

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Church of the Brethren

# Let love flow

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# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

January/February 2021 Vol.170 No. 1 [Brethren.org/messenger](http://Brethren.org/messenger)

Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
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## 6 Opioid addiction by Jim Benedict

## 10 I wish you pain by Morgan Dickason

## 11 Speaking truth to power by Anna Lisa Gross, Dawn M. Blackman Sr., Leah J. Hileman, Eric Bishop, Audri Svay, and Mary Scott-Boria

## 22 Edge encounters by Randall Westfall

## 27 Why Christians should welcome face masks by Isaac Wilhelm

## departments

- 2 FROM THE PUBLISHER
- 3 THE EXCHANGE
- 4 IN TOUCH
- 16 MEDIA REVIEW
- 19 REFLECTIONS
- 20 BIBLE STUDY
- 25 NEWSLINE DIGEST
- 28 LETTERS
- 31 TURNING POINTS
- 32 POTLUCK

## on the cover

Ice covers red berries on a beautiful stand of hawthorn trees at the Church of the Brethren General Offices after an ice storm hit Elgin, Ill., a few winters ago. Photo by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

# Time

**T**he sense of time as a chronological line is one of the casualties of the pandemic. The weeks loop endlessly, and we have to check the calendar to see what day it is. Some stretches of time drag on forever, and others speed away. The arrival of a vaccine is both impossibly slow and blazingly fast.

In other ways, time has seemed to fold in on itself. Life is so strange right now that we can't help but look ahead and imagine what future historians will write about us. In fact, we spend a lot of time looking longingly at the future. We also look back. We examine the 1918 flu pandemic and wonder what we have learned in a hundred years. We study the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s to see whether we have progressed.

Some days feel like an endless repeat of the day before, but paradoxically the world is also changing rapidly. Names fall from favor and immutable institutions lose their power. Did they collapse suddenly, without warning, or slowly and inexorably, like glaciers calving in a warming sea?



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

*Chronos* is one kind of time, the linear, quantitative kind. But the disruption of the pandemic has forced us into *kairos*—a time of opportunity, of action, of decision. The pandemic has caused grief and hardship; the upheaval has also rearranged time and given us a different lens.

Jesus spoke of *kairos*, asking the crowd, “but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (Luke 12:56). In this rather apocalyptic passage, he wasn't speaking of the hour of the day or the day of the week. He was speaking of a divine season, a different sense of time that was breaking

into the everyday world of his listeners.

As we peer into 2021, what can we expect? Perhaps a refining fire, as Jesus describes a few verses earlier. Perhaps a turning upside down of the power structures of the world, as Mary sang a few chapters before. Martin Luther King Jr. warned that those in power, who live by “a mythical concept of time,” should not “set the timetable” for another person's freedom. If we seek to interpret the present time, we will need to lay aside our clocks and calendars and watch for the *kairos* moment.

*Wendy McFadden*

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### Subscription rates:

\$17.50 individual rate  
- \$32 for 2 years  
\$14.50 gift rate  
\$14.50 church club rate  
- \$27 for 2 years  
\$ 1.25 student (per month)

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MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright © January 2021, Church of the Brethren.

MESSENGER (ISSN 0026-0355) is published 10 times a year by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren. Periodicals postage paid at Elgin, Ill., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120-1694.



Printed on recycled paper  
(20% post consumer)





**“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”**

—Mahatma Gandhi

## Service with a smile

**F**eb. 7 is **Service Sunday** in the Church of the Brethren, a day for particular attention to Brethren Volunteer Service, Brethren Disaster Ministries, and other ways that we serve our neighbors. Resources are available on [brethren.org/bvs](http://brethren.org/bvs).

**1948** Year in which Brethren Volunteer Service began

**7,000+** Number of people who have served through BVS

**327** Number of orientation units that have been held through 2020 (Unit 328 will gather virtually Jan. 31–Feb. 12)

**56** Total number of active BVS projects as of December 2020

**23** Number of BVS volunteers serving as of December 2020

**20** Number of states that are home to BVS projects

**11** Number of countries with currently active BVS projects (spanning five continents)

**“The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But . . . the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”**

— *Martin Luther King Jr.*

**“Life is for service.”**

— *Fred Rogers, in Life’s Journeys According to Mister Rogers: Things to Remember Along the Way*

**“Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.”**

— *Booker T. Washington, in Up from Slavery*

**“I cannot do all the good that the world needs. But the world needs all the good that I can do.”**

— *speaker/musician Jana Stanfield*

### LEADING UP TO LENT

**T**he season of **Lent** begins with **Ash Wednesday**, which falls on Feb. 17 this year. The six and a half weeks that follow are a time of reflection, introspection, prayer, and repentance as the church journeys through Palm Sunday and on to Easter. Many Church of the Brethren congregations observe love feast during Holy Week.

### IN SEARCH OF HOPE

**A recent article by Religion News Service** (RNS) reported that BibleGateway.com saw a surge in searches for scripture texts related to racial justice, politics, the apocalypse, and pandemics in the past year. Some of the frequent search terms included “racism,” “justice,” “equality,” “oppression,” “disease,” “plague,” and “praying for government.” The site said that its most-searched terms, however—“love” and “peace”—remained unchanged at No. 1 and No. 2 in 2020, but “hope” moved up the list to No. 3. “You could say people are looking for hope more this year than they have in the previous couple years,” Bible Gateway content manager Jonathan Peterson told RNS.

# Thanksgiving with 'Flat Mack'

**U**nable to have a traditional indoor Thanksgiving worship service and carry-in meal because of the pandemic, the church leadership team at West Charleston Church of the Brethren in Tipp City, Ohio, engaged in a session of creative thinking in which "Flat Mack" was born.

It's a spin on the children's book series by Jeff Brown about the adventures of Flat Stanley. Julia Lutz used Mod Podge to mount pictures of Church of the Brethren founder

Alexander Mack onto foam board, creating Flat Mack. Nov. 1 was the date for the kick-off of Flat Mack's congregational visits, focused on illustrating

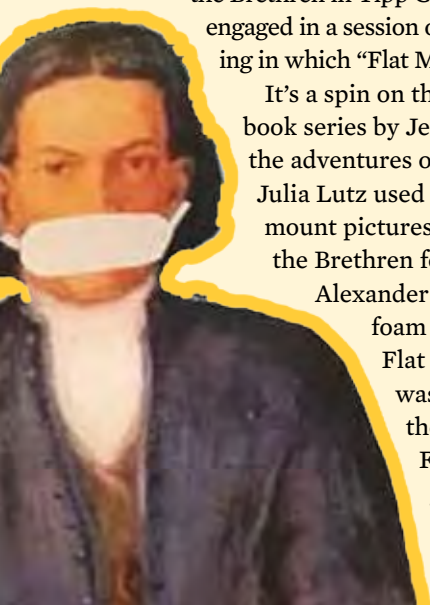
what members thanked God for. A drive-through "grab and go" meal of turkey bratwurst and fixings was prepared and served to members at the front doors of the church, where they met Flat Mack for the first time.

Flat Mack then made his way among the members of the congregation. Photos of his visits and all the things members were thankful for were posted on the church's Facebook page. In Zoom worship services, Sonia Ewald introduced children to the story of Alexander Mack, sharing from *Alexander Mack: A Man who Rippled the Waters* by Myrna Grove. During one service, Don Buccholtz shared about his visit to Germantown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, the first Brethren congregation in the Americas, and Wissahickon Creek, site of the first Brethren baptisms in the Americas.

On Nov. 22, Alexander Mack himself



in the person of A. Mack (aka Larry Glick) made a surprise visit to the Zoom service. —Irvin Heishman



## Sweetening Eel River

**J**erry Sweeten's work to protect and preserve Eel River was the subject of an Associated Press story published by news outlets in late November, including *U.S. News and World Report*. Sweeten has taught biology and environmental studies at Manchester University in North Manchester, Ind.

"Over the last eight years, the Eel River in northern Miami County has undergone a stunning transformation," the story said. "Four low-head dams have been removed, making the river safer than ever before for paddlers. Fish and other aquatic animals are thriving that haven't lived in the stream in decades. The water quality has vastly improved, thanks to efforts to curb the amount of nutrient runoff from farm fields. And behind all those changes is Jerry

Sweeten, a 67-year-old stream ecologist who has partnered with universities, government agencies, and nonprofit groups to improve the river he's come to love."

His work for a healthy river began when Sweeten started as a professor at Manchester and needed hands-on field work opportunities for students. The river runs right beside the campus.

"A textbook only provides very limited information," Sweeten said in the AP story. "To train a biologist, you need applied experience and understanding on how research works. This provided a great laboratory for us. It was right here in our backyard."

In 2016, the Fish and Wildlife Service named the 100-mile long river as one of the top improved watersheds in the country. But Sweeten's work continues. His current effort is to remove the low-head dam in Logansport.



Courtesy of Manchester University

## Bridgewater College cuts majors in multiple areas

The board of trustees at Bridgewater (Va.) College voted in November to accept nearly all of the college administration's recommendations for a Strategic Resource Allocation Plan. This restructuring includes phasing out low-enrollment majors in Philosophy and Religion, Applied Chemistry, French, Mathematics, Nutritional Science, and Physics, as well as the restructuring of the college's equestrian program.

"The changes are being made to better align the college's curriculum with student needs and interests," said a statement from Abbie Parkhurst, associate vice president for Marketing and Communications. "It is important to understand that elimination of a major does not mean a discipline is being discontinued. The elimination of a major in mathematics, for example, does not mean math courses, including high-level courses, will not continue to be offered as electives, as part of Bridgewater's core curriculum, or as

minors. They will. It simply means the credential of a major in math will no longer be offered, although more in-demand majors in applied math disciplines are likely to be developed and introduced.

"The changes will not affect the timeless parts of the college," the statement continued. "The college remains committed to the liberal arts and will continue to offer a full, robust curriculum that provides all the disciplines traditional to the liberal arts. We will continue to prepare our students both for professional success and for personal fulfillment, instilling in them the habits of mind required for engaged citizenship and purposeful, meaningful lives."

## New Racial Equity Alliance includes McPherson College

McPherson (Kan.) College is among 51 inaugural member institutions of the Liberal Arts Colleges Racial Equity Leadership Alliance recently announced by the University of Southern California

Race and Equity Center.

The college has participated in the center's Campus Climate Survey since 2019. As a member of the new alliance, it can participate in eConvenings, professional development on racial equity, and an online repository of resources and tools to which every employee will have access. Additional benefits include workplace climate surveys and student surveys and quarterly meetings of the presidents of member colleges.

## Northern Plains sends gifts to ministers and churches

The Northern Plains District Board sent Brethren Press gift certificates to all its ministers and churches before Christmas. The district board used special funds to give a \$25 certificate to each minister and TRIM student in the district, and a \$50 certificate to each of the district's congregations, fellowships, and church projects.

The gifts were "a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is straining the financial resources of Brethren Press and putting extra demands on churches and ministers," said the district newsletter. "Northern Plains District recognizes that we are all in this together—ministers, churches, Brethren Press, district."

The district sent the certificates "with encouragement in these challenging times and with gratitude for our partnership in the gospel ministry."



**Johnsontown Church of the Brethren youth and their advisors had not been able to meet during this pandemic. However, they did get together to create this visual art work on the church fence for everyone to see and enjoy," reported Sharron Burkhart in an email newsletter from Mid-Atlantic District. The church is in Hedgesville, W.Va.**



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](mailto:messenger@brethren.org).



# Opioids

## America's addiction crisis *and how congregations can respond*

by Jim Benedict

**I**t started out as an ordinary day. Mrs. M. was seated at the breakfast table when she realized her son should be up and getting ready for work. John had had some struggles with drugs in the past, but he had returned from his most recent stint in rehab with a new attitude. He was holding down a job and looking forward to hunting season later that year.

