



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

MESSENGER

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**Peace is
not passive**





CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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Happy dodransbicentennial!

When MESSENGER's ancestor, the *Gospel Visitor*, was born, the United States of America was only 75 years old.

The *New York Times* was also born in 1851, though we can't help but point out that MESSENGER is five months older than the Gray Lady.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

If the US celebration is a semiquincentennial, then what is a 175th? It's a *dodransbicentennial*—which translates to a quarter less than a bicentennial. We wonder why a 250th is named for the fanciful but faraway 500, while 175 is named for being short.

But we are feeling tall right now, and so should our readers and contributors. In our dodransbicentennial year, the team earned six awards from the Associated Church Press, the most we've ever received. Here are the awards for work published in 2025:

Science: Award of excellence (first place) for "A Mountaintop Moment," by William L. Miller, in the category of science writing for the world of faith. "The article's strength is that it does not merely mention science; it teaches readers how ecological systems, public conservation, and faith-based stewardship are connected," said the judges.

Calling: Award of excellence for a trio of articles on calling, by Eric Bishop, Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred, and Erika Clary, in the category of feature writing on denominational politics. The writers were members of an Annual Conference committee recommending changes to how the church calls leaders. The judges said, "Those who are drafted to serve in any denominational legislative session would do well to read a primer as well assembled as this one."

Heart: Award of excellence for *Take Heart*, a video produced by Wendy McFadden to report on the ministries of the Church of the Brethren. It won in the video category of editorial/documentary style/educational.

Hope: Award of merit (second place) for a cluster on the theme of hope. A host of MESSENGER readers responded to an invitation from the editors to submit short essays, poems, and photos. (There were so many good submissions that the next issue carried another section on hope.)

Curiosity: Honorable mention (third place) for The Exchange, a department created each issue by Walt Wiltschek. The page "creates an accessible entry point for readers across ages and interest levels," said the judges. "The best parts are its ability to connect faith, history, culture, and curiosity in a compact package."

Simple living: Honorable mention for "Unnecessary Things," by Gimbiya Kettering, in the category of humor in writing. With wit that resonates with fellow simple-life Brethren, the writer pondered what to do with a dying refrigerator.

Wendy McFadden

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“A devout life does bring wealth, but it’s the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that’s enough.” —1 Timothy 6:6-8, *The Message*

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.”

—German-American painter Hans Hofmann

“Simplicity is living not conformed to the world, but transformed by Christ.” —from the 1996 Annual Conference statement on the “Simple Life.”

“Once we let go of the things that don’t matter, we are free to pursue all the things that really do matter.” —author and philanthropist Joshua Becker

“Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us.”

—theologian and author Richard Foster



BY THE NUMBERS

200

Number of members per delegate a congregation is allotted for the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. A congregation of up to 200 members receives one delegate; one of 201-400 members receives two delegates, and so on. District representatives to Standing Committee also serve as delegates, regardless of congregation. A total of 409 delegates attended the 2025 Annual Conference in Greensboro, N.C.

DID YOU KNOW?

If you ask Google AI amid this semiquincentennial what the Church of the Brethren has to say about patriotism, it comes up with this (in one iteration): “The Church of the Brethren, a historic peace church, traditionally views faith as transcending national borders. Rather than typical patriotic quotes, Brethren theology emphasizes a higher loyalty to the Kingdom of God, nonviolence, and active peacemaking.”

IMAGINE THIS!

This year’s Annual Conference theme, from moderator Don Fitzkee, is “Imagine!” (from Acts 2:17-18). In the puzzle below, can you find “IMAGINATION” and the other related words? They can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, forward or backward. Don’t work on it during business sessions!

CREATIVITY DREAM VISION			IMAGINATION INVENTION IDEA			INGENUITY INSPIRATION THOUGHT			BRAINSTORM SEE PICTURE		
A	V	I	P	F	T	B	W	A	Y	N	E
N	I	A	N	G	A	R	M	C	O	N	F
D	N	U	M	V	L	A	P	E	R	E	C
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T	P	I	T	R	C	N	C	V	H	B	E
I	I	E	D	E	E	S	T	G	W	E	A
U	R	E	Y	E	S	T	U	I	C	N	T
N	A	V	K	P	A	O	R	K	O	D	I
E	T	M	A	Z	H	R	E	I	N	N	V
G	I	C	K	T	T	M	S	Y	E	R	I
N	O	I	T	A	N	I	G	A	M	I	T
I	N	P	R	A	V	N	F	M	U	M	Y

THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

Church World Service, a global relief agency, celebrates its 80th anniversary this year. Created in 1946 by a group of 17 denominations including the Church of the Brethren, its founding principle was to “do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone.” Work began with aid for Europe in the wake of World War II and it continued building its ministry in the decades since to address hunger, poverty, migration issues, natural disasters, and more. Today, CWS says it “proudly serves as the toolbox that our neighbors near and far use to build healthy, dignified, and safe lives.”



Belonging before believing

by Don Fitzkee

I grew up believing in a somewhat sharp separation between "church" and "world." I thought all the good people believed in Jesus and went to church, and our task was to convince all those heathen unbelievers to repent and accept Jesus. We had to convince them to believe certain things and behave in certain ways before they could belong with the rest of us saints.

Visually, the church was one circle and the world was a totally separate circle with a wide gap between the two. This view fit nicely with an Anabaptist view of the church as a distinctive community that "came out from among them" and was separate (2 Corinthians 6:17). We believed in "another way of living" before it became an official Brethren tagline.

But now I'm wondering if we need to go back to the drawing board in search of a new sketch.

Shrinking church participation in recent decades has been well documented. Membership and church attendance have declined precipitously, not only in the Church of the Brethren but across many mainline and, more recently, evangelical denominations. But a recent study of the US religious climate by the Pew Research Center—"Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe"—observed that 70 percent of those who claim no religious affiliation still believe in God or a higher power. Decades earlier sociologist Grace Davie described a similar phenomenon in Great Britain as "believing without belonging."

Per Pew, many people who are not in pews still have interest in spiritual things and presumably are people of goodwill seeking some of the same things church people are seeking—meaning and purpose, safe and caring communities, guidance for living, maybe a little more peace and a lot less acrimony.

But they don't believe that they can find these things in church. Some have been burned by legalistic understandings of faith or driven away by scandalous behavior of religious leaders and ensuing cover-ups. The gap between Christian

principles and practice is just too wide.

How do we reach people who are still spiritually curious but suspicious of the institutional church? Certainly, living lives of integrity and showing our faith by the manner of our living is an excellent starting point!

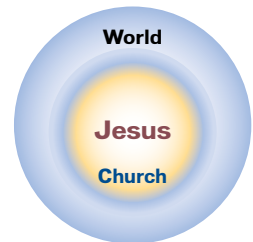
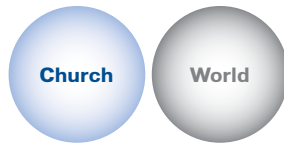
But then maybe we also need to redraw the picture of "church" and "world" and reorder the steps for crossing from one to the other. Instead of believe, behave, belong, maybe it should be belong, experience, believe. To arrive at this reordering will require churches that are safe spaces for questions, where community comes even before conviction, where participation precedes full agreement, and where rich fellowship and practical faith point people toward Jesus.

I still believe the church should model distinctive Christlike living that contrasts with the world. That hasn't changed. But these days I would diagram it differently. Instead of two separate circles, make it one big circle, representing the entire world, with Jesus in the center. Somewhere within that big circle, there's a smaller concentric circle indicating the church.

I wouldn't draw the line for that inner circle too sharply. I would render it faint and fuzzy enough that people wouldn't realize they had crossed it until one day they discover they already belong.

Oh, eventually as we move closer to Jesus in the center of it all, things grow clearer. A time comes for confession, commitment, and baptism. We'll get around to believing. But what if belonging precedes and actually promotes believing? Imagine that! 

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



“To arrive at this reordering will require churches that are safe spaces for questions, where community comes even before conviction.”

Western Plains women meet in the mountains

The Western Plains District Women's Retreat is a popular event, and when it is held in the beautiful Colorado Rockies participants feel especially blessed. The view of the mountains, the free time for hiking or jewelry making, and a labyrinth added to the appeal of the retreat.

On April 17-19, the women of Colorado hosted 52 women at the Highland Presbyterian Retreat Center in Allenspark, Colo., near Estes Park, where National Youth Conference will be held this summer.

Retreat leader Rita Berglund, a licensed professional counselor and spiritual director, led the group in exploring the "Seasons of a Woman's Life." Duey Freeman's diagram of developmental tasks, injuries, and

healings was introduced. This included the developmental stages, starting at 0-18 months with "Is the World OK?" and leading upward to 11 years and older with "Who Am I?" Then, as people age, the developmental tasks reverse as new challenges appear.

Berglund led participants in the

spiritual practice of lectio divina and led guided doodling. Worship times included prayer in the style of Taizé.

The time spent together reunited old friendships, sparked new ones, and brought together women of different generations—whose souls were fed.

—Gail Erisman Valeta



Annual Dunker Church Service to be held at Antietam

The 56th Annual Dunker Church Service will be held on Sept. 20 at the historic meetinghouse on the Antietam National Battlefield—one of the most iconic landscapes of the Civil War. Set against the backdrop of the bloodiest single day in US history, this annual gathering offers a striking and hopeful counter-witness: a testimony to peace, reconciliation, and the enduring call to shalom.

For more than half a century, people have made a pilgrimage to the Dunker Church on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the battle. Built in 1852 by Dunker farmers, this simple and unadorned meetinghouse became a focal point during the Battle of Antietam on Sept. 17, 1862. The church stood in the midst of intense fighting and was used as a field hospital for Confederate soldiers. Though heavily damaged, the structure was repaired and continued to host worship services into the

early 20th century. After being destroyed by a storm in 1921, it eventually came under the care of the National Park Service, which reconstructed it in 1962 for the battle's centennial using original materials wherever possible and preserving its historic character.

Denise Kettering-Lane, associate professor of Brethren Studies and director of the Master of Arts program at Bethany Theological Seminary, will bring the message. The service also will include a welcome, call to worship, congregational hymns, scripture readings, special music, and prayers.

The service is sponsored by Mid-Atlantic District and is free and open to the public. Seating inside the

meetinghouse is limited and early arrival is encouraged. A livestream will be available via the Annual Dunker Church Service Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/dunkerchurchservice. —Paul Munday



Joel Brumbaugh-Cayford

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.



Bethany Theological Seminary's commencement

on May 9 on the Richmond, Ind., campus awarded the largest number of degrees and certificates since Bethany relocated from Illinois in 1994. It also honored former president Eugene Roop and former board chair Lowell Flory, who were serving in those leadership positions at the time of the move. The commencement address was delivered by David Witkovsky. **Bethany also held its biannual commencement ceremony in Jos, Nigeria, on May 26, honoring graduates from 2025 and 2026. For a list of all the 2026 graduates, in the US and Nigeria, go to <https://bethanyseminary.edu/2026-commencement-2>.**

'We walk alongside their footsteps'

The denomination's Mission Advancement staff have launched a campaign to preserve the historic Germantown property in Pennsylvania. "We invite you to prayerfully consider helping us to take the next step by supporting this effort to raise \$300,000," said an announcement.

