



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MESSENGER

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IMAGINE!

Living Christ's peace today

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026





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Photo by Glenn Riegel.

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Not-so-big plans

Chair. Sunrise. Banana. I was given those words and told that later I would be asked to repeat them. There was a brief moment of panic, since I've always been bad at remembering names under pressure.

But then I realized I could make them into a sentence: "At sunrise I sit on my chair and eat a banana." When the words sound like the beginning of a story, they are easy to remember.



WENDY MCFADDEN
PUBLISHER

For a long time now, I have been fashioning words and ideas into stories. Whether the task is a news article, a video project, or a board report, a story is often the best way to communicate. Stories disarm. They open a way. They help us make sense of our lives.

Over the years, my most regular writing has appeared here on this page in MESSENGER, a column that began in 1998 when then-editor Fletcher Farrar invited me to fill the space that previously had been "From the editor." Today's essay is my 299th (and final) "From the publisher."

The most frequent question asked a soon-to-be retiree, I have learned, is this: "So, do you have big plans?" To be honest, I thought the idea of retiring was to not have to make big plans. I've been planning curriculum projects, books, magazine issues, videos, reports, budgets, and strategies for almost 45 years. So my most immediate plan is to hand over the reins to other people.

This issue is the last with my name on the masthead, and next month's will be the last with Walt Wiltschek's name. We are grateful for his years as at-large editor. Walt has brought a graceful spirit to his work whether he's the editor in charge (as he was 2004–2010) or the part-time at-large editor who ably pitches in where needed. It's his clever mind that's been the source of The Exchange, a popular, award-winning page.

My big thanks to the continuing members of the MESSENGER editorial team, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford and Jan Fischer Bachman. Together we have created space for writers and photographers to collectively tell the Brethren story.

Cheryl and Jan are being joined by Madalyn Metzger, interim executive director of Engagement and Communications, who is well qualified to be at the helm. I will leave the big plans to them, and see what not-so-big plans percolate for me.

Wendy McFadden

Correction: In the May issue, I wrote that MESSENGER was the first department in the Elgin offices to acquire desktop computers. But Rosalita Leonard, who worked many years in the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, remembers that BHLA got a computer in 1986. Let the record be corrected!

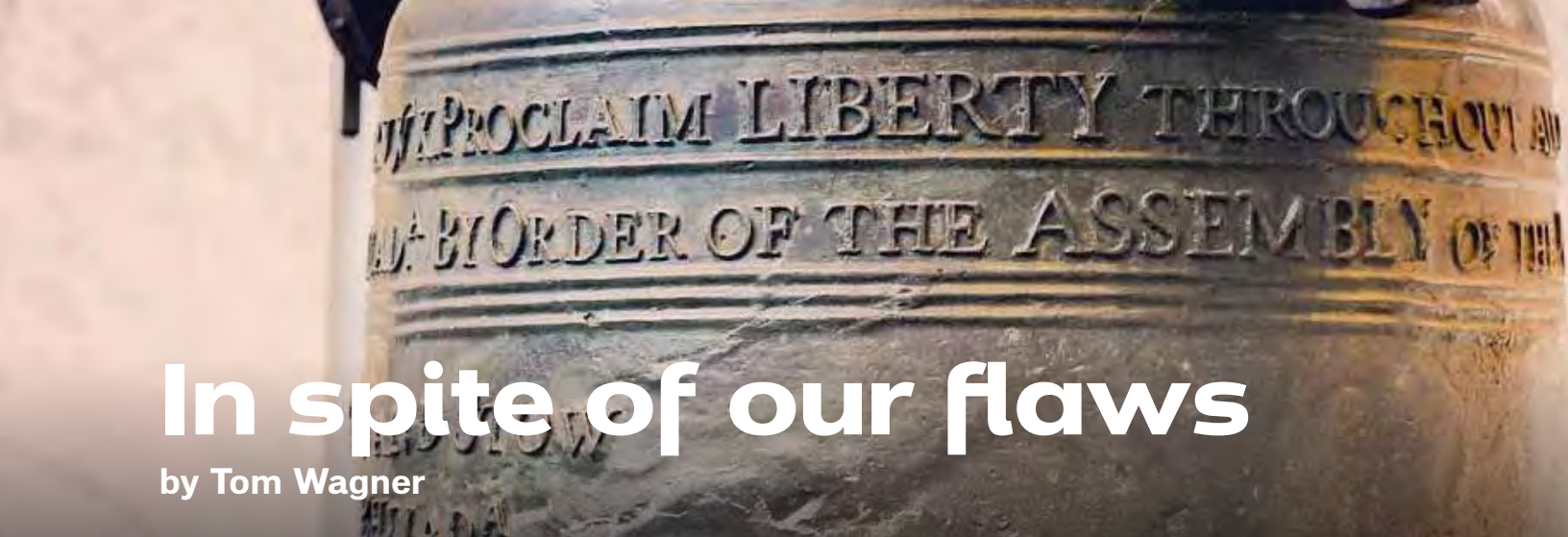
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In spite of our flaws

by Tom Wagner

For many years I have enjoyed watching Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "Finding Your Roots" on PBS. During most episodes, Gates hosts two celebrity guests who know little about their family histories or seek the truth about family lore. In addition to interviewing the guests, Gates presents family trees based on a combination of paper trails and DNA data.

