

MESSENGER

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

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The gift of the Spirit

Photo by Glenn Riegel

“He breathed on them and said,
‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”
~John 20:22

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1451 Dundee Ave. Elgin, IL 60120
MA@brethren.org



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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

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In the spirit

It turns out we're celebrating Earth Day a month late! While April 22 gets all the attention and a politician gets the credit, the first Earth Day 50 years ago took place March 21. And it was created by a Pentecostal peacemaker.

The lesser-known story is that the first Earth Day was created by visionary John McConnell Jr. About the same time, an Environmental Teach-In was promoted by Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson. Nelson's protest against pollution was scheduled for April 22 and took over the Earth Day name in the US—though the United Nations and some countries still observe International Earth Day on the vernal equinox.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Why the vernal equinox? This was important to McConnell because of the spiritual significance of life in balance, with March 21 representing not just the renewal of the earth but also the moment when day and night are equal. He thought of the equinox as “nature’s global holiday,” says the Earth Flag website. On that day “the sun is shared equally between people of the northern hemisphere and people of the southern hemisphere.”

According to the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, which holds a collection of his materials, McConnell saw Earth Day as an opportunity for Christians “to show the power of prayer, the validity of their charity, and their practical concern for Earth’s life and people.” In addition to launching the first governmentally recognized Earth Day, he created the Earth Flag and numerous ventures related to peace and the environment.

McConnell credited his Pentecostal background “for his concern for peace, justice, and care of earth,” says the heritage center. His parents were founding members of the Assemblies of God, and his father was an itinerant preacher and evangelist. His grandfather was part of the Pentecostal movement at the Azusa Street Revival.

While I’m happy to mark April 22 each year with renewed commitment to protecting the world that God gave us, I’m even happier to learn of this story behind the story. Whether in March or April, let’s join in the spirit of McConnell’s Pentecostal fire and fervor: “Let each person choose to be a Trustee of Planet Earth, each in their own way, seeking to think, choose, and act in ways that will protect, preserve and increase Earth’s natural bounty, ever seeking fair benefits for all Earth’s people and for its creatures great and small.”

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

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

Advertising:

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

Editorial:

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

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Courtesy of Ann Stover

Coasting to change

As a third grader, Lucy Bowman from McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren read a book about Malala, the Pakistani girl who was shot in the head by terrorists. Malala survived the attack and has made it her mission to further the cause of educating girls. Bowman was moved by the story and the mission. She said she realized that “not everybody gets to go to school.”

The daughter of Jd and Becki Bowman, she has three siblings. On their behalf, she set a goal of raising \$250 for the Malala Fund to send four girls to school. She began her craft business, “Coasting to Change,” in which she made ceramic tile coasters to sell. The church caught her passion and she raised \$1,280, enough to send 20 girls to school. Rather than seeing it as a mission accomplished, she

viewed the success as just a beginning.

In the ensuing two years, she has promoted her mission to the community, found a reliable market at the annual Alternative Christmas Gift Market, and expanded her homemade products to include bookmarks, hand warmers, bottle cap magnets, rock pictures, upcycled wine bottles, and decorated wine corks. To date, this young entrepreneur has raised \$11,033, which will send more than 200 girls to school. Her link is on the Malala Fund webpage, where she ranks as the second top in donated money (<https://give.classy.org/coastingtochange>).

Very aware of the skills she has learned, Bowman credits her education and family with the wherewithal to be successful. In a presentation given at her middle school, she said, “Service work is HARD work.” —Ann Stover

WASHING FEET

Church of the Brethren minister Paul Roth of Harrisonburg, Va., has written a story published in the *Christian Century* online “Readers Write” feature. These essays by readers are on occasional topics, inspired by one-word “writing prompts.” Roth’s essay was inspired by the word “feet.” He wrote down his memory of participating in love feast with his father and brother, Kennie, who had Down Syndrome. The moment his brother washed his feet, he wrote, “my heart changed.” Read Roth’s essay at www.christiancentury.org/article/readers-write/feet-essays-readers.

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.



Giving socks and love

Olivet Church of the Brethren in Thornville, Ohio, is a close-knit congregation, eager to support church members like Angela Hammond in her first teaching position out of college: the ALPHA (Adolescents Learning Parents Helping Adolescents) Program in Crooksville, Ohio.

The ALPHA Program was created by Luann Cooperider, Perry County Juvenile Court Judge. According to its website, “The ALPHA Program is designed as a result-oriented program to rehabilitate students in Perry County who are involved with the Juvenile Court . . . based on the filings from the local schools in Perry County. These filings include truancy, delinquency, and unruly charges.” Students are held to a strict attendance policy as well as daily “soft” searches. Many have less-than-ideal home lives, which contribute to their behavior.

Olivet funded the purchase of 30 packs of socks for ALPHA students. Each pack had at least five pairs of socks, so students would have a pair for each day of the week. A few extra minutes were spent one Sunday placing socks in gift bags. When the students saw the festive bags, and realized the gifts were for them, their eyes lit up. The joy of Christmas morning graced a small school in the middle of nowhere. The students eagerly opened their gifts and were excited and grateful for the love that they had been shown by a church that didn’t even know them.

ALPHA students returned the blessing to Olivet Church of the Brethren with their unreserved gratitude. They spent the remainder of the school day writing thank-you notes to Olivet. Many wrote that it was great that the church had bought socks for “kids who really needed them”—none of the students seeing themselves as needy. One student was so excited, she put a pair on and walked around sock footed.

The next morning, when they took their shoes off to undergo the “soft” search, many were showing off their new socks. —Angela Hammond

Singing the vision

When the touring choir from Bridgewater (Va.) College performed at York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren on March 14, they sang a hymn written by church member Greg Bachman. He recently wrote both text and music for a new hymn titled “Peacefully, Simply, Together.”

Bachman had contacted choir director Curtis Nolley, visiting director of choral music at Bridgewater, about his creation. Nolley responded, “It is a lovely melody, engaging harmony, and absolutely relevant text.”

Bachman shared the hymn with MESSENGER. Here are a few lines from the opening verse:

*“In a world that is torn by divisive words,
by the gun, by the power of fear,
there’s a need for the peace of the Living Word
to be heard, to be strong, to be clear.”*

Sister church closes magazine

The Brethren Church, a sister to the Church of the Brethren, has announced that its denominational magazine, *The Brethren Evangelist*, has ceased publication after more than 140 years. The Brethren Church shares the Church of the Brethren’s roots in the 1708 baptisms in the village of Schwarzenau, Germany.

“This final print issue of the *Evangelist* is published just a few weeks shy of the 141st anniversary of the printing of the *Progressive Christian*, the publication that would eventually become what we call the *Evangelist*,” wrote Steve Cole, executive director of the Brethren Church, in the magazine’s Winter 2019-2020 issue. The magazine’s founder, Henry Holsinger, was a progressive leader in the schisms of the Brethren movement in the 1880s.

“Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present.”

—N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*

All about Easter

Did you know?

The name “Easter” comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, according to the Venerable Bede, a monk and historian who wrote in the 7th and 8th centuries. She presided over springtime celebrations and fertility. The springtime themes were incorporated into the Christian celebration of the holiday.

The Eastern Orthodox Church usually celebrates Easter at a different time than the Western church, because Eastern Orthodox tradition uses the Julian calendar. The West uses the Gregorian.

The date of Easter is set by the lunar calendar, falling on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox (always assumed to be March 21 for the purpose of setting the Eastern date). It can range from March 22 to April 25. It typically tracks close to the Jewish festival of Passover, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples just before his crucifixion and resurrection. The term “Pascha” or “Paschal,” sometimes used for Easter, comes from the Hebrew word for Passover.

Twelve of the US states recognize Good Friday as an official holiday.

Purple or red is the traditional liturgical color for Lent through Holy Week, and white (or sometimes gold) for Easter Sunday.

Lilies (specifically white lilies or “Easter lilies”) are the unofficial official flower of Easter as they are considered symbols of purity and grace.

In Greece, Christians traditionally knock eggs together when they meet, with the words “Christos anesti!” (“Christ is risen!”). Some view the cracking as symbolic of Jesus breaking out of the tomb. In Germany, celebrations often include a cake shaped like a lamb.

In 2018, Americans spent about \$18.2 billion on Easter, according to *Good Housekeeping*. The holiday was celebrated by about 80 percent of the population, although for some it is only a secular observance. About half of that group said they planned to go to church for Easter.

One for the bunny . . .

The Easter bunny has become a popular symbol of the Easter season, probably since rabbits are considered signs of new and abundant life. Test your knowledge with some rabbit trivia:



1. True or False: Rabbits are rodents.
2. What do you call a group of rabbits?
3. What's the average lifespan for a rabbit?
4. What is the world-record distance for highest jump by a rabbit?
5. How many babies are in an average litter of rabbits?
6. When did chocolate Easter bunnies begin?
7. In Switzerland, what animal replaces the bunny in bringing Easter eggs?
8. And what animal typically performs the task in Australia?

1. False. They are actually lagomorphs.
2. A herd. (So we've heard—although in northern Canada they're called a “fluffle”.)
3. In captivity, around 8–10 years; in the wild, only about 3 years. The record for a pet rabbit is 18.
4. It's 39.2 inches, recorded in Scandinavia. That's about a meter high!
5. Somewhere around 4–12—and the gestation period is only a month.
6. They go back to the mid-1800s in Germany. They made it to the US around 1890.
7. A cuckoo. (At least birds actually lay eggs!)
8. A bilby. Rabbits are viewed as unwanted agricultural pests in Australia. Chocolate bilbies are given as treats.

What do you do for love feast?

These responses come from a Facebook conversation initiated by Jamie Steamer Nace, director of children's ministry at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.



Cheryl Burnbaugh-Coyford

➔ Our love feast is done in community with everyone, men, women, family, and co-ed. It's a lunch type meal of cold cuts, cheeses, rolls, applesauce, carrots, and celery.

Jeffrey Clouser, Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

➔ On Maundy Thursday, we seat folks in the more traditional way, men on one side, women on the other, and washing feet at the tables. We always have a table for hand washing for those who cannot get down. Our Holy Week service is somber, focusing on the sacrifice of our Lord.

