

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

JULY/AUGUST 2024 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG

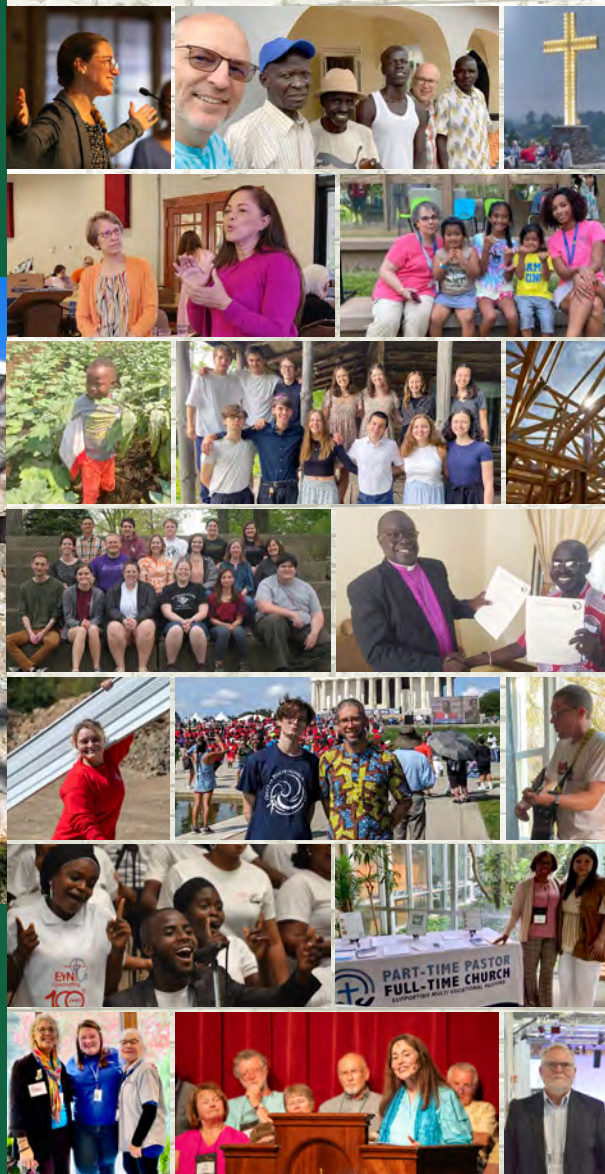


A century of
holy ground



Church of the Brethren

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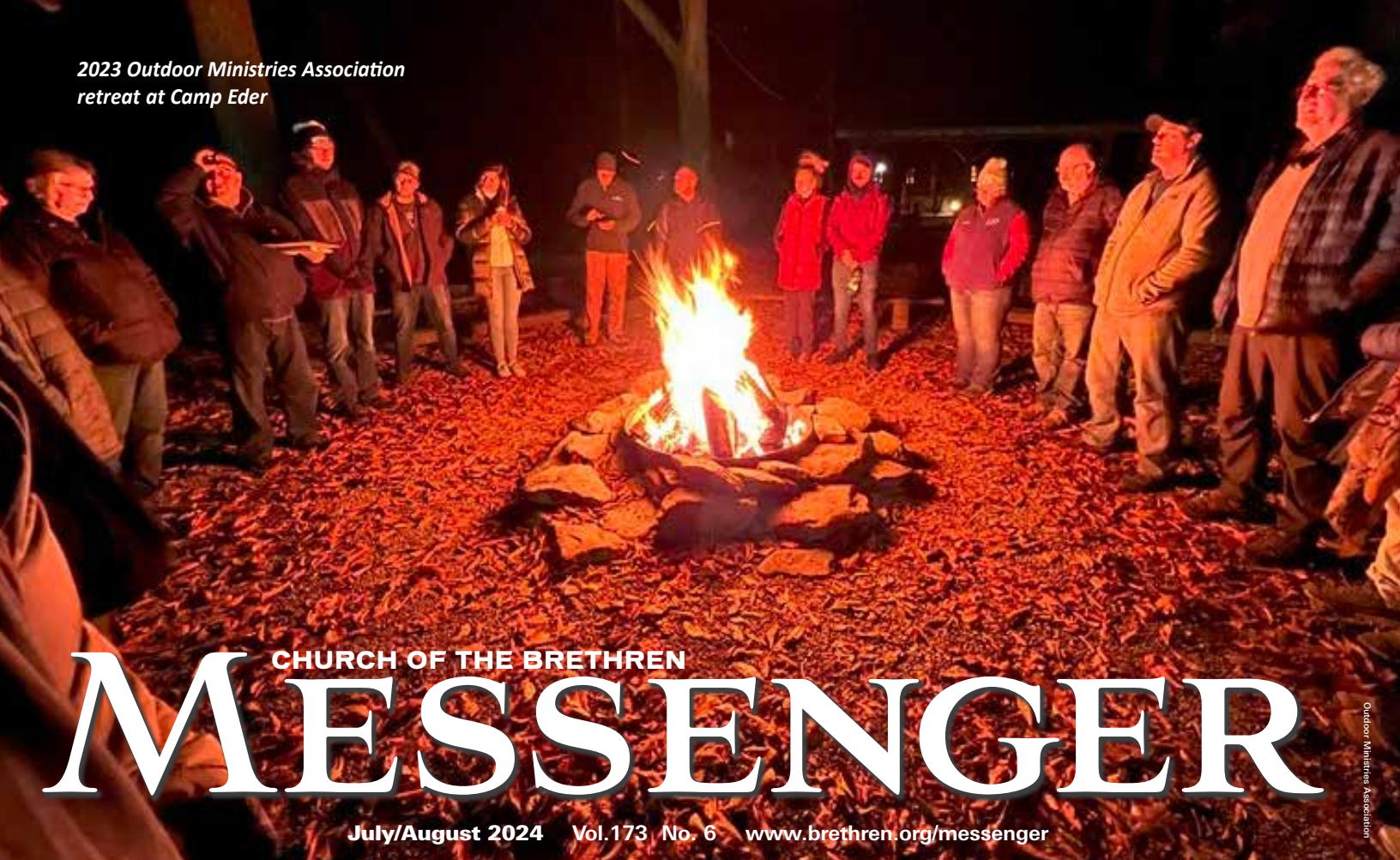
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2023 Outdoor Ministries Association
retreat at Camp Eder



Outdoor Ministries Association

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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

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on the cover

*Campers pause for worship
at Camp Eder's mountainside
vespers spot in Fairfield, Pa.*

Photo courtesy of Camp Eder



MESSENGER has received two awards from the Associated Church Press

An award of merit in the category of science writing for the world of faith for "The Bird Carrier,"
by William L. Miller, and an award of merit for coverage of the 2023 Annual Conference.

Do not fear, take heart

A story from the First Nations Version of the New Testament:

His followers were still in the canoe, far from land. The wind blew strong against them, and the waves pounded the canoe and began to toss it about.

Late into the night, just before the morning light, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) came near them, walking on the water! When his followers saw him, they cried out in terror, "It is a ghost-spirit!"



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

But he heard their cries and called out to them, "Do not fear, take heart. It is I."

"Wisdomkeeper, is it you?" Stands on the Rock (Peter) shouted back to him. "If so, tell me now to come to you on the water."

"Come!" he said to him without any hesitation.

With reckless abandon, Stands on the Rock (Peter) climbed over the side of the canoe and began to walk on the water toward him. The wind howled and the waves splashed against him as he made his way toward Creator Sets Free (Jesus).

But when he felt how strong the wind was, fear took hold of him. He began to sink and cried out, "Wisdomkeeper, save me!"

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) quickly reached out and took hold of him. "Man of small faith," he said, "what made you hold back and doubt me?"

The wind stopped blowing and the waves grew still as they climbed into the canoe. All twelve of his message bearers gave honor to him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of the Great Spirit."

In times of fear, what makes us hold back and doubt? Let us follow with reckless abandon.

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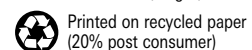
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“Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?”

—Isaiah 40:26a, NIV

“The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.” —naturalist John Muir

“Camping is the ultimate way to disconnect from the chaos of the modern world and reconnect with what really matters.” —author and environmentalist Rachel Carson

“There’s no wi-fi in the mountains, but you’ll find no better connection.” —anonymous

“If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night, I’ll bet they’d live a lot differently.” —cartoonist Bill Watterson

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

One hundred twenty-five years ago, in 1899, Brethren were forbidden from being seated as delegates at the Annual Meeting if they raised tobacco.



MAD ABOUT MICHIGAN

Annual Conference meets in Grand Rapids, Mich., this year—in the west central part of the Wolverine State. Can you identify whether the Michigan “facts” below are true or false? Answers are below.

1. Michigan borders all five of the Great Lakes.
2. Michigan has the longest shoreline of any state.
3. Michigan is home to the planet’s largest limestone quarry.
4. Michigan’s state reptile is the painted turtle.
5. The capital of Michigan is Detroit.
6. Gerald Ford is the only US president to hail from Michigan.
7. You can find the world’s largest weathervane in Michigan.
8. You can find the world’s biggest Christian cross in Michigan.
9. Each year, more tonnage passes through Sault Ste. Marie’s Soo Locks than the Panama Canal.
10. Traverse City, Mich., is the strawberry capital of the world.

ANSWERS: 1. False. While Michigan is sometimes known as the Great Lakes State, it borders only four of them. It does not have a border with Lake Ontario. 2. False. Michigan has more than 3,200 miles of lake shoreline, according to NOAA, but Alaska is tops with nearly 34,000 miles. 3. True. It’s in Presque Isle County. 4. True. It was made official in 1995. 5. False. Lansing is the capital (since 1847), located about an hour east of Grand Rapids. 6. True. Ford was born in Nebraska but grew up in Grand Rapids and later represented Michigan in Congress. 7. True. It’s in Montague, north of Muskegon. It’s 48 feet tall. 8. False. That’s in Spain. But the world’s second-largest crucifix is the Cross in the Woods, a Catholic shrine in Indian River, Mich. 9. True. They handle more than 75 million tons of cargo annually. The Panama Canal handles more ships, however. 10. False. But it is the tart cherry capital. A festival is held each July.

DID YOU KNOW?

Seven of the 24 Church of the Brethren districts have more than one camp.

Mid-Atlantic

- Camp Mardela
- Shepherd’s Spring

Pacific Southwest

- Camp La Verne
- Camp Peaceful Pines

Illinois/Wisconsin

- Camp Emmanuel
- Camp Emmaus

Southeastern

- Camp Carmel
- Camp Placid

West Marva

- Camp Galilee
- Camp Hope

Pacific Northwest

- Camp Koinonia
- Camp Myrtlewood

Western Plains

- Camp Colorado
- Camp Mount Hermon

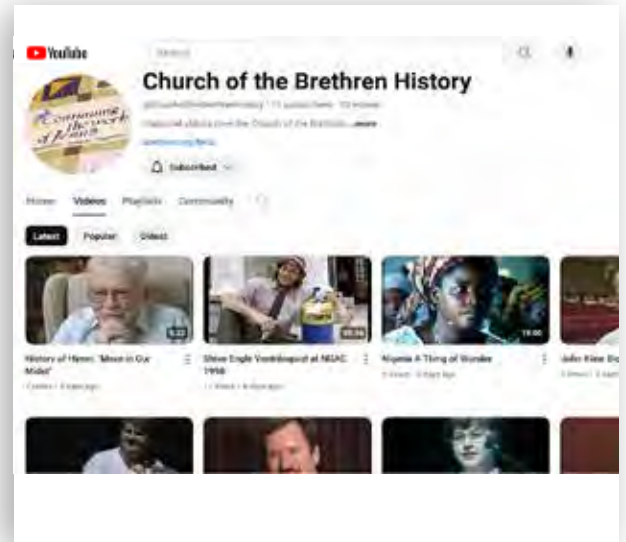
Conversely, the two Indiana districts share Camp Alexander Mack.

