



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

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**What it means to
be a peace church**

*EYN chooses
faith over fear*



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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on the cover

Don Fitzkee walks with EYN President Daniel Y. C. Mbaya, (center) and EYN vice president Nuhu Mutah Abba. Photo by EYN News.

Above: Construction of the entrance to Brethren University Nigeria.

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Humans and intelligence

When I'm in conversations about artificial intelligence, I like to lean into my Brethren identity. I feel good about being slow to adopt new technology where the end result is unconvincing,

Or terrifying. That's not my word; that's the word used by two different presenters at a recent conference—both of them early and consistent users of AI.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

When I mentioned this word to a lawyer who specializes in publishing rights and AI, he asked, “Did you see the movie *Oppenheimer*”? I sure did. We chuckled uneasily.

I recognize that AI is embedded into my everyday life, bidden or unbidden: Predictive text has gotten annoying, but texting with AI turned off is laborious. Search engines give fast answers because of AI. It's there at the end of every paragraph in Gmail, asking whether I want to improve my wording. (How to annoy an editor: Have a machine keep offering to make your writing better.)

The conference presenters emphasized that AI is a useful tool but should never be used without your scrutiny, honed by years of critical thinking—and maybe even a degree in English literature. Use of AI as a tool should begin with a human and end with a human, one of them said.

That might be fine for those of you in the middle of your careers, said a young person in the audience. What advice would you give to someone who's 22 and doesn't have those years of experience? she asked. In today's world, how do I develop the critical thinking skills I need to use AI responsibly?

Good question.

“Cognitive surrender” is a term used to describe what happens to our brains when we willingly hand over our thinking ability to AI. What will life be like a generation after we have surrendered our ability to think critically?

For now I'm using my critical thinking skills to listen to those addressing the ethical issues around AI. Many of those are well known, but from the World Association for Christian Communication I learned of a new one: “digital colonialism.”

This term, which originates from the Global South, refers to the exploitation of millions of people who do the hidden data annotation that makes AI work. (See more at “The Hidden Cost of AI,” on www.waccglobal.org.)

Artificial intelligence is trained on the hoovered-up creativity of the world's humans, and it's dependent on human “ghost workers” to provide digital labor. AI consumes massive amounts of fresh water and energy needed by humans to live. And nobody—most notably those in charge of the AI race—knows what will happen next.

From Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

Wendy McFadden

“Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.” —Psalm 62:5, NIV

“Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week.”

—novelist Alice Walker

“A life built upon Sabbath is contented because in rhythms of rest we discover our time is full of the holiness of God.” —author Shelly Miller, in *Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World*

“Stop for one whole day every week, and you will remember what it means to be created in the image of God.” —Episcopal priest/author Barbara Brown Taylor

“Rest and be thankful.” — English poet William Wordsworth

“If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath—our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents create Sabbath for us.” —Bread for the Journey founder Wayne Muller, in *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*

MOVING AROUND THE MAP

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference lands in Fort Wayne, Ind., this year. Can you put these states in order from the most recent to host an Annual Conference to least recent? Answers are elsewhere on this page.

- | | | |
|------------|------------|----------------|
| ARIZONA | ILLINOIS | NORTH CAROLINA |
| CALIFORNIA | IOWA | OHIO |
| COLORADO | KANSAS | PENNSYLVANIA |
| FLORIDA | MISSOURI | TENNESSEE |
| IDAHO | NEW JERSEY | VIRGINIA |

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

One hundred forty-five years ago, in 1881, an Old Order group within the Brethren resubmitted directly to the Annual Conference their Miami Valley Petition seeking adherence to more traditional values. The petition, which had been turned aside in favor of an “alternate motion” the previous year, was rejected again because it had not followed the proper process of coming through a district conference that year. That proved the final straw, and the group formally separated from the denomination that November, becoming the Old German Baptist Brethren.



BY THE NUMBERS

223

Number of congregations that received grants in 2025 through the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations and the Lilly Endowment National Clergy Renewal Program. Both are administered by Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. The grants help to support and encourage sabbath rest and renewal for pastors. The 2025 grants totaled more than \$13 million.

DID YOU KNOW?

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Route 66, the historic “Mother Road” that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles. Along nearly 2,500 miles, it crossed through Illinois, Missouri, the southeastern tip of Kansas, Oklahoma, northern Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. Many portions of the road still exist. If you want to “get your kicks” in Brethren fashion, some congregations located near the route include Chicago First, Springfield (Ill.) First, Virden (Ill.), Girard (Ill.), Cabool (Mo.), Big Creek (Cushing, Okla.), Independence (Kan.), Clovis (N.M.), Pomona (Calif.) Fellowship, La Verne (Calif.), Restoration-Los Angeles, and other L.A.-area churches.



ANSWERS (most recent to least): 1. North Carolina (Greensboro, 2025); 2. Ohio (Cincinnati, 2023); 3. Florida (Tampa, 2012); 4. Missouri (St. Louis, 2012); 5. Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh, 2010); 6. California (San Diego, 2009); 7. Virginia (Richmond, 2008); 8. Iowa (Des Moines, 2006); 9. Illinois (Peoria, 2005); 10. Idaho (Boise, 2003); 11. Kansas (Wichita, 1994); 12. Arizona (Phoenix, 1985); 13. New Jersey (Ocean Grove, 1968); 14. Colorado (Colorado Springs, 1953); 15. Tennessee (Bristol, 1905).



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Churches join press conference at correctional facility

Members of four Church of the Brethren congregations in Indiana—Beacon Heights, Northview, Manchester, and Eel River Community—joined Manchester University students and others at a press conference at the Miami Correctional Facility on April 9.

The prison in north central Indiana has been called “the Speedway Slammer” by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a title that both the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and many Hoosiers reject. This is already the most dangerous prison in the state, with the highest rates of inmate death. Recent whistleblowers have joined countless correctional staff decrying the culture and practices of the prison.

Now there are about 600 immigrant detainees held

there, separate from the rest of the prison population, with a contract with DHS to increase this number to 1,000.

“Every detention bed is a family in crisis,” said Miguel Avila, a Mexican immigrant who spent nine months in ICE detention. He described horrible conditions, but said his family suffered the most.

“The tremendous stress level that my wife and family have to deal with and the psychological trauma comes to my children is not something that can be easily handled,” he said. “It has caused lasting damage, and my family will never be the same again.”

Two recent deaths of immigrant detainees and another prisoner at Miami Correctional Facility have grown the outcry for the state of Indiana to end current DHS contracts.

—Anna Lisa Gross

Anniversaries

■ **First Church of the Brethren in Chicago is celebrating 101 years in its current building** at the corner of Congress Parkway and Central Park Avenue on the west side of Chicago. The anniversary celebration included an open house May 9 and a special worship service May 10 with former pastor Orlando Redekopp.

■ **“Camp Colorado turns 75!”** said the camp, which highlighted 75 summers of “campfires, late-night conversations and worship, and young people going home different than they arrived. Seventy-five years of volunteers giving

their weekends, skills, and hearts so that something special can happen in the mountains.”

The camp in the Rocky Mountains near Sedalia is celebrating with anniversary events and a “75 for 75 Giving Campaign,” along with a reunion weekend and family camp June 25-28.

—Kerrick van Asselt

■ **The Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests is celebrating its 50th anniversary.** Plans for an event May 29-31 in Minneapolis include storytelling, singing, worship, workshops, artmaking, games, and connecting over meals.

■ **Camp Bethel in Fincastle, Va., held its 25th Sounds of the Mountains Festival April 17-18.** The camp in Virgina District also is beginning plans for its 100th anniversary in July 2027. The district’s historical committee is inviting submissions for a book covering the past 50 years of Camp Bethel and its ministries. “Whether you are/were a camper, a staff member, the parent of a camper, or someone who loves Camp Bethel, do you have a favorite memory or a great photo of Camp Bethel dating from 1977 to today?” asked the committee. Send submissions to history@virlina.org.

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.

Spruce Run assembles 50 years of ministers

The annual homecoming of Spruce Run Church of the Brethren on July 20 last year was a rare opportunity to assemble a team that spanned 50 years of the congregation’s ministry in Monroe County, Va. The church’s history in the county dates to 1829.

Pastors and former pastors at the homecoming included 91-year-old William R. Biddle as guest speaker, who pastored the church from 1976 until 1992; Rodger L. Boothe, pastor from 1990 until 2022; Dewey V. Broyles, whose pastorate began in 1990; and Annette Hubbard and Kerry Johnson, who accepted the call to join the shared ministry in November 2023.

While Boothe continues to serve as an elder of the church, Broyles, Hubbard, and Johnson make up the current ministerial team. Biddle has returned many times in retirement to share God’s word and fellowship with the congregation. Under his leadership, a shared ministry pas-



Pastors at the homecoming included (from left) William R. Biddle, Rodger L. Boothe, Dewey V. Broyles, Annette Hubbard, and Kerry Johnson.

toral model began that continues today.

Appearing behind the pastors is baptistry artwork that was unveiled at the previous year’s homecoming. It was painted by local artist Robert Tuckwiller in early 2024. Inspiration came from Psalm 23 and imagery includes familiar landscapes from the surrounding community, the Spruce Run church building, and the newly purchased John Deere tractor and round hay baler belonging to the church’s oldest member, Roy Shaver, who still resides in the Lindside community. —Dewey V. Broyles

A whale of an idea

Bill Dougherty of Parkview Church of the Brethren in Lewistown, Pa., was featured in the *Lewistown Sentinel* for his part in a sermon series on Jonah. The article featured a picture of Dougherty holding the whale he carved during the Lenten series, at the invitation of pastor Teresa Fink.

When she asked him to use his wood-carving talents for the church, “he didn’t try to ‘run away’ from the task” but “came up with ‘a whale of an idea,’” the article reported. During four worship services, he carved a 32-inch piece of basswood into a whale “as the messages unfolded.” He put in more work at home between services, “devoting more than 35 hours to the beautifully detailed finished project.”

Find a picture of Dougherty and the whale at www.lewistownsentinel.com/news/religion/2026/04/jonah-and-the-whale.



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How young adults can find *community*

The third stop during a four-house progressive dinner party in Lancaster.

Rae Ann Miller

by Luke Haldeman

Randomized and intense work schedules, scattered housing availability, far-reaching political divides, aging congregations, and the million other factors that the world has gifted our generation make it difficult, as young adults, to find community. With the deck stacked so thoroughly against us, what can we do? I think we can stack the deck back.

I live, mostly by luck, among warm and vibrant communities of young people, family, and supportive adults in Lancaster city. In these groups, I've seen choices that build community and choices that discourage it, and I've watched social dynamics change over time. Community, I've seen, is a long-term effort, and our choices can help us find (or create) it.

In our contexts, we can *seek community*. In our relationships, we can *invite community*. And in our charac-

ter, we can *be community*. Here are a few suggestions based on my own experience.