Ray Hileman, Celebration of Christ, Saint Petersburg, Fla.

➔ In the fall, we had communion with various cut-up pieces of breads to represent differences and grape juice. We also offer a gluten-free alternative. I ended up with a sweet cornbread. Very meaningful!

We had love feast with East Dayton and Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren. We have never tried this before.

We started having family tables in the 1970s, including footwashing. We offered all three: men, women, and family. We are a mostly older congregation and still offer the option of all three but more prefer sitting mixed. It has been interesting to watch the change.

Jeannie Campbell, Beavercreek (Ohio) Church of the Brethren

➔ We have worship together in the morning and then move to our Family Life Center downstairs for love feast. We sit together at long tables. We have footwashing stations for men, women, couples, families. Our meal is chicken and rice soup (or tomato), a roll with a slice of cheese in it, and grapes. During footwashing, children are taken to a separate room for a "mini" love feast designed to help them understand the love feast experience and unpack its meaning.

Jamie Steamer Nace, Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

➔ Men and women seated separately. Beef, sop, grapes, bread and water on china dishes. Sang two hymns, read scripture and some other readings. Candlelight and subdued overhead lighting.

Janet Elsea, Barren Ridge Church of the Brethren, Staunton, Va.

➔ Evening service held in the fellowship hall. Bread chunks, chopped beef, topped with hot broth. Men and women sit together, separate to wash feet. Soft lighting. Scripture, singing, meditations. Bread and cup.

Rita Murphy, Hollidaysburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

➔ 2019 marked the 150th anniversary of the first Brethren coming to the Maryland Eastern Shore. It culminated with a joint love feast for all seven churches, hosted by the Ridgely Church of the Brethren. While some churches were too far away for their members to attend, four of the churches had members attend, with deacons of all the churches joining together to provide the materials and organize the event. The readings were done by the pastors of these four churches (with some help from the deacons!). It turned out to be a great success!

Kenneth Wilson George, Ridgely (Md.) Church of the Brethren

➡ Stevens Hill joined Harrisburg First at 5 p.m. Shared leadership in the service. We sat mixed with the footwashing off to the side in small circles of three. Beef soup & bread.

Ann Bach, Stevens Hill Community Church of the Brethren, Elizabethtown, Pa.

➡ Our congregation had a traditional love feast this evening. We started with a time of self reflection in the sanctuary and then moved to the fellowship hall, where men and women sat at separate tables. Footwashing was done around the tables. Our simple meal included beef and sop. Our theme scripturally was centered around the parable of the Prodigal Son. We had several first-time attendees and young families!

Dennis Beckner, Columbia City (Ind.) Church of the Brethren

➡ We do the entire service in the fellowship hall. The men and women sit separately. We wash feet around the tables and also have a hand washing table for those that prefer that.

Brenda McLearn-Montz, Bakersfield (Calif.) Church of the Brethren

➡ I have been Brethren since a baby. I'm now ninety four. What I like about this church is that they don't take communion without wearing their prayer cap, which I grew up doing. It's more special to me.

Lydia Jones Price, Geiger Church of the Brethren, Somerset, Pa.

➡ All glory to God, in our local congregation the service was inspiring. I had an ulcer attack during the service, and pastor asked us to pray for our individual problems. I declared it to the Lord, and I was made whole. I left the church healthier than before even to this moment.

I participated in love feast, washing of feet, men separate but ate together. Everyone brought food and drinks from various homes and we all participated immediately after the church service.

We later took the bread and wine and the benediction was said at 14:13hr.

Nzalo Vappa Luka, LCC Nyanya, Abuja, Nigeria

➡ We shared a meal of beef and sop and Mediterranean food. We eat together but move into two circles—one for men and one for women—to wash feet. I've appreciated silent/somber love feasts in the past, but Peace Covenant's meal and footwashing is filled with stories, laughter and hugs, and I love it.

Dana Cassell, Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C.



➡ This photo of two of our children participating in feet washing says it all :)

Paul Liepelt, Annville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

➡ My kids have grown up attending love feast. My daughter is nine, and this Sunday she washed feet with her friends. She had a friend from school there who's never been to love feast, and my daughter said, "I can wash your feet and if you don't feel comfortable washing mine, that's okay."

Mandy North, Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren

➡ I had the children "wash" dolls' feet, then the dolls "washed" the children's feet. Washing hands in basins like the adults do. Then a picnic. For communion we had crackers and grape Kool-aid. (I emphasized it was pretend—I didn't want to be sacrilegious.) My son said he wants to do it again next love feast, so I'd say it was a success. (These children have not yet been baptized.)

Karen Mackie, White Branch and Nettle Creek Church of the Brethren, Hagerstown, Ind.

➡ We invited the area Mennonite church members and another Church of the Brethren congregation to join us for love feast. It was a nice group, and we enjoyed meeting new people. It sure added to our numbers as we usually have a small group for love feast. We hope to continue inviting other churches to our love feast.

Wendy Boettner, Freeport (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

THE BEAUTY AND MEANING YOU HAVE ALL SHARED IS TRULY FROM GOD.

➡ My most memorable love feast was in Nigeria in 2004 or 2005. All from the Jos congregation were seated outside in the compound. I remember the sun going down, the awesome sunset, and the screeching of fruit bats as they returned to the bush for the night. Men and women washed feet separately. Tea was used for grape juice, along with pieces of bread for communion. It was a memory both my husband, Bob, and I will cherish forever.

Carol Krouse

➡ Sunday school watched and discussed Christina Singh's message from Annual Conference on footwashing and servanthood. Worship with service as preparation for love feast included bread and cup. Congregation met for carry-in meal immediately following worship. Ended with footwashing. Was fine service of fellowship and reminder of why we claim salvation in Christ.

Claude Simmons, Staunton (Va.) Church of the Brethren



What is sop? This is not a misspelling of "soup." It is bread soaked in beef broth.

➡ Our love feast is very fantastic and lovely. We conduct it immediately after the church service. Men and women dress colorfully. We start with washing of feet, men on this side, women on the other side. People from different cultures bring delicious meals to share the love. We have a new baptism among us, which we share the love together. It is always memorable. We give God the glory for this wonderful experience. I love the Brethren from the bottom of my heart.

Ishaya Ibrahim Sanya, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

➡ We share simple finger foods such as nuts, figs, dried & fresh fruits & pita bread spread with honey butter. As we eat, we share stories of how the church has strengthened our lives in good times *and* bad. We think of all the dear saints who used to sit at feast with us. You may wash hands or feet, or a sister or brother gets down to do it for you when you no longer can. There is both joy and solemnity to our service but mostly lots of gratefulness and love!

Leslie Lake, Polo (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

➡ Immediately after the service we had footwashing, men on a separate side from women. After that we ate variety of food, fellowship that was brought from our various houses. We had communion thereafter in remembrance of what our Lord Jesus taught us to do likewise. All glory to God.

Diya Hamidu, LCC Center Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

➡ We celebrate the October love feast at our regular morning worship time. Families sit together in the fellowship hall for a simple meal of grapes, cheese and crackers. Foot and hand washing is segregated and away from the tables. The entire service is woven together with scripture, prayer, meditation and singing. Most women and girls wear prayer caps.

Shannon Moore Metcalfe, Greensburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

➡ In the fall, we shared love feast immediately following the worship service. We arranged the tables in the shape of a cross with men sitting on one side and women on the other. We shared a meal of beef soup, grapes, and cheese and crackers followed by the bread and cup of communion. The deacons led the service since I was on paternity leave. The service was especially meaningful as the whole body of Christ pitched in to lead.

Daniel Rudy, Ninth Street Church of the Brethren, Roanoke, Va.



Lukas Koskela



Lukas Koskela

Footwashing at Green Tree, photos by Lukas Koskela, age 10.

➡ My 10-year-old son joined me for the first time. He offered to take pics during footwashing. What a great way for him to learn.

Gail Koskela, Green Tree Church of the Brethren, Oaks, Pa.

➡ Wenatchee Brethren Baptist and Sunnyslope celebrated in the evening. Sop, roast beef, fresh fruit, and cheese slices. Men and women separate footwashing, hand washing table also provided. Bread and cup, hymn singing, and benediction.

Colleen Michael, Wenatchee (Wash.) Brethren Baptist Church

➡ We seat men and women separately. Our meal consists of beef, sop, bread and water. I do meditations with each element and, of course, Scripture readings. This year I wrote the meditations from the perspective of Peter. I love this service and consider it to be vital to the life of the church.

Dave Weiss, Springfield Church of the Brethren, Coopersburg, Pa.

➡ We celebrated in the evening. It was just a time of really nice fellowship. Men sit on one side and the women on the other side.

I also loved passing our Amish brothers and sisters on our way to church who were heading to their own celebrations.

Jeffrey Keller, Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren, Quarryville, Pa.

➡ Evening communion with women, feasting on fruits and local dishes, anointing.

Toma Ayuba, LCC Madanya Mubi, Nigeria

➡ We usually do love feast with footwashing on Maundy Thursday.

In the fall, we began with a processional, carrying the cross, the basin and towel, the bread, and cup. There was a lovely hymn that none of us knew, so we turned it into an interpretive reading: 462 in the blue hymnal, "Now the Silence."

Someone came prepared to play the recorder while we were passing the bread and the cup. And special music, a solo of "I Believe."

Such a wonderfully meaningful sharing of World Communion Sunday.

Nancy Hammond-Chaffin, First Church of the Brethren, Flint, Mich.

➡ The beauty and meaning you have all shared is truly from God. We have read about many different ways to come together at love feast: some wash feet separately, some together. Some have beef at their meal and some fruit, cheese, and crackers. Some sit at round tables, some at long tables. Some had their service in the morning, some in the afternoon, some in the evening. But, *one* thing is overwhelmingly consistent: people of God gathered together to remember what Christ has done for us and to serve each other in his precious name. Amen, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Jamie Steamer Nace, Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren



A benediction for my brother

by Jim Weaver

Let us live in active anticipation of that day when all of God's family will gather for a great picnic by the river of justice that flows from the throne of God.

All of God's children will be there regardless of race, creed, or orientation.

And the only greeting will be "Hello, Brother " and "Good to see you, Sister," and all of our loved ones, who have gone before us, will be saving our places.