YouTube channel created for historic church videos

After more than 40 years of creating videos for the Church of the Brethren, David Sollenberger realized that nearly all the recordings were in formats that are no longer used. As he converted recordings into digital files, he encountered significant moments that were not being seen by those who appreciate the history, heritage, and experiences of the Church of the Brethren faith tradition.

Working with Sollenberger, Brethren Historical Library and Archives interim manager Allison Snyder and Church of the Brethren web producer Jan Fischer Bachman created a new YouTube channel for historical Church of the Brethren videos.

The more than 50 videos range from General Board live reports, to wrap-ups from denominational conferences, to significant events such as the original ABC News segment on the death of Ted Studebaker. Go to www.youtube.com/@churchofthebrethrenhistory.



A glorious gift of disaster ministry

Jerry Ruff, chair of Shenandoah District's disaster ministry, has been responding to natural disasters since he was four and a half. One of his early memories is standing in line at the school in Bridgewater, Va., to receive a shot after the June 17, 1949, flood in northwestern

Augusta County and southern Rockingham County.

The flood washed away virtually everything except the community church in the small town of Stokesville. The swift-moving waters also annihilated a tiny African American community on the North River called Strothertown, and flooding affected a wide swath of homes in and around Bridgewater. Ruff's grandparents, the Gardners, lived in Bridgewater and were among the families faced with cleaning up after the historic flooding.

Ruff received his inoculation to resist disease while providing the assistance he could to his family. He was amazed at the power of the flood waters. He remembers opening a refrigerator door and finding silt and sand inside. These and other images gave him poignant memories of the devastation natural disasters can inflict.

As a young man, Ruff served with Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) in Puerto Rico from 1965 to 1967. He unwittingly became involved with the Church of the Brethren's response to Hurricane Cleo, which had hit Haiti. A team of volunteers from the US was traveling to Jacmel, Haiti, to assist with recovery. He was the closest "deployed asset," so he was asked to hop over to Haiti and help coordinate the efforts. This is where he said he first "got the bug" for disaster ministry.

Jerry Ruff with clean-up buckets at the Kit Depot at the Shenandoah District Office.



courtesy of Shenandoah District

In the news

■ **Meyersdale (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** celebrated the 100th anniversary of its church building in mid-May.

■ **Erma Purnell of Chicago (Ill.) First Church of the Brethren** was featured as a Chicago legacy gardener through the Legacy Gardener Project of the Chicago Community Gardeners Association. Purnell's work with the New Horizons Garden, started by Chicago First in the 1980s and continuing today, was highlighted. The garden adjacent to the church provides a place of respite in the city, as well as cultivation of native plants and vegetables to share with the community.

■ **Mary Gough of Nokesville (Va.)**



Mary Gough is Nokesville Day Citizen of the Year.

Church of the Brethren is this year's Nokesville Day Citizen of the Year. She is known for her hard work on the farm and dedication to volunteer activities including driving her tractor in parades. She is the Martha Early Circle president, has held all the Homemakers Club offices, has been a member of the PWFC Farm Bureau and a Farm Woman of the Year nominee, and has been superintendent of the Prince William County Fair.

■ **Wil Nolen of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren** gave the mes-

sage for Bridgewater College's Baccalaureate on May 3. He is past president of Brethren Benefit Trust (now Eder Financial).

■ **McPherson (Kan.) College's Citation of Merit Award for 2024** has been given to Larry and Sandee (Hoover) Kitzel of Bethel Church of the Brethren in Arriba, Colo.; Sigrid Wagner Horner of Antelope Park Church of the Brethren in Lincoln, Neb.; and Ron and Rita (Smallwood) Harden of Loveland, Colo.

Ruff was not the only one to be bitten—his parents, Carlton and Hilda Ruff, and others in their circle had been assisting local families who needed help, so they naturally gravitated to serving with the district. Ruff recalls one story of Mary Cline and Hilda Ruff feeding 14 people three meals a day using a one-burner hotplate on a project in San Juan, P.R. The Ruffs became active in Shenandoah District's growing disaster response ministry in the 1970s and worked to help establish the annual Brethren Disaster Auction in the early 1990s.

After BVS, Ruff returned to the Shenandoah Valley shortly before Virginia's deadliest natural disaster on record. In August 1969, Hurricane Camille dumped nearly three feet of water in eight hours on Nelson County, killing 153 people, destroying roads, and causing 3,730 landslides. Ruff was with a district group that went to Lovingsston to help with the cleanup.

Experiencing the aftermath of a massive natural disaster so close to home inspired Shenandoah District to explore ways to become more active in disaster ministry. In ensuing years, the district and its volunteers responded to a wide variety of disasters including 1972's flooding from a dam break in southern West Virginia; the Johnstown, Pa.,

flood of 1977, when volunteers traveled to Pennsylvania in their own pickup trucks, leading to the first district van dedicated for disaster ministry; 1985 flooding in West Virginia; and the 2011 tornadoes that hit Pulaski, Va.

Ruff describes the evolution of Shenandoah's disaster response from the initial challenges, such as providing meals for displaced families and helping people get debris cleared, to a "focused vision on long-term rebuilding to provide housing for those who fall between the cracks."

He has seen disaster ministry come full circle, starting as neighbors helping neighbors, expanding to participating with work projects around the nation and beyond, and now adding local needs back into the equation. Within the past year, partnerships with Renewing Homes of Greater Augusta County and Habitat for Humanity in Rockingham County have opened the door for short-term, local projects.

"You don't have to serve in any one particular way or with an organization; you just have to serve," Ruff says, as he winds down his time as coordinator of Shenandoah District disaster ministry. He and his wife, Bernice, have worked on many projects, and he considers this service a glorious gift.—Brenda Diehl

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.





The plant lady miracle

by Arnold S. Platou

It all started the Sunday before Easter. Or did it?

During sharing time at Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren, I told the congregation that I—as our new Mid-Atlantic District plant sale coordinator—needed help.

“As you cast your flower and veggie seeds this spring,” I said, “please cast a few extra, and raise them, pot them, label them, and bring them to me May 2 so I can take them over to Westminster. There, on May 4, we will sell them at the district’s annual Disaster Response Auction fundraiser to benefit Brethren Disaster Ministries.”

That night, I was alerted by a church neighbor that six cardboard boxes had been left that afternoon outside the church. My wife, Ann, and I drove back, and we could barely believe what we found!

Inside each box were row upon row of red cups containing good soil mix, with a small plant we judged to be nearly two weeks old sprouting up from each.

In all, there were 122 plants. The boxes were found huddled together on the sidewalk off the parking lot. No clues appeared anywhere. The only messages, hand-printed on sticky notes inside some boxes, read: “yellow pepper,” “red pepper,” or “small round watermelon.”

Each box had been packed with obvious care. Lined with thin, black plastic, each was filled with either red plastic cups or smaller clear ones. The plants arrived already watered and, with the plastic sheathing and box flaps drawn over them, protected against the weather.

A couple days later, a second batch was found in the same spot. This time, eight boxes contained more plants and the same sort of notes.

The plants seemed so well-cared for, I began to think the donor was a good citizen, someone who enjoyed growing plants, had gotten an early start on spring, and maybe lived in our church neighborhood. If it wasn’t someone who attended church and

heard my appeal and wanted to do this good deed anonymously, then perhaps our mystery donor had just tuned in that Sunday to Hagerstown’s broadcast.

While we were wondering, we got a break. The church’s security camera provided a surprising answer: The boxes had been brought by a woman with long, light-colored hair who looked to be in her 60s, pushing a shopping cart across our parking lot. The cart held a suitcase, pocketbook, and other belongings—on top of which were strapped two or three plant boxes. Later that day, the camera showed the woman had returned, pushing all that and even more boxes atop the cart.

Could she be homeless? What was her name? How did she get started growing plants? Does she know God? Does she know us through our outreach—neighborhood fests, clothing drives, free breakfasts once a month, vacation Bible school, work at the local homeless shelter?

“ I have learned that when something doesn't make sense to me, it just might be God's hand. ”



That Saturday, when the church was busy with volunteers going in and out to prepare for Easter, I learned she must be something of a chameleon, too. A member arriving at 9 a.m. found more boxes and carried them inside. An hour later another surprise: A new load had arrived!

By now, roughly 250 cups sat on the tarp in our guest room. What spare time I used to have was now devoted to watering plants and turning pots 180 degrees to correct the previous day's lean toward the light, giving each pepper or watermelon bright incentive to straighten up. Better posture equals better sales.

The next day was Easter Sunday. In just that week, we'd had three days of plant deliveries. I stood before the congregation, this time telling the incredible story of what had been happening. I told them nothing about this really makes sense to me, except that God must be in this. God must have "planted" this woman in our neighborhood and told her to begin planting *two weeks before* I asked for seeds to be cast!

Looking directly at our worship's streaming camera, I thanked our benefactor and told her we had quite enough peppers and melons now. So, thank you.

But she—or God—wasn't done.

That night, the church's security camera guy texted me: "Looks like you have some more," he wrote, attaching a photo showing four more boxes. "Today was 3:34 p.m."

I was too tired to go in that night. The next morning, after it had rained overnight, I got two calls from church members, both reporting the same: Arnold, you have more boxes. They are *very* wet.

So in I went, taking a snow shovel—just in case the boxes and contents were too wet to pick up and put into my truck bed. But cradling them in my arms, I was able to load them, their contents sloshing water. Knowing our

church money-counters would be inside, I went to reassure them that the boxes, if not the situation, were well in hand. I told them that, while I still believed God was in this, I was starting to feel frustration.

"For a while last night after I got that text," I told them, "I started feeling like Noah—that the rain . . . the waves of plants . . . were *still* coming! The difference is, Noah had a plan. What I need is a plan."

Then, God gave me one.

I was standing by my truck, looking at the soggy boxes of soggy plants, when I heard a schoolbus stop at the end of the lot. Five kids got off, gathered around their waiting mother, and began walking across the lot.

I motioned them over. "Would your children like to have a plant to each raise themselves?" I asked the mom. "A woman in our community gave them to our church to share."

Moments later, the little group left, proudly carrying their plants—along with the message that Mr. Arn's church would be offering vacation Bible school soon, and they were all welcome!

That little parking lot ministry didn't end there. More plants were given out to more moms and kids. And with so many plants—eventually more than 600—I began giving them out to churchgoers after Sunday worship in return for donations to disaster response.

This all has been personally rewarding in a soul-lifting way to me, too. One member took three plants, warming the hearts of three women she visits at the rehabilitation hospital. After four children of another member had each taken a plant, my own heart was deeply warmed when the oldest boy, maybe 11, took a bill from his birthday money and put it in the donation jar.

Others have stepped up, too. As the Plant Lady, as I now call her, continued her silent deliveries, I've stopped get-

ting calls and texts to come and take them home. One couple, for example, saw that more plants had been delivered and took them home to raise, "so Arn doesn't have to do that," someone told me.

