

A photograph of a winter forest scene. In the foreground, a stream flows through a snowy landscape. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding trees and sky. The banks are covered in snow, and several trees are partially submerged. The background shows a dense forest of bare trees, with snow on the ground and branches. The overall atmosphere is quiet and serene.

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

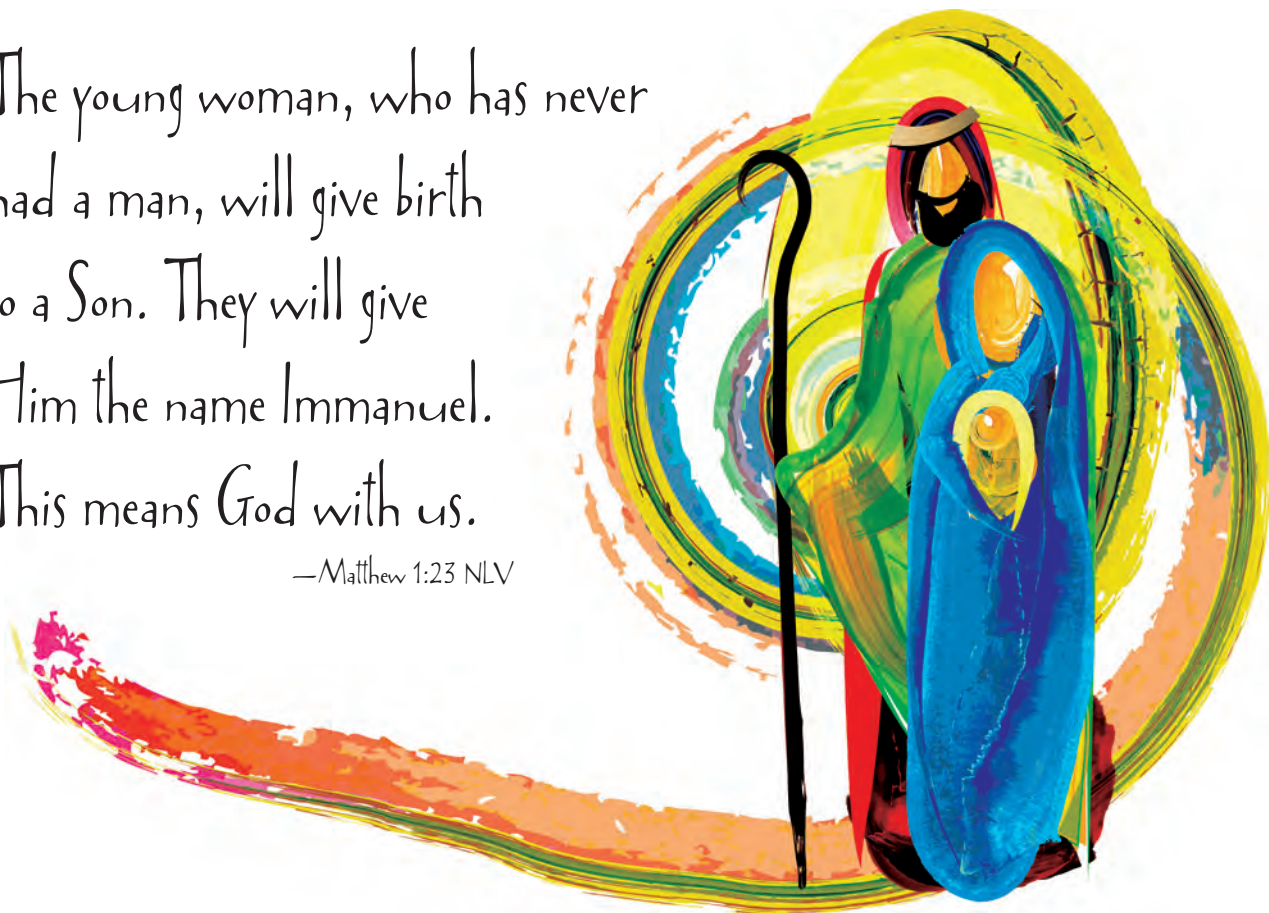
DECEMBER 2023 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

## Christmas Day 1723

The first Brethren baptism in America

The young woman, who has never  
had a man, will give birth  
to a Son. They will give  
Him the name Immanuel.  
This means God with us.

—Matthew 1:23 NLV



May you and your loved ones be blessed by the coming of Immanuel.  
May you be filled with great joy as we celebrate the birth of Christ.



**Church of the Brethren**

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CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

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## on the cover

The first Brethren baptism in America took place on Christmas Day 300 years ago in the Wissahickon Creek in Pennsylvania. In this issue, read about that day in 1723, the present-day Germantown Church of the Brethren, early Brethren women, and waters that unify and divide. Photo of the Wissahickon by Rhys Asplundh.

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**Christmas traditions** Does your congregation have a Christmas tradition to share with readers? MESSENGER is especially interested in stories that depict a range of cultures. We're inviting you to think about that now, during the 2023 Christmas season, and we'll publish several stories in December 2024. Send brief articles and photos by email to [messenger@brethren.org](mailto:messenger@brethren.org). Your submission may be published in print or online.

# The fruit of the Spirit

**One of the best meetings I've attended** recently was a district conference. One might not have expected it to be so uplifting, since the agenda included closing two congregations, recognizing the sale of a retirement facility, and deliberating about a potentially difficult query.

In its favor, the meeting did have all the attractions of a quintessential Church of the Brethren get-together: meaningful worship, opportunities to learn, fellowship with friends old and new, a hearty lunch, lots of snacks, and a closing auction that elicited laughter and generosity.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

But in addition to these things, the business was leavened with a lightness of spirit.

The congregations that had closed were remembered with stories of their vitality over the years and a recounting of how, even in their closing, their assets had been used to extend their ministries. One church had been founded in 1845 and the other in 1919. There was sadness, but also gratitude for lives well lived.

The story of the retirement home's founding and flourishing was told through words and photos. The eventual necessary sale was accomplished in a way that cared for both residents and

staff. While there was a real sense of loss, the focus was on moving from mourning to celebrating the institution's 130 years of ministry and its legacy of Christian care.

And the potentially contentious item of business proceeded smoothly, perhaps because disagreements had been aired in a hearing the week before. During the conference discussion, what people highlighted was how the district has in recent years been able to reach across differences and knit itself together. There was genuine affection, which seemed to allow people to see the best in each other.

Delegates named this spirit, and wondered if was a gift that could be shared with others across the Church of the Brethren. Could others see how these people love each other? While this district is not large, its members seemed hopeful and imaginative rather than limited or small.

"Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind," says 1 Peter 3:8. What a witness that would be among those who call themselves Brethren. What a witness that would be for a wounded world.

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“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’”

—Luke 1:46-47

“Christmas Eve was a night of song that wrapped itself about you like a shawl. But it warmed more than your body. It warmed your heart . . . filled it, too, with melody that would last forever.”

—author Bess Streeter Aldrich in *Song of Years*

“I truly believe that if we keep telling the Christmas story, singing the Christmas songs, and living the Christmas spirit, we can bring joy and happiness and peace to this world.”

—pastor and author Norman Vincent Peale

“As I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog.”

—author Philip Yancey

## SONGS OF THE SEASON

Can you match the Advent/Christmas season songs at left with the composer of the tune on the right? Answers are below.

- |                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. It Came Upon the Midnight Clear | a. Franz Gruber          |
| 2. We Three Kings                  | b. Gloria Shayne         |
| 3. Silent Night                    | c. John Rutter           |
| 4. O Little Town of Bethlehem      | d. Gustav Holst          |
| 5. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing    | e. Henry Thomas Smart    |
| 6. Do You Hear What I Hear?        | f. Richard Storrs Willis |
| 7. Angels from the Realms of Glory | g. Henry John Gauntlett  |
| 8. Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus  | h. Lewis H. Redner       |
| 9. In the Bleak Midwinter          | i. Adolphe Adam          |
| 10. O Holy Night                   | j. Charles Wesley        |
| 11. Once in Royal David’s City     | k. John Henry Hopkins    |
| 12. Candlelight Carol              | l. Felix Mendelssohn     |

## CONTRABAND CHORDS

This year marks another interesting anniversary: a century and a half since the first organ was installed in a congregation of the Church of the Brethren, which had long frowned on musical instruments being used in church. Brethren hymnals didn’t even include musical notes until 1901.

The wayward Brethren of the Philadelphia First congregation, however, reportedly used a small organ in worship services as early as 1872, and the following year a larger organ was placed in the church’s basement, per Don Fitzkee’s historical account in *Moving Toward the Mainstream*. A new church, built in 1891, featured a new organ, according to Fitzkee.

Fitzkee continues: “By the time Annual Conference approved musical instruments in worship in 1920 (and then only in congregations where they would not disturb the peace), Philadelphia First was about to purchase its *fourth* organ!”

The Pipe Organ Database lists the congregation’s current organ as being installed by Schantz Organ Co. in 1958.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Not many songs in the Advent/Christmas season feature John the Baptist, who was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah just months before Jesus and later baptizes his cousin. But *On Jordan’s Banks the Baptist’s Cry* (more often sung for the Baptism of the Lord Sunday in January) begins by referencing “the Baptist” as he prepares the way for Christ’s ministry. The final verse proclaims: “All praise to you, eternal Son, whose advent has our freedom won.” The hymn was written by Charles Coffin in France; originally penned in Latin, it was translated by English priest John Chandler.

ANSWERS: 1-f; 2-k; 3-a; 4-h; 5-l; 6-b; 7-e; 8-j; 9-d (another popular version was composed by Harold Darke); 10-i; 11-g; 12-c.