On that day the lame will shoot slam dunks and the tone deaf will sing arias, the blind will see bluebirds and the deaf will hear them sing because all pain and scarcity and limitations will have disappeared.

Bayonets will be used to toast marshmallows to make s'mores because war will be no more, scarcity will be replaced with abundance, regrets of the past and fear of the future will be replaced by an eternal glorious now! And there will hugs of reunion, tears of joy, dancing, and singing—*oh, the singing!*


All instruments and machines join to create a wondrous symphony of salvation. The total cosmos, with one voice, will sing "Alleluia!"

And God will be laughing and shouting "Yes! Yes!! Yes!!! This is going exactly according to my plan."

Our challenge is to work toward making this dream become a reality.

God's promise that it will take place is our benediction.

In the name of God who creates and sustains,
Jesus, who teaches, heals, and saves,
And the ever-active, ever-present Holy Spirit.

Right on! Amen! Hallelujah! 

Jim Weaver, an alumnus of Bethany Theological Seminary and Elizabethtown College, was a retired family and marriage counselor and member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Saint Charles, Ill. He died Oct. 25, 2019.

Eating together

Brethren take seriously that gathering around a table nourishes both community and faith. Dinner church, one of Jesus' favorite traditions, is cool again. Kendall Vanderslice anthologizes this (re)emergence. Her stories may inspire your congregation's renewal.

Vanderslice folds case studies into light, poetic exploration of theological and ecclesiastical dynamics. She loves



ANNA LISA GROSS

and knows food, but sees eating to be in service to deeper callings on our lives—building relationships with God and one another. Vanderslice's greatest love may be the re-creation of Christ's body when we gather, and she paints pretty pictures of 10 meal-centered churches.

Reflecting on Root and Branch, founded by Tim Kim and Neil Ellingson in pursuit of liturgy and

“real” community (not simply the fad of dinner church), Vanderslice shares from her own bread-baking expertise:

Sourdough bread takes on the most flavor not through extra ingredients or hip, new techniques. It comes into fullness slowly, as the leaven works its way through the dough. The Kingdom of God is like leaven, the Gospel of Matthew says. It builds strength and develops flavor when we slow down and let the yeast do its work (pp. 88-89).

Church is always a balance of comfort and discomfort, whether it's a steepled stone building or re-purposed storefront. Do we sing the familiar favorite hymns, or invigorate worship with songs from new supplements? Do we catch up with loved ones or greet visitors in those crucial two minutes after the postlude? Do church leaders ask these questions when church happens in a restaurant?


In Lansing, Mich., Church in a Pub is a comfortable gathering for people who are turned off by church. Pastor Tom Arthur works for a Methodist church with a traditional Sunday morning worship in a church building. Rather than expecting outsiders to find the church, Arthur talked to restaurant owners about celebrating eve-

ning worship in their places, and Church in a Diner was born. After the diner owner retired, the way opened for Church in a Pub.

It's a space where people know how to behave comfortably, and they don't feel restricted by unspoken rules about what is appropriate or not. They come mostly for fellowship and also for dinner, a seamless service the least of their concerns. “The messiness is part of doing worship on the edge of the ‘mission field,’” says Tom. This messiness, which feels quite like a boisterous family dinner, offers a sense of belonging that is fertile ground for the seed of Christ's love to take root (p. 123).

This experience of church has more in common with Jesus' earliest followers than my Sunday routine. In the rhythms and shared spaces of their lives, with food and some teaching, people find church. Jesus' preaching was at hillside picnics and around dinner tables far more often than in synagogues. Spread out your picnic blanket with the Garden Church. Earlham School of Religion alumna Anna Woofenden's church plant in San Pedro, Calif., began with the land; work/worship/nourishing grew out of this land.

While Vanderslice often references relationship-building as a gift or goal of dinner church, she doesn't explore the nature of these relationships. As years' worth of meals are shared, do these become lasting friendships? Spiritual companions weekly, or all week long? What's the difference between church relationships, dinner church relationships, and lunch bunch relationships?

As Christendom disintegrates, with church buildings and institutions declining, perhaps our refuge won't be underground catacombs. Crest Manor Church of the Brethren continues Sunday morning worship in a steepled stone building, but in 2020 we've also prayed in someone's living room and sung hymns at Ponderosa. Balancing comfort and discomfort and religiously eating together nourishes Christ's body. 

Anna Lisa Gross is interim pastor at Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *We Will Feast: Rethinking Dinner, Worship, and the Community of God*. **Author:** Kendall Vanderslice.

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Soup's on

A Maryland church serves up hot meals—and connection

by Walt Wiltschek

The second Tuesday of the month has rolled around again, and the west side of Ridgely, Md.—population 1,638—is popping with activity.

Sitting at the center of the buzz is the little white church at the corner of 2nd St. and Park Ave., Ridgely Church of the Brethren, and on this weekday evening people are flowing through the doors. For about three years now, the second Tuesday has meant Soup Night at the church, and it's become a popular attraction for good food and conversation.

"We serve those who need a hot meal, we serve those who are lonely, and we serve for the fellowship," says Peggy Hutchinson, one of the regular volunteers at the event. "A lot of people come for the fellowship."

Despite the name, soup isn't always on the menu. On this particular night, three varieties of homemade soup fill one end of the table, but sometimes the offerings feature spaghetti, tacos, hamburgers, casseroles, or—in November—a hot turkey dinner. Side dishes, desserts, and beverages fill out the meal.

And it's free. Completely free. The church won't even accept donations from anyone who comes in. That's because they see it as part of their service and mission, so they want it to be a gift.

"People usually tell me what they're going to bring after I let them know what we're going to have," says Barbara Thompson, chair of Ridgely's outreach and witness committee and coordinator of the monthly events. "I go shopping for paper products and such if we need it. But it's all donated, except if there are big things—like the turkey and ham or hamburger and hot dogs. The church has a budget for it, and I will buy that."

It wasn't always such a big operation. The idea began when members learned that about a dozen people in their small town were homeless. They decided that providing occasional healthy meals would be one way to reach out. They started putting up a few signs in the community and spreading the word.

For the first year or so, they served maybe 30 to 40 people on a given night—about the same as the church's attendance on an average Sunday morning. And the homeless people they were trying to reach rarely came. So they started encouraging members of other area churches to come, and others from the community. Things began booming.

"We just say, 'Come!' The more the merrier," says another of the volunteers, Joann Schuyler. "We'll use the Sunday

school rooms if we need to. We just have to put everyone somewhere.”

Over the past year, the total has topped 125, sometimes exceeding the space in the fellowship hall and overflowing into other rooms. Most of the homeless community comes now, along with residents in local Section 8 housing and others in need, sitting side by side with church members of all ages, some from as far as half an hour away. Takeout boxes are also provided to anyone who requests them.

“It started off very small, but it has gotten large,” Thompson says. “People come and enjoy it, and the food is very good. People feel welcome, and we try to talk to them. We don’t have room for many more, but we don’t want to turn anyone away. The first few times I was getting discouraged because we didn’t have many there, but now we’re reaching the people we need to reach.”

Pulling it all off, of course, requires a lot of help. Thompson quarterbacks the process. Various members cook homemade dishes each month. Some donate supplies. Youth help to serve and clean.

“It’s a total church effort,” Hutchison says. “Men and women, everyone has jobs to do. We’re small, so we know we need everyone.”

Schuyler agrees. “If you’re part of the church here, you just pitch in,” she says.

Take, for example, Victor Reynolds, a former restaurant manager who began attending Ridgely in the past year. He quickly found the meals to be a place where he could use his gifts, making sure the kitchen is sanitized and running smoothly. He was amazed by the skill the church puts into the meals.

“They know what they’re doing!” Reynolds says. “It seems like they’ve been cooking for 1,000 years.”

And others toss the jovial praise right back.

“We couldn’t do it without Victor,” Schuyler says. “He does everything in the kitchen. He cuts cake, cooks the hot dogs and hamburgers—he just does everything. If we’re short on something, we just say, ‘Hey, Victor!’ and he’s right there.”

Amid the lightheartedness, Thompson says running

out of food is indeed a concern, especially as attendance continues to grow.

“We’ve come close a few times, but God always provides,” she says. “One time we were almost out of desserts, and one lady walked in with Oreo cookies. Sometimes we’ve had to raid the food pantry and come up with extra things if we’ve run low, but nobody has gone away hungry.”

Ken George, a second-career ministry student who has been leading the congregation’s ministry for the past two years, loves what he has been seeing.

“I think it shows that a small church can do big things,” George says. “Everybody pulls together. It’s a wonderful thing—a

wonderful opportunity to serve.”


He says the fact that it’s all offered as a total gift to the community is important as a theological statement of who the church is.

“When Jesus washes the disciples’ feet, he’s not expecting anything in return,” George says. “All he was expecting was for the disciples to go out and do the same. I hope maybe here we have one or two people go out and do the same.”

The community has taken notice. George says at least four people have started attending Ridgely as a direct result of the Soup Nights, and nine people are currently enrolled in a membership class. The energy has undergirded other outreach efforts, too, such as assisting a family center, collecting supplies for a school, volunteering at nearby Camp Mardela, partnering with a Scout group, and more.

“It’s kind of exhilarating,” says Miriam Garey, another of the many volunteers. “It was hard when there weren’t many coming, but then it picked up. You feel good about what you’re doing.”

They plan to keep on doing it. The work can stretch the small congregation at times, but they’ve felt that stretching is good for them, forcing them to think about how they can maximize the resources God has given them.

“We’re a small church, and we ask, ‘Can we keep doing all this?’” Hutchison says, gesturing around the hall. “But I’m sure we’ll continue it. We feel like it’s our duty. Our whole church is really involved, and it’s helped us to grow. We just enjoy this.” 

Walt Wiltschek



THE WORK CAN STRETCH THE SMALL CONGREGATION AT TIMES, BUT THEY’VE FELT THAT STRETCHING IS GOOD FOR THEM, FORCING THEM TO THINK ABOUT HOW THEY CAN MAXIMIZE THE RESOURCES GOD HAS GIVEN THEM.

THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW



by Annika Harley

April 22 will mark the 50th anniversary of **Earth Day**. This year's Earth Day Sunday theme from Creation Justice Ministries is "The Fierce Urgency of Now," from words by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King:

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

While the context has shifted, Dr. King's statement is as true today as it was decades ago. In 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that we had 12 years to drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions as a planet by 2030. While this is a steep climb, it is far from impossible. God's creation is at a tipping point, and everyone must act together in the spirit of the "fierce urgency of now."

Yet, this bird's-eye view of numbers and timelines can cause feelings of detachment, apathy, and defeat. This is why, through the lens of faith, Creation Justice Ministries (CJM) focuses on how lives are already being affected and shapes the agenda around justice. Like Jesus, we are called to walk with the most vulnerable.

Everyone is intimately connected to the climate crisis, but some people are more affected than others. People of color, children, and people living in poverty are the first to be harmed by environmental injustice.

For example, low-income families and people of color are most likely to live near risky sites such as incinerators, toxic dumps, fossil fuel extraction sites, and industrial factories.

They suffer most from health impacts such as asthma, cancer, and reproductive harm. Children, whose tiny bodies are still using air, water, and food from their surroundings to grow, are disproportionately vulnerable.

Also uniquely vulnerable are communities that once depended on extractive, unsustainable economic systems. In places where fossil fuel energy production, mining, or other unsustainable industries once thrived, we seek a just transition to an economy of dignity. "Just transition" is the concept of moving from a non-renewable to renewable society, economy, and governance system with a holistic justice-centered approach. It puts racial, gender, and economic equity at the forefront of change so that marginalized communities do not bear the cost of the transition.

My task, as a staff member for Creation Justice Ministries, is to listen to the people most affected and help them find allies by sharing their stories with religious communities and public policy makers. Through storytelling efforts in Appalachia and Flint, Mich., I have helped lift up voices speaking about lack of access to clean drinking water. In groups of front-line communities, water activists, and faith leaders, information is shared between environmental justice communities. CJM shares stories through faith-based and secular news sources, Sunday school, and worship programming. This builds allyship among those who have not been directly affected by an environmental crisis.

Those with economic and racial privilege often win the argument that unsightly, polluting industries should be "not in my backyard." Yet as Christians, can we morally live with the knowledge that a dump or incinerator is polluting another neighborhood? How can we continue to power our



Creation Justice Ministries is a national faith-based organization that focuses on the environmental justice priorities of 38 member communions, including the Church of the Brethren. Members include other historic peace churches, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, and historically black denominations. CJM is a regular project site for Brethren Volunteer Service.

electric grid with coal and natural gas while miners get sick with black lung disease and Appalachian mountains are blown apart?

The lesson in the parable of the good Samaritan is that everyone is our neighbor—and everywhere is our backyard.

These concepts are vital to consider while making changes in lifestyle, becoming active in environmental organizations, and even deciding who to vote for in local, state, and national elections. Here are some of the many meaningful ways to get involved:

Visit the Creation Justice Ministries Action Center.

Each month CJM releases a timely action alert that allows you to easily send a message to your congressional representatives on a national piece of legislation that affects God's creation. The simple process allows you to tell your elected representatives about issues that matter to you. Go to www.creationjustice.org/action.

Celebrate Earth Day Sunday. Earth Day Sunday can be celebrated on the Sunday before or after April 22. Find ways for your congregation to celebrate at www.earthdaysunday.org.

Join a local chapter of an environmental justice organization. Research environmental justice organizations near you and join climate and environmental actions in your own locality. Local communities know best the issues that affect them and their area. Grassroots knowledge and action are where change starts.

Participate in town hall meetings and environmental justice hearings. Voice your questions and opinions to local officials at town halls and hearings. This is a great way for local politicians to hear about the issues that affect the community and for you to learn about the representative's priorities.


Start a green team at your church. Get your congregation involved in the work of caring for God's creation. Green teams work on all kinds of projects, such as improving the energy efficiency of the building, incorporating the many biblical teachings of creation care and justice into Sunday school and worship, gardening, volunteering, and

outreach. Find prayer, education, and action resources at www.creationjustice.org/educational-resources.

Learn about your local watershed. Water is a human right. Learn about the bodies of water near you, the watershed you live in, and the pollutants your water faces. Join a watershed group to get involved in protecting your community's water.

Learn about communities that have been environmentally marginalized. Who are the indigenous people native to the land where you live? Find out if that group has any environmental initiatives that are important to them and find out how to be supportive. Learn who lives around the local dumps, factories, incinerators, or other major polluters. Explore what the community and local governance is doing (or not doing) to mitigate these sites.

Grow a garden. This has so many benefits—eat less expensively, cut down on your food carbon footprint, eat a fruit- and veggie-filled diet, and spend regular time with creation. A flower garden with native plants encourages the local ecosystem to thrive and especially offers bees (a keystone species) places to cross-pollinate. If green space is hard to come by, consider gardening at a local community garden. Even indoor plants have benefits. They are natural air purifiers and they beautify living space.

Of course, there are personal changes we can all make, such as using reusable grocery bags or taking public transport instead of a personal vehicle. While these small-step changes are necessary, in the spirit of the “fierce urgency of now” it's time to look beyond our individual selves and participate in structural, justice-oriented change. There are fantastic initiatives and projects that are eager for more support. People of faith and moral value are just the right ones to be involved. 

Annika Harley is the policy and outreach associate with Creation Justice Ministries (CJM). She came to this position through Brethren Volunteer Service and transitioned from volunteer to employee in 2019. While Harley grew up in a Mennonite church, she has been involved in many Church of the Brethren activities through family members who are Brethren. These connections guided her to CJM, where she assists with program management, advocacy, and outreach.



Jeff Boshart

Seedtime and harvest

by Jeff Boshart

What does a missionary kid do for an encore?

Missionary kids, or MKs, often find themselves living in the shadow of their parents' ministry successes. This

is true for Richard Petcher, founder of Petcher Seeds in Fruitdale, Ala. Richard, along with his parents, Paul and Esther, and his sister Cheryl, arrived in Nigeria in 1951. The Petchers served a three-year term in

Garkida and later a four-year term in Lassa. Along the way they were joined by younger siblings Christine and Steven, and suffered the loss of another sibling, Susan, who is buried in the missionary cemetery in Garkida.

THROUGH THE CALLING THAT GOD PLACED IN RICHARD'S LIFE, PETCHER SEEDS HAS SENT SEEDS TO JUST ABOUT EVERY CORNER OF THE US, AS WELL AS PROVIDING NUMEROUS MISSION EFFORTS WITH SMALL AMOUNTS OF DONATED SEEDS.

Richard recalls how his mother would send him out of the house to give food or drink to visitors who crossed their yard, and his father is remembered in Lassa to this day as “our doctor” by elders in the community. Later, upon returning to Alabama, his mother instructed him to seek out those at church who had nowhere to go after the Sunday service and invite them to lunch. He credits his mother as the one who instilled a desire to serve others deep within him. As a child, the wildlife and plants of Africa captivated him and gave him a love for all of God’s creatures.

The transition to life in the United States from that of an MK in Nigeria was not easy. Many MKs share the experience of feeling like they just don’t fit in anywhere. Richard knew he was different, but remembers his father saying, “To make a difference, you have to be different.” As Richard grew into adulthood, he studied agriculture and lived and worked in various parts of the US before returning


to live near his family in Fruitdale, all the while desiring to use his gifts and knowledge to help others.

Believing that God gave him a call, much like the call to ministry, Richard started a seed business. His motivation was never to sell seeds, but to provide a product that would improve soils and improve animal health. After researching many options, he settled on forages and cover crops. The most popular was Sunn Hemp or Crotalaria—a leguminous annual plant unrelated to marijuana or other hemp crops.

In the early days of his business, Richard’s claims of benefits to animals and soils were met with great skepticism by farmers and academia in the US. Other countries had used Sunn Hemp and other crops being promoted by Petcher Seeds, so Richard knew he was on solid footing with his assertions. For a time, Richard was joined in the business by younger brother Steven, a veterinarian. Petcher Seeds was run out of Steven’s barn, but ultimately outgrew the space and a warehouse had to be built to con-

tain the expanding inventory.

Through the calling that God placed in Richard’s life, Petcher Seeds has sent seeds to just about every corner of the US, as well as providing numerous mission efforts with small amounts of donated seeds. This includes the Church of the Brethren Global Food Initiative (GFI) and its partners in Nigeria, Haiti, Rwanda, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. It all began decades ago in Nigeria when God placed in him the gift of mercy upon being touched by the suffering of children his own age and watching his parents’ ministry.

In a letter to GFI manager Jeff Boshart, Richard wrote, “Our hope at Petcher Seeds is to help as many in God’s world as possible.” With a strong desire to pray for, love, and serve others, clearly this MK has done very well, with God’s help, at charting his own course that continues to improve lives around the globe. 

Jeff Boshart is manager of the Global Food Initiative.

Jeff Boshart



Jeff Boshart





When the US cut all aid to Central America

by Chester Thomas

Most of us live in a neighborhood where, as good neighbors, we try to keep up with what is happening. We keep up with who is moving in and who is moving out, how our neighbors are dealing with their problems, and many times, how we can help them resolve their problems.

We get involved in special needs that can be resolved so that our community can become a more prosperous, peaceful, and

caring neighborhood with everyone helping each other and developing a sense of family. And, when possible, worshipping together and thanking God for the blessings he has given us.

Living in Central America and in Honduras we see families very tightly attached to the United States as they have fathers, sons, daughters who have migrated and who live and work in the US. They form part of someone's neighborhood. They are very hard workers and struggle to earn a living as they send money back to their families in Honduras every week. They work mostly in jobs requiring physical labor, many times taking jobs that locals won't do. Sometimes they work two jobs and receive less than minimum wage as they know that their families back in Honduras are depending on them in order to eat. They do not want a hand out, they want to work. And almost every year they send more than \$4 billion to Honduras to help support their families and improve the quality of life back home.