Meantime, with our spare bedroom's floor space filling, Ann and I converted one of the big-windowed Sunday school rooms into a greenhouse for 220 new arrivals, with me visiting two or three times a week to turn and water what I've begun calling "my kids."

As the weather warmed, the plants moved to our carport. On nights with a frost warning, I covered them with old sheets, box lids, and whatever I could find. Most survived, and I made plans to haul them all down to Westminster for the fundraiser.

All this, obviously, has been quite a chore. What may not be so obvious is that this has been quite a gift. I have learned that when something doesn't make sense to me, it just might be God's hand. With these plants, I'm learning to lean into that feeling. And I'm feeling each new part of it as a true "God blessing."

This has given me many reasons to share this story and, thus, my faith. It's also given me some good soil mix. Not all the plants made it, so I used nearly half of the mix from the Plant Lady for shoots that I pruned off my red raspberry bushes and replanted to fill in their rows.

Who knows? Next spring, I might be potting up some of my raspberry plants to take to Westminster and sell at our plant sale.

Thanks, Plant Lady! 🌱

Postscript: Almost all the plants were sold at the Mid-Atlantic District disaster auction, raising important funds for Brethren Disaster Ministries.

Arnold S. Platou, a retired newspaper reporter and, later, an editor, has been active at Hagerstown (Md.) Church of the Brethren for more than 25 years.



A century of holy ground

First Brethren camps mark 100 years

by Walt Wiltschek

Randall Westfall—manager of Camp Emmaus in Mount Morris, Ill.—shared at a recent district event his take on the concept of “thin places.” And he did so in a rather compelling way.

Thin places were locations and moments where ancient Celtic Christians believed heaven and earth, the sacred and the earthly, came particularly close together. But Westfall reframed it for our context, pondering: What if thin places are those holy and meaningful spots where the knees and feet of praying and serving saints have worn the fabric thin, made tracks in the grass that we continue to follow?

For many Brethren, the denomination’s camps have been such places. From coast to coast, 28 camping locations currently exist, and various others now gone have left their mark on our history. They have been, and are, places of worship, fellowship, faith formation, leadership development, service, retreat, and much more.

“I speak about them as though they are our national parks—common areas for all to enjoy the majesty of nature and the intimacy of divine and human connection,” said Dan Radcliff, director of organizational investing for Eder Financial and treasurer for Camp Emmaus.

“Camp is among the few places left on earth that embraces people of all ages, political alignments, and socioeconomic backgrounds and asks them to cook a hot dog (or veggie dog) side-by-side. I can speak from personal experience that camp was one of the first places that nurtured me as a leader and provided opportunities for further leadership along the way in a safe space to explore that side of myself.”

This year marks a centennial, 100 years since the first camps as we know them today came into existence and began their ministry. Well-worn by decades of dedicated staff and volunteers, enthusiastic campers, and guests seeking rest or respite, these sacred sanctuaries continue to be

“All across the country, nestled in the bounty of God’s creation, you will find our camps; communities where the love of Jesus Christ is shown, felt, and shared to all persons. Each of our camps is unique, but the love and mission we share connects us. In the modern world, camp plays an important role, now more than ever.” —from the Outdoor Ministries Association website



Courtesy of Camp LaVerne

Courtesy of Camp Mack

BH/A

Courtesy of Camp Harmony

Courtesy of Camp Harmony

places of encountering the divine unlike anywhere else. Some have said our camps represent the best of who Brethren are. They just might be right.



While records of Brethren holding camp experiences date to at least the late 19th century, the first ongoing and organized camps in the modern sense began in the 1920s.

Camp Harmony (Hooversville, Pa.) is usually credited as the first Church of the Brethren camp, as the property was purchased in 1923 and programs officially began on site the following year. Camp La Verne (Angelus Oaks, Calif.) started operations that same summer. Each is celebrating its centennial this year.

Camp Alexander Mack in Indiana followed a year later, and Camp Bethel began in Virginia in 1927. Between them, Camp Sugar Grove—which ceased operations in 1974—started in southern Ohio.

Already in 1930, a camper letter received by Brethren missionary A.D. Helser said, “I shall never forget the happy times we had at Camp Sugar Grove.” Another said, “There was a stillness, and I could feel the presence of Jesus among us.”

Camp Myrtlewood in Oregon, Camp Wilbur Stover in Idaho, Camp Carmel (originally Camp Carolina) in North Carolina, and Camp Hope and Camp Galilee in West Virginia followed in the 1930s, along with several other camps that no longer exist—like Camp Peniel in Maryland, later sold to the

federal government.

A host of others joined the list in the 1940s. Among them, Camp Emmanuel (originally Camp Bethany) and Camp Emmaus in Illinois and Camp Mardela in Maryland each celebrated a 75th anniversary last year, and Camp Brethren Heights in Michigan does so this year. More camps came along in the 1950s and 1960s, and Shepherd’s Spring (Sharpsburg, Md.) joined the roster in 1991. Most recently, Camp Sugarwood was formed in Southern Ohio/Kentucky District in the past decade (using a rented facility in Dayton) after the sale of Woodland Altars.

Yes, it’s a long list. It’s also a rich and much-loved legacy that still speaks to our souls.

“Camps, and the communities built there, are beloved because the memories created are rooted in such joy,” said Betsy Kuecker, director of Camp Pine Lake in Iowa. “Children are the focus of camp work, so when camp communities are at their healthiest, all invested are always doing what is best to create a space and culture that allow children to see themselves and others as God does: beloved. In turn, those who serve at camp are often working to share their best selves, so we see ourselves as beloved more easily at camp. It is a beautiful cycle.”



Much credit for energizing the early camping movement often goes to the decidedly non-apocalyptic “Four



Courtesy of Camp Eder

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN CAMPS

- Brethren Woods, Keezletown, Va.
- Camp Alexander Mack, Milford, Ind.
- Camp Bethel, Fincastle, Va.
- Camp Blue Diamond, Petersburg, Pa.
- Camp Brethren Heights, Rodney, Mich.
- Camp Carmel, Linville, N.C.
- Camp Colorado, Sedalia, Colo.
- Camp Eder, Fairfield, Pa.
- Camp Emmanuel, Astoria, Ill.
- Camp Emmaus, Mount Morris, Ill.
- Camp Galilee, Terra Alta, W.Va.
- Camp Harmony, Hooversville, Pa.
- Camp Hope, Moatsville, W.Va.
- Camp Ithiel, Gotha, Fla.
- Camp Koinonia, Cle Elum, Wash.
- Camp La Verne, Angelus Oaks, Calif.
- Camp Mardela, Denton, Md.
- Camp Mount Hermon, Tonganoxie, Kan.
- Camp Myrtlewood, Myrtle Point, Ore.
- Camp Peaceful Pines, Dardanelle, Calif.
- Camp Pine Lake, Eldora, Iowa
- Camp Placid, Blountville, Tenn.
- Camp Sugarwood, Dayton, Ohio
- Camp Swatara, Bethel, Pa.
- Camp Wilbur Stover, New Meadows, Idaho
- Hammond Mill Camp, Peace Valley, Mo.
- Inspiration Hills, Burbank, Ohio
- Shepherd's Spring, Sharpsburg, Md.

Horsemen”: Chauncey Shamberger (who organized a series of denominational youth gatherings as a staff member in the 1920s), Alvin Brightbill, Perry Rohrer, and Dan West. The group traveled around the country in an old Studebaker, visiting camps to teach and provide other programming.

In one early camp publication, West praised those outdoor settings. “The groves were God’s first temples,” he wrote.

As the camps grew, Brethren in various regions worked to develop local leadership and create the infrastructure needed to keep this new thing going. An Annual Conference statement in the 1950s said, “The rapid growth of church camping in the last two decades is one of the most significant developments in Christian education.”

In the 2005 book *Kum Ba Yah: The Story of Brethren Camping*, author Linda Logan noted: “The early days of Brethren camping were a time of furious development. Large numbers of people across the denomination were busy finding sites, putting up facilities that would ‘do’ at first, just to get started, and then improving them as quick as was feasible. For all of the organizers, it was an effort to keep up with the growing number of campers who were full of enthusiasm and appreciation for the camp programs.”

Many of the camps experienced other challenges in the succeeding decades, from finances and aging facilities to personnel and occasional church politics to on-and-off denominational support for outdoor ministries. The camps began to seek greater connection and sharing of resources.

Walt Bowman became the first official denominational staff consultant for outdoor education in 1976, helping to create a more cohesive national camping organization. In 1977, following a consultation near Cincinnati, the Church of the Brethren Outdoor Ministries Association (OMA) officially came into being.

After Bowman retired in 1988, Camp Ithiel administrator Nancy Knepper became denominational staff for Outdoor Ministries. Her work included leading workshops, helping camps with legal issues, staff placement, and assisting other agencies with the development of the Youth Peace Travel Team program.

“I think every time I went to a new camp in a different district, I felt so much like I was entering holy ground,” Knepper said. “Each camp has its own identity, but there was this sense of it being an environment where change can happen. It’s hard to put into words how important I think camping has been to the denomination and to being a community of faith.”

Her position—eventually supplemented by OMA funds—continued until 1997, when she shifted into broader district ministries. The denomination hasn’t had an outdoor ministries staff person since then, although in recent years a staff member has served as a designated liaison to OMA. The OMA steering committee/board has taken over much of that work, sponsoring annual retreats and conferences, working at connection and communication, giving grants and awards, and addressing camp-related issues.

“One hundred years later, those faithful seeds continue to fall on divinely timeworn trails, fields, and campfire rings.”

In recent years, the pandemic, added regulations, church division, and generally declining church numbers have created additional struggles for the camps, but they continue to provide valuable and valued ministry across the country. Many have developed creative programs and reached out into their communities and beyond to expand their audience and witness.

“Camps need to be actively thinking both short-term and long-term as to their mission,” said OMA board member Garry Pearson, who first went to camp in high school and later served as a Brethren Volunteer Service worker at Camp Peaceful Pines in California—where he remains board chair today. “This is a process that should be done every five to seven years in order to not become complacent and lose focus. We as camps need to be continuously thinking about how our camps can be fully supportive of all generations.”




Dean and Jerri Heiser-Wenger served for three decades as directors of Camp Blue Diamond in Pennsylvania. Looking back on that experience, they treasure the connections campers made with God, the staff, and one another. They also hope the campers gained an experience of faith that can endure even as the church goes through some seismic changes.

“We hear stories from past campers that their lives were changed at camp, how God got their attention during a campfire, washing feet at the beach, or through a meaningful relationship with another camper,” they wrote. “Many

of these campers are no longer connecting with the church, perhaps no church, because the church is not relevant for them. However, these past campers find ways to express their spirituality because even though they are disillusioned by the church, they are not disillusioned by God.”

Those God moments still happen, both within the church and beyond, due to the dreams and determination of people of faith several generations past. In her book, Logan marveled at how “a few Brethren scattered widely across the United States could bring into existence a movement that by the end of the 20th century would be offering inspiration, Christian education and challenge, sanctuary, relevant and vibrant worship, and an opportunity to meet and fellowship with God and Christ” to thousands of campers each summer.

