



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

# MESSENGER

JUNE 2024 [WWW.BRETHREN.ORG](http://WWW.BRETHREN.ORG)

## Seasons of ministry

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to share how you join Jesus in the neighborhood,  
building up others and neighbors near and far!*



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# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

June 2024 Vol. 173 No. 5 [www.brethren.org/messenger](http://www.brethren.org/messenger)

Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford  
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## on the cover

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*The current season of ministry in the Church of the Brethren might look like barren. The statistics are sobering. But just as there is tremendous activity beneath the earth's wintry landscape that springs forth and is revealed in warmer days, encouraging activity of the Spirit is emerging across the denomination. Read more from Nancy Sollenberger Heishman and John Fillmore, starting on p. 10.*

# Follow the peace path

**A** few weeks ago I was a substitute teacher for the elementary class at my church. This age group does more running around the room than junior youth, the age I have more experience with. But after a little chaos and some sharing time, everyone focused intently on the Bible story.



WENDY MCFADDEN  
PUBLISHER

First the kids listened while I read the story of Saul’s conversion from *The Peace Table* storybook Bible, and then they acted it out while I read it again. One played the part of Saul, and another Ananias. I thought the third person would act out the part of a friend, but instead she volunteered for set design, quickly putting together a temple with a place for a burnt offering. (No, that’s not in this Bible story, but that was okay.)

The fourth class member handled lighting—shining a portable work light in Saul’s face when the narrator announced that a light from heaven flashed around him. Then he switched off the room lights when Saul discovered he could see nothing.

The class learned that Saul listened to God and changed his life. They also learned that Ananias and the other apostles had their own conversion experience when they decided to trust God and believe that Saul had changed.

I can tell these kids are going to like Shine’s new “Follow the Peace Path” cards. These cards are a way for families to read a Bible story together and follow up with simple activities and prayers for a range of ages and learning styles. Congregations that use the Shine curriculum are receiving a free set as part of the Lilly-funded Shine Everywhere initiative.

Through this initiative, Brethren Press and MennoMedia are leading a process in which congregations and families can learn from each other about how to practice faith at home.

Why did Lilly Endowment choose our proposal for one of their grants in the Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative? We don’t really know. But maybe it helped that we had some momentum because of fast changes that had to be made during the pandemic, when many congregations suspended in-person Sunday school. We also think the longtime publishing collaboration between Brethren and Mennonites is a plus.

Others think so too. When we shipped out the free sample card sets to Shine congregations, there were a large number from denominations beyond the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite churches. These are congregations that value our approach to faith. In a world where war and weaponry overwhelm, we seek peace and pursue it.

*Wendy McFadden*

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\$17.50 individual rate  
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MESSENGER is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren. Member of the Associated Church Press. Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © June 2024, Church of the Brethren.

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

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

Printed on recycled paper (20% post consumer)



“The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant.” —Luke 22:26b, CEV

“Ah. I smiled. I’m not really here to keep you from freaking out. I’m here to be with you while you freak out, or grieve or laugh or suffer or sing. It is a ministry of presence. It is showing up with a loving heart.”

—author Kate Braestrup, in *Here If You Need Me*

“Service is what prayer looks like when it gets up off its knees and walks around in the world.”

—former Xavier University president Michael J. Graham, S.J.

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

**Fifty years ago, in 1974**, Annual Conference was held among the mountains of Roanoke, Va. One hundred years ago, the 1924 meeting was among many in that period to take place in Hershey, Pa. And 200 years ago, in 1824, Brethren gathered not far from Hershey—in Cumberland County, Pa.—for their meeting.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,578

Number of ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers in the Church of the Brethren as of March 2024, according to data from the denomination’s Ministry office. Explore more about ministry in the denomination beginning on page 12.

Searching for service

FaithX, the Church of the Brethren’s short-term service program, is leading a dozen trips across the US and in Ecuador this summer. Find the sites where this year’s FaithX trips will be held in the puzzle below. Answers can be forward or backward, horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Learn more about FaithX at [www.brethren.org/faithx](http://www.brethren.org/faithx).

- ECUADOR
- ILLINOIS
- NORTH CAROLINA
- VIRGINIA
- FLORIDA
- INDIANA
- PENNSYLVANIA
- WASHINGTON
- 
- MARYLAND
- TENNESSEE

N E C I V R E S C H P U R  
 B O R E E S S E N N E T C  
 E T R H B R E N W E N A H  
 R M E T A V I R G I N I A  
 B A L E H R S O B V S A N  
 K R O K A C E L G I Y N R  
 R Y B K N M A D D B L A O  
 O L V O A D I R R E V N D  
 W A S H I N G T O N A S A  
 O N N R D I A I T L N V U  
 H D O I N E L P A L I B C  
 M L S B I N I L F R A N E  
 F Y R I L L I N O I S W A

DID YOU KNOW?

The Church of the Brethren “Ministerial Leadership” polity paper, which lays out guidelines for ministry in the denomination, was adopted 25 years ago, at the 1999 Annual Conference in Milwaukee, Wis. A revised edition was adopted 10 years ago, at the 2014 Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio. It includes theological perspectives, steps for discernment and calling people to ministry, details of the credentialing process, and more. A document at the time said the paper was “an attempt to ensure standard processes across the denomination, build in systems of accountability and support for ministers struggling with isolation and loneliness, and to combine the rich theological background of ministry in the Brethren tradition with the important logistical processes of calling, credentialing, and sustaining ministers.”

### Plan set up for new action to prevent gun violence

**T**he Church of the Brethren Gun Violence Prevention Action Team is setting up a system of congregational ambassadors. At an organizing meeting in March, the group introduced a new path for individuals feeling a call to help their congregations take action on gun violence.

“We’re calling this new role a ‘Congregational Ambassador,’” said the group’s announcement. “It’s flexible enough to work within your community context, skills, and time constraints, while also ensuring you receive structured support and resources from the Church of the Brethren Gun Violence Prevention Action Team and On Earth Peace. We have our first several ambassadors signed up, and we are looking for ambassadors in every district of the church.”



### Standing with mothers

**F**orever a teacher, Bev Nye brought to the adult Sunday school at McPherson (Kan.) Church of the Brethren a multi-week presentation and discussion about gun violence. Special attention was given to children killed by guns.

The class investigated data, invited the sheriff to talk about gun locks among other things, and discussed actions people could take. Every Sunday, pictures and short biographies of the children and teacher killed in the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, were posted on the walls of the classroom.

Frustrated with the question of what effective action can lessen gun violence, Nye suggested that the class write Mother’s Day cards to the mothers of the children killed on that awful day in Uvalde. A local card-maker, Jana Goering, designed poignant cards in which to write heartfelt messages.

One evening, many of the class members gathered together to write cards and to grieve with the parents and to stand with them as they negotiate another Mother’s Day. Somehow it seemed the right thing to do. —Lois Grove

### Ephrata turns 125

**E**phrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren is celebrating the 125th anniversary of being a church family. Multiple events were planned for the weekend of April 26-28, starting with a Friday evening worship service and an ice cream social. Festivities continued on Saturday with a barbecue picnic and games. Two worship services on Sunday morning featured guest speaker Paul Munday, a retired pastor and former moderator of Annual Conference. —Jenn Dorsch-Messler

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.



## Coincidence or God moment?

In April, volunteers from South Waterloo Church of the Brethren worked at a Habitat for Humanity site in Waterloo, Iowa. The house that was being renovated was built in 1900 and the walls were later insulated with newspaper.

The workers were surprised to find a newspaper article buried in the walls, headlined “Program Given for McPherson

College Choir.” The article announced a concert that was to be held at South Waterloo Church of the Brethren in April 1938!

Pastor Dave Kerkove’s response was, “What a treasure!”

The group decided to leave the clipping in place as a way to continue the connection of the church with the future homeowners. —Diane Sittig

## Plains women welcome Osheta Moore

Osheta Moore was welcomed as the featured speaker at the Western Plains District women’s retreat in April in Great Bend, Kan. Fifty-four women attended in person and another dozen joined as Zoom participants.

Moore is author of *Shalom Sistas* and *Dear White Peacemakers*, and was a presenter at National Youth Conference and National Older Adult Conference. Her three presentations addressed the selected theme (and subtitle of her book) “Living Wholeheartedly in a Brokenhearted World.”

As the chosen charity for the retreat, elementary schools received donations of books on racial, ethnic, and gender diversity with help from the McPherson congregation planning committee who

collected monies and donated books.

The “women on the plains” enjoyed spending time together in singing and worship, at morning watch on a windy

day, around the tables, playing games, in small group sharing, learning how to be peacemakers with others and within the world. —Jean Hendricks



Photo courtesy of Brenda Black at Heartland Center for Spirituality



# A change of trajectory

## Brethren Disaster Ministries' Puerto Rico invitation opened a new path

*Carrie Miller served as long-term disaster project leader for the Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) Hurricane Maria recovery project in Puerto Rico from August 2018 to June 2020. BDM invited her to reflect on her experiences, hoping to encourage others to consider serving with BDM or another service ministry.*

**BDM: What were you doing before you learned about the opportunity with BDM?**

**MILLER: It was a very unfortunate situation** that turned into an incredible opportunity for me to join the BDM team in Puerto Rico.

I entered US Peace Corps volunteer training in Nicaragua in February 2018. Just a couple months later, in April, what started as peaceful protests in response to a social security tax reform that increased taxes and decreased benefits turned deadly for protesters when police responded violently. The country very quickly shut down as violence ensued, and all US Peace Corps volunteers had to be evacuated through the southern border into Costa Rica. It took two months of being on standby with the US Peace Corps for the determination that it was unsafe for the Nicaraguan post to continue.

After learning that I would not be fulfilling my two-year volunteer service in Nicaragua, I began looking for other similar opportunities. Family friends Jerry and Jan Warstler, from my parents' church—Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite in Michigan—approached me about an upcoming service opportunity that I might be interested in, which they learned about at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference.

A BDM rebuilding site was going to be established in Puerto Rico, and they were in search of a long-term disaster project leader who could speak Spanish. I was not immediately

*Carrie Miller (second from left) joins in celebrating a repaired home. Others pictured are pastor Carmen Mercado, the homeowner, a local pastor, and former district disaster coordinator José Acevedo.*

convinced, as it seemed a bit intimidating to help establish a program in such a rural area in Puerto Rico, and my Spanish was still shaky.

Jerry persuaded me to call BDM staff and just speak with them. Of course, we know where that call led to, and I will be forever grateful to the Warstlers for connecting me with BDM.

### What drew you to serve?

**Three things convinced me.** The first was the history of work and commu-

nication between BDM and the local Brethren in Puerto Rico. There was trust and rapport that made establishing a rebuilding site incredibly easy compared to what it would have looked like without that.

Second, the BDM staff were so supportive and made sure that sufficient training, a local support network, adequate facilities, and other materials were all provided. Everyone who has volunteered on a BDM rebuilding site knows to expect structure and organiza-

tion, which I can definitely appreciate!

And lastly, there was an intense need for housing on the entire island after hurricanes Irma and Maria passed through. Being able to help people in this way is what eventually convinced me to continue extending my time with BDM, even forgoing a planned return to work with the US Peace Corps in Peru. I absolutely loved the work, loved the people I worked with, and loved Puerto Rico.

### What were your main responsibilities?

**My responsibilities as a long-term disaster project leader (DPL)** involved overseeing volunteer groups; supporting other DPLs who served on a month-long basis; collaborating with local partners; overseeing project purchasing and inventory; and also assisting case managers with client outreach.

A bit more complex responsibility was helping to adapt the “template” of a BDM rebuilding site to the context of rural Puerto Rico, but it was also one of my favorite aspects of my position.