Many Hondurans live in slums in city neighborhoods that are dangerous and lack opportunities such as jobs, education,

Two articles, one in *Christianity Today* and one published by *Relevant*, help explain the consequences of the cuts to US government aid to Honduras and other countries in Central America:

www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/trump-foreign-aid-cuts-impact-ministry-northern-triangle.html

<https://relevantmagazine.com/current/report-christian-nonprofits-are-collateral-damage-in-trumps-foreign-aid-cuts>

WHEN THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION CUT ALL US GOVERNMENT AID TO HONDURAS, GUATEMALA, AND EL SALVADOR IN MARCH 2019, MANY PROGRAMS WERE UNDERWAY TO REDUCE THE PROBLEMS CAUSING MIGRATION. STOPPING FUNDING OF ALL THE LOCAL PROGRAMS WAS NOT THE SOLUTION, AND HAS BEEN VERY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

decent basic services, accessible health services. The drug cartels moving cocaine and other drugs through Honduras to satisfy the demand and consumption in the US have corrupted the government and local businesses. They have created a climate of crime that is overwhelming and sometimes beyond the capacity of the government to control and contain.

Many people and families living in such difficult situations cannot cope and simply walk away from environments full of crime, drug running, gang warfare, and desperate economic situations. They join with others and start walking to the US-Mexican border in search of a better life, walking away from living in slavery in a world of poverty.

But there is no Moses who can open the way across the Rio Grande River into Texas, and many migrants are returned to Honduras because they have no legal documents to travel and cannot enter the US without visas.

The massing of immigrants at the US border is a symptom of a problem that has become bigger over the years and reflects the underdevelopment of much of Central America. One of the problems is that local economies are not growing fast enough to create the jobs and conditions to provide for a better life. A US lifestyle is not available in Honduras, and probably never will be. But the right to a good education, to food, to a piece of land with a decent house and with water, to basic health services, to living without fear and with security is a goal that must be met, and soon.

When the Trump administration cut all US government aid to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador in March 2019, many programs were underway to reduce the problems causing migration. The US decision was made as a means of penalizing countries like Honduras “that were not stopping migration” to the border. However, stopping funding of all the local programs that attempted to deal with the problems causing migration was not the solution, and has been very counterproductive.

At Project Global Village/Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG), the Christian development agency that I direct, we had five programs that lost funding from the US government. PAG works with a holistic Christian mission focus on community health care, agricultural development, infrastructure, working against domestic violence, microcredit, educational scholarships, and the management and development of a large national park. The Church of the Brethren has been supportive with funding for projects.

One of our programs that had been funded by USAID focused on unemployed and uneducated slum youth, many of




whom were social misfits with tattoos, prostitutes, and ex-gang members who had never worked in their lives. We turned them around with education, counseling to change attitudes, vocational training, and job placement.

When the funding was cut, 700 youth who were in the program were more than upset. Some said that we had cheated them and lied to them and were very disappointed that their dream of breaking out of poverty and getting a paying job was over. They had trusted and believed in us!

But we decided to keep our word to the youth and tried to go ahead. I found some small donations to keep a minimum program staff working and provide some bridge funding for a couple of months. It bought some time until we could find more funding, which is what we are doing right now. Some of the original group of students who had gone through the initial basic training to develop a new mindset did acquire a changed attitude and wanted to become employed with a job, but some left the program when we had to temporarily stop.

Now we are back with a smaller crew, renewing contact with the entire group, and moving forward. We are continuing to seek additional funding to help us get through to next year and into 2022. Maybe the US government will decide to resume funding, and we can rebuild our program activities. So far this year we have placed more than 30 youth in jobs since December.

We need your prayers and support. 

Chet Thomas directs Project Global Village/Proyecto Aldea Global, which he founded in 1983. Originally from western Pennsylvania, where he maintains membership in Maple Springs Church of the Brethren, he first traveled to Honduras in 1974 to direct a Church World Service reconstruction program after Hurricane Fifi. He and his wife, Lizzeth, who also is a member of the Church of the Brethren, have been in Central America for 46 years.



Friends to cherish

How Shenandoah District made a choice

by Jonathan Prater

“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

—John 15:15 NASB

Ponder this mystery for a moment: God, the creator of the universe and sustainer of all things, calls you “friend.” Despite all the reasons we give God to walk away from us, regardless of our failures and faults, even knowing the times we come up short on our end of the covenant,

God remains, and we remain friends of God. Why? Because at the core of friendship is choice.

There are many relationships in life that are inherent. We are born into families, thrust in relationships with coworkers by virtue of our jobs, and set alongside neighbors by the location of our homes. Many of these relationships are not chosen, but come as natural consequences of other factors in our lives.

Friendship is not like those relationships. We get to choose our friends, at least most of the time. We tether our lives to those who make us happy, those who fill our lives with

joy, those we enjoy being around the most. Many times, this is in spite of variances of social class, cultural divides, and family values. We give grace and understanding to these friends because we know in our hearts that our relationship transcends the need to be right or manipulate one another into relationship.

We can learn a lot from the choice God made to calls us friends, and the way that God renews that covenant with us each day. Jesus said that God calls us friends and grants us access—access to God’s heart and God’s intentions. God lays down the right to treat us as slaves, as mere pawns in the game of the universe, but chooses to call us friends. All methods of manipulation and coercion are laid down, and the Holy One says, “I will treat you well, my child.”

There is a lack of treating each other well in our society these days.

After several years of “bracing for the worst,” Shenandoah District worked through differences and approved a withdrawal process for congregations that decide to leave the Church of the Brethren. “We made a choice to treat each other well,” says Prater.

WE EMPOWERED ONE ANOTHER TO CHOOSE CARE AND RESPECT FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS—A RELATIONSHIP THAT TRANSCENDS ANY ONE PERSON, ONE CONGREGATION, OR ONE GENERATION—AND WE PROCLAIMED THAT WHATEVER THE SPIRIT LED US TO DO WE WOULD DO TOGETHER, **BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT FRIENDS DO.**

The common practice has become to divide people into binaries, leave little room for conversation or variance in the middle, and proceed to degrade, insult, or harm the other side of any given issue into submission. It has become common to see the other as an argument to win rather than a friend to cherish. We lament that these practices have seeped into our precious church.

I am glad that God does not operate in this manner. It gives me peace to know that, when the divine Creator of the world looks on us, we are not seen as things to manipulate into submission; we are seen as children and friends.

A few weeks ago, a friend from the Midwest asked, “How are things in Shenandoah?” I replied firmly, and honestly, “They are good!” Not because I am living in a clueless utopia, or I am naïve about the struggles around us. I answered that way because truly things are good.

“How?” this person asked. “How did you all make it through the past few years?” My answer to my friend and my encouragement for this moment are the same: We chose to be friends.

In the moment when things were most tense and everyone was bracing for the worst, in Shenandoah District we made a choice to treat each other well. We adopted the conviction to lay down our weapons of coercion, manipulation, and harm, and to choose friendship over the need to win an argument. Was anyone asked to abandon their convictions? No. Were there demands made to force

any one person to throw out personal conscience? No. Did we proclaim any one group as “wrong”? No.

Instead, we empowered one another to choose care and respect for our relationship as brothers and sisters—a relationship that transcends any one person, one congregation, or one generation—and we proclaimed that whatever the Spirit led us to do we would do together, because that is what friends do. If we stayed together, we would do so as friends, and if some had to depart, we would depart as friends.


So together we have walked through the past four years. Along the way we have made some hard decisions. One year we tabled business completely at our district conference and did nothing but worship together. We reformed our ministry teams and amended our constitution and bylaws to match the current needs of the district and to offer ministry to a changing church culture. We have been more innovative with our pastors’ events, and worked intentionally at creating sacred space where pastors can share their anxieties about what is happening in denominational life with no fear of judgment or retaliation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, district conference passed a paper reshaping the way property will be handled if a congregation decides to leave the denomination. With this paper in place, there is no threat to a church’s property if they follow the outlined process. Our conviction remains that laying down property rights is a form of laying down our weapons.

What has transpired has been beau-

tiful. We have seen the kingdom of God come alive. Many of the churches that once were insisting on exiting now express a full commitment to stay with the district. Words like trust, integrity, care, and love are now at the center of our lives together. Recently, a pastor once set on leaving the Church of the Brethren said that they could never imagine leaving the denomination because their relationship with their brothers and sisters in the district is too valuable to let go.

What would happen if this same idea—to commit to treat one another well above all else—were adopted by the delegates at Annual Conference? What if our greatest witness of being a peace church were to lay down our weapons of property, polity, and precedent, and find a way to either stay together or allow a graceful exit in peace? What if we adopted the conviction that it is more important to show one another grace than to win an argument? Maybe then the kingdom of God might be little closer, and we could give the world a model that would show them the way of Christ.

Let’s face it: Most people have their minds made up about biblical authority, sexuality, and other hot-button issues. Rather than trying to change one another’s minds, let’s focus on trying to “love one another with brotherly affection” and “outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10 ESV). 

Jonathan Prater, pastor of Mount Zion Church of the Brethren in Linville, Va., chaired the committee that developed the Shenandoah District paper on congregational withdrawal.

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.

Humility

by Jeremy Ashworth

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 2:1-5

Like much of the New Testament, the book of Philippians is someone else's mail. Not only that, it's jail mail, written by the apostle Paul when he was imprisoned for the gospel.

Philippians 2:1-11 is dazzling. It culminates with a cosmic vision of an exalted Christ, where every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus is the name above every name. This is a universal, worshipful realization that Jesus was and is and always will be every blessed thing he said he was. We would do well to read, reread, even re-reread verses 9 through 11, to be still in the light of that glory.

But before the glory comes the humility. Jesus the living Word becomes physically embodied, made flesh, Emmanuel, God-with-us. The mysterious, pre-existent God climbs down and crawls inside a simple earthly existence. Eternity enters time. The Creator slips quietly into creation, tiny and soft, alive and kicking in the womb of Mary. How could God possibly come closer? This is no distant deity.

The God who chooses a human life also chooses a human death. And not just any human death; Jesus died on a cross. To grasp the significance of this, we 21st century believers need to be re-sensitized to the cross. We need an unsanitized understanding of the cross.

The original cross wasn't jewelry; it was naked public



Wendy McAdams

torture. More than just a method of execution, crucifixion was a gruesome advertisement, a bloody, humiliating PSA that made an example of an enemy: “Don’t mess with us. Don’t mess with our interests. Don’t mess with our power. This can happen to you.” The cross sent a message.