Mrs. M. went to John's bedroom door, knocked, and called his name. There was no response. She pushed the door open and saw John lying on top of his bed, looking peaceful. But when she tried to rouse him, she could tell something was seriously wrong. When paramedics arrived, they confirmed her worst fears: John had died of an overdose.

On an average day in the United States, a scene similar to this plays out

approximately 125 times, while 1,000 more opioid overdoses requiring emergency medical treatment take place with the victim surviving. Annual deaths have numbered more

than 50,000 for the past five years in a row, and more than 750,000 overdose deaths have taken place since 1999. Opioid misuse is a major public health crisis affecting millions.

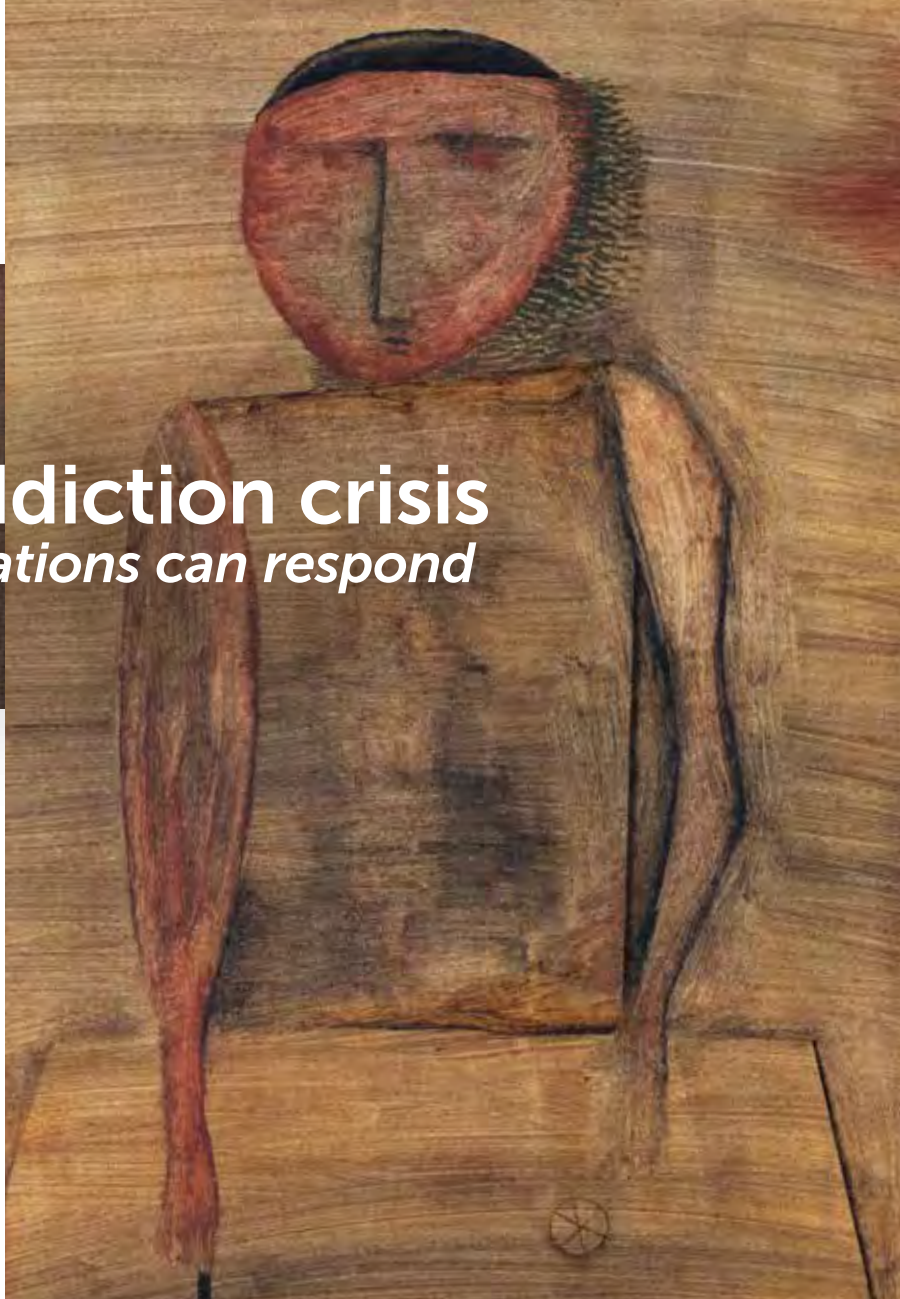
Opioids are a valuable tool in health care for the relief of acute pain. Used carefully and for a limited time under medical supervision, they pose little threat and offer real benefits. Millions of Americans are treated with opioids every year, especially for post-surgical pain. Only a small percentage go on to misuse the drug or to develop an opioid use disorder.

Unfortunately, when you start with many millions of people being exposed to the drug, even small percentages turn into very big numbers. It is esti-

### Road to recovery

**In medication-assisted treatment (MAT)**, methadone or buprenorphine are used to wean individuals off opioids so that they do not go through physical withdrawal.

Ninety percent of people who try an abstinence-only approach relapse within 12 months. With MAT, accompanied by counseling and other social support, 60 percent of people will not have relapsed even after 42 months. There is resistance to MAT because the medications used contain opioids. However, the formulations are much less dangerous, especially when used under medical supervision.



Doctor by Paul Klee, 1930. German expressionist painter.



mated that more than 10 million people misuse prescription opioids each year, while 2 million currently suffer from an actual opioid use disorder (addiction).

The origin of the current crisis, which began shortly before the turn of the 21st century, is complex. In 1980, a short letter in the *New England Journal of Medicine* described a small study in which opioid medication administered to patients by healthcare workers for a short time in a hospital setting did not appear to result in addiction. Over the following years, the letter was referenced many times by people eager to encourage greater use of opioids, including manufacturers. However, most references left out the details regarding short-term use in a hospital setting and simply claimed that the opioids carried little risk of addiction. This turned out to be false, of course.

In the 1990s, major healthcare organizations—including the World Health Organization—were calling attention to the inadequate treatment of pain. Opioid medications seemed to be a simple and relatively safe remedy to the problem. They were also less expensive than other means of dealing with pain, so insurance companies and other payers in the healthcare system gladly jumped on board.

As public health officials and others became aware of the growing problems,

## Manufacturers and distributors

Lawsuits, criminal proceedings, and congressional hearings spotlight the unethical business practices and criminal conduct of manufacturers and distributors in the opioid crisis. On Nov. 24, Purdue Pharma, maker of OxyContin, pled guilty to criminal charges including conspiring to defraud officials and paying kickbacks to doctors and a healthcare records company in order to boost prescriptions.

Purdue made more than \$30 billion from OxyContin. It may pay several billion as part of impending bankruptcy. Close to \$2 billion will go to the thousands of communities that have sued Purdue. On Dec. 17, members of the billionaire Sackler family that owns Purdue Pharma were brought up before a House committee trying to find out more about their role. The family already paid \$225 million for allegedly making false claims to government healthcare programs. —Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

efforts were made to limit the prescribing of opioids. Progress has been made in that area, but only slowly. Many of those who can no longer access prescription drugs have turned to street drugs like heroin and fentanyl, which are now the leading causes of overdoses and deaths.

As we have learned more about the causes of the crisis, we have also learned more about what works in combatting it. Experts point out that a two-pronged approach is needed: On one hand, we need to find ways to prevent people from developing an opioid use disorder in the first place. On the other hand, we need to help those who already have a

use disorder find a way to break free. Congregations and individuals can play a valuable role in both efforts.

Prevention starts with understanding. Learning about opioids, how they affect the brain, how people typically first start to misuse them, and what characteristics make people most vulnerable to the development of a use disorder is the first step. Pastors, deacons, and outreach committees can get educated about opioids and sponsor learning opportunities for their congregations and communities. Most county health departments have people ready to come and make presentations.

Among the factors that make certain

## Resources and ideas for congregations

**M**ore than half of pastors in a November survey (lifewayresearch.com) reported that someone in their congregation was struggling with opioids.

Some ways that congregations and individuals can respond to the opioid crisis:

- Sponsor a drug take-back day, where people in the congregation and surrounding community are invited to bring leftover prescription medication to a secure drop box at the church for safe disposal. Work with your county health agency or local police to set this up.
- Provide space for support groups, especially those associ-

ated with medication-assisted treatment (MAT) programs.

- Take advantage of resources designed for churches by the Department of Health and Human Services, including the “Opioid Epidemic Practical Toolkit: Helping Faith and Community Leaders Bring Hope and Healing to Our Communities” ([www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/iea/partnerships/opioid-toolkit](http://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/iea/partnerships/opioid-toolkit)).

- Participate in a Rural Faith Leaders Workshop, designed for pastors in rural settings. The next workshops are tentatively scheduled in February, March, and April 2021 ([www.ruralcommunitytoolbox.org/starting-points/rural-faith-leaders](http://www.ruralcommunitytoolbox.org/starting-points/rural-faith-leaders)).



**RELAPSE OFTEN OCCURS WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL FEELS OVERWHELMED AND UNABLE TO SEE ANY WAY BACK TO A 'NORMAL' LIFE. CONGREGATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS CAN HELP THE PERSON SEE A PATH FORWARD.**

people more susceptible are past physical or emotional trauma, a lack of significant positive personal relationships, and early experimentation with opioids. Congregations can target those at risk by promoting outreach to people in the community who may fall into these categories. Things the church may already

be doing, like youth groups, recreation opportunities, or young adult programs, can be preventive. Providing people with alternative ways to find pleasure and meaning in life decreases the likelihood that they will turn to drugs.

When it comes to helping those who have already developed an opioid use

disorder, the assistance of addiction specialists and healthcare professionals is usually required. Even so, many people struggling with substance use disorders turn first to a trusted friend or clergyperson. Knowing where to send someone for help and what kinds of help work best is critical. While the

# The personal side of addiction

by Bonnie and Ken Kline Smeltzer

**I**f we're honest with ourselves, most families are dealing with some kind of addiction, whether it's the more acceptable addiction to work or the stigmatized addictions to food, alcohol, and drugs. Drug addiction conjures up images of dark, back alleys with emaciated figures shooting up with syringes. We don't think of beautiful young women like our daughter, Liz, who had a part-time job while attending college. Her addiction unraveled before us with a phone call from the police saying Liz was on her way to the hospital to be treated for an overdose of heroin.

We had no idea that Liz had moved beyond weekend partying with alcohol and marijuana to using opioids. This overdose was a wake-up call for Liz and for us. Fully aware of the stigma attached to the use of heroin, she was embarrassed and ashamed. Unaware of Liz using heroin, we were in shock! Our concerns and questions were endless: She could have died. When did she start using heroin? What do we do now? Is she willing to get help? Are we? Where do we get the help we need?


Fortunately, that night in the emergency room Liz told us she needed help. While we were greatly relieved, little did we know that was only the beginning of a long and heart-breaking journey for our family. In short, Liz spent 30 days in a private drug rehabilitation center, came home and continued in an outpatient program, relapsed and put herself on suboxone (an opiate blocker), later weaned herself off, seemed to be on the road to recovery, returned to school and work, and three months later died from a second overdose.

This sequence of events outlines an emotional rollercoaster

for our family. Liz kept her addiction a secret from most of her friends. The stigma was too much for her to bear. She could only be open about her drug use with a very few people who were fellow users. Most of her friends were totally surprised about her addiction. To them, Liz was that wonderful friend with a big, caring heart. Sure, she partied like most of them, but they never suspected she was an addict. Liz kept that secret well.