“How was so much development possible with so little denominational leadership, almost no physical resources in the beginning, and no prior camping experience?” she asked. “The answer, of course, is that Brethren individuals, most of them now long forgotten, from hundreds of congregations caught the vision and became involved. They expended their gifts, their resources, their time, their common sense, and their energy in sacrificial ways. They did it in faith and prayerfully. . . . The story of Brethren camping is truly a mustard seed story.”

One hundred years later, those faithful seeds continue to fall on divinely timeworn trails, fields, and campfire rings. As nearly 30 Brethren camps carry forward their unique gifts and ministries, who knows what the decades ahead might hold? 

SPECIAL EVENTS

■ **Camp La Verne** (Angelus Oaks, Calif.) is planning a 100-Year Centennial Celebration Aug. 31 at the camp with “lots of food, fun, and friends.” Plans are also in the works for “centennial campfires” in the district “to bring camp to you.”

■ **Camp Harmony** (Hooversville, Pa.) also turns 100 this year. It identifies March 3, 1924, as the date it was officially established. Plans for a possible centennial event are being determined.

■ **Camp Alexander Mack** (Milford,

Ind.) plans to kick off its 2025 “Century of Sanctuary” celebration Nov. 27 with a special video of camp staff and board members on a “thank you tour” of congregations. A variety of special events are planned in the following year, highlighted by a centennial celebration on Aug. 10, 2025.

■ **Camp Brethren Heights** (Rodney, Mich.) marks its 75th anniversary this year. It will have a special booth at Annual Conference and plans to cele-

brate the anniversary when it hosts Michigan District conference Oct. 5.

■ **Outdoor Ministries Association** will have a presence at Annual Conference with an equipping session led by Camp Mack executive director Gene Hollenberg the evening of July 4 (“Working Together—Church/Camp Partnerships”), the OMA breakfast (with centennial recognition and awards presentations) July 5, and an exhibit hall space.



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The Christian Citizenship Seminar group with Thomas Bowen, White House senior advisor for public engagement (left), and Pete Buttigieg, secretary of transportation (fifth from right), on the steps of the Eisenhower Building on the campus of the White House.

Connecting at Christian Citizenship Seminar

by Joan Huston

Making connections is one of my life's joys, and the Christian Citizenship Seminar (CCS) April 11-16 in Washington, D.C., was a place to make them.

On one morning at the Eisenhower Building, for example, we had brief conversations with a Church of the Brethren pastor who jogged past our group; with “Mayor Pete” Buttigieg, now Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg, who was greeted by a CCS participant from Indiana; and with a former German environmental minister, identified by the Brethren Volunteer Service worker from Germany, Cornelius Raff, who serves in our Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.

Those connections were sheer delight! The places where faith and politics meet, if not connect, are not sheer anything, however. They are complicated and frustrating, involving work, prayer, and time. Even so, faith and politics were the essence of CCS.

Nate Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, and Becky Ullom Naugle, director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, guided our learning about immigration. Session leaders, articulate and caring, were part of local, national, and international faith organizations working with immigrants. We heard reports of what immigrants face at the US border and in cities like Washington, D.C., to which many are bused from the southern border. We also heard from church leaders in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.


We learned about why people flee their homes: poverty, violence, persecution, and food shortages—likely to worsen with climate change. We also took time to pray and reflect.

One goal of the five days of learning was that the youth

would then talk with their representatives and senators in Congress, or their staff, about the issue of immigration from a Brethren perspective. I accompanied two youth and a BVSer to meet with staff from both Senate offices for Pennsylvania. It was interesting and inspiring to see the youth take the lead in the conversations and to hear the staff encourage them to continue to care and to speak about issues.

As the elder in our group, and one who spent time in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Mexico during the Contra War of the 1980s, I wanted to speak to ways our country fuels immigration. I advocated for interdiction of guns and ammunition transported illegally out of our country, weapons that give gangs and drug cartel members more power than police. For example, did you know that Haiti does not manufacture any guns within its borders? All of the guns in Haiti are imported from other places.

This year was my first attending CCS and, yes, I would attend another and encourage others to do the same. It's difficult for advisors and for busy youth to pull away from springtime sports and music activities and classes, but the many ways of learning about issues that CCS provides made the sacrifice worthwhile.

Our scriptures repeatedly call us to see immigrants as fellow humans. Jesus said welcoming the stranger is welcoming him, and it's a metric by which nations will be judged. I appreciated the opportunity to advocate with others from such a solid faith base. 

Joan Huston is a member of Mount Wilson Church of the Brethren in Lebanon, Pa. For this CCS, she served as advisor for Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren.

The ties that bind

Sharing and renewing relationships with the Brethren in India

by Madalyn Metzger

As our caravan emerged from a narrow side road into a quiet, grassy courtyard, I looked around confused.

According to our itinerary, we should have been arriving at a Church of the Brethren congregation in Ankleshwar, an industrial city located in the state of Gujarat, India. But instead, outside my window stood a quiet cluster of older, colonial-influenced buildings.

Stepping out of the car and into the muggy morning, I caught glimpses of children scampering across the yard to the centermost building. I looked questioningly at our host Darryl Sankey, a leader in the First District Church of the Brethren in India and vice moderator of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion. Grinning, he explained that we had stopped at a former Brethren mission vocational training school, which they were now using as a primary school for under- and unhoused children in the area.

We made our way into the main building, where Sankey and others shared some of the school's history, then stepped barefoot into the worship room and were greeted—in unison—by the students, who had been sitting quietly in neat rows.

Following an official welcome and student performance, the headmaster invited me, as moderator of the Church of

the Brethren in the United States, to share some comments with those gathered. Knowing my usual talking points (intended for predominantly adult church groups) likely wouldn't resonate, I quickly improvised—sitting on the floor, so that I could engage with the children at eye-level.

With Darryl Sankey interpreting by my side, the students and I talked about their favorite subjects (some of them teasing each other about their responses) and what they liked most about school. And as tears welled in my eyes, I told them about how my great-grandmother, Ella Elizabeth Flohr (nee Miller), had taught students like them in the 1920s when she was a Church of the Brethren missionary in Jos, Nigeria; how my mother, Vân Metzger (nee Lê) had been a school teacher in her home country of Vietnam; and how visiting their school and meeting each of them would be one of my very favorite memories of my time in India.

Sending forth of ardent hopes

In 1895—some 175 years after the first Brethren settled in the Germantown, Pa., area—the Church of the Brethren began its first international mission work outside of the US, sending Wilbur and Mary Emmert Stover and Bertha Ryan to establish a mission center in Valsad (then known as Bulsar), India.

The missionaries arrived at the tail end of a cataclysmic 50 years for the country. From 1850 to 1899, India suffered a series of 24 major famines, resulting in millions of deaths. To support the hundreds of children in the region left orphaned, Brethren in the US raised significant funds for famine relief and the construction of an orphanage. The orphanage in Valsad was completed in 1899, followed nine years later with the completion of a church building.

Fifty years after the Stovers and Ryan first began their work, more than 20 congregations with over 8,000 members—as well as several schools, health care facilities and other institutions—had been established across the Gujarati and Marathi territories in India.

The US Brethren saw this as the “fulfillment of a great goal” and, in 1945, the church in India became autonomous, with local leadership assuming all responsibility for its ministry. For their part, the US Brethren desired an ongoing



Eric Miller

A group of girls performs a traditional welcome dance at the Church of the Brethren in Pervad.



Eric Miller

Madalyn Metzger shares greetings from the church in the US to the Brethren congregation in Dariya. At right is Darryl Sankey, a Church of the Brethren India leader and moderator of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion.

connection with their brothers and sisters in South Asia, calling on the denomination to bless the ties binding the two groups and “join hands with us in making the future of the Indian church the best years of all.”

Called to part, but joined in heart

Over time, fewer US mission staff were sent to India, and the Brethren-established schools were turned over to the Indian government as the country assumed administration of most missionary schools and formed its own vocational training programs.

By 1970, all US Brethren mission work in India ended when the church in India joined with several other denominations to form the Church of North India (CNI). A small group of church members, however, chose not to join the unification process and continued worshipping outside of the CNI.

The schism resulted in decades of ongoing litigation between the two groups regarding possession of former Brethren mission properties (for which the US Church of the Brethren is legally required by Indian law to nominate trustees to steward the properties). And while the Church of the Brethren in the US officially related to CNI only in the

“It was particularly meaningful to meet the many women, children, and young adults who are a vital part of the church’s ministries.”



Eric Miller

Pastor Ashok Solankey welcomes Metzger to India and the Church of the Brethren in Valsad. The congregation worships in the same building constructed by Brethren missionaries in 1908—the oldest Church of the Brethren building outside the US and the first church of any denomination in the city of Valsad.

first 33 years following the 1970 merger, we also maintained an unofficial relationship with those who did not join CNI, helping to sponsor reconciliation and mediation attempts.

In 2003, Annual Conference delegates voted to re-establish an official relationship with the India Brethren. “We rejoice that the vision for unity that gathered the members and congregations of six denominations . . . which formed the Church of North India (CNI) in 1970, has provided a strong church framework for most of the participants,” the 2003 Annual Conference statement reads, in part. “We also recognize that this framework has not been suitable for many of the former Church of the Brethren members. . . . Having acknowledged the essential role for the Indian churches to guide their own futures . . . the U.S. church desires a relationship with two churches in India: the Church of North India and the India Brethren.”

Hope revived, and ties renewed

Despite the prolonged tensions, what is now known as the First District Church of the Brethren India has focused its ministry efforts on growing the church and serving others, similar to the call answered by the early US missionaries.

Today, the denomination has gone from a small group to some 29 churches, 39 worship centers, and 10,000 members on record—larger than in the US mission’s heyday.

It was in celebration of their continued growth and our

efforts for renewed relationships that I wanted to visit our siblings in Christ in India, along with my husband, Kristopher Brownlee, and then-executive director of Global Mission, Eric Miller. I also was keenly aware of the symbolism around my visit, as the first woman of Asian American descent to serve as moderator of the US Church of the Brethren—and the notional parallels between my personal experience and the India church experience of being both Brethren and non-European in background.

Over the course of just four days in early April, we saw approximately 10 different First District Church of the Brethren India properties, visited at least 8 congregations, and met numerous church leaders and members of all ages and backgrounds.

Some of the congregations—such as Valsad (where the original 1908 church is still in use), Vyara, Dolara, Pervad, and Ankleshwar—are large, with thriving women’s fellowships, youth fellowships, Sunday schools, and community programs that support educational and basic living needs in both urban and rural settings.

The congregation in Rajpipla, which broke ground just four years ago with a ceremony that included US Brethren leaders, now has four licensed preachers and two worship centers in Vadodara and Amil.

And other congregations in Champwadi, Dariya, Vakhatpara, and elsewhere are growing—their hope for the future palatable in their love for Christ, each other, and neighbors.

As a woman in church leadership, who was shaped by transformative faith formation experiences as a youth, it was particularly meaningful to meet the many women, children, and young adults who are a vital part of the church’s ministries, regardless of their official or unofficial roles in the church.

Where Christian love and friendship reign

Of course, we were not the first delegation of US Brethren to visit our brothers and sisters in India. But I was the first Annual Conference moderator to visit since 2017, and they rolled out the red carpet, both literally and figuratively.

No matter where we stopped, we were received with fully open arms of hospitality, a core value deeply rooted in Indian culture. From celebratory processions to enthusiastic greetings, mounds of fragrant marigolds and cups of silky chai tea, our brothers and sisters extended God’s welcome and worthiness to us—not simply because we represented the “mother church,” as many put it, but also because of the inherent connection to and with each other through our shared baptisms into the Body of Christ.