It is one thing to choose the limitations and frailties of a human life. It is another thing entirely to fully embrace the cross. It is one thing to “put yourself out there” and risk possible rejection. It is another thing to do so knowing that your vulnerable overture will be violently refused. It is the cost of coming close, the inherent danger of embodied love. Jesus counted the cost. Then he paid the price.

That’s when the cross took on a very different message: The cross is what love looks like. The cross is God turning the other cheek. The cross is not Jesus acting out of self-interest, but acting in the best interest of others, whether or not those “others” realize it or accept it. Glorious humility.

This enormous theological vision (v. 6-11) lands hard on a single point of practical application: Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (v. 5). Go and do likewise. If Jesus was humble, you can be too.

Humility is hard. Some of us struggle with low self-esteem. Some of us struggle with high self-esteem. On the surface, self-aggrandizement and self-hatred look like polar opposites. But deep down, they have a common core: a wounded soul turned in on itself, self-centered and self-absorbed. Pride and self-loathing are not opposites of each other. Together, they are the opposite of humility and the opposite of Christlikeness. So whether we think too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves, all of us need something—or someone—to come close, go deep, and pry us off ourselves.


Verses 2-5 can and should be turned into deep interpersonal questions for the body of Christ. Are we like-minded? Do we have the same love? Are we one in spirit? Are we of one mind? Do we do anything—*anything*—out of selfish ambition? Do we do anything out of vain conceit? Do we

value others above ourselves? Do we look to our own interests, or the interests of others? And if so, how do we conspicuously demonstrate this?

My friends in the Church of the Brethren may be inclined to apply these questions to our own churches. That is necessary. It is also insufficient. I am told that, according to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are now over 40,000 Christian denominations worldwide. Please let that number sink in.

I consistently meet people—believers and unbelievers—who do not even know what a denomination is. I would be very hard pressed to describe more than a few denominations, and I am a lifelong religious professional. I’m an enthusiastic Protestant, but I am completely at a loss to give an account for the existence of 40,000 different Christian brands in light of Philippians 2:2-5. These verses are not “gray areas” of the Bible where “scholars disagree”; they are painfully clear commands. More than that, in the context of this scripture, these directives are rooted in our view of Jesus.

Jesus is infinitely more than a role model, and humility is more than a nice virtue. Christians have a generous view of others and a modest, honest view of ourselves for one reason: because we have a high view of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus was and is and always will be every blessed thing he said he was. And this high Christology demands relentless humility. The body of Christ should have the mind of Christ. In theological terms it’s not a stretch. In practical terms it may be a miracle.

So I hold on to miracles, because I hold on to Jesus. His entire existence was and is a universe-bending concert of miracles. Perhaps Christlike humility is more than a tame, moral virtue. Perhaps Christlike humility is the self-emptying, message-sending, knee-bending, tongue-confessing, death-defeating, servant-leading, other-loving, God-glorifying, world-changing miracle all of us need. 

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

THE MYSTERIOUS, PRE-EXISTENT GOD CLIMBS DOWN AND CRAWLS INSIDE A SIMPLE EARTHLY EXISTENCE. ETERNITY ENTERS TIME. THE CREATOR SLIPS QUIETLY INTO CREATION, TINY AND SOFT, ALIVE AND KICKING IN THE WOMB OF MARY.



Music's simple value

by Frances Townsend

Simple living has to include music. In our utilitarian world where the value of everything is measured by money, music is touted as merely optional, a decorative addition. But in the church, we know better—especially in churches with a strong singing tradition like ours.

“Music takes us to the spiritual realm that some people don’t visit often,” said Jan Thomas from Marilla (Mich.) Church of the Brethren. Until recently, this small church had a choir with a singing ministry to homebound members and area elder care homes.


Music connects church and community in other ways. The Spirit of the Woods music festival will take place in Brethren, Mich., on the third Saturday in June, as it has since 1978 when it was started by Church of the Brethren members Tim and Wanda Joseph and their friends. Although it is not a sacred music concert, many members of local churches help put it on. This free, family-friendly gathering of community is a simple, joy-filled blessing. Small children dance and play, while grandparents sit under the trees listening or visiting with one another.

Onkama (Mich.) Church of the Brethren has held fundraising concerts for Nigeria and for Puerto Rico in recent years. These brought area musicians and community members to the church, glad for a way to be of service to people across the world by giving their money through a trusted channel.

Music’s most profound connections, however, are made during holy times in our lives.

For years I carried a paper in my wallet with the words to the hymn “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” I printed it out so I could sing it when a parishioner, Troy Schrock, was in the hospital after a stroke. He had helped me learn to sing tenor in the choir at Root River Church of the Brethren. Later, I took a couple of hymnals up to the hospital so that his daughters could sing to him in the days before he died. The nurses were touched. They had not seen a family do this before. Since then, I have been involved in several occasions when church members sang with someone who was dying.

I have heard many people speak of their favorite hymns, why those words or notes have special meaning. They may be the hymns we sing to accompany someone at the hospital, or at a funeral. Whenever the congregation sings those hymns, I am aware of the cloud of witnesses who are with us. I am aware that the souls of the living congregants are connecting with God in ways that words do not define. As we sing together, we also connect with each other, feeling how the music is touching other hearts.

It may be freely shared by people of all ages and abilities, but music is much more than a simple add-on to life. 

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

AS WE SING TOGETHER, WE ALSO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER, FEELING HOW THE MUSIC IS TOUCHING OTHER HEARTS.

Birthplace of Nigerian church suffers attack

The town of Garkida in north-east Nigeria was attacked by Boko Haram the night of Feb. 21-22. Garkida is considered the birthplace of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) as the place where the church was started in 1923.

The attack was carried out by several trucks and dozens of motorcycles carrying armed men, who started shooting sporadically and then began burning and looting buildings. Three soldiers who worshiped with EYN were killed and three civilians sustained injuries. Missing after the attack was a staff member of EYN's Mason Technical School.

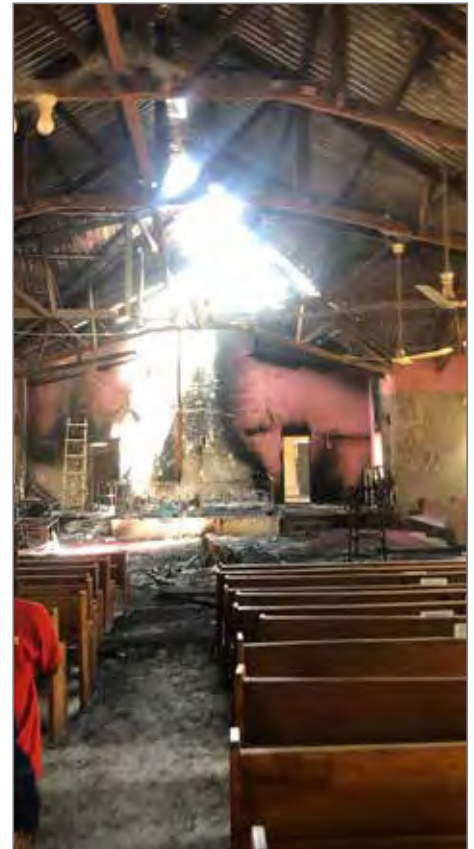
The EYN Rural Health Training School was burned, but its more than 100 students were on holiday at the time. The EYN women's fellowship of Garkida district was having its annual conference at the EYN Garkida No. 1 church that was attacked and burned. None of the women were killed.

EYN president Joel S. Billi made an assessment visit to Garkida on Feb. 24 and described the destruction as “enormous.” He lamented the destruction of three churches (EYN Garkida No. 1, a Living Faith church, and an Anglican church); the EYN Rural Health Training Center including an administrative block, a student's hostel, and classrooms; the police station and barracks; several shops; and homes of prominent people in Garkida.

State governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri visited Garkida on Feb. 23 and appealed to the federal government and development partners to provide aid.

EYN staff also reported violent attacks on other congregations and church districts in recent weeks, and the abductions of several people from EYN including children.

“We grieve the attack on Garkida,” said David Steele, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren. “We pray for our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. We pray for this violence to end.”



Brethren Faith in Action Fund grants

The Brethren Faith in Action Fund has given grants to six congregations. The fund provides grants to outreach ministry projects of Church of the Brethren congregations, with funds generated by the sale of a portion of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

Alpha and Omega Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pa., received \$5,000 for five outreach projects: a Food Bank, Spanish Vacation Bible program, Fall Festival, 40 Days of Prayer, and Video and Internet Ministry.

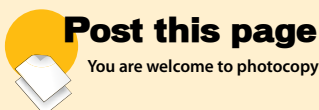
Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., received \$5,000 for a project supporting asylum-seeking families from the Latin American caravans that are seeking help in the US.

Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren received \$5,000 to help replace the HVAC system in a facility used to host homeless families.

Spring Creek Church of the Brethren in Hershey, Pa., received \$5,000 to replace a heating system in its former parsonage, which is used as a place for people to stay when family members are receiving care at Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

Pleasant Valley (Va.) Church of the Brethren received \$1,250 to host a marriage retreat.

Buffalo Valley (Pa.) Church of the Brethren received \$1,000 to purchase materials for MifflinServe, a ministry of repairing homes for community members.



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Group plans to separate

Our end goal is unity,” said general secretary David Steele in an interview about the Covenant Brethren Church, a group exploring separation from the Church of the Brethren. On Feb. 1, he and Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday met with leaders of the group. Steele said members of the denominational Leadership Team have held meetings with the group “to hear their concerns, what they are working at. We are making efforts to keep the communication lines open.”

The Covenant Brethren Church leadership made it clear their intentions are no longer simply exploratory, but that separation will happen, Steele said.

The Covenant Brethren Church chose its name at a meeting in Woodstock, Va., last November. The decision to explore separation was made last July in Chambersburg, Pa., at a meeting of some 50 people from 13 districts. The group is exploring office locations in West Virginia, has named a temporary executive board and task groups, and is developing bylaws and a statement of faith. The temporary board includes Grover Duling (chair), Eric Brubaker, Larry Dentler, Scott Kinnick, James F. Myer, and Craig Alan Myers. The temporary board includes Brethren Revival Fellowship leaders and prayer summit leadership, including a district executive.

