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new again*

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on the cover *Window at Germantown
Church of the Brethren by Glenn Riegel.*

What I like in January

It would be easy to make a list of the things that annoy during this time of year. But the world has enough complaining, so I'm looking beyond that. What I like in January:



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

- A new calendar.
- The intrigue of a year named for perfect vision.
- The optimism of resolutions.
- Lengthening days.
- Electricity, hot water, and indoor plumbing.
- Stocking feet by the fireplace.
- Heated seats.
- Homemade soup with family and friends.
- A pile of books and a down blanket.
- The right coat for the weather.
- Fresh snow when the sky is blue.
- Icicles afire in the morning sun.
- The flash of a red cardinal.
- The silence of soil and seeds in fallow time.
- A holiday dedicated to peace, justice, and the righting of racial wrongs.
- The gospel story of mysterious visitors from afar, evidence that God's gift reaches beyond what we expect.
- The season of Epiphany, of light in the darkness and the manifestation of God to the whole world.

A large, elegant handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy McFadden".

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Building peace

On the weekend before Thanksgiving 2019, high school senior and Church of the Brethren member Shaun Deardorff completed his Eagle Scout project at Campus Hills Park in Durham, N.C., with the help of a team of volunteers.

No ordinary project, the “World Peace Garden and Anti-Gun Violence and Terrorism Memorial” took many years of planning and development. Its purpose, Deardorff wrote, is “to counteract violent events that have occurred in our nation and internationally, as well as local gun violence. It also serves as an art installation to beautify the park and surrounding community.”

More than 45 people helped build the garden and memorial over two weeks. “It is surreal to see my project set in stone now,” Deardorff said. “It has been four years in the making and I have crossed so many hurdles to get to where I am today, but hard work pays off.”

To him, the project “encapsulates and epitomizes optimism and hope, and provides a meaningful place for peace contemplation and is a catalyst for change.”

The site is inside a roundabout in front of the community center at Campus Hills Park. At its center is a 15-foot aluminum sculpture designed by Deardorff and fabricated by his project mentor, Joseph Lemmens.

Incorporated in the sculpture are a heart symbolizing that “love is the cornerstone of peace”; a three-dimensional peace sign forming a globe shape, symbolizing world peace; and four pedestal legs symbolizing the four corners of the Earth.

An aluminum tube that forms the globe is meant to be one continuous piece of metal, symbolizing the never-ending goal of peace.

Behind the sculpture stands a peace pole with the phrase “May peace prevail on Earth” in seven languages, each chosen to symbolize a significant conflict with the US: Cherokee, Russian, Vietnamese, Japanese, German, Arabic, and English. It also has a line stating, “May peace be in our schools,” to memorialize mass shootings and domestic terrorism in schools—including a gun threat at C.E. Jordan High School where Deardorff is a senior, made the week before the project was completed.



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.



Knit Wits share God's love

The Knit Wits ministry at Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren was started in 2011 by Linda Hart. This group of women gathers regularly to knit afghans. The group has grown and prospered over the last eight years, joined by women from other Church of the Brethren congregations in the area and by residents of Hillcrest, a retirement community in La Verne. Known as Knit2gether, this larger group meets at Hart's home once a month.

In 2019, the Knit Wits and Knit2gether produced 38 full-size afghans and 10 more for babies. This

brings the total number of blankets created since 2011 to 231.

Every year the blankets are blessed during a November service at Pomona Fellowship Church before being delivered to community organizations including Crossroads, a re-entry program for formerly incarcerated women; Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center Auxiliary for newborns; and the Loma Linda Veterans Administration Hospital. Each blanket includes a note of love and prayer.

The organizations receiving the blankets for their clients and patients always express their appre-

ciation, and the church has received hand-written notes from several individual recipients over the years. This ministry is a practical way for the congregation to share God's love through the warmth of a simple blanket. —**Lauren Seganos Cohen**




E-town graduate's story told in film

The story of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College graduate **Daniel J. Jones** has been told in the film *The Report*, featured on Amazon and starring Adam Driver of *Star Wars* fame. *The Report* has gained wide attention for its portrayal of Jones' investigation into and report on a CIA Detention and Interrogation Program and "enhanced interrogation techniques"—eventually identified as torture—adopted after 9/11.

According to Elizabethtown College, "The completion of the report [in 2014] and Jones' departure from

the Intelligence Committee was heralded by former Intelligence Committee vice chair Dianne Feinstein in a tribute submitted to the Congressional Record."

Jones is now president of the Penn Quarter Group, a research investigative advisory firm. He holds degrees from Elizabethtown, Johns Hopkins University, and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In addition to his work for the CIA, he spent four years with the Federal Bureau of Investigation working on international terrorism investigations and worked for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.



“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” –Matthew 6:12

Forgive (v.) “1. To cease to feel resentment against (an offender); 2. To give up resentment of or claim to requital” (Merriam-Webster). “To stop being angry with someone who has done something wrong” (Cambridge Dictionary).

■ According to a Barna report last April, 22 percent of Christians reported “struggling with receiving forgiveness for something they have personally done wrong.” More than three-quarters said they had “offered unconditional forgiveness to someone else.”

■ The word forgive, or forms of it—such as forgiven and forgiveness—appears 132 times in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

■ A 2010 survey by the Fetzer Institute found that 64 percent of Americans

needed “more forgiveness in their personal lives” and 94 percent “wanted to see more forgiveness in the country.”

■ A Mayo Clinic staff article in 2017 listed benefits of forgiveness including healthier relationships, better mental health, less anxiety, a stronger immune system, fewer symptoms of depression, and improved self-esteem.

■ The 2015 academic book *Forgiveness and Health* reported findings of a linkage between forgiveness and better physical health. “Forgiveness allows

you to let go of the chronic interpersonal stressors that cause us undue burden,” researcher Loren Toussaint of Luther College said.



“Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a constant attitude.”

–Martin Luther King Jr.

“Always forgive your enemies—nothing annoys them so much.”

–Oscar Wilde

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” –Matthew 6:14-15

“He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”

–Martin Luther King Jr.

Learn more about forgiveness on pages 24-27 of this issue.

Sources: Religion News Service, Barna Group, American Psychological Association, Mayo Clinic, BrainyQuote.com.

What's old is new again

At its tricentennial, historic Germantown church breathes life into its neighborhood

by Walt Wiltschek

The following story is about a congregation that has become a church in, of, and for its community."

That's how authors Ron Sider, Philip Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh begin a case study in their 2002 book *Churches That Make a Difference*—a case study about Germantown Church of the Brethren in Philadelphia, Pa. It described the congregation as "visible and available" and "invested—financially, relationally, and spiritually—in the

holistic well-being of its neighbors."

Nearly two decades after that book's publication, and on the verge of Germantown's 300th anniversary as a congregation, that's still what Germantown strives to be. It may be the oldest congregation in the denomination, but it's no quiet historical museum. Three centuries into its life, the "mother church" is still working hard to take care of its ever-changing family.

"The congregation with its unique positioning and longevity has been one of the major anchors in the community, providing a safe and convenient place for the community to gather and be a hub for social, human, and educational services," says Germantown pastor Richard Kyerematen, who has now been leading the congregation for more than a tenth of its life—arriving in 1989.

"Our greatest gift to the community, though, is our incarnational ministry, worshiping the Lord for close to 300 years on the same grounds and providing a lifeline to all by proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore."

...

The first Brethren arrived in Philadelphia from Europe in 1719 and soon clustered in Germantown, then a distinct community north of the city and largely populated by Mennonites and other German speakers. Four years later, the group held its first baptisms in North America in the nearby Wissahickon Creek and formally established a congregation under the leadership of Peter Becker.

Brethren founder Alexander Mack Sr. arrived in 1735, bringing a fresh dose of energy, and by 1770 the Brethren were constructing their first permanent meetinghouse. The years that followed saw ebbs and flows as populations shifted, with the congregation sometimes sputtering and even ceasing to meet on a few occasions.

But each time, revival came. Missionary Wilbur Stover led one such wave when he came to Germantown for a few years in the 1890s. M.C. Sweigart built on that wave in the





early 20th century, taking the congregation from about 60 members in 1906 to more than 450 in 1934, necessitating an expansion of the church building.

By the mid-20th century, decline had set in again, with most of the congregation's white members, and many other white members of the surrounding community, moving to the suburbs as Germantown became more urban and increasingly African-American in its demographics. By the 1960s, the building was primarily used as a Brethren Volunteer Service site.

In the 1980s, Atlantic Northeast District executive Earl Ziegler contacted Kyerematen, who had moved from his native Ghana to Europe and then the US for academic pursuits and was a student at Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary. Kyerematen answered Ziegler's call and moved to Germantown shortly after his graduation. He's brought his energy and evangelistic passion to the congregation ever since.

"Under Richard's ministry, the church has come back to life," says Jeff Bach, director of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies

and a member of the denomination's Germantown Trust, which helps care for the historic meetinghouse. "It is now again a church of its own neighborhood. The people who worship there reflect the neighborhood now—African-American, Afro-Caribbean, a few white members. It really is a multicultural church. They know the neighbors, and the neighbors know them. That helps a lot."

• • •

Kyerematen made those community connections a priority when he came to Germantown and never wavered from that emphasis. He is well known on the surrounding streets and has become engaged in a variety of local organizations.

In *Churches That Make a Difference*, Kyerematen said that local residents had come to think of Germantown "as a white church, because when most black people moved into this neighborhood they didn't feel welcomed here."



"IT IS NOW AGAIN A CHURCH OF ITS OWN NEIGHBORHOOD. THE PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP THERE REFLECT THE NEIGHBORHOOD . . . A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH. THEY KNOW THE NEIGHBORS, AND THE NEIGHBORS KNOW THEM. "

“The church has made significant progress in dispelling these myths in recent years,” the book said, “particularly through its combination of social ministries, persistent but patient witness, and warm fellowship.” One church member told the authors, “The outreach programs and the open doors, it’s like a big welcome sign on the outside. And people get a lot of love when they come here.”

Kyerematen says one of the greatest blessings during his three-plus decades as pastor is “to see so many lives transformed both spiritually and socially, and to see babies who were dedicated here now attending worship services.” Two women who grew up in the congregation both became pharmacists, he says, with one now serving as a lecturer at a local university.

The denomination assisted in renovating several abandoned buildings near the meetinghouse, and about 15 years ago the congregation purchased an adjacent building that now serves as a fellowship hall, bustling with life as it hosts a wide range of meetings, meals, and events. On any

given week, tutoring sessions, music groups, youth events, Bible studies, audio recording workshops for children, and even a small cable TV operation bring people to the church. Worship services are

broadcast live to the community each week, and numerous outreach ministries operate.

Others have noticed. A 2017 feature article in the *Philadelphia Tribune* carried the headline: “Germantown Church of the Brethren: Long heritage of outreach, love goes unabated.”

“As pastor, Richard is visionary regarding the needs of the area, but members join into that as well,” Bach says. “There’s a lot of good collaboration. It’s a really blessed coming together of both outreach and internal commitment to help make it happen.”

