

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

MAY 2024 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG



*From every people
under heaven —Acts 2:5*

A breath of fresh air

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house.” ~ Acts 2:2



Suggested date: May 19

The Pentecost Offering of the Church of the Brethren highlights our passion for calling and equipping fearless disciples and leaders, renewing and planting churches, and transforming communities. Gifts are directed to Core Ministries, and the offering highlights the work of the Office of Discipleship and Leadership Formation.

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on the cover

Photo by Robbie Miller

Too many to count

On the closing day of last year's Annual Conference, there was something remarkable up front: Both the preacher and the newly consecrated moderator were biracial women. A few months later, for the first time ever a biracial man chaired the denomination's board. My heart rejoiced at the confluence of these extraordinary moments in the history of the Church of the Brethren.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

Some might think such details shouldn't be mentioned, believing that equality-minded people don't see color. But people do see color. And I'm not the only person of color who notices how few people like us are in the room. (Sometimes we even know exactly how many.)

This year is the 238th recorded Annual Conference. Out of all those years (plus the ones with no records), this is the fifth time the moderator is a person of color. It felt momentous when Bill Hayes broke the color barrier in 1988. But it was another 13 years before the next person of color was called as moderator, and it's taken 36 years to reach the fifth. At this rate, it will be

2060 when the church reaches double digits.

I've heard people say how diverse the Church of the Brethren has become, but never have I heard that from a person of color.

When Bill Hayes became moderator, he recalled how isolated he felt at his first Annual Conference in 1978. Twenty-four years later, "lonely" was the way pastor Dennis Webb felt at his first Annual Conference, in 2002.

These feelings don't mean that other Conferencegoers weren't kind. (I sure hope we were.) It means these two people felt like outsiders. It took fortitude for them to stay in a church that is predominantly white.

The measure of the church's diversity is not necessarily how many people of color are elected moderator, though that has value that is both symbolic and real. Certainly let's keep doing that; let's even pick up the pace.

But another kind of accomplishment would be if newcomers at every Church of the Brethren gathering encountered such a vivid array of people that they had no need to count the other people of color. In fact, there would be, as the book of Revelation envisions, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."

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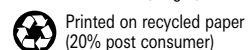
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“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

—John 14:26

“Without Pentecost, the Christ-event—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—remains imprisoned in history as something to remember, think about, and reflect on. The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now.” —priest and author Henri Nouwen

“When you strip it of everything else, Pentecost stands for power and life. That’s what came into the church when the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost.” —author and evangelist David Wilkerson

“Wherever you turn your eyes, the world can shine like transfiguration. You don’t have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it?” —author Marilynne Robinson

“An awake heart is like a sky that pours light.” —Persian poet Hafiz

BY THE NUMBERS

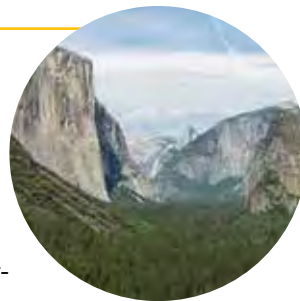
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Number of times, including this year, that the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference (formerly Annual Meeting) has been held in the state of Michigan. In all five cases (2024, 2017, 2011, 1955, 1950) the conference was held in Grand Rapids. The 2020 Annual Conference was also supposed to occur in Grand Rapids, but the event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A WALK IN THE PARK

The US National Park Service oversees more than **400 sites**, including 63 officially designated as a National Park. Several free entry days are offered each year: The next ones are June 19, Aug. 4, and Sept. 28.

The Church of the Brethren has occasionally had people serving as chaplains and ministry leaders at the parks through A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP), an ecumenical organization formed in 1951. Can you arrange the parks below from the oldest (by year established as a national park) to the newest? Answers are below.



- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| ROCKY MOUNTAIN | MESA VERDE | NORTH CASCADES |
| CRATER LAKE | ACADIA | GATEWAY ARCH |
| YELLOWSTONE | CARLSBAD CAVERNS | GLACIER |
| YOSEMITE | KENAI FJORDS | DRY TORTUGAS |
| EVERGLADES | CANYONLANDS | |

DID YOU KNOW?

Pentecost is Greek for “fiftieth,” or 50 days after Easter, noting when the Holy Spirit’s coming occurred in the biblical narrative during the Jewish festival of Shavuot. This year that falls on May 19. In some traditions it is also known as White Sunday or Whitsunday, and in parts of Europe the Monday after Pentecost is a public holiday.

Pentecost has historically been a significant day in the Church of the Brethren. The Annual Meeting (later Annual Conference) of the church took place around Pentecost in the early decades of the denomination.

ANSWERS: Yellowstone, 1872; Yosemite, 1890; Crater Lake, 1902; Mesa Verde, 1906; Glacier, 1909; Dry Tortugas, 1909; Kenai Fjords, 1980; Rocky Mountain, 1915; Acadia, 1916; Carlsbad Caverns, 1930; Everglades, 1934; Canyonlands, 1964; North Cascades, 1968; Gateway Arch, 1992; Gateway Arch, 2018.

CWS legacy award goes to Mountville

On Feb. 14, **Belinda Addae**, a representative from Church World Service (CWS), presented a Legacy Congregation Award to Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren in recognition of years of support for the CWS kit program.

In 2010, the Mountville congregation began this partnership by supplying 300 hygiene kits and 300 school kits annually. More recently, they've added the creation of 25 to 30 clean-up buckets each year.

CWS states that “each kit is filled with hope, packed with love, and shared with our neighbors in need at just the right time.” This statement aligns with the Mountville congregation’s core values, and the church is grateful for this partnership of compassion. — **Angela Finet**



Carter represents Brethren on the world stage

Bethany Seminary president **Jeff Carter** is continuing his representation of the Church of the Brethren on the world ecumenical stage, having been named to a second

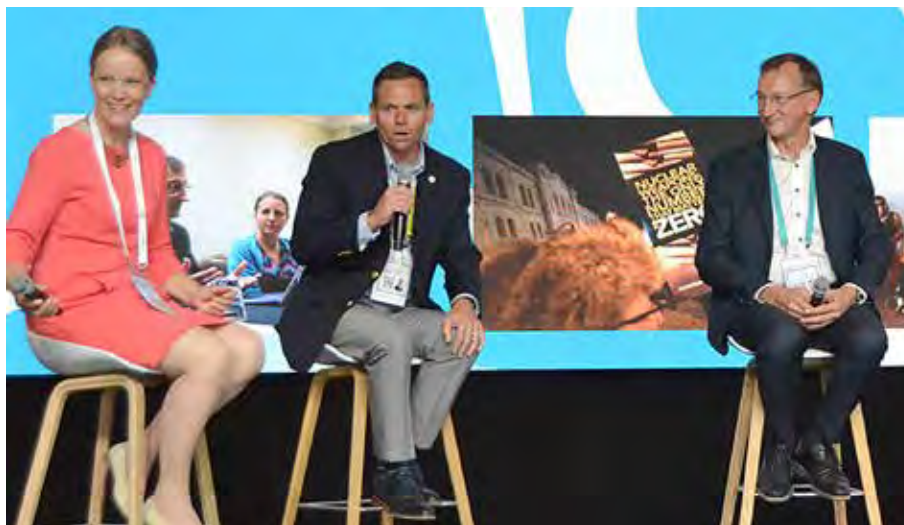
term on the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

In early March, Carter traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, for discussions

regarding international peacemaking and the witness of the church during a joint meeting of the WCC’s three commissions that also include the Commission on Health and Healing and the Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development.

“As a historic peace church, the denomination has a place at the table during conversations regarding international conflict and peacemaking,” said Carter. “Even though the Church of the Brethren and Bethany Seminary are small, we have a prominent voice among these faith leaders and their communities.”

Carter noted that the scholarship and advocacy of retired professors Scott Holland and Don Miller—who also is a former general secretary of the denomination—helped draw attention to the unique perspective of the Church of the Brethren, particularly in relation to the concept of “just peace.”



Cheryl Bunnburgh-Cayford

Jeff Carter (at center) taking part in a panel of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs at the WCC Assembly in 2022.

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.

Brethren in the news

■ “Meet the woman running Sam Altman’s universal basic income study to find out how cash payments can mitigate AI-related jobs losses” said an article from *Fortune* about **Elizabeth (Beth) Rhodes**, a former coordinator of the Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference. Rhodes was completing a doctorate in social work and political science in 2016 when she saw Altman’s blogpost about the study. She “applied to a position leading the study and became the research director for YC Research, which was renamed OpenResearch after Altman moved to OpenAI,” *Fortune* reported. “She ran Altman’s pilot program and now oversees the full universal basic income study. For three years, the study provided 3,000 participants with either \$1,000

per month or \$50 a month. It recently finished providing cash transfers to recipients in two states and plans to release its first findings later this year.”

■ **Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren** in Fort Wayne, Ind., and its welcome for refugee families was the topic of a series of radio interviews with congregation member Leslie Sperry and Nazanin Ash, CEO of Welcome Corps. Interviews aired on a local NPR station, Delmarva Public Media, with interviewer Don Rush.

■ **Clover Creek Church of the Brethren** received media attention and recognition for its donation to the 2023-2024 Martinsburg (Pa.) Community Fund drive. The *Morrisons Cove Herald* reported that the community met and exceeded the fundraising goal of \$45,000, receiving a total of \$50,742, “with a huge donation of \$8,000 from the Clover



A large cake in the shape of the middle school building was a notable part of an effort by McPherson (Kan.) First Church of the Brethren to reach out to the local school district with a show of support. The church’s outreach team gathered the names of every employee of the district, designed a valentine’s card of support and appreciation, baked cookies and cakes, and purchased snacks for delivery to each school building—four elementary schools, middle school, high school, administration building, alternative education, bus barn, and Strive (education for eligible 18- to 25-year-olds)—and to the board of education during a regular meeting. It was a statement of love from the dozens of people who worked together to decorate cookies, bake cakes, personalize cards, and make the deliveries. —Ann Stover

Creek Church of the Brethren.” The fund helps 16 agencies that do work in and around Martinsburg borough.

■ **Troy (Ohio) Church of the Brethren** was awarded \$6,000 for a ministry in which volunteers from the church provide quarters and detergent

to anyone in need of help to do their laundry, offered on the second and fourth Thursday each month at Sherwood Laundry. The grant came from the Troy Foundation Distribution Committee, which recently approved grants totaling \$505,091.86 to 27 local programs.

College news

■ A seventh annual Neurodiversity Symposium at the **University of La Verne** (Calif.) addressed “Equity in Gifted Education and Neurodiversity” on April 20. Sponsored by the school’s LaFetra College of Education with the Center for Learning and Innovation and the Center for Neurodiversity, Learning, and Wellness, the symposium featured three keynote speakers: gifted program coordinator Dina Brulles, senior research scientist Jack Naglieri and Kimberly Lansdowne, former executive director of the Herberger Young Scholars Academy. “Together, they discovered that 1.2 million non-white gifted students were previously unidentified as

gifted students,” said a release. “They each have dedicated time, education, and experience to identifying historically marginalized gifted students to create a more equitable program for all.”

■ **Bridgewater (Va.) College** offered this year’s endowed lecture sponsored by the W. Harold Row Symposium on Reconciliation on March 25 with “two of America’s most experienced political analysts,” said a release. The speakers were Mara Liasson, a veteran NPR reporter who is national political correspondent for NPR and who reports on politics and policy for the newsmagazines *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*; and conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg, former senior editor of the *National Review* and currently



founding editor-in-chief of the online magazine *The Dispatch*. The panel discussion was facilitated by Bobbi Gentry, associate professor of political science, joined by undergraduate student Jory Cardoza, a political science major.



