

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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*Weeping may
linger for the night,*



*but JOY comes with
the MORNING*

—Psalm 30:5b

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The Bruderhof & *the Brethren*



David Mow will speak about the history and relationships shared between the Church of the Brethren and the Bruderhof, an intentional community in the Anabaptist tradition that is observing its centennial this year.

Mow is a Bruderhof minister and a former editor at Plough Publishing House. After years of service in western Pennsylvania, he and his wife, Louisa, pastored at the Bruderhof's urban house community in London. More recently, they returned to pastoral service at Spring Valley Bruderhof in Farmington, Pennsylvania. David is the oldest grandson of Anna Mow, a beloved missionary, teacher, and ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren.



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Cover photo by Wendy McFadden



MESSENGER has won three awards at the Associated Church Press (ACP) Best of the Church Press Awards this year. Messenger won honorable mentions in the following categories: theological reflection, “Creation and the Cross” by Wendy McFadden; convention coverage of the 2019 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference written by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Frances Townsend, and Tyler Roebuck; and a humor piece, “Will It Blend?” by Wendy McFadden and Walt Wiltschek.

Waiting



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

There's that moment between the time you
open your eye wide and the puff of air
makes you flinch or
that second just before your finger is pricked.

There's that hour in the neighbor's basement after
the tornado siren that pierced your nap.
There's that week between
the lab test and the phone call.

There's that bedside vigil after
her breathing slows and
time stands still.

These kinds of waiting we know.

But not this waiting
stretched out for miles and mountains
because we cannot tell where the horizon shifts
or what lies beyond that blurred line.

Together and apart we tend
our anxious thoughts—
baby birds that must be fed
before they can fly away—

hoping for mercy and maybe
giving mercy too.
A fire consumes the familiar and
we wait

for shoots of greening life
raw and tender.
We will love that holy ground with
a fierceness we did not know we had.

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Lower Miami offers sanctuary

On Nov. 17, 2019, for the second time in its 200-plus year history, Lower Miami Church of the Brethren on the edge of Dayton, Ohio, declared sanctuary. The church declared itself a sanctuary for immigrant neighbors who may need a safe place to live because they are under threat of deportation.

Some in the congregation have had the experience of being outcasts because of race or place of origin and wanted to continue to open doors for others. The congregation voted unanimously to offer refuge if an immigrant or family requests safe haven in order to remain near their family in the United States, to prevent persecution or danger should they be forcibly deported, or to continue to pursue alternative legal avenues to remain in the US.

In the late 1980s, the congregation provided a year of safe haven for a Guatemalan family. During that time, the congregation provided for all of the family's needs including presence with them in the church, sometimes with immigration enforcement officers parked outside. More than 30 years later, the church's members are fewer and older and have limited financial resources but have a well-equipped building and a hospitable spirit.

When the recently formed Miami Valley Immigration Coalition put out the call to faith communities to consider offering sanctuary, the church again stepped up. Lower

Miami is collaborating with other churches and individuals in the coalition to organize the necessary resources, since the congregation will need help to make the offer of sanctuary a genuine possibility should immigrant neighbors ask to stay in the church building.

Members of Lower Miami understand that they are taking risks when they decide to host someone who is peacefully resisting deportation. One member who voted enthusiastically to declare sanctuary reported that when she was younger she applied to the Ohio State Patrol but was told she was not eligible because her church was acting in defiance of the law by housing an immigrant family who had been ordered deported. When pastor Nan Erbaugh contacted the church's insurance company as part of the decision-making process, she was told that any claims that result from the presence in the church building of immigrants who are under a deportation order would not be covered.

The church, nevertheless, hears Jesus' call to welcome sisters and brothers who have come from afar to find safety, and to meet other basic needs. Lower Miami remembers that Jesus took many risks as he loved everyone and spoke truth to power. Risks are a regular part of continuing the work of Jesus together, and connecting with others gives this tiny faith family greater opportunities to serve. —Jan Futrell

San Diego church provides garden space

The Peace Garden of First Church of the Brethren in San Diego, Calif., is providing community garden space for a program called Second Chance farms. It got media attention from ABC 10 News San Diego for donating produce to those in need during the pandemic.

"We have been providing Second Chance space for over five years," says pastor Sara Haldeman-Scarr. "We also use a water reclamation system to water the garden when we have the rainwater to do so. It is a pretty awesome garden."

Find the news video at www.onenewspage.com/video/20200326/12942761/Gardeners-donate-extra-produce-during-Coronavirus-Pandemic.htm.



Living Stream gains interest

Living Stream Church of the Brethren is gaining interest as one Anabaptist church who was doing “Internet church” long before the pandemic. *Mennonite World Review* in April published a feature about the congregation.

“As churches respond to the spread of coronavirus by shifting temporarily to online worship, one Anabaptist congregation has been exclusively in that position for years,” the magazine reported. “Living Stream Church of the Brethren is an online-only church, and these days its pastors are fielding questions from leaders of other congregations. Unlike traditional worship services streamed or broadcast from a physical sanctuary, a Living Stream worship service is entirely online, with all participants logging in, wherever they may be.”

The article noted the congregation’s start on the first Sunday of Advent in 2012 by founding pastor Audrey DeCoursey of Portland, Ore., working with Enten Eller, now pastor of Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. At the time, Eller was staff for electronic education at Bethany Seminary and was part of a group seeking to meet the needs of small congregations west of the Mississippi.

Find the article at <http://mennoworld.org/2020/04/06/news/online-only-congregation-draws-growing-interest>.

New Yorker features China hospice work

A New Yorker magazine piece on the new role hospice care is playing in China features ground-breaking work being done by Ruoxia Li to establish a hospice unit at You’ai Hospital in Pingding, Shanxi Province, China. Li and her husband, Eric Miller, earlier this year signed a service agreement with the Church of the Brethren regarding their continuing work in China. Go to www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/04/06/chinas-struggles-with-hospice-care.

From the MESSENGER archive

In 1918, as the influenza pandemic crossed the Atlantic and began to make its presence felt, Brethren passed along a news item that turned out to be completely false. In an “Around the World” column, the GOSPEL MESSENGER included an item titled “Alcohol and Spanish Influenza” that read:

Medical men [have] come forward with the well-attested warning that the drinkers have but little chance to survive pneumonia, as compared with the greater resistance of the abstainer. Since men in the army and navy are amply protected against the deleterious effects of alcohol by rigid prohibitory measures, no doubt many will escape the dire effects of pneumonia who otherwise would succumb to that disease. So far as statistics of pneumonia cases among civilians are available, a fine showing is made by the Prohibition States. What a pity that war time Prohibition could not have been made effective at an earlier period! —GOSPEL MESSENGER, Oct. 19, 1918, p. 66

Abstention, of course, proved no protection at all. It’s hard to fathom that anyone believed soldiers and sailors didn’t drink, and if certain so-called “prohibition states” had a statistical advantage it was only temporary. —**Frank Ramirez**

Juniata professor develops COVID-19 test

Juniata College’s **Dr. Gina Lamendella**, professor of biology at the Church of the Brethren-related school in Huntingdon, Pa., has developed a new way to test for COVID-19 in collaboration with the Central Pennsylvania Clinic in Belleville. Lamendella also is co-owner of Contamination Source Identification (CSI), housed on the college campus.

The test was developed “in order to serve one of our most vulnerable communities, the Amish and Mennonite,” said a release from the college. “Dr. Lamendella reports that ‘our test directly detects the viral genome of Covid-19,’ which is impor-

tant because RNA viruses can change quickly; this particular method reveals the entire viral genome and how it is changing. . . . Drive-through testing sites that accommodate the community’s horse and buggies have been established, and the CSI lab is able to process several hundred tests per day.”

CSI is housed in the Juniata Sill Business Incubator. Its team is led by Gary Shope, a 1972 graduate, and also includes Juniata professor Dr. Kim Roth, 10 alumni, and a current student. The development was reported April 7 by CNN at www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/us/amish-coronavirus-drive-through-testing-horse-and-buggies-trnd/index.html.

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.



“Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor
people not been restored?” —Jeremiah 8:22

Brethren and health care

As we applaud the efforts of doctors, nurses, and other health care workers in the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, it’s a good reminder that medical care is often a part of ministry. Brethren have a long history of being involved in this area, including the following:

- Bethany Sanitarium and Hospital, later renamed **Bethany Brethren Hospital**, opened on the west side of Chicago in 1921 as a project of adjacent Bethany Bible School (later Bethany Theological Seminary). The hospital merged with another community hospital in the late 1960s and eventually moved into a new building. While no longer connected to the Church of the Brethren, it operates today as Advocate Bethany Hospital.
- In the early 1940s, a Civilian Public Service camp held under the auspices of the Brethren Service Committee converted an abandoned barracks in Castañer, Puerto Rico (site of the first Heifer Project cattle shipment in 1944), into a 25-bed hospital. A more modern hospital was built nearby and opened in 1960. It still operates today as **Castañer Hospital**. The Heifer International 75th anniversary celebration in Castañer this past October included a tour of the facility.
- Brethren mission workers in China established the “**Friendship Hospital**” (You’ai) in Shanxi Province under Dr. Daryl Parker. The hospital later moved to another site and continues to operate today, focusing on cancer care. Brethren mission workers Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller oversee a pioneering hospice program there (see p. 4). Another hospital was opened on the site of the original Brethren hospital and contains a bust of Dr. Parker.
- There are 22 retirement communities related to the Church of the Brethren, part of the **Fellowship of Brethren Homes**. The homes are located in 11 states, spanning from Pennsylvania to California. They can trace their denominational spirit of caregiving back to the Pettikoffer House, a home used by the early Brethren to care for widows in Germantown, Pa., in the 18th century (see p. 11).
- The **Association of Brethren Caregivers**, successor to earlier health-related organizations, began in 1991 and later became an official Annual Conference agency. Its work merged into the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board and continues in part today under the denomination’s **Discipleship Ministries**, which provides resources for deacon ministry, older adult ministries, and other programs. Several nursing scholarships are awarded each year to Church of the Brethren members through the Health Education and Research Endowment.



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

Scrambling to help

Can you unscramble the following medical-related terms? Answers below.

- HOTPOSTCEES
- GRUYERS
- SAINTAHESE
- FONENICIT
- CTDOOR
- LISPATHO
- TENUPAINTO
- INDIMEIC
- NATEMERTT
- GOONISUCAT
- SOULIONTTANC
- SEESAID
- GOADSSINI
- MMOPSTY

ANSWERS: Stethoscope, surgery, anesthesia, infection, doctor, hospital, outpatient, medicine, treatment, contagious, consultation, disease, diagnosis, symptom.

Sources: *The Brethren Encyclopedia*, *Brethren Historical Library and Archives*, *brethren.org*, Peggy Reiff Miller

Church in the time of coronavirus



Dennis Beckner

Virtual church during viral crisis

by Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey

Eight years ago, the Church of the Brethren's first online church was born. I served as the founding pastor of Living Stream Church of the Brethren, a congregation that still worships together every

Sunday night (which is Monday morning for our members in China).

In 2012, I started livestreaming an hour-long worship service out to whomever wanted to watch and take part in the chat stream. I was able

to take this worship service “on the road,” traveling with me to stream from Oregon, Washington, California, Kansas, Utah, Virginia, Ohio, and Illinois. Since then, I have stepped back from leadership and a wonderful team of pastors has taken over, leading worship from across the country. It remains a unique way to bring together people who might live far from a

Up-to-date information on the Church of the Brethren response to COVID-19 can be found at www.brethren.org/covid19.

