

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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*Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky*

—Psalm 85:11



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



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on the cover

Drive-in campfire at Camp
Mardela blessed by a
sunset (see page 5). *Photo*
by Tom Schuyler.

Pivot

September is often a bustling time in congregations, as people return from summer breaks and Sunday school resumes. Kids are back in school and there's a certain energy that everyone feels. It's not really the start of the church year, which begins with Advent, but it's still a season of beginning.

Not so much this year. Churches are struggling with how to worship safely, and Sunday school seems especially difficult. Some are holding classes outside. Some are meeting by Zoom. Bless them all!

In the midst of all that uncertainty, Brethren Press and MennoMedia introduced a new round of *Shine: Living in God's Light*. The day the new materials launched, curriculum editor Chrissie Walls wrote on social media:

"We began this work by imagining what faith formation would look like in 2020. Never could we have dreamed that this curriculum would arrive during a pandemic and a country-wide reckoning about racial justice. And yet, I am deeply gratified to discover that the decisions we made back then and along the way are so fitting for this season."



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Walls went on to describe how *Shine* offers the biblical worldview of justice, mercy, hospitality, generosity, simplicity, community, and compassion. A new Bible storybook called *All of Us: God's Story for You and Me* gives special attention to representing everyone, with the purpose of showing the whole people of God.

Once the pandemic hit, the *Shine* staff made a big pivot (that's the word of the year) and produced two new resources—one to help teachers navigate teaching online and one to help overworked parents continue faith formation at home. I'm in awe of the creativity of staff, the dedication of teachers, and the commitment congregations have to spiritual formation.

This is a hard year for everyone. I don't know how many more pivots will be required next month, much less over the next year. But I am inspired by a congregation holding Sunday school in a parking lot, a church sending *All of Us* to all their children, and a pastor who says they're still buying bulletins because they want the bulletins—and the publishing house—to be there when the congregation can return to the building.

In the words of one of the new songs for *Shine*: "We can rise up and live like there's hope to be found."

Wendy McFadden

HOW TO REACH US

MESSENGER

1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120

Subscriptions:

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

Advertising:

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

Editorial:

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

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The road to rights

A variety of sites around the country offer important perspectives and places for education and reflection on our nation's history with racial issues. While some of the sites are currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of them have websites that provide overviews or offer virtual tours, and some are located outdoors or have outdoor portions. Six to consider include:

National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum, Montgomery, Ala.

Also known informally as the National Lynching Memorial, this sobering six-acre site that opened in 2018 memorializes the more than 4,400 African Americans who were killed by white mobs from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. The nearby museum, subtitled "From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration," examines the history and ongoing legacy of racism in the US. Other notable sites in Montgomery include the Southern Poverty Law Center's Civil Rights Memorial, the Freedom Rides Museum, and the Rosa Parks Museum. The Edmund Pettus Bridge, a National Historic Landmark, is in nearby Selma. museumandmemorial.eji.org

National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, Tenn.

The complex of buildings includes the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. The exhibits offer a "full immersion experience" tracing the history of civil rights in the US. civilrightsmuseum.org



International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Greensboro, N.C.

Opened in 2010, the museum occupies the former Woolworth's store that housed the whites-only lunch counter where a sit-in movement led by students began in 1960. The original lunch counter is preserved, and a variety of other exhibits explore the civil rights movement. sitinmovement.org



National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.

Established in 2003, this free museum opened in its permanent home in the fall of 2016. It has quickly become one of the most-visited of the Smithsonian museums. Also in Washington, just off the National Mall in West Potomac Park, is the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial dedicated in 2011. nmaahc.si.edu



Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park and the King Center, Atlanta, Ga.

The sprawling site includes the Ebenezer Baptist Church where King preached, his boyhood home, a visitor center, a rose garden, the tombs of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King, and the adjacent King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, which houses a library and exhibits. nps.gov/malu and thekingcenter.org



Birmingham (Ala.) Civil Rights National Monument

Part of the larger Civil Rights District, the site around the 16th Street Baptist Church—bombed in 1963—confronts the US history of segregation and racial injustice. It includes the Smithsonian-affiliated Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, whose theme is "Silence is not an option." nps.gov/bicr and bcri.org



Numerous other museums, memorials, and historic sites also exist. A good resource for more information and additional sites is the US Civil Rights Trail: civilrightstrail.com.

Sources: Individual museum websites, Wikipedia, civilrightstrail.com, and "Remembering George Floyd: Here are the civil rights museums and landmarks to visit," USA Today, by Curtis Tate, June 9, 2020.



Final baptisms

There was still one final act of service for the church building of the former Morrill (Kan.) Church of the Brethren. This grand old church was created from the uniting of three congregations in the area, the first being Pony Creek Church of the Brethren in 1871. When the congregations outgrew their buildings, the large brick building in Morrill was erected in 1918. The cost was \$33,000 and the seating capacity was 1,000.

For years, the Morrill church was one of the largest in the state of Kansas. In 1988, the congregation merged with the Sabetha congregation six miles west. The building was sold and resold, and deteriorated over the years.

On the week of July 5, word was received that the city had condemned the building and part of the building was torn down. That weekend, Amanda Adams and her mother, Pamela Gerdes Adams, walked around the building and ventured into the remaining parts. Amanda had attended Sunday school and Bible school at the church, and Pamela and her husband, Dale, had been married there. Amanda felt a deep need to be baptized in the church of her childhood. Her mother also felt called to be baptized.

From the rubble still rose the peak of the church and the chancel area that housed the baptistry. Amanda contacted me as minister of the Sabetha church to ask if I would baptize her in the Morrill baptistry. Her mother was a school classmate of mine and, incidentally, I had great-great-grandfathers who had been ministers at Morrill.



As the sun was going down and the building growing dark, we made our way to the baptistry, accompanied by a close friend. A few candles were lit. Years of dust, dirt, and other debris “adorned” the baptistry but we moved aside only some bricks and splintered boards because Amanda wanted the baptistry just as it was. Water from a spring north of Morrill, near two of the previous churches, was brought in a pitcher. It was impossible to pump water to fill the baptistry, but I assured them it is not so much how we baptize but why that matters.

One by one, the women entered the baptistry, knelt, confessed their belief in Jesus Christ, repeated their baptismal vows, and had water from the spring poured on their heads in the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On its final day, the Morrill church rose once more, to the glory and honor of God.—Cheryl Mishler

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.

Prepared for change

While the onset of COVID-19 came as a shock to most, Fairview Church of the Brethren in Unionville, Iowa, had heard a sermon in September 2019 based on Paul's message in Philippians 1:27-2:4 and knew change was coming.

The sermon was preached thinking of a change from a pastoral team of three to a single pastor. "We can either see this as a challenge to strength, or an opportunity to show strength," I said then, as one of the former team pastors. "Strength is not dependent on one or two people, but strength which God has placed in the congregation waiting for birth."

In December, church members began answering the call to give Sunday sermons. When meeting at the church was no longer an option, the church voted for drive-in services led from a flatbed trailer stage, which one of the members pulls in every Sunday. Two members direct the parking. Other members with guitars provide music and one of the musi-

cians brings sound equipment to broadcast the service. Others provide leadership for announcements, scripture, prayers, and sermon. One hands out bulletins and receives the offerings, going car to car. Instead of saying "Amen," car horns toot appreciation. Video recordings enable others to watch later.

Each sermon has been scripture-based and straight from the heart and the experience of members. The one remaining pastor, Sharon Heien, thought she would give two sermons a month. In May, she rejoiced that she was finding it hard to fit herself into the preaching schedule because 15 out of 50-plus members had volunteered to speak.

Many cars pass by on Highway T61 during the drive-in services and people have asked, "What is going on at your church?" The drive-in service is bringing attention to faithful worshiping in difficult times. Fairview continues to move forward in our 166th year. —**Marilyn J. Koehler**

No small amount of gratitude and love

During the COVID-19 pandemic, members of Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren knew that their community was experiencing increased needs, stress, and uncertainty. We also realized that the majority of our church members are considered a vulnerable demographic and needed to follow stay-at-home orders to keep themselves safe and healthy.

"So what can we offer our community during this challenging time, while also protecting our vulnerable members from this virus?" we wondered. During the month of June, as pastor I led a

series of virtual prayer and letter-writing services, to give thanks to God for local essential workers and to express gratitude and care to those workers through hand-written letters.

Members of the church met over Zoom and prayed for different essential workers during each service: staff of our hospital and mental health agency, employees at grocery stores and the farmers' market, staff and volunteers at food pantries, police officers, teachers, staff of the city of Pomona, and staff at Hillcrest Homes—a Church of the Brethren retirement community in near-

by La Verne, where many of our church members live. After the time of prayer, participants stayed on the call to write letters of appreciation and then to bless the letters they had written. I hand-delivered the letters to their recipients, sharing that the prayers and gratitude of our church continued to be with all essential workers during this pandemic.

Overall, the church wrote more than 110 letters in a month's time. Pomona Fellowship may be a small congregation, but our gratitude and love for our local pandemic heroes is anything but small! —**Lauren Seganos Cohen**



Drive-in campfire It was late June, a hot and sunny mid-Atlantic day, and a great time for a "Drive-in Campfire" at Camp Mardela with 29 carloads of close friends.

We were serenaded by several hay wagons full of people providing entertainment including poems, camp songs, stories, and a skit. There was a semi-professional gospel singing group, and an ensemble of two saxophones along with drums and a keyboard. Horns replaced applause as we all remained socially distant in our cars. There was a large campfire for effect, and Walt Wiltschek prayed us on our way at the close. The camp received more than \$1,500 in donations at the event.

Just when we thought the evening was complete, God's gift appeared: a sunset highlighted by a nearby thunderstorm. —**Tom Schuyler**



REFLECTING ON 'SEPARATE NO MORE'

A conversation between Thomas Dowdy and Darla K. Deardorff

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9 NIV).

Thirteen years ago, Annual Conference embraced a commitment to live into the vision of Revelation 7:9 and be "separate no more." Two members of the committee that wrote the paper reflect today on how the church is doing with that commitment. They decided the spirit of their free-flowing conversation was best preserved by not identifying who said what.

Given all that's happening now, it seems timely that we reflect on the "Separate No More" paper, which laid out how the Church of the Brethren could live out Revelation 7:9 in the here and now—of all of us coming together to worship Christ.

We sure put in a lot of time and energy exploring Revelation 7:9 when we were working together as a study committee. How do we sense the church

has embraced this vision?

Well, my initial response is that I don't believe the church has truly embraced this. I think the church truly wants to, but I don't sense the church has actually embraced the vision of Revelation 7:9.

I would concur. I still remember us presenting the paper to the Annual Conference body in 2007. If I recall correctly, it passed unanimously and

I LOVE THAT THE PAPER EMPHASIZED THAT, BY COMING TOGETHER, WE SEE MORE OF THE TOTALITY OF GOD BECAUSE WE EACH BRING SOMETHING OF GOD WITH US SO WE NEED EACH OTHER.

we all felt the spirit of God moving. There was such great hope in moving forward. In the intervening years, while there has been some effort made—such as establishing the Intercultural Ministries position as recommended in the paper—there just seems to be a lack of desire and motivation at all levels of the denomination to really live into that vision.

I agree. With the divisions facing the denomination right now, with districts and congregations pulling away to form a new denomination, the current reality seems far away from the vision. That Revelation 7:9 vision got lost somewhere.

Yes! Yes! I agree. Can you say more?

We've lost focus instead of having a one-vision focus. For those of us who put the time and energy into this, it's somewhat disheartening. The recommendations were good for a short period of time but not in the long term. Yes, there was the staff position, some attempts to bring different groups together, some efforts that Bethany made early on, some of the staff training done at the denominational level—but then the focus was

redirected. We talked in our paper about the journey together. And then somehow, togetherness was redefined, resulting in some of the tensions I see within the body in more recent years.