# For a common spiritual cause

*Forgive us, Jesus, for understanding that violence is, indeed, a heart problem, but then putting into people's hands the most violent weapons ever created.*

*Forgive us, Jesus, for making you into a mascot for our political team, reducing you to a slogan for a cause you will not recognize.*

*Forgive us, Jesus, for not recognizing that hurt people hurt people; strengthen us for the long road to healing, wholeness, and peace.*

**W**ith this prayer, a walk to recognize the International Day of Prayer for Peace began, sponsored by the Virlina District Peace

Affairs Committee. The walk was a new addition to the district calendar, designed as an intentional response to both rising incidents of gun violence in the city of Roanoke, Va., and recent efforts to understand and reverse the impacts of racism in the city.

The committee capitalized on connections that members have through the district and local civic work on these issues, as well as relationships with a growing network of concerned Christians from across the area who are committed to peace and justice work.

The 38 walkers were from eight Virlina District congregations, congregations from several other Christian denominations, and some civic and social justice groups. The group walked together along a two-mile path through the Gainsboro neighborhood in Roanoke. This historically Black area witnessed the decimation of once-vibrant religious, civic, and arts life by the so-called urban renewal efforts of the 1960s to 1980s that destroyed neighborhoods, churches, and businesses, relocating citizens from homes to housing projects.

The walkers visited five historic Black churches, two of which are in their current location after being forced to relocate when their original property was condemned during the urban renewal process. Pastors and church members greeted us with a brief history of their congregation and a moving prayer for peace for our world and especially for our city, as much of Roanoke's gun violence impacts members of these congregations. This was made more tangible to walkers as our route passed a convenience store where one participant's son had been murdered several years prior, and then later stopped to visit a homemade

memorial to a recent victim of gun violence.

Though the pain and loss that several walkers carried with them was significant, the overall spirit on the walk was one of great enthusiasm and joy. New friendships were made, laughter was frequent, songs were sung, and history was encountered first-hand through the stories of this historic neighborhood. This combined to create a delightful sense of common spiritual cause with one another and the congregations visited along the way. Even neighbors enjoying their front porches on a beautiful September evening (some of whose initial reactions conveyed uncertainty) expressed appreciation when they learned of the purpose of the walk. Others who drove past slowed down to wave their hands and honk their horns in support.

Returning to the starting point nearly two hours later, many participants exchanged contact information and expressed a desire to repeat this event next year. Hearts had been touched by the experience, and we look forward to working with one another and with God that peace would indeed prevail in our neighborhoods. —Tim Harvey



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.



## A new ministry for Ridgeway church

**R**idgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa., has started a new ministry in conjunction with HANNA's Pantry, located across the street in Susquehanna Township. HANNA's Pantry is a community food bank that provides service to neighbors in need.

Here is how the program started and how it has expanded.

Almost 25 years ago a nurse in the school district noticed that several children complained of stomach aches on Monday mornings. She realized that many of them had too little food to eat on weekends. To help with this need, the nurse collected food and sent home a grocery bag on Friday afternoons filled with the dietary needs for the weekend for the identified families.

That effort has become HANNA's Pantry, named after SusqueHANNA Township. Each month, 30,000 pounds of food are served to almost 600 families. Storage rooms, shelving units, freezers, and refrigerators were donated or purchased with help from the school district, local food distributors, and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. Twice a month pantry volunteers from the community and area churches, including Ridgeway, distribute food in direct proportion to a family's needs. A representative from each family drives to the pantry center behind the township high school with a form identifying how many members are in their family, how many are children, and what dietary needs must be met.

Now Ridgeway church has expanded that program. Teams of church members volunteer to make a free drive-through pancake breakfast for those families in the program. HANNA's Pantry provides most of the food and the congregation contributes about \$300 each month for the rest of the food and supplies. One Saturday a month, church members prepare pancakes and sausages, serving

the breakfasts in compostable containers along with butter, syrup, plastic utensils, and a napkin. Meanwhile, other church members walk to the waiting cars and ask how many pancake meals are needed and what supplemental foods the family would like.

Supplemental foods vary monthly but usually include juice, containers of fruit, nutrition bars, and coffee. Those foods are gathered, bagged, and delivered with the pancake containers to the family car. Frequently as many as 225 people are served this free breakfast.

The church and the community have formed an ever-growing relationship. The outpouring of help from church members demonstrates their willingness to provide for the needs of the neighborhood. Words of peace from the church members are usually met with words of heartfelt gratitude for both the food and the caring extended to the recipients. Indeed, Ridgeway has taken its name seriously as a community church. —Cheryl Faber



## In recognition of the International Day of Peace

*Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren on Sunday, Sept. 17, shared a litany of remembrance for the 216 children killed each month in the United States due to gun violence (according to Pew Research Center, April 6, 2023). Following worship, the congregation "planted" pinwheels in the lawn, each representing a child, as a public witness to "Seek Peace and Pursue It." On Sept. 21, a public candlelight vigil was an opportunity for the whole community to lament, remember, and witness to God's call to be people of peace. —Angela Finet*



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# Brethren in America at 300

## A passionate commitment to Christ

by Brian Nixon, with Jeff Bach



Cheryl Burnham/Up-Country

**W**hat Hance (Hans) Jorick Klauser and his wife, Anna

**Maria, were thinking** when they boarded the Ship Allen in 1729 to come to America with the Mack family is unknown to my family history. As a relative on my mother's Clauser side, I'd love to know. There is no insight from my mother's grandmother, Anna Kline, either. Hans and Anna Klauser's story remains a mystery.

In her book *Some Early Lineages of Berks County, PA*, Beulah Hix Blair

states, "According to tradition, the western and eastern branches of the Clauser line . . . are descended from the same immigrants. Hans Jarick Klauser, and his wife, Anna Maria, arrived on September 11, 1729, on the ship Allen. . . . All the passengers were members of the German Baptist Brethren or Dunkards. Among them was the leader of the Dunkards himself, Alexander Mack." Blair continues, "However, these were preceded by a group of Dunkards under Peter Becker, who settled in Germantown by 1719" (page 1).



Wassahenden Trail in Winter by Rhys Aspinwall / flickr.com



Richard Kyerematen, longtime pastor of Germantown Church of the Brethren, reminded the gathering that God “is always in the building business.”



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

“ The baptisms that began the congregation on Christmas Day 1723 also mark the start of the organized Brethren movement in the Americas. ”

It is because of Becker’s work in Germantown that I flew to Philadelphia to take part in the Oct. 8 celebration of the 300th anniversary of Germantown Church of the Brethren. The baptisms that began the congregation in 1723 also mark the start of the organized Brethren movement in the Americas.

Brethren historian Jeff Bach provides more information on Becker and on Conrad Beissel, founder of the breakaway Ephrata Cloister, in his book *Voices of the Turtle doves*: “Beissel apprenticed himself for a year to

weaver, Peter Becker (1687-1758), in Germantown. . . . Becker was baptized by the Neu Täufer in 1714. . . . Upon expulsion, a group emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1719, with Becker as leader” (page 16).

The whole group of Brethren in Marienborn were expelled from Ysenburg-Buedingen in 1715 and moved to Krefeld. Becker and his party left Krefeld in 1719. The exact reasons are unknown, but it was possibly due to tensions within the congregation at Krefeld over church discipline, and the

immigrating group might have had some tensions among themselves. These conjectures are based on comments in Ephrata’s internal history, *Chronicon Ephratense*.

The Germantown congregation was formally organized on Christmas Day 1723 and did get off to a good start. Less than a year later, in November 1724, members from Germantown, led by Becker, traveled to the present-day Coventry area and organized a new congregation there. A few days later the Germantown group evangelized in

*Views of members of the congregation and guests during the Oct. 8 official congregational celebration of Germantown's 300 years.*

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



Joel Brumbaugh-Cayford

the area around Leola, Pa., that was called Conestoga. This congregation chose Conrad Beissel as their leader. He immediately began to teach different beliefs from the Germantown group, including the superiority of celibacy and observing the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday). The conflict with Germantown continued to grow until Beissel led a formal division at Conestoga in 1728. He and his followers moved to Ephrata in 1732. A few members at Conestoga remained in fellowship with Germantown.

**Still standing after 300 years**

The Germantown congregation continues, though the names and congregants have changed. Instead of a German immigrant pastor, the congregation is pastored by Richard Kyerematen, who is originally from Ghana. Instead of being predominantly German, the congregation is predominantly African American and Afro-Caribbean.

I firmly believe this would warm the heart of Becker and his first congregation at Germantown. The gospel has no color or nationality; all are one in Christ, regardless of personal history or hue.

I was honored to meet Jeff Bach at the celebration on Oct. 8. We sat together as we joined the congregation in a passionate worship service of song, testimony, and sermon. Pastor Barbara Elizabeth Short-Clark gave the opening prayer and encouragement. Poet RuNett Ebo recited a poem written for the celebration. Pastor Kyerematen used Psalm 127:1-2 as his text: “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.”

Kyerematen reminded the congregation that God “is always in the building business.” What is it God is building? According to Kyerematen, God is building you, God’s church, and a nation. He reminded us that what God builds is always beautiful, unique, intelligent, exudes love, and is dependable. God has a blueprint for our lives and his people.

The service was a powerful reminder that the Germantown church is still

in the building business, helping to create a beautiful body of believers.

After the celebration, Bach gave me a tour of the church. He pointed out various aspects of the building’s growth, from a small, stone church to larger church that acclimated to the times. As an example, the original win-



Chris Brumbaugh-Cayford



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Chris Brumbaugh-Cayford

“ I firmly believe this would warm the heart of Becker and his first congregation at Germantown. The gospel has no color or nationality; all are one in Christ. ”

dows were rectangular but sometime in the 1890s they were adjusted to fit a more Protestant aesthetic.

In the basement, Bach showed me old Brethren benches and love feast ware. He told me that the height of the congregation’s growth was between 1904 and 1934, when it jumped from 60 members to 400 members.

As we walked outside to the graveyard, Bach showed me various prominent Brethren graves including those of the Mack family. I was moved as I gazed upon the simple gravestone of the Brethren founder (a new gravestone was erected years later).

