



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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*The 175-year
conversation*

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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on the cover

For this anniversary issue, we bring back a cover from 56 years ago. Wilbur Brumbaugh created the illustration for Easter in March 1970.

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Bombs for peace

There's no right time in the church year to bomb another country, but it seems particularly horrific to do so in a season of repentance and humility, leading to the days in which we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The US attacks on Iran came during the Christian season of Lent and the Muslim season of Ramadan—"both lengthy periods in which people try to refine their character and bridle their impulses," writes Lauren Jackson in "Believing," a *New York*

Times newsletter on faith. "They're fasting and meditating, reflecting and abstaining, all in pursuit of self-mastery. That's a stark contrast to what's happening on the geopolitical stage."

Most people are in favor of peace, surely, even if they disagree on the way to get there. But for those in the historic peace church tradition—the Church of the Brethren, for example—how we get there does matter. The question isn't whether we say we're for peace—that's easy. It's sticking with a deeper truth when the strongmen of the world flex their power.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

I didn't learn pacifism in the church of my childhood. I learned it from the Church of the Brethren, which declares

unequivocally that all war is sin: Wars that are legal or not, wars launched as a distraction, wars to fulfill a prophecy, wars to save people from a cruel leader, wars to take oil, wars that kill children as collateral damage, wars for peace. All war.

To be honest, there's been some slippage in this view and not everyone is unequivocal anymore. But the Church of the Brethren still is committed to the hard work of peacemaking and the countercultural idea of pacifism.

There's another faith tradition that speaks into this moment. The attacks by the US came shortly before the Jewish holiday of Purim, points out Rabbi Jay Michaelson, writing in Religion News Service. He draws parallels between our own political moment and the corrupt King Ahasuerus. "A story set in the sixth-century BC features characters who seem ripped from last week's headlines."

The hero of the story is Esther. Amid "all the nihilism of Ahasuerus' court," she "risks everything to save innocent lives." Like her, "we are called to act ethically in a world often governed by the least ethical among us."

Michaelson concludes: "It is not new to be ruled over by demagogues who incite hatred or tyrants who are swayed by them." When we despair? "Turn to the scroll of Esther and read—and take inspiration from her example."

Wendy McFadden

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“Light in a messenger’s eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.” —Proverbs 15:30, NIV



“It really is a ‘messenger,’ a vehicle of communication, and as long as we are human and as long as we are people of faith we will want to know what’s happening, want to communicate it, and want to shape it.”

—Brethren historian James E. Lehman, writing about MESSENGER in a 2001 issue commemorating the 150th anniversary of the magazine

“When we put our hands together, we move forward faster.” —Church of the Brethren Deportation Defense Response Team staff member Vildor Archange, speaking to church leaders in January

“Being together is messy.” —Miami First Church of the Brethren pastor Michaela Alphonse, in an intercultural Bible study on Acts 2

“I believe generosity and love always win.” —Bethany Theological Seminary president Jeff Carter, during denominational Inter-Agency Forum meetings

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

April 26 marks 55 years since Church of the Brethren young adult and peace advocate Ted Studebaker was killed by the Viet Cong while serving in Vietnam through Vietnam Christian Service. His life and example were highlighted in the song “Brave Man from Ohio” by Brethren musicians Andy and Terry Murray.

DID YOU KNOW?

In addition to pressing the issue of beginning an official periodical for the church, editor Henry Kurtz also pushed the 19th-century Brethren boundaries in other ways. At a time when Brethren were very much discouraged from owning or using musical instruments, Kurtz owned a 17th-century organ that he kept in his home until his death in 1874. That original “Kurtz Organ” now resides in the lower level of the Church of the Brethren offices in Elgin, Ill.

BY THE NUMBERS

17

Number of hymns written or translated by former MESSENGER editor Kenneth I. (Ken)

Morse that have been published in hymnals or songbooks, according to hymnary.org. The best-known one in Brethren circles is “Move in Our Midst,” No. 418 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. The one that appears most often, however, is “Je louerai l’Eternel,” which Morse translated into “Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord.” It appears in the Brethren hymnal in both English and French.



THE TRUE MESSENGER

Think you know MESSENGER? As the magazine celebrates its 175th anniversary this year, see if you can decide whether the statements below are true or false. Answers are elsewhere on this page.

1. MESSENGER is the official magazine of the Church of the Brethren.
2. Annual Meeting twice rejected MESSENGER’s original predecessor, *The Monthly Gospel-Visiter*, as being too worldly.
3. *Gospel-Visiter* editor Henry Kurtz served three times as moderator of the Annual Meeting.
4. *The Gospel Messenger*, as MESSENGER was formerly known, was a weekly publication for many years.
5. *The Gospel Messenger* was an independent publication, not officially owned by the denomination, in its early years.
6. MESSENGER currently has more than 10,000 subscribers.
7. MESSENGER shifted to a full-color magazine in the 1990s.
8. MESSENGER has regularly won awards from the Associated Church Press.
9. MESSENGER publishes 12 issues per year.
10. Even with the recent increase to \$21 a year, MESSENGER is still a bargain.

ANSWERS 1. True. It’s the long-time flagship publication. 2. False. While Annual Meeting was wary of the periodical and wanted more information, Henry Kurtz pressed it forward. The Annual Meeting—after a trial period—gave its cautious okay to let it proceed. 3. False. Kurtz never held the role. 4. True. *The Gospel Messenger* published weekly for more than eight decades, until 1965. 5. True. While considered “official” publications of the church, *The Gospel Messenger* and its predecessors were privately published until the denomination took ownership of *The Gospel Messenger* in 1897. 6. False. The current total is about 4,500. But we’re always glad to have more. 7. False. That change only took place in 2014. 8. True. It’s been a regular winner in that ecumenical showcase. We’re hoping for more this year! 9. False. MESSENGER currently publishes 10 issues per year. It moved from 11 to 10 in the mid-2000s. 11. True? We think it’s a great value, but you’ll have to decide!

Fear, faith, and welcoming the stranger

by Beth Sollenberger

Fear is real.

Imagine having someone touch a cocked gun to your temple while telling you to leave the country or be killed.

Imagine knowing there is no food in the cupboard while watching your children gather at the kitchen table to wait for their next meal.

Imagine coming to a new country with a new language, breathing a full breath, feeling safe—and then, in the blink of a presidential proclamation, discovering that the hope was misplaced and you are no longer welcome.

Imagine knowing it is not safe to be seen in the street, not safe to go to church, not safe to take the bus to work, not safe to answer the door, not safe to pick up children from school.

Imagine reading the letter proclaiming your asylum is under review and knowing it could cost \$10,000 to pay an attorney to accompany you to the hearing.

In early 2025, the Pew Research Center numbered the people born in another country and currently living in the United States at about 52 million. That means you probably know an immigrant, and you probably depend on immigrants. They harvest strawberries, milk cows, build homes, answer telephones, clean floors, provide care for elderly individuals. They are members of the Church of the Brethren in Virginia, Ohio, California, Illinois, and all across the denomination.

And they are afraid. Church attendance has fallen because it is not safe to leave the house. Increased food and rent donations are necessary because going to work is not safe. Children miss school because there is no one to safely get them there or pick them up.

Why? Because fear is real. Due to the presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), so many things we take for granted are now risky business for many people. Even carrying one's paperwork declaring citizenship, or a green card, or proof of Temporary Protected Status has no meaning to a hooded ICE agent intent on arrest, detainment, or deportation.

In November, the Cato Institute think tank reported that “New non-public data” from ICE leaked to the organization showed “Nearly three in four (73%) immigrants in custody had no criminal conviction. Nearly half had no criminal con-

viction nor even any pending charges. Only 8% had a violent or property criminal conviction.” The story is that law-abiding immigrants cannot escape ICE.

That means my sisters and brothers in the church need my support. Sometimes this old, white woman raised on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania under the assumption that government was all about being *for* the people has to open her eyes. Churches need to act in places where the government has gone a different direction.


In the Gospel of Matthew, the story is told of people welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned. When confronted with the question “Who is the stranger?” the answer from Jesus is clear: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

How do I welcome the stranger? Prayers, and action.

I remember to pray for the pastors of non-white churches who are dealing with immigration issues on a regular basis. I read the messages I get from the attorney who frequently posts the (seemingly daily) changes to immigration laws. I sometimes buy some extra food or towels or other stuff and donate it to churches I know support their members and neighbors caught in this horror. I donate to the denomination's Deportation Defense Response legal and mutual aid fund. I call a representative and share my dismay that immigrants and citizens are being treated this way.

And I listen to my friend who legally entered this country while a spouse and children stayed behind. Now, no one can move. My friend can't go back to be with family, and family can't come to the United States to visit or live.

For this family, thousands of dollars have been committed to immigration attorneys to establish a path to stay in the US. When I question the system, when I wish God would fix things, when I hesitate, their refrain is always the same: “God is in control. God is good. Thanks be to God.”

What a reminder and testament to faith and hope in this season of fear. 

Beth Sollenberger is interim director of administration and Council of District Executives representative for the Church of the Brethren Atlantic Southeast District, which includes numerous Haitian and Hispanic congregations. She lives in Goshen, Ind., and Sebring, Fla.

“How do I welcome the stranger? Prayers, and action.”

Children’s Disaster Services volunteers make up almost half of the congregation at Living Peace Church in Plymouth, Mich. Of the 18 active members, 7 have been trained by CDS (shown here from left: Kathy Short, Phil Collins, Nancy O’Neill, Wendy Russell, Bruce O’Neill, Sharon Taylor, and Becky Copenhaver). Most have been deployed more than once to various places: El Paso, Texas; The Border, La.; Panama City Beach, Fla.; Dayton, Ohio; Asheville, N.C.; and Baton Rouge, La. We are grateful their service. —Mary Anne Martin



Souper Bowl of Caring Challenge inspires district

Northern Indiana District recently wrapped up a second annual Souper Bowl of Caring Challenge encouraging district congregations to gather cans of soup

to aid the hungry. The challenge took place over six and a half weeks from Christmas to Super Bowl Sunday.

Soup collections were measured by the ounce and participating congregations reported their totals weekly. Each congregation donated their collected soup to a local feeding program. The competition sparked enthusiastic participation and friendly rivalry, with some lighthearted banter shared among the congregations.

Last year, 11 congregations joined the challenge. District board chair Lauren Phipps designed the Souper Douper Trophy that was awarded to the Columbia City congregation for collecting an impressive 16,036 ounces of soup. All together, Northern Indiana

District congregations amassed a remarkable 65,740 ounces—or 513 gallons—of soup.

This year, 13 congregations—about 40 percent of the district—participated. Weekly submissions kept the competition intense, with close results, unexpected turnarounds, and new contenders emerging throughout the event. The Agape congregation in Fort Wayne was this year’s champion, collecting 26,160 ounces (204 gallons) of soup. Columbia City, last year’s winner, followed closely with 23,318 ounces. In total, the district collected an astounding 114,769.90 ounces of soup—896.64 gallons—surpassing last year’s total by 383.4 gallons.

—Todd Hammond



Todd Hammond

Mechanicsburg celebrates 100th year

Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren celebrates 100 years on May 3, marking its centennial with a morning worship service on its anniversary theme “Yesterday’s Vision: Today’s Strength, Tomorrow’s Hope.”

Jeff Carter, president of Bethany Seminary, will deliver a keynote sermon. Jeff Bach, director emeritus of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, will speak during Sunday school. Nashville recording artist Anita Stapleton, who began her performing career singing in the children’s choir at Mechanicsburg, will kick off the centennial weekend with a free concert on Saturday, May 2.