When asked how the First District Church of the Brethren India has managed to not only survive but also flourish over the past 50 (and somewhat contentious) years, church leaders


“It was in celebration of their continued growth and our efforts for renewed relationships that I wanted to visit our siblings in Christ in India.”

and pastors all attribute it to being faithful to God and their Brethren understandings of peace and reconciliation.

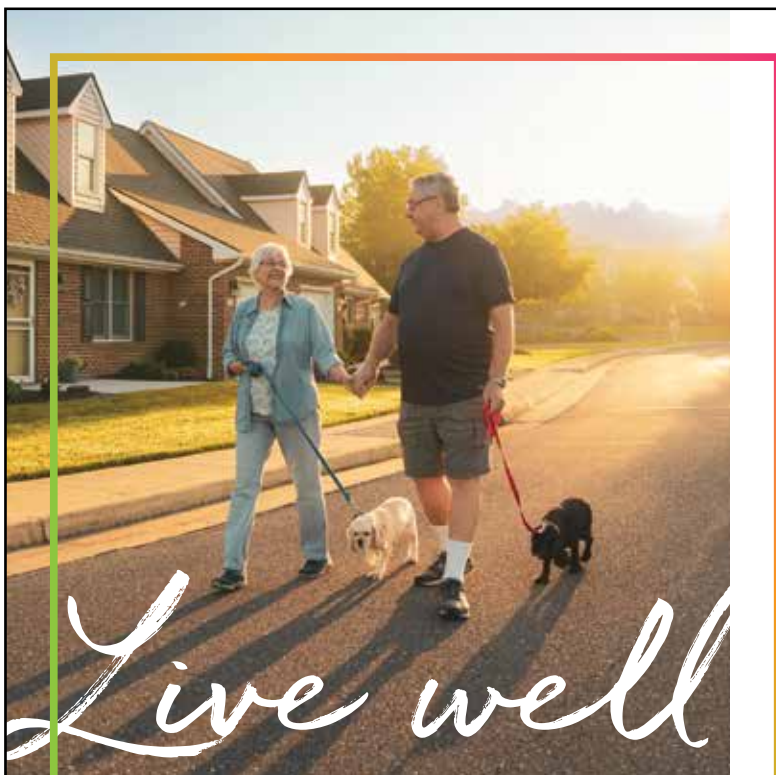
They acknowledge it hasn't been easy. For so long, the church focused on land and property conflicts. But now, they're focusing their energies elsewhere—at how they can be the church, rather than simply exist as a church—by extending their hands to others in Christian love. We certainly witnessed this firsthand, as we saw the many ways our brothers and sisters in India are being Jesus in their neighborhoods, including at the converted primary school in Ankleshwar.

And they're praying about how they might continue the momentum, with goals to establish a permanent denominational office with paid staff and dreams of exploring their own global mission work. When asked how the US Brethren may support them, their thoughts go toward resourcing

opportunities such as improved Brethren-informed pastoral training and teaching.

In the Global Church of the Brethren Communion, India is our closest denominational relative in terms of age, borne out of a shared faith movement, bound together by our ties of Christian love, devotion to God, and service to neighbors. At each church visit, I concluded my remarks with the assurance that US Brethren would pray for the churches in India. And I asked for their prayers for us, that both denominations will continue to walk alongside each other—binding our hearts in Christian love, growing our capacity to serve, and living into our call to welcome others in ways that are worthy of God's people. 

Madalyn Metzger is moderator of the 2024 Annual Conference.




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IMAGINE A FUTURE THAT IS DIFFERENT

Office of Peacebuilding and Policy joins delegation to Israel/Palestine

by Nathan Hosler

A view into Gaza through binoculars.

Since October 2023, it has felt difficult to imagine constructively and hopefully. While the work of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy continued to cover a range of topics and organizational partners, we spent considerably more time than usual in relation to Israel and Palestine. Much of this has been in collaboration with and in support of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and coalitions such as the Arms Trade Accountability Project and the big-tent Ceasefire Now Coalition.

Much of this joint work has been aimed at bringing an end to what the International Court of Justice has

determined is a “plausible case of genocide.” As a US-based organization, our greatest focus is on the actions of the US government and its ongoing insistence on sending more weapons to support mass destruction and death of Palestinian civilians. This work has also focused on the release of hostages and political detainees as well as adequate humanitarian aid.

A recent lectionary passage from 1 Samuel 3:1-20 opened as follows: “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.” In a time when much action and little progress is made on stopping violence, it is often hard to imagine or envision a future that is different.

In late May, I heard Lamma Mansour, a Palestinian Christian, powerfully address this from a position of vulnerability and grief. “Hope gives the power to imagine,” she stated. “We are hope-shaped creatures. . . . If we fail to imagine, others will fill the gap.” Her words, spoken at the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference at Bethlehem Bible College, were met with great affirmation by both the international attendees as well as Palestinian Christians.

I joined part of this conference and about a week of meetings on behalf of the Church of the Brethren and as part of CMEP. While the Church of the Brethren opposes all war and supports

“In Gaza they have taken almost everything. But they cannot get inside and take our faith in a just and good God.” —Palestinian pastor Munther Isaac

the wellbeing of and peace for all people, we have specifically committed to supporting Christian communities at risk and those that are religious minorities (2015 Annual Conference resolution on “Christian Minority Communities”). In working to fulfill this mandate and in response to Palestinian Christians’ plea for solidarity and support, I traveled to visit, hear from, and advocate with them and on behalf of all victims of violence and injustice.

While in Jerusalem, I met with Yusef Daher, who leads the World Council of Churches liaison office. In our brief meeting, he expressed his distress that representatives of the global church—particularly the churches in the West—have not visited, and that some have been silent about the international support for this unprecedented catastrophe for the Palestinian people, or have even supported the violence.

The week, as such trips go, was full of meetings, and ranged from meetings with high-level diplomatic and church leaders to grassroots activists and survivors. Traveling with CMEP executive director Mae Elise Cannon and the Middle East Partnerships and Communication coordinator Lauren Draper, we met with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Combatants for Peace, the US Ambassador to Israel and the head of the US Office of Palestinian Affairs, local priests, rabbis, Catholic Relief Services, parents of wrongfully detained and abused children such as Shadi Khoury, and others.

In addition to spending considerable time being with and hearing from Palestinians, we also visited three sites of the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas. Cannon noted that as followers of Christ working for peace, we can attend to and care for the hurt and trauma on all sides. This does not make all experi-

ences or power the same or equal, but acknowledges the real pain and fear.

On a Sunday, we traveled with a guide to the “Gaza envelope” and visited several of the sites of Oct. 7 attacks. We could hear Israeli artillery, bombs, and drones, and machine gun fire from Israeli helicopters not far away—and at one point needed to take cover when a “red alert” sounded for an incoming rocket from Hamas. We could see destroyed buildings in Gaza and plumes of smoke and dust caused by the bombing and destruction there.


After visiting homes destroyed by Hamas and hearing of those killed, the resident we were meeting said (her remarks here are paraphrased): Hamas keeps developing weapons and Israel keeps developing weapons, and where are we? I know that my safety and wellbeing and my children need them [Palestinians] to also have safety and wellbeing as well.

This did not start on Oct. 7 and will not be over when the bombing stops. The work of justice, peace, rebuilding, and healing will continue for a long time. Despite this, Palestinian pastor Munther Isaac asserted, “In Gaza they have taken almost everything. But they cannot get inside and take our faith in a just and good God.”

The work and ministries of sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel are characterized by strength and hope but are severely strained. Families continue to leave due to the hardship. People continue to live in fear and in dire circumstances.

Our call and vocation is to proclaim, in word and deed, the Gospel of Peace.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying around in the body

the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:8-10, NRSVue). 

Nathan Hosler is director of the Church of the Brethren’s Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in Washington, D.C.



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Seeing Indigenous people

New stories of our denominational history

by Joshua Brockway

The stories we tell matter. They shape how we understand ourselves as a community and as individuals.

Since history is essentially a story we tell about the past, we get uncomfortable when new questions or information change the story we have learned. Yet, our stories about the past do change. When we ask new questions about old stories, we begin to see people who have been hidden for too long.

Indigenous historians and theologians have noted that our dominant stories in North America erase the

presence of Native peoples. To see Indigenous people in our past means we must challenge the idea that Europeans “discovered” the Americas. As Mark Charles often says, how can someone discover a place where people are already living?

In the early 2000s, denominations in Canada and the United States have taken that challenge seriously and begun retelling the story of Christianity’s role in the treatment of Indigenous peoples around the world. To date, dozens of religious organizations in North America have acknowledged that Christian theology

justified the literal and figurative erasure of Indigenous peoples through what is known as the Doctrine of Discovery.

At the 2023 Annual Conference, delegates of the Church of the Brethren joined these organizations in rejecting the Doctrine of Discovery. The adoption of “With Actions and in Truth: A Lament of the Doctrine of Discovery,” is just the beginning, however.

We now need to retell the stories of our past to include how Brethren were part of the wider settler-colonial project built on the fiction of “discovery.” While Brethren were not part of the militarized removal and relocation of Native peoples, Brethren were connected to boarding schools and were also specifically recruited to settle western land along the railroads.

Boarding schools

After fighting in both the Civil War and military battles in the plains, Richard Henry Pratt began teaching English and craftsmanship to Native prisoners in



John N. Chronak/Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center

The Carlisle Indian School in 1892. Students were relocated from nearly every indigenous nation within the US.



Advertisements in Gospel Messenger.

“Complicity in the erasure of Native peoples does not require firing a gun, but it can look like families simply making a living.”

Saint Augustine, Fla. In the eyes of the military and the federal government, Pratt's efforts were successful.

In 1879, he was given federal funding along with decommissioned army barracks in Carlisle, Pa., for the first off-reservation boarding school. Because it was an industrial school, the curriculum included half days of classroom instruction followed by labor around the grounds to maintain the school's operations.

The goal of Pratt's program was not just education. It was intended to assimilate Native youth into dominant American culture. On arriving the children were required to pick English names, wear Euro-American rather than Indigenous clothing, and speak only English. Boys were given haircuts. If students spoke their Indigenous language or practiced their familiar customs they were punished, even court-martialed, as if the school were the army.

While Pratt believed Natives and whites were equal, he still clearly saw white ways as superior, and the goal was to make Indigenous youth more white and civilized. He was noted for saying, “kill the Indian, save the man.”

Martin Grove Brumbaugh, the Brethren leader famed for his time as governor of Pennsylvania and president of Juniata College, had significant ties to the Carlisle Boarding School. As commissioner of education in Puerto Rico, Brumbaugh sent around 40 children to Carlisle for education. In one instance he had to ask Pratt's forgiveness for sending too many students and asked that more be accepted in the future.

Brumbaugh understood that his educational reforms in Puerto Rico shared the same goals as Pratt at the boarding school. In early 1902, Brumbaugh delivered the commencement address to the Carlisle graduates. In that speech he began by noting how the United States, yet a young republic, could Americanize the world through organization and ability. As he conferred the diplomas, he exhorted the graduates to live according to the ideals of their school.