### What skills did you possess that helped you as a DPL? What skills did you have to develop?

**Luckily, I was not a stranger** to either rural living or to traveling abroad. I incrementally increased the length of international trips (two weeks to one month to a semester abroad to US Peace Corps), and that helped me realize that I was both capable of living abroad and that I enjoyed it! I ended up serving almost two years



*In addition to her role as project leader and BDM representative in Puerto Rico, Carrie Miller participated in the church community, including sharing her musical talents during services and other events.*

“What an incredible joy to be able to live out the values we believe, and to share the love that we have received.”

“Putting yourself in a position of service is a beautiful way to get to know a community and to get to know yourself.”

with BDM and stayed in Puerto Rico for another year and a half.

I also tend to thrive in novel, intense work environments, as long as there is some structure. I have a strong work ethic, and enjoyed having an outlet to put that towards a cause that was making a real impact in underserved communities.

When it comes to skills I developed—wow, where to start? I have gained so much through my service with BDM. What first comes to mind is that I quickly had to take a crash course in Puerto Rican Spanish, which is very different from Nicaraguan Spanish. This was perhaps the most uncomfortable experience, but very rewarding, as I eventually was able to connect with locals much more easily.

I also learned a lot about leadership, which was challenging at times as a young female, but helped me to gain so much confidence in what I was capable of doing. There were also soft skills specific to working in a crosscultural setting that I don't think I would have gotten even from the US Peace Corps. I loved learning more about construction and enjoyed the days that I got to work on site. And finally, I have gained administrative skills that I use in every aspect of my life still today.

**What parts of your work and the project were the most impactful for you?**

**I could answer this question** in so many ways. I think a zoomed-out answer would be that it has impacted how I view myself within the world. Putting yourself in a position of service is a beautiful way to get to know a community and to get to know yourself. It will reveal both your strengths

and your weaknesses: Your strengths will be appreciated by those you serve or serve alongside, and your weaknesses will be voids that others will fill with their strengths.

This seems obvious, but working in such a collaborative environment necessitated this sense of trust that was necessary to move the project forward. I had not had the opportunity to practice this kind of trust before in my life. I think that has helped me become a better person both professionally and in my relationships.

**How did your faith affect the work you did?**

**I have always felt that service** is such an important part of faith. What an incredible joy to be able to live out the values we believe, and to share the love that we have received. With this opportunity, I feel that I have been given the chance to be challenged, to grow, to serve, and, often, to just listen. It was an amazing experience to also see how everyone involved in this project—from DPLs to volunteers to local partners—created an environment of purpose and love, as each one shared their faith as acts of service.

**What has your life looked like since the project closed? How has your time in Puerto Rico influenced your current life?**

**Working with BDM has changed** the trajectory of my life. First of all, it has inspired me to pursue my current career path within the field of historic preservation. I absolutely loved project management and working within the construction industry. I knew I wanted to be a part of the industry, but in an area that focused on sustainability and saving cultural resources in

our built environment—both deep passions of mine!


After moving back to my home state of Michigan, I began working as a conservation technician with Buildings Arts and Conservation in Saline, as well as pursuing my master of science degree in historic preservation at Eastern Michigan University.

Additionally, I cannot exclude the fact that I met my fiancé, Safuan, in Puerto Rico! He is a wonderful man, and I feel so lucky to have met him during the unlikely time of the pandemic. Though we are currently living in Michigan, we look forward to creating a home in both places in the future.

In the meantime, we still make plenty of trips back to the island to visit his family, as well as community members we both keep in touch with in Castañer. I am so excited about the possibility of returning to work in Puerto Rico, this time in the field of preservation.

**What are some recommendations you would give to someone considering a long-term volunteer role with BDM or Brethren Volunteer Service?**

**My number one recommendation** is to not let self-doubt get in your way. Doubting my abilities almost prevented me from pursuing long-term service, but the act of service dissolves that sense of doubt very quickly. You will always be provided with the support and training that you need, and you will surprise yourself with how much you can accomplish alongside team members.

But also be prepared to devote your time to the project. Service is not easy, but it is one thing I know I will never regret. 

# It's the 'ologies' that'll get ya

**N**o doubt about it, many of us are entering the “ology” time of our lives, when days are measured by medical appointments, future appointments, and mileage markers. Aside from the costs of travel and wear and tear on vehicles, most of us are able to say that it is a good thing to entertain the “ologies” as needed.

They certainly seem to roll off the tongue in easy enough fashion: cardiology, neurology, ophthalmology, epidemiology, urology, all layered and folded into innocent enough sounding titles of providers like internists, D.O.s, M.D.s, P.A.s., N.P.s and orthopedists. It did take some coaxing, however, when a necessary colonoscopy was in the offing for a grandparent. All turned out well when the doctor, tongue in cheek, got quietly serious with her and confided, “Oh, my dear lady, don’t ever tell my mama what I do for a living.”



KEN FRANTZ

Ology references the field of study, hopefully imparting some higher thought regarding its study. So it is with “ologies.” Some are more appropriate sounding than others. They just seem to fit, like archaeology, geology, biology, and ecology. Others are esoteric, to say the least: triology, taxology, mixology, moology. A casual search on the web reveals thousands of possibilities, and we aren’t even to the made-up ones yet: brideology, pantology, pokerology.


But of all the ologies that tie together strings of thought and contemplation, few compare with the always underrated yet undeterred *theology*.

Theology is great because it mostly presents itself as a

question or theory that is ultimately debatable. Of course, for many, there are mostly single answers. They fit well, appear stylish in the moment, and leave no doubt as to where the other stands—in judgment if need be. What sometime catches people off guard is to be called a theologian. What? Me? How could that be?

If you speak over coffee and engage the spiritual in the discussion, you are a theologian. If you write religious poems or speak in tongues—or don’t speak in tongues—you are a theologian. If you wrestle with inconsistency and alternative thought and troublesome interpretation, you are a theologian. What is the nature of the divine? If you ponder that, you are a theologian. And underlying it all is theology, always patient, always waiting.

Don’t you have to be smart and learned to be a theologian? If that is the case, then churches would be empty. Instead, they are populated with quite ordinary people doing their best to understand the nature of God and where all this is taking us. We need teachers and scholars and individuals revered for their insights, but we also need deep people who are willing to ask the right questions, producing and sharing soulful responses that stick with a person, sometimes for years. Let us also not forget the joyful and the courageous and the not-so-courageous who take a chance on themselves and on others in claiming the title of theologian, if even in the quietest of ways.

For those who are both deep and learned, thank you. For the other great theologians from all walks of life who blush at the thought of being special, too late. I make no apology. 

Ken Frantz is a nonsalaried ordained pastor serving the Haxtun (Colo.) Church of the Brethren.

“If you speak over coffee and engage the spiritual in the discussion, you are a theologian... What is the nature of the divine? If you ponder that, you are a theologian.”



# Reading the times and the seasons of ministry

by Nancy Sollenberger Heishman

**confess to loving all the earth's seasons.** Well, except maybe one.

As a three season-lover with a definite order of preferences, I simply adore spring with its brilliant flowers, eagerly budding trees, fragrant blossoms, and increasingly long days of warmth. I love summer second best, even on sweltering days, as my bones can finally get warm. And I appreciate fall's crisp air and warm colors, but less so because—as you've guessed—I know what season is next.

At my worst, I honestly dread the onset of winter and begin a countdown to the first day of spring. However, I have been striving to remember that the barren days of bleak landscapes in the eastern and midwestern US actually contain the hidden promise of spring's arrival. On my best days, I trust that the new life I cannot see is nevertheless profoundly at work within the quiet soil and the stark landscape. Faith, after all, is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Some would suggest that the current season of ministry in the Church of the Brethren is a lifeless landscape. They are observing what has become painfully obvious to even the casual observer. The statistics are sobering. From the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 to the March 2024 census of ministers, the number of ministers in the Church of the Brethren has declined by 591—a loss of more than 25 percent.

Articles abound recounting the pressures on ministers these days.

“When we see small shoots emerging at the edges of fields or gardens, we know God is doing a new thing among us. Do we not perceive it?”

Factors include economic stress brought on by rising inflation, the significant increase in societal polarization that seeps into congregational life, the minister's occupational stress augmented by a growing cultural sense of isolation, and the effects of diminished resources on congregational viability.

In addition, the age of pastors in America has been trending upward for decades. *Faith & Leadership* recently cited a 2020 Faith Communities Today (FACT) study that found the average age of religious leaders increased from 50 in 2000 to 57 in 2020. Similarly, they noted a 2017 Barna study that found the median age of a Protestant pastor increased from 44 in 1992 to 54 by the time of the study.

Of the 1,353 ordained ministers in the Church of the Brethren currently, 535 (40 percent) are retired, a good number of whom are still serving actively. Adding to the ministerial landscape is the unique multi-vocational distinction of the majority of Brethren ministers. Statistics gathered in 2019 by the grant-funded Part-time Pastor; Full-time Church program of the Ministry office revealed that approximately 75 percent of Brethren ministers are multi-vocational.

The term “multi-vocational” points to the rich and full lives of ministers who juggle family needs, educational and ministry preparation goals, secular employment, and the demands

of pastoral ministry. Increasing numbers of multi-vocational ministers are understandably reluctant or unable to move far from their location given the complex nature of their financial and relational needs for sustainability.

In addition, having withstood the pandemic's challenges of debates over mask-wearing, loss of members, increased racial unrest flowing from the racially motivated killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, congregational and denominational conflicts over human sexuality and biblical interpretation, and family stresses resulting from lockdowns, many ministers understandably experienced decreased morale.

The result is that, as one seasoned district executive minister expressed, “the pastoral placement system has imploded.” Over his 13 years leading Shenandoah District, John Jantzi has seen the stark reduction in the number of ministers available for congregations in the search process. “In the past I would have had at least a small armful of pastoral profiles to offer a congregation; now there are very few or often no profiles at all to offer.”

As of this writing, the profile site maintained by the Ministry office contains five profiles of pastors willing to relocate for a call. The number of congregational profiles, on the other hand, is 52, including part-time, associate, and full-time openings.

Thankfully, a good number of the

congregations searching for a settled pastor have been served by interim pastors, some faithfully staying as long as five years or more. Many are experienced retired ministers graciously giving service well into their upper decades of life. Even if the interim pastor has not been formally trained in focused, intentional, or—as it is sometimes termed—transitional ministry, they support the basic ministries as best they can.

### Between death throes and birth pangs

Given the shortage of persons called to the set-apart ministry and the increasing complexities of ministers' lives, the expectations of congregations for finding a seminary-trained, compensated pastor are changing. It is clear to many now that the practice of the paid, professional ministry that had its beginnings among Brethren in the early 20th century and came into cultural prominence in the 1950s has mostly ended.

An October 2019 MESSENGER article by Dana Cassell astutely observed that “the practice of every congregation employing a full-time, seminary-trained, salaried minister was a fairly recent adaptation in the life of the Church of the Brethren. We might even call it an interesting experiment that lasted approximately two generations before proving unsustainable for the life of our congregations.” This is a time of tremendous change, experimentation,



“Congregations struggling to find a settled, employed pastor have returned to Brethren historical roots of more creative and collaborative ministry models.”

and creative exploration as congregations seek to meet their ministry needs.

John Jantzi describes the times in which we are living as “somewhere between death throes and birth pangs. We need leadership that is collaborative, cooperative, and creative as we move forward.”

Observers of the current ministry landscape such as Gilbert R. Rendle, author of *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*, believe that as faithful as denominational and congregational leaders are, “the established church cannot now thrive on the good

leadership it currently has. Leaders must change from good leadership to quiet, courageous, purposeful leadership. They must be willing to embrace new ways of thinking and behaving to respond to the times in which they find themselves.

“It seems clear at this point,” he continues, “that established congregations and denominations have a much greater capacity to improve what they already know how to do rather than create new forms and vehicles for their purpose to thrive in a changed landscape. Leaders must accept that the new landscape, the changed mission field of their

ministry, is actually the condition under which organized religion will now live.”