Mechanicsburg members have provided significant leader-



ship to the district and denomination. In the 56 years of Southern Pennsylvania District executive leadership, two members—Stanley Earhart and Warren Eshbach—served as executives for a combined 30 years. Newly elected district executive Traci Rabenstein also has served on the denominational staff. Several other members have served with

denominational boards or agencies: Eshbach chaired the former General Board, Colin Scott chaired the Mission and Ministry Board, Wayne Scott chaired the Eder Financial board, Vernne Greiner and Margie Fultz were on the Association of Brethren Caregivers board, Del Keeney was executive of Congregational Life Ministries, Theresa Eshbach directed institutional advancement for Bethany Seminary. —Sherri Kimmel

In the news

■ **Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren** members took part in “Butterfly Prayers: Public Art and Witness for Immigrants” in front of the Allen County Courthouse in Fort Wayne, Ind., last Nov. 2. Lorelei VerLee, founder of Creative Women of the World, led an artistic prayer expression. “Each person was invited to paint on a small canvas (tiles) something that reflected their prayers for immigrant neighbors,” said the congregation’s newsletter. “The tiles were then put together, creating a butterfly.” Beacon Heights displayed the butterfly in its fellowship hall.



Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren

■ **Four Church of the Brethren congregations**—Beacon Heights, Fort Wayne, Ind.; Columbia City, Ind.; Hartville, Ohio; and Lititz, Pa.—are among 19 congregations participating in “All In: Immersive Worship for Everybody,” a program of the Anabaptist Disabilities Network.

■ **Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren** is helping to pay off the debt of students who owe money for school lunches. The congregation kicked off a campaign at the community Thanksgiving Eve service to help pay off debt that school district staff said totaled around \$34,000. Elizabethtown board chair Amy Karr said 328 students were

carrying lunch debt ranging from 10 cents to just over \$900.

■ **Two districts—Michigan and Missouri and Arkansas**—have issued public letters concerned with violent immigration enforcement. A “Letter to the World” from Missouri and Arkansas leadership, issued in mid-November, was written to people who are suffering and seeking justice. “We believe the one God for all people extends welcoming arms and calls us into loving community,” it said. “We are struggling with you. Your troubles are our troubles.”

Michigan leadership issued a “letter of lament” in January. “The Gospel calls us to love our neighbors and to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves,” it said. “We are deeply troubled by the broader context in which these killings occurred, the escalation of federal immigration enforcement actions involving militarized tactics in American cities, and the apparent erosion of constitutional protections.”

■ **Southern Ohio and Kentucky District** announced a new way of extending the church’s welcome through affordable housing. This is “a need across a wide spectrum of people including poor working-class folks whose families have lived in this country for generations to more recently arrived families who are immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. . . . Many of these families are active members in our congregations,” said the announcement. Three congregations—West Charleston, Lower Miami, and East Dayton Fellowship—have formed the Brethren Affordable Cooperative Housing.

Bridgewater College
February 4 at 1:08 PM

Drumroll, please: The Screamin’ Eagles Marching Band just won \$20,000 in Metallica’s 2025 Marching Band Competition!

Band Director Barry Flowe and the Screamin’ Eagles submitted the video of their rockin’ halftime show and placed second among all DII and DIII schools competing! Check out the full video of their routine on YouTube: see link in the comments.



Facebook post by Bridgewater College

■ **“Here We Stand: Faith Leaders for Immigration Justice & Family Unity,”** an immigration summit in Springfield, Ohio, on Feb. 2, was attended by Church of the Brethren ministers Irv Heishman, Tara Hornbacker, Caleb Kragt, Mark Lancaster, and Zack Spidel, among others. Heishman reported that “the Haitian community and faith leaders . . . in Springfield were praying for God to intervene on behalf of the Haitian community.” The event gained attention from national media including Religion News Service.



Information on congregations’ online or virtual worship is being collected and published by Church of the Brethren communications, a project that began during the COVID pandemic. Updates from congregations are needed to help connect with people wanting to find online worship. Send updated information to your district executive, asking to be added to the webpage listing.

Do you have district or congregational stories that might be of interest to MESSENGER? Short items with a photo are best. Send them to MESSENGER, c/o In Touch, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or messenger@brethren.org.

THE 175-YEAR CONVERSATION

by Frank Ramirez

Happy 175th birthday, MESSENGER! I've been getting MESSENGER around 50 years, ever since the La Verne Church of the Brethren welcomed me, a junior at La Verne College, into their midst. Two years earlier, I'd never even heard of the Church of the Brethren. But I'd already registered for the draft as a conscientious objector, and MESSENGER helped confirm I'd found my forever church home.

What struck me way back then was how clearly I saw that a conversation was going on in its pages—one still continuing after 175 years—whose give and take is best characterized by the words spoken by the prophet Mick Jagger: “You can't always get what you want. You can try sometimes, but you might find you get what you need.”

Since we Brethren don't have a Grand Poobah who has the final word when it comes to belief and practice (although I suspect there have always been a few of us, self-appointed to be sure, who are ready to apply for the job) we've relied on a conversation among equals, centered on scripture, to figure out who we are and what we ought to be doing.

It all began with the original eight women and men who prepared for the first Brethren baptism by studying the Bible together to determine what it means to be the church

of Jesus Christ. But that conversation didn't end in 1708. It continues to this day as we revisit the Scriptures with new insight and more voices at church coffee hour, Annual Conference, and, of course, in the pages of MESSENGER.

A good example of the way this conversation is open to change is the early Brethren decision that scripture called for them to practice celibacy. The Brethren soon revisited that decision and rescinded it (Alexander Mack, Jr., among others, was conceived following its implementation). A little conversation convinced the Brethren celibacy wasn't going to work and wasn't really biblical anyway.

Henry Kurtz (1796-1874), a German immigrant to Pennsylvania, left behind his careers as schoolteacher and Lutheran priest, and then moved to Ohio hoping to find or found the perfect church. He didn't find that perfect church. Instead he found us, which was good enough.

Like many newcomers to the Brethren fellowship, he entered our conversation with fresh ideas. Fortunately, he was a patient soul and wasn't discouraged when he met resistance. For instance, when he was asked to report on Annual Meeting for the benefit of those unable to attend, he accepted a compromise: To prevent any distraction, he would do his reporting by hanging from the rafters of the barn where the elders met.

A TIMELINE OF MESSENGER



1851 Henry Kurtz publishes the first issue of *The Monthly Gospel-Visitor* (later *The Gospel Visitor*) near Poland, Ohio.



1856 James Quinter becomes assistant editor of *The Gospel Visitor*.

1864 Quinter becomes editor when Kurtz retires; H. R. Holsinger starts *The Christian Family Companion* as the second Brethren periodical, publishing weekly.



1874 *The Gospel Visitor* and *The Christian Family Companion* merge; a variety of other new Brethren publications and subsequent mergers follow.

1883 *The Gospel Messenger* is formed through consolidation of *The Primitive Christian* and *The Brethren at Work*.

1888 D. L. Miller becomes editor of *The Gospel Messenger* after Quinter's death. J. H. Moore assists Miller through much of his tenure.



1897 The Church of the Brethren officially assumes ownership of the publication through the Brethren Publishing House.

1899 The Brethren Publishing House moves from Mount Morris, Ill., to Elgin, Ill.

MESSENGER
175
YEARS

Some of those elders expressed skepticism about his idea of publishing a magazine, saying the only reading material any good Dunker needed was the Bible. In the inaugural issue of *The Gospel Visitor* (spelling was fluid in those days) Kurtz responded by calling to mind the conversation between the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip. When asked if he understood the passage from Isaiah he'd been reading, the Ethiopian answered, "How can I except some man should guide me?" MESSENGER has often been that guide in our continuing conversation.

Besides, Kurtz pointed out, since Brethren were already reading magazines put out by other denominations, wouldn't it be better if they could read material written by their brothers and sisters?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term "crowdsourcing" goes back only to 2006, but that didn't stop Henry Kurtz from crowdsourcing articles, poems, opinions, and reports from his readers. Our conversation grew exponentially in those pages.

In that first issue Kurtz attempted to clarify who we are, and aren't, and in the process made a complaint still valid today—we're more than willing to serve others through the gospel, but we don't always share who we are because we don't like to brag. That's true even today: The many

This month marks exactly 175 years since the first issues of MESSENGER's direct ancestor—*The Monthly Gospel-Visitor* (later *The Gospel Visitor*)—rolled off the presses in Ohio. Helmed by entrepreneur and maverick of sorts Henry Kurtz, it soon found its way into the parlors and the hearts of Brethren. Annual Meeting, reluctantly at first, allowed it to continue. The rest is history.

Over the years, it merged with about a dozen other publications, eventually coming together as *The Gospel Messenger* in 1883. So it's 143 years since that nameplate took hold, one that whittled down to simply MESSENGER more than six decades ago, in 1965. The magazine, initially independent even though an "official" publication of the church, became owned by the Brethren Publishing House in 1897.

So, here's to a century and three-quarters for the official magazine of the Church of the Brethren, one of the oldest continuous church publications in the country and one that continues to find its way into offices, living rooms, and hearts around the world!



1921 Edward Frantz becomes editor of *The Gospel Messenger* following Miller's death.



1944 Desmond Bittinger becomes editor.



1950 Kenneth I. Morse becomes editor.



1971 Howard Royer becomes editor, with Morse continuing as an associate editor.



1979 Kermon Thomasson becomes editor after two years as acting editor.



1931 *The Gospel Messenger* merges with the denomination's *The Missionary Visitor* and changes from a newspaper format to a magazine.

1965 The publication is renamed MESSENGER, switching to a biweekly format with a new logo and design.

1973 MESSENGER changes to a monthly publication schedule.

1990 MESSENGER receives a redesigned logo and look.



“What struck me way back then was how clearly I saw that a conversation was going on in its pages—one still continuing after 175 years.”

denominations that work together on Heifer International don't know we founded it.

About a year after that inaugural publication, a “brother from Virginia,” despite his admission that many were more qualified than him to address the controversial subject of women preachers, didn't hesitate to fill three densely written pages why they shouldn't. Ironically, the scriptures he quoted were the same ones folks like me quote to demonstrate women were preaching from the start.

Basically, his argument was this: If scripture portrayed women preaching, they weren't preaching because they were women. For example, the women at the tomb sent by Jesus “to go and tell Peter and the disciples, that Jesus had risen from the dead, (are) not preaching the gospel.” In that case, the 45 Easter sermons I delivered before my retirement weren't preaching either!

What I want to emphasize is that the author's interpretation of scripture was *not* the final word. It did *not* settle the matter. It was only part of a long, ongoing conversation. The one real Brethren heresy, from what I can tell, is closing your Bible and ending the conversation without listening to your sisters and brothers.

Or, as I like to say, “The Bible says it. I believe it. Let's

start talking about it.” (Someone should put that on a bumper sticker.)

From Kurtz's day to ours, that conversation is open to everyone. One of the more prolific contributors, Abraham Harley Cassell (1830-1908), considered himself uneducated and unqualified. His formal education was limited to 12 weeks because his father believed more knowledge led to more ways to sin. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, Cassell ultimately amassed one of the largest private libraries in the world. In the process he accumulated and preserved invaluable historical documents.

Though Cassell insisted he was too uneducated to write a book, that didn't stop him from contributing historical articles to *The Gospel Visitor* and the various publications descended or related to it. Kurtz and those who followed him demonstrated that the conversation is open to everyone, not simply those with an ecclesiastical title, a degree, or an administrative position.

Those pages were open to women as well. My favorite examples are Julia Graydon, Rose P. Fox, and Alice Trimmer, who contributed to the Nov. 30, 1918, issue of *The Gospel Messenger* (as it was then known). Churches were closed, the magazine's obituary columns were filled those



1992 Wendy McFadden becomes publisher of Brethren Press (after beginning as managing editor of MESSENGER in 1981). When Communications is added to her portfolio in 1997, she begins a long run as publisher of the magazine.

1998 Fletcher Farrar succeeds Thomasson as editor, working out of Springfield, Ill.



2000 MESSENGER's logo and design receive another update.



2001 MESSENGER celebrates its 150th anniversary with a commemorative issue and a party at Annual Conference in Baltimore.