A new thing

by Meghan Mauldin

This is the vision we share as the Church of the Brethren: “Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.”

Since joining the Mission and Ministry Board in the fall of 2020, I have been intrigued by this vision statement. I like the wording, but these ideas of being innovative, adaptable, and fearless are not things that come naturally to me. I am a worrier and generally just like to be comfortable. I shy away from confrontation and change, and, for the most part, enjoy tradition and the status quo. So, let me tell you about a time that God


pushed me out of my comfort zone and called me and a small group of others to embrace the idea of becoming innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

Picture it: Western North Carolina, summer 2020. It is hot, I am four months pregnant, and we are in the middle of a global pandemic with no end in sight. The congregation that I have attended my entire life is worshipping outside due to state COVID restrictions on large gatherings, and church leadership has decided this is the perfect time to hold a vote on whether or not to leave the Church of the Brethren.

There is a longer story leading up to this, but ultimately the vote was held and, by just one vote, a two-thirds majority decided to leave the denomination. This left one-third of us with a decision to make. Do we go along with the others and stay where we have always been, or do we stick

together as a group of about 20 people and remain Mill Creek Church of the Brethren? Sticking together meant that we had each other to lean on, but we had no church building and no money. Even so, that is what we decided to do, and we began referring to ourselves as the remnant.

For a couple of weeks following the vote, our remnant group still met in the church parking lot—which was sort of awkward. The larger group had moved back inside. After a couple of weeks, it was clear we needed a new plan. We started meeting on each other’s carports, decks, and patios. We had weekly dinners at restaurants with outdoor seating. We took turns leading Bible studies and Sunday school lessons and sat in a circle, singing songs, accompanied by a single guitar. We sought help from David Shumate, David Steele, and some of our former pastors, who all helped us to get better organized and



“ Throughout our journey, we have seen God’s word lived out over and over—”I am doing a new thing; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness.” ”

former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” At different times we all had trouble with that “not dwelling on the past” part.

Despite the hurt we all felt and still feel at times, we managed to keep working together, lifting one another up, and holding each other accountable. Soon former church members who had left the church years before began to return, after learning of our split and the little ragtag group that was meeting in the woods.

In recent months, we have moved to a former United Methodist church building in town that is more visible and much easier to get to. This building is used throughout the week as a community center run by pastors of local Methodist and Congregational churches. This has allowed us to make ecumenical connections that wouldn’t have been made otherwise and given us chances to reach further as we attempt to be “Jesus in the neighborhood.” We’ve had pastors come to fill the pulpit, and a new district executive who joined our congregation has helped to breathe some new life into Southeastern District.


Throughout our journey, we have seen God’s word lived out over and over—”I am doing a new thing; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness.” Sometimes becoming adaptable, innovative, and fearless comes out of necessity, but we have felt God’s presence every step of the way.

I share this story as an example that

it is possible to do hard things together. Our remnant group has become like family. We are pretty diverse in thought and we are not of one mind on all topics, but we work to build community and talk through our differences. And, yes, like many families, we sometimes argue and get on each others’ nerves.

The Bible is full of examples of people who are trying to reach Jesus and had to be pretty adaptable, innovative, or fearless to do so. Zacheus climbed a tree, the bleeding woman made her way through the crowd just to touch Jesus’s robe, and the paralytic man’s friends lowered him through the roof. In that same spirit, I hope we are able to step out in faith, listen to one another, and work through decisions together. One thing our remnant group has learned is that it is much easier to live out this vision together than it would be to do so alone.

The wider Church of the Brethren is going through a hard time right now, and sometimes it may feel that we have no choice but to be innovative, adaptable, and fearless when making decisions or seeing things change. It is my hope that we can shift our mindset—that, rather than seeing problems that need to be solved, we see opportunity to move forward together, to listen to one another, and to make sure *all* voices are heard.

God is still at work in the work we are doing. God is doing a new thing; do you not perceive it? 

Meghan Mauldin, from Mill Creek Church of the Brethren in Columbus, N.C., is a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board.

figure out our next steps.

In time, we found a place to worship that was off the beaten path at a small retreat center. While we had a building now, we used it only for its restrooms, choosing to hold our worship services outside around a campfire as a social distancing measure that lasted until the following spring. The Advent season around a campfire was truly special.

This is the clean, neat, and fast-forwarded version of the story. The longer version is much more difficult and messy. There was a lot of pain throughout this process that some of us still struggle with. It was tough for me, personally, because I found myself disappointed in church members and elders who I had looked up to my entire life. Maybe even harder was knowing they might be disappointed in me.

However, throughout this time the scripture from Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV) became a theme for us. “Forget the



Sister, servant, moderator

How Madalyn Metzger welcomes us all

by Gimbiya Kettering

There is an old adage that says there are two types of people: those who enter a room and say “Here I am,” and those who enter a room and say “Ah, there you are!”

Madalyn Metzger, 2024 Annual Conference moderator, is the second type of person.

“Madalyn walks into a room and sees who doesn’t get seen,” said Amy Gall Ritchie, associate pastor for pastoral care and Christian education at Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind. “She makes space for those whom space is limited. It’s more than just care and kindness. It’s justice making.”

This natural inclination to create space for welcome is, perhaps, drawn from Metzger’s own experiences.

Though it is not possible to know for sure, it is likely that Metzger is the first biracial Annual Conference moderator who is both “blood Brethren” and a person of color. Her mother, Vân Metzger (nee Le), who is originally from Vietnam, met her father, Dennis Metzger, while he was serving there as a Brethren Volunteer Service worker.

On her paternal side, Metzger can recite generations of familial Brethren lineage and history that spans from Indiana to Virginia to Germany, with ancestors and relatives who have influenced the Church of the Brethren and related organizations in innumerable ways around the world, from Vietnam to Nigeria.

On her maternal side, she also relates to those who are relative newcomers to the denomination—individuals who



At Annual Conference 2023, Madalyn Metzger is surrounded by (from left) brother-in-law Ed Watkins, sister Jocelyn Watkins, husband Kris Brownlee, and parents Vân and Dennis Metzger.

“I do feel my upbringing has given me a different perspective on what it means to live peacefully and in community with one another.”

can't play the “Brethren Name Game” and whose life experiences don't mirror those of their Anglo European-descended neighbors in the pew.

“I know my experience is unique and not universally experienced,” Metzger acknowledged. “But I do feel my upbringing has given me a different perspective on what it means to live peacefully and in community with one another.”

Her commitment to cultivating community, then, ties in well with the Annual Conference theme, “Welcome and worthy,” from the apostle Paul's introduction of Phoebe in Romans 16:1.

“It would be easy for us to skim past this one and only reference to Phoebe in the Bible,” she said. “But there is so much for us to unpack here, about relationships with ourselves and each other, and what it means to be a faith community together.”

The single scriptural reference to Phoebe does not place her within the nexus of kin or tribe. Instead, she is known only by her name and the relationship she has to Paul, who refers to her as *adelphē* (the Greek term for sister)—which Metzger holds up as noteworthy.

“In the Brethren tradition, we regularly use sibling language to refer to one another,” she said. “But for those early Christians, this language is significant. The call to follow Christ strained and even severed many biological family relationships. The church became their chosen family.”

Like Phoebe, Metzger has chosen the church as her family, serving the denomination in numerous ways.

As a youth, she accepted calls to the Illinois/Wisconsin District youth cabinet, Illinois/Wisconsin District board, and National Youth Cabinet. As a young adult, she chose the denomination again, attending Manchester University (then College) as an undergraduate and serving on the On Earth Peace conflict transformation team.

From 2007 to 2015, Metzger gave time, talent, and finances as part of the On Earth Peace board, even serving as the agency's board chair—and a member of the denomination's Inter-Agency Forum—from 2009 to 2013.



At the Brethren World Assembly in 2023, Metzger is pictured with Germantown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren pastor Richard Kyerematen (left) and EYN president Joel Billi.

In 2016, she joined the Manchester University board of trustees, where she has, among other things, helped lead the board's efforts and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism.

And this list does not even include Metzger's participation and leadership in the Springfield (Ill.) First Church of the Brethren, where she grew up, and the Goshen (Ind.) City Church of the Brethren, where she is now rooted. It does not mention the miles she has put in for Church World Service CROP hunger walks, nor the love she invested as a founding member of the Church of the Brethren multiracial family support group, nor her other leadership contributions outside of the denomination.

Traveling across the country to meet congregations, attend district conferences, visit international sister churches—on top of contributing to hours of board and committee meetings—makes Annual Conference moderator a full-time job unto itself. Looking at everything Metzger has done for the church, one might assume she's ordained and working in a pastoral role, perhaps for a congregation that has blessed her service to the national denomination and found temporary ways to fill the pulpit in her absence.

But, in reality, Metzger is chief marketing officer at Everence Financial®, a national faith-based financial services organization founded by the Mennonites. Which



AC 2024

means she accepted the call to be moderator while also managing the workload and responsibilities of a C-suite, executive-level job that includes envisioning and executing organization-wide marketing strategies, leading a 21-person marketing team, and traveling for conferences and meetings with regional constituents and stakeholders. On top of that, she also teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in strategic marketing for Bluffton (Ohio) University and Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, Va.).

“It’s a lot,” she admitted. “I’ve had moments when I wasn’t sure I would have the mental, physical, or emotional bandwidth for all of it.”

The learning curve, too, has taken time and energy.

“When I was elected, I generally knew what is going on in the denomination. But then I attended my first Annual Conference officers meeting and I was like, ‘Oh no, maybe I don’t know what’s going on,’” she joked.

But what Metzger does know is how to listen.

“Growing up in a multicultural household, listening and observing helped me understand the nuances of what peo-



At Annual Conference 2023, Metzger and other US church leaders visit with guests from EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

ple were saying, doing and feeling” across cultural contexts, she reflected. It’s a skill that has served her well, personally and professionally.

“For me, marketing isn’t about pushing products. It’s about relationship-building. It’s about listening to people, connecting with them, and understanding their needs to better help them.”

And the same is true as she’s traveled the church, not

Continued on page 12

A group of firsts by Wendy McFadden

Madalyn Metzger is the first Asian American and the fifth person of color to serve as moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. The earlier four are highlighted below.

Coincidentally, three of those moderators pastored congregations named First Church of the Brethren and the fourth planted a new church. These “firsts” seem fitting, given their groundbreaking leadership in the denomination.

Samuel Sarpiya 2018 Cincinnati

Described by MESSENGER as “planter, pastor, peacemaker,” Samuel Sarpiya has ministered in numerous countries across three continents. His years of ministry and



innovation include work with a community center in South Africa, Urban Frontiers Mission in West Africa, and Youth with a Mission in Amsterdam and Hawaii.

He grew up in Jos, Nigeria, where he became acquainted with both EYN (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) and Hillcrest School. But it was years later that he encountered the Brethren in the US and became a church planter in Rockford, Ill., where he co-founded Rockford Community Church of the Brethren and the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation.

Now based in Toronto, Canada, where he is discipleship pastor at The Meeting House, Sarpiya provides training in nonviolence, mediation, and conflict transformation. He holds a doctor of ministry degree from George Fox University and is author of *The Highest of All Mountains*.