The group has said its reasons to explore separation are to provide “a haven for congregations who are making the decision to leave, but want to retain their Brethren values, and do

not want to be independent” as well as “failure of the denomination to stand strong on biblical authority” and a complaint that the compelling vision process does not address “the homosexual issue.”

Steele spoke about rumors that many congregations have left or are planning to leave in order to join the new group. As of February, Steele had confirmation of only a dozen or so congregations that have withdrawn in just a handful of districts, for a wide variety of reasons, with no indication that they intend to join the new group. In response to criticism of the compelling vision process, Steele emphasized it was never intended to address sexuality but “to move the conversation above that to matters of faith and vision and where the church ought to be.”

Steele highlighted recent successes that he would like the denomination to focus on instead of division. Those include districts that are renewing their passion for ministry together, and the progress toward a new global structure for the Church of the Brethren worldwide.

The general secretary said he wants to work toward an understanding with leaving congregations. He is deeply concerned about how separation “is tearing congregations apart. . . . Some people in those congregations want to stay in the denomination. They are torn between relationships with their family and friends and their loyalty to the Church of the Brethren.”

Personnel notes

An interim team has been named to staff the Global Mission office. **Norman and Carol Spicher Waggy** began March 2 as part-time interim directors of Global Mission. **Roxane Hill** began as interim office manager on Feb. 12. Hill was coordinator of the Nigeria Crisis Response for five years, from Dec. 1, 2014, through 2019. The Waggys, who lived in Nigeria 1983-1988, also spent time working for the church in the Dominican Republic and have been disaster volunteers in Puerto Rico. Carol has been a member of the Mission Advisory Committee since its inception 12 years ago. She is a retired ordained minister. Norm served on the former General Board 1989-1994. He

worked as a family physician for 34 years, retiring in 2015.

Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller have signed a service agreement with the Church of the Brethren regarding their continuing work in China. The couple have worked in Pingding since August 2012, when they were invited to work with the You'ai Hospital that takes its name from a hospital founded by Church of the Brethren missionaries in 1911. Miller grew up in York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren while Li grew up in Shouyang, in China's Shanxi Province. Li has established a hospice program. Miller has focused on improving management and developing inter-



Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller

national partnerships for the hospital.

Gieta Gresh has resigned as camp administrator for Camp Mardela in Denton, Md., one of two camps in Mid-Atlantic District, effective the end of August. She has served in the position since April 2005.

Another way of living in northern Virginia

by Angela Finet

As the denomination explored what it means to be the body of Christ through the compelling vision process, the Church of the Brethren congregations in northern Virginia were also “wandering without a sense of unified purpose.” They were not in conflict, but trapped by traffic.

At one time these congregations organized and participated in a month-long gathering known as the School of Christian Growth—an opportunity for spiritual development and fellowship. But as traffic worsened in this area outside Washington, D.C., the distance between the churches grew, no longer measured by miles but by travel time. The month-long School of Christian Growth gave way to a day-long Winter Festival. Then, after a couple of years, the gatherings fell by the wayside completely, fostering a sense of congregational isolation.

Increasing that sense of separation was a season of inward focus, as the churches created their congregational profiles. In the past five years, all but one of the northern Virginia churches conducted a pastoral search. In 2019 alone, half of these congregations called new ministers.

As pastoral placements were made, however, excitement grew. Six of the newly called pastors were good friends, having overlapped in their studies at Bethany Theological Seminary: Mandy North at the Manassas congregation, Matt Rittle at Arlington, Richard Wehrle at Midland, Angela Finet at Nokesville, and Audrey and Tim Hollenberg-Duffey at Oakton.

These pastors began thinking about how to revisit community and restore a sense of unified purpose. An idea was hatched for a pulpit swap, with the pastors traveling to each other's churches.

We chose the season of Lent for this event because there are five Sundays and five participating churches. Next, we came up with the theme “Another Way of Living.” Not only would this theme serve as a lesson in Brethren beliefs—a sense of “revisiting”—but also as a forward-thinking challenge for Lent: how should we live? Each pastor chose a Brethren value grounded in a scripture text from Matthew (the sermons can be found at <http://bit.ly/AnotherWayofLivingSermons>). We worked with a graphic designer to create a logo to visually unify our efforts. We also pooled our resources to bring Ken Medema and Ted



Swartz to northern Virginia for an uplifting concert to be enjoyed by all the congregations together.

In the midst of our planning, the compelling vision report was released and we were delighted that our endeavors mirrored the vision expressed in this document. It called us to work toward interdependence and community, and we were doing it!

The compelling vision proposed to Annual Conference also called us to radical transformation and invited us to understand God's holy values as revealed in Jesus Christ. Through our Lenten series, we chose to revisit the values of peace, forbearance, community, service, and simple living.

To complete the challenge to pursue “Another Way of Living” we created a litany based on the compelling vision statement, which we shared at the conclusion of each sermon:

Leader: Together, as the Church of the Brethren,

All: We will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement.

Leader: To move us forward,

All: We will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Leader: This is another way of living

All: Peacefully, Simply, Together. Amen. 

Angela Finet is the “senior” pastor in this northern Virginia cohort, both chronologically and in tenure. She serves at Nokesville Church of the Brethren.

MAY WE RECLAIM OUR BIRTHRIGHT AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS RATHER THAN SELLING IT FOR POPULAR POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS.

Answered prayer

What an answer to prayer, when I received the December issue of MESSENGER. In 2018, I read a “clip”

about a family going to work in a pygmy colony. It touched my heart. I sent monetary gifts and offered many prayers in their behalf. I’ve tried to hear how the work was progressing but

I had no answers. It really made my day to see the Ludwick name and article, even if it didn’t answer all my questions. I was happy to read how they are doing now.

Follow-ups are really important. I appreciate the MESSENGER even though I don’t always agree with the content. It keeps me updated and lets me know what and where to concentrate my prayers.

Elsie M. Michael
Davidsville, Pa.

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Reclaim our birthright

Thanks for three excellent articles in the December issue.

“A Trip Summary” accurately reminds us that we are too often willing to sell our birthright as Esau did, for immediate political gains. Conservatives and liberals have both been guilty.

“The Church in Rwanda” is a fantastic update by Josiah Ludwick of the work in Rwanda. Thanks to Southern Pennsylvania District for their support of the work there. The Southeastern District has built two churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo at Makabola and Kabumbe, and is considering a third project in Goma.

“The God Who Sees.” I had just bought this excellent book by Karen Gonzales. Another equally compelling book is *Separated by a Border*, a book by Gena Thomas about a child separated from his parents at the border. All we need to know as Christians about refugees is that Abraham was a stranger in a strange land, the descendants of Jacob were refugees (strangers) in Egypt, the tribe of Judah was exiled as refugees to



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Babylon, the holy family were refugees in Egypt escaping the violence of Herod. The Old Testament as well as Jesus in Matthew 25 warns us that we are to care for strangers.

May we reclaim our birthright as followers of Jesus rather than selling it for popular political viewpoints.

Gary Benesh
North Wilkesboro, N.C.

Relaying the message

I would like to take this time to thank everyone involved in putting this very enjoyable periodical together. I love to open the pages and let

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the pages lead me on a spiritual journey. I learn to look at situations in a whole different light.

God is good all the time . . . and it is easy to see how he uses us to relay the message to the world. After all, that is what we are called to do—be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Thanks again for the encouragement.

Julie Kauffman
McVeytown, Pa.

True witness

I want to publicly thank Don Fitzkee (I have already done so privately) for his article “Lament, Repent, Reinvent.” I find myself in



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a very similar position and his thoughts on our present situation really resonate with me, especially those relating to lamenting and repentance.

When we allow our convictions to

denigrate and dismiss those who disagree with us on any point, we can hardly claim to be following Jesus or honoring the word of God. If we live out our convictions in love for others, especially our brothers and sis-

ters in Christ (based on our common Father, not agreement in every point of theology or practice), we will truly be witnessing to the love and grace of Jesus.

David Ulm
Woodbury, Pa.

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.

New members

Alpha & Omega, Lancaster, Pa.: Luz Soto, Steven Valentin

Columbia City, Ind.:

Jennifer Frank, Bastien Love, Caspian Love, Estara Love, Anne Mynhier Steury, Mark Flory Steury, Erin Van Houten, Lisa Van Houten, Steve Van Houten

Elizabethtown, Pa.: Jacob Bradley, Heather Drake, Nancy Garber, Richard Garber, Jerry Knight, Olivia Knight, Isaiah Lokai, Allison Mattern, Lyssa Morehart, Mason Morehart

Garden City, Kan.: Carl Knaus, Don Reule, Kimberly Reule

Lancaster, Pa.: Brian Detwiler, Carolyn Fitzkee, Don Fitzkee, Galen Fitzkee, Marianne Fitzkee, Bob Wintsch, Misty Wintsch

Marilla, Copemish, Mich.: Lawrence Dietz

Pipe Creek, Peru, Ind.: Christian Vernengo

Uniontown, Pa.: Jean Moore

Waynesboro, Pa.: Andrew Paterno

Wedding anniversaries

Burkett, Paul and Carol, North Manchester, Ind., 65

Frazee, Willard and Betty, Uniontown, Pa., 67

Keim, Donald and Ann Overst, Nampa, Idaho, 70

Stansbury, Leighton and Dottie, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 69