After a luncheon prepared and served by the Germantown congregation there was another celebration recognizing the 300 years of faithful ser-

vice. Guests from several churches in Atlantic Northeast District were present. Ron Lutz, who pastored at Germantown in the 1980s during efforts to revive the church, and his wife, Ila, were there and shared memories of that time. The Coventry church that has had a close association with Germantown since 1724 was represented. Among others, a van load of people from Lancaster attended and brought along with them Roger Moreno, president of the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela.

After greetings and comments by various Brethren leaders from the US and abroad, the microphone was handed to Bach. In his opening remarks, he stated that it was a joy “to worship God and to experience the crossing of faith and cul-

tures, of ages, musical styles, and commitments to Jesus Christ in unity to celebrate 300 years of the Brethren in America.” He emphasized that it is “God’s faithfulness, not our efforts, not our works.” He reminded the congregation that the first Brethren who came to Pennsylvania from Europe carried with them a “blueprint of what God wanted to build in his church in Jesus Christ. It’s the story we celebrate today.”

The start of the Germantown congregation’s 300 years occurred on Christmas Day in 1723, when six Brethren were baptized in the local Wissahickon Creek. Thereafter, there were many “tests and challenges, some from the inside and some from outside ... and yet God is faithful,” Bach said. He proceeded to give a wonderful

overview of the Brethren history at Germantown, underscoring his points by reciting some poetry by Alexander Mack Jr., who was one of the pastors at Germantown.

From "On love" by Alexander Mack Jr.:

Jesus' love is the fire  
that can melt hearts,

Jesus' love is great and precious  
and takes our misery,  
Jesus' love sinks down deep  
into our deepest distress,  
And brings back—unexpectedly—  
new life out of death.

From one of Mack Jr.'s birthday poems:  
Through the death of Jesus,

through the wounds of Jesus,  
God has bound Himself to  
the distress and wounds  
of the soul,  
So that we may certainly recognize,  
thereby, His faithfulness;  
And never shy away from  
His easy yoke.



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*A Ministry of the Church of the Brethren*

## The mission has not changed

After stating some of the differences between the first Germantown congregation and today's congregation, Bach concluded his message with this: "In some ways the [mission] has not changed: the Gospel of Jesus Christ's saving love—his uniquely redemptive death and resurrection and his outpouring of the Holy Spirit to gather a church and to live in obedience to the New Testament—has not changed."

I was encouraged as I listened to Bach and the faithful people at Germantown who continue to build the church. Although I didn't find—or was unable to decipher—my Clauser family gravestones at the Germantown cemetery (if they were there at all), I found something as grand: a broader, more beautiful family, the body of Christ. At Germantown, I found men and women, Black, white, and brown, gathered to celebrate Christ's work in his people, and a call to be a congregation of Christ's peace and a people of praise.

As the current Germantown mission statement declares, "We exist to create a passionate commitment to Christ, His cause, and His community." I dare say this may have been the same sentiment for 300 years, for a unique place and community where people are invited to join "into God's extraordinary purposes." 

Brian Nixon is a writer, artist, musician, educator, and minister in Albuquerque, N.M., and a former licensed minister in the Church of the Brethren. Jeff Bach is a Church of the Brethren historian recently retired from leadership of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College. The Oct. 8 celebration is available to view on the Germantown website at [www.gcob1723.com/watch-live](http://www.gcob1723.com/watch-live).

# The first Brethren baptism in America

by Frank Ramirez

**T**he group walked carefully down the little roads that made up Germantown, until soon they were beyond the buildings and nearing Wissahickon Creek. At the water's edge, or rather at the edge of the ice, all was still, except for the flutter of a few small birds watching the people and hopping from branch to branch.

At a signal from Peter Becker, the six who were to be baptized knelt down, and he laid his hands on them one by one and prayed aloud. As they all shivered together and huddled close for warmth, he then began to crack the ice with a long stick.

The sound of rushing water greeted them. "See, even in the cold of water, God's Spirit is bright and alive," Peter said.

Anna Gumre watched Peter take a very deep breath and shudder as he stepped into the water. After that he did not hesitate, but walked until the water reached his waist. Quickly, one by one, Martin Urner and his wife, Catherine, and Frederick Lang and John Mayle and Henry Landis with his wife took their turn in the stream, while the others on the shore sang Alexander Mack's hymn.


*Count well the cost, Christ Jesus said,  
When you lay the foundation.  
Are you prepared, though all seems lost  
To risk your reputation,  
Your self, your wealth, for Christ the Lord  
As you now give your solemn word.*

*Within the church's warm embrace  
The child of God is molded,  
God's Spirit lighting up a face  
And by his grace enfolded  
And childlike steps by God are led  
Into true life these steps are sped.*

As quickly as he could, Peter asked the six their baptismal questions and then quickly dunked them three times beneath the water. They sputtered and spluttered in turn, struggling to catch their breath as they were helped to their feet. The others had all taken part in their own time, but that was in the old country. It occurred to Anna as she watched that there was something old about this, like the first Christians who were baptized, and something new, for it was the first Brethren baptism in America—and not illegal!

Quickly they wrapped the newly baptized men and women in layers of warm blankets and walked together back to town, this time to the Gumre home. The lights were bright inside as the winter afternoon began to wane. A roaring fire was waiting for them and, even better, the smell of good food cooking over the fire. There was a large pot of potatoes and carrots and onions and lamb, a delicious smell.

Soon bread, which had been left to rise, was baking in the stone oven. And for those who were too hungry to wait for the feast, there was a bowl of apples, a little dried, but part of the fall's crop and very sweet and hard.

The children began to run around, pretending to baptize the one they caught. Some pretended they were Brother Peter Becker and would act as if they were sharing food with the poor. It was not long before the bowl of apples was empty and more were put out. The children were fed first. They devoured the food on their heaping plates and were promised sweet cake as a reward for waiting patiently and watching the adults as they celebrated the love feast. 

This account is excerpted from "Bread and Ice," a story in *The Meanest Man in Patrick County: And Other Unlikely Brethren Heroes*, by Frank Ramirez (Brethren Press). Written for both young and old, the stories are based on historical accounts. Ramirez is pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind.

“As they all shivered together and huddled close for warmth, he then began to crack the ice with a long stick.”



photos by Wendy McFadden

# The waters of baptism

by Wendy McFadden

**D**o you have a personal baptism story? Have you ever told it to someone else?

Sharing baptism stories in small groups was one of the first activities in the annual forum of Christian Churches Together. The theme of the gathering was “Waters that Unite and Waters that Divide: Baptism and the Journey to Unity and Reconciliation.”

The membership of CCT stretches across Christian traditions in the US, and an examination of beliefs and practices related to baptism was deep and meaningful. Presentations ranged from the academic to the experiential. Here are words and images that are especially memorable.

**Modes of baptism:** Some of the obvious differences in beliefs about

baptism are infant versus adult baptism and sprinkling versus immersion. A presentation from a Syriac Orthodox priest became vivid when he showed video footage of his infant daughter being immersed up to her shoulders in the baptismal font, where water was poured over her head from four directions. It was a window into a scene that most of us had not witnessed before.

**An Anabaptist connection:** The First African Baptist Church in Savannah, the oldest Black church in North America, was organized in 1773. The associate pastor told the group that founding pastor George Leile had sent letters to England about the importance of the Anabaptists. Leile was the first African to be ordained in the US and the first missionary from the US, establish-

ing a church in Jamaica in 1788.

The group learned that early members of First African Baptist Church raised the money for the property by re-enslaving themselves in order to make use of the equity.

**Baptism breaking borders:** One presenter quoted Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who exclaimed, “What are the baptized doing in the realm of politics? What matters their baptism?” The archbishop wasn’t saying Christians didn’t belong in politics, explained Edgardo Colón-Emeric. Rather, the problem for Romero was that they had left their baptism behind—their baptism had become insignificant.

Those who killed Romero and others were “threatened with resurrection,” Colón-Emeric said, quoting

## What Is Christian Churches Together?

**CCT is an organization devoted to bringing together the breadth of American Christianity.** The seeds were planted about 20 years ago, and the first convocation was in 2006.

Five faith families make up the membership: Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Black, Historic Protestant, and Orthodox. At annual meetings, each family is represented among the presentations and the worship services.

Many of the worship services and sessions are held in nearby congregations. This year in Savannah, Ga., CCT visited the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist, Christ Church Episcopal, St. Paul’s Greek Orthodox Church, First African Baptist Church, and First Zion Baptist Church in Riceboro.

Wendy McFadden attended for the Church of the Brethren, which has been a participant of CCT since the first convocation.

Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel. (Esquivel's book by that title is a publication of Brethren Press.)

Recounting the story of a church that gathers in Tijuana at the US-Mexico border, Colón-Emeric observed, "All Christians are migrants because baptism breaks borders."

### The misuse of baptism:

Representing the Historic Black family, William D. Watley described how enslaved people were first taken to Brazil to be "broken." They were baptized in a mass baptism, he said, giving those who misrepresented the liturgical act the power to call them anything they wanted.

In contrast, Watley said, it has been the role of the African American church to empower people to be "holy and wholly human." Citing Daniel 4:1-9, he told of Daniel, who steadfastly maintained his own name, which means "God is my judge," rather than using the name assigned by the oppressor.

**The baptismal trail:** There were two opportunities for forum participants to reencounter their baptisms, the most dramatic being a walk down the Historic Baptismal Trail of the Gullah Geechee people. Living in the low country of the Atlantic coast, the Gullah Geechee are descendants of formerly enslaved people who have maintained their language and their ties to Africa.

The trail, located in Riceboro, Ga., takes people to a stream where baptisms used to take place for almost a century, beginning in the 1840s. The CCT group gathered by the water's edge and poured small cups of water on each other's hands, praying that God would "bless these hands and feet to bear witness to your reconciling love."