Belita Mitchell 2007 Cleveland

Belita Mitchell, pastor at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, was the first Black woman to be



ordained in the Church of the Brethren and the first to be called as moderator.

She met the Church of the Brethren in Los Angeles, when she and her husband, Don, began attending the Imperial Heights congregation. After leadership roles in the congregation and district, she eventually began working with the denominational Black Advisory Committee.

Eventually she felt called to ministry, and began taking seminary classes while working full-time. She was associate pastor at Imperials Heights in the 1990s, and was called to pastor Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren in 2003.

A voice from 1988

Two worlds

In 1978, after attending his first Annual Conference, Bill [Hayes] wrote a letter to MESSENGER, expressing his feelings of isolation and concern about the relevancy to black people of the issues discussed at Annual Conference. “The priority interests and concerns of the Church of the Brethren,” he wrote, “are not those of most black people.”

Now, 10 years later, he says with undisguised frustration, “I could sign that letter and send it right back without a change. I really don’t think we have addressed that issue at all. It just seems to me that the Church of the Brethren is not taking black America seriously.”

If the Brethren want to minister to blacks, says Bill, we need to spend more time and resources on issues that affect blacks—employment, family life, the resurgence of racism in

this country. “We are missing a great opportunity,” he says.

Even though he has been active in the denomination for 10 years—serving six years on the General Board, providing key leadership on the Urban Network Steering Committee, and serving on the Committee on Interchurch Relations—he still sometimes feels isolation similar to what he felt at his first Annual Conference, when in that “mass of humanity” he saw no one who looked like him.

“A black person who is involved in a predominantly white structure has to work for some benefits for black people through that structure,” Bill states, “or else you have to ask yourself how you can stay in there with integrity. That’s been one of the tensions I have always lived under. It’s like living in two worlds.” —An excerpt from “The Two Worlds of Bill Hayes,” by Don Fitzkee, June 1988 MESSENGER

In 2017, the Mitchells received the Revelation 7:9 Award from the denomination’s Intercultural Ministries. Belita Mitchell died earlier this year, on Feb. 10 (see article in the April MESSENGER).

Phill Carlos Archbold 2001 Baltimore

Phill Carlos Archbold, the first Hispanic moderator, was a health care administrator, founder of a center for people with HIV/AIDS, and associate pastor for Hispanic and special ministries at Brooklyn (N.Y.) First Church of the Brethren. A “pastor of the streets,” as MESSENGER put it, he was featured by *Group* magazine as “Youth Leader of the Year” in 1990.

Archbold was born in Panama to Colombian parents. He attended theo-

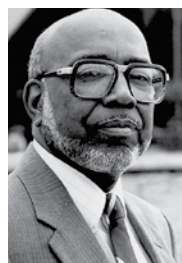


logical college in Jamaica and finished his theological training in Tennessee. After joining the US Army, he became a medic and licensed practical nurse—and eventually secretary to Gen. William Westmoreland.

Archbold became acquainted with the Church of the Brethren through Earl Foster, who later became pastor of the Brooklyn congregation. Archbold joined the church staff in 1970, while continuing his hospital work. Across the church, he was “one of the loudest voices for evangelism.” He died in 2012.

Bill Hayes 1988 Saint Louis

Bill Hayes was the first Black moderator and the first person of color to serve as moderator in the Church of the Brethren.



Raised Baptist in South Bend, Ind., he graduated from Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and then became ordained in the United Church of Christ. He became acquainted with the Brethren after finding Oakland Mills Uniting Church in Columbia, Md., a joint UCC/Church of the Brethren congregation. He met other Brethren through his work with Internet, an interfaith seminary in Washington, D.C., where he served as vice president.

In 1977, Hayes became pastor of Baltimore’s First Church of the Brethren, a mostly white congregation in a neighborhood that had become mostly Black. Under his leadership, the church became interracial.

Hayes was vocal about two themes—that the Church of the Brethren wasn’t taking Black people and other minorities seriously and that the church’s future was in the city. He died in 1993.



Continued from page 10

just to speak but also to listen. And what she's hearing is a yearning for community.

"Most people want to get back to or be reminded what it means to be part of a faith family again, locally and nationally."

For many Brethren, much will feel familiar at this year's Annual Conference, with it being hosted in Grand Rapids, Mich., for the third time in recent history. There will be four-part harmony, ice cream socials, and motions from the floor. Also familiar, will be some of the continuing and cresting conflicts and divisions within the body.

Metzger is well aware of all this, particularly given its bittersweet proximity to her own faith journey and experiences that have led to her being called as the denomination's youngest woman and first Asian American moderator.

While she has chosen, again and again, that the Church of the Brethren is her faith family, Metzger also knows, intimately, the "million little paper cuts that people of color and others in the denomination have felt for years and years."

"Yet in my travels and conversations on behalf of the denomination, I've heard a lot of comments of hope in the midst of lament, which is very encouraging," she said, observing that it's easy to be welcoming and to treat others as worthy at times of celebration and joy. But to be family is also to face the turmoil and challenges, together and between one another.

It was the same for Phoebe, who delivered Paul's letter to the early church in Rome. In that letter, Paul warns, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions..." (Romans 16:17, NIV).

"Phoebe carries this important letter to a church that is made up of a diverse group of believers," Metzger described. "The Christians in Rome came from different geographic, socioeconomic, and gender backgrounds. So, it would make sense that there would be diversity of thought among them, and perhaps tensions around that."

And while some have interpreted Paul's warning as an admonishing against diverging theological interpretations, others interpret it as Paul's deep concern about those who

Welcome and worthy

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Welcome and Worthy" (Romans 16:2, CEB) is the theme for the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference on July 3-7 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Madalyn Metzger will preside as moderator, assisted by moderator-elect Dava Hensley and Conference secretary David Shumate. The Program and Arrangements Committee also includes Jacob Crouse, Nathan Hollenberg, and Gail Heisel, with Rhonda Pittman Gingrich as the Conference director.

The business agenda includes the

ballot for elected and appointed leadership positions, items of unfinished business that were set in motion at previous Conferences, and items of new business.

The ballot

Candidates for moderator-elect are **Don Fitzkee** of Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, who is a pastor of worship and a former chair of the Mission and Ministry Board, and **Gene Hollenberg** of Union Center Church of the Brethren in Nappanee, Ind., who is executive director of Camp

Alexander Mack in Milford, Ind.

For the full ballot see p. 28 of the April MESSENGER.

Unfinished business

Query: Standing with People of Color: The committee is bringing an interim report.

Query: Breaking Down Barriers—Increasing Access to

Denominational Events: The committee is bringing an interim report.

Request for an Annual Conference Study on Calling Denominational Leadership: The committee is bringing an interim report.

New business

Mandate for the 2025-2027 Review and Evaluation Committee: The Standing Committee of district delegates is bringing a proposed new man-



ROMANS 16:2 (CEB)

WELCOME+ WORTHY

2024 CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

willfully seek to cause divisions by pitting church members against each other.

“Just like the early Christians, the Brethren have experienced a great deal of diversity of theological thought and practice throughout our history and across our cultures,” Metzger reflected. “This is not new, nor is it something I think we should fear.”

What’s important, she believes, is that the Church of the Brethren has been and remains a faith community that is called to offer and receive counsel from one another in the Spirit of Christ.

“All of us live lives and have perspectives that are outside of others’ experiences,” Metzger said in a 2018 interview for *Brethren Life and Thought*. “When we share those with each other, we are made better and stronger collectively. And I truly believe that we can embrace both our differences and the common values that bring us together as the body of Christ.”

To believe in the worthiness of one another, even as we are not of one mind, is to believe that God’s welcome is for



Madalyn Metzger and her husband, Kris Brownlee.

each of us as we are.

After Annual Conference, Metzger will welcome having fewer responsibilities on her plate. She is looking forward to traveling with her husband, jazz musician Kris Brownlee, for his performances and to see family and friends. But this sister, servant, and moderator will undoubtedly continue answering God’s call, listening and extending welcome to others in ways that are worthy of God’s people. **W**

Gimbiya Kettering is a writer and storyteller who has worked for various Church of the Brethren organizations.

date for the Review and Evaluation Committee, which will be elected next year, in 2025. That committee is called in the fifth year of each decade to review and evaluate the organizational structures and procedures of the denomination. The committee is to make its report, with any recommendations of organizational change, to the Annual Conference in the seventh year of the decade.

Recommendation for a One-time Change in Tenure for Review and Evaluation Committee: The Standing Committee is recommending that the tenure of the Review and Evaluation Committee be changed from two years to four, with the option to report sooner. Standing Committee foresees the need for the Review and Evaluation Committee to develop organizational changes and related polity adjustments



that will require considerable time for research, discussion, deliberation, and discernment, and likely an organizational transition plan.

Housing Equity Fund Recommendations: The Housing Equity Fund was created in 1975 as a savings fund to enable pastors living in parsonages to purchase their own homes after leaving the parsonage. Originally created as a mutual fund account, the fund created unhelpful tax consequences for participants. The recommendation is to invest the fund

in a qualified church retirement plan such as the Eder Retirement Plan. The fund currently serves 29 pastors.

Query: A New Model of Denominational Structure: This query from Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren and Atlantic Southeast District notes “serious conflict and division around issues of human sexuality and biblical authority” in the denomination, cites several groups that it contends are experiencing frustration in particular, and states that “many want to continue to

embrace basic Brethren beliefs and practices but feel alienated from the denomination.” It asks, “How might a new model of denominational structure support growth and vitality; address the issues that threaten the unity and viability of our beloved denomination; and offer hope to individuals and congregations who are contemplating separation from the Church of the Brethren?”

Proposed Memorandum of Understanding Updating Polity for Bethany Theological Seminary:

Brought by the board of trustees of the seminary, which is an Annual Conference agency, this document restates the board membership and composition and will serve as polity until new agency covenants are in place.

Proposed Update of Polity

Related to On Earth Peace: Brought by the board of On Earth Peace, which is an Annual Conference agency, this updates polity for the operation of the board in light of the extended process to create new agency covenants. The document outlines the relationship between Annual Conference and On Earth Peace.

Recommended Cost of Living Adjustment to the Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors: The Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee will bring a recommended percentage cost of living increase.

The preachers

Wednesday, July 3: **Moderator Madalyn Metzger**

Thursday, July 4: **Greg Broyles**, pastor of Germantown Brick Church of the Brethren, Rocky Mount, Va.

Friday, July 5: **Brandon Grady**, pastor of Black Rock Church of the Brethren, Glenville, Pa.

Saturday, July 6: **Leonard M. Dow**, vice president of Community and Church Development for Everence® and previously pastor of Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

Sunday, July 7: **Cindy Laprade Lattimer**, a team pastor at Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.

The **worship team** includes Nathan Hollenberg from the Program and Arrangements Committee; Founa Augustin Badet, director of Intercultural Ministries for the denomination; Calvin Park of Knoxville, Md.; and Amber Harris of Winston-Salem, N.C. The music coordinator is Seth Crissman of Harrisonburg, Va. The choir director is Julie Richard of Finksburg, Md. The pianist is Jocelyn Watkins of East Peoria, Ill. The organist is Robin Risser Munday of Frederick, Md. The children’s choir director is Stephanie Rappatta of Elkhart, Ind.