The Germantown Meetinghouse and Cemetery in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia date back to 1723. It is the site of the first Brethren meetinghouse in the Americas and celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2023.

The historic meetinghouse continues in use today by the congregation at Germantown Church of the Brethren, pastored by Richard Kyerematen. The cemetery behind the meetinghouse is where several of the most prominent early Brethren leaders are buried. The property



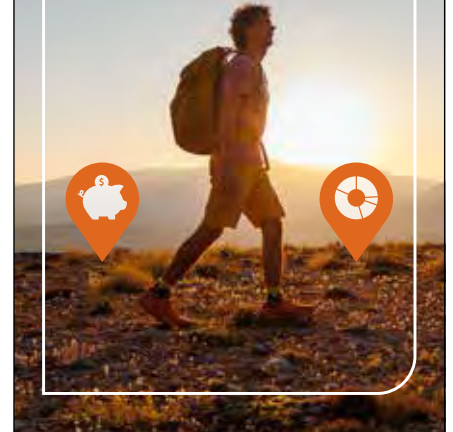
Cheryl Brumbaugh-Carford

also includes the church parsonage.

The property is owned by the Church of the Brethren and is cared for by the Germantown Trust. Members of the trust include representatives from the Germantown congregation, Atlantic Northeast District, the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board, and several other Brethren denominations that descend from the Germantown congregation.

Find out more at www.brethren.org/giveGermantown.

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Where the mountains meet the clouds

A journey with the Burundi Church of the Brethren

by Sharon Brugger Norton

Dave Proffers

In April I witnessed the vibrant, rapidly growing life of Eglise des Freres au Burundi (Church of the Brethren in Burundi). It was a journey of many miles through the mountains, joyous singing, and deep theological reflection. While our contexts differ, “continuing the work of Jesus” looks remarkably similar whether you are in the Shenandoah Valley or the hills overlooking Lake Tanganyika.

Stepping off the plane in Bujumbura, I was met with the kind of hospitality that defines our global family. The welcoming group included Expert Bukene, founder of the Church of the Brethren Burundi; Ron Lubungo, founder of the Church of the Brethren in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Chris Dieudonne, vice president of the Congolese church. I was especially grateful for the presence of Chris Elliott and his daughter, Grace, who traveled from Rwanda to offer their accompaniment and perspective.

In a world that often feels divided, there is something profoundly Brethren about the way our global leaders show up for one another. Whether navigating the travel delay of South Sudanese women’s ministry coordinator Nyakanitha Magaw or joyfully sharing a meal, we immediately felt a sense of covenant community.

Collaboration between the Congolese and Burundian churches is strong, as they work together to care for those displaced by war in eastern DR Congo.

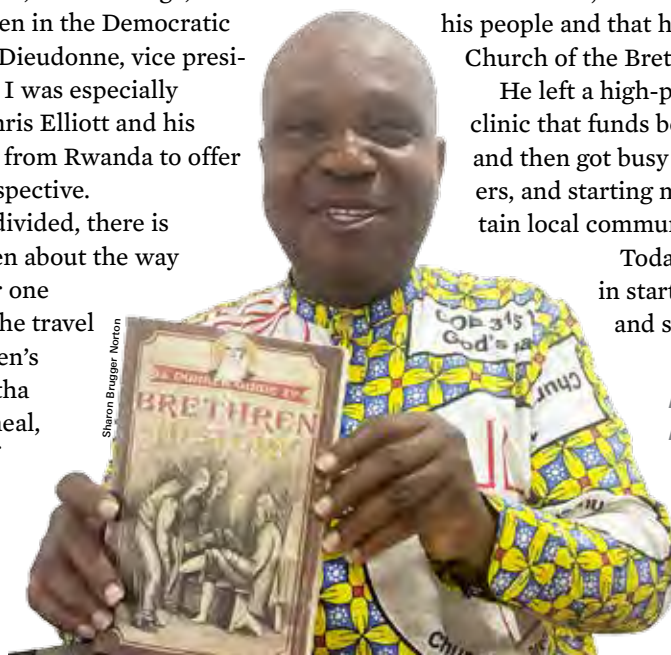
This was my second meeting with Bishop Expert Bukene, who was ordained by the Methodists as a bishop to start the Church of the Brethren in Burundi. Talk about generous ecumenical support!

When we first met last year in Nigeria, he brought a familiar book one day to breakfast: a copy of *A Dunker Guide to Brethren History*, published by Brethren Press in 2010. A Burundian man had given it to him years ago. As he read this book, he felt deeply stirred that these were his people and that his calling was to plant the Church of the Brethren in Burundi and beyond.

He left a high-paying NGO job to start a health clinic that funds both his family and his ministry, and then got busy planting churches, training leaders, and starting ministries to empower and sustain local communities.

Today, Bukene has been instrumental in starting 52 congregations in Burundi and several in neighboring countries.

Burundi church founder Expert Bukene displays the book that sparked his interest in the Church of the Brethren.



Sharon Brugger Norton

The international delegation visited many of the congregations and sites important to the Church of the Brethren in Burundi.

He carefully guards and promotes Brethren identity, ensuring that pastors and leaders are grounded in our Anabaptist and Pietist heritage. This indigenous leadership keeps the church rooted in local culture while remaining clear about its theological foundations.

In Gitenga, we visited a congregation led by district executive Felicien Nkunuzimana. Here, the gospel is lived out in practical ways. Next to the church sits a soap factory, which they own, and nearby is a “Farming God’s Way” plot.

Seeing orderly rows of plants with compost and irrigation pipes designed to preserve moisture reminded me of our own agrarian roots. To the Brethren in Burundi, stewardship of the land not only is a biblical value pleasing to God, but also helps gardeners and farmers yield higher quality crops.

The Brethren value of sharing what you have for the common good is a recurring theme in Burundi. In one town, a leader donated three properties to the church and runs a bakery on site, feeding both the bodies and spirits of his community. It is a model of church growth that is entirely indigenous and sets them up for self-sustainability.

A deeply meaningful portion of the trip was our visit to a refugee camp in the Rutana region. The camp itself is a sea of UNHCR shanties housing thousands of Congolese refugees. The local congregation made a strategic choice to



Sharon Brugger Norton

build their church—a humble structure of stick, mud, and thatch—just outside the camp to avoid coming under government oversight and remain a free space for worship.

The congregation is made up of both Congolese from the refugee camp and local Burundians. Standing before this group, I encouraged them to be one in Christ, urging that linguistic and cultural differences not cause division.

In a gesture of radical hospitality, they gifted us a live goat—a reminder of the story of the widow’s mite in Mark 12:41-44. Generosity is for everyone! Thanks to Emergency Disaster Fund grants, the church provides vital care in this place of transience.

Education is a cornerstone of the Burundi Brethren vision. I had the opportunity to teach at the International Pastors Institute (IPI), which Bukene began to train leaders at three distinct levels. Chris Elliott and I shared the teaching load: He covered the Gospel of Matthew and the Brethren ordinances and history; I covered the priesthood of all believers, biblical interpretation from a Brethren perspective, and the Gospel of Luke.

Watching students like Athanasus, the principal of the Brethren Primary School, engage these concepts was a highlight. As Brethren theology takes root in East African soil, the New Testament comes

The group visited a thriving farm supported by the church.



Sharon Brugger Norton

“The Brethren value of sharing what you have for the common good is a recurring theme in Burundi...a model of church growth that is entirely indigenous and sets them up for self-sustainability.”

Expert Bukene teaches a class on Matthew and the Brethren ordinances and history.

alive for me in a fresh way. We could witness the systematic way Bukene is preparing the church with many good leaders, who will carry on the ministry of the Church of the Brethren when he retires.

We also attended a graduation for the primary Brethren School children, marveling at the church's commitment to foster growth and opportunity in the next generation by offering a trilingual education—Kirundi, English, and Swahili.

Expert Bukene is committed to avoiding dependency on outside funds. His health clinic provides employment for 11 people and offers medical care on a sliding scale, with 10 percent of earnings going to the national church. He dreams of expanding the clinic into a hospital with a maternity ward, to support the church's mission. It is a vision built on sustainable, local investment.

He also empowers women through a microloan program called Get Up and Walk, inspired by the story in Acts 3:6-8. Nyakanitha Magaw, the women's ministry coordinator who had traveled from South Sudan, attended a meeting of the microloan group and is excited to bring that kind of ministry to her country.

Bukene's integrity is evident in the four-level "cathedral" he has built in Bujumbura without outside money. Because my visit coincided with Holy Week, I was able to participate in a classic Brethren love feast on Maundy Thursday. The cathedral in Bujumbura was packed, with three to four hundred people across four levels of the building.

Though the power flickered on and off throughout the service, the spirit was undiminished. We shared a meal of lamb and *ugali* (cassava), a delicious adaptation of the Brethren tradition. During footwashing and communion, I was struck by the universality of the ritual. The language



Sharon Brugger Norton

was different and the food was different, but the humbleness of the service was exactly what I recognized from my Church of the Brethren experience in the United States.

On Easter Sunday, we traveled a rutted mountain road up to a small congregation. As fog rolled through the windows, we sang and danced and finally I preached on Matthew 28, where Jesus tells his disciples: "I will meet you there."

For the Brethren in Burundi, *there* is often a place of poverty, addiction, or displacement. Yet, they go there with open arms and a commitment to sharing the gospel in its many forms. As I left for the Global Church of the Brethren Communion gathering in Spain, I carried with me the echoes of Burundian harmonies.

The Church of the Brethren in Burundi is a leading edge of our denomination. They are teaching us what it means to be a peace church in a conflicted world. And they are teaching us what it means to share generously, care for the whole person, and use the resources you have. May we continue to meet them *there*, in the shared work of the kingdom. 

Sharon Brugger Norton is executive director of Global Mission for the Church of the Brethren.

“They are teaching us what it means to be a peace church in a conflicted world. And ... what it means to share generously, care for the whole person, and use the resources you have.”