In your context, seek community

If there is any way, move your life closer to where people are. Moving is stressful but often possible. It's also beneficial to find a place with space to host people, even if that space is a nearby park or church.

Attend conferences, conventions, or concerts to find people who share your interests.

Participate in church events outside normal service times, like game nights or small groups—even at churches you don't regularly attend.

Search directories like Foundation for Intentional Community or the Catholic Worker Movement to find intentional communities in your area.

Attend a church close to your house to meet people nearby.

Find coffee shops, parks, or other venues. Show up often and talk to people.

Search for volunteering opportunities (libraries, nonprofits, churches, ecological work, community theaters) or young professionals groups, and sign up.

Show up at events promoted through local newspapers, Eventbrite, social media, accounts with your city name in the title, or even physical bulletin boards in libraries, parks, or stores.

Ask anyone you meet if there are cool events going on!

Subscribe to email newsletters from local nonprofits, news sources, social causes, or faith organizations, to learn about events you might not otherwise see.

Join others in activism or protest and show up more than once.

Use apps like Meetup, Heylo,

Bumble BFF, Facebook groups, or even Google search to find potential friends and interest groups in your area. There are often groups for things like hiking, hobbies, sports, dancing, improv, music, board games, book clubs, stargazing, crafts, etc.

In your relationships, invite community

Ask friends and neighbors for help with simple things, and at other times offer help back (shovel snow, clear leaves, babysit, bring food when people are sick).

Be open and talk often about things you're interested in, or things you want to do, and ask others about these things. You'll likely find common interests and opportunities to do things together.

Plant a garden and share produce with neighbors, or help them weed their gardens.

For one-on-one conversations, invite people from work or church or other spaces to get coffee, lunch, or to hang out after work. Eventually you'll find people you like!

Say yes to invitations. Even if you don't have a great time, maybe you'll meet someone else who's not having a great time either.

Be open with affirmations and appreciation. Tell people what you like about their lives, and receive their words and gifts with thankfulness and grace.

Have hobbies like the gym, climbing, crafting, or watching a show, or be part of small groups or book clubs and invite people to join you. This can work especially well if activities are scheduled at predictable times.

Live with housemates or friends so that, when you host or plan things, you already have a group of people who will be there; then you can invite more people. If you don't live with others, find a core group of two or three people for an activity and then invite others.

Find excuses to celebrate (your last student loan payment, a new job, your favorite niche holiday, your return from a trip where you have lots of pictures to share, or even just a time for doing homework or job applications). People love an excuse to hang out.

Find older relatives or adults you respect, and call or get food with them. Ask if you can do it regularly—they would probably love it, and it could expand your perspectives on what's possible.

Say hi to your neighbors, and keep a list of their names so you remember them.

Ask to schedule activities with your church, like a hike or game night, or something even more unique. In my church, we signed up in groups of four to share memories from different points in our lives.

Cook or bake extra food, and bring it to work, church, or neighbors.

Spend less time online and more time in the streets, parks, markets, and shops of your neighborhood.

Make plans for yourself, and then invite people to join you in what you're already going to do. If no one else comes, it still works out!

Create themed group chats with people—movies, games, books, local events—and share invitations.

Advocate for work schedule adjustments to make space for community. Say you have a prior commitment.

In your character, be community

Be yourself authentically, while also realizing that you create yourself (your habits, your skills, your relationships) over time.

Start being a little bit more annoying—not by how much you ask for things, but by how freely and frequently you offer, invite, give, affirm, and celebrate.

Check your cynicism, sarcasm, and tendency toward non-commitment, and seek instead to express hope, make

commitments, and speak sincerely. This helps build trust and good feelings with others, and can improve your own outlook on life.

Pick up skills that are welcoming, like baking, cooking, working on cars or bikes, playing an instrument, babysitting, or helping people out with your pickup truck.


Hype up people you know when talking about them to others. It's a small thing, but it helps bring people together.

Pray frequently for other people in your life. It will draw your focus to the lives and needs of others, and maybe you can be the answer to those prayers.

Practice these good things until they become habits, and then second nature, and then simply who you are. Habituate the virtues of community.

Underlying these suggestions is a common theme: finding community takes effort and time. You have to be in it for the long haul.

Because of this time and effort, there are ways that a community-focused life might take away from your individual freedom. It might mean more annoyance and inconvenience, and greater closeness to the problems of others. "Count the cost," as Alexander Mack liked to say.

When I reflect on my own experience and when I see the vast history and witness of our Anabaptist heritage, I believe that pursuing community also makes us more free; it opens us to the freedom to live a much fuller and more wonderful life—a life we never could have dreamed of alone. 

Luke Haldeman, of Lancaster, Pa., works as an archivist for Mennonite Central Committee and serves on the Young Adult Conference steering committee. This article is adapted from the spring 2026 issue of *Bridge*, a newsletter of the Church of the Brethren Youth and Young Adult Ministries office.

“Community, I’ve seen, is a long-term effort, and our choices can help us find (or create) it.”



A peace church in a prevailing storm

by Don Fitzkee

What does it mean to be a peace church when enemies are burning your churches, killing your pastors and family members, and in some cases displacing entire congregations? This was one of the questions I wrestled with as I listened and learned from brothers and sisters in Nigeria in March.

One of the privileges of serving as Annual Conference moderator is representing the Church of the Brethren internationally. My wife, Carolyn, and I traveled with Roy Winter, executive director of Service Ministries, to attend the Majalisa (Annual Conference) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN).

We were joined there by Sharon Flaten, Bethany Theological

Seminary's staff person in Nigeria, and EYN project manager Markus Gamache, who cared for us throughout the week. The event was held March 24-27 at the denominational headquarters in Kwarhi, under the banner "Peace Church in Prevailing Storm."

This Majalisa was our second. During my previous tenure as Mission and Ministry Board chair, Carolyn and I attended the April 2016 conference at the Boulder Hill compound in Jos. On that trip we marked the second anniversary of the abduction of 276 girls from a school in Chibok, many of them EYN members and 87 of whom still haven't returned. We also learned then about the church's early efforts to provide relief to the suffering. Such work continues today.

Since 2014, the Church of the

Brethren in the US has contributed more than \$6.5 million from the Emergency Disaster Fund, providing humanitarian aid and recovery assistance for some of the most vulnerable people. A recently approved \$95,000 grant for 2026 will help resettle some of the 20,000 EYN members living as refugees in neighboring Cameroon.

As EYN's capacity to respond has grown, the Church of the Brethren has been reducing support. But it was clear that deep bonds have been forged through 103 years of partnership, and especially through the past decade as US Brethren have accompanied our Nigerian brothers and sisters through the storm.

I'm not comfortable with a lot of fuss, so it was difficult for me to receive the honorific treatment

“Deep bonds have been forged . . . especially through the past decade as US Brethren have accompanied our Nigerian brothers and sisters through the storm.”

At a first-time mass ordination service, 31 ministers are inaugurated into different levels of ministry.

extended to us “international guests.” (Then again, I would willingly have accepted the gift of air conditioning as daily temperatures soared above 100 degrees!) I’m not particularly good at being a dignitary, but I tried to play the part, recognizing that the goodwill extended to us was an expression of appreciation for many decades of mutual relationships.

One older brother expressed gratitude for the early missionaries who introduced his people to the gospel. Another told us how he was the first in his family to attend school, where he was nurtured by a Brethren missionary. He went on to a career, rising to the country’s Ministry of Education.

Carolyn and I did what we could to strengthen those relationships. She took along Nigerian handcrafts and musical instruments that her parents, Dick and Cathy Boshart, had purchased in Nigeria 60 years ago, when they served briefly as house parents at



Markus Gamache (left) interprets the message preached by Don Fitzkee.



The Rev. Daniel Y. C. Mbaya, EYN president, delivers a fiery message that calls out leadership failures in the Nigerian government.

Hillcrest School in Jos. (Carolyn took her first steps in Nigeria.) The vintage items created great interest at the Majalisa and are intended for display at a new museum in Garkida.

The security situation in northern Nigeria has improved enough in the past decade that we were able to travel in areas this time that would not have been advisable 10 years ago, although on April 8—eight days after we returned home—the US State Department downgraded parts of Nigeria from “Reconsider Travel” to “Do Not Travel.”

Northern Adamawa state, home to Kwarhi and Garkida, was among the downgraded areas. The week before our arrival, suicide bombers had carried out a coordinated attack in Maiduguri, home to the largest EYN church and many others. And the day we left another attack took place in Jos.

The EYN headquarters at Kwarhi had been attacked by Boko Haram terrorists in 2014 but has since been rebuilt and fortified with block walls

around the entire compound. A few armed military personnel provided security during the conference, which began on a somber tone, as three delegates were killed in an auto accident on their way to the event. Travel remains challenging, especially in rural areas. To allow people to travel to funerals on what was to be the final day of the conference, planners instead added a business session on Thursday night, which didn’t wrap up until 1:30 a.m.

In his report to the delegates, the Rev. Dr. Daniel Y. C. Mbaya, EYN president, described the current situation in Nigeria as “Christian genocide.” After naming pastors who had been killed, he asked, “Is their blood not that of martyrs?” He cited figures of 20,000 widows, 130,000 orphans, and more than 70 congregations (local church councils, or LCCs) that were displaced at the end of 2025, an increase of 30 LCCs since the previous year.

And while encouraging the church to choose faith over fear, he chastised government officials for their lack of response. He expressed deep faith in God but also called on the government to provide security. I gathered that some EYN members welcomed recent US military involvement in Nigeria. While I view the US involve-



The entrance to the new Brethren University Nigeria (BUN) is under construction.

ment negatively, I might think differently if I had lost loved ones and continued to face threats of attack.

It was fascinating to observe the interaction between church and state. A steady stream of political leaders—some expected and some who appeared to have arrived unannounced—greeted the conference body, which wreaked havoc on the schedule. Among them were a national senator (and EYN member), the deputy governor of Adamawa State, state-level politicians and candidates, and even a regional king.

While President Mbaya emphasized that EYN members are encouraged to support qualified candidates regardless of party, it was clear that the church views political participation as one way of achieving peace and security. What does it mean to be a peace church in stormy times?

The Rev. Dr. Amos G. Kiri, guest speaker and president of the United Church of Christ in Nigeria (HEKAN), ably examined the theme from different angles as he preached in each worship service—focusing on peacemaking, being ministers of reconciliation, prevailing over storms, and resisting the internal storm of disunity. He suggested that a preacher from EYN, with its long commitment

to peace, might have been better qualified to address the conference theme.

I could relate to his sentiment. I preached at a 7 a.m. Wednesday devotional. I learned of the conference theme only a day or two before we traveled, but I had chosen to speak on Jesus' victory through the cross, highlighting his example of nonviolent suffering love and his call to his followers to take up our cross and follow him.