Witness to the Host City

Two organizations will benefit from Conferencegoers’ donations and volunteer service: **Kids’ Food Basket**, which works to increase access to healthy food for children and families with a goal of “realizing a hunger-free West Michigan for all”; and **Sleep in**

Heavenly Peace, a group of volunteers dedicated to building and delivering bunk beds to children and families in need, with the belief that “a bed is a basic need for the proper physical, emotional, and mental support that a child needs.” During the Conference, there will be service projects—coloring lunch bags for Kids’ Food Basket and building beds for Sleep in Heavenly Peace. Monetary gifts and donations of food and bedding will be received. Detailed wish lists and a required sign up for the “build a bed” project are on the Annual Conference website.

Concert

Friends with the Weather is the featured concert, to be held at 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, July 6. Friends with the Weather is a project of a trio of singer-songwriters and instrumentalists including Seth Hendricks, Chris Good,

and David Hupp. Many will recognize the trio as former members of the band Mutual Kumquat.

Tours

A bus tour to the **Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park** is offered on the morning of Thursday, July 4. Ticket price is \$32. The park is a 158-acre botanical garden, art museum, and outdoor sculpture park located on the east side of Grand Rapids.



Leonora Enting / Flickr.com

Ministers Association

This pre-Conference event for Church of the Brethren ministers is planned for July 2-3 with **Frank A. Thomas**, professor of homiletics at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Ind., speaking on “Listening for the Sound of the Genuine.”

Silent auction

The Program and Arrangements Committee is holding a silent auction. Proceeds will benefit Annual Conference translation expenses and the Annual Conference operating budget.

For more information

Go to www.brethren.org/ac for registration and to find the full schedule of events including equipping sessions, meal events, blood drive, quilting, age group activities, and more.



Haiti

Mother of liberty

by Ilexene Alphonse

“Haiti is black, and we have not yet forgiven Haiti for being black or forgiven the Almighty for making her black. . . . Until she spoke no Christian nation had abolished negro slavery. Until she spoke no Christian nation had given to the world an organized effort to abolish slavery. Until she spoke the slave ship, followed by hungry sharks, greedy to devour the dead and dying slaves flung overboard to feed them, ploughed in peace in the South Atlantic painting the sea with the Negro’s blood. Until she spoke, the slave trade was sanctioned by all the Christian nations of the world, and our land of liberty and light included. Men made fortunes by this infernal traffic, and were esteemed as good Christians, and the standing types and representations of the Savior of the World. Until Haiti spoke, the church was silent, and the pulpit was dumb. Slave traders lived and slave traders died. Funeral sermons were preached over them, and of them it was said that they died in the triumphs of the Christian faith and went to heaven among the just.”

—Frederick Douglass, American abolitionist, giving a “Lecture on Haiti” for the dedication of the Haitian Pavilion at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. A few years later he served briefly as US ambassador to Haiti.

Haiti is located in the Caribbean and used to be called the island of Hispaniola. It’s a land of forests and of rock, of deep blue sea and mighty rivers, of high mountains.

The Spanish sailed to that land in the late 1400s and occupied it. Columbus arrived in 1492. The Spaniards treated the resident Tainos and Caribs brutally. When the number of native people declined, the Spanish and then the French imported slaves from Africa, whom they also treated brutally and lethally. From the early 1500s until 1803, Europeans trafficked almost 800,000 slaves, double the number taken to North America.

Then the Africans who had been enslaved revolted and fought the greatest army of that time—the army of Napoleon—and won, led by Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Haiti declared independence on Jan. 1, 1804.

[The eastern portion of Hispaniola is now the Dominican Republic. It celebrates its official Independence Day on the day in 1844 when the nation was first declared to be independent of Haiti.]

Haiti is the first Black independent republic in the world. It fought and won its independence without help from any other nations. Even before Haiti’s independence from France,

“Haiti is the first Black independent republic in the world. It fought and won its independence without help from any other nations.”

Wendy McFadden

Haitians helped the United States of America to gain its independence. Haitians fought alongside Americans from the state of Georgia, and today there are some monuments in Savannah to commemorate the participation of Haitians during the American Revolutionary War.

Haiti was the first country to abolish slavery and demanded every other nation do the same. Haiti was the first state in the world to be formed from a successful revolt of the lower classes (slaves), and the second republic in the Western Hemisphere, only 28 years behind the US.

Early in the 19th century, Haiti helped modern-day Brazil, Guyana, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, northern Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Bolivia obtain their independence. Haiti opened its doors to anyone who wanted to be free from slavery. As long they were able to make it to Haiti, they would be free.

The United States, however, under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, did not acknowledge or accept Haiti's independence. Finally, the US said that it would recognize Haiti's independence only if France accepted it. France said that the only way to accept it would be if Haiti paid for its freedom. Haiti was forced to pay retribution to its former slave owners.

Haiti is continuing to pay for its audacity in abolishing slavery. Today, Haiti has no government, and the blood of Haitians is filling the canals and rivers of Haiti. Presidents are assassinated, and Americans, Haitians, and Canadians are kidnapped. Ransoms are paid, but everything remains the same.

The assassinated president asked for help, and the former prime minister of Haiti, Claude Joseph, asked for help from the international community, especially the US. But both times the answer was the same: "No." Now, many countries that Haiti helped to gain their independence have declared that anyone with a Haitian passport is not allowed in.

Ambassador Daniel Foote, who was appointed by President Biden as the US special envoy to Haiti, resigned in protest. "I will not be associated with the United States' inhumane, counter-productive decision to deport thousands of Haitian refugees," he wrote in his resignation letter. "This cycle of international political interventions in Haiti has consistently produced catastrophic results."

I fear that it has always been the international community's desire to destroy Haiti. The violence in Haiti today is a combination of the legacy of

Haitian church seeks hope in a desperate situation

The only hope many people have is the light of God in the church," said Ilexene Alphonse, describing the desperate situation of the Haitian people. Being the church in Haiti right now is "stressful and it is painful, but the most part is that everybody, they live in a limbo. They are never certain about what will happen," he said. "There is the constant fear of being kidnapped."

The pastors that he relates to in Haiti carry the fear of violence and kidnapping by the gangs—fear for themselves and their loved ones. Most have no means to flee to a safer place, especially those living in and around the capital city of Port-au-Prince where gangs have seized total control. They have become "prisoners in their own home and their own country."

Haiti has been prominent in the news, as gang violence has increased exponentially, alongside ever-worsening political turmoil, economic hardship, and the lack of a functioning government. These have merged into a spiraling humanitarian tragedy.

Alphonse's role for Global Mission includes keeping in touch with the leadership of l'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti). What he hears is that "things are very difficult." Difficulties range from the life-threatening to the seemingly simple, like unreliable internet.

"People are really hungry," Alphonse said. Food is scarce, outside of some rural farming areas, and it is expensive. Many people have no money left, after years of economic turmoil. Many have no way to earn money without access to reliable work.

Of the more than 30 congregations in l'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti, many that continue to meet for worship have just a few people in attendance. Those in or near Port-au-Prince have largely been abandoned because of the gangs. But nowhere is really safe, even areas that used to be peaceful.

The pastors use WhatsApp to keep in touch, as they can. However, as of early April, more than 10 pastors had not been heard from, and there is deep concern for them.

The anxiety and stress can be unbearable. Even people like Alphonse, who are keeping in touch from a distance, experience the trauma. They get constant pleas for help, and are unable to do much.

What *can* be done? The need for humanitarian aid is desperate—in the form of food and monetary aid. Alphonse and staff of Brethren Disaster Ministries have been meeting to talk about what is possible, given the numerous logistical difficulties.

In the meantime, Alphonse is sharing expressions of prayer from the church in the US with the Haitian church. It is a ray of hope. —Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



“I dream that one day Haiti will stand again as the mother of freedom”

slavery and the price that Haiti paid to become free and independent.


The destruction of Haiti includes, for example, the loss of its formerly rich agriculture—producing plantains, rice, yams, millet, cotton, bulgar, sweet potato, yuca (cassava roots), corn, coffee, cocoa, mahogany, vetiver, Campeche wood, breadfruit, malanga. Now Haiti is mostly dependent on imported goods from outside. Former US president Bill Clinton apologized for destroying Haiti’s rice industry. His administration forced Haiti to drop tariffs on imported American subsidized rice.

“It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake,” Clinton said in 2010. “I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people, because of what I did.”

Haitians are resilient. Haiti will not perish. We have been pressed on every side, from slavery to natural disaster, man-made disaster to “theorists” who

try to help, carrying their guns, or cell-phones, dressed in suits or sandals, some nearby and some far away, and some with veto power.

The people of Haiti have been through a lot of crises, but we shall overcome. The Haitian people always rise every time they are faced with struggle. God is watching, hearing the cries of the motherless and fatherless. Our eyes are upon him as the blood of our brothers and sisters cries out. God is our refuge and hope. We take courage in knowing that one day God will act on our behalf.

I dream of the day Haiti will stand up, shake its head, open its eyes in front of all the people and all the nations that are oppressing her. I dream that one day Haiti will stand again as the mother of freedom that she is. Live Haiti! 

Ilexene Alphonse is Global Mission’s Country Advisory Team (CAT) representative for Haiti. An ordained minister, he pastors Eglise des Frères Haitiens, a predominantly Haitian-American congregation of the Church of the Brethren in Miami, Fla.

‘The greatest heist in history’

Haiti is one of the poorest nations in the world, and rich countries have their fingerprints all over the nation’s stunted development. The United States worked to isolate a newly independent Haiti during the early 19th century and violently occupied the island nation for 19 years in the early 20th century. While the US officially left Haiti in 1934, it continued to control Haiti’s public finances until 1947, siphoning away around 40 percent of Haiti’s national income to service debt repayments to the US and France.

Much of this debt to France was the legacy of what the University of Virginia scholar Marlene Daut calls “the greatest heist in history”: surrounded by French gunboats, a newly independent Haiti was forced to pay

its slaveholders reparations. You read that correctly. It was the former slaves of Haiti, not the French slaveholders, who were forced to pay reparations. Haitians compensated their oppressors and their oppressors’ descendants for the privilege of being free. It took Haiti more than a century to pay the reparation debts off...

But as a nation of freed black slaves, Haiti was a threat to the existing world order. President Thomas Jefferson worked to isolate Haiti diplomatically and strangle it economically, fearing that the success of Haiti would inspire slave revolts back home.

—From an NPR “Planet Money” piece by Greg Rosalsky, “The Greatest Heist in History: How Haiti Was Forced to Pay Reparations for Freedom,” Oct. 5, 2021



Holy obedience

by Cliff Kindy

When Jesus sends his followers out to make more followers in all nations (Matthew 25), he is asking them to take the bold initiative to represent his new way of living. There are different ways that can be done. I would say in our country today the Christian trying to live faithfully might find more instances than not for holy obedience that might get translated by the state as civil disobedience.

Let me share some examples of active witness with which I have been involved. All of these examples are incidents of obeying God rather than obeying the state.

Selective Service System

While I was in Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS), doing my alternative service as a control patient at the National Institutes of Health and then rebuilding after Hurricane Camille in Mississippi, it became clear to me that I could not serve under a structure—the Selective Service System (SSS)—the primary purpose of which was to gather bodies to ship off to Vietnam and neighboring countries to fight wars. I returned my draft card to President Nixon, knowing that as a Quaker he would understand. He didn't, or at least my case was turned over to the Justice Department.