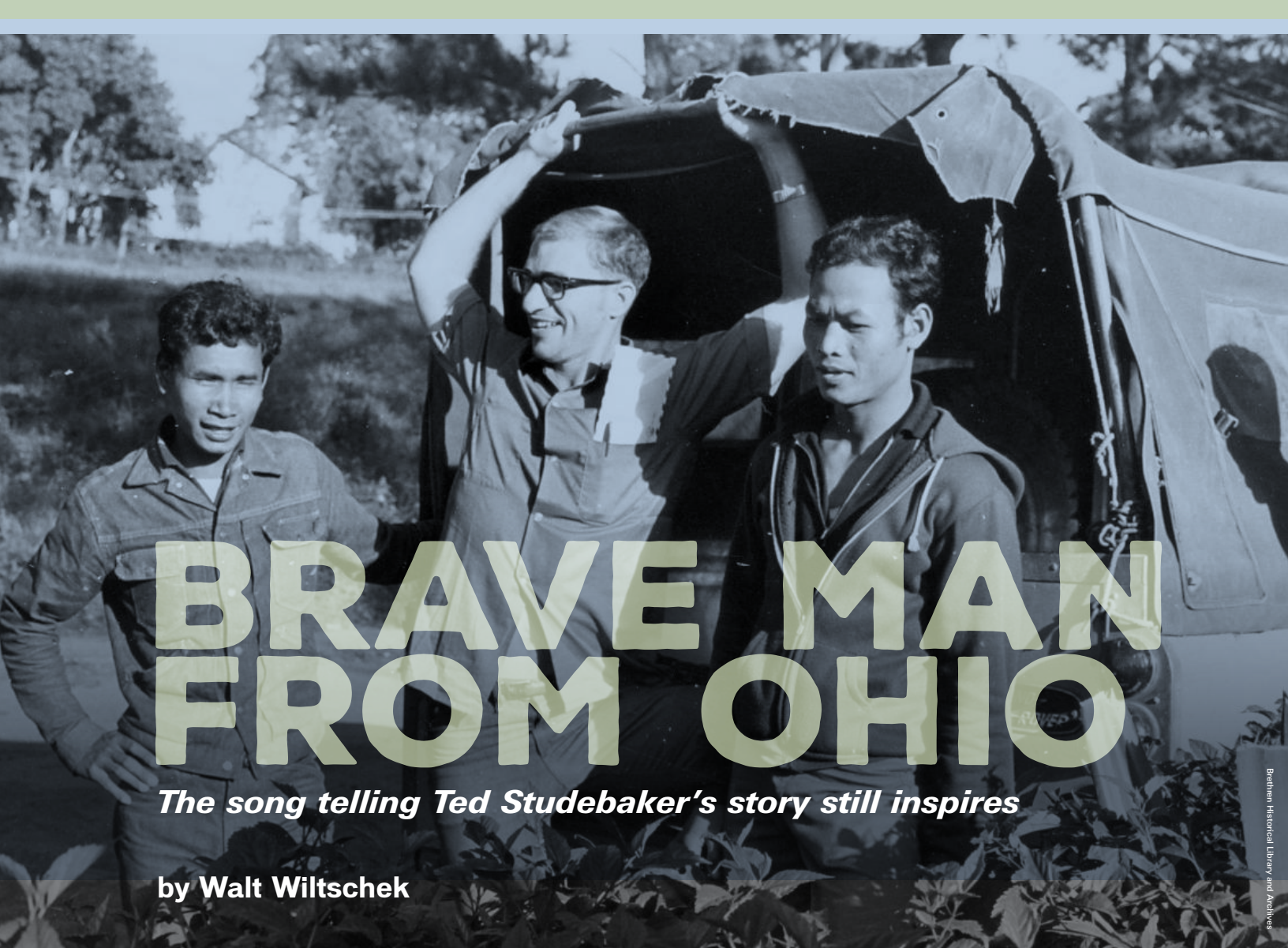
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BRAVE MAN FROM OHIO

The song telling Ted Studebaker's story still inspires

by Walt Wiltschek

*"Give me a shovel instead of a gun,
and I'll say so long for now..."*

Ted Studebaker holds a special place in Brethren hearts and history. Though he was only 25 when he died, his life and witness have carried resonance well beyond his years.

A Church of the Brethren member who lived near West Milton, Ohio, Ted felt the beliefs of his faith tradition called him to be a peacemaker and not to participate in war. As he came of age during the Vietnam War, he declared himself a conscientious objector and chose alternative service during the draft.

He went to Vietnam as an agricultural worker with Vietnam Christian Service in 1969, drawing on his farm background to

serve in the highland village of Di Linh for two-plus years. He married a fellow volunteer, Lee Ven Pak, but just a week later—on April 24, 1971—he was killed by soldiers who entered the village and found him in his bedroom.

Among the people inspired by Ted's story was Andy Murray, a Brethren peace studies scholar and musician. It became "Brave Man from Ohio," among the most enduring of the heritage songs that Murray wrote and recorded with his wife, Terry. With this spring marking 55 years since Ted's death, it seemed an opportune time to talk with Murray about the story, the song, and its lasting legacy.

MESSENGER: What inspired you to write "Brave Man from Ohio"?

Andy Murray: Well, it was an amazing story, so I wanted to tell the story. I was in the midst of writing nonviolent hero model songs for kids. I intended those to be



“Keep us ill at ease and restless, God, as long as we can see need in the world. Help us to understand the true meaning of love and brotherhood and give us strength to say and mean in all sincerity, ‘Here am I, Lord, send me.’”

—a prayer by Ted Studebaker, as recalled by his friend Joel Freedman in an essay for the *Finger Lake Times* (Geneva, N.Y.)

communicated to young people. And out of that came “Little John” and “Cowboy Dan.” So it was part of that series of things, looking at people who exhibited extraordinary bravery and had really an extraordinary impact through their life but did it without killing anybody.

I’ve tried to remember how I first found Ted’s story. I assume it was in *MESSANGER*, but I can’t remember for sure. I must have read it in 1971, when he died. It was just the desire to take people who had shown courage in the face of danger and had an impact through their witness and their life and tell their stories.

Q Do you remember about what year you actually wrote the song or first performed it?

A I probably made notes on it in 1971 and then started working on it later. At that time I was already doing (the album) *Summertime Children*. It wasn’t ready for *Summertime Children* in 1974 or 1975, but it was already percolating when that came out. So probably in 1976 or 1977 is when I actually started working on the song.

Q In a radio interview some years back (2010) they were talking with you about your peace witness, and they asked you about “Brave Man from Ohio.” At the time you said it was “probably one of the most important things” you had done. Do you still feel that way now?

A Yeah. So many young people told me that was an important song for them in terms of their own journey regarding conscientious objection and their relationship to the state and to war. So I still feel that.

I sometimes say when we’re doing a concert that I was impressed by Ted’s optimism almost as much as his bravery, except “Optimistic Young Man from Ohio” doesn’t quite have a ring to it. But the whole thing is for me kind of summarized at the end (of the song) in “Don’t worry, my love. We’re going to make it.” It was sort of like Martin Luther King’s “arc that bends toward justice”—this optimism that things will be okay, that they’ll work out. That was really terribly important to me.

Q Given today’s headlines and the global climate, the song feels like it has particular relevance again—or maybe it’s always been so?

A Yes, and you know the church has a big job to do in terms of telling our story, what we have witnessed to throughout our history.

Q Of all the songs that you and Terry did, are there any that are particular favorites of yours that have stayed close to your heart?

A There was a little song that I wrote, I think it was for a junior high conference. I was always writing stuff, because I had to have it for a conference or an album or something. And the song “Somebody” is also very much in the same genre of peace witness as the Ted Studebaker song. That’s my song about peace studies, really—that if we commit ourselves to a problem and stay with it, we might be able to figure out how humans can get out of this horrible loop that we’re in.

A CONTEMPORARY TRIBUTE

When Brethren musical group Friends with the Weather developed a series of music videos a decade ago, the project included only two songs by other writers. One was Andy Murray’s “Brave Man from Ohio.”

Seth Hendricks and Chris Good (core members of the band along with David Hupp) explain: “Written by one of our mentors, Andy Murray, we grew up singing this song within communities steeped in legacies of peacemaking, service, and working for social justice as expressions of their Christianity. The song continues to challenge and invite us to not simply critique violence in the world but to be active participants in sowing the seeds of peace.”

Find the video at: <https://friendswiththeweather.com/brave-man-from-ohio>.

With the current war, I don't really want to think about the price of gas or how everything is costing more now. I want to think about the kids who were in that school building (in Iran) when we took it out. *We* did it. It was *our* country that did it. We have to own it, and we have to say to ourselves, "Is this really who we want to be? Is this really the kind of country that we want to be?" To me, that's a rhetorical question.

Q You and Terry filled such an important place in telling those stories of our faith and making them real and tangible for those who were hearing it. Are there others today that you see filling that role in the Brethren/Anabaptist or larger peace church community?

A Certainly *Friends with the Weather* has that same vibe, and certainly what they do I would feel is in that tradition.

Q Have you heard their cover of "Brave Man from Ohio"? What did you think of it?

A I'm flattered that they would do it, and I love their version of it.

Q You've done a lot of other things in your life beyond writing these Brethren songs. Looking back, do you feel comfortable having that as a big part of your legacy to the church?

A Sure. There was a time when I wanted to be known more for what I wrote, my sermons and papers. At one time I told Annual Conference that I didn't want to do anything else there until they let me preach—and for a while I didn't do anything!

But I'm very comfortable with it, and just so grateful that we had the opportunity, the breaks, to do that kind of thing. It was always a kind of sidebar, the music. Working in peace studies and the things I did with the United Nations were more what I focused my life around, but clearly the music was probably as valuable to the church as anything that I did. 

Andy Murray was founding director of the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College in Pennsylvania and taught there for many years, including partnerships with the United Nations. Previously he served Juniata as campus minister and chaplain. He was Annual



Brethren Historical Library and Archives

LEARN MORE

"... And if I die, I'll die making something, instead of tearing something down."

- The Dayton (Ohio) **International Peace Museum**, located not far from where Ted Studebaker grew up, has an exhibit on him as part of its "Peace Heroes" collection. A virtual exhibit is also available. Learn more at www.peace.museum.
- Additional information about Studebaker can be found in Mennonite Central Committee's **Civilian Public Service/conscientious objection archives** (www.civilianpublicservice.org) and through materials from the **Brethren Historical Library and Archives** (www.brethren.org/bhla).
- While **Andy and Terry Murray** no longer do many concerts, they were part of a musical event at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College in

November. It was organized by teacher Rachel Bucher Swank, music coordinator at Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, who has created a new songbook collection featuring many of the Murrays' original works: ***Living Our Song: The Music of Andy and Terry Murray***. The songbook and a two-CD set of the Murrays' albums are available through Brethren Press.

- Other related titles available from Brethren Press are ***Ted Allen Studebaker: An Enduring Voice for Peace***, by siblings Gary and Douglas Studebaker, and ***Shoes of Peace: Letters to Youth from Peacemakers***, which includes entries from Ted Studebaker. Visit www.brethrenpress.com.

Minimal commitments

Simple living is more than getting rid of 'stuff'

by Lucas Keller

In 2016, I became aware of “minimalism” as a lifestyle—kind of. I mean, I grew up in the Church of the Brethren, so I had always heard about living simply. But this was different. It was an aesthetic; it was cool.

It started when my sister introduced me to *The Minimalists* podcast (theminimalists.com). The show features Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, who reflect on how life can be more fulfilling with less stuff. They encourage listeners to experiment and find a version of minimalism that works in their own lives.

From there, a world of minimalist influencers was served up to me through social media platforms. My Instagram algorithm knew I was fascinated by this world of people who had clean countertops or lived in a tiny house on a beach in New Zealand or could fit everything they own in a backpack.

There was a promise to it all. If you live with less stuff, you can have more life, more freedom, cleaner countertops.

Early in my 20s, minimalism was easy. After all, when you are just starting a career, it is hard to accumulate clutter on such a tight budget. Then when I hit my 30s, I looked around and realized the stuff had begun to accumulate.

So, this past March, my wife, Kelsey, and I decided to do some spring cleaning by playing the Minimalism Game, an idea from the podcast. The game starts by putting the numbers 1 to 31 in a hat. Every day we drew a number to determine how many things we needed to get rid of that day. For those who are curious, that comes out to 496 items over the course of a month.

While the dates did not line up perfectly, I thought this would feel like a Lenten practice. As the stuff disappeared, I figured I would become more focused and present in the season.

While my space became somewhat cleaner, I realized I did not feel more focused or present. I am learning the difference between the aesthetic of minimalism and the intentional, everyday practice of simple living.