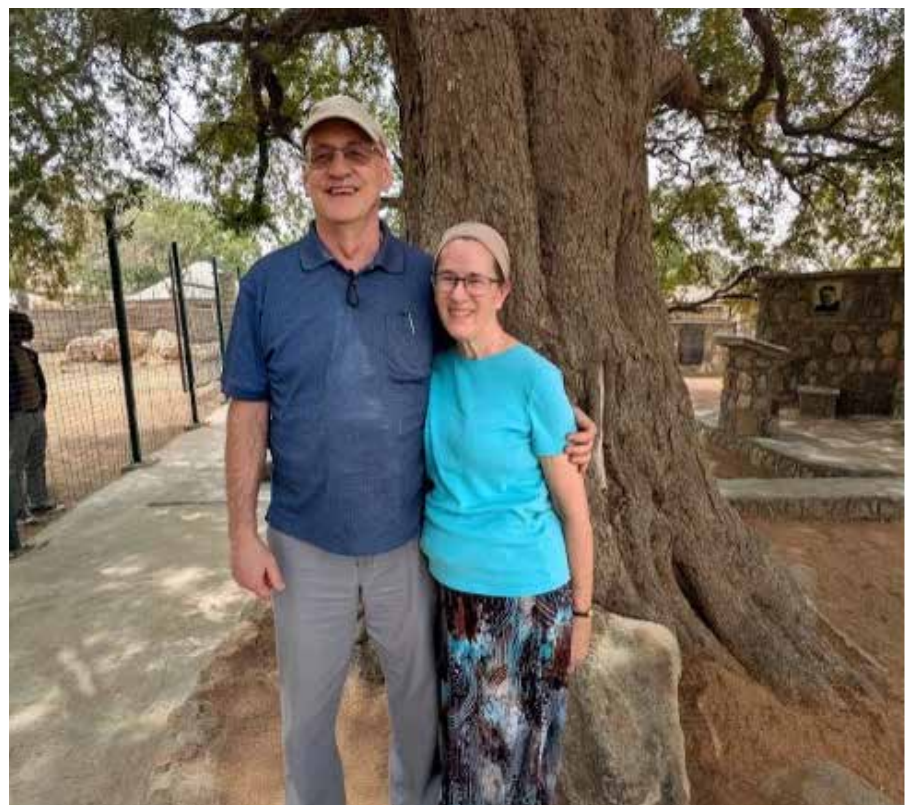
I have been a longtime advocate of Christian nonviolence, but I felt unqualified to preach “take up your cross” to Christians who have seen pastors murdered, lost family members, had churches burned, and con-

tinue to face an ongoing threat of violence. I felt like I should have been listening instead of talking.

While the security situation and peace theme pervaded the conference, EYN continues to move forward in the midst of storms. On our way to the Majalisa, we stopped at a lonely archway under construction in a field at what will be the entrance to the new Brethren University Nigeria (BUN) at Muchalla in Gombe state.

BUN is expected to take its place among EYN's already extensive educational program that includes schools for young children through high school, technical and job training schools, and Bible and theological schools, including Kulp Bible College and the EYN Technology Center, where Bethany Theological Seminary offers classes and students also receive computer training.

Throughout the conference we drank Stover Kulp Water and ate Crago Bread. Named after Brethren missionaries, these church-owned brands provide jobs and generate income for the church. The church



Don and Carolyn Fitzkee stand at the tamarind tree in Garkida, where the Church of the Brethren was planted.

continues to try to scale up its Brethren Microfinance Bank that serves EYN members and others, with farmers as a core clientele. EYN's holistic ministry also includes work in agriculture, development, disaster relief, healthcare, and more.

The budding Brethren Broadcasting Services (BBS) has a vision of sharing “the gospel of salvation and peace” through radio and television. A swarm of EYN News photographers and videographers covered the Majalisa (along with outside television, radio, and print news outlets). It was hard for an international guest to find time to yawn or wipe sweat without being photographed.

Construction of new facilities on the Kwarhi campus, including office space, staff housing, and the new Filibus K. Gwama Guest House, named after a former EYN president (and the building where we stayed), also marked growth. Our room still had wet mortar in some of the cracks in the bathroom, so it was evident they worked hard to complete our room in time.

A first-time mass ordination service as part of the Majalisa was another sign of vitality. During the ceremony, a total of 31 ministers were officially inaugurated into different levels of ministry. Those who were ordained received white robes and clerical collars.

Music is always a highlight of EYN worship. Services included joyous selections from a women's choir, an energetic young adult mixed choir with stirring hand percussion, and a more classical choir. Joy is present even in the midst of storms.

Following the Majalisa, we visited Garkida, where the Church of the Brethren was planted 103 years ago under the shade of a tamarind tree. Carolyn couldn't get over that that




Majalisa participants view handcrafts and musical instruments that Carolyn Fitzkee presented as gifts to EYN. The artifacts were collected by her parents in the 1960s.

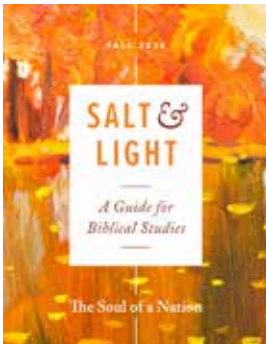
same tree—now protected by high metal fencing—continues to thrive and produce pods filled with tangy fruity pulp.

The church that began under that tree also continues to thrive and bear fruit, as does the relationship between Brethren in the US and Nigeria. At the Majalisa I observed that a century ago EYN was a daughter church to the Brethren. Today we are sister church-

es. And EYN, which has far outgrown the US church, is now our big sister.

In a time when Christians in our country are attracted to violence, maybe we can learn from our big sister what it means to be a peace church that chooses faith over fear. 

Don Fitzkee is moderator of the 2026 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. He is co-pastor of Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.





Coming this fall

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The new size takes the place of both regular and large print.

For more information, go to www.brethren.org/bp.

Back home again in Indiana

Annual Conference returns to the Hoosier State for the first time since 1993

by **Walt Wiltschek**

Bing Crosby once sang, “Can’t Get Indiana Off My Mind,” but Church of the Brethren Annual Conferences in Indiana have been out of mind in recent years. Before this year’s event in Fort Wayne, it had been more than three decades since the big meeting last landed in the Hoosier State: Indianapolis, in 1993. By contrast, in that span the conference has traveled five times to North Carolina (also the regular home of National Older Adult Conference), five times to Ohio, and three times to Michigan.

It hasn’t always been that way. In the last half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th, Brethren flocked to the “Crossroads of America” like Anabaptists to a good potluck. The first recorded official Annual Meeting in the state took place in 1852, in Elkhart County (although a “Special General Council” was convened in Carroll County in fall 1848 to deal with a local situation). Annual Meeting returned to Carroll County in 1858 and Wayne County—now home of Bethany Theological Seminary—in 1864.

In 1868, it went back to Elkhart County before settling into two primary Hoosier host sites over the next several decades: North Manchester, where it met five times from 1878 to 1945, and Winona Lake, where Brethren gathered seven times from 1910 to 1935. That stretch also included meetings in Kosciusko County, Muncie, and Anderson—which hosted the first National Youth Conference in 1954, as well.

As Brethren have finally ended their Hoosier hiatus this year, it seemed an apt time to look back at some of the notable moments and memories from those past Indiana meetings:

North Manchester

Best known as the home of Manchester University (previously Manchester College), it seems hard to imagine today that this northeastern Indiana town of about 5,000 people could have hosted a major conference. In earlier days, though, Brethren would sometimes stay in the homes or barn lofts of Brethren families or travel in via railroad or wagon as needed.

A North Manchester Historical Society article by the late William Eberly observed, “It not only takes a village to raise

a child; it takes a whole community to host an Annual Conference. At least it did in the nineteenth century.” In 1900, Eberly noted, an estimated 60,000 visitors came to town for the meeting!

Among the significant occurrences in North Manchester was in 1878, when Sarah Major preached at a local Lutheran church, part of numerous preaching services held in the community during the meeting. Eberly noted that the Lutheran church was “filled to overflowing” as people came to hear a woman preach. A local article called her “a fluent talker” and “deeply logical reasoner.”

Ten years later, in 1888, Brethren leader and editor James Quinter took the stage to lead the body in prayer and then died of a cardiac event in the midst of his praying.

For the 1900 conference, Eberly records that several large buildings were constructed in the town’s Harter’s Grove (now part of Warvel Park), including a 12,000 square foot “tabernacle” and two dining areas, with tents surrounding the area.

A newspaper report from the time said that on Sunday, “Early in the morning rigs of all descriptions began to arrive from the surrounding country and neighboring cities, towns, and villages. Carriages, buggies, road-wagons, spring wagons, and farm wagons filled to overflowing came pouring in from every direction, and each was loaded to its utmost capacity. The streets and sidewalks were soon little less than a great moving mass of activity.”

A historical marker in the park today commemorates those early Brethren conferences. Eberly wrote that, by the



1888 Annual meeting at North Manchester, Ind.



1910 Annual meeting at Winona Lake, Ind.

time of the 1929 and 1945 conferences held in North Manchester, the events were “planned and conducted by denominational agencies, and commercial centers were usually chosen as sites for the meetings.” Manchester College hosted a large portion of those meetings on campus.

Winona Lake

Like Ocean Grove, N.J., later in the 20th century, Winona Lake was a major Bible conference site frequented by Brethren for a period. Best known as the home of baseball player-turned-revivalist preacher Billy Sunday, who settled in the area in 1911, the Winona Lake Christian Assembly hosted some of the world’s largest Bible events and revivals at the time. A massive auditorium was constructed in the 1920s with Brethren support.

Several hotels were built around the lake to accommodate all the attendees, a few of which are still standing. A historical account said, “Perhaps no place has quite the good accommodations for lodging people at a meeting of this kind.” The Brethren returned every three years from 1910 to 1925, returning once more in 1935.

The 1910 and 1913 Annual Meetings in Winona Lake both had major agenda items on proper dress for Brethren, with the 1910 conference affirming the existing guidance but appointing a committee to create a summary. By 1913, noted as a very rainy event, the conference appointed a new Committee on Dress Reform. Numerous mission workers were also sent out in 1913, including a group that went to China.

At the 1922 conference, women were granted the ability to be licensed into the ministry in the denomination for the first time, though ordination had to wait until 1958.

In 1925—plagued by an outbreak of typhoid fever that resulted in more than 100 deaths—Annual Conference urged “able” congregations to hire full-time pastors, and to collect regular offerings to support their ministry. Bethany Biblical Seminary (now Bethany Theological Seminary)

officially came under denominational ownership, as well. And in 1935, delegates adopted an early version of the statement that “all war is sin.”