And so did we. Our family, a select few friends, and some members of the churches we served knew what we were going through. It was hard to be totally open with the one where Liz attended, especially, because it was Liz's story to share, and because we wanted Liz to feel comfortable going there.

In hindsight, it might have been better for us to be more candid about our journey with addiction at the time, and more involved with Liz's daily life. She was just shy of her 22nd birthday when she died, and clearly was asserting her independence from us. As her parents we were navigating a delicate balancing act of how much to be in "her business," as Liz referred to her life.

Opioid addiction is a very difficult disease to cope with. As we so tragically learned, one never succeeds in completely shaking it, but must remain vigilant for life. Since her death, over what we know would have been Liz's objection, we have shared our story in hope that it might be helpful to others who are on the endless journey of recovery from drug addiction. 


Bonnie Kline Smeltzer is pastor of University Baptist and Brethren Church in State College, Pa. Ken Kline Smeltzer is a retired pastor who coordinates the annual Church of the Brethren Song and Story Fest and runs his own handyman business.



vast majority of opioid treatment programs in the United States are based on abstinence only, research has demonstrated that medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is far superior.

The role for congregations and individuals in helping people overcome an opioid use disorder extends beyond knowing where to send people for help, however. It is also critical that people feel supported and cared for. Meaningful relationships give people the strength to do a difficult thing. Congregations and individuals can provide practical support through programs that lead to jobs and provide housing, food, and childcare. Relapse often occurs when an individual feels overwhelmed and unable to see any way back to a “normal” life. Congregations and individuals can help the person see a path forward.

Another important response is to support the person’s friends and families. Because of the stigma, friends and family members may be reluctant to share their own struggles. Acknowledging the issue in prayer, in sermons, and in Christian education settings sends the signal that it is okay to talk about opioids in church. Friends and family members should receive special attention from pastors, deacons, and other spiritual caregivers.

The opioid crisis should have a special resonance for people who see themselves as called to “continue the work of Jesus.” Like the sinners and tax collectors to whom Jesus directed his ministry, people struggling with an opioid use disorder are often seen as having brought their troubles on themselves through bad choices. Nonetheless, Jesus called for an attitude of compassion rather than judgment. As a healer and redeemer, Jesus prioritized helping people over punishing them. So should we. 

Jim Benedict is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and a scholar in residence at the Center for Healthcare Ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Last fall, he led a denominational webinar on “Responding to the Opioid Crisis.” He is a Bethany Theological Seminary graduate and holds a Ph.D. in Health Care Ethics from Duquesne.

# What the opioid crisis reveals about all of us

by Wendy McFadden


**F**or most of my growing up, my family had to deal with a family member who was addicted to drugs. There was stealing, lying, incarceration, and a succession of wrecked relationships. This caused deep pain for my parents, but nobody at church knew; the church was the last place they wanted to take their shame and confusion.

That was not the fault of their church, but it’s an indication of how drug abuse was regarded—and still is—as moral failure, as something to be judged and punished. As the disciples once asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?”

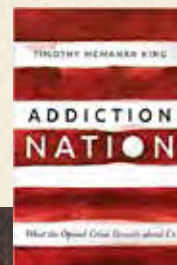
In *Addiction Nation* (Herald Press), Timothy McMahan King explains how disastrous this approach has been for our country. While he begins with the story of his inadvertent addiction to opioids because of a botched medical procedure, the book is much more than a memoir. It’s “an exploration of what this crisis says about us, all of us.”

King delves into the history of opiates, the way the body works, the nature of pain, public policy, criminal justice, racial differences, corporate greed, and a national increase in “deaths of despair.” His lens is biblical and theological, as well as societal. This list could sound overwhelming, but his lucid writing makes the connections clear, understandable, and compelling.

“I believe the opioid crisis is not an aberrant tragedy or an unexplainable phenomenon,” he writes, “but rather a reflection of ourselves, our culture, our history, our politics, our economy, our materialism. It is about the failures of religion and of an anemic spirituality that we have not wanted to face.”

While King leads us into looking critically at these systems, his style is invitational rather than strident; he leads as experienced guide showing us the way. By the time he reaches the concluding chapter on “Resurrection,” he has brought us to a new understanding of humility, grace, and hope. 

*Addiction Nation: What the Opioid Crisis Reveals About Us* is available at [Brethrenpress.com](http://Brethrenpress.com).





Angel in the Making by Paul Klee, 1934, German expressionist painter.

# I wish you pain

by Morgan Dickason

I've come to the realization that I wish you pain. Not exclusively, but undoubtedly.

I wish you the kind of pain that makes you think twice before being the one to inflict it.

I wish you just enough pain to understand and practice empathy. Without the pain I have endured, I wouldn't understand the victory that comes when suffering ends, and I would not understand the value of each painless moment. I wish you that kind of life, over the kind of life that does not know its value.

I wish you the pain that teaches Mercy.

I wish you the pain that teaches Love.


I wish you the pain that teaches Empathy.

I wish you the pain that teaches Endurance.

I wish you the pain that teaches Hope.

I fear for who I would've become without my illnesses, accidents, and so on. Such lessons are also the reason I am unwilling to inflict this pain, and I am satisfied to be myself while this is true.

Many people have mistaken my pride and confidence for blind naïveté, but every ounce came from the realization that my greatest feats have been my struggles with pain, and I have overcome them all. I wish you this feeling too.

I guess I'm saying I'm grateful for the wisdom we will bring into 2021. I'm hopeful for a deeply joyous new year. 

Morgan Dickason grew up in Union Bridge (Md.) Church of the Brethren and now works as a portfolio analyst in Indianapolis, Ind.



# “Speaking TRUTH to POWER”



by Anna Lisa Gross

**W**hen Annual Conference couldn't safely happen in person, the Church of the Brethren Womaen's Caucus asked Gimbiya Kettering, Madalyn Metzger, and Debbie Eisenbise to share online on the theme “speaking truth to power.” Hundreds of people tuned in, asked questions, wrestled together, and parted in blessing.



We continued the conversation with the modern technology of Messenger Radio. I had never created a podcast before, but I have listened to them. And I love to hear people's stories. I reached out to people—some I knew well and others I had never met. Over 11 episodes, some of which are excerpted in this issue, a wise and wide variety of Brethren shared stories of “speaking truth to power.”

The phrase is often attributed to Bayard Rustin, a Quaker civil rights activist. And “speaking truth to power” is what ancient Greeks may have called *parrhesia* and Gandhi's nonviolent movement called *satyagraha*.

As we moved through these 11 episodes and wove stories with scripture, we found a wealth of verses on the blessings and consequences of “speaking truth to power”:

*So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. . . . Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.—Ephesians 4:25-29*

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus overflows with guidance, including the fondly quoted “speak the truth in love.” We are called to “speak truth to power in love” just like our faith


ancestors and role models: Nathan speaking to David, the Syrophoenician woman to Jesus, the early Brethren Schwarzenau eight to state churches. Our legacies may not loom so large, but we are called to the same struggle.

*For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. . . . As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.—Ephesians 6:12-15*

The words “power” and “truth” have complex applications. Just as beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, we argue about what is “true” in the Church of the Brethren, in daily news, in presidential elections. The book of James grieves complexity.

*From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives? —James 3:10-12*

Brethren inherit suspicion of power from our Anabaptist ancestors. How does this limit us? How does it protect us? How does it encourage us to be naive about the power we do have?

These are questions to wrestle with in your congregation, to ponder on a walk, to bring to God in prayer. I pray that through the sacred stories shared and the discussion they generate, you will hear God calling you to the struggle 

Anna Lisa Gross is interim pastor of Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind., and a member of the Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee.

SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T COUNT ON PEOPLE SUPPORTING THAT TRUTH THAT YOU SPOKE EVEN THOUGH THEY KNOW IT IS TRUTH. AND YOU'RE GOING TO BE OUT THERE ON YOUR OWN. IF GOD WILLS YOU TO SPEAK IT, THEN YOU'VE GOT TO SPEAK IT.



## OUT ON YOUR OWN

Dawn M. Blackman Sr.

**I** moved to Champaign (Ill.) just after our own (Eric) Garner incident. Police put a man in a chokehold, and he died. He was an older African American man who grew

up in Champaign. He remembered when Campustown was off-limits to African Americans, and he wanted to go look in the shops. Somebody saw him looking in windows and was uncomfortable, so they called the police, and the police came.

The man was developmentally delayed. He was a grown-up, but he was like 14, maybe. The police show up and he panicked.

He said, "I'm sorry, I'll leave, I just wanted to look in the window." And he started backing up.

They said, "Stop!" The police officers don't like it when you don't do what they say.

...

We're sitting around, with community members and police officers at each table. And one community member said while it was unfortunate that the man lost his life, he was glad that the police were on the case.

I said, "What was it they took care of?"

"Well, he didn't belong there."

I said, "Why was that?"

"Older African American man, in Campustown?"

I said, "I didn't know that Campustown was still restricted to African Americans. What time is the curfew for Campustown?"

"Well, there's not a curfew."

"Then why doesn't he belong in Campustown?"

They just looked at each other.

And the officer finally said, "I was part of that detail, and he refused an order."

I said, "So the penalty is death?"

"Well, it wasn't intentional that he died, but if he had just stopped it wouldn't have been a problem."


Okay . . . "Why were you there on the call?"

"Because I was called. They were uncomfortable with people looking through the window."

I said, "It's a business district. They've got windows from the sidewalk to the ceiling. They want you to look through them."

"But they ruled that it was an acceptable use of force."

Because the police officers—three of them—felt threatened by his refusal to follow orders, backing away from them. Because the use of force ordinance says that if the officer feels threatened—physically or verbally—he is the sole determiner of the amount of force to be used. That's just giving them carte blanche to do whatever they want.

Sometimes you can't count on people supporting that truth that you spoke even though they know it is truth. And you're going to be out there on your own. If God wills you to speak it, then you've got to speak it. 

Dawn M. Blackman Sr. is outreach minister at Champaign (Ill.) Church of the Brethren.



## LEARN MORE

Listen to all 11 "Speaking Truth to Power" episodes at [www.brethren.org/messengerradio](http://www.brethren.org/messengerradio).





## SPEAKING THE MESSAGE

Leah J. Hileman

**I'm cautious with the phrase**

“speaking truth to power” because

I've seen worldly methods of doing that creeping into the church, and that makes me very uncomfortable. I want to be careful that we're speaking gently and with grace. I believe there's a strong call in scripture to keep our speech seasoned with the salt of the world and the light of the world.


Here in Page County (Va.), we're watching some of the racial divide coming down. We're watching Black churches being empowered into leadership in the community, establishing a new community center. We (had) a Black mayoral candidate on the ballot this year for the first time in the history of the town. This is an opportuni-

ty for all churches to rise up and speak the truth to power, and the power here is establishment power. To be able to say, “We see a bigger, fresher vision for our town.” We do that by modeling our relationships in public. We do that by white churches and Black churches finding ways to collaborate with each other. We do that by putting a Black man on the ballot and then white folks like me putting his sign in our yard. We do that in peaceful, nonviolent ways.

We (Brethren) aren't as peculiar as we used to be. And if you're not going to live peculiarly, or if you're going to watch nonbelievers be equally benevolent, and advocate for justice, and live with economic sustainability, and take good care of the earth, and all of the things that our public witness has been, then the message of Christ is get-

ting lost when we are not proclaiming it. It is a message, and messages are not lived, they're spoken. The gospel is embodied, but that also includes being embodied in our message.

We're missing an opportunity when we let our good works just slip on by out of a false sense of humility. We don't want to get noticed, but we forget that the whole point was never for us to get noticed; it was for Christ to get noticed through us.