You talk about tension. I believe that we could live out Revelation 7:9 even with the tension. Yet, for us being a peace church, it doesn't seem like we're very good at dealing with tension and conflict, despite attempts to do so.

You touched a nerve there. Yes, some people see tension as a way to move forward. But if others fear tension, then we become stuck. I've been looking at the legacy of John Lewis when he challenges us to get into some "good trouble"—and that's where the tension is. We need to take risks to get into some good trouble!

I love what you just said about risk. What are we willing to risk? It seems the denomination has not been willing to get into good trouble and to risk.

In the "Separate No More" paper, we felt God calling us to return to the teachings of Jesus—especially about loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. We are falling short of Jesus' command to the point that I'm almost

hesitant to sing "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

Yes! You hit another nerve! We have so many nice songs about peace and love—how come we're not living this out?

So, I am with the Church of the Brethren because I feel this is where God wants me—and feel that God even somewhat pushed me into the denomination to offer to the church what God has given me. We need to recognize what others have to offer the church. I love that the paper emphasized that, by coming together, we see more of the totality of God because we each bring something of God with us so we need each other.

Yes, we did a lot of listening to sisters and brothers across the denomination, and I remember being disheartened about hearing so many say that they were accepting of others as long as they weren't being asked to change and as long as those coming in would become like them.

Oh, here's another question for us: Have our views changed since we wrote this paper?

THE SOCIETAL AND DENOMINATIONAL CHANGES HAVE BROUGHT THE “SEPARATE NO MORE” PAPER INTO EVEN STRONGER FOCUS NOW, WITH ALL THE DIVIDES CONFRONTING US.

I would say that, while the world has changed dramatically, what we wrote in the paper has not changed. In fact, the societal and denominational changes have brought the “Separate No More” paper into even stronger focus now, with all the divides confronting us.

Is it more divides, or is it that the divides are out in the open more? These divides didn’t just appear; these divides were always there but kept

behind closed doors. As the paper points out, Sunday mornings are one of the most segregated times in the US. We all had our views that we kept hidden, and now it’s all out in the open. We see divides within and among churches, even during this pandemic—such as around issues to open back up for worship or not.

My feel-good feeling when we first completed the paper has changed—I’m going to be honest with you.

There’s a scripture passage from Ephesians that talks about knowledge bringing much pain—so the more you know, the more susceptible you are of knowing the good and the bad. By being on the denominational board, I know the good and the bad. For the most part, it’s good though. My view has changed in that initially I thought this denomination was about reaching out into all the world, but now I’m not so sure.

HOW TO GET THERE

“Separate No More” enumerated recommendations for all facets of the church and assigned Standing Committee the job of accountability, monitoring, and implementing the recommendations and reporting to Annual Conference every two years. Here are selections:

Bethany Theological Seminary: Make intercultural church planting and intercultural education a priority; pursue a policy of intentional recruitment of people of color among its students; seek qualified faculty from various ethnic and national backgrounds; include the religious history and heritage of nonwhite church members, along with intercultural communication, in its curriculum.

Districts: Develop and implement strategies for realizing the Revelation 7:9 vision in the district; require that all pastors have ongoing continuing education focusing on intercultural activity; require that all district staff and program volunteers have intercultural orientation and experience; implement a formal mentoring program for new minority pastors.

Congregations: Reach out intentionally to people from different backgrounds in their neighborhood and love them as neighbors by building authentic relationships with them; become informed about the conditions of life for ethnic and racial minorities within their neighborhoods and their congregations, so that when inequities are uncovered, they can make strong commitments of time, financial resources, and action.

Individuals: Be intentional about forming authentic relationships with diverse neighbors, learning about their cultural backgrounds and personal stories, and learning more about how they experience and view God; become better informed about racism and discrimination; stand in solidarity with victims of all hate crimes.

To read all the recommendations, go to www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2007-separate-no-more.html.

So that brings us to another question about what's changed. One change even in the last couple months is that systemic racism is more openly discussed. In the spirit of antiracism, are we as a denomination ready to examine the denomination's structures, policies, and practices, especially decision-making and who gets to make decisions and who are the gatekeepers? Whose voices are heard and whose voices are missing? How are we addressing systemic racism in our denomination and within our congregations and local communities? Given that our sisters and brothers of color have had to bear this pain and oppression for so long, I believe it's time for white members to step up.

I was trying not to see this as white and black. I actually see this as a learning opportunity for all members of the Church of the Brethren moving forward. The church has been very timid to even put a statement out. But by not responding, we need to remember that silence is complicity.

So perhaps the bigger question is, how can we prepare ourselves to move forward? We need to be more forward thinking, or otherwise we become too complacent, waiting for things to settle down. I appreciate individuals who rise up and say, "I stand with you and all people who are going through struggle and recognize that your life matters." We must remember that people are not invisible. The church has a tendency to see

only certain groups of people—even the disciples fell into this. And yet Jesus made the invisible visible. As a church we must do that too.

Amen! I love that—that Jesus made the invisible visible.

That's what Black Lives Matter is really about—to say, "I see you."

We should not see anyone as "less than" and yet again the church often falls short on that.

The question is, where have we been putting our time and energy? With Black Lives Matter, how come it took us so long to respond? People are asking me as a Black member on the board about why it's taking us so long to respond, but I'm not the one they should be asking.

We need to do the hard work of understanding systemic racism. We need to put in the time and effort and to understand that we will feel uncomfortable, but we have to do this to move forward together as the body of Christ.

The "Separate No More" paper calls for us to live out Jesus' command to love. And as we've said, that goes beyond singing nice songs on a Sunday morning. Love takes intentionality in living out Jesus' command to love—and what does it really mean to love our neighbor? Especially our neighbors who don't look like us, think like us, believe what we believe. Within the church, what does it mean to truly love sisters and brothers

who don't agree with us, who make us feel uncomfortable, and who no longer want anything to do with us?

The paper also called for total transformation, which may mean we have to be willing to give up something. What are we willing to get rid of? What do we need to get rid of? If we embrace all in the body of Christ, it means more than just letting others in. Total transformation means saying what is mine is yours.

I've witnessed how God has really worked on me and worked with others within our congregation. I've stayed because God told me to stay. And because God has transformed me and has transformed others in the congregation.

When you think about the transformation you've experienced, what stands out most?

Praying like I've never prayed before. And I remember a friend who asked me a simple question: "Where's your Bible?" and added, "The only thing that's going to get you through this is to go deeper and deeper with God." I realized it's not about me, not even about the Brethren—only about what God was teaching me and that transformation comes only from God. Even hurt can be transformed.

That's powerful stuff! Thanks so much for sharing that.

What do you sense is the urgency of the church today?

WE NEED TO DO THE HARD WORK OF UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMIC RACISM. WE NEED TO PUT IN THE TIME AND EFFORT AND TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE WILL FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT WE HAVE TO DO THIS TO MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

GOD IS CALLING US TODAY, TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO A WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST, SO THAT WE ARE SEPARATE NO MORE.

One word: Love. It's all about love!

Yes! Before we get into church planting or looking at the business of the church, if we don't do it out of love, we miss it all. We need to share the love of God, so that others truly know God and God's love through us.

What does that love look like? Love is not a Hallmark card. Love is action. Love is dangerous and cutting-edge.

Cutting-edge means you need to cut out some stuff. This means sacrifice, forgiveness, deep crying, a time to go into our darkness as David cried out—because we're dealing with the dark stuff in ourselves and removing that. What's keeping us from experiencing the true joy of God? We need to rebuild the whole church in the ways Jesus has called us. We need to ask at every turn: What does love get to do with it?

Yes, we've lost that focus on love.

We need to stop and ask ourselves, "What matters most?" That helps us stay focused.



Thomas Dowdy



Darla K. Deardorff

Love is cross-cutting through all communities and churches. If we position love first, it will transcend all boundaries.

Love is being willing to be changed by God and by our sister and brothers.

Love is intentional, not conditional, and it seems we mostly live in conditional love with each other. The only way our church can love that way God wants us to love is to be transformed.

Indeed. This is a journey for all of us that will create uncertainty, tension, aha moments, and will bring us closer to truly loving each other. In the end, it comes down to relationships. When we actually focus on loving each other, we put the time in to really getting to know each other and then we will be in a position to reach out in love to those in our communities—so that others feel comfortable turning to the church for comfort and support, especially during times like these.

To truly love as Jesus calls us to love, we as the Church of the Brethren need to be transformed and we're not there yet.

So here are some questions we all need to wrestle with: How are we moving outside our comfort zones daily? What does intentional love look like? How can we experience God more fully? What does it truly mean to be God's family? What does it mean to truly be one in Christ? What prevents us from realizing the vision of Revelation 7:9? What do we need to

do to achieve this vision?

In the end, we need the church to read the "Separate No More" paper again and to embrace God's call to be transformed—as individuals, as congregations, as districts, and as a denomination. As we concluded in the paper, "This is a plea for transformation, calling each of us to more fully and completely follow Christ's example of loving all peoples—in loving our neighbors. Through Christ's love, we become the all-inclusive family of God envisioned in Revelation 7:9.

"To do this, we must be completely open to God's work in us and among us. In truly opening ourselves to God, there is no limit to what God can accomplish. . . . God is calling us today, to be transformed into a whole body of Christ, so that we are SEPARATE NO MORE.

"Sisters and Brothers, this is a call for new wineskins—for total transformation through being open to God's guidance. This is the only way to realize more of the Revelation 7:9 vision. In this transformation and moving toward this vision for the church, we are called into reconciliation—and God can use this message and ministry of reconciliation to literally transform and heal our society and our world." ❧

Thomas Dowdy is pastor of Imperial Heights Community Church of the Brethren, Los Angeles, Calif., and a retired information systems analyst. Darla K. Deardorff, an author/researcher/professor, is a founding member of Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C.

WHO WILL BE A WITNESS?

An interview with Drew Hart by Joshua Brockway

Q Your first book, *Trouble I've Seen*, was published in 2016. It had a solid response then, but it is clearly having a resurgence in 2020. What do you think *Trouble I've Seen* gifts us with in the current context since the murder of George Floyd?

A Obviously, our society is awakening—I don't know if that's the right word, but we'll use awakening for now—to our moment. We at least are not sleeping. People are trying to understand what's been going on. *The New York Times* best-seller list has been filled with anti-racist literature, and many churches are trying to have conversations about race and the church.

Unfortunately, many church leaders are not equipped to have these kinds of conversations, or have thin frameworks for understanding what racism is and really what's going on all around us. *Trouble I've Seen* provides an avenue for Christians to have conversations that are informed by a sociological framework.

Sociology works for thinking about race and racism, but *Trouble I've Seen* was also informed by Christian theology and a commitment to Christian discipleship to Jesus. It took both sociology and theology very seriously and used my own stories and those of

others to help make faithful conversations about race more accessible.

It creates really good conditions for congregations to talk about these issues in ways that will make sense to them and connect to their faith. *Trouble I've Seen* comes from a place of explicitly anti-racist discipleship.

Q You have identified your work as AnaBlacktivist. What does that mean? I see three words in there.

A So the three words I threw together. It's Black theology, Anabaptism, and activism. Those who know my life and my work know that I've been deeply shaped first and foremost in the Black church. That was my most formative Christian community.

But as an adult, another community that has deeply shaped me is the Anabaptist community. At this point it is kind of a multi-denominational Anabaptist community—first getting introduced through the Brethren in Christ, then getting to know Mennonites, and then having had relationships in the Church of the Brethren. Now I am a member of the Church of Brethren and have been getting to get to know my Church of the Brethren family. All those things have really been formative for me.

I think about AnaBlacktivism as the convergence of these different tradi-



Drew Hart



Joshua Brockway

tions and the implications that this convergence has for activism. How do we live discipleship to Jesus on the ground, pursuing peace and justice in our everyday lives?

Q *Trouble I've Seen* gives us a view and understanding of Black experience in the midst of dominant white culture. What is the elevator speech that you would give for your new book, *Who Will Be a Witness*?