Rendle asserts that the shortage of ministers in our midst is not a problem that can be fixed with a simple, technical solution but rather a condition that calls for exploration, learning, and adaptation.

### A new/old model

One might ask about now, is there any good news? Any hope anywhere? Just as there is tremendous activity taking place beneath the earth’s wintry landscape that springs forth and is revealed in warmer days, there is surprisingly encouraging activity of the Spirit emerging across the denomination in congregations and districts.

While congregations do by and large compensate their pastors today, other congregations struggling to find a settled, employed pastor have returned to Brethren historical roots of more creative and collaborative ministry models.

Remembering the wisdom that winter-lovers espouse, beneath the appearance of a ministerial shortage is an outpouring of the Spirit’s creativity that is exciting to behold. When no settled pastor appears on the horizon, creative congregations find themselves reviving a new/old model based on the concept of the priesthood of all believers and the intentional discernment of spiritual gifts in the members and attenders in their pews.

Instead of wistfully longing for the glory days of a distant past, congregational members in some churches and

## A creative certificate

**D**esigned particularly for ministers new to the denomination, Bethany Theological Seminary’s certificate of achievement in ministry studies (CAMS) includes six courses that focus on Brethren history and theology, practical experience with the ordinances and preaching of the church, biblical interpretation, and peace studies. The certificate can be completed in two years or even one year, depending on course offerings. Five of the six courses can be completed at a distance.

Steve Schweitzer, academic dean, sees this certificate as an example of Bethany’s creativity and willingness to work collaboratively with the denomination to provide what is needed to help ministers succeed as they enter the Church of the Brethren.

“The seminary worked with the Council of District Executives and the Ministry office to create something relevant to our present context,” said Schweitzer. “This new certificate provides a helpful entry point and grounding in Brethren values for ministers new to the church. The CAMS allows these individuals an option to continue to follow their call. These kinds of creative approaches to ministry and ministry training are necessary as we navigate these changes in partnership together.”

districts have found gifts in one another that the Holy Spirit is using for their flourishing. They sense the Spirit's leading to form a team of people from their midst able to carry out the ministerial leadership functions through a mutual, cooperative effort. This approach looks back beyond the aberrant time of institutional prominence of the 20th century to an earlier time when the "free ministry" or shared leadership model predominated in many Brethren congregations. Often, this old practice in our heritage is bringing new life today.

### Stories of fruitfulness

Kevin Kessler of the Canton (Ill.) congregation is delighted that, after years of serving as part-time pastor and half-time district executive minister, he is now semi-retired and serves as one member of a five-person team at Canton: "I have 21 Sundays off from leading worship, and I support the ministry team as they enthusiastically share their gifts of leadership."

Mary Jessup, a minister and member of the newly formed six-member team of the Springfield (Ill.) First congregation, found that the team was encouraged to form when they viewed a set of videos featuring other teams. They appreciated learning that other congregations are also trying this new/old model.

The team model for supplying the ministry needs of congregations is not without its challenges, as retired ministers may be serving in a congregation that is their former parish. Good transparency, accountability, and mutual support are essential to a smoothly functioning team.

In addition, laity may not feel equipped and may struggle to find the training and resources they need. An experiment in progress in Middle Pennsylvania District seeks to meet that need by offering short-term

## A shared ministry model

**W**hen leaders at Springfield (Ill.) First church began exploring creative ways to provide for the ministry needs of the congregation, they were pleased to find stories posted on the denomination's website. (Visit [www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/shared-ministry-model](http://www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/shared-ministry-model).)

"We learned that what we are attempting has a name, shared ministry model, and that we're not the only ones attempting this model," said Springfield member and retired pastor Mary Jessup.

"I recently took a Brethren Academy course on Brethren history," she said. "It was then that I realized that this model has been used throughout most of our denomination's history. It's only been since the launching of Bethany Bible School in 1905 that the era of professionally trained and salaried ministers began. So I guess you could say shared ministry is a return to a style that was used for our first 200 years."

"The Springfield congregation is now 101 years old. For a full century, we functioned under the leadership of a paid pastor. Each week there was a line in the worship bulletin that gave the name of the pastor. But there was also a line that identified the ministers. It read, 'Everyone.' We are now putting that to the test."



classes on basic ministry skills for laity who find themselves called to help with ministry needs. The first class offered on preaching drew about 20 people.

Another creative development toward equipping and orienting ministers entering the Church of the Brethren from other denominations is a new certificate of achievement in ministry studies offered by Bethany Theological Seminary. Designed particularly for those ministers new to the denomination, it also serves those who may have some theological training but lack a complete array of skills.

Besides the model of a shared ministry team, there are other hopeful signs of developing leadership, such as a strong practice of discipling and men-

toring leaders. Daniel Rudy, district executive minister in Virlina District, rejoices in the well-established practice of discipleship demonstrated particularly within the district's Spanish-speaking congregations.

From the time they arrived as church planters in 2010, Raúl and Lidia González began identifying people with potential spiritual gifts of leadership and church planting. They invested consistent, patient, and attentive time mentoring and discipling them. In time, laity with gifts for leadership matured in the use of those gifts.

Some remained as lay leaders in their home congregations, and some were called into the ministry. Five of them (Cesia Salcedo, Endino and



“It is a confession of hope to look at the present, seemingly barren, landscape of pastoral placement and affirm that the ground is actually cradling the seeds of an abundant harvest.”

Cristal Herrera, and Manuel and Lupita Cruz) have been called into the ministry from the two churches that Raul and Lidia Gonzalez planted. Three of these ministerial leaders either have served or are serving pastorates in existing congregations.

Pastors Manuel and Lupita Cruz are currently serving as church planters. Within these new fellowships the established practice of discipling leaders toward maturity will continue to bear much fruit.

“I am grateful for the attentiveness to the Holy Spirit’s call, particularly as it is expressed in the calling of


leadership,” Daniel Rudy said about the work of the district’s Spanish-speaking pastors. “Those called into the ministry among our Spanish-speaking congregations continue to provide leadership to the whole of our district and denomination. I pray that God will continue to bless this ministry of discipling, calling, and equipping.” This district’s landscape is continually becoming a fruitful field.

And sometimes a bit of patience and persistence is needed in mentoring potential ministers from other denominations who simply haven’t realized yet that they are a perfect fit

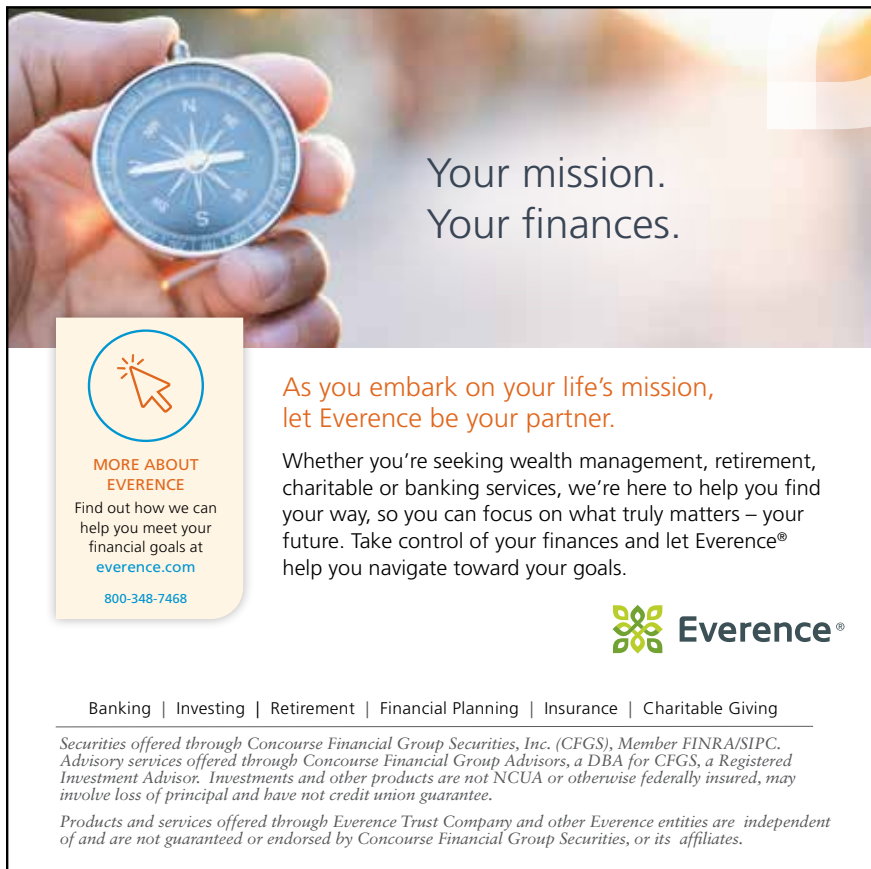
within the Anabaptist/Pietist tradition. That was the case for Jonathan Chubb, pastor of the Papago Buttes congregation in Scottsdale, Ariz. Pacific Southwest District executive minister Russ Matteson nurtured his relationship with Jonathan for several years, sharing Brethren heritage and stories, answering questions, and accompanying the process of Chubb’s discernment that led to his ordination in the Church of the Brethren this past spring.

Matteson observed, “When John said ‘yes’ to joining the Brethren, the process we followed over the years had provided a good understanding of who we were, as well as a network of mentor pastors and church members to answer questions and affirm that he has a ministry home in the Pacific Southwest District and the denomination.”

It is a confession of hope to look at the present, seemingly barren, landscape of pastoral placement and affirm that the ground is actually cradling the seeds of an abundant harvest. Our faith proclaims, “By faith we understand . . . that what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

When we see small shoots emerging at the edges of fields or gardens, we know God is doing a new thing among us. Do we not perceive it? When the fruitful field that is emerging seems to bear fruit we have never tasted before, let’s practice curiosity, gratitude, and hospitality, and respond with celebration. 


Nancy Sollenberger Heishman is director of the Ministry office of the Church of the Brethren.



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# An alternate route

by John Fillmore

Steens Mountain in Oregon  
Bonnie Moreland/Flickr.com

**T**here's always an alternate route. But sometimes that alternate route will take you a long way from where you think you need to go.

A few months ago, I was driving back to Idaho from Portland, Ore. The freeway was blocked by an accident ahead of me, so I had to jump on a side road to detour around the closure. In eastern Oregon, these detours can add hours to your trip. Highway 395 is 120 twisty miles through the mountains, crossing ridges and ranching valleys between Pendleton and John Day.

A handful of tiny mountain towns sit along the route, and, as I was coming down off a ridge, I happened to glance to my left and noticed a little stone building with a modest steeple nestled in a grove of junipers and pines—the Long Creek Mennonite Church. I wasn't surprised that there was a church. Most of these small communities have some sort of a house of worship. What caught my attention was that it was unapologetically connected to a specific faith tradition. There were folks in this isolated,

rural region who were willing not only to gather in community, but to also hold to a rich theological heritage. The Long Creek Mennonite Church is an alternate route.

Mark Chaves, director of the National Congregations Study at Duke University, notes that more than 90 percent of congregations have fewer than 360 people participating in worship. Yet these congregations serve only half of the people attending church. In *Congregations in 21st Century America*, Chaves states: "In 2018-19, the median congregation had only 70 regular participants, counting both adults and children, and an annual budget of \$100,000."

In our increasingly urban society, Christians are consolidating in fewer and larger churches, leaving more churches with smaller congregations. These smaller congregations with limited resources are often served by part-time or multi-vocational pastors.

Unfortunately, we've been culturally conditioned to view this situation with wistful remorse. Smaller congregations often look with longing at the local megachurch, envious of its diverse programs and abundant resources.