Brethren congregation, or who might be unable to leave their homes.

Now, during this time of lockdowns for the coronavirus crisis, almost every church, synagogue, and dharma center is offering at least some sort of online gathering. Some have streamed worship for years by now, and some are just learning the technological ropes. Some are streaming videos out, a one-way outreach of worship. Others are hosting conference calls, a harmony (or maybe cacophony?) of voices in conversation.

It's an interesting time to reflect on how far we've come in the past decade, and how we got here.

In the first years, it was hard for some established church leaders to conceive of church as being possible online. Now, we can't conceive of remaining a church community without a digital connection. I never imagined that a global pandemic would be what brought religious community to more online connection—and I wish we had never come to this point.

But this strange moment is teaching us some lessons about what being church is all about. Some of these lessons are things we of Living Stream have been practicing as an online church for years, and these reflections are offered in hopes of being helpful to others.

Theology

Online church reminds us that church isn't a building. Living Stream defines itself as "a church with no building and no walls." It was a lesson known by the



Wendy McFadden

The positive side

by Marcos Inhauser

I truly believe that nothing is so good that it does not have something bad, and that nothing is so bad that there is nothing good. I also believe that no effect is produced by a single cause and that no cause produces a single effect.

With these premises in mind, I want to point out some positive aspects of the coronavirus. The first is that none of the climate protocols (Kyoto, 1997; Rio de Janeiro, 1982; Kyoto, 1997; Paris, 2015) has achieved what the coronavirus is achieving: drastic reduction of emissions with the number of planes stopped and cars parked. People staying home is a strong contribution to the improvement (although temporary) of the climate.

The second beneficial aspect is that decisions to reduce social contact have led families to have more time at home, playing with children and discovering the pleasure of social conviviality. Old games are being recovered or dug up from cabinets.

The third factor is that, in a society in which the old are considered disposable, there is a return of concern for their health and the increase of family care, fulfilling the commandment to "honor your father and your mother."

The fourth is the acceleration of the use of technology. Telemedicine can now have a boost in its application. Classes are being given online, and kids are at home receiving the content. New ways to do work are being found. After the crisis, we will no longer be as we were. Churches will need to reinvent themselves.

And the fifth is that humanity has become more clean! We have never washed our hands so much and never used so much alcohol gel. 🧼

Marcos Inhauser is national director of the Church of the Brethren in Brazil along with his wife, Suely. This is excerpted from a Facebook post he wrote in March. Suely has been using social media to provide pro bono family therapy as a ministry during the crisis.

Hebrew people in exile—that, even after the destruction of the Temple, God was still with them as a people, not defined by a single structure alone. Wherever two or three gather, Christ promises his presence. We take that promise seriously! Wherever and however we gather, we know Christ is present.

Think of the ditty we say when we

lock our fingers together and show our children: "Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors, and see all the people." When we open the doors, the "building" of the church fades away, and the people who are the church emerge.

This is a poignant lesson in a time of health crisis. Living Stream had an unusual insight into the emerging

In addition to many congregational love feast observances offered in multiple ways, more than 10,000 people (from at least a dozen countries) joined in a denomination-wide love feast livestreamed on Maundy Thursday. Other Holy Week opportunities were a virtual love feast produced by the Dunker Punks Podcast and a Tenebrae service of shadows, produced at Creekside Church of the Brethren in Elkhart, Ind.



courtesy of Arbie Karasek

Arbie Karasek (right) and a colleague mark their first anniversary April 8 as RNs at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. "I never thought my first year of hospital nursing would include fighting a pandemic, but I feel very fortunate to be at Rush during this crisis," said Karasek, a member of York Center Church of the Brethren, Lombard, Ill.

COVID-19 crisis, as some of our members live in Pingding, China, and experienced the effects of the pandemic in its earliest weeks. This international interconnection is one, visible element of the spiritual truth: that our sisters and brothers in Christ are one body, across the ages and around the world.

Spirituality

Online worship often requires more of worshippers. To fully feel like worship, and not just another podcast or movie to be streamed, the responsibility

falls on the participants to prepare for worship. They cannot count on the experience of walking into a specific building to set their intentions. They might need to prepare their space to feel worshipful: maybe lighting a candle beside the electronic device. They need to carve out the time to take part. But most of all, they need to prepare their hearts and minds to focus on worship. A word to church leaders using online technologies: One blessing of technology is the frequent reminder of humility, that through whatever

Running in the dark

by Andrew and Allison Sampson

Allison: This pandemic has affected me on many levels. First and foremost, as a front-line nurse I am living in the “trenches” daily. I am emotionally, physically, morally, and spiritually drained. In my 20 years of nursing I have never been afraid to come into work. Now I am, every day. And second, it has been a lot to deal with as a pastor’s spouse at a new church.

What has kept me afloat is knowing that people out there are praying for healing, and praying for us on the front line. Words cannot express the gratitude. Also, our new church family is so supportive. Between contacting each other, notes of encouragement, feeding the hungry, and online meetings we are still together even though we are apart. We have continued to grow and keep the community together. Our local congregation is amazing.

My children have also given us a sense of normalcy during this time of change. I love that I can come home and, because they have not been exposed to all the fear, they relay this sense of security and love.

I hope that the faith community continues to reach out to those in

need by calling them, writing letters of encouragement, ordering groceries, etc. And *stay home* unless you need groceries! And pray for everyone.


Andrew: I feel like I’m running in the dark through a maze at 100 miles per hour most days. Having been at Modesto Church of the Brethren for less than a year, still building relationships, trying to find what services the community offers to those in need, and the “normal” day-to-day has been exhausting.

There has also been some learning on the fly: how to create an online worship service, for example. That is tiring because of it being new. Working more hours from home has also added chef and teacher to the mix of responsibilities and, honestly, I’ve never felt busier.

Relationships, especially relationships beyond the four walls that we call home, have really helped. I’ve appreciated our deacon body and other caregivers who are calling, emailing, etc., with people from the church network. I know that they’ve been hard at work, and it is helping alleviate a lot of the burden. And the Pacific Southwest District and Russ (Matteson,

district executive) offer support through frequent communication and check-ins.

The congregation’s response has been putting people first. Our first online worship service was March 15, and the decision to go from in-person to online was made largely because of people’s concerns during the week. We cut our office hours in half, but the decision was made to continue to pay the regular salary to our administrative assistant and janitorial staff. The executive committee recognized that it was important to keep everyone employed. Even more intentionally, we are asking, “How will this help and encourage others?” as we make decisions in an ever-changing landscape.

I believe that the church, individuals, and family units will come out ahead. How? Because we have pushed the hard reset on our lives and have been reminded of what is really important. I believe that these “new” priorities will play an even bigger role in all those areas I mentioned. We will be changed by this experience, and I pray that it will be for the better. 

Andrew Sampson is pastor of Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren. Allison Sampson is a hospital nurse in the city.

technical glitches may come, we are not judged by our imperfections!

Being church practically

More technological options exist today than ever before, offering choices for the variety of congregation sizes and styles of worship. It provides a complement, one more way we gather. We will likely appreciate worshipping together in-person all the more after this crisis.

Online worship can reach people who are left behind by in-person-only worship, which we are learning very clearly right now. The main value of online worship is that it can cut down on loneliness when we're faced with isolation. While these quarantines and lockdowns are new for many of our members, may we take what we're learning of this experience with us and always remember those who feel isolated and separated from their in-person communities.

On the other hand, online worship can exclude some people, who don't have access to the internet or who don't have training in navigating the apps needed. We have to stay aware of the digital divide that still keeps some of us separate.

Online worship can be more ecologically efficient, if our regular worship entails people driving cars longer distances to attend. We might do well to maintain some online connection for weekday meetings that could cut down on car trips to church.

Not just how but why

In the focus on *how* we gather for worship, it's ever important to remember *why* we gather. This global crisis is rocking the world. In moments of fear, we need all the more the assurance of our Christ who reminds us we are loved and not alone, especially in our suffering.

We need to gather not only to end our individual loneliness, but because those who are home are needed to turn their prayers toward others.

We gather to lift in prayer those who are facing the virus directly: those suffering the illness, at home or alone in hospitals;



Children from the Church of the Brethren in Spain display a sign that says "God is in control" and "I stay home."

Physically distant but socially connected

by Nathan Hollenberg


"I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy." —2 Timothy 1: 4

The other evening our youth group and youth leaders joined me for a Zoom meeting. Zoom is a wonderful online platform where multiple individuals can video call one another so that we can all hear and see each other at the same time. We didn't have grand plans for our meeting—simply an opportunity to check in on one another. Still, there was something joyful about simply being together, even digitally, for a short amount of time.

This experience has caused me to reflect that perhaps during this pandemic we need to stop using the term "social distancing." To clarify, I completely trust and understand the need to be physically distant from one another. However, I do believe there is a deep difference between being "physically" distant and "socially" distant.

One of the criticisms often levied against the youth of today is that they rely too heavily on technology to connect to one another and perhaps are losing some personal communication skills. The irony now is that our young are needing to teach the older generations that we can remain socially connected through technology, even when we cannot be physically together.

This type of communication, while wonderful, is admittedly not the same as being together in person. I feel blessed to have the tools to put together online worship services that can still get other church members involved, but it's not the same as our normal Sunday morning routine. I feel blessed to have technology that allows me to meet remotely with youth groups and other church members, but it will never replace the joy of physically being together.

And yet, doing all we can to stay socially connected, even though we are physically disconnected, is vital. I lament not being able to be with my church family in person. In the words of Paul, "I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy." Even as I hope for the day we can be together again, I know it is important now more than ever to be socially connected. Call one another, write cards, plan Zoom meetings, and stay connected even though we are apart. 

Nathan Hollenberg is pastor of Linville Creek Church of the Brethren in Broadway, Va.



Joanna Miller in Pingding, China.

medical workers; families who can't visit their loved ones in the hospital; survivors mourning the ones they have lost and who cannot gather with others to grieve.

We also lift up those facing the economic fallout of protecting lives from the virus: workers who have been laid off, facing economic instability alongside the blow of feeling their work is deemed "nonessential"; workers facing extra pressures to help produce and transport the goods the public needs; other essential

workers whose service the wider society is only now coming to value.

There are blessings of this time, such as refocusing on what we need the most. But it is too soon for cheerful takeaways. We are still in the midst of this crisis. We gather because knowing we are not alone is part of our very survival. **Z**

Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey, an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, works in criminal justice reform service and policy with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the state council of churches.

Words for a pandemic

by Paul Munday

Have you ever been in such a deep valley that you have doubted in the depths? Together we are in a valley called COVID-19.

Confess it's alarming. People of faith tend to sweeten the jolting reality of life. But God loves honesty. And so just say it: This pandemic is upsetting, disrupting life in a scary way. The biblical character Job models bluntness: "What's the point of life when it doesn't make sense? . . . Instead of bread, I get groans for my supper, then leave the table and vomit my anguish. The worst of my fears has come true. . . . My peace destroyed. No rest for me, ever—death has invaded life" (Job 3:23-26 *The Message*).