The early 1900s were the beginning of the Progressive era, full of optimism of human capacity for reform and the good of all. As the country was moving onto the global stage, first in Puerto Rico and then in world wars, the

Brethren were also becoming more Americanized themselves. From the schisms of the 19th century to the first years of World War II, the Brethren slowly shed their particularity of dress and practice and assimilated into American culture.

What Brumbaugh and Pratt championed to the indigenous Carlisle students was also being adopted, less traumatically, by Brethren themselves. Though Brumbaugh's own celebration of education and Americanization may still have been uncomfortable for parts of the denomination at the time, it would not be long before Brethren leaders such as Paul H. Bowman told Congress that the people of the peace church were good Americans.

Westward expansion

The character and work ethic of the Brethren also made them the perfect settlers for the westward expansion of the United States. While early settlers on the Pacific coast traveled there by horse and wagon, the railroads quickly increased the capacity of people and goods moving across the continent.

However, the rail system required



John C. H. Grabill Collection, Library of Congress

Group of Miniconjou at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

land and local infrastructure along the routes. The federal government gave land grants to private companies to build the railroads—land that less than 50 years before had been reserved for Native Americans. That meant that treaties were broken and Indigenous peoples were again forcibly relocated to less desirable land.

At the same time, the railway companies needed local economies across

the continent to provide labor and goods to sustain the business. Companies began partitioning their land grants and selling parcels to farmers and settlers at low prices.

As rail travel grew, the *Gospel Messenger* advertised frequently for cheap land from these rail companies. In the Feb. 4, 1899, issue, three advertisements noted great land for homesteading in North Dakota, Montana,

Idaho, and Washington.

These were not generic ads but ones crafted for Brethren. The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad specifically mentioned that many Dunkers and Mennonites were settling in Nebraska. And the Northern Pacific Railroad noted that Brethren were building homes on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. One notice in the June 14, 1904, issue notified readers that land would be

In the hearts of Native people

The following version of the Beatitudes comes from the *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*. The First Nations Version translation council sought “to provide an English Bible that connects, in a culturally relevant way, to the traditional heart languages of the over six million English-speaking First Nations people of North America.”

According to the council, “The FNV is a retelling of Creator’s Story from the Scriptures, attempting to follow the tradition of the storytellers of our oral cultures. Many of our Native tribes still resonate with the cultural and linguistic thought patterns found in their original tongues. This way of speaking, with its simple yet profound beauty and rich cultural idioms, still resonates in the hearts of Native people.”

The First Nations Version is available for purchase from Brethren Press.

Blessings of the good road

(Matthew 5:3-12)

“Creator’s blessing rests on the poor, the ones with broken spirits. The good road from above is theirs to walk.

“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.

“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk softly and in a humble manner. The earth, land, and sky will welcome them and always be their home.

“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be

made right again. They will eat and drink until they are full.


“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who are merciful and kind to others. Their kindness will find its way back to them—full circle.

“Creator’s blessing rests on the pure of heart. They are the ones who will see the Great Spirit.

“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who make peace. It will be said of them, ‘They are the children of the Great Spirit!’

“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who are hunted down and mistreated

for doing what is right, for they are walking the good road from above.

“Others will lie about you, speak against you, and look down on you with scorn and contempt, all because you walk the road with me. This is a sign that Creator’s blessing is resting on you. So let your hearts be glad and jump for joy, for you will be honored in the spirit-world above. You are like the prophets of old, who were treated in the same way by your ancestors.” 

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available on the Rosebud Reservation in the coming months.

Land this cheap was possible only because of the new federal policy regarding Indigenous lands. Rather than allow collective ownership by Native nations, the Department of the Interior pushed Native Americans into small, individually owned allotments on the reservations. They were given title to the allotments and could pass them down through family lines.

The great expanses of reservations were carved up into smaller parcels, and any land not claimed by individuals was then handed out to private companies or sold to homesteaders. Of course, the allotments to Indigenous owners were not the prime locations of their reservations. The best of the land was only for the government and corporations.

Two key Brethren institutions were direct products of the railways and the westward expansion. The town of McPherson, Kan., worked with the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway to bring rail service to the county and town in the late 1870s. When the Brethren gathered for the Annual Meeting of 1887, they called for a school west of the Mississippi. McPherson College was possible, in part, because of the access to local and transcontinental rail service.

M. M. Eshelman, an elder from the Whiterock congregation in Kansas, helped raise significant funds for McPherson College. Yet, his efforts created some conflict, and when a call came from southern California he moved west.

George McDonough, a fellow Brethren and agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, invited Eshelman to consider turning the then Lordsburg Hotel into a college. They purchased the small hotel, and Eshelman and others founded Lordsburg College, now known as the University of La Verne. McDonough and Eshelman worked for the Santa Fe railroad to bring people to

the area, and they specifically recruited their fellow Brethren.


The population of the United States grew and moved west, and the Brethren did the same. The story of westward expansion of the nation cannot be told without the forced removal of Native Americans, the Plains Wars, and then the allotment policies of the Department of Interior.

Our own story as a denomination must include these same plot lines of violence and displacement of Indigenous peoples. While Brethren did not participate in the military removal and massacre of Native Americans, they were a key piece in the wider settler-colonial project of the country.

Once Indigenous peoples were removed, the national economy needed people to repopulate the areas and cultivate the land so it could produce goods that could further grow the national economy. Complicity in the

erasure of Native peoples does not require firing a gun, but it can look like families simply making a living.

Acknowledging the atrocities of the Doctrine of Discovery presses us to tell new stories. These new stories bring to light the literal and figurative erasure of Native Americans in our national and denominational stories. The story must be complex, acknowledging that many Brethren did call for the humane treatment of Indigenous peoples but at the same time benefited from the national policies of removal and relocation.

Better stories about our past should not leave us too comfortable or proud. Rather, new and better stories invite us to reframe the ways we see ourselves and others so that we can seek both the glory of God and our neighbors' good. 

Joshua Brockway is director of spiritual formation for the Church of the Brethren.



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Christ's love as the rule

1 John 3:1-10

by Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

1, 2, and 3 John are written to a church in turmoil. In fact, their story may sound rather familiar. An argument has arisen in the church and, because of the disagreement, a portion of the church has split off from the rest. The author of the Johannine letters, as they are called, is writing to those who remain with the community in hopes that they will be encouraged and inspired again for their work as the church.

The specific argument that divided the community in these letters was the nature of Christ: Was Christ human and divine, or just divine? This argument may seem like a given to us today, but of particular importance to the author of these letters is that the community would understand that belief is the root of action. If we believe that Jesus is only divine, then he is a being entirely separate from humanity and thus cannot be followed. If we believe that Jesus is human and divine, that God is incarnate in Jesus, then we have a model for

faithful living. Such faithful living also is incarnate in that our actions reveal who God is to the world.

Understanding that Jesus is both human and divine means that Jesus reveals both God's nature and how we are to be in relationship with God. When we look to Jesus, we see the love of God in action. And as followers of Jesus, we are children of God who are identified with God when we love as God loves.

The gospel in a word

I grew up going to church camp. Specifically, I went to Shepherd's Spring every single summer (minus one) that I was eligible. I loved going to camp. I especially loved (and continue to love) camp songs. I loved silly songs like "Da Moose," "Herman the Worm," and "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down." I also loved the songs that talked about faith in God in simple, yet profound ways.

The song choices of Pete Haynes make up the soundtrack of most of my formative years at camp. He even wrote

the theme song for Shepherd's Spring that we would sing every summer. He also led us in well-known camp songs like "Shake Another Hand" and "Magic Penny." One of my favorites was the "Love Round" because of the harmonies it created. The words were simple:

*Love, love, love, love.
The gospel in a word is love.
Love your neighbor as yourself.
Love, love, love.*

While not directly quoting the greatest commandment, it echoes the way in which Jesus whittles down his purpose and God's identity to one word—love. On this word hang all the laws and the prophets. For this reason, God gave God's only son. We gather as a church because of it, and we proclaim it because we have received it.

In his book *The Orthodox Heretic: And Other Impossible Tales*, Peter Rollins illustrates this through a contemporary parable. He tells an ancient legend that speaks of when God wanted to help

“Love expressed between brothers and sisters in Christ is the visible sign that the church is full of God’s children.”

humanity understand how to live. God decided to send out angels to gather all the wisdom of the world into one library that all would have access to.

However, when the work was done the library was so vast that no one person could begin to read all that it contained, not to mention that most people were never able to make the trip. So, God instructed the angels to summarize the wisdom into a single encyclopedia. Once again, the angels did as they were told, but the encyclopedia was so large that one person could hardly lift it, let alone both read and practice what it said.

In response, God again asked the angels to craft a single booklet with all the essential information, but the people were either lazy or unable to read.

So, God decided once and for all to refine the essential wisdom into a single word that was distribute by word of mouth and through the life of a messenger. That word was love.

Children of God

When you become a parent, it is not uncommon to hear words and phrases come out of your mouth that are direct quotes of your own parents. At some point, no matter how much we try in our teen years to differentiate ourselves from our parents, we pick up aspects of their identity. This is not true just of families. Friend groups often find themselves becoming like each other in certain aspects. People change people, for better or for worse. And who we spend our time with has an impact on our lifestyle and identity.

The author talks about this by using familial language to describe the relationship between Christians and God. This is in part a callback to the way Israel understood their special relationship with God as the chosen people, a heritage that Jesus-followers can now also claim. In addition, the title “children of God” is meant to impress in these Christians a sense of responsibility to represent their divine parent well. The Christian is to be an apple that doesn’t fall far from the tree.

In 1 John 4:8, the author of these letters states with simple clarity that God is love. He goes on to explain that any love we give or receive is possible only because God first loved us. God’s love was made visible through God’s son, Jesus Christ, and, because of Jesus, we can become children of God. As children of God, we make God known in a similar way to how Jesus made God known—through love. In fact, it is our ability to love one another that is the very sign that we are God’s children.


Sin and the law of love

In the Johannine letters, actions are just as important, if not more important, than words. The author writes, “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18). This is because our actions often speak louder than words can alone. In the Gospel of John, after Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, he tells them, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are

my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

The Johannine letters remind us of Jesus’ commandment to love, reminding the church that to do as God commanded is to show that we are God’s children. To be unloving is to sin, and sin is not characteristic of God’s children. That’s not to say that the children of God can ever truly be sinless, but children of God are meant to live transformed lives that are outwardly visible.

In this sense, when the author of 1 John says those who are born of God cannot sin, he is likely not referring to a single sinful moment, but rather a characteristic way of acting which avoids sin. In fact, earlier in the letter, the author writes, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1:9-10).

The Johannine letters talk about God’s continued presence in the community when love is expressed. Love expressed between brothers and sisters in Christ is the visible sign that the church is full of God’s children. To be unloving not only hurts our relationship with God and others, but it damages our witness to who God is. What we say and do is of vital importance to us, to our faith family, and to our witness. 

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey is co-pastor, with her husband, Tim, 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.

Nigeria Crisis Response to phase out

A grant of \$225,000 from the Emergency Disaster Fund extends the Nigeria Crisis Response through 2024, part of a plan to phase out the program over the next three years. The plan was created in collaboration with the Disaster Relief Management Team of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria).

The Nigeria Crisis Response is a joint program of EYN and the Church of the Brethren Global Mission and Brethren Disaster Ministries that, since 2014, has provided more than \$6 million to the work of helping EYN endure an ongoing crisis of violence.

