Fike and general secretary David Steele.

### New priorities for ministry

The Executive Committee and the general secretary reported on their assessment of how current program and resources align or do not align with the strategic plan. The board adopted the following declaration of priorities:

"Develop a prominent, comprehensive, sustained framework for equipping evangelism."

"Develop a program about healing and

reconciling relationships within the church and transforming conflict, including the intentional construction of a network of members who understand the dynamics of conflict and who are called to serve in a ministry bringing healing to our brokenness."

"Develop, in consultation with the Council of District Executives, a pilot program to help provide additional resources needed for effective ministry placement."

"Develop IT staff both to help other staff navigate the changing landscape of technology and to consult with and resource the wider church."

"Realign stewardship emphasis to go with the next version of Mission Advancement."

"Realign care of pastors programs to go with the next version of the Office of Ministry."

The board approved creation of a new Stewardship of Properties task team to consider both the General Offices and Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., and to assess the Material Resources program.

The board approved a "game plan" to help congregations define their neighborhoods with the goal of meeting and sharing "Jesus in the neighborhood," through promotion of existing resources and cohorts of congregations located in similarly defined neighborhoods.

A team creating a "road map to seek God's racial justice" recommended the board "begin this work within its own house." The board adopted a four-step process within the board and staff to: 1. identify "whiteness and racialized hierarchy" in order to allow leadership "to see barriers that previously were invisible"; 2. critique the information gathered; 3. confess and repent, using a formal, spiritual process; and 4. dismantle "the barriers and structures that inhibit and harm."

### Reimagining Brethren Press

The board affirmed the intent of recommendations from a Brethren Press Reimagining Team that was convened by the board chair and general secretary and consisted of church members from across the denomination: Don Fitzkee, Jess Hoffert, Todd Marcum, Russ Matteson, Belita Mitchell, and Carol Scheppard. The team was to recommend a proposal for sustainable operation addressing financial concerns about Brethren Press, which worsened during the pandemic. Staff will explore the financial implications prior to the board taking final action in October.

The group recommended that Brethren Press be moved into Core Ministries and be considered the "in-house publishing partner" working with other departments to expand their reach into the denomination. The press's focus would shift to "facilitating and fostering the mission of the Mission and Ministry Board and its strategic plan."



The Mission and Ministry Board uses a consensus-style decision-making process, shown here displaying green cards to signify agreement with a proposal.



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Book publishing would be redefined in consultation with the general secretary or designee, who would approve all significant book projects. All publishing projects would be “held to a litmus test of ‘does this publication capture a unique aspect of our faith or strongly forward our ideas?’” Some traditional projects or “marginal” projects might not be carried forward. Also included are expectations for growing the Brethren Press customer base and generating positive revenue over expense.

### Budget parameter

A balanced, break-even budget parameter of \$4,983,000 for the Core Ministries in 2022 was approved. A revised parameter will be brought to the board in October if needed as a result of the Brethren Press reimagining recommendations. Rationale included, among other factors:

—A projection of \$1,611,000 in congregational giving was based on a downward 10-year trend of approximately 4 percent per year. A projection of \$582,000 in individual giving was based on an upward 10-year trend of close to 1.5 percent per year.

—Use of up to \$233,000 from designated funds. No draw percentage changes in the annual transfers from the savings, endowment, bequest quasi-endowment, and Brethren Service Center quasi-endowment funds.

—Distribution of \$148,000 from the Zella Gahagen Trust for youth and young adult programming.

—A 2 percent cost-of-living increase in employee salary and benefits and a projected 8 percent increase in the cost of medical insurance benefits.

### In other business

**A new communications policy** was adopted, replacing one dating back more than 30 years. It was created by the Executive Committee to clarify authority and responsibility for denominational communications, improve standards and marketing efforts to increase the visibility of ministries, and decrease miscommunication and “mixed messages.” A statement that no department or staff other than the general secretary is authorized to release or issue statements was amended to read: “Statements by departments and staff need the approval of the general secretary.”