A In many ways the elevator speech really flows out of where *Trouble I've Seen* left off. *Trouble I've Seen* almost leaves you with this idea that you ought to go out and struggle in solidarity for justice. And then people are like, "Okay, that sounds great. What does that mean? What does that look like? What does it mean especially for followers of Jesus?" That is where *Who Will Be a Witness* picks up.

UNFORTUNATELY, MANY CHURCH LEADERS ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO HAVE THESE KINDS OF CONVERSATIONS, OR HAVE THIN FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING WHAT RACISM IS AND REALLY WHAT'S GOING ON ALL AROUND US.

OUR WITNESS IS NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF HOW THE CHURCH SCATTERS OUT INTO THE WORLD, BUT EVEN IN HOW WE GATHER AND HOW WE WORSHIP TOGETHER.

Except there are multiple things happening in the book. The first thing is a turn towards radical discipleship. I really want people to see an undomesticated, undiluted vision of Jesus. So I spend the first couple chapters giving a witness to the way of Jesus and the radical implications that he was even willing to take up his cross, clashed with the powers that be, and accepted the consequences of crucifixion, doing his work as prophetic witness on earth. And there are other things that I do around the witness of Jesus as well.

Then I move to history. I deeply believe that, if we are going to have a sense of where we need to go moving forward, we need to understand where we have come from. So I write about the history of Christendom and colonialism or white supremacy and how that has shaped the life of the church.

The last part is really the significance of the book. If we are going to think about Christian activism and justice, and we think about it externally in terms of what we want to tell the world to do, I really believe that the church needs to be faithful to its calling as the church. Our witness is not only in terms of how the church scatters out into the world, but even in

how we gather and how we worship together. I spend a couple of chapters looking at our own life together in community and what it means to worship a God of justice and how that ought to shape our lives.

Then, finally, I give practical advice in terms of how we can engage in justice work and utilize social science knowledge in ways that feed into faithful practices for the church to do justice in the way of a peacemaking Jesus. Drawing on nonviolence theory, organizing theory, movement theory, I explain what exactly these different things mean because a lot of people get confused about what exactly we are talking about. The book is very practical by drawing people into practices that are really conducive for followers of Jesus and for congregations that are committed to doing justice in their neighborhoods because they love their neighbors.

At the end, I challenge folks in terms of what it means to love our neighbors as well. I like to say that I engage in dialogue with Martin Luther King and Howard Thurman and Jonah to help stretch our imaginations for what it means to love well in our society.


Q What does the Anabaptist faith have to say about activism and about engaging the world? You have heard the traditional lines of nonresistance and nonparticipation or the quiet in the land. What's another way of understanding Anabaptist faith and practice?

A Even just from a historical standpoint it is interesting to think about the ways that Anabaptism grew in the context of the poor peasant rebellion. Sometimes contemporary white Anabaptists tend to not

mention that. It's actually really significant to think about that connection. Their economic concerns, their break from the church-state relationships—these are all concerns that the poor peasants have as well. There were significant overlaps between these two communities of poor people and Anabaptists.

I also like to think about Anabaptism as not belonging to anybody, like sometimes people think it's having the right name that makes someone the proper inheritor of the tradition. That's not how I understand Anabaptism. I see it more as a renewal tradition committed to discipleship and community.

If that's true, then anybody who is practicing and embodying that are inheritors of the tradition. I've gotten to meet all over the country—but especially in Philly and Harrisburg—Black and brown communities and Anabaptists who are engaging with and inheriting this tradition on the ground and expressing it in a whole variety of ways. Back in Philly, I got connected with the Anabaptist world, Mennonites, Brethren, and Brethren in Christ. I was meeting Black, brown, and Asian Anabaptists who are expressing Anabaptism in really creative and fruitful ways in their different communities.

That really inspired me in terms of not just what Anabaptism can mean but what it does mean right now. So I have started talking about Anabaptism with people who are not familiar with it. I describe it as taking Jesus seriously. 

Drew G. I. Hart, a member of Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, is associate professor of theology at Messiah College and a frequent speaker at Church of the Brethren events. Joshua Brockway is director of spiritual formation for the Church of the Brethren.



Drew Hart's books are available at www.brethrenpress.com.

The greatest commandment

One weekend last winter (when crowds were still allowed), my sister Laura and I went to the high school we graduated from to watch a basketball game.

We see family members play in local basketball games occasionally, but we thought it would be fun to go back to our high school, two hours away, because we remember all the fanfare: how great our basketball team was, how impressive the cheerleaders were with their acrobatic skills, the pep band getting us fired up, and the gymnasium filled with community spirit. “Nobody does high school basketball like our hometown community,” we thought.



VAL KLINE

But as much as we enjoyed going to the game, reminiscing about old times, and saying hi to one of our favorite teachers, it wasn’t what it used to be. The gym was maybe half-full, the section that used to be reserved for the band was empty, only a few rows were filled in the student section, and there was no halftime show. The mother of two of the players said she had heard about the “glory days” of the program.

When we returned home from the game and told Laura’s husband that the game in Pendleton wasn’t really any more exciting than games we’ve seen at home in Garrett, he said he wasn’t surprised. He said people don’t support high school games like they used to.

The truth is, I hadn’t been to a lot of high school games over the past 30 years, so I really didn’t know that low attendance was common now. I couldn’t help but think about the church. Not every congregation, and not every denomination, is losing members. But I know the Church of the Brethren in the United States has been steadily losing members for decades, and that seems to be escalating. I’ve heard many people from many congregations talk about the “glory days” of the church: how full the church used to be, how many families used to attend, how many well-behaved children there used to be.

As a Gen Xer, I certainly remember the days when many more people were active in church.


I’ve heard that many millennials don’t have such memories. For many, or most, low church attendance is what they’ve always known.

And that makes me think about how important it is for us to not lose our first love, and how important it is for us to keep our faith stirred up. We have a responsibility to do that. In Matthew 22:36-40, when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, he answered by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Then Jesus added: “And the second one is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.” These two interconnected laws—love for God and love for one’s neighbor—together summarize all of the Ten Commandments. So how do we keep our love for the Lord alive? How do we keep that first and foremost in our lives?

Maybe it’s taking a step of faith, getting out of our comfort zones, going on a mission trip, doing something that we know we *need* to depend upon the Lord in order to do—because if we try to do it on our own strength, it will likely fail. Maybe keeping our first love alive involves knowing our spiritual gifts and using them to build up the body of Christ and to be salt and light in this world.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Sometimes it only takes one dedicated fan, faithfully cheering on the players, to get the crowd fired up, and it can be the same for cheering on the faithful, whether we’re meeting together in person or online. So stay the course. Keep your zeal. Shine your light. Live for Jesus. And keep looking up! 

Val Kline is pastor of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren in Ashley, Ind.

THAT MAKES ME THINK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR US TO NOT LOSE OUR FIRST LOVE, AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR US TO KEEP OUR FAITH STIRRED UP.

Enten Eller

Welcome, everyone, from everywhere you are joining us tonight! It is great to see so many gathered here!

Kathleen Morphew

We are Brethren separate but together!

Emma Batdorf

so glad to be here to hear all this amazing music

Anna Lisa Gross

my heart overflows when I hear this song...

Cady Laycook

Those who sing pray twice.

Joel Peña

great music

Joy to the World Hallelujah!

Judy Stout Hearing our Sisters in Nigeria fills my heart to overflowing.

Carol Elmore This hits my soul!!! Love it!

William Christiansen Covid sure has made drastic changes to our lives

Carol Lindquist Making a joyful noise in the midst of challenge. So much we can learn!

Kay Weaver Been a long time since I heard a beautiful mixed quartet singing a favorite hymn. This is great!

William Christiansen 283 more and we'll hit 1000 chatting

Kenneth Wilson George We almost hit the 1000 mark last night...

Bobbi Dykema And that's # of devices connected, even more ppl with more than 1 watching on 1 device

Petra Werner incroyable tout les talents

Elton C Ford III Thank you for the music

Joyce Ward im clapping



Photo courtesy of Eric Miller

The hospice team in Pingding, China, gathers with Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller to view the virtual Church of the Brethren concert. Li and Miller serve with Global Mission and Service.

How did they do that?

“We were up against crazy deadlines,” said Enten Eller

about the project to put together the Church of the Brethren’s first-ever virtual denominational choir. Here is how it played out:

He and Dave Sollenberger, who regularly work together to livestream Annual Conference events, were asked by moderator Paul Munday to take on the project. They recruited Josh Tindall as accompanist, Carol Elmore as female vocalist, and singers from across the Church of the Brethren. Members of the denominational staff created web pages and helped with other tasks. Eller served as project manager, laying out the process and creating a spreadsheet to make sure everything got done on time.

But first, the hymns had to be chosen. What should be sung for such an occasion? Since the process to record one hymn might as well be used for

more, the decision was made to sing three: “I See a New World Coming” by Steve Engle; “Move in Our Midst” by Kenneth Morse and Perry Huffaker, sometimes called “the Brethren national anthem” because of its popularity across the denomination; and “Blessed Assurance” by Fanny Crosby.

Then came the tasks of finding singers and providing clear instructions and the technical tools to help them submit their videos. An open invitation was issued for singers from across the denomination. Web pages were designed with instructions and technical tools to share rehearsal tracks and receive video submissions. Rehearsal tracks were prepared and made available to help singers sing in the same key and in time with each other.

Preparation of rehearsal tracks began with Eller videotaping himself directing and singing each melody. Tindall used that track as direction to record the piano accompaniment. After that, Eller

A new level of virtual

SERVICES AND CONCERT BRING THE CHURCH TOGETHER ONLINE

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Online events brought a new level of virtual experience to the Church of the Brethren this summer: a denominational worship service and children's worship on July 1—available in Spanish and English—and a concert on July 2. The online-only events were timed for what would have been the first two evenings of the Annual Conference canceled because of COVID-19.

“The Program and Arrangements Committee is to be commended for initiating and crafting these rich and varied events,” said Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday. “Though they were not intended to replace Annual Conference, they added great value to the church, nevertheless, during the week many anticipated gathering together in Grand Rapids. We are grateful for the inspiration, depth, and encouragement these events provided during a vulnerable and

challenging season for our denomination.”

Conference director Chris Douglas thanked all who participated for “sharing their gifts and faith with the whole church. We’d like to give special recognition to Dave



Enten Eller (left) and Dave Sollenberger during final day of video editing.

and Elmore recorded the four vocal parts, singing along to the director's video and the piano accompaniment. Elmore sang soprano and alto, Eller sang tenor and bass. Four rehearsal tracks were made—one for each vocal part—that included the director's video, piano accompaniment, and an enhancement of that particular part with the other three vocals in the background. Singers could feel they were singing along with a choir while also easily hearing their own part.

Singers videotaped themselves singing along to their rehearsal track by listening on head phones or ear buds and watching Eller direct.

Sollenberger, Eller, and Tindall worked together to mix all the tracks—director, accompaniment, and 50-plus singers in four parts.

Audio and video had to be handled separately for several reasons, including the desire to show all of the singers on screen. The final synchronizing of faces

and voices included converting all the files to formats that worked with his editing equipment, Sollenberger said. Despite all the careful planning to keep a common tempo, some recordings lagged behind others. Synchronizing the audio tracks required tedious work, as did the task of synchronizing the video images that were made into small thumbnails. Decisions had to be made about how to show every singer and how to position them on screen.

The final product “tried to make everyone's mouth sync up with the sound,” Eller said. It also included some additional video footage. “We didn't want to do a literal representation” of the hymn texts, Sollenberger said, but they also wanted to enhance the visual experience.

“It was a real collaboration,” Sollenberger said, one that required hours and hours of work and the sharing of musical and technical gifts by many people.

“It's delightfully Brethren,” Eller concluded. “It's not performance; it's worshipful.”





Ken Medema performs the song he wrote for the virtual concert.