“ Maybe the road we've wanted to travel, toward larger and better resourced churches, has been blocked, and the Spirit wants us to take a detour. ”



“What if the increasing prevalence of small congregations isn’t a problem at all, but simply an alternate route that the Spirit of God wants us to take?”

Churches feel they have to “settle” for part-time ministry while quietly hoping for a turnaround, a return to what author Gil Rendle (in *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*) calls an aberrant period when the church “was established at the heart of the culture as a bedrock, trusted institution.”

But maybe the road we’ve wanted to travel, toward larger and better resourced churches, has been blocked, and the Spirit wants us to take a detour.

In many ways, smaller can be better. Large churches serve an important purpose, and we can celebrate their vibrancy. But as congregational size increases, leaders in larger churches often begin to wonder if they’re missing something—something inherent in the very fabric of life for a smaller congregation. Faithful leaders in congregations of all sizes know that relationships are the foundational context for mutual love, and that the more impersonal and disembodied our communal life becomes the more difficult it is to simply love each other as Jesus calls us to. When life in the church becomes complex and programmatic, the simple act of mutual care can become more of a formula than a movement of the heart.

The abundance of stakeholders in a larger congregation has the potential to dilute the good news. Theology becomes homogenized into a therapeutic “Christianity Lite.” There is less room for curiosity, less room for questions, less room for the transformational work that is so hard to measure with the abstracted metrics of modern church growth theories. In a small congregation, we have a chance to be vulnerable, which is necessary to spiritual growth. Life in a small congregation is twisty and full of blind corners, and there aren’t guardrails all the time, but the rewards can make the trip worthwhile.

Every church wants to grow. Living things like congregations *need* to grow. But the cultural conviction that bigger is better may mask a deeper, more profound sort of growth—the transformational growth brought about by the Spirit. And this sort of spiritual formation often occurs more richly as we travel together in the intimate community of a small congregation.

The challenge we’re facing, though, is that small congregations are inevitably trying to do more with less. As


Chaves observed in his study, “one quarter of clergy serve in the largest 9 percent of congregations that contain about half of all churchgoers.” This leaves the remaining 91 percent of smaller congregations being served by 75 percent of the pastors. Countless attempts have been made to mediate what we see as a problem. We cut hours from the pastor’s schedule, we yoke parishes and rely on itinerant ministers, we close congregations.

But what if the increasing prevalence of small congregations isn’t a problem at all, but simply an alternate route that the Spirit of God wants us to take? We can pound the steering wheel, angry that we’re forced to go a different road than the one we wanted—the one it seems all the “successful” churches are going—or we can settle in and enjoy the drive. God might be showing us something that we never would have seen otherwise.

Traveling down a different road will take some adjustments. If we’re going to thrive as a smaller congregation, we might need to change what we expect from our leaders. We might need to set aside our fixation with programs and simply embrace community. We might need to learn a little better what it takes to care for each other instead of expecting the pastor to do it all. We might need leaders who are equipped differently—not with ecclesial tools better suited to the larger congregation of decades past, but with the resources to be representatives of Jesus in the neighborhood today.

And maybe we need a little more grace. A little more understanding. A little more love. Jesus taught us a lot of things, but his life and example can be distilled into these simple truths: Love God with everything in you, and love each other. As we have been loved, we need to love each other.

Any congregation, regardless of size, does well when it simply does this. It just might be that a small congregation with multi-vocational leaders can love each other and their neighbors pretty well, particularly when that congregation embraces a theological heritage that puts that love first.

Maybe this detour we’re on is the best road we could possibly take after all. 

John Fillmore is pastor of Nampa (Idaho) Church of the Brethren and a circuit rider for the denomination’s Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church program.



# Saying goodbye

by Christy Waltersdorff

**S**everal years ago, a man went on vacation and picked up a big, fat book at an airport bookstore. As he relaxed in his hammock at the beach and read the *Alexander Hamilton* biography by Ron Chernow, Lin-Manuel Miranda imagined hip hop songs rising off the page.

The actor, singer, and songwriter was as surprised as anyone to find great inspiration in the story of the man whose image is on the \$10 bill. The more he read, the more determined he became to create an album based on the life of this

founding father. The musical *Hamilton* opened to great acclaim and continues to be one of the hottest tickets in the history of Broadway.

What I find most intriguing about the show is the diversity of the cast, most in their 20s and 30s. Miranda, whose parents are of Puerto Rican descent, lifted real-life white people from the dry and brittle pages of history and wrapped them in human flesh in glorious shades of black and brown. Two Black men portray slave-owning presidents Washington and Jefferson. And it works.

Alexander Hamilton was a

teenaged orphan immigrant who arrived in New York with nothing and ended up being one of the creators of our fledgling democracy. He fought in the Revolutionary War and set up the young nation's treasury system, among many other institutions that continue to this day. Hamilton was far from perfect—the musical makes that clear.

One of the most powerful songs is “One Last Time.” It is President George Washington’s resignation song to the nation he helped to create. In the early days of the nation, Hamilton met with the Continental Congress and suggested choosing a president

“What appeared to be a tragic goodbye, an unwelcome ending, turned out to be just the beginning of new life for those closest to Jesus.”

“Now, it is our turn to answer the call of Christ, to wait and pray, to welcome the power of the Holy Spirit, and to go forth and witness to the truth we have seen.”

who would serve for life on “good behavior.” Others saw this as a “pseudo” king—what they had just defeated England to prevent. War hero Washington was chosen to serve as the first president. After serving two terms he did a surprising thing: He said goodbye.

Miranda said, “The most extraordinary thing Washington did was to step down as president, ensuring that this American experiment would continue without him. By modeling a peaceful transition from president to president, he put us ahead of every fledgling democracy on earth.”

Hamilton was Washington’s right-hand man, and he did not want the first president to step down, especially because his nemesis, Thomas Jefferson, was waiting in the wings to be president. In the show, Washington sings about how he wants to teach the citizens of America “how to say goodbye.”

In a back-and-forth argument in the song, Washington sings: “I wanna talk about what I have learned. The hard-won wisdom I have earned.”

Hamilton argues: “They will say you’re weak.”

Washington counters: “No, they will see we’re strong.”

“Your position is so unique.”

“So, I’ll use it to move them along.”

“Why do you have to say goodbye?”

“If I say goodbye the nation learns to move on. It outlives me when I’m gone. One last time.”

The chorus sings, “George Washington is going home.” And he does.

I am certainly not equating George Washington with Jesus Christ, but they do have one thing in common. They both knew when it was time to say goodbye.

The time between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of his disciples by the Holy Spirit represented the transition of power from the risen Christ to his disciples. It had been an amazing time for them. Jesus spoke, and they listened. They broke bread together, and they basked in the warmth of his presence. They never felt stronger, more courageous, or more solid in their faith than when they were with him. His presence gave them more wisdom than they could ever achieve on their own.

And yet, they still didn’t quite grasp his message. Even after all that had happened, they still asked, “Is this when you will overthrow the Romans and restore God’s kingdom to Israel?” They still didn’t know what kind of Messiah he was. They still wanted him to be an avenging Messiah who would lead an army to destroy the oppressive Roman empire so Israel could become the nation they thought it was meant to be.

As they gathered around Jesus on the final day of his earthly ministry—of course, they didn’t know it was the final day—they were ready to follow him anywhere. But he surprised them once again. He told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait. Wait?

“Wait,” he said. “Wait for the promise to be fulfilled.” They were supposed to wait and pray and pay

attention because, when the Holy Spirit arrives, they will have to get to work. And then before anyone could even raise a hand to ask a question, before Peter could blurt out an inappropriate comment, Jesus was gone. They were left staring up into the sky with their mouths hanging open, trying to comprehend what they had just witnessed.

For three years the disciples had had the introductory courses on discipleship by following Jesus. But they had not yet gained the power to share their experiences, to witness to Jesus, to change the world. That is what they were to wait for. So, they went back to Jerusalem, climbed the stairs to their upper room, and waited. With them were the women disciples who had followed Jesus, along with his mother and brothers. They spent their time in wonderment and prayer.

Jesus had told them many times about how the Holy Spirit would come to them and provide comfort, wisdom, and peace in his absence. But they had no idea what that meant. They were about to find out.

What appeared to be a tragic goodbye, an unwelcome ending, turned out to be just the beginning of new life for those closest to Jesus. This band of followers would no longer be “disciples”—students of a teacher. They would now be “apostles”—people sent out with something important to share with others.

It is hard to believe that these apostles—these courageous women and men of God we read about in the

book of Acts—are the same confused and frightened disciples we met in the Gospel stories. Their transformation didn't happen overnight, and neither does ours. It was a long and difficult process. They still had so much to learn, but once Jesus was gone from their sight, there was no turning back.

Jesus gave his disciples a calling, but the Holy Spirit gave them the power to do all they were called to do. In his leaving, in teaching them how to say goodbye, Jesus opened the way for his Spirit to fill and empower them.

The disciples were thrust into a future they had not planned on, and they weren't sure they were ready for it. How in the world could they continue in ministry without Jesus? He was their teacher, their leader. They weren't ready to move on without him. His promise of the Holy Spirit didn't make them feel a lot better in that moment. But it would.



As the disciples found themselves in a changing environment, so does the church find itself today. Even before the trauma and chaos of the pandemic quickly forced us to change the way we do ministry, we were beginning to see the necessity of rethinking the way we share the good news of Jesus Christ. The pandemic caused us to evaluate our relevance and accessibility to the people we call sisters and brothers and to those whom we have not yet met.


Many church leaders find this to be an uncertain and scary time. Is the church still relevant? How do we proclaim the deep and meaningful good news of Jesus Christ in a world that is TikTokking its way to five minutes of fame? How do we embody the importance of community in a time of deep division and suspicion? How do we

make our spiritual lives a priority in a time of so many competing loyalties and commitments?

The story of the disciples is also our story. That fearful, anxious, bewildered, impatient, waiting group has no power of its own. And yet, power is given that causes this fragile little community to have the energy, the courage, the imagination, and the wisdom to change the world.

Those folks who stood there staring up into heaven were just ordinary people with a bad track record. Their calling from Jesus didn't make them perfect. Their empowerment by the Holy Spirit didn't turn them into superheroes. They were still flawed

human beings, vulnerable to prejudice, misunderstanding, power struggles, and inflated egos. They didn't always get it right, and they didn't always get along with each other. But they tried their best to follow Christ, and here we sit today.

Now, it is our turn to answer the call of Christ, to wait and pray, to welcome the power of the Holy Spirit, and to go forth and witness to the truth we have seen. Let's not fear saying goodbye to things as we know them. Rather, let's fear never saying hello to the risen Christ and to the wild and wonderful Holy Spirit. 

Christy Waltersdorff is pastor of York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill.



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# What do we spend on war?

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27).*

**“The Church of the Brethren regards with sorrow and deep concern** our nation’s increasing movement toward a permanently militaristic outlook. . . . The American public may come to accept as normal and inevitable the prospect that the nation must be prepared to go to war at any moment . . . that an overwhelming share of our Federal taxes must be devoted to military needs, and that this country must always be willing to assume the military burdens of weaker allies, actual or potential. Because of our complete dissent from these assumptions, the Church of the Brethren desires again, as at other times in its history, to declare its convictions about war and peace. . . . recognizing that almost all aspects of the economy are directly or indirectly connected with national defense.”

—1970 Annual Conference Statement on War

**E**very year, the United States spends vast sums on war and the military—far more than any other nation. In 2023, the \$900 billion military budget of the US represented 40.5 percent of the global total and was more than the combined total of 15 countries with the next highest military spending.

“Total global military expenditure reached \$2,443 billion [equivalent to \$2.443 trillion in the U.S., which uses different terminology than Europe] in 2023, an increase of 6.8 percent in real terms from 2022,” reports the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. “This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023—led by the United States, China, and Russia—all increased their military spending.”