“They worship very energetically, with a strong faith, directed to God,” he adds. “They’re so welcoming and gracious. It’s a great experience. Germantown church is very Brethren—doing what Brethren faith values and considers important, and they do it in a way that’s congruent to their own makeup and the neighborhood they’re in, and I think that’s a great thing.”

The congregation says it clearly on its website (gcob1723.com): “We fervently desire to be conduits of (God’s) glory in our immediately community, and the world at-large.”

• • •

For the next few years, the congregation’s life will include some additional celebrations as it marks its tricentennial—not an occasion that many churches of any denomination can claim.



A brief timeline of Germantown Church of the Brethren

1719 The first Brethren arrive in North America.

1723 The first congregation in North America is organized in Germantown under Peter Becker’s leadership. Germantown at the time is a distinct community north of Philadelphia. The first baptisms are done in Wissahickon Creek.



1735 Brethren founder Alexander Mack Sr. dies.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

“GOD IS NOT FINISHED WITH THE GERMANTOWN CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN YET,” KYEREMATEN SAYS. “THE FIRE THAT WAS LIT ALMOST 300 YEARS AGO IS STILL BURNING, AND GERMANTOWN WILL BE THE NEW FRONTIER FOR THE BRETHREN TO ENGAGE URBAN AMERICA.”

“It is a significant milestone in the life of every living institution, and its beneficiaries should make no apologies in celebrating, but Brethren being bashful, we plan to tone it down,” Kyerematen jokes.

The festivities kicked off last March with a special worship featuring a sermon by current Atlantic Northeast District executive Pete Kontra and words from denominational Office of Ministry director Nancy Sollenberger Heishman. Ziegler, now retired, came to preach at the Palm Sunday service. And each year’s Christmas concert at the church is also being tied in as a special celebration event.


Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday has been invited to preach at a worship service this year, and Kyerematen says a special culminating worship celebration will take place in the summer or fall of 2023. He has also had conversations with Bach about possibly hosting the Brethren World Assembly in Germantown that year.

And he says the congregation has another ambitious goal that he hopes will be the crowning celebration: “a million-dollar ministry endowment fund to ensure ministry visibility and viability into the next century.”

LIFE ABOUNDS

“There is a vitality there that continues to find meaningful witness to Christ and Christian service and outreach,” Bach says. “As the area around it changes, the Germantown church has been pretty remarkable at being able to do that. They’ve had tough times over their history, but overall with 300 years of existence it’s pretty remarkable they’ve continued to do that. It could be just a historical building, but they’ve figured out ways to get back up and get going again.”

So if you’re in the Philadelphia area over the next few years, stop by Germantown and visit the old stone meetinghouse along Germantown Avenue. Check out the history, but check out the living, energetic Brethren congregation and the vibrant community it embodies, too.

“God is not finished with the Germantown Church of the Brethren yet,” Kyerematen says. “The fire that was lit almost 300 years ago is still burning, and Germantown will be the new frontier for the Brethren to engage urban America.” 



Glenn Riegel

1770 The congregation builds its first meetinghouse.

1890s Wilbur Stover leads an era of revival at Germantown.

1894 Alexander Mack Sr.’s remains are moved to the congregation’s cemetery.

1896–1897 An addition is made to the original meetinghouse.

1915 Another addition is made to the original meetinghouse.

1989 Richard Kyerematen is called as pastor.

1995 Historical displays are created for the original section of the meetinghouse.

2007 The congregation hosts a service launching the Church of the Brethren denomination’s 300th anniversary celebration.

2019 Germantown kicks off a celebration of its tricentennial.



Cheryl Baumhugh-Coyford



The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind, watercolor painting by William Blake, 1825

LAMENT, REPENT, REINVENT

by Don Fitzkee

This is an extraordinary time in the life of our district and denomination, with levels of division not seen perhaps since the early 1880s. A couple congregations already have left Atlantic Northeast District and things are not good in the denomination as a whole. This all got extremely personal for me when the congregation that nurtured me and that I have been part of for most of my nearly 56 years of life decisively moved toward separation this past summer, forcing me to choose between my local church family and my extended church family.

So it's hard to know what to preach about at a time like this. Do you confront our divisions directly? I guess I could do that, but sometimes it feels to me like our divisions are all we ever talk about, and so far it doesn't seem like more conversation about homosexuality has done much to bring us together.

Do you just admit that we are divided on that issue, ignore it, and preach about something else? You know, let's focus on mission or evangelism or disaster relief or a compelling vision, all of which are good things to focus on and do have potential to bring us together. I could do that, but it's hard to talk about brighter topics when the dark cloud of division is blocking out the sun, at least for me.

So using a decidedly unspiritual analogy, I decided I would play the cards I was dealt—namely a 50th district conference, a divided church, and the story of Job—and see if I could turn that into a winning hand. As I shuffled those three cards around in my mind, I was handed these three words: lament, repent, and reinvent.

Job's story is pretty familiar. In the first two chapters we learn of this man from Uz. He was blameless and upright, feared God, and shunned evil. He was blessed with a large

JOB ADMITTED THAT HE WAS IN OVER HIS HEAD AND REPENTED IN DUST AND ASHES. MAYBE WE TOO NEED TO REPENT OF SPEAKING WITH SUCH CERTAINTY OF THINGS WE DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND.

family, larger herds of animals, and great wealth. He was extremely conscientious and faithful to God, a respected pillar in the community. Job 1:3 summarizes, “He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.”

For reasons I don’t fully understand, one day in the course of a conversation with Satan, God pointed out what a wonderful guy Job was. Satan, in effect, taunted God by saying something like, “Well, of course Job is faithful. Who wouldn’t be faithful if they had been blessed the way you blessed Job.”

Before the conversation was done, God had agreed to let Satan take away everything Job had, so long as he didn’t lay a finger on Job himself. And so Satan set to work destroying Job’s donkeys and sheep and camels and servants and finally all 10 of Job’s children.

A short time later God pointed out that Job indeed had remained faithful despite all his devastating loss. And Satan said in effect, “Well sure he stayed faithful through all that, but he’ll curse you to your face if his own health fails.” And again, inexplicably, God gave Satan permission to afflict Job, so long as he didn’t kill him.

Job soon was covered with excruciating sores from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet. He sat in abject misery among the ashes, scraping his sores with a shard of pottery. His wife, the only family member he had left, told him to just curse God and die. Yet, Job replied to her, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” And the narrator of the story affirms, “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.”

Back in my Sunday school days, we skipped right from there to the epilogue in chapter 42, where we learn that God restored everything to Job, blessing him with 10 more children and twice the wealth he had before. He lived a long life and died a happy man. So the lesson is that if we are faithful in the midst of adversity God will be faithful and bless us.

But to arrive at that neat and tidy conclusion, we have to skip over chapters 3-41, which aren’t quite as cut-and-dried. In the final verses of chapter 2, Job’s friends came to comfort and sympathize with him. When they saw Job’s misery they

wept aloud, tore their robes, and sprinkled dust on their heads in mourning. For seven days and seven nights they sat on the ground with Job in silence, sharing in his suffering. And that was pretty much the last thing they got right.

Lament

After seven days, it was Job who broke the silence. He opened his mouth and cursed the day he was born, beginning a long period of lament and wrestling with why God had permitted his life to fall apart. By definition, a lament is passionate expression of grief or sorrow. The Bible contains a good bit of it. A third or more of the Psalms include laments. The prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk expressed lament, and Jeremiah penned an entire book lamenting the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. Jesus lamented in the garden. Job laments.

And in this divisive chapter of our church’s life I lament.

I lament that the friends I have on either side of this great divide—people I consider brothers and sisters in Christ, people whose faith and convictions I admire for different reasons—can’t talk to each other, unless it is to defend their own views or question or disparage the views of the other.

I lament that individuals, congregations, and organizations are judged on the basis of a single issue. And the issue is not what they believe about Jesus.

I lament that the spiritual ties of brothers and sisters forged over more than 300 years of common faith and heritage can be severed in what seems like the blink of an eye.

As the Church of the Brethren, we can’t claim the level of faithfulness to God that Job was able to claim. But I can relate to Job’s feeling that our best days were in some earlier era. For some, the glory days were a time of sharper separation from the world and more clarity on theology and moral standards. For others it was the exciting era of establishing overseas missions—although I would note that era has not ended. We still do have some exciting missions and sister churches around the world. For some, it was the Brethren Service era after World War II when we sent boatloads of heifers accompanied by seagoing cowboys to people in need,

founded Brethren Volunteer Service, and helped rebuild war-ravaged Europe—although I would note that we still have some pretty good service ministries.

But now our divisions and numerical decline seem to overshadow much of the good that remains in our church, and so, like Job, I lament.

Repent

My second word is repent. It probably isn't fair to summarize the dialogue in chapters 3-37 in a couple of sentences, but it boils down to Job defending himself, saying that he was undeserving of all that had befallen him, while his friends argued that God is just and therefore, if all these terrible things happened to Job, he must have done something to deserve it. Job was accusing God of unjustly punishing him, while his friends were defending God,

trotting out many orthodox views on who God was and what God was like. So who was right?

God said at the beginning of the story and at the end that Job was in the right. But in between, Job repented. So what did Job have to repent of?

After chapter after chapter of debate and lament and questioning God, God finally spoke, but didn't really answer any of Job's questions. Instead, he asked Job quite a few questions of his own, beginning with, "Where were you, Job, when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand." God went on like this verse after verse, establishing that God is God and Job is not.

Finally, in Job 42:3 and 6, Job confesses: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. . . . Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

BELONGING

by Nancy Sollenberger Heishman

When I was growing up in a small farming community, invariably someone would meet me and say, "Oh, your mother is Verna, the music teacher, isn't she?" That was okay with me because she was a popular teacher. Other times I would be known as Robert's daughter. When my father built an airplane hangar and runway in the middle of the farm and crafted his own homebuilt plane, it was kind of fun to be known as Robert's daughter.

As we grow up, we are invariably known for whom we belong to—parents, siblings, grandparents. But there comes a moment when all that shifts. Instead of being known for whom we belong to, we are known for who belongs to us.

At least that's what Sister Binwa tells me. Binwa Didas's heritage is Congolese. After a year and a half or so in the congregation we attend together, it's possible that she doesn't know my first name. At least I can't remember ever being called Nancy by Binwa. I am Mama Tim. And Irv is Baba Tim. Once a child is

born, your identity changes and you are known as the parent of your *child* instead of the child of your own parent. You are known for who belongs to you.

At least in some cases. I think this must be especially painful in some cultures for those parents who cannot conceive children. I wonder what the stigma and weight of expectations feel like for women in Binwa's culture for example. I know that here in our society there is strong pressure to have children and so I can only imagine what it must be like in her culture.

We also know that we are more than the children we can or cannot bear. We may choose to adopt. We may be aunts and uncles. We may be mentors to youth in our churches and communities. We may be a second set of parents to the next-door neighbors' children. The circle expands and includes those who are beyond the biological families we may or may not have.