**Updates were made to the financial policies**, most for clarity or consistency with current practice.

**A capital expenditure** of up to \$270,000 was approved to upgrade the General Offices air conditioning.

**Tim Binkley**, archivist at Berea College, was appointed to the Brethren Historical Committee.

**Called to the Executive Committee** were Dava Hensley, Roger Schrock, and Lauren Seganos Cohen, with incoming chair Carl Fike and chair-elect Colin Scott.

**Board members completing their terms** were recognized: chair Patrick Starkey, Marty Barlow, Thomas Dowdy, Lois Grove, and Diane Mason.

## BBT screens for defense contracts

**Brethren Benefit Trust has long screened out** weapons and weapons systems, firearms, and Department of Defense (DOD) contracts from its investments of Brethren Pension Plan funds and money management clients, consistent with Annual Conference statements.

Each year, BBT updates two lists of companies that earn significant revenue from US military operations. One identifies the top 25 publicly traded defense contractors based on the size of contracts awarded by the DOD. The other includes all publicly traded companies that generate 10 percent or more of their revenue from DOD contracts. See [www.cobbt.org/investment-options](http://www.cobbt.org/investment-options).



Courtesy of Erin Sliwa

*CDS completed a short response in Surfside, Fla., for the building collapse of June 24. A local CDS team was activated by the Red Cross on June 27, followed by a Critical Response Childcare team specially trained for mass casualty events.*

## CDS resumes volunteer training

**Children’s Disaster Services** has announced its first volunteer training workshops since pandemic restrictions started last year:

- Sept. 24-25 at York Center Church of the Brethren, Lombard, Ill.
- Oct. 22-23 at Friendship Christian Reformed Church, Byron Center, Mich.
- Nov. 5-6 at First Church of the Brethren, Roaring Spring, Pa.

## Brethren Academy celebrates graduates

**Four students have graduated** from the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. Completing the Training in Ministry program were **Rita Carter**, pastor of visitation at Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren, Quarryville, Pa.; **Jamie Nace**, pastor of child and elder ministries at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; and **David Scott**, associate pastor at Woodbury (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. **Leonor Ochoa**, pastor of Iglesia de los Hermanos Ebenezer in Lancaster, Pa., graduated from Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano de la Iglesia de Los Hermanos (SeBAH-COB).





# Autumn

## Unearthing God's eco-blueprint

by Randall Westfall

**A**t the conclusion of our wilderness camps, we have a tradition of lighting our last campfire by an ancient method known as the hand drill. The whole community is involved in the process, as folks take turns spinning a dry stalk in their hands until they tire, and then the next person steps in to spin and maintain the friction needed to generate a coal. Everyone gets a chance to contribute to the process of giving life to a coal and then lighting the fire.

When the hazy smoke begins billowing around the stalk, our singing picks up its cadence and volume. And then it happens. The smoke continues to billow even without someone spinning the stalk, and at that point we know we've got a coal. Then the whole camp community comes together and helps to blow the coal to life. When that coal bursts into flame, a celebratory song is sung with deep gratitude to our Creator for the gift of fire and community.

As the shadows of the autumnal equinox begin to deepen, it is a reminder that the long, hot days of summer are giving way to the cool, crisp air where night and darkness are lengthening. Like its springtime cousin, the autumnal

equinox is a time when both night and day are equally balanced. Only now, it's not about tilting towards dynamic energy; rather it is about slowing into contemplative aspects of life. If spring is about holding on to the things that give us life, then autumn is about learning to let go of those things.


Each season is encrypted with its own meanings and lessons. And if we are not aware of how autumn is a season of finding balance and letting go, then we'll be stuck in a threshold space between light and dark. And thresholds are just that, not suited for living permanently.

Autumn is a season of fire. Not only is it found as we gather around bonfires with hot cider, but also in the reds, oranges, and yellows of the changing leaves. It is found in the auburn colors of the sunset. It is a time when we may have to turn on the heat in our homes. It is a season for returning to school to rediscover or reclaim that which ignites our passions.

We recognize that creation is beginning the process of returning to the soil as leaves drop, and plants wither and rot. It is a season of grief over what we had and have lost. Plants and trees are bearing the last fruits and food for creation to

store for the long nights of winter. So we, too, bear the fruits of our summer labors in the hopes they will sustain us through the dark winter nights of the soul.