Sollenberger for much videotaping and hours of editing; Enten Eller for hours editing with Dave on the three virtual choir hymns; Wil Zapata for translating the denominational worship service; Nohemi Flores for translating the children’s worship; to Program and Arrangements Committee who did the planning and follow-through: Jan King, Emily Shonk Edwards, Carol Hipps Elmore, Jim Beckwith, Paul Munday,

and Dave Sollenberger.”

The worship began with a half-hour for children, followed by a service featuring numerous speakers and musicians from across the Church of the Brethren. It included inspiring video stories from congregations and international mission, and a first-ever virtual choir.

The choir’s rendition of “I See a New World Coming,” by Brethren composer Steve Engle, highlighted the theme of the service and a focus of Munday’s message. He spoke of the God who accompanies the people even in exile and troubled times, promising a new creation.

Edwards and Elmore served as hosts for the concert that included dozens of Brethren musicians from various national backgrounds singing and playing a variety of instruments in many musical styles. Sollenberger intermixed excerpts of recordings from previous Annual Conferences and other venues with pieces self-recorded by musicians from their homes.

Ken Medema, a popular performer at many Church of the

A new world coming

by Frank Ramirez

It was 1970. Leland Wilson, then pastor of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, preached at Annual Conference in Lincoln, Neb. His message on “The Language of the Beautiful and the Grotesque” in Revelation 21:1-4 careened like a roller coaster through kaleidoscopic images, and included popular culture references to *Man of La Mancha*, Brethren history via Christopher Sower Jr., and shout-outs to the Bethany Seminary faculty and the White Oak congregation.

He concluded, “We are a people of this world, but more important, we are a people of the world that is coming,” after which Brethren sang for the first time the hymn Wilson commissioned, “I See a New World Coming,” by Steve Engle.

The hymn, which is marking its 50th anniversary in this year, was chosen by Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday as theme song for the denomination’s virtual worship service in July.

Back when Engle composed the song, he had by turns served the La Verne congregation as conscientious objector, youth director, head of special music

projects, and music director.

“I went back to my apartment and pulled out the guitar. The music came pretty easily, though I had to work at the text a little more,” Engle admits. “Originally I envisioned it as more of a folk song than a hymn.”

“I See a New World Coming” is now a quintessential Brethren hymn. Engle credits Nancy Faus for making sure it made it into the 1992 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. Among the many renditions over the years, Engle “really liked the recent virtual denominational choir.” He also likes the anthem version commissioned by Faus that was performed at National Older Adult Conference and at the 2009 Annual Conference in San Diego, especially the soprano descant in the last chorus. (For information about the anthem, contact Engle at englemedia@juno.com.)


The hymn was first printed in the Aug. 13, 1970, issue of *MESSANGER*. “It was a handwritten copy that I gave them,” Engle says. Befitting its folk style, the stanzas were in unison, with Engle’s harmony confined to the chorus.

Years later, Willard Dulabaum

mounted the original brass plate for that printing on a piece of driftwood as a gift for Engle. Sharp eyes will catch an error in the handwritten notes, four measures from the end. “I scratched out one note,” Engle says. He wrote the correct one next to it, “and they printed that too. It’s on the plate.”

Engle has composed innumerable songs and several musicals, most notably *The Saint Judas Passion*. In addition, he was a ventriloquist for many years.

When it comes to writing songs, he says, “Some things just come to you. I can’t describe the inspiration, but as they say, 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration. . . . It’s like being up in an airplane, and you start to descend in very wide circles. You keep narrowing the circles, zeroing down into it.

“And that’s pretty much the way I work. Very seldom does something just fall out. Then you feel like a vessel and it’s just coming through. That doesn’t happen often.” 

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren near Nappanee, Ind. He and Steve Engle have co-authored several musicals and songs.

Brethren conferences, wrote and performed a new song with roots in a hymn beloved by the Brethren:

*Brethren we have met to worship
and adore the Lord our God.
Text and screen and sound and image
now we join to preach the word.*

*In these days we know the Spirit
of the Holy One comes down.
We'll become the Holy Manna
richly scattered all around.*

*We are Brethren on the line,
you in the place that you call home and I in mine.
Separated but together we are singing to each other.
We are Brethren on the line.*

*We'll take all the tools, and love what's in our hands.
With God's children, bruised and broken, we will stand.
Sure, we long for the day we can sit together
in the meeting house again,
but for now we are Brethren on the line. . . .*

The online events gained an audience in the thousands, one that continues to increase as people view recordings of the events. On July 1, live log-ins for the children's worship in English peaked at 480, including 8 for the Spanish service. Live log-ins for the denominational worship service peaked at 1,004, including 18 for the Spanish service. On July 2, the concert peaked at 727 log-ins. These numbers indicate individual devices, so likely represent more viewers total.

Recordings are at www.brethren.org/ac/virtual.

What have you missed?

by James Beckwith

This year our body of Christ was not able to gather together for our 234th annual meeting. However, the Standing Committee of district delegates met on June 28 by Zoom. Committee members were divided into virtual “break-out rooms.” One of our get-acquainted questions was, “What will you miss about not having Annual Conference this summer?”

What have you missed?

I have sorely missed the opportunity to experience the spiritual discernment of our church that I experience nearly every year—in Standing Committee in particular—when we are truly open and honest in seeking to discern what the Spirit of Christ is yearning to help us affirm together. In such times we discern truth larger and deeper, more all-encompassing than any of our individual discernments. We speak our convictions forthrightly—our personal convictions and what we perceive to be our corporate convictions. We pray. We struggle. We dare to care about each other deeply. We yearn for words that can be the best wisdom of our disparate body. And,

sometimes, the Lord leads us to *kairos* moments when we discern the mind of Christ, and we experience something akin to the apostle Paul's Galatians 2:20 declaration, that it is no longer we who live and speak and discern, but Christ who lives in us and moves among us.


Seeking the mind of Christ is a core understanding of Brethren heritage. Fully one-fourth of our annual meeting minutes contain that phrase. It occurs at least 233 times, dating back to the 1805 minutes. It intrigues me that the phrase does not occur again in Annual Conference minutes until the World War I years, then not again until the outset of World War II, and pretty much every year since. But we know that way back in the first Brethren hymnal, printed in 1720, Alexander Mack concluded his hymn, “Count Well the Cost,” by declaring that to join Christ's work against evil we must “listen to him in his outer [written] and inner [Spirit-discerned] word” to “have the mind of Christ.”

The phrase comes directly from 1 Corinthians 2:16, where the statement, “we have the mind of Christ,” concludes a discussion about becoming mature in

God's secret wisdom, citing Isaiah 64:4, “No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” A response comes in 1 Corinthians 2:10, “But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”

Church of the Brethren annual meetings, at their best, are times for searching, yearning for the discernments that our Lord will provide when it is no longer we who are in charge, but Christ. When it is not our wisdom that must prevail, but the deep wisdom of God. The mind of Christ.

I yearn for the parts of this body of Christ to listen to each other's earnest convictions and seek ways to discern together the mind of Christ, to whom we all belong. Next year in Greensboro?

In the meantime, how will you and I help the church resolve that, as for us and our households, we will discern the mind of Christ together? 

James Beckwith is secretary of the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren. He first shared this reflection in a prayer circle that includes the Council of District Executives, Annual Conference officers, and executive staff and board chairs of the Annual Conference agencies.



William Stafford Listening to the leaves

by **Brian Nixon**

*Time, always almost ready
to happen, leans over our shoulder reading
the headlines for something not there.*

These lines from William Stafford's poem "Reading the Big Weather" weigh on me. They remind me of the subtle power of the man's work, not only as a poet but as an instructor on the art of teaching and writing, and perhaps most importantly, his resilient stance as a Christian pacifist. They also force me to recall the time I missed out on meeting Stafford in person.

My first personal encounter with William Stafford came at the 1991 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, held in Portland, Ore. The theme that year was "Behold! The Wonder of God's Presence."

I drove up from California with my pastor, Jeff Neuman-Lee. Later, we connected with another friend, Isaak Dockter. Isaak and I camped just north of the city. Together, we drove into Portland daily to hear lectures on a variety of topics: peace, justice, Native American issues, and most importantly, how to follow Jesus.

Memories of my time listening to artists, storytellers, theologians, and musicians are vivid. However, in hind-

sight, it was at this conference that I had one of my great disappointments: not meeting William Stafford.

As an impressionable college student, I looked over the plethora of lectures and saw one called "Poetry Reading: William Stafford." This sounded great, but other sessions appealed as well. I finally decided upon a folk group concert instead (I was into music). Imagine that! I chose a now-forgotten folk group over William Stafford.

I sat at the concert and listened, unimpressed—mainly because I knew I should be at the Stafford reading. Something nagged at me, a still, small insistence that he was important—"a weather of things that happen too faint for the headlines, but tremendous. . . ." Finally, I jumped up and ran over to the room where Stafford was reading.

The room was packed, so I decided to sit outside, listening to the final few poems and commentary. To this day, I don't remember which poems he finished his reading with. And even more disappointing, I didn't look into the room to see Mr. Stafford reading his work.

Had I looked around the corner, I would have seen the poet that, over the next 28 years of my life, would bring me pleasure and thought, someone I would turn to over and over again.

Born William Edgar Stafford on Jan. 17, 1914, Stafford

spent most of his life in the academic world, both as a student (receiving a BA, MA, and PhD) and teacher (teaching the longest at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon). As



poetry consultant to the United States Congress (a position now called Poet Laureate), Stafford's own work was late to the publishing world. It wasn't until his mid-40s that his poems took root in American literary circles, and not until 1963—at the age of 48—did *Traveling Through the Dark* take home the prestigious National Book Award for poetry.

To make up for my mistake of not getting his book *Scripture of Leaves* at the Brethren conference, I called Brethren Press a couple years later to see if they had it. To my great surprise, they had a copy—and even better, it was one of the last signed editions. It now sits prominently on my shelf.

I now collect William Stafford books. Since that first great purchase, I have found many treasures. My favorite is a first edition signed copy of *Traveling Through the Dark* (a collector's dream).

Stafford went on to write dozens of books, following a daily ritual of writing early in the morning. He kept a regular journal for 50 years, composing over 20,000 poems, 3,000 or so which have been published. Likewise, he traveled across the country teaching people the art of finding their voice by putting thoughts on paper. As a poet and teacher, he is remembered.

Yet to many, it was his personal life that mattered most. As a conscientious objector, working for the Church of the Brethren during World War II, Stafford stood at the forefront of people yearning for reconciliation and peace in the midst of a world ravenous for conflict and war.

As a member of an unusual class of Christian American poets dedicated to peace (William Everson, aka Brother Antoninus, being another) that came out of the World War II conscientious objector camps, Stafford first discussed his Christian peace stance in the book *Down in My Heart* (1948). It stands as his only prose treatise on living beyond the American psyche of war.

Through all my collecting and book searching, I have found Stafford, through his poetry, to be a gentle reminder

Brethren Press has published two books by William Stafford, *Down in My Heart* (1948) and *A Scripture of Leaves* (1989 and 1999).

that there is another way of living. And as Christians, we do, indeed, look for another world instead: the coming of God's kingdom, the establishment of his world, a dream that is a yet unseen reality. "*This world we are riding keeps trying to tell us something. . .*"

So, until that day of God's consummated kingdom, we abide, live, and work for building the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. And somehow William Stafford knew this. In his poem "Reading the Big Weather" (found in *A Scripture of Leaves*), he summarized the tension of living for the Kingdom and waiting for the Kingdom:

Reading the Big Weather

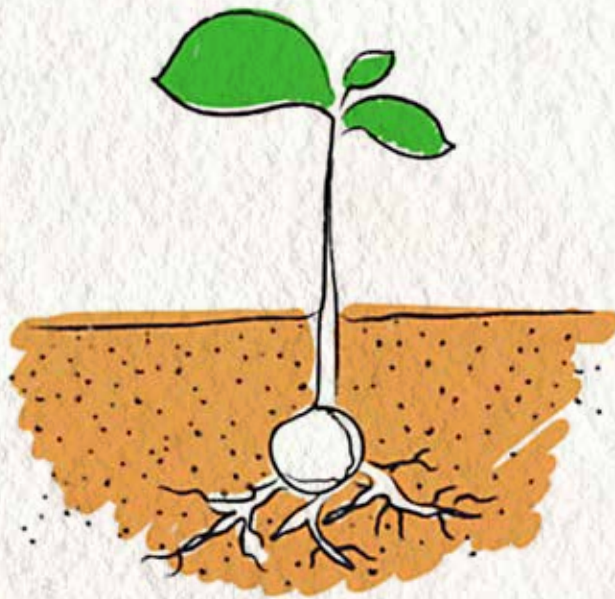
Mornings we see our breath. Weeds sturdy for winter are waiting down by the tracks. Birds, high and silent, pass almost invisible over town.