Due to a deep knowledge of my own genealogy, I was surprised to discover a couple of his guests are distant cousins of mine. Comedian Stephen Colbert and I share 18th-century German immigrant ancestors. Activist and social philosopher Angela Davis and I share 17th-century English immigrant ancestors.

Beyond those personal connections, I greatly appreciate the way Gates weaves stories of individuals from various family trees into the broader context of US and world history. Also, in a time when powerful voices are attempting to whitewash and even erase episodes of the past that make people uncomfortable, this program takes a matter-of-fact approach to individual biographies and social history. Families are complicated, and so is history.

Anniversaries can be moments for celebration, but they are also an opportunity for sober reflection. As the US observes the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence this year, I put more weight on reflection, especially under current circumstances. At the same time we celebrate the values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," we must recognize that much of the economic prosperity of the nation was built on stolen land and stolen labor.

While I tend to identify more closely with my Swiss and German Anabaptist ancestors who opposed both the use of lethal force and slavery, my family history is more complicated. As is true of many families with a long history in this country, I have ancestral lines who participated in both activities.

A few of my English relatives from New England and Maryland, and even a few Pennsylvania Germans, fought in the War of Independence and the War of 1812. The English branch of early Maryland settlers were enslavers during the 17th and 18th centuries. That practice ended when a new generation moved to Ohio soon after it gained statehood. Eventually all those lines merged with Dunker families in the 19th century.

Yet when I think about it, there are complications in the behavior of my Anabaptist ancestors, especially concerning real estate. I believe William Penn, the Lenni Lenape, and the Susquehannock sincerely wished to live peaceably with each other, but they approached land purchases very differently. First Nations simply were agreeing to allow these newcomers to share their homeland as neighbors. Penn and later his sons believed they were gaining clear title to the land.

The 18th-century Anabaptist settlers made the same assumptions as they purchased land from the Penn family. Settlement of the Northwest Territory (now the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was a much bloodier affair.

Several of my ancestors settled in northern Indiana around the time that the Potawatomi were removed from the area in the late 1830s. While my ancestors did not directly engage in the genocide and forced removal of native populations, they did benefit from that dispossession.

My Dunker, Amish, and Mennonite forebears' attitude toward the War of Independence can most accurately be described as officially neutral, with loyalist sympathies. Their scruples against military service and swearing of oaths prevented them from taking up arms for anyone's cause, but there were also other factors. They had been treated well and prospered under the British. Most were farmers living inland, so they were far less affected by new British economic policies. While they were willing to submit to a legitimate government, they were unclear about the legitimacy of either side in what appeared to them as a civil war among the "English."

About a generation before independence, a bell was hung in the steeple of the old Pennsylvania State House, when Quakers still led the assembly. Made of a poor alloy, the bell cracked, requiring it to be recast twice. It then served its purpose before it cracked permanently over 70 years later.

That bell may best symbolize our nation's imperfections. The larger context of the Leviticus 25 quote cast in the bell may point toward mending our divisions with debt forgiveness, releasing captives, reparations, environmental stewardship, and land reform. That would be a true Jubilee. 

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren living in Michigan and serves Muskegon County Cooperating Churches as clerk.



“Love doesn’t do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the Law.” —Romans 13:10, CEB

“Our first task is neither to demonize nor idolize technological tools, but to utilize them on the basis of a fundamental principle, namely that truth is a common good and not the property of those with power or influence.” —from Pope Leo XIV’s encyclical on artificial intelligence

“We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality.” —Albert Einstein

“Whenever you are creating beauty around you, you are restoring your own soul.” —American novelist Alice Walker

“Our culture has us choking on too many things and too little time to enjoy our life, our families, our children, and our grandchildren because we are running too fast and working too hard to accumulate.” —Jan West Shrock, daughter of Heifer International founder Dan West, writing in the December 2019 issue of MESSENGER

“We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another.” —Henri Nouwen, in *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*

TOSSED SALAD

Numerous Church of the Brethren congregations and organizations have community gardens, helping people (especially in more urban environments) have access to fresh produce. Others grow crops to donate proceeds to benefit hunger relief work, including through the denomination’s Global Food Initiative. Can you unscramble the names of the fruits and vegetables below? Answers can be found elsewhere on this page.

BY THE NUMBERS

40,376

Hours of service given by 676 Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteers in 2025. Their work helped 42 families restore their homes while saving homeowners an estimated \$1.4 million in rebuilding costs.

DID YOU KNOW?