After picking a few items out of the junk drawer, I sometimes found myself scrolling on my phone rather than engaging with my wife. Instead of spending time in contemplative silence, I would turn on Spotify or a YouTube video after loading up a box of donations.

I do not blame the minimalist influencers for selling me a false bill of goods. In fact, podcasters Josh and Ryan often warned about this. The benefits of minimalism really come from maximizing that which brings a deep joy to our lives: conversations with loved ones, time in prayer and meditation, or a walk in the park taking in God’s creation.

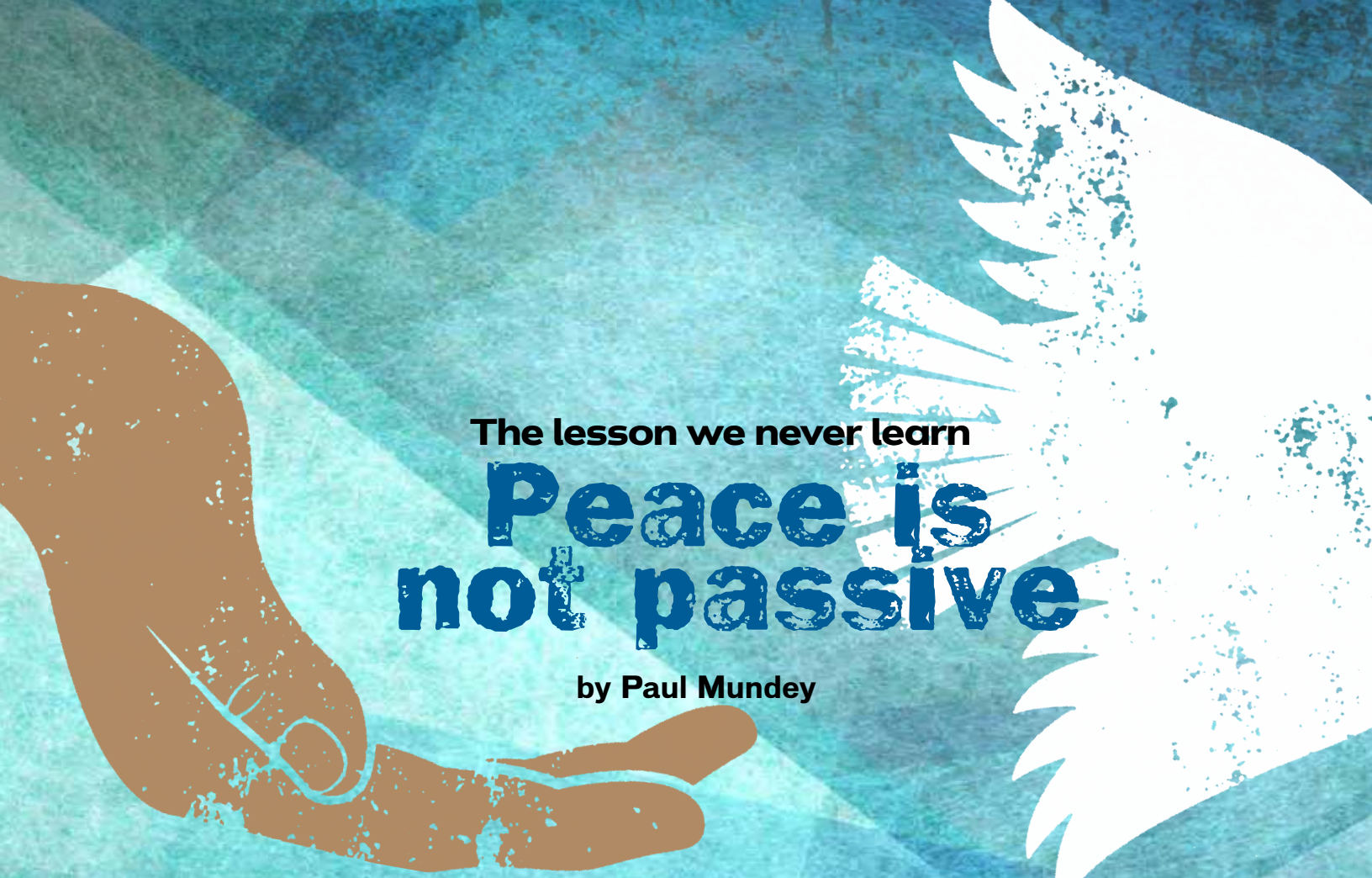
Looking back on March, I am reminded that simple living is not just about getting rid of things, or sleek design, or even clean countertops. Simple living is about seeking out deep joy in all the little things this life has to offer. It is about making time for relationships and opportunities to show love to our neighbors. As much as it is about minimizing clutter, simple living is also about maximizing joy.

In her book *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks wrote: “Living simply makes loving simple. The choice to live simply necessarily enhances our capacity to love.”

I want to continue choosing more love, more joy, and more hope through the intentional practice of simple living. 

Lucas Keller is a Mission Advancement advocate with the Church of the Brethren. A graduate of Bluffton University, he lives in Maineville, Ohio.

“I am reminded that simple living is not just about getting rid of things, or sleek design, or even clean countertops. Simple living is about seeking out deep joy in all the little things this life has to offer.”



The lesson we never learn

Peace is not passive

by Paul Munday

A favorite destination of hikers is the Gettysburg (Pa.) National Military Park. One spot on the battlefield is especially compelling: a stone wall and adjacent historical marker near The Angle, the focal point of Pickett's Charge.

The marker features a photo of Confederate and Union veterans shaking hands across the stone wall. You learn the handshake occurred during the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1938, as Civil War veterans gathered not only to reminisce but also to reconcile.

The gesture echoed Franklin D. Roosevelt's address four years earlier on Memorial Day 1934 at the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Concluding his remarks, Roosevelt said: "Here . . . at Gettysburg . . . in the presence of the spirits of those who fell on this ground, we give renewed assurance that the passions of war are moldering in the tombs of time and the purposes of peace are flowing today in the hearts of a united people."

In truth, the passions of war have not moldered, and the purposes of peace have not flowed. Despite a desire to learn the lessons of war, our default reflex remains violence to resolve conflict and contain evil. The apostle Paul summarizes our plight: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19, NIV).

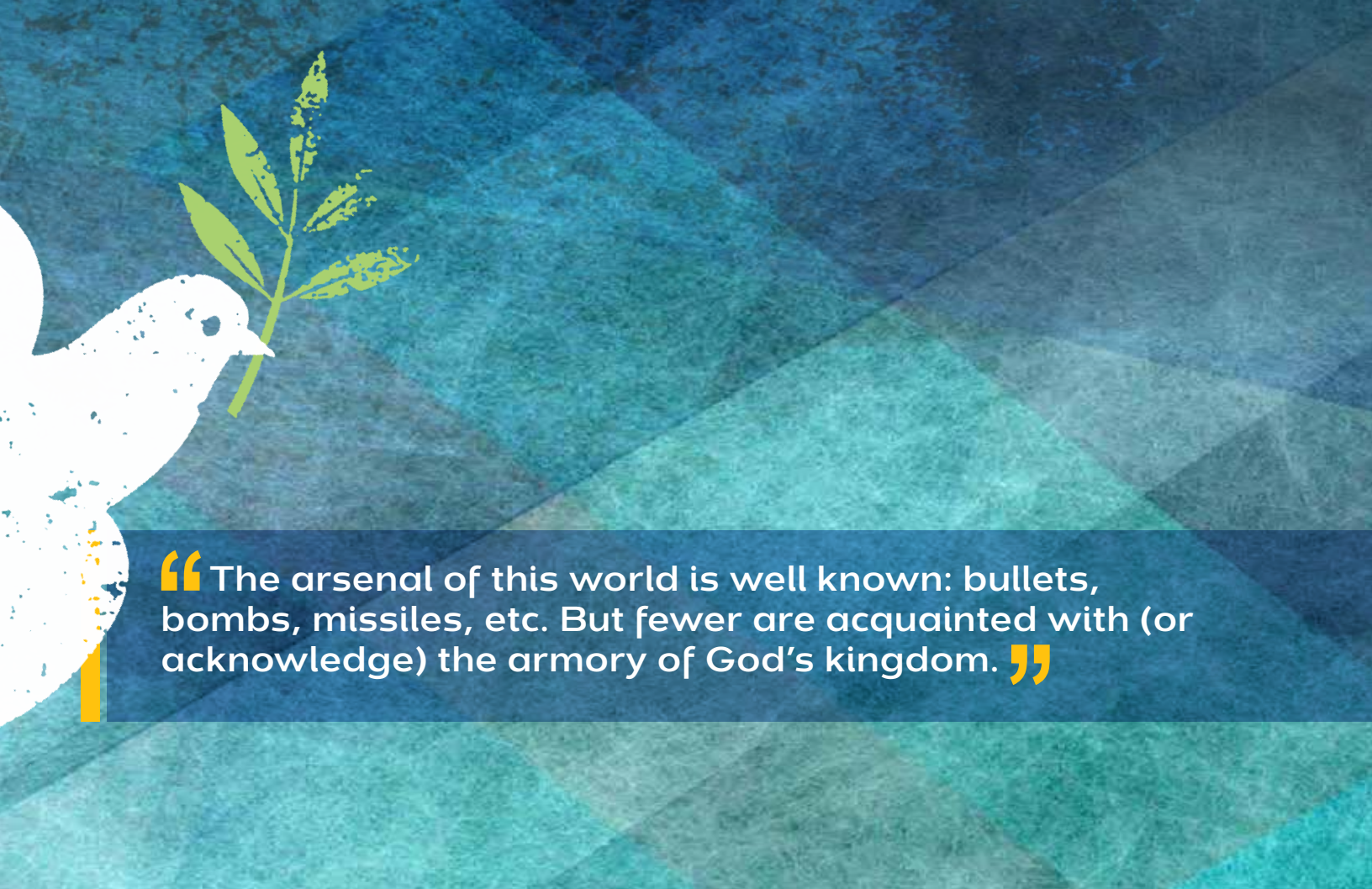
The root of this irony, for both Paul and us, is sin. Such

sin is personal, systemic, and destructive, yet it's not beyond the reach of a living God, who desires to save and transform us in Christ. Thus, we confess not only our propensity for violence and that "all war is sin," but also that peace is possible in Jesus, joining New Testament scholar Richard Hays in calling for the "complete conversion of the human imagination."

That vision blossoms in Romans 8, where Paul portrays creation on tiptoe, awaiting the unveiling of God's children (Romans 8:19). The violence and decay of this present order are not its final destiny but the labor pains of a new creation (v. 22), as creation itself is set free from its bondage into the freedom and glory God intends (v. 21). Even now, those who live by the Spirit set their minds on "life and peace" (v. 6), embodying a cruciform, self-giving way that renounces violence and anticipates God's coming shalom—the full liberation and wholeness of all creation.

Many interpret this and similar passages as realities reserved for the future. Yet God longs for an inbreaking of shalom and new creation now. Critics object, arguing that such a foretaste of glory is naïve amid today's Hitler-like evil and relentless violence. Yet Jesus instructs us to pray now: "May your Kingdom come; may your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, emphasis added).

