

MESSENGER
175
YEARS

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

MARCH 2026 WWW.BRETHREN.ORG





CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
MESSENGER

March 2026 Vol.175 No. 2 www.brethren.org/messenger

Publisher: Wendy McFadden Associate editor: Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford
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5 **Make a joyful noise**
by Robyn Reals

10 **Treasures in the Pearl of Africa**
by Jenn Hosler and Brittany Chadwick

15 **Tolstoy's Christianity**
by Paul D. Numrich

18 **Reorder and the resurrection**
by Joanna Wave Willoughby

22 **Feed the flock**
by Harry Jarrett

24 **Following Jesus in a time of war**
Messenger at 175

departments

- 3** FROM THE PUBLISHER
- 4** THE EXCHANGE
- 6** IN TOUCH
- 8** REFLECTIONS
- 9** POETRY
- 21** IMAGINE THAT!
- 26** BIBLE STUDY
- 28** NEWSLINE DIGEST
- 30** LETTERS
- 30** TURNING POINTS
- 31** POTLUCK

on the cover

Wildflowers in Trout Park in Elgin, Ill. Photo by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

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

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



Printed on recycled paper
(20% post consumer)

Of the making of lists

I am a maker of lists. In a chaotic world with lots to get done, it's the only way to feel remotely organized.

Adding something to a list means I can let it go—something else is keeping track of it for me.

Coincidentally, my lists of Books (to read) and Movies (to watch) have exactly the same number of items (in the hundreds). Fortunately, the Weekend list—code for “fairly soon,” regardless of the day—is much shorter.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

I separate chores that are not time-sensitive into Tasks (small things, like hem pants) and the gargantuan Big Jobs (replace the driveway). Though, to be honest, none of those chores, large or small, seem to get checked off very often.

As any serious list-maker knows, it's strategic to break projects into small steps so you can get the dopamine rush of frequent checkmarks. (But what is the first step that will get you out the door to clean the garage?)

I'm part of even more lists at work. You should see the array required to produce a year of MESSENGER or four quarters of worship bulletins.

Did we used to have fewer things to remember? Did things seem less overwhelming when the lists were written on paper? Why do I need lists of lists?

There are moments, however, when the to-do list seems disturbingly short:

- Save the planet
- Save the country
- Save the church
- Save our neighbor

It turns out that adding something to a list doesn't necessarily mean you can let it go. In fact, some lists are paralyzing. But what causes me to take heart is some of the lists found in scripture: Lists of commandments that tell us how to honor God and love our fellow humans. Lengthy genealogies, where the record is punctuated by the names of brave women who were outsiders but stood up to the powers of the day. Lists of the kind of people whom God blesses.

One list that comes to mind is so short that we don't have to write it down:

Do justice.

Love kindness.

Walk humbly with your God.

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” —Romans 12:12, NIV

“Faith is the force of life.” —author Leo Tolstoy

“Unless we teach children peace, someone else will teach them violence.” —journalist Colman McCarthy

“Peace cannot be bullied into existence.” —Palestinian politician Ali Jarbawi

“Lent is a much-needed mentor in an age obsessed with visible, measurable, manageable, and tweetable increase, for it invites us to walk with Jesus and his disciples through darker seasons that we would rather avoid.” —author Alicia Britt Chole

“Self-denial means knowing only Christ, and no longer oneself.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring.” —Saint Catherine of Siena



THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

A century ago, in 1926, the Dunkard Brethren split from the Church of the Brethren to form their own church. Areas of division included an increasing conformity to the world and a lack of sufficient church discipline as well as the move toward the professional ministry in congregations. The Dunkard Brethren Church continues today with about 20 congregations scattered across the country.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study (most recently carried out in 2023-2024), 62 percent of Americans identified as Christians, with another 29 percent identifying as “religiously unaffiliated.” Evangelical Protestants were the largest group of Christians (23 percent of Americans), with Catholics second (19 percent).



HOP TO IT

Rabbits became associated with the celebration of Easter due to their abundant fertility, part of the theme of new life that surrounds the Christian holiday. Can you find these rabbit-connected words in the puzzle below? Answers can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, forward or backward.

- RABBIT
- COTTONTAIL
- BUCK
- BURROW
- CARROT
- ANGORA
- DOE
- HOLE
- HARE
- HOPPING
- EARS
- BUNNY

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

BY THE NUMBERS

580

Number of youth who attended the 2022 Church of the Brethren National Youth

Conference (NYC) in Fort Collins, Colo. Registration is now open for the 2026 NYC, which will take place in Estes

Park, Colo., July 18-23. Learn more at www.brethren.org/nyc.



Chris Brumbaugh-Coyford



Make a joyful noise

Two elderly church ladies walk into a toy store

by Robyn Reals

There are quite a few lovely scriptures giving us license to whoop it up in praise of God's love and especially for his ultimate gift of Jesus. We treasure Jesus' birth, his life, his sacrifice, his Easter resurrection, and sometimes we just burst to spread the happiness!

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands" (Psalm 66:1, KJV).

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song" (Psalm 95:1-2, NIV).

Our pastor suggested the congregation celebrate Holy Humor Sunday the week after Easter. A member agreed to play his djembe. I already needed a kazoo for an Easter skit being prepared by the church drama group.

A friend from church and I entered the back entrance of a toy store down the street. One of the cashiers cheerfully greeted us from the store's front. She was a perfect fit for the youngsters in the store. Buoyant and bubbly, she waved to us amid the wandering shoppers.

The sales lady immediately targeted a selection of kazoos for us. Truth be told, one of my grandchildren had left one of these after a visit. I blew and blew and blew into it, with no sound. Since the funny thing didn't work, I trashed it without guilt. I was relieved to find the exact replica of the one I had tossed.

I excitedly opened it and tried to play it on our way out of the store. I blew and blew. Nothing but air. I discreetly returned to the front cashier and explained perhaps it was broken.

Our jolly saleslady said, "Hold on!" and reached for her own handbag. There is no way she has a kazoo in her bag, I thought.

Sure enough, she dug around and pulled out a silver kazoo and showed me how to rattle the walls.

I laughed hard, then tried. It was great. It was fun, and also hard to ignore. Oblivious of other salespersons and shoppers, I asked if she wanted to join me in a few bars of "Amazing Grace." And that is just what we did. After some good belly laughs and hilarious applause, my friend and I left the store. The new kazoo was put to repeated work that celebratory Sunday.

We spend years and years hearing and using the term, "Shhhh." As youngsters and adults, in schools, theaters, public transportation, hospitals, meetings, we are trained into polite silence.


Now, I learn that the Lord is waiting to hear from me—loudly, noisily, with a whole array of musical instruments and with song (even though I could clear a room with my tonal inequities). Shake the rafters with loud and joyful noise in praise of the Lord. Oh joy! Where does one begin?

Sunday after Sunday I wish we could fling open the windows when we are belting out a favorite hymn, or when our organist is playing a rousing number. I want everyone to hear the joyous noise we make singing about Jesus. Let our sounds fly out of the windows and through the neighborhood.

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 98:4-7, KJV).

Let loud singing, roaring seas, harps, drums, and crazy kazoos make joyful noise to the Lord.

We did.

Praise the Lord from corner stores and church windows. 

Robyn Reals is a member of Arlington (Va.) Church of the Brethren.

People gather around a memorial to Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, in this photo by Matt Rittle, pastor of Arlington (Va.) Church of the Brethren. He and Jenn Hosler of Washington (D.C.) City Church of the Brethren were among the interfaith pastors from around the country who answered a call from local organizers in Minneapolis for clergy to be present during recent large protests. The call was issued by MARCH (Multifaith Antiracism, Change & Healing). A few days later, Hosler also took part in civil disobedience in the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., as one of the clergy who deliberately chose to risk arrest.



Open Circle mobilizes to support Minneapolis

The communities that Open Circle Church of the Brethren in Burnsville, Minn., supports in the Minneapolis area have been in crisis since the federal immigration crackdown sent thousands of ICE agents to Minnesota. This is the harm that has been inflicted because of this action:

Immigrants have become afraid to leave their homes to buy food or to work, leaving them without food to eat, essential supplies, or money to pay rent and bills.

ICE agents targeting schools have caused them to shut down to protect the safety of students, and resulted in many children no longer attending their schools.

Vibrant immigrant businesses have experienced devastating financial loss as their patrons have vanished, either removed by ICE or forced into hiding.

Neighbors who fear racial profiling have ceased to seek out health care in fear of encountering ICE agents.

US citizens have been arrested for exercising their constitutional rights or because of their accents and skin color, resulting in the need for legal assistance.

Parents have been separated from children, sometimes leaving children without adults to care for them.

Protesters braving bitter cold to peacefully protest have been physically harmed by pepper spray, tear gas, chemical irritants, and ICE assaults. And, as everyone has seen, some have been shot and killed.

While Open Circle is a small congregation and the need has, at times, seemed overwhelming, church members have mobilized to support their community. The church hosted a citizen observer training with more than 130 attendees. Food collections and monetary donations have supported La Vina Comunidad Cristiana church in Burnsville and Dios Habla Hoy Ministries Inc. in South Minneapolis. Individual church members have offered

legal services, created a fund to assist the community, helped welcome those attending Friday prayers at the local mosque to show solidarity, supported a fundraiser for medics who assist citizen observers injured in protests, and participated in protests themselves.

Open Circle will continue these actions until neighbors are safe and the crisis resolves.—Janet Westenberg



Open Circle members hold signs in the cold Minneapolis winter.



A church member collects donations of diapers to aid Open Circle neighbors in the Minneapolis area.

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.

