

MESSENGER

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

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on the cover *Madison Avenue Church of the Brethren in York, Pa. Photo by David Wolfe. Left: Pastor Keith Hollenberg took a group of youth to a fish farm last year. Many of the youth had never been fishing before, and each one took some fish home for supper that night.*

For the common good

Each February, the staff of the Church of the Brethren gather for two days of reconnecting with each other, hearing updates, and engaging in professional growth. Some work in places other than the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., so it's an opportunity for coworkers to spend time together.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

It's a diverse group. But a few weeks ago when individuals shared one thing they especially liked about their jobs, it was clear they had a lot in common.

For many staff, it's the people. One likes meeting church members and hearing stories of what they're passionate about. For another, it's helping people solve problems. One likes becoming acquainted with those being trained for Children's Disaster Service. Another likes working with youth to plan events. One likes working with writers. For another, it's meeting people from across the denomination. One likes getting to know the new volunteers at Brethren

Volunteer Service orientations. Another likes visiting with people and finding out what they love about the church.

Other staff highlighted the variety within the work—"it's never boring" and "I learn something every day." They mentioned creativity, including photography and writing. Doing meaningful work that makes a difference. And knowing in advance that each day's work will be interesting. For one person, the especially enjoyable task was working on MESSENGER.

What about you? As you engage in the ministry of the church, what brings you joy?

Do you like opening up the Bible text so that it comes alive for other people? Do you enjoy welcoming children into a Sunday school class? Do you extend the love of Jesus through food cooked in your church kitchen? Do you press for justice and righteousness in your community and your world?

We don't all have the same job, but we are enlivened by the same Spirit: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

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

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

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

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Tim Heishman

A Nigerian feast

On Jan. 11, Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren in Kettering, Ohio, hosted a Nigerian meal prepared by recent Bethany

Seminary graduate Hassan Dicks and current Bethany student Patricia Doka Amos. The sibling duo prepared a feast for about 85 people from the congregation, other district churches, and the Southern Ohio/Kentucky district board, which arranged to hold its meeting at the church that day.

The event included an overview and description of all the foods as well as instructions on the best way to eat each dish. There were different kinds of rice, stews, bread, and vegetables—including the “real yams, not sweet potatoes,” which are white in color. Nigerian-style coffee and hibiscus tea with added fruit were served. During the meal, Dicks shared information about

the history of Nigeria and the current context as well as impacts for the Nigerian church.

For the past six months, the congregation has been ministered to by Dicks, a visiting pastor. He has been gaining experience ministering within the context of the American church. After only a few weeks, he got an opportunity to go solo when pastors Katie and Tim Heishman took a month off for parental leave.



Art Fountain

“One of the most fun parts of working with him has been learning about the similarities and differences between how our different cultures ‘do church,’” say the Heishmans. “We are grateful for his powerful preaching that has inspired us, his outside perspective that has enriched us, and his wonderful sense of humor that has kept us laughing.” Dicks plans to pursue a doctorate degree in trauma heal-

ing in Pennsylvania. —Tim and Katie Heishman



BAUGO'S BLANKETS

Piles of blankets make for an unusual worship center at Baugo Church of the Brethren in Wakarusa, Ind. The congregation held a blanket drive for its annual Christmas project in 2019. The goal of collecting 100 new blankets was far exceeded when 126 blankets were received and distributed to local relief agencies.

—David Stackhouse

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.





Leonard Matheny

PEORIA'S BLESSINGS

First Church of the Brethren in Peoria, Ill., gave 19 families Christmas baskets organized by the fellowship and hospitality ministry team. The congregation donated all the canned goods, fruit, and vegetables, and the money for eggs, milk, and hams. "What a blessing it was to assemble and distribute them today! A very nice way to celebrate Christ's birthday!" wrote Leonard Matheny in a Facebook post.

Honoring BVSErs

A Sunday morning message on service that highlighted Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) was an inspiration for Jane and Gary Thompson, members at Roaring Spring (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren. They decided to commemorate those from the church who have served in BVS over the years.

A plaque with the names of 15 people who were either members of Roaring Spring when they served, or who later joined the church, was presented to Paul Witkovsky, church leadership chair and a former BVSEr himself.

The plaque will hang in the church to highlight the service of those 15 people and as an encouragement for future volunteers. —**Dave Crumrine**



Outreach achieved

Friendship Church of the Brethren in Southeastern District, averaging about 60 people in Sunday morning worship, hit a unique fiscal milestone in 2019: 58 percent of its actual expenditures went to outreach.

Much of this is the result of a resolution passed a few years ago that any amount left in the budget exceeding \$50,000 on Dec. 31 and not set aside for a particular purpose would be spent on outreach. That decision allowed left-over funds from 2018 to be given to the Church of the Brethren's Global Food Initiative; Hope Ministries, a local ministry that helps families in crisis with

food, power bills, and other necessities; a cancer patient who lives near the church; and a missionary to Honduras who was in need of a kidney transplant.

A year later, the church board again made grants from funds left over from 2019. Among them, \$5,000 is being sent to support Puerto Rico; \$3,000 is designated to a church building project at Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo; more funds were given for the cancer patient; and 40 gift cards were bought for a homeless shelter to issue for clients to purchase breakfast.

In addition, the church budgets to support disaster relief and several additional local ministries, takes up

the annual Great Hour of Sharing offering—usually exceeding \$2,000 each year—and gives to Gideon's International. This past Christmas, several children of incarcerated parents were given gifts through Angel Tree Ministries. Close to \$2,000 was raised to help finish building a church at Kabumbe in the Congo.

Another \$2,000 went to outreach through a unique effort: Friendship Church used to hire a cleaning agency, but a few years ago prepared a list of volunteers to take turns doing the cleaning. The money budgeted for cleaning now goes to support people in need in the community. —**Gary Benesh**



“Small things, great love—that’s how the mountains move. Small things, each day—give yourself away.”

—from song by Ken Medema based on words of Mother Teresa

Celebrating smallness

A little bit of trivia

■ Smallest state in the US:

- By area: Rhode Island, 1,034 square miles
- By population: Wyoming, 572,381 residents

■ Smallest county in the US:

- By area: Kalawao County, Hawaii, 11.99 square miles
- By population: Kalawao County, Hawaii, 88 residents

■ Smallest US state capital:

- Montpelier, Vt., population 7,484
- Despite its name, Little Rock, Ark., has a population of almost 200,000.

■ Smallest US national park:

- Gateway Arch National Park, Saint Louis, Mo., 90.9 acres

■ Smallest country:

- Vatican City, 0.2 square mile

■ Smallest Church of the Brethren district:

- Puerto Rico, 339 members (per 2018 denominational statistics)
- The smallest in the continental US is Missouri and Arkansas, with 412 members.

■ Disney’s “It’s a Small World” ride debuted at the New York World’s Fair in 1964. The original is now at Disneyland in California.

■ The hit TV superhero series “Smallville” ran for 10 seasons, ending in 2011. It focuses on the backstory of Clark Kent, who later takes on the identity of Superman.



Did you know?

■ More than half of congregations in the US had fewer than 100 members, according to a study by the United Methodist Church back in 2001. Within its own ranks, more than 50 percent of UMC churches had fewer than 100 people in worship on average (UMC Office of Research and Planning). Church attendance has declined significantly since then, down almost 18 percent from 2005 to 2015.

■ The National Congregations Study by Duke University found the median church size in the US was 75. More than 65 percent of congregations had an attendance under 100, and 42.7 percent had 50 or fewer. The last study was in 2015; updated results from a new study are expected this summer.

■ No Church of the Brethren congregation has “small” in its name. However, you can find Little Swatara (Bethel, Pa.), Little River (Goshen, Va.), and two Little Pines (Goshen, Ind., and Ennice, N.C.).

VISION STATEMENT

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

Jesus in the neighborhood

A compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren

Three years ago, denominational leadership recognized that we had reached a critical moment in our life together. While individuals and congregations were engaged in faithful ministry, as a denomination, it could be said we were wandering without a sense of unified purpose. Further, we were mired in soul-sapping conflict. Something needed to change.

As a body, we were called into a time of intentional discernment. Like Noah in the ark, Moses before the burning bush, the Israelites in the desert, Ruth following Naomi to Judah, Elijah on Mount Horeb, Mary during her visit with Elizabeth, Jesus entering the desert following his baptism, and Paul after he had been struck blind, for almost two years we dwelled in a challenging, disorienting, and uncomfortable, yet creative, exciting, and hopeful season of waiting

and watching for God's presence and direction.

Throughout, as a community, we were centered in Jesus Christ, guided by scripture, and led by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the emergence of a new, unifying, and compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren.

There is much in this rich vision to unpack as we look to scripture and theology to further interpret each significant phrase.

"Together, as the Church of the Brethren ..."

Bonded to Jesus Christ, we move together toward God's New Creation. In our diversity we celebrate our unity in the person and work of the Savior, celebrating the God who makes us one. We recognize we are more than individuals; we are the people of God. In a world that favors independence and solo effort, we choose interdependence and community. We do so in the context of our Church of the

Brethren heritage, living out our Anabaptist-Pietist ideals empowered by the Holy Spirit, through congregational, district, and national ministries. We believe our faith legacy lives on as we risk adventuresome acts of radical discipleship, utilizing every expression of the church, local and trans-local. In doing so, we venture forth boldly as a faith family, expectant and innovative, serving others and the God who makes all things new.

“...passionately live and share ...”

This vision calls us to passionate discipleship, requiring us to embody an enthusiastic zeal that glows from within us as we live and share with others. Our living should exhibit the vigor of one who is alive in Jesus Christ, thoroughly steeped in and guided by the Holy Spirit. The manner in which we live should radiate in our homes and communities so our good works can be seen and God may be glorified. With the same passion that we live Christ-centered lives, we are called to share generously with our neighbors, in deed and by word, what we have experienced ourselves. We share so that our neighbors and our communities may participate in the blessing of abundant life in Jesus Christ, now and for eternity.

“...radical transformation ...”

Radical transformation occurs only through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is characterized by an all-encompassing, profound change within those who place full faith and belief in God incarnate as revealed in scripture—Jesus Christ. This inner transformation manifests outwardly through a life that turns away from the values of a world alienated from God and seeks to understand and embody God’s holy values as revealed in Jesus Christ. Lives radically transformed by Jesus Christ become channels for the flow of Christ’s pow-

It is our fervent prayer that God’s vision, discerned in community and for our community, will lay claim to our hearts and our minds, our imaginations and our spirits, shaping our identity and inspiring our ministry at the congregational level, the district level, and the denominational level as we wholeheartedly embrace the challenge set before us to share—in word and deed—the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ with individuals, with our neighborhoods, with the world. For as Eugene Peterson says in his paraphrase of Proverbs 29:18: “If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what (God) reveals, they are most blessed.”

Throughout the process we heard from people who engaged in conversation with brothers and sisters with differing perspectives, sharing with honesty and vulnerability, listening with compassion, seeking understanding, finding common ground, building respectful relationships, and strengthening the bonds of unity even amidst diversity. For this we are grateful and in this we found great hope. So, aside from the resulting vision, the process has laid the foundation for a **different way of engaging** around difficult topics. We hope and pray we don’t overlook or dismiss that potential.

erful grace, unconditional love, and holistic peace in the world around us where the Holy Spirit continues to draw people into radical transformation for the glory of God.