### Waters that unify and waters that divide:

In many ways the examination of baptism provided a sense of unity and fellowship. But there were signs that unity is not always easy, and there was more history hovering in the

air than could be dealt with in three days. The Historic Black family reminded the group that some of the churches we had visited were constructed with the labor of enslaved people. There was a plea for the organization to move more actively from learning to leading.



There were three Anabaptists at the conference—two from the Bruderhof and one from the Church of the Brethren. Anabaptism began almost 500 years ago; the Brethren movement began more than three centuries ago with an illegal baptism in 1708.

The act of believer baptism was both religious and political. What does this mean for us, the descendants of those believers? Here in 2023, the 300th anniversary of the first Brethren baptisms on this continent, how are we carrying our baptism with us? How does baptism make a difference in each of us individually, and also in a world searching for justice and healing?

# TRANSFORMED by GOD

Romans 12:1-2

## Young Adult Conference

May 24 – 26, 2024

Camp Shepherds Spring, Sharpsburg, MD

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Church of the Brethren

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# Early Brethren women

## Known and unknown

by Denise Kettering-Lane

**O**n Christmas Day 1723, a small congregation made their way to the icy Wissahickon Creek to perform the first Brethren baptisms in the Americas. Led by Peter Becker, this moment marked a new beginning for the Brethren in the new world.

Among those baptized were four men and two women—Catherine Urner and the wife of Henry Landis. Following the baptisms, the members returned to the home of John Gumre and held the first Brethren love feast in the Americas. Besides the newly baptized women, there were several other women present: Maria Hildebrand, Magdalene Traut, Anna Gumre, and Johanna Gans. These and other women formed a significant part of the early Brethren, and yet we know next to nothing about most of them.

For many Brethren today, the names of male Brethren founders easily come to mind: Alexander Mack Senior and Junior, Johann Kipping, Christian Liebe, John Naas, Peter Becker, Christopher Sauer Jr., John Price, and more. Yet, what about the early female Brethren? Their names come much more slowly to mind, if names come to mind at all. Maybe we know the name of Alexander Mack's wife, Anna Margaretha, but beyond her, these women remain obscured, either lost to history or unknown to present-day Brethren.

This difference in how much we know about early Brethren men versus early Brethren women boils down to a few factors. At the most basic level, these women often remain in the background simply because we don't have documents

that provide us with the same level of information about women of the time as we do for men. These women didn't write down their thoughts and feelings in letters or diaries, like John Naas or John Price, or if they did, the documents didn't survive so that we can peruse them today. They didn't write theological treatises, like Alexander Mack Sr., or publish newspaper editorials like Christopher Sauer Jr. The stories we tell about the men relate back to the records written by themselves or by others, but these same records rarely tell the stories of the women. Without these sorts of documents, it's hard to understand the motivations, thoughts, and experiences of these faithful women.

Beyond the issue of documentation, women's names can vary significantly, making it difficult to trace scattered references. In early Brethren membership lists, for example, some women are listed by their full names, some with their maiden names, and some simply as "wife of" with their husband's name. Peter Becker's wife, Anna Dorothea Partman Becker, appears in Brethren sources as "wife of Peter Becker," has her married last name spelled in three different ways (Baker, Bäcker, and Becker), and her maiden name spelled in two ways (Partman and Partmann). Her first name appears as "Dorothy," "Dorothea," and "Anna Dorothea." In fact, in the handful of references to this woman, her name is never listed in the same way twice. These difficulties in simply having names, let alone consistent names and spellings in historical documents, further complicate the challenge of understanding who these women were. We can't even figure out what names we should use to search for them.

Women also played roles in both society and the church of the time that contributed to their anonymity. The Pietist

“What we can do is acknowledge women’s presence at and participation in major Brethren events, such as the first baptisms and love feast in Germantown in 1723.”

movement in Germany had given women more prominent roles in many areas, whether through publication, leadership, or establishing Pietist groups, but often those opportunities were most readily available to noblewomen or the wealthy. Women who embraced the new opportunities often faced backlash from religious and civil authorities. Most early Brethren women had far more limited educational and economic opportunities, as they came from farming or artisan families. Yet some faced consequences simply for joining the Brethren. Most notably, the widow Eva Elizabeth Hoffman faced exile from Marienborn in Germany after receiving baptism from Alexander Mack. At the same time, the privatization of women’s roles focused more activity on home and family. As a result, women were important but background actors in the various events that transpired. For the early Brethren, women served roles that mainly helped to sustain and grow the movement, and did not appear as the face of Brethren identity.

So what do we know about early Brethren women in Europe and America? Anna Margaretha Kling Mack, Johanna Nothiger Boni, and Johanna Kipping were the first three women to be baptized in the Eder River in 1708.

Anna Margaretha Mack (1680-1720) was the daughter of one of the leading families in the town of Schriesheim. Unfortunately, we know little about her own convictions. She stood steadfastly beside her husband, Alexander Mack Sr., as they left their family home and financial stability behind for the relatively unknown town of Schwarzenau, received this new baptism alongside her husband, and eventually moved to the foreign land of Friesland (the Netherlands) with her husband and their small children. It was there that she died.

Johanna Boni had been married to her husband, Andrew, for only a year at the time of her baptism. She later joined in the Brethren migrations to Friesland in 1719 and to Pennsylvania in 1729.

Of the three, Johanna Kipping probably had the most challenging route to the Eder River. Her husband had refused to baptize their infant daughter, leading to his imprisonment and her decision to baptize the infant in the

Lutheran Church rather than face further consequences. She also had to raise funds to pay for her husband’s imprisonment, which put a severe strain on the family finances. Following release from prison he faced expulsion, and she was given the choice of either going with him but without her three daughters, or remaining with her daughters and letting her husband go. She chose the latter in 1707, but by the summer of 1708 she and her daughters had apparently joined him in Schwarzenau. Eventually, the family joined the party that departed for Pennsylvania in 1729.

In Pennsylvania, Brethren women arrived with the initial group in 1719 and were involved in the first baptisms and love feast in 1723. While the names of these women are known, little else is known about their motivations and interests. As the colonial period progressed, history gives glimpses into the lives of these women. Widows like Anna Dorothea Becker received gifts from the congregation, as noted in Alexander Mack’s daybook. In letters, there are references and greetings to them as wives and mothers. Few other details appear, however. There are limited details about Alexander Mack Jr.’s wife, Elizabeth, but his daughters, Hannah and Sarah, appear in his letters when they faced discipline by the Germantown congregation for their relationships with young men who were not Brethren. Yet we hear the story only from their father’s account, not through their own words.

Many questions remain about the roles, interests, and motivations of the early Brethren women. Without more documentation it is difficult to create fuller stories of their lives, interests, motivations, and contributions. What we can do is acknowledge women’s presence at and participation in major Brethren events, such as the first baptisms and love feast in Germantown in 1723.

We can include their names, when we know them, among the Brethren founders: Anna Margareta and Anna Dorothea, Elizabeth and Johanna, Catherine and Eva. The Brethren flourished in America, in part, because of the faithful contributions of these women. 

Denise Kettering-Lane is associate professor of Brethren Studies and director of the Master of Arts Program at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind.



# Saved from the power of sin

Reflections for the fourth Sunday of Advent

by Tim Harvey

*God rest ye merry, gentlemen,  
let nothing you dismay,  
remember Christ our Savior  
was born on Christmas Day  
to save us all from Satan's pow'r  
when we had gone astray.*

**P**erhaps the last thing we expect in worship the Sunday before Christmas is a sermon on sin. After lighting the Advent candle of love, we're much more likely to hear a choral cantata, or have our hearts warmed by the children's Christmas play (complete with a cast of bath-robed shepherds and angels with halo hairbands), or sing a familiar Christmas carol—perhaps even the one above.

But a sermon on sin? We might prefer to pass on that one. And yet, what are we affirming when we sing hymn lyrics like, “save us all from Satan's pow'r”?

The Gospel lectionary for the fourth Sunday of Advent offers us the familiar story of Gabriel's announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38). If we continue past the comfort of a traditional nativity text, we can follow the story to the implication of Mary's “yes” in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56), which stands in as the Psalm text for this Sunday. It is in Mary's prophetic song that we begin to sense how Jesus' birth helps us to a more complete under-

standing of sin and the significance of the Incarnation.

## Forgive us our sins

In my experience, we most commonly describe sin as *misdeeds*, the things people do that hurt God, one another, ourselves, and creation. My congregation uses the prayer of confession from the *Book of Common Prayer* on the Sundays we have communion. In that prayer we

confess that we have sinned against [God] in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We typically follow this with a time of silent confession where we name specific sins before God in prayer.

While this is an accurate understanding of sin, it is incomplete. Understanding sin in this way makes it easy to rank sins by their perceived severity. How often do we think that *your* sins are worse than *my* sins? Have you ever thought (or said), “I may not be perfect, but I would never. . . .” and then fill in the blank with someone's behavior you find particularly offensive? From ranking sins, it is just a short step to ranking—or even demonizing—people. Perhaps without thinking about it, our understanding moves from rightly naming certain actions as

sinful to demonizing entire groups of people as “evil.”

Sadly, we have witnessed the poisoned fruits of this kind of thinking far too often. When we consider the history of American slavery, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, or even some of the more extreme voices in our current political climate, we recognize the error of thinking that sin is mostly a problem in other people. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously wrote:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

## Save us from Satan's power

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he announced the significance of Mary's child by saying,

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:33).

Mary's song celebrates that Jesus' kingdom will address more than just

“Mary’s song celebrates that Jesus’ kingdom will address more than just our individual, accumulated misdeeds; Jesus will also confront the established, sinful powers of this world”

our individual, accumulated misdeeds; Jesus will also confront the established, sinful powers of this world who exert harmful control over people. The Christmas story reveals that Jesus understands sin to be a power that operates in the world to oppose God.