Twenty US states currently have a Growing Hope Globally “Growing Project.” Each project produces crops or raises animals that are sold to fund agricultural programs internationally. Numerous Church of the Brethren congregations and individuals are part of the effort, originally known as Foods Resource Bank. Growing Hope Globally estimates it has served about 2.5 million people.



THIS YEAR IN HISTORY

Eighty-five years ago, in 1941, the Church of the Brethren became a member of the Federal Council of Churches, predecessor to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC). The NCC today includes 38 faith groups representing more than 100,000 congregations. It carries out a variety of initiatives, events, and conferences, and was responsible for publishing the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible in 1952 and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) in 1989. An NRSV Updated Edition was released in 2021.

CUTETLE	LOADLCR SNERGE	MOOTAT	BGABACE
BRAGATUA	PLAPE	RUBBHAR	QAHUSS
CRUMCUBE	NOONI	ENERG ABEN	BRATYSWERR
WESTE RONC	MUNKPIP	CHICZINU	

ANSWERS: Lettuce, Rutabaga, Cucumber, Sweet Corn, Collard Greens, Apple, Onion, Pumpkin, Tomato, Rhubarb, Green Bean, Zucchini, Cabbage, Squash, Strawberry

Church of the Living Savior shares hope 'one box at a time'

Church of the Living Savior (COTLS) in McFarland, Calif., has held a monthly food distribution for more than three years.

The congregation partners with CAP-K Food Bank to serve approxi-

mately 1,800 people each month. CAP-K supplies the food, while COTLS provides volunteers, space, and hospitality.

The congregation distributes fresh produce and grocery boxes to neighbors in need, including senior citizens on fixed incomes, single parents, and families facing financial hardship. No one is turned away, and each distribution offers both practical assistance and prayer.

Congregation members say the ministry is about more than meeting physical needs—it's also about reminding neighbors that they are seen, valued, and cared for.

COTLS also operates the House of



Photo courtesy of Church of the Living Savior, McFarland, Calif.

Hope ministry, providing food, clothing, and other resources for people experiencing homelessness, single parents, seniors, and others facing difficult circumstances. Along with meeting immediate needs, volunteers offer prayer, encouragement, and the hope found in Jesus Christ.

Together, the two ministries demonstrate the congregation's commitment to serving beyond the church's walls and delivering hope—one box at a time. —Anthony Blanco, pastor, Church of the Living Savior



Photo courtesy of Church of the Living Savior, McFarland, Calif.

Elizabethtown hosts CWS Rise Up conference

Lancaster, Pa.—dubbed “America’s refugee capital” by BBC News in 2017 after welcoming 20 times more refugees per capita than the rest of the United States—continues to serve immigrant communities despite early 2025 restrictions on refugee resettlement.

Earlier this year, Church World Service (CWS) launched its Rise Up for Refuge campaign to strengthen faith and community involvement. As part of the initiative, CWS Lancaster and CWS Harrisburg hosted a daylong conference at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Church of the Brethren.

The church’s central location was one reason it was selected to host the event, according to CWS community organizer Matt Johnson.

“I’ve spoken at this church many times, and I’m always amazed at how well informed and committed this con-

gregation is,” he said. “I never have to start at square one when explaining the refugee situation.” Johnson added that, because of their biblical commitment to welcoming the stranger, the Brethren have long been among the strongest faith-based advocates for refugees.

Conference attendees received updates on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement and detentions, green card processing, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), work authorization, and birthright citizenship.

About 70 participants attended breakout sessions on a variety of topics. Naomi Kraenberg, pastor of the Elizabethtown congregation, co-led a session exploring how faith can ground and inspire effective immigration advocacy.

Johnson called the conference “highly relevant and successful in the current climate around immigration,



Sherri Kimmell

Selena Sherzad, CWS policy and advocacy manager, presented recent immigration policy changes.

TPS, and refugee support.” He said participants will continue receiving updates and resources to equip churches and community members to support immigrants and refugees.

—Sherri Kimmell, Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren

For more information about the Rise Up for Refuge campaign, visit cwsglobal.org/rise-up-resources.

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.

Mount Morris garden feeds area families

A community garden with deep Church of the Brethren roots continues to provide fresh produce for families in Mount Morris, Ill. Although the Mount Morris congregation sold its church building last year and moved to nearby rented space, the garden behind the building remains an important community ministry. The building is now home to a vibrant Hispanic church, while Loaves & Fish Food Pantry continues to operate there. In partnership with the pantry, the garden distributed more than 5,500 pounds of fresh produce last year.



Walt Wiltschek

Ed and Norlene Weinberg, members of Mount Morris Church of the Brethren, coordinate the garden, with support from other congregation members who have volunteered over the years. The garden was featured on this year's Mount Morris Village Garden Walk, where visitors toured its growing beds. Some plots are rented by area residents, while others produce food for Loaves & Fish. The pantry distributes food several times each month, and a mobile pantry also serves the community monthly.