If we are attentive to God's Holy Spirit, then we recognize autumn's invitation as God's people to harvest, celebrate, and share in the abundance of our lives. Just like creation, we are called to bear fruit and share with others. It is a time for us to come back to the village and be in community. It is a time for mentoring and teaching. It is a time to come together and worship, to celebrate and express gratitude for the good things that we have harvested together. It is a season of thanksgiving for all that God has given us, and for the unknown blessings already on their way.

You see, fire awakens something in us: first, in our bodies (passion), then in our hearts (gratitude), and finally in our souls (faith). Autumn is a season meant to evoke the same things in our lives. And even more importantly, not to do it alone . . . but together. 

Randall Westfall has been mentoring youth and adults in creation connection awareness and practices for more than a decade. He is director at Camp Brethren Heights (Rodney, Mich.) and served as the 2021 moderator for the Michigan District.

### Seeing Asian American Brethren

Friends, we have a long way to go, but we are on the road. As a nation and as a denomination we are reckoning with complex issues of race as never before. This reckoning sometimes has awkward and painful results—in the short term.

Did you see what happened in these pages this summer? In her May column, publisher Wendy McFadden shared from her experience as an Asian American. Then, in the July/August issue, she published a letter by fellow Brethren who interpreted her column as a personal attack on white people, distorting her intent and totally disregarding the personal content of her piece.

White Brethren—of which I am one—must take care not to look through the lens of fear and let our own discomfort take center stage. Please, let us see that acknowledging our nation's historic and systemic flaws does not mean white people are being pointed at as individu-

ally bad. Although if we have our own individual messes to clean up, we must do so! Lord, give us eyes to see.

Our dear “saint” Anna Mow once told of meeting an Indian woman on her path who had just the message she needed to hear at a hard moment: “Do not despair that you have failed. To see you have failed is evidence that you are walking in the light.” Sister Anna felt her load lightened, and she regained her hope. *But not to see* and atone for our nation's collective failures is to continue to walk in darkness.

Thank goodness the July/August issue also contained a feature on Asian American Brethren, returning the focus where it belonged so that we may all grow by understanding Wendy's, Lin's, and Madalyn's experiences more deeply. Yes, the road is long, but at least we're on it! And we will get there—peacefully, simply, together—I hope! Let's walk in the light, all to the glory of the One who made us all.

**Shawn Kirchner**  
La Verne, Calif.

### Creative, thoughtful, inspiring

Becky Ullom Naugle's “Potluck” on “What Is Your ZIP Code?” was the most creative, thoughtful, and inspiring I've read in some time. It was truly an imaginative way to highlight some of our uniqueness as Brethren. We're blessed to have such a person in our leadership.

**Hal Garner**  
Murrieta, Calif.

### Standing outside of nationalism

Thanks to MESSENGER and Carl Bowman for the excellent article on “Nationalism and the Brethren.” I hope we all take seriously his reminder of our Brethren heritage of standing outside of nationalist commitments, because they interfere with expressing equal love for all people throughout the world.

As we now are becoming aware that national governments cannot solve global problems, we see that Brethren

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GALATIANS 6:2

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# LETTERS

“non-national beliefs” were far ahead of their time.

Bowman’s research shows that recently many Brethren have become indistinguishable from other Protestant denominations and US citizens who accept, almost without thinking, an exclusionary nationalism. It is not too late to resurrect and apply the best of the Brethren heritage to help us solve global problems of war, terrorism, environmental destruction, and nationalist-induced poverty that causes suffering for half of God’s people on Earth.

**Robert Johansen**  
South Bend, Ind.

## Supporting the police

The Locust Grove congregation recently sent a letter to our local police expressing our support for them. We really wanted them to know that they are appreciated, and their profession is important and noble.

A concerted effort has arisen to disparage and demonize law enforcement, and law enforcement officers have received the brunt of much criticism, which has been unwarranted. Seeing that Jesus has called us all to love one another, part of our responsibility as individuals, churches, and church organizations is to express such love in multitudes of ways. Our law enforcement officers need an encouraging word.

