

# Unnecessary Things

by Gimbiya Kettering



1828 Annual Conference  
(York, Pennsylvania) Article 2:

*Whether we may conform ourselves to the world with unnecessary things on our carriages? Considered, that it cannot be.*

**E**very time my daughter wanted milk I had to put on my winter coat, gloves, hat, and snow boots to ready myself to go outside. All of the food was in coolers on the back porch while we dithered about what to do about our dying fridge. This made me feel a bit Old Order, so to speak. I was grateful, I suppose, for the unseasonable cold, but I also blamed it for the outage and fluctuations that likely killed—or almost killed—our fridge.

It was, by contemporary standards, an elderly fridge—new to the house when we bought it 20 years ago. I joke that it must have been on clearance

when the flipper who set to work on the century-old row-house was buying appliances, because it was a respected, American brand and a little too large for the space. Twenty years ago, it was top of the line with a water dispenser and an ice dispenser.

It was also the last generation of refrigerator that had dial temperature control settings: *cold, colder, coldest*. It was not the first time the fridge had died, nor the second, nor the third. I am the neighbor others call when they need a referral to fix anything.

This time, my repairman came and looked at the fridge and shook his head. It was repairable, but it was a significant fix; parts would take days to come, and it was a very old fridge and the damage could be worse than it appeared at first glance. He suggested

it was time to get a new fridge.

Instead, I got a second opinion. My other repair person, who has an activist approach to the right-to-repair, pointed out something entirely different that was wrong with it. Also, he asked some rather worrying questions about the condenser.

About that time, my husband texted that refrigerators were 35 percent off at the big-box retailer near our house. So, we went to the store and there

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were three rows of fridges that seemed to have more in common with computers than iceboxes: There were buttons to program the exact temperature and the amount of water and the temperature of dispensed water. There were buttons to lock and unlock these settings. There was a fridge that, if you knocked on it twice, the door glass would turn clear so you could see what was inside. Another had an embedded television screen.

I kept thinking, *This is sin.*

By which, I simply mean that all of these features are unnecessary.

One of the virtues of the early Brethren was to live simply—with neither ostentatiousness nor luxury. In 1828, on the matter of carriages, unnecessary things included upholstery, decorative metal fittings, and other such bling. There are Annual Conference statements in the 1800s also considering and turning away from carpets, curtains, and fashionable clothing.

The slim notes repeatedly reject conformity with the world, much the way that today's Amish choose to use the horse and buggy instead of cars. Like our pacifism, the commitment to simplicity was countercultural and I am certain that, at some point, there was a query about the necessity of trendy, fashionable iceboxes.

Three days of selecting dinner ingredients by flashlight took any romance out of the idea of simple living. For me, a fridge was a necessary thing, and still I was unsure what to do. In lieu of an Annual Conference statement about electrical appliance upgrades, I talked to my parents about the choice, and my Sister of faith, and my spiritual director, and a number of pastoral friends. They offered prayers with my struggles and absolution in the spirit of individual choice.

If this were a parable, I would tell

you that we repaired the old fridge.

But we didn't. The new fridge keeps the food cold. It also keeps asking me how many ounces of water I want. I am overwhelmed and guilt-ridden. As

with all sins, I suppose I will grow accustomed to it. 

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



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