I continued in BVS, encouraging draft resisters, and talking about peace in university, school, church, and camp settings across the country. I was liable to 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for disobeying Selective Service law. Interestingly, I ended up on the Phil Donahue Show where Curtis Tarr, director of the SSS, was asked what he would do with me and Bob Gross, the two of us on that BVS proj-

ect together. Bob did end up with a three-year sentence, spending one and a half years at the federal prison in Kentucky. Yes, we were subject, or Bob was, and we were brought before political rulers. See Matthew 10:16-20.

Homes in Hebron

When I was in occupied Palestine with Christian (now Community) Peacemaker Teams (CPT), we lived in Hebron, south of Bethlehem. One of the issues we faced was home demolitions of Palestinians who had no building permit. Of course, it was impossible for Palestinians to obtain a permit to build! We objected, we rebuilt demolished homes, we set up a listening space for Palestinians to share their stories with Israelis. We soon despaired when there were 700 homes scheduled for demolition!

We decided to start a fast as a plea to God to intervene since this was way bigger than we could tackle. Soon there were two million people around the world who were connecting to that email invitation, some fasting in various ways, others just paying attention to these events.

Near the end of that fast, we started to rebuild a home that had been demolished a year earlier against the order of the Israeli Prime Minister. A Jewish rabbi, two Palestinians, and I were arrested when the Israeli soldiers declared a closed military zone, for what I saw as holy obedience. On Easter Sunday I went before the judge in the Ashkelon Prison and was ordered out of the country. For the next year and a half there were no home demolitions in the Hebron District! Sometimes God chooses to act if we put our feet into the game.

“The ways we seek to reflect Jesus' love and example in the world around us are worth sharing.”



Vieques occupation

Vieques is a small island east of Puerto Rico. It was the training grounds for many of the troops that went to Vietnam and Iraq. The east end was a bombing zone where ships, tanks, and planes blasted away at targets and munitions manufacturers tested their wares. But the native population lived downwind and received the brunt of toxins that caused cancers, leukemias, and birth defects. Fisher folk started the protest because the fish were dying.

When a Church of the Brethren pastor from Puerto Rico invited CPT to support this effort, I was designated to go. First there was a massive silent march into San Juan by Puerto Ricans, with a call for the US Navy to leave Vieques. The admiral of the US Navy replied, “We will never leave Vieques. There is no other place in the world that provides deep offshore waters for nuclear submarines, a 70-mile flyway for bombing runs by fighter jets and bombers, and sandy beaches that are easy landing spaces for Marines.”

A coalition of Catholic and Protestant church leaders, veterans, women’s groups, student groups, and environmental supporters decided to set up tents in the bombing zone. Each time the coalition set up tents and moved back into the bombing zone, the bombing would stop. Groups were arrested but returned, this time to put up alternative energy systems for the camps, plant gardens, and begin the process of rebuilding spaces for people to live. Arrested again. And again. Testimony during court time, interactions with US Navy representatives, massive support from the people of Puerto Rico, visits from government officials, and very supportive media publicity followed. In three years, the US Navy left Vieques and also pulled out of Roosevelt Roads Naval Base. Again, for me this was holy obedience that resulted in prison times. I was subject to the ways the state responded, but could still faithfully witness to God’s new order breaking into the world.


Entering Iraq

About the same time, CPT went to Iraq with Voices in the Wilderness in the fall of 2002. We had been prepared to leave for Afghanistan, but swiveled to Iraq to respond to the question, “What would it take to stop a war for a change?” It was illegal to enter Iraq—big fines and threats of long jail time. We invited grandpas and grandmas, farm-

ers, lawyers, teachers, pastors, and veterans of other wars and this war. We invited the pope to join us (the cardinals said he couldn’t). Vice president Dick Cheney’s daughter called us from Amman, Jordan, to ask if she could join us. (He flew overnight by jet to talk her out of that action.) Yes, our actions were illegal, in disobedience to US laws, but consistent with Jesus’ way of responding to other human beings created in God’s image. We did not stop the war and the destruction of that country and severe damage to our own, but were building the creative ways we can choose to be part of God’s new order here on earth as in heaven.

Refusal to pay taxes to support war

Since we married in 1971, Arlene and I have chosen to keep our income below the taxable level so we will not pay taxes for war. Choosing to live a life that does not so much need to be defended by war also seems consistent with following Jesus. This year, news reporters say that the United States will spend about \$1 trillion on war and related expenses. When over half of discretionary taxes are spent on war (which has been the case in this country since I have been a teenager), what should a Christian do? I say a Christian should not pay for war. Since we have been married, Arlene and I have refused to pay the telephone excise tax, which goes for the same purposes.

When Jesus went into the wilderness and was tested by the devil, the devil offered him all the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4 and Luke 4), which seemingly were his to offer. With the resurrection, the powers of death were defeated. God did that work through Jesus’ resurrection. Are we as Jesus’ followers willing to take the risks of being dragged before kings and governors for Jesus’ sake, to witness to that resurrection? Might it be that, as followers of Jesus, more is expected of us than we have thought and practiced? 

Cliff Kindy has worked for more than 30 years with Community Peacemaker Teams, an organization created by members of the historic peace churches. He is a member of Eel River Church of the Brethren in Silver Lake, Ind.

Church of the Brethren statements

- Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience, 1967
- Statement on War, 1970



Healthy planet, healthy people

by William L. Miller

It all started with an achy knee.

For many people, this symptom would not draw a lot of attention, but for a healthy high schooler it was certainly odd. From there, I would go on to develop inflammation of the cartilage and ligaments between my ribs. Then, a crippling fever of 103°F that would not break for days, accompanied by a painful, stiff neck and a terrible headache.

By this point, I had already been to the doctor who prescribed a regimen of antibiotics. Then the rash showed up: a faint, reddish halo that formed on my ankle around what I thought was a mosquito bite, only two or three inches in diameter.

Based on my history, my doctor had already identified the most likely culprit before the rash showed up. To this day, I'm grateful that my doctor, an avid hiker and outdoorsman himself, thought about medicine from an ecological lens.

This grand storm of symptoms hit me about two weeks after returning from a family vacation to the Pinelands of southern New Jersey. I have always been captivated by wildlife, and the Jersey Pine Barrens are home to the rare pine snake, a large, gray snake with dark blotches across the body. These snakes are found only in Pinelands ecosystems in the eastern United States. I also found out that they are very difficult to find—I still have never seen one.

I did, however, encounter other

types of wildlife, including numerous eight-legged arthropods, each about the size of a poppy seed. One of these small creatures likely sent me home with a souvenir: a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the causative agent for Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is in a group of diseases known as vector-borne diseases, which are spread by the bite of an arthropod, like ticks, fleas, and mosquitoes. I had encountered a nest of black-legged ticks and was unlucky enough not to find the one who snuck under my sock and attached itself to my ankle.

That was about 15 years ago. Since then, many of my friends and family have had their own experiences with Lyme disease. Some were lucky, and only ever saw the characteristic bull's eye rash (although some 20 to 30 percent of cases will present without a rash). Others not so much, catching the disease months or years after the initial exposure when severe symptoms, such as irregular heartbeat or neuropathy, may develop. Ultimately, Lyme disease has become the most prominent vector-borne disease in the United States by some margin, according to the CDC, even though cases are found mainly in 15 states.

A disease rooted in ecological change

Lyme disease is a human disease rooted in ecology. Part of what drew my

attention to the issue is its link to animals and the landscape. The spread of Lyme disease has been facilitated by the rapid expansion of blacklegged tick populations. I now spend my summers tracking the expansion of ticks in west Michigan, which has experienced a significant increase in Lyme disease cases over the last two decades.

Other animals are important, too. Lyme disease is an example of what scientists refer to as a zoonotic disease. These are diseases that originate and circulate in animal populations but can spread to humans from time to time. Lyme disease is maintained naturally through parasitic interactions between the blacklegged tick and small mammals. White-footed mice serve as the reservoir hosts for the Lyme disease bacterium, meaning that it can live in the bodies of mice and infect ticks feeding on them.

Ticks can then pass the bacterium to people on subsequent feeds. Nymphal blacklegged ticks, the intermediate life stage, have a particular association with Lyme disease since they can be numerous where found, are much smaller and more difficult to detect than the adult tick (think, again, the size of a poppy seed), and are active during summer months when people spend more time outside.

White-tailed deer are also associated with the expansion of Lyme disease. While they do not play a direct

“ Shalom encapsulates right relationships, between people, between creatures, and between the creation and God. ”

role in the proliferation of the Lyme disease bacterium, deer serve as the reproductive hosts for blacklegged ticks (hence their other name, the deer tick). Higher deer densities may therefore support larger tick densities. Deer are also mobile hosts, so they may play a role in moving ticks from one location to another.

Lyme disease is also associated with other types of environmental changes. The disease emerged as a significant public health issue in the 1970s and 1980s, although scientists think that it has been on the North American landscape for a long time prior to that.

So, what changed? The mid-1900s corresponds to a period of forest regeneration across the Midwest and Northeast. During colonization, forests in these areas were cleared for lumber and to make way for other types of land use, but small, patchy forests have come back since. This is not a bad thing, as regenerative forests provide new habitat opportunities for wildlife, but they also provide habitat for ticks and their hosts.

Human populations also began to live in closer proximity to wildlife, notes the CDC. For example, the expansion of suburban communities interwove with these regenerative forest patches, increasing the potential for contact between humans and ticks. Human-mediated climate change may also play a role in the expansion of tick populations and timing of tick activity, further increasing contact between ticks and people.

Environmental stewardship and human health

Lyme disease reflects a series of intricate connections that link human health to the health of the environment. I believe it also highlights a growing need to understand the role of humans within the framework of cre-

ation. The creation story in Genesis emphasizes humans as God’s image-bearers to the rest of creation (Genesis 1:26-27). However, what is missed is also an important point of the narrative: humans are also creatures embedded in the ecological tapestry of creation (Genesis 2:7, 15).

Christian perspectives on environmental stewardship often overlook the duality of our roles as both image-bearers and creatures and focus disproportionately on human distinctness (see *Beyond Stewardship*, by David Paul Warners and Matthew Kuperus Heun). This may tempt us to overlook the reciprocal relationships that exist between humans and the environment in favor of a more top-down view of the relationships between humans and the nonhuman components of creation.

Thus, traditional approaches to Christian environmental stewardship tend to place humans as benevolent stewards of ecosystems, but characters that are ultimately disconnected and unaffected by ecological processes. Interestingly, aspects of human distinctness are also emphasized in “preservationist” viewpoints (e.g., nature should be preserved apart from any human influence) that have shaped

secular views of wildlife conservation over the last century.

The last century has been a time of significant environmental change—and a time that provides a compelling counternarrative to the viewpoint that human wellbeing is ultimately unaffected or only marginally affected by the health of ecological systems. Emerging conservation approaches acknowledge that human health is increasingly linked to the health of wildlife and ecological systems—with global climate change, overexploitation of natural resources, and even the increased emergence and spread of diseases like Lyme disease offering powerful examples.

One such approach, termed One Health, emphasizes the important connections between human, wildlife, and environmental health by bridging gaps between environmental conservation, animal health, and human medicine spheres. The concept of reciprocity has shaped these dialogues, placing humans as a keystone member of ecological systems and one that is also affected by the wellbeing of other nonhuman components of ecological systems.

The idea of ecological reciprocity is an important scriptural narrative as well. Biblical reciprocity is often



William L. Miller

Learn more

For more information on Lyme disease, including information on geographic trends, symptoms, treatment, and prevention, visit www.cdc.gov/lyme/.

For more information on the One Health concept, visit www.cdc.gov/onehealth/.