Grants received

■ University Baptist and Brethren Church in State College, Pa.—

known in the community as UBBC—this year will put 43 solar panels on the roof of its building. The project is aided



by a \$20,000 grant from the West Penn Energy Fund. The system will offset more than 100 percent of the building's annual 26,000 kWh energy consumption. It is expected to be operational toward the end of 2026.—Dick Jones

■ South Central Indiana District

has received grants from Lilly Endowment Inc. for an initiative called "Being the Body of Christ." The first grant funded 10 listening sessions in which more than 115 people from 30 congregations shared the challenges they are experiencing in their congregations including aging membership, lack of innovation and imagination, difficulty having hard conversations, strained relationships, and less relevance in and connection to local communities. Participants named a desire

for deeper, more connected relationships with each other and a willingness to learn practical tools that will help them foster authentic discipleship, community engagement, and radical belonging. To continue this work, Lilly Endowment Inc. gave a matching grant of \$200,000 to implement a transformational process with three components: leadership formation, district strategic planning and transformation, and new initiatives.—Laura A. Stone

■ **Bethany Theological Seminary** has received a \$10 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support its partnership with the six colleges and universities related to the Church of the Brethren. The grant establishes the Brethren Higher Education Consortium and UP@Bethany, fostering collaboration with the church-related schools and allowing juniors and seniors at those schools to take Bethany courses prior to receiving their undergraduate degrees.

Bethany also is among 10 seminaries benefiting from a \$10 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to New Brunswick Theological Seminary on behalf of AdminWise Shared Services, a nonprofit providing services and consulting expertise to theological schools. The grant allows AdminWise to expand in the areas of admissions, advancement, marketing and communications, and information technology, and also offer its employee health care initiative to additional schools.

Central Church becomes open and affirming

Central Church of the Brethren in Roanoke, Va., in mid-November 2025 became an Open and Affirming Congregation and joined the Supportive Communities Network of Brethren Mennonite Council. Prior to the church council vote, the leadership team suggested a work team to study and educate the congregation about the importance of taking this step.

The team held four work sessions and provided two listening sessions for the congregation before the church council action. In the months ahead, the team will continue to provide additional educational resources for the congregation to welcome all persons created in God's image.

The church's Welcome Statement said, in part, "Central Church of the Brethren is a faith community that seeks to follow the life example of Jesus Christ. As such, we are called to believe in Jesus as Lord, connected with unconditional love for one another, and compelled to serve our neighborhood, our City and beyond. . . . As followers of Jesus, we strive to be a Beloved Community where everyone is welcome and named as beloved."—Eric Anspaugh



Thomas Bilger-Hilger

Knobsville Church of the Brethren observed its 70th anniversary on Dec. 14, with a full house of members and visitors, including pastor Robert Bilger (at right) with retired pastor Chris Elliott (at left). Begun as a mission endeavor of Southern Pennsylvania District in a rural village, it opened in 1955 utilizing a remodeled one-room schoolhouse. The congregation soon became self-sustaining and in 1961 built the present brick structure on the same property. During this 70-year history there have been only four pastoral couples: Roger and Anna Markey, John and Ruth Sellers, Chris and Deloris Elliott, and current pastors Robert and Christine Bilger. Although a small congregation in one of Pennsylvania's most rural counties, Knobsville has produced several pastors, missionaries, and a college president.—Chris Elliott

A grant is available for church employees losing ACA credit for their health insurance plans.

The grant is for active employees of a Church of the Brethren district, camp, or congregation through the Church Workers Assistance Plan via Eder Financial. Write to cwgrants@eder.org.

In the land where Jesus walked

by Andy Hamilton

I have been trying to put into words my experience of traveling to Palestine this past fall. I took the trip in November, responding to an invitation.

The journey really began back in August, when I represented the Church of the Brethren at a gathering of religious and nonprofit organization leaders strategically working to respond to the genocide and ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza and Palestine. I heard firsthand accounts of what was occurring and how Palestinian Christians felt abandoned and betrayed by their Christian siblings in the West due to their silence and their support of the Israeli state. The details of the ongoing reality deeply disturbed my conscience. When the invitation was issued, I agreed to travel there.

This was not my first trip to the Holy Land. Back in 2013, as a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board, I was part of an educational trip to Palestine organized by the Telos Group. On that occasion, our group traveled with a delegation of American Baptist leaders, and it was in this context that I was introduced to the geopolitical reality of Palestine.

In 2015, I was asked to help lead another delegation from the Mission and Ministry Board with the Telos Group. Over the years, I have had the opportunity and privilege to experience the hospitality and faith of the Palestinian Arab community, especially within the Christian community.

This trip, however, was quite different from those earlier ones. Since the horrible attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the Israeli government has waged a brutal war on the people of Gaza and tightened its oppressive grip on the West Bank. This trip coincided with a gathering called Kairos Palestine, and I was traveling with Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). The purpose of this trip was to listen actively, see, and return to share what I witnessed.

From our first visits in East Jerusalem and Ramallah to our time with the Christian community in the historic village of Taybeh, I heard and saw a people weary of oppression but clinging to hope. At each stop, we saw evidence and heard stories of settlers' violent incursions trying to remove the Palestinian community.


LEARN MORE

The full Kairos paper, **"A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide,"** is available at https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/Final_Kairos_document_II_English.pdf.

One of the themes of meetings and visits I attended was the catastrophic effects of Christian Zionism. Such effects include how Christians in the West have used scripture to justify supporting the modern state of Israel's oppressive rule over Palestinians (including a genocide). Our Palestinian Christian siblings are calling us to condemn Christian Zionism as a perversion of the gospel of our Lord.

At the Kairos gathering in Bethlehem, leaders presented a paper that outlines their context and calls for a response from the wider Christian community. While I recommend reading the entire paper, titled "A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide," the following is the final paragraph in their call to response and action, highlighting solidarity:

Christian solidarity means standing beside and supporting the local church in its steadfastness, strengthening the steadfastness of believers in the land and empowering church and Christian institutions that embody the faith-based and humanitarian mission on the ground. Today we renew our appeal to Christians worldwide to challenge the siege imposed on the Christians of the Holy Land, to come and visit the *living stones*, to witness and respond to what you see, and to help strengthen the steadfastness of the Palestinians and the Christian Palestinians among them. This is our call: *"Come and see."* Then tell what you have seen, respond to it, and stand with the steadfast Church. (Kairos Document, paragraph 3.13).

May our prayers, our words, and our actions make it so. 

Andy Hamilton is district executive minister for the Church of the Brethren Southeastern District. He lives in Canton, N.C.

“ Our Palestinian Christian siblings are calling us to condemn Christian Zionism as a perversion of the gospel of our Lord. ”

For such a time as this


by **Peggy Faw Gish**

Not just for fairer skies,
but for times of trouble,
times of darkness,
you have been nurtured
and strengthened,

to be ready to respond
with wisdom and love,
to weep with those
who are threatened,
care for those cast out,
or those who are told
they don't belong.

You are anointed to
speak the truth boldly
as the prophets of old,
to call out and resist evil.

You are called to act,
even intervene,
not constrained by the risk,
knowing God is with you,
guiding your path,
alongside sisters and brothers
who help you when you fall.

Do not shrink with fear,
for you've been wonderfully made
and will be strengthened,
mount wings of eagles
for such a time as this. 

Peggy Faw Gish is a Church of the Brethren
member, farmer, author, and peace activist
living in Athens, Ohio.





TREASURES IN THE PEARL OF AFRICA

Uganda FaithX trip offers service opportunities and connections

by Jenn Hosler

When landing at the airport in Entebbe, Uganda, you are welcomed to “the Pearl of Africa.” Pearls are beautiful treasures formed by oysters underwater, under pressure. Uganda—its people and its landscape—are treasures, too: joyful people and gorgeous landscape, all formed by God.

Uganda is a politically and economically challenging context, yet our Brethren siblings in Christ there are resilient and resourceful. They continue the work of Jesus, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and living out the gospel through farming, orphan care, support for widows, a flour grinding mill, and other ministries.

The FaithX Trip to Uganda last July featured relationship building and service with the Church of the Brethren

in Uganda, one of the newer members of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion. For seven days, we visited congregations, toured church ministries, and carried out service projects at a church-run orphanage and elementary school.

The six of us who traveled there from the US last summer came from Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Kansas, and the District of Columbia. The trip was led by Gordon Hoffert (retired pastor and Country Advisory Team member for Uganda) and Colby Patton (seasoned FaithX participant and member of the Mission and Ministry Board).

Songs and dances greeted us as we met the Brethren in different congregations, some of them little village churches with rough-hewn walls and others with poured

“We learned about the Ugandan church’s ministries and spent time in fellowship—building relationships and extending love across social boundaries.”

Students from New Planet Star Academy march the team to the Bigando congregation.

cement floors and block walls. Our generous hosts offered us a bounty of food: matoke (mashed green bananas), cassava, beans, vegetables, and stewed meats.

We learned about the Ugandan church's ministries and spent time in fellowship—building relationships and extending love across social boundaries. We received generous hospitality and kindness from all our hosts, especially the leader of the Church of the Brethren in Uganda, Bwambale Sedrack, his wife, Diana, and their two small children, Shadrose and Sedriana.

Our first full day took us to the Mubende congregation, about halfway between Kampala and Kasese. The congregation met in a simple, open-air, metal-roofed building. We were received with traditional dancing and beautiful singing.



Stefanie Ketterman works at the group's sewing project, while a local expert provides guidance.

Then we traveled on to Kasese, where there is a concentration of Brethren congregations and ministries near the Rwenzori Mountains that border Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The next day brought us to the Radiant Star Orphanage and Junior School, where we worked on two service projects.

The Church of the Brethren in Uganda takes seriously the biblical exhortations to care for widows and orphans. Radiant Star is meeting a need for schooling and care recognized by the church, the community, and the local government. Some students at the school have lost both parents, while others have lost one parent, typically a father.

Radiant Star provides a caring environment to protect and enrich the lives of vulnerable children, despite the challenges the school faces with a lack of resources and a need to upgrade its buildings to meet government standards. The local government has been supportive of the ministry and provided a timeline for upgrades, which the church is working toward.

Our group was welcomed by students who had prepared songs for us. Lots of smiles reinforced the words of one song: "We are very happy, we are very, very happy, we are very happy to receive you, visitors!" Students flocked around us during recess and while we toured classrooms and dormitories and visited with children, teachers, and administrators.

Jenn Hosler preaches at the Rugendabara congregation, while translation is provided by Nzalumba Joshua, one of the pastors and headmaster of Radiant Star.





The Rugendabara congregation poses with the FaithX group.