Time, always almost ready to happen, leans over our shoulders reading the headlines for something not there. "Republicans Control Congress"—the year spins on unheeding.

The moon drops back toward the sun, a sickle gone faint in the dawn: there is a weather of things that happen too faint for headlines, but tremendous, like willows touching the river. This earth we are riding keeps trying to tell us something with its continuous scripture of leaves.

"Reading the Big Weather" taken from *A Scripture of Leaves*, by William Stafford, copyright © 1989, 1999 Brethren Press, Elgin, Illinois. Used with permission.

Brian Nixon is a writer, artist, musician, educator, and minister in Albuquerque, N.M., and a former licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren. This article is excerpted from his new book *Tilt: Finding Christ in Culture*, and is used with permission from Wipf and Stock Publishers: www.wipfandstock.com. The book is available from Brethren Press.



Not just any old church plant

How can our new churches be uniquely Brethren?

by Ryan Braught and Nate Polzin

In 1708, the original eight members of what would become the Church of the Brethren started something new as they entered the waters of the Eder River in Schwarzenau, Germany, for their baptism. Though it was indeed a new church they began, it was not without historical antecedents. The Church of the Brethren emerged from the influence of Radical Pietism that Alexander Mack's mentors exemplified and espoused. They withdrew from established state churches to study the Bible on their own in small groups. They believed that the lives of Christians needed to reflect the holiness of God. Pietists also emphasized a personal, spiritual relationship with Jesus.

As the founders of the Church of the Brethren met in their small group studying the Scriptures, they eventually became convicted that the Radical Pietists, for all their helpful reforms, had missed something important in their rejection of organized church. Especially in Matthew's Gospel, they saw a mandate for Christians to be in a visible congregation. Anabaptist writings and ideas helped persuade Mack and the others that their impulse to form a new church had merit.

The early Brethren spread their faith with zeal and joy, despite the persecutions and other hardships that following their convictions entailed. As the church grew, so did the need for more leaders and more congregations. As the future Church of the Brethren moved to America and continued its growth, even more churches were formed. Annual Conference began in order to ensure all these different congregations would still form one larger body of faith, holding to similar theological convictions.

Centuries later, as the Church of the Brethren continues to plant new congregations, it is helpful to know what distinguishes Brethren churches from those of other denominations and non-denominational new church starts. In a world where denominations are largely in decline and even non-denominational mega-churches may be past their heyday, many Christians are worshiping in churches without much regard for the denominational roots that gave rise to them.

While we do not claim that the Church of the Brethren is the "best" denomination, and we know that all Christians

form the universal body of Christ, we do believe that the Church of the Brethren is well-suited to reach this generation with the gospel of Jesus. At our best, the expression of faith entrusted to us by our forerunners is powerfully attractive, especially to today's young adults. Our emphasis on doing what Jesus did—including the experiential aspects of our worship (love feast, footwashing, believer's baptism, etc.), combined with the service and volunteer work for which the Brethren are known, are very compelling for seekers looking for a vital spiritual connection with God. New church plants can make those qualities particularly visible and accessible.

So what makes a new church plant uniquely Brethren? With thanks to our Mennonite Brethren sisters and brothers and their resource *The 12 Principles of Anabaptism* (usmb.org/anabaptism), we offer the following characteristics.

A uniquely Brethren church plant would:

■ **Have a high view of the Bible.** The Scriptures would be authoritative in their life together and would be collectively discerned through the Spirit. One way to live this value out would be to have a more dialogical approach to the preaching of the Bible.

■ **Emphasize the New Testament.** After all, the Church of the Brethren states that the New Testament is our creed. This doesn't mean that the Old Testament isn't important, just that we read the Old through the perspective of the New.

■ **Emphasize Jesus as central to all else.** Jesus is our example, teacher, master, and Lord, as well as Savior. He isn't just the Secretary of After-Life Affairs; he is concerned with all of life.

■ **Stress the necessity of a believer's church.** One of the ways a church plant can live into this value is by adult baptism. At one church plant, they throw a party for each baptism that they hold, as a means of celebrating someone making a decision to follow Jesus and cementing that decision through Christian baptism.

■ **Place importance on discipleship and following in the way of Jesus.** We are not only to worship Jesus; we are to follow him. Writer Dallas Willard asks: "Does your church have a plan for discipleship, and is it working?" One church plant has a plan based around five contexts (for more information, see *Discipleship that Fits* by Alex Absalom and Bobby Harrington).

■ **Insist on a church without class or divisions.**

In a deeply polarized world, a church that could love each other in the midst of differences (political, theological, social, etc.) would point to the love of Christ in their midst and to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.

■ **Challenge the individualism of our day,** by calling people into covenant community. "An individualistic or self-centered Anabaptist is a contradiction in terms," as the Mennonite Brethren wrote. In one community, this looks like each regular attender having a deacon who keeps in contact with them regularly.


■ **Live as a visible counter-cultural community.**

The values of the community would be drawn from the upside-down kingdom of God and not primarily from the values of the kingdom of the world. One way to live into this reality is to live a third-way life that doesn't fall into the dominant narratives and polarity of our day.

■ **Demonstrate peace as a holistic lifestyle derived from the Prince of Peace.** "Anabaptists believe that the peace position is not optional, not marginal, and not related mainly to the military," the Mennonite Brethren wrote. "On the basis of Scripture, Anabaptists renounce violence in human relationships. We see peace and reconciliation—the way of love—as being at the heart of the Christian gospel."

■ **Value servanthood.** This type of community would take seriously Jesus' call to live a life of service. One community, as a means of entering into service as a community, offers a Fifth Sunday Day of Service where instead of gathering to worship, they gather to serve their local community.

■ **And be a missional community.** They would see themselves as a community on a mission: a mission to "make disciples of all people, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey and follow Jesus."

We strive in the Church of the Brethren to "Continue the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together." We hope that new expressions of the denomination will find support and encouragement to join in that work. The world needs the Brethren to share the good news! 

Ryan Braught is church planter and founding pastor of the Veritas Community, a Church of the Brethren congregation in Lancaster, Pa. Nate Polzin is church planter of the Church in Drive, a Brethren congregation in Saginaw, Mich., and pastor of Midland (Mich.) Church of the Brethren, and is active in campus ministry. They have led denominational webinars together and offered other resources on church planting.

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

Obedience

by Alexandre Gonçalves

We live in a world obsessed with the self. Pressed daily to enjoy the alleged benefits of our prevailing culture of self-sufficiency, self-promotion, and self-gratification, we confuse autonomy with selfish attitudes. Not surprisingly, in such an each-one-for-oneself culture the practice of obedience is increasingly associated with a loss of control and blind submission. One consequence of this attitude is that the more self-absorbed we are, the more indifferent and alienated we become.

Ironically and paradoxically, this self-centeredness creates other kinds of submission and dependence. Think, for example, of how obedient we are to the logic of consumerism when we give in to the temptations of buying things we actually don't need only to satisfy our desires, no matter the economic inequalities it reinforces or what the consequences are for the environment. Consider also how easily we might become submissive or compliant to certain eloquent but misleading preachers, when our intention is to hear

only what pleases us.

In his defense of the gospel to the Galatians, Paul offers us many hints on what genuine obedience is, how it relates to our faith, when it may be skewed or become dangerous, and why it is decisive to preserve the truth of the gospel.

Concerned with disruptive and divisive teachings by the Judaizers—Jewish Christians who, in addition to the gospel, advocated for the observance of the Mosaic Law—Paul writes a letter to the churches in Galatia to refute those teachings and reaffirm the absolute sufficiency of Christ (1:6-9). In short, Paul argues that the salvation offered to us in Christ through faith is a gracious gift from God, with no need for complementary works. Therefore, freed from the dominion of sin and no longer subjected to the law, we can freely and voluntarily decide to follow Christ, in whom we receive a new identity to live in newness of life with the help of the Spirit.

Early in the letter, Paul defends the authority of his

THE OBEDIENCE GOD WANTS IS ONE THAT COMES FROM WITHIN US AS AN EARNEST, GRATEFUL RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE, WHICH EXPANDS TO EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES THROUGH THE FRUITS IT BEARS.

apostolate, and consequently the validity of his message—not based on his own competence or achievements, nor on submission to the church leaders in Jerusalem, but first and foremost on his obedience to God's call to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. That was not a matter of why, but of how Paul's authority was legitimate: through acknowledgment by others that the grace of God was working in him, transforming his fiery devotion to Jewish legalism into love for and obedience to the gospel of Christ.

From this we learn that obedience is, above all, a response of gratitude in recognition of God's saving grace. We can embrace the gospel of Christ and submit ourselves to God's will, firstly, because we are free to do so, not because we feel obligated or forced to. Accordingly, obedience cannot be a way to obtain God's favor, as if it were a bargaining chip that should be traded away for some concession. The obedience God wants is one that comes from within us as an earnest, grateful response to God's grace, which expands to every area of our lives through the fruits it bears.

There is, therefore, an important correlation between obedience and faith in the sense that to be genuine, tangible, and discernible, faith must be embodied in practical ethical terms—otherwise it will be pointless. Our obedient attitude towards the gospel of Christ is the bridge that reduces the distances between what we say and what we do. Obedience is faith into practice, for we cannot be disciples of Jesus unless we confess him as our Lord and Savior and act according to his praxis. As the first Anabaptists highlighted, just as faith demands commitment to live out the radical ethics of Jesus, obedience through discipleship confirms one's faith.

However, a wholehearted obedience must also be evidence of the active working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If on the one hand obedience must be a steadfast decision on our part, on the other hand its continual strengthening and renewal comes with the help of the Spirit. The practice of obedience bears witness to our walk in the Spirit, manifested through such fruits as love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.


Many of these fruits, though, draw our attention to the communitarian dimension of obedience. A life of obedience is not meant to nurture a boastful spirituality, but to create a heart inclined to compassion and service. By God's grace we indeed become instruments of righteousness, but never for

self-praise or individual rewards. Because it cannot be carried out divorced from the practice of communal life, obedience makes sense only if mediated by selfless love.

Such a radical obedience will always be a challenging task, for it confronts our personal interests, or the interests of the groups we belong to or agree with. It demands that we make difficult choices, to review the privileges and attitudes we enjoy and are reluctant to give up. One of the underlying issues of the controversy in Galatia was the cultural, social, and ethnic dispute between the Judaizers and the Gentile converts. In demanding that the Gentiles adopt Jewish religious customs, thus ignoring the sufficiency of Christ, the Judaizers made clear their intention to impose a kind of superior piety to the church. Because of their purist, excluding view of obedience, the Judaizers sent a message like this: "Only we do church the right way. . . . People will not be fully accepted by God unless they believe and behave like us."

Instead of making us members of the same body, attitudes like that make us partisans of a particular faction—precisely the kind of submission we should not comply with, not even for a moment! Accordingly, we should never act like the law-keepers in Galatia, despising or rejecting our brothers and sisters in Christ by deeming their faith as imperfect or flawed. When ignoring the self-giving, all-loving radicality of grace, we run the risk of being trapped in non-essential doctrines or private interpretations that only disturb and divide the church.