Other

The 1864 Annual Meeting, held in the Hagerstown area of Wayne County, took place in the midst of the Civil War and was notable as the last one at which John Kline presided as moderator. The meeting also reportedly handled some 40 queries! Some of those dealing with nonresistance in the face of war brought a response that said: “We exhort the brethren to steadfastness in the faith, and believe that the times in which our lots are cast strongly demand of us a strict adherence to all our principles, especially our non-resistant principle.”

The 1882 Annual Meeting in Arnold’s Grove, in Elkhart County, was a tense one. The factions led by H. R. Holsinger were threatening division over education and other doctrinal issues—after the conservative Old German Baptist Brethren group had already separated the previous year.


A History of the Church of the Brethren in Indiana observes, “It is doubtful if any other Annual Meeting of the Church of the Brethren was ever awaited with such fearful forebodings as the one of 1882.” An account of the meeting describes many “heated discussions.” Holsinger’s group broke off the following year.

While not an official Annual Conference, another important event was hosted by Indiana in 1918, when a special conference met in Goshen in January of that year. It produced the “Goshen Statement,” which famously set out the denomination’s peace position and commitment to conscientious objection during World War I. When the US later threatened the conference officers with sedition, they retracted the statement—one of the less-proud moments of the Brethren.

After 1945, Brethren didn’t return to Indiana until 1978—matching the current 33-year gap. The 1978 Annual



Conference was the first of three in Indianapolis, followed by meetings in 1981 and then that 1993 Conference. The 1993 gathering also had some tension, with moderator Chuck Boyer advocating for greater acceptance of LGBT members and “inclusive leadership” in the denomination. Some Brethren called for Boyer’s resignation.

What will the 2026 Annual Conference in Fort Wayne add to the Brethren lore? We can only imagine. 



Indiana Historical Bureau

Conference business

Delegates to consider weapons transfers, care for immigrants, polity for ministers

by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

The business agenda for the 2026 Annual Conference

includes four new business items: a resolution on Weapons Transfer; a resolution on “Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors”; Recommendations for Adjustments to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership Paper; and the annual Recommended Cost of Living Adjustment to the Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors.

Delegates will also receive an interim report from the Review and Evaluation Committee, among numerous other reports and the ballot.

Annual Conference takes place June 28–July 2, a Sunday to Thursday schedule, at the Grand Wayne Convention Center in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Review and Evaluation interim report

Every decade, the Church of the Brethren calls a Review and Evaluation

Committee. Elected during the fifth year of the decade, the committee reviews and evaluates the organizational structures and procedures of the denomination and reports back with any recommendations for organizational change. Usually, the report is made in the seventh year of the decade, but because of additional tasks assigned to this committee their term is from two to four years.

This decade’s Review and Evaluation Committee was elected last year: Ilexene Alphonse, Atlantic Southeast District; Lupita Cruz-Ortiz, Virgina District; Chris Douglas, Illinois and Wisconsin District, secretary; Anna Lisa Gross, Northern Indiana District; and Daniel L. Rudy, Virgina District, chair.

The committee is bringing an interim report outlining its work and activities so far and listing the assigned tasks: “Assessing the quality, scope and effectiveness of the denominational structure and program, making recommendations regarding unfinished

assignments related to calling denominational leaders, breaking down barriers to full participation in the major conferences of the church and recommending ways that our siblings in Christ, congregations and districts can live and work together in light of ongoing struggles related to the church’s response to LGBTQ+ persons within and beyond the church.”

The committee is recommending no further changes to polity responding to the Calling Denominational Leadership query, which asked for consideration of “moving to a slate of nominees; allowing self-nominations and revising eligibility and disqualification rules for elected positions, such as the exclusion of agency board members or staff.” The committee decided “that not enough time had passed to fully evaluate the effects of recent changes to church polity (i.e., the move away from election of agency board members and the loosening of the requirement for the

Nominating Committee of Standing Committee to find four candidates for every position on the ballot.)”

Resolution on Weapons Transfer

The Mission and Ministry Board has adopted this resolution and is recommending it to the Conference.

The resolution cites Matthew 5:44-46, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, . . .” to call the church to “examine and respond to the impacts of the arms industry.”

A section on the global impact of the US arms trade notes that the US “is currently the world’s largest exporter of weapons, with 39 percent of global weapons imports in 2023 coming from the US.”

A section on the Church of the Brethren’s historic opposition to war and the defense industry notes the centuries of opposition to war and adherence to peacemaking and more recently the denomination’s stated opposition to particular types of weaponry, including nuclear weapons and military drones.

The closing section offers recommendations for the individual, congregations and districts, and the denomination ranging from educating about the US arms trade and the biblical call to peacemaking, to public advocacy, to divesting from the arms industry.

Resolution on “Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors”

The Mission and Ministry Board has adopted this resolution and is

recommending it to the Conference. The resolution responds to a query from Atlantic Southeast District.

Citing Matthew 25:36, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,” the resolution includes five sections, the first four headed by these statements:

“Care for immigrants and refugees is an essential part of the Christian and Church of the Brethren ethic of service and peacemaking.”

“Church of the Brethren history and tradition include radical discipleship, conscientious objection, and participation in civil disobedience.”

“Faithful civil disobedience is grounded biblically and theologically.”

“Support for newcomers and respect for God’s love for justice are reaffirmed.”

The closing section offers calls to action and a prayer in several languages. Calls to action for individuals, congregations, districts, and the denomination range from reading and listening to immigrant and refugee stories, to public support for immigrant communities, to understanding that civil disobedience may be necessary, to support for those who prayerfully participate in civil disobedience.

Recommendations for Adjustments to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership Paper

The Mission and Ministry Board is recommending two adjustments to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership Paper.

These adjustments to ministerial polity would affect licensed and commissioned ministers:

—Licensed ministers would receive “provisional credential status” in recognition of “the increased number of licensed ministers serving in ministry roles which require them to perform ministry functions normally expected to be carried out by credentialed ministers.”

—Commissioned ministers would receive a “simpler path” to qualify for ordination, in recognition of the cumbersome nature of the procedure. In the proposed path, the commissioned minister would “be in conversation with the Brethren Academy and their credentialing committee to determine what additional training and/or study might be required.”

The Ministry Office and the Council of District Executives are responsible for reviewing and updating ministerial polity as implemented by the Ministry Advisory Council. The council consists of three district executives and three representatives from Bethany Seminary and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, and is convened by the director of the Ministry Office. A review of the 2014 Ministerial Leadership polity is expected to continue through the coming year.

Recommended Cost of Living Adjustment to the Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors

The recommendation is yet to be announced by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee.

Full texts of all the business documents are at www.brethren.org/ac2026/business. 

“Care for immigrants and refugees is an essential part of the Christian and Church of the Brethren ethic of service and peacemaking.”



The rhythm of Sabbath

by Angela Finet

I love the rhythmic flow of Genesis 1:1 to 2:3. I can feel my body gently sway as though I'm on a boat, or a hammock, as the words tickle my ears. You can hear it in the repetition that God created, took stock, and declared it good.

Created

Saw

Declared it good.

It's like a heartbeat. Like a breath.

This passage tells us that the creative process has a rhythm. God spoke, and it was so. And the days had a rhythm. You see, this story is all about rhythm, not about 24-hour units of time. There was evening. There was morning. The first day.

Think about that rhythm for just a second. Notice the order.

There was evening. There was morning. The first day. *We* think the day begins at the crack of dawn when the rooster crows. But that's not how scripture describes it at all.

In her book *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, Tish Harrison Warren offers insight regarding the evening/morning rhythm: "In Jewish culture, days begin in the evening with the setting of the sun... The day begins with rest. We start [our day] by settling down and going to sleep.

This understanding of time is powerfully reorienting, even jarring, to those of us who measure our days by our own efforts and accomplishments. The Jewish day begins in seemingly accomplishing nothing at all. We begin by resting, drooling on our pillow, dropping off into helplessness" (p. 150). Harrison emphasizes that the day *begins* with rest.

Everything in scripture that follows from this Genesis passage contains a rhythm of rest:

Rest each day.

Rest on the seventh day.

Rest in the seventh year.

Rest in the fiftieth year—the Jubilee.

God created rest

We hear the daily rhythm in chapter 1. But then we get to chapter 2, the seventh day. On the seventh day, God *created* rest. Sabbath is part of the created order.

Read Genesis 2:3 again, this time from *The Voice* paraphrase: "Thus, God blessed day seven and made it special—an open time for pause and restoration, a sacred zone of Sabbath-keeping, because God rested from all the work He had done in creation that day."

Do you notice the hint that God is still creating? Even on day seven?

Ancient rabbinical tradition teaches that God did not finish the work of creation—the heavens and earth and the multitudes—until the seventh day.

Author Wayne Muller writes: "The ancient rabbis teach that on the seventh day, God created *menuha*—which means tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose. In other words, God created rest, in the deepest possible sense of fertile, healing

“ Sabbath is one of God’s very first gifts to God’s beloved creation. Not simply a gift of rest, but a gift of time . . . a gift of presence. A gift that restores peace to our bodies, minds, and souls. ”

stillness. Until the Sabbath, creation was unfinished. Only after the birth of *menuha*, only with tranquility and rest, was the circle of creation made full and complete” (37).

What makes the practice of sabbath different from rest? I believe the difference is *menuha*. *Menuha* means so much more than simply ceasing from labor and exertion. It offers so much more than freedom from toil, strain, or activity of any kind. *Menuha* is not a “thou shalt not,” but rather a “thou shalt.” As one made in the image of the One who rests, *thou shalt* also rest. *Thou shalt* lean into the rhythm of creation—in the presence of the Creator.

The gift of Sabbath

In her book *Flunking Sainthood*, Jana Riess explores Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s book *The Sabbath*. She explores his approach to space and time and how we spend our lives.

Most of life, he says, is a struggle to conquer the space around us: we conquer space when we pay our mortgage, battle any kudzu that threatens to encroach in the yard, or venture forth from our homes to wage the incessant war that is earning a living. But it’s a tradeoff. We can only conquer that space, he explains, when we sacrifice *time*. And after some years of this, a surprising thing happens: we come to dread blank

time without that war of busyness, because here we have to face the truth of who we are and what we’re doing (p. 83).

When, through our practice of sabbath, we imitate the God who rested, we are reminded of who we are: people made in God’s image. When we practice sabbath, we become more aware of God’s presence.

And here we really get to the heart of it all. “Sabbath is the presence of God in the world, open to the soul of man. God is not in things of space, but in moments of time” (Heschel, p. xiv).

Later, in Exodus, we find that observing the Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments—part of the covenant between God and Israel. But here, in the beginning, sabbath is part of creation—a gift for *all* people, and for every created thing.

Heschel writes, “The Sabbath is the most precious present mankind has received from the treasure house of God. All week we think: The spirit is too far away, and we succumb to spiritual absenteeism, or at best we pray: Send us a little of Thy spirit. But, On the Sabbath the spirit stands and pleads: accept all excellence from me” (p. 18).