2004 Walt Wiltschek becomes editor.



2008 MESSENGER marks the 300th anniversary of the denomination with a series of articles and tributes, later collected in the book *A Dunker Guide to Church History*.



dying of “The Spanish Flu,” but not one male author addressed the pandemic directly. (I know. I played hooky from a couple meetings upstairs while reading through all the issues of 1918 and 1919 with the help of the late archivist Ken Shaffer.) But these women wrote about how to minister to others during that difficult time.

Our conversation has always included humor. Take this little piece, which followed those ponderous arguments against women preaching.

A pious sister, who was confined by sickness, being asked by a friend, who visited her, if she desired to recover, replied, “The will of the Lord be done.” “But suppose the divine being would refer the matter to your own choice,” observed her friend. “Why then” said she, “I would refer it to him again.”

Another example of humor is the innumerable uncredited illustrations provided by the late editor Kermon Thomasson. Over 40 years ago, he illustrated my article on genetic engineering with a cow sporting one udder after another.

Finally, what was true in 1851 is true today: No one else is writing this news. We’re lucky to still have a magazine, and it’s the result of many dedicated staff members and volunteers adding tasks to their already packed portfolios. Many denominational publications have stopped publishing. We need historical articles to remind us where we’ve been, theological viewpoints to remind us who we are and are becoming, and personal news to help us keep track of our family. And most especially, to remind us we’re a pretty cool bunch.

Over the decades I always took delight in knowing the authors personally. I’m even happier nowadays there are so

many I don’t recognize. That’s a good sign. New generations are joining the conversation and blessing us with fresh insights, written from the perspective of our several languages. I like knowing, that when I and my generation are gone, it won’t mean the end of MESSENGER.

In the inaugural issue, Henry Kurtz called to mind the words of Hebrews 13:2, reminding his readers it’s important to welcome strangers “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” With those words of scripture in mind he addressed his readers, saying “With this salutation we send the *Visitor* in the midst of you. Will you bid him welcome?”

In this 175th anniversary of Brethren magazines, let us continue to welcome MESSENGER in our midst! 

Frank Ramirez is a writer and retired Church of the Brethren pastor.

My first contribution to MESSENGER back in 1977 was a sonnet. As I reflect on this anniversary, I thought a limerick more appropriate.

*With Dunkerish leanings are many still
Celebrating our late tercentennial.
Messenger more than survives,
And most truly it thrives
This demi-semi-sept-centennial.*

—Frank Ramirez



2010 Randy Miller, working from La Verne, Calif., begins as interim editor and then editor.

2013 The Brethren Digital Archives are fully operational, making available—among other things—the archives of *The Gospel Visitor/Gospel Messenger/MESSENGER* from 1851 to 2000. (Issues from 2000 to the present are later added to an online MESSENGER archive.)

2014 The magazine’s inside pages go from black and white to color.

2016 MESSENGER shifts from a single editor to an editorial team to coordinate and produce each issue’s content.



2024 *Notes to the Church*, compiling many of McFadden’s “From the Publisher” columns, is published by Brethren Press.

2026 MESSENGER marks its 175th anniversary, making it one of the oldest continuously printed church periodicals in the US.



March 5, 1932

The Moral Aspects of a Machine Age

By Ira H. Frantz
Fruita, Colo.

MACHINES ARE GENERALLY CHARGED WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT. Industrial conditions have changed greatly since the days of the spinning wheel, the hand loom, the cradle, and the flail. One man with modern machinery now does as much as a hundred men did in colonial times. While a considerable number of the other ninety-nine have been thrown out of employment by these machines, there are a very few, if any, who would be willing to go back to the conditions of two hundred or even a hundred years ago. There is a reason.

In order better to comprehend the real possibilities of this machine age with reference to labor and general welfare conditions, let us... imagine ourselves back in the days of George Washington, reading some prophecy of the mechanical inventions that would be in general use in 1931. What would we naturally and rightfully expect to be the results of this mechanical development?... First, a lavish production of material goods, enabling all people to live amid such comforts as would have been fabulous in Washington's day. Second, a relief from drudgery and long hours, giving every worker leisure for rest, recreation and cultural pursuits.... It is because these results have indeed been partly attained and because of a persistent hope of their ultimate realization that people are not willing even amid present unemployment conditions to return to the days of the candle and the ox-cart.

Why have these happy results not been achieved? Again, there is a reason. Stated briefly and in general terms it is this: Machines have been used primarily not as labor savers but as profit makers; not as instruments of human welfare but as tools in the big game of personal acquisition. That they have been successful in attaining the ends for which



they have been used does not admit of question. That they would have been even more successful in the promotion of general well-being had they been used to that end, is the profound conviction of those who have made serious and sympathetic study of the relation of machines to unemployment. Indeed there is good reason to believe that machines have done all they can do in building up individual fortunes, that unless some new, humanitarian motive can be introduced into our industrial life, machines are ready to turn (have they not already turned?) to destroy the very civilization and industrial system that developed them. It is seriously to be doubted whether industry can make any further advance unless or until the spiritual ideals and humanitarian motives of our time can catch up with our material progress. The structure seems already to be topheavy and about to crash. The next great advance in the world must be spiritual. Here, O church of Christ, is our opportunity!

... The present writer does not pretend to be able to outline a detailed plan for bringing about the needed change in

“ THE JOB IS A BIG ONE. NONE OF US QUITE COMPREHEND HOW BIG IT REALLY IS. BUT LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOR AND WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE MAKE A POWERFUL TEAM. ”

“WHEN MEN AND WOMEN OF BAD TASTE OR OF BAD HABITS OR MERCENARY MOTIVES GET CONTROL OF THE RADIO IT IS JUST AS POWERFUL FOR EVIL AS FOR GOOD.”

motives. The “humanizing” of this machine age will be accomplished only by much experimenting and many failures. But if we can now perceive the causes of the present distress and indicate the general direction in which to seek for reform, we will have gained by that much.

The job is a big one. None of us quite comprehend how big it really is. But *love* of one’s neighbor and *wisdom* that is from above make a powerful team.

What Do You Hear on the Radio?

By V. F. Schwalm
McPherson, Kans.

THE RADIO IS A MODERN MECHANISM destined to have a profound effect on our civilization. Of all the inventions that have helped make the world smaller and to bring humanity into one common culture, none is doing more than the radio. It seems such a simple, insignificant box, hid away in some corner of the house, and yet what strange, weird, uncanny things it performs. Sometimes it seems human, alive. How it catches up heretofore undetected sounds and makes them audible! How it brings into our very homes voices from distant parts of the earth.... How the great symphony orchestras, heretofore inaccessible except to the few, have been brought into the homes of the humble.

It is really remarkable what one may hear on the radio: daily news, daily markets, daily worship, daily recipes, a crooning Vallee, Amos and Andy, great orchestras, world renowned hands, grand symphonies, syncopated jazz, great scientists, great statesmen, famous preachers, harangues about chain stores, medical quacks, propaganda and salesmanship of every kind from goat gland specialists to advertisers of Camels and Chesterfields. The variety is so great every taste and every mood can be satisfied.

What an opportunity the radio presents for bringing information and inspiration to millions of men and women in all walks of life and in the remote places of the earth. What a blessing to the invalid, the aged, the shut-ins to have the long lonely hours broken by music, and lecture or sermon. What a boon to mothers with much housework, and many children. The long winter evenings in rural homes may be filled with

wholesome entertainment or serious instructions. Many colleges and universities are now giving regular courses in adult education over the radio. How the radio helps call for aid for those in distress, as in the case of a ship at sea. Great, indeed, are the blessings of the radio.

But like every other means or agency for good, it is just as potent for evil. The radio is inanimate. It transmits what is on the air, and when men and women of bad taste or of bad habits or mercenary motives get control of the radio it is just as powerful for evil as for good. It becomes, then, a matter of selection. The radio is entirely under the control of the *owner* or *operator*. In attending a public program, and as a matter of courtesy, one does not leave in the midst of the program. But fortunately one can turn off the radio without fear of offending the performer.

...What one listens to on the radio out of the vast mass of material available tells pretty largely what one is in his unvarnished and unguarded self. For the inner responses one gives to his surroundings are a pretty sure index to what he is. The same might be said of one’s reading—that what one reads is an index to his character.

It is also true that what one listens to and what one reads tends to determine what one is to become in the future. “Character is the sum total of our yesterdays.” So with one’s tastes. They are the result of one’s training, environment, and experience of the past. But his present experience, inner responses, are also determining factors in what is to become in the future. What one listens to on the radio, then, is both a result and a cause—an outcome of his past and a molding force of his future.

...A radio in our home is, then, sort of a touchstone to our character. We may not dare to go to some kinds of local program in person because of our reputation, but we can turn on what we like in the privacy of the home, and what you like and turn to is an index to what you are. Let us remember that these influences on us and our children will be determinative for taste and character....

It seems to me a tragedy of the first order that the radio, which is the medium of so many helpful programs, should have been so prostituted by certain commercial firms as to make it seem ridiculous to the public. Let us hope that the time will soon come when the government will see to it that some of our cultural and inspirational programs may be free from the stigma of these propagandistic programs.

When *The Gospel Messenger* helped Elder Leander lie

by Nancy Werking Poling

He told so many lies he couldn't keep track of them. That's probably why he needed to type "A Brief Summary of Work Done by Leander Smith." The list includes serving as a US congressman from 1897 to 1903, traveling to the Holy Land in 1907, and baptizing 180 believers in 1908.

Leander Smith assumed no one could unravel the truth of his life prior to 1910, when he showed up to pastor a Brethren congregation in Missouri. He had no way of anticipating the internet or Ancestry.com.

He was the grandfather of my husband, James Poling. The family had no reason to doubt Leander's narrative of his past until Donald Durnbaugh was collecting information for *The Brethren Encyclopedia*. A Brethren minister who devoted his life to home missions west of the Mississippi, a man who'd been a congressman from North Carolina prior to being called to the ministry—surely, Jim thought, there should be an encyclopedia entry about him.

But Leander Smith's name did not appear on any list of US congressmen.

Meanwhile, Jim's parents, Virginia and Newton Poling, developed an interest in genealogy. They visited Virginia's distant relatives, where they came across a family Bible. They spent hours

in the Brethren Historical Library and Archives in Elgin, Ill., photocopying pages of *The Gospel Messenger* where Leander's name was mentioned.

And they trusted that whatever was published in *The Gospel Messenger* had to be true.

Jim and I retired to North Carolina, a 40-minute drive from Burke County, where Leander was born in 1866. One day, out of curiosity, I visited the county library's genealogy room. I brought along one piece of information: a *The Gospel Messenger* news item from 1911. Elder Leander Smith's only daughter, seven-year-old Othella, had died back in North Carolina. "Her mother preceded her six years ago."

I assumed it would be hard to locate someone named Smith. But the librarian quickly found a Leander and his daughter Othella in the 1910 census. There was another daughter, Ruth—and a *living* wife. It didn't take long to trace Othella and Ruth Smith over the years. Othella died in 1977; Ruth died in 1988. And Leander's *dead* wife? She lived until 1944. The census form also revealed that this was Leander's second marriage.