How do we pray and work for the kingdom to come—a



“The arsenal of this world is well known: bullets, bombs, missiles, etc. But fewer are acquainted with (or acknowledge) the armory of God’s kingdom.”

new creation of shalom—moving beyond mere lip service toward fuller expressions of peace? A few directives follow:

Demonstrate that peace isn’t passive

For many, peace is laudable but wimpy. In the face of significant conflict or outright evil, nonviolence appears docile, placating violent reality. But peace is not passive; it is savvy, wielding weapons more effective than any conventional arsenal.

Years ago, Church of the Brethren theologian Vernard Eller penned a book titled *King Jesus’ Manual of Arms for the Armless*. Among other things, Eller clarifies that Jesus is not naïve in the face of conflict and atrocity but strategic, employing a wiser weaponry, the armaments of the kingdom.

The arsenal of this world is well known: bullets, bombs, missiles, etc. But fewer are acquainted with (or acknowledge) the armory of God’s kingdom. A few examples:

- *Protest and persuasion* (marches, speeches, symbols). A biblical example: Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21: 1-11).
- *Noncooperation* (boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience). A biblical example: Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-32).

- *Nonviolent intervention* (sit-ins, blockades, alternative institutions, non-lethal capture, negotiation, legal challenges, assertive speech). A biblical example: Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11).

Despite this show of force, eyes roll and voices murmur: “How gullible!” Cynicism is a common response to Jesus’ nonviolent approach and armaments. But consider:

- *John F. Kennedy*, who resolved one of the most dangerous nuclear threats (the Cuban Missile Crisis) through a blockade and diplomatic negotiations.
- *Martin Luther King Jr.*, who loosened the grip of racism through mass protests, nonviolent action, legal challenges, and moral appeal.
- *Jesus*, who brought salvation to the world through a sacrificial death that did not return violence for violence, or evil for evil. As Peter notes: “When he [Christ] was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

As Christ-followers, we are called to follow Jesus and to discover nonviolent ways to address conflict and evil. When faced with battles and atrocities, we “resist



“Our enemy is not a monster but a fellow human being—created in the image of God and caught in the same web of sin and grace as we are.”

steadfastly,” in the words of pastors André Trocmé and Édouard Theis, “with the weapons of the spirit.” Such an approach can seem incredulous and unrealistic. But does killing fellow image-bearers of God make more sense? Sure, conflict must be addressed and evil contained. But plowing through human life with bullets and bombs is primitive, cruel, and foolhardy.

Research suggests it’s also largely ineffective. In their landmark study *Why Civil Resistance Works*, political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan analyzed 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006. They found that nonviolent campaigns succeeded about 53 percent of the time, compared with violent campaigns, which were effective only 26 percent of the time.

The evidence suggests that durable peace is more often secured through nonviolent resistance than through force of arms. Such truth is incarnated in Jesus, who embodied shalom, reconciliation, and suffering love, employing the armaments of the kingdom.

Expand peace research and training

Yet another way we pray and work for the kingdom, for shalom to come, is to advocate for expanded peace inquiry and education. The military-industrial complex is a well-oiled machine, supported by massive research and development (R&D) and an extensive educational enterprise, including military academies.

By contrast, peace efforts are scattered and poorly aligned, with minimal R&D and training resources. As a result, Chenoweth observes, nonviolent campaigns often emerge in more improvised forms, with less access to institutionalized training, doctrine, and strategic infrastructure.

How to address this deficiency is debatable. Advocating for increased R&D and education for peace within governmental circles is one option. The possibility of shalom is enhanced by the United Nations and the continued presence of the Peace Corps, for example. Why not continue to advocate for a National Peace Academy—a “West Point” for shalom—in line with the late Senator Mark Hatfield’s original dream for such a school?

Supporting R&D and educational efforts in the private sector and academia is also fitting. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, shapes policy and strategy for shalom, and the Kroc Institute for International Peace

Studies provides vital research and training in nonviolence.

But the church also has a vital role to play in peace research and education. Renewed spiritual insight and formation in shalom are urgently needed, especially as new pressures mount against the peacebuilding priorities of Jesus. One looming concern is a new federal policy—enacted through the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act—that will begin automatically registering eligible men (ages 18–25) for Selective Service in December, using existing government databases.

Although this does not reinstate the draft, it reflects a shift toward heightened military readiness should a major conflict arise. Thus, as Alan Stuckey recently observed in *MESSENGER*, given the current administration’s preference for being “unpredictable on purpose,” this “very uncertainty . . . should be an urgent call to action . . . in *training up* the next generation of conscientious objectors and peacemakers” (emphasis added).

The training Stuckey advocates is an imperative priority for the church today. Thus, alongside the efforts of On Earth Peace, the Call of Conscience curriculum, and similar initiatives, we as the people of God must deepen our formation in peace and nonviolence through renewed research, education, and discipleship.

Confront cosmic powers of darkness

Lastly, we pray and work for the kingdom, for shalom to come, by confessing that our current dilemma is ultimately of cosmic proportions. Paul’s call in Ephesians 6 is timely and strategic: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:10–12, NIV).

In the final analysis, advancing shalom is not merely a matter of demonstrating that peace is not passive nor of expanding peace research and education; it is reckoning with the cosmic, spiritual forces of this present darkness. As biblical scholar Walter Wink reminds us, the struggle is not against people but against the powers, revealing that the deepest battle is not human but spiritual and systemic.

There is a battle for the soul of humankind. As individuals and societies consider peace, they are drawn not only by the

gracious pull of God but also by the subtle, persuasive power of the Evil One. For this reason, the pursuit of peace must be grounded in prayer and spiritual discipline—an active resistance to the forces of darkness—while remaining confident that, though the world remains broken and fallen, the victory has already been won in Christ: He is risen, He is risen indeed!

Thus, we do not confuse our opponent with the real threat. As theologian Miroslav Volf argues, our enemy is not a monster but a fellow human being—created in the image of God and caught in the same web of sin and grace as we are. The real threat is the network of powers—political, spiritual, ideological, and institutional—that enlists people in patterns of fear, violence, and evil.

The Christian vocation, then, is ultimately to confront the cosmic forces of darkness through subversive acts of prayer, courage, patience, savvy, and suffering love.

On June 5, 1964, during the 20th anniversary of D-Day, journalist Walter Cronkite interviewed Dwight D. Eisenhower as they toured sites related to the invasion. As the interview ended, Cronkite and Eisenhower visited the

American military cemetery at Saint Laurent sur Mer, overlooking Omaha Beach.

As Eisenhower viewed the 9,000 graves in the cemetery, he said: “I devoutly hope that we will never again have to see such scenes as these. I think and hope and pray that humanity will learn more than we had learned up to that time.... So every time I come back to these beaches, or any day when I think about that day 20 years ago now, I say once more we must find some way to work to peace, and really to gain an eternal peace for this world.”

Eisenhower is articulate in naming the tragedy of war and our failure to learn from it. But he also underscores the necessity of mastering that lesson, for peace is the only sane way to navigate the living of our days.

May we, as the church, lift our voices and trumpet this conviction: calling humanity, in Christ, to rise above the scourge of violence, to renounce the sin of war, and, at long last, embrace the fullness of shalom! 

Paul Munday is a minister, consultant, and writer. He served as moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2020 and 2021.

Every great jam session
starts with the
first chord



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Singing on their way to prison

THE SOLINGEN BRETHREN

by Karen Garrett

In 1525, the first Anabaptists dared to set aside their infant baptism and be rebaptized as adults. This set off political and religious reactions that led to the deaths of many martyrs. The religion of that time in Europe was a church and state arrangement, meaning church decisions were approved by government councils and the government carried out punishment for “wrong doctrine.” Anabaptism was a reaction against that church-state connection.

Anabaptism was one movement with which the early Brethren participated in the part of Europe that is now central Germany. They also were influenced by Pietism. Scholars point to the writing of Philipp Spener’s *Pia Desideria* in 1675, 350 years ago, as a marker to date the beginning of Pietism. The founder of the Brethren movement, Alexander Mack, was born in 1679 and grew up in the midst of this religious sifting.

The state churches (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed) were threatened by the religious dissension and sought to protect their status quo. While Pietists were not martyred in the numbers Anabaptists were, they were persecuted. The Church of the Brethren considers itself a blend of Anabaptism and Pietism, but were any Brethren persecuted? By 1708, when the first Brethren baptism was held in Schwarzenau, Germany, had the persecution ended?

One reason Mack relocated to Schwarzenau is that he had been speaking against the state churches and barely escaped arrest. The count in Wittgenstein, where Schwarzenau is located, welcomed religious refugees. Thus, Alexander and Margaretha Mack packed a few meager belongings and, with their two young children, fled to that small town on the Eder River. There they would have two more children and live in

relative safety. For a few years, at least, they had escaped arrest and imprisonment.

However, not all Brethren were as fortunate. By 1717, the Brethren movement had grown in numbers, with several families in the Krefeld area adopting Brethren beliefs. These Anabaptist/Pietist beliefs were still not approved by the political or religious leaders. In 1719, many Brethren in Krefeld boarded a ship and migrated to America, led by Peter Becker. They escaped persecution.

Also in 1717, six young adult men ages 22 to 34, living in Solingen, had a very different experience. It resulted in their place in Brethren history as the “Solingen Brethren”: Jakob Grahe, Wilhelm Grahe, Johann Friedrich Henckels, Wilhelm Knepper, Johann Lobach, and Gottfried Luther Stetius.

Some years earlier, these young men had become disappointed in the leadership of the Reformed church in which they had been baptized as infants. The Brethren awakened them to reconsider their baptism. Hochmann von Hochenau, a radical Pietist, was often visiting in their area.

After reading and discussing scripture, and praying together, the six men became convicted that they had been living unchristian and immoral lives. They determined the state churches had done little if anything to teach them about Jesus and holy living. Along with several other women, they chose to be rebaptized as adults in 1714.

They continued to meet regularly for Bible study and prayer, growing deeper in their faith. It was soon known that they were illegally meeting privately as a group for Bible study and prayer. Church leaders had them arrested. Interestingly, their landlord was arrested along with them

“On the road, the six Brethren men began singing hymns. Praising God as they marched along—what a sight that would have been!”

because he had been in contact with disorderly dissenters.

The group was to be taken to prison in Düsseldorf until they agreed to cease their private meetings and return to the “true church.” Their journey on foot began by being bound together, two by two, with the landlord, who had one arm tied behind his back. They were escorted by a large contingent of armed guards who were to march them the 20 miles to Düsseldorf.

On the road, the six Brethren men began singing hymns. Praising God as they marched along—what a sight that would have been!

We have a record of this event because one of the men, Wilhelm Grahe, wrote an account later in his life that has been preserved. Fortunately, Donald Durnbaugh included an English translation of Grahe’s account in his book *European Origins of the Brethren*.

A detail Grahe included was the name of one of the hymns they sang, “O Jesus, My Bridegroom, How Happy Am I.” This and other Pietist hymns were printed in a hymnal commissioned by the Brethren in 1720. The words of these hymns give us insight into Pietist faith and thought. I am grateful that many of these hymns from 1720 have been translated from German to English by James Zaiger.

This hymn gave the six young men strength for their journey. The sentiments are the words Grahe recalled singing that fateful day. Let us consider the words together:

O Jesus my bridegroom, how happy am I,
Thy love how it fills me when Thou art come nigh.
Oh blessed the hours! I have found the powers,
That bring joys eternal and rest for the soul.