“...holistic peace ...”

In the beginning, God created the world in Shalom. Shalom is not simply the absence of violence, but rather the presence of a holistic peace—right, or healthy, relationships in four different ways:

- between us and God;
- between us and other human beings;
- between us and ourselves;
- between us and all of creation.

In Genesis 3 all four of these relationships become broken: Adam and Eve become estranged from God, their relationship with each other becomes distorted, they know their sin and experience internal brokenness, and their relationship with animals and even the ground is cursed. The rest of the biblical story is an account of God’s varied and ongoing attempts to restore this original Shalom, ultimately culminating in sending Jesus Christ to bring about this restoration through his life, death and resurrection.

When we speak of “holistic peace” we are referring to Shalom. Since God’s kingdom is already begun, but not yet complete, we are called by God to strive for and participate in Shalom, both in small, everyday ways and in large, systemic ways. For example:

- To help others learn about Jesus and become his disciples is to participate in Shalom.
- To work to transform conflict, whether between individuals or nations, is to participate in Shalom.
- To directly address mental health issues is to participate in Shalom.
- To care for God’s creation that has been entrusted to us is to participate in Shalom.

The compelling vision itself, as well as the interpretation of that vision, is **steeped in scripture**. To read the interpretive statement complete with scriptural citations, go to www.brethren.org/compellingvision. Also available on the webpage are reports from the various conversations that took place throughout the process.

"...Jesus Christ ..."

Jesus Christ is the living Word, the Son of God, fully divine and present with God at creation. He was sent from God as a human being, walking and living in the neighborhoods of Judea proclaiming God's kingdom. We continue to delight in the presence of the living Christ through the Holy Spirit, empowering us to live as Jesus' followers in our neighborhoods. Therefore, we confess together:

- **Jesus Christ is our Redeemer**—Through God's extension of grace and our repentance, Christ's redemption delivers us from sin. Our redemption through Christ restores our broken relationship with God and our neighbors.

- **Jesus Christ is our Teacher**—Jesus' words, deeds and example are recorded in scripture, teaching us how to live in reconciled relationships with God and our neighbors.

- **Jesus Christ is our Lord**—We pledge to Christ alone our loyalty and obedience. All other loyalties are secondary to our commitment to follow Jesus as his disciples.

"...relationship-based neighborhood engagement ..."

The body of Christ is called to be generous, sharing its resources with those in need. Many congregations quickly and enthusiastically gather food, clothing, and other resources to help those who face scarcity in relation to basic, physical needs. This vision calls us to go beyond meeting physical needs to a place where we, like Jesus Christ, are walking in authentic friendship with those who share our geographic neighborhoods. This means respond-

When affirming the command to "love our neighbor," Jesus was asked the question **"Who is my neighbor?"** It is a question that the body of Christ—manifest in individual and local congregations, districts, and the denomination as a whole—is still asked to wrestle with. This vision is asking us to engage with our neighbors as the hands and feet and heart of Christ, but also to look for the ways Jesus is already present in our neighborhoods.

ing to needs and sharing our resources without partiality or condescension in the face of any differences, but rather with sensitivity, compassion, respect, and a genuine willingness to learn. It is grounded in a deep understanding that every human being stands in equal need of reconciliation with God, and when we have experienced that reconciliation we become ministers of it through trusting, faithful, long-term relationships with our neighbors.

This is well done by the body of Christ when behavior toward those both within and outside the body consistently and seamlessly embodies the call to love as Jesus Christ loved, making the "walls" of the church virtually non-existent. In these times, God is calling us to be the denomination challenging its congregations to live out a deep sense of love and care for the body, soul, and spirit of each individual with whom we are privileged to engage, and an unmistakable commitment to the overall well-being of the neighborhood. Such a focus brings deeper meaning to the motto which hung above the Sauer printing press and which many Brethren have claimed as their own: "For the glory of God and our neighbor's good."

We are one of the historic peace churches. Many participants expressed a desire not just to claim that historical commitment, but to bear witness to **the holistic peace of Jesus Christ** in the midst of our hurting and broken world today.

"...culture ..."

We will reorient the entire "nature and being" of our denomination around a missional (e.g., outwardly focused) mindset. To this end, we call every element of our denominational system (Mission and Ministry Board, Annual Conference agencies, districts, congregations) to realign their language, norms, beliefs, symbols, values, and priorities around an external focus to reach persons for Jesus Christ and his other way of living. We will create a culture of empowerment that encourages and equips the local church to reach persons with a comprehensive message of salvation, declaring Jesus Christ as Lord of all life.

It is understood that such a kingdom emphasis summons congregations to respond prophetically, systemically, and globally, even while reaching out locally. We recognize such refocus will require loss but claim the biblical hope that as some things die, there is, nevertheless, the promise of new life. We further affirm such rebirth is a gift of the Holy Spirit; thus, we recommit to a renewed denominational language of dependence on God's provision and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

“...calling and equipping ...”

It has been said that “God doesn’t call the equipped. God equips the called.” Within the Church of the Brethren, we affirm the “priesthood of all believers.” Therefore, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all called to partner in God’s ongoing work of redemption. Further, we can trust that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will equip us—individually and as a community—with all we need to do God’s will.

However, that doesn’t mean it isn’t important for us to actively call and equip people to lead us in special ways. As we embark on this journey into our neighborhoods to live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ with grace and humility, it is incumbent upon us to be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and in the lives of our neighbors, to discern the God-given gifts in one another and ourselves, to call out those among us who can lead us into our neighborhoods, and to partner with God in equipping our faith communities—through teaching, prayer, communal study of Scripture, and a consistent, faithful openness to what God is calling us to do and be.

“...disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless ...”

Discipleship connects not only the head (learning and growing in faith and knowledge) and the heart (allowing us to feel the needs of those around us); it also connects to our hands (challenging us to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in this world). Consider the disciples who walked with Jesus Christ and the radical manner in which they lived out their call. They interacted with outcasts, they engaged others in unique ways, they were molded

We are a people who claim the **priesthood of all believers**. In order for us to “passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ” in our neighborhoods, it isn’t just about leadership development and it isn’t just about the missional stance of a few. It is about discipleship formation. It is about nurturing a missional stance among all our people.


What compels you to follow Jesus?

The process of discernment was shaped by the guiding statement drafted by the Compelling Vision Working Group and affirmed by the Compelling Vision Process Team:

Confessing Jesus Christ as Teacher, Redeemer, and Lord, we desire to serve Him by proclaiming, professing, and walking in His way together bringing His peace to our broken world. Join us in reclaiming a new passion for Christ and helping set a course for our future as the Church of the Brethren serving Him in our communities and in the world!

The conversation was launched at Annual Conference in 2018 with the question “What compels you to follow Jesus?” From there, the questions asked, analysis and interpretation of the data, and even the articulation of the vision itself, reflected our commitment to this guiding statement.

and shaped into evangelists, encouragers, empathizers, and those who empowered others. Even in the first century, these radical disciples changed the way people thought about life, faith, and community. Men and women, together, demonstrated a new hope found only in Jesus Christ.

To be disciples in the 21st century, we need look no further than those first disciples and the cloud of witnesses that came after them. Disciples throughout the years were fearless in their pursuit of Jesus Christ. They were risk-takers, seeking opportunities to let go of their needs and surrender to the call of Jesus in their lives. They had courage to share the holistic peace and radical transformation Jesus Christ offered. At each step of history, disciples were innovative in sharing this transformation and peace in a constantly evolving world. New ways of connecting, sharing the gospel, and building community change with every generation. Like the disciples who preceded us, we need to be adaptable in both the means by and opportunities in which we share that hope. In a fractured culture, we must be courageous and discerning of new ways to proclaim Jesus Christ in order to passionately live out Christ’s call for our neighborhoods and world. 

The proposed vision statement will be considered by delegates at Annual Conference this summer. Members of the committee that developed the statement and accompanying words of explanation are Michaela Alphonse, Kevin Daggett, Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, Brian Messler, Alan Stucky, and Kay Weaver, along with moderators Samuel Sarpiya (2018), Donita Keister (2019), Paul Munday (2020); Chris Douglas, Annual Conference director; David Steele, general secretary; and district executives John Jantzi and Colleen Michael. The sidebar material is by Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, who chaired the committee.



Beginning with this issue and through the coming months, MESSENGER is highlighting some of the small congregations in the Church of the Brethren that aren't letting their size limit their vision for ministry. In this issue, you will also find some comparative statistics and highlights of congregations in the western part of the US, where small congregations predominate. If you have a story idea, send it to messenger@brethren.org.



Keith Hollenberg

Outreach on 'The Avenues'

York congregation finds joy in serving its city

by Walt Wiltschek

Don't let the name fool you. Madison Avenue Church of the Brethren is located nowhere near the skyscrapers and media meccas of Manhattan. The compact brick church instead sits in the smaller urban context of York, Pa. (population 44,000), and in recent years it has increasingly felt at home in its diverse neighborhood.

"The Avenues," as the area is called, stretches from the York Fairgrounds into downtown York. The blocks surrounding the church are filled with rowhouses, some stately

older homes that are now mostly apartments, a former school, and a few businesses.

Brethren came to the neighborhood in 1936, splitting off from a larger church in York. Today the congregation has about 75 members, with 50-60 attending worship on an average Sunday morning. Keith Hollenberg has served as part-time pastor of Madison Avenue since 2011, and he's delighted with the way that members have stepped up to serve.

“THIS IS A CHURCH THAT CARES ABOUT PEOPLE. I SEE THAT ALMOST EVERY SUNDAY. THERE’S A GENUINE CARING. IF THERE’S A NEED, IT’S MET. IT’S AMAZING. AND I KNOW IF I NEEDED IT, THEY WOULD BE HERE FOR ME, TOO.”

“We really are partners in ministry, which is what the church is supposed to be,” says Hollenberg, who drives charter bus trips for his other work. “We all have to jump in and do ministry together.”

One particularly fruitful ministry literally centers on fruit. Over a decade ago, Madison Avenue began “Fresh Fruit Fridays” each summer. A women’s group became aware that elementary school students in the area were receiving subsidized meals during the school year, but nothing during the summer—leaving many without healthful foods for several months. So the congregation stepped up to help.

Members go to pick-your-own-fruit farms in the county, doing the picking, washing, and boxing themselves. On Fridays, they set up a tent in front of the church and spread the word that free fruit is available. It started with two children, according to member Becky Rishel. Now it’s up to 30 or so.

“And it’s not just giving out strawberries and such,”

Rishel says, “but talking to the people in our community.”

On one occasion, they saw a man on a porch across the street and decided to take him a pint of fruit. As they talked, they learned that the man’s daughter had been carjacked the week before, and the emotions of that were still difficult for him. Hollenberg and others prayed for the family, and the church was even able to supply footage from its security cameras to assist with the case.

“I love that ministry,” Hollenberg says. “It tells me our congregation is really thinking about how we can minister to the neighborhood. It’s good when you know people are thinking, ‘How can we reach out?’”