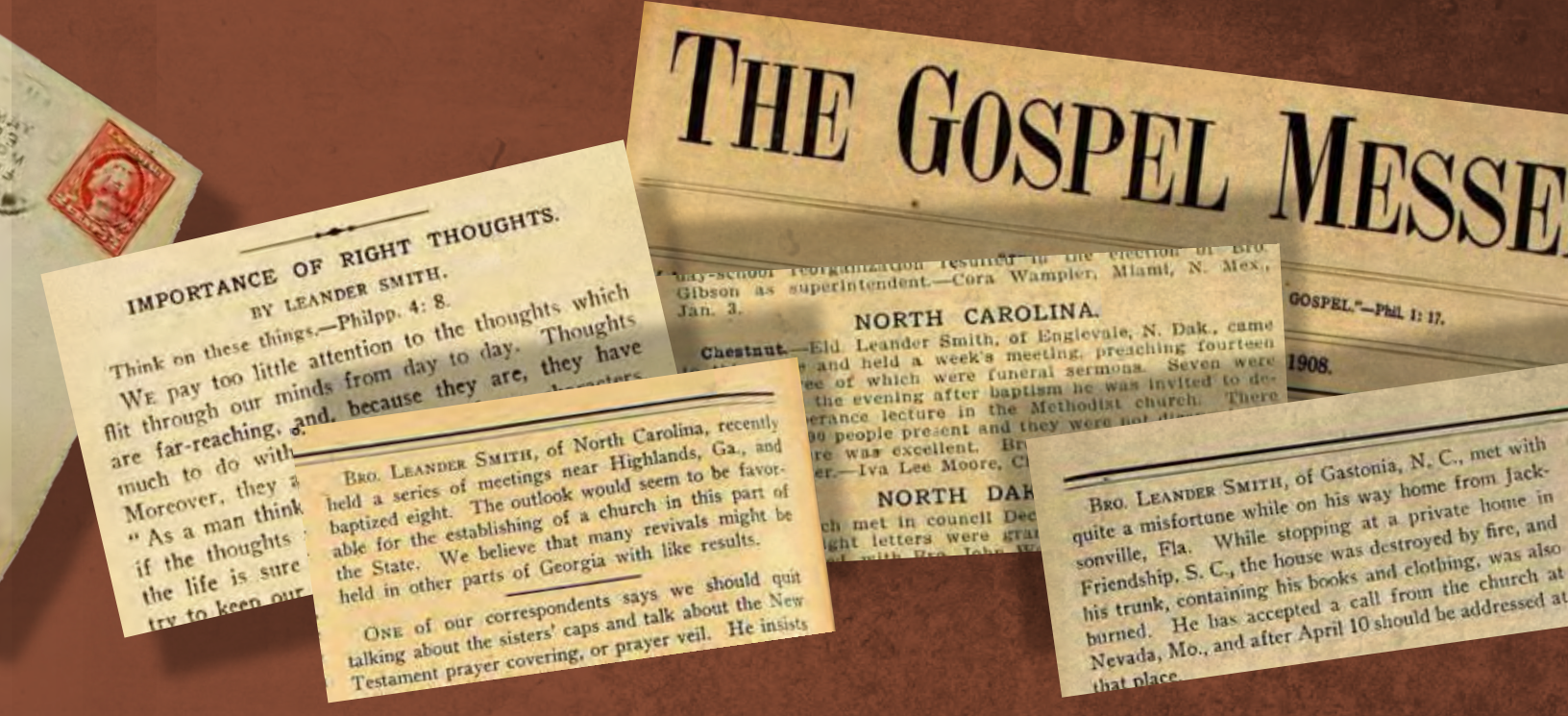
If Leander Smith had lied about being a congressman and about the death of his daughter and second wife, what other lies had he told? What about his first wife? Were there other children? I

was determined to unravel the mystery.

A two-page spread from a family Bible was photocopied by Jim's parents. On the left side, in elegant cursive penmanship, were the names of Leander's father and siblings—when they'd been born, when they died. At the bottom of the right side were four names crudely printed: parents and two sons, it seemed, with only birth dates. The parents were Elias L. Smith and Sarah E. Smith. Elias, I discovered, was Elias Leander. Sarah Emma was Wife #1, who lived until 1927.

Another page in the Bible was an account of Elias Leander's religious journey. He was baptized at St. John's Baptist Church in 1881; ordained to be a deacon in 1884; "liberated by the church at Corinth to preach, January 12, 188[smudge]." The church at Corinth was Corinth Baptist Church in Casar, N.C., home congregation of the parents of Wife #1, Sarah Emma.

So why did Leander Smith change denominations? Likely because Southern Baptists would not have permitted a twice-married man to preach. The same was true for the Church of the Brethren. But if the Brethren didn't know? A few strokes of the pen and an envelope addressed to *The Gospel Messenger* took care of that. Plus, he planned to marry again.



He recognized that anything published in *The Gospel Messenger* was assumed to be true.

Apparently the Brethren didn't require him to fill out the "Ministerial Record" until 1938. On the form he made no mention of having been a Southern Baptist. He stated that he'd been licensed in 1905 in Aquone, N.C., and later was installed and ordained there.

Why Aquone? Because nobody had heard of it. I found no evidence that a Church of the Brethren had ever been located anywhere near this small, remote mountain settlement in the far western part of the state.

Englevale, N.D., is the first verifiable place where Leander came into contact with the Brethren. According to *History of the Northern Plains District Church of the Brethren, 1844-1977*, in 1910 the congregation reported having 18 members, with Leander Smith as elder.

That year he must have been in North Carolina just long enough to be counted in the census.

Another question troubled me: How did he even know about the Brethren? North Carolina congregations were mostly in the northern part of the state. He lived in the southwestern Piedmont. There were a few congregations in Polk County, but the nearest one was approximately 60 miles away. These were horse and buggy days, when it took two to three days to travel 60 miles.

I gave Bill Kostlevy, Brethren archivist at the time, a call. "An interesting man," he said while looking at Leander Smith's obituary. Submitted by Jim's father, it mentioned Leander's career in politics.

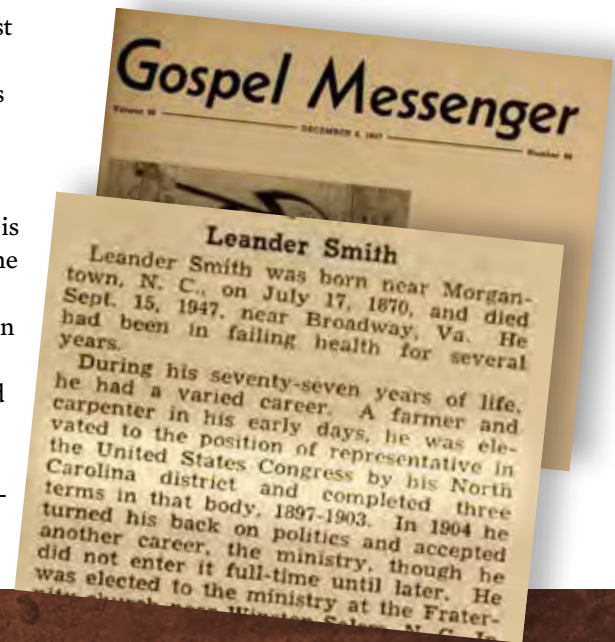
"Lies," I said. Of course, I had to explain myself. "What I want to know is how he learned about the Church of the Brethren."

Bill explained that the denomination was publishing millions of religious tracts at that time. Maybe Leander had come across one.

However he discovered the church, he began purchasing Brethren publications in 1907. His name first appeared

on the list of ministers in the 1908 *Brethren Almanac*.

Leander was a master of self-promotion. Even Brethren historian Roger Sappington was fooled. In *The Brethren in the Carolinas: A History of the Church of the Brethren in the District of North and South Carolina*, he wrote about Elder Leander Smith's role at the



“If Leander Smith had lied about being a congressman and about the death of his daughter and second wife, what other lies had he told?”

Downs Chapel church. Sappington's research probably relied on news blurbs in *The Gospel Messenger*.

For a multitude of reasons, I'm pretty sure that Leander wrote the news items himself and that the Downs Chapel congregation existed only on paper. If Leander wanted to change denominations so he could be a minister, he needed visibility, a way to establish credibility.

He could depend on Brethren believing that everything published in *The Gospel Messenger* was true.

After Sappington recounted the love feast, the sermons, the baptisms, he wrote, "In spite of all this activity, the Downs Chapel congregation was never included in the roster of congregations at the District Meeting." Of course not, if it didn't really exist.

On Aug. 1, 1908, Leander's first article, "Importance of Right Thoughts," appeared in *The Gospel Messenger*. His second article came out in September. After that, for 34 years, *The Gospel Messenger* regularly published his theological reflections.

Then in March 1910, there was an announcement: "MINISTER WANTED. There are a few members at Nevada, Mo., with a good church house, but without a resident minister. We appeal to those ministers who contemplate making a change to correspond with the writer." Perhaps this was what Leander had been working toward. A chance to answer God's call to preach. A chance to escape.

Two months before he was scheduled to leave for Missouri, *The Gospel*

Messenger reported that the private home where Brother Leander Smith was staying had been destroyed by fire. His trunk containing his books and clothing had been lost in the fire.


Was this true? Or did he want Mary Jane, Wife #2, to believe he'd be away only a short while? Yet in Missouri he'd need an explanation for why he arrived with so few belongings. In any case, the 44-year-old minister left two wives and five or six children behind. He never returned to North Carolina.

How did he get by with all this deception? Again, I contacted Bill Kostlevy.

Bill explained in an email, "The Church of the Brethren didn't actually create a unified board structure until 1946. In 1908 the structure would not have been centralized." So, there were no Elgin offices, no national staff. Districts operated on their own.

And the people he knew from his previous life? They were Southern Baptists and would have had no access to his publications.

Were the Brethren naïve? "A man's word is his bond," they taught. So they assumed Leander's integrity. Maybe he had a compelling personality, this intelligent man with a charming Southern accent. Maybe they were impressed by what he wrote.

For if it was in *The Gospel Messenger*.... 



Nancy Werking Poling is author of *Leander's Lies*, a historical novel, which is available through Brethren Press. She offers a disclaimer—that her conclusions about how he worked his way into the Church of the Brethren are conjecture. She also explains that the main character in the book is named Muller rather than Smith in order to avoid connections to descendants of his first two marriages.



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How science fiction helps us imagine the future

by Steve Schweitzer

At its core, science fiction is about imagining how the world might be otherwise” (Sherryl Vint, *Science Fiction*, MIT Press).

The Annual Conference 2026 theme “Imagine!” calls us to consider how our church and our world exist in comparison and contrast to the vision offered by the Bible, and especially by Jesus in the Gospels. When we look around us, does our reality reflect what we understand to be Jesus’ vision for the kingdom of God, or does it misalign?

As we consider how the church should respond to the complexities and challenges of our present context and into an uncertain future, one viable option forward is to imagine the future that we want to see manifested and then identify what must be put in place and what must be removed so we may move along that path toward something new.

While this may seem obvious, it can also be daunting. Where or how should we begin? Can we find a creative parallel to assist us as we navigate the way forward both collectively and individually?

I believe that science fiction can help us think differently. Science fiction resists a simple definition as a genre. In *On*

the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre, theorist Darko Suvin termed it the “literature of cognitive estrangement,” meaning that it challenges our thinking or assumptions by reframing what we think we know. James Gunn notes the temporal displacement common to science fiction and the emphasis on change (usually societal) in relation to the present (*Road to Science Fiction*).

My own working definition claims that science fiction as a genre constructs an alternative reality to our present (using a displacement of either time or space or both). It’s one that asks questions about our present, through social critique, often with a concern for how science or technology will affect our society. The emphases on questions and social critique form the heart of effective science fiction.

Science fiction puts our reality in conversation with alternative realities, asking questions of “what if,” “why,” and “why not.” Why is the world this way? Does it have to be? Can it be different? If so, how? The world-as-it-is can be exposed, and it can be re-created into the world-as-it-should-be.

Sherryl Vint connects imagination and storytelling: “The social imagination and the stories we tell, the worlds we

“Let us imagine “new worlds” that can and should be built to the glory of God, and let us act in hopeful expectation for such a future.”

build with our stories, matter... [A]s you glimpse this other possible world, you grasp the power of science fiction and why it is an essential discourse for contemporary life.” Through these stories we tell and the worlds we build with them, our imagination works to embody these visions and to bring ideas into reality.

Science fiction is filled with this type of imaginative storytelling, creating worlds and societies that operate with different assumptions and values than our own. *Star Trek*, in its various forms and series over 60 years, offers numerous examples.

In *Star Trek: The Original Series*, the starship crew of the *Enterprise* had leadership roles for an African American woman, a Japanese man, and a Russian man. The worldview within the show depicted this as normal, as normative, and without explanation; it was assumed to be appropriate and even desired.