Check out the book *Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care* (The Calvin Press), which discusses current trends in Christian environmental stewardship.

related to the concept of shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. I call it a concept rather than a term, because the word “shalom” is used in a variety of contexts throughout the Bible. It can be used to denote completeness, safety, and wellbeing. In short, shalom encapsulates right relationships, between people, between creatures,

and between the creation and God.

The creation story indicates that a shalomic outcome of human dominion is the mutual flourishing of both human and ecological communities, as espoused in the joint charge for both humans and nonhuman creatures to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1: 22, 28). And the Genesis account also indi-


cates that ecological degradation results from a loss in shalomic relationships caused by sin (Genesis 3).

Where do we go from here?

When I started my career in wildlife ecology, I did not imagine that I would be spending my summers chasing down ticks. But in a post-pandemic world, understanding how humans are connected to our environment seems more important than ever. Lyme disease is not the only disease connecting humans and ecological systems. Scientists estimate that around 75 percent of all emerging diseases originate from animal and wildlife populations. Lyme disease is on the list with other prominent examples, such as rabies, Ebola, and yes, even COVID-19!

As human populations become ever more connected to the ecosystems we live in, it is time to consider how One Health perspectives can grow our understanding of our role as stewards of God’s world. How can we more effectively fill our role of image-bearers to the rest of creation? We were not meant live apart from creation, nor can the nonhuman aspects of creation meet the fulfillment of their purpose without the “working” and “keeping” done by humans (Genesis 2:15).

Likewise, in a world marred by sin, how do we best care for human communities affected by ecological degradation, including the worst effects of climate change, loss of ecological resources, and emergence of new diseases? The negative effects of ecological degradation are often felt most by poor and marginalized communities. Christian environmental stewardship, then, also includes care for human communities.

These are critical questions—and opportunities—for Christians to consider as we live into our calling to be agents of reconciliation and renewal. 

William L. Miller, assistant professor of biology at Calvin University in Michigan, is a member of the Brethren Creation Care Network.



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Like that first Pentecost

by Mandy North, Robbie Miller, Julia Wheeler

We stepped into the Old City of Jerusalem and were overtaken by the vivid variety of people, exhibiting their culture and religion through their wardrobe—the hats, the scarves, the robes. We knew so little, but were sure each outfit revealed something about what they believe and the manner of their living in this ancient city with its four separate yet entwined quarters: Christian, Armenian, Jewish, Muslim. Like the tables of spices in the markets there and a basket of naturally dyed yarn in Nazareth Village, the astonishing beauty and diversity of humanity were on full display.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:4). The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 takes place in this city. People from more than 15 nations are gathered and begin speaking in their native languages, hearing and understanding one another.

Appreciating the true beauty of diversity was a gift during our trip to Israel, Palestine, and Jordan last July. During the many days we spent in the Old City of Jerusalem, we saw the richness of culture, religion, and language meeting in one place.

It was the location of the Jewish Temple with ongoing prayers in Hebrew at the Western Wall. It is the location of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where Muslims believe Muhammad ascended to heaven. It is the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Christian tradition holds Jesus was crucified and buried. In the streets of this tiny city, we were regularly greeted by the various languages and cultural garments that adorn its inhabitants. In the evenings, we heard the Islamic call to prayer in Arabic.

We had the honor of sitting with the Orthodox Jewish owners of a local biblical gift store. They closed the shop so our group could gather for conversations across religious lines. We talked about the diversity in the city. We talked about the longing for peace in Israel and Palestine. We talked about the need for building relationships and trust, and the opportunities to hear and understand each other, much like that first Pentecost.

As the war between Israel and Hamas continues to take its horrific toll, we are reminded by Pentecost of the Holy Spirit’s power to connect strangers, reconcile enemies, heal differences, and bring people “from every nation under heaven” together in common cause.


Now more than ever, the Holy Spirit needs people willing to declare “the wonders of God” in their own tongues (Acts 2:11, NIV). Now more than ever, the Holy Spirit needs



Robbie Miller

people willing to transcend their differences and act for the greater good (Acts 2:44-45). Now more than ever, the Holy Spirit needs people willing to be Christ’s hands, feet, eyes, and body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) to continue his work peacefully, simply, and together.

Pentecost reminds us of the Holy Spirit’s awesome power and calls us to embody that power in ways that unite, heal, and bless this broken yet beautiful world.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*
—attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila 

Mandy North is lead pastor of Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren. Julia Wheeler is pastor of Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship Church of the Brethren.. Robbie Miller, retired chaplain at Bridgewater (Va.) College, organized the July 2023 Lands of the Bible tour (and previous ones) in partnership with University of the Holy Land. “Sacred Spaces” is a series of reflections timed with the church calendar.



Reconciled to God

Romans 5:1-11

by Michael L. Hostetter

Romans 5 opens with a bold statement: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1). This suggests there was a time when we were not at peace with God. It seems that faith creates a new condition and heals an old wound.

It is easy to misunderstand Paul when we fail to comprehend what he means by the terms “sin” and “death.” Our text for today ends with verse 11. But as is often the case, the text is set in a larger literary context that gives hints about how to understand it.

To understand how Paul uses “sin” and “death” it is necessary to examine verses 12-14. Notice that “sin” is singular.

This is not unusual for Paul, especially in Romans. He does not think of sins as isolated acts that are contrary to God’s will. Instead, Paul thinks of sin as a state of being. Sin is a state of alienation, or separation, from self, God, and others.

As an example, he notes Adam’s disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. This refusal to obey God reveals humankind’s predisposition to live selfishly without concern for God or others. This self-centeredness is destructive to human community, personal faith, and even creation itself.

The problem of sin is a relationship problem. People are estranged from God, themselves, and one another. In fact, all creation groans for shalom,

restoration, healing, and peace (Romans 8:22). This state of being is like a prison cell from which all creation must be freed. We are enslaved by our own desire for complete self-sufficiency and independence. We are, in fact, self-absorbed. “Death” represents this alienation taken to the extreme. For Paul, self-centeredness (sin) ultimately leads to death (complete alienation from self, God, and others). Our dilemma is Paul’s as well (Romans 7:15-20, 24-25).

Jesus means freedom

Paul’s approach to the relational problem of separation and alienation is not to provide stricter rules to follow. He believed that, for humanity to be whole, humanity

“Christ swings wide the cell door. God’s acceptance of us is a gift freely given. Trust in God’s grace liberates us from the need to be in control of our lives.”

must be free from the prison of self-absorption, because that only leads to guilt, shame, and moral paralysis.

For Paul, the freedom we need is found in Jesus Christ. Christ swings wide the cell door. God’s acceptance of us is a gift freely given. Trust in God’s grace liberates us from the need to be in control of our lives. Our self-centeredness leads us to try to make ourselves good enough and worthy enough to deserve God’s approval. When we are freed from that, we can live in thanksgiving and joy. Our devotion to the wellbeing of others becomes an expression of gratitude instead of obligation. We are freed to love extravagantly and to serve joyously.

Response to afflictions and suffering

Many of us have tried to make sense of suffering. Since afflictions are sewn into the very fabric of life, this is not surprising. How we respond to misfortune and trouble, to a large degree determines whether we will be generous or bitter, loving or resentful, grateful or aggrieved.

The church at Rome was suffering from some sort of misfortune or persecution. Would the trouble they faced lead to generosity or bitterness, resentment or love, grievance or gratitude? In verses 3-5, Paul tells them that afflictions produce endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. If we are honest about our lived experience, we must admit that this is sometimes true but not always. Most of us have known people who have been crushed by their afflictions. Sometimes we ourselves react to misfortune with anger and a desire for revenge.

The message of hope in Romans 5 is lofty and inspiring. This is so because Paul is not writing a self-help book. He is not offering a plan for how to please

God and thereby earn God’s approval. In this letter, Paul is proclaiming freedom from self-centeredness and selfishness. This is not about improving; this is about transformation. Paul wants people to accept God’s freedom and gracious love and thereby be made new! For this apostle, the ethics of gratitude exceed the ethics of obligation.

Prevenient grace

“Prevenient” is not a word we use every day. In fact, it is a word many of us have likely never used. When paired with “grace,” the term means that God was at work in the world before we knew it. Sometimes prevenient grace is called “preceding” grace. That may be an easier term to wrap our minds around.

As the term suggests, God’s working in the world precedes our knowing it. Verse 8 says it this way: “God proves his love for us in that while still we were sinners Christ died for us.” First John 4:19 says it another way: “We love because he first loved us.”

Prevenient grace, preceding grace.

A puzzle

For centuries, Christians have been debating the meaning of “Christ died for us” (v. 8). This phrase is so widely used among Christians that most think they know what it means. Paul didn’t write, “Christ died instead of us or in our place.” Nor did he write that Christ’s death paid a ransom to the devil to free us. No, he just says, “Christ died for us.”

This is puzzling for some Christians. Was Christ’s death required for God to extend grace to all creation? Was Jesus punished for our sin? Scholars acknowledge at least seven theories that try to answer the questions: “Did Jesus have to die?” and “If so, why?”

Another curious term is “wrath of God” (v. 9). A deity that takes the initiative to free humanity from the captivity of sin, and does so as an expression of love, doesn’t seem wrathful. The God whom we love because God first loved us, does not appear to need a victim to satisfy a thirst for blood.

These are two of many ways of perceiving the divine—as a God of wrath or a God whose love precedes our response. Is there a disconnect between these two views? They at least appear to be quite different from one another.



In *A Guide for Biblical Studies*, this is the third of four lessons based on texts from Romans. Each of the first three are, for the most part, consistent with one another. But it also must be acknowledged that Paul leaves many strings hanging, almost challenging us to pull on them.

His use of the two words, “sin” and “death,” invites us to discover what Paul meant when first he wrote this letter. By surveying the breadth of his letters, it is very likely that both words are relational in meaning. That is, “sin” represents humanity’s self-centeredness that leads to alienation from self, God, and others. “Death” is that state of alienation in the extreme.

The gift of grace in Christ Jesus reconciles human beings to God, self, and others. The divide is crossed, the alienation ended, and the prison door swung wide. This offers freedom from our self-absorbed inclinations, making it possible to become “persons for others.” All this is a gift from God.

Michael L. Hostetter, a retired minister in the Church of the Brethren, lives in Bridgewater, Va. In the last two issues, Hostetter was mistakenly identified as living in Manheim, Pa.”

General secretary issues pastoral statement for Haiti

Church of the Brethren general secretary David Steele issued a pastoral statement for Haiti in early March, at a time when the island nation was under a state of emergency and experiencing widespread violence. The statement was shared in three languages: English, Haitian Kreyol, and French.

Directed to l’Eglise des Freres d’Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti), Haitian Church of the Brethren congregations in the US, extended family, and the Haitian diaspora community, the statement said, in part, “Please receive with this letter the care and love of the whole of the Church of the Brethren. Our denomination continues to stand with you and the Haitian people now as we have during previous times of trial and trouble, through storms and earthquakes, economic and political turmoil.”

DR church to aid displaced Haitians

Brethren Disaster Ministries and Iglesia de los Hermanos (the Church of the Brethren) in the Dominican Republic (DR) are working together on an effort to aid displaced Haitians.

A grant of \$5,000 from the Emergency Disaster Fund is providing emergency food to Haitian citizens fleeing across the border to the Dominican Republic and away from the violence in Haiti. Haiti and the DR share the same Caribbean island.