We at Locust Grove Church of the Brethren call upon individuals, churches, districts, and our denomination to send a letter of support to these servants of our communities. Such an expression is part of the ministry that we’ve been called to.

**Greg Quintrell**  
Mount Airy, Md.

## An important memory

Thanks for the informative, biographic article on William Stafford in the June MESSENGER. My father, Earl Garver,

also served in Civilian Public Service and, by reading about William Stafford’s experience during World War II, I could reflect on the lives of my dad and many other Brethren of their age.

Growing up in North Manchester, I remember the year that the Staffords spent in our small college community. One winter afternoon, the Garver and Stafford families ventured to Long Lake for ice skating. Frozen in the ice was a clearly visible fish. William Stafford commemorated this frozen fish in a poem that became an important memory of my childhood.

**Carolyn Garver DeCoursey**  
Oak Park, Ill.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**Include peacemaking in your lesson planning for the coming year.** Iraqi-Canadian artist Lubna Mousa and Mennonite peace activist Mel Lehman offer live interactive Zoom webinars which use Middle East art to teach students that peace is possible. More at [CommonHumanity.org/zoom-classes](http://CommonHumanity.org/zoom-classes)

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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 and less than one year old to be published. Individuals are not listed under both Centenarians and Deaths in the same issue.

### Centenarians

- Brown**, Ruth, 100, Trotwood, Ohio, May 4
- Eisemann**, Millie, 100, Ephrata, Pa., July 13
- Orpurt**, Phil, 100, North Manchester, Ind., Aug. 9
- Peters**, Verda Mae, 100, Hillsboro, Ohio, June 18
- Strom**, Faith, 100, Worthington, Minn., May 24

### New members

- Chambersburg**, Pa.: Alaina Irvin, Ian Irvin, Harriet Van Horn
- Indian Creek**, Harleysville, Pa.: Dennis Duett, Chris McBreen
- Little Swatara**, Bethel, Pa.: Sara Haag
- Maple Grove**, Ashland, Ohio: Sarah Keib
- McPherson**, Kan.: Bev Nye, Kent Nye
- Middlebury**, Ind.: Kent Bailey, Sue Lancaster, Becky Lengel, Sheila Poyser, Steve Poyser
- Middlecreek**, Rockwood, Pa.: Jessie Knoll
- Prince of Peace**, Kettering, Ohio: Dylan Leininger, Charlie Skipper, Kaitlen Skipper

### Wedding anniversaries

- Anderson**, Donald and Keri, Middlebury, Ind., 50
- Badger**, David and Marilyn, Polk, Ohio, 55
- Bahn**, Curtis and Ruth, York, Pa., 67
- Breisch**, Charles and Bonnie, Zieglerville, Pa., 60
- Day**, Ed and Sandy, Jefferson, Md., 60
- Ebersole**, Don and Linda, Williamsport, Md., 50
- Gibble**, Lamar and Nancy, Saint Charles, Ill., 69
- Gottshall**, J. Richard and Doris H., Salem, Va., 76
- Hanes**, Glenn and Doretha, Knoxville, Md., 70
- Hengst**, Howard and Elva, York, Pa., 73
- Kettering**, George and Annabelle, Ashland, Ohio, 65
- Korber**, Tom and Barb, Hollsopple, Pa., 50

- Landis**, Ken and Gloria, Dayton, Ohio, 65
- Martinez**, Richard and Janice, Seattle, Wash., 50
- Masser**, Jack and Diane, Frederick, Md., 65
- Myers**, John and Cindy, Union Bridge, Md., 60
- Negley**, John and Beverly, Boonsboro, Md., 60
- Nyce**, Alfred and Betty Lou, Harleysville, Pa., 60
- Pletcher**, Virgil and Marcheta, Lake Forest, Calif., 74
- Rice**, Carroll and Shirley, Monrovia, Md., 60
- Rinehart**, Harry and Dorothy, Vienna, Md., 55
- Schultz**, Bernard and Linda, Frederick, Md., 50
- Snyder**, Greg and Rose, Hagerstown, Md., 50
- Stinebaugh**, Vernon and Angela, Lancaster, Pa., 79
- Sumpter**, Jim and Joyce, Goshen, Ind., 50
- Thomas**, Glenn and Leta, Charlottesville, Va., 50
- Timmons**, Glenn and Linda, Englewood, Ohio, 60
- Waltersdorff**, Robert and Jo Anne, York, Pa., 65
- Wampler**, Guy and Linda, Lititz, Pa., 55
- Wenger**, Clyde and Shirley, Lancaster, Pa., 66