In the context of the 1960s, this was a radical statement about racial equality, former and current enemies becoming full allies, and the recognition that humanity did have a future beyond the turmoil and uncertainty of their present. In numerous episodes and movies, bigotry is rejected, prejudices are explicitly critiqued, and compassion and empathy are held out as key values for the members of Starfleet and the Federation.

The stories within the *Star Trek* universe describe a vision of the future built on different understandings of what is important and the struggle that humanity must go through to maintain its depicted utopian society.

Indeed, while *Star Trek* may at times act like everything is changed and that humanity has transcended its baser instincts, there is always a threat to that fiction—a hostile species with other interests, or an admiral within the system who operates from fear or quest for power, or some new means of understanding how the universe works that causes the characters to examine their long-held beliefs in light of new revelation.

Star Trek has always engaged the current reality of the time in which the series were produced—the Civil Rights era, the post-9/11 War on Terror and its Patriot Act, the cultural shifts around LGBTQ rights, or the economic realities of the 1990s and 2000s. Recent and contemporary events were recast into the future, with the implications of and responses to those events written into the storylines.

This allows for the audience to engage that reality at somewhat of a distance and to interrogate it, all the while having those questions and new perceptions mirrored back on themselves, as the show functions to engender such critique and imagination in the viewers.

Star Trek has been explicit in stating its values and conveys those through metaphor in its various series, sometimes subtly and sometimes bluntly. The recent third season of *Strange New Worlds* goes one step further. It provides a metacommentary on what it is *Star Trek* is doing in the episode “A Space Adventure Hour.”

In the context of a pilot holodeck drama, a character within the narrative explains the importance of the fictive TV show that obviously stands as a cipher for *Star Trek* itself:

Do you realize how rare a show like this is? TK [the producer of the fictive show] wanted to give audiences a digestible reflection of their own world through the lens of fantasy. Social commentary with rubber masks and buried metaphors. You know, science fiction... TK wanted to take our rotten world, with its warts and injustices, and give audiences something better. [And all of that with weekly space adventures?] You don't find the idea inspiring? You don't think some kid out there is going to see this show and spend the rest of their life searching the stars? You don't think a person can love a piece of art or music or a story so much that it heals them? Shows them parts of themselves they'd never seen before? And give them hope?... Giving generations of fans a place to feel seen, to belong, something to believe in again, no matter who they were or where they came from.

For many people, *Star Trek* (and other science fiction shows or stories in other genres too) clearly functions this way. This imaginative storytelling anchored in an awareness of the present that creates something new, something other, draws people in where they are seen, heard, and find a place of belonging.

This should be the church, at its best: the people of God brought together for radical obedience to Jesus, living out the vision of an alternative reality, the kingdom of God, that we find in the Bible.




So, moving from *Star Trek* to scripture, I suggest that, if we want to think imaginatively, we should spend more time with the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the Sermon on the Plain in Luke, and his many parables. In these teachings, Jesus conveys truth about the values, actions, and portrayal of the mysterious transcendent reality that is the kingdom of God, which operates apart from this world.

May we ask questions and pay attention to the similarities, differences, challenges, and critiques between our view of reality and the view of another reality seen through the lens of God's kingdom. Once we grasp it, new and fresh, may we nurture that vision as we work to create that world through living out the values that propel it forward, from a divine idea to our reality.

I conclude with two lines from the fourth verse of the popular hymn "Move in Our Midst," by Kenneth Morse. In that hymn, known to many as the "Brethren anthem," I hear that same call—to imagine the world that should be. This world reflects the kingdom of God, as expressed by Jesus Christ, and can be brought into reality through the power of the Spirit of God stirring up and working through God's people.

Let us imagine "new worlds" that can and should be built to the glory of God, and let us act in hopeful expectation for such a future.

Stir us to build new worlds in thy name.

Spirit of God, O send us thy pow'r! 

Steve Schweitzer is academic dean and professor at Bethany Theological Seminary. He regularly teaches a course on science fiction and theology.



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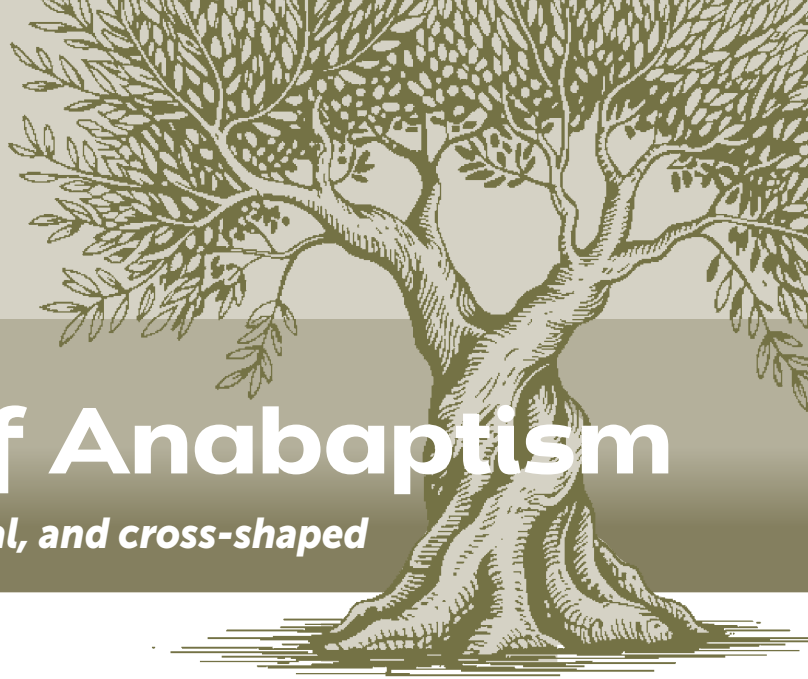
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The **future** of Anabaptism

The way ahead looks small, global, and cross-shaped

by Nate Showalter

After spending a year looking back over five centuries of the Anabaptist story, I find myself asking a quieter question: *What will our next 50 years look like?* Not in theory, but in the congregations where we worship, raise children, bury our dead, and try—sometimes haltingly—to follow Jesus together.

I grew up in one branch of the Anabaptist family, but over the years I have worshiped with Brethren, Mennonites, and a variety of global communities I never imagined as a child. And across that wide landscape, two truths have become clear:

The future of Brethren and other peace church communities looks bright in the Global South.

The future of these churches looks fragile in much of the West.

Holding these realities together might be the first spiritual discipline of the next generation.

A shifting center of gravity

Unless the world experiences some great upheaval, Anabaptism's demographic center will continue to move south and east. For the Church of the Brethren, this shift is already visible: membership in Nigeria now far exceeds that of the church in the United States, reminding us that our identity is no longer centered in the West but

in a global fellowship. Churches in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia are growing in numbers, energy, and confidence. Many are younger, poorer, and closer to instability than most congregations in North America.

These churches will increasingly shape our shared identity: worship that is embodied and joyful; a keen awareness of spiritual conflict; and a lived experience of hardship that makes the Sermon on the Mount sound less like an ideal and more like daily bread. Their witness will be a gift—if we in the West are humble enough to receive it.

Widening fault lines

At the same time, divides within North American and European Anabaptism are unlikely to disappear soon. We already see widening distance between conservative and progressive congregations—not only on sexuality and gender but also on scripture, tradition, and the church's relationship to the nation-state.

A second divide is emerging between Western Anabaptists and those in the Global South. Western churches are often pulled toward the culture wars; Global South churches face very different pressures—authoritarian governments, economic injustice, enduring tribalism, and, in some places, militant religion. Each side risks assuming that the other has compromised: to secular progressivism on one hand, or to resurgent nationalism on the other.

If we are not careful, our global family could fracture—not over a statement of faith or the meaning of baptism, but over which culture we baptize and which politics we fear most.

A deeper root: our shared heritage in Christ

Yet even amid these tensions, I have hope. One of the surprising fruits of the past half-century has been a growing recognition that the peace churches share a common Christian heritage with God's people everywhere. Brethren and other Anabaptists have joined ecumenical conversations, rediscovered the early church, and learned from evangelicals and Pentecostals, Catholics and Orthodox.

We have something to offer—a persistent emphasis on discipleship, community, and peace—but also much to receive. Our future faithfulness will depend on whether we can be both clearly Anabaptist and generously Christian.

What I hope we will become Smaller, but deeper, congregations:

I suspect many churches in the West will be smaller than they were a generation ago. That need not be a defeat. A faithful church in a changing world will lean into what the peace churches have long done well: communities where people truly know one another, share burdens, and practice costly love, echoing Paul's call to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."



“Our calling is simply to be a small, faithful part of that larger story: rooted in scripture, shaped by the cross, listening to the global body, and open to the Spirit.”

I pray for congregations less driven by programs and more by practices: shared meals, scripture soaked in prayer, life in the Spirit, mutual aid, confession, and forgiveness. These are old paths, but they remain fertile soil.

A peace witness that continues to mature: Our world is more violent, polarized, and anxious than the one earlier generations knew. Genocide, racism and tribalism, terrorism, digital manipulation, and the many forms of violence that shadow modern life demand a peace theology that faces our age without illusion.

Christian pacifism has always carried a paradox: God uses governments to restrain evil, yet the church refuses the sword. At its best, this avoided both naïveté and moral superiority. At its worst, it tempted us to retreat from public wounds.

A mature peace witness cannot remain in retreat. Pacifism is not merely refusing to kill; it is working to reduce the conditions that lead to killing. It means stepping into fractures, building relationships across divides, and learning the slow arts of mediation, truth-telling, repentance, and repair. We cannot eliminate the sword, but we can show what life looks like when the sword is no longer needed.

Do we model this perfectly? Rarely. But in small congregations practicing reconciliation and in ministries healing local wounds, we see traces of the king-

dom. And we can teach our young people not only why we reject violence but how to practice reconciliation in families, congregations, neighborhoods, and across borders.

The future of our peace tradition depends not on retreat or triumph, but on a deeper apprenticeship to Christ—the One whose peace is shaped by the cross.

A church that resists both nationalism and despair: Across the world, Christians are told their only options are to baptize their nation's politics or retreat into private spirituality. The Brethren tradition holds a third way: We confess that our citizenship is in heaven while still seeking the good of the city where we live.

I pray for congregations that disentangle faith from allegiance to any party or nation, and at the same time refuse the cynicism that says nothing can change. We follow a crucified and risen Lord. That guards us from both triumphalism and despair.

A more intercultural body: In my lifetime I've seen Brethren and other Anabaptist congregations become more racially and culturally diverse. I hope this continues, and that we move from “multicultural Sundays” to truly intercultural communities where leadership, worship, decision-making, and preaching bear the marks of many peoples.

I pray for churches where a child from a long-time Brethren family and a

newly baptized Christian both recognize themselves in the story we tell and the songs we sing.

How is God calling us?

If I had to sum up how I sense God calling us to meet the challenges ahead, I would say this:

Remember your baptism. We belong to Jesus, and our first loyalty is to him—lived in the mystery of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Rediscover the table. The Lord's supper, the love feast, a potluck meal, the kitchen table—these are where reconciliation takes root and strangers become family.

Recover the cross as a way of life. The cross is not merely a symbol or doctrine, but a daily pattern of self-giving love in our relationships, our politics, and our economics.

The future of Anabaptism is not guaranteed. Movements can lose their first love. But the future of Christ's church is secure. Our calling is simply to be a small, faithful part of that larger story: rooted in scripture, shaped by the cross, listening to the global body, and open to the Spirit who keeps surprising us—sometimes in the very places we once overlooked. ■

Nate Showalter is a pastor, historian, and writer based in Los Angeles. He has served international congregations in multiple countries and Mennonite congregations in the US.



An urgent call to action for this peace church

by Alan Stucky

The US government is in the process of making the most significant change to the process of registering young men for the military draft in a generation, and here is why you should care.