As we grow in discipleship, we grow in our ability to confess the ways in which we limit the circle of belonging we allow in our lives. We confess that,

left to ourselves, our circles of belonging might be fairly small and not very diverse. If it were not for Jesus' persistent widening work in our lives, we would keep the circle too tight, opening up just for those who think and act like us, look and believe like us, and love just like we do.

Who belongs to us? To whom do we belong? Whom do we claim as ours, as our sisters and brothers, our family of faith? Whom will we claim as our fellow citizens, as part of the human family, as members of this society? And who would eagerly claim to belong to us and be known as our people?

Even within the Church of the Brethren, we seem to be increasingly divided and determined by who belongs and who does not belong.

This past fall the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District acknowledged that three congregations that used to belong to our district no longer want to belong to us. Near the close of the district conference, board chair Jennifer Keeney Scarr led a beautiful service of releasing these congregations from our covenant of belonging. Representatives from the district shared positive stories of how and when we once lovingly belonged to one another. Representatives from two of the congregations shared words of appreciation for the gracious way the

WE FIGHT BATTLES WITHIN THE CHURCH. . . . INSTEAD OF REASONING TOGETHER AND SEEKING TO DISCERN GOD'S LEADING, WE TRY TO UTTERLY DEFEAT THE OPPOSITION. WE COULD REPENT OF THAT.

One of the things that is so interesting about our current liberal/conservative divide is that both sides believe the other side is “winning.” With all due respect, I think it’s pretty clear that we all are losing. I don’t know what to do about it, except maybe repent. But even here, it’s hard to agree on who needs to repent of what.

Those advocating for radical inclusion are pretty sure that more conservative voices need to repent of being judgmental, exclusive, and homophobic. They need to repent of

elevating law above love, of failing to understand the Jesus who embraced outcasts, stood with the marginalized, and welcomed them to his table and into his kingdom. I agree with some of that.

Those advocating for the traditional Judeo-Christian view of sexuality and marriage, on the other hand, are pretty sure that those liberals need to repent of ignoring the plain truths of scripture, of distorting God’s intent for sexual expression which goes back to the creation story itself when



process had gone, even as it led to separation. Then we raised our hands in blessing toward them and released them. It was deeply moving and sad, but it also felt healthy and it was healing.

This business of belonging to one another is messy and uncertain and perplexing these days.

What does it mean to belong to one another? That question starts me wondering about God. Sometimes we have conflicted feelings about being known


for being “so and so’s” parent or mentor or aunt or uncle because of wayward or patience-testing behavior on their part. If we feel the uncertainty and responsibility for our role, I wonder, does God have mixed feelings sometimes about the whole prospect of being known as belonging to us? Does it always seem good to God to be known as my parent? If someone asked who God is, would God readily say, “You can know me. I’m Nancy’s God?”

I take comfort that throughout history God has been willing to be known as the God of a particular people. God was known in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and presumably of Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel and Leah. God is willing to be known as the God of all kinds of people, some whose behavior was less than stellar, even disastrous and despicable.

The writer of 1 John gives us these words. Hear the note of celebration and joy and wonder at the prospect of being known in relationship to God. “And

now, little children. . . . See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. . . . Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”

I trust that God regards each one of us with the satisfaction and joy of a proud parent who, even in trying times of conflict, stress, and uncertainty, can say, “You are a beloved child of mine.”

God is willing to be known as the God of the Church of the Brethren (and of other denominations), divided and anxious as we are. To use the language of our Congolese sisters and brothers, God is willing to be known as Baba Brethren or Mama Brethren. And God is willing to be known by your very own name as well. 

Nancy Sollenberger Heishman is director of ministry for the Church of the Brethren. She is a member of West Charleston Church of the Brethren in Tipp City, Ohio.

I TRUST THAT GOD REGARDS EACH ONE OF US WITH THE SATISFACTION AND JOY OF A PROUD PARENT WHO, EVEN IN TRYING TIMES OF CONFLICT, STRESS, AND UNCERTAINTY, CAN SAY, “YOU ARE A BELOVED CHILD OF MINE.”

MAYBE OUR WITNESS FOR THIS TIME IS TO SHOW THE WORLD HOW PEOPLE WHO SEE SOME THINGS QUITE DIFFERENTLY CAN BE RECONCILED TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER AND WORK TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

God created man and woman for each other, of being purveyors of a cheap grace that extends welcome without repentance and that blesses that which God does not bless. I could probably agree with some of that too.

But can we agree on anything that most or all of us need to repent of? Doubtful, but let's take a stab.

First, we could repent of letting the divisions and methods of our culture into the church. So much of what divides us within the church is what divides our culture as a whole. The toxicity of our politics has found its way into the church. We fight battles within the church just like the Democrats and Republicans do outside the church. Instead of reasoning together and seeking to discern God's leading, we try to utterly defeat the opposition. We could repent of that.

We could repent of questioning our opponents' commitment to Christ. If somebody has taken similar baptism vows to mine, then I should treat that person as a fellow Christian. From there we can debate what it means to follow Jesus and how scriptures should be interpreted, but we have to stop questioning the sincerity of each other's faith based on views on specific issues. We could repent of that.

The third thing to repent of comes directly from Job. Both Job and his comforters thought they understood God. Job's critics especially could easily find texts from the law and the prophets to back up their views of who God is and how God acts. Yet, God said they had it all wrong.

Although most everything that Job said about God and himself was correct, in the end God put Job in his place and Job admitted that he was in over his head and repented in dust and ashes. Maybe we too need to repent of speaking with such certainty of things we do not fully understand, things too wonderful for us to know.

Reinvent

My third word is reinvent. Whether many more congregations eventually leave or whether most of us decide to stay together as Brethren, we are going to have to find what unites us. Certainly a commitment to Jesus Christ has to be at the center of that. And with Christ at the center, the center might be where we need to be.

The Brethren were born as a balancing act between two theological strains—Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. While more recent scholarship has viewed these two movements as mutually reinforcing, there were tensions between indi-

vidualism and community, inward and outward expressions of faith, and more. The Brethren sought to strike a balance between things that aren't always easy to reconcile.

Since the first eight Brethren were baptized in the Eder River in 1708, dozens of denominations and smaller splinter groups have split from the Schwarzenau Brethren. We are members of the only group that always decided to stay and try to reconcile the tensions. We have been the epitome of a middling group, seeking to strike a balance as various forces have tugged us in one direction or another.

During our greatest period of division, in the early 1880s, as the Brethren wrestled with whether to maintain a sharp separation from the world or to pursue more aggressive mission and evangelism, the denomination suffered a three-way split. The Old German Baptist Brethren chose separation from the world and thus separation from the main body. Two years later the impatient Progressives, who desired to be less plain and more aggressive in employing new evangelistic methods like Sunday school and revival meetings, pulled out to become the Brethren Church. Those who remained in the Church of the Brethren decided to live with that tension of being in, but not of, the world.

Many of the plainer churches in eastern Pennsylvania would have sympathized with the concerns of the Old Orders in 1881, but chose to stay with the main body. Many of the congregations in the greater Philadelphia area would have sympathized with the Progressives' desire to more actively engage the world in 1883, but most stayed with the main body. Historically, in Atlantic Northeast, we have been inclined to hang in there, in the middle, seeking to work out differences and strike a balance.

In the 1920s and 1930s and beyond, when Protestantism was divided by a rift between conservative Fundamentalists and liberal Modernists, Brethren lost some members in either direction. But as the main body, we said we aren't exactly either of those. We are Anabaptists, who understand the Old Testament in light of the New, and the New Testament in light of the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. We find Jesus somewhere in the middle between theological fundamentalism and liberalism.

While much of Christendom today is divided into some who believe the mission of the church is evangelism and individual salvation and others who believe that the mission

of the church has more to do with peace and justice, we have tried to hold evangelism and social action in tension, believing that both are part of Christ's gospel. We find Jesus somewhere in the middle, showing us how we can have peace with God and be peacemakers among people.

I am reminded of the beginning of John's Gospel, in 1:14, where it says that Jesus, the Word, came from the Father, became flesh, and dwelt among us, "full of grace and truth."

It seems like we in the church are engaged in a battle between grace and truth. Oh, it isn't quite that neat. Those who are advocating for greater inclusion, who I would put in the grace category, also believe they are standing for the truth. And those I would say are more truth oriented, also believe in God's grace. But it still feels like a tug-of-war.


Maybe our calling is to continue to struggle with the tension between grace and truth and pull those who threaten to skew our balance too far one way or the other back toward the center. We may find Jesus somewhere in the middle.

One of the characteristics of biblical lament is that it almost always ends on a hopeful note. Read the psalms of lament and you will see that laments move from sorrow to hope. "Though things are bad now and I can't see your hand at work, Lord, yet will I trust you." Often somewhere in the middle between lament and reinvent is repent.

Such was the case with Job. After he lamented and repented, God restored him. Now it wasn't the same. Having 10 new children doesn't replace the 10 that

were lost. But after Job's devastating loss, the Lord still had good things in store for his servant.

I don't know where you are as you view the Church of the Brethren today. I'm still lamenting. I recognize I am in need of repenting. But when we get through all of this, maybe God still has plans for us, if we are willing to do some reinventing. That reinventing might actually look more like reclaiming.

In this day when our culture is polarized, when our politics are polarized, and when our church is polarized, maybe the most radical and faithful place to be isn't at one of the poles, but in the middle. Maybe our witness for this time is to show the world how people who see some things quite differently can be reconciled to God and to each other and work together for the common good. Just maybe as we continue to seek Jesus we will find him somewhere in the middle, and he will still be full of grace *and* truth. 

Don Fitzkee is pastor of worship at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, former chair of the Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren, and author of *Moving Toward the Mainstream, a history of churches in Atlantic Northeast District*. Previously he served on the nonsalaried ministry team at the Chiques congregation in Manheim, Pa. This article is condensed from a sermon delivered at the 50th Atlantic Northeast district conference in October.

Don Fitzkee will lead an insight session on this topic in July at Annual Conference in Grand Rapids.

A district that lives with differences

In 1866 when leaders of the 14 churches east of the Susquehanna River met to discuss forming a district, they were divided by language and practices. In rural areas to the west, Brethren were plainer and spoke mostly German. Brethren in the greater Philadelphia area spoke English and were beginning to dress more like the world and adopt practices of more worldly churches.

The plain churches, who were worried about contamination from the others, advocated formation of two districts. Quoting from an account of the meeting, "On the other side, it was argued, and that with tears, by some that by staying together, the influence of the plain churches might have a salutary effect on

those dressy churches, by mingling together."

The newly formed Eastern District of Pennsylvania held its first district conference in May 1867 at the Chiques meeting-house. But that "salutary effect" didn't materialize, and tensions increased over the years as those worldly Philadelphia churches tolerated "unbiblical" practices such as salaried pastors and taking offerings to pay them, indoor baptistries, women wearing hats, and many other evils.