The DR church reports that thousands of Haitians have been fleeing into the DR due to the violence, killing of family members, lack of food, and homes being taken by the gangs in Haiti. In spite of a DR government position against the displaced Haitians, the church is providing some humanitarian aid.

BFIA grants issued to churches, camp

Brethren Faith in Action grants were given to the following local ministries:

- \$5,000 to a “Brethren Building Beloved Community” project of congregations in Indiana and Ohio.
- \$5,000 to a “Love Your Neighbors” outreach of Jesus Lounge Ministry in Atlantic Southeast District.
- \$5,000 to a coffeehouse outreach at GraceWay International Community Church in the Baltimore area.
- \$5,000 to a gun buy back program supported by Spirit of Peace Church of the Brethren, East Lansing, Mich.
- \$5,000 to Myerstown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren’s upgrade

of technology for community outreach.

- \$5,000 to the Blessing Box project at Williamson Road Church of the Brethren, Roanoke, Va.
- \$5,000 to multiple community outreach projects of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren, Peoria, Ariz.
- \$4,304.82 to community outreach projects of Glendale (Calif.) Church of the Brethren.
- \$2,500 to a community meal at Camp Pine Lake in Iowa.
- \$1,600.80 to a family movie night program at Lanark (Ill.) Church of the Brethren.
- \$1,000 to a ministry for children and families at Roaring Spring (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.
- \$480.24 to Day of Caring projects of Eel River Community Church of the Brethren, Silver Lake, Ind.



Charly Brumbaugh-Cayford

Office of Ministry director Nancy Sollenberger Heishman led orientation for nine trainers who will lead required ethics training for ministers to renew their credentials. In addition to the current curriculum written by Jim Benedict, a new set of addendum materials will be introduced on clergy ethics and artificial intelligence, guidelines for the use of social media, and a multidimensional approach to intercultural ethics. The trainers (from left): Heishman; Dave Kerkove, pastor of South Waterloo (Iowa) Church of the Brethren; Joe Detrick, interim executive for Mid-Atlantic District; Gail Erisman Valeta, pastor of Prince of Peace Church of the Brethren, Denver, Colo.; Nathan Hollenberg, pastor of Linville Creek Church of the Brethren, Broadway, Va.; Ilexene Alphonse, pastor of Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren; Cathy Huffman, director of Ministry Formation for Virilina District; Janet Ober Lambert, director of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership; Del Keeney, retired pastor from Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; and Ramón Torres, retired pastor of Puerta del Cielo Church of the Brethren, Reading, Pa.

Shine Everywhere is introduced

The Shine curriculum of Brethren Press and MennoMedia is introducing a new initiative called Shine Everywhere, to provide new avenues of communication between those who create Shine curriculum and the congregations and families who use it.

“Shine Everywhere allows us to give focused time and attention to discovering and practicing the ‘everywhere’ habits that grow faith in children,” said project facilitator Shana Peachey Boshart. “We look forward to deepening our relationships with congregations and families, listening for what is working to grow faith, and providing helpful resources for churches, families, and children.”

A grant of \$1.25 million from Lilly Endowment Inc. supports development of Shine Everywhere. The grant is part of Lilly Endowment’s Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative, which aims to help parents and caregivers share their faith and values with their children.



Marietta Witkovsky-Eder

Older adult FaithX participants spent a week at Camp Ithiel in Gotha, Fla., completing a variety of volunteer projects under the guidance of camp director Mike Neff. Worship was full of conversation and singing led by devotion leader Carol Elmore. The week also included time for fellowship and recreation. A day trip took the group to Silver Springs State Park for a boat ride to view birds, manatees, and other wildlife.

Personnel

Jennifer Hosler began April 22 as part-time manager of the Global Food Initiative (GFI), in the Global Mission office. She will work as a remote employee from Washington, D.C., where she is part of the pastoral team at Washington City Church of the Brethren. Hosler has served on the GFI advisory board and is a current trustee for Bethany Theological Seminary. Her previous work on the denominational staff included several years as a mission worker in Nigeria, and service as a consultant for the project “Stories from the Cities.” Her work and consulting on community development projects has included a program in Haiti.

Her language skills include Hausa, Spanish, French, and biblical Hebrew.

Tracy Repmann has left the position of assistant director of Financial Operations at Eder Financial. **Su Holbus** has been hired to the position, as of March 13. She is a registered CPA who most recently was a senior financial analyst with Corporate America Family Credit Union.

Beth Sollenberger began April 1 as quarter-time interim director of administration for Atlantic Southeast District, working from her home in Goshen, Ind., as well as periodically onsite. Prior to her retirement in 2021, Sollenberger was executive

minister for South Central Indiana District for nearly 11 years. She also served for several years in Michigan District in interim leadership roles.

Douglas Veal starts June 25 as executive minister for Mid-Atlantic District. He has been pastoring Wabash (Ind.) Church of the Brethren in South Central Indiana District and also has served pastorates in Southern Ohio and Kentucky District and in Virlina District. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Bridgewater (Va.) College and a master of divinity from Bethany Seminary, and has done Clinical Pastoral Education training through Eastern Mennonite Seminary. Veal has been an instructor

for Virlina’s Christian Growth Institute and the Brethren Leadership Institute of South Central Indiana District. He chaired Virlina’s New Church Development Committee for several years and has been a member of the denomination’s New and Renew Advisory Team for 10 years.

The new **Death Row Support Project (DRSP) Team** started their work in January, following the retirement of founder and former director Rachel Gross: **Rachel Caidor** of Chicago, Ill.; **Tara Collum** of Toronto, Ontario, Canada; **Heidi Gross** of Chicago; **Dina Milito** of Sunnyvale, Calif.; and **Tim Reed** of North Manchester, Ind.



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A new translation of the Hebrew Bible

This year marks the 55th year of my love affair with the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translations of the Hebrew Scriptures. In 1969, a teacher at Azusa High School in California recommended the 1962 JPS translation of the Torah (the “Law”) for his Bible as Literature course. I asked my father for a copy and somehow he managed to find the five bucks (closer to 50 bucks today) necessary for the purchase.

I was gobsmacked. At a time when most Bible translations echoed the King James Version, the JPS translation was vibrant, vivid, and alive. Divine beings married humans. Balaam’s donkey talked! Moses and 70 elders ate with God on Mount Sinai and lived. Jacob wrestled all night with a mysterious “man.”



FRANK RAMIREZ

Later, at Bethany Theological Seminary, under the tutelage of Brethren writer and professor Christina Bucher, I would discover biblical Hebrew as a concrete, dancing language, always in motion. JPS got it right.

Over the years, JPS added the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Writings (*Kethuvim*) to the Law (*Torah*) to complete the *Tanakh* (this word for the Hebrew Scriptures is formed from the first letter of all three parts). Revisions have followed to keep pace with the way we speak English. Just published is *The JPS Tanakh: Gender-Sensitive Edition*.

I love it.

Even back in 1962, the JPS translators pondered gender questions in their quest for accurate translation. In that early edition they considered questions like whether to use “son” or “offspring,” “fathers” or “ancestors.”

This translation accomplishes something both biblically accurate and nuanced, overseen by, among others, Carol L. Myers and Adele Berlin, two of my favorite writers who are also top-flight scholars.

One of my complaints about the chocky-blocky stilted nature of well-intentioned “inclusive” language is the auto-

matic substitution of one term for another regardless of whether it sounds natural or is appropriate in the context.


By contrast, JPS offers “gender-inclusive renderings when appropriate and gendered ones when called for historically and linguistically.” That’s because a good translation must be comprehensible and take into account “historical and cultural authenticity.” With regard to references to humanity, it’s important “whether women as well as men were in view.”

It’s important that scripture “evoke for today’s audience the same mental picture as the original text apparently evoked for its ancient one.” And for many of us, “God is a persona not only in the ancient texts but also in present moments—and the deity (we experience) is not a male.”

Most translations render the four letters of God’s name as the word LORD in all caps. This version refers instead to the Eternal, or the Eternal God. *Adonai* is translated Sovereign instead of Lord, but “Lord” is still used when God is referred to in military terms.

One good example involves Psalm 140:2: “Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men.” As Berlin noted in an earlier book, while it was more likely that men were at the root of the problem, it is possible for women to perform evil as well. So now it reads, “Rescue me, O Eternal One, from evildoers.”

The earliest Christians had no New Testament. This was their Bible. To those who object and say we Brethren are a New Testament church, I would reply that’s more a case of rewriting history backwards. The early Brethren quoted from both the Old Testament and the Apocrypha.

As I’ve said more than once from the pulpit, “The Word of God doesn’t change, but the English language does!” Believers in every generation who do not have access to the original biblical languages must count upon translations that accurately reflect what is actually said, not what we want it to say. 

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Union Center Church of the Brethren near Nappanee, Ind.



ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

Title: *THE JPS TANAKH: Gender-Sensitive Edition*. **Publisher:** Jewish Publication Society Inc. The translation is available for purchase through www.brethrenpress.com.

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T

Tiny stories

Otis

He'd been doing it for as long as anyone could remember. Every Saturday morning at first light he'd let himself in and polish the small brass cross on the communion table.

Some said it started when he came back from World War I; others that it was a promise he made to his dying mother. No one knew for sure. No one ever asked him. One cold January morning I did.

His answer was a small smile. "God knows," he said. "No one else needs to."

—Ken Gibble, Lititz, Pa.

Connections blossomed

Plans for the St. Croix workcamp had gone awry. Youth piled out of rented vans at a home for adults with disabilities for an unanticipated morning of service.

We heard screams. Clearly apprehensive, teens entered reluctantly and followed instructions to accompany residents to the garden.

Under the trees, some blew bubbles, eliciting visible delight. One girl rolled clay into a ball and placed it in the hand of a blind and deaf man. He rubbed it into a snake and handed it back, a repeated exchange that became a wordless conversation. Connections blossomed amid the flowers.

"Can we come back tomorrow?"

—Jan Fischer Bachman, Oklahoma City, Okla.

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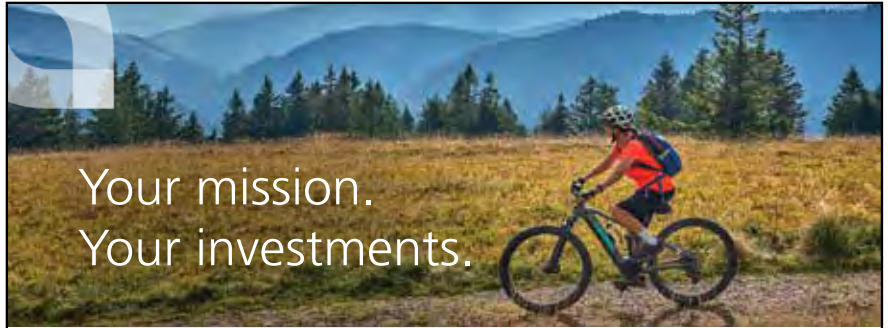


Discussion starters for small groups

■ **A new thing** is what Mill Creek Church of the Brethren has become, emerging from a difficult time. How did this “remnant” embrace the ideas of becoming innovative, adaptable, and fearless, as in the vision statement of the Church of the Brethren? What happened to them? How did they recover? What scripture helped? What lessons may the wider church learn from them?

■ **Sister, servant, moderator** describe Madalyn Metzger. What other words and phrases would you add? How does she build bridges across groups and connect people within and outside of the Church of the Brethren? What experiences and skills does she bring as moderator of Annual Conference? What challenges and encouragement have come her way?