Then carpenters and leaders of the sewing cooperative gave us an orientation to the work we had come to do. The two service projects were to build desks and bunk beds for students and to sew uniforms for students. For us, the work required flexibility and a willingness to do things differently.

Each FaithX participant spent time sewing or wood-working. Some members of our group joined with the carpentry work, using hand tools and learning the steps to make the bunk beds and desks. The work was slow, and there were not enough tools for everyone.

I joined the sewing team. After seeing the piles of fabric waiting, I expected that we would make an assembly line, with some people cutting and others sewing.

However, the practice in Uganda is not to mass-produce as many garments as possible in each size, but to measure each individual and provide a tailor-made skirt or pair of shorts. I also had to adjust to treadle sewing machines.

Our time at the orphanage and school was closed out by performances prepared by the children, with songs and skits.

A major element of the trip was to visit Church of the Brethren congregations. One day we headed to a little church building made of rough-cut lumber where the Rugendabara congregation meets and shared in worship.

On another day, we stopped at a church farm purchased in 2024, in part through a Global Food Initiative (GFI) grant. The farm was in the midst of maize harvest and had also harvested beans. We eventually came to

ABOUT UGANDA

When I heard about the Church of the Brethren in Uganda in 2024, I was both intrigued and impressed by the fledgling denomination. I was eager to meet these new Brethren.



The church organically emerged as Brethren without any leadership or initiation from existing Brethren denominations (American or otherwise). Led by Bwambale Sedrack, the group discovered the Church of the Brethren online and was profoundly moved by its beliefs and practices—especially peacemaking, the emphasis on the New Testament, and simple living. The church started calling themselves the Church of the Brethren in Uganda. They started developing formal connections with the US Church of



The Mubende congregation.

the Brethren later, a few years after that start.

Like many churches in sub-Saharan Africa, the Church of the Brethren in Uganda is ministering in contexts of deep poverty. Each congregation starts out committing to a service or justice ministry (for example, caring for orphans or widows) and an income-generation project, to help build a building, pay a pastor, and become sustainable. —Jenn Hosler

A large part of the service work was sewing uniforms for children at the Rising Star Orphanage, a ministry of the Uganda Church of the Brethren. Church members trained the group to use the sewing machines and make the skirts.

the Kendahi congregation, a “wattled and daub” (mud and wood) church building where we worshiped before heading onward to Bigando.

There we parked on a main street and were met by a parade of students from another church school, the New Planet Star Academy. The students marched us back to the Bigando congregation, next to where the school is also located. We worshiped again, this time in a large cement building, painted a welcoming purple color. We toured the school and observed a sewing cooperative run by the church.

The next day brought an early start to visit the picturesque Ndugutu congregation. The building is located in a hilly area, next to a small stream. Banana trees and coffee plants surround the church, along with a small mud brick-making operation to generate income.

It was a beautiful place to worship with our Ugandan siblings in Christ, who then shared delicious refreshments with us—freshly roasted ground nuts (peanuts), hard-boiled eggs, and little bananas. Later, we stopped by another church building near Hima, where

Colby Patton



we met with the district executive and learned about hopes to start a health clinic.

In Hima we visited a GFI-funded project, where a grain mill provides income for the church and an opportunity to help widows and others access grinding services at low or no cost.

The trek back to Kampala brought additional highlights: a few elephant sightings as we drove through Queen Elizabeth National Park and a stop at the equator. The evening in Kampala featured a program and dinner at Ndere Cultural Center, with drumming and dancing from many of Uganda’s ethnic groups. Some final excursions included the Gaddafi Mosque, where we toured the largest mosque in East Africa and learned more about Uganda’s Muslim minority.

Another service project for the Rising Star Orphanage was the construction of beds and desks. Jenn Hosler and Brittany Chadwick cut boards to the right length.

Colby Patton



ABOUT FAITHX


The FaithX program (formerly denominational workcamps) offers short-term service trips across the US and internationally for youth and adults each summer, as well as an older adult trip to Florida in February. The summer schedule is scaled back in years when there’s a National Youth Conference, but six trips are still being offered this year. Learn more at www.brethren.org/faithx. Registration closes April 1.



Brittany Chadwick, an elementary school teacher in Pennsylvania, leads a small lesson with children at the Rising Star Orphanage.

Our final activity was worship with the Shalom congregation at the edge of Kampala, where we sang, shared reflections from scripture, and gave greetings and blessings.

Fellowship on a global scale provides an opportunity to practice the beautiful Spirit-led reality that joins us as siblings in Christ across differences. The words of Paul from Colossians 1:3-6 rang true for me, so I used them during my preaching in Uganda: We thank God for you. We pray for you. We have heard how the gospel is bearing fruit through you.

The love of Jesus and the power of the Spirit unite us in love across boundaries, enabling us to pray for and encourage one another, bearing fruit in each of our contexts. Thanks be to God. 

Jenn Hosler is manager of the Church of the Brethren Global Food Initiative and serves on the pastoral team at Washington City Church of the Brethren in Washington, D.C.

BLESSINGS IN UGANDA

by Brittany Chadwick

Attending the FaithX trip in Uganda was an opportunity to be humbled.


Having been to Africa once in the past, I felt slightly prepared. I knew the living, housing, and food culture that I might expect, but I quickly experienced culture shock. I missed air conditioning, a soft bed, and my family. I forgot that God was my family.

The Brethren in Uganda were a family willing to love me, support me, and share fellowship with me. As the Gospel of John says, we are children of God born of God, recalling that we are all God's children and family. I was never alone in Uganda; instead, I added to my family in Christ.

God always provides for us what we need—not always as we wish, but in his way. God knew that our Ugandan family started an orphanage in need of desks, uniforms, books, and love. And so God sent this FaithX crew to Uganda to

help build and share these resources. God knew that the Uganda congregation needed the encouragement of seeing that they are not alone, but that they share in the work of God with the Church of the Brethren from the US.

Coming back home to my small town in Pennsylvania, I again enjoyed my cozy bed and air conditioning. There are people in Pennsylvania, in the United States, in Africa, and in the world who are less fortunate than I am in terms of material resources. But none of us are short on God's love and mercy.

Next time you lay your head on a soft pillow, pray for those in need and commit to sharing love and fellowship with all of God's family. 

Brittany Chadwick has attended FaithX trips in Rwanda, Spain, and Uganda. She attends Clover Creek Church of the Brethren and lives in James Creek, Pa.

“The Brethren in Uganda were a family willing to love me, support me, and share fellowship with me.”



TOLSTOY'S CHRISTIANITY

A cautionary tale

by Paul D. Numrich

I filed for conscientious objector status when I turned 18 in 1970. My draft board rejected my application, writing, “The registrant has professed his love for his fellow man, but fails to document demonstrative instances of actual participation in acts of love for his fellow man.”

That was true, and so I embarked on a spiritual journey that began with Mahatma Gandhi but shifted to Leo Tolstoy when I read that Gandhi considered himself “a humble follower of that great teacher whom I have long looked upon as one of my guides.” I eventually affiliated with the Church of the Brethren when I discovered that it took the Sermon on the Mount as seriously as did Tolstoy.

Readers may be aware of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1878), generally considered among the greatest novels ever written. They may not be aware that Tolstoy fell into deep emotional turmoil after each novel’s publication and eventually devoted his literary talents exclusively to religious topics, including pacifism and nonviolence.

Tolstoy greatly influenced me as I came of age during the Vietnam War and journeyed toward ordination in the Church of the Brethren. His religious writings helped to shape my understanding of Christianity, though I now see his story as a cautionary tale—not only for myself, but for all Brethren.

Lev (better known as Leo)

Nikolaevich Tolstoy was born in 1828 on his aristocratic family’s estate south of Moscow. According to biographer Andrei Zorin, he kept diaries in which “[h]e subjected his deeds, thoughts, and desires to harsh scrutiny, condemning his own self for a failure to abide by the highest moral ideals he had set.” A military career that included skirmishes in the Caucasus and serious combat during the Crimean War (1853-1856) set the stage for his eventual pacifism.

Tolstoy’s first explicitly religious writing, *My Confession* (1879), bares his inner unrest at that time. His literary fame had succeeded only in “stifling in my soul all questions about the meaning of my life and life in general.” Even if he became more famous than

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any other writer in history, he asks, “What of it?” Describing himself as “on every side surrounded by what is considered to be complete happiness,” he nevertheless hid a rope so as not to hang himself “and did not go out hunting with a gun, in order not to be tempted by an easy way of doing away with myself.”

Tolstoy reports that, by age 18, he no longer believed in the Christianity he had been taught as a child. He began a desperate search: “Is there in my life a meaning which would not be destroyed by my inevitable, imminent death?” Science, philosophy, and his own elite social circle provided no answer. Rather, he found an answer in what he called the “real faith” of ordinary believers, a faith that flows “from a mysterious beginning . . . God” and “[gives] to life a meaning which is not destroyed by death.”

In *My Religion* (1884), Tolstoy presents his interpretation of Christ’s core teaching and argues that the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian authorities have misunderstood or deliberately obscured that teaching, offering instead what he calls a “pseudo-Christian” religion. When he finally came to understand Christ’s core teaching, Tolstoy writes that he “completely freed myself of the church doctrine.”

For Tolstoy, this core is found in the five “rules” or “commandments” comprising “Christ’s law” in the Sermon on the Mount. The legalistic terminology here is crucial to understanding Tolstoy’s Christianity. Tolstoy summarizes the five rules as “not to be angry, not to commit debauch, not to swear, not to defend yourself, not to wage war.” Most importantly for him, “The passage which for me was the key to the whole was Verses 38 and 39 of the fifth chapter of Matthew. It hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you,

That ye resist not evil.”

Tolstoy is adamant that Christ expected his followers to keep his commandments. They are not impossible, as commentators and the church claim. He asks why people do not keep Christ’s commandments, “And on all sides I hear one and the same answer, expressed in different words, Christ’s teaching is very good, and it is true that, if it were executed, the kingdom of God would be established upon earth, but it is hard and so impracticable.”