Sabbath is one of God’s very first gifts to God’s beloved creation. Not simply a gift of rest, but a gift of time . . . a gift of presence. A gift that restores peace to our bodies, minds, and souls.

And it’s a gift we’re often not

inclined to receive. That’s not a new story either. We find it again in Hebrews 4:9-11: “So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, for those who enter God’s rest also rest from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.”

Disobeying, or refusing, this gift of God’s rest leads to violence—to self, to family, to community, to creation. It leads to destruction rather than restoration.

Resting on the Sabbath is a witness to peace. It’s a sign that God’s creative order continues to exist in the present. When all the world rests on the Sabbath, it demonstrates that all are in right relationship with the Creator, and God’s created order will once again be complete; be restored; be realized as it was in the beginning.

In their daily practice of sabbath, our Jewish brothers and sisters include in their evening prayers a petition based on a promise found in Psalm 121, that God will guard their going out and coming in.

But on the seventh-day Sabbath, the prayer is different. Instead of requesting protection from harm, it declares that God will embrace us with a tent of peace. ❧

Angela Finet is pastor of Mountville (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. She is the author of *Sabbath: God’s Call to Peace* (Brethren Press), from which this is excerpted.

“If violence creates ripples of fear, then let us be deliberate about creating ripples of hope.”

RUN. HIDE. FIGHT.

by Alice Young-Basora

As I was getting a haircut, I received a text from my daughter: “Hi. There’s someone armed on campus. I just wanted to let you know that I’m safe in the basement with my class. Just in case you got the alert already. I love you.”

This is a text message no parent—no person—ever wants to receive. Six hours away. Sitting in a chair with wet hair. Frozen. Thinking, this isn’t real. This can’t be happening. But it was. It was my baby girl, in a basement, then in a supply closet, in Saint Louis. Far from me. And in that moment, I had zero power to do anything but wait.

The official message from her school read, stark and clinical:

“Armed person on campus. Run, Hide, or Fight. If hide, lock or barricade yourself in a room until further notice.”

Run.
Hide.
Fight.

These are the instructions our children now receive between classes.

What I didn’t expect was the anger that followed the fear. And the sadness.

Anger that this is my daughter’s generation’s version of “normal.”

Sadness that they have grown up practicing lockdown drills the way we once practiced fire drills.

That they know where to go.
That they know how to stay silent.
That they know to say “I love you”

just in case.

They have normalized the fear and uncertainty of living in spaces where the threat of violence is part of the landscape. Even when no shots are fired, even when everyone is physically unharmed, the emotional residue lingers. The ripples remain.

I was reminded—in a visceral way—of what the threat of violence feels like. It destabilizes. It narrows the world to survival. It ripples outward into homes, into hair salons, into communities six hours away.

But here is what I am holding onto: ripples work both ways.


Violence sends shockwaves.

But so does goodness.

So does courage.

So does steady, daily work for peace.

It may take more ripples of nonviolence to outweigh the ripples of violence. They may move more quietly. They may not make headlines. But I believe—deeply—that there are more people doing positive work than not. More people choosing compassion than cruelty. More people building safety than threatening it.

If violence creates ripples of fear, then let us be deliberate about creating ripples of hope. Attend a program. Support an organization working for peace. Have a hard conversation. Reach out to someone who feels alone. Model for the next generation that “normal” does not have to mean numbness. The world our children inherit is shaped, in part, by the ripples we send out today. 

The Dayton International Peace Museum

Founded in 2004 by southwestern Ohio Church of the Brethren farmers Ralph and Christine Dull, the Dayton International Peace Museum is the only brick-and-mortar museum dedicated to peace in the United States.

The museum emerged from a commitment to peace and nonviolence inspired by Dayton’s legacy in global diplomacy. Located in the city’s Courthouse Square, it houses a permanent exhibit on the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the Bosnian War in 1995, along with other permanent and temporary exhibits. Programs for visitors of all ages explore diverse perspectives on peace, social justice, and conflict resolution.

“We are guided by UNESCO’s belief that peace must be constructed within minds and cultures, so we address peace through human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability,” the museum website notes. “Our exhibits and programs encourage visitors to engage with ‘positive peace,’ defined by justice, equality, and respectful relationships—offering a path to transform violent histories into a shared commitment to a more peaceful future.” —Peggy Reiff Miller

Peggy Reiff Miller is a writer and historian in the Church of the Brethren. She is author of *The Seagoing Cowboy*, published by Brethren Press.



Alice Young-Basora is executive director of the Dayton (Ohio) International Peace Museum.

Faithful Response Immigration Gathering

Spiritual grounding and renewed hope

by Kayla Berkey

Irvin Heishman was just returning from Honduras, where he visited two congregants who had been deported, when he arrived at the Faithful Response Immigration Gathering March 17-19 in Marysville, Ohio.

West Charleston Church of the Brethren, where Heishman is co-pastor, experienced the direct impact of ICE's aggressive tactics when congregants Armando and Marlon were detained. Though both had followed the necessary immigration processes, they were held in prisons under "disturbing conditions" and deported by plane with shackles on their hands and feet, Heishman said.

Heishman's visit to Honduras, with support from his church, was to provide pastoral care and encouragement, to deliver a love offering from the congregation, and to learn about his congregants' lives after deportation. He described the immense pain and trauma Armando and Marlon expressed about treatment in detention, their forced migrations, and the separation from their families. Both have young children.

"I love these folks so, so deeply, and it hurts to watch them going through this," Heishman said. "I hope my trip helped them see in a more concrete way that they are not abandoned. Our government has rejected them, but they are not rejected by God or by us."

This is one of many stories that people carried with them to the gathering organized by the Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Mennonite Church USA. It included spiritual practices, congregational safety planning, and resource tracks.

It was part retreat, part conference, "which I think is exactly the kind of event that people need," said the organizer on the Church of the Brethren's Deportation Defense Response Team. "People are hungry for training, resources, and tools . . . but also spiritual grounding and time away to gather with people face-to-face." She came away with "renewed hope of what can be done together as people of faith if we stay connected to God and to one another."



Courtesy of the UCC National Ministries News Team

Fleeing Egypt, detained in the US

Keynote speaker Iman Ayman Soliman became well-known in Ohio during a successful campaign to free him from detention after his asylum status was abruptly terminated and he lost his job as a Cincinnati hospital chaplain. He shared his story of fleeing Egypt due to threats he experienced as a journalist and seeking political asylum in the US.

Then a regular immigration check-in resulted in 73 days of detainment at the Butler County Jail, which he described as "a very, very terrible experience." While in jail, however, Soliman found deep faith that sustained him, and he had the support of people of many faith traditions advocating on his behalf.

He received 760 letters, most from people he had never met. One from a Christian in Tennessee assured him that "since you are Egyptian like Moses, I'm sure God will save you in a miraculous way"—which is exactly what happened to me," Soliman recalled.

After press coverage and persistent public pressure, Soliman's asylum status was reinstated and he was released. "People of faith came together more than ever before," he said. "I've been shown a lot of love so that I will feel loved to the last day of my life."

Kayla Berkey is digital content specialist on the news team in marketing and communications for the United Church of Christ National Ministries.

“This retreat was fabulous. It not only provided great information and training but nourished my spirit.” — Kimberly Koczan

“Our witness in fleshing out the Beloved Community of caring, love, and compassion in our relationships with the immigrant community is part of the resistance against policies that depersonalize and 'other' our neighbors.”

— Cliff Kindy

José's story

by Jan Orndorff

The National Holocaust Museum is not appropriate for most seventh graders. Our teaching team was adamant about that. However; there was a small, select group of students who wanted to go to the Holocaust Museum during our spring field trip. We reluctantly agreed to allow the social studies team to offer the side trip to a specific group of students who met application criteria.

Sadly, in the time crunch to plan the field trip, that side trip was opened up to any chaperone who wanted it, regardless of the makeup of their group. For one student, this had devastating emotional consequences.

José was bright and outgoing. His open personality and quick sense of humor made him popular from the moment he arrived from Mexico into my sixth-grade language arts class, even though he did not know English. I knew enough Spanish and ways to help him learn English that we developed a good relationship.

José gradually learned English, but he insisted on speaking to the ESL teacher and me in Spanish. He seemed to need that connection to home.

Over the course of the year, he let things slip about his life in Mexico: drugs, knife fights, being protected by an older brother who was tougher than everyone. After one of these slips, he quickly made a joke and moved on, and I didn't fully understand the real terror of his life experiences or the honor of his trust.

The next school year, I moved up and taught seventh grade. José was not in any of my classes, but he frequently stopped to talk to me in the hall, in English. I was relieved that he had finally adjusted enough to not need the reassurance of my Spanish.

In October, one of the other Spanish-speaking students came up to me very upset. He told me that José had just told him, "Quiero morirme." (I want to kill myself.) I confronted José, and he admitted those words and that he was serious. I referred him to the guidance counselor, and he allowed the guidance counselor to share his pain with me.

While he was in the US legally, he was terrified that his

friends would lose their "dreamer" status and be deported. He told the guidance counselor, "They can speak Spanish, but they've never lived there. They don't know how to take care of themselves. They'll be hurt bad or killed." The guidance counselor helped him work through his feelings, but the fear was still there.

That spring, we took our usual seventh grade field trip to Washington, D.C. In the afternoon, José's chaperone caught up with me at the Natural History Museum. She said that José was refusing to stay with the group.

When I pulled José aside, he spoke to me in Spanish. He kept repeating, "I want to go home." I formulated my "teacher speech" where I planned to tell him that even though he had seen bad things in Mexico he was not familiar with Washington, D.C.

All I was able to get out was, "I know you saw bad things in Mexico."

José started sobbing and sank to the ground in a fetal position. The light bulb went on.


"Did your group go to the Holocaust Museum?"

Small nod and more tears.

I realized that the little glimpses José had given me of his life in Mexico were nothing compared to the terrible reality he had hidden with his jokes and smiles. Like his friends, I knew a little of the language but didn't understand the true horrors that so many people endure there.

The shadow of that day still lingers in my mind. Now I see repeated news of asylum seekers who are yanked out of that process and sent back to certain cruelty. I read of people here without papers who cannot get a hearing. I listen to government decisions that Temporary Protected Status is being removed for people from places we know are overrun with violence.

I wish more of us could be like José, willing to care about others even though we are safe ourselves.

Jesus tells us, "Whatever you do to the least of these brothers of mine, you do to me" (Matthew 25:40). 

Jan Orndorff is part-time pastor of Sunrise Church of the Brethren in Harrisonburg, Va.

“ I wish more of us could be like José, willing to care about others even though we are safe ourselves. ”

Prayer for intercultural ministries

by Founa I. Augustin Badet

God of every people and every language,
you spoke creation into being and called it good.