There are other ministries, too. Each fall Madison Avenue holds a yard sale that includes free clothing giveaways. A weekly “Joy-El” program brings interested students from a local elementary school to the church for an hour of Bible education. It sponsors a recovery ministry for those who have been in prison, with one participant attending the church.



Keith Hollenberg

SMALL CHURCHES BIG HEARTS



DAVID WAUGH

Several Alcoholics Anonymous groups use the building through the week, along with Scout groups and others.

“We’re at our best as a congregation when we’re working at service projects,” says Don Kauffman, Madison Avenue’s leadership team chair. “We’ve been able to provide a lot of support for various outreach activities, a lot of them brought to us by members of the church. There are a lot of opportunities for people to contribute in multiple ways, whether labor or dollars or whatever.”

It wasn’t always that way, Kauffman says. At one time Madison Avenue was populated mostly by members who lived outside the city but came to the church for worship. Little connection happened with the surrounding community, and the building sat empty most of the week.

And then? “There was a sea change,” Kauffman says. “We became a whole lot more intentional about trying to connect with our neighborhood.”

Madison Avenue’s ministry is also amplified by a decades-old, well-maintained endowment fund dedicated exclusively to outreach purposes. Hollenberg says the church is able to give out more than \$20,000 a year to various ministries and projects as a result. That includes strong connections to district-related ministries such as Children’s Aid Society, the Brethren Home Community, and Camp Eder, as well as other York-area ministries, disaster relief work, and supporting a mission worker in Atlanta.

“It allows us to bless other ministries and share way more than we could otherwise,” Hollenberg says. “It has become a way for a little church to do a lot of good.”

The church’s caring and energy nurtures its inner life, as well. An active youth program, the small groups, vibrant fel-

lowship activities, workshops by outside speakers, a praise team, art projects, and more infuse the life of the congregation. And they just enjoy being together to do the work of Christ.

“This is a church that cares about people,” says Bill Waugh, executive minister of Southern Pennsylvania District and a member of the congregation. “I see that almost every Sunday. There’s a genuine caring. If there’s a need, it’s met. It’s amazing. And I know if I needed it, they would be here for me, too.”

Carol Kauffman, who leads the small group ministry team, says one particularly poignant moment came last summer, when the church held a “Survivor Sunday.” It started with wanting to celebrate one couple who had been fighting cancer but, as they began planning, “We discovered that pretty much everyone has survived something.”

The team created a display with the words, “By the grace of God, I am surviving,” and people were able to write down what they had survived and add it to the display. Worship centered on the theme, and some survivors shared more of their stories during a luncheon after worship.



DAVID WAUGH

IT KEEPS ON GOING. AND THE BEST THING, HOLLENBERG SAYS, IS THAT MUCH OF IT HAPPENS WITH MEMBERS HAVING THE VISION AND LEADING THE WAY.

“It really opened our eyes to what the needs were,” Carol Kauffman says. “And in our small groups, it gave us a lot of topics to talk about in the coming year.”

It keeps on going. And the best thing, Hollenberg says, is that much of it happens with members having the vision and leading the way.

“They’ve really gotten a fire under them,” he says of the church. “I don’t have to worry about driving the small group

ministry or a lot of the other programs, and that’s fantastic. I love that.”

“There are a lot of good things happening here,” Hollenberg adds. “I’ve been amazed at this little congregation. I’ve told others, ‘If you want a place where people will love you and care about you, come to our church.’ It’s just consistently welcoming and loving. I’m convinced that’s what makes this congregation what it is.”

Breakthrough

by Lois Grove

Several months ago, my pastor resigned to serve another church in our district. Our congregation became aware that Peace Church of the Brethren in Council Bluffs, Iowa, was not at the top of the list for Brethren pastors seeking a change. A “woe is us,” “the sky is falling” mindset crept in, along with many “grasping at straws” solutions.

But guess what? One of our members with a vast amount of training and experience in organizational administration woke up in the night with a vision of how we could continue to operate in the interim without a called pastor, using the gifts and talents that were abundantly present in our small body of members.

The plan was presented to the district executive, the church leadership team, and then the congregation, and you could feel excitement around the possibilities that the new structure offered. It included more people in leadership roles and a

calling out of gifts that were not being used to their potential. You see, in a small church it is very easy to let the pastor do most of the work.

Our new plan also meant ignoring the constitution at several junctures, but we were no strangers to operating that way. A few years earlier, when it became apparent that our board of administration setup wasn’t working, we came up with a plan for a leadership team model. We suspended the constitution for a year, figured out what worked for us, practiced it for a while, and then rewrote the constitution to match what was working.

While we are not far into the execution of our interim ministry plan, the beautiful thing to observe is a sense of hope for the future. Many of us are sensing a renewed call and excitement in responding to God’s invitation to use our gifts for Christ and the church.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is ready for breakthrough moments in our lives—at

any time and in any place. Are we receptive to that happening *and* can we celebrate how God is working in the lives of the rest of our Church of the Brethren family members? When our differing cultures, geographical areas, ages, theologies become co-mingled, is there enough love for each other to create the new community that Jesus so desperately wanted for his followers?

Hebrews 10 reminds us that we need to help each other to live spiritually productive lives, according to the Spirit we have received, meeting together for encouragement and for the development of interpersonal skills that equip us to deal with occasional differences of opinion. Doing these things will put us on the path to achieving the perfect church and Godly perfection.

Lois Grove, from Peace Church of the Brethren in Council Bluffs, Iowa, is a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board.

Plains to Pacific Roundtable

A quest from the West

As of 2017, only 3 Church of the Brethren congregations west of the Mississippi averaged 100 or more in worship attendance. That compares with 119 in the denomination as a whole.

The 142 western congregations (counting fellowships and projects) had a combined membership of 9,113, or 8.34 percent of the denomination. Only 22 of them had full-time pastors,

compared to 234 across the Church of the Brethren.

These numbers have been tracked for more than a dozen years by a volunteer think tank called the Plains to Pacific Roundtable (PPR), a group of Brethren concerned about church vitality in the part of the church that is spread between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

The group noted that in 2007, when PPR formed, the congregations in this region made up 15 percent of Brethren congregations and had 9.4 percent of the membership. But they are dispersed across “an area that is 76 percent of the United States and has 41 percent of its population,” according to PPR.

PPR met regularly for about a dozen years, with attendance ranging from 10 to 22 people. The initiative, which grew out of the denominational Small Congregations Program and Western Plains District’s Congregation Transformation Program, sought “to enable the spiritual vitality and transformation of the Church of the Brethren in the Plains to Pacific region and beyond.” The efforts were threefold: congregational wellbeing, new church growth, and use of technology.

Over the years PPR tried out a number of ideas and models, some of which worked well and some that didn’t. In an evaluation of its work, the group concluded that the most successful relationships were with McPherson College and the Brethren

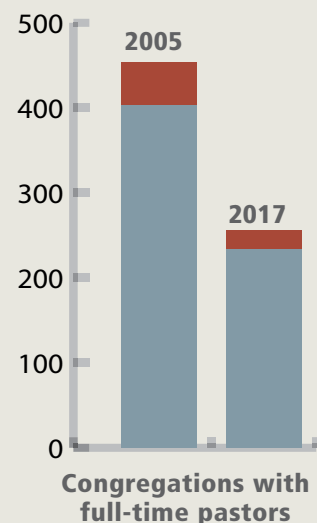
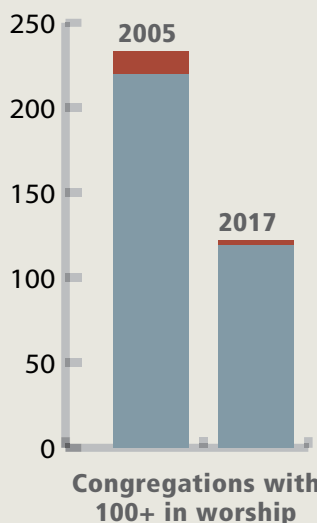
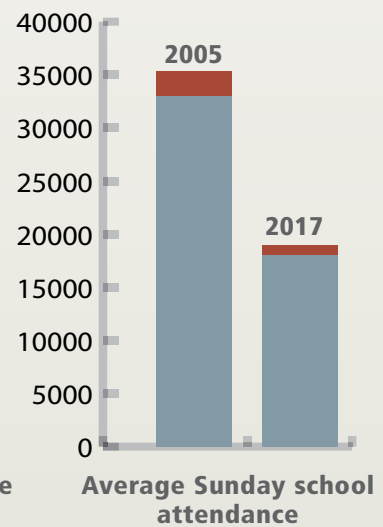
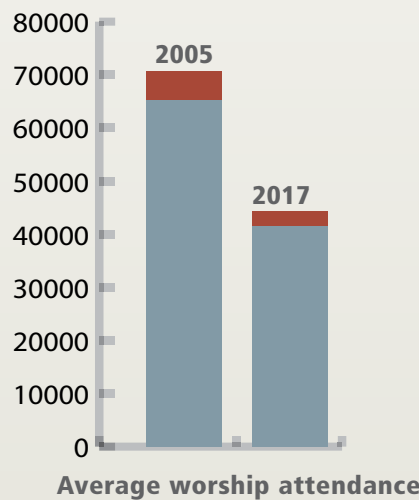
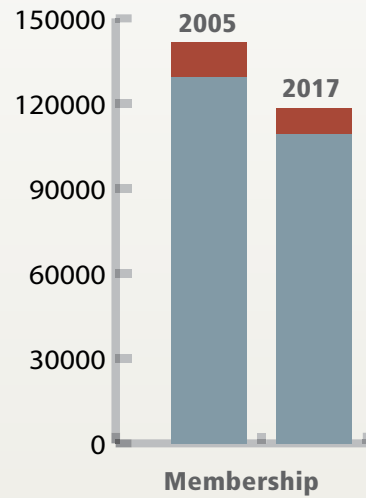
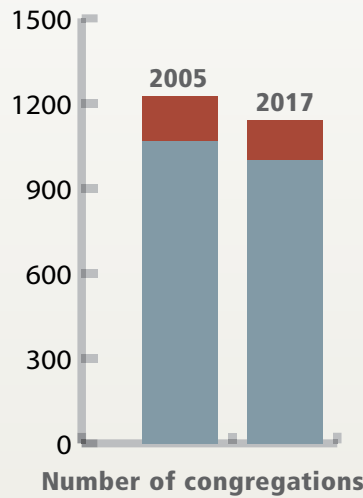
Congregations with worship attendance of 100 or more and congregations with full-time pastors

District	2005		2017	
	100+	FT pastors	100+	FT pastors
Atlantic Northeast	34	35	30	29
Atlantic Southeast	4	9	1	6
Idaho	1	3	0	1
Illinois/Wisconsin	6	14	1	5
Northern Indiana	14	25	7	14
South/Central Indiana	8	14	5	11
Michigan	1	7	1	4
Mid-Atlantic	16	29	7	19
Missouri/Arkansas	0	0	0	0
Northern Plains	3	10	0	4
Northern Ohio	11	25	6	11
Southern Ohio/Kentucky	14	20	3	11
Pacific Northwest	0	6	0	2
Pacific Southwest	3	16	2	7
Middle Pennsylvania	11	18	9	10
Southern Pennsylvania	24	26	16	15
Western Pennsylvania	14	34	4	13
Shenandoah	26	35	15	22
Southeastern	1	7	0	4
Southern Plains	0	3	0	1
Virgina	17	35	9	25
Western Plains	3	13	1	7
West Marva	9	19	2	12
Puerto Rico*			0	1
Totals	220	403	119	234

* Previously Puerto Rico was part of Atlantic Southeast District.