This year, 2024, is on pace to be another record year for military spending worldwide.

And for next year, fiscal year 2025, President Biden has requested a 4.1 percent increase in the military budget over fiscal year 2023, according to the Coalition on Human Needs (CHN).

However, it’s a challenge to arrive at, or even agree on, a total dollar figure for annual US military spending.

The Congressional Budget Office says that “about one-sixth of federal spending goes to national defense.”

The War Resisters League—a 100-year-old peace organization famous for publishing annual pie charts titled

“Where Your Income Tax Money Really Goes”—says a much larger slice of the federal pie is spent on the military.

Some spending appears in the federal budget in ways that obscure its relationship to the military. Citing figures from the *Analytical Perspectives* book of the *Budget of the United States Government*, the War Resisters League adds together both “past military” and “current military” to arrive at the total figure of \$2.297 trillion in US federal military-related expenditures for fiscal year 2024. Excluding from the federal operating budget trust funds like Social Security, the War Resisters League says this comes to 43 percent of total outlays of US federal funds in 2024.

The War Resisters League accounting for 2024 includes in the current year’s spending on “past military” the veterans’ benefits of \$320 billion, plus the 80 percent of the interest on the national debt that was created by the military, estimated at \$806 billion. Included in the \$1.171 trillion “current military” expenditures for 2024 are—in addition to the Department of Defense’s \$862 billion—also the military portion of other departmental budgets such as the Department of Energy’s nuclear weapons, NASA’s military spending, international security assistance, military expenditures by Homeland Security and the State Department, and others.

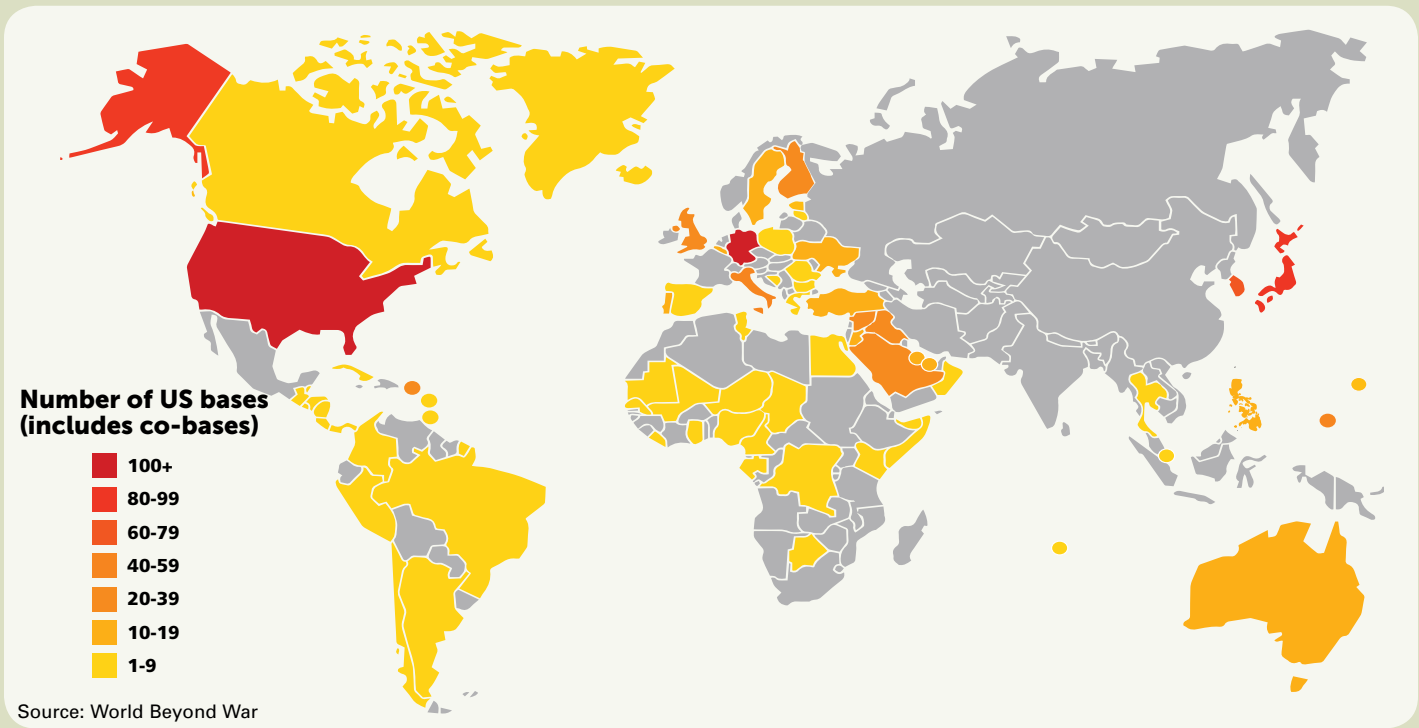
To make a true accounting more difficult, US military aid to other nations often is approved as “supplemental appropriations.” Recent examples are the \$60.8 billion for

## US military bases and installations

**M**aintaining bases and military installations in more than 90 countries and territories around the world accounts for a sizeable portion of US military expenditures. Most are

a collaboration between the US and the host government, and a number in Europe are part of NATO. Some US military installations are very small, such as a communications facility with fewer than a handful of staff.

Others are very large, with thousands of troops and personnel. Some are used only by US troops, some are also used by the host country's military, and some are used by the US to train the host military.



Ukraine and \$26.3 billion for Israel (which included money for humanitarian aid for Gaza) approved in April by Congress as separate legislation, and also separate from the Pentagon budget.

In addition, there is the \$3.8 billion annual military funding given by the US to Israel in an agreement made by President Obama that will continue through 2029, according to the War Resisters League.

In a process related to the supplemental appropriation for Ukraine, “the US will purchase the weapons from defense contractors before sending to Ukraine,” reports *The Hill*.

Which brings up a couple of the many questions that can be asked: Who does the money actually go to? How is it accounted for?

In recent years, one-third to one-half of spending by the Pentagon has gone to federal military contractors and weapons manufacturers. “A large portion of these contracts . . . have gone to just five major corporations: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon [now RTX], and Northrop Grumman,” according to a “Costs of War” analysis in 2021 by Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University. “The \$75 billion in Pentagon

contracts received by Lockheed Martin in fiscal year 2020 is well over one and one-half times the entire budget for the State Department and Agency for International Development for that year, which totaled \$44 billion.”

### Mapping militarism

**World Beyond War** has posted a set of maps at <https://worldbeyondwar.org/militarism-mapped> where visitors can view the world according to a variety of categories including total military spending and spending per capita; which countries are selling, buying, or financing weapons; wars, troop placements, and drone and air strikes. The category “US Empire” displays countries that have US and NATO bases and US troops, and where US wars and military interventions have taken place since 1945. A category called “Promotes peace and security” shows which countries stand by various treaties and international measures to prevent war.



“The Church of the Brethren’s strong statements against war are founded in our discipleship to Jesus Christ, and in a clear understanding of the terrible nature of war.”

In 2023, an in-depth investigation by *60 Minutes* found “what can only be described as price gouging by US defense contractors,” reported CBS News.

Compounding these questions is the fact that the Department of Defense has failed its annual audit for six years in a row—ever since 2018, when it was first required

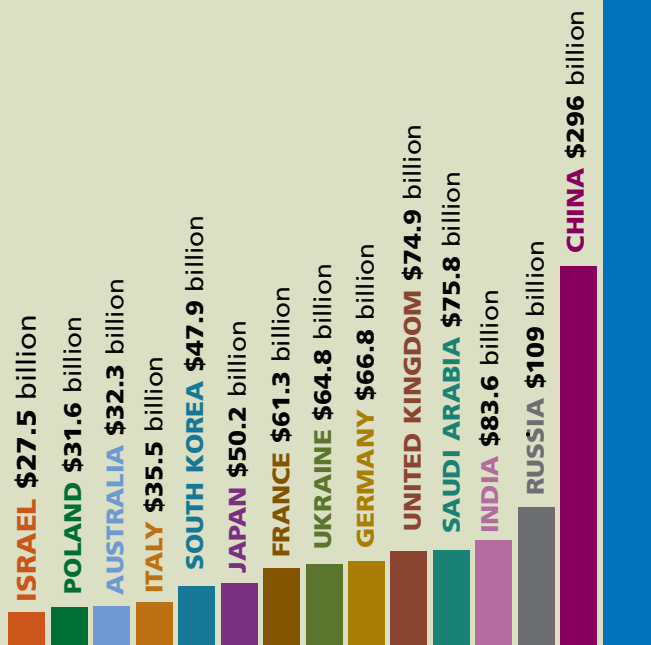
to do an audit. “The 2023 audit was only able to account for half of the Department’s \$3.8 trillion in assets—leaving \$1.9 trillion in unaccounted assets—more than the entire discretionary budget Congress passes every year;” said a press release from the House Budget Committee.

## World spending on war at all-time high in 2023

US \$916 billion

World total:  
**\$2.443 trillion**

The 31 NATO member nations (including US) total:  
**\$1.341 trillion**



Source: SIPRI

### What’s wrong with spending so much on war?

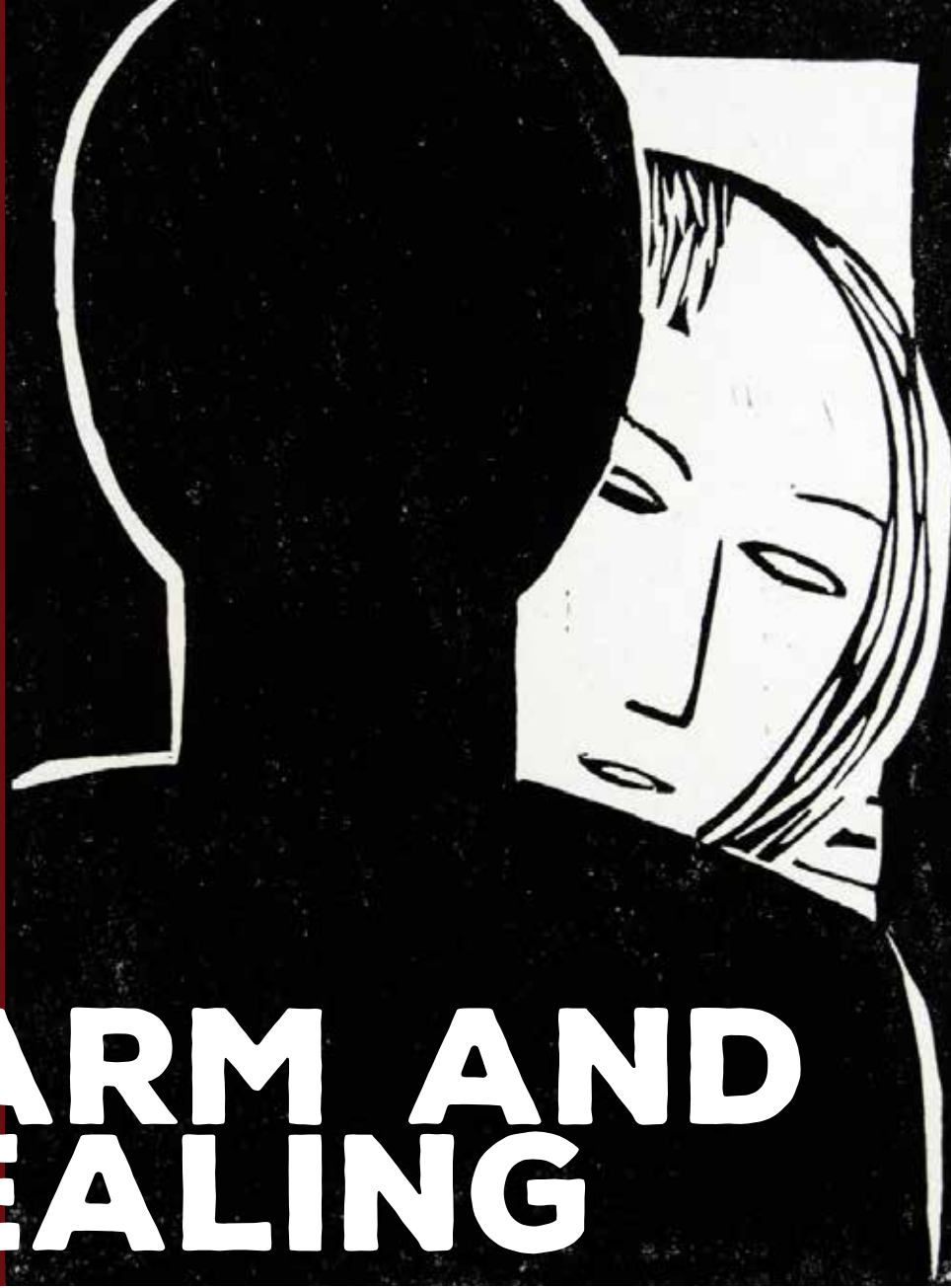
Objections from religious and humanitarian groups range from the moral to the practical. “The Federal Budget is a moral document outlining what we as a nation choose to invest in, and these investments will affect individuals and communities across the country,” says CHN. When more and more of the financial pie is spent on the military, less and less is available for basic human needs and a healthy environment.