Stutzman, Lyle and June, Taneytown, Md., 70

Deaths

Anthony, Pauline Louise Benshoff, 91, Mont Alto, Pa., Feb. 11

Aschliman, John H., 104, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 24

Ausherman, Donald Robert, 74, Dallastown, Pa., Dec. 22

Baldwin, Robert W., 69, Carlisle, Pa., Feb. 12

Brillhart, Frieda Rader, 98, Saint Petersburg, Fla., Dec. 22

Buckingham, Nina M. Zickel, 85, Reasnor, Iowa, Dec. 17

Burkholder, Ruby Maxine Wakeman, 90, New Market, Va., June 20

Burkins, Jeanne Marie Herr, 93, Lititz, Pa., Jan. 19

Carper, Doris, 92, Martinsburg, Pa., Jan. 16

Dietz, Ron, 80, Freeport, Ill., Jan. 18

Dolnikowski, Joanne Phillips, 92, Huntingdon, Pa., Feb. 2

Duncan, Wanda Burton, 85, Salem, Va., Jan. 15

Fike, Jessie Lee Channell, 94, Westernport, Md., Aug. 3

Fingerle, Betty L. Miller, 89, Rossville, Ind., Dec. 6

Frey, Charles Eugene, 85, Columbia City, Ind., July 31

Funk, Edythe Jewell Howard, 96, McPherson, Kan., Jan. 19

Funk, James R., 86, Pittsburgh, Pa., Feb. 11

Gardner, Mike, 81, Bremen, Ind., Jan. 2

Gilmore, Walter E., 82, Ashland, Ohio, Feb. 14

Greenawalt, Benjamin E., 96, Lititz, Pa., Jan. 7

Hall, Harriet Elizabeth Rudolph, 78, Perrysburg, Ohio, Dec. 31

Harding, Kathleen, 59, Hicksville, Ohio, Feb. 14, 2019

Hotchkiss, Thelma (Connie), 93, Harrisonburg, Va., Oct. 4

Hunt, Beverly J. Paxson, 78, Ankeny, Iowa, Nov. 30

Hurd, Ronald, 80, Stryker, Ohio, Sept. 29

Keck, Marjorie E. Stantz, 82, Bryan, Ohio, Jan. 4

Kindy, Glenna Marian Yoder, 100, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 3

Knaus, Carl Lavern, 82, Garden City, Kan., Feb. 11

McClure, Dennis Henry, 76, Greenwood, Ind., Feb. 10

Miller, David S., Jr., 86, Spring Grove, Pa., Dec. 21

Mitchell, Carolyn June Figg, 88, South Bend, Ind., Jan. 12

Moore, Joann June Northrup, 87, Bryan, Ohio, Nov. 17

Nantz, Joyce E. Davis, 82, Palmyra, Pa., Feb. 5

Nesbitt, Theron F., Sr., 70, Mogadore, Ohio, Jan. 17

O'Diam, Benjamin Franklin, Jr., 90, Beavercreek, Ohio, Jan. 1

Reed, Howard J., 97, Bremen, Ind., Dec. 24

Reed, Robert Allen, 75, Bremen, Ind., Dec. 26

Ritchey, Iona (Jeanne) Herron, 86, Chambersburg, Pa., Jan. 17

Rose, Jean S., 87, Oakton, Va., Jan. 6

Shumaker, John R., Sr., 91, Columbia City, Ind., July 15

Simpson, M. Maxine Buchanan, 91, Franklin Grove, Ill., Nov. 22

Taylor, Jeanette Nina, 95, Rockingham, Va., Jan. 18

Thill, Wesley W., 91, Lena, Ill., Jan. 17

Wiley, Patricia Ann, 86, Modesto, Calif., Feb. 12

Wilt, Ruth Virginia, 92, Swanton, Md., Aug. 7

Wine, Stanley Malcolm, 90, Mount Sidney, Va., Dec. 30

Ordained

Frazee, Gina, W. Marva Dist. (Oak Park, Oakland, Md.), Feb. 9

Sanchez, Aida Lymaris, Atl. S. E. Dist. (La Iglesia de

los Hermanos Nuevo Comienzo, Kissimmee, Fla.), Feb. 22

Commissioned

Pierre-Louis, Gaston, Atl. S. E. Dist. (Eglise des Freres Haitiens, Miami, Fla.), Feb. 23

Licensed

Fink, Teresa, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Parkview, Lewistown, Pa.), Feb. 9

Garvey, Mary, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Stone, Huntingdon, Pa.), Feb. 23

Houser, Jennifer, Virgina Dist. (Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C.), Feb. 9

Houser, Zechariah, Virgina Dist. (Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C.), Feb. 9

Placements

Ballinger, John, interim pastor, Painesville, Ohio, Feb. 2

Eisenbise, Debbie, interim pastor, Goshen City, Goshen, Ind., Jan. 1

Hodges, Carlton, pastor, Red Hill, Roanoke, Va., Feb. 1

Mitchell, E. Anne, interim pastor, Trinity, Troutville, Va., Feb. 1

Schaefer, William, interim pastor, New Covenant, Gotha, Fla., Feb. 1

Stade, James, associate pastor, Pleasantdale, Fincastle, Va., Feb. 16

Dueling GPSes

by Marty Barlow

For Christmas, my sister Karen and I gave each other tickets to a show at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Karen volunteered to drive.

When we could see the Kennedy Center out the car window, her GPS instructed us to take a left into the center, but we missed it, continuing straight onto Rock Creek Parkway. It was pitch dark by now, and the traffic was fierce and unforgiving. The woman's voice on her GPS kept saying, "Make a U-turn."

There were no opportunities to make a U-turn, even though we desperately searched for one. When we got into downtown D.C. traffic, the GPS seemed to speed up its reminders, now reminding us every 15 or 20 seconds, "MAKE A U-TURN as soon as you can do so safely and THEN A SHARP LEFT."

We found a place to make the U-turn, but the sharp left had orange cones blocking off all traffic. Even so, the GPS continued to insist, "MAKE A U-TURN . . . AND THEN A SHARP LEFT."

I said to Karen, "Why don't you turn your GPS off, and I'll see what my Google Maps tells us to do." She agreed and I turned on my phone. My Google Maps lady said in a reasonable tone of voice, "Proceed 3/10 of a mile to 23rd Street NW and make a slight right turn." That sounded good.

Right then, Karen's GPS kicked in again and shouted, "MAKE A U-TURN . . . AND THEN A SHARP LEFT!" My lady responded, "Continue ahead 3/10 mile."

It was dueling GPSes!


With some intensity, I said to Karen, "Turn your lady off!"

She yelled back, "I thought she *was* turned off! I don't know why she keeps talking."

At this point, one of us said, "What I wouldn't give right now for a good old-fashioned paper map and a place to park to look at it!"

We got to the Kennedy Center with time to spare, and the play was great! But this experience reminded me of the times we are living in. One side yells, "Turn around right now!" and the other says something different. We need to remember that we do have maps, old-fashioned maps.

You know what they are. They are our dependable and mature friends and families. They are our Scriptures, our tried-and-true devotional materials, and our earnest prayer to have the discernment and courage to recognize and challenge the wrong and to stand for the right.

But we also need to be willing to park. Without a place to park, we just keep going in circles reacting to the loudest and most persistent voices. To park might mean choosing to retreat to a quiet place for a period of time, away from phones, televisions, gadgets, and harsh voices. And then, with sincerity and humility, praying for guidance that we might reflect the spirit of Jesus into our troubled world. 

Marty Barlow is moderator of Shenandoah District. A member of Montezuma Church of the Brethren in Dayton, Va., she is a mostly retired licensed professional counselor.

WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT WE DO HAVE MAPS. THEY ARE OUR SCRIPTURES, OUR TRIED-AND-TRUE DEVOTIONAL MATERIALS, AND OUR EARNEST PRAYER TO HAVE THE DISCERNMENT AND COURAGE TO RECOGNIZE AND CHALLENGE THE WRONG AND TO STAND FOR THE RIGHT.

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Daily Bible Study led by
Michael Gorman
professor at St. Mary's Seminary
and author of nearly twenty books

**Find out more about Annual Conference including
hotel information, the conference schedule, meal events,
as well as children and youth activities at www.brethren.org/ac**

**On-line Registration and Housing Reservations are open only until June 10
www.brethren.org/ac**

Many volunteers are needed to help with Annual Conference!

Please sign up to volunteer for a few hours at: www.brethren.org/ac/activities
Questions? Call 847-429-4365 or email annualconference@brethren.org



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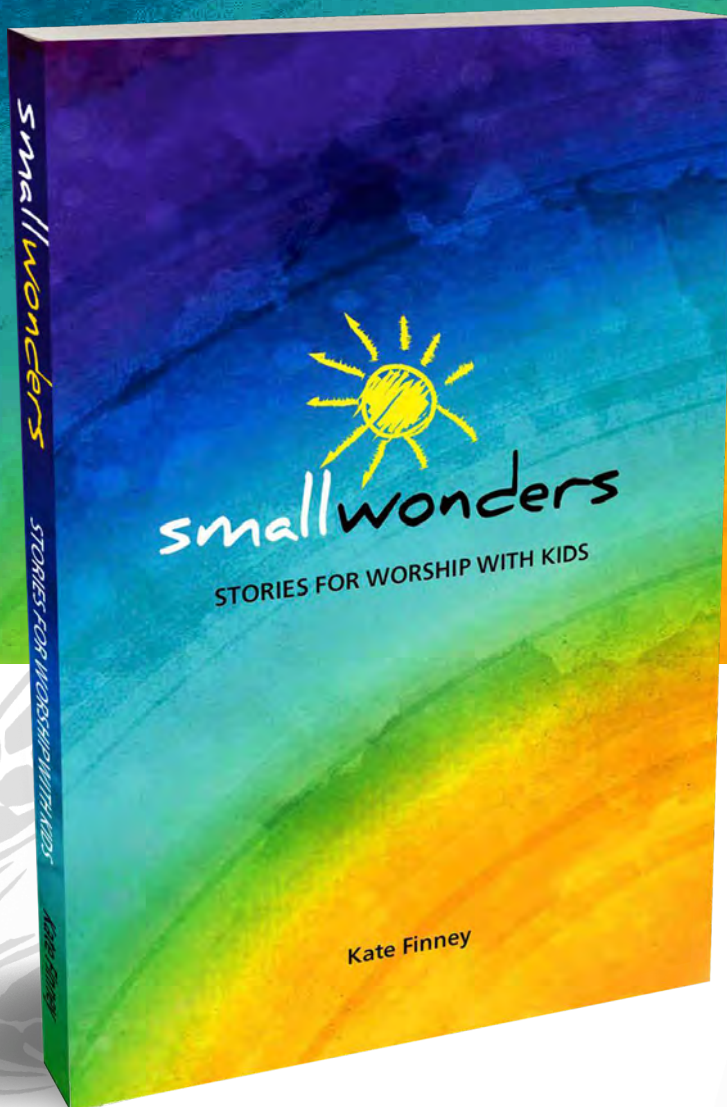


Church of the Brethren

Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.



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