Thou hast me, O Jesus, made richly alive!
And pressed me upon your love’s comforting breasts.
With riches of pleasure, made sick above measure,
In heavenly ecstasy fully drawn in.

Now, O heart’s beloved, I am no more mine,
For, all that I have around me, all is Thine.
What I love and I hate, have I to Thee given,
This all works within me like Thy divine wine.

What is it that here and there fights against me,
The parents, the brothers, the children, their face?
Away you relations, you friends and acquaintance!
Be quiet you all for I now know you not.

Today, we speak of and sing of God’s love for us.

We live as Christians called to love each other. As I read these words, sung so long ago in a situation I have difficulty imagining, the words sink into my soul—with a couple of questions. How deeply do I love Jesus? Do I think of Jesus as my bridegroom? In verse 3, they sing of “Herzens Geliebter,” translated as “heart’s beloved.” They had a deep, personal, even intimate relationship with Jesus, one they could rely on as they were marched to an unknown future.

Pietism emphasizes that Christians should have a personal daily walk with Jesus, not simply knowledge of theological words about God as love—or simply listening to words preached on a Sunday morning, then failing to live them out during the week. These men, as a small community of six, were living out their faith as they walked to prison. Their story is one not only of deep faith but also deep commitment to one another. What one faced they would all face together.

The hymn clearly names Jesus as their bridegroom. Is Jesus our bridegroom? John the Baptist, speaking of the Messiah, shares that he, John, is preparing the way. The bridegroom, Jesus, will marry the bride (John 3:27-30). Early Brethren understood this metaphor. Jesus is the bridegroom waiting for his bride, the church, which will be forever united with him.

The parable of the foolish and wise bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13) reminds us to always have oil for our lamps ready as we wait for the bridegroom, Jesus. We can maintain our supply of “oil” by maintaining spiritual practices that keep us in relationship with Jesus. The hymn these men sang was part of their supply of oil. The words “joys eternal” and “heavenly ecstasy” name their assurance that, even though they did not know when or how their lives would end, their focus was on an eternal kingdom and the bridegroom who loved them intimately.

They had hope for their journey. What hope do we have for our journey? May we learn to sing “Thou hast me, O Jesus, made richly alive!” 

Karen Garrett is active in Southern Ohio and Kentucky District and is a longtime volunteer with the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio. Her upcoming book from the *Brethren Encyclopedia* is titled *Nineteenth-Century Brethren Spirituality through the Words of Select Poets 1850 to 1880*.

Excerpts from the 1970s

October 1, 1971

Do You Dream in Color?

By Ken Morse

This was the question my wife asked me one morning. I had to confess that most of my dreams, at least those I could remember, came off in black and white, or a fuzzy gray, but I could recall a few vivid dreams that reflected a shattered rainbow.

There was one that demanded to be experienced in living color. Its setting was a church sanctuary, but it was neither the stained-glass windows nor any liturgical robe that caught my attention. Rather it was the almost infinite variety of worshipers, the way they appeared, the clothing they wore.

It must have been on a sunny, late summer Sunday morning. My eyes glanced forward, backward, and sideways, and everywhere I responded to a barrage of color. Not attempting to distinguish whether the source was a dress or a blouse, a coat or a shirt, a necktie or a sash, I reacted to bright patches of yellow and turquoise, lilac and orange, to printed patterns on green and blue, to stripes and solids, to paisleys and plaids, all of them reflecting a generous selection of primary and secondary colors with blendings and shadings that rivaled nature's own patchwork of hues.

From this palette of color I turned to watch the faces they brightened. Here was an even more complicated variety, worthy of an artist's lifetime effort to capture nuances of expression in flesh tones that ranged from an austere paleness, through a fascinating spectrum of pinks and tans and browns, to a black that was indeed beautiful.

I must have been dreaming, but I had the distinct feeling that God wanted it to be this way, that somehow it must be a part of his dream to create and develop human beings who can be distinct individuals, each one unique and colorful in his own way but each reflecting some facet of the image of God.

Is it only in dreams that persons so differently attired, so distinct in their life-styles, can come together in a church service or in the fellowship of believers? In reality, as well as in dreams, I have watched men conservatively attired in business suits, with white shirts and modest neckties, feel at ease with a fellow Christian decked out in a tie-dyed tee shirt, patched jeans, and maybe sandals and beads. So far as I know, there is no single attire that is a prerequisite for Christians; but sometimes a church fellowship behaves as if you have to conform to a required standard before you are welcome.

Contrary to what its enemies maintain and some of its defenders insist, the church does not need to be drab, dull, or dismal. Instead it should partake of a spirit that reflects something of the refulgent glory of a God whose throne is surrounded by a rainbow and whose love can only be pictured in terms of a shower of colors—as indeed is the natural world God made and intended as a home for his children.

What we lack in many church fellowships—and what accounts for the drab image that many churches project—is the kind of acceptance that Paul advocated in his Roman letter. He writes, “The man who eats must not hold in contempt the man who does not, and he who does not must not pass judgment on the one who does; for God has accepted him” (NEB). On a related topic he observed that “this man regards one day more highly than another, while that man regards all days alike.” Recognizing differences in scruples and convictions, Paul endorsed variety while at the same time he urged Christians to be tender toward the scruples of their brothers. He concludes that they should “accept one another as Christ accepted us.”

All of this supports the dream of a Christian fellowship in which a mixture of tastes, a mixture of life-styles, and a mixture of convictions may be expected as the norm rather than the exception. A rainbow was once the sign of a covenant between God and the earth. Could it also be a sign of the kingdom of God for which we pray and by which we should live?

Do you dream in color? God does.

“God whose throne is surrounded by a rainbow and whose love can only be pictured in terms of a shower of colors—as indeed is the natural world God made and intended as a home for his children.”

“How long can we be party to the wanton destruction of a people and a land?”

October 15, 1972

420 Hiroshimas: How Many More?

By Howard Royer

One week in Vietnam I found was far too limiting to grasp the intricacies of the conflict there. But it was sufficient exposure to gain two unforgettable impressions: the countenance of the Vietnamese people as seen close up, and the contours of the country as viewed aloft Air America.

In both the people and the land I glimpsed an ethereal beauty, a grace that surpasses natural splendor. The villages and the villagers, the pastures and the paddies and the peasants who attend them, the snakelike rivers and the winding coasts, entire families on hoof or on Honda, university students and grade school children, Buddhists and Montagnards, orphans and refugees—in all the qualities of sturdiness, cohesiveness, discipline seemed visible in spite of a generation of war.

That was South Vietnam two years ago. By now reports indicate that idyllic land and its people in North and South have been subjected to a bombardment unprecedented in the history of warfare, of such magnitude as . . .

...to deliver in seven years of US bombing almost seven million tons of bombs, more than three times the tonnage dropped by American planes in World War II, inflicting upon Indochina the explosive equivalent of 420 Hiroshimas.

...to render an enemy even of the landscape, employing defoliation, fire bombing, ground stripping, rain making, and

other weaponry, leaving jungles scarred, croplands sterile, flood control systems endangered, and a giant pox over the land—21 million bomb craters and duds and mines strewn indiscriminately.

...to expel from the North whole urban populations and to uproot in the South six million persons, making refugees of one out of three persons.

Such startling statistics are available from several sources; one of the most comprehensive and revealing is a Beacon Press book, “The Air War in Indochina,” based on a report of 21 scholars in the Cornell University Air War Study Group. Many of the cold and clinical estimates have been corroborated since by National Security Council memoranda.

The Cornell Group’s calculations point up that in Vietnam from 1965 to 1971 six times more US bombs fell on the friends of the South than on the enemies of the North. Less than 10 percent of the fixed wing air activity in the South was for tactical support of ground troops; more than 90 percent was for “interdiction,” which carries fearful consequences for civilian populations. More than half the ordnance is estimated to have fallen outside the intended target area.

Militarily grave questions have been raised on the effectiveness of wide-scale bombing. Some strategists contend it has been marginal, self-defeating, and all out of proportion when the damage caused is measured against the advantage sought. Observed Robert Kleiman of *The New York Times*: “Of all the tragedies in devastation of Indochina from the air, perhaps the deepest lies in its overwhelming futility.”

Yet we sense in Indochina a tragedy more troubling than the efficacy of US firepower. We continue to ponder its morality, seeking a reasonable answer to the reasonable question: Why? Why bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age to prop up the dictatorial Saigon regime? Why accept My Lais from the air as somehow more tolerable than My Lais on the ground? Why dislocate a centuries-old society because foreigners see it threatened by an enemy its own people fail to fear? Why, in sum, the ruthless benevolence—pulverizing a tiny country while trying to save it?

How long the Vietnamese in either the North or the South can endure the devastation is one urgent question, but for sensitive Americans there is another more pressing. It is one the Christian community needs weigh with renewed vigor. How long can we be party to the wanton destruction of a people and a land?

Creating communities of belonging

by Sarah Werner

The purpose was “Immersive Worship for Everybody,” and the event was like a worship experiment incubator.

People from 19 Mennonite and Church of the Brethren congregations in 9 states met at a kick-off retreat to launch the All In project, sponsored by Anabaptist Disabilities Network.

Consultants David Csinos and Betty Pries and song leader Seth Crissman shared all kinds of ideas and taught the group new ways to worship. It was a welcoming place to try out new practices with one another.

The three-day event in April was a testament to what is possible when caring people come together to reimagine

worship that is centered on embodied experience rather than intellectual concepts and shared with love.

Interactive seminars from the staff and consultants dealt with intergenerational worship practices, accessibility, and how to navigate congregational change.

Betty Pries offered guidance on how to navigate change in congregations as they work to become more inclusive and accessible. Change can be hard, she said, and often requires skillful work to ensure the key stakeholders are supportive of a shift in the worship habits and culture of the congregation.

David Csinos led seminars on creating meaningful intergenerational worship in faith communities.

Congregations are segregated by age, to the detriment of everyone, he said. He provided participants with practical tools for making worship a place where all generations can come together to be nourished in their faith and to deepen their connections with one another, including through art, liturgy, and experiential prayer.

“It was very helpful, trying out some of the intergenerational worship approaches, as well as forming teams to create an intergenerational approach for specific parts of worship,” said Kyla Zehr of Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren in Fort Wayne, Ind.

“I appreciated all of the information offered by Betty Pries

What is All In?

All In is a five-year project of Anabaptist Disabilities Network to create accessible and intergenerational worship practices that can be shared with Anabaptist congregations. Funded by a grant from the Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative of Lilly Endowment Inc., the project brings together 19 congregations to create worship that engages people of all ages and abilities.



Loren Wiegman

“Participants had a chance to try out what they had learned by creating an interactive worship service that became a celebration of creativity and inclusivity.”

about navigating change, with specific steps to ease transitions. Dave Csinos helped me think more broadly about inclusion and thinking of children as fellow disciples.”

What makes us human is not our cognitive capacity, executive director Jeanne Davies reminded the group, but our ability to form relationships with one another and with God. She described strategies and practices to create communities of belonging in their own congregations.

Keli Boyer, project director for All In, discussed belonging and behavior in worship, drawing on her experience as a former children’s pastor and L’Arche director. She pointed to Gospel texts that demonstrate that disruption can be a good thing, and she identified “gestures of belonging” that can create a safe and nurturing space in the context of worship.