Understanding sin as a power might challenge our modern understanding of the individual. We instinctively assume that our choices are our own. Even when we consider other people’s seemingly unhelpful choices, we are inclined to believe things like, “If they had just made better choices, things would have worked out better for them.”

But those who are concerned about social justice understand that, when individual misdeeds are enacted through systems of power and influence, sin influences entire societal structures. The Magnificat reveals that Jesus will confront these systems of power.

Read through Mary’s words again—especially verses 51-54—and notice the verbs (“scattered,” “brought down”) and the objects of those verbs (“the proud,” “the powerful”). Mary’s words reveal that, through Jesus’ birth and coming ministry, God is confronting those who have misused their power and authority to create oppressive, abusive systems. Those who have


rigged the system in their favor will find their comeuppance; those who have been victims will find themselves the beneficiaries of a new kingdom.

Mary’s language draws deeply from the experience of her own faith tradition, a tradition steeped in stories of slavery (Exodus) and exile (Babylon). In both cases, rescuers/deliverers were sent to bring people out of an oppressive system into the shalom God intended all along. Nowhere in these words does Mary suggest that God’s activity would be to have people “stop doing bad things.” That language exists elsewhere in the New Testament. But here, the language is that of freedom from captivity, victimization, and of being caught up in something beyond our control.

What does this look like in our lives, though? Might these “systems” of sin just be more sinful actions committed by terrible people who also have access to great power? Possibly. But historian Hannah Arendt offers a different understanding. Reflecting on the Holocaust, she writes about the so-called banality of sin—the ways that ordinary people get caught up in horrific misdeeds, people like military officers who were “just following orders” or the average Rwandans who got caught up in a genocidal frenzy and slaughtered their neighbors.

Since understanding racism is a topic of interest for many Brethren, we might here also consider the case of Jonathan Edwards, who wrote a sermon on the back of a receipt from his purchase of a young slave named Venus. Was this simply a misdeed? How was it that someone so deeply steeped in scripture could not see the act of purchasing another human being as sin?

When we understand that action within the wider context of American culture of that era—including the web of laws, rules, threats, and biblical interpretations designed to “prove” that Black people were less than fully human—we begin to see how sin functions as a power, causing people to either not recognize or simply go along with a certain way of thinking and acting.

Singing hymns with lyrics like “save us all from Satan’s power”—even on a Sunday when our thoughts are filled with the richness of family and congregational traditions—invites us to grow in our appreciation of Jesus’ work on our behalf and be even more in awe of God’s grace. It is this work that enables all to “rest merry” in the truth that the babe in the manger has indeed set us free from the power of sin. 

Tim Harvey is pastor of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va.

## Bethlehem

## Encountering Jesus on holy ground

by Mandy North, Robbie Miller, Julia Wheeler

**It was a sweltering afternoon last July.** Our tour group entered through the Door of Humility, bowing as we made our way through a tiny opening.

We had come to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, eager to see the place where tradition holds Jesus was born. Our group of 17 gathered on the stairs, set in a semi-circle, excited to descend the steps to the cave-like grotto that is said to be the place of Jesus' birth. Other groups gathered, pushing and shoving their way closer to this sacred space. We all waited, some with deep devotion, some with quiet skepticism, some out of simple curiosity, but all with a yearning to "Come and see" what the space would reveal.

We were hot and sweaty as one bossy tour guide made way for her whole group to walk through, and another irritated woman decided not to wait any longer, pushing her way to the door. People from all over the world, speaking different languages and celebrating different customs, all wedged uncomfortably together on these slippery limestone stairs—waiting to encounter Jesus.

In a world with so much diversity and division, we all gathered in this ancient space to encounter the divine. It's a visceral reminder of how God came to us: not in the power and privilege of royalty but in the broken messiness of our humanity.

As we descended the narrow stairs into that grotto, the crowds pushing us forward and through, we had to intentionally pause, take a breath, and remember where we were: Bethlehem, "House of Bread," where the Bread of Life was born. The place where we stood, the stone beneath our feet, was indeed holy ground!


This holy ground, this "Holy Land," attracts people from the ends of the earth, some to check off a bucket list destination, some to scratch a curious itch, some to experience what the scriptures describe, still others to fulfill a dying wish. It is also the place of new life and beginnings.

In all the hustle and bustle of the crowd, a father came with his infant child. The crowd parted to give him space as he gen-



tly lowered his newborn to the place of the manger. A thin place—where the human and divine met and continue to meet.

Through the bustling and jostling of this Advent and Christmas season, may we also take time to pause, go through our own door of humility, and seek Jesus.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin and enter in;  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels,  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel!* 

Mandy North is lead pastor of Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren. Julia Wheeler is director of development at the University of La Verne (Calif.). Robbie Miller retired this past summer as chaplain at Bridgewater (Va.) College and organized the July 2023 Lands of the Bible tour (and many previous ones) in partnership with University of the Holy Land.

“May we also take time to pause, go through our own door of humility, and seek Jesus.”



# Listening for Annunciation

by Ruthann K. Johansen

*The Annunciation, by Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1899*

Advent is waiting time,  
walking expectantly,  
peering into houses,  
or alleys and cathedrals,


gazing endlessly at lists  
hoping—for the origin story  
to wrap us round again  
in angel wings and fleece.

On this dark December night  
far from the first announcement,  
words and music will  
proclaim again the Mystery.

A painted image,  
icon telling of the past  
reveals a Jewish peasant's  
rumped wrestling with a visitation.

In her flesh we see/know our own.  
Ah, tonight let's not hide  
in what happened  
long ago. Let us wait  
still. Listen. Watch

for Light streaming  
into our peasant bedrooms,  
our barren, anxious hearts.

Announced again  
a new quickening of Love  
waiting to be birthed  
into our midst. 

Ruthann K. Johansen is former president of Bethany Theological Seminary, professor emerita in the Program of Liberal Studies and Kroc Institute Faculty Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, and an author. She is a member of Crest Manor Church of the Brethren in South Bend, Ind.



# Able and ready

**FaithX program offers unique service opportunities for all**

by Jonathan Shively

**W**e are able. Yes! Every one of us—a conviction confirmed as nine adults gathered in June for four days of ser-

vice, worship, fellowship, and growth. Our home base was Judson University in Elgin, Ill., and our sponsoring partner was the FaithX program

of the Church of the Brethren. Three of us were the designated leaders: Anabaptist Disabilities Network executive director Jeanne Davies, nurse

“It is a chance to feel like we are all able to do something great. And everyone has that ability.”



Cassidy McFadden, and me. The other six were beautiful servants of Jesus intent on doing some good in the world.

That good included two sessions of food packing at Feed My Starving Children, a rock garden beautification project at Lambs Farm (a residential community for adults with disabilities where my son Ben lives), and learning from horses as we also assisted with groundskeeping at the Ranch of Hope Reins (a therapeutic horse farm).

Daily worship featured spirited singing, inspired prayer, and insightful scripture engagement. Each participant contributed valuable talent to the celebration of God's all-embracing love.

Just for fun, we attended a local concert in the park featuring The Stingrays, who play 50s, 60s, and 70s-era rock music. Our crew did a lot of dancing, and several strangers became friends! One evening we stayed in, made popcorn, and laughed through a movie together. We prepared most of our meals, while some were delivered by local friends. We adapted to life in a dorm and sharing space with roommates.

We experienced a few rough patches. At times, we wore on each other's patience. We had a few medical issues. Sometimes it was hard to understand each other, both what we were saying and what we meant. We all got tired, sometimes powering through and other times adjusting our schedule for rest.

But in the end, we left for our homes

## Helping brings us together

by Emily Krabill

**W**hen I got out of the van for the We Are Able workcamp in Elgin, Ill., I noticed a brightly colored invitation in chalk welcoming us to Judson University. The first thing I did when I stepped into the foyer was explore my surroundings. I noticed a café and wondered if it would be open during my stay; I like a good cup of joe. It wasn't open, but I survived without it. Besides, we had our own stuff: boxes on the counter filled with food for four days.


Turns out there was a Mod Pizza close to the college. We got to make our own pizzas or salads for dinner that evening. A few chose salad over pizza. That's fair—salad is probably lighter on the stomach. I couldn't finish my pizza, but it was so good. After dinner, we went out for ice cream. I got a Buster Bar after finding out online that they're gluten-free.

One night down, three more to go. The next day, I found out that I tend to wake up earlier than the rest of the group. It was nice to have some peace and quiet in the mornings, just walking around all by my lonesome. After breakfast each day, we had worship time.

Then we went to Feed My Starving Children, where our diverse group got the chance to participate in something bigger than ourselves. We packed 36 meal packets in every box for hungry children, and the boxes were piled high in a massive crate. It was a big project; we had to move quickly. Every time we filled a box, we yelled out, "Winner, winner, chicken dinner!" to let people know the box was done.

We gave more than just our time at Feed My Starving Children by also donating money to the cause. We could purchase containers of M&Ms to fill with quarters to donate when we come back to help more hungry people around the world. I gave five dollars, so I brought six M&Ms containers home with me.


After Feed My Starving Children, we volunteered at the Ranch of Hope Reins, a horse ranch, where we helped families and children coping from trauma.

I'm glad that we got to help people, because there is something about helping others that just makes you feel good. It's a great thing to do, to give back to the community. I feel like it brings people together—it definitely did for us. We Are Able is a chance for people with intellectual disabilities to feel like we are all able to do something great. And everyone has that ability. 

Emily Krabill lives in Goshen, Ind. When she is not working at a local soap boutique, she likes to work on her blog, act, sing, and dance.

in Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois at the end of the workcamp having made new friends, having learned more about following Jesus, having grown in self-understanding, and having

done something meaningful for our neighbors near and far.

Without a doubt, we know that as followers of Jesus we, individually and together, are able! 

Jonathan Shively is executive director of Fox Valley Hands of Hope and a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.