Since 1959, almost all men ages 18 to 25 have been required to register for the draft under the threat of a variety of penalties ranging from jail time to not being able to access federal student or housing loans or even hold federal jobs. For this entire time, however, registering for the draft has been the responsibility of the individual. Many will remember filling out a draft card and mailing it in. Some registered while filing out student loan paperwork. Others registered when they got a driver's license because their state required registration to get a license.

In December 2026, this process will change.

On Dec. 18, 2025, Section 535 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2026 included a requirement that all males 18 to 25, both citizens and non-citizens, be


automatically registered for the draft using existing governmental databases. This change will go into effect on Dec. 18, 2026.

There are many questions that come with this change, most of which do not have answers at this point. How, and from where, will the Selective Service System (SSS) actually collect this information? How will they go about verifying who is and is not required to be registered, and how will people be able to prove that they are? How will they go about finding and ensuring that all males, even undocumented immigrants, are registered? For that matter, how will they determine who is and who is not male in order to register them?

In a world where DOGE has broken down the firewalls of certain governmental databases, what does this mean for our data privacy and information sharing without our knowledge or consent? What does this mean for the likelihood of a draft being implemented in the near future? Will the process of actually being drafted be as it has been in the past, or will that also be changing? And how should we prepare our

young people for that new process?

At this point in time, the answers to these questions are not the first reason to be concerned. The main reason to care is that there are *not* answers to these questions. With an administration that seems to be unpredictable on purpose, the range of possibilities seems much wider than in the past. It is that very uncertainty that should be an urgent call to action for this peace church. Yes, in our advocacy work, but also in training up the next generation of conscientious objectors and peacemakers.

Ultimately, this is not an abstract conversation. I am writing this on the weekend that the US has started a sustained attack on Iran, seemingly beginning a full-scale war possibly aimed at regime change. I also write this with my two boys, ages 9 and 12, playing in the next room. I do not know what the future holds for them. But what I do know is that now is the time to remind ourselves, and teach our children, what it means to follow Jesus' way of peace in this world. 

Alan Stucky is pastor of First Church of the Brethren in Wichita, Kan.

Conscientious objection: A brief primer and resources

The Church of the Brethren commitment to peace has manifested in many ways over the years and remains an important aspect of Brethren identity for many church members today. Historically, the Church of the Brethren has taken the stance that military service is antithetical to the teachings of Jesus—a stance that commonly is called conscientious objection. Those who object to participating in warfare commonly are called conscientious objectors, or COs for short.


It is important for Brethren to be aware of their options when it comes to engaging on issues of war and peace. Becoming a CO is a strong way to make such a witness. A CO is someone who is opposed to serving in the armed forces or the military, or objects to bearing arms or carrying weapons, on the grounds of religious or moral principles.

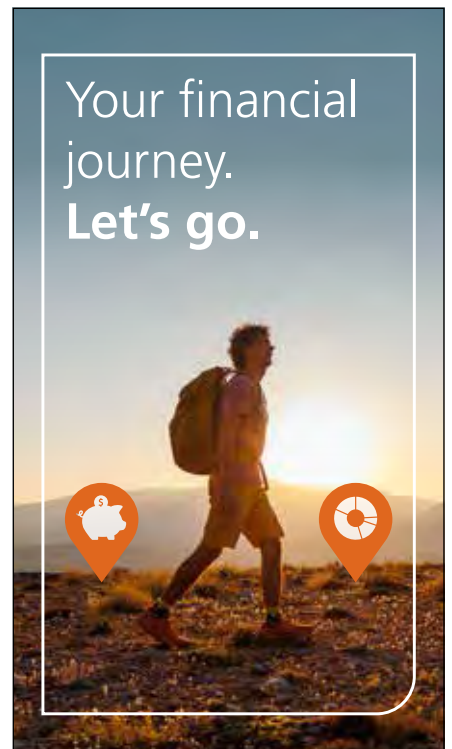
There are several Annual Conference statements that support conscientious objection to war, including “Statement on War,” 1970; “Statement on Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience,” 1969; “Statement on Non-Cooperation,” 1973; and “Call for a Living Peace Church,” 2003, among others. Go to www.brethren.org/ac/statements.

Call of Conscience is the Church of the Brethren curriculum for senior high youth and young adults to explore their beliefs about peace and to understand conscientious objection. It focuses on developing a personal peace position based on biblical teaching and the traditions of the church. The curriculum is designed to be led by an adult and includes free downloadable session plans and resources, with a student workbook available to purchase from Brethren Press.

Four sessions help participants think through the difference between allegiance to God and allegiance to the state; biblical teaching on war and peace; the church’s historic and living peace position; and making a case for conscientious objection. A culminating project invites young people to compile a personal file of evidence that they firmly believe in the teachings of Jesus on violence and peace and demonstrate that they are conscientious objectors to war. The curriculum is a resource for young people to “make a defense for the hope that is within them” (1 Peter 3:15) and prepare their heart, mind, and soul for the possibility of a military draft.

Download *Call of Conscience* from www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/co. Purchase the student workbook *The CO Journal* from www.brethrenpress.com.

Another resource is the Center on Conscience and War, a nonprofit that got its start in 1940 as an initiative of the historic peace churches, including the Church of the Brethren. It advocates for the rights of conscience, opposes military conscription, and serves all conscientious objectors including those needing help to leave the military. Go to centeronconscience.org. 



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EARTH DAY

THE CANOPY OF TREES

In cities across the United States, there is a striking correlation between historic redlining maps and modern-day tree canopy maps: precisely those communities that were historically redlined are the same ones that lack tree canopy coverage.

As you layer on other social and economic factors, like race, income, and asthma rates, the trend continues. The dearth of trees in a community portends other issues of justice. Fewer trees means higher temperatures, worse air quality, decreased resilience to flooding, not to mention the lack of mental health benefits that trees provide.

According to American Forests' Tree Equity Score, lower-income areas typically have 26 percent less tree cover and are exposed to temperatures on average 6 degrees higher than wealthier neighborhoods. In communities of color, the

tree cover disparity increases to 38 percent and the temperature difference to 13 degrees.

This connection is a rather simple one. Over the past century, higher-income communities have benefited from local investment, including tree planting. Lower-income communities have not. So, as those trees grew into a full canopy in the Main Street neighborhoods, the other side of the tracks baked under full sun.

Much like the language shift from food deserts to food apartheid, we could understand this reality as *tree apartheid*—a reflection not of natural scarcity but of systemic injustice that has created unequal access to the benefits trees provide.

In a time of climate breakdown, the importance of trees is even more evident. They cool cities, mitigate flooding, stabi-

lize soil, filter the air, support psychological well-being, and create diverse habitats for species, all while pulling carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Trees are climate resilience infrastructure. They are partners in the work of creation justice.

While many environmental issues like climate change are sinister problems, tied up in knots of policy, culture, and economics, issues of tree equity have a strikingly simple solution: plant more trees!

There's nothing quite like seeing an area that has been void of canopy become lush and green once again. The simple act of digging a hole and placing within it a small sapling that will grow to become a life-giving essence for a neighborhood is the physical reminder of what it is to sow the kingdom of heaven in a place. As trees grow, they

FOR DISCUSSION

■ The only members of creation that show up more often in the Bible than trees are humans. There are nearly 300 biblical references to trees, and that number balloons up to nearly 4,000 when you consider parts of trees or times when trees are used as symbols. How many biblical

trees can you name? Can you find scripture references for them?

■ For much of the biblical narrative, trees act as thermometers, reporting the temperature of humanity's faithfulness to God. How have trees been a barometer of your community's faithfulness to God?

■ Where are the trees in

your neighborhood? How many are there? Are there so few you can count them, or are they plentiful? How have the trees, or lack of trees, in your neighborhood been a barometer for the state of your community?

■ Read Genesis 2 and Revelation 2:1–22:7. How do you understand these passages differently given the need for tree justice?



“Trees are climate resilience infrastructure. They are partners in the work of creation justice.”

not only heal the environment but also have a way of lifting our spirits!

Yet, as good as the news is, Jesus reminds us that seeds need soil that's ready. Otherwise, the rocks, ravens, and thorns may get in the way.

That readiness begins not with shovels, but with listening. Before we plant trees, we must plant trust. The first rule of permaculture applies to community life as well: *observe and interact*. True tree equity grows from relationships. It grows through listening, collaboration, and shared vision, not through outside interventions that replicate old patterns of power. Healing tree apartheid requires dismantling the systems of segregation and disinvestment that created it.

Tree planting, then, is both ecological and relational work. We must heal

our divisions if we hope to cool our streets. We must engage in models of collaborative partnerships rather than colonial rule. We must work with an eye toward social reconciliations as much as environmental restoration. When we create a canopy of love through listening, presence, and patient investment, the shade of oaks, elms, and maples becomes the visible sign of a healed community.

“The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). The leaves of our neighborhoods, too, can become healing for our communities because they have remained long enough to root, grow, and bear witness.

Finally, the wisdom trees offer extends beyond the moment of planting. They invite us into an arborist spirituality—a way of life that recognizes leaves

and bark, that knows how to prune and harvest, and that practices mutual flourishing with the living world. In the presence of trees, we remember how to live again in relationship with one another and with the canopy of creation that shelters us all. **M**

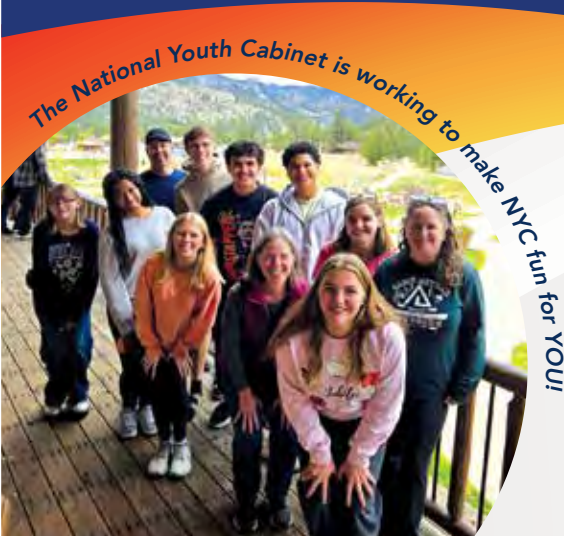
This article is adapted from *The Canopy of Creation: Trees, Faith, and the Work of Justice*, published by Creation Justice Ministries. Find the full resource at creationjustice.org/canopyofcreation. The organization has more than 20 member denominations, including the Church of the Brethren.



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Mark 9:36-37, 42; 10:13-16

The child in a Christian world

by Naomi Kraenbring

Recently there have been images shared on social media with phrases like “I can’t adult today.” This phrase, and others like it, have been printed on T-shirts and mugs, often accompanied by a cat or dog that looks weary and limp. It is meant to be a humorous depiction of the reality that being an adult and taking care of the daily responsibilities of independent living as an adult can be tiring and challenging. This stage of life also comes with autonomy and choice and power. Yet there are often pieces of the seeming simplicity of childhood to which we long to return.

Everyone who is an adult has, at some time and in some way, been a child who progressed into adulthood. Growth happens during life in all sorts of ways—

including physically, mentally, emotionally, and vocationally. This shared experience of development serves as both a useful reality and a potential metaphor. In most social and cultural contexts globally, children have less power, which is the foundational assumption upon which Jesus builds.

Jesus’ teachings about welcoming children appear in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 18:1-5, 19:13-15; Mark 9:36-37, 10:13-16; and Luke 18:15-17). There are three pieces to these teachings. First, Jesus instructs the disciples that the one who is like a child is the greatest. Second, Jesus shares the metaphor of the millstone hung around the neck of the one who causes a “little one” to stumble. Third, Jesus indicates that the children will receive the kingdom of God.

In these teachings, Jesus actively centers a child in the midst of the gathered listeners, and suggests that their faith should be childlike, too.

A child among them

In Mark 9, midway through the Gospel narrative, Jesus sits down to teach the disciples. Previously, as they walked, the disciples had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.