The western Brethren, 2005-2017

West of Mississippi Whole Church of the Brethren



Academy, which bore fruit in the Ventures program for lay training. Another success was the ability to connect with each other through technology, “one of the most significant game-changers,” making it possible to reach across distances and include people in new ways. And the group concluded that its collaboration with the district’s congregational transformation work had proven helpful.

Areas of struggle were efforts to promote new church growth, including Asian ministry training and relationships with Sudanese congregations.

Plains to Pacific Roundtable has brought itself to a close, but wants its learnings and vision to help the church as a whole, which it believes faces the same concerns and needs as the western Brethren. In addition, “as our congregations are living in the midst of an increasingly multicultural context, the church must find ways to serve and to welcome diversity and to learn from others.”

In a presentation to the Mission and Ministry Board last October, representatives from PPR summarized their experience in hopes the board could use their insights “to address the challenges of survival, vitality, and transformation facing the Church of the Brethren.” —W.C.M.

Statistics are compiled by Jim Lehman from the 2006 and 2018 Church of the Brethren yearbooks. Not all congregations send reports, so statistics are not complete.

The march toward positive peace

by Susuyu Lassa

Pacebuilding has always been a passion of mine. I've known from a young age that I am called to a life of volunteerism and service; I remember spending a number of my weekends throughout middle and high school volunteering however I could,



Cheryl Bumbahugh-Cofford

be it spending the majority of a day painting the walls of a recently erected building at a mission compound, or spending just a few hours holding newborn babies at an orphanage.

After graduating from Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria, I seamlessly transitioned into being a political science major on a pre-law track at Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind. I knew that I wanted to go into human rights and advocacy, and my passion for working with the disenfranchised and marginalized was born out of seeing my people suffer massive displacement and death at the hands of radical insurgency and ethno-religious conflict. I was convinced that if I went to school and became a lawyer, I would be equipped to move back to Nigeria and apply myself in the march toward the betterment of the lives of those affected by displacement and violent conflict.

Then I spent a summer shadowing a slew of lawyers and realized law was not for me.

I was devastated, not because of the realization that law would not be a good fit—in fact I was quite glad to have figured that out sooner than later—but because I found myself with no path to my goals. Law had been the plan since I was in middle school, and I found myself at the dreaded “what now?” impasse.

In the throes of the closest thing I had ever had to an existential crisis, my guardian angel—in the form of a few members of the Manchester Church of the Brethren—whispered to me, “What about policy advocacy?” That was my breakthrough.

Halfway through the first semester of my last year of college, I began looking into how I could influence policy to better the lives of those in whom I had an active interest. I learned of the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy and its work on Nigeria—as well as with marginalized groups within the US, such as people of color, refugees, and immigrants. I spent three weeks of my January term

unofficially interning at the office, and I became more and more curious about Brethren Volunteer Service.

Fast forward and here I am, a BVSer serving this year as the associate in the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy. This is about the last place freshman-year Susu would have envisioned ending up, but therein lies the beauty of the organic nature of life—that we are constantly becoming. I am excited to plug in to the work being done on immigration and to join the various discussions being had on Capitol Hill surrounding the multi-faceted nature of conflict in Nigeria.

In my short time here, I have been able to delve into immigration work by joining the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, and I have been blessed to have conversations and brainstorm ideas with folks from various Brethren churches who would like to plug into these issues and be a force for change within their communities. Through the Nigeria Working Group, I have had the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives on issues such as the Farmer-Herder conflict, and to participate in the working group's fall congressional briefing, during which the role of US foreign policy and humanitarian aid were highlighted.


Working in this field is tough, especially in the current political climate. The staggering disparities that plague our world are widening at an alarming rate. Oftentimes being engaged in the effort to push back without seeing any tangible fruition can be draining—our brains are wired to crave instant gratification, after all.

Nevertheless, we persist, because it is in persisting that we build our capacity to withstand. Much like Rome was not built in a day, positive peace—peace that mandates justice and equity for all—cannot be achieved in a day, a week, a year, or even a decade. The work of peacebuilding is slow and steady. It does not merely end with the absence of conflict or violence, but with the presence of justice.

Thus, this position is so important, not only because of the worthwhile nature of the work, but because of the ways in which it fosters resilience in those who are engaged in the march toward positive peace and in the work of peacebuilding. It imbues in us an awareness of the weight of the task placed upon us as peacebuilders. We recognize that speaking out for those who cannot speak, as we are called to

do in Proverbs 31:8, is not an easy endeavor, nor should it be.

Sometimes, the enormosity of this task becomes lost on us, and we begin to minimize the severity of these injustices, thus relegating the urgency of this task to the back of our minds. In our hesitation to be made uncomfortable, we inadvertently become complacent.

Being in this role has served as a kind of re-awakening for me. It has put into perspective the continuous effort that we must all put in to create a just, equitable world. This work is never-ending and ever evolving, and we must evolve with it in order to achieve positive peace in our communities, local and global. We must keep pushing back, even in times when we feel as though we are making zero progress. Something has got to give, but we cannot let it be our resolve; I know now that I will not let it be mine. 

Susuyu Lassa is the associate in the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, serving through Brethren Volunteer Service.



Lassa working on the issue of drone warfare.

Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

WE MUST KEEP PUSHING BACK, EVEN IN TIMES WHEN WE FEEL AS THOUGH WE ARE MAKING ZERO PROGRESS. SOMETHING HAS GOT TO GIVE, BUT WE CANNOT LET IT BE OUR RESOLVE; I KNOW NOW THAT I WILL NOT LET IT BE MINE.

BRETHREN SERVICE EUROPE

DECADES OF SERVICE IN CHRIST'S NAME

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Kristin Flory

Brethren Service pushed up against—and sometimes through—many political and societal boundaries in Europe, from M. R. Zigler going into Germany in 1945 to assess the needs of defeated enemies, to Brethren Volunteer Service workers in the late 20th century going to Northern Ireland and the Balkans where they risked violence to work for peace and reconciliation. Emblematic are two photos of the Berlin Wall. In one, BSC personnel stand on a high point looking into East Germany, unable to go to work in a place still closed to them. In the other, demolishing of the wall has begun and someone peers through to see to the other side. Not long after the wall fell, a BVSer began to work in East Berlin.

From 1947 to 2019, the Brethren Service Europe office in Geneva, Switzerland, was an anchor point for Church of the Brethren service in the name of Christ. It was started by the Brethren Service Commission (BSC) to coordinate post-war relief and rehabilitation work in Europe. In recent years it coordinated Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) in Europe.

A brief timeline and a few stories offer a window into the wide-ranging work of the office over seven decades.

The churches in America [in 1948] were still debating whether or not they should give sanction to a world relief program. Some were hesitant to join in relief work, feeling that attention should be given rather to the missionary program of the churches. When the question was asked of Dr. Visser 't Hooft [secretary of the World Council of Churches],



“Is there need for material aid in Europe?” he replied, “Yes.” The second question was, “What is needed?” His reply was, “Food, clothing, bedding, and bicycles for ministers.”

. . . Many meetings were held in Geneva with WCC and also with the United Nations agency, the World Health Organization, always keeping in touch with the United States representative. These contacts with persons from all over the world created a world background in regard to human need that would have been impossible otherwise.

—*M. R. Zigler, To Serve the Present Age*

M. R. Zigler, the Brethren Service leader, had managed to visit the devastated, Allied-occupied nation [Germany] as one of the first churchmen allowed entry with the intent of examining needs and reporting them to the American churches. One of many poignant incidents he experienced was a conversation with a Berlin mother:

“The woman announced without apparent emotion that she must decide which of her children she would try to keep alive during the winter to come. She could not possibly find enough food for all four of her children, and had to choose which one or two had the best chances of surviving. The food she scrounged would go to them and she would have to watch the others waste away. . . . It was reported from Berlin that during the winter most of the children under three failed to survive.”

—*Donald F. Durnbaugh, To Serve the Present Age*

Helena Kruger was a whirlwind of enterprise [in Austria] in 1946 and 1947. Always impatient with regulations, be they from the military government or church administrators, she largely went her own way throughout the Allied and Russian zones of occupation, helping anyone in need. An American general once stated ruefully, in recalling how Helena Kruger “requisitioned” army materials for the TB sanatorium, “I could have been court-martialed for giving her those supplies, but how can you say ‘No’ to Mrs. Kruger?”

—*Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine*

Besides maintaining the effectiveness of the ongoing relief and rehabilitation programs in several countries . . . Zigler had two major concerns. The first was to promote the peace cause in Europe in cooperative fashion, then using this to influence the ecumenical movement. The second was to extend work into the Orthodox world, especially into Greece.

. . . Zigler was able to win an invitation from Spyridon, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, to begin relief and rehabilitation work in the isolated villages of the Ioannina district of northern Greece near the Albanian border. He first sent two Brethren service workers, Edson Sower and Dean Neher. Soon other team members from several nations and churches arrived. . . . Team members fanned out to the mountain villages during the week to teach better farming methods and ways to preserve food. The team introduced the raising of poultry to the area, which by the 1990s was supplying most of Greece with this meat and in the process had revolutionized the area’s economy.

—*Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine*

The Brethren Service program in Europe utilized a state-side movement among youth to expand its witness to war-weary embittered people by summer projects [workcamps] that truly demonstrated “love in action.”

. . . Intellectually, the campers were sincere in wanting to participate in such a situation. Emotionally, a Dutch girl was not prepared to even associate with a “still-Nazi German.” Emotionally, the shame and guilt of German Christian youth for the sins of their nation often made them supersensitive to a discussion of prewar times in European countries. Likewise, our own youth seemed to hold the people responsible somehow, yet did not want themselves to accept responsibility for the destruction rained on civilians by allied nations. Even those who had themselves suffered from the Nazi regime because their parents openly opposed Hitler were by no means ready to accept a Jew as a daily companion. Participants whose faith was not tested in their home communities found that quietly

demonstrating it took more self-discipline and more daily prayer than an extremely busy day provided.

... Crises—if overcome by a democratic Christian approach—built a deeper spirit of fellowship than had our camps not been so open.

—*Mary Coppock Hammond, To Serve the Present Age*

Among the most intriguing of Brethren Service initiatives

during the Cold War era was the series of exchanges between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of the Brethren. Begun when relationships between



Soviet and American citizens were still very restricted and strained, it marked a successful effort to establish bridges across ideological and ecclesiological boundaries. The chief architect of the exchanges was W. Harold Row, executive secretary of the Brethren Service Commission.

The unlikely meeting of two such dissimilar churches was made possible by the peace witness of the Brethren and its record of relief aid that included Eastern Europe.

Developed only after protracted negotiations and the surmounting of extensive bureaucratic red tape on both sides, the exchange featured delegations of Russian church leaders visiting American churches and institutions and reciprocal delegations of Brethren church leaders visiting Russian churches and institutions. These exchanges of delegations took place in 1963 and 1967. Right-wing demagogues picketed events attended by the visiting Russian delegations.