These articles are drawn from posts first published on the Anabaptist Disabilities Network blog.

FaithX



FaithX



## FaithX at a glance

**Summer 2023:** This past summer, nearly 175 participants ranging in age from 12 to 68 joined a Church of the Brethren FaithX service trip (formerly called workcamps). Junior high, senior high, and We Are Able participants served at 10 locations in the US, providing assistance at shelters for the unhoused, clothing distribution centers, therapeutic horse-riding organizations, food pantries, Church of the Brethren summer camps, and more. Adult participants journeyed to Gijón, Spain, to fellowship and worship with our Spanish siblings in the Church of the Brethren. See photos at [www.yogile.com/faithx-2023](http://www.yogile.com/faithx-2023).

**Winter 2024:** Older adults, age 55-plus, are invited to join a new short-term service opportunity this winter. Held at Camp Ithiel in Gotha, Fla., Feb. 25–March 1, it will be a week of volunteering, Bible study, and recreation. Register at [www.brethren.org/faithx](http://www.brethren.org/faithx).

### Summer 2024:

- **The We Are Able** trip will be June 19–22 in Elgin, Ill.
- **An adult domestic trip** for those 18 and older will be held in partnership with Brethren Disaster Ministries somewhere in the eastern US July 28–Aug. 3. This trip combines volunteering at a disaster rebuilding site and enjoying the programming of a FaithX trip.

- **An adult international trip** will travel to Ecuador to serve at Fundación Brethren y Unida (FBU) June 1-10. FBU traces its beginnings to Church of the Brethren mission work in the 1970s. It specializes in agroecology, rural development, water resource management, and environmental education.

- **Youth FaithX** service opportunities will include junior high trips to Roanoke, Va., June 19-23 and to Palmyra, Pa., July 17-21; combined junior-senior high trips to Camp Mardela in Denton, Md., June 9-14; to South Bend, Ind., June 18-23; to Knoxville, Tenn., July 21-26; and to Winston-Salem, N.C., July 28-Aug. 2; senior high trips to Camp Koinonia in Cle Elum, Wash., June 8-14 and to North Fort Myers, Fla., July 14-20. In addition, a new all-family option will be offered at Camp Blue Diamond in Petersburg, Pa., June 23-27. Custom service trips for youth groups and others can also be designed if requested.

- **Registration** for summer FaithX programs opens online Jan. 10 at 7 p.m. Eastern time.

For questions or additional information, visit [www.brethren.org/faithx](http://www.brethren.org/faithx) or contact FaithX coordinator Marissa Witkovsky-Eldred at [faithx@brethren.org](mailto:faithx@brethren.org) or 847-429-4337.



# An overflowing cup

by Audri Svay

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:4-5, KJV).*

**A**s we approach the end of the school semester and impending finals for my university writing students, I begin class by setting an empty cup on the table at the front of the room. I hope that, by this point in the course, they all know what a metaphor is.

“This cup,” I say with conviction, “is a metaphor for each of us.” Then I ask them what activities replenish their spirits, or fill their metaphorical cups. The answers vary beautifully from listening to music, coloring, exercising, reading, playing instruments, and spending time with people they love, to simply taking a nap or inhaling deep breaths of fresh air. I carefully write each suggestion on a slip of paper and place them all inside the cup until it is overflowing.


At this point, I shift gears and prompt them to imagine that they have just woken up and, starting from the beginning of their day, recall everything that causes them stress. This list is no less extensive. Have they slept through their alarms? Will they make it to class on time? Have they forgotten anything they need? Will there be difficult social situations to navigate? Did they study enough to pass the test? Will they have energy left after classes to participate fully in sports and clubs? When will they have time to do their homework? Do they really have to wake up the next day and face doing it all over again?

This time, with each suggestion, I remove a slip of paper from the cup until it is once more empty.

Gently, I remind them, “This cup is a metaphor for each of us. There will always be more that needs to be done and more people who need our attention. Yet, when we have reached a point of exhaustion where we are running on empty, it becomes a need to refill our cups. Do not feel guilty about taking 20 or 30 minutes out of your day to do one of those activities that fill your cups. Put those things on your to-do list also. They are even more necessary the busier we are.”

Short-term, I want my students to make it to the end of the semester without experiencing burnout or giving up. I am trying to support their success in my class as well as all their other classes. Long-term, I know they are entering into a lifetime of stress, and they need to hone their skills in self-care so they don’t experience future burnout or give up on their future jobs or families due to feeling too overwhelmed.

Filling our cups is a biblical metaphor as well. Psalm 23 evokes the imagery of the overflowing cup in verse 5, “my cup runneth over.” For the psalmist, God is the source of this cup filled to overflowing. God fills the psalmist’s cup with a deep sense of comfort, protection, peace, and gratitude. These soul-restoring gifts are replenished each time the psalmist turns to God to sustain him through life’s most difficult and overwhelming moments.

Spiritual practices like prayer and meditation are centering for us in times of trouble and can provide a much-needed rest for our weary spirits. As we count down the days to the completion of another calendar year, we find ourselves searching for that same sense of completeness in our own lives. May we rediscover the practices that help us feel more whole and make them a priority. May our cups be filled to overflowing. 

Audri Svay is pastor of Eel River Community Church of the Brethren in Silver Lake, Ind., and teaches writing courses at the University of St. Francis. She has a master’s degree in theopoetics from Bethany Theological Seminary.

# The Faith of Elizabeth and Mary

**Luke 1:36-45, 56**  
by David A. Leiter

**T**his text begins just as the angel Gabriel winds up his speech to Mary. The account of his visit begins in Luke 1:26, when Gabriel appears to Mary in her hometown of Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

As he greeted her, Mary, of course, was surprised. Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid, and then he got right to the point. He said she had found favor with God, and that she would conceive and bear a son whom she would name Jesus. Mary questioned the practicality of Gabriel's message by asking how this could happen to a virgin. Gabriel replied by indicating the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and that the child would be holy, the Son of God.

A similar exchange had taken place earlier between Gabriel and Zechariah (1:11-20). Gabriel told him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son, whom they would name John. John would precede Jesus and prepare people for his coming.

Like Mary, Zechariah questioned the practicality of Gabriel's words. He was

unable to see how Elizabeth could bear a son since he was an old man and Elizabeth was getting old as well. Instead of being sympathetic and supportive, as he was when Mary questioned how she could bear a child, Gabriel treated Zechariah harshly and punished him because of his skepticism.

The difference is striking. When Zechariah expressed doubt about what Gabriel told him, Gabriel rendered him mute until John's birth. Conversely, when Mary expressed doubt regarding Gabriel's message, he treated her gently and provided her with additional explanation and reassurance. The fact that Gabriel gave special treatment to Mary over Zechariah indicates that Mary assumed center stage in the narrative. As we will find, Zechariah and Elizabeth are still important characters, but Mary is the focal point.

## **Mission impossible**

Gabriel concluded his speech to Mary by stating that her relative Elizabeth

had also conceived a son. This revelation seems to serve as a sign to Mary that the angel's word was true. If God could allow Elizabeth to bear a child in her old age, then Mary could give birth through her virginal status as well.

Then Gabriel spoke those very important words: "For nothing will be impossible with God." They serve as words of assurance that Gabriel's proclamation about the birth of Jesus is not simply wishful thinking but an indication that God has the power to bring this proclamation to fruition. A barren woman can give birth to a child. A virgin can become pregnant. The Lord can live among humans from birth to death and rise again from the tomb. The Holy Spirit can empower a few believers to launch a church movement that will travel to the ends of the earth. God's power can transform the impossible into the possible for the good of the kingdom.

As unusual as Gabriel's message may have appeared to Mary, she jumped on board and said she would be God's

“ Now they are in the same place so they can experience the immediate and uncertain future together. ”

servant and go along with everything that Gabriel proclaimed.

We all know what it is like to face impossible situations. We may be in a failing marriage and can't imagine a path toward reconciliation. We may have lost a spouse of many years to death and can't see how we can live without them. Perhaps every job we applied for went to someone else and we wonder if we will ever be gainfully employed. When a family loses a home and everything they own to a catastrophic event such as a hurricane, flood, earthquake, or tornado, how is it possible to envision a life with some sense of normalcy again? Some people never recover from such events—but many do, as they allow perseverance, faith in God, and the support of others to propel them forward.

In his book, *The Meanest Man in Patrick County and Other Unlikely Brethren Heroes*, Frank Ramirez tells the story of P. R. Wrightsman, who was a doctor, farmer, and Brethren minister during the American Civil War. One day Confederate soldiers looted Wrightsman's farm. They stole about a dozen horses and most of his crops. During the looting, Wrightsman stepped into his barn and prayed to God. He prayed for his own deliverance, and he prayed that God would have mercy on the looters and redeem them from their evil ways.

After he stepped out of the barn, he viewed the soldiers from a different perspective. He observed their emaciated bodies due to hunger. He noticed the poor condition of their clothing and the fact that a number of them were shoeless.

Upon seeing the pain of the soldiers, he also felt God's love for them despite what they were doing. He brought out bread and butter and fed all the soldiers. They wondered how he could treat them with kindness after what they had done to his farm. Wrightsman

simply said that Jesus taught us to feed the hungry and to turn the other cheek.

Wrightsmen could have responded differently. He could have been angry or resentful. He could have defended his farm with force and violence. Instead, he fed the soldiers and sent them on their way. With faith and trust in God nothing is impossible. Wrightsmen responded in a way that was contrary to retaliation but consistent with Jesus' teachings. What a difficult thing to do. But in this case, the difficult and virtually impossible action toward his enemies became possible through faith and prayer.

### The visitation

After Mary accepted Gabriel's message and expressed her willingness to be part of God's plan, the angel left. Mary then quickly made her way to an unnamed village in the Judean hills to visit Elizabeth. Until this point, the storylines of Elizabeth/John and Mary/Jesus were separate. Gabriel visited Zechariah and told him Elizabeth would give birth to John. Then Gabriel visited Mary and told her about the upcoming birth of Jesus.