Quite the contrary, argues Tolstoy, “[Christ] did not understand his teaching as a distant ideal of humanity, the execution of which is impossible, . . . but as a deed which would save humanity.” Tolstoy opens the concluding chapter of *My Religion* with this: “I believe in Christ’s teaching. . . . I believe that the fulfilment of this teaching is possible, easy, and joyful.”

Note that Tolstoy identifies the core of Christ’s teaching as ethical commandments rather than theological doctrine, claiming that “every person who has read the Gospel knows that in the gospels Christ either says nothing about this, or speaks in very doubtful terms.” According to Tolstoy, Christ proclaimed “the true, eternal law of God,” and we must conform our lives to it.

Tolstoy’s religious writings provided me biblical grounding for my conscientious objection to war, but they also showed me that I could challenge my religious upbringing and think for myself. His rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church was categorical, for which he was effectively excommunicated as “a new false teacher” (in their words). For a time, I engaged in a comparably categorical rejection of my upbringing, but today I am often reminded of what I retain from my past even as I have evolved out of it.

More importantly, I have evolved beyond Tolstoy’s views in significant



ways. In my initial encounter with him as a young adult, I was enthralled with his reasoning powers. I soon began to doubt the wisdom of placing too much trust in his words, largely because I felt myself slipping into his spiritual and moral quagmire.

Sadly, it seems Tolstoy never fully grasped the liberating effect of that “real faith” he observed in ordinary believers, nor did he find the fulfilment of Christ’s teaching “possible, easy, and joyful,” as he had claimed. He remained a prisoner of his reason. He never escaped the rational conclusion that he could not follow Christ’s teaching no matter how hard he tried. What happened when he failed to fulfil Christ’s teaching? He became unhappy and self-loathing.

“Tolstoy’s God is the perfectionist God of his childhood,” writes psychoanalyst Daniel Rancour-Laferriere. He suggests what this can mean to an adult who has never matured beyond such a childish understanding of God: “What does it mean for a child to seek perfection in the eyes of God? It means living with guilt about inevitable imperfection, for no one can be perfect. It means fear of punishment. God now seems to be a guilt-inducing martinet.”

“Tolstoy’s ardent strides toward per-

fection never resulted in any semblance of peace or serenity,” observes Christian author Philip Yancey. When he turned the unforgiving light of reason on his own life, “he was filled with disgust. He saw moral failure and hypocrisy and faithlessness. Perhaps for this reason few people today read his spiritual musings. . . . With crystal-line clarity, Tolstoy could see his own inadequacy in the light of God’s ideal. But he could not take the further step of trusting God’s grace to overcome that inadequacy.”


Tolstoy committed what Yancey calls the “worst tragedy,” namely, “to turn the Sermon on the Mount into another form of legalism.”

I said at the outset that Tolstoy’s story is a cautionary tale for Brethren. Allow me to draw the eminent Brethren scholar Dale W. Brown into this discussion. In *Brethren and Pacifism*, Brown noted that the “historical tendency of the Church of the Brethren has been to fall into a legalism of slavishly following Jesus and obeying literally his commandments.” As to the Sermon on the Mount, Brown argued that it is not “sheer moral principles or a list of entrance requirements into the kingdom.” Thus, “Pacifism should not become law; it should rather represent a

joyful response to and participation in the coming of the kingdom.”

The 1966 Annual Conference statement, “The Theological Basis of Personal Ethics,” got it right: “The gospel is not a new code of conduct. Legalism looks to a law or principle to find the specific requirements of God in a particular situation, but love supercedes the most exacting legal description of an act.”

Psychoanalyst Rancour-Laferriere suggests, “As a creative writer, the older Tolstoy parlayed his personal problems into a quasi-theological view of the world. Had he been less narcissistically oriented, and had he focused on God himself/herself, he might have offered us a real theology.”

I appreciate what Tolstoy’s quasi-theology did for me in my youth, but I am thankful for the real theology I discovered later. 

Paul D. Numrich is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren from Naperville, Ill., and Professor in the Snowden Chair for the Study of Religion and Interreligious Relations at Methodist Theological School in Ohio.

“Tolstoy could see his own inadequacy in the light of God’s ideal. But he could not take the further step of trusting God’s grace to overcome that inadequacy.”



REORDER AND THE RESURRECTION

by Joanna Wave Willoughby

Richard Rohr writes about order, disorder, and reorder.

He says transformation and change come in those three stages.

While he writes about this in his 2025 book *The Tears of Things*, he has been reflecting on these ideas for some time. As he described in 2017: “A sense of order is the easiest and most natural way to begin; it is a needed first ‘container.’ But this structure is dangerous if we stay in its safe confines too long. It is small and self-serving. It doesn’t know the full picture, but it thinks it does. ‘Order’ must be deconstructed by the trials and vagaries of life. We must go through a period of ‘disorder’ to grow up” (Center for Action and Contemplation, July 14, 2017).

To picture a time of “order” in the Church of the Brethren, some of us might think of the times when meeting houses were full, not just on Sunday morning but throughout the week. Love feast and fundraiser dinners were full of

people eager to be together and to do and be church together. Youth were bubbling up with great ideas for denominational programs like Brethren Volunteer Service. National Youth Conference was so big that it had to move from Estes Park to Fort Collins. Our camps were overflowing with kids spending time in nature and in community. It felt good to be part of something vibrant and growing.

But it didn’t feel good to everyone, and not everyone had a seat at the table.

Rohr addresses the next stage, which is disorder.

At some point in our lives we will be deeply disappointed by what we were originally taught, by where our choices have led us, or by the seemingly random tragedies that take place in all our lives. There will be a death, a disease, a disruption to our normal way of thinking or being in

the world. It is necessary if any real growth is to occur. This is the Disorder stage. . . .

Permanent residence in this stage tends to make people rather negative and cynical, usually angry, and quite opinionated and dogmatic as they search for some solid ground (Center for Action and Contemplation, Aug. 25, 2024).

We’re in a time of disorder, and we do not know when it will end.

Congregations have gotten smaller. Some have left the Church of the Brethren to do church differently, while still ministering to their community. Some congregations have sold their buildings and have closed altogether. Questions about who we are as a body have no definitive answers. We haven’t developed models of process and communication to deal with hard questions in a healthy way where everyone feels

“We are here in a time of discomfort. The disorder. The unknown. We are on the edge of great change whether we are ready or not. And God is with us.”

good about the process. We often walk away feeling like winners and losers.

Society is changing. People aren't having as many kids. Fewer people are in pews on Sunday morning and the church hasn't been able to adjust. Our big meeting houses have become a burden to some congregations. NYC is moving back to Estes Park. There are fewer people bringing their gifts to do and be church, but we are still together.

Our container is looking different. The safe confines within the church are feeling less cozy and a little scary. We haven't the tools yet to fully recover from a global pandemic. Our church members are facing dangerous deportations. Our beloved Nigeria and South Sudan continue to struggle with instability. Our global partners face war and famine. Christians around us have taken up a cross wrapped in a flag that seeks power and enforces an empire that the Jesus I know would not recognize.

To deal with tremendous change, we have decreased our budget, right-sized our organizations, and let go of some programs that used to be important to us. Some beloved servants have been asked to decrease their hours or their jobs have been eliminated entirely.

It's not just the Church of the Brethren seeing these changes. The effects are being felt by a large number of what used to be called mainline denominations. People are leaving the church of the 1950s for a variety of reasons, and many Sunday church services are trending smaller. But God is with us in this time of great change.

Do we maybe feel like the disciples felt after the devastation of Christ's crucifixion but before the resurrection? Is that melodramatic? Are we afraid because we don't know what is going to happen?

We want to jump directly from the crucifixion to the empty tomb. Naturally

it's hard to step from the known to the unknown—to leave our comfortable, orderly way of doing church. It feels like death, and there's no resurrection that we can see. But God is with us.

Change is messy. Sometimes it feels like failure. Everything seems so black and white. It's either this or that. Either/or. It's hard. Do we focus on evangelism or social justice? Do we join ecumenical groups or maintain our own identity and programs? Do we fund this project and end another? This is not familiar territory.

Roger Schrock once reminded me that all this is a marathon, not a sprint. In this time of change we may be planting trees that will never shade us.

In Numbers 14, we read that Moses had to answer to the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness. Some of the Israelites suggested that going back to Egypt would be preferable. They didn't know where they were going, and they weren't happy that there was no Google Maps telling them exactly where they were going, which lane to be in, and how long it would take to get there—down to the minute. They were tired of not having a plan. At least in Egypt, they knew what to expect, even if it meant returning to being slaves.

But the Church of the Brethren can't go back. We have no way to restore our previous order. It's not a puzzle. None of the pieces and parts to our past exist in the same way anymore.

But this is where we have the opportunity to lean in to the struggle. We don't know what is going to happen. We are here in a time of discomfort. The disorder. The unknown. We are on the edge of great change whether we are ready or not. And God is with us.

How often do we hear the dreaded phrases “unprecedented times” and “new normal”? We find ourselves reacting and not following a plan. Why do

growing and maturing have to be so painful? Couldn't we just form a study committee and let them wrestle with the issue so we can wait patiently for their answer? We are past the time when change must be enacted.

Rohr concludes:

Only in the final “reorder” stage can darkness and light coexist, can paradox be okay. We are finally at home in the only world that ever existed. This is true and contemplative knowing. Here death is a part of life, and failure is a part of victory. Opposites collide and unite, and everything belongs.

We dare not get rid of our pain before we have learned what it has to teach us. Most of religion gives answers too quickly, dismisses pain too easily, and seeks to be distracted—to maintain some ideal order. So we must resist the instant fix and acknowledge ourselves as beginners to be open to true transformation. In the great spiritual traditions, the wounds to our ego are our teachers and are to be welcomed. They should be paid attention to, not denied or even perfectly resolved. How can a Christian look at the Crucified One and not understand this essential point?

The Resurrected Christ is the icon of reorder. Once we can learn to live in this third spacious place, neither fighting nor fleeing reality but holding the creative tension, we are in the spacious place of grace out of which all newness comes. God is now in charge, not us.