It is hard to know how they measured their greatness. Maybe it was in terms of who had the most land or who was the oldest. Perhaps it was in terms of who thought they were the most intelligent or had the strongest argument in a recent ethical debate. It could have been greatness measured by physical strength or family lineage or

“Jesus upends the expectations of society and culture in many ways during his time of ministry.”

frequency of spiritual practice. We might conclude, though, that when Jesus asked them about this argument, they realized its futility in their response of silence (v. 34).

Jesus upends the expectations of society and culture in many ways during his time of ministry. In this illustration, he counters what seems to be perhaps the most obvious and natural definition of who is greater. Of course, children are less powerful, at the bottom of the social ladder, and at the end of the line! Of course, children are smaller, weaker, lesser! And yet, Jesus claims, “Whoever wants to be first must be last” (v. 35). Greatness is redefined.

Children are prioritized as Jesus took a child and “put it among them” (v. 36). He centered the young one, the one viewed by the world as less, and gave it power of position. Jesus embraced this small person and gave it prioritized love and care. Jesus placed the symbol of their goal, to become childlike, right there in their midst, accessible to anyone who chooses this path.

Luke 2 reminds us that Jesus was a child among them from the very beginning of his story. God brought Jesus into the world as a human, but not as the type of human that we might think would be most logical or appropriate. God did not send Jesus to earth as an adult, grown and wise, with resources and experiences on which to rely. Instead, God became incarnate in an infant, a child, the exact opposite of what we might expect. Jesus as a baby became a child among them, announced by angels and visited by shepherds. The glory and power of the Messiah was not at all in the form that was anticipated. The shepherds were awe-struck by this news (v. 9). As they

shared the message further, others were amazed as well (v. 18).

Humility and hospitality

As Jesus’ teaching about greatness and centering children is shared in Matthew 18, Jesus makes clear that his followers must “change and become like children” (v. 3). But in the version in Mark 10, the instruction goes in a different direction. There is certainly the implication that the disciples should become like children if they want to be part of the kingdom of God (v. 15), although they are not explicitly told to change. Instead, in Mark 9:35 and 37, the disciples are told that whoever desires to have power must actually relinquish power. Whoever is welcoming to a child, like the one in their midst, also welcomes Jesus and, therefore, the Holy One who sent Jesus.

This call to following Jesus requires humility. Even the disciples who walked with Jesus in the flesh struggled with understanding Jesus’ teachings and found it challenging to apply them to their lives. After fussing with each other about who is the greatest, Jesus makes it clear that actual power, authentic power found in God, is not about how we perceive greatness through our human eyes and minds. Instead, humbling ourselves, putting ourselves last, in the way that a child would have found themselves, is a true measure of the power found in the kingdom of God. Shrinking our hearty view of ourselves and instead expanding our view of others leads to this type of humility.


This call to follow Jesus also requires hospitality. Caring for others, bringing those close who seem very different—because of chronological age or amount

of time as part of the church, for example—is an act of hospitality. Welcoming those who are perceived as weak, or “little,” is the hospitable thing to do.

Becoming like children

Don Kraybill writes in his book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*: “As the disciples vied for power and pushed toddlers away, Jesus used a child to symbolize kingdom values. Typically we tell people to grow up and ‘act their age.’ Jesus reverses the logic. He invites us to ‘grow down,’ to regress to childlike behavior” (p. 224).

Jesus is not suggesting that his disciples should stick their tongues out at one another or refuse to eat their peas. Instead, in Mark 10:15, Jesus is inviting his disciples to pursue a childlike faith, to “receive the kingdom of God as a little child.” This could look like the humility described above, an encouragement to those who strive for power to instead strive to elevate others.

This guidance to adopt a childlike faith also could look like faith that is more peaceful, more simple, and more dependent on one another. Children need and desire all those qualities! The Church of the Brethren has long used the tagline, “Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.” This emphasizes key aspects of the Anabaptist and Radical Pietist theological foundations of the denomination. The words also help us to focus faithful efforts in practice, engaging in ministries that seek to live out these characteristics. 

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

IAF statement calls on ‘Spirit of Power and Love’

The Inter-Agency Forum meeting in Florida on Jan. 27 issued the statement “A Spirit of Power and Love” on immigration enforcement and political violence and their effects on church members. The IAF includes the Annual Conference officers and other denominational leaders.

The statement cited scripture and Brethren heritage to address concern about “the terror and disorientation that many of our churches and communities are experiencing” and “the health of our common life together.”

“At this writing, 21 members of the Church of the Brethren have been detained or deported,” it said, in part. “People in the United States are losing their lives in detention and in public, at the hands of the authorities. We write now to members of the Church to remind all of us: In the face of brutal immigration enforcement, misinformation, and political violence, ‘God did not give us a spirit of timidity but one of power, love, and self-discipline’ (2 Timothy 1:7, ISV)... When the military is asked to serve as a police force, when trusted institutions become politicized, when the integrity of elec-

tions is questioned or attacked, and when misinformation flows from official voices, we sense patterns that trouble the spirit and strain the fabric of our lives together as a country.”

Find the full text at www.brethren.org/news/2026/spirit-of-power-and-love-statement.



Founa Badet (at microphone), director of Intercultural Ministries was among leaders of a press conference and prayer service calling for the extension of TPS for Haitians.

District executives make intercultural connections

The Council of District Executives held winter meetings on Jan. 28-Feb. 1 in Miami, Fla., combining business sessions with intercultural continuing education that connected with local congregations.

CODE and several agency representatives spent time at Miami Haitian Church of the Brethren and other area congregations (Miami First, Tabernacle of the Restoration, and Unify Christian). The time included a conversation with

Intercultural Ministries director Founa Badet and Deportation Defense Response staff Vildor Archange, Bible studies on Acts 2 shared through the lenses of different cultures and languages, and attendance at the Atlantic Southeast Multicultural Festival.

In their business sessions, CODE received various reports from Annual Conference and its agencies, the Deportation Defense Response Team, and the Annual Conference Review

and Evaluation Committee, among others. The group held conversations with the Ministry Advisory Council on possible updates to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership paper and with the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee on potential revisions to denominational sabbath renewal guidelines. Bethany Seminary president Jeff Carter led a combined session with the Inter-Agency Forum on “Creating a Culture of Calling.” Another combined session with IAF explored the “New Table” process being developed by CODE and the Annual Conference agencies.

Prayers were raised for the impending end of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitian immigrants, a move that was later stayed by a federal judge.

While in Florida, district executives and other denominational leaders joined in Atlantic Southeast District’s first Multicultural Festival.

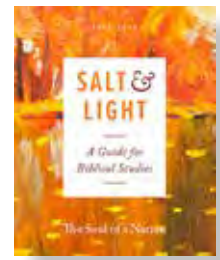


Church joins amici curiae brief in Supreme Court

On Feb. 17, the Church of the Brethren joined 30 other faith organizations in an amici curiae brief in the Supreme Court in support of the plaintiffs in *Noem v. Al Otro Lado*, No. 25-5. The case challenges the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) authority to prevent individuals from filing for asylum at ports of entry into the US.

Plaintiffs challenged a DHS interpretation of 8 U.S.C 1158(a)(1) that states that “[a]ny alien who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States ... may apply for asylum.” DHS has interpreted the language “arrives in the United States” to mean that the individual must step across the border. Under that interpretation, an individual stopped right at the border is not eligible to apply for asylum.

Brethren Press, MennoMedia curriculum partnership



Salt & Light: A Guide for Biblical Studies is a new quarterly Bible study curriculum for adults produced jointly by Brethren Press and MennoMedia. It blends *A Guide for Biblical Studies* published by Brethren Press and *Salt & Light* published by MennoMedia.

Building on decades of partnership between the two publishing houses, the curriculum will be written by Church of the Brethren and Mennonite biblical scholars, pastors, and educators. A Spanish-language edition will be available in digital form. To be released quarterly beginning this fall, the curriculum will be available at www.brethrenpress.com.

Discussions begin between Eder Financial and Everence®

Eder Financial has entered into discussions with Everence® (formerly known as Mennonite Mutual Aid) to explore how the two agencies can build on a shared commitment to better serve individuals, organizations, and congregations. “Eder and Everence have come to these discussions grounded in a shared foundation of faith, values, mission, and heritage,” Eder announced.

Personnel

Wendy McFadden has announced her retirement as publisher of Brethren Press and executive director of Communications for the Church of the Brethren, after almost 45 years of work for the denomination. She started in October 1981 as managing editor of *MESSENGER* and director of News Services. Her many accomplishments have included guiding Brethren Press through the struggles that have faced all small faith-based publishers; supporting *MESSENGER* and its several editors, culminating in 2016 in her creation of an editorial team on which she is an active member; creating the Church of the Brethren annual report in its various forms including written, pictorial, video, and display; serving on committees that developed the Church of the Brethren logo and denominational taglines; representing the Church of the Brethren at national and international ecumenical bodies and events, most recently Christian Churches Together; leading collaborations with the Mennonite publishing house including the major children’s Sunday

school curricula Jubilee, Gather ’Round, and Shine. She led Brethren Press’s publication of the 300th anniversary devotional *Fresh from the Word* as well as new iterations of the *Inglenook Cookbook*. She will retire on July 31.

Nancy Sollenberger Heishman retires July 17 as director of the Ministry Office, a position she has held since Nov. 6, 2017. During her tenure, she facilitated search processes for district executives for most of the 23 districts; worked with the Council of District Executives in reviewing policy and polity; worked with the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee on pastoral compensation practices; oversaw the ethics training for credentialed ministers that takes place every five years; sponsored and helped plan the Clergywomen’s Retreats; and more. The Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program supporting multi-vocational pastors was made possible by her work to acquire and oversee grants from Lilly Foundation Inc. She is a previous coordinator of the Spanish-

Language Ministry Training Programs of the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and a past mission co-coordinator in the Dominican Republic. In 2014, she was moderator of Annual Conference.

Gene Hollenberg retires at the end of 2026 as executive director of Camp Mack in Milford, Ind. He has served in the position for almost 10 years, since September 2016. His tenure included accomplishments such as facility improvements, new programs and staff, successful completion of a capital campaign, and successful pursuit of multiple grants.

Kelly Rumpf has been hired as director of camps and the Global Village at Shepherd’s Spring in Mid-Atlantic District. She and her husband, Danny, are ministry fellows at Grossnickle Church of the Brethren.

Preston Killough started Feb. 4 as an intern in the Brethren Historical Library and Archives at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. He also is an intern at the Lombard (Ill.) Historical Society.



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Discussion starters for small groups

■ **Happy 175th birthday!** writes Frank Ramirez in a retrospective of MESSENGER's long history. Ramirez has been reading MESSENGER for around 50 years. How long have you read MESSENGER? For longterm readers, what has the magazine meant to you over the years? For new subscribers, what prompted you to begin reading it? What does MESSENGER offer that other publications don't? Ramirez notes ways that MESSENGER helped develop his faith. In what ways does MESSENGER enhance your faith? How does the magazine represent "a conversation among equals, centered on scripture, to figure out who we are and what we ought to be doing" as a denomination—in other words, how does the MESSENGER help maintain Church of the Brethren identity and values? In your experience, does ongoing longterm conversation between people of differing points of view serve the church well?

■ **When MESSENGER spread Leander Smith's lies** by Nancy Werking Poling is a helpful corrective: our Church of the Brethren magazine doesn't always get it right! The story of how her family discovered the truth about her husband's grandfather also reveals how the man took advantage of *The Gospel Messenger*. List the ways Smith succeeded in creating false "truths" about himself and his ministry. Have you ever come across a person who did something similar? How is such self-promotion carried out today—through social media and the internet for example? How important is fact checking in the church, and how can we be vigilant about who to trust? List tools that help us discern who to trust—such as background checks. How does having a strong bureaucracy help protect the church? As we consider ways to evaluate truthfulness, how is the Bible a tool for discernment?

TURNING POINTS

New members

Bakersfield Community, Calif.