■ **Two worlds** is how Bill Hayes described his experience of the Church of the Brethren. As the first Black moderator of Annual Conference, how did he live in two worlds? How does Potluck writer Dennis Webb echo that experience? The two describe their first Conferences with very similar words—*isolation, loneliness, nobody looked like me—although the events were 25 years apart.* Think about a time when you were in a place where no one looked like you. What did it feel like? If you haven’t had such an experience, why would that be?



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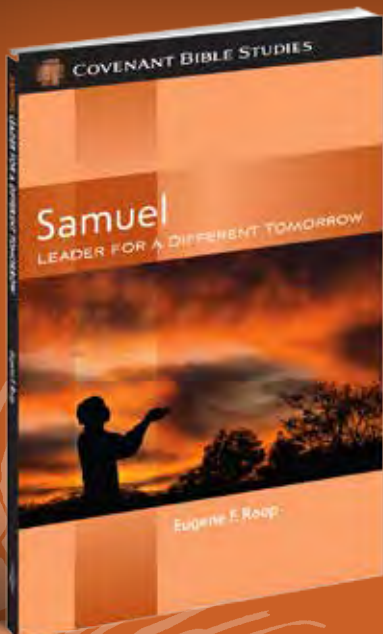
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What I value about the Church of the Brethren

Christ's love for everyone

Let me count the ways, and let us count the cost.

I especially value that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, living peacefully, simply and together. We reach out and welcome people, and do good works in our communities, spreading the good news. We work toward consensus in our congregations, districts, and for hundreds of years in our Annual Meeting. Conference brings us together in love and recharges us to do the work of Christ in our communities and around the world.

We reject the hate and divisiveness of the world in favor of peaceful, patient, and kind efforts toward agreement, using the strategies of the peacemaker—valuing everyone's opinion and listening carefully and respectfully in a conversation rooted in Christ's love for everyone.

—Douglas Nyce, Annville, Pa.

Centenarians

Rohrer, Alice Rupel, 100, North Manchester, Ind., March 31

Simmons, Mary, 100, Hershey, Pa., March 13

New members

Hanover, Pa.: Bob Krouse, Carol Krouse

Monroeville, Pa.: Ricardo Carter, Anika Davis

Pleasant Chapel, Ashley, Ind.: Cathy Dick Egler, Kallie Mae Egly

Troy, Ohio: Marilyn Vaughn

Wedding anniversaries

Crim, Gary and Karen, Dayton, Ohio, 50

Wilson, Jack and Flo, Lititz,

Pa., 73

Winchell, Ed and Sandy, South Bend, Ind., 55

Young, Walt and Pat, Lancaster, Pa., 60

Deaths

Baer, Robert D., Sr., 93, Friedens, Pa., Feb. 23

Barrett, Michael K., 68, Loveland, Colo., Dec. 16

Becker, Sharon Arlene Wolfe, 79, Troy, Ohio, May 29, 2023

Bergy, Barbara Jean, 98, Caledonia, Mich., Feb. 23

Bernhard, H. Fred, 83, Greenville, Ohio, March 12

Crump, Annie L., 88, Chicago, Ill., Feb. 5

Davis, Marla Kay Anderson, 67, Goshen, Ind., Nov. 15

Duvall, William Roger, 87, Everett, Pa., Jan. 1

Feierstein, Gerald Richard, 94, Troy, Ohio, March 2

Forsha, Mary Ellen (Billie) Lehman, 94, Lititz, Pa., Feb. 13

Gnodle, Linda M., 80, Troy, Ohio, Oct. 31

Griffith, Carol Lee Rodgers, 81, Port Republic, Va., Jan. 19

Hogle, Donna Marie Wagoner, 91, Ames, Iowa, Jan. 29

Johnson, Jeffrey H., 80, Greeneville, Tenn., Feb. 16

Judy, Timothy, 63, Greenwood, Del., Feb. 10

Littlejohn, Max E., 82, Troy, Ohio, Feb. 19

Lutz, Betty Jean Redinger, 93, Olathe, Kan., March 4

Mahaney, Calvin Merritt, 95, Fairplay, Md., Feb. 23

McCune, Barbara Sue, 61, Tucson, Ariz., March 3

Orpurt, Philip A., 102, North Manchester, Ind., Feb. 17

Schwarz, John George, 76, Bridgewater, Va., Jan. 18

Shanks, Jeannine Powell, 91, Astoria, Ill., Feb. 21

Shull, Dorothy Anne Huffman, 93, Elizabethtown, Pa., Feb. 29

Simmons, Grant Dewayne, 92, Naples, Fla., Dec. 22

Spitler, Esther E. Hess, 92, Troy, Ohio, March 13

Thomas, Rodger J., Sr., 87, Windber, Pa., Nov. 14

Thomas, Zachariah Nathaniel, 41, Holland, Iowa, Nov. 11

Wilson, Carolyn Diane Perrell, 81, Martinsburg, W.Va., Sept. 12

Ordained

Wright-Hawkins, Gina, Virgina Dist. (Monte Vista, Callaway, Va.), Feb. 24

Licensed

Buohl, Joseph, II, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Mountville, Pa.), Feb. 25

Cripe, Mark, S/C Ind. Dist. (Lafayette, Ind.), Feb. 25

Hidalgo-Hernandez, Christian, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Un Nuevo Renacer Fellowship, Mountville, Pa.), Feb. 18

Osborne, Drema, Virgina Dist. (Jeters Chapel, Vinton, Va.), Jan. 14

Placements

Emmons, Timothy, from interim pastor to pastor, Ninth Street, Roanoke, Va., Feb. 5

Faus, Ron, interim team pastor, La Verne, Calif., Jan. 1

Osborne, Drema, pastor, Mount Bethel, Eagle Rock, Va., Feb. 15

Romero, Gilbert, Jr., pastor, Glendora, Calif., Feb. 1

Rudy, Tabitha, interim pastor, Bethany, Boones Mill, Va., Feb. 15

Wheeler, Julia, pastor, Pomona Fellowship, Calif., March 1

TURNINGPOINTS

To submit information for Turning Points, go to www.brethren.org/turningpoints.

Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at dstroyeck@brethren.org or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published.

Grieving for a friend I never met

After giving my exploratory call sermon at Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren in 2002, I did not expect to be called. I was self-conscious about my Jamaican accent that marked me as an immigrant. None of the people I met through the interview process were of my color. The congregation, though diverse in its own way (it's now 90 percent of Indian origin), did not include another Black face at that time. I did not think I could belong to the Church of the Brethren. However, to my shock, the congregation called me.



DENNIS WEBB

Only six months after being called, I was representing my congregation at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in Louisville, Ky., accompanied by Ernie Thakor, one of the deacons. When I entered the worship auditorium, filled with the multitude of Brethren folks, to say I was

shocked would be a gross understatement.

Nobody looked like me. It was a very lonely place. I had the same feeling that I felt after my “call” sermon. Yes, Sister Belita Mitchell did reach out to me and invited Ernie and me to a table, to have lunch with her and a few other Brethren. But I still felt so alone. Very lonely. I didn’t know anybody. And nobody knew me. That was 22 years ago.

A few weeks ago, a Church of the Brethren friend sent me a text message with a picture attached. Her question: “Did you know him?” I did not. The man in the picture was Brother Phill Carlos Archbold, a Church of the Brethren pastor who is no longer living.

For 22 years, I thought I was the only Jamaican-trained Baptist pastor in our denomination. But I was not. Brother Phill Carlos did his initial theological training in Jamaica at Calabar College. I learned this from his obituary. In 1967, Calabar College became part of the ecumenical United Theological College of the West Indies—where I trained as a Baptist pastor in Kingston, Jamaica.

He died at Brethren Village in Lancaster, Pa., on Oct. 1, 2012. Receiving this news 12 years late hit me hard, with a fresh, raw, and deep grief. I am grieving for a friend I never met.


Brother Phill Carlos was Annual Conference moderator in 2001, just a year before my first Annual Conference. I wish I had seen him preaching, so I could have introduced myself to him. I wish we had sat down together and recalled and reminisced about our Baptist tradition, in relation to our Brethren tradition. I wish we could have talked as alumni, maybe discovering we had the same professors. I wish we could have talked about what it is like to be rooted in the Baptist traditions and branching into Brethren-land. We could have talked for hours and hours in Jamaica’s native dialect—Patois, a colorful variation of English. We could have talked about Bob Marley, the architect in making Jamaican reggae music into a global phenomenon.

But most important of all, I wish I could have called him many times as a new Brethren pastor, to tell him how lonely I was. Because I really was. I needed a mentor as I walked through the early years of my Brethren journey.

To be clear, I have now made many connections in the Church of the Brethren. And, in all humility, I now know a lot of people. They also know me. I am Brethren now, and proud to be Brethren. I have stayed in the same congregation, the Naperville Church of the Brethren, for 22 years. They have fully welcomed me and my family, and repeatedly affirmed our work together. I have made deep friendships among my ministerial colleagues and earned a master’s degree from Bethany Seminary. I connected with Intercultural Ministries, served on the Mission and Ministry Board, and was a member of the Nominating Committee. I have preached at many national conferences, including Annual Conference.

So, I have been around. But sometimes, I still remember my first lonely Annual Conference. The very lonely conference.

I deeply regret that I did not know Brother Phill Carlos, because I would not have felt like a stranger in the denomination for such a long time. I grieve for a man I did not know. But as scripture teaches: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5, KJV).

I am grieving for a friend I never met. May his soul rest in peace. 

Dennis Webb is pastor of Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren.

“Receiving this news 12 years late hit me hard, with a fresh, raw, and deep grief. I am grieving for a friend I never met.”



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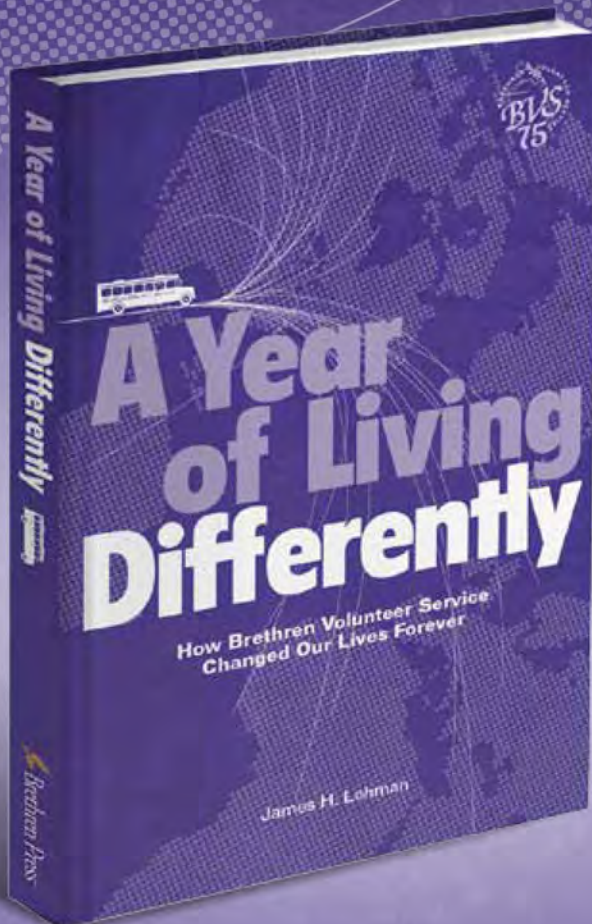
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