There is no direct flight from order to reorder. You must go



Identity in Community

—Romans 12:4 & 5 (NIV)

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Church of the Brethren



Contact Becky Ullom Naugle in the Youth/Young Adult Ministry
Office with questions: bullomnaugle@brethren.org or 847-429-4385

through disorder, which is surely why Jesus dramatically and shockingly endured it on the cross. He knew we would all want to deny necessary suffering unless he made it overwhelmingly clear.

So here we are, ready to be safely settled into a time of reorder. We don't need to act like the Israelites confronting Moses, saying that maybe we just need to go back to Egypt. We need to gather around one another for prayer and encouragement. We need dreamers, doers, and cheerleaders. We need to listen to the visionaries and prophets among us. We need a letter from Paul written to us to help us figure this out.

I often wonder what Paul's letter might say to the Church of the Brethren right now. What would he compliment and how would he chasten us? Would he tell us to set aside our differences, our distractions so we can continue to be a strong voice for evangelism and social justice, creation care, and community? We have so much to give and we need to be freed up to do it.

I am remembering these words from Rohr: Opposites collide and unite. Like Anabaptism and Pietism? We have been walking the line of both/and for a long time. We are faith-filled and we struggle. And God is with us. Everything belongs. Both are necessary for growth. Joy and pain. Hope and despair. God is here through it all.

Can we still live with a spirit of abundance while reducing our budget and realigning priorities? Can we be both multicultural and open and affirming? Can we structure ourselves so that everyone has a voice at the table? Can we equip ourselves and one another to be innovative, fearless, and adaptable?

It's not either/or. Either/or mentality might be the death of us. It's time for both/and.

Joanna Wave Willoughby, from Common Spirit Church of the Brethren in Grand Rapids, Mich., is a member of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board. This article is adapted from a message she gave at the MMB meeting in October.

! "Imagine That!" is an occasional column inviting Christians to see things differently.

Giving up without giving in

by Don Fitzkee

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (Matthew 16:24-26).

Never give up!" Seems like good advice, and sometimes it is. Coaches encourage athletes with these words. Teachers and parents challenge children to keep trying in school even when it's hard. Even the apostle Paul urged Christians at Philippi to "press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Perseverance clearly is a Christian virtue.

But what if we are called to give up? Imagine that.

Some years ago, a co-pastor and I preached a series during Lent titled "Giving It Up." The focus was things we should give up not just for Lent, but for life. Rather than the usuals—like chocolate, meat, desserts, screen time, and social media—we addressed giving up things like control, selfish ambition, the right to get even, even life itself. But giving up is different than giving in.

Giving up is deliberately sacrificing our desires, comfort, or personal security for something greater, while giving in is surrender to things that should not rule us—like fear, temptation, or despair. Giving up is faithful. Giving in is almost always failure.


Jesus makes this distinction clear. He calls his followers to deny themselves, take up the cross, and lose their lives for his sake. That's giving up. But Jesus never calls us to give in to evil. He resists temptation in the wilderness, refuses to be

silenced by threats, and confronts injustice even when it costs him everything. On the cross, Jesus gives up his life freely, but he does not give in to hatred, fear, or violence. His surrender is not defeat; it is resistance. Christian surrender is giving ourselves so fully to God that evil loses its leverage over us.

As I write, tens of thousands of people—including some Brethren—are marching in Minneapolis in subzero temperatures to protest federal ICE agents who had been terrorizing and brutalizing immigrants and people of color in that city. Local businesses closed to express solidarity with the protest, sacrificing their income for a greater good.

A few days earlier, an FBI agent resigned her job when she was forbidden from investigating the homicide of Renee Good, who was killed by an ICE agent in Minneapolis. Instead, the Justice Department ordered an investigation of the victim and her family, prompting six Minnesota prosecutors to resign in protest. I don't know how many of these people were Christians, but I do know they all made great sacrifices. They understood giving up without giving in.

Many others across the country have been praying, investing time and energy in contacting legislators, writing letters to the editor, participating in vigils, and putting themselves at risk by documenting injustice in the streets.

Jesus doesn't call us to never give up; he calls us to never give in—and to give up whatever makes us want to give in. The phrase "I give up!" conjures images of raised hands or waving a white flag. Christ-followers have a different symbol for surrender—a cross. 

Don Fitzkee is a pastor at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and 2026 Annual Conference moderator.

“Jesus doesn't call us to never give up; he calls us to never give in—and to give up whatever makes us want to give in.”



FEED THE FLOCK

A one-sentence job description that transforms ministry

by Harry Jarrett

The Sheep, painting by Franz Marc, 1914.

I'm back in full-time pastoral ministry. I stepped away 13 years ago, burned out after more than two decades of vocational missionary and pastoral work, which culminated in serving a large, multi-staff congregation and moderating a conference. I could spend pages unpacking the reasons I hit the wall, but that's not the point of this piece.

What matters is what I learned in the in-between.

During those 13 years, I served in two intentional pastoral interims, but mostly I sat in the pews of the congregations my wife pastored. I listened, prayed, and watched. And I loved it. I was a proud pew potato!

I also worked outside the church, running a small business at our wedding venue and working in sales for a large hotel and conference center. I eventually became general manager of a Courtyard by Marriott. Those “secular” seasons gave

me new tools and a fresh vantage point on people, systems, and health.

After a two-year period of discernment, I accepted a call to return to a full-time pastorate. Early on, something crystallized—something I had missed before: *The primary role of a pastor is to care for the people in our charge.* Their spiritual, emotional, communal, social, and even physical well-being is the north star. Everything else is secondary.

I hear Jesus' words to Peter ringing three times for emphasis: “Feed my lambs.... Tend my sheep.... Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

When Jesus repeats himself, pay attention. I wish I had. In my earlier season, I often functioned as chief visionary, chief strategist, chief program officer, chief staff supervisor—sometimes even a congregational CEO. None of those roles is inherently wrong; they're just not the center.

Coming back, I have chosen a different center: *Tend the flock I have.* Not the hypothetical future church I might wish to have, not the ideal membership I hope to attract, and not the former era I have no interest in recovering. Tend the people God has already entrusted to me—today.

You may ask, “Why didn't he know this already?” I asked myself the same question.

The truth is, I did know it. I taught it, I practiced it, and I believed it. But it was not the locus—the center, the mission—of my pastoral identity. Other foci crept toward the middle: expectations, urgency, optics, even my own desire to be helpful. In this new season of ministry, tending toward health has moved from something I valued to the core that orders everything else. That shift—from an important value to the organizing center—has changed how I pray, plan, and lead.

“When a congregation is healthy, it will care well for one another, welcome the stranger, protect the vulnerable, and—yes—often grow.”

Health before growth

In business, I watched a basic truth play out: *Healthy things grow*. Not because you force growth, but because health creates the conditions where growth is likely—organically, sustainably, and often surprisingly. Healthy teams communicate. Healthy systems adapt. Healthy leaders replicate health.

Translate that to pastoral ministry and it sounds like this: When a congregation is healthy, it will care well for one another, welcome the stranger, protect the vulnerable, and—yes—often grow. The growth may not always be numerical; it might be depth of discipleship, resilience in hardship, or generosity in mission. But growth follows health far more reliably than health follows growth.

So my single-sentence job description now reads: “*Tend the flock in my charge toward spiritual, emotional, relational, and communal health.*” Vision, strategy, and programming still matter—but they flow from this center.

What we carry—and what we don’t

Tending is not rescuing. We cannot take on the burden of another person’s health—spiritual, emotional, or physical. We can only cultivate conditions that *foster* health in others: prayerful presence, trustworthy relationships, wise boundaries, good referrals, and practices that invite people to participate in their own healing.

Paradoxically, this is part of tending our *own* health as pastors. When we try to carry what only Christ can carry or control what only another person can choose, we fracture ourselves and confuse our role.

Healthy shepherds name limits, share loads, and honor agency. We preach grace, but we also practice it—by refusing messiah-complexes and honoring

sabbath. My rule of life now includes a simple boundary question: “Is this mine to carry, or mine to tend?”

What tending looks like

These are practices from my doable week:

■ **Name the people, not just the plans.** In every meeting agenda, the first item is a person: someone grieving, someone new, someone drifting, someone whose gifts need blessing.

■ **Measure symptoms of health, not just outputs.** In addition to attendance and giving, we watch “vital signs”: pastoral contacts, conflict temperature, newcomer follow-ups, volunteer fatigue, and reconciliations attempted.

■ **Right-size the calendar.**

Overprogramming is a health hazard. We prune so that relationships, sabbath, and margin can breathe.

■ **Normalize seeking help.** Pastoral care includes referrals to counselors, spiritual directors, recovery groups, and physicians. Shepherds sometimes need the assistance of other shepherds and veterinarians.

■ **Form leaders as caregivers first.**

Whatever the role, we train ourselves to maintain a heart posture of attending to the person in front of us.

■ **Preach for practice.** Aim sermons at *orthopraxy* (right practice) as much as *orthodoxy* (right belief). Each message asks: So, what? Why does this matter? What will caring for one another look like by Tuesday?

Holy endings

Healthy ecosystems include death. Pruning can be faithful. Programs end. People move. Saints die. Grief is not a sign that health is gone; it is evidence that love has had real weight among us. Tending a flock includes approaching losses in healthy ways—telling the truth, making

room for lament, practicing hospitality toward sorrow, and marking endings with gratitude and blessing. Holy endings create compost for future life.

The theology underneath

Here are some of the foundations under all this:

■ **Ecclesiology:** The church is a people to be cherished before it is a program to be run.

■ **Orthodoxy and orthopraxy:** Right belief must become right care.

■ **Theopoetics:** The gospel is embodied in the life poetry of the divine *poiema* taking agency in and through the priesthood of all the believers—lived in kitchens, hospital rooms, and fellowship halls.


■ **Epistemology:** We come to know God not only by statements about God but by participating in God’s shepherding life among us.

None of this rejects vision or mission. It just orders them: care first, then organize whatever supports care.

A word to the pastor on the edge

If you’re burned out—or afraid you’re close—consider adopting this clarifying sentence for a season. Write it at the top of your planner, your sermon outline, your council agenda: “My primary work this week is to tend to the people in my care towards health.”