—*Durnbaugh, Fruit of the Vine*

When the full story of all these years . . . is written, you Brethren probably won't be recorded; sorry about that. But more importantly, in many ways that can never be measured . . . you've made a huge contribution to the lives of so many people here and to our overall situation. By your coming here you've encouraged us, by helping us to realize we are a part of a great world family who are concerned about justice, peace, and people.

—*Harold Good speaking in 2002 at the 30th anniversary of BVS in Northern Ireland, Sharing BVS*

At the core of L'Arche is the relationship between persons who have an intellectual disability and those who choose to support them in community. We believe that this relationship is one that is mutually transformative, a sign of hope and a powerful witness in our world.

You do everything needed to ensure that Core Members live a happy and full life as adults. Many Core Members, though fairly self-sufficient, need help with things such as doing laundry or bathing; most do not cook at all so you help with making meals, taking medicine, making doctors' appointments, etc. Those things we take for granted as adults much of the time our Core Members need support with, that's where we come in! But we also make sure that the Core Members feel loved and respected, we foster a feeling of family and community, which is pivotal in the lives of all people.

You would think you need a lot of patience . . . but I'm not sure I have that and I manage well, most of the time. If you don't have, you will definitely learn while you are here! You need a loving heart, definitely! A sense of selflessness and a desire to help others live a life full of love and happiness and integrity.

—*Gloria Oseguera-Verdugo, Sharing BVS, 2012*

1939 The Brethren Service Committee is formed, predecessor to the Brethren Service Commission recognized by Annual Conference in 1941. It grows out of Brethren aid to Armenians and Syrians between the wars, and to both sides of the Spanish Civil War.

1945 Soon after war's end, BSC is doing relief work in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Already, before the end of the war, BSC staff was seconded to the YMCA in England to work with German POWs. Shipments of heifers begin, with "seagoing cowboys" accompanying livestock to Europe.

1946 BSC work extends into Italy and Poland.

1947 In February, the BSC establishes an office in Geneva. From the late 1940s into the early 1960s it was one of many BSC centers across Europe. Brethren Haus in Kassel, Germany, is perhaps best known. Over the next years, the BSC post-war work in Europe becomes, arguably, the largest Church of the Brethren programmatic effort—especially when Heifer Project is acknowledged as a BSC program.

1948 M. R. Zigler, first BSC executive, moves to Geneva to direct relief and rehabilitation work in Europe and to represent the Brethren at the newly formed World Council of Churches. This is the year BVS begins.

1949 The first BVSers arrive in Germany.



1962 Brethren Haus in Kassel is sold.

1968-69 The BSC is merged into the denomination's mission program and BVS. The office begins to focus on supervision of BVSers in Europe. An agriculture exchange is started with the Czech Republic, one of several agriculture and student exchanges the BSC has with various countries.



Kristin Flory



Kristin Flory



Kristin Flory



Kristin Flory



File photo

The Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most has been organizing “Peace Camp” in Bosnia-Herzegovina. . . . Each day began with morning prayer, but each day different traditions led this short ritual. To begin, I presented an Anglican meditation from the *Book of Common Prayer*, then the next day, the few Catholics led us in prayer, then Orthodox, Muslim, and finally, non-religious persons. After each short tradition’s prayer/reflection there was a time of silence for all to pray in her own way, then we sang a simple song to orient ourselves for the day with our common purpose:

Great, great power of peace

You are our only aim.

Let love grow and borders disappear.

Mir, mir, oh mir. (mir = peace)

At the beginning of Peace Camp, there was evident skepticism and discomfort with the prayers as well as this song, but quickly both were accepted with deepening appreciation. The song became our mantra.

—Julianne Funk, *Sharing BVS*, 2012

I’ve been immersed in the dusty archives here in Geneva for the past six months. . . . It’s a fascinating and sometimes wrenching task. Although I’ve only sifted through some 300-plus personnel files of the volunteers since I came on the scene in the spring of 1987 (and we also have files here dating back to the 1940s), what I find interesting is how often most of those BVS volunteers corresponded, how pithy, descriptive, touching, and often amusing their letters were. And yes, those are treasures, those early handwritten letters and postcards. Later on I printed out many of their faxes and emails. (Not to mention telexes . . . does anyone remember those?) Such histories of the times and places, countries in conflict or post conflict, nations breaking up or merging, projects and organizations and churches addressing the local or global needs and dilemmas, providing practical services or faithful support. . . . And the volunteers weathering all the joys and storms and learning and growing and serving.

—Kristin Flory, *Sharing BVS*, 2018

1972 A BVSer is placed in Northern Ireland during the height of “The Troubles” between Catholics and Protestants. BVS presence there continues through the ceasefire of 1994 and to the present.



Kristin Flory

1980s The office is the administrative center for Brethren work in Europe and the Middle East.

1987 BVSErs are at projects ranging from Northern Ireland to the Netherlands to Poland. The Polish Agriculture Exchange celebrates 30 years and director H. Lamar Gibble receives the Gold Medal of the Order of Merit, Poland’s highest honor for noncitizens.

1989 The Berlin Wall falls. A few years later, a BVSer is placed in East Berlin.

1992 BVSErs start to be placed with peace groups in the former Yugoslavia.

1994-95 Before fighting ends in the Balkans, BVSErs are at work in parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2019 In December, the office is closed. Staff Kristin Flory retires. More than 300 BVSErs have served in Europe during her 33-year tenure. Northern Ireland and Ireland are the two European countries where BVS will continue to place volunteers.



Uwe Hirsch

Sources: *The Brethren During the Age of World War*, by Stephen L. Longenecker; *The Brethren Encyclopedia*; *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren 1708-1995*, by Donald F. Durnbaugh; *Sharing BVS*, the Brethren Service Europe newsletter; *To Serve the Present Age*, edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh

Ahmedabad's old city during January's kite festival. Below: Jivandawar Orphanage in Gujarat, India. Herb and Jeanne Smith on right. Father Albert seated in front.

Integrity

by Herb Smith

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.

It has been said that “India assaults the senses and yet refreshes the spirit.” One could add that it often exemplifies integrity. Four of the last eight years, my wife, Jeanne, and I taught at the Gujarat United School of Theology, a seminary of the Church of North India. It is located in the teeming metropolis of Ahmedabad, adjacent to Mahatma Gandhi’s former ashram. It was from this location that he walked 214 miles to the coast in civil disobedience. The story of Gandhi’s integrity permeates the folklore of this region. The seminary honors Gandhi and is a consortium for a variety of mainline Protestant denominations, including the Church of the Brethren.

When we taught there, no alarm clock was necessary. We were awakened around 6 by the stereophonic Islamic call to prayer. This repetitious call resounded from several surrounding mosques. Around 6:45 we alighted from our missionary bungalow surrounded by a broken-down barbed wire fence. We walked in almost total darkness to the school of theology. Along the way we were greeted by stray dogs, grazing goats, wandering sacred cows, and the ubiquitous long-tailed monkeys—a menagerie of animals.

As we approached the red-brick seminary, piercing through the darkness was the stunning sight of flickering candles. Their pungent aroma permeated the crisp morning



courtesy of Herb and Jeanne Smith

air. We heard the rhythmic chanting of the scriptures in the Gujarati dialect.

Our teaching sessions featured Church of the Brethren history and lasted nonstop for approximately three hours. During this time the students, even with a translator echoing our commentaries, sat in rapt attention. Perplexed by why they were so responsive, we asked the dean of the faculty. His reply was startling. Some of the students had received poison from their families, even their mothers. Others were beaten by thugs contracted by their very conservative Hindu relatives because of their conversion to Christianity. The Gujarat province of India is known for its strong support of the right-wing BJP Party, which tends to dominate the current national government. Anti-Christian and anti-Islamic riots have been staged. If one were to try to convert someone to Christianity, there might be a five-year jail sentence.

IF ONE WERE TO SUMMARIZE PAUL'S LIST OF TRAITS THAT INCORPORATE ALL NOBLE VALUES, IT CAN BE STATED IN ONE WORD: INTEGRITY. THIS IS PERSONIFIED IN THE LIVES OF THE GUJARAT SEMINARY STUDENTS AND FATHER ALBERT.

Following independence from the British empire, the constitution of India outlawed the caste system. Nonetheless this oppressive, complex social configuration pervades Hinduism. It also permeates other religions and has hundreds of social categories called *jait*. Below the bottom rank are the so-called untouchables. They prefer to be called Dalit because it means *broken ones*. This category constitutes over 200 million individuals, whom Gandhi called *Harijans, children of God*.

Most of our ministerial students were Dalits. In traditional cultures, one's name incorporates and personifies who you are. It is curiously profound that the students changed their Dalit nomenclature and adopted biblical names in their new identity as Christians.

In our life together at the seminary, these young ministers in training personified the highest traits of the Christian faith. Among them, integrity—personified in authenticity and perseverance in truth-telling, no matter how difficult. They follow Alexander Mack's ideal of "counting the cost." They have painfully paid the price both physically and socially. Their lives are courageous (faith under pressure) as they train for the ministry in India.

Affiliated with the seminary is a truly remarkable Christian institution, a leprosarium funded by the Church of North India. Even though Hansen's disease is now rare throughout most of the global community, it still persists in parts of India. Within the leprosarium is an orphanage with 72 children, ages 5 through 17. Many have lost their parents. Others were abandoned.

When we first arrived, these children had virtually nothing. In a barren, desert-like landscape they did not even have a soccer ball. But they did have a boom box with taped music. Immediately upon our coming, we joined with them in an exhilarating circle dance that lasted for several hours. The children embraced each other as they circumambulated a broken piece of pottery. It was absolutely enchanting.

Kicking up the dust, interlocking arms, they embraced one another with laughter. They looked at the sky, which seemed to be choreographing their movements from the heavens. They often gazed up at the moonless tapestry with an array of stars like salt sprinkled on black velvet. As we danced with them, what the New Testament calls *kairos* invaded *chronos*. Eternity permeated time. Like honey flowing through a honeycomb, heaven kissed earth.

How many adults took care of these 72 children? One. All of us have heard about the extraordinary work of the late

Mother Teresa, but how many have heard about Father Albert? This maimed, 70-something widower was truly a father to these children. He exuded Christian love through his warmth and relentless caring. He was the centerpiece of centripetal love, which permeated the whole compound.

Our first day at the leprosarium, he told us this remarkable story. A young Hindu woman dying of leprosy came for several weeks to request that he take her newborn. Each time he tearfully declined because of the infant's age. Finally, she said that her baby son was the Christ child, whom Father Albert must shelter. But again, he reluctantly said no.


That very afternoon, as usual, a train came by the orphanage. This time the children watched in horror as the train hit a pregnant deer. But as the dying animal was flung through the air, she gave birth. This beautiful newborn deer became both the pet and the mascot of the children.

Father Albert took this as a miraculous sign to adopt the Hindu's woman's Christ child. Over the years, Jeanne and I came to know this little boy. Given the Christian name of the archangel Michael, he is one of the happiest children we have encountered anywhere.