“We try to grow as much produce as possible for as long as we can to get it in the hands of people who come to the food pantry,” Ed Weinberg said. “If I can hand out good food to people who can't afford it, it's a blessing to do that.” —Walt Wiltschek, Illinois and Wisconsin District executive minister

hands of people who come to the food pantry,” Ed Weinberg said. “If I can hand out good food to people who can't afford it, it's a blessing to do that.” —Walt Wiltschek, Illinois and Wisconsin District executive minister

Northern Ohio congregations compete in peanut butter and canned food drive

Fourteen Northern Ohio District congregations participated in a peanut butter and canned food drive challenge, collecting more than 3,500 pounds of food for local food ministries.

East Chippewa Church of the Brethren collected 14,834 ounces to earn the trophy for the largest congregation-wide donation. Mansfield First Church of the Brethren collected 11,722 ounces, or 510 ounces per attendee, earning the award for the highest per-attendee total.

The biggest winners, however, were the local food ministries that received the donations.

The district thanks the Akron Eastwood, Akron Springfield, Ashland Dickey,

Ashland First, East Chippewa, Eden, Hartville, Lakewood, Lick Creek, Mansfield First, Marion, Painesville, Reading, and Richland congregations for joining in the challenge while helping feed their communities.—Kris Hawk, Northern Ohio District executive minister



TOGETHER,

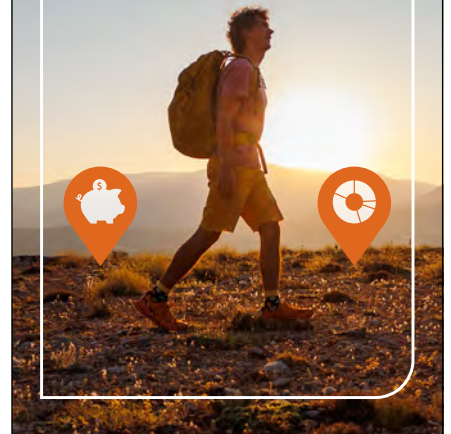
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‘We can do this’

Champaign’s Dawn Blackman Sr. is an unstoppable force in her community

by Walt Wiltschek

Don’t tell Dawn Blackman Sr. that something can’t be done.

Whether it’s finding resources, writing grants, starting a new project, or meeting some immediate need, Blackman will move heaven and earth to make it happen. “I make them tell me ‘No,’” she says.

Serving as outreach coordinator at Champaign (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, Blackman has almost singlehandedly expanded the small urban congregation’s reach to cover a wide swath of the surrounding area. A string of awards attests to her impact and visibility. Community garden? They do that. Food pantry? Absolutely. Computer classes, clothes closet, lending library? Yes, yes, and yes. This is “Jesus in the neighborhood” on steroids.

It all began in 1994, when a series of events led Blackman to the Church of the Brethren, and she ended up staying. She grew up in an entrepreneurial family in Chicago that had several home-based businesses and she’s a natural connector, so it wasn’t long before she started to look for opportunities to leverage the congregation’s resources for greater impact.

While running her own sewing business, she noticed kids in her neighborhood near the church without much support. She started helping them with their homework. Sometimes they were thirsty, so she started handing out water. They were hungry after school, so snacks became available.

“If they weren’t with me, they’re on the street,” Blackman said.

As the initiative grew, she asked the church for help. She went to a board meeting and explained what she was doing and what she needed. The very next Sunday, the newest Church of the Brethren ministry was announced in worship. Eight Sunday school class-

rooms were ultimately provided for the project, which soon had almost 20 kids coming every day after school.

Other efforts began with similar simplicity. Blackman would organize “bread walks,” for example, in which teams of two would go around the neighborhood delivering fresh bread and treats for the kids.

“We’d go out door to door, talking to people, and the kids would get popsicles,” Blackman said. “After a while, the kids would be out on the sidewalk, and they would yell, ‘Here come the Brethren, y’all!’”

And on it went. Blackman started writing grants to grow the work, and grow it did. Today, the community outreach projects occupy the entire basement level of the church, as well as some other spaces. The church has actually had a food pantry since the 1930s, before it moved to its current north Champaign location, so it was no stranger to outreach. But now the engines were firing on all cylinders.

The most visible of those efforts today is the Randolph Street Community Garden, a community endeavor administered and stewarded by the nearby church. Blackman came to the garden in 2006 with admittedly limited knowledge in horticulture and just eight small garden beds available.

It had been started by a woman in the community who wanted to create “something that would outlast her” and was looking for someone to take it over when she couldn’t do it any longer. Per usual, Blackman found a way to bring in the resources she needed.

She found a master gardener who was willing to work alongside them for two years. A donor eventually provided buckets and other equipment for a creative irrigation system. School involvement and two job training programs for youth and young adults brought volunteers.