### Deaths

- Adkins**, Ruby Hollandsworth, 96, Martinsville, Va., March 9
- Alderman**, Louise Estes, 86, Bassett, Va., April 8
- Anthony**, Ralph, 58, Bassett, Va., Jan. 12
- Arrowood**, Trevor Jeffrey, 25, Columbus, N.C., Jan. 5
- Baltzerson**, Robert L., Sr., 85, Ambler, Pa., Jan. 18
- Barnhouse**, Shirley L. Carter, 89, Knoxville, Md., May 22
- Bashore**, Terry Lee, 74, McPherson, Kan., June 29
- Behney**, Ferne L. Doster, 91, Myerstown, Pa., May 23
- Bert**, Joel R., 73, Hollidaysburg, Pa., June 9
- Biser**, Norma Kline, 94, Waynesboro, Pa., May 30
- Bomberger**, Mildred M. Wenger, 89, Akron, Pa., May 4
- Bosserman**, David Allen, 71, Marquette Heights, Ill., June 4

- Boyd**, George William, 90, Venice, Fla., June 21
- Campbell**, James Warren, 91, Leawood, Kan., May 17
- Charters**, Phyllis Neiman, 92, Toms River, N.J., April 1
- Cobbler**, Billie (Betty) Neice, 71, Bassett, Va., May 16
- Cobbler**, George Edmond (Eddie), 62, Bassett, Va., March 9
- Cox**, C. Ervin, 83, Bassett, Va., May 20
- Custer**, Edith, 97, Blue Ridge, Va., June 2
- Deemer**, Barbara Ann Smith, 62, Nokesville, Va., April 23
- Firestine**, Ruth A., 93, Lebanon, Pa., June 24
- Flynn**, Peggy Colleen Hankins, 94, Garden City, Kan., June 10
- Frantz**, Kenneth S., 97, North Manchester, Ind., May 29
- Freidline**, Ruth N. Mishler, 90, Jennerstown, Pa., March 28
- Garber-Phillips**, Barbara Ann, 83, Westminster, Md., Feb. 23
- Godfrey**, Delores V. Stremmel, 90, York, Pa., April 15
- Godfrey**, Dennis W., 53, Glen Rock, Pa., Feb. 26
- Groff**, Ruth, 98, Bartlett, Ill., July 11
- Hale**, Edward Lee, 74, Littlestown, Pa., Nov. 9
- Handy**, Joseph Dudley, 84, Fieldale, Va., Feb. 11
- Harsh**, Rita Joyce Rogers, 87, Eglon, W.Va., May 11
- Hill**, Robert R., 76, Ashland, Ohio, April 21
- Holder**, Iona P. Weimer, 93, Hollsopple, Pa., June 7
- Hower**, Carl D., 74, Myerstown, Pa., June 24
- Kelley**, Marlene R. Bowers, 88, Hagerstown, Md., May 27
- Keppley**, Wilbur G., 82, Palmyra, Pa., June 11
- Kobus**, Frederick R., 82, Chambersburg, Pa., June 25
- Lavy**, Daniel, 93, North Canton, Ohio, July 16
- Lavy**, Linda Sue, 67, Andover, Ohio, April 11
- Marks**, James W., 88, Lititz, Pa., May 28
- McDaniel**, Drema Dare Sandridge, 82, Waynesboro, Va., July 6
- McDonald**, James R., 77, Delphi, Ind., April 26
- McKinnell**, James C., III, 88, York, Pa., May 15
- Metzger**, Leo, 100, North Manchester, Ind., July 15
- Miller**, Ammon (Jiggs), Jr., 96, Lake Odessa, Mich., May 29
- Miller**, Guy Junior, 80, New Windsor, Md., April 2