Get back to the table. Sit down with people. Break bread together. That's the Brethren core. Any good that we have to offer the world is probably going to come around the potluck table or fixing up old women's broken porches. I would love to see us getting back to what we do best. 

Leah J. Hileman is pastor of Luray (Va.) Church of the Brethren.



## THE COST OF SILENCE

Eric Bishop

**I think I'm in a new space** of sharing what it means to be an African American male in this society and the struggle with that. Telling truth to power means telling my church how


much it is not on the forefront of justice. And it's been a really hard piece to wrestle with. Why are you not out front calling out the injustices that we are seeing across the board?

I live in a congregation who is doing it. I am consoled to know that I have that place of support, even if I don't feel it in my larger church.

Sometimes I wonder if the reason our numbers are declining as a denomination is because we're so scared of our shadow to just take justice by the horns and say this is who we are and we're going to call out wrongs for everyone in our society. We just tiptoe so much around anything that

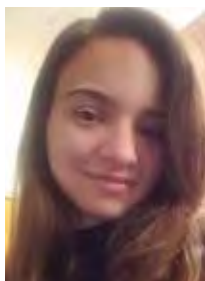
is deemed controversial that we're nowhere.

And so people find solace in their congregation. I think more congregations are stepping up to carry the peace and justice voice, whether or not the denomination as a whole recognizes that is a direction the church should be in and wants to go.

Speaking truth to power has its cost, but silence has its cost as well. While it may be uncomfortable, and you may lose something, you gain the ability to know that you were honest and said what needed to be said. You didn't sit idly by. When you find yourself in that space, there's a cost either way. It's just a matter of what you're willing to pay. 

Eric Bishop is a member of La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren. He has served in local, district, and national positions within the church and is currently president of Ohlone College in northern California and chair of the Bethany Theological Seminary board of trustees.

**SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER HAS ITS COST, BUT SILENCE HAS ITS COST AS WELL.**




## APPRECIATING DIFFERENCES

Audri Svay

**I** came into the pastorate a year and a half ago. It's been a blessing that we don't all share the same political ideology. We come from different backgrounds; we have different lifestyles. That's not something we hide. Everybody comes to church knowing that they're sitting across the aisle or next to someone in the pew who believes differently than them or woke up to a totally different environment.

They're coming into the space ready to understand other people's perspectives and to accept people beyond the divi-

sions, or they wouldn't come into that church setting, knowing how diverse we are. That's a great space for the church and for the denomination.

Preaching in that setting, I feel that I can talk about things from all different sides of an issue. And I know that people may not agree with me, but since we don't have a majority opinion, the only majority that we share is God and is Jesus. 

Audri Svay is co-pastor of Eel River Community Church of the Brethren, Silver Lake, Ind. She is pursuing a graduate degree in theopoetics through Bethany Theological Seminary.



## INTERSECTIONS AND ELEPHANTS

Mary Scott-Boria

**I** was very involved with the anti-rape community in Chicago in the early '80s. At that time, the anti-rape community was very white, very white women-led. I was the first African American woman to be the director of the rape crisis center. There was certainly this undercurrent that our gender was much more important than our racial identity, and never a sensitivity to what that intersectionality meant for women of color. We did not have the language of intersectionality at that time.


I was also very heavily involved in Chicago politics, and women's role in Chicago politics. A lot of those women went on to become members of (President) Obama's cabinet, so it was

sort of the early days for that political voice. There was a Black judge who was running for mayor. He had been identified by this group of women as someone who was soft on Black men who were accused of rape. Well, he was also very strong on defending Black people. It raised this level of anxiety and conflict in me that had been simmering for many years. I'd sit and listen to women talk about how they needed to go after this judge. Now he became this symbol of Black liberation in the city. Here was this deep contradiction around race and gender.

You know how sometimes you've got something to say, and it's inside of your bones, and you're scared to death, and you don't know what to say, but you know that this is the moment.

Your integrity is being tested. I remem-

ber I stood up in this endorsement session and testified to whatever I saw the contradiction was. I was scared to death. I was shaking inside, and I was like, "I'm not making any sense." As much as I was afraid, and as much as I was inarticulate, it was that one moment in my work in that time where I felt that I was heard.

I was very shy and introverted, and I still am. I still don't always feel quite able to speak up, but I always feel very strong inside. I often can call the elephant in the room. Lots of times, people don't like that. They like the elephant in the room to be veiled. 

A member of First Church of the Brethren in Chicago, Mary Scott-Boria is a longtime social worker and administrator who has led a number of programs related to women and youth, community development, politics, anti-violence, and racial justice.

“ AS MUCH AS I WAS AFRAID, AND AS MUCH AS I WAS INARTICULATE, IT WAS THAT ONE MOMENT IN MY WORK IN THAT TIME WHERE I FELT THAT I WAS HEARD. ”





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# Celebrating Black History Month by binge-watching *Watchmen*...again

**T**he first time I heard about the **Tulsa Race Massacre**, I was in college. It was a grainy VHS documentary, and I was sitting in a roomful of African Americans. I had a sense that I was being trusted with an important, secret truth. As I watched, I never imagined that the wider, whiter America would believe that a group of white American citizens would wage a two-day massacre with the intent to destroy a neighboring



GIMBIYA KETTERING

stable, affluent African American community. As I understood the scope of the violence in Tulsa and how it has been intentionally hidden, I understood what it means to be Black in America.

It has been 401 years since the first enslaved Black people were brought to America. It has been 157 years since Emancipation. Black History Month seems intended to celebrate that journey—which the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King described as “the arc of history bending towards justice.” But it has only been 100 years since the Tulsa Massacre. It has only been seven months since a police officer knelt on the neck of George Floyd until he died.

For African Americans, Black Americans, the statistics remain grim. Our average wealth is one-tenth that of average white American wealth. We are half as likely to own our own homes. We are less likely to go to college and, when we do, we are more likely to graduate with a higher student loan debt. Despite earlier attempts at affirmative action, unemployment rates are twice as high among African Americans, regardless of educational attainment.

We are more likely to live in underrepresented neighborhoods and attend underfunded schools. Black Americans are imprisoned at such a disproportionate

rate that the only way to describe it is the term “mass incarceration.” We are only now beginning to understand, but do not yet have a term for, the impact that has on extended families and wider communities. We have more chronic health conditions and are less likely to have jobs with health insurance. African Americans have a shorter life expectancy than white Americans—by 3.6 years. That’s why we say keep saying, “Black Lives Matter.”

When *Watchmen* originally came out, I was so excited to tell everyone about it. Over and over, Church of the Brethren friends said they couldn’t watch it. They don’t watch *those kinds* of movies because they are too violent. They don’t want to be exposed to choreographed fights of costumed superheroes.

*Watchmen* is a violent television show about violence. There is the violence of kids bullying one another and bodies piled up on the moon. The violence that most frightened and most mesmerized me came in the opening scenes that reenact the Tulsa Massacre, from the perspective of a little boy running for his life. I can watch this because I have a solid grasp of the historically accurate truth: Publicly elected officials gave white Tulsa (Okla.) residents guns and bullets to kill their African American neighbors; bombs were dropped from airplanes on city blocks; when the National Guard arrived, they arrested African American citizens.

It is not possible to calculate how many people died during the Tulsa Massacre. It is not possible to calculate how many Black Americans have died and will continue to die as a result of racism. That is the real violence, the violence we must understand. *Watchmen* starts with this act of racialized violence and imagines the endless repercussions and permutations of that violence. It also imagines a president who seeks to stop hate groups at any cost. It imagines a history museum dedicated to the dead

## ABOUT THE WATCHMEN

**History:** *The Watchmen* began as a DC Comics series in the 1980s and became a feature film in 2009. The re-envisioned, nine-episode *Watchmen* TV miniseries ran in 2019.

**Where to Watch:** The miniseries was a highly acclaimed HBO production and is available with an HBO Max subscription or as an add-on with other streaming services, such as Hulu and Amazon Prime. It can also be watched by paying for episodes individually on YouTube and Google Play.






IT TAKES THE TRUTH OF HISTORICAL PAIN OF THE TULSA MASSACRE AND  
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EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE METAPHOR.

and their descendants. It imagines the victims becoming avengers. It imagines reparations.

I am watching *Watchmen* because it is not *pure* escapism. Rather it is an alternative history that offers an alternative imagination for Black history. It takes the truth of historical pain of the Tulsa Massacre and loops it with the unbearable contemporary pains that I experience through the metaphor.

When Angela Abar—a police officer and a descendant of the Tulsa Massacre—finds that a coworker keeps a shrine exalting a KKK robe, the look of confusion, despair, and anger on her face reflects how I felt when I found out a coworker still believed that the Confederate flag is only heritage. He told me that people who choose to wear and wave the flag are not motivated by hate. The too-real truth is that neither the characters of *Watchmen*, nor I, get to demand answers from these people we thought were friends. Abar's co-worker ate with her family, helped

her at work, and yet his racism remains inexplicable and enduring. I may not know how Abar feels, but I know how I would feel. I know how I feel.

I will also be rewatching *Black Panther* and my favorite episodes of *Black Lightning*—both of which are also comic books. I will re-read Octavia Butler, N.K. Jemisin, and Mat Johnson. With my children, we will read the *Mia Mayhem* and *Moon Girl* series. I have spent my life studying Black history, and this year, for a month, I need to explore fictional futures of Black people surviving and thriving—not without racism, but despite it. It is necessary for my hope since, if the statistics are right, you will get three or four more Black History Months than I will. 

Gimbiya Kettering lives in Washington, D.C., where she seeks to continue the work of Jesus peacefully, simply, and together. She has worked with various denominational agencies. Her family and faith roots are at Maple Grove (Ohio) Church of the Brethren.



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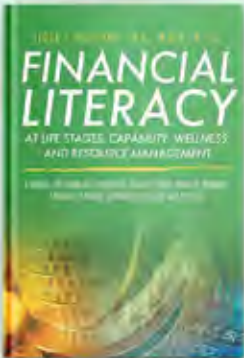
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Rev. Dr. Williams, M.Div., R.F.C., is professor emerita at Purdue University, Registered Financial Consultant, ordained minister in Church of the Brethren, and world-wide speaker. Teaching was 32 years at Purdue University, directing an award-winning crisis center, and teaching at Jia Tong University, Shanghai, China, University of California Davis, and Viscosa Federal University, Brazil. She has written 26 books and over 100 research articles. Award are many. She is a concert/church musician, wife, and mother of three children, four grandchildren.





# God the mathematician

by Diane Mason

**W**hen a child begins learning about God, she recites bedtime prayers, then memorizes common scriptures, then hopefully extends her understanding to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ evidenced in a life of service to God, church, and beyond. The more one experiences God, the more the doors of the spirit are opened and the individual finds there is more to discover.

When a child begins learning about mathematics, she learns to count, then compute, then hopefully extends her understanding to algebra, geometry, and beyond. The more one experiences mathematics, the more the doors of the mind are opened and the individual finds there is more to discover.

Through the centuries, mathematical philosophers have argued whether mathematics is created or discovered. I believe God created mathematics and we discover it. For example, no one sat down one day and said, “I think I’ll create a number 3.1415926 . . . and let it go on and on forever without repeating, and I’ll call it ‘pi.’” Though the number “e” is named for mathematician Leonard Euler, he did not create it. Such transcendental numbers are discovered as humans explore the circles God inscribed (Job 26:10) and the growth that God generated (Genesis 8:17).

The apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:16, “For in [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible.” One of these “all things” is mathematics and, as part of creation, mathematics reveals “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1:20, NIV).

Numbers themselves are abstract, yet very real. We don’t see them until we interact with them in some way. God’s nature is the same: invisible yet very real and unknown until we interact with him in some way.