The two stories merge when Gabriel informs Mary of Elizabeth's pregnancy and when Mary hurries to see her. As readers, we know this is important because, at the point when Mary entered the house, John leaped in Elizabeth's womb and the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. We have two women who are relatives, and they each face unusual and mysterious births which an angel of God explained to them. Now they are in the same place so they can experience the immediate and uncertain future together.

Once the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth, she offered a spirit-filled message to Mary. This message neatly divides into four parts. First, Elizabeth declared the blessedness of Mary and her child. Second, in the form of a

question, Elizabeth disclosed more explicitly the identity of the child in Mary's womb as she declared Mary to be the mother of her Lord. Third, Elizabeth explained what it meant when John leapt in her womb: it was a leap of joy. Fourth, the reason Elizabeth called Mary blessed is because Mary believed what Gabriel told her would come to fruition.

There's a lot of content and theology in these four brief verses. One theme that stands out is that of blessedness. What does it mean to be blessed? Are we blessed because God shows favor upon us as beloved children? Or are we blessed because we believe in God's ultimate power to transform the impossible into the possible? Elizabeth suggests that Mary is blessed because she believed what Gabriel told her. On the other hand, in verses 28 and 30, Gabriel stresses the notion that God looked upon Mary with much favor.

Another theme that we glean from the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary and Mary's subsequent visit to Elizabeth is the importance of support and encouragement. Immediately upon learning that Elizabeth was pregnant with John, Mary went to her. When Mary arrived, Elizabeth, without pleasantries and greetings, launched into a speech that confirmed Mary's specialness during this time.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before returning home to Nazareth. This gave the two women adequate time to process the impending births of their sons. We know very little of what occurred during this three-month visit, but we can speculate that, due to their family connections and encounters with the divine, they provided each other with mutual support and inspiration. 

David A. Leiter is a retired minister in the Church of the Brethren. He lives in Manheim, Pa.

## Decision to close Material Resources program, Israel and Palestine violence top board agenda

**A decision to close Material Resources**—a Church of the Brethren program that collects, processes, warehouses, and ships relief aid—and a statement on “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” topped the agenda of the Mission and Ministry Board at its fall meeting Oct. 20-22.

This was the first meeting presided over by Colin Scott, who began as chair in July, assisted by chair-elect Kathy Mack and general secretary David Steele.

■ **Material Resources:** The program of Material Resources, based at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., will wind down over a period of up to 30 months. Employees who stay through the end of the program will receive severance packages. Loretta Wolf, who has been director of Material Resources for almost 40 years, since 1984, is among the 9 full- and part-time employees affected.

Not affected by the decision are the other ministries based at the Brethren Service Center including Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services, and the warehousing operation of SERRV.

The decision was not entered into lightly, said Scott when he announced the consensus decision reached during closed session. He named that the decision was difficult and there was prayerful discernment. He shared the board’s appreciation for staff who have worked at the program, and of the congregations that have contributed many resources toward this ministry over the years.

A legacy program of the Church of the Brethren, Material Resources has a long and significant history dating back to World War II. Collections of relief clothing that church members and congregations began in 1939 planted the seed for the program. In 1944 a processing center for relief goods was established in New Windsor, under the auspices of the Brethren Service Committee.

■ **Israel and Palestine:** The board statement cited scripture as it expressed grief and compassion for all who have lost loved ones in the violence in Israel and Palestine that began with the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7. “While the Church of the Brethren has consistently opposed war, we

are particularly concerned about the targeting of civilians,” the statement said, in part. “We feel anguish for the Israeli people and those of Jewish heritage around the world. . . . We feel anguish for Palestinians and people of Arab descent. . . . We call on Church of the Brethren members to join in prayer for all the Israelis and Palestinians who are affected by this terrible situation, and for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples worldwide.” The statement called for a ceasefire, release of all hostages, and increased humanitarian measures for Gaza, among other actions.

■ **2024 budget:** The board approved a total budget for denominational ministries of \$8,720,960 of income and \$8,789,640 of expense, representing an anticipated net expense of \$68,680. The decision included a Core Ministries budget of \$5,507,000 of income and \$5,546,120 of expense, representing an anticipated net expense of \$39,120, which will be covered by the Core Ministries net asset balance. The board heard that a financial “pinch point” is coming soon, and the executive committee will begin processing how to prioritize denominational ministries.

■ **Pastoral Housing Fund:** The board approved changes recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, to be proposed to the 2024 Annual Conference. The fund helps pastors living in parsonages to purchase their own homes once they leave the parsonage, with financial contributions from their congregation. The changes create a way for contributions to be held in the Eder Retirement Plan instead of mutual funds, to alleviate the tax burden for the pastors who participate.

■ **Global Church of the Brethren Communion Bylaws:** The bylaws were affirmed by the board and are expected to



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

A group photo of the elected board members with general secretary David Steele.



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be finalized by the communion in coming months. The communion is an organization of the national Church of the Brethren denominations around the world.

■ **Intercultural listening:** In a session held via Zoom at the request of a group of Church of the Brethren ministers, the board listened to questions and concerns from nine people from Hispanic, Latin American, Haitian American, and African American communities. Also speaking was Bob Kettering, a white retired minister in Atlantic Northeast District.

Several told of painful experiences of racism in church settings. Their concerns included a list of questions and topics including print resources and ministerial training in Spanish and Kreyol, accuracy of Spanish interpretation at Annual Conference, delay in hiring intercultural ministries staff, lack of intentional engagement with the intercultural community by denominational leaders, and fears that the Church of the Brethren is becoming “open and affirming”—which they characterized as antithetical to Hispanic and Haitian cultures.

The MMB agenda also included worship and prayer, reports, small group sharing by board and staff, training on Kingian Nonviolence, and a chance to greet the Young Adult Steering Committee.

## Pastoral letter sent to Armenian community

**General secretary David Steele** sent a pastoral letter to the Armenian community following the Azerbaijan attack against Artsakh



Benjamin Hoffmann

**Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 334** completed orientation Sept. 26–Oct. 4. *Front, from left: Pauline Schick*, Bad Oeynhausen, Germany, to Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center, Little Rock, Ark.; **Ken Chiu**, Vancouver, Canada, to Asian Rural Institute, Japan; **Virginia Rendler**, BVS volunteer coordinator; **Chelsea Goss Skillen**, BVS director; **Justice Westlake**, Woodland Church of the Brethren, Astoria, Ill., placement pending. *Back: Paul-Joa Durt*, Lübeck, Germany, to SnowCap Food Pantry, Portland, Ore.; **Lisa Lauterbach**, Nuremberg, Germany, to WATER, Washington, D.C.; **Anou Sethi**, Leipzig, Germany, to Camp Stevens, Julian, Calif.; **Jasper Neddermeyer**, Herford, Germany, to La Puente Home, Alamosa, Colo.; **Seth Spire**, Sangerville Church of the Brethren, Bridgewater, Va., also to SnowCap; **Anton Ellehnson**, Offenburg, Germany, also to SnowCap.

(Nagorno-Karabakh), which forced the Armenian population to flee. Addressed to Archbishop Vicken Aykazian on behalf of the Armenian community worldwide, the letter also gave particular attention to Armenian members and attendees in the Church of the Brethren. It said, in part: “Please know that the Church of the Brethren continues to stand with the Armenian people now as we have for more than 100 years since 1917, when our church first began providing aid to survivors and refugees of the Armenian Genocide.”

## CDS critical response team works in Lewiston

**On Oct. 28, Children’s Disaster Services** deployed a team of five Critical Response Childcare volunteers to Lewiston, Maine, in partnership with the Red Cross. This deployment was made in response to the mass shootings at two locations in Lewiston in which 18 people were killed and 13 others were injured. The critical response teams are certified CDS volunteers who have received additional specialized training for mass casualty events.

## Personnel

**José Calleja Otero** has resigned as executive minister for Puerto Rico District. He has been the district’s first executive since July 12, 2015, when Puerto Rico became the Church of the Brethren’s 24th district. Among previous roles,

he was team pastor at the congregation in Morovis.

**Shannon Kahler** is retiring from Inspiration Hills, a camp and retreat center in Northern Ohio District. **Andrew Kauffman** has been appointed interim executive director,

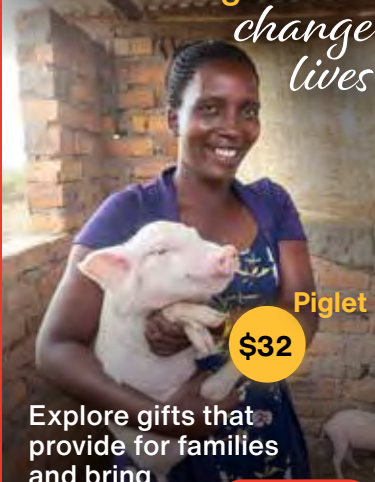
beginning Dec. 1. He has worked at Camp Mack in Indiana for multiple years, and also worked in the school system in Arizona.

**Allison Snyder** began Oct. 10 as interim manager of the Brethren Historical Library

and Archives in Elgin, Ill., where she previously served two years as archival intern.


**Kay Weaver** retired Oct. 15 as director of stewardship for Atlantic Northeast District. She had served in the position since 2003.