In 1911, to ease the tensions, the district was divided by drawing a convoluted district boundary that separated plain churches from fancy ones, so that both districts could remain Brethren, but Philadelphia ladies could keep their hats

and Lancaster sisters their bonnets. The churches to the west maintained the Eastern District of Pennsylvania name.

Those to the east, became the Southeastern District of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Eastern New York and later added "and Northern Delaware" to include the Wilmington congregation. For obvious reasons the name eventually was shortened to North Atlantic District. By 1970, the things that had divided the two districts seemed less significant and Eastern and North Atlantic Districts merged to form Atlantic Northeast District. ANE Brethren found a way to live with some differences for a time and most of those issues eventually resolved. —Don Fitzkee

An invitation into the Old Testament

Fire by Night is a beautifully written invitation into the church's First Testament, what we commonly refer to as the Old Testament.

Some people wonder why Christians bother with the Old Testament, and in some congregations the Old Testament is rarely used for scripture reading or sermons. If you find yourself in the company of those who question the value of the Old Testament for today's church, Melissa Florer-Bixler's book just might change your opinion.

Florer-Bixler, pastor of Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church, explores portraits of God in the Old Testament that can, and should, speak to us today. Her writing is reflective and meditative. Each of the 11 chapters in her book could easily serve as a basis for one's daily meditation or prayer time.

Each chapter connects an aspect of God's identity with a particular biblical passage. The author's preaching ability shines through each chapter when she connects biblical passages to her experiences as a parent, pastor, and neighbor and tells stories that illustrate the message. She draws upon a wide range of written sources, from the letters of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jew who died at Auschwitz in 1943, to Anabaptist writer Peter Dula, a religion professor at Eastern Mennonite University—to give just two examples.

In her chapter on "God of the Table," Florer-Bixler connects the story of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality in Genesis 18 to theological reflections on the Trinity and to her personal experience of baking communion bread for her church. In "God of the Vulnerable," she reflects on the fragility of life, especially for children, as she draws a connection between a vulnerable young girl in 2 Kings 5 and young children involved in a neighborhood traffic accident, and, further, to the L'Arche communities, where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together. This chapter is a good example of how Florer-Bixler can draw meaning from the smallest of details in an often-overlooked Old Testament story.




CHRISTINA BUCHER

In "God of Neighbors," Florer-Bixler connects Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," to the larger context of the book of Leviticus. She describes a visit of her church to a local Islamic Center at a time when Muslims in the US are frequently targets of hate crimes. In "God of Victims," the author uses the story of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19 to reflect on the systemic racism of the US prison system. For this section, she draws upon the work of civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander in the book *The New Jim Crow*.

Some chapters focus on contemporary social issues; others explore the sense of awe before God expressed in the Old Testament. In "God of Wonder," Florer-Bixler paints a picture of a God who wants us to delight in our world, and in "God of Birds," she writes about how Psalm 84 has helped her see all of God's creation as beloved.

One of my favorite chapters is "God of Darkness," in which she reflects on the experience of Job. I love her story about helping a nine-year-old girl in her congregation prepare a sermon for Children's Sabbath. With some fear and trembling, Florer-Bixler assigned the girl the lectionary text for that Sunday, a passage from the book of Job. Nine-year-old Hannah announced, "I don't think this story is appropriate for children." But they forged ahead anyway and, although Hannah's interpretation of the story made the pastor a little uneasy, Florer-Bixler concluded that she had reached a correct understanding of Job. Pastor Florer-Bixler writes, "Almost all of us worship a God of *quid pro quo*, a God of retribution and wagers, a God who rewards good behavior and politeness," only to discover as Job does that "the God we have come to expect has disappeared."

This book is not an argument about how to read the Old Testament. Rather, as good preachers do, Florer-Bixler models a way to wrestle with the biblical text in order to uncover its deeper meaning and applicability to our lives today. Read this book and you will be drawn into the Old Testament's stories about God. Please do read this book. 

Christina Bucher is professor of religion at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament*. **Author:** Melissa Florer-Bixler.

Publisher: Herald Press, 2019. Available from Brethren Press.

risk is to be made flesh 🌿 reward is the Word living amongst us 🌿 risk is building a boat big enough for all the animals 🌿 reward is the covenant after the storm 🌿 risk is stepping out of the boat to follow Jesus 🌿 reward is walking on water 🌿 risk is escaping the oppression of empire for the unknown desert 🌿 reward is finding God's promised peace 🌿 risk is sending your only begotten son 🌿 reward is love that does not perish 🌿 risk is investing your talents 🌿 reward is the joy of the Lord 🌿 risk is defying the unjust laws of man 🌿 reward is safety from the jaws of death 🌿 risk is going before those blinded by their power 🌿 reward is healing the blind 🌿 risk is daring to stand before a king 🌿 reward is standing up for the people of God 🌿 risk is wading into the troubled waters 🌿 reward is the river receding at our ankles 🌿 risk is asking for water to become wine 🌿 reward is seeing the miracle 🌿 risk is refusing to worship gold 🌿 reward is dancing in the flames 🌿 risk is taking in strangers 🌿 reward is having angels as your guests 🌿 risk is going into the threshing field 🌿 reward is a new family 🌿 risk is reaching out to touch the cloak 🌿 reward is healing you need 🌿 risk is to interpret the dreams 🌿 reward is wisdom to face a drought 🌿 risk is to be made flesh 🌿 reward is the Word living amongst us

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It's all interim

by Anna Lisa Gross

Don't you want to find a settled pastorate?" people often ask me. Nope.

Not only am I particularly called to interim ministry, I believe we live in a season when *all* pastorates are interim.

What *isn't* changing? We're in upheaval: public education, higher education, churches, family farms, manufacturing—our cornerstone institutions are eroding. The expectation that our children and grandchildren would live longer with bigger houses, higher income, and more opportunities than we did is no longer valid. Which geopolitical crisis, climate disaster, cyber security breach, or genetic sequencing breakthrough flashes on your news feed today?

How can our churches minister to a turbulent world? Many church people are too distracted by changes in their own lives and congregations to serve their communities. Yet by living gracefully and courageously amid change, we witness to the world.

God designed creation to be adaptable. All of life, from microorganisms to field corn to your cat to your mom, adapt through life stages and to new environments. When do we adapt graciously? When do we resist change with resentment or nostalgia?

How does our faith equip us to live creatively and courageously in a changing world?

Praying the Psalms, we put words to a range of emotions and conflicts.

Studying the parables, we hunt for Jesus' wisdom in mystery and paradox. Singing favorite hymns proclaims a faith stronger than we can daily muster. Our faith tradition overflows with resources for changing times.

How do our congregations train us to live creatively and courageously in a changing world?

Do we share honest and relevant prayer concerns, opening up the vulnerable and essential parts of our lives to one another's prayers? Are we gathering in small groups, Sunday school, and Bible studies to listen and learn God's call? Do we share a vision of God's kingdom and commit daily actions toward that vision?

If you struggle with passion, vision, focus, or commitment, don't simply blame your shallow prayer practice or sinful nature. The church is in transition—perhaps an era-marking one. Phyllis Tickle's *The Great Emergence* puts reformations in perspective. She demonstrates that about every 500 years the church has changed dramatically—Christianity emerging out of Judaism, foundational councils, the Great Schism, the Reformation—and now we're at the next 500-year mark. What will Christianity look like by 2600? Which of our reforms will last . . . at least 500 years?

Serving as an interim pastor keeps me tuned in to God's movement and call in a congregation and community. I have little stake in what feels rewarding,

successful, or even faithful, in the moment.

- Imagine a congregation called to blend with the Korean Americans in its neighborhood, which then realizes that a Korean-speaking pastor would lead this transition most faithfully.

- Imagine a congregation called to swap places with the Latino congregation worshipping in the fellowship hall. The Anglos are sparse in sanctuary pews and would be more comfortable sitting in a circle of chairs in the basement, while the growing Latino congregation fills the sanctuary.

- Imagine a congregation wearied by shaving the budget each year, stuck in maintenance mode, lacking passion or purpose for ministry. Is it time to start over as a house church and focus time and money on service?

None of these congregations senses a call to fire their pastor, but ending that employment may be essential to starting the new thing. An interim pastor can lead through this discernment, then step away at the right time. Long-term pastors can serve congregations with lightness of being if they have spiritual, financial, and social roots beyond the congregation.

When were the glory days of your church? Was it the 1950s or 1960s, when your building was built or expanded? Was it that Easter you welcomed 12 new members, including the city mayor? Was it during the civil rights movement, when

you marched and prayed with your feet?

Now that only 45 percent of people in the US attend church at least once a month (according to the Pew Research Center), we ask: Is this the end, or just another dip?

As we become the minority within the US, I anticipate deeper passion and purpose for Christianity. Consider who Christians have been when small, subversive, and set apart. That means we have to say goodbye to Christendom, to being mainstream and powerful. Shouldn't Brethren be ready for that?

Before we can embrace gifts of the next era of "church," we need to let go of the past. Just like any transition (funerals, weddings, graduation, retirement) we celebrate and honor what is ending, we say goodbye, and we open up to what comes next.

That means letting go of what we enjoyed in the past, including what seemed like "success." That may include long-term, full-time pastors (already a memory for many congregations). In the midst of changing *everything*, you can expect more pastoral transitions, too.

Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree describe this in their book *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*:

Unfortunately, we often operate out of a church paradigm that worked fifty years ago. In that era of high denominational loyalty, transitions were much less disorienting owing to off-the-shelf ministry approaches universally applied, simple programmatic paths to success (worship, Sunday school, youth group), an ample supply of ministers, and low mobility among church members. People tended to stay with a church through its transition, and the new pastor from Seattle used the same curriculum as the former pastor from Bloomington.

Today, ministry is much more localized, customized, specialized, and complex. What


works in Seattle may not work in Bloomington. The high-stress culture in which we all swim is not one in which many people can survive a long period of tumult in their primary resources for emotional and spiritual stability. They move on to another congregation.

Is your congregation talking about these changes? Our instinct is to avoid talking about something if we don't believe we have the resources to deal with that something. Most congregations I visit don't believe we have the resources to navigate denominational conflict, declining membership, lack of pastoral or lay leadership, empty or aging buildings, and dwindling budgets. As you read that sentence, does your anxiety spike?

Recall the sorry shape of the church (or pre-church Jesus followers) 2,000 years ago: Devastating conflict, including

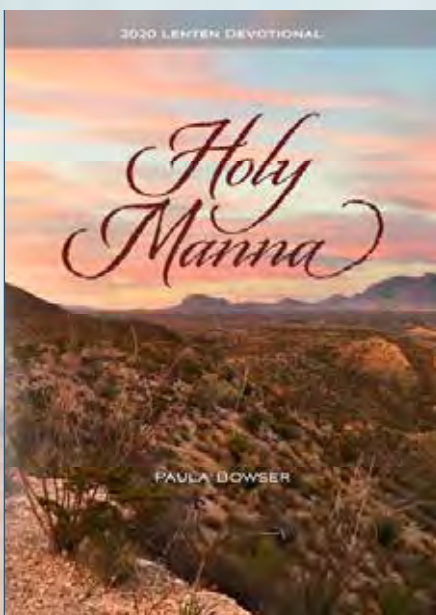
Judas' betrayal and confrontation at the Temple and with religious elite. Lack of leadership—even Peter, the rock upon which Jesus would build the church, fails and the disciples fall asleep in the garden. The threat to sacred space—the Temple's days are numbered and holy Jerusalem pulses with oppression and rebellion.