Then let other tasks align or fall away. You may find, as I have, that this focus is simpler than the old way: simpler because it removes a thousand false centers and aligns us to focus on presence, patience, and prayer.

Healthy things grow. Start with health. We are called to take care and feed, leaving the rest to God. 

Harry Jarrett is pastor of Pleasant Valley Church of the Brethren in Weyers Cave, Va.

Following Jesus in a time of war

April 21, 1917

Exemption from Bearing Arms

AT THE REQUEST OF THE BRETHREN from different sections of the Brotherhood, a committee, consisting of Brethren I.W. Taylor, W.J. Swigart, Henry Gibbel, and H.C. Early, went to Washington, D.C., April 10, in the interest of exemption from military service for the Brethren and noncombatants.

... The following extracts are from the senate bills, and speak for themselves:

“That members of any religious sect or organization, now organized and existing, whose creed forbids its members to bear arms in war, shall not be required to undergo training in the bearing or use of arms, but shall be trained in the non-combatant branches of the military or naval service.”

“That any person, liable for military service, under the provisions of this Act, who shall be accepted and called out for such service under this Act, and who shall under oath declare that he is conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and is prohibited from so doing by the tenets, rules and articles of faith of any now existing religious denomination to which he belongs, and who shall prove, by satisfactory evidence, that his conduct and deportment have been uniformly consistent with such declaration, shall be employed on such duties, not involving the bearing of arms, as the Secretary of War may direct.”

The Committee on Military Affairs ... stated to us that the committee, to a man, stands for the exemption provision. It has also the support of President Wilson and Secretary of War Baker, besides general support in both branches of Congress, so far as we were able to learn conditions. So it seems practically certain that it will become law. ...

An effort was made to interview the President, but he is so overrun with duties, at the present time, that he could

not be seen. However, we had a conference with his secretary, Mr. Tumulty, who assured us of his moral support. Congressmen interviewed received us cordially, and all, except one, pledged their support of the exemption provision. ... One senator, on the floor of the Senate, stated yesterday that he had received from 500 to 800 telegrams since this extra session of Congress began, April 2.

... It must not be thought that matters of exemption from military entanglement for noncombatants are settled. They are not. And the Brethren, all over the land, are urged to write their representatives in Congress, setting forth their position on military training and service; also on military training in the public schools, since action by Congress may be expected on this subject.

H.C.E.

January 5, 1918

Gathering Strength in Days of Sorrow

THERE WAS A PARAGRAPH in a recent Sunday-school lesson peculiarly pertinent to these days in which so many things are happening to start our tears. On that memorable day when Ezra and his helpers read and explained the law to the people, it is said the people wept. Did the reading tend to freshen up their memories of all the tragedy the nation had gone through since the ancient glory had been destroyed? And did it make them sadly wonder whether the future could ever be so glorious as the past had been? And did it, worst of all, prick their consciences with conviction of wrongs committed and duties left undone? Small wonder that they wept.

But listen now to the counsel of Nehemiah and his brethren: “Mourn not, nor weep ... Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our

“**WEEP? YES, SOMETIMES. IT WILL RELIEVE OUR BURDENED SPIRITS. BUT THIS MUST NOT BE TOO FREQUENT, NOR TOO PROLONGED. THERE IS TOO MUCH WORK TO DO.**”

“THE WORLD HAS NEVER MORE URGENTLY NEEDED THE LOVE MANIFESTED IN TRUE CHRISTIANITY THAN IT DOES NOW.”

Lord: neither be ye grieved; for the joy of Jehovah is your strength.”

Do you note the kindly gentleness in that reproof? It can hardly be called reproof at all. The people could not be blamed for weeping, some. How could they help it? And yet they must not weep too much. It was time to cease. There were more important things to do. They must “send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared.” And, most significant of all, they will need strength for the tasks before them. And that is to be found in “the joy of Jehovah.”

How intensely practical this is for us—for all of us who must do our work even while we carry some load of personal sorrow. Weep? Yes, sometimes. It will relieve our burdened spirits. But this must not be too frequent, nor too prolonged. There is too much work to do. There are too many people “for whom nothing is prepared.” We must send portions to them. We must conserve and gather strength for our tasks of spiritual ministrations. And this we can not do with too much weeping. Brace up. Eat and drink. Make merry and be glad. Smile and go to work again. “The joy of Jehovah is our strength.”

November 16, 1918

Shall We Love the Germans?

By Edgar Rothrock
Holmesville, Nebr.

LOVE YOUR FRIENDS, and let your enemies look out for themselves,” said a Sunday-school teacher in a nearby town to his class, one Sunday morning, recently. This teacher, after a year and a half of war with Germany, decided it would be wrong to love the Germans...

“Shall we love the Germans?” is a pertinent question at the present time. In attempting to answer it the writer has no desire to either excuse or minimize the atrocities perpetrated by the German militarists during the last four years. But let us consider fairly what Jesus meant when he said: “Love your enemies.”

I. HIS TEACHING

He established a new Kingdom upon the earth, founded upon new principles. At his birth the angels heralded the great purpose of his coming, when they sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave to his disciples the consti-

tution of his Kingdom. [quotes from the Sermon on the Mount] . . . To be a citizen of his Kingdom means far more than to be under the old law. It means that our righteousness will exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees . . . , if we enter into the new and living way where he walks and leads.

II. HIS EXAMPLE

Jesus not only loved his friends but he died for his enemies. . . . “Your way leads to destruction,” he said, “my way leads to life.” His example and teaching have done more to make this old world a fit place to live in than any other agency in the course of human progress.

III. THE MOTIVE OF CHRISTIANITY

When one reads of “pure, God-like hate for the Germans,” as if any hatred of men can be God-like when it was never Christ-like, or when Bishop Quayle in a sermon, which was published widely, applies such adjectives as “pro-German,” “impious,” “spineless,” and “godless” to those who express love for our German enemies, I feel that a vital, fundamental teaching of our Savior has been attacked. This blind teaching—that we owe no good-will to our enemies—which is being put forward in America, is a dagger aimed at the heart of Christianity. That beloved apostle John said that one can not even love God, if he hates his fellowman. . . . The motive of Christianity is love. . . . The world has never more urgently needed the love manifested in true Christianity than it does now.

IV. HOW SHALL WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE?

These are stern times, when actions rather than words count. . . . Christianity will soon have added to the already unparalleled opportunities of the present hour, the opportunity of ministering to the German people. Our President has wisely said that when the war is over we shall establish no justice for ourselves which differs essentially from that which we shall give to our foes. Secretary Lansing says: “A justice tempered with mercy.” “With malice toward none but with charity toward all” we must lead them back to the Christian point of view.

. . . Booker T. Washington keenly felt the cruelty and injustice of the lawlessness by which some of this people, without trial, and virtually under the protection of the authorities, were burned at the stake. Despite all that, he could say that “no white man could ever compel him to fall so low as to hate him.” Shall we, then repeal the law of Christ in respect to our enemies?

Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:42-45

Helping neighbors in need

by Liz Bidgood Enders

Deuteronomy 15 includes a set of sabbatical laws. Just as people are commanded to rest on the Sabbath, the land and all who live on it are to be set free every seventh year. It points to God who is fundamentally about redeeming life from oppression. The call to release claims on land and debtors is a reminder that God is the source of life and blessings. People are called to release whatever debts others owe them as God releases the debts people owe to God. This freedom allows people to faithfully live out the Sabbath. No one who carries a heavy burden can truly rest or focus on what makes life meaningful.

This land is your land

Exodus 23 introduces the command for sabbatical years. Land that is normally tilled and harvested must lie fallow every seventh year. From an

agricultural perspective, this practice allows nutrients in the soil to be replenished. From a larger perspective, it also allows animals to freely graze and for those who are sojourners to have access to what grows on its own.

These commandments are part of the landscape of Deuteronomy 15. Including the first three verses of the chapter, neighbors are restored to a place of equality with one another. Even so, there is a distinction between those who are insiders and those who remain outside of the community. Strangers in the land still owe whatever debts they have incurred.

Today, we are challenged to care for the land and to care for all who live on it, but issues of indebtedness are just as present as they were in biblical times.

This land is my land

During the 2022 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, Ted

Swartz and Michelle Milne of Ted & Company performed the play *We Own This Now*. Created by Allison Casella Brookins, it asks the question, “What if the land you love was stolen?”

Weaving multiple family stories of connection to land and loss, it challenges the Doctrine of Discovery. The policy usurped land that had been home for Indigenous Peoples and gave it to settlers who may have had no idea that other peoples had lived there. The play explores what it means to own something and take ownership for actions.

As a member of the audience, I was both drawn into the story and disturbed by my own complicity in living without consideration of who had lived where I stood or what had become of their rights to live peaceably. I wonder about the Israelites who entered Promised Land that was already occupied. Both the play and the commandments in

“In the commandments to care for those in need, a faithful response requires more than offering prayer or even a donation.”

Deuteronomy challenge people of faith to pay attention to what is just and to be mindful of the needs and rights of people in whose footsteps we walk.

The Deuteronomist is confident that with trust in God and faithful observance of the commandments, no one will experience need. For a people who had spent 40 years in the wilderness, that affirmation continued the promise of care they had received with manna and quail—but in a new land, they would need to actively tend the land and nurture growth. They longed to settle in a land that promised stability and safety.

The fact that they would be given land currently occupied by others did not seem to be a source of discussion or conflict. The command only addresses those who had been part of this journey from slavery to freedom. With God's blessing, they would have the luxury to be generous, to loan and not have to worry about needing to borrow.

Embodied care

In the commandments to care for those in need, a faithful response requires more than offering prayer or even a donation. In the *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* on Deuteronomy, Gerald Gerbrandt names hand, heart, and eye as components of active care. While the NRSVue names hand twice in these verses, in Hebrew, it is used five times: verse 2 (the loan of your hand), verse 3 (your hand shall release), verse 7 (tight-fisted), and verses 8 and 11 (open your hand). Gerbrandt writes, “the hand reflects and represents the power the wealthy have over the poor” (p. 289).