You formed many cultures, many songs, many stories,
and breathed one Spirit through them all.

Forgive us when we have feared differences,
when we choose comfort instead of community,
when we listen to reply instead of to love.

Teach your church to accept one another as a gift,
not a threat.

Slow down our speech and deepen our listening.
Let humility be our strength, and curiosity be our attitude.


At your table, remove the walls we rebuild.
Where accents differ, foster understanding.

Where history wounds, heal; and let patience develop.
Where power comes together, teach us to share.

Make us a people who notice who is missing.
People who create space before taking space,
who learn before leading,
and who follow Christ together rather than alone.

Send us into our neighborhoods as neighbors,
gentle in spirit, courageous in justice,
and loyal in friendship across all boundaries.

May our life together declare that your kingdom
is not one culture welcomed,
but everyone reconciled in love.

In the name of Jesus,
who gathers us and transforms us
into one body. Amen! 

Founa I. Augustin Badet is director of Intercultural
Ministries for the Church of the Brethren.

January 13, 1962

Is the Church Grounded in This Jet Age?

By *Kenneth Morse*

THE MOST RECENT EDITION OF A POPULAR ENCYCLOPEDIA devotes six pages to Jesus Christ. It seems almost providential that in the center of the middle volume there would be a concise review of his ministry and his message.

But when you turn the next page you discover that the editors have allotted another six pages to the subject of jet propulsion. Side by side with the miracles of Jesus are the wonders of the jet age.

Observing this alphabetical association, you are tempted to make comparisons. Do jets deserve as much space as Jesus? In another ten years, will Jesus get only four pages while some new high-speed, high-powered development receives twice as much attention?

You can pursue that line of inquiry, but it is probably unfair to the encyclopedia's editors. They have done their best to describe the world in which we live; and we should be grateful that after two thousand years the lowly Man of Nazareth is still such a force that he must be reckoned with in this modern age. Though Jesus lived long before the age of invention and rapid transportation, the history of the Christian movement bears witness to the startling changes that his gospel has injected into the lives of persons – from the first century until this one.

Instead of begrudging the attention that new sources of power receive in our day, we would do better to ask why the church today is often so lacking in power. Where is the dynamic that once threatened to turn the world upside down, that infiltrated a pagan civilization with radical ideas and new ideals? Is the church so comfortably settled in its way that it is permanently grounded? We think not, but it will take more than the usual blasts of warm air from the pulpit to give it the propulsion it needs.

Some of us believe there are still untapped sources of power lurking in the church of Jesus Christ. We have his

own promise that power will come. In the early church we can see the evidence of its fulfillment. What a takeoff Pentecost must have been, with tongues of fire to ignite the explosive winds of the Spirit and thus to inspire ordinary men and transform them into dynamos of spiritual energy.

Pentecost can come again—in the jet age. The church need not remain at a standstill if it takes stock of its stores of spiritual fuel and learns once again how to ignite its cold engines. The slumbering church can be propelled forward and lifted to new heights by the sparks of the Spirit. Our greatest need today is not to apologize for Jesus Christ or to protest against those modern forces that may threaten to overshadow him. What we need is rather the explosion of a new force to upset comfortable churches and scatter their emissaries abroad as a testimony to the dynamic character of the Christian gospel. The most powerful jets do not have anything to compare with the thrust of the gospel. But who will release it?

February 3, 1962

Church of the Brethren Washington Office

ON JANUARY 1, RUTH EARLY BECAME THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN WASHINGTON REPRESENTATIVE. This is a new office for the Church of the Brethren, and reflects an interest in strengthening the witness and service of the church to the government.

The beginning of the position of Washington representative is the response to the action of the 1961 Annual Conference. A query asking for the establishment of the office came originally at the 1960 Annual Conference from the Waterford church in Northern California. The query was referred to the General Brotherhood Board for a study and a report at the 1961 Conference. The report of the General Brotherhood Board included recommendations which would develop a greater relationship to concerns in Washington. The answer of the Conference was a request to the Board to “pursue actively” this direction and to

THE MOST POWERFUL JETS DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING TO COMPARE WITH THE THRUST OF THE GOSPEL. BUT WHO WILL RELEASE IT?

HOW LIGHTLY WE MUST REGARD THE BIRTH OF CHRIST AND HIS NAME IF WE INSIST ON TELLING THE WORLD ABOUT OUR NEWEST WEAPONS OF DEATH UNDER THE DATELINE, "CHRISTMAS ISLAND."

report the new developments in 1962.

Miss Early is currently the associate director of the National Service Board for Religious Objectors. She will continue in that responsibility on a half-time basis and will serve as the Church of the Brethren Washington representative also, as a half-time responsibility. Her offices in the latter capacity will be with those of the National Council of Churches at 110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington 2, D.C. The telephone number there is Lincoln 4-2350.

The office will serve the whole Brotherhood in its program interests in Washington, and Brethren are encouraged to seek her counsel and advice. As Washington representative, she is charged with advising the Brethren on developments in Washington that are of interest and concern; assisting in official visits to Washington; and handling arrangements for political seminars, consultations, and conferences. Her task will not involve policy formulation or lobbying. Administratively she will be related to the General Brotherhood Board through the Brethren Service Commission. Limitations of time and function will not permit her to serve Brethren on matters of sight-seeing and general accommodations.

Miss Early has been associated with the Brethren Service Commission since 1944, with the exception of a period in 1960 as the associate director of the Disarmament Campaign, Nyack, N.Y.

Much of her responsibility has been administered from the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., where she directed refugee resettlement and immigration service. Academically, she has studied at McPherson College, the University of Wyoming, and Western Maryland College. Recently, she has worked in the field of international relations at American University.

Interdenominationally, Miss

Early has served on the Operations Committee of Immigration Service, Church World Service, and has assisted the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

The Rockingham church in Missouri is her home church.

March 3, 1962

Will Testing Be Resumed on Christmas Island?

By Kenneth Morse

BY THE TIME THIS ISSUE IS IN THE MAILS President Kennedy will likely have announced the government's decision regarding nuclear testing in the atmosphere. We hope that protests on the part of concerned Christians and many others fearful about a renewed arms race will have persuaded the President to continue the moratorium on such tests.

We understand that if atmospheric tests are resumed, the location will be Christmas Island, a British possession more than 1,300 miles south of Honolulu. In 1957 the British evacuated the island so that all 222 square miles of it could be used as a nuclear weapons testing base. So if we are going to follow the example of the Soviets, whom we properly condemned for their testing program, the bombs will fall in the neighborhood of Christmas Island.

Is it not rather ironic that a program of experiment in destructiveness should be undertaken on *Christmas* Island? If we must add to the threat of annihilation, then surely we should choose a location without a name even remotely suggestive of the birth of Christ, who came into the world as a helpless babe to become the Prince of Peace. Under the providence of God the baby lived; he taught men that the meek would inherit the earth; he accepted the humiliation of the cross rather than retaliate with explosive force; and yet he brought a spiritual kingdom that endures while mighty empires fail.

Yet we so quickly forget what kind of king he was. How lightly we must regard the birth of Christ and his name if we insist on telling the world about our newest weapons of death under the dateline, "Christmas Island." Is this the way we demonstrate to non-Christian lands what we mean by our religion? It hardly seems like an effective deterrent to atheism—to identify Christmas with atomic destruction.



Amos 1:1; 2:11-12; 3:7-8; 7:10-15

Amos: Called by God

by Christy Waltersdorff

Amos was going about his business, running his farm and caring for his orchards, when God said, “Go preach to my people Israel.” Amos didn’t have an easy message, but he took his call from God seriously and preached with courage, power, and strength.

Speaking truth to power

When I was a young preacher, a mentor told me that the role of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

Speaking truth to power: that’s what God’s prophets do. They stand before the people and the leaders and speak the word of God. The problem is that it is usually not a word anyone wants to hear—especially the people in power.

We don’t often hear from prophets

when God’s people are in right relationship with God and with each other. Their words aren’t necessary when kings and priests are following God’s laws, when they are doing their jobs with justice, integrity, and honesty.

The word of the prophet is often unwelcome by the oppressors. Throughout history God’s prophets have been persecuted, reviled, arrested, deported, exiled, and killed. Most biblical prophets didn’t jump at the chance to speak for God.

Amos was the earliest and first prophet to have an Old Testament book bear his name. His prophecy speaks most clearly in a society where there is great inequality between the rich and the poor. His words carry weight in times of great prosperity when oppression and exploitation run rampant. He came to disturb

the oppressive complacency of God’s people who freely ignored God’s call to care for one another.

An unexpected call

We have no reason to believe that Amos was expecting his call from God. We can imagine that it must have been quite a surprise. Until this point, he wasn’t a prophet and he wasn’t from a family of prophets; he was a farmer in a small village in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Scripture doesn’t tell us why God chose Amos. But his call affirms our belief in the priesthood of all believers—knowing that God calls each one of us to serve God’s purposes in a way that only we can. Throughout scripture, witnesses like Amos play a key role in the success of God’s plan and

“ God is angry because God’s people were no longer practicing justice and mercy. ”

purpose. They are not perfect but are very real human beings. Witnesses respond to their relationship with God through faith and action. When we first meet Amos, he is speaking God’s word in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Some people hear God’s call as a quiet whisper. Not Amos. He reported that God roared like a lion with such strength and ferocity that the pastures withered and the mountaintop dried up (Amos 1:2). The divine voice blasted from the heavens.

The king forgets God

King Jeroboam was overseeing a time of great wealth and peace in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He built his empire on territorial expansion, aggressive militarism, and unprecedented economic prosperity for the wealthiest of his citizens.

Sometime during his 40-year reign, the king forgot that he was a servant of God. In the first two chapters, Amos lists the specific sins of different cities. These cities include enemies of Israel (Syrians and Philistines) as well as its neighbors (Edom, Ammon, and Moab). Also named is Judah, which shares a common history and common faith with Israel.

This list makes it clear that God is concerned about international politics and active in the histories of other nations, including Israel’s most despised enemies. Amos claims that God has worked for the good of those nations but will also punish them for their crimes. Amos was reminding the people of Israel that God didn’t belong solely to them but was the God of the universe, and so they belonged to God.

Collusion

Amaziah, a religious leader, supported the king’s desire for absolute power and gave his blessing to everything

Jeroboam did. The king, of course, handsomely rewarded the priest of Bethel. There was no separation between church and state.

There was no time in biblical history when the collusion between corrupt religion and corrupt political power was celebrated by God or God’s prophets. Amos went to the temple at Bethel and confronted the high priest Amaziah. He delivered a word of warning to all religious leaders who bow down to the king instead of to God.

The intertwining of religious and political institutions is blatant when Amaziah says to Amos, “Bethel is the king’s sanctuary” (7:13). It was supposed to be God’s sanctuary. The priest reported Amos’ words of condemnation and warning to the king.