In the age of the new covenant, Paul of Tarsus most likely had no children. We hear nothing about his family. Nonetheless, he was perhaps a father figure for his disciple Timothy. In the second letter attributed to him, Paul mentions Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. In a patriarchal age, he curiously does not mention his father.

In his treatise to Timothy, dictated when he was partially blind, Paul colorfully catalogs the ideal traits of a Christian minister: "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11-12). These are similar to the description of Paul's own servanthood as recorded in 2 Corinthians. They are the qualities of ministerial service in the upside-down kingdom of Christ's love.

Perhaps having been a spectator at the famous Greco-Roman Isthmian Games at Corinth, Paul uses an athletic metaphor for personifying these qualities: "Run your best in the race of faith." Paul himself deserved one of the crowns of these Olympic-like games.

If one were to summarize Paul's list of traits that incorporate all noble values, it can be stated in one word: integrity. This is personified in the lives of the Gujarat seminary students and Father Albert. 

Herb Smith is professor of philosophy and religion at McPherson College in McPherson, Kan.

Holy Envy

The title of this book may raise a red flag for some potential readers. How can envy be “holy”? Envy is a sin to be avoided (Romans 1:29, Galatians 5:21, and 1 Timothy 6:4).

In *Holy Envy*, Barbara Brown Taylor invites readers to journey with her as she moves from her experience as an Episcopal pastor to become a teacher of world religions to students in Piedmont College in Georgia. As she explains her use of the word *envy*, she tells of finding things in the religions she introduced to her students that she wished were included or given greater emphasis in her own faith tradition.

For example, she believes her Christian faith would be stronger if she practiced more fully the Jewish observance of the sabbath and deepened her experience of meditation as she sees it in the Buddhist tradition. She asks, “What do

Muslims know about the power of community that has all but withered from my neglect?” Her goal is never to weaken the faith of her Christian students, but to help them understand more fully how God’s love shows itself and reaches out to all people.

She begins her exploration of other religions with the Jewish faith, the “nearest neighbors,” reminding us of something that is often forgotten:

Jesus was a Jew. According to Jewish tradition, she notes, God made a covenant that included all people before making a covenant with Abraham that included one particular people.


As Taylor took her students to a Jewish temple, a Muslim mosque, a Hindu temple, and a Buddhist monastery, she counseled them to go with an attitude that is open-minded—they should not compare their own religion’s best to another religion’s worst.

In a chapter entitled “Divine Diversity,” she begins with Jesus’ words in the fourth Gospel: “In my Father’s house

there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2). A common understanding of those words is a vision of places in heaven for those who have died. With Taylor’s help, I have come to believe that this “house” refers to the fullness of God’s creation, one that welcomes various forms of worship and a multiplicity of ways of responding to God’s love.

There is a sense in which Taylor’s book is mostly autobiographical. Although she was employed to teach students about world religions, it was in fulfilling this role that she learned more about her own faith journey as a Christian and discovered that it had been enriched in ways not anticipated. She tells her readers that she is “Christian to the core.” Her exploration of other faiths did not lead her to become an adherent of another religion. Instead it helped her cherish the best of Christianity and also to recognize its limits. “What I see in my neighbor’s yard does not belong to me, but it shows me things in my own yard that I might have otherwise overlooked.”

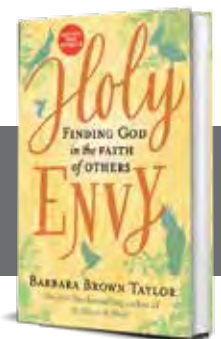
At the Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam, the imam concluded his time with her students by saying, “Our deepest desire is not that you become Muslim, but that you become the best Christian . . . the best person you can be. In the name of God, the most gracious, the Most Merciful. Thank you for coming.” Those words left Taylor with “a fresh case of Holy Envy.”

This book helped me affirm what we read in Genesis—that you and I and everyone else is made “in the image of God.” And also what we read in 1 John 4:20—that “those who do not love a brother or a sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” Which means that a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew, though they may understand faith differently than I do, are loved by God as much as I am and that I am called to love them as sister and brother. 

Ken Gible, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, lives in Camp Hill, Pa.



KEN GIBBLE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. **Author:** Barbara Brown Taylor. **Publisher:** HarperOne, 2019. Available from Brethren Press.

Nigerian Brethren leader executed by Boko Haram

Lawan Andimi, a leader in **Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria** (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) was executed by Boko Haram on Jan. 20 after having been captured during an attack on the town of Michika on Jan. 2. He was EYN district secretary for Michika area and chair of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) for Michika. Also killed alongside Andimi was a Nigerian soldier.

General secretary David Steele sent condolences to EYN president Joel S. Billi on behalf of the Church of the Brethren. "Please know that we are holding all of you in our prayers, praying through our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you mercy and

peace," he wrote. "May God continue to grant you strength to sustain you in your leadership of EYN during this most difficult time."

Said Nathan Hosler of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, "Though the world has paid less attention to Boko Haram, the situation in the region still is dire."



CAN said its leadership and the Nigerian churches "are deeply saddened," and urged Christians to set aside three days to fast and pray. It also called for effective action by the Nigerian government.

Andimi was from Kwada village in the Chibok area. His abduction gained international attention when on Jan. 5 his captors released a video in which he professed his Christian faith, saying, "I have never been discouraged, because all conditions that one finds himself . . . is in the hand of God."

Amnesty International Nigeria reported that "Boko Haram followed up the killing of Rev. Lawan Andimi with an attack on his village in Chibok."

Annual Conference ballot is announced

Topping the ballot for the 2020 Annual Conference are candidates for moderator-elect Paul Liepelt and Tim McElwee.

Paul Liepelt is a pastor at Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and serves on the executive committee of the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board. His term ends during Conference this July. His work for the church has included teaching at Kulp Bible College in Nigeria, 2004-2007. He holds a master of divinity degree from Bethany Seminary.

Tim McElwee, now retired, has filled numerous leadership roles at Manchester University over more than 30 years including vice president for advancement, vice president for academic resources, associate professor of peace studies, and campus pastor. He has been a chaplain at Timbercrest retirement community, denominational staff in Washington, D.C., and senior director of development for Heifer



International. He holds a master of divinity from Bethany and a master's degree and doctorate from Purdue University.

Additional nominations:

Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee: Beth Jarrett, Harrisonburg, Va.; Walt Wiltschek, Easton, Md.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, representing laity: Richard E. Allison, Claysburg, Pa.; Arthur Fourman, Dayton, Ohio.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1: Josiah Ludwick, Harrisburg, Pa.; Mandy North, Manassas, Va. **Area 4:** Daniel L. Butler, Grundy Center, Iowa; Kathy A. Mack, Rochester, Minn.

Bethany Seminary trustees representing clergy: Chris Bowman, Manassas, Va.; Frances R. Townsend, Onokama, Mich. **Representing laity:** Irene Beltran, Pomona, Calif.; Jacki Hartley, Elgin, Ill.

Brethren Benefit Trust board: Janis Fahs, North Manchester, Ind.; David L. Shissler, Hummelstown, Pa.

On Earth Peace board: Erick Flores, Hermitage, Tenn.; Drew G. I. Hart, Harrisburg, Pa.

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GFI evaluates Haiti projects

Global Food Initiative (GFI) director **Jeff Boshart** traveled to Haiti in January for a year-end evaluation of an agriculture project carried out with Eglise des Freres Haitiens (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) and Growing Hope Globally.

As well as participating in the evaluation, Boshart visited 7 of the 14 communities that are participating in a Soil Conservation and Income Generation project.

“We learned of the disastrous impacts of last year’s civil unrest or ‘lock down,’ as it was called,” reported Boshart. “Roads were closed from September through November. Schools were closed and life became even more of a struggle than it normally is in Haiti. During the ‘lock down’ it became difficult for people to get medical care and lives were disrupted.

“The animal raising projects of Eglise des Freres saw significant deaths of animals as veterinary services were not able to get to remote villages,” he continued. “Many rabbits died. The goat projects fared a bit better, and the fish projects looked excellent. ... The evaluation is giving us a clear direction of interventions in the third and final year of this project, which will begin in April.”



Aquaponics project in Haiti.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Corona

Clergywomen gather from across denomination

Church of the Brethren clergywomen gathered in retreat at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Ariz., Jan. 6-9. The 57 women were led by presenter Mandy Smith on the theme, “Treasure in Clay Pots” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Originally from Australia, Smith is lead pastor of University Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*. She told about powerful experiences of God working through her own weakness and frailties, and related those experiences to the dynamics of a church leader’s life. She encouraged clergywomen to “lean into” and accept their own vulnerabilities and weaknesses to allow God to work through them.

The retreat included daily worship, workshops, recreation, relationship-building, and fellowship. Childcare was provided, encouraging the participation of younger clergywomen.

Support to Puerto Rico after earthquakes

Puerto Rico District asked for prayer after many earthquakes and aftershocks hit Puerto Rico in late December and early January. The quakes hit especially hard in the south of the island.

The district and Brethren Disaster Ministries were in close communication to identify critical needs. Pastors and district leaders met to discuss future response plans and determine what funding would be required. An initial grant of \$5,000 was given from the Emergency Disaster Fund to enable the district to start addressing emergency essentials.

Some of this support went to Río Prieto Church of the Brethren to help its ministry with a tent city where at one point 23 adults, 2 babies, and 6 children were living. District executive José Calleja Otero and district disaster coordinator José Acevedo visited the site.

Contribute to the Puerto Rico relief effort at www.brethren.org/edf.

Personnel notes

LaDonna Sanders Nkosi began Jan. 16 as director of Intercultural Ministries, a staff position in Discipleship Ministries. Nkosi is the planting pastor of the Gathering Chicago and former pastor of Chicago First Church of the Brethren. She has served in diversity and multicultural program administration for DePaul University, Loyola

University Chicago, and Syracuse University. She is a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary specializing in cross-cultural community development and international relations, and is completing a doctorate as a Wright Scholar at McCormick.

Sara Cook is contracted with Brethren Volunteer Service to coordi-

nate BVS Europe as of Jan. 1, working in Ireland and in Northern Ireland where she was a BVSer 2001-2003. Originally from Corona, Calif., she has been living in Belfast for the last decade and has been involved in peacebuilding in the period following the Good Friday agreement.

Woven into community

by Frances Townsend



I was sorting donated fabric at the fiber shed when a young mother dropped in with her children. I know her as my church board chair's daughter. Her 4-year-old and his friend were looking for fabric and buttons for a sewing project they wanted to do. What joy to see little boys getting excited about such a thing! They are part of a growing movement of people reclaiming the skills of simple living.

Shopping at thrift stores is becoming trendy, and Facebook groups for repurposing clothing and fabric are growing rapidly. Sewing and knitting are catching on with a new generation. People want to be more mindful of resources, less wasteful, and also more artistically expressive.

Our area donation center, Mifibershed, near Benzonia, Mich., is a community-based nonprofit that accepts unwanted fabric, sheets, clothing, and old sewing machines. It gives out fiber credits that can be used pound-for-pound in trade. It keeps fabric out of landfills and gets it back into use.