Additionally, the heart is named three times: verse 7 (do not be hard-hearted), verse 9 (do not hold a base

thought in your heart), and verse 10 (your heart shall not be grudging when you give). It is not enough to give. The intention of the heart matters in faithful response to God's commandments.

Finally, to respond to the needs of a neighbor, we must see them with love. Verse 9 (do not view your neighbor with hostility) is a call to not refrain from doing what is right by focusing on the nearness of the year of sabbath and holding back needed help. If we see someone in need, we cannot pretend to be blind to the need or focus on our own gains, using the proximity of the coming sabbath year as an excuse.

Sometimes it is about you

Deuteronomy includes multiple laws, contextualized by language that is personal and points to relationships. Those in need are neighbors, family, and members of the community. This set of laws is a personal directive to individuals and the wider community. In these verses, the word “you” is included 21 times. The ones who need help are not apart from familiar social circles.


Faithful discipleship continually asks the question of how far these circles expand. In its original context and in our discernment today, how far are we willing to stretch ourselves to see the needs of our neighbors? How far does it reach into our past, and how far does it extend into the future?

Matthew 25:31-46 is commonly called the “parable of the sheep and goats” or “the judgment of the nations.” In the verses quoted for this lesson, the king condemns the goats for failing to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome to the stranger, clothing to the naked, and company for

those who are sick or in prison. They, like the sheep, do not realize that caring for any of these is the same as caring for the Lord. The difference between the two groups is that the sheep provide care without consideration of any reward, while the goats neglect the call to care for the benefit of all in the community.

We are challenged to engage and expand our understanding of neighbor. The parable of the good Samaritan is one part of this discernment, but an understanding of economic justice expands to an understanding of community that includes fair use of resources. The term “reparations” refers to making amends for a wrong that has been done. Following times of war, countries make payments from one to another, recognizing undue hardships imposed on a people and a country's resources.

In the US, reparations have been part of discussions for a complicated history of treatment of Indigenous persons, African Americans, and others who have been marginalized or dehumanized as a result of colonialism. Recognizing how practices have led to multi-generational imbalances, specific initiatives attempt to even the playing field, restoring land to those who were pushed away and who were prevented from having property of their own.

We are called to share what we have with equity, restoring what has been taken away, including people's sense of honor and dignity. 

This Bible study is reprinted from the spring 2026 quarter of *A Guide for Biblical Studies*, published by Brethren Press. The quarter is co-written by Liz Bidgood Enders and Naomi Kraenbring, members of the pastoral team at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

Haitian church members in US face end of TPS

The Department of Homeland Security moved to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians living in the US, as of 11:59 p.m. on Feb. 3. However, a US district judge ordered a stay in a last-minute ruling on Feb. 2. It is unknown how long the stay will be in effect.

The Church of the Brethren Deportation Defense Response Team called for intercessory prayer for the approximately 200 members of the Church of the Brethren, among some 350,000 Haitians living in the US, who will be affected if TPS is ended.

Effects may include loss of employment and deportation.

TPS is a government designation allowing immigrants to legally live in the US when their home countries are unsafe because of armed conflict, environmental disasters, or other extraordinary conditions that prevent a safe return. TPS has been applied to Haitians almost continuously since 2011. Its termination was announced despite the lack of safe return to Haiti, where there is ongoing violence and a severe humanitarian crisis.

Funds close out 2025 with grants

Emergency Disaster Fund

- \$120,000 for the Hurricane Melissa longterm recovery program of Église des Frères d'Haïti, aiding families affected by the storm in Haiti. Another \$5,000 extended Hurricane Melissa emergency relief to Cuba via connections made by the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela.
- \$20,000 for the Restoring Hope Campaign of Bethlehem Bible College's Shepherd Society in Gaza, aiding children who have suffered injuries and trauma.
- \$19,850 for work by the Church of the Brethren in Uganda to repair a school damaged by a severe storm.

- \$8,500 for purchase of a vehicle by the Burundi Church of the Brethren to support disaster and crisis response.
- \$5,000 for response to the humanitarian crisis in Ecuador by Fundación Brethren y Unida (FBU, Brethren and United Foundation).

Global Food Initiative

- \$35,000 for the Small Animal Microbusiness Projects of Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG) in Honduras.
- \$19,000 for the Kanembwe Poultry Farming Initiative of the Church of the Brethren in Rwanda and another \$1,780 for clean water projects.
- \$8,000 for a school gardening and

nutrition education program of FBU in Ecuador.

- \$5,000 for the Soybean Value Chain project of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria.
- \$3,410 for the Food Bank Ministry of Alpha and Omega Community Center in Lancaster, Pa.
- \$2,500 for the food pantry at Hatfield (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.
- \$2,500 for the Mountaineers' Table Ministry of Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

Brethren Faith in Action Fund

- \$5,000 for legal expenses of immigrant families at Jesus Lounge Ministry in West Delray Beach, Fla.
- \$5,000 for a food pantry of Living Faith Church of the Brethren in Concord, N.C.
- \$5,000 for purchase of a van for food distribution by Naples Haitian Church of the Brethren in East Naples, Fla.
- \$5,000 for a Kingian Nonviolence Training led by On Earth Peace at Wichita (Kan.) First Church of the Brethren.
- \$4,667 for immigrant and refugee support by West Charleston Church of the Brethren in Tipp City, Ohio.
- \$3,333.33 for a food pantry at Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren.
- \$2,000 for a Live Nativity community outreach of Sangerville Church of the Brethren in Bridgewater, Va.



More than 95 volunteers from Brethren Disaster Ministries traveled from Sept. 15 to Nov. 21 to Johnson County, Tenn., to support 11 households affected by Hurricane Helene. The work was in partnership with International Orthodox Christian Charities and the Johnson County Long Term Recovery Group.



Children's Disaster Services cared for children during a first anniversary American Airlines Flight 5342 memorial in January. The memorial for 67 people killed in the mid-air collision with a military helicopter over the Potomac River took place Jan. 29. CDS sent this team of Critical Response Care volunteers at the request of the Red Cross. The team, which is specially trained to respond after an aviation incident or other mass casualty, provided children and parents with a place to find respite during the emotionally taxing day.

The Church of the Brethren Yearbook will not be published for 2025. Standing orders have been suspended after the Yearbook office was moved from Brethren Press to Mission Advancement. The 2024 edition is available to purchase at www.brethrenpress.com/product_p/year2053.htm.

Personnel

Pat Marsh retires May 29 as manager of accounting and assistant treasurer for the Church of the Brethren. She has worked for the denomination for 31 years, since January 1995 when she started as an accountant. In her most recent role, which began in April 2020, she has managed the general ledger, prepared financial statements, assisted with the organizational budget, and served as lead staff for the audit. Her extensive accounting knowledge and devotion to accuracy have been significant assets over the three decades.

Jenn Dorsch-Messler on Jan. 9 resigned as director of Brethren Disaster Ministries, after serving for more than 10 years since Feb. 24, 2015. She led the Home Rebuilding Program, nurturing a network of volunteers and supporters while also serving as representative to national disaster response groups. Her personal involvement in disaster relief included, in late 2024, a tour of areas hit by Hurricane Helene in Southeastern District. She has accepted a position on a new executive leadership team at Mennonite Disaster Service in Lititz, Pa.

Traci Rabenstein resigns on April 3 as executive director of Mission Advancement

for the Church of the Brethren to become Southern Pennsylvania District executive. She began on the denominational staff in October 2016 as a congregational support representative in Donor Relations and assumed her current role in 2023. She is an ordained minister and has been a youth director and youth pastor. Her leadership in the district has included service as moderator and board chair of Cross Keys Village—The Brethren Home. She holds a Training in Ministry certificate from the Brethren Academy.

Chelsea Skillen on Feb. 10 resigned as director of Brethren Volunteer Service after having led BVS since Oct. 24, 2022. During her tenure BVS continued to develop new models for orientation and volunteer placement, added new placement sites, began a pilot Early Enrollment Program, and moved to remote work. Her previous work for the church included two years as a BVS volunteer and service with On Earth Peace, New Community Project, and Camp Bethel. She is moving to Portugal to join her husband's publishing business.

Marissa Witkovsky-Eldred and **Virginia Rendler** began Jan. 26 as interim co-directors

of BVS. Witkovsky-Eldred will lead administration of BVS while continuing as coordinator of FaithX. Rendler will lead development and partner relationships while continuing as coordinator of volunteers.

Raul Rivera Arroyo began Feb. 2 as part-time administrative assistant for the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, working remotely. His prior employment included a supportive role with the Church of the Brethren in Puerto Rico. He holds a master of divinity from Bethany Seminary.

Sydney Goldsborough has begun as fulltime director of administration and communication for On Earth Peace. She first worked for On Earth Peace in 2023 as social media intern and most recently was communications coordinator.

Adam Swartz, a licensed CPA and a member of Stevens Hill Church of the Brethren, began Jan. 1 as part-time director of finance for Atlantic Northeast District. **Kay Weaver**, former interim director of finance, has become district treasurer.

Erik Brummett has resigned from the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board. He was elected in July 2024.



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Reminiscing

I really enjoyed reminiscing while reading “Leading the Way” in the December issue. I have good memories of experiences at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

As a youth group, we processed clothes and stayed overnight in dorm rooms. Church groups went down for the day to deliver school kits, clean-up kits, and health kits. The day was spent checking the kits to see if they were complete. Others packaged the kits in large boxes to be shipped. We counted, recorded the number of kits in each box, taped the boxes shut, weighed the boxes, and sent them on the conveyor belt.

My future husband, Gary Shenk, in 1966 trained in Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 70 at New Windsor. Half of his day was spent in the classroom and the other half was spent sorting clothes and loading and unloading trucks at the Material Resources center.

Janice Shenk
Manheim, Pa.

■ **Treasures in the Pearl of Africa** is a fanciful title, but FaithX participants did discover treasures in Uganda. Its people and its landscape are treasures, writes Jenn Hosler. What other treasures of faith and witness did the FaithX trip discover? What words describe the church in Uganda and its members? What are the ministries of that church? Who do they serve? Where and how have you participated in “fellowship on a global scale” that provided “an opportunity to practice the beautiful Spirit-led reality that joins us as siblings in Christ across differences”?