Participants had a chance to try out what they had learned by creating an interactive worship service that became a celebration of creativity and inclusivity. The scripture from 1 Corinthians 12 was shared in the form of a skit. For the sermon, participants were invited to create a person using materials on a table to illustrate the composite nature of the body of Christ.

“The retreat combined foundational learning, concrete ways to thoughtfully and skillfully introduce changes, and practical tips and resources for making worship engaging for all ages, said Paula Ziegler Ulrich, co-pastor of the Beacon Heights congregation.

Said Jill Speicher of Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren: “It is extremely important to me as someone with disabilities to be a part of welcoming and including everyone, regardless of their abilities. The retreat showed me creative ways to do worship so that all of us become energized and involved in the worship experience.”



Sarah Werner

Jeanne Davies leads a song in American Sign Language.

The week was a joyous testament to the moving of the Holy Spirit in this particular time and place as people work to make worship a practice that can be enjoyed by people of all abilities and gifts.

“The kickoff retreat did a great job balancing theory and practicality,” said Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, pastor of the Lititz congregation. “Seeing concrete examples of what inclusive worship can be like helped me think about these practices in real terms.”

From Hartville (Ohio) Church of the Brethren, Jocelyn Siakula reflected: “What a joy it was to be with other individuals representing churches who have a passion and desire to be ‘All In’—to be with those who are intentional at inviting people with all abilities and all ages to be together in a space of worship and communion with God.” 

Sarah Werner is communications director for Anabaptist Disabilities Network.

Five ways to make your congregation a community of belonging

Accessibility is more than building ramps. Here are some practical tips:

- Start by talking to the people with disabilities in your congregation about what would most benefit them, recognizing that many disabilities are invisible.
- Consider simple changes to make

your worship service more sensory-friendly, such as finding alternatives to clapping or other loud sounds, dimming harsh lighting, and providing sensory aids such as fidgets, weighted lap pads, or noise-reducing headphones.

- Provide a hearing assistance system and test it regularly. Make the sermon

and scripture available in written form.

- Provide large-print or digital copies of bulletins and other materials for worshipers who have low vision.
- Create mobility cutouts throughout the worship space where people who use wheelchairs or walkers can sit without being in the aisle or having to sit in the back.

**Mark 8:27-29, Luke 22:31-34,
John 18:25-27; 21:15-17**

From weakness to strength

by Christy Waltersdorff

Peter was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him. He became the leader of the disciples and Jesus called him the rock upon which he would build his church. But Peter also stumbled in his faith journey with Jesus.

The disciples experienced a great deal in the two weeks prior to the events described in John 21. In just a few short days, Jesus had been arrested, crucified, and resurrected. On the day of his resurrection, he appeared to Mary Magdalene and then to the disciples. He came back a week later so Thomas could see him.

As a disciple of Jesus, what do you do after that? The risen Christ had not given them any instructions. So, Peter and six of the disciples did what they

knew how to do. They went back home to Galilee and went fishing. No doubt they talked about the events of the past few weeks, trying to make sense of it all. They worked hard all night and caught nothing.

As the sun rose, they noticed someone standing on the beach. The stranger offered fishing advice. They did what he said, and suddenly their nets filled with so many fish they could hardly pull them into the boat! (For a dramatic presentation of this story, download and watch “Breakfast on the Beach” from Ted and Company. Find it at <https://www.tedandcompany.com/product/breakfast-on-the-beach>.)

Breakfast with Jesus

In the midst of such overwhelming abundance, the beloved disciple recog-

nized the stranger as Jesus. Impetuous Peter put on his outer layer of clothes, jumped into the water, and swam to shore where Jesus had started a charcoal fire and was preparing fish and bread for breakfast.

This meal on the beach as the sun rose is proof that the promise of the resurrection isn’t just some theological doctrine about life after death. It is a lived experience of meeting Jesus in the flesh. It is intimacy with the risen Christ. It is all about relationship—with Jesus, with God, and with one another.

The resurrected Christ, like the earthly Jesus, cared about meeting the disciples’ physical needs as well as their spiritual ones. They had worked all night; Christ knew they would be hungry and exhausted, so he prepared a meal for them.

“On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the risen Christ is calling them a second time. But this time will be very different because he will not physically be with them.”

Another charcoal fire

In John 18, Peter stood by another charcoal fire. This one was in the courtyard of the high priest, and it is where Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus—not once, but three times. (For a dramatic presentation of this story, download and watch “Arrest and Denial” from Ted and Company. Go to <https://www.tedandcompany.com/product/arrest-and-denial>.)

You can be sure Peter had not forgotten that awful night. Did he feel ashamed or embarrassed for denying his relationship with Jesus? Now here he is, on the beach with Jesus by another charcoal fire. Jesus asks him three times, “Do you love me?” and three times Peter responds in the affirmative. Then Jesus gives him a new definition of what it means to be a disciple: Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

The good shepherd

In John 10, we find Jesus referring to himself as the “good shepherd.” Now, Peter is to take on the task of caring for the sheep of God’s flock. In this intimate time together, Jesus helps Peter to understand that Peter needs to forgive himself for denying his discipleship in those terrible hours after Jesus’ arrest.

By asking Peter to feed his lambs, tend his sheep, and feed his sheep, Jesus is showing Peter that his failures don’t define him. Jesus knows who Peter is and what he is capable of. Being a disciple of the risen Christ means more than a WWJD slogan asking what Jesus would do. In John’s Gospel, a true disciple embodies the presence of God through their own imperfect humanity and the power of the Holy Spirit. We

may feel as though we are not worthy, but Christ knows we are.

In those days, caring for sheep was labor-intensive and time-consuming. Like all domesticated animals, sheep needed someone to make sure they had enough to eat. They needed a shepherd to move them from pasture to pasture and look out for poisonous plants. They needed someone to find a source of clean water to drink. They needed someone to protect them from predators—animals and humans. Sheep sometimes needed a midwife to assist with the safe delivery of their lambs. They needed someone to shear their wool once or twice a year.

Wool was an important commodity in biblical times. It was used for clothing and blankets, in religious rituals, and in economic transactions. Sheep were used for food and for religious sacrifice: a good shepherd would choose the appropriate animal at the appropriate time.

The metaphor of the good shepherd makes it clear that caring for the spiritual lives of human beings is no less important than caring for the actual lives of a flock of sheep. A diligent spiritual leader, like a diligent shepherd, will take that responsibility quite seriously.

Do you love me

Jesus didn’t ask Peter, “Do you remember what I taught you? Are you obeying the commandments? Are you going to synagogue regularly? Are you reading the scriptures every day?” No. Jesus asked him, “Do you love me?”

For Jesus, love is the basic qualification for living the Christian life. In relationship with God, love encompasses everything. If you love like Jesus taught us to love, then everything else will fall into place.

What does it mean to love like Jesus? It means this: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Perhaps Jesus asked the question “Do you love me?” three times to replace the three times Peter had said, “I do not know him.”

A second call

The disciples were first called to walk with Jesus, and they followed him for three years. They lived with him, ate with him, worshiped with him, and learned from him. Now, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, the risen Christ is calling them a second time. But this time will be very different because he will not physically be with them.

Before his crucifixion and resurrection, they could depend on Jesus to lead the way. Now, they must rely on themselves and each other. Now they are the ones who will lead the way as witnesses of God’s love and grace. This is their call to do even greater works than they had done before.

That morning on the beach, after a long fruitless night of fishing, flawed, imperfect Peter is fed, redeemed, and commissioned by the risen Christ to continue his work of sharing God’s love on the earth.

It must have been terrifying for the disciples to know that God called them to return to the same world that had crucified Jesus. But they returned with hope in the power of God and an abundance of love. The world didn’t change after the resurrection of Jesus, but the disciples did. 

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.

Second L.E.A.D. Conference held at Ephrata

Hebrews 11:8 was the theme of the second Church of the Brethren L.E.A.D. Conference held at Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren on May 1-3, organized by the denomination's Discipleship and Leadership Formation staff. Attendance included 112 people in person and 8 online.

Michaela Alphonse, pastor of Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren, opened the gathering with a challenging sermon reflecting on the need for church leaders to obey God, no matter the cost.

A wide variety of workshops were held in three languages—English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole—with leadership from more than 20 presenters from across the Church of the Brethren.

Three keynote messages by Tod Bolsinger expounded on the concept of following God's Spirit into unknown places and situations. An author, professor, and former pastor, Bolsinger drew



Tod Bolsinger, the keynote speaker for the 2026 L.E.A.D. Conference.

on illustrations from scripture and from history to describe how the church in North America in 2026 finds itself in uncharted territory.

"What got us here won't get us there," was his common refrain, meaning that the landscape of the culture has

shifted and Christianity is not the dominant influence it once was. Bolsinger noted that relying on old methods and patterns that served the church well in the past may not be as effective in sharing the unchanging Gospel within our rapidly changing world.

Global Church of the Brethren Communion meets in Spain

After many meetings on Zoom with the delegates and alternates, the Global Church of the Brethren Communion met in person on Spain's northern coast in April. The last in-person meeting of the communion was in 2022 in the Dominican Republic. A number of representatives did not get visas to enter Spain, so a Zoom connection was provided for those who could join online.

The Gijón congregation of Iglesia Una Luz En Las Naciones, where pastor Santos Terrero started his ministry 20

years ago, hosted the meeting. He serves as president of the Global Church of the Brethren Communion.

Each day began with a time of devotions and prayer led by various countries. "State of the church in action" reports were shared and topical sessions were held around a theme from Acts 4: "The authority of the church in the face of opposition."

To ground the assembly in shared history and theological heritage, secretary Alexandre Gonçalves traced the development of the communion by naming the "five pillars" of its global vision:

- Affirming autonomy
- Embracing indigenous churches
- Mutual sharing of resources
- Practicing servant leadership
- Sharing core Brethren values while respecting cultural differences

The communion voted unanimously to accept the Church of the Brethren in Burundi into the global fellowship. The group also heard updates on contacts with house churches in Cuba and interest from Iglesia de Los Hermanos Comunidad de Fe of the Dominican Republic.



The Global Church of the Brethren Communion representatives from around the world spent an afternoon helping out with the Gijón congregation's food bank ministry.

\$500,000 grant supports Brethren Disaster Ministries

The Church of the Brethren has been awarded a half-million dollar grant to support Brethren Disaster Ministries. The grant was received from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its initiative, “Hope After the Storm: Capacity Building for Faith-Based Disaster Relief Organizations.” It will support “a three-year program expansion and improvements to US-based programs,” said Roy Winter, executive director of Service Ministries.

The grant will support Brethren Disaster Ministries goals of strengthening US programs and increasing volunteer participation. To expand, the program needs more volunteers to support children after disasters, rebuild homes, and provide onsite leadership, and needs to update systems, communications, and tools to increase volunteer recruitment and participation. The funds also help purchase two new vans.

Winter emphasized that continued financial support of Brethren Disaster Ministries programs will be important during the three-year grant cycle, as the grant does not fund normal operations.



The planning team for National Older Adult Conference 2027

(from left): Dennis Webb of Illinois and Wisconsin District, intercultural coordinator; Heidi Berkenbosch of Northern Plains District, workshop coordinator; Kim McDowell of Mid-Atlantic District, worship co-coordinator; Glenn Bollinger of Shenandoah District, hospitality coordinator; Christy Waltersdorff of Illinois and Wisconsin District, NOAC coordinator; and Ilexene Alphonse of Atlantic Southeast District (wearing a special stole for Haitian Flag Day), worship co-coordinator.