Because God created, we have objects to count and measure—techniques we learn from our Creator. God counts the stars (Psalm 147:4) and also keeps a tally of the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30). God measured the earth and the waters and weighed the winds and the mountains (Job 28:25, 38:5; Isaiah 40:12).

God taught addition (Numbers 1:44-46), subtraction (Genesis 18:28), multiplication (Leviticus 25:8), and division

(Numbers 31:26). Even Jesus’ instruction about forgiveness was given the form of multiplying 70 times 7 (Matthew 18:22). God also revealed to us negative numbers (Isaiah 40:17).

The cyclical calendar is a mathematical construct that God created for us using sun, moon, and planets (Genesis 1:14, 8:22). From his study of the stars, Galileo remarked, “Mathematics is the language with which God wrote the universe.”


Plato observed, “God ever geometrizes.” Circles and ellipses show up in water drops and orbits. Geometrical patterns appear in flowers, honeycomb, snowflakes, and even in cracked mud!

Two-dimensional drawings of three-dimensional objects result in less observable detail because of the lost dimension. Likewise, our three-dimensional eyes perceive less than the fullness of God that Paul describes in the four distinct dimensions of “breadth and length and height and depth” (Ephesians 3:18).

The Preacher declared in Ecclesiastes 3:11 (CEB): God has “placed eternity in their hearts.” For example, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as countless as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 32:12, Hebrews 11:12, Jeremiah 33:22).

When we study with mathematician Georg Cantor the mathematics of what is beyond counting and what cannot be measured, we find a most significant revelation of God. In finite arithmetic,  $1+1+1 = 3$ , but transfinite arithmetic shows the three-in-one trinitarian nature of God: **infinity + infinity + infinity = infinity**.

Mathematics is not God, but mathematics reveals God’s eternal majesty. Its permanency reflects Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

God is beyond what we can fully know (Job 33:12, 36:26). His thoughts remain higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9). Yet, the more we know, the more we are driven to discover the multi-dimensional nature of God, which Paul says will show us “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19) 

Diane Mason, a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board, is a retired mathematics professor and retired member of the pastoral team at Fairview Church of the Brethren, Unionville, Iowa.

The Bible studies this year come from *Shine: Living in God's Light*, the Sunday school curriculum published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. Each month, MESSENGER is publishing two of the Bible essays that help teachers prepare. These essays are written by Carrie Martens. The illustrations, by David Huth, come from *All of Us: God's Story for You and Me*.



# Jesus is baptized

Mark 1:1-11

**W**hile Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with rather leisurely accounts of Jesus' birth, Mark wants the reader to get right to the point—Jesus' ministry. Jesus is "Christ" and "Son of God," and John the Baptist is preparing the way. This is basically the only preamble the reader receives before they are dumped headlong into the baptismal waters, the same waters that Jesus enters and then exits covered with the Holy Spirit. Nothing happens at a leisurely pace in Mark.

Despite the rapid-fire narrative, the Gospel is layered with meaning from the first line. The story the reader is about to encounter is "good news." The nature of that good news unfolds as the identity of Jesus is revealed. This is the goal of Mark 1:1-11, to introduce the reader to the Jesus Mark wants people to know. And the language Mark uses is bold and likely inflammatory. As "Christ" Jesus is declared anointed, and as "Son of God," he is given a title traditionally reserved for the king. Such a proclamation is a direct challenge to the Roman Empire. This bold proclamation is strengthened in verse 11 by

a "voice from heaven" who says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

God's pleasure with Jesus is significant in this introduction as it places Jesus in stark contrast to some of Israel's earlier leaders with whom God was not well pleased. The history of Israel is littered with kings who turned from God and brazenly rejected the messages of correction God sent through the prophets. Ahaziah was one such king. The message God sent to him through the prophet Elijah was an announcement of death, definitely not pleasure. Jewish people encountering John the Baptist would surely have been reminded of Elijah—who was also known for his hairy attire and leather belt—and the wayward kings he encountered.

While Jesus is described in language associated with empire and kingship and is named by John as one with power, Jesus does not emerge from the centers of empirical power. Jesus is simply a man from Nazareth and a carpenter. However, as Son of God, Jesus is also a leader who—in contrast to many who have come before him—is worthy, beloved, and one with whom God is pleased.

Jesus is, in fact, good news.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, readers are invited to discover for themselves the profound truth that Jesus both proclaims good news about the nature of the kingdom of God in contrast to earthly kingdoms, and is good news in his embodiment of God's love and healing for the people he encounters.

**When you think of Jesus as "good news," what images come to mind? Prophets have always served an important role in the life of God's people. Consider the voices in your community. Do any of them help orient you toward Jesus and his mission to embody good news in the world?**

*God, you can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. Open my eyes and heart to encounter Jesus in new ways through the Gospel of Mark. Inspire in me a love for your kingdom brought to life through Jesus. Amen.*



# Jesus feeds 5,000

Mark 6:30-44



**M**ark 6:30-44 opens with Jesus inviting his disciples to come away to a deserted place, a poignant image. The reader is at once reminded of Jesus being tempted for 40 days by Satan in the wilderness but also of Old Testament stories like the 40-year journey of the people of Israel. Mark presents Jesus as a new Moses, gathering his people and feeding them through divine means.

Out in that desert-place, the people are hungry—hungry for a good word from God. There is a gnawing deep in their hearts, but soon also in their bellies. It is late and they need food. Suddenly, seemingly from out of nowhere, there is bread and fish. Jesus offers a blessing and “manna” rains down. And there is enough—more than enough. Every person has been fed in body and in spirit, for Jesus “had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus as shepherd is a popular Christian motif. In religious art Jesus is frequently depicted as the shepherd in

Psalms 23 or the good shepherd in John 10. In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as a figurative shepherd leader much like the literal shepherds—Moses and David—who were chosen to lead Israel. It was also common, however, for kings, priests, scribes, and even Roman emperors to be identified as shepherds. And there were good and bad leaders in the bunch. Some cared for their people, while others betrayed them for the benefit of the elite.

For a comparison of these types of shepherds, one need only read the story that immediately precedes this outdoor banquet. In Mark 6:14-29, the reader is given an intentional flashback to the events following John the Baptist’s arrest at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. During King Herod’s birthday celebrations, his daughter dances, pleasing his guests. Herod then offers the girl whatever she wishes. She asks her mother’s advice and since her mother has a grudge against John the Baptist, she tells her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The king is “deeply grieved” but feels he needs to keep his promise to his daughter and wishes to maintain the respect of his guests, so he has John killed.

Herod is a shepherd who holds a

banquet for himself surrounded by the ruling elite. And in his grand halls of power he sees fit to sacrifice one of his sheep to satisfy the grudge of his wife. Jesus is a shepherd who, having sought a place of rest cannot turn away from those who need his care. Surrounded by common people he is filled with compassion and so he feeds them spiritually and physically. In placing these two feeding stories side by side, Mark makes it plain that Jesus is a very different kind of shepherd.

**What about Jesus’ character makes you want to follow him? How do you think these characteristics shape the realm that Jesus came to bring about on earth?**

*God, you can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. Food enough for everyone seems like an impossible dream, yet through Jesus you show us that you can do the impossible. You are our shepherd. Show us the way toward a world where all are valued and have enough. Amen.*

## Read along

Jan. 3 Jesus is baptized  
Jan. 10 Follow me  
Jan. 17 Jesus begins his ministry  
Jan. 24 Five friends  
Jan. 31 Parable of the sower  
Feb. 7 Jesus feeds 5,000 people  
Feb. 14 Jesus and the children  
Feb. 21 Jesus heals Bartimaeus

Mark 1:1-10  
Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-17; 3:13-19  
Mark 1:29-39  
Mark 2:1-12  
Mark 4:1-20  
Mark 6:30-44  
Mark 10:13-16  
Mark 10:46-52

**SHINE**  
LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT



# Edge encounters

**Is the church missing the power of wild spaces?**

by Randall Westfall

**B**y day four the hunger pangs subsided. And in their place another kind of hunger emerged.

I'd been in this secluded Pacific Northwest wilderness for half a week with nothing but the clothes on my back and the knowledge and skillset that was now being put to the test. It was called Survival Week, the culmi-

native rite of my nine-month deep nature connection training.

I arrived at this juncture of my journey because I had experienced a spiritual dryness. The contemporary form of the church was no longer keeping my spirit green. So I sought solace in an ancient rite, hoping for what Thoreau called "the tonic of wildness" to water my dry roots.

And that night while tending my small fire, I experienced what I can only describe as a numinous warming in my heart. And I remembered. My biblical ancestors experienced this same ancient rite. They, too, had known the feeling of hunger and loneliness in wild spaces. The fire of God's presence was now made manifest in my own isolation from the world.





I spent the rest of that night doing something I had not yet done since arriving days earlier. I prayed. Apart from foraging on a few wild edibles I was already fasting, so prayer only made sense. I must have prayed the Taizé song *Veni Sancte Spiritus* a thousand times that night. And as I awoke the next morning, the weariness had dissipated. My hunger, gone. No lon-

ger was this to be a test of my physical ability to survive, but rather of my ability to thrive in the Spirit.

In this threshold space of testing myself and intentional cultural deprivation, my life's vocation was given new meaning. My body had absorbed the wild tonic, and my spiritual roots were replenished by the Spirit of God. And I will testify that the man who emerged from the forest a week later was not the same one who went in.

#### **Wilderness immersion in scripture**

Throughout scripture, we observe the role that wilderness and desert settings play in the formation of God's people and leadership. In the Hebrew scriptures we have examples of Moses and Elijah, who each embark on 40-day wilderness journeys where they encounter the sheer intensity and the sheer silence of the living God. And in the New Testament, wild spaces provide the kindling that is needed to sustain the fires of ministry and mission. Nowhere is that more evident than in the lives of Jesus and his cousin John. In their ministries, they model three types of wilderness immersion experiences:

- An extended length of time for preparation
- A shorter length of time for rejuvenation
- An ascetic life of subsistence and cultural deprivation

When Jesus is driven into the Judean wilderness east of the Jordan River, he models for us the first example of wilderness immersion. For 40 days and nights he undergoes both a physical and spiritual initiation, the sole purpose of which is to prepare him for his mission and ministry.

Alongside the spiritual temptations documented in the synoptic Gospels, I imagine him constructing a simple lean-to or finding sanctuary in an outcropping of the rocky hills. I see him using a dry reed and spinning it between his hands to get a fire by friction. And perhaps just as his hunger pangs kick in, he is tempted by the Adversary to turn stones into bread.

Not entirely unlike my own survival experience, it starts out as a time for testing one's skills of self-reliance by enduring the elements of creation. Yet the further along one goes, it gives way to reliance upon the Spirit amid isolation. As I tell my wilderness survival campers, it's about proving yourself *and* losing yourself. It is during this kind of primal encounter that one's awareness is heightened. With nothing to distract the mind, one is forced to pay attention to the spiritual undertones that otherwise might be missed.

The second type of wild immersion experience takes place during Jesus' ministry. These ventures into the wild are short retreats that likely were only for a few days. In doing this, he shows us that wild spaces are not only for testing, but now also have a contemplative dimension to them as places of solace for prayer, fasting, and renewal. Other than for prayer, the text does not say in what other sabbath practices he might have engaged, yet it was important enough for the Gospel writers to include it. And it is the form and methods found within this type of encounter that we have included in our spiritual practices. A contemplative retreat is the most familiar form of immersion experience that we engage in today. And as with Christ, its purpose is to renew and affirm the



**EDGES ARE TRANSITION SPACES, SOMETIMES LITERAL AND OTHER TIMES METAPHORICAL, WHERE WE FACE A CRISIS OF LIMITATION THAT BREAKS US FROM THE NORMAL PACE OF OUR LIVES.**

vocational call of ministry.