■ **Reorder and the resurrection** are happening in the Church of the Brethren, writes Joanna Wave Willoughby. Relying on the thought of Richard Rohr, she addresses why this time requires us to accept the “reorder” of the church. Why is disorder part of this process? When and how have you felt disorder in the church? How have you seen that resolve or become something new? If you have seen resurrection in the church, what does it look like? Answer this question for yourself: “Do we maybe feel like the disciples felt after the devastation of Christ’s crucifixion but before the resurrection?”

TURNINGPOINTS

Centenarians

Blickenstaff, Nelda, 99, Boise, Idaho, Nov. 21
Frantz, Violet, 100, Bethel, Pa., Feb. 26
Helser, Maxine, 100, Rushville, Ohio, Dec. 18
Miller, Margaret Lee (Flora), 100, Salem, Va., July 18
Miller, Phyllis, 102, Columbia City, Ind., Nov. 29
Schade, Alfred, 102, Tipp City, Ohio, Dec. 27
Waybright, Arvetta, 103, Weyers Cave, Va., Jan. 3

MESSINGER only recently received the ministerial listings for the year 2025. This delay was due to reductions in staffing in the Ministry Office and the data breach at the denominational offices.

Ordained

Bakwash, Yakubu Bulus, Mid-Atl. Dist. (GraceWay, Dundalk, Md.), Aug. 10
Cole, Michael, Ill. and Wis. Dist. (Dixon, Ill.), Aug. 10
Davis, James, N. Ind. Dist. (Union Center, Nappanee, Ind.), May 20
Fuska, Christopher D., Mid. Pa. Dist. (Holidaysburg, Pa.), Feb. 26
Hamilton, Laura, Southeastern Dist. (Mill Creek, Columbus, N.C.), June 15
Horst, Deborah J., Shen. Dist. (Wakemans Grove, Edinburg,

Va.), March 9
Matarese, Phillip A., N. Ind. Dist. (Lincolnshire, Fort Wayne, Ind.), May 18
McAllister, C. Ryan, Shen. Dist. (Mill Creek, Va.), March 23
Moss, Joseph A., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Dranesville, Herndon, Va.), Nov. 15
Rinehart, Dylan A., Mid-Atl. Dist. (Thurmont, Md), May 18
Roop, Calvin, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Heidelberg, Schaefferstown, Pa.), Aug. 5
Sizemore, Timothy, Southeastern Dist. (Peak Creek, Laurel Springs, N.C.), June 8
Swope, Paul N., S. Pa. Dist. (Rouzerville, Waynesboro, Pa.), July 20

Commissioned

Becker, Christian J., Virilina Dist. (Nineveh, Hardy, Va.), Jan. 12
Dutt, Krista, Ill. and Wis. Dist. (Highland Ave., Elgin, Ill.), Oct. 12

Licensed

Bouwmeester, Gay L., Ill. and Wis. Dist. (Highland Ave., Elgin, Ill.), Sept. 21
Caplinger, Kenneth “Cappy,” W. Marva Dist. (Beaver Run, Burlington, W. Va.), Oct. 30

Cozme-Rodriguez, Epifanio, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Un Nuevo Renacer, Pa.), Feb. 9
Delk, Dennis, S. Ohio Dist. (Potsdam, Ohio), May 18
Henriquez, Ana G., Virilina Dist. (Blacksburg, Va.), Aug. 10
Livengood, Ed, Ill. and Wis. Dist. (Milledgeville, Ill.), Nov. 2
Ratcliffe, Ronald, Atl. N. E. Dist. (Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa.), June 22
Reinso, Ronny, Virilina Dist. (Blacksburg, Va.), Aug. 10
Reinso, Rossesy, Virilina Dist. (Blacksburg, Va.), Aug. 10
Sluss, Bradley, Southeastern Dist. (Cumberland, Clintwood, Va.), Aug. 24
Staton, Hope, S/C Ind. Dist. (Northview, Indianapolis, Ind.), Jan. 5
Swartz, Larry A., S. Pa. Dist. (Gettysburg, Pa.), June 22
Trusty, Steve, S. Ohio Dist. (New Carlisle, Ohio), June 22
Weaver-Spidel, Desiree, Atl. N.E. Dist. (Elizabethtown, Pa.), March 23

Placements

Cyrus, Daryl Jr., pastor, Claysburg, Pa., Jan. 1
Dubble, Kirby, from interim pastor to pastor, Paxton,

Harrisburg, Pa., July 27
Dueck, Stanley, interim pastor of special ministries, Palmyra, Pa., Oct. 5
Eller, Mary, from interim pastor to pastor of special ministries, Palmyra, Pa., March 2
Elliott, Gideon E. Jr., interim pastor, Welty, Greensburg, Md., May 1
Ewing, Christopher, from associate pastor to interim pastor, County Line, Harrod, Ohio, March 1
Fike, Lisa, pastor, Wabash, Ind., Jan. 12
Fisher, William R., co-pastor, New Covenant, Pa., Jan. 1
Fuchs, Rebecca, interim co-pastor, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 1
Hess, Nancy, interim co-pastor, Lancaster, Pa., Jan. 1
Hinton, William J. Sr., pastor, Central, Roanoke, Va., July 1
Hollenberg-Duffey, Timothy, from co-pastor to pastor, Oakton, Va., May 1
Huiras, Erin, pastor, Ind., Jan. 1
Kissel, Wayne, interim pastor, Akron First, Ohio, June 15
Ladd, Connor M., pastor, Peters Creek, Roanoke, Va., July 15
Light, Horace D., interim pastor, Copper Hill, Claysburg, Pa., Jan. 1
Meiser, Laura K., associate pastor, Hempfield, Manheim, Pa.,

June 1
Miller, Charles L., interim pastor, Dunning Creek, New Paris, Pa., Nov. 16
Pickens, Mark K., associate pastor, Manassas, Va., July 1
Pisarski, Stanley, pastor, Roxbury, Johnstown, Pa., Feb. 16
Richards, Jeremy, University Baptist and Brethren, State College, Pa., July 16
Rogers, Sandi E., interim pastor, Westminster, Md., May 15
Routh, Joseph, interim pastor, Center, Louisville, Ohio, May 15
Schuler, Cynthia, from interim pastor to pastor, East Cocalico, Reamstown, Pa., March 9
Schultz, Amy J., interim pastor, Luray, Va., Jan. 6
Schwaner, Sandra, pastor, Charlottesville, Va., March 1
Seace, Jeffrey D., pastor, Bethel, Broadway, Va., Jan. 19
Simmers, Kinley, pastor, Grossnickle, Myersville, Md., June 1
Varnar, Michael, interim pastor to pastor, Green Hill, Westover, Va., Aug. 1
Weber, Thomas, from pastor to pastor of special ministries, Florin, Mount Joy, Pa., Jan. 10
Wyland, Mark E., pastor, Upper Claar, Claysburg, Pa., Jan. 1

To submit information for Turning Points, go to www.brethren.org/turning-points. Or send information by email to messenger@brethren.org or by mail to Messenger, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120.

Heroes

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Brandon, the crossing guard, made these small snow people to amuse the children who pass by his corner on their way to school.

have met a new set of heroes.

For the past few months I've been one of the volunteer school observers for our local Rapid Response Team. We are present around public schools during drop-off and pick-up times to watch for ICE, border patrol, or other federal agents who target immigrant families.

Our job is to alert the Rapid Response Team and the school principal of any incidents. We are also asked to take photos and video as documentation, if possible, and accompany any children who are left on the street when a parent is abducted—until the arrival of volunteers who have special training to aid families who lose a loved one to immigration detention or deportation.

Thank God I have not yet had to report ICE presence around a school, although other school observers in our town have had to do so.

Those early morning walks to and around the elementary school have been an exhilarating way to start my day—perhaps too exhilarating on cold winter mornings. One morning the temperature at 8 a.m. was all of 7 degrees with a windchill of minus 7!

The exhilaration doesn't just come from being out and about for a brisk half-hour walk, but also from the acquisition of a new set of personal heroes:

Teachers and other school staff are heroes. They are always there earlier than their students, and I see them welcome the children and oversee their play before the doors open. They make sure the children are safe and cared for once on school property. And the way children eagerly run up to the building and hug friends says a lot about the quality of the school and the positive experience it provides.

Crossing guards are heroes. They hold up bright red stop signs to keep children and parents safe on their way to school. On the less busy corners, crossing guards are students who seem to relish their task, joking and laughing with each


other as they wait for people wanting to cross the street.

At the busiest corner is the one adult on crossing guard duty. Brandon, who gave me permission to share his first name, is a young man with two girls of his own. I learned a bit about him in our brief chats as I passed his corner on my walk around the school. He takes the job seriously, and he is courteous, kind, and welcoming of the children and parents who need his help.

I asked him if he thinks of his job as risky, stepping out onto a busy street numerous times a day, where the cars always seem to be driving too fast for a school zone. He agreed that it is, but his awareness of the danger for him never seems to get in the way of his willingness to help decrease the danger for others.

The parents who walk or drive their children to school are heroes. I see parents, but also people who may be grandparents or older siblings. At a school like this, where the vast majority of families are people of color, with a large population of Hispanic students, the risks associated with what should be a humdrum task of getting kids to school are now greatly increased by ICE and border patrol activities in our region.

Each of these families risks being picked up by federal agents anytime they go out of their homes, ever since agents have been empowered to abduct anyone they choose. Over recent months in my city, dozens of people have been abducted off the street, forced out of their cars, picked up at their places of work, and had their homes violently invaded. In one incident, federal agents attacked a neighborhood with tear gas.

Our world often equates heroism with acts of violence, armed prowess, military might. I think the unarmed parents and families who take daily risks and make themselves vulnerable to ensure their children get the education they need—those are the real heroes. 

“Those early morning walks to and around the elementary school have been an exhilarating way to start my day.”

SERVING TOGETHER WITH A COMMON PURPOSE

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." –1 Peter 4:10



WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE? Volunteer. Support. Pray. Encourage.



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