A whole community is being created at the same time. People meet at the fiber shed, share, and teach one other. A local teacher gets fabric there so she can teach students at the high school to sew during study hall, as there are no longer home economics classes. A group meets there to sew reusable menstrual pads for girls around the world, who live in places where disposable supplies are not available or too expensive. These supplies are critical for the girls to be able to go to school.

I am busy making connections at the fiber shed too, inviting people who need sewing lessons to come to Onekama Church of the Brethren on Thursday mornings when we have a lively fiber arts group meeting. Sewing at church has a long history, of course.




Frances Townsend

Church women have organized quilting bees and done sewing for charity for many, many years. A church basement, with lots of space and tables, is the perfect place.

Our fiber arts group has a more ecumenical, community-building focus than the ladies' aid societies of days past. We connect people from several local congregations, and sometimes people who are not part of any church. We encourage people to bring whatever they are working on, share their enthusiasm with the group, and get help if they need it. When someone comes who would like to learn to sew, we have machines, fabric, and experienced helpers to get them going. School kit bags, like those used for Church World Service disaster relief donations, are good practice for a beginner.

Our noon potluck is another good reason to come. Several people come just to eat the meal together. There is no organized devotional time, but we have a lot of conversation. We end up telling each other how God is working in our lives and praying for each other. Folk from the fiber arts

group often come to our church events, such as hymn sings, and our church members try to attend their events too.

There are many common threads between the fiber shed, online groups interested in re-energizing traditional fiber arts, and the fiber arts group that meets at our church. They are communities, people coming together to help one another, to enjoy one another, and to uphold and reinforce shared values. They are helping us live more simply by cherishing skills and resources and doing it together. 

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

Congratulations

Dear friends, I really do not want to make a habit of writing to you but I simply must do so after reading your October issue.

I congratulate you on your article

“Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery” in all its shocking details. To see each piece going over the centuries is at the least very disturbing—such a terrible history continuing to this very day as described in the excellent article by Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred. It is so

very encouraging and inspiring to read of Marlene Thomas’ amazing service and work for all her people despite an extremely discouraging environment. We just have to carry her and all like her in our hearts as they serve so many on behalf of us all.

I would like to ask for 3 more copies of this issue to distribute to some of our 20 elementary schools in the Bruderhof. We run our own elementary schools and also three high schools, basically without use of electronic devices in the old-fashioned way of handwriting etc., so such articles are given more than passing attention.

We have two Bruderhof communities in Australia and have won the trust of our Aboriginal neighbors there, who have suffered at least as much destruction and mistreatment as our native peoples here in the US—even treated as local fauna until too recently.

Martin Johnson
Maple Ridge Bruderhof
Ulster Park, N.Y.

What do I like?

Inspired by the publisher’s column, “What I Like in January”:

What do I like this time of year?

- 1) It is cool and the sun is shining in Jos, Nigeria.
- 2) The neighbor children come and want to play Uno whenever.
- 3) Muslims and Christians are finding ways to be friends.
- 4) Teachers and children are taking a break.
- 5) Hillcrest School.
- 6) Divides seem less significant this time of year.
- 7) Nothing is yours or mine; it is all ours.
- 8) I am strong and can just get stronger each day.
- 9) Brethren Volunteer Service sent me to Nigeria.
- 10) BVS keeps on sending.

Judy Minnich Stout
Jos, Nigeria

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Romans 12:9-18

SPEAKERS:
 Lauren Seganos Cohen, Drew Hart, Rebekah Houff, Richard Zapata, José Santos Woss, and Paul Shaver.



Church of the Brethren

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Heifer shows our care and love

When the MESSENGER arrived I read the interesting piece about how the Heifer Project spent 75 years in Puerto Rico. It is wonderful to know what we Brethren have done to show how much we care and love all people.

I am now 84 years old. The first time I heard about the project was several years after I became a member of the Church of the Brethren in Southern Ohio, where our congregation sent some heifers overseas. One of our ministers went along with them.

The second time I heard about Heifer was when I was helping teach vacation Bible school in Adams County, Ohio. The folks from Southern Ohio gave a heifer to a family I was staying with during that time. It was so wonderful to be able to drink fresh milk every day before attending Bible school.

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During this time Southern Ohio dedicated the new camp Woodland Altars, with close to 500 folk present. Brother Dan West was our special speaker. I wanted to stay there but there wasn't any way to make a living. I had to move to Chicago where I was employed at Sears for 35 years.

Patricia Connell
Sandwich, Ill.

Seek God's love among us

I've just heard that some Church of the Brethren congregations are leaving our denomination and I feel very hurt. I understand the issue is homosexuality. I hear also that some congregations essentially scoot gays and lesbians out of their fellowship, I suppose by words or attitudes.

As a follower of Jesus, I don't understand. I am aware that a few verses in the Old Testament imply people of these orientations are sinful. That doesn't seem to be my God of grace and mercy, shown to me by Jesus. In the New Testament I read statements like "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26). "If we walk in the light, as [God] is in the

TURNINGPOINTS

Please send information to be included in *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

Ledford, Henry, 100, Flat Creek, Ky., Sept. 23
Wickert, Violet, 100, Astoria, Ill., Jan. 13

New members

Beaver Creek, Hagerstown, Md.: Bruce Darner, Joyce Darner
Bremen, Ind.: Sarah Bollenbacher, Regina Davenport, Trevor Johnson, Ruth Whaley
Brownsville, Knoxville, Md.: Abby Olson, Jesse Olson, Mira Olson, Payton Olson
Celebration of Christ, St. Petersburg, Fla.: Marilyn Basehore, Rod Basehore
East Fairview, Manheim, Pa.: Natalie Earhart, Christine Eifert, Mac Eifert
First, Harrisburg, Pa.: Carrie Miller Flores, Drew G. I. Hart, Renee A. Hart, Rachel E. Ludwick, Andrew Rodriguez Santos
Freeport, Ill.: Wanona

Wellspring Ceisel
Germantown Brick, Rocky Mount, Va.: Opal Arduino, Greg Broyles, Teresa Broyles, Tricia Crawford, Linda Flora, Ron Flora, Betsy Johnson, Betty Johnson, Ellen King, Kenny King, Michelle King, Tami King, Crystal Williams, Jeff Williams
Little Swatara, Bethel, Pa.: Billie Jean Wagner, David Wagner
Middle Creek, Lititz, Pa.: Aiden Balmer, Connor Fahnestock, Dawson Forney, Bridget Kline, Ava Martin, Valerie Martin, Emersen Weaver, Eric Zimmerman
Mill Creek, Port Republic, Va.: David Bollinger, Janet Bollinger, Barbara Marsh, Jerry McLeod, John Schwarz, Judy Schwarz
Pleasant Chapel, Ashley, Ind.: Dean Pfefferkorn
Plymouth, Ind.: Carleah Morrison
Ridgeway, Harrisburg, Pa.: George Pickens, Ruth Pickens
Roxbury, Johnstown, Pa.: John Geisel, Judy Geisel, Dave Hoyman
Spring Run, McVeytown, Pa.: Jonathan Whitsel, Tiffani Whitsel
White Oak, Manheim, Pa.: Adriann Alwine, Clayton Copenhaver, Brayden

Gregory, Kami Groff, Ray Heisey, Callison Miller, Lamar Wenger

Wedding anniversaries

Barkdoll, Stanley and Hazel, Kearneysville, W.Va., 69
Bridenbaugh, Alan and Lona, Hanover, Pa., 50
Brubaker, Paul and Evy, Ephrata, Pa., 55
Collins, Russell and Sue, Palmyra, Pa., 50
Dickinson, Robert and Adrienne, Portland, Ore., 50
Fike, J. Rogers and Elizabeth, Oakland, Md., 68
Gingrich, Arthur and Nancy, Palmyra, Pa., 60
Grubb, Wilmer, Jr. and Dorothy, Palmyra, Pa., 74
Hamm, Ray and Barbara, Summum, Ill., 65
Hildreth, Gayle and Janet, Lafayette, Ind., 50
Jarrels, John and Helen, Harrisonburg, Va., 65
Keller, John and Alice, Greenville, Ohio, 60
Knepper, Royal and Faye, Markleton, Pa., 67
Lewis, Thomas and Linda, Egdon, W.Va., 50
Leonard, Wayne and Thelma, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, 65
Liller, Paul and Jeanne, Keyser, W.Va., 67
Myer, J. Hershey and Anna Mary, Myerstown, Pa., 75
Myers, Homer and Mildred,

Smithsburg, Md., 67
Peffer, Glenn and Shirley, Carlisle, Pa., 68
Reaker, John and Sue, Bremen, Ind., 50
Rohrer, Wilbur and Judy, Lititz, Pa., 55
Spitler, Dale and Esther, Troy, Ohio, 70
Teets, Leland and Ardis, Egdon, W.Va., 50
Timmons, Bob and Joan, Beaver Creek, Ohio, 60
Tipton, David and Nancy, Somerset, Pa., 55
Weaver, Ralph and Mary, Palmyra, Pa., 71

Deaths

Ali, Frances Sue, 76, Dayton, Ohio, Nov. 12
Basehore, Jeanette T., 92, Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 12
Bashore, Gilbert, 72, Bethel, Pa., Oct. 16
Bitner, Bonnie K., 63, Newville, Pa., Dec. 6
Brocius, Byron A., 88, Harrisburg, Pa., Nov. 30
Bucher, Ruth M., 90, Palmyra, Pa., July 31
Calloway, Robert Lee, 91, Queen Anne, Md., Nov. 17
Caplinger, Donald, 75, Lititz, Pa., Oct. 3
Crilly, Geraldine Oleta Clark, 89, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 27
Delcamp, Daniel P., 60, Covington, Ohio, Oct. 14
Dell, Robert W., 81, McPherson, Kan., Jan. 16
Elliott, Duwane J., 86, Bremen, Ind., Dec. 2
Farringer, Dean L., 99, Denver, Colo., Nov. 26
Feather, Ruby Victoria Dumire, 88, Egdon, W.Va., Oct. 3
Feathers, Diane S. Emerich, 73, Bethel, Pa., Sept. 6
Ferguson, William, 69, Ashland, Ohio, Nov. 26
Finkenbinder, Dorothy J., 89, Shippensburg, Pa., Dec. 10
Flora, Samuel Henry, Jr., 95, Bridgewater, Va., Nov. 18
Gingrich, Walter C., 91, Palmyra, Pa., Sept. 21
Graybill, Orpah Hernley, 96, Lititz, Pa., May 20
Heisey, Dorothy J., 90, Myerstown, Pa., Nov. 30
Hickey-Ruth, Shirley Stover, 84, Union Bridge, Md., Dec. 19
Holsapple, Omer (Bud), 86, Bradford, Ohio, Nov. 10
Hopkins, E. Ruth, 94, Hatfield, Pa., Dec. 28
Johnson, Helen Ardenia, 93, Fishersville, Va., Dec. 8
Jones, Larry, 82, Greenville, Ohio, June 9
Karpenske, Jack D., 76, Lynchburg, Va., Jan. 12
Kaylor, Earl C., Jr., 93, Huntingdon, Pa., Jan. 8
Keiper, Joyce Baker, 77, Bedford, Pa., Jan. 14
Kight, Orville, 91, Westminster, Md., Nov. 23
Kline, Margaret J. Bollinger,

light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7). “You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). “So faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love” (John 15:9).