Look for manna. Manna was the nourishment God gave the Israelites in the wilderness of their suffering and abandonment. But it didn't arrive in one delivery. Instead, God provided just enough manna for each day. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. . . . I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, at twilight, you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God'" (Exodus 16:4, 12).

Did you catch both God's attentiveness and God's timing? God hears our lament and hears our grumbling, and God is responsive. It's not according to my preferred timing, but according to God's preferred provision and schedule. And so

be patient. But affirm: God will provide. Expect manna. Look for neighbors running errands for neighbors. Look for grocery stores restocking shelves and extending hours. Look for physicians adding services and sharpening attentiveness. For in a myriad of ways, even in the wilderness, God will deliver.

Expect new creation. Scripture is filled with hopelessness, wasteland, and desert. But consistently, scripture accents God's promise to make a way where there appears to be no way—"a road in the wilderness and paths in the wastelands" (Isaiah 43:19 NET). New creation!

Through God in Christ, blessing can emerge from brokenness, hope can emerge from horror, promise can emerge from pain. For Jesus is the ultimate survivor demonstrating through the cross that even the greatest tragedy, abandonment, and suffering can result in redemption, reconciliation, and new creation.

For "surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," [but] even the darkness is not dark to you [O God]; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you" (Psalm 139:7-12).

Over time, let that truth register. It is a process. But be expectant, for God does make a road in the wilderness and a path in the wasteland (Isaiah 43:19), giving light to navigate alarming darkness—even a pandemic. **Z**

Paul Munday is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor serving this year as moderator of Annual Conference. The words are excerpts from a sermon he gave at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren in March.

THROUGH GOD IN CHRIST, BLESSING CAN EMERGE FROM BROKENNESS, HOPE CAN EMERGE FROM HORROR, PROMISE CAN EMERGE FROM PAIN.



After Brethren built their first permanent meetinghouse, left, in Germantown in 1770 (portrayed in a 20th century illustration), the Pettikoffer house was used to care for widows and the elderly.

Pettikoffer house legacy still inspires

Original Germantown “Old Folks’ Home” set an example

by Zoe Vorndran

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27 NIV).


Surely for a denomination committed to serving others and giving resources to the needy, this New Testament scripture is a foundational principle to the Brethren way of living. It should, therefore, be no shock that the first mission of the Brethren in the 18th century was to care for those in need. The first Brethren building was the Pettikoffer house, a home for the aged, widowed, and poor.

John Pettikoffer, a poor German immigrant, built a house in 1731 on an acre gifted to him by Elder Peter Schilbert of the German Baptist Brethren. After Pettikoffer moved to Ephrata, his house was returned to the Brethren. While it is said the Pettikoffer house was used as a meetinghouse from 1760 to 1770, it would be remiss to overlook that it was concurrently known as the “Widows’ Home.” Indeed, as early as 1760, the Brethren had set aside a rent-free room and kitchen for a widow.

The Pettikoffer house officially earned its title as the first Old Folks’ Home in 1770 when the Germantown church meetinghouse—the mother of Brethren churches—was erected, and members of the congregation moved to the new building. For a total of 101 years, the Pettikoffer house shel-

tered, clothed, and fed the poor, widowed, and elderly at the expense of the Germantown congregation. The congregation had a “poor box,” where members could donate money in order to collect funds for the Old Folks’ Home.

This commitment to service found further expression in 1887 when the Annual Meeting appointed a committee to organize “old folks’ homes.” Though the Pettikoffer house did not directly initiate the nationwide movement to build retirement homes during the 1880s, it was, according to Mary Sue H. Rosenberger, “the earliest model for today’s Brethren homes and hospitals.”

The Pettikoffer house served as an example of early Brethren acting upon the principles set forth in the New Testament, and it compels modern readers to consider the impact of the denomination’s longstanding ministries to the aged and elderly, widowed, and orphaned. The significance of the Pettikoffer house undoubtedly extends beyond its use as the Brethren’s first Widows’ and Old Folks’ Home; however, its centuries-old reputation as the oldest home for the aged and widowed is a testament to the Brethren’s timeless attitudes towards service and action. 

Zoe Vorndran is serving as this year’s intern in the Brethren Historical Library and Archives in Elgin, Ill. She is a member of Lincolnshire Church of the Brethren (Fort Wayne, Ind.) and a graduate of Manchester University (North Manchester, Ind.).



Courtesy of Paul Munday

The long, green tunnel

MODERATOR PAUL MUNDEY URGES THE DENOMINATION FORWARD—AND OUTWARD

by Jan Fischer Bachman

With 43 years of set-apart ministry experience, 2020 Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday describes himself as “not optimistic but hopeful.”

“The heart of my hope is the very strong belief that there is manna and there is a guiding light—there is a vision pulling us toward the promised land, being in Christ and being in mission,” he said in a conversation at a Maryland coffee shop prior to the pandemic-related social distancing. “No matter what our circumstances are, we can move through the wilderness.”

Munday has an appreciation for literal wilderness, too. That pulls him toward the outdoors, and specifically the Appalachian Trail, which lies minutes from his home.

“Hiking forces me to keep moving,” he said. “You’ve got rocks, you’ve got streams to cross, you’ve got points you think you

can’t make it.” On the Appalachian Trail, he noted, the more you hike, the harder it gets—not physically, but mentally: It becomes nothing but a “long, green tunnel.” What’s the way forward?

“You change your mind; you change your heart. You fixate not on circumstances but have a sense that the trauma is worth the journey,” he said. This image underlies the 2020 Annual Conference theme that Munday selected, “God’s Adventurous Future.”

“It acknowledges the journey,” Munday explained. “But there’s something about the adventure of it all that makes life really fulfilling.”

Extending the illustration to the life of the Church of the Brethren, he continued: “We’re not going to solve everything on the journey, but we can develop a common vision and travel together. My overall dream is that we truly understand

THE WORD 'EVANGELISM' TO MOST PEOPLE IS CONNECTED WITH SOME SORT OF NARROW VIEW OF FAITH, WHEN IN REALITY, IT'S ABOUT INVITATION AND INCLUSION

the incredible gift of the compelling vision and the great promise of that in terms of moving us forward in this in-between season. . . . People think we have to use political tactics to win the battle. We have to find another way.”

Considering the denominational compelling vision statement, arrived at through several years of discernment, will be the focus of this year’s Annual Conference business.

“It’s hard to contain my enthusiasm!” Munday exclaimed. “My prayer is that people can get beyond the normal human default to the negative, the cynical, and focus on the vision. We need to learn the word ‘missional,’ understand what that is, and turn it inside out. Unless you become radically open to the outsider, you have no sustainable future.”

Munday’s personal story fuels his passion for reaching outsiders. Growing up in a family that did not attend church, he was invited to Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren by neighbors Kitty and Alaric Bowman, which profoundly changed his life.

“The word ‘evangelism’ to most people is connected with some sort of narrow view of faith, when in reality, it’s about invitation and inclusion—but I don’t mean by that what some mean by that.”

He gave the illustration of a lighthouse, one that no longer rescued people at sea because it had become “messy and unseemly.”

“It’s easier to have a lighthouse for people working at the lighthouse,” he said, “while surrounding each church are scores of people who are all alone, who have no place to belong. If we would learn at the local church level the radical biblical meaning of hospitality, it would revolutionize the local church.”

Biblical hospitality was one of two things Munday described as marking the ministry of Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren during his two decades there as pastor (1996-2016). The second was radical missional emphasis. When he arrived, the congregation had one neighborhood engagement. By the

time he left, they had dozens of neighborhood ministries.

“Are we willing to radically include the outsider?” Munday asked. “The denomination can be more like a fraternity than an open system.” He named, for example, some Brethren cultural markers: attending Brethren colleges or one’s genealogy, having Brethren relatives.

“We have to have a sense of larger inclusion. If we are including people, we have to have a baseline, as well,” Munday added. “Everything is in tension. We have to find the line between flinging the doors open but calling people to discipleship, as well. The baseline has to be the centrality of Christ.”

Prior to his pastorate in Frederick, Munday served as director of evangelism and church growth for the Church of the Brethren for 13 years.

“I believe in long tenure,” he said. “The biggest challenge in leading now is perseverance.”

Earlier he pastored Friendship Church of the Brethren (Linthicum Heights, Md.) for six years and served part-time or summer pastorates at Fairview Church of the Brethren at Endless Caverns (Timberville, Va.), Arlington (Va.) Church of the Brethren, and Dundalk (Md.) Church of the Brethren. He currently serves as moderator for the Hagerstown and GraceWay congregations.

With a commitment to lifelong learning, Munday has studied at a number of universities. His degrees include a Bachelor of Science in history from Towson (Md.) University, a Master of Divinity in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, Calif.), and a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership from Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary, where he was also a visiting scholar from 2016 to 2017. He is presently in association with St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore.

For now, though, his service to the denomination is the primary focus of his attention.

“I wasn’t planning on doing this!” Munday admitted of being moderator. “It was unexpected and very exciting. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it. I wish every member had this opportunity: to travel widely and meet a variety of people. To go beyond labels and stereotypes. To have this larger relational experience. . . . The greatest gift is Christ in community.”

After Annual Conference is over, Munday says he is very open to the next call, although he appreciates “the freedom of ‘having my own shop’” and plans to launch a new website following this year’s Annual Conference.

And once the Appalachian Trail opens again, he will be back on it, facing the challenges and listening for the voice of God. 



Courtesy of Paul Munday



Liminal but not lost

UNCERTAIN TIMES CALL FOR IMAGINATIVE, MISSIONAL RESPONSES

by Paul Munday

It's unwise to understate the rigor of our times. There is a rumble among us that's unsettling as we navigate a culture that's moved from empathy to extremism, baiting people toward new excesses of problematic behavior.

One overt example is tribalism that is far from tame. We don't just differ; we dig at each other with deepening disregard. It's painful to experience such contempt in culture, but it's agonizing, even maddening, to encounter it in the church.

Though far from excusable, such barbed talk is plausible as we acknowledge a broader, turbulent church context. We're in great angst as we experience, in the words of Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer, "a great ecclesiastical rummage sale," as established church life is turned upside down. The resultant sorting is grating, threatening stuff.

Expanding on Dyer's observation, author Phyllis Tickle noted such disarray happens about every 500 years. "For Western Christianity, the Protestant or Great Reformation was about five hundred years ago," she wrote in *The Great Emergence*. "Five hundred before that, you hit the Great Schism when the church divided between east and west. Five hundred years earlier, you have Pope Gregory the Great, who helped bring the church out of the dark ages."

And now, another rummage sale is before us. The crux of our current upheaval is a shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. Christendom welcomed "blue laws" (e.g., the shuttering of businesses on Sunday) and the embossing of coinage with "In God We Trust." In post-Christendom, there's a

growing distance—even hostility—toward established understandings of faith, church, religion, and spiritual belief.

As we sort through the disarray, there's high tension in deciding what to keep and what to discard. To oversimplify, progressives/liberals tend to enter an ecclesiastical rummage sale with greater ease, open to parting with established beliefs and practices in favor of what they perceive as fresh awareness of God-Truth. Evangelicals/conservatives tend to be more circumspect amid the frenzy; yes, open to adjustment, but also underscoring the value of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3 KJV).