God’s message to Israel

The message Amos delivered was not a new one. It had been repeated to God’s people by numerous prophets throughout the generations since they were set free from slavery in Egypt.

God is angry because God’s people were no longer practicing justice and mercy. They were not taking care of the poor. They were cheating their neighbors. The religious leaders were corrupt. Evil had become acceptable.

Amos is very clear about what God does and does not want:

“I can’t stand your religious meetings.

I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions.

I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals.

I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making.

I’ve had all I can take of your

noisy ego-music.

When was the last time you sang to *me*?

Do you know what I want?

I want justice—oceans of it.

I want fairness—rivers of it.

That’s what I want.


That’s *all* I want”

(5:21-24, *The Message*).

To carry a burden

The name Amos comes from a Hebrew verb that means “to carry a burden.” And that is what Amos did. He carried the burden of God’s disappointment, anger, and grief to the belligerent people of Israel. He carried words of disaster and failure. But he also carried the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness. And in the end, he carried a word of hope as well.

Amaziah confronted Amos and said, in essence, “Get out of here, prophet! Go cause trouble in your hometown. You are not welcome here!” Amos stood up to the corrupt priest and claimed his identity and call by saying, “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel!’” (7:12-15).

Amos makes it clear that he is not a religious professional like Amaziah who sold himself to the highest bidder. He speaks the word of God only through the power and presence of the Lord. Although that word is one of judgment and anger, like most prophets Amos also carried the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness. And in the end, he carried a word of hope as well. 

Christy Waltersdorff, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, lives in Lombard, Ill. This Bible study is reprinted from *A Guide for Biblical Studies*, published by Brethren Press.

BDM rebuilding focuses on Hurricane Helene

The Brethren Disaster Ministries Rebuilding Program has a new focus on recovery from Hurricane Helene in North Carolina. This April, the program began serving survivors in Ashe, Henderson, and Transylvania Counties.

Previously, the program had helped Helene survivors through a two-week project in Spruce Pine, N.C., in May 2025, and a project in Johnson County, Tenn., from September to November 2025.

In Ashe County, a two-week

project was carried out working with the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

In Henderson and Transylvania Counties, an eight-week rebuilding project began April 12. Volunteers are working in partnership with Henderson County and Thermal Belt Habitat for Humanity, and the Transylvania County Habitat chapter.

Additional Hurricane Helene recovery sites in North Carolina may include a 10-week site in Yancey County beginning June 7.



Donnell Polkman

A new home being built by Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteers in Henderson County, N.C., for a Hurricane Helene survivor.

Standing Committee acts on transition from Eder to Everence

Standing Committee approved two documents related to Eder Financial’s transition of services to Everence Association Inc. in a Zoom meeting on April 13. The meeting of the Standing Committee of district delegates to Annual Conference was led by moderator Don Fitzkee.

Eder is an Annual Conference agency which, along with predecessor organizations, has been in existence for 83 years as a Church of the Brethren organization. Everence is a financial services nonprofit that is a ministry partner to the Mennonite Church USA.

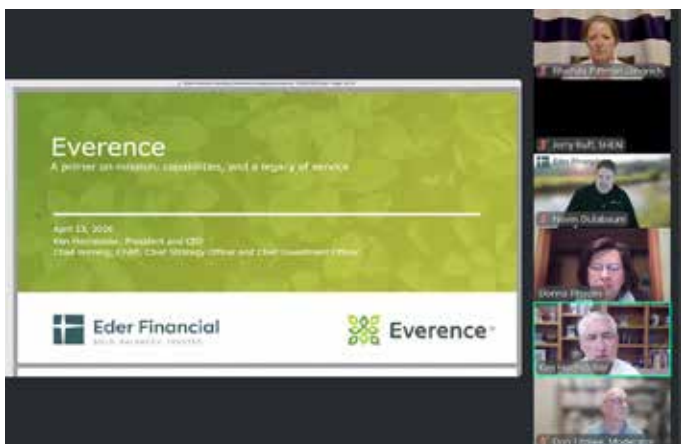
The decision endorses Everence as the Church of the Brethren’s preferred provider for services being transferred by Eder to Everence, primarily employee retirement and organiza-

tional investing. Standing Committee approved an interim Memo of Understanding (MOU) for a Resource Partnership between the Church of the Brethren and Everence and a “Certificate of Secretary” as legal foundation. The documents outline how Everence proposes to serve the Church of the Brethren, its members, and institutions pending approval of a final agreement with Annual Conference in 2027.

With the interim MOU, the Church of the Brethren authorizes transfer of the Eder Retirement Plan, its assets, and existing participants to the Mennonite Retirement Trust; shifts institutional investment management to Everence; and grants Everence access to gatherings of the Church of the Brethren at the denominational and district levels. Everence will not have agency status with Annual Conference but will be a “resource partnership.”

Eder cited changing demographics, financial realities, and challenges from the COVID pandemic as reasons for the transition. The pool of full-time, benefits-eligible pastors in the Church of the Brethren is significantly reduced, said a release. “Approximately 70 percent of Church of the Brethren congregations are served by part-time pastors who are unable to access full benefit packages. As a result, only about 200 congregations currently have employees actively contributing to the Eder Retirement Plan. . . . At the same time, the organization’s staffing, product offerings, and service expectations have expanded, creating financial pressures that are no longer sustainable.”

Most Eder employees are expected to be let go by the end of 2026. They are receiving severance packages and professional help with job placement.



Everence leaders presented information about their organization during the special meeting of Standing Committee.

Grants

Emergency Disaster Fund:

■ **\$95,000 supports the Nigeria Crisis Response through 2026.** After 12 years, 2026 will be the last year of an annually planned program. Going forward, grant requests from Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) will be considered case-by-case.

The 2026 plan focuses on resettlement in Nigeria of families from a refugee camp in Cameroon, including repair or rebuilding of 30 homes, assistance to 800 households, and scholarships for 60 children. An additional \$10,000 was added to the planned grant for newly displaced families affected by Boko Haram violence following the US missile strikes against terrorist groups in December 2025.

■ **\$25,000 supports aid by the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (LSESD)** for families displaced by the war between Israel and Hezbollah. LSESD's relief arm, Middle East Revive and Thrive, developed the plan for at least 10,000 families needing assistance.

Global Food Initiative:

■ **\$20,000 supports a goat and chicken farming project of the Church of the Brethren in Uganda.** The project trains people in livelihood development and

supports improved nutrition for vulnerable communities including those related to Radiant Star Orphanage and Junior School.

■ **\$6,990 supports an agricultural training component at the Great Lakes Bible School.** The school is a ministry of the Rwanda church. Students will receive practical training in sustainable and low-resource farming practices.

■ **\$4,576 supports Farming God's Way in the Church of the Brethren in Burundi.** Trainings are for a holistic model that combines faith and creation care with regenerative agricultural practices.

Brethren Faith in Action:

■ **\$5,000 to Iglesia el Buen Pastor,** Blacksburg, Va., supports families facing immigration issues.

■ **\$5,000 to Monte de Hermon,** Bassett, Va., supports families facing job loss and a reduction of hours.

■ **\$5,000 to Mountain View Fellowship Church of the Brethren,** McGaheysville, Va., helps fund a commercial-grade sign with message board.

■ **\$5,000 to Onekama (Mich.) Church of the Brethren** supports ECHO His Love programs for those experiencing homelessness.

■ **\$5,000 to Troy (Ohio) Church of the Brethren** supports a Laundry Outreach project.

FAITH COMMUNITIES SAY NO TO HISTORIC
\$1,500,000,000,000
PENTAGON BUDGET



The Office of Peacebuilding and Policy signed an interfaith letter opposing the proposal for a \$1.5 trillion budget for the Pentagon. "Our traditions are united by a shared moral conviction," the letter said, in part. "This proposed budget would represent a staggering 50 percent increase over the already enormous \$1 trillion dollar FY 2026 Pentagon budget—at a moment when millions of Americans are losing access to health care, food assistance, and other vital support."

■ **\$5,000 to Union Grove Church of the Brethren,** Muncie, Ind., supports a paper pantry.

■ **\$4,800 to Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren,** Harrisburg, Pa., supports a monthly drive-through breakfast ministry.

■ **\$3,900 to Potsdam (Ohio) Church of the Brethren** funds community outreach events in 2026.

■ **\$2,500 to Camp Emmaus,** Mount Morris, Ill., supports renovation of volleyball and basketball courts and a campfire-picnic area.

Personnel

Huma Rana on March 27 resigned as director of Financial Operations for Eder Financial, to accept an offer with the Salvation Army. She began with Eder in July 2015.

Eder Financial on April 2 concluded the work of three staff: **Russ Chrusciel**, director of Retirement Benefits, an employee since 2022; **Beth Martin**, Marketing director, an

employee since 2022; and **Felicia Kaplan**, Content Marketing manager, an employee since 2024.

Michelle Martinez began April 27 as assistant treasurer and manager of accounting for the Church of the Brethren at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. She holds an accounting degree and a master of business administration.

Risa E. Dickson has been named president of the University of La Verne, Calif., after being interim president since 2024. The ULV board affirmed her leadership following input from the university community prioritizing experienced leadership, continuity, and stability, among other priorities.

Tim Courtright has resigned as executive director

of Camp Swatara in Bethel, Pa., effective Sept. 5.

Andrew Hamilton, Southeastern District executive, will represent the Church of the Brethren on the board of Churches for Middle East Peace. He follows Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, who served on the CMEP board for 14 years.



Post this page You are welcome to photocopy these news pages. For more Newsline stories, go to www.brethren.org/news

Disappointed in Esther

I was disappointed in Wendy McFadden's reference to Esther as a hero, and the suggestion to take inspiration from her example, in "From the Publisher" in April. As Paul Harvey would say, here is the "rest of the story."

When Esther and Mordecai received relief from the enemy, they wanted revenge. The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword. They killed 75,000 of them, but did not lay their hands on the plunder. Esther also asks the king for a public display of the 10 murdered sons of Haman and she is allowed to hang them on a specially constructed gallows for all to see. Now Purim is a holiday for feasting and joy!

Is everything ethically correct when God is on your side?

David Braune
Westminster, Md.

What a great issue!

The Joanna Willoughby, Harry Jarrett, and Paul Numrich pieces in the March

issue were especially helpful to me. I'm still re-reading them! Also, thanks for the Drew Hart piece in the previous issue. Feeling grateful for your work,

Barbara West
Corvallis, Ore.

On our way to Ohio

We look forward to every issue of MESSENGER. As soon as the magazine arrives, my wife, Mim, has it all read within a day or two.

We recently had a special family-con-

nected trip to Ohio and the April issue arrived the day before we were to leave. I told Mim I would really appreciate having her read MESSENGER during that three- to four-hour trip.