Remember that one of Paul's most passionate but overlooked defenses of the unity of the church is in the letter to the Galatians: "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:26,28).

The life of obedience by faith in Christ enables us to realize that our existence goes well beyond this culture of self-sufficiency we live in. Only then can we move from being self-centered to having a Christ-centered life, which completely reframes our self-perception, frees us from the limitations of our social and religious bubbles, and helps us to find common ground with others, particularly those different from us. 

Alexandre Gonçalves is a licensed pastor of Igreja da Irmandade (Church of the Brethren in Brazil) and a social educator with specialization in child protection. He earned his master of divinity from Bethany Theological Seminary.

Making it in a world with limited resources

by Frances Townsend

Sore shelves were sparsely stocked in 1979-80 when I lived in Warsaw, Poland, while in Brethren Volunteer Service. I felt like I was really starting to fit in when I stood in my first line outside a shop, waiting to buy my share of canned tomato paste. People there had lived this way for decades, so one of the things I learned was how they made it in a world with limited resources.

Some people had friends or family living in the countryside with gardens and some livestock. When even cheap sausage became unavailable the year of the Moscow Olympics, because the entire Eastern bloc was supplying the Olympic Village, those country connections were an important way for people to get meat. It reminds me of the way people in our country are making connections with CSA (community-supported agriculture) farmers.


One of my friends in Poland was a doctoral student working with plant breeding. She had a great resource in a country where tomato-based products were always in short supply: hundreds of tomato plants. She also had a friend whose plant-breeding project involved cucumbers. So, even though I lived in a university dorm room, I made pickles and tomato ketchup.

I hauled buckets of cucumbers and tomatoes home on the city bus and worked in the kitchen for our floor of the dorm. My friend helped me with a recipe for pickles that involved using grape leaves in the jars to keep the pickles crisp. We walked around the semi-rural neighborhood where her dorm was located, looking for good grape leaves that would not be missed from the edge of a yard. Sprigs of dill were added to each jar. They were great pickles. I wish I still had the recipe.

Another Polish friend, a forestry student, taught me about the variety of summer mushrooms in the forest when we spent a couple of weeks laying out her study plots to record vegetation density. We had lots of free time to hunt mushrooms and cook them. I found out that many city people would go out to the forests to gather them too. We were only a few miles outside Warsaw, and it was only about 35 years after the war, so my head was filled with wartime stories of how people would sneak out of the city at great risk to get provisions in the countryside.

I also remember the sauerkraut in Poland, sold out of open barrels by the greengrocers. The next time I encountered sauerkraut like this was years later here in Onekama, where two men from the church, Mark Ward and Fred Pries, are sauerkraut makers.

According to Ward, it takes cabbage, salt, five-gallon plastic buckets, kraut cutters, and axe handles or baseball bats to make sauerkraut. Cut the cabbage, add the salt, then pound, pound with a wooden club until the cabbage is bruised and broken up enough to get all the way to the bottom of the bucket. Put the lid on it and let it sit for a month, and you have sauerkraut. In the old days, the plastic buckets would have been stoneware crocks, and they would have been kept cool in a root cellar.

When the stores are not always fully stocked, or when the goods available are not the best, people fall back on the old ways, if they have the knowledge. They develop other ways of obtaining food, building their own supply networks, and they find ways to preserve the harvest. As life shifts during this season of pandemic, it is a good time to develop and renew our skills, teaching each other and teaching our children as well. 

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



Sauerkraut makers Mark Ward and Fred Pries.

Mission and Ministry Board meets via Zoom

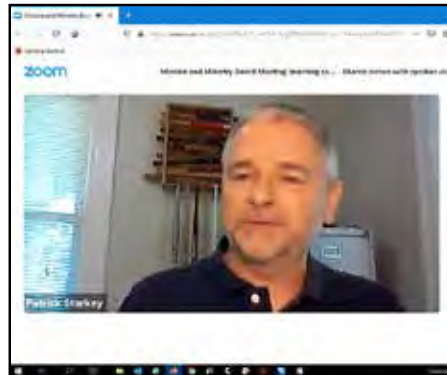
The denominational board met via Zoom on July 1 for a summer meeting usually held onsite at Annual Conference. The meeting was chaired by Patrick Starkey assisted by chair-elect Carl Fike and general secretary David Steele.

The board set a budget parameter of \$4,934,000 for core ministries in 2021.

Revised 2020 budgets that reflected work by staff to review expenses as well as to reassess income projections for the remainder of this year were approved in light of the pandemic that has resulted in changes to the denomination's financial situation.

"Staff needed a more dependable and realistic budget to work from," said Starkey.

This year has seen a significant shortfall in congregational giving, although individual giving has increased somewhat. Core ministries expenses were revised downward by almost \$340,000 to a total of \$4,629,150, and the income projection for core ministries was revised downward by



almost \$447,000 to \$4,522,040, resulting in an anticipated core ministries deficit of (\$107,110) for 2020.

The board approved a new strategic plan based in large part on the compelling vision statement that will be presented to the 2021 Annual Conference. The plan is titled "Jesus in the Neighborhood."

The board confirmed the appointment of Ed Woolf as treasurer of the Church of the Brethren, and called board members Thomas Dowdy, Lois Grove, and Colin Scott to the executive committee.

Small increase to pastors' salary table

In light of the cancellation of this year's Annual Conference, the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee offered a recommendation rather than a delegate-approved decision. The committee recommends a 0.5 percent increase to the 2021 Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors. Find out more at www.brethren.org/ministryoffice.

Global Mission creates country advisory teams

The Global Mission office has instituted country advisory teams (CATs) as a way to stay informed and better understand each country or region where Church of the Brethren partners are involved.

CAT members are volunteers with passion for mission, commitment to the Church of the Brethren, and knowledge of the country served. These teams are made up of one person from the US, one from the country or region represented, and others as needed.

The teams: Africa Great Lakes—Chris Elliott and Bwambale Sedrack; Brazil—Greg Davidson Laszakovitz, Alexandre Gonçalves, Marcos and Suely Inhauser; Dominican Republic—Jonathan Bream and Pedro Sanchez; Haiti—Ilexene Alphonse and Vildor Archange; India—yet to be determined; Nigeria—Carol Mason and Joel S. Billi; Rwanda—Josiah Ludwick and Etienne Nsanzimana; South Sudan—Roger Schrock and Athanasus Ungang; Spain—Carol Yeazell and Santo Terrero; Venezuela—Jeff Boshart, Joel Peña, Robert Anzoategui, and Jorge Rivera.

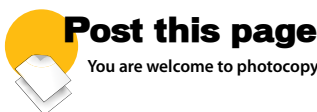
Nominating and Appeals committees reorganize

The 2020 Standing Committee of district delegates meeting by Zoom on June 28 has named new members to the Nominating Committee and Appeals Committee.

The following people will join current Nominating Committee members Michaela Alphonse, Kurt Borgmann, Becky Maurer, and Dennis Webb: Bob Johansen of Northern Indiana District, Kim McDowell of Mid-Atlantic District,

Loren Rhodes of Middle Pennsylvania District, and Susan Chapman Starkey of Virginia District.

Three people will serve as the Appeals Committee for 2020-2021: Carolyn Dean of Middle Pennsylvania District, Jonathan Prater of Shenandoah District, and Craig Stutzman of Mid-Atlantic District. First alternate is Ben Polzin of Northern Ohio District. Second alternate is Mark Jones of West Marva District.



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EYN conference elects leadership

The 73rd Annual General Church Council Conference (Majalisa) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) was held July 14-16 at the EYN Headquarters in Kwarhi.

The conference re-elected incumbent president Joel S. Billi and vice president Anthony A. Ndamsai, reappointed as general secretary Daniel Y. C. Mbaya, reappointed the Disaster Relief Ministry director Yuguda Z. Mdurvwa, and appointed Nuhu Mutah Abba as administrative secretary. Joshua Wakai was confirmed to the EYN Board of Trustees.



EYN leaders are (from left) Nuhu Mutah Abba, Daniel Y. C. Mbaya, Joel S. Billi, and Anthony A. Ndamsai.

EYN members among aid workers killed in Nigeria

Two Nigerian Brethren, Ishaku Yakubu and Luka Filibus, were among five humanitarian aid workers who were killed in July, execution-style by a faction linked to Boko Haram.

Yakubu “lived with his widowed mother in Monguno, is from Kautikari, Chibok. He left behind a wife and two children,” reported Zakariya Musa, head of EYN Media. Filibus was from Agapalawa in the Gwoza area, and his parents “are living in one of the IDP camps managed by EYN in Maiduguri.”

The men were abducted in June on their way to Maiduguri. They were employees of the State Emergency Management Agency, Action Against Hunger, International Rescue Committee, and Rich International.



Disaster ministry completes rebuilding in Puerto Rico

Brethren Disaster Ministries has completed a rebuilding project in Puerto Rico in partnership with Puerto Rico District. The project worked on homes that were destroyed or damaged by Hurricane Maria in 2017. One hundred homes were completed either with volunteer labor, contractor work, or by providing materials to homeowners.

Brethren Disaster Ministries has opened a new project site in Dayton, Ohio—the first resumption of volunteer work since a shut-down due to COVID-19 began in mid-March. Local volunteers will serve families affected by the 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes.

19 congregations withdraw from Southeastern District

The Southeastern District Conference on July 25 approved the withdrawal of 19 congregations from the district and the Church of the Brethren. The withdrawing churches represent close to half of the 42 congregations that have been part of the district that covers Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, and the western parts of North Carolina and Virginia.

The withdrawals follow on the creation of the Covenant Brethren Church in 2019. Earlier this year its leaders—which include Southeastern District executive Scott Kinnick—indicated an intention to separate from the Church of the Brethren. It is not clear how many of the with-

drawing congregations will affiliate with the new organization.

Withdrawing congregations are Beaver Creek in Knoxville, Tenn.; Brummetts Creek in Green Mountain, N.C.; Community in Cleveland, Ala.; Ewing (Va.) Church; Hawthorne in Johnson City, Tenn.; Jackson Park in Jonesborough, Tenn.; Johnson City First; Knob Creek in Johnson City; Limestone (Tenn.) Church; Little Pine in Ennice, N.C.; Melvin Hill in Columbus, N.C.; Midway in Surgoinsville, Tenn.; Mill Creek in Tryon, N.C.; Mount Carmel in Scottville, N.C.; New Hope in Jonesborough; Pleasant Hill in Blountville, Tenn.; Pleasant Valley in Jonesborough; Spindale (N.C.) Church; and Trinity in Blountville.

Why We Hate

Examining the enemy within

Why do we hate other people? It's a fundamental human question, one that executive producers Steven Spielberg and Alex Gibney set out to explore with the six-part documentary *Why We Hate*.

The sweeping series was not produced in response to the latest flashpoint in our country's racial tensions—it was released last October, well before the wave of violence and activism that has occurred following the killing of George Floyd and other incidents. But in the wake of those events, the issues raised by the series feel all the more timely as it examines not only race, but a wide range of dividing lines.



WALT WILTSCHER

Originally aired on the Discovery Channel and now available online, the roughly 50-minute episodes begin with a look at the origins of hate in humanity and continue through “Tribalism,” “Tools and Tactics,” “Extremism,” “Crimes Against Humanity,” and, finally, “Hope.” Different voices lead viewers through each episode, bringing perspectives from history, academia, science, legal justice, and more.

The series repeatedly notes how easy it is to create the “us against them” mentality in which we gradually dehumanize “them” into something less than us. But by dehumanizing others, it argues, we end up destroying our own humanity in the process. In one episode, an international criminal lawyer from Philadelphia observes that it's not a sudden move to hating one's neighbor enough to kill them. Instead, “We get there step by step,” she says, as we are gradually convinced of an “enemy out there” that needs to be dealt with forcefully. Ultimately, we can become “blinded by an idea.”