This issue seems like a parent who

has sent a child out of the family when that child “came out of the closet.” I simply cannot comprehend that.

Theologians suggest that it’s important to examine the context of the times of specific scriptures. The culture and conditions of centuries ago are different from the times of Jesus and when the New Testament scriptures were being told and written. Things are

very different now in the 21st century.

I pray that we listen and seek God’s love among us as Brethren. I’m in an open and affirming congregation and, thankfully, we celebrate all people among our fellowship, gays or straights, the whole creation of God.

Mary Bowman Baucher
Modesto, Calif.

73, Akron, Pa., Nov. 18
Knox, Harold, 90,
 Norristown, Pa., Nov. 19
Kobus, Dorothy Moyers, 81,
 Afton, Va., Dec. 25
Kurtz, Ellen E., 81, Topeka,
 Kan., Nov. 13
Leffler, Kenneth E., Sr., 89,
 Palmyra, Pa., Dec. 10
Lehman, Jerry Wayne, 77,
 Windber, Pa., Sept. 22
Leonard, Thelma A. Trost,
 83, Pleasant Hill, Ohio,
 Sept. 14
Longenecker, William W.,
 Jr., 91, Mount Joy, Pa.,
 Dec. 9
Martin, Shirley E. Lebo, 80,
 Palmyra, Pa., Aug. 25
Martin, Wilmer E., 90,
 Denver, Pa., Dec. 16
McCan, Joanna Belle
 Snyder, 86, Plymouth,
 Ind., Nov. 24
McWilliams, Shirley Ann, 74,
 Rockingham, Va., Nov. 28
Metzger, Max Eugene, 92,
 Lafayette, Ind., Dec. 19
Miller, Earl S., 93,
 Myerstown, Pa., Oct. 17
Morris, Nancy Ellen, 79,
 Stanardsville, Va., Nov. 22
Murphy, Ruth (Susie)
 Spotts, 81, Greenville,
 Ohio, Aug. 14
Palmer, Lillie Mae Eckhart,
 89, Baltimore, Md., Dec. 31
Palsgrove, Gene, 96,
 Modesto, Calif., Nov. 25
Peterson, Dorothy L., 91,

Shippensburg, Pa., Sept. 28
Phillippi, Richard Alan, 70,
 Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 1
Platter, Henry Nelson, 74,
 Salem, Va., Oct. 27
Ritenour, Edith May
 Money maker, 103,
 Waynesboro, Va., Jan. 4
Rothrock, Rebecca Ellen
 Spear, 92, McPherson,
 Kan., Nov. 21
Runner, Aretta F. Spitzer,
 83, Keyser, W.Va., Dec. 7
Seibert, Charles R., 89,
 Elizabethtown, Pa., Jan. 8
Sellers, Zetta Marie
 Pinkstaff, 94, Flat Rock,
 Ill., Oct. 21
Shirley, Reva H., 95,
 Keyser, W.Va., Nov. 10
Skinner, Mariann Young,
 75, Hartville, Ohio, Dec. 7
Smith, Norma Jean
 Zimmerman, 90,
 Harleysville, Pa., Dec. 4
Smitley, Ruth Evelyn Stein,
 91, Greenville, Ohio, Nov.
 10
Snow, Donald Oneil, 82,
 Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 20
Snow, Rachel Rebecca
 Shifflett, 84, Harrisonburg,
 Va., Dec. 6
Stump, Kermit Eugene, 91,
 Bethel, Pa., Oct. 2
Teets, Audra Virginia
 Shaffer, 97, Eglon, W.Va.,
 Jan. 11
Thompson, Darrell J., 92,
 West Lafayette, Ind., Dec. 23

Tolson, Donald R., 87,
 Hartville, Ohio, Oct. 2
Troyer, Floyd G., 91, Ashley,
 Ind., Sept. 22
Twigg, Robert, Sr., 81,
 Middletown, Md., Oct. 10
Wagner, F. Marilyn Forney,
 86, Lititz, Pa., Dec. 3
Wash, William B., 94, La
 Verne, Calif., Jan. 22
Waybright, Junior M., 97,
 Palmyra, Pa., Oct. 20
Whitsel, Hays B., 92,
 Chambersburg, Pa., Jan. 1
Wooters, Howard Harry, Jr.,
 83, Easton, Md., Dec. 11
Yenser, Esther E., 96,
 Myerstown, Pa., Sept. 4
Zellner, Patricia, 96,
 Ashland, Ohio, Nov. 30
Ziegler, Kathryn K. Dubble,
 89, Bethel, Pa., Jan. 9, 2019

Ordained

Baugus, Raymond, South-
 eastern Dist. (Mount Carmel,
 Scottville, N.C.), Dec. 15
Durst, Rodney, W. Marva
 Dist. (Cherry Grove,
 Grantsville, Md.), Dec. 1
Gutierrez, Petra, South-
 eastern Dist. (Ministerio
 Uncion Apostolica,
 Sevierville, Tenn.), Jan. 4
Hamilton, Paul, W. Pa. Dist.
 (Westmont, Johnstown,
 Pa.), Dec. 1
Hornor, Tammy, W. Pa.
 Dist. (Beachdale, Berlin,
 Pa.), Aug. 25

Lee, James, N. Ohio Dist.
 (East Nimishillen, Canton,
 Ohio), Jan. 19
Topf, Annali, Pac. S. W. Dist.
 (Pasadena, Calif.), Jan. 12
Yingst, Michael, S. Ohio &
 Ky. Dist. (Covington,
 Ohio), Dec. 8

Commissioned

Brown, Charles,
 Southeastern Dist.
 (Hawthorne, Johnson City,
 Tenn.), Dec. 22

Licensed

Crumrine, David, Mid. Pa.
 Dist. (First, Roaring
 Spring, Pa.), Jan. 19
Hamilton, Laura, Atl. N. E.
 Dist. (Stevens Hill,
 Elizabethtown, Pa.), Dec. 8
Harris, Timothy,
 Southeastern Dist.
 (Midway, Surgoinsville,
 Tenn.), Dec. 29
Wenger, Andrew, N. Ohio
 Dist. (Springfield, Akron,
 Ohio), Dec. 1
Wright-Hawkins, Gina,
 Virgina Dist. (Oak Grove,
 Roanoke, Va.), Dec. 1

Placements

Abe, Marla, pastor, Bethel,
 Arrington, Va., Jan. 1
Auker, Thomas, pastor,
 Jones Chapel, Martinsville,
 Va., Jan. 1

Bernard, Mike, from pastor,
 Oak Dale, Scherr, W.Va., to
 pastor, Sandy Creek,
 Bruceton Mills, W.Va., Dec. 1
Crumrine, David, director of
 ministry, First, Roaring
 Spring, Pa., Jan. 15
Fitzkee, Don, from interim
 pastor to pastor of worship,
 Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 1
Foley, William, pastor, Mason
 Cove, Salem, Va., Jan. 1
Hostetter, Michael, interim
 pastor, Sunrise,
 Harrisonburg, Va., Dec. 1
Kettering, Robert, from
 interim pastor, Lancaster,
 Pa., to interim pastor, East
 Fairview, Manheim, Pa.,
 Jan. 1
Lancaster, Mark, interim
 pastor, Good Shepherd,
 Tipp City, Ohio, Jan. 12
Murrell, Daniel, pastor,
 Clovis, N.M., Dec. 14
Naff, Jerry, pastor, Boones
 Mill, Va., Sept. 1
Sonafrank, Harold, interim
 team pastor, Fraternity,
 Winston Salem, N.C., Oct. 1
Wenger, Andrew, pastor,
 Springfield, Akron, Ohio,
 Nov. 25
Williard, Robert, interim team
 pastor, Fraternity, Winston
 Salem, N.C., Oct. 1
Wintsch, Misty, from
 associate pastor, Mechanic
 Grove, Quarryville, Pa., to
 pastor, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 1

On coffee and creation



enjoy coffee. In fact, I enjoy coffee a lot. I'm not sure if it's the jolt of caffeine or the fragrant roast that perks me up more, but it's become a staple in my life.

I'm not alone. According to the National Coffee Association, coffee is the most widely consumed beverage worldwide, with more than 400 billion cups brewed each year. Coffee's growing popularity in North America and Europe has created an all-time high in demand.

Coffee farmers are feeling the pressure, often relying on low-wage migrant workers to plant and harvest on what can be dangerously rough terrain. And now, more than ever before, a large portion of the world's Arabica coffee is grown in direct sunlight instead of under shady forest canopies.

These full-sun farms dramatically increase yield, which lowers the price of coffee—something that appeals to buyers, whether they're frugal Brethren or not. But, full-sun farming also depletes the soil of vital nutrients and moisture, creates greater reliance on pesticides, and incentivizes deforestation, which kills healthy biodiversity, destroys habitats for native species, and increases the risk of erosion.

So, it's not like we're coming out the winners in this scenario. While we're paying less, the coffee is worse and we're killing off the land and the creatures that live in it.

In the Costa Rican village of Palmichal de Acosta, nestled in the Cerros de Escazu mountain range, residents have formed Nacientes Palmichal, a community organization dedicated to protecting their forest and water sources. Last July, I toured the area with their executive director, Hernán Ramirez Alvaro. He pointed out how they are reforesting the area with indigenous plants and trees, and how that's helping their local water sources to thrive.

Don Hernán also drew attention to illegal coffee farms nearby, where farmers were disregarding national law to tear down trees and plant coffee on terrain too steep to

support plantations. More and more, these illegal farms are encroaching on the very land that Nacientes Palmichal is trying to revitalize. The public discourse about it has become explosive—to the point that Don Hernán has received death threats.


Death threats? At what point did we, as a society, decide that inexpensive coffee was so important that we needed to put people's lives and livelihoods in danger? That we needed to destroy God's creation in order to enjoy God's bounty?

The Scriptures are filled with stories of the mountains and the hills, the valleys and the waters proclaiming the good news. Creation is not a passive observer in the kingdom of God. *All* of creation is an active participant, made by God, loved by God, and entrusted by God to humanity for its care and celebration.

Some early Anabaptists leaders embraced a "Gospel of All Creatures," interpreting God's call to go into the world and proclaim the good news (Mark 16:15) not as a command to preach the gospel *toward* others, but to preach the gospel that is *already found* in God's creation.

"The Christian tradition is filled with resources that encourage humans to extend dignity and nonviolence to animals (and the entire creation)," writes Matthew Eaton, assistant professor of theology at King's College in Pennsylvania and graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana. "[F]rom the creation narrative to Isaiah's peaceable kingdom to the teachings of Jesus, we are repeatedly encouraged to treat all creation with the love of Christ."

The issues around coffee production and creation care may seem inextricably big, but there are small things we can do to be better stewards of God's resources. If you drink coffee or serve it at your church, do some research. Find out how your coffee is produced, if those working the land were paid fairly, and if the farming was done sustainably.

When we consider the growers who toil for a living and the land entrusted to us by God, it's a small price to pay. 



MADALYN METZGER

Madalyn Metzger is a member of Goshen (Ind.) City Church of the Brethren.

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—1 Corinthians 12:5-6 NIV



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