Historically, Annual Conference has been an expected, respected place for the Church of the Brethren to sort through varied aspects of church life. We've moved through lots of upheavals previously as we've sorted through differences over clothing and musical instruments, the role of higher education, and the calling of women to ministry. But our current sorting is epic. Our present regrouping is more visceral, at a nery, deeper existential level. Adding to the intensity is a questioning of the authority of the Annual Conference as a sorting arena, as some interpret forbearance (and related themes) as a bypass for accountability to Conference decisions.

A way forward? *Frame, center, and adapt* through mixed reality.

Frame. Few enjoy upheaval, but the "rummage sale" will not go away. Thus, it's wise to enter into, even embrace, what spiritual director Susan Beaumont calls a season of

liminality, anticipating “the threshold between an ending and a new beginning.” “Liminal seasons are challenging, disorienting, and unsettling,” she says. “[Yet they] are also exciting and innovative . . . [for] God’s greatest work occurs in liminal spaces.” Thus, it’s wise to frame our current sorting as a grand adventure—an expected, normal part of traveling with God, toward God’s promise of new creation.

Like the Israelites in Babylonian captivity, it appears there is no promise and no destiny. But as God’s people have rediscovered in all generations, God makes a way where there seems no way. “This is what the Lord says, the one who made a road through the sea, a pathway through the surging waters, the one who led chariots and horses to destruction, together with a mighty army. . . . Look, I am about to do something new. Now it begins to happen! Do you not recognize it? Yes, I will make a road in the wilderness and paths in the wastelands” (Isaiah 43:16-19 NET).

And so, yes, we are traversing wild, ominous terrain; and yes, we are anxious, stumbling, groping. But such trekking is core to our identity as God’s people. So, frame it as expected, needed, required, likely, normal—but, most profoundly, as God-guided and desired.

Center. It’s important to underscore that liminality is not without light, specifically the light of the gospel—Jesus. During my moderator travel, I have yet to encounter a Church of the Brethren congregation that does not end its observance of the love feast with a celebration of the eucharist. For me, that’s a centering truth amid our messy, liminal journey.

A continuing affirmation of bread and cup underscores that, yes, much is unclear, but much is, nevertheless, claimed: We uphold that Jesus Christ is broken body and shed blood, the sacrifice and salvation of God, the Lord of all life, given to rescue humanity. I find such certainty a bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16) as we traverse uneven, daunting terrain.


Author Leonard Sweet notes a scene in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Trespasser*, where Helena and Siegmund lie in the sand, anticipating the sunrise. “Each was looking at a low, large star which hung straight in front of them, dripping in its brilliance in a thin streamlet of light along the sea almost to their feet. It was a star-path fine and clear, trembling in its brilliance, but certain upon the water.” To Siegmund, it appeared to be a star-path home, akin to a lantern lighting the way, beckoning amid uncertainty. Jesus Christ is our

star-path home, a lantern lighting the way, beckoning amid the uncertainty of liminal times.

Adapt. Though Jesus centers and guides in liminality, Jesus also calls for inventiveness, because new outcomes require new approaches and discovery. As Harvard University lecturer Ron Heifetz notes, such discovery is not mere technical change, such as adjustments to current operating procedures. What’s needed is adaptive change, Heifetz notes, necessitating “experiments . . . and adjustments from numerous places in the organization . . . changing attitudes, values, and behaviors.” Without such deep change, organizations “cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment.”

The central adaptive change required of the Church of the Brethren is to become missional. By missional, I mean a concerted effort by every sector of the church to empower the local church to reorient every aspect of its being toward service to the outsider, beginning with the outsider in its neighborhood. A missional orientation, as theologian Darrell Guder notes, does not view mission as just “one of the necessary prongs of the church’s calling . . . [but] the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church’s purpose and action.”

Such mission saturation calls for widespread, systemic changes in how we “do church.” Church is no longer just a place to “fill up,” but to “pour out” for the least, lost, and outcast, beginning with those in our immediate reach. Central to our outreach is invitation and inclusion, as we recognize that people need not just our service, but Christ—and life together in him. We find our life by giving Christ-life away to a growing number of people, yearning ultimately for the Revelation dream of a “a vast multitude of people . . . from every nation, tribe, people group, and language” (Revelation 7:9 The Passion Translation).

And so, the rummage sale continues. But as we sort, we move missionally toward God’s adventurous future. We frame, center, and adapt. I am not optimistic, but I am hopeful. I believe that even in liminal seasons we need not be lost, for there is a way when there seems no way, for there is a God who looks beyond captivity and wasteland toward promise and new creation—in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NIV). 

Paul Munday is a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, serving as moderator of the denomination’s 2020 Annual Conference.

I BELIEVE THAT EVEN IN LIMINAL SEASONS WE NEED NOT BE LOST, FOR THERE IS A WAY WHEN THERE SEEMS NO WAY, FOR THERE IS A GOD WHO LOOKS BEYOND CAPTIVITY AND WASTELAND **TOWARD PROMISE AND NEW CREATION—IN JESUS**



Gospel Messenger



Gospel Messenger



Gospel Messenger



Gospel Messenger

Clockwise from top left: Brethren young adults on Ocean Grove beach in 1949. Dan West addresses the 1954 conference. Enjoying the boardwalk in 1965. Annual Conference in 1954.

An ocean of memories

UNIQUE OCEAN GROVE HOSTED ANNUAL CONFERENCE SEVEN TIMES

by **Walt Wiltschek**

They call it “**God’s square mile at the Jersey Shore.**” Ocean Grove, New Jersey. The town of about 3,000 year-round residents is a quiet haven from another time, worlds apart from its boisterous next-door neighbor, Asbury Park, just to the north, and sprawling Neptune to the south.

The unincorporated community was founded by Methodists in 1869 as a summer camp meeting spot along the Atlantic. The Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association has

been running ever since, centered on the impressive Great Auditorium, built in 1894. That wooden auditorium, which seats more than 6,000 people, and many of the Victorian homes through the town are largely unchanged since that period. It gives the streets an idyllic, movie-set feel—so much so that the whole place is a National Historic District. It’s been called a “time capsule,” a “jewel,” and a “national treasure.”

Its boardwalk is open and uncommercialized, nothing but ocean views and beach. Restaurants, shops, and other



Walt Witczek



Nathan Simmers, flickr.com/nosha

businesses instead cluster mostly along Main Avenue, with inns and bed-and-breakfast spots sprinkled through the town. It even has an ice cream parlor, Day's, that dates to 1876. And the auditorium is surrounded by unique small wooden structures, called the "tent city," which provide rentals for summer visitors.

In an article in *New Jersey Monthly*, guest house owner Barbara Eisel told author Caren Chesler, "You feel like you're in Mayberry. Everybody is so friendly. It just cracks me up."

It's small wonder, then, that the Church of the Brethren selected the town for its Annual Conference gatherings—seven times over the course of three decades in the mid-20th century. The first took place 80 years ago, in 1940, and return trips came with growing frequency, in 1949, 1954, 1959, 1962, 1965, and, finally, in 1968. A front-page headline of the *Neptune Times* in June 1962 proclaimed, "Brethren returning to Grove in 1965."

While New Jersey has never been a Brethren stronghold, Ocean Grove is only 75 miles from Philadelphia and 60 from New York, making transportation convenient. The beach and the town's residential feel were also attractions, and Ocean Grove's rules—no alcohol, no dancing, no gambling, and more—were appealing to many Brethren of the time. Until 1981, the town's blue laws even prohibited all vehicular traffic on Sundays, and the beach is

still closed on Sunday mornings.

Fred Swartz, a retired pastor from Bridgewater, Va., and former Annual Conference secretary, says he remembers the Sunday driving ban well. Since conference ended on Sunday, it required special planning for departure.

"It was an ideal place for Brethren, because you weren't even allowed to park on Sunday," says Swartz, who attended six of the Ocean Grove meetings. "We had to take our cars outside the town limits Saturday evening, and on Sunday, we had to carry our luggage out of Ocean Grove to our cars. Everyone knew that in advance, so there was no room for legitimate complaints, but there were still complaints, all right."

"The other ideal thing," he adds, "was that there was really no shopping in Ocean Grove on any day, and no amusement activities. When conference was held the beach was open. That was the main attraction, and the only attraction."

INSIDE THE AUDITORIUM, BRETHREN GATHERED FOR THE MAIN EVENT. WORSHIP RESONATED IN THE SOARING STRUCTURE, KNOWN FOR ITS EXCELLENT ACOUSTICS AND GRAND PIPE ORGAN, AND BUSINESS SESSIONS DEBATED THE ISSUES OF THE DAY.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Swartz confesses, though, that one time as a teenager he and some friends snuck up to Asbury Park—the “evil place,” as some called it—to look at the entertainment venues, which included a casino. He emphasizes, though, that they weren’t seduced into stopping.

Jim Myer, a free minister at the White Oak congregation in Manheim, Pa., remembers that the meetings there were often rather warm, and the auditorium was cooled only by natural breezes.

“Of course, you could jump in the ocean if you got too hot,” Myer says. “When I was 15, I had another buddy along with me, and I remember we spent some time in the ocean while some of the sessions were going on.”

Howard Royer, a long-time denominational staff member in Elgin, Ill., now retired, attended four of the Ocean Grove conferences.

“I recall an aura that made the venue unique,” Royer recalls. “The boardwalk and ocean, the college crowd that waited tables, the auditorium seating and singing, the environs of a historic religious community and its strict Sunday rules banning cars, vintage housing in a seaside resort jammed with Brethren all factored in.”

He says that it’s a rather similar atmosphere to what Brethren experience today for National Older Adult Conference in Lake Junaluska, N.C.—“another Methodist conference center by a body of water,” Royer notes.

Swartz, like Royer, appreciated the concentration of Brethren that occurred from having such a large group from the denomination in one intimate setting.

“With thousands of Brethren gathering in that small town you saw so many Brethren all the time coming and going,” Swartz says. “It was like your family was suddenly enormously big. It was a caring for one another that I don’t think I’ve experienced at other conferences.”

That rolled over into the lodgings, as many Brethren stayed in the inns and boarding houses around town and walked to the auditorium. Meals were often taken at those accommodations, so sharing continued around the tables with other Brethren and with their hosts.

“My grandparents became very good friends with the people they rented the boarding house from every time they went,” Swartz says, adding that some Brethren young adults even took summer jobs in Ocean Grove as they made connections with the community.



Others lined up at restaurants around town. Parts of that dining experience were a new thing for Myer, who grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania.

“I don’t know that my family had ever eaten breakfast in a restaurant before we went to Ocean Grove,” Myer says. “The waitress came and asked how I wanted my eggs, and I didn’t know what to say. My buddy said, ‘Well, ask for over medium,’ and so that’s where I learned how to get my eggs.”

Inside the Auditorium, meanwhile, Brethren—up to 10,000 of them—gathered for the main event. Worship resonated in the soaring structure, known for its excellent acoustics and grand pipe organ, and business sessions debated the issues of the day.

Among the noteworthy events that occurred at Ocean Grove were the formation of the Brethren Revival Fellowship in 1959—a reaction to some decisions at the previous year’s Annual Conference in Iowa; a statement on Membership in Secret Societies in 1954; the establishment of the denomination’s Washington, D.C., office in 1962; a citation that same year for former United Nations official—and Brethren minister—Andrew Cordier, who addressed the conference; and the adoption of the revised Statement of the Church of the Brethren on War in 1968 (later revised again in 1970) as the conflict in Vietnam escalated.