Today the garden has 82 well-used and in-demand growing beds of various sizes and a mini-orchard of apple and pear trees, grapes, cherries, and berries. Pumpkins, beans, tomatoes, rhubarb, garlics,



herbs, and even “edible weeds” fill the beds in a verdant explosion of growth.

With supermarkets mostly on the outskirts of the city and no easy way to walk to most of them, many city residents have few other options to get fresh produce.

“People keep asking, ‘Can I get a bed?’” Blackman said. “It’s filling a need.”

It doesn’t stop in the garden, either. Like the Heifer Project concept of “passing on the gift,” each gardener donates one row of their produce for the marketplace held in the garden every Saturday during the growing season—a sort of farmer’s market meets garage sale. And then, a portion of the marketplace proceeds is tithed back to the garden, which helps keep it sustainable by aiding the cost of repairs and purchase of supplies.

A horde of volunteers give the gift of time, as well. The local Rotary International chapter comes twice a year. During the summer, groups of students work four hours each morning in an internship program. One local couple keeps the composting operation going. Champaign’s DREAAM (Driven to Reach Excellence and Academic Achievement for Males) program brings in groups for skills training. Others contribute in various ways.

Blackman, with her usual tenacity, even convinced the American Association of Dermatologists to give a grant to build a large pavilion at the garden to provide shade after a large walnut tree fell. It took three years of applications, but she persisted, and it happened. Since the garden is on public property between two schools, the city even agreed to help build it, doing so in less than two weeks.

The garden has become an important community space. School groups sometimes come for “smell tours” and other learning experiences. More than a dozen faith communities held a joint anti-gun violence event there. An arbor/deck area provides a spot for occasional poetry readings. The ANT (Adults ‘N’ Toddlers) program lets little ones experience gardening, drawing 160 kids this year. And recently, the garden hosted its annual Juneteenth celebration in partnership with DREAAM. Blackman estimates 300 people attended.

“People just like to gather in the garden,” she said. “I don’t think there’s a church in town that hasn’t been here for worship or some other event.”

Back at the church, food boxes are provided for seven families each week. Regular computer classes take place. Food, clothing, and small appliances are available as needed. A Little Free Library has been set up. A digital recording studio is in the process of development. Even local crossing



guards are pulled in, receiving gloves and other warm items to give to kids who might need them during the winter.

Sometimes things go awry, like when the city recently said the church needed to get a commercial refrigerator if they were going to continue distributing meals. One conversation led to another, and Blackman soon connected with a local Quaker meeting that gave nearly \$7,000 to cover the expense. Or occasionally when Blackman’s ancient blue Chevy pickup decides it’s had enough, funds and help appear to get it going again.

Many of Blackman’s days—especially in the summer—start early in the morning and continue well into evening, not the typical work schedule for a septuagenarian. She spends so much time out in the community that one time the fire department checked to see if someone was still living in her apartment because it seemed vacant. True story.

Even the church building itself is shared space. For the last few years, Champaign Church of the Brethren has been renting to a Guatemalan congregation that uses the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. The two congregations worship together once a month. On the other weeks, the Brethren have shifted to an interactive worship/Bible study time on Wednesday evenings, always starting with a cheery rendition of “This Is the Day!”

One recent Bible study, with six people present, focused on Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 from the Gospels—a rather apt story for a congregation that does so much with so little. With the congregation’s support and Blackman’s determination, modern miracles continue to happen.

“I always say, ‘Let’s pray about it,’” Blackman said, reflecting on the various outreach ministries. “If God provisions it, we’re going to do it. And when God provisions it, we say, ‘Okay, we can do this.’”

Don’t dare to tell her otherwise. 

“Blackman has almost singlehandedly expanded the small urban congregation’s reach to cover a wide swath of the surrounding area. . . . This is ‘Jesus in the neighborhood’ on steroids.”

IMAGINE!

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Acts 2:17-18



Daniel Murrell II



Keith Hollenberg

Annual Conference takes action on ministry, witness, and the church's future

The 2026 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference brought decisions that applied the denomination's longstanding convictions to contemporary challenges. Guided by moderator Don Fitzkee, delegates meeting June 28–July 2 in Fort Wayne, Ind., approved actions affecting ministerial leadership, public witness, and the future work of the church.

This coverage is by the Annual Conference Press Team photographers Glenn Riegel, Keith Hollenberg, Donna Parcell, Lauren Flora, and Daniel Murrell II; writers Frances Townsend, Frank Ramirez, and Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford; with editor Madalyn Metzger.

Ministerial leadership polity

One of the Conference's most noteworthy actions was approving two changes to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership paper, recommended by the Ministry Advisory Council and the

Mission and Ministry Board.