The disciples don't want to talk about change, either. When Jesus brings up his death and departure, they change the subject. Still, a small, subversive, set-apart, arguing, confused, error-prone, and broken body of believers listened and told the stories so often that they survived for us to learn.

We inherited a reformed and reforming faith. The Holy Spirit is our settled Advocate in each unsettling era. 

Anna Lisa Gross is interim pastor at Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind. An ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, she has served as a hospital chaplain and in a number of interim pastorates.

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Frances Townsend

Simple living is not simple

by Frances Townsend

It may be getting harder to tell by looking at us, at our material goods and our crowded calendars, but we have long said that simple living is foundational to being Brethren. With the earth imperiled by misuse of resources and by pollution, and with lives becoming uncomfortably frenetic, simple living could be one of the distinctive gifts that Brethren bring to the culture around us.

Tim and Wanda Joseph of Brethren, Mich., have spent their lives living out this Brethren value. Wanda remembered lessons from childhood, stories about her mother's cousin Dan West. He was a strong promoter of simple living but his wife, Lucy, was more ambivalent because while he was gallivanting around the world talking, she was home doing the farm work and housework. For her, a truly simple life would have been to turn up the thermostat when the house was



Frances Townsend

*Above: Apple making at the farm.
Top: Tim and Wanda Joseph canoeing.*

"Simplicity is the Way of Jesus, God's gift to us. The New Testament and the Holy Spirit's guidance have led the Brethren to practice this plain way. We affirm our heritage that began with people like Anna and Alexander Mack, who gave their lives and wealth for God's service until they died in material poverty and spiritual riches. Simplicity is living not conformed to the world, but transformed by Christ. Neither rules nor programs, neither simplistic answers nor legalism can fully

define the simple life. Jesus's way of simplicity is at the heart of the gospel. It is central to our faith and practice, not optional. To make it less than central is sinful. Simple living is sometimes difficult. But to those who embark on this humble journey God provides joy and peace.

"The context in which we presently respond to the simple life is one in which most of the world lives on far less than we in North America consume. Since the last conference statement on Christian lifestyle, the gap

between rich and poor in the world, in the United States, and among Brethren has widened. Many more people live in poverty. The number of children in poverty has grown. Lifestyles dominated by consumerism despoil the earth and deplete resources that could be shared with the poor. Such lifestyles separate us from the grace and humility of our lord Jesus Christ, who emptied himself for our sakes to give us another way of living."

—From "Simple Life," a 1996 Annual Conference statement

cold. But no, wood had to be cut and stacked, brought into the house, restacked, chopped into kindling, and put into the stove for the next hour of heat. In her experience, the simple life translated into a lot more work for women.

The Josephs built their house of local stone and lumber milled from trees cut on their land and in the neighborhood. The ceilings are made from 4-inch wide tongue-and-groove pine boards. Wanda recalled a thought that came to her as she installed a piece. The board had been handled so many times—logged, moved to the mill, cut into boards, planed three times, cut to length. So much work to cover four inches. As Wanda said, “Simple living is not simple in terms of human energy. The person who wants to live simply must be committed to hard work and not put the burden of that work on others.”

She pondered the purpose of this work: “The goal is to live closer to the source as much as we are able, like making rag rugs. . . . I remember my Grandma Schrock in her wheelchair braiding rag rugs. She cut strips of old, worn-out clothing to make them. You get a warmer floor, keep the fabric out of the landfill, and you share a piece of yourself as well.”


Simple living, when it is lived well, is more than paring

down and doing without. At its best, it is about deliberately adding to life, building community, and bringing more beauty into the world. It means choosing to share resources and becoming more interdependent.

The Josephs work with neighbors and church friends to make more than 100 pints of apple butter each fall. It takes a lot of people, who all enjoy the benefit of the labor.

Buying local is another choice that helps neighbors. A disabled friend depends on sales of her jewelry to pay the bills. Buying from her instead of from a big company will make a difference, \$10 or \$50 at a time.

Support using earth’s resources in a respectful way. Respecting the plants, fibers, and minerals is a way to support longer term life of the earth.

And, said Wanda, “Simple living needs to include beauty. The simple life that is stark makes no sense to me, in a world adorned with beauty. Show the children the leaves, the flowers, the rocks. Help them see and appreciate all the bounty we live in.” 

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

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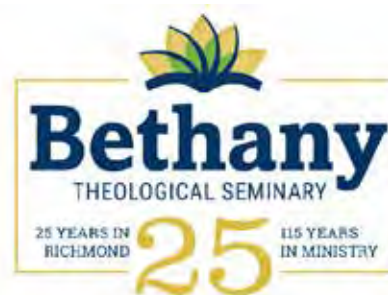
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Photos courtesy of Elaine Lindower

Risking love in Bethlehem

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

I cannot be with my family or in my home in Bethlehem,” wrote Elaine Lindower Zoughbi in an emotional Facebook post on April 5, 2019. Some 60 hours previously she had flown to Tel Aviv, Israel, on her way home to the West Bank—only to be forcibly sent to the United States. She was detained at Ben Gurion Airport, held for some 12 hours, denied entry, and deported.

It was in the late 1980s that Elaine Lindower first went to live in Israel and Palestine as a young Brethren Volunteer Service worker from Indiana. There she fell in love with Zoughbi Zoughbi, a Palestinian from the West Bank city of Bethlehem, an area under the control of Israel’s military. They married in 1990 and she made his home her home—an ancestral home near the Church of the Nativity, in a place inhabited for hundreds of years by many generations of his family.

The family maintains its roots in the Church of the Brethren as well as Zoughbi’s faith tradition, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. Their roots in the US are based in Indiana and at Manchester University. Elaine and her mother, Margaret Lindower of Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in South Bend, as well as her late father, three sisters, and several aunts, uncles, and cousins are alumni. Two Zoughbi sons have earned Manchester degrees—Lucas in 2017 and Tarek in 2015. All four of the Zoughbi children have attended college or university in the US.

There are deep roots in peacemaking on both sides of the family. As well as Elaine’s service in BVS, Zoughbi is founder of the Wi’am Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center. In 2019, Lucas Al-Zoughbi was confirmed by Annual Conference to serve on the board of On Earth Peace.

Years of uncertainty

Throughout 30 years of married life, Elaine has made her home in Bethlehem but also has traveled to the US for periods of time for various reasons including earning a master’s degree in nonprofit administration. She also has had to return to the US to renew her tourist visa to continue living with her husband in Bethlehem. This was necessary because she has been denied permanent resident status by Israel.

For the first five years of their marriage, the couple regularly applied for what is called “family unification” for Elaine to become a legal resident. “Between 1990 and 1994 we applied for family unification about every six months, and each application was denied,” Elaine said. “Then, with the Oslo Accords, spouses of Palestinians married between 1990 and 1993 were able to pay for visa extensions for one

year, and then re-apply and pay for another one-year extension before having to leave the country.”

Although the new rules allowed her to get regular tourist visa extensions, it was expensive. “We have to pay every time, sometimes for the family unification application and sometimes for the visa extension,” she said, “but it meant that I could stay for a consecutive 27 months.” Included in the cost was her airfare to the US because she had to exit Israel to receive another tourist visa. The process included applying for a 3-month automatic visa on entering Israel, and then applying for two 12-month visa extensions.

Then, in 2017, she was denied the 12-month visa extension. At that point, she began experiencing real efforts to prevent her from living in the West Bank, including delays or a complete lack of response to her applications, culminating in visa denials based on spurious excuses. She contrasts her experience to that of American friends married to Israelis, who received permanent resident status within a few months of their marriages.

During the long hours in custody in Ben Gurion Airport, she finally heard a border control officer voice the truth. The reason she has been denied visas and permanent residency? “Because you are married to a Palestinian,” he said.

Elaine gives Israel some credit for giving permanent resident status to a small percentage of foreign spouses of Palestinians. “About 2,000 per year receive it, out of 30,000-plus who have applied and have not been approved.” She added, “I’ve never met a spouse [of a Palestinian] who has received this status.”

Haaretz, a leading newspaper in Israel, told Elaine’s story earlier this year. It reported “the same uncertainty . . . afflicts thousands of other people in her situation, foreign nationals who are married to Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza, and depend on tourist visas from Israel, because Israel

ignores their right and applications for permanent resident status.”

According to *+972 Magazine*, a non-profit offering independent journalism from Israel and Palestine, the pressure on spouses of Palestinians is part of a policy of Israel “to keep foreign nationals out of the West Bank.” It affects “partners of Palestinian residents of the West Bank, parents of children who are West Bank residents, and people who have been working in the occupied territories for many years.” It includes denials of work permits as well as denials of visa applications, and the results are significant: “In a single stroke, two words—‘request denied’—are jotted down on a little note that is attached to an applicant’s passport. Within seconds, these people become illegal residents of the very place they had lived and worked for many years, and suddenly face deportation. . . . Entire families find themselves in an impossible situation, where Israel leaves them with one option—to leave.”

Difficulties continue

Since April last year, Elaine has twice managed to return home to Bethlehem by making applications to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT, a branch of the Israeli military). The application process takes up to 45 days, with no guarantee of success. She received two entry permits for three-month periods, in early summer 2019 for the wedding of son Lucas, and again in the fall. She and her family had to come up with a bank guarantee of \$20,000 (70,000 Israeli New Shekels) deposited into a bank account of the Israeli military. They forfeit the money if she stays beyond the three-month visa period. Her travel is restricted to Areas A and B, less than 40 percent of the West Bank.

Because she has been banned from Ben Gurion Airport, she must enter through the neighboring country of Jordan. It is a long and messy journey.

Last summer she traveled with her daughter and they endured lengthy waits at the Allenby Bridge crossing point and difficult conversations with border authorities. They had to plead with officials to honor her entry permit.

The COGAT permits allow a four-day window for entry into Israel. Last October, while waiting in Indiana for a response to her application, COGAT sent notice of approval on the first of those four days. She immediately flew to Jordan in an effort to cross the bridge in time—only to find it closed for the Sabbath. She spent a night in Jordan and managed to cross very early the next morning, arriving in Bethlehem on the last day she was allowed in.


Early in 2020 she must leave again. She will find herself back in the US, at the mercy of the Israeli military, with no way of knowing when she will be permitted to return to her husband and her home.

Sharing the story

Since her deportation in April, Elaine has been outspoken about what it means to be an American married to a Palestinian. She has given interviews to media. She has posted frank messages on Facebook.