Some other particular moments of those meetings stand out: Swartz recalls hearing *Cotton Patch Gospel* author Clarence Jordan speak there and sending off missionaries with waving handkerchiefs and singing “Speed Away.” Royer remembers an impressive worship service led by Paul Fike. Myer is reminded of hearing eloquent speeches by Norman Baugher at the business microphone.

The overall conference schedule and layout was much different than today, however, with a small exhibit space and few planned events outside of worship, Bible study, and business.

“I don’t know that there were many meal events or planned events for conferencegoers,” Myer says. “Today when you go to Annual Conference there are so many things to go to after the


OCEAN GROVE ISN’T PERFECT, AND SOME ASPECTS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE DECADES. BUT FOR MANY OLDER BRETHREN IT STILL KINDLES MEMORIES OF A TIME WITH **A DIFFERENT PACE AND A DIFFERENT WAY OF BEING COMMUNITY.**

main sessions are over that you have to kind of rush out of the main session and get to where you're going, while there (at Ocean Grove) it was much more relaxed, standing in line and visiting with your friends and relatives and whatever. There was much more free time, a much more relaxed schedule. Today it kind of resembles a political convention with so much to do and rushing to the next event. We're all much more used to being highly organized today."

Those shifts to a more complex, more modern conference eventually led the Brethren to move away from Ocean Grove, with most events today held at convention centers in major cities, or occasionally (most recently in 2003) on a large college campus.

Brethren also became increasingly conscious of race issues in the 1960s, and some practices in Ocean Grove raised concerns. While it was not officially noted as a "sundown town," workers who were non-residents—which included most minorities—had to leave the town at night, when the main gate was locked. Even today, the town is more than 95 percent white in the midst of a diverse region.

So, no, Ocean Grove isn't perfect, and some aspects have changed over the decades. But for many older Brethren it still kindles memories of a time with a different pace and a different way of being community.

As Church of the Brethren member Ron Gordon says in some online reflections: "Ocean Grove was more than just a conference, it was an experience." 



Walt Witbeck

Staying small

Two other small-town locations were used frequently by Brethren for Annual Conference/Annual Meeting in the first part of the 20th century:



Indiana Historical Society

Winona Lake, Ind. (1910, 1913, 1916, 1919, 1922, 1925, 1935): Winona Lake began as a family resort, but like Ocean Grove it attained fame as a Bible conference and revival setting after it was purchased by the Presbyterian Church in 1894 and later became the home base for evangelist Billy Sunday. It featured a large wooden auditorium. Annual Meeting also was held in the same county in 1882 and in nearby North Manchester, Ind., in 1878, 1888, 1900, 1929, and 1945.



Brethren Historical Library and Archives

Hershey, Pa. (1915, 1918, 1921, 1924, 1927, 1930, 1933, 1936): In addition to its famous chocolate factory, Hershey featured the family-friendly Hershey Park amusement area, which opened in 1906. Brethren met by the park in a 4,000-seat convention hall built by Milton Hershey. Annual Meeting was also held in nearby Harrisburg, Pa., in 1902, and in York, Pa., in 1912.



Sowing hope in Indiana

Pleasant Chapel spreads smiles and love near and far

by Val Kline

One cold night this past winter, my husband woke me up to tell me the neighbors' house was on fire. We prayed a quick prayer, and then immediately heard and saw fire trucks arrive. My husband went outside, and I started our prayer chain.

We live in the parsonage by Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren (Ashley, Ind.), and it wasn't long before we had some church members at the church, offering coffee and a place of refuge for the firefighters. Five fire depart-

ments were on the scene for about five hours, and many of them took the opportunity to warm up in the building. I was so happy to learn that they did, and even more so after I found out they had icicles on them.

We were joy-filled to learn that everyone was okay, but saddened that the house was a total loss. It was suggested that we collect an offering for the neighbors, and we did so. Another church in our small town did the same thing and gave us their money to deliver with ours. I was overjoyed to give the generous offerings to our neighbors and to let them know that we love and support them.

And it wasn't surprising. I've been the pastor at Pleasant Chapel for over 12 years, and one thing I learned early on is that Pleasant Chapel is a generous congregation. When there are opportunities, the church gives generously and joyfully.

Shortly before I came, the congregation started collecting peanut butter and jelly one Sunday each month for a local food pantry, along with monetary gifts. That monthly offering collection continues to this day. Children pull a little red wagon through the center aisle and collect the donations while regular tithes are also being collected. On that Sunday, we always eat snacks together, most of which are made with peanut butter and/or jelly.

Pleasant Chapel's reach stretches much farther, too. The year before I came, the congregation began a partnership with another nearby congregation (from another denomination) to participate in the ministry of Foods Resource Bank

Seyran, Trino, and Anna came to Pleasant Chapel from Armenia to share how Growing Projects have made an impact on their community.



Val Kline



Manwel, originally from Rwanda and later a refugee, was a beneficiary of Pleasant Chapel's Growing Project.

(FRB). FRB often partners a rural church with a city church, one to grow crops and the other to raise funds. The two churches usually get together a couple of times a year to worship and to celebrate the harvest.

One of the goals of FRB is to train people in other countries to break the cycle of poverty and end their struggle with hunger through agricultural development. FRB has growing projects around the world, and partners in our country choose projects to support. Every year, FRB staff members from our country visit growing projects in other countries, and sometimes partners from other countries come here.


Through our participation in FRB, we have had the privilege of meeting several brothers and sisters from different countries. During one Harvest Celebration, two people from Myanmar—Dominick and Agnes—joined us and shared ways the ministry has changed their lives and community. Dominick told us, “If you could see how your growing projects are helping people in other countries, you would be so proud.”

FRB decided to change its name a few years ago, because there was ongoing confusion about the ministry (some people thought it was a food bank). I was invited to be on the conference call to brainstorm ideas. During that call, the name “Growing Hope” was shared, and we all liked it. Foods Resource Bank officially changed its name to Growing Hope Globally (GHG).

In the past few years another city church joined our partnership, and we have had a great time getting to know brothers and sisters from that congregation, too. Members from the three churches, as well as GHG staff members, have planned, worshiped, eaten, celebrated, and laughed together.

In these past 12 years, we have seen many changes within our church family, including the fact that some of our farmers have gone on to glory. But their families have decided to continue farming designated acres to continue supporting this important ministry.

After our last harvest, we discovered that we, along with our partner churches, have raised more than \$200,000 since 2007 to help growing projects around the world. Growing Hope Globally is a wonderful ministry that has allowed us to make a positive impact in many countries. (Learn more at growinghopeglobally.org.)

For a little country church in northeastern Indiana with fewer than 50 active members located a few miles outside of a town of about 1,000 people, we are grateful for the contributions we’ve been able to make. And I’m blessed to be a part of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren, a small church family that, by God’s grace, is making a difference in the lives of our neighbors around the world . . . and across the street. 

Val Kline is pastor of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren in Ashley, Ind., located in Northern Indiana District.

GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY

A total of 27 Church of the Brethren congregations

participate in one of the Growing Projects of Growing Hope Globally (GHG). According to GHG, most of their projects are ecumenical, and about 10 percent of the 162 current active Growing Projects include at least one Brethren partner. GHG regional director Eric Mattson says the Ashley, Ind., project that includes Pleasant Chapel has raised enough funds to sup-

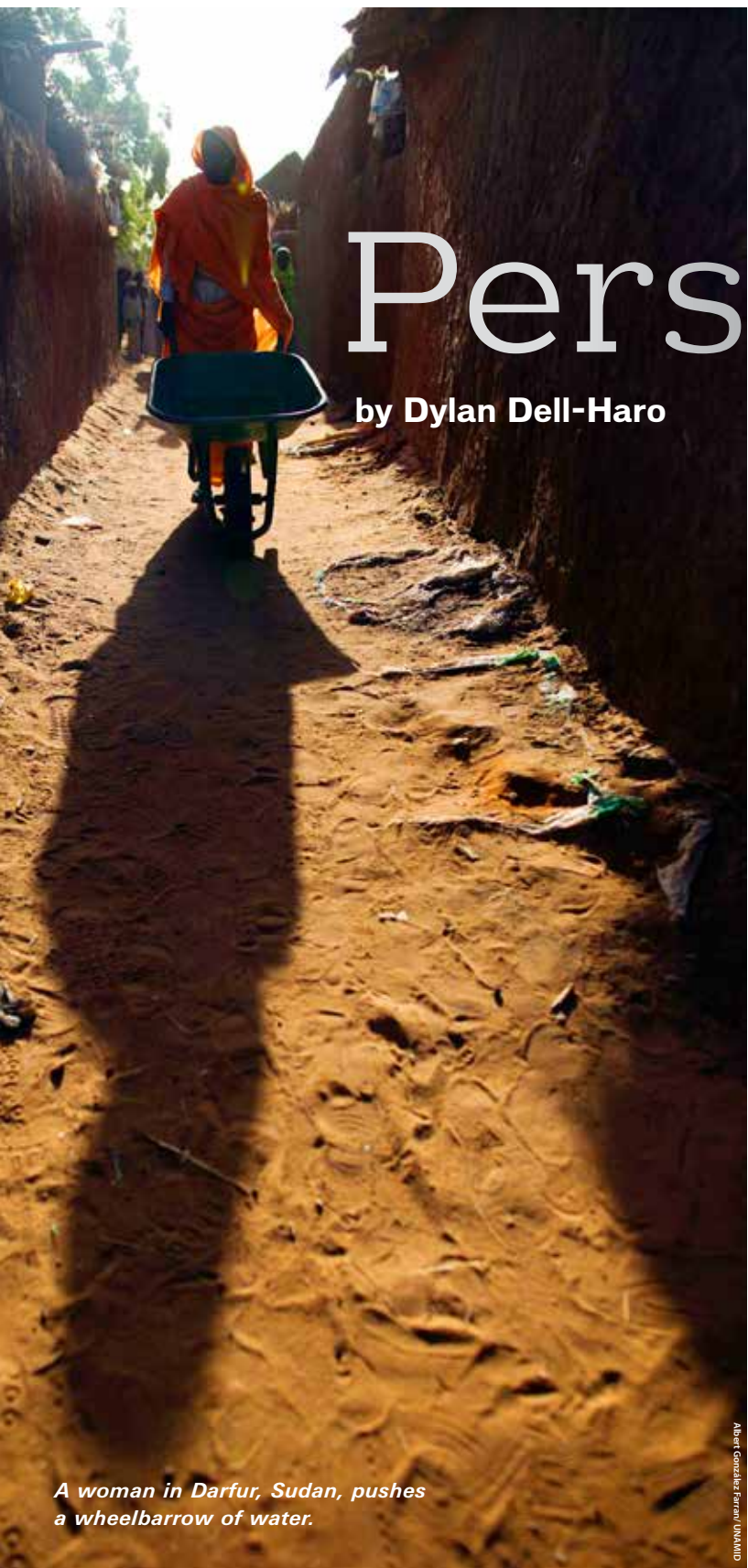
port nearly 3,800 people in six countries in Africa and Latin America.

The Church of the Brethren supports GHG directly through its Global Food Initiative, contributing \$15,000 to \$30,000 annually as an implementing member to cover administrative and operating costs for the organization. This allows more funds from the Growing Projects to benefit on-the-ground efforts in developing countries.