Mim is a retired elementary teacher, an excellent reader, and she wonderfully fulfilled my dream. For me it was like a mountain-top experience as she read the April MESSENGER on our way to Ohio. What a joy!

Roger Eberly
North Manchester, Ind.

Discussion starters for small groups

■ **How young adults can find community** may rely on the ability to seek, invite, and be community. Read the long list of suggestions for finding community twice—first to note those you think are most effective for young adults, and then those that speak to your own situation. Underline the suggestions you like the best. How might your congregation or community act on these suggestions?

■ **A peace church in a prevailing storm** is how Don Fitzkee describes Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria after his moderator's trip. He asks, "What does it mean to be a peace church," in EYN's situation of suffering persistence violence. Answer that question for yourself first, then review the answers Fitzkee heard at the Majalisa—such as "faith over fear," seeking greater security, being ministers of reconciliation, among others. Have you lived in a community experiencing violence? If so, how did it react and what guidance did leaders offer? If not, imagine living such a situation and the guidance you would seek from leaders. How does EYN offer the US church a model as our "big sister"?

■ **Annual Conference business** includes three action items: "Resolution on Weapons Transfer," "Resolution on Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors," and "Recommendations for Adjustments to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership Paper." Read the full documents at www.brethren.org/ac2026/business. What pros and cons do you see in each recommendation, and why? How may each of these business items lead the Church of the Brethren forward in discipleship to Jesus Christ?

See you at AC & NYC!



Church of the Brethren
Mission Advancement
www.brethren.org/MAcontact

TURNINGPOINTS

New members

Bethel, Arriba, Colo.: Cole Michal, Ezra Saffer

Evergreen, Stanardsville, Va.: Christine Barber, Macey Conley, McKinley Conley, Wesley Conley, Eli Morris, Stacy Roach, Ava Robinson

Hanover, Pa.: Dennis Hare

Ivester, Grundy Center, Iowa: Robin Ainsco

Nettle Creek, Hagerstown, Ind.:

Ruth Rinehart

Roaring Spring First, Pa.:

Bobbie Albright, Evelyn Messick, Devon O'Neal

Trotwood, Ohio: Kay Filbrun

Wedding anniversaries

Fitzkee, Dan and Floy,

Manheim, Pa., 66

Mason, Diane and Ronnie,

Hillsboro, Kan., 50

Miller, Gary and Grace,
Phoenix, Md., 65

Miller, Leroy and Sharon,
Easton, Md., 65

Snoots, Jackie and William
"Bill," Knoxville, Md., 65

Deaths

Brumbaugh, David, 75, Roaring
Spring, Pa., April 4

Domarasky, Leona, 81,

Pottstown, Pa., Feb. 20

Gallamore, Donald L., 96,

Middletown, Ind., Jan. 20

Harper, Phyllis Maureen Erb,
98, Panora, Iowa, April 21

Haynie, Janice, 87, Anderson,
Ind., Nov. 27

Little, Pamela, 85, Wabash, Ind.,
March 27

Matheny, Leonard, 68, Dunlap,
Ill., April 20

McCan, Arlene Ann (Fouts), 88,
Plymouth, Ind., Feb. 10

Rohrer, Alice Rupel, 101, North
Manchester, Ind., Feb. 16

Schade, Alfred, 102, Tipp City,
Ohio, April 9

Shumaker, Shirley A., 91,
Ligonier, Pa. April 15

Stouffer, Betty, 83,
Chambersburg, Pa., April 22

Corrections

Harold Bowser in the May issue was incorrectly listed as serving as pastor at Madison Avenue in York, Pa.

Terrie S. Cox (Mid-Atl. Dist., Manassas, Va.), who is a licensed minister, in the April issue was incorrectly listed as ordained.

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.

In a time like this

“I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you”
(2 Timothy 1:6).

There are moments in the life of the church when the question is not simply what we believe, but how we will live, and this feels like one of those moments.

In recent weeks, violence and conflict have come into clearer view again. The United States’ increasing involvement in conflict with Iran is one example. At the same time, the language of division and hostility seems to surface more quickly, not only in distant places, but in the spaces we inhabit every day.



JOCELYN WATKINS

In a time like this, it is worth asking who we are, and how we are called to live.

For the Church of the Brethren, that question has never been abstract. We have long understood that following Jesus means taking seriously his refusal to participate in violence. We have named this as nonresistance, as peacemaking, as a commitment to live in ways that reflect the life and teachings of Christ. But we have also understood something else that feels especially important right now.

Peace is not only about what we refuse. It is also about how we live together.

Our tradition has long held that truth is best discerned in community. We gather, we listen, we speak honestly, and we remain with one another long enough to move toward understanding. We call this consensus, not as a procedural requirement, but as a way of trusting that the Holy Spirit works through patient, communal discernment.

In a world that moves quickly toward division, this is a different way of being, and it raises questions for us.

How do we engage one another when we disagree? How do we speak about conflict, whether global or local, without mirroring the hostility we see around us? What does it look like to remain in relationship when it would be easier to withdraw or divide?

If our commitment to peace is real, it must take shape somewhere.

It takes shape in our personal lives, in how we respond to fear, in how we speak about others, and in whether we choose to escalate conflict or interrupt it.

It takes shape in our congregations, in whether we create space for honest conversation, in whether we model listening, and in whether we are willing to remain present with one another when agreement does not come easily.

And it takes shape in our public witness, in whether we are willing to say, clearly and without hesitation, that violence is not the way of Christ, even when that position feels out of step with the world around us.

To live as a people committed to peace is not to be passive. It does not mean withdrawing or remaining silent. It means choosing, again and again, to engage the world in a different way, one that refuses violence while still taking responsibility for how we live, speak, and act.

This is not easy work. It is slower than we would like, and it requires humility, patience, and a willingness to examine our own habits as much as the world around us.

But this is also the moment in which our witness is most needed.

In a time when violence is again being justified, explained, and normalized in public life, silence carries its own weight. If we believe that the way of Christ is a way of peace, then this is not only something to hold internally or practice privately. It is something to be named, embodied, and, when necessary, spoken with clarity.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you.” The theme of the Illinois/Wisconsin District this year is “Kindled Anew.” Perhaps being kindled anew begins close to home, with a renewed willingness to live what we have long professed, even when doing so feels difficult or costly.

So, I find myself wondering:

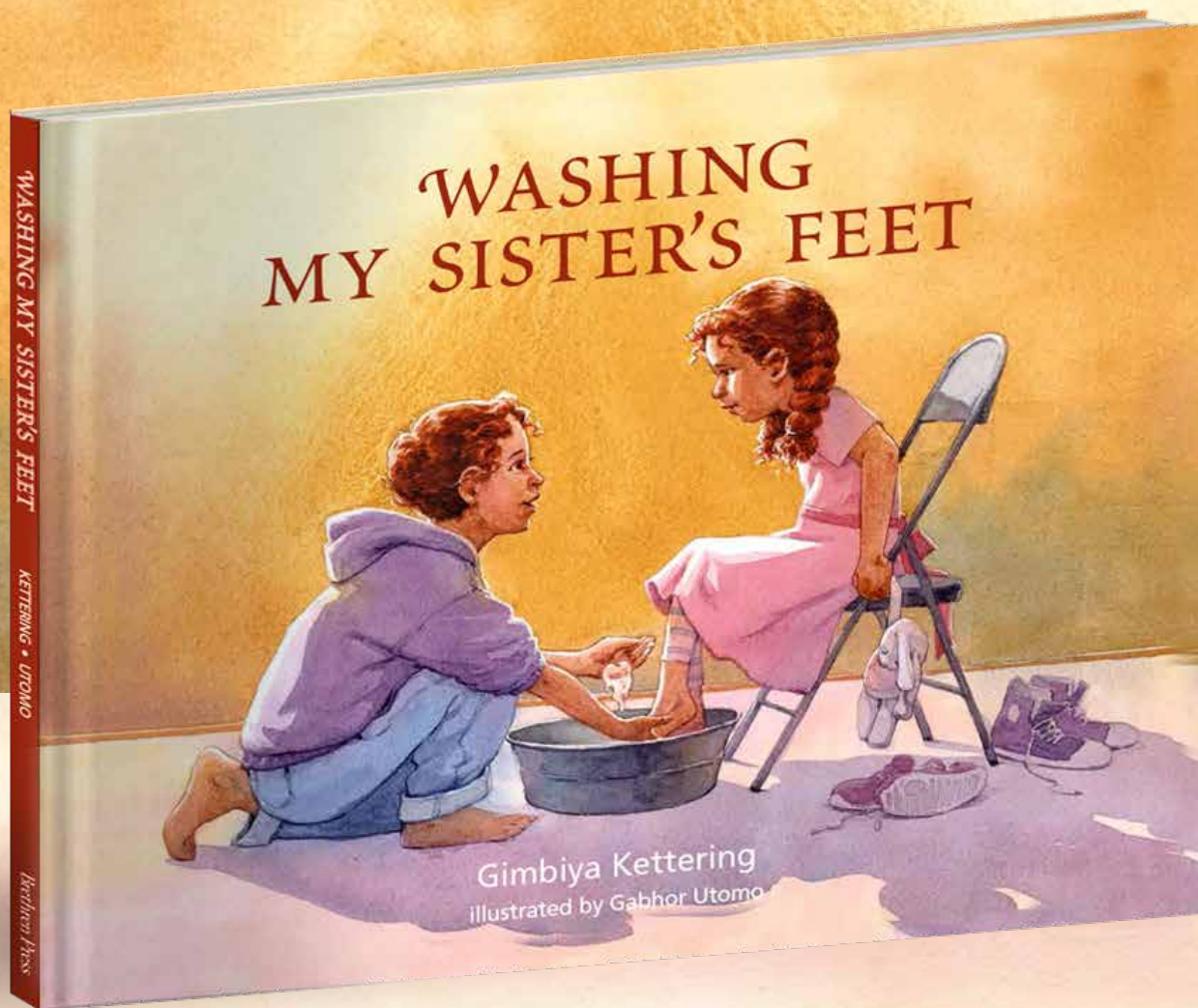
Where is peace being practiced in your life right now? Where is it being avoided? What would it look like for your congregation to be known not for its agreement, but for its commitment to remain in relationship? And what small, concrete step might you take this week that reflects the way of Christ in a world shaped by conflict?

We may not be able to change the course of nations, but we are not without influence in the places we inhabit, and we are not without a calling to live in ways that bear witness to something different.

In a time like this, that calling matters. 

Jocelyn Watkins is a member of First Church of the Brethren in Peoria, Ill., and 2026 moderator of the Illinois/Wisconsin District.

“In a time when violence is again being justified, explained, and normalized in public life, silence carries its own weight.”



A story of reconciliation and belonging

Ilse had a hard time as she and her sister Lina prepared for a special service at their grandma's church. By the end of the day, Ilse has learned something new about family, forgiveness, and footwashing.




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