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**New members**

**Agape**, Fort Wayne, Ind.: Derek Hale, Grace Hale, Maddie McMillan, Daniel Musser, Brayden Shipe  
**Bremen**, Ind.: Corbin Phipps, Matthew Rensberger, Zac Rensberger, Paisley Welborn  
**Oak Grove**, Roanoke, Va.: Bill Hall, Julie Hall, Amanda Leddy, Carol Leddy, Harvey Leddy, Rachel Leddy, Morgan Taylor  
**Sebring**, Fla.: Harriet Durrwatcher, Ron Durrwatcher  
**South Waterloo**, Waterloo, Iowa: Sabrina Inyani, Joshua Kerkove, Kathy Pullin, Larissa Schneider  
**Union Center**, Nappanee, Ind.: Rick Walter

**Anniversaries**

**Brumbaugh**, Donald and Doris, Curryville, Pa., 70  
**Devers**, Tom and Sue, Union, Ohio, 50  
**Fourman**, Arthur and Carolyn, Centerville, Ohio, 60

**George**, Jim and Debbie, Wakarusa, Ind., 50  
**Morris**, Chuck and Becky, Churubusco, Ind., 50  
**Musser**, Dean and Joyce, Fort Wayne, Ind., 55  
**Sheets**, Sam and Brenna, Nappanee, Ind., 50  
**Spitler**, Dale and Esther, Troy, Ohio, 74  
**Veal**, Russ and Kathy, Bridgewater, Va., 50  
**Welch**, Doug and Vicki, Churubusco, Ind., 50

**Deaths**

**Anglemyer**, Mary L. Sechrist, 96, Nappanee, Ind., Nov. 14, 2022  
**Bowling**, Cleve Edgar, 70, Big Creek, Ky., Sept. 28  
**Bryant**, Thelma Gertrude Wood, 94, Waynesboro, Va., Oct. 18  
**Chapman**, Ward Graves (Cubby), Jr., 90, Staunton, Va., Sept. 26  
**Clapper**, David Robert, 89, Hollidaysburg, Pa., Oct. 1  
**Cox**, Timothy Paul, 63, Cushing, Okla., Aug. 6  
**Dimmick**, Rodney Leland, Jr., 78, Pierce, Colo., Aug. 20

**Eichorn**, Mary Jane Maust, 98, Aldie, Va., July 10  
**Etsinger**, Mervin F. (Bud), Sr., 96, New Paris, Ind., March 1  
**Evans**, John Samuel, Jr., 67, Hagerstown, Md., Sept. 16  
**Heavner**, Paul Harvard, 64, Knoxville, Md., Sept. 1  
**Hoke**, Carlyn, 87, York, Pa., Sept. 25  
**Johnson**, Joy Phippen, 102, Nappanee, Ind., March 12  
**Kesselring**, Anthony, 59, Sebring, Fla., Aug. 16  
**Kramer**, Richard E., Jr., 87, Lancaster, Pa., Sept. 27  
**Lighty**, James E., 94, Sebring, Fla., May 29  
**McElheny**, Debbie A. Everest, 65, Goshen, Ind., April 3  
**McGuire**, L. Gay Penrose Penrod, 95, Ligonier, Pa., July 8  
**Miller**, Linda Louise Hawkins, 75, McPherson, Kan., Sept. 29  
**Miller**, Marvin S., 93,

Sebring, Fla., Sept. 3  
**Morris**, Donald S., 85, Dyke, Va., Sept. 18  
**Myers**, James R., 73, Martinsburg, Pa., Dec. 13, 2022  
**Nick**, David William, 67, Brunswick, Md., Aug. 30  
**Rissler**, Quentin David, 53, East Earl, Pa., Sept. 5  
**Rogers**, Conald Walter, 92, Keyser, W.Va., Aug. 24  
**Sauceda**, Jaime G., 53, Nappanee, Ind., Sept. 6  
**Shaffer**, Peggy Ritchey, 76, Woodbury, Pa., June 13  
**Shirk**, Catherine Louise Nicodemus, 95, Hanover, Pa., Oct. 6  
**Sletten-Hahn**, Louise (Ada) Gilbert, 94, Beavercreek, Ohio, Jan. 27  
**Troxell**, Phillip Lester, 72, Walton, Ind., Sept. 8  
**Wenger**, Russell K., 65, Bethel, Pa., July 22  
**Whitacre**, Charles Jerome, 97, McPherson, Kan.,

Sept. 24  
**Zimmerman**, Mildred R. Blough, 93, New Florence, Pa., June 25

**Ordained**

**Drees**, Carrie, S. Ohio & Ky. Dist. (Oakland, Bradford, Ohio), Sept. 10  
**Stake**, Luke, Mid. Pa. Dist. (Valley Point, Orbisonia, Pa.), Sept. 3  
**Westfall**, Randall, Mich. Dist. (Common Spirit, Wyoming, Mich.), Aug. 12

**Placements**

**Flumerfelt**, David, pastor, Tyrone, Pa., Oct. 9  
**Kuecker**, Betsy, pastor, Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa, Sept. 17  
**Snyder**, Paul, pastor, New Enterprise, Pa., Oct. 1  
**Stake**, Luke, pastor of special ministries, Valley Point, Orbisonia, Pa., Sept. 3

**To submit information for Turning Points, go to [www.brethren.org/turningpoints](http://www.brethren.org/turningpoints). 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 and less than one year old to be published.**



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# Walking in faith

by Peggy Faw Gish

**I**t's easy to have hope when things are going well, when we feel like we are making some progress in solving the world's problems. But how about now, with heat intensifying around the world and the ocean temperature rising, wars abounding and the possibility of nuclear war increasing, and hate and bigotry becoming acceptable social and political behavior?

I keep coming back to things that kept me going during times when I've worked to prevent war and when I've walked alongside local people who were seeking dignity, justice, and peace in the midst of chaotic violence. It seemed like an uphill, impossible effort. Were we naïve? Couldn't we see how the odds were against us?


During those times, we had to walk in faith, not in the ways of the world. We sought to claim the power of love, hope, and truth—the things that compelled us to do this work. We saw each step as sowing seeds, that we prayed God would make sprout and grow into the Kin'dom Jesus gave us a glimpse of—a realm of salvation, encompassing personal and corporate healing and wholeness, justice, peace, right living, and caring for all of God's children.

I still believe that if we are to move toward these goals at all, we need to put what weak faith we have into action, try to live into it, and work toward it with God's guidance and strength. We may not be able to reverse the environmental destruction predicted for our world, and the suffering caused by structural bigotry and social and global violence, but we must not give up hope. We must not stop praying and, out of that prayer, working toward the vision Jesus calls us to. We, as a people, must change our destructive ways and repent. But without hope, God will have a harder time breaking in, using us, and helping us see what we must do to be part of God's work of transformation.

There are many tasks God may give us. Some of us will be called to the role of the biblical prophets who boldly and tirelessly spoke God's warning and pleaded with the people to repent and change their course. Others may take the role of Jeremiah who, when destruction of Jerusalem was imminent, bought a field to demonstrate his trust in God's care and redemption (Jeremiah 32).

We know from the Bible that God has not always rescued the people but at times has allowed them to reap the consequences of their lack of repentance. This means that much of our work will be to care for and minister to people in their anguish amid increasing physical calamities. While being able to serve and act requires us to acknowledge, not deny, the likely destruction to come, it also means not allowing hopelessness to overcome our spirits. We must not crumble into despair, curse God, and shed whatever faith and hope we have.

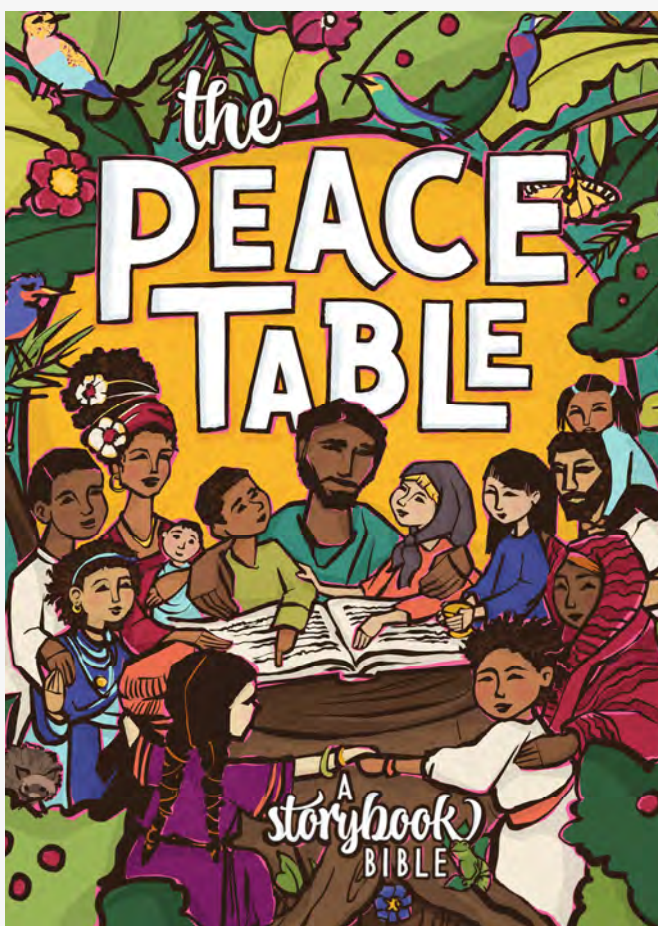
When working with Community Peacemaker Teams in Iraq, I saw our work as a refusal to let evil engulf and defeat us. Any time we act out of love, undeterred by fear, giving ourselves in service, telling the truth, acting boldly to defy lies, greed, hate, and destructive systems and policies, we are resisting evil. We are called to take up the weapons of the Spirit in this spiritual battle—the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of faith—and run shod with the gospel of peace. Those of us seeking to be the body of Christ know that we are not alone. When we walk in faith we do it together, with all the wisdom and knowledge we are given as a community.

We will not see the results of what we do and we cannot know all that is to come, but responding faithfully calls us to act and do what we can in this precarious time. 

Peggy Faw Gish is a Church of the Brethren member, farmer, author, and longterm peace activist.

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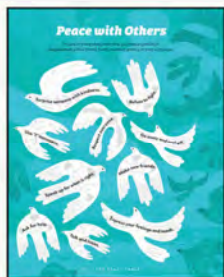
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