A variety of forces can stoke those attitudes and fears, the series argues: one's own history and genetics, media messaging (particularly social media), charismatic leaders, and more. It points out that maintaining conflict and division is often driven by economic interests, as distinct groups

will more readily look for things to support their identity and confirm their views, and by power, as politicians and others use the “traditional levers of conflict” to advance their interests. Religious groups have not been immune to these same tendencies.

In a CBS interview, Spielberg—who has explored aspects of the issue in past films, such as *Schindler's List* and *Amistad*—said he saw making the documentary as “a mandatory project” in the current climate. Despite the seemingly uninterrupted thread of hatred and violence through human history, Spielberg says he remains convinced that “hate is the constant abnormal,” and that it can be defeated if we commit to doing so.

Some critics have said that attitude, which colors the series, is too rosy. They argue it overlooks the depth of unjust structures, such as economic inequality, that need to be overcome and past wounds that must be healed. Others called the documentary “somewhat muddled” as it seeks to cover a lot of ground in a relatively short time. Almost all, though, still conclude that it is a worthwhile endeavor and even “essential viewing.”

Given the times in which we find ourselves, it is hard to disagree with that latter assessment. The series does not provide all the answers for how we move forward, but it does raise some excellent questions. Specifically, Spielberg and company put most of their focus on addressing their initial question, “Why?” helping us to think about the reasons that hatred seems to be so prevalent and so constant and hopefully sparking the small steps toward change that awareness can bring.

The documentary observes that in each of history's worst chapters of hate, there have been people who “resist evil” and “push back against the darkness.” So while there might be natural inclinations toward hatred within us, the potential for goodness lives alongside them. Thinking critically about which instincts we nurture might not be enough, but it is a good beginning, and particularly so for people of faith who claim to follow a God of love. *M*



ABOUT THE SERIES

Title: *Why We Hate*. **Format:** Six-part documentary series. **Executive producers:** Steven Spielberg and Alex Gibney. **Directors:** Geeta Gandbhir and Sam Pollard. **Original air date:** October–November 2019. **Broadcast:** Discovery Channel. **Learn more:** discovery.com/shows/why-we-hate.

A personal story

I read with interest the June article on Lassa Fever and thought I would share a personal story.

In 1976, when I was a fourth-year medical student at Penn State, I took a three-month elective learning and providing tropical medicine at the Church of the Brethren hospital in Garkida, Nigeria, the main Brethren mission site in the country. It was one of the most inspiring and intense learning experiences of my life and made possible by the consistent and caring cooperation of our General Offices in Elgin, Ill., and our mission team.

During my time there I traveled to the mission hospital in Lassa and was housed in the rooms used seven

years earlier by Laura Wine, the first identified case of Lassa Fever. About a week later, after I returned to Garkida, I became as ill as I have ever been in my life, with high spiking fevers and a weakness so profound I could barely walk across a room. I was treated for malaria just in case, but we really thought it was a virus. Fortunately, I recovered in a few more days.

When I returned to the US, I contacted the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta and asked if they would test my blood for antibodies to Lassa Fever. The result was negative, but I experienced the challenge of contracting an exotic virus about which I knew virtually nothing, very reminiscent of the COVID-19 challenge we all are facing today—and with the same approach in

addressing it of dedicated medical intervention combined with trust in God's providence.

Dennis Gingrich
Hershey, Pa.

Thank you

I want to tell you how much I enjoyed the June MESSENGER. Another person from my church mentioned it during Zoom time on Sunday and I chimed in and said, "Yes! I enjoyed it too." Everything from cover to cover was very good. There were so many things that if I could find you in person I would tell you each one of them. I want to thank you very much for this issue.

Elton Ford
Dallas, Texas

Now it is my turn

My husband has written a few letters to MESSENGER and now it is my turn. I thank Jeanine Wine and Harriet Hamer for their careful work on the article about Lassa Fever and the excellent and carefully presented comparison of Lassa and COVID-19. We at the Bruderhof also are thrilled with the long article by our minister David Mow. Thank you for your efforts to produce his article so well. We feel this is a truly historic event in our friendship with the Church of the Brethren and we look forward to the future together.

Unlike my one-time-Quaker husband, I was born and grew up in the Bruderhof. I was born among the snowy peaks of Liechtenstein to parents who, with others of our members, were seeking temporary refuge from the Nazi regime before traveling to our new Bruderhof in England.

Two months later, our original German pacifist Bruderhof near Frankfurt was confiscated by the Gestapo. All 80 people—babies and all—were given 24 hours to leave with only what they could carry. In the

A long time ago,
when I was looking for adventure,
I became a seagoing cowboy.
We didn't ride horses. We rode
waves

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providence of God, two Hutterite ministers happened to be visiting there and, through their strenuous protests, all but three members were allowed to flee to Holland and eventually to England. They were mercifully saved from concentration camps.

Three years later, I experienced the bombing of Britain. The British government generously allowed the whole Bruderhof community of some 300 souls to travel safely to Paraguay through submarine-infested waters during the Battle of the Atlantic.

Thus I grew up in the Paraguayan jungle where, despite the fact that we all suffered much from disease and poverty, I had a happy, adventurous childhood.

Twenty years later, the Bruderhof eventually traveled to the US where, despite failures and struggles, we have been allowed to grow and increase to try to represent brotherhood in Jesus ever since. (See the book *Joyful Pilgrimage* by Emmy Arnold, available from Brethren Press.)

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

Speak truth to power

The phrase “speak truth to power” is taken from a charge given to 18th century Friends, or Quakers. Now, in the midst of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, an urgent need to address the climate crisis, the overwhelming awareness that we must address Black Lives Matter, and increasingly deadly presidential politics, what can I as a senior citizen do if I wish to speak truth to power?

I have felt powerless, unable to effect change, and sometimes downtrodden, but:

1. I can write letters to the news media, thanking publishers for giving support to freedom of the press.
2. I can use social media to express

my opinion honestly and forthrightly.

3. I can walk with peaceful protest groups.

4. I can write to my state and federal legislators. I can call their offices and express my opinion and ask for their support of progressive legislation. I will urge each one to vote, not the party line, but their own conscience.

5. I can write to my church publications with a letter to the editor or to propose an article.

6. I can ask my congregation to address these national and international concerns.

7. I will vote.

Ralph McFadden
Elgin, Ill.

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IN THIS RICH HOUR, IT IS TIME TO BE SILENT AND LISTEN. THERE ARE PEOPLE AMONG US YEARNING TO BE HEARD.

It's time for prophetic listening

Over the generations, the Church of the Brethren has said many right things about racism and human relationships. Unfortunately, our actions have not matched our soaring rhetoric. Now is not the time to add more words to our pile of statements, nor is it the time to tell our stories or reflect upon our own understandings. Now is the time to do something that we find difficult—to keep silent and learn to listen.

If we wonder why racism and its ugly dynamics continue to fester within our land, it is in large measure because members of the dominant culture have difficulty in listening to experiences beyond themselves. All too often when oppressed people speak, members of the dominant culture are quick to add their own experiences and thereby minimize what we need to hear but would rather brush past.

We Brethren, once a peculiar people, have long been members of the dominant culture. In the past 40 years, numerous meetings and workshops have been held in the hope of enabling us to hear the stories of the oppressed. Most of the time, we were quick to shut down or change the subject because the stories told were painful and we were the cause of some of the pain.

Twenty years ago, at the second Cross Cultural Consultation of the Church of the Brethren, held in southern Ohio, a gift of the Holy Spirit emerged. Wuerthner James, an African-American pastor who had spent 20 years serving the Church of the Brethren, spoke of his deep and abiding pain. He had served faithfully in the church yet no one had ever bothered to listen to his story or seek to

understand his experience. The very people who advocated for an end to racism in the church had no idea who he was or why he was among them. He may have been seen, but he most certainly was not heard.

In this rich hour, it is time to be silent and listen. There are people among us yearning to be heard. The challenge will be to listen without commenting, arguing, or adding our own spin. This might be called prophetic listening, and it is needed now more than ever.

Duane Grady
Goshen, Ind.

Let's not go back to normal

Everyone keeps asking about when they think things will get back to normal. I hope that they never do, if getting back to normal means going back to the status quo. "Normal" means:

- Black lives don't matter.
- It's not okay to be queer, transgender, or gender neutral. Only binary sexuality matters.
- The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
- The environment is expendable to prosper economically, and climate change doesn't exist.
- Success is the same as being prof-

itable or economically productive.

- The US dominates the world through military might. Might makes right and only violence and dominative power can win.
- Human rights don't matter.
- Not everyone can have adequate health care.
- It's okay to build walls, separate families at the border, and cage up young children.
- The ends justify the means.

COVID-19 has reminded us that ultimately, we are not in control of our life and our fate. We need to redefine how we are to be together on this beautiful blue orb. There are many individuals and groups who, over the years, have worked tirelessly to give a different vision of what the future of the Earth holds. These are the folks that I cast my lot with.

The world that we inherited and molded and created into its recent past is not the world I want to go back to. Instead, I look forward to a future that is more loving, just, peaceful, environmentally friendly, and human friendly. This is the vision of a Beloved Community that Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of.

What do you want our legacy to be?

Paul Brun Del Re
East Lansing, Mich.

CLASSIFIEDS

The Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, Pennsylvania, is seeking a full time Executive Director who supports our mission of "educating, inspiring and witnessing to the church and community by collecting, preserving and sharing the Anabaptist/Mennonite story." This leadership position will include responsibility for fundraising, budget oversight, expanding community relationships, supporting and articulating Anabaptist history, and staff supervision. To learn more about our organization, see www.mhep.org. Annual compensation of \$55,000 to \$65,000 plus competitive benefits will be offered considering experience and education. Please send resume, including phone number, to edsearch@mhep.org. Interviews will begin August 2020. Start date planned for early fourth quarter of 2020.

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

Burger, Dick, 100, Moravia, Iowa, July 26
Cronk, Ed, 102, Adamstown, Md., May 20
Warner, Vivian, 100, Frederick, Md., Jan. 20

New members

Bear Creek, Accident, Md.: Dorcas Suit
Codorus, Dallastown, Pa.: Roger Coleman, Anna Hartman, Megan Hartman, Terry Jamison
Frederick, Md.: William Anspach, Calvin Bowman, Kevin Bowman, Kim Carson, Dorothy DePalma, Tina Delauter, Caroline Jones, Greg Jones, David Jupin, Judy Jupin, Joscelyn Todd, Wisdom Torsoo, Leika Uzcategui, Jeremiah Wilkes
Gortner Union, Oakland, Md.: Destin Moon
Maple Grove, Ashland, Ohio: Maryellen Bliss

Wedding anniversaries

Bennet, Roger and Betty, Middletown, Md., 55
Blalock, Jim and Polly, Hagerstown, Md., 76
Bradley, Larry and Dorothy, Delroy, Ohio, 60
Despeaux, Ed and Joan, Thurmont, Md., 65
Earp, Virgil and Glenda, Thurmont, Md., 50
Enders, Jay and Nancy, Lancaster, Pa., 50
Fogle, Kenny and Betty, Frederick, Md., 60
Gibble, Marvin and Nancy, Seven Valleys, Pa., 60
Godfrey, Mahlon and Mary Jane, York, Pa., 65
Hallock, Ted and Mary

Edith, Frederick, Md., 60
Hartman, Kenneth and Barbara, Dallastown, Pa., 65
Heckman, Galen and Maralyn, Cerro Gordo, Ill., 60
Hengst, Howard and Elva, York, Pa., 72
Huffer, Wayne and Barbara, Jefferson, Md., 50
Keener, Harold and Nancy, Ashland, Ohio, 55
Latham, Tom and Kay, Homeworth, Ohio, 60
Martin, William and Elizabeth, Lititz, Pa., 55
Mercer, Eddie and Belva, Frederick, Md., 60
Nelson, Kent and Joan, Peoria, Ill., 50
Parker, Creed and Vonnice, Frederick, Md., 60
Powell, James and Kay, Akron, Ohio, 55
Shade, Junior and Carolyn, Martinsburg, W.Va., 50
Shallenberger, Clyde and Helen, Cockeysville, Md., 70
Sweitzer, Wayne and Sharon, Jacobus, Pa., 50
Wenger, Clyde and Shirley, Lancaster, Pa., 65
Williams, Leiw and Flora, Lafayette, Ind., 60
Wright, Ronnie and Debbie, Fort Mill, S.C., 50