“Sadness and despair have been met with overwhelming support and love,” she wrote in one of those posts. “I have been messaged, called, and contacted by friends, family, and even strangers. They all have decided to share with my family’s pain, offer words of love, encouragement, and support, and take action to help spread awareness and put an end to this injustice.”

“Besides this one event,” wrote her son, Tarek, on Facebook, “my people, my family, and I still suffer the other realities and consequences of occupation and of living life under systems of oppression and injustice.

“I could be romantic and say this about family reunification: Love is one of Israel’s greatest security risks.” 

This year MESSENGER is focusing its Bible studies on 10 words that rose to the top during the church-wide conversations toward a compelling vision. Watch for a new word each month.

Forgiveness

by Ruth Aukerman

It is Peter who opens up his big mouth with this question about limitations for forgiveness. But does he not also speak for the rest of the disciples as well as for you and me? Don't we all come to a point when we simply have had enough?

Peter is not asking about how to deal with outsiders—sinners in general—but how to deal with the brothers and sisters within the church family. How long do we have to put up with them? How long do I have to put up with you, and you with me? Seventy times seven?

But is this magic multiplied number really the limit? Actually, this is the same number used in relation to vengeance in the book of Genesis when the Lord proclaims, “Not so, whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance” (Genesis 4:15). And later in that chapter Lamech expands this promise: “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold” (verse 24). Seventy-sevenfold was a number beyond comprehension at the time, meaning limitless.

In other words, there is no end to forgiveness. Jesus continues to make his point by telling what might be the most haunting of his parables, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

It is the story of someone who owed a huge debt, ten thousand talents. One talent was equivalent to more than 15 years of wages. How in the world could such a sum be paid off?


This debtor, mind you, is you and me. We owe God big time. Some artists have tried to show the immensity of our debt by depicting a soul on a scale that has no counterweight. We remain “shackled by a heavy burden,” as the song says.

We do not like to see ourselves that way. In fact, many of us often think that it is God who owes us. Sometimes we even put God on trial, accusing him of all that is wrong in the world.

But the debtor in Jesus's story knew that he was doomed, that he was to be sold together with wife and children and all his belongings. He fell on his knees and pleaded for mercy. The lord in the story did have pity on him. He did not just give him more time to pay back the debt; he did not simply reduce the amount owed; but he forgave all of it, every penny! Who in the world can afford to do this?

How did the servant in the story feel when all he owed was forgiven, the slate was clean, and he could rise to his feet and walk away a free man? How does someone on death row feel when at the last minute the death sentence is commuted? How did we feel as children when our parents forgave us? Or as adults when our broken marital relationship or betrayed friendship was given a new start through forgiveness?

However, the servant in Jesus' parable soon picked up



FORGIVENESS FROM OUR HEART WILL BECOME EASIER WHEN WE INDEED REALIZE JUST HOW MUCH WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN AND HOW MUCH WE CONTINUE TO BE IN NEED OF FORGIVENESS.

his life as if this amazing miracle had not happened. When he saw a fellow servant who owed him a fraction of a fraction of what he owed the lord, he demanded payment and had no compassion whatsoever. In fact, he had him thrown into prison until the debt could be paid.

This makes us feel righteously indignant, upset that someone who was given so much would have no pity on someone who owed a lot less. This may remind us of cases where banks are bailed out but then foreclose on the little guy.

But remember this parable is told to help us see a much deeper dilemma. Each one of us owes God not just for occasional trespassing or little white lies, not even for bigger sins, but we owe God everything. If we look at our lives clearly and begin to see how messed up we are, how overwhelming the debt is, and what God needed to do to redeem it, the immensity of his forgiveness and the price paid blows our minds.

Too often we take God for granted. We go on with business as usual. When we come across someone who owes us, we make the person pay in some way. It is easier to point out the sins of others than to look at our own. It is easier to take on the role of prosecutor or judge than that of the defendant. "Judge not so you will not be judged!"

Why is it that I, saved by grace and grace alone, still have so much trouble forgiving others? Is it because most of our worldly justice systems are based on retribution and ven-

geance? God's justice, though, is restoration and salvation from that system.


And yet there is a limit. When the lord in this parable learns about how the man acted toward his fellow servant, he was outraged. He called back the unforgiving servant and reversed everything. "You wicked slave! . . . Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave as I have had mercy on you?" And then he ordered severe punishment for the one whom he had saved from doom before.

That is God's justice. That is why Christians and non-Christians alike keep wrestling with the question of whether a loving God can be just and a just God be loving.

The implications are sobering: "So my heavenly Father will also do to everyone of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." This statement can be read as one of the strongest arguments against the claim of many who believe that "once saved, always saved." Can we indeed lose our own salvation if we refuse to forgive our brothers and sisters from the heart?

Forgiveness from our heart will become easier when we indeed realize just how much we have been forgiven and how much we continue to be in need of forgiveness. We then can begin to see our brothers and sisters, our family members, and even those who have done us terrible wrong with the eyes of Jesus, who on his cross still called out, "Father forgive, for they do not know, what they are doing!" Seventy times seven becomes our way to break with the systems of retribution and vengeance, and instead continue the work of God's salvation and unending love.

In *Les Misérables*, the convict Jean Valjean is released from prison after serving 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread and for subsequent attempts to escape from prison. When he arrives at the town of Digne, no one is willing to give him shelter. Desperate, Valjean knocks on the door of the bishop of Digne. Bishop Myriel treats Valjean with kindness, and Valjean repays the bishop by stealing his silverware. When the police arrest Valjean, Myriel covers for him, claiming that the silverware was a gift. This act of mercy changes the criminal, not instantly but profoundly. He is saved by grace.

May we, who are being saved by grace day by day, continue to live the love and forgiveness of our Lord Jesus toward all who knock at our door. So help us God! 

Ruth Aukerman is pastor of Glade Valley Church of the Brethren in Walkersville, Md.



THE 490TH SIN

A BRUTAL CRIME TESTS THE LIMITS OF FORGIVENESS

by Thomas Patrick-Joseph Hanks

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22 KJV).

Over the years, I have enjoyed reading the stories from MESSENGER that challenge our faith, where members of the church overcome evil with love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Jesus calls us to forgive an uncountable number of times. I may be able to count to 490. But to keep track of 490 wrongs? How can I keep track for all the people who have wronged me over the years?

Still, I didn't have a problem with forgiveness until Sept. 1, 2017. I was awakened by a ringing telephone at 4 a.m.

It was my youngest brother, John, calling. "Thomas, I have some bad news."

Expecting that someone in the family must have died, I asked, "What is it?"

"Lauren is dead." It didn't compute. I thought that he was telling me our 58-year-old sister, Laurie, had died. He corrected me.

"No, Lauren is dead."

But Lauren was only 29. "What happened?" I asked.

"Matt killed her." Matt had married Lauren just 10 months earlier. My family and I had driven from our home


in West Virginia to attend their wedding in Raleigh, N.C. I even took Sunday off, so we could stay and enjoy the dinner and dancing that would follow. He was such a sweet young man. Very playful. Since Lauren was a woman of deep faith, the fact that Matt had studied at a Bible college seemed perfect. It appeared that they were very much in love.

Now, a mere 10 months later, my brother was describing the few details we had of the murder. I was trying to hold it all together for John's sake. We shared our plans for travel to Raleigh to be with Lauren's parents and sisters during this horrible time of grief.

We spent a week together. I tried to support my sister, brother-in-law, and nieces, but I was grieving, too. When we finally left, I felt like I had unfinished business. So I went back a couple weeks later to spend another week with my sister. Little by little, the grisly details of the crime came to light.

Matt had attacked Lauren in her sleep with a butcher knife from their kitchen. As he began to stab her, she tried to fight him off. During the struggle she fell from the bed and landed on the floor. He continued his assault, stabbing her 123 times with such force that the knife penetrated bones.

In a private blog he had written that he finally found an "angel to kill." He asked, "What would it feel like to actually kill someone?" He urged people to worship Satan.



IT SEEMS THAT EACH TIME I GET TO THE PLACE WHERE I MIGHT BE ABLE TO SAY, “I FORGIVE YOU, MATT,” THE BLADE COMES BACK TO INFLICT YET ANOTHER WOUND.

Then, to add insult to injury, the press was unkind. In seeking to share the sensational news story, they asked pointed, painful, and unkind questions during our time of grief. But the cruelest act of all was when they erroneously reported that Matt was a pastor.

In the midst of all of this, I am trying to figure out a way to forgive him. But I just cannot quite do it.

Every time I see one of my family members suffer because Lauren is no longer with us, the grief and anger come rushing back. It's like I can feel Matt's blade slashing at my own heart.

A couple months after Lauren's death, we attended another niece's wedding. It was a beautiful celebration at the Coast Guard Academy Chapel in Connecticut. My 14-year-old, Hope, asked me, “Daddy, what if the same thing happens to Anna that happened to Lauren?” Slash!

I tried to assure her that it would not, although privately I would have to admit that the same thought had crossed my own mind. Slash!

But worst of all, my beautiful daughter began cutting her arm. It went on for about two years. Despite her confession that she didn't want to live, whenever we would take her to a psychiatrist she would deny an intention to kill herself. Slash!

She was diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and post traumatic stress disorder. Slash, slash, slash.

We finally committed her to a psychiatric hospital. She wept several times on the way to the hospital. Each time we visited her, she begged us to take her home, weeping as she did. Slash!

When she revealed the reason for the cuttings, my heart was slashed again. She suffers panic attacks brought on by a recurring nightmare in which she is being stabbed by a faceless man. Slash!

How many times and in how many ways will this one man's act of violence do violence to me and to my family?

It seems that each time I get to the place where I might be able to say, “I forgive you, Matt,” the blade comes back to inflict yet another wound.

Four hundred and ninety times, Jesus said, we should forgive those who wrong us. It's a ridiculously large number. If I were to try to keep track of it, I would lose count. Yet, it is indeed what he asks. I am beginning to understand

that each one of these slashes to my own heart is one more sin I must forgive. But how?

The more I pondered the question, the more the Lord pointed me to Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (KJV).


That word “substance” has several meanings. First, it is the matter of which something exists in the physical. Something that a person can reach out and touch. Kind of like the realm of God itself. Jesus said that it was at hand—that it was so close one could reach out and touch it. Faith is the belief that the things God promised will come to pass.

Second, substance can mean ground, in the sense of something that is firm enough one can stand on it. In other words, I can depend on faith. This verse is the introduction to a recitation of the faith of the heroes and heroines of our faith. It notes that most of these men and women received a promise which they believed, even though the promise was not fulfilled in their lifetimes.

Which brings us to the third meaning of substance: confidence. Faith is more than believing. It is trusting that God will do for us what God did for Moses and for Paul. God equipped them to do that which he called them to do yet—without God's power—they would be unable to do.