GHG will hold its annual Growing

Hope Summer Celebration for all its partners July 24-25 in Grabill, Ind. Find out more about GHG at www.growinghopeglobally.org.





A woman in Darfur, Sudan, pushes a wheelbarrow of water.

Albert Gonzales Ferran/UNAMID

Persistence

by Dylan Dell-Haro

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.

Immediately after his encounter with **Zacchaeus**, and just before he rides a colt into Jerusalem, Jesus tells this parable in Luke 19:11-28 (paraphrased):

A man of inherited wealth aspired to have more political power in his country, but he needed to obtain permission to rule from the colonizing empire. Before he departed, he lent each of his 10 slaves one mina—100 days' wages—and instructed each of the 10 to manage his business interests while he was away.

Many people despised this wealthy man. They organized a delegation to follow him and staged a protest against his petition for control. They chanted:

*We don't want this man to lead us!
Give us back OUR land and minas!*

Even so, the wealthy man got his way. The colonial empire approved his request, against the will of the people, and imposed him as political leader.

When he returned to his country, with newfound power, he requested a report from each of his slaves on how they had handled his money. The first slave was happy to report that he gained 10 times what was lent to him. The new ruler was so pleased that the slave had used his money to make more money that he gave this slave governing authority over 10 cities. The second slave reported a 500 percent increase in business. Proportionally, the ruler bestowed to the second slave political control in five cities.

Out of the group another slave came before the ruler. The slave returned the money untouched. Echoing the protesters' chant, he told the new ruler, "Your wealth has always come from other people's pockets. You take what isn't yours. You don't care about anyone but yourself. I refuse to play your game because you are a violent, corrupt, and harsh man. I am giving you back only what is yours. I was afraid of you, but I value my integrity more than my security."

The wealthy man was infuriated. "Keep your integrity. Even a dummy could have put my money in the bank, where

I would have at least made some interest on someone else's business. If everyone believes I am harsh, let it be true: All the money you failed to increase will go to the first slave."

Several more people stood by the slave and spoke up. They interrupted the wealthy man to say how cruel it was to give more to the one who already had so much. But the wealthy ruler insisted: "This is the way the world works. This is how I do business. This is how I govern. The people who have wealth will be given more—they have proven they deserve it and can be trusted. The poor don't deserve any investment since they are incapable of managing what little they do have. Also, everyone who has been disrupting my plans will be executed. Bring them here now. I want to watch them die."

Then Jesus made his own act of protest and rode to the city of politicians and religious leaders. Jesus intended to show what kind of a ruler he was: the kind that gets executed.

Persistence in this scripture

This bold parable is the last thing Jesus says in Luke before entering Jerusalem. And the leadup to this parable informs us how it oozes with meaning.

It begins in Luke 18:1-8, where the widow who keeps demanding justice from the unjust judge is a more obvious demonstration of persistence. Luckily for her, it pays off: Even though the judge has no respect for God or other people, he grants her justice to get her off his back. Can we be persistent in our conversations with and about God? Won't God help us more than this excuse for a judge?

There is another wealthy ruler in that previous chapter. He is unable to follow Jesus because it requires selling everything he owns and giving it to the poor (18:18-30). He keeps himself out of Jesus' kingdom—a kingdom where everyone has enough—so that he can maintain his own kingdom, where *he* already has more than enough. Who needs God when we are comfortable being the rulers of our own lives? Will our reliance on God persist more than our dependence on economic power?

Jesus then reminds the disciples that the trip they are on doesn't look successful in the typical sense. Jesus reminds them this trip will look like victory for the powerful leaders in Jerusalem. Jesus reminds his followers, for the third time, that he will be executed. But the political powers that kill him

won't have the last word (18:31-34). How do we get to resurrection except through the struggle and mystery of death? Will we persist in following Jesus even through hard times?


A blind beggar's persistence is recognized as an act of faith (18:35-43). Will we persist in calling for Jesus to aid us when we are told we are unworthy?

Then, another wealthy man (Zacchaeus), in contrast to the wealthy ruler, thoughtfully redistributes his wealth. In doing so, he provides restitution for the wrongs he committed and welcomes redemption for everyone in his home (19:1-10).

We see throughout Luke passages that emphasize—more so than the other canonical Gospels—the description of Jesus' kingdom as prioritizing the oppressed and bringing down the oppressors. The Gospel of Matthew has a parallel to the parable in Luke 19:11-18. But the parable in Matthew (25:13-40) makes the third slave an example of bad faith; his fear and inaction make him unprepared for Jesus' coming kingdom.

Both Matthew and Luke include the speech from the slave that calls the benefactor a harsh man who reaps what he doesn't sow and harvests someone else's work. Yet the context in Luke aids in its contrast from Matthew's telling. Luke does not make the wealthy ruler a stand-in for God. Instead, God is with the slave who stands up to the wealthy ruler. The slave's actions are not cowardice but courage.

The slave doesn't sabotage the wealthy ruler or run away. He speaks truth about the injustice he sees. His faith compels him to stand up against corruption. He stands up not to do what is in his own interest—he knew it might cost his life. Instead, he stands up for the interests of many who do not want a ruler of this kind. He could have done the easy thing, put the money in the bank, and been rewarded with political power, status, or more wealth. Instead he persists, like the widow or the man seeking better vision.

Jesus' kingdom doesn't function like the kingdom of capitalism—there is not growth for a few at the expense of many. Instead, Jesus' kingdom, as demonstrated in this parable, is a radical departure from the status quo. It requires us to stand up, even through hard times, and continue doing so until Jesus' kingdom is realized. 

Dylan Dell-Haro, who lives in Beatrice, Neb., is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren. He works as a case manager, and he and his spouse, Laura, operate a native plants nursery.

HE COULD HAVE DONE THE EASY THING, PUT THE MONEY IN THE BANK, AND BEEN REWARDED WITH POLITICAL POWER, STATUS, OR MORE WEALTH. INSTEAD HE PERSISTS, LIKE THE WIDOW OR THE MAN SEEKING BETTER VISION.

The generosity of gardens

by Frances Townsend



Three sweet potatoes came home with me from the grocery store one day recently, my last run to any stores for at least two or three weeks because of the pandemic. Maybe I should have bought more, because I won't be eating all of them. I cut off a part of each top to root in a dish of water to plant in the garden. After checking my seed stock, I ordered more. This year, more of my back yard is getting planted.

Like many Brethren, I was raised in a gardening family. As a teenager, I canned the family's fruits and vegetables. My congregations have included many gardeners, too, even though produce is so easy to buy these days—or has been up till now. It would just feel wrong to let spring happen and summer come without tilling the earth, watching little plants sprout, and harvesting, as long as I have a patch of soil and am physically able. Gardening is part of my identity.

The garden space in my parsonage yard has been cultivated by previous pastors since before the house was built. All those years of composting have built the infertile sand up a bit, though sadly, large black walnut trees at the neighbors' have sent their roots in, exuding the poison they produce to keep down competing plants, including many garden favorites. So, on to raised beds and new spaces carved from the lawn farther from the trees. The walnut-tainted soil will still grow plenty of flowers and milkweed for the monarch butterflies, as well as some resistant crops. I need to see if my sweet potatoes will tolerate black walnut.


I also look forward to peaches and grapes from the tree and vines I planted almost as soon as I moved here. My first fruit tree wasn't even planted deliberately. The "automatic" peach tree grew from a pit left in compost in the corner of the garden. In a mere three years, it was giving me peaches, enough to share—my sign of blessing, a sign that I had come to the right place.

It is always good to exercise the skills to help feed yourself and your family, to be able to make do in troubled times, as we are in now. And to have food to share.

A few years ago, when Annual Conference was held in Ohio, I drove there mostly by two-lane highways, through small towns and past miles of farms. I looked for the rhubarb, the asparagus, the grape arbors, for the tilled gardens with tomato plants and corn coming up. There were very few, disappointingly few, even around the farmhouses. Many times, I could tell where the garden used to be, but nobody seemed to bother anymore. I was surprised at what it told me about who we have become.

Such a contrast to my upbringing or to the world of Dorothy Burkholder of the Root River (Minn.) congregation! She gardened and canned into her 90's. When her children were young, they lived on that same half-acre plot, cultivating nearly all of it. They even had a cow. Having no pasture, they tethered it up and down along the road right of way, carrying water to it and bringing it home to milk. Gardeners know how to make do.

They also know how to share. Years ago, a bench was installed by the front door of the Onekama (Mich.) church. Although people do sit there, it has another purpose. Fred Pries named it the "sharing bench." He and other gardeners bring extra produce throughout the season to share with the congregation. Sometimes there is too much to bring, so he invites people over to harvest their own. The little flower bed in front of the church always includes a few tomatoes and herbs, as well, the result of a suggestion from the nurture commission. The Marilla (Mich.) church created its "Share the Harvest" fund so that people who did not garden could make donations when the gardeners brought produce. The fund was used for local community needs.

The needs this year will surely be great. As we all stay at home more, I hope to be out in the garden much more than in years past, doing my part to care for myself and my neighbors. 

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

AS WE ALL STAY AT HOME MORE, I HOPE TO BE OUT IN THE GARDEN MUCH MORE THAN IN YEARS PAST, DOING MY PART TO CARE FOR MYSELF AND MY NEIGHBORS.



Traci Rabenstein

Southern Ohio/Kentucky District hosts Mission and Ministry Board

The spring meeting of the Mission and Ministry Board on March 13-16 was hosted by Oakland Church of the Brethren in Bradford, Ohio, and Southern Ohio/Kentucky District.

Originally to take place at the Brethren Retirement Community in Greenville, Ohio, the meeting moved to the Oakland church after the retirement community was closed to visitors because of COVID-19. Months in advance, board members had been invited to preach for Sunday morning worship at 11 congregations in the area. Most canceled, but three of the preachers were able to bring their messages as planned. The board was to attend a district-sponsored performance by Ted Swartz and Ken Medema, but it was canceled. A visit to Bethany Seminary, just over the border in Indiana, went ahead.

The meeting agenda was marked by numerous reports and a board development training led by Annual Conference secretary James Beckwith.

John Mueller was welcomed as a new board member filling the uncompleted term of Marcus Harden, who has resigned.

After receiving an extensive report on

the Nigeria Crisis Response, the board approved an Emergency Disaster Fund grant of \$300,000 to cover remaining 2020 expenses and to carry the response through March 2021.

Two recommendations from the Strategic Design Team were approved, to hire a consultant and name an expanded committee. The new Strategic Plan Formation Team is convened by Carl Fike, board chair-elect, and includes board members Lauren Seganos Cohen, Paul Schrock, and Colin Scott; Russ Matteson, Pacific Southwest District executive; Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, who has led the compelling vision process; and Josh Brockway as staff.

A short-term committee was formed to bring a recommendation for use of the Brethren Service Center Quasi-endowment, including board members Roger Schrock, convenor, Paul Liepelt, Diane Mason, and a staff member to be named.

Denise Kettering-Lane, assistant professor of Brethren Studies at Bethany Seminary, was appointed to the Brethren Historical Committee.