Then there's Jesus' cousin, John ben Zechariah (aka John the Baptizer). His wilderness experience is neither an extended foray for preparation, nor is it a retreat for renewal. For John, it is for the duration of his ministry (somewhere between three to six years, if not longer). The context is solely in the wilderness areas around the Jordan River valley. The landscape itself speaks prophetically to the prophet, the space where the word of God comes to him. His diet and attire would be considered minimalist by today's terms. His is a lifestyle of ascetic subsistence and a more direct link to Israel's desert prophets. Outside of the desert monastic tradition, this type of immersion experience is rare in the history of the church, yet it is possible that it is being reimagined in the 21st century?

### **On the edge**

What the wilderness immersion experience draws to the surface of the soul is our edges. Edges are transition spaces, sometimes literal and other times metaphorical, where we face a crisis of limitation that breaks us from the normal pace of our lives. These are not comfortable places; they are spaces where we encounter trials, loss, and grief.

On Jesus' edge lived the Adversary, by whom he was tempted. John's entire ministry was on the edge of Judaism. And yet these types of longer "edge" experiences are not an intentional part of our own faith formation or even leadership development. We flirt with edge encounters when we go on a short retreat, but for a truly transformative experience we need to look at a longer immersion.

How long? Eco-psychologist Robert Greenway observes that during wilderness trips, "It takes people four days to start dreaming nature dreams rather than 'busy' or 'urban' dreams." And to him, that "recurring pattern suggests that our culture is only four days deep." I've known this to be true, because I've experienced it in my own life. Longer immersion experiences reboot our biological and spiritual programming to our original Edenic setting.

I wonder if there isn't a space for more of the "preparation form" that Jesus models for us in his 40-day experience, or even for the longer ascetic model of John. What if it were an integral part of the training of pastors and ministers? I could see the MESSENGER headline: "First-year Bethany Seminary student undergoes 40-day wilderness encounter to test their calling from God." It would make for good entertainment by today's wilderness survival show standard. I'd subscribe for sure.

And what about John's desert ministry of cultural deprivation? In her book *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, Susan Bratton asks the question: "Does some portion of the church need to voluntarily undergo cultural deprivation to provide clear vision for the remainder of the body?"


Cultural deprivation is just one type of edge experience. Is it safe to say that the church has not been good at cultural deprivation in and of itself? Bratton says we need those opportunities now more than ever to "safeguard against cult personalities, national superiority, middle-class values, and various forms of systemic oppression."

For John, the symbolic sense of him being the one who announces the coming of the Messiah meant that the Jordan River would be an edge space for people to repent, just as the Jordan represented the threshold space into the Promised Land from the Exile.

### **Our edges are the new wilderness**

For many of us, 2020 was extraordinary, to say the least. I'm wondering if it hasn't been another sort of wilderness (edge) sojourn for many. Except now the edges are not created so much by external landscapes but rather as we navigate our internal terrains. Isolation shifts our focus and awareness from "out there" to "in here."

What are we finding *in here*? Our hearts. Our souls. As we cringe at the words "quarantine" or "isolation," we must remember that their etymological roots are literally tied to "40 days." Extreme isolation in our edge spaces is supposed to make us more ascetic, not more self-indulgent. Yet as we are forced to our edges, we experience discomfort with the disruptions of our life's need for control.

I see people emerging from other edge experiences, too, such as racial justice, who have something to say to the rest of the church. We need people who are dealing with their edges to speak to us. And we need to listen to their stories on the edge. The whole point of an edge experience is that what emerges afterwards looks nothing like what went in. 

Randall Westfall is director of outdoor ministry at Camp Brethren Heights in Rodney, Mich., and is serving as moderator for the 2021 Michigan District conference.



## Final Brethren Faith in Action grants for 2020

**T**he Brethren Faith in Action Fund made its final grants for 2020. The fund was created with money generated by sale of the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

—\$5,000 for **Akron (Ohio) First Church of the Brethren** to expand its radio ministry.

—\$5,000 for **Camp Alexander Mack** in Milford, Ind., to increase wireless connectivity.

—\$5,000 for **Camp Carmel** in Linville, N.C., to help fund a virtual camp, rebuild a rain shelter, and construct an outdoor classroom/amphitheater.

—\$5,000 for **Camp Mardela** in Denton, Md., to help replace the roof of the King Retreat Center.

—\$5,000 for **Camp Placid** in Blountville, Tenn., to renovate an existing building as an Outdoor Learning Center.

—\$5,000 for **Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren** in Peoria, Ariz., for outdoor “pop up” worship services.

—\$5,000 for **Haitian Church of the Brethren Fellowship** in Naples, Fla., to purchase audiovisual hardware and musical instruments.

—\$3,500 for the Family Pantry outreach at **Memorial Church of the Brethren** in Martinsburg, Pa.

—\$5,000 for **Sebring (Fla.) Church of the Brethren** to make facility improvements to upgrade accessibility.

—\$2,400 for **Shepherd’s Spring**, a camp and outdoor ministry center in Sharpsburg, Md., for the accreditation application process with the American Camping Association.



*PAG delivers food and other relief supplies to Hondurans whose homes were destroyed in the hurricanes that hit Central America in November.*

## Brethren Disaster Ministries directs EDF grants

**Brethren Disaster Ministries** has directed grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to aid people affected by recent disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

—\$25,000 for hurricane relief in Honduras by **Proyecto Aldea Global**, following Hurricanes Iota and Eta.

—\$10,000 for the **Church World Service** response to hurricanes in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala.

—\$60,000 for the **domestic COVID-19 Relief Program** for the remainder of 2020. The program provides grants to Church of the Brethren congregations and districts for pandemic-related initiatives. Previously in 2020, \$135,000 had been designated, providing 35 grants.

—\$15,000 for the COVID-19 response of **Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria** (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) for the remainder of 2020.

—\$14,000 for a flood mitigation project of **Shalom Ministries** in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

—\$6,000 for COVID-19 response in the DRC through **Shalom Ministries**, helping some of the most vulnerable people in Church of the Brethren communities.

—\$10,000 for **Lutheran World Relief** and **IMA World Health** as part of Corus International’s response to the August port explosion in Beirut, Lebanon.

—\$10,000 for a pandemic-related feeding program of the **Church of the Brethren in Venezuela**.

—\$2,000 for flood response carried out by the **Venezuelan church**.



*Last fall, Brethren Disaster Ministries celebrated two house blessings for homes that were repaired or rebuilt in the Carolinas. “We were all truly blessed in serving you Darvella, as well as Roosevelt and Inez,” said a Facebook post. “Welcome Home! We pray that you are blessed with many more years in your homes!”*

## Workcamp Ministry is now FaithX

**T**he Workcamp Ministry has begun operating under the name Faith Outreach Expeditions or FaithX. The new name will be used for all short-term service opportunities offered by Brethren Volunteer Service. For more information see [www.brethren.org/faithx](http://www.brethren.org/faithx).



### Global Brethren gather in two online meetings

**Virtual meetings of the Global Brethren Communion** were held in November and December. In November, 15 people represented 5 of the 11 denominations. The December meeting included 22 representatives from 10 denominations.

COVID-19 continues as a major concern, as do violence and political upheaval, with conversation about how these have prevented evangelism and meeting together as churches.

A committee was appointed to begin the work of proposing a constitution and bylaws to define the structure and purpose of the organization.

### BBT extends COVID-19 emergency grants

**Brethren Benefit Trust has extended its COVID-19** emergency grant program as part of the Church Workers' Assistance Plan. The initial program ran through July 2020, with a second round of grants made through November last year. A third block of money is now available for applications received through March 31. Contact Debbie Butcher at 847-622-3391 or [pension@cobbt.org](mailto:pension@cobbt.org).

## NOAC 2021 will be virtual

**N**ational Older Adult Conference 2021 will be held online Sept. 6-10 on the theme "Overflowing with Hope" (Romans 15:13).

The decision to go online with the event was made by the NOAC Planning Team based on concerns about COVID-19: restrictions at the site in Lake Junaluska, N.C., limiting in-person gatherings; an age group particularly vulnerable to the virus; numerous deadline considerations; and uncertainty about transportation and lodging options come September.

The team announced it is "working on developing creative ways to joyfully experience NOAC online." Members are Christy Waltersdorff (coordinator), Glenn Bollinger, Karen Dillon, Jim Martinez, Rex Miller, Pat Roberts, Paula Ziegler Ulrich, and staff Josh Brockway and Stan Dueck of Discipleship Ministries.



## Personnel notes

**Gary Benesh** and **Wallace Cole** began last fall as interim co-executives for Southeastern District, working as non-salaried volunteers. They are co-pastors of Friendship Church of the Brethren in Wilkesboro, N.C.

**Connie Burkholder** started as interim executive minister for Illinois and Wisconsin District on Jan. 1. She has previous experience as district executive minister for Northern Plains District 1996-2006. She is a member of the ministerial team of Monitor Church of the Brethren in McPherson, Kan.

**Terry Goodger** resigned as program assistant for Brethren Disaster Ministries at the end of 2020, to take another job. She had been program assistant for the disaster rebuilding program since June 2017. She previously worked for the Material Resources program for 10 years, 2006 to 2016, serving as office coordinator at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

**Daniel Radcliff** began Oct. 26, as client manager for the Brethren Foundation at Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT). He holds a degree in Business Management and Leadership from Judson University in Elgin, Ill. Previously he was a financial advisor for Edward Jones. He and his family are members of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin.

**Tracy Repmann** began as assistant director of Financial Operations for BBT on Sept. 28. She holds a degree in accounting from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign and has training in financial management.

**Jennifer Lynn Summy** began Jan. 4 as administrator of Camp Mardela in Denton, Md. She is a graduate of Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pa., working to complete a master's degree in Business Administration and Ministry from Mount Vernon (Ohio) Nazarene University. She recently spent a year as a worship coordinator for the World Race.



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# Why Christians should welcome face masks

by Isaac Ottoni Wilhelm

**J**esus Christ—and through him, God—has given us tools to make it through this coronavirus pandemic. Prayer, faith, and community are familiar tools. We have been using them for months now to get by.

But I want to talk about another Christian tool: face masks.

One might be surprised to see face masks described as Christian. At first, I thought face masks were instruments of medical science only: non-religious items that doctors tell us to wear. In fact, I doubted whether something that partially hid my face could be Christian at all. Covering up a face feels like covering up a flame, and the Gospels warn against that: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar” (Luke 11:33).

As a philosopher and a teacher, however, I believe it is important to question our assumptions. So I did some research. I began scanning through the Bible, looking for anything that might support—or contradict—my thinking.

The Bible had a lesson for me. As I quickly discovered, it contains many stories of people wearing protective clothes. Fabric, strips of cloth, and other garments are divine items, used throughout the Bible to cover, heal, and express sorrow in times of tragedy. And when viewed in the light of these stories, face masks appear to be strikingly biblical garb:

- Take sackcloth, for example. It was used by Jacob when he mourned the passing of Joseph (Genesis 37:34). And it was used by Ahab to express fear and despair when he heard Elijah’s prophetic condemnation (1 Kings 21:27).

Face masks play a similar role. Like sackcloth, they express sorrow and fear. They mark our grief in times of mourning.

- Or consider Moses’ veil. When Moses returned from Mount Sinai, his face shone with the light of God. It shone more brightly, in fact, than others could take. In order to shield the Israelites from the overwhelming divinity that radiated from his face, Moses wore a veil (Exodus 34:33-35).

Again, face masks serve a similar function. Like Moses’ veil, face masks serve to protect. We wear them to protect one another.