So, if God equipped them, by faith I can expect that he will do the same for me. God will give me the power to forgive. Is God waiting for me to perceive the 490th sin, to make my forgiveness complete? I don't know. Still, my quandary reminds me of the confidence of Henry Alford, who writes in our hymn “We walk by faith”:

Help then, O Lord, our unbelief,
and may our faith abound
to call on you when you are near,
and seek where you are found:
that when our life of faith is done,
in realms of clearer light,
we may behold you as you are
in full and endless sight.

By the eyes of faith I believe that one day, God will give me the strength to say, “Matt, I forgive you.” 

Thomas Patrick-Joseph Hanks is pastor of Williamsburg and Fairview Churches of the Brethren in Williamsburg, Pa.



courtesy of Jon Hess

What I learned from skydiving

by Jon Hess

Last summer I learned to skydive. The most common question people ask is what happens if your parachute doesn't open. As it turns out, that problem is fairly uncommon, and it's only one of many risks we work to mitigate. But a good canopy deployment is certainly the most essential element of a safe dive. And it's something you can never be assured of before you jump. You simply have to have faith.

As I drove home from one of my early jumps, I found myself reflecting on matters of faith. I have often seen my faith in God as an abstract concept. But jumping out of a plane two and a half miles in the air solely on the expectation that my canopy will deploy reminded me that faith is a very concrete motivating force.

The writer in James tells us that our faith should cause tangible actions (James 2:14-26). "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? . . . Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." To say we have faith and not act on it calls into question the authenticity of our faith. Do you *truly* believe something if your actions are inconsistent?

I have faith in my parachute, and as a result I jump out of airplanes. I also have faith in God. What do I do as a result of that faith? What specific actions are different than if I had no faith? I found myself pondering that question as I drove and, while I could easily point out general dispositions, specific actions were harder to delineate with certainty.

Are the answers clear for you? More important, do the reverse: *What do your actions tell you about your faith?* The answer to this question will tell you what real presence God has in your life—and perhaps, how strong and authentic your faith really is. Our actions are driven by our deepest held beliefs.


For a successful dive, faith is not enough. I also have to understand and master essential skills. Flying with other jumpers requires nuanced body control to complete dive sequences and avoid dangerous collisions. Safe landings demand accuracy and timing. While my gear is pretty reliable, my flying skills are a work in progress.

And so it goes with living our faith. That too requires knowledge and skills—insight to discern God's will and to understand how scriptural guidance given to different people in a different time informs our choices in today's world. And, it requires skills to put that guidance into action, often taking a more difficult path than easier alternatives.

While I regularly come up short—both in the sky and in Christian living—God never fails. I know God will always act in a perfect manner. Of course, our limited human perception can lead to flawed judgment and to blame God when things don't go as we think they should. Fortunately, I also have faith that, if I could understand life in the way God does, I would understand how God's actions are always worthy.

Ironically, I have more faith in God's right actions than my own, even though I have proof of my own existence and only have faith in God's. I also have proof of my own ignorance and fallibility. Thank goodness God loves us even with all our flaws.

Skydiving is not a sport learned easily. It takes hundreds of jumps and a lot of coaching to develop the skills you see in videos.

The same is true in spiritual matters. Living the life God wants for us takes a lot of practice—and help from others—to do well. With faith and the actions that follow, that promises to be an exciting and worthwhile adventure. 

Jon Hess is a professor of communication at the University of Dayton and a member of Beavercreek Church of the Brethren in Dayton, Ohio.

JUMPING OUT OF A PLANE TWO AND A HALF MILES IN THE AIR SOLELY ON THE EXPECTATION THAT MY CANOPY WILL DEPLOY REMINDED ME THAT FAITH IS A VERY CONCRETE MOTIVATING FORCE.

Brethren gather to discern a global alliance

Meeting in Kwarhi, Nigeria, representatives from Church of the Brethren bodies around the world gathered Dec. 2-5, 2019, to discuss the vision of becoming a global church body. Representatives came from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Spain, and Nigeria, with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) as host.

The 23 people—18 men and 5 women—included the EYN president, vice president, and general secretary. Jay

Wittmeyer, Global Mission and Service executive, and Jeff Boshart, director of the Global Food Initiative, attended from the US. Representatives from Brazil, India, and Venezuela were unable to attend either due to difficulties in procuring visas or for other political reasons. Carol Waggy from the US also was unable to get a visa.

The conference tested the US proposal that autonomous Brethren groups should develop a global structure for the Church of the Brethren. Unanimously, representatives affirmed their hopes for establishment of a global body and shared how such a structure might positively affect their communities and the broader church witness. Many expressed the need to magnify the Brethren voice for peace and hoped such a structure might reaffirm Brethren beliefs and practices, give a deep sense of Brethren identity, and be a vehicle to develop shared mission programming.

Participants also discussed concerns about a lack of resources, difficulty in procuring visas to travel, fears of discrimination and prejudice, and concerns that the body could identify and agree to adhere to shared biblical principles.

The group recommended that a temporary board be established to work toward a constitution, develop guiding principles, and define points for sharing resources and programming. The Nigerian Brethren suggested Global Brethren Communion be used as a temporary name.



Brethren Service Europe office closes

The Brethren Service Europe office has been closed. It was hosted at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Switzerland, and had served as the center of Church of the Brethren presence in Europe for some 72 years.

Most recently the office centered on placement and supervision of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) workers in Europe. For more than three decades it was staffed by Kristin Flory, who has retired.

Factors in the decision to close the office included cutbacks in the denominational budget, fewer BVSers serving in Europe, and difficulty in acquiring visas for BVSers to work in European countries. BVS project sites in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are expected to continue.

The office was first established in February 1947 by the Brethren Service Commission (BSC), the group responsible for Church of the Brethren relief and rehabilitation work after World War II.

In 1968-69 the work of the BSC was merged with the mission work of the denomination, including BVS. Over several decades, those who staffed the office continued a tradition of engaging with places suffering from war and violence including Northern Ireland and the Balkans. The staff served as Church of the Brethren representatives participating in historic peace church consultations, engaging with ecumenical leadership at the WCC, and at times with world leaders at the United Nations in Geneva.



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Delegation visits Kurdistan

During fall 2019, **Nathan Hosler**, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan with Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), and Erik Apelgårdh of the



World Council of Churches. Hosler is chair of the board of CMEP, where the Church of the Brethren is one of nearly 30 member communions.

The group met with church leaders, humanitarian organizations, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Church leaders spoke of the displacement and severe decrease of their members in recent years. Their numbers have dropped from 1.5 million Christians before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, to some 200,000 at present.

Among other activities the delegation also visited with the Christian Peacemaker Team near the Turkish border and heard of CPT's accompaniment and human rights documentation of cross-border bombing by Turkey.

Brethren Disaster Ministries changes sites

Brethren Disaster Ministries made changes in its rebuilding project sites as 2019 closed out and the new year began.

In the Carolinas, ongoing work will focus on Robeson County, N.C.

In Puerto Rico, a project rebuilding homes affected by hurricane damage has been extended to May 2020, with Carrie Miller continuing as site leader.

In Florida, Brethren Disaster Ministries is working on recovery from 2017's Hurricane Irma. A short-term site in Jacksonville that started in September 2019 was to close around Christmas. Tampa is the new site for spring 2020.

Annual Conference preachers announced

The names of those preaching for daily worship services at Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich., July 1-5 have been announced. The Conference will devote significant time to a compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren. Though other business will be entertained, no polity/structural changes will be considered in 2020.

Moderator **Paul Munday** speaks on the opening evening, July 1.

Richard Zapata, a pastor of Santa Ana (Calif.) Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren, preaches on July 2.

Sister-and-brother team **Chelsea Goss and Tyler Goss** of Virginia bring the message July 3.

Beth Sollenberger, executive minister for South Central Indiana District, preaches July 4.

Patrick Starkey, chair of the Mission and Ministry Board, leads the Sunday morning service on July 5.

Personnel notes

Jay Wittmeyer has resigned as executive director of Global Mission and Service, effective Jan. 13. He has spent 11 years in the position, since Jan. 5, 2009. He has supervised Brethren Disaster Ministries and Material Resources, Brethren Volunteer Service, the Global Food Initiative, and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, as well as holding primary responsibility for the mission work of the denomination. During his tenure, new and emerging church groups have been nurtured in Haiti, Spain, the Great Lakes region of central Africa, and Venezuela. South Sudan also has been a priority. He has strengthened relationships with Church of the Brethren denominations in Brazil, Dominican Republic, India, and Nigeria, where he worked with leaders of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria during the most extreme violence of the Boko

Haram insurgency. A culminating accomplishment was "Vision for a Global Church," adopted by Annual Conference in 2018 and opening the possibility for an international conference on a global structure for the Church of the Brethren held in December. His career also included two years with Brethren Benefit Trust, where he was director of the Brethren Pension Plan and employee financial services.

Kristin Flory has retired as Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) staff at the Brethren Service Europe office in Geneva, Switzerland. She served in the position for almost 33 years, since 1987. Her work included supervision of more than 300 BVS volunteers in many different countries, maintaining working relationships with each project site and organizing annual retreats for the volunteers. Under her leadership, BVSers served at projects

focused on peace and reconciliation—sometimes in war and conflict zones, worked with children and families, lived in community with people with disabilities, worked with refugees and homeless people, and more. She also continued relations with European ecumenical organizations. In addition to her work with BVSers, Flory was the denomination's Europe representative and served in that capacity at annual meetings of ecumenical and peace organizations and at European church events and conferences.

Roxane Hill concluded her position as coordinator of the Nigeria Crisis Response at the end of 2019. Her work with Nigeria-related efforts of Global Mission and Service has totaled five years. The Nigeria Crisis Response is not ending, but programming is being reduced. The response is expected to continue through 2021.