The first change recognizes a minister's license as a provisional credential. Previously, licensing was a step toward credentialed ministry but was not itself considered a credential. Under the



Glenn Riegel



Glenn Riegel



By the numbers



1,675 people registered

389 delegates, 1,133 nondelegates, and 153 virtual attendees



10 international guests representing 4 countries



2 new faith communities welcomed

Iglesia Cristiana Elohim (Pacific Southwest District) and The Sanctuary (Northern Indiana District)



110 units of blood donated



4 pallets of art supplies, snacks, and personal hygiene products donated to support Alive Community Outreach's Peace Rooms in Fort Wayne's 5 high schools



\$69,543

raised through Conference offerings and the Silent Auction
 \$13,606 for Witness to the Host City
 \$24,435 for Annual Conference (operating expenses and children/youth)
 \$16,818 for Church of the Brethren (core ministries)
 \$14,684 through the Silent Auction

new polity, licensed ministers will hold a provisional credential while they continue preparing for commissioned or ordained ministry. The change also gives district calling and credentialing committees greater flexibility to extend licensing beyond 10 years when appropriate and with clear expectations.

The second change simplifies the pathway from commissioned to ordained ministry. Previously, com-

missioned ministers seeking ordination were required to repeat much of the credentialing process. Under the new polity, districts and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership will instead determine what additional education or preparation is needed before ordination.

Because these changes revise the denomination's ministerial polity, they required—and received—the two-thirds majority necessary for adoption.



Commitment to immigrants and refugees reaffirmed

Delegates adopted “Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors,” reaffirming the Church of the Brethren’s longstanding commitment to welcoming immigrants and

refugees while calling the denomination to respond faithfully to the realities many immigrants and refugees face today.

Grounded in Jesus’ words, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35), the resolution connects the church’s historic peace wit-

ness, tradition of conscientious objection, and commitment to justice with practical support for those seeking safety and opportunity. It encourages congregations, districts, and members to accompany their neighbors through ministry, advocacy, education, and prayer while recognizing that faithful

From the preachers

“Visions for the future are built on dreams, signs, and wonders from the past... As we are gathered here this week, let us both remember and imagine.” — Moderator Don Fitzkee, in

the opening worship service, invited the church to reclaim its historic commitments to peace, service, community, and discipleship while imagining a faithful future.



Glenn Riegel

“The Bible... is a packet of seeds. It takes root in us until it becomes visible. It points us to the living Word, Jesus Christ.” — Beth Jarrett, pastor of Staunton (Va.)

Church of the Brethren, preaching during Monday evening worship.



Keith Hollenberg

“Is peace possible? I say yes, it is. But it requires the hard work of examining ourselves to see if we are living in the faith, if we are agreeing with God.”

— James Washington, pastor of Pleasant View Church of the Brethren in Elida, Ohio, and Elm Street Church of the Brethren in Lima, Ohio, preaching during Tuesday evening worship.



Glenn Riegel

“Te invito a imaginar una iglesia... / A church where no one walks alone. Where Jesus is not only preached but is seen alive in the lives of his people.... Imagina una iglesia donde Jesús se ve.... / Imagine a church that can see the presence of Jesus.”

— Becky Zapata, pastor of Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren in Santa Ana, Calif., preaching in Spanish with English interpretation during Wednesday evening worship.



Glenn Riegel

“Jesus washed all their feet—from Peter all the way to Judas. Sometimes, when we are asked to stoop down and wash the feet of certain others, that reveals something in us.” — Caleb Kragt, pastor of West Charleston Church of

the Brethren in Tipp City, Ohio, preaching the closing worship service.



Glenn Riegel

discipleship may at times require acts of conscience rooted in biblical conviction.

Weapons transfer resolution

Delegates approved the “Resolution on Weapons Transfer,” calling the Church of the Brethren to respond more intentionally to the human consequences of the global arms trade.

Drawing on the denomination’s identity as a Historic Peace Church, the resolution encourages members, congregations, districts and denominational agencies to examine the impact of weapons manufacturing and international arms sales through education, responsible investment, and public advocacy as expressions of the church’s living peace witness.

Pastor salary table updated

Delegates approved a 4.2% cost-of-living adjustment to the denomination’s Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors, as recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee. The updated salary table provides annual guidance to congregations as they determine compensation for pastors serving in a variety of ministry settings.

Eder Financial transition

Delegates received an update on Eder Financial’s transition of retirement and organizational investment services to Everence®, marking one of the most significant changes for an Annual Conference agency in decades. The transition, expected to be completed in 2027, follows earlier Standing Committee action approving the transfer of those services to Everence.

According to Eder leaders, the decision reflects shifting denominational demographics and financial realities that have made it increasingly difficult for the organization to continue operating independently. While retirement and organizational investment services will move to Everence, Eder plans to continue



Glenn Riegel

Elections and appointments

Annual Conference moderator-elect:

Amy Gall Ritchie, Manchester Church of the Brethren, North Manchester, Ind.