- Morgart**, Jay Robert, 76, Uniontown, Ohio, Feb. 27
- Moser**, Russell I., 92, Harleysville, Pa., July 4
- Ott**, Ruth Eileen Hershberger, 80, Hollsopple, Pa., April 23
- Oxley**, Audrey Talbott, 93, Onalaska, Wash., July 10
- Phillips**, Everette (Phil), 87, Westminster, Md., April 20
- Powell**, Kay Ann Spence, 75, Akron, Ohio, May 25
- Reish**, William Edwin, 96, Broadway, Va., May 27
- Riley**, Norma Jeanetta Caskey, 85, Goshen, Ind., March 24
- Ryan**, Geraldine L. Bailey, 89, York, Pa., April 27
- Sales**, N. Roliene, 95, Eureka, Ill., May 30
- Sheldon**, Judith Gail Roney, 80, Tipp City, Ohio, June 14
- Sholl**, Carol R. Frantz, 78, Lebanon, Pa., May 20
- Singley**, Carol L. Dewalt, 61, Hummelstown, Pa., Dec. 22
- Smith**, Gary William, 61, Liberal, Kan., June 14
- Snyder**, Anna Mae, 82, Lebanon, Pa., June 19
- Stade**, James J., 72, Blacksburg, Va., May 30
- Stevens**, L. Arlene Clapper, 97, Davidsville, Pa., April 26
- Straub**, Donna Louise Roberts, 79, Taneytown, Md., June 6
- Stuckey**, Irene Hathazi, 98, Souderton, Pa., Aug. 15, 2020
- Suter**, Lorraine Cathlene Helmick, 77, Ambler, Pa., Feb. 27
- Thomasson**, Robert Kermon, 85, Martinsville, Va., July 12
- Thompson**, John Leonard, Sr., 91, Frederick, Md., June 8
- Ullom**, Kenneth Leroy, 78, Wiley, Colo., July 14
- Wineland**, Carl R., 86, Greensburg, Pa., July 16, 2020
- Woods**, Anna Louise, 96, Ankeny, Iowa, June 6
- Young**, Glenn Alden, 79, Akron, Ohio, June 2

### Ordained

- Bilger**, Robert, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Rockhill, Rockhill Furnace, Pa.), May 31
- Crowe**, Alicia, W. Marva Dist. (Westernport, Md.), June 20
- Flores**, J. David, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Iglesia de Cristo Sion, Pomona, Calif.), May 16
- Funkhouser**, Ricky, Shen. Dist. (Round Hill, Toms Brook, Va.), May 23
- Keller**, Jeff, Sr., Atl. N. E.

- Dist. (Lebanon, Pa.), May 30
- Kuryon**, Carolyn, N. Ohio Dist. (East Nimishillen, Canton, Ohio), June 6
- Liller**, Susan, S. Ohio & Ky. Dist. (West Charleston, Tipp City, Ohio), June 6
- McMullin**, Thomas, N. Plains Dist. (Fairview, Unionville, Iowa), June 6
- Polzin**, Kathryn, N. Ohio Dist. (Poplar Ridge, Defiance, Ohio), April 11
- Zapata**, Rebeca, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Principe de Paz, Santa Ana, Calif.), June 13

### Commissioned

- Bougher**, Joseph, Atl. N. E. Dist. (North Fort Myers, Fla.), June 6
- Chubb**, Jonathan, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Papago Buttes, Scottsdale, Ariz.), May 23

### Licensed

- Amsden**, David, Mich. Dist. (Lakeview, Brethren, Mich.), May 2
- Brillman**, John, III, Shen. Dist. (Mount Olivet, Broadway, Va.), June 13
- Luzynski**, Terri, Virgina Dist. (Williamson Road, Roanoke, Va.), May 30
- Painter**, Alan, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Rockhill, Rockhill Furnace, Pa.), May 30
- Siakula**, Emmanuel, N. Ohio Dist. (Hartville, Ohio), June 27
- Wyse**, Eugene, N. Ohio Dist. (Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio), May 16