- Similarly, Jesus’ garment was a conduit for healing. Remember the suffering woman who dared to touch his tunic (Mark 5:25-34)? After doing so, she was immediately cured of her illness. Jesus’ divine power flowed through his clothing, making believers well.

So, too, with face masks. Of course, face masks do not directly heal people in the way Jesus did. Face masks do not dispense medicine, for instance. But by preventing the spread of coronavirus, face masks have the power to make

ourselves and our communities healthy. Like Jesus and his tunic, face masks instill wellness.

- Clothing features prominently in many other biblical passages. For instance, according to the Gospels, Jesus’ life—from birth to crucifixion—begins and ends with clothing. As soon as Jesus was born, the Gospel of Luke tells us that Mary “wrapped him in bands of cloth” (2:7). And as soon as Jesus died, the Gospel of Matthew reports that Joseph of Arimathea took his body and “wrapped it in a clean linen cloth” (27:59). Clothing—in particular, strips of fabric and clean linen—was a vessel for Jesus, welcoming him into the world and bearing him out of it.

Even here, there is something to learn about face masks. For just as clothing bookends the story of Jesus’ life, face masks will bookend the story of this pandemic. We put on face masks at the start of it, and we will remove them at the end.

So face masks are not un-Christian. By expressing sorrow, protecting each other, keeping us well, and framing this pandemic’s story, face masks embody the divine significance of sackcloth, veil, tunic, and wrapping. And Christians, therefore, should welcome them. 

Isaac Ottoni Wilhelm, a lifelong member of the Church of the Brethren, is a doctoral student studying metaphysics and the philosophy of science at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

EQUALITY CAN BE LESS SATISFYING THAN FEELING SUPERIOR, JUST AS FINDING WAYS TO MAKE PEACE TAKES MORE CREATIVITY AND MUSCLE THAN REACTING VIOLENTLY. AND RESISTING UNJUST, ACCEPTABLE NORMS WITH LOVE—WELL, THAT’S THE SPIRITUAL WORK WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO.

## Our spiritual work

MESSENGER is such a gift. Thanks specifically for the November issue. Wendy McFadden’s cover story said what we have been learning in this year of 2020 vision. And Cliff Kindy named an example of how we Brethren benefited from white supremacy practices, even though we sometimes think our being “separate from the world” exempted us from complicity with the Empire.

Equality can be less satisfying than feeling superior, just as finding ways to make peace takes more creativity and muscle than reacting violently. And resisting unjust, acceptable norms with love—well, that’s the spiritual work we have been called to. We can’t change the past or correct those injustices, but we can face and denounce and repent of them. We can learn from those who know well the effects of racism in our communities. We have directives like

those in Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25.

And we are thankful for your voices in MESSENGER.

**Ervin and Joan Huston**  
Elizabethtown, Pa.

## Quality and meaningful perspectives

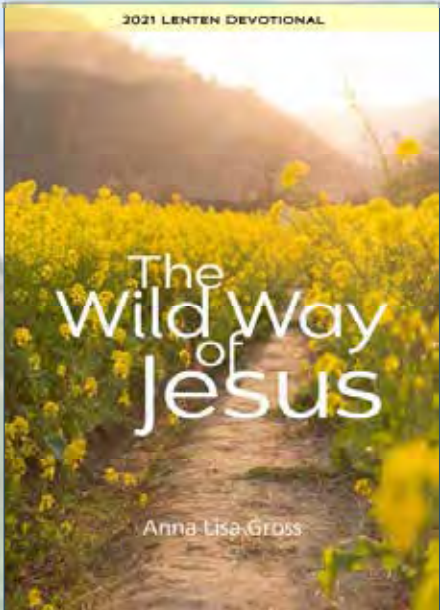
Just a quick note of appreciation to publisher Wendy McFadden for her fine work with MESSENGER. I have been a subscriber for several years, and her note at the beginning of the magazine and former editor Randy Miller’s opinion at the end were the first things I would turn to for thoughtful inspiration.

I miss Randy’s essays, but I still read the publisher’s note first. It has a lovely way of bringing depth to issues, making the piece very devotional. McFadden’s article adapted from her sermon about the Dunker Church of Antietam was likewise helpful and uplifting.

Thank you for the dedication to bringing us quality, meaningful perspectives on life and faith. You bless us!


**Julie Kurtz**  
La Verne, Calif.

## Take a walk on the wild side



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## Continue Selective Service and the draft

In the November issue, authors Santelli and Galvin support a bill to end Selective Service and the military draft. I would like to see the government not only continue the Selective Service program but also the draft of both men and women, tied to affordable college education. I see nothing wrong with our



youth serving one or two years in the military or one of these volunteer areas, for the welfare of humankind. We have a “war” going on against COVID-19, global warming, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, hunger, and other disasters.

My father served as a conscientious objector in World War I, my brother served in Civilian Public Service (CPS) in World War II, and I served through the Mennonite denomination in a program called PAX during the Korean War.

Mental health care improved dramatically during WWII because of CPS. Pax during the Korean and Vietnam wars had over 1,200 men serving all over the world. I served for nearly three-and-a-half years in Germany building homes for war refugees and in an agricultural program in Greece, where the Church of the Brethren also had programs. Thousands met their military obligations working in hospitals and other areas in the IW program for conscientious objectors.

Unfortunately, it took a war to get the peace churches really involved in this type of service. Yes, the peace churches still have voluntary service programs, including Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). However, since there is no draft, voluntary service has been significantly reduced.

Maybe we need a kick in the rear to get us doing more of what we should be doing as followers of Christ. PAX service was extremely influential in the direction of my life and my decision to be a teacher, and if I were a young man would gladly go again.

**Denzel Short**  
Westland, Mich.

### Oddly un-ecumenical

The five-member Leadership Team’s response to the formation of the Covenant Brethren Church, reported in the October Newline Digest, seemed oddly un-ecumenical. “No

dual ordinations for pastors, no dual memberships for individuals, no dual affiliations for congregations” (p.25).

Noteworthy, by contrast, in the same issue was the article on the East Dayton congregation, which has a pastoral arrangement with an ordained Brethren in Christ pastor who obtained dual ordination in the

Church of the Brethren (“a strange combination of patience and flexibility,” p. 13). This is strikingly different from the concluding threat that the Leadership Team leveled at those connecting with the Covenant Brethren Church, who “would not be approved for future ministry in the Church of the Brethren.” I do

# Come to National Junior High Conference!

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photo by Glenn Regal

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Church of the Brethren

I DO NOT KNOW WHY ANY PRODIGAL, SO BANNED, COULD OR WOULD WANT TO COME HOME TO THAT KIND OF WELCOME.

not know why any prodigal, so banned, could or would want to come home to that kind of welcome.

Recognizing that Church of the Brethren polity does not anticipate the current crisis, the Leadership Team appeared by “executive order” to state a list of “best practices” for responding

to dual ordination, membership, affiliations, etc., in a Sept. 14 communication posted on Brethren.org. How different districts respond to this intrusion into their authority for licensing and ordination will probably reveal how the modern Brethren “manner of living” values of diversity, tolerance, and rec-

onciliation have reached their limits and become divisive.

**James McKinnell**  
York, Pa.

## It's marvelous

Just received the November issue of MESSENGER. It's marvelous. The publisher's note by Wendy McFadden was wonderful, and her article, spot on! Thank you. So glad she is writing. She has a fine style and great insight.

And when I turned to see Frank Ramirez's article on Vernard Eller, my heart leapt.

Keep up the fine work.

**Brian Nixon**  
Albuquerque, N.M.

## CLASSIFIEDS

**Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren Celebrates 50 Years in Current Building** on Sunday, June 6, 2021, the Pleasant Hill Church of the Brethren, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, will be celebrating 50 years in their current church building. You are invited to attend a special Sunday morning service, followed by a noon meal and the opening of the time capsule. A video documentary is being created to chronicle the church's history from its earliest beginnings to the present day. The planning committee would like to invite you to share your stories, photos, videos, and keepsakes. If you have something to contribute, please contact committee chair Sharon Bledsoe at sbb212@hotmail.com, or the church office at 1-937-676-2281 or Pastor Nick at phillcob@gmail.com

# The Reward of Risk

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Church of the Brethren



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Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at [dstroyeck@brethren.org](mailto: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.

## New members

**Buck Creek**, Mooreland, Ind.: Alexandra Conner, Lois Miller  
**Evergreen**, Stanardsville, Va.: Keith Workman  
**First**, Harrisonburg, Va.: Melissa Barnes, Patrick Barnes, Joanna Friesen, Caroline McCutcheon, Maggie McCutcheon, Tim Schell  
**Garden City**, Kan.: Jessica Bunch, Shawn Bunch, Adam Bwire, Brandon Lorimor, Memphis McCarter-Myers, Brynna Piccone, Josh Russell  
**Hagerstown**, Md.: John Boring, Carol Jones, Ida Plaine, Marsha Purucker  
**Lancaster**, Pa.: Daniel Fitzkee, Floy Fitzkee, Tim Lester  
**Ligonier**, Pa.: Andy Boyd, Kara Boyd, Lori Derk, Kris Kinsey, Sue Kinsey  
**Waynesboro**, Pa.: Garrett Beaver, Lisa Beaver, Nelson Beaver, Wes Beaver  
**White Hill**, Stuarts Draft, Va.: Harold Haney, Ben Hatter, Jill Hatter, Jessica Meadows, Tyler Meadows, Sandra Miller, Jordan Rosson, Cassidy Stutes, Amanda Sutton, Darren Via, Sara Via

## Wedding anniversaries

**Anspaugh**, Eric and Bev, Rocky Mount, Va., 50  
**Bergy**, Keith and Jean, Caledonia, Mich., 75  
**Blough**, Frank and Mona, Davidsville, Pa., 65  
**Bollinger**, Herbert and Barbara, Westminster, Md., 50  
**Bolt**, Kenneth and Esther, Rohrsersville, Md., 67  
**Brant**, Henry and Judy, Carlisle, Pa., 50  
**Breidenstine**, Glenn and Patricia, Lititz, Pa., 65  
**Crouse**, Merle and Jean, Saint Cloud, Fla., 65

**Duvall**, Roger and Mamie, Everett, Pa., 65  
**Herr**, Paul and Thelma, East Petersburg, Pa., 71  
**Hildebrand**, Howard and Helen, Hollsopple, Pa., 65  
**Hood**, Donald and Janet, Sykesville, Md., 60  
**Kover**, Virgil and Floy, Lititz, Pa., 71  
**Moyers**, Clarence and Elizabeth, Harrisonburg, Va., 67  
**Peregoy**, Bill and Jeannine, Westminster, Md., 50  
**Wenger**, Donald and Jane, Port Republic, Va., 60  
**Wine**, Ray and Ann, Bridgewater, Va., 70  
**Zehner**, John and Winona, Somerset, Pa., 60

## Deaths

**Archart**, Rebecca Houseman, 79, Stuarts Draft, Va., June 10  
**Baker**, Eugene, 81, Greenwood, Del., Nov. 17  
**Barden**, Robert, Sr., 88, Goshen, Ind., May 17  
**Batts**, Delores Weaver, 85, Sebring, Fla., Aug. 2  
**Black**, Selby M. (Buddy), 86, Union Bridge, Md., Nov. 5  
**Boyd**, C. Edward, 90, Ligonier, Pa., Sept. 21  
**Brocius**, Byron A., 88, Harrisburg, Pa., Nov. 30, 2019  
**Carson**, John E., 81, Chambersburg, Pa., Nov. 18  
**Chandler**, Cecille (Frances) Brooks, 81, Stuarts Draft, Va., July 24  
**Cohick**, Esther Maxine, 93, Carlisle, Pa., Oct. 14  
**Coulter**, Sharon Ann, 75, Knoxville, Md., Oct. 18  
**Desper**, Dolly Jean Madison, 75, Stuarts Draft, Va., Jan. 4, 2020  
**Dotterer**, Mary Louise Arbaugh, 89, Woodsboro, Md., Oct. 16  
**Duffy**, Robert Eugene, Sr., 80, Salunga, Pa., Nov. 3  
**Eady**, Hoyt Winfred, 92, Louisville, Ohio, Nov. 4