Kathy Mashburn, Edmona McLaughlin, Elias Pastrano, Jeremiah Pastrano

Beaver Creek, Hagerstown, Md.:

Nancy Burrell, Marilyn Disbennett, Kevin Unger, Shannon Unger

Bush Creek, Monrovia, Md.:

Shelli Hill, Kathy Peyton, Bruce White, Audrey Wilson

Columbia City, Ind.:

Jennifer Baker, Sofia Bradburn, Jakob Collier, Amber Coverstone, Cleon Downing, Kathy Harrison, Maddie Jagger, Kendyl Sims, Ryan Sims, Tracy Wineland

Freeport, Ill.:

Dave Boettner, Lavel Chaney, Haeven Kelley

Garden City, Kan.:

Heath Barnard, Ramona Navarez (Boyd), Zachary Boyd, Natalia Byrd, Bill Eichorn, Jan Fief, Catherine Gordon, Jerri Jackson, Mike Keller, Jamie Symmonds, Martha Symmonds, Emilee Turley, Brad Weller

Gettysburg, Pa.:

Kathy Miller, Aly Musselman, Melissa Rosenberry

Good Samaritan, Cranberry Township, Pa.:

Carl Kirstatter

Hagerstown, Md.:

Beth Davis-Reinhold, Becky Ernst, Marsha Fuller, Wilma Moore, Gary Wright, Sue Wright

Living Peace, Powell, Ohio:

Jo-Anna Fullen, Zoe Fullen

Maple Grove, Ashland, Ohio:

Gloria Byrns, Mike Byrns, Mary Cuffman, Ronald Cuffman, Pat Deane, Joe DiCesare, Laura DiCesare, Justin Donley, Qiana Donley, Jill Duncan, Cierra Gurney, Charles "Chuck" McCarty, Jed Miller, Olivia Miller

Myerstown, Pa.:

Robert Lentz, Sandra Lentz, Mabel Shirk

Peoria, Ill.:

Ginny Moore,

Lenora Roloff

Peters Creek, Roanoke, Va.:

Dorothy Goodman, Connor Ladd, Jack Lowe, Lorna Lowe, Cathy Rollison, Becky Sackett, Kailey Simmons, Brooklyn Vaught, Jennifer Vaught

Poplar Ridge, Defiance, Ohio:

Derek Humbert, Greg Kunesh, Josh Kunesh, Clint Sexton

Wedding Anniversaries

Cullor, Dwight and Hope, Mt. Morris, Ill., 50

Dietrich, Jan and Steve, Mt. Morris, Ill., 50

Herron, Dave and Deb, Columbia City, Ind., 50

High, Dianne and John, Myerstown, Pa., 55

Laudermilch, Jeanne and John, New Oxford, Pa., 50

MacOwan, John and Sue, Lafayette, Ind., 55

Miller, Blaine and Judy, Waterloo, Iowa, 65

Miller, Francis and Sandra, Littlestown, Pa., 50

Otey, Janet and Ken, Roanoke, Va., 75

Toms, Irv and Joyce, Mt. Morris, Ill., 60

Weller, Herb and Mary Frances, Littlestown, Pa., 50

Ziegler, Helen and Levi, Lititz, Pa., 72

Deaths

Appenheimer, Rosemary, 94, Dixon, Ill., Feb. 3

Bashore, Donald G., 77, Lebanon, Pa., Nov. 13

Bashore, Janet E., 77, Bernville, Pa., Oct. 1

Bashore, Lester D., 75,

Myerstown, Pa., Dec. 19

Baughman, Judy A., 69, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., Jan. 5

Bernhard, Miriam, Tavares, Fla., Jan. 4

Bishop, Granville, L., 84, Willis, Va., Nov. 28

Bishop, LaVon, 93, Defiance, Ohio, Jan. 2

Bowles, Sarah, 91, Roanoke, Va., April 8

Brandt, Daryl Eugene, 96, La Verne, Calif., Dec. 15

Brode, Robert B., 98, Mechanicsburg, Pa., Dec. 1

Caron, Helen, 88, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 22

Collin, Chris, 96, Freeport, Ill., Feb. 10

Collins, Liz, 87, Sebring, Fla., Oct. 12

Copeland, Bettie, 91, Pekin, Ill., Oct. 1

Crone, Clara, 98, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 1

Curtis, Marvin, 65, Selbyville, Del., Dec. 30

Desper, Jane Arnold, 91, Lyndhurst, Va., Jan. 9

Dickinson, Adrienne, 76, Portland, Ore., Feb. 13

Ebersole, Linda, 77, Williamsport, Md., Oct. 7

Ebling, Earl George, 87, Bethel, Pa., Oct. 24

Emerick, Cinda, 96, Chambersburg, Pa., Dec. 13

Engel, Donna, 94, Waterloo, Iowa, Jan. 1

Etter, Ray, 88, Chambersburg, Pa., Nov. 26

Funk, Elizabeth Ann Clark, 87, Upper St. Clair, Pa., Nov. 26

Garey, Gerald, 77, Greensboro, Md., Dec. 30

Garst, Jean, 86, Salem, Va., Jan. 24

Gibble, Nancy, 93, Sycamore, Ill., Dec. 22

Gindlesperger, Donna (Jean), 91, Chambersburg, Pa., Dec. 3

Hayward, Robert, 82, Brookville, Ohio, Dec. 28

Hoffman, Margaret Joanna (Joan), 93, McPherson, Kan., Dec. 10

Kenepp, Jeanette, 100, Yeagertown, Pa., Dec. 14

Kratz, Jan, 83, State College, Pa., Feb. 1

Linkous, Lee, 71, Roanoke, Va., Dec. 26, 2024

Martin, Carl W., 89, Lititz, Pa., Oct. 5

Martin, Melba (Wert), 98, Roanoke, Va., Jan. 13, 2025

McCleary, David, 91, Chambersburg, Pa., Nov. 30

McCullough, Joanne, 87, Libertyville, Ill., March 22, 2025

McMullen, Edna, 90, Hanna City, Ill., Jan. 31

McOwen, Dennis, 78, Indianapolis, Ind., Oct. 11

Miller, Paul, 90, Lewistown, Pa., Dec. 5

Mullens, Joyce, 93, Roanoke, Va., Feb. 4, 2025

Powell, Thomas, Roanoke, Va., June 23

Rhodes, Kaye, 79, Hagerstown, Md., Dec. 9

Rhodes, Leon Weaver, 99, Bridgewater, Va., Feb. 18

Rice, Robert E. Jr., 76, Argos, Ind., July 20

Rupert, Doris, 93, McVeytown, Pa., Jan. 3

Saul, Richard, 91, Cedar Falls, Iowa, Nov. 6

Shafer, James, 89, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 5

Smith, A. Harrison., 98,

Greensburg, Pa., Dec. 14

Smith, Michael E., Fort Wayne, Ind., Dec. 10

Stachnik, Ken, 78, Washington, Ill., Jan. 13

Swynenberg, Mary, 91, Montgomery, Ill., March 9, 2025

Taylor, Thomas W., 93, Lititz, Pa., Nov. 16

Twigg, Rebecca, 83, Frederick, Md., March 23, 2025

Wagner, Kenneth C., Waxahachie, Texas, May 18

Wenger, Shirley, 92, Manheim, Pa., Dec. 27

Wesner, Richard "Dick," 82, Ashland, Ohio, Dec. 16

White, Preston L., 80, Columbus, N.C., Jan. 15

Winders, Kathleen, 92, Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 14, 2025

Wolfsen, Michael Glenn, 83, Upland, Calif., Jan. 9

Wright, Oren, 83, Oakley, Ill., Feb. 19

Ziegler, Levi, 94, Lititz, Pa., Dec. 28

Ordained

Cox, Terrie S., Mid-Atl. Dist., (Manassas, Va.), Dec. 2

Habecker, Nicolette, Atl. N.E. Dist., (Cornerstone, Lebanon, Pa.), Dec. 7

Haldeman, Jason E., Atl. N.E. Dist., (Elizabethtown, Pa.), Dec. 28

Irvin, Ian G., S. Pa. Dist., (Gettysburg, Pa.), June 22

Iyasere, Chukwuma F., Atl. N.E. Dist., (Providence, Royersford, Pa.), Sept. 14

Kramer, Matthew R., Atl. N.E. Dist., (Lancaster, Pa.), Oct. 26

Zurin, Kevin, Atl. N.E. Dist., (Florin, Mount Joy, Pa.), Sept. 16

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.



MESSENGER and the telephone

This year is the 150th anniversary of the telephone. Alexander Graham Bell was granted a patent on March 7, 1876; a few hours later, Elisha Gray applied with a very similar invention. The conflict went to court, and Bell won the case, ending up with the official first patent.



JAN FISCHER
BACHMAN

Having always had phones, it is hard for me to imagine a world without them. Yet at the time Bell and Gray were fighting about who owned the idea of talking at a distance, MESSENGER had already existed for 25 years, albeit with a series of different names. Through the years *Gospel-Visitor*, *Gospel Visitor*, *Christian Family Companion*, *The Pilgrim*,

Weekly-Pilgrim, *Primitive Christian*, *Brethren at Work*, and *Gospel Messenger* combined in various ways to become the magazine we have today.

Phones have changed from big wooden boxes with different rings to identify whose call was coming through the party line, to wall-mounted devices with long curly cords, to tiny pocket computers that take photos and offer books, games, alarms, calendars—and even articles from MESSENGER.

The financing and staffing of MESSENGER has changed. In 1972 the editors lamented losing a subsidy from the denomination, which had been \$50,000 in 1971 and was cut to \$35,000 in 1972. In 2026 dollars, those subsidies would equal \$456,172 and \$272,340. That same year, they lost two associate editors, the director of news, and the director of graphic design.

Today's streamlined MESSENGER mostly pays for itself through subscriptions (thank you!) and ads (thank you!).

The only person who works solely on the magazine is a part-time subscription specialist, whom you might have spoken with by, yes, phone. The editorial team is made up of three people who do other work for the Church of the Brethren, a contract editor, and a contract designer—not to mention more than 120 writers per year from all parts of the denomination.

Like the telephone, MESSENGER has evolved and changed. It used to be possible to dial a phone number and hear Newsline read aloud. In the past decade, MESSENGER Radio has offered something similar, although less comprehensive, online. The MESSENGER Facebook page allows readers to discuss articles virtually in real time, expediting the function of letters (which we still also receive and appreciate). Music playlists expand on themes from the magazine, serving people who like to listen and not just read.

There has been a digital edition of MESSENGER for many years, with a few dozen subscribers preferring to read it online. Last year, the online edition became free and usage has grown to about 150 readers per month—far from the more than 4,400 print subscriptions!

As the denomination changes, the format or focus of MESSENGER may change. In 2025, MESSENGER offered a Bible study in English and Spanish and another in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. Is there a demand for more writing in those languages?

MESSENGER Radio has been on hiatus. Would our members appreciate more audio recordings? Is it time for a video MESSENGER?

Former editor Howard Royer perhaps said it best when celebrating the magazine's 150th anniversary: "However the role of MESSENGER evolves in the decades to come, there will always be a place for telling stories of a faith that makes known the love and reconciling spirit of Christ."

“There will always be a place for telling stories of a faith that makes known the love and reconciling spirit of Christ.”

Annual Conference

June 28-July 2, 2026 ◦ Fort Wayne, Indiana



The 239th recorded Church of the Brethren Annual Conference offers something old and something new as we reflect on our past while envisioning our future. We can't imagine doing it without you. Please join us in Fort Wayne to...

IMAGINE!

Acts 2:17-18

- Inspiring preaching, music, and worship
- Meaningful connections
- A Morning of Sparking, Stirring, and Serving
- Genuine expressions of care and concern for our world
- Informational and formational learning
- Necessary business (but no more than necessary)
- Empowering witness and service



For registration, housing and information go to:
www.brethren.org/ac2026

Annual Conference 2026 conference photos by Rebekah Carswell, Chuck Martin, Rebekah Overman, Donna Parcell, Gladys Remnant, Glenn Riegel, and Ally Yingling

...with us!