The military has a very negative impact on the environment and climate. Reuters reports that militaries are “among the world’s biggest consumers of fuel” and “account for 5.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions,” citing a 2022 study by Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory. “Around 60 percent of all global GHG emissions come from just 10 countries,” says the study. “These are China, the USA, India, Indonesia, Russia, Brazil, Japan, Iran, Canada, and Saudi Arabia. All of these—except Indonesia—are among the top 20 countries in terms of their military expenditure.”

The Church of the Brethren’s strong statements against war are founded in our discipleship to Jesus Christ, and in a clear understanding of the terrible nature of war. Some trace this understanding to the historical Brethren identity that emerged in central Europe in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, in which more than eight million people died from violence, famine, and disease.

One of the most important of our church statements, made in 1970, says, “The Church of the Brethren has always believed that peace is the will of God. In the two and one-half centuries of its history it has come to understand more clearly the tremendous evil which war brings upon human beings and their society.”

Sources: Budget of the United States Government, CBS News, Coalition on Human Needs, Conflict and Environment Observatory, Congressional Budget Office, Defense News, The Guardian, The Hill, National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies, Reuters, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), War Resisters League, The Washington Post, Watson Institute International and Public Affairs at Brown University, World Beyond War



*Couple*, Woodcut on paper  
Lasar Segall, 1929

# HARM AND HEALING

## How denominations can respond to abuse

by Anna Lisa Gross

**C**lergy abuse betrays the community of faith, the calling of ministry, and the culture of servant-leadership. What can we learn from denominations whose stories have gone public?

We can turn to the Mennonites, our closest faith cousins, to increase awareness and invite reflection on how our own congregations and denomination should seek accountability, healing, and redemption.

The most prominent Mennonite

theologian is also the most infamous Mennonite perpetrator of abuse. John Howard Yoder's book *The Politics of Jesus* is one of the most influential Christian texts of the 20th century, and one of about 30 books Yoder published during his lifetime (1927-1997). Is it merely ironic, or profoundly relevant, that Yoder taught and wrote on Christian ethics while abusing more than 100 women?

While women persistently raised concerns about Yoder's abuse, at both

Goshen Biblical Seminary (GBS) and the University of Notre Dame—and Yoder himself described some of his own behavior to his seminary president in 1979—no institutional leader took action to protect or support survivors and future victims. No one filed a criminal complaint or issued an advisory to current or potential students or colleagues. We can be certain that people were talking. But these conversations stayed private: between institutional leaders seeking to mini-

“How can our processes of accountability seek redemption and transformation for the abuser, and healing and wholeness for the abused?”

mize scandal or drama, and between women warning one another.

Eventually some church and seminary leaders quietly forced Yoder to resign from GBS (later merged into what is now known as Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) in 1984, more than a decade into his acknowledged abuses, and after four years of actively trying to convince Yoder to change his behavior in a Matthew 18 process. Even after leaving GBS, Yoder continued to lead, teach, write, and speak, even becoming president of the Society of Christian Ethics.

In 2014, Mennonite historian Rachel Waltner Goossen was asked by Mennonite Church USA to research Yoder's abuse and responses to it. Her work, “Defanging the Beast: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse,” was published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 2015.

In a summary published the following year, Goossen writes, “Newly accessible archival sources have shed light on the ineffective institutional processes devised in response to reports of misconduct. For two decades, Mennonite administrators, committees, and task forces respond-

ed—mostly informally—to women who sent letters of complaint, phoned, or appeared in person. No one called in law enforcement, no legal charges were brought, and although several parties consulted attorneys, no lawsuits were filed.”

What happened between 1984's private golden parachute and 2014's call to pull history into the light?

■ **Women kept talking with one another.** It took a long time, because most women abused by Yoder were silenced. Speaking up risked relationships with family members and church community. Speaking up risked each woman's academic success or ministerial call. But women persisted in talking with one another.

■ **Church and church-academic communities continued to seek Yoder's redemption.** Goossen names seven groups and periods of formal discipline—two at GBS, two at the church where Yoder was a member, and three in the Indiana-Michigan Conference.

“In all cases,” she summarizes, “people grew weary after a few months or years of engagement. Like

[GBS president] Miller in the beginning, each group sought to ‘counsel’ their Christian brother rather than to have him arrested or expelled. Persons who through employment or credentials entered the fray from outside the denomination felt stonewalled, not only by Yoder himself but also by the secrecy surrounding his behavior, which served to protect Mennonite institutional interests.”

■ **Understandings of sexual harassment evolved.** More precisely, enough people in power realized that sexual harassment was not “simply flirting,” but a barrier to working, studying, and participating in society. During the period that Yoder was actively crossing relational and ethical boundaries, church and academic institutions were developing policies about sexual harassment. These new words required looking at Yoder's behavior anew.

■ **Secular press printed the story.** Just as with Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and many other religious institutions' cover-up of abuse, a secular newspaper told—and

## LEARN MORE AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Women's Caucus is sponsoring two events at Annual Conference that deal with the topic of sexual abuse in the Church of the Brethren. The speaker at a dinner on July 4 is Heidi Ramer, author of *Her Words, My Voice*, an account of the sexual abuse of Ramer's mother by a person who at the time was on the denominational staff. Copies of Ramer's book are available from Brethren Press. On July 5, an equipping session will focus on the ways the denominational ethics process can be used (and used with care) in situations of sexual abuse.



therefore changed—the story. *The Elkhart Truth* in Indiana printed five stories about Yoder’s abuse and the cover-ups in 1992. The same year, *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* also shared the story, along with various Mennonite publications.

Congregations, seminaries, and denominations consistently prefer to keep conflict and concern private. The Church of the Brethren tends to have a family culture in our local, district, and even denominational bodies. Just as most families and households prefer to work out problems privately, church bodies instinctively want the same.

This is not inherently right or wrong, but it makes the church vulnerable to many sins and pitfalls—ignoring or even avoiding those who have been abused, treating those who have been abused as a “problem,” and managing the story rather than changing behaviors. In the case of Yoder, keeping concerns about his behavior quiet allowed his behavior to continue far longer.

There are many terrible aspects of the accounts of the church’s response to Yoder—first and foremost the harm done through abuse. Yet the same intensity of the *harm* can match the intensity of the *healing*. Mennonites are taking this seriously. There are powerful resources and stories at [www.into-account.org](http://www.into-account.org).

What can the Church of the Brethren learn from this? How can we care for power dynamics, cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity, and the health of our own members? How can our processes of accountability seek redemption and transformation for the abuser, and healing and wholeness for the abused? ❧

Anna Lisa Gross is pastor at Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind. She is a member of the steering committee of Womaen’s Caucus.

## IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

by Sandi Evans Rogers

**T**he Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the US, has received criticism for its less-than-healthy attention to and support for people who have been sexually abused. For decades, cases have been ignored, passed on, and covered up.

Paul Pressler, an architect of a conservative movement designed to rid SBC churches of “creeping liberalism,” and often lifted up as a hero, was a sexual predator of young men. “What makes Pressler’s case so enraging to many Southern Baptists, however, is that his abuse has been detailed for years,” reported Religion News Service in January.

“A lawsuit, filed by a former Pressler assistant named Gareld Duane Rollins Jr. claiming the older man abused him for decades, has been making its way through the courts since 2017,” RNS reported. “In 2017, Rollins sued Pressler, claiming that he had assaulted him in a hotel room. Pressler then agreed to pay the sum of \$450,000, but when the payment stopped, once again, Rollins sued alleging the sexual abuse.”

According to *The Texas Tribune*, it was this lawsuit against Pressler that was the catalyst for a major investigation into sexual abuse in the SBC by the *Houston Chronicle* and *San Antonio Express-News*, which led to many suppressed accusations coming to light.

While the SBC was originally unwilling to create a list of key officials, pastors, and volunteers convicted of sexual abuse crimes, the investigation uncovered more than 263 offenders over a 20-year period in 30 states and Washington, D.C.

In response to these articles, the SBC contracted with Guidepost Solutions to investigate the alleged misconduct. The 228-page report details sexual abuse that was even more widespread and found the SBC had stonewalled and denigrated survivors of clergy sex abuse over almost two decades, while seeking to protect their own reputations. Guidepost Solutions discovered an internal list of over 700 alleged perpetrators and found that the SBC leadership was more interested in shaming survivors and avoiding legal liability than in stopping the abuse.

At their annual gathering in 2022, the SBC voted overwhelmingly to create a way to track pastors and other church workers credibly accused of sex abuse and launched a new task force to oversee further reforms.

Many of the survivors felt that the vote on sex-abuse reforms fell short of what some SBC churches sought, such as a compensation fund for victims and a more robust and independent commission to monitor congregational responses to abuse. Critics, on the other hand, complained the report over-hyped the crisis and interfered with the independence of Baptist congregations.

“Many of the victims are not people who have been knocking at the SBC door because they want money from it or want to make their stories famous,” said Isaac Chotiner of *The New Yorker*. “They really don’t want the men who abused them to be in positions to continue to abuse children and other women. So, they’re doing it out of this obligation and responsibility to protect against further harm. And, even with that approach, they’re being accused of trying to take down the SBC.”

The SBC continues to struggle to support victims, discern tangible ways to address their concerns, and help them heal from their trauma. ❧

Sandi Evans Rogers is interim pastor at Woodbridge (Va.) Church of the Brethren and a member of the steering committee of Womaen’s Caucus. She was first ordained in the Southern Baptist Convention.

# Hope amid differences

**Romans 15:1-13**

by Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

One of my favorite songs is “Crowded Table,” by The Highwomen. The song imagines a home that has an expansive table where all sorts of people are brought together in love. Though the song isn’t explicitly Christian, knowing the faith of at least one of the singers I am sure the connection to the kingdom of God banquet metaphor is not accidental. One of the key themes of this song is that the crowded table is a place where everyone belongs, no matter how broken. It paints a beautiful image of a house full of people, finding community through love.

The Church of the Brethren tagline is “Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.” A central component of Brethren identity is the idea that we can only do faith together. In his book *Another Way of Believing: A Brethren Theology*, Dale Brown describes how the Brethren have historically placed a high value on the doctrine of the church, insisting that

the community that gathers together as the church is “essential to salvation.” In other words, when we are called by Christ, we are not called as “isolated disciples,” but as “God’s people.” It is only together, even if just two or three people, that Brethren anticipate the presence of Jesus and the movement of the Spirit (p. 33).