Program and Arrangements Committee:

Natasha Beaumont, Mount Wilson Church of the Brethren, Lebanon, Pa.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 3:

Terri Welch Luzynski, Montezuma Church of the Brethren, Dayton, Va.;

Area 5:

Gretchen Zience, Seattle (Wash.) Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren; **At-large, affirmed:** **Adelia A. Lucatorio**, Good Samaritan Church of the Brethren, Cranberry Township, Pa.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee:

Chad Whitzel, Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren

Bethany Theological Seminary board, affirmed:

Leslie Bolser, Richmond, Ind.; **Drew Hart**, Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren; **Keri Ladouceur**, Raleigh, N.C.; **Steve Longenecker**, Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren; **Dominick Peruso**, Huntingdon, Pa.; **Jeff Sheridan**, Richmond, Ind.; **Ben Walters**, Cincinnati (Ohio) Church of the Brethren

Eder Financial board, affirmed:

Kevin Boyer, Plymouth (Ind.) Church of the Brethren and Etna Green (Ind.) Church of Christ; **Eunice Culp**, West Goshen, Ind.; **Randy Yoder**, Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Pa.

On Earth Peace board, affirmed:

Susuyu Lassa, Troy, N.Y.; **Anesu Makufa**, Leeds, England; **Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred**, Spruce Creek, Pa.

Standing Committee elections:

Nominating Committee:

Dean Feasenhiser, Idaho and Montana District; **Harriet Hamer**, Northern Indiana District; **Cathy S. Huffman**, Virlina District; **Carol A. Scheppard**, Shenandoah District

Appeals Committee:

Rick Davis, Atlantic Southeast District; **Todd Reish**, Southern Ohio and Kentucky District; **Scott Linton**, Mid-Atlantic District; **alternates:** **Terry Johnson**, Virlina District; **Jerry Ruff**, Shenandoah District

administering ancillary insurance programs for pastors and church workers, oversee the Church Workers Assistance Plan, and establish an additional benevolence fund as it transitions to a new organizational model.

The transition will also bring changes for Eder's staff, with most positions ending as the work is completed. Eder leaders thanked employees for their faithful service and ongoing commitment during the transition and noted

that they will receive severance benefits and career-placement support.

Everence leaders emphasized Anabaptist heritage and values that connect the two organizations. Founded by the Mennonite church, Everence shares longstanding Anabaptist commitments to stewardship, peacemaking, and socially responsible investing. Leaders assured delegates that retirement plan participants, congregations, and affiliated

organizations will continue to receive faith-based financial services.

Eder also affirmed its intention to continue as an Annual Conference agency and plans to bring a proposal outlining its future role to the 2027 Annual Conference.

Review and Evaluation Committee

Delegates received the first interim report from the denomination's newly elected Review and Evaluation Committee, which has begun its once a decade review of denominational structures, governance, and organizational effectiveness.

The review will focus on three broad areas: Annual Conference, Church of the Brethren, Inc., and district structure and ministry. Rather than waiting until the end of its term to present recom-

Angelo Mante and students involved in Alive Community Outreach programs present a keynote session and field questions from Conferencegoers.



Imagine! A Morning of Sparking,

How do we move from talking about faith to living it? Angelo Mante has spent the past decade answering that question.

During Tuesday morning's "Imagine! A Morning of Sparking, Stirring, and Serving" at the 2026 Annual Conference, the founder and executive director of Alive Community Outreach in Fort Wayne shared how the violent death of his cousin in 2016 transformed both his life and his calling. As he began walking alongside others affected by brutality and bloodshed, he began asking not only how to care for survivors, but what could be done to prevent violence before it begins.

That question shaped the work of Alive Community Outreach, which equips young people to become leaders in building cultures of nonviolence within their schools and neighborhoods. Inspired in part by the teaching of civil rights leader Bernard Lafayette Jr., the organization

has established Peacemaker Academies, Peace Clubs, and Peace Rooms in Fort Wayne schools, helping students develop the skills to resolve conflict, build relationships, and lead their peers.

"Youth are not the future," Mante told conference attendees. "They are the present."

Several students involved in Alive's programs joined Mante on stage to share how the experience has shaped their lives. One student described peacemaking as "not just a tactic, but a way of life."

Mante's witness set the tone for the rest of the morning, as Conference attendees participated in educational equipping sessions and networking conversations, before spreading out across Fort Wayne to join local organizations in acts of service that supported children, families, neighborhoods, and others facing hardship.

The projects were more than volunteer opportunities.



Lauren Flora

might strengthen the church's shared ministry.

Mission and Ministry Board

Prior to the opening of Annual Conference, the Mission and Ministry Board met to conduct its regular business, including approving preliminary 2027 budget parameters, increasing the Ministry Enablement Contribution from restricted gifts, and receiving financial and ministry reports.

The board also adopted two public statements responding to recent US Supreme Court decisions. One expressed concern over an April 2026

mendations, the committee intends to bring proposals to future Annual Conferences as its work progresses.