This grant helps shift focus to equip displaced people to better support themselves and their families. As a result,



EYN disaster relief team giving scholarships to orphans.

there is a significant decrease in the food distribution budget and expansion of funding for education, agriculture, home repair, and livelihood programming.

Emergency Disaster Fund gives grants

Haiti and the Dominican Republic

■ **\$143,000** to aid l'Eglise des Freres d'Haiti (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) while the country is undergoing multiple crises that are having a significant negative effect on the church. Some congregations have closed and many families are displaced. The money will provide food distributions at all congregations and preaching points of the church.

■ **\$25,000** to Comunidad de Fe (Community of Faith), the Haitian Kreyol-speaking sector of the Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic, for the work to aid Haitians who arrive in the DR often without any money, food, clothing, or shelter.

■ **\$5,000** to Iglesia des los Hermanos, the Spanish-speaking sector of the church in the DR, for its emergency food aid to Haitian refugees.

Ukraine

■ **\$100,000** for Church World Service to aid displaced

Ukrainians. CWS has identified Moldova as a country needing considerable assistance to support large numbers of refugees from the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. CWS also has a new program for displaced people inside Ukraine, focusing on remote villages near Odesa.

South Sudan

■ **\$68,000** for the South Sudan Crisis Recovery Initiative, a revised mission plan put together after executives of Global Mission and Brethren Disaster Ministries visited in November 2023. It focuses on communities with developing Church of the Brethren congregations. Funds will go for food distributions, agriculture, a well for a village school, and a small portion of overhead costs.

United States

■ **\$62,000** for the Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding project in Dawson Springs, Ky., following December 2021 tornadoes. This grant completes the project through Aug. 17, 2024.

■ **\$5,000** for Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren in southern California to expand its ministry of supporting families with meals and groceries, to aid those affected by flooding. Extensive damage was caused by a series of heavy rains and floods beginning this past February.

Democratic Republic of Congo

■ **\$40,000** for the Goma congregation of l'Eglise des Freres au Congo to aid 600 families displaced by conflict and violence.

■ **\$30,000** for l'Eglise des Freres au Congo to provide emergency food to 950 households, or about 7,600 people, following flooding of Lake Tanganyika.

Mexico

■ **\$8,800** for the Tijuana Community Center and Bittersweet Ministries to support migrants. Migrants wait in Tijuana for their asylum appointments with the US government, making the city

a gateway for thousands of people seeking to enter the US. The center provides housing and meals for people in need, originally those living locally in poverty and more recently those migrating through Mexico.

Venezuela

■ **\$7,500** for ASIGLEH (the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela) to aid families affected by an epidemic that is killing children in Delta Amacuro State, where the church has a mission point. The unknown nature of the disease is causing fear and desperation. Parents have abandoned homes, crops, and food, hoping to prevent the spread of the disease, leaving many families in need of aid.

Burundi

■ **\$5,000** for the Church of the Brethren in Burundi to provide emergency food to 75 households, or about 450 people, in Gatumba who lost homes in the 2023 and 2024 flooding of the Rusizi River.

CDS deploys during active tornado season

From March through May, Children's Disaster Services (CDS) provided care centers for children in what has become the most active tornado season in the US since 2017. A total of 34 children were served, as of the end of May, with 13 CDS volunteers attending.

In March, CDS volunteers deployed to Multi-Agency Resource Centers (MARC) in Lakeview and Russells Point, Ohio, following tornadoes that included one category EF3 that killed three people.

Following tornadoes in Iowa late in April, CDS provided volunteers for a MARC May 4-5 in Minden, Iowa.

Overnight May 7-8, a series of tornadoes and severe storms affected Iron County, Mo. A MARC was set up on May 29, to which CDS responded.



A child in the care of Children's Disaster Services at a center in Lakeview, Ohio, following tornadoes.

Personnel

David Banaszak on July 28 concludes his service as executive minister for Middle Pennsylvania District, a position he has held since Sept. 5, 2017. During his years on the Council of District Executives he was on the Ministry Issues Committee. Prior to serving as executive, he served the district as chair of the Ministry Commission, directed Ministry Formation, and was on Standing Committee.

John Jantzi plans to conclude his service as Shenandoah District executive on March 1, 2025. He began in the position on Aug. 1, 2012. As a member of the Council of District Executives, he served on the Ministry Issues Committee and the Ministry Advisory Council and as representative to the Outdoor Ministries Association. He was a member of the Annual Conference Vitality and Viability

Committee 2016-2017 and was on the Compelling Vision Team.

Eric Miller on May 15 concluded his work as executive director of Global Mission. He began in the Global Mission office on March 8, 2021, when he was hired with his wife, Ruoxia Li, as co-executive director. Li resigned several months later. Previously, the couple had worked for Global Mission in China.

Nancy Miner retires Oct. 31 as manager of the General Secretary's office, a position she has held for 15 years. She has worked for the denomination since April 1993, when she first worked in the insurance and communications departments of Brethren Benefit Trust (now Eder Financial). Her work for the church included serving as administrative assistant for the Association of Brethren Caregivers and the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren.

Blaine and Nancy Miner begin Aug. 5 as co-district executives for Western Plains District, half-time. Nancy Miner will work fewer hours until she retires from the General Secretary's office. Blaine Miner holds degrees from Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and Bethany Seminary. He was ordained by Illinois and Wisconsin District and Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., where the Miners are members. His ministry experience includes pastoring Dixon (Ill.) Church of the Brethren and working as a chaplain in state correctional centers.

Jacqueline Claire Flowers of Blacksburg, Va., begins July 15 as director of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives. She holds a master of divinity from Bethany Seminary and a bachelor's in psychology from Argosy University.



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Adapting to disability

Three years ago, I became dependent on a wheelchair for mobility. Despite a strong faith, nurtured by my Anabaptist roots, I was unprepared for the emotional, physical, and spiritual adjustments necessary to move forward in life.



JILL KEYSER
SPEICHER

The loss of independence and control was the most devastating. Emotions such as grief, anger, hopelessness, depression, and fear invaded my thoughts.

After 12 surgeries and 4 infections, I no longer had a left hip to help me balance and walk. In addition, osteoarthritis affected many joints in my body. Despite the many prayers of friends, family, and church prayer

chains, I am unable to walk on my own. But as I look back over the tough times, I know God was with me. I am amazed and grateful that I survived all the surgeries and setbacks.

Following my final surgery, I used a manual wheelchair for six months. When my motorized wheelchair was delivered, I regained some of my independence.

It was a time of many changes. My husband, Tim, had already retired to help take care of me. We sold both our cars to buy a wheelchair van. Soon, a first-floor, independent-living apartment became available for us at Brethren Village in Lititz, Pa. A roll-in shower along with other adaptations were completed for my needs. A few months later, we moved 35 miles from Reading, Pa., to our new apartment to start a new life together. This change has been good for both of us.

Before our move to Brethren Village, we were members of Wyomissing (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, where Tim was pastor. It was during this time that a new, totally accessible, church building was completed. We also appreciated the loving support of the congregation through my surgeries.

Shortly after I joined Palmyra (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, I had my final surgery and became wheelchair-dependent. Fortunately, their multilevel church building


has an elevator that helped me to get around the facilities. The sanctuary has space available in the pews for wheelchairs, and the church folks were very welcoming and appreciative of our participation.

In 2023, we became members of a new supportive congregation, Lititz Church of the Brethren. The building is totally accessible, with spaces among the pews for wheelchairs. We witnessed with appreciation how the people embraced another woman in a motorized wheelchair who is active in the church.

One special observance with the Lititz church family that I continue to enjoy being part of is love feast and communion. I am welcomed to table fellowship by my sisters, who move a chair or two for me. For feetwashing, I join a group of women who, like me, can no longer bend and kneel for the traditional ordinance. We pass around a bowl of water to wash each other's hands and dry them with a towel. I am grateful for the time of fellowship with my sisters as we eat the meal of beef and rice soup and a roll. I join with my sister by reaching across the table to break the homemade unleavened bread and drink the grape juice, representing the body and blood of Christ. We sing a hymn together and leave the meeting room, refreshed and ready to continue our faith journey.

As a seminary graduate, retired chaplain, and ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, I bring gifts and abilities for service in the church. I assist as I am able, despite chronic pain and continuing dependence on my husband to drive me to activities. I am fortunate he is glad to help in this way.

In addition, I enjoy writing essays and poems to help others gain an understanding of the challenges faced by a person with disabilities. I believe I can minister by advocating for our needs and rights as part of society, and I'm a good listener who can help others dealing with their own limitations.

Even though life is complicated and challenging, I have begun moving toward acceptance. With God's help and the embrace of my family, friends, and faith community, I go forward with hope. 

LEARN MORE

The Anabaptist Disabilities Network has a variety of resources and information about disabilities. Visit www.anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org.

Impact

No other recent article has had more impact on me lately than Brian Bachman's "No Easy Answers" (April). His timely words are extremely relevant, rocking, and revelational.

Bachman describes our opinions about the Israel and Hamas conflict as

Discussion starters for small groups

■ A century of holy ground

describes 100 years of outdoor ministries in the Church of the Brethren. How are camps "holy and meaningful spots" or "national parks" for the church? How do camps change lives? How do they connect people with God and creation? Which church camp is closest to you, and how have you or your congregation helped support it?

■ Imagine a future that is different

invites Nathan Hosler after visiting Israel and Palestine. Search out the latest news about the war in Gaza, then try to imagine a different future for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. What would that future look like? What would it take to carry out the work of justice, peace, rebuilding, and healing that is needed?

■ Seeing Indigenous people

and—in light of that intentional recognition—revisiting our stories about how we understand ourselves is part of the work of healing and justice for all. In what ways have Brethren been part of the settler-colonial project? What injustice is represented by assimilating Indigenous youth into the dominant American culture, or by westward expansion of the US? How are you—or your church, or an institution that is important to you—connected with or benefiting from either effort? Why should we revisit this history? What new and better story would you tell?

raw and passionate, and then continues to break it down revealing/reminding us of the long history behind it all. He doesn't shy away from telling us just how deeply the conflict is embedded—how every Israeli and Palestinian has lost someone. "Jesus told us that peacekeepers are blessed. And they need to be, for making peace is hard." The boxes of definitions and particularly the history of the conflict are invaluable for understanding.

Every Christian needs a copy of this article. Thank you for including it in MESSENGER.

Carol Davis
Canton, Ill.