Deaths

Baker, Mary Jean (Tootie) Lantz, 83, Feagaville, Md., Feb. 25
Benner, Clyde Samuel, Sr., 82, Ashland, Ohio, July 2
Bettler, Mary I. Farris, 95, Delaware, Ohio, July 8
Bloss, William Harry, 91, Uniontown, Ohio, June 9
Brashears, John Frank, 76, Frederick, Md., March 2
Bridge, Elizabeth Talcott,

Clarksburg, Md., Sept. 12, 2019
Bussard, Viola Grace Long, 93, Frederick, Md., June 2
Chapman, Olivia Anne Orndoff, 83, Inwood, W.Va., April 2
Cline, David Earl, 69, Frederick, Md., March 2
Coffman, Marilyn Elizabeth, 83, South English, Iowa, Nov. 7
Crance, Phyllis Ann Matheny, 92, Frederick, Md., Dec. 2
Crenshauc, Shahara F., 50, Chicago, Ill., June 20
Crosson, Vaughn E. (Pete), 75, McVeytown, Pa., April 17
Dagen, Nancy A., 86, Lititz, Pa., May 28
Dewese, Andrew R., 56, Frederick, Md., Dec. 8
Diller, Ray Horst, 96, Chambersburg, Pa., June 25
Dotterer, Naomi Estella Grossnickle, 91, Union Bridge, Md., July 4
Dye, Michael Alan, 55, Louisville, Kan., March 27, 2019
Erbaugh, David Roy, 71, Union, Ohio, June 22
Esworthy, Nina Mae Hughes, 92, Mount Airy, Md., Feb. 9
Farmer, Rebecca Ann, 76, Mount Airy, Md., June 8
Frantz, Evelyn Mildred, 93, Palmyra, Pa., June 2
Freeland, John Richard, Sr., 87, Frederick, Md., July 10
Garman, Mary B. Johnson Yunge, 99, Frederick, Md., Sept. 17, 2019
Gaver, Paul Eugene, 95, Frederick, Md., Dec. 4
Groff, Eleanor M. Shaffer, York, Pa., Feb. 14
Grove, June Rosalee, 94, South English, Iowa, Nov. 28
Hallock, Edward Norton (Ted), 84, Frederick, Md., June 15
Hayes, Mary Margaret, 89, Kinross, Iowa, May 25, 2019
Hipskind, Gene F., 78, Boise, Idaho, July 11

Innerst, Orpha J. Lehman, 87, Red Lion, Pa., May 13
Johnson, Elma M. Rice, 87, Mount Airy, Md., May 19
Jones, Perry Buren, 82, Forest City, N.C., May 13
Keeney, Mark, 93, Boulder, Colo., April 12
Keeney, Ruth E. Frantz, 86, Rehersburg, Pa., June 16
Kidwell, John A., 93, Bridgewater, Va., July 16
Koch, Evelyn Tzoumas, 68, Frederick, Md., Jan. 24
Lehman, Donald Lee, 86, Johnstown, Pa., June 29
Lewis, Marie, 84, Harper, Iowa, Sept. 19, 2019
Litton, Janet, 85, Hagerstown, Md., June 25
Lydard, Vicki Lynn, 65, Frederick, Md., Nov. 3
Macy, Lula Mae, 87, Glendora, Calif., May 14
Mahaney, Betty Jane Huntberry, 89, Fairplay, Md., June 22
Martin, Priscilla A., 85, Ephrata, Pa., June 17
Moats, Stephen, 53, Myerstown, Pa., May 28
Myer, Anna Mary, 97, Myerstown, Pa., May 11
Myers, C. Arthur, 89, San Diego, Calif., June 9
Pezzanite, Joseph Lloyd, 58, Keyser, W.Va., May 29
Powell, W. Ellis, 90, Rockford, Ill., March 18
Rehmeyer, Carroll G., 97, Shrewsbury, Pa., Dec. 24
Reiste, Richard H., 91, Minburn, Iowa, May 30
Rhudy, Charles Curtis, 79, Jonesborough, Tenn., June 6
Rose, Belva Myrtle Irene Springett, 98, Frederick, Md., April 13
Rusbult, Phyllis N. Armstrong Buettner, 95, Jefferson City, Mo., Nov. 17
Sass, Susan Marie, 74, South English, Iowa, June 2, 2019
Saylor, Erma Grossnickle, 90, Frederick, Md., Aug. 14, 2019
Seiler, Gerald H., 86, Bethel, Pa., April 20

Shaffer, Ella Louise (Eloise) Troupe, 94, Williamsport, Md., June 21
Sheaffer, Patricia Joan Kopache, 85, Hartville, Ohio, July 16
Showalter, Donald Ray, 76, Harrisonburg, Va., June 4
Stupp, Adele M. Keeney, 76, Bethel, Pa., May 24
Tichnell, Bobby Dale, 87, Frederick, Md., Sept. 6, 2019
Tolson, Beverly Fugitt, 82, Hartville, Ohio, April 1
Warrenfeltz, Mary Jane Ramsburg, 82, Middletown, Md., Nov. 27
Warrenfeltz-Rentfrow, Sylvia Annette, 72, Waynesboro, Pa., July 16
Wastler, Elizabeth (Tissy), 90, Frederick, Md., March 12
Wilson, Jon Henry, 72, Smithsburg, Md., Feb. 3
Wollard, Brenda, 63, Martinsburg, W.Va., Jan. 4
Young, Fred Warren, Jr., 85, Frederick, Md., July 10

Ordained

Kraenbring, Naomi, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Elizabethtown, Pa.), March 8

Licensed

Covell, Robin, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Thurmont, Md.), June 3

Placements

Benedict, James, interim pastor, Brownsville, Knoxville, Md., May 1
Garvey, Mary, interim pastor, Stonerstown, Saxton, Pa., June 14
Loose, Vaughn, from pastor, Mansfield, Ohio, to interim pastor, Dunnings Creek, New Paris, Pa., June 14
Ritchie, Amy, from team pastor, Beacon Heights, Fort Wayne, Ind., to associate pastor, Manchester, North Manchester, Ind., July 1
Woodard, Emma Jean, interim pastor, Bethany, Boones Mill, Va., July 15

Resilience

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Here are some of the headlines the second weekend in August:

“COVID-19 threatens to overwhelm the developing world”

“US reaches 5 million COVID-19 infections, by far the highest in world”

“As millions cry for justice, Breonna Taylor’s sister faces her own quiet grief”

“Stress from the pandemic can destroy relationships with friends—even families”

“Coronavirus relief talks collapse on Capitol Hill”

“Hispanic, Black children at higher risk of coronavirus-related hospitalization”

“Why climate change is about to make your bad commute worse”

A line from this last article caught my eye: “America’s transportation system is not set up to recover and regain functionality after a major disruption or disasters,” said Paula Pagniez, director of the Climate and Resilience Hub.

We yearn for resilience when our lives are falling apart. The concept is so popular that it is drifting into cliché status. It refers to psychological and emotional capacity for protecting and maintaining the self through traumatic experiences, but often is thought of as the ability to bounce back after adversity.

COVID-19 is revealing and exacerbating our lack of resilience.

Our economy is so fragile it can’t survive pandemic shut-downs, leading to runaway unemployment, widespread loss of small businesses, and devastation of large industries. Those paid the least are lauded as “essential” but may lack PPE and effective coronavirus protections at their workplaces.

The elderly and disabled who rely on nursing care, and indigenous, Black, and Hispanic communities are succumbing to the virus and dying at high rates. New holes are appearing in an already inadequate health care system. The government is unable to address the pandemic without politicizing it, and has ended up in helpless gridlock.

America has rallied in massive protests of continued police violence against the Black community, protests that have been mostly peaceful, yet federal forces have responded with brutal attacks. There has been a run on gun stores,

where purchases have broken records, and some of our largest cities have seen drastic increases in shootings.


It is becoming clear that women will pay the most for the pandemic conditions in the long term because the lack of safe childcare will have negative effects on their earning power for years to come. The fight over online versus in-person education is causing huge stress for parents and educators, and no one yet knows what the disruption will mean for a whole generation of children.

The pandemic has revealed a lack of resilience in the church too. The Church of the Brethren is struggling with how to worship, maintain budgets, and pay pastors and staff—on all levels from congregation to district to denomination—while we grieve canceled events that we have relied on for spiritual nourishment.

I believe we must redefine resilience. Earlier this year, I saw a redefinition in the celebration of June 19 as Emancipation Day. Juneteenth.com insists that any commemoration of the end of slavery must celebrate education and achievement along with freedom. “It is a time for assessment, self-improvement, and for planning the future. . . . People of all races, nationalities, and religions are joining hands to truthfully acknowledge a period in our history that shaped and continues to influence our society today. Sensitized to the conditions and experiences of others, only then can we make significant and lasting improvements in our society.”

This is an expansive and intentional resilience. It makes a realistic assessment of trauma and its lasting effects, it actively works for improvement, and it plans—not just hopes—to deal rightly with injustice, violence, inequity, and “business as usual” attitudes.

I sympathize with those who just want to get back to normal. But our “normal” isn’t good enough. And there are solutions for each of our ills. A resilient people seeks out solutions, and a resilient church helps carry them out, for a better future.

“Then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. . . . You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in” (Isaiah 58:10b and 12b). 

A RESILIENT PEOPLE SEEKS OUT SOLUTIONS, AND A RESILIENT CHURCH HELPS CARRY THEM OUT, FOR A BETTER FUTURE.

Your gifts do great things!

A planned gift to the Church of the Brethren helps sustain our missions and ministries into the future.

One planned giving strategy to consider is a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)**. It is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian to a qualified charity.



Photo by Coombesy

In addition to supporting a charity, a QCD is unlike regular withdrawals from an IRA because it excludes the amount donated from taxable income and can reduce the impact to certain tax credits and deductions, including Social Security and Medicare. QCDs can also be counted toward your Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) for the year if:

- Your age is 70 ½ or older,
- the amount of the QCD does not exceed what would be taxed as ordinary income, which excludes non-deductible contributions,
- the sum of all annual QCDs does not exceed \$100,000, AND
- the RMD deadline for the current year is met (generally December 31).

If a Qualified Charitable Distribution sounds like a favorable move for you, we invite you to prayerfully consider the Church of the Brethren as one of your charitable organizations of choice.



Church of the Brethren

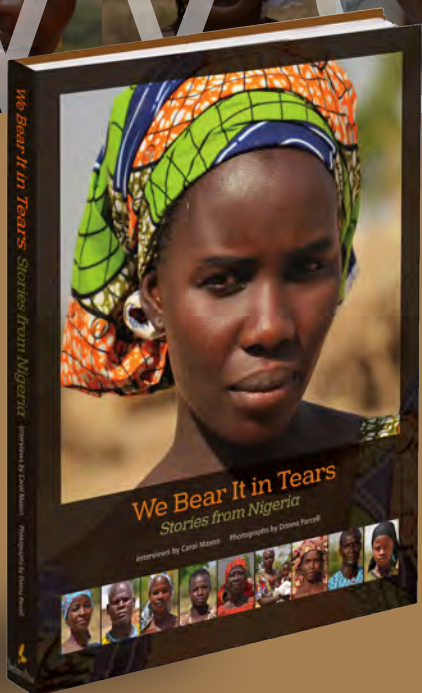
Office of Mission Advancement
MA@brethren.org
1-800-323-8039 ext. 370

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When Boko Haram attacked
We Bear It in Tears: Stories from Nigeria



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