**Edwards**, Frank Linwood, 69, Knoxville, Md., Oct. 12  
**Ellinger**, James T., 76, Green Lane, Pa., Nov. 4  
**Fish**, Dorothy E. (Toots), 94, Ligonier, Pa., May 10  
**Funkhouser**, Pauline Cathern Wilson, 94, Moorefield, W. Va., Sept. 28  
**Gibbel**, Harry Lewis, Jr., 91, Harrisburg, Pa., Oct. 19  
**Goshorn**, Alberta Yvonne Haught, 76, Huntingdon, Pa., Nov. 8  
**Groves**, Virginia Elaine, 86, Sebring, Fla., March 10  
**Hanger**, Lois Jane Wood, 82, Stuarts Draft, Va., June 14  
**Hardy**, Roena Jones, 86, Salisbury, Md., Oct. 23  
**Hostetler**, Homer, 84, Orrville, Ohio, Aug. 21  
**Hovis**, Earl Roy, 84, Fayetteville, Pa., Nov. 12  
**Johns**, Betty Jo, 88, Oklahoma City, Okla., Oct. 23  
**Jones**, Thelma M. Beard, 89, Ligonier, Pa., Nov. 6  
**Kline**, Adam, Jr., 86, Newmanstown, Pa., Oct. 31  
**Knepper**, Royal W. (Junior), 88, Markleton, Pa., Oct. 19  
**Knotts**, Donald Raymond, 59, New Creek, W.Va., Oct. 26  
**Laudermilch**, Judith Metzger, 74, Harrisburg, Pa., April 19  
**Lefever-Hoover**, Donna L. Giesman, 69, Elizabethtown, Pa., Oct. 7  
**Lichty**, Alice Marie, 96, Waterloo, Iowa, Oct. 28  
**Liller**, Paul (Diddy) Griffin, 89, Keyser, W.Va., Oct. 14  
**Liskey**, Mary Smith, 92, Dayton, Va., Sept. 20  
**Lotts**, Rosanna Marie Zimmerman, 66, Stuarts Draft, Va., April 19  
**Ludy**, Dorothy Kauffman, 104, Quincy Village, Pa., Oct. 31  
**Martin**, William Burgard, 92, Huntingdon, Pa., Oct. 21  
**Mielke**, Bonnie Larue Mowen, 85, Westminster, Md., and Sebring, Fla., Nov. 13, 2019  
**Moyer**, Linford R., 67, Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 21  
**Mummau**, Dorothy Neff, 84, Shippensburg, Pa., Nov. 2  
**Nell**, Harry B., 93, East Berlin, Pa., July 5  
**Nesbitt**, Jean Hutson Conner, 77, Mogadore, Ohio, Sept. 24  
**Nutting**, Donna Lee, 78, Finksburg, Md., Sept. 23

**Paulin**, Marshall Eugene, 71, Bridgewater, Va., Jan. 11  
**Platz**, Glenn E., 63, Walkerton, Ind., Nov. 12  
**Raker**, Robert Curtis, 50, West Alexandria, Ohio, June 4  
**Richard**, Wesley D., 80, Goshen, Ind., Oct. 6  
**Riley**, Carolyn Jean Collins, 86, Hartsville, Ohio, Nov. 18  
**Scofield**, Dorothy M. Neighbors, 100, Kansas City, Mo., Nov. 8  
**Seitz**, Harry Myers, 96, Phoenixville, Pa., Nov. 9  
**Shidler**, Treva F. Lechlitrer, 97, Goshen, Ind., Feb. 4  
**Skaggs**, Sabra Elizabeth Richeson, 97, Goshen, Ind., June 7  
**Smithley**, Janice Ruth Hay, 77, Ligonier, Pa., July 20  
**Smoker**, Jerrold M., 67, Lancaster, Pa., Nov. 22  
**Sweigard**, Mary Louise Kurtz, 89, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Nov. 14  
**Thurman**, Charles, 90, North Canton, Ohio, May 24  
**Wiles**, Marie Kathleen, 91, Eugene, Ore., Oct. 10

## Ordained

**Beckman**, Teena, W. Marva Dist. (Hanging Rock Fellowship, Augusta, W.Va.), Sept. 6  
**Combs**, Brenda, W. Marva Dist. (Hanging Rock Fellowship, Augusta, W.Va.), Sept. 6  
**Durst**, Dennis, W. Marva Dist. (Cherry Grove, Grantsville, Md.), Sept. 27  
**Gordon**, Ron, Jr., W. Marva Dist. (Fairview, Oakland, Md.), Sept. 20  
**Teets**, Lindsey, W. Marva Dist. (Maple Spring, Eglon, W.Va.), Aug. 30  
**Webster**, Jessica, W. Pa. Dist. (Pleasant Hill, Johnstown, Pa.), Oct. 11

## Commissioned

**Clark**, Wayne, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Harmony, Myersville, Md.), Oct. 25

## Licensed

**Garcia**, Maria, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Iglesia de Cristo Genesis, Los Angeles, Calif.), Nov. 8

**Herrera**, Janet, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Iglesia de Cristo Genesis, Los Angeles, Calif.), Nov. 8  
**Keim**, Stephen, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Beech Run, Mapleton Depot, Pa.), Nov. 1  
**Linton**, Scott, Mid-Atl. Dist. (Union Bridge, Md.), Oct. 25  
**Navarrete**, Fernanda, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Pasadena, Calif.), Nov. 1  
**Plaza**, Juan, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Pasadena, Calif.), Oct. 11  
**Rios**, Adriana, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Pasadena, Calif.), Oct. 11  
**Ripley**, Elliot, S/C Ind. Dist. (Pleasant Dale, Decatur, Ind.), Nov. 8  
**Rubalcava**, Clara, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Iglesia de Cristo Genesis, Los Angeles, Calif.), Nov. 8

## Placements

**Beckman**, Teena, youth pastor, Hanging Rock Fellowship, Augusta, W.Va., Sept. 6  
**Combs**, Brenda, associate pastor, Hanging Rock Fellowship, Augusta, W.Va., Sept. 6  
**Detrick**, Joe, interim pastor, Mountville, Pa., Nov. 1  
**Dykema**, Bobbi, interim pastor to pastor, Springfield, Ill., July 1  
**Eikenberry**, Jim, pastor of congregational care, Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa., Nov. 1  
**Gandy**, Craig, interim pastor to pastor, Lewistown, Pa., Nov. 10  
**Hostetter**, John, from interim pastor to pastor, Mount Wilson, Lebanon, Pa., Oct. 11  
**Kreighbaum**, Jennifer, interim pastor, Bear Creek, Accident, Md., Oct. 11  
**McMullin**, Thomas, pastor, Fairview, Unionville, Iowa, Nov. 1  
**Myers**, Janet, pastor, Paxton, Harrisburg, Pa., Oct. 26  
**Senger**, Garold, Jr., interim pastor, Sunrise, Harrisonburg, Va., Nov. 15  
**Waggy**, Linda, interim pastor, Pine Grove, Rockingham, Va., Nov. 1

# The need for quiet places

**G**ordon Hempton has circled the globe to find the rarest sounds on earth—natural sounds that can be appreciated only without noise produced by humans. And they are hard to find.

An acoustic ecologist, Hempton has recorded sunrises on six continents and noted the never-ending wave of bird song that follows the rhythm of the earth's rotation. He's camped out in remote rainforests in Ecuador to listen to



JAMES DEATON

the earth breathing. And he's documented the ocean's gurgles and roars from inside a hollowed spruce log along the Pacific Northwest coastline.

Based on his research, Hempton claims that silence, or quietness, is an endangered species. Silence is neither the absence of sound—a vacuum—nor the absence of human beings. It's the absence of noise, the incessant buzz of modern life. Silence

is also the experience of place—what it means to really listen to our natural soundscape and take it all in.

Hempton speaks about the healing aspects of silence. When human beings experience quiet places, good things happen. We are more aware of the natural world, even other humans around us. People feel more secure and safe. We are calmer, kinder. And get this: We become better listeners. When listening to nature, we aren't trying to manipulate it or change it in any way. There aren't preconceived notions. We just take it all in, accepting it for what it was created to be. Hempton says that learning this skill in nature can help us listen to each other better.

If ever there was a time to seek quiet places, to learn how to listen better, it's right now.

One of my quiet places is Old Baldy, a remote spot within Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, not far from my home. It's on the backside of an abandoned historic farm along the Lake Michigan shoreline. I wander past ancient orchards, reaching a secluded grove of cedars perched on a sheer cliff. From the edge, I feel as if I've been transported to a sea in a faraway land. From there, I


turn and clamber up a scrubby sand dune, hollowed by long, cold winters. Climbing on sand isn't easy, but the payoff is worth it. I find this certain cedar log and sit, staring out over the big blue lake. It's the perfect spot to listen, to pray. And I take it all in.

Getting away from noise and settling into those quiet places doesn't mean we're numb or calloused. It doesn't mean we're avoiding responsibility, that we're willfully ignoring the call to do justice and love mercy. It's a time to walk humbly with God, something we often forget.

In *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, Henri Nouwen writes about seeking solitude as the first movement of an authentic spiritual life. Desiring wholeness, we move from a self-centered loneliness rooted in suspicion and fear to a solitude of heart that is reflective and receptive. It is transformation “from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play.” Biblically speaking, it is living by the Spirit and not by fleshly desires.

Solitude of heart is not a withdrawal from the world and the pressing needs around us. With God's help, our mind descends into our heart—the deep well of compassion—and there we can truly listen to the world and identify the pain we see as our own. Once our intellect meets our affections, we are prepared to engage the “burning issues of our time,” to quote Nouwen. The Holy Spirit moves us from head to heart to hands, from compassion to solidarity.

So, where do we find places of solitude, of quietness, that will give us the fortitude to move beyond ourselves and take hold of our calling? How can we engage the burning issues of our time if we are not grounded in God's love, listening and learning, reflecting and praying?

Consider Nouwen's advice and cultivate the solitude of heart. Attune your spirit to God's voice. Ponder Hempton's advice, too, and immerse yourself in nature. Seek and find the quiet places in our world. Get beyond the din and distractions. Silence leads you to prayer, and then to action. 

James Deaton is managing editor of Brethren Press.

WITH GOD'S HELP, OUR MIND DESCENDS INTO OUR HEART—THE DEEP WELL OF COMPASSION—AND THERE WE CAN TRULY LISTEN TO THE WORLD AND IDENTIFY THE PAIN WE SEE AS OUR OWN.



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Adventurous  
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our church can continue to move  
forward and do the work of Jesus,  
peacefully, simply, together."*

—Sue Ranson, Roanoke First CoB



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

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# National Older Adult Conference

## September 6-10, 2021

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—Romans 15:13

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### Preachers:

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Paula Bowser  
Don Fitzkee  
Christy Dowdy  
Eric Landram

### Keynotes Speakers:

Karen Gonzalez  
Lisa Sharon Harper  
Ken Medema



NOAC 2019 photos by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

### Registration opens online May 2021

Check the website and Facebook page  
in the coming months for registration  
fees and other details.

[www.brethren.org/NOAC](http://www.brethren.org/NOAC)

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National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) is an event for folks over fifty who want to worship,  
learn, reflect, pray, serve, rest and enjoy fellowship with others in a virtual setting.