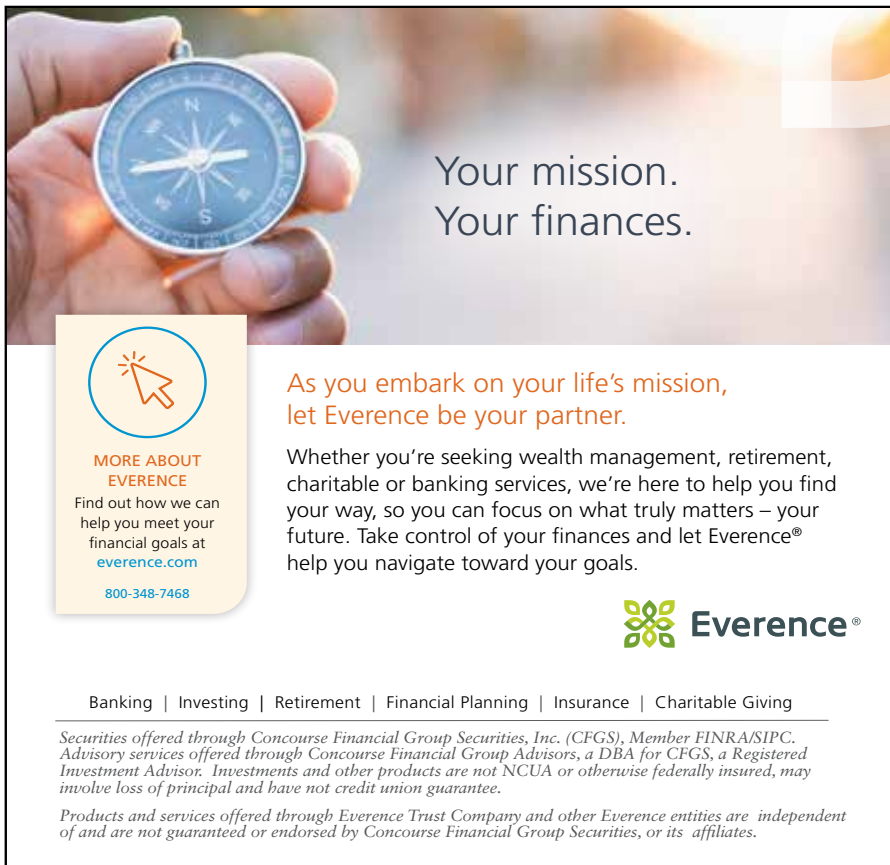
Concerns

I am writing to express concerns regarding Brian Bachman's article "No Easy Answers." First, the title "Obstacles to Peace Between Israel and Hamas" implies that Israel is solely targeting Hamas, when over 35,000 people, including Christians, have been killed in Gaza alone. In the West Bank, 507

Palestinians (81 of whom were children) were killed by Israel in 2023, according to the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs. In order to accurately reflect the scope of the conflict, it is necessary to correctly name the parties involved: Israel and Palestine.

More importantly, to deny evidence of genocide against Palestinians in light of South Africa's lawsuit against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), is to dismiss a good part of the global community's concerns and findings. Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Namibia, Pakistan, and the Maldives, as well as the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, all have expressed support for South Africa's allegations that Israel violated the 1948 Genocide Convention.

Furthermore, it is very confusing to insinuate that use of the word "genocide" is antisemitic, particularly when Israel has targeted Palestinian hospitals, schools, mosques, and churches, including St. Porphyrius, believed to be one of



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the oldest churches in the world. The staggering number of casualties, mainly civilians, includes journalists and aid workers. Cemeteries have been bulldozed. Not a single university in Gaza has survived. These facts illustrate an ongoing genocide, defined by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention as “any of five acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. These five acts include killing members of the group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children out of the group.”

Portraying Israel as “a small nation surrounded by hostile neighbors” ignores the fact that Israel killed more than 1,100 Lebanese people in 2006, and conducted hundreds of airstrikes on Syria and Iran.

Bachman’s timeline of the conflict omits the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, started when Ariel Sharon and

roughly 1,000 Israeli police and soldiers stormed Al-Aqsa compound on Sept. 28, 2000. The blanket period of “relative calm” in the timeline belies the number of Palestinians killed during that “calm”—234 were killed in just the West Bank (an area the size of Delaware) in 2023, prior to Oct. 7.

I visited Palestine (both the West Bank and Gaza) in October 2001, and it is simply my desire that the historical and current suffering of the people there be accurately depicted by our denomination, which has such a rich tradition of social justice work and peacemaking. I only wish for these concerns to be prayerfully considered, and that more of a stand is taken—our Christian duty—for suffering Palestinians.

“When churches justify a genocide or are silent watching from a distance, making carefully crafted and balanced statements, the credibility of the Gospel is at stake.” —Munther Isaac, Bethlehem Bible College

Tammy Watts
Bradford, Ohio

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Centenarians

Etzweiler, George, 104, State College, Pa., March 14
Fisher, Helen Hissong, 100, Haverhill, Mass., March 5
Stinebaugh, Vernon, 105, Lancaster, Pa., April 4

New members

Bear Creek, Accident, Md.: Christine Caron, Robert Caron
Big Creek, Cushing, Okla.: Tim Mills
Goshen City, Goshen, Ind.: Loyce Borgmann, R. Kurt Borgmann, Steve Haney, Virginia Haney, Marilyn Sexton Mason, Steve Mason
Hartville, Ohio: Linda Kuhn, Robert Kuhn
Huntsdale, Carlisle, Pa.: Cliff Wolaver, Kathy Wolaver
Mountville, Pa.: Sara Haldeman-Scarr, Sophia Hart,

Joy Ricard, Kevin Ricard, Gail Wrightson, Tim Wrightson

Wedding anniversaries

Baile, James and Wilma, Warrensburg, Mo., 65
Edwards, Russell and Carol, Virden, Ill., 60
Reichert, Fred and Eileen, Auburn, Ill., 68
Vanderveer, Loyal and Sue, Boonsboro, Md., 60

Deaths

Beckner, Donald Huston, 88, North Manchester, Ind., April 27
Boldosser, Alma E. Railing, 91, Carlisle, Pa., Feb. 6
Bowers, Kevin Duane, 70, Dixon, Ill., April 25
Clark, Rosalie Bean, 86, Goshen, Ind., April 11
Corbett, Cynthia Lynn Roden,

68, Cortland, Ohio, Aug. 12, 2023

Darhower, Violet M. Cleaver, 84, Carlisle, Pa., Feb. 27
Dell, Emilie Ellen Rowland, 84, McPherson, Kan., Feb. 2
DeVinney, William Allen, 72, Hagerstown, Ind., March 22
Finkbiner, Lloyd H., 95, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 22
Godfrey, Benjamin David, 43, Goshen, Ind., April 28
Goode, William Rueben, 88, Frederick, Md., April 1
Grimes, Nancy Carol Hovis, 80, Chambersburg, Pa., May 11
Kienholz, Barbara Lou Stebbins, 93, La Junta, Colo., April 25
Locke, Daniel K., 77, Hartville, Ohio, Jan. 17
Luker, Richard M., 80, Uniontown, Ohio, March 23
McKennedy, Brenda Sue Cain Baker Scales, 79, Virden,

Ill., Nov. 10
Riley, Robert Dale, 88, Canton, Ohio, Feb. 12
Rudisill, Isabelle Rice, 96, Washington Boro, Pa., Feb. 13
Rush, Gary E., 75, Hartville, Ohio, April 30
Schall, Lois Walbridge, 82, Denton, Md., April 10
Smail, Harry Ross, 83, Export, Pa., March 1
Smith, Twyla Louise Catherine Turner, 88, Harrisonburg, Va., May 2
Spaulding, Sue Ellyn, 78, Anderson, Ind., April 10
Stinebaugh, Angela M., 104, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 16
Swartz, Jean Evans, 95, Carlisle, Pa., June 15, 2023
Swigart, Jay Leon, 81, McVeytown, Pa., Oct. 15
Tucker, Kathryn Marie, 60, Frederick, Md., March 15
Van Winkle, Garnet Ann Stoner, 81, Newton, Iowa, April 22
Weaver, Mary Naomi Musser, 89, Lititz, Pa., April 7
Williams, Harry R., Sr., 89, Newville, Pa., Sept. 22

Ordained

Gibson, Susan, Virlina Dist. (Williamson Road, Roanoke, Va.), May 5
Reinford, Christopher, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Ephrata, Pa.), May 5

Placements

Bauer, Gary, interim team pastor, Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C., Jan. 1
Haldeman-Scarr, Sara, interim pastor, Ambler, Pa., April 1
Harris, Amber, interim team pastor, Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C., Jan. 1
Houser, Zechariah, interim team pastor, Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C., April 10
Klink, Aaron, interim team pastor, Peace Covenant, Durham, N.C., Jan. 1
Mosorjak, Gary, interim pastor, Roxbury, Johnstown, Pa., Jan. 1
Reed, Todd, pastor, Cedar Bluff, Boones Mill, Va., March 15
Stanton, David, pastor, Pike Run, Somerset, Pa., Jan. 1

To submit information for Turning Points, go to www.brethren.org/turning-points.

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

TURNINGPOINTS

Sabbath questions

“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death” (Exodus 31:15, also Exodus 35:2, NRSVue).

This past Sunday I planted three milkweed plants before church. My actions differed little from those of the man in Numbers 15 who gathered sticks on the sabbath. The Lord said that he should be put to death; the whole congregation stoned him.

Did Jesus change this? In Matthew 5, he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”



JAN FISCHER
BACHMAN

I guess I need to update my will.

But wait! Jesus’ disciples picked grain on the sabbath. The Pharisees asked Jesus why he let his disciples do “what is not lawful on the Sabbath.” It’s a reasonable question: why weren’t Jesus’ followers taking scripture seriously? Jesus reminded them that David ate the holy temple bread, which was only lawful for

priests. (No one stoned David.)

In the next chapter of Mark, Jesus went to the synagogue and encountered a man with a withered hand. Jesus asked the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” Silence.

Jesus healed the man. Of course.

The command to rest on the sabbath appears multiple times in scripture. It is not just any law: Exodus describes it as a sign between God and the ancient Israelites, a “perpetual covenant.” Keeping the sabbath is a requirement, a symbol, a metaphor, a marker of God’s people.

Jesus and his disciples did not keep the law in the way it was understood by educated and devout religious leaders of their time. Yet passages throughout the New Testament

repeat that Jesus “knew no sin,” “in him there is no sin,” he was “yet without sin.”

Jesus evidently kept the law the way God intended it.

This transforms my understanding. The Pharisees championed a formula for sabbath observance offering certainty. One could make a checklist and feel confident about following the rules and having the “right” theology.

The Jesus understanding of the sabbath includes meeting basic needs, healing, saving lives, doing good, and working to reduce harm—and killing. It is grounded in awareness of other people and their suffering.

It requires my attention, engagement, imagination, and action. It forces me to listen to the subtle prompting of the Holy Spirit.


Additional lessons I take from Jesus’ teaching:

Approach the Bible with humility. Understanding this clear and covenantal law requires a look at multiple Bible passages, along with consideration of Jesus’ actions. After all that, we still don’t know exactly how we are to keep the sabbath—and it may be different for different people, considering that priests were allowed to act in ways others were not.

Avoid using “The Bible says…” as a “gotcha.” The Bible says that I should be put to death for working on the sabbath (which is not Sunday—another issue.) Yet, call me biased, but I don’t think obeying the exact words of Exodus and killing me reflects the heart of God.

Acknowledge that longstanding ways of understanding the Bible can be wrong. The Pharisees stood firm, confident in the foundation of hundreds of years of traditional interpretations of the Torah. Mark 3 points out that their refusal to consider the needs of a suffering human over their understanding of righteousness angered and grieved Jesus.

Jesus shows anger and grief only a few times in the gospels. Observing the Pharisees prioritize traditional practices over a hurting human being makes him feel both.

I wonder how our worship—and world—might be transformed if we faithfully practiced the kind of sabbath Jesus demonstrated. 

“The Jesus understanding of the sabbath includes meeting basic needs, healing, saving lives, doing good, and working to reduce harm—and killing.”



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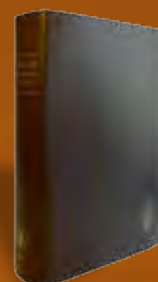
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