Legal and Mutual Aid Fund reaches goal of \$250,000

The Deportation Defense Response team has announced that its Legal and Mutual Aid Fund achieved a goal of raising \$250,000 by Easter weekend. The fund aids church members affected by immigration enforcement. As of April, more than 95 grants had been distributed via more than 30 congregations. A new goal has been set to raise \$400,000.

Personnel

Madalyn Metzger and **Rhonda Pittman Gingrich** have been named to new interim leadership positions on the denominational staff following the retirement announcement of Wendy McFadden, longterm publisher of Brethren Press and executive director of Communications.

Madalyn Metzger on June 15 began as part-time interim executive director of Engagement and Communications, moving to fulltime July 13. She will lead Communications and Mission Advancement. She was moderator of the 2024 Annual Confer-

ence and has had a lifelong involvement with the Church of the Brethren. Most recently she has been chief marketing officer at Everence. She will work remotely from northern Indiana and be onsite regularly at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill.

Rhonda Pittman Gingrich begins in August as part-time interim leader of Brethren Press, in addition to her work as director of Annual Conference. She will provide leadership in a time of discernment of how Brethren Press may best be supported moving forward. Her responsibilities for Annual Conference will be shared by Debbie

Noffsinger, Conference assistant, who has transitioned from part-time to full-time.

Michelle Martinez began April 27 as manager of Accounting and assistant treasurer at the Church of the Brethren General Offices. She is a graduate of the University of Phoenix with a bachelor of science in accounting and a master's in business administration. Previously, she worked at the Village of Niles, Ill., as senior accountant manager.

Adam Lane began May 27 as program assistant for Children's Disaster Services at the Brethren Service Center in

New Windsor, Md. He is a graduate of Huntington University with a bachelor's in Worship Leadership and of Bethany Seminary with a master of arts in Spiritual and Social Transformation. He and his family are members at Beaver Creek Church of the Brethren in Hagerstown, Md.

Gaston Pierre-Louis has joined the Part Time Pastor; Full Time Church program of the Ministry Office as a circuit rider. He will fill in after Founa A. Badet, director of Intercultural Ministries, steps down as a circuit rider effective July 31.



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Wrapping up

Wendy McFadden, who is wrapping up her amazing tenure as publisher, has been a creative and deeply respected voice within the Church of the Brethren. Through her thoughtful leadership, editorial excellence, and unwavering commitment to the church's mission, she has helped shape MESSENGER into far more than a publication—it has become a trusted companion for generations of readers seeking wisdom, inspiration, and connection.

Her work has consistently reflected the very best of the Church of the Brethren tradition: humility, compassion, intellectual curiosity, and a deep concern for faith lived out in everyday life. She has elevated countless voices, encouraged meaningful dialogue, and brought clarity and grace to complex issues facing both church and society. Her ability to blend professionalism with genuine spiritual sensitivity has made her not only an exceptional editor, but also a beloved leader.

Beyond her editorial accomplishments, her years of service have strengthened the broader witness of the church, leaving a lasting mark on the denomination and on all who have had the privilege

of working with her or learning from her words. Her legacy is one of faithful service, enduring influence, and extraordinary care for the life of the church.

And just a word on the April MESSENGER. It's marvelous, eclectic, and welcoming. Steve Schweitzer's piece on "How Science Fiction Helps Us Imagine the Future" is great. Thank you.

A recent love feast inspired a short poem, which is also how I felt reading the April issue.

A Gentle Feast

Quiet ones—
lilies in pews,
earth and heaven
touching.
They stoop,
whisper Peace.
O Ratgeber,
zeige uns den Weg.

Brian Nixon
Albuquerque, N.M.

Discussion starters for small groups

■ **Where the mountains meet the clouds** there is a unique church. What words does Global Mission executive Sharon Brugger Norton use to describe the Church of the Brethren in Burundi? What is "profoundly Brethren" about it? How did founder Expert Bukene become Brethren? How did he start and develop this thriving denomination? How is development of the church melded with development of agricultural and commercial projects, education, and health care that support church members, "feeding both the bodies and spirits"? How does combining church and community development reflect the "Brethren value of sharing what you have for the common good"? Could this model be used by the Church of the Brethren in the US? If so, how would it change the US church?

■ **Peace is not passive** is the lesson we never learn, writes Paul Munday. How does he use moments from history to illustrate it? Why is "plowing through human life with bullets and bombs . . . primitive, cruel, and foolhardy"? Munday points to sin as the reason "our default reflex remains violence." How is sin described? Read Romans 8 and note answers to sin. Consider the question, "How do we pray and work for the kingdom to come—a new creation of shalom—moving beyond mere lip service toward fuller expressions of peace?" Read each section that outlines Munday's answers: 1) Demonstrate that peace isn't passive, 2) Expand peace research and training, and 3) Confront cosmic powers of darkness. Which answers speak to you, and why?



TURNINGPOINTS

Centenarians

Frantz, Violet, 100, Bethel, Pa., Feb. 26
Gross, Vera, 100, Myerstown, Pa., July 5

New members

Brooklyn First, N.Y.: Erick Ortiz Castillo, Isaiah Cruz, Anthony Juarez, Gabriel Juarez, Jacob Juarez, Nicole Juarez, Sonia Juarez
Oak Grove, Roanoke, Va.: Greg

and Teresa Broyles, Katie Smith Caudill, Mike and Paula Geake, Jack Griffin, Nancy Reichart, Bob and Bonnye Thompson

Pine Glen, McVeytown, Pa.: Jodi Gentt, Connie Kownacki
Prince of Peace, Littleton, Colo.: Blake Trujillo Manry
University Baptist and Brethren, State College, Pa.: Marianne Bowers-Duffy, Nancy Galgoc, Alicia Grandey, Rolaine Grandey, Will Kratz,

Andrea Ragonese, Jeremy Richards, Ashton Webb
West Charleston, Tipp City, Ohio: Mark Wheeler

Wedding anniversaries

Beckwith, James and Carolyn, Elizabethtown, Pa., 55
Brandt, Beverley and Barbara, Live Oak, Calif., 60
Dodson, William, and Joy Gross, Harrisburg, Pa., 50
Schrock, Paul and Sally,

Indianapolis, Ind., 50
Waltersdorff, JoAnne and Bob, York, Pa., 70

Deaths

Adkins, Francis, 97, Modesto, Calif., Jan. 13
Albert, Ronald, 84, Philadelphia, Pa., April 27
Bernhard, Joyce Irene, 93, Greenville, Ohio, April 5
Berwager, Bonnie, 89, Hanover, Pa., April 21
Bupp, Sylvan, 80, Modesto,

Calif., Nov. 9
Fourman, Donna J., 95, Greenville, Ohio, Sept. 23
Hoppe, Ruth, 77, North English, Iowa, Feb. 16
Jackson, Nancy, 80, Greenville, Ohio, Dec. 10
McAvoy, Nancy, 97, Yuba City, Calif., April 14
Messamer, David W., 83, Modesto, Calif., Sept. 11
Shafer, Janie Weber, 79, Knoxville, Md., April 22
Spitzer, Terry E., 91, Kalona, Iowa, Jan. 21
Thompson, Orville Augusta Jr., 90, Charles Town, W. Va., May 10

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.

Who needs a creed?

An education book for children and youth by Barbara Lewis asks in its title the question *What Do You Stand For?* Designed to help kids develop “positive character traits,” it invites questions and discussion about one’s core values and beliefs. The dedication page includes



WALT WILTSCHKE

a quote from Alexander Hamilton: “Those who stand for nothing fall for anything.”

What do we stand for? Brethren increasingly seem to be asking ourselves the same question, and in a sense, perhaps, we always have been asking it. If *The Wizard of Oz* had included a Brethren character, it probably would have jauntily sung “If I only had a creed” before joining Dorothy and the others on the yellow brick road.

Brethren have famously been noncreedal since our beginning, proclaiming that we have “no creed but the New Testament.” Instead, the early church discerned together what that New Testament message called them to do, leading to understandings of concepts like adult baptism, nonresistance, and service to our neighbors. Even in the early years, though, cracks emerged among those Bible-believing Brethren, such as with the Ephrata Cloister group of Conrad Beissel.

As the church became larger and interacted more with the mainstream of American society, it became more diffuse. One Church of the Brethren congregation can look markedly different from another—and much more like one from another denomination down the street. The polarization of religion in recent decades has likely added to or sharpened our divisions. That can’t be blamed entirely on noncreedalism, of course, as many mainline and very creed-holding denominations have experienced separation and schisms over differing interpretations and beliefs.

For Brethren, the lack of a clear creed has been both a blessing and a curse of sorts. On the one hand, it keeps our faith expansive and keeps us engaging with scripture. On the other, it can be . . . squishy, and keeps us arguing over scripture. In some instances, scripture even seems to be at odds with itself.

And how do we balance being faithful to God’s Word with the commitment to “seek the mind of Christ” and be open to the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit? What is core, and what is open for debate? Jesus is core, certainly, but where do we go from there?

Brethren have occasionally tried to codify some core principles, most notably with the “Brethren’s card” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The card, a version of which was taken up by Annual Conference in the 1920s, lays out many basic practices and beliefs (such as observing the love feast and opposition to war), but it came with the explicit instruction that it was not to be considered a creed. Too much creedalism can shift the focus to “quibbling over words,” as Brethren author Frank Ramirez once expressed it.

Annual Conference statements also have endeavored to offer clarity by bringing discernment to controversial topics of the day. But for a century and a half, at least, those statements have offered guidance rather than law, providing the collective wisdom of the majority of gathered delegates. They are observed (or not) in varying degrees depending on the congregation and district.

One pastor recently asked, “How do I know what to preach?” in order to stay consistent with Brethren values and beliefs. I suppose my answer would be to study and interact with the New Testament and the larger text and our historical understandings as authentically as possible, and then share where the Spirit is giving light at that moment—but also be ready to keep the conversation going with other members. Dialogue helps to keep our personal biases and assumptions in check. Seeking wisdom keeps faith alive.

On the TV show *Seinfeld*, a mail carrier named Newman was asked why he wouldn’t deliver mail in the rain despite the postal proclamation “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night. . . .”

His answer: “I was never that big on creeds.” Brethren have said the same, not to get out of our duty but rather to deepen it.

What do we stand for? Like the kids to which Barbara Lewis writes, hopefully we, too, are developing positive traits as we continue learning together. Let’s keep the conversation going. 

“On the one hand, it keeps our faith expansive and keeps us engaging with scripture. On the other, it can be . . . squishy.”



Joining together to **REBUILD HOMES**

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.
There are different kinds of working, but in all of them
and in everyone it is the same God at work.

—I Corinthians 12:5-6 NIV



**BRETHREN
Disaster Ministries**

Support Brethren Disaster Ministries
Give to the Emergency Disaster Fund
1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120

For more information: 800-451-4407
www.brethren.org/bdm



"Working with Christian brothers and sisters through BDM has been an affirmation of the joy and blessing of being able to assist others who have suffered loss." "It goes far beyond pounding a few nails or painting trim; it's being the hands and feet of Jesus to serve those in need."

—Reflections from BDM volunteers