For Paul, the togetherness of the church is not only the calling, but also the fruit of the calling. It is both the evidence of our faith in God and the foretaste of the hoped-for unity we are promised. For this reason, unity in the church is of vital importance and something that must be protected and pursued. To do this, Paul identifies two issues that threaten unity in the church—power and divergent views.

### Strong versus weak

We often associate strength with physical ability. As a runner, I work hard to build up my strength and endurance so that, over time, I can run longer and

faster. However, this is not the strength that Paul means in Romans 15:1.

Our English translations are misleading, making us prioritize the faith of the “strong” against the faith of the “weak.” The NRSVue says that those “who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak.” However, the words strong, weak, and failings in the original Greek have more to do with power and ability than physical or moral strength. In addition, the phrase “put up with” is the Greek verb *bastazo*, which means to bear or carry. The same word is used in Luke 14:27 when Jesus says that “whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

The Common English Bible captures the original Greek best with this translation: “We who are powerful need to be patient with the weakness of those who don’t have power.” What Paul really wants to impress upon the Romans is how to deal with power differentials in the church. He wants the power-

“The church can be a foretaste of the kingdom of God when it is able to ‘live in harmony’ with one another and with Christ.”

ful to recognize that with great power comes great responsibility. He reminds the powerful that when compared to Christ, they are all powerless, and yet Christ was willing to carry them. With Christ as their example, the powerful in the church must also be willing to carry the powerless.

Paul echoes the words of Jesus, who levels the playing field between the greatest and the least (Luke 22:25-27). Powerful and powerless are irrelevant labels. All are to serve, welcome, and live in harmony with one another. Harmonious churches are particularly important to Paul because he knows that churches can do nothing of worth to God’s kingdom if they are at odds with one another. Not only are they, practically speaking, too busy to do the work of God if they spend all their time infighting, but they also declare something untrue about God. The church is the body of Christ, and if the church is divided, then it declares that God is not one, but divided. Harmonious churches are likely both more effective and more faithful communities.

#### Divergent views

Biblical scholar James Edwards outlines the themes of Paul’s letter to the Romans, placing this section of the letter among Paul’s teachings about the importance of being “gracious with other believers who differ on matters not essential to salvation.” Included in this section are concerns about when and how to abide by food purity laws, which day sabbath should be remembered, and whether followers of Jesus should participate in Jewish festivals. For Paul, these concerns are not of ultimate importance and thus have the tendency to distract the church from what is truly important.

When there is disagreement in the church of this kind, Paul provides two important insights: 1) do not judge the other for doing what they believe is right, and 2) do what needs to be done to pursue peace in the church. For Paul, it is important that faith be lived, so if someone believes that certain foods shouldn’t be eaten for theological reasons, it would be a sin if that person continued to eat them. Paul even goes so far as to say that there may be times when the church goes along with the belief of individuals in the church so as to not provide a stumbling block to faith.

For the contemporary church, it is likely not an issue of what to eat. The best example I have of this is how one Brethren pastor explained the choice to abstain from alcohol. He personally did not have issue with the consumption of alcohol; in fact, he recognized that alcohol is regularly consumed, without judgment, in scripture. However, he had walked alongside several alcoholics in his ministry and had decided that alcohol was a severe stumbling block for those individuals. Thus, for him to be able to commune with and minister to those individuals, he would need to abstain.


Such a desire for a church to avoid stumbling blocks for individuals in their midst may mean that individual congregations make differing choices on how they live out their faith. Paul’s appeal to avoid judgment thus extends beyond disagreements within a church, to other churches who disagree with our church on matters that are not essential to salvation. I wonder what disagreements we struggle with today as churches that we unnecessarily elevate to concerns “essential to salvation” when they are not, and thus “destroy the work of God” (Romans 14:20). In Romans 15,

Paul argues that, for the sake of unity and building up of the body of Christ, we should err on the side of inclusion, welcome, and humility.

#### Foretaste

Christians are sometimes guilty of “pie in the sky” theology that saves realized hope for heaven when, in reality, faith is a way of living into hope that takes root and bears fruit even now. You don’t start reading a book and then skip over everything to get to the ending. The ending is only meaningful when you’ve allowed yourself to be invested in the middle. Similarly, we find meaning in the way hope begins to bear fruit in our faith in Jesus, today.

The church can be a foretaste of the kingdom of God when it is able to “live in harmony” with one another and with Christ. The purpose of such harmonious living is “so that [they] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:6). In Revelation, the new heaven and new earth is made up of people from all nations who bask in the light of the Lamb (21:23-24) and who worship God and the Lamb together, forever (22:3-5).

Our unity allows us to receive now what we have been promised. We can prioritize mutual upbuilding, we can strengthen our churches so that they can worship God and the Lamb together, with one voice, even now. As the hymn “Blessed Assurance” describes, “Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!” 

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey and her husband, Tim, are co-pastors of Oakton Church of the Brethren in Vienna, Va. She is also coordinator of English-language ministry training programs with the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. This study is from *A Guide for Biblical Studies*, published by Brethren Press.

## EYN elects new leaders

**T**he 77th Majalisa (annual conference) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria was held April 16-19 at EYN headquarters in Kwarhi, Adamawa State. Highlights included a speech by president Joel S. Billi, who is concluding his term of service, as well as musical performances, presentations of awards, and the welcoming of 13 congregations.

On the agenda were elections and appointment of a new leadership team:

- Daniel Y. C. Mbaya was elected president. He formerly was general secretary.
- Nuhu Mutah Abba was elected vice president. He formerly was administrative secretary.
- James K. Musa was appointed general secretary.
- Luka M. Timta was appointed administrative secretary.
- Bitrus Y. Duwara was appointed director of Disaster Relief Management.



**ASIGLEH (the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela) held its annual conference in Cúcuta, Colombia, March 12-16 with about 120 church leaders and family members in attendance. Representatives from three Colombian churches were also there. The conference was led by Roger Moreno, president of ASIGLEH, and included teaching on Brethren beliefs and practices, sermons, challenges for mission, and business sessions. International guests were Marcos Inhauser from Igreja da Irmandade (the Church of the Brethren in Brazil) and Joel Peña, Leonor Ochoa, and Bob Kettering from the United States. Video greetings were shared from Eric Miller, executive director of Global Mission, and Joel Billi, president of EYN. The conference concluded with love feast, anointing, commissioning of church leaders, and licensing and ordaining of pastors. ASIGLEH presently has about 51 congregations and preaching points.**

## Annual Conference officers return query

**T**he Annual Conference officers have returned the query “Regarding Greater Congregational Latitude on Matters of Sexuality” to Illinois and Wisconsin District for revision and potential resubmission in 2025.

The decision to return was necessary due to language that could be construed

as answering the query itself, rather than asking a question for discussion and discernment by the church, said moderator Madalyn Metzger, moderator-elect Dava Hensley, and secretary David Shumate.

“This may feel like a technicality to some,” said Shumate. “But this requirement is important in its intention to invite shared spiritual discernment and

outcomes from the Annual Conference delegate body.”

The query asked whether decisions related to sexuality should be made at the congregational level rather than by the denomination or districts, given the personal nature, wide range of viewpoints, ongoing disagreements, and inconsistent enforcement of policy.



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## Board responds to intercultural leaders, international churches

**A**t its March meeting, the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board spent time in a closed session to discuss questions from a group of intercultural ministers who presented to the board last fall. The board also discussed letters received from four international Church of the Brethren bodies.

The letters from the Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Spain, and Venezuela communicated concerns about the conversation on human sexuality occurring in the US church. The response formulated by the board's Executive Committee affirmed the partnership of Church of the Brethren bodies around the world, explained the board's role in the church and in the US and in relationship to Annual Conference, cited the 2008 Conference resolution on "Urging Forbearance," and committed to seek the mind of Christ together.

An envisioning session led by the board's strategic planning committee sought to identify common themes for the work of board and staff.

The board named Steve Longenecker to a second term on the Brethren Historical Committee.

In an end-of-year financial report to the board, treasurer Ed Woolf reported that giving to the denomina-

tion declined in 2023 but total net assets grew. He reported on the main Core Ministries budget, self-funding units, and special-purpose funds.

Congregational giving to Core Ministries totaled \$1.5 million in 2023, down \$46,000 from the previous year and \$23,000 behind budget. At \$652,000, individual giving to Core Ministries was down \$58,000 and \$84,000 behind budget. Total giving to Core Ministries was \$2.15 million, down \$105,000 from the previous year and \$108,000 behind budget.

Total income to Core Ministries, including giving, ended the year \$221,000 behind budget. Despite the loss, Core Ministries maintained a net asset balance of \$2.15 million.

At \$42.6 million, the denomination's total net assets increased \$2.9 million from the beginning of 2023 primarily due to market gains, helping to offset some previous losses. Net assets recorded the second-highest total over the last five years.

Investments totaled \$36 million, an increase of \$2.7 million. Despite surging inflation and interest rate hikes, Church of the Brethren accounts experienced an 8.7 percent return in 2023, compared to the 16 percent loss of the year before.

## Clarification issued about On Earth Peace

**T**he denomination's Leadership Team issued on March 18 what it called a "clarification" of a May 2020 statement related to On Earth Peace joining the Supportive Communities Network.

The statement four years ago reasoned that On Earth Peace's decision to join the Supportive Communities Network placed the agency in opposition to Annual Conference.

"To clear the way for the nurturing of renewed relationships being shaped by the development of new denominational agency covenants, the Leadership Team wishes to clarify that On Earth Peace did not violate the previous agency polity," said general secretary David Steele.

"We regret the pain and distress experienced over the past years, as well as the additional time and energy required to work through the confusion. We pray that this time and energy may become a strong foundation for those who choose to partner with On Earth Peace."

The Leadership Team communication noted uncertainty about the polity governing Annual Conference agencies and what constraints polity places on agency actions. It acknowledged "the ongoing challenges in interpreting and implementing the 1983 Statement on Human Sexuality—but articulates that On Earth Peace is not in violation of polity, as the agency is carrying out its specialized ministry that is within the scope of Annual Conference directives and congruent with articulated values of the Church of the Brethren."



At the spring meeting, board members completed the final hours of lengthy Kingian Nonviolence training, led by Sherri Bevel and Matt Guynn.

## Contradiction

After reading and rereading the report of the Mission and Ministry Board's Fall 2023 meeting, it seems to me that

## Tiny stories

### Loving hands

Church sisters come with me monthly to do abstract art with dear ones in nursing care. There, time and space are filled with laughter and hugs, colors, and creativity. Loneliness and fretfulness rest. In the ease of this comfort, we all magically become artists, true visionaries, who love beyond age, illness, or differences. Lines blur as those who come to serve are healed and those who come to receive, give. Here, what really doesn't matter . . . doesn't matter, and what is at our essence shines with great warmth. Who knew Christ's loving hands would be so beautifully covered in paint?

—Kathy Fuller Guisewite,  
Bridgewater, Va.

we, at all levels of church governance, need to reexamine the role of annual financial budgets in relationship to large endowment funds.

What piqued my interest was the seeming contradiction between the treasurer's concern that we are approaching a "pinch point" in denominational financial operations, on the one hand, and the reported net asset balance of \$42.6 million, on the other hand. That \$42.6 million includes financial investments of \$36 million.

What is especially concerning is that we are apparently at a point where severe cuts will be made to operational programs of the denomination (such as Material Resources). Simultaneously, statements were made such as "The increase in net assets was primarily due to market gains," "Church of the Brethren accounts produced solid results with an 8.7 percent return," "The denomination also is maintaining good liquidity." Should the heirs of Anna Mow, Hazel Peters, Dan West, and M. R. Zigler feel good about this?

I realize that classic endowment strategy adopts the twin principles of, first, perpetuity, where the object is to build the corpus of the fund to last

indefinitely, and second, intergenerational equity, intended to equalize the financial benefits to both current and future generations.