### Placements

- Bougher**, Joseph, pastor, North Fort Myers, Fla., June 1
- Chubb**, Jonathan, pastor, Papago Buttes, Scottsdale, Ariz., May 23
- Finet**, Angela, from pastor, Nokesville, Va., to pastor, Mountville, Pa., May 24
- Hinton**, William, Sr., interim pastor, Copper Hill, Va., July 1
- Horst**, Pat, interim pastor, Green Tree, Oaks, Pa., June 21
- Michael**, Kathleen, pastor, Middle River, Fort Defiance, Va., June 1
- Millard**, Sandra, pastor, Bakersfield, Calif., May 1
- Simonsick**, Robert, pastor, Jonah's People, Fostoria, Ohio, March 31
- Wyse**, Eugene, from interim pastor to pastor, Lakewood, Millbury, Ohio, May 16



# Learning from MVPs

**Y**ou may have heard that 75 percent of Church of the Brethren pastors are serving congregations in part-time roles. Over the last several years, the Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program has been working to learn from and support these multivocational ministers.



DANA CASSELL

(We call these pastors MVPs, because they are both Multivocational and Most Valuable.)

While you may have heard the statistic, you might not have heard, yet, what these pastors and their congregations are teaching us about creativity and faithfulness. There's the story from Forest Chapel Church of the Brethren in Virginia about how having a part-time pastor enables other lay leaders to step into tender,

powerful ministry moments, like hospital visitation or leading a graveside service. Over in Indiana, the Eel River Community Church of the Brethren's ministry team of three part-time pastors created a built-in mentoring program, with retired ministers working alongside college students who are exploring a call to ministry. And at the Cabool Church of the Brethren in Missouri, calling multiple part-time pastors has opened up time, energy, and enthusiasm for new and creative outreach ministries. (You can hear more of these stories on our website: [www.brethren.org/part-time-pastor](http://www.brethren.org/part-time-pastor).)

Multivocational ministry is built into the DNA of Brethren ecclesiology. Our history of "free" or "plural, non-salaried" ministry stretches back to the beginnings of the Brethren movement. Paid, professional clergy did not become the norm in Church of the Brethren congregations until the 1950s, which means that full-time, professional pastors have been a fruitful but ultimately unsustainable experiment that lasted approximately two generations. We carry the wisdom of multivocational ministry in our tradition, and its benefits have always been part of how we organize our life together.

Since part-time pastors have limited availability to attend to congregational and community needs, the whole church is invited into the work of ministry. Stories from pastors in our program tell us that the "work of ministry" encompasses everything from taking out the trash to making pastoral visits to serving on community councils to officiating funeral services. Some congregations have

always functioned in this way, sharing the work of caring and leading, but others are discovering the power of mutuality in new ways.

Multivocational pastors seem to avoid the dangers of isolation that so many full-time pastors encounter. Since their work and relationships extend beyond the small sphere of the congregation, they are connected to people and communities that offer support in ways that congregants cannot.

Part-time ministry leaves more room for pastors to invest in the fullness of who God is calling them to be, combining congregational ministry with teaching, farming, law, study, caregiving vocations, and so many other creative callings. One MVP summarized the transition from full- to part-time ministry this way: "When I was a full-time pastor, I was mostly concerned with what the congregation wanted. Now that I'm a part-time pastor, I am much more concerned with what God wants."

Multivocational ministry clearly enables creative discipleship. But some denominational systems and structures pose unnecessary barriers to the creativity. Although our denominational reality has clearly shifted from full-time to part-time ministry, "we forgot to update the road map," remarked one of our circuit riders, a seasoned pastor called to walk alongside MVPs.

MVPs told us that earning continuing education credit was difficult because the policy required real-time attendance at events, so the Brethren Academy revised the policy to include an option to earn credit by viewing recorded material.

We heard from pastors and district executives that agreements and contracts were tricky for part-time pastors. The Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee has taken this seriously in developing a new "Integrated Ministry Agreement" tool.

There is so much more to learn from these creative congregations and MVPs. While the program has full funding through 2023, thanks to a generous grant initiative, the lessons and invitations to the church to become a true, living testimony to the theology of a priesthood of all believers will continue for many years to come. **W**

Dana Cassell is concluding her service as program manager of the Thriving in Ministry program. She continues as pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C.

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