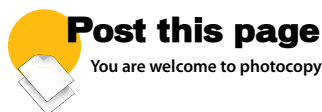
Church called to prayer and fasting

General secretary David Steele issued a call for Brethren to join in prayer and fasting on the Fridays in April, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. “I recognize that this is a time of anxiety and even fear. Yet, as persons of faith in Jesus Christ we know that death no longer holds us captive, for we are people of Christ’s resurrection,” said the general secretary’s announcement, in part. Quoting from Psalm 46, he invited the church to “gather together spiritually before our ever-present God . . . to center our hearts in the refuge of God’s peace.”



EYN

An innovative hand-washing station allows Nigerian Brethren to sanitize their hands to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, even in an area without access to running water. Photo courtesy of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).



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EDF grants go for COVID-19 relief, hurricane recovery

The denomination's Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) has made grants to international partners for relief aid during the COVID-19 emergency and to continue hurricane recovery work in the Carolinas and the Caribbean.

A grant of \$150,000 continued funding for the Puerto Rico hurricane recovery program of Brethren Disaster Ministries and Puerto Rico District. An additional \$5,000 was given for the January earthquakes.

A grant of \$40,500 financed remaining work at the Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding site in the Carolinas, supporting recovery from Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence in 2018. COVID-19 affected volunteerism and the ability to travel beginning in March, and the site was on suspension.

A grant of \$25,000 supported the Church World Service response to Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. CWS, working with the ACT Alliance, developed a long-term recovery program for migrants.



Food distribution through the Rwanda Church of the Brethren.

A grant of \$20,000 was given to Proyecto Aldea Global to support pharmacies in central and western Honduras. Also in Honduras, \$4,000 supported distribution of food to vulnerable families in the Flor del Campo area of Tegucigalpa by Iglesia Cristiana Viviendo en Amor y Fe.

A grant of \$15,000 supported IMA World Health to establish a COVID-19 isolation and treatment center in the Democratic Republic of Congo, at the non-profit HEAL Africa Hospital in Goma.

In central Africa, a grant of \$8,000 to the Rwanda Church of the Brethren provided emergency food to 225 at-risk families selected from the four congregations and surrounding communities. A grant of \$12,000 to the Church of the Brethren in Democratic Republic of Congo provided emergency food to 550 households from five congregations and surrounding communities.

A grant of \$4,000 provided seed funds for a COVID-19 response in South Sudan, to be carried out by mission staff.

Material Resources ships face masks

The Material Resources program has made shipments of face shields and masks to Italy including 540 cartons of face shields for B'nai Brith and shipments to two health organizations made on behalf of Brother's Brother Foundation. Also on behalf of Brother's Brother Foundation, two pallets of masks were shipped to Boston, and 21 cartons of exam gloves and two cases of tie face masks were donated to the community of New Windsor.

Pandemic forces closures, cancellations, postponements

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of denominational facilities and the cancellation or postponement of numerous Church of the Brethren events:

The General Offices in Elgin, Ill., and the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., were closed to visitors and non-essential personnel, and most denominational staff began working from home.

Brethren Disaster Ministries announced an extended suspension of its rebuilding sites.

Children's Disaster Services canceled spring training workshops.

The Material Resources program was detrimentally affected by the Church World Service closure of all kit depots in congregations across the country.

Brethren Volunteer Service worked with project sites to continue support for its volunteers, encouraging caution and safety. EIRENE, a partner organization for more than 40 years, pulled all of its volunteers back to Germany.

The Christian Citizenship Seminar for 2020 was canceled.

The Workcamp Ministry postponed the Rwanda workcamp until May 2021.

The New and Renew Conference was rescheduled for May 12-14, 2021. Speakers Christiana Rice and José Humphreys agreed to be available at that time.

The Annual Conference Moderator's Forum was postponed until the fall.

Bethany Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership moved class sessions online, as did all of the Church of the Brethren-related colleges and universities.

Casting light on sexual abuse

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul pleads with the church to “live as children of the light” (5:8), people who live with such integrity that there is “not even a hint of sexual immorality, impurity or greed” (5:3). Those who are in Christ are to live as a light in the world of darkness.

Paul is asking the church to be witnesses for their own sake, but he also believes that living as light might create opportunities for those around them who live in darkness to be redeemed, as well. “Everything that is exposed to the light becomes illuminated,” he explains. “And everything that is illuminated becomes light” (5:13, emphasis added).

In other words, living lives marked by integrity, transparency, and honesty is not just good for the small community of disciples; it is good for the larger community, too. Those of us who “have nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (5:11) invite more light into the world.

Ruth Everhart’s new book, *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church’s Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct*, takes Paul’s instructions seriously. Everhart is a pastor and survivor of sexual abuse, and she shines light after light on the fruitless deeds of darkness perpetrated by clergy and church leaders over the past several decades. Weaving real-life stories of assault, abuse, and misconduct with scriptural texts for guidance, she outlines a horrific picture of what happens when congregations and larger church structures choose to keep quiet about the violent behavior of trusted leaders.

This book is not for everyone—it includes graphic descriptions of sexual violence that may trigger those who have survived such abuse. Exposing evil is not a polite endeavor. But this book should be required reading for any of us who inhabit roles of leadership and power in the church. As the stories unfold, we recognize ourselves: as pastors who want the best for all our parishioners; as leaders who are tasked with protecting the reputation of the institution in addition to the well-being of its people; as well-meaning churchgoers who have been taught wrong and dangerous things about who should be given the benefit of the doubt and who should bear the burden of proof.

Story after story, from both scripture and lived experience, drives home that unless we choose to believe and protect the most vulnerable in our communities, we risk being complicit in unimaginable violence and harm. Everhart includes stories of men who were allowed to continue abusing women and children over *decades* because of the church’s half-hearted discipline processes and unwillingness to be honest and transparent about what was happening.

It might seem that this sort of book would be hard to read, and it is. It was also impossible to put down. I read the book in two sittings, compelled by the implications of our inaction as much as I was horrified by the details of these stories.

Interwoven explorations of scripture help to put these modern stories of abuse and violence in a larger theological context. Everhart includes reflection and discussion questions after each chapter, asking readers to move beyond the book and examine their own responsibility to the most vulnerable. She includes an entire chapter at the end called “A Way Forward,” in which she lists specific, proactive steps for congregations and denominations to prevent this kind of sexual abuse and violence from continuing. My favorite is: “Begin by telling your own story more honestly.”

As much as we would like to believe otherwise, the Church of the Brethren is not immune to this kind of harm done by those to whom we entrust our spiritual lives. Clergy and church leaders in our denomination and our congregations have engaged and continue to engage in sexual misconduct and abuse, even though we do not like to talk about that. “Holding these secrets,” Everhart says, “creates harmful patterns that lead to further breakdown as church members avoid difficult topics, distrust each other, blame others, and allow bullies to flourish.”

Everything exposed to the light becomes illuminated, Paul tells us. And everything illuminated becomes light. I hear Everhart inviting us to become people who expose fruitless deeds of darkness not out of spite or revenge, but for the health of the body at large, and for the purpose of inviting Christ to transform even those places of deep, dark pain into something whole and holy. **W**

Dana Cassell is pastor of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C., and manager of the Thriving in Ministry program for the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry.



DANA CASSELL



ABOUT THE BOOK

Title: *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church’s Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct*.

Author: Ruth Everhart. **Publisher:** IVP Books, 2020. Available from Brethren Press.

Christ at the center

I was very moved by Don Fitzkee's article "Lament, Repent, Reinvent" in the January-February issue. Each group within our church can probably find texts to reinforce their arguments to separate or to remain, but Christ must remain at the center, calling forth his centrality.

When we take communion, as we have done so many times, we say as we partake, "The bread which we break is the body of Christ." And, "The cup which we drink is the blood of Christ." As we contemplate the path we may feel we should take, let us be mindful of the vows we have taken so many times.

The church is an organic body with Christ at the center. I think Christ will feel the pain of a break. When Christ said, "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," I don't think he meant those filling only a certain category and not any other. That's what the Pharisees wanted to say, and we know

what Jesus said about them.

I hope we can see our way clear to remaining one body and open the doors of our churches to all those who seek rest in Christ.

Lois H. Snyder
North Manchester, Ind.

Marvelous timing

My new MESSENGER arrived and as I looked through it, I marveled at the timing of the article titled "Dueling GPSes." Our lives have turned a corner where we cannot turn back due to the COVID-19 virus. Many of us are parked in our homes (in my case, a room) for the duration. We need to check our maps and revamp some changes in our lives. All of us are impacted and can find new routes for doing things to help our fellow people. With that inspiration, I do not feel so confined.

Gail Clark
Mount Morris, Ill.

Keep on sharing

I just love "What Do You Do for Love Feast?" in the April issue! It was so good to be part of such an amazing sharing session from so many of our brothers and sisters. Let's keep this kind of sharing going!

Jamie Steamer Nace
Marietta, Pa.

Christian responses

The pandemic crisis is taking over our lives. So how do we deal with our current situation? What are some Christian responses?

Reach out to others. Do you know of people who are lonely or depressed? Give them a call. Send an email. Send a birthday card. It's amazing how much we may help ourselves by helping others. When we act in love, we may find that love comes back (not that we do it for that reason). Keep in mind that



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when it comes to social interaction, we are all in need.

Go deeper with God. Spend time in longer meditations on scripture. Enter the stories of the Bible as one of the characters. Use your imagination to experience it.

Spiritual reading can be a great way to spend time alone. That deep book on prayer, that very long biography of some great saint, that book on spiritual disciplines—these all may take some time and quietness. Now may be the time.

Likewise, prayer can be longer and deeper in these times. I find it helpful to pray through my anxieties. It can also be good to pray through the news. Pray for others who have special needs. Pray for all our loved ones who need help from God in this crisis. Pray for the people of our nation and world, that they will be drawn to God in this hard time, and experience his love.

If the one thing that comes out of this

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togetherness


IS WHAT MAKES THIS A HOME



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time of social isolation is a deeper and stronger prayer life, how wonderful would that be?

Robert Vroon
Lancaster, Pa.

A treasure to read

To Wendy McFadden and each contributor who, together, make MESSENGER a treasure to read, I eagerly await each issue and appreciate the variety of information and inspiration. It gives me hope that great things can be accomplished for God's kingdom, even in the midst of discord; that small can become amazingly strong, at least according to the mustard seed parable told by Jesus.

The March 2020, issue was of particular interest to me as a former Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) worker in Unit 11. Heartfelt gratitude to Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and staff for all the research about Brethren Service Europe, and the excellent reminders of those who set an example and paved the way for such Christ-like service to continue. Although their names are seldom seen now, they will not be forgotten.

CLASSIFIEDS

Individuals, groups, and congregations are welcome to join the community of hundreds of Brethren from across the country in live, online worship at the Elizabethtown CoB livestream. Be part of a full, in-sanctuary worship experience featuring engaging preaching and inspiring music. Every Sunday at 10:30am Eastern. Visit www.etowncob.org and click on "livestream." Or, search "Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren" at www.YouTube.com where you can watch live, or view past services anytime. Call 717-367-100 with any questions and/or tips for getting connected. See you on Sunday!

Have you always wanted to work in a bookstore? Brethren Press is looking for volunteers to assist in set-up, operation, and tear-down of the Annual Conference Bookstore in Grand Rapids, Michigan. If you have interest and time to volunteer, contact James Deaton at jdeaton@brethren.org.