Please send information for *Turning Points* to Diane Stroyeck, 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120; 800-323-8039, ext. 327; dstroyeck@brethren.org. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

Centenarians

Barkley, Minnie, 100, Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct. 14
Branner, Frances, 100, Bridgewater, Va., Sept. 3
Fleishman, Grace, 104, Bridgewater, Va., Oct. 20
Smith, Iris, 101, Oakwood, Ga., Oct. 17

New members

Fairview, Cordova, Md.: Monika Ireland
Grossnickle, Myersville, Md.: Brianna Blickenstaff, Grace Ellis, Natalie Flook, Mackenzie Grossnickle, Madryn Hanser, Keri Horine, Patrick Mahoney, Lilly Rumpf, Olivia Zeigler
Lincolnshire, Fort Wayne, Ind.: Felicia Double, Marissa Double, Aaron Swaidner, Mario Vasquez
Peters Creek, Roanoke, Va.: Karly Arrington, George Copeland, Briana Keith, Betty Kropff, Joseph Kropff, Adrianna Louthen, Chelsea Louthen, Tisha Rawat
Plumcreek, Shelocta, Pa.: Eugene Kimmel, Mary Kimmel, Alice Simmons, Keith Simmons
Salamonic, Warren, Ind.: Aubrey Landrum, Kelsie Ludemann, Luke Szelis, Gene Wright
Sipesville, Pa.: Elizabeth Pearl Foust, Karen Herwig, David Trevarrow, Raquel Trevarrow
Wyomissing, Pa.: Dana Ramsey, John Steffy, Kelly Steffy

Wedding anniversaries

Anderson, Elmer and Donna, Hampstead, Md., 50
Bolt, Kenneth and Esther, Rohrsersville, Md., 66
Boyers, Auburn and Ruth, Bridgewater, Va., 60
Brinkmeier, Neil and Judy, Amboy, Ill., 50
Coplen, Carl and Betty, Rapid City, S.D., 75
Cott, Al and Barbara, Lancaster, Pa., 55
Flory, Alan and Barbara, Apple Valley, Calif., 50
Herr, Paul and Thelma, East Petersburg, Pa., 70
Kercher, Bob and Hilda, Reading, Pa., 71
Lape, Robert and Dolores, Davidsville, Pa., 66
Marshall, Rick and Jane, Easton, Md., 50
Moyers, Clarence and Elizabeth, Harrisonburg, Va., 66
Mummau, Gene and Kathy, Lancaster, Pa., 60
Ott, Marlin and Ruth, Stoystown, Pa., 60
Rankin, Stanley and Amy, Uniontown, Pa., 55
Replogle, James and Carol, New Oxford, Pa., 65
Stump, Carl and Gladys, Roanoke, Va., 75
Swank, Donald and Marlene, Plymouth, Ind., 65
Turner, Neil and Margaret, Harrisonburg, Va., 70
Wine, Ray and Ann, Bridgewater, Va., 69

Deaths

Albaugh, Doris Louise Niswander, 86, Westminster, Md., Oct. 25
Alexander, David Paul, 77, Plymouth, Ind., Oct. 29
Anderson, Catherine I. Wolfe, 90, Hampstead, Md., Feb. 7
Bowman, Wilma Elaine Krall, 68, Cerro Gordo, Ill., Nov. 11

Brown, Leila Erisman, 96, Alta Loma, Calif., Sept. 3
Burkholder, Catherine R., 66, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 10
Canfield, L. Max, 68, Stone Creek, Ohio, Sept. 27
Chaney, Gregory W., 69, Troy, Ohio, Nov. 2
Cole, Mary Ellen Myers, 87, Plymouth, Ind., Aug. 22
Dickson, James David, 70, Mount Morris, Ill., Oct. 22
Diehl, Charlotte, 90, Farmington, Pa., Nov. 13
Evans, Clelea Rae Gallatin, 86, Brook Park, Ohio, Dec. 11, 2018
Fisher, Hazel F. Rittenhouse, 88, Lewistown, Pa., Oct. 4
Folkers, Gary Lee, 80, Waterloo, Iowa, Nov. 25
Frace, Ray W., Jr., 81, Lancaster, Pa., Oct. 1
Glessner, Curt, 90, Waterloo, Iowa, Nov. 13
Green, Mary Katherine Slifer, 95, Mount Morris, Ill., Oct. 5
Harris, Howard Leroy, 83, Ashland, Ohio, Oct. 30
Hershberger, Dorothy Marie Lehman, 91, Martinsburg, Pa., Sept. 26
Hickman, Betty, 84, Brook Park, Ohio, Sept. 7
Hission, Mary Ellen, 96, Plymouth, Ind., Sept. 4
Hoffer, Irma G., 89, Palmyra, Pa., Nov. 17
Holobinko, Charles, Jr., 80, Chambersburg, Pa., Nov. 19
Igou, Helen Marcella Beers, 90, Roaring Spring, Pa., Oct. 12
Keener, Ollie E. Kirkpatrick, 84, Mansfield, Ohio, Sept. 13
Keim, Thelma F. Rummel, 83, Hollsopple, Pa., July 17
Leininger, Verne Henry, 80, Goshen, Ind., Oct. 14
Long, Gwendolyn Romaine Honsaker, 97, Hagerstown, Md., Nov. 10
McGuire, Donna J. King, 86, Duncansville, Pa., Nov. 3
Meyer, Ruth, 92, Mount

Morris, Ill., May 3
Moses, Joseph Samuel, 84, Brook Park, Ohio, May 4
Owens, Glenna Robison Bobb, 94, Springfield, Ohio, Oct. 12
Quintrell, Ruby Virginia Cabbage, 85, Harrisonburg, Va., June 2
Reinecker, Gene Hayden, 92, McPherson, Kan., Oct. 29
Reisinger, Paul Cecil, 79, Springfield, Ohio, Aug. 28
Richardson, Lonnie Leslie, 89, Greensboro, N.C., Oct. 13
Riley, Jobie E., 91, Elizabethtown, Pa., Oct. 21
Rogers, Nancy Anne, 78, Lebanon, Pa., Nov. 8
Romick, Betty Reynolds, 95, Alleman, Iowa, Oct. 26
Shaulis, Mary Kathryn Schmucker, 91, Sipesville, Pa., Oct. 11
Strine, Virgil D., 84, Myrtle Beach, S.C., March 13
Vanas, Patsy, 81, Grand Rapids, Mich., Oct. 21
Vinck, Leona J., 87, Olmsted Falls, Ohio, July 15
Wheeler, Wayne E., 96, New Philadelphia, Ohio, Oct. 20

Ordained

Aikens, Larry, Jr., Shen. Dist. (Bethel, Broadway, Va.), Nov. 10
Allebach, Lynne, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Hatfield, Pa.), Nov. 10
Augustin-Badet, Founa, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Eglise Des Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), Oct. 13
Hollenberg, R. Eugene, N. Ind. Dist. (Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.), Oct. 27
Sanders Nkosi, LaDonna, Ill. & Wis. Dist. (York Center, Lombard, Ill.), Oct. 20

Commissioned

Short, Jackson, Mo. & Ark. Dist. (Warrensburg, Mo.), Nov. 10

Licensed

Champ, Shawn, W. Marva Dist. (Brick, Maysville, W. Va.), Oct. 27
Edwards, Robin, W. Marva Dist. (Georges Creek, Lonaconing, Md.), Nov. 10
Ladd, Connor, N. Ind. Dist. (Columbia City, Ind.), Sept. 8
Rinehart, Dylan, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Pipe Creek, Union Bridge, Md.), Oct. 27
Woodcox, Aaron, N. Ind. Dist. (Walnut, Argos, Ind.), Oct. 6
Wright, Cynthia, Atl. N. E. Dist. (East Cocalico, Stevens, Pa.), Oct. 27

Placements

Allebach, Lynne, team pastor, Hatfield, Pa., Nov. 10
Ball, Timothy, interim pastor, Emmanuel, Mount Solon, Va., Nov. 11
Cooper, Ryan, from pastor, Emmanuel, Mount Solon, Va., to pastor, Beaver Creek, Bridgewater, Va., Nov. 11
Dolan, Kenneth, from interim pastor, Leake's Chapel, Stanley, Va., to interim pastor, Garbers, Harrisonburg, Va., Nov. 4
Edwards, Robin, pastor, Georges Creek, Lonaconing, Md., Nov. 10
Jones, Gregory, from pastor, West York, York, Pa., to pastor of discipleship and evangelism, Frederick, Md., Oct. 20
Leighton-Harris, Laura, from pastor, Peace, Council Bluffs, Iowa, to pastor, Dallas Center, Iowa, Sept. 1
Short, Jackson, team pastor, Warrensburg, Mo., Nov. 10
Sites, Timothy, from pastor, Fairview, Endless Caverns, Timberville, Va., to interim pastor, Leake's Chapel, Stanley, Va., Oct. 13
Woodcox, Aaron, pastor, Walnut, Argos, Ind., Oct. 13

CLASSIFIEDS

Attention Genealogists: *Allegheny Passage*, the history of churches in West Marva District from 1752, offers not only details of churches but also more than 800 pages of extensive research that was carried out on pioneer families of the congregations. Written by Dr. Emmert

Bittinger, this is an exceptional and authoritative tool for those doing research of families who moved westward across our nation. Books sell for \$40 plus \$5 shipping. Please email WestMarva@brethren.org for more information.

Cascades

by Ken Frantz

Early morning ice layered onto the branches of our hackberries and American elms. A fortnight of declining temperatures set the stage as Christmas moved toward New Year's. An unhappy coincidence of fog, mist, and sub-freezing temperatures loaded even the smallest twigs to their breaking point.

Luckily, the cold moderated just enough. The stalemate broke and small chunks of ice wrestled free of the topmost branches, allowing gravity to do the rest. It took only the smallest pieces of falling ice to create a cascade of increasing size, speed, and intensity.

A cascade is a cumulative process, a sequence with each tier activating another. In the case of the falling ice, the cascades began quietly, rose to a crescendo, and then dissipated when they ran out of kinetic fuel. Each group of trees appeared to take their turn, unburdening themselves from the grip of ice that lay upon them. To truly appreciate the process required being quiet for a time and listening for the sound, somewhat hollow and wood-like. All else appeared on hold until the chorus came to a close, with a smug and triumphant sun finally seizing the day.

We humans are also affected by cascades. Information cascades arise from single events or transactions that quickly broaden, embracing alternate views and interpretations and adding complex layers to the final result. Like falling ice, information cascades generate movement that starts small and quickly grows larger. Once begun, cascades take on a life of their own until their fuel is spent. Their origins are not always clear, but they result in both short- and long-term effects in society and in the life of our

churches. They can be somewhat unruly, even when they occur out of the best intent.

If the intent is positive and good, the cascade will reflect that goodness, drawing others in even though it may be short-lived. The opposite can be said for cascades of a malevolent variety, those that do not reflect the best ele-


ments of faith and hope. They become damaging ice that accumulates until something gives, releasing energy into the spiritual community that is neither helpful nor representative of the faith.

We dress up information cascades to make them acceptable in the church community even when they are not.

Addressing members of the early house churches of Corinth, the apostle Paul expresses his anxiety and unease over directions some have taken. "For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder" (2 Corinthians 12:20). These cascading elements are nearly always damaging at some level. Imagine, for example, the fine line between prayer chains

that seek God's wholeness and ones that serve as sources of gossip. Either can represent a cascade event.

We are spiritual wanderers. We have the opportunity and free will to create cascades of a higher order, ones that embody the peace and presence of the Holy Spirit, ones that merit the attention of others rather than driving them away.

What fresh cascades will we get caught up in as the new year unfolds? We are no mere observers. It is up to us. 



THE STALEMATE BROKE AND SMALL CHUNKS OF ICE WRESTLED FREE OF THE TOPMOST BRANCHES, ALLOWING GRAVITY TO DO THE REST. IT TOOK ONLY THE SMALLEST PIECES OF FALLING ICE TO CREATE A CASCADE.

Ken Frantz is a nonsalaried ordained pastor serving Haxtun (Colo.) Church of the Brethren. He lives near Fleming, Colo., and writes regularly for the local newspaper.



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AC 2019 photos by Laura Brown, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Keith Hollenberg and Glenn Riegel.



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