The problem with this strategy is that, after careful analysis, it can be shown that the current generation is perpetually shortchanged in favor of an indeterminate, unpredictable, and unknown future. We know the desperate human needs that face us now, but we cannot predict future needs with certainty.

Instead of protecting our financial assets at all costs at a low 4 percent or 5 percent annual withdrawal, wouldn't it be more prudent to up the withdrawals to the historic tithe of 10 percent and use the increase to bolster the crucial contribution to the denomination of the Core Ministries and the Annual Conference? It would take about 30 years to exhaust the endowment balances absent any new contributions to the endowment funds. Who knows what the needs will be at that time?

Ray Leckrone  
Lititz, Pa.

## Stimulating conversation

"MESSENGER Sunday"™ in our congregation at Mechanicsburg Church

## Discussion starters for small groups

■ **Reading the times and the seasons of ministry,** there are reasons to describe the current season as "a lifeless landscape." What trends contribute to this ministerial landscape? How are congregations and districts affected, and how are their expectations for ministry changing? Where have you witnessed creative collaboration for ministry, such as the shared ministry model? What other models do you see emerging?

■ **What do we spend on war?** What makes arriving at an answer to this question challenging? Why do you think the US spends so much on war, compared to other nations? How do you answer the question "What's wrong with spending so

much on war?" Decide on an action that expresses your Christian response to military spending.

■ **Harm and healing** may both be outcomes of abuse by clergy, depending on how the church responds. What "ineffective institutional processes" were attempted by Mennonite leadership in response to abuse by John Howard Yoder, and what was eventually effective? Compare the Mennonite experience with the Southern Baptist one. List actions that helped bring accountability and actions that made the church more vulnerable. If you were responding to an abuse case, how would you ensure accountability? How would you offer opportunities for healing?

of the Brethren always engenders meaningful discussion on the recent edition of the magazine. But our conversation on the April MESSENGER was especially stimulating, thanks to the guidelines for small group discussion. The proposed questions were excellent, and very, very helpful in guiding the conversation. What a gift! We look forward to using the same process every month.

Thank you for resurrecting the study guide, but most of all, thank you for your really fine work. It is greatly appreciated.

**Theresa Eshbach**  
Mechanicsburg, Pa.

## Memories

What a refreshing moment when I opened my March MESSENGER and read the article by Roy Winter in

remembrance of Fran Holcomb. It brought back memories of our working together at various Disaster Child Care sites. At age 92 years, good memories are a blessing.

**Elsie M. Michael**  
Davidsville, Pa.

## Poetry for everyone

I appreciated the treasury of poetry in the March MESSENGER. The world seems to turn too fast to allow the pondering of poetry for many folks, but the ones printed were what I tend to call “poetry for every man/one” vs. “poetry for poets” that frequently takes considerable pondering. It is a lovely issue. I was glad to share it with a friend.

**Janet Stroup**  
Brethren, Mich.

# What I value about the Church of the Brethren

## Becoming Brethren

In seminary at the University of Dubuque, we had cross-enrollment at Aquinas Institute, a Dominican seminary. I studied under some brilliant Roman Catholic fathers and played music with the Dominican brothers. This experience reinforced my already ecumenical leanings.

Motivated by the first Gulf War, my late first wife and I sought out a traditional peace church. We began to attend Peoria (Ill.) Church of the Brethren. Still not knowing much about the Church of the Brethren, I opened a hymn book and saw Roman Catholic hymns.

This helped to sell me, along with the membership class conducted by Chris Bowman, pastor at the time.

—Wes Sedrel, Peoria, Ill.

## TURNING POINTS

### Centenarians

**Espigh**, Sarah, 100, Lewistown, Pa., Nov. 5

### New members

**Evergreen**, Stanardsville, Va.: Elizabeth Allen, Shelly Segan, Brian Snow

**First**, York, Pa.: Onalee Fisher, Rebecca Soyke, Connie Wingard, Kevin Wingard

**Free Spring**, Mifflintown, Pa.: John Schlegel, Rebecca Schlegel

**Hanover**, Pa.: Dolores Beard

**Little Swatara**, Bethel, Pa.:

Lacey Scholl, Annie Umberger, Dennis Umberger, Kerrie Jo Umberger

**Pine Glen**, Lewistown, Pa.:

Estee Donahey, Hannah Donahey, Luke Donahey, Mark Donahey, Orla Donahey, Raissa Donahey, Samuel Donahey, Silas Donahey, Chris Simone, Mary Swartz

### Wedding anniversaries

**Barber**, Bob and Karen, Lancaster, Pa., 60

**Johnson**, Ron and Sue, Bremen, Ind., 50

**Legg**, Thomas and Margie, Keymar, Md., 50

**Replogle**, James and Carol, New Oxford, Pa., 70

### Deaths

**Barrows**, Carole Dianne Aliffi, 79, Waterloo, Iowa, Jan. 21

**Batten**, Lily Morris, 90, Dyke, Va., April 12

**Bechtol**, Michael Ray, 57, Elkhart, Iowa, March 4

**Breidenstine**, Patricia Anne Buckwalter, 90, Lititz, Pa., March 31

**Brumbaugh**, Janet L. Roe, 89, Albion, Ind., March 21

**Dipert**, Regina (Genie) L., 76, Plymouth, Ind., March 8

**Dundore**, Richard R., 88, Fredericksburg, Pa., Jan. 26

**Eby**, Dorothy M. Keller, 96, Dallas Center, Iowa, Feb. 28

**Fike**, Emerson Samuel, 96, Bridgewater, Va., April 12

**Hammel**, Bonnie L., 72, Duncansville, Pa., March 20

**Hawbaker**, Mabel (Charlotte), 98, Saint Thomas, Pa., March 31

**Hinson**, Verla M. Callihan, 99, York, Pa., Jan. 17

**Horst**, Melvin J., 84, Bel Air, Md., March 15

**Hoskins**, Patricia Schiel, 84, Waterloo, Iowa, March 8

**Kindell**, Donald Edward, 86, Yuba City, Calif., March 3

**Koehler**, Marilyn Joyce Joiner, 86, Marion, Kan., March 20

**Kuenzer**, Betty Hanson, 92, Onkama, Mich., Nov. 8

**Lanning**, Carol Sue Rohr, 78, Bremen, Ind., March 3

**Martin**, Richard Conrad, 93, Hagerstown, Md., March 29

**Megggers**, Leslie Gene, 86, Traer, Iowa, Feb. 15

**Moist**, Fern E., Sr., 85, McVeytown, Pa., Feb. 2

**Mullendore**, Thomas Eugene, 86, Hagerstown, Md., March 22

**Nettleton**, Gary Stephen, 77, Louisville, Ky., April 2

**Steinrock**, Connie Lynn Bashore, 74, Wernersville, Pa., Jan. 19

**Stutzman**, Lyle Wade, 95, Taneytown, Md., April 10

**Swigart**, Paul I., 92, Myerstown, Pa., March 8

**Walters**, Karen Sue, 77, Tempe, Ariz., April 15

**Wymer**, Billie Ann Cooper, 86, Joppa, Md., March 29

### Ordained

**Magenhofer**, Karl, Shen. Dist. (Timberville, Va.), Oct. 7

**Merlos**, Florecita, Pac. S. W. Dist. (Nueva Vision la Hermosa, Waterford, Calif.), March 9

**Myers**, Matt, S/C Ind. Dist. (Peru, Ind.), April 14

**Schrock**, John, N. Ind. Dist. (Rock Run, Goshen, Ind.), March 10

**Swenson**, M. Elizabeth, Pac. N. W. Dist. (Wildwood Gathering, Olympia, Wash.), Oct. 15

### Commissioned

**Traxler**, Larry, Ill. & Wis. Dist. (Cerro Gordo, Ill.), April 7

### Placements

**Bailes**, Mark, from pastor, Indian Creek, Harleysville, Pa.,

to senior pastor, Chambersburg, Pa., March 1

**Ball**, Timothy, from team interim pastor to pastor, Bethel Mayland, Broadway, Va., April 7

**Bowser**, Paula, interim team pastor, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, April 1

**Bowser**, Thomas, interim team pastor, Pleasant Hill, Ohio, April 1

**Eller**, Enten, from pastor, Ambler, Pa., to interim pastor, Ridgeway Community, Harrisburg, Pa., March 25

**Godfrey**, Richard, from interim pastor to pastor, West York, York, Pa., March 7

**Roth**, Paul, interim pastor, Mount Pleasant, Rockingham, Va., Jan. 1

**Shull**, Gary, interim pastor, Mount Bethel, Dayton, Va., Feb. 1

**Whitsel**, Jonathan, pastor, Sugar Run, Shirlleysburg, Pa., April 1

To submit information for Turning Points, go to [www.brethren.org/turning\\_points](http://www.brethren.org/turning_points). Or send information to Diane Stroyeck at [dstroyeck@brethren.org](mailto:dstroyeck@brethren.org) or 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Information must be complete and less than one year old to be published.

# The danger of a life transformed by God

**W**hen I was in my sins,” wrote Francis of Assisi, reflecting on the early part of his life, “just to see lepers was very bitter for me.”

As a teenager, Francis was popular, carefree, and wealthy. He delighted in eccentric clothing and was training to enter the world of business. His life was going so well, and yet the mere sight of someone less fortunate



LUKE HALDEMAN

caused him great distress. I can understand his discomfort! Lepers exposed in their very bodies the fragility of every one of the comforts Francis trusted. His money, clothing, friendships, status, and health—all could so easily fall away. There is comfort in distance from that understanding.

And then life changed. Francis left for battle imagining the knights of famous romances. He returned, after a year locked up as a prisoner of war, as a shattered young adult. How could he go on? What was left to trust? For guidance in this crisis, he turned to prayer—first at the tomb of Saint Peter and then at a local church on his way home. Something incredible happened.

“And the Lord himself,” wrote Francis, “took me among [the lepers], and I showed mercy to them. And on leaving them, what seemed bitter to me had turned for me into sweetness of body and soul.”


What a change! There at the church, he opened his soul to God, tearing down the walls which preserved his old ways. There with the lepers, he found new ways to love the people he’d feared the most—first with his hands and then with his soul. He allowed God to do a terrifying thing—to close his distance from the outcast. God

transformed him entirely. Francis of Assisi became a legendary saint, and he referred to embracing the lepers as his moment of conversion.

That is Francis’s story. I’ve seen so many other stories of transformation: friends who opened their home for two years to the homeless; family who sacrificed financial security to pursue work in line with their values; coworkers who packed up to serve the suffering in Palestine; Brethren who live in intentional poverty; Anabaptists who share all possessions in common; nuns who plant themselves in the way of mine excavators; neighbors who give up cars out of respect for creation; Mennonites who pastor churches for those kicked out of other places of worship; and on and on.

As Christians, and especially as Anabaptists, we are surrounded by so many ordinary people whose submission to the risky life of the gospel has led them into extraordinary things. So what about your life? What about mine?

Ordinary, loving lives can be holy too. Jesus, of course, spent his first 30 years in the ordinary life of family, work, and community. Yet still, when the time came for something new, he let it go. “Not my will, but yours be done,” were his words to God the Father in Gethsemane, and they rang true for his whole life.

This openness to the risky life of God, modeled by Christ and Saint Francis and so many others, is key. We must let go of the walls that keep us comfortable and let God grasp our hands through the terrifying new thing. We all have some idea of what these transformations have looked like for others. What could a transformed life look like for you and for me? 

Luke Haldeman, who works at Mennonite Central Committee, is a new member of the Church of the Brethren Young Adult Steering Committee. The theme for Young Adult Conference, held last month, is “Transformed by God,” from Romans 12:1-2.

“We must let go of the walls that keep us comfortable and let God grasp our hands through the terrifying new thing.”



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