Consignment sales at Annual Conference. Brethren Press rents space in the Annual Conference Bookstore for individuals or groups to sell items on a consignment basis. Consignment space must be reserved by June 1. For information on consignment sales, contact Karen Stocking at kstocking@brethren.org.

The Mission Advancement email of March 11 was like a continuation of the BVS story. Shared by Christina Kaak, of Unit 311, it was a modern-day complement to the BVS ministry started long ago.

Giving thanks for each of you.

Emily Mumma
Lorida, Fla.

Faith statement

My brother and I are both in our 90s.

He lives alone, separated from family and friends, in the nursing care unit of the Bridgewater Retirement Community in Virginia. I live with my wife in a cottage at the Brethren Retirement Community in Ohio, trying to obey Governor DeWine by staying at home. This coronavirus pandemic stresses all of us to the limit as we try to cope on planet earth.

For me, faith in a personal Creator who walks and lives among us is helpful. Thank God for all the public ser-

vants who, at their own peril, surround us with love and care.

This week I played some old hymns on my harmonica while meditating on the words. The first stanza of the hymn, "Move in Our Midst" is a prayer.

*Move in our midst, thou Spirit of God.
Go with us down from thy holy hill.*

Walk with us through the storm and the calm.

Spirit of God, go thou with us still.

Bill Kidwell
Greenville, Ohio

An online form is now available to submit information for Turning Points. Go to www.brethren.org/turningpoints.

Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at dstroyeck@brethren.org or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete in order to be published. Information older than one year cannot be published.

Centenarians

Dadisman, Avis, 101,
Chatham, Ill., April 11

New members

Eel River, Silver Lake, Ind.:
Luther Eberly, Susan
Finney, Audri Svay, Jake
Svay

First, Peoria, Ill.: Carson
Dare, Sullivan Dare, Vivian
Dare, Eictoria Neal, Cheryl
Mura

Green Hill, Salem, Va.:
David Ilgenfritz, Yvonne
Ilgenfritz

Maple Grove, Ashland,
Ohio: Natalie Goschinski

Maple Spring, Hollsopple,
Pa.: Christiane Blough,
Michael Blough, George
White, Sally White

Mohican, West Salem,
Ohio: Roy Anderson,
Annie Brazis, Laura
Krajcik, Tim Krajcik, Chris
Lewis, Darin Lewis, Leah
Mendez, Saul Mendez,
Gabriella Palmer

Somerset, Pa.: Athena
Furry, Reuben Furry

Trotwood, Ohio: John
Hepner, Kathleen Hepner,
Clarence Howard, Denise
Hull, Jeannette Jackson, Jill
Jackson-Randolph, Peggy

Reiff Miller, Rex Miller,
Marisha Randolph, Janet
Shaffer, Jim Shaffer, Susan
Wible

Wedding anniversaries

Flowers, Lawrence and
Lenora, Oakland, Md., 65

Mishler, Ray and Ruth,
Boswell, Pa., 66

Stutzman, Clifford and
Sally, Hollsopple, Pa., 70

Wenger, Jay and Leah,
Akron, Pa., 50

Wilson, John and Floretta,
Lititz, Pa., 69

Wilson, Robert and Rowena,
Wichita, Kan., 67

Deaths

Bain, Paris Elbert (Pete), 90,
Daleville, Va., March 14

Balsar, Ella Lorraine, 92,
Rockwood, Pa., Feb. 26

Barwick, Jennie, 67, New
Providence, Iowa, Feb. 24

Batdorf, Margaret Davis,
94, Troy, Ohio, March 9

Bowman, Charles Ivan, 77,
Wenatchee, Wash., June 29

Browning, Vicki, 71, Citrus
Springs, Fla., Feb. 18

Carter, Leonard Clyde, Jr.,
84, Daleville, Va., Feb. 28

Cowger, Lawrence Junior, 75,

Brethren, Mich., June 11
Davis, Clarence R., Jr., 71,
Winchester, Va., Jan. 1

DeWitt, Helen Lois
Hostetler, 82, Rockwood,
Pa., March 2

Dulabaum, Pauline Amanda
Miller, 84, Elgin, Ill., Feb. 22

Eby, Janet Louise Stauffer,
103, Trotwood, Ohio, July 1

Ferguson, A. Wilson, 90,
Bassett, Va., Aug. 28

Garland, Roy Evan, 88,
Lititz, Pa., March 15

George, Myrtle F., 88,
Marydel, Md., March 9

Graham, Patricia Ann
Friend, 74, Oakland, Md.,
March 14

Hartsough, Gilberta L., 76,
Goshen, Ind., Dec. 15

Hess, Clarence Graybill, 92,
Myerstown, Pa., Jan. 7

Hunt, John Samuel, Sr., 85,
Denton, Md., Feb. 14

Hurt, Norma Jean, 82,
Tremont, Ill., Feb. 11

Keltner, Wayne Emery, 94,
Strafford, Mo., March 7

Kolp, Howard, Jr., 90, West
Salem, Ohio, May 5, 2019

Kreider, Timothy S., 60,
Lititz, Pa., Feb. 22

Lamson, Christine Ann
Lawson, 58, West Salem,
Ohio, Jan. 24, 2019

Mason, Edward James, 97,
Charlottesville, Va., Jan.
13, 2019

Mayfield, Margaret J.
(Billie), 78, Wooster, Ohio,
April 9, 2019

McInnis, Russell L., 90,
Virden, Ill., March 10

Miller, Donna J. Pepple, 82,

New Paris, Ind., Feb. 25

Miller, L. Byron, 105,
North Manchester, Ind.,
Feb. 5

Miller, Muriel P. Greene,
84, Mount Morris, Ill.,
March 1

Miller, Wanda Johnson, 96,
Wenatchee, Wash., Jan. 26,
2019

Morentz, Grace Schrock
Zunkel, 85, Richmond,
Ind., Feb. 15

Myers, Homer Leon, 85,
Smithsburg, Md., Dec. 27

Nunez, Manuel F., 78,
Wooster, Ohio, June 11

Peckover, Chester B., 91,
North Manchester, Ind.,
Sept. 8

Ramsier, Stanley Allen, 72,
Ashland, Ohio, Aug. 16

Reese, Samuel Edward, 90,
Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 25

Reeves, Gerald H., 75, West
Salem, Ohio, March 3,
2019

Reneau, David William, 87,
Hagerstown, Ind., Nov. 6

Roher, Goldie, 89, Downers
Grove, Ill., Feb. 28

Rosenberger, Margaret S.,
89, Lititz, Pa., Feb. 2

Sredy, Louis George, 84,
Somerset, Pa., Feb. 15

Stephens, Miriam
Sembower, 95, Berlin, Pa.,
Dec. 17

Stout-Dilling, Lucille Belt,
89, Hagerstown, Ind.,
Feb. 6

Stutzman, Laura Ellen
Juday, 84, Goshen, Ind.,
Oct. 25

Swartz, Loree Isabel (Pinky),

94, Carlisle, Pa., Feb. 5

Thorne, Jacob Virgil, 87,
Capon Bridge, W.Va.,
Nov. 4

Tritt, Clair S., 99, Carlisle,
Pa., Jan. 3

Wadel, Mary C. Wingert,
82, Scotland, Pa., Feb. 23

Walbridge, Doris, 91, Elgin,
Ill., March 7

Walker, Ivan Blair, Jr., 77,
Carlisle, Pa., Oct. 1

Weik, Mary Elizabeth
Balsbaugh, 95, Myerstown,
Pa., Feb. 10

Wengert, J. Nelson, 82,
Harrisonburg, Va., Feb. 20

Whitlow, Bernice Parcell,
90, Bassett, Va., Oct. 24

Wolboldt, Glenn A., 87,
Wooster, Ohio, June 17

Licensed

Knight, Meghan, Mid-Atl.
Dist. (Long Green Valley,
Glen Arm, Md.), March 8

Leck, Shana, W. Plains Dist.
(Monitor, McPherson,
Kan.), March 1

Pearce, Teresa, Mo. & Ark.
Dist. (Warrensburg, Mo.),
March 1

Placements

Fink, Teresa, pastor of
special ministries, Parkview,
Lewistown, Pa., Feb. 12

Morris, David, from interim
pastor to pastor, Smith
Creek, Franklin, W.Va.,
and Friends Run, Franklin,
W.Va., March 2

Rowe, Twyla, from interim
pastor to pastor,
Hagerstown, Md., March 1

At a loss

by Walt Wiltschek

Grief. Loss. Sorrow. These are familiar words in the practice of ministry—sometimes all too familiar. And they have been on my mind with some frequency in recent weeks.

As the nation's health crisis escalated and events were cancelled and more and more things were shut down, I found my datebook and church calendar littered with a collection of horizontal lines slashing through words and numbers that had been on those pages.

A visit with friends in Washington. Gone. A planned trip to Japan for a wedding. Gone. Our camp auction, my work at a local college, dinners, other special events, and, of course, being face-to-face with my congregation for worship and fellowship. All gone, one by one, like a quickly falling line of dominoes. Some will be rescheduled, while others are lost to time. I've heard it from others, too, like a college senior mourning the loss of closure in her final semester or a retirement home resident no longer able to have visitors.

I found some comfort and resonance when I happened across a post by Liz Bidgood Enders, pastor of Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa., who wrote about experiencing similar feelings. She said, in part, "I want to acknowledge the loss that comes from dreams deferred, hopes put aside, celebrations and rites of passage put on hold. Like other losses, they will be integrated into the fullness of life, but like visiting a cemetery, when I see reminders of what was and is no more, sometimes I simply need to allow the tears to fall."


As she notes, there are much larger losses out there: The growing number of people who have become ill, the many thousands who have died, the multitudes who are out of work, the businesses that are struggling or gone, the sacrifices of health care workers, and so much more. I've been fortunate that, as I write this, only a few of my friends and family members and church members have been directly affected. Yet nearly everyone is feeling loss in some way.

And while I'm grateful for technology that allows us to maintain some semblance of connection with alternate worship approaches and conversations in the midst of it all, I wonder at times if we have moved so quickly to replace what had been that we have failed to allow enough space to grieve the voids in our lives, individually and as the church—like telling a grieving family member at a funeral that they need to move on while their broken places are still raw.

Psalm 137 records the emotions of the Hebrew people after they were carried off into exile: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (NIV). They were still God's people, but they were feeling profound loss as they were disconnected from almost all they had known.

In some ways, Brethren have good resources built into our theology to deal with such times. The Radical Pietists who shaped our heritage believed in the "invisible church," bound together not by buildings or structures but by love and their common commitment to Christ. While we are physically apart during this time, we know that the bonds of heart and soul continue. As the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "Invisible threads are the strongest ties."

So by God's grace, we carry on. We check on our neighbors, and especially the vulnerable. We offer support where we can. We find the rays of sunshine and occasionally even bits of humor in our situations. We endure short-term pain for the greater good of our communities and world. We pray and worship and sing. But we also acknowledge that in some moments our words are tinged by tears. We recognize the torn places in the tapestry of our communities.

In the words of author Robert Fulghum, "Love is a fabric which never fades, no matter how often it is washed in the water of adversity and grief." May our love endure during these troubled times, but may we also be willing to enter those hard-yet-necessary waters of grief. 

"LOVE IS A FABRIC WHICH NEVER FADES, NO MATTER HOW OFTEN IT IS WASHED IN THE WATER OF ADVERSITY AND GRIEF."

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