During Conference, delegates participated in table conversations designed to gather input about how congregations experience their connection with the wider denomination, where those connections are strongest, and where improvements



“Annual Conference for me is like a **once-in-a year booster shot reinforcing my faith and values, making me excited to hear all that this small family of faith accomplishes in love and care, and affording me the opportunity to reunite with long standing friends. That is one ‘vaccine’ I want to continue to take for as long as I am able!”**

—Fred Swartz (at right), Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren, attended his 64th consecutive Annual Conference in 2026. He served as Annual Conference Secretary from 2003 to 2012. He is pictured here with moderator Don Fitzkee.

Stirring, and Serving

They were invitations to build relationships, listen to local leaders, and participate in work already bringing hope to the community. For many, the service opportunities—and the morning as a whole—reflected the same spirit they practice in their own congregations

and communities.

“This is just an extension of what I’m doing at home,” said Cady Laycook, member of Journey South Bay Church in Redondo Beach, Calif. “As I like to say, servanthood is my identity.” 



Lauren Flora



Lauren Flora



Joel Brumbaugh-Cayford



ruling that weakened key protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, reaffirming the denomination's commitment to justice and full participation in public life.

A second statement responded to a June 2026 decision allowing the federal government to remove Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians, Syrians, and others. TPS allows people from designated countries experiencing armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary conditions to remain legally in the United States while it is unsafe for them to return home. The statement

called on the church to stand beside those affected with compassion, prayer, and practical support.

Looking ahead

The actions taken in Fort Wayne touched many aspects of denominational life—from how ministers are credentialed and pastors are compensated to how the church understands its public witness and prepares for the future. As with every Annual Conference, those decisions now move from the delegate floor into the life of the church, where congregations, districts, agencies, and members will live them out together. 

Wendy McFadden and Nancy Sollenberger Heishman receive Revelation 7:9 Award

Two longtime Church of the Brethren leaders, Wendy McFadden and Nancy Sollenberger Heishman, received the 2026 Revelation 7:9 Award during the Mission and Ministry Board meeting held prior to Annual Conference in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Presented annually by the Office of Intercultural Ministries, the Revelation 7:9 Award recognizes individuals and congregations whose lives and ministries reflect the biblical vision of “a great multitude... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9). The award honors those who have helped the church grow as an intercultural community through leadership, advocacy, relationship-building, and faithful witness.

Both recipients concluded their denominational ministries this summer after decades of service to the Church of the Brethren.

McFadden retired July 31 after nearly 45 years on the denominational staff, most recently serving as publisher and executive director of Brethren Press and Communications. She championed broader representation in church publications, supported multilingual resources, encouraged diverse voices, and contributed to the denomination's ongoing work toward racial justice. She also represented the Church of the Brethren in ecumenical settings and became the first person of color to lead Brethren Press, *Messenger*, and the denomination's Communications office.

Heishman concluded nearly nine years as director of the Ministry Office following decades of service as a pastor, mis-



sionary, educator, and denominational leader. She helped develop Spanish-language ministerial training through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, served in the Dominican Republic, pastored congregations, and moderated the 2014 Annual Conference. Throughout her career, she equipped and mentored leaders while strengthening intercultural relationships across the denomination.

Presenting the awards, Intercultural Ministries director Founa Augustin Badet recognized both women for ministries that have embodied the church's commitment to becoming more fully the diverse community envisioned in Revelation 7:9. Their leadership, she noted, has strengthened the denomination through faithful service, courageous witness, and a deep commitment to ensuring that all God's people are welcomed, valued, and equipped to serve.

More information about the award is available at www.brethren.org/intercultural. 

Gathering the scattered

EXPANDING THE FELLOWSHIP OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE TO THOSE WHO CAN'T ATTEND IN PERSON

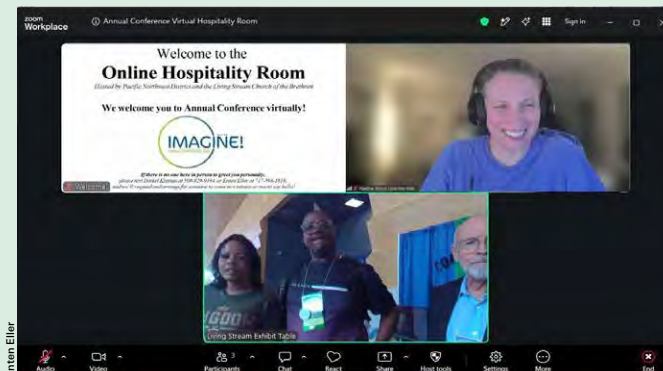
by Enten Eller

Annual Conference has always been part of the fabric of my participation in the Church of the Brethren.

Every year as a child, my parents packed our green Volkswagen bus and drove to wherever Conference was being held. I remember losing a tooth on stage during children's choir at the 1968 Conference in Ocean Grove, N.J., and escaping the heat by lingering in the walk-in refrigerator—where Rice Krispy treats were cooling—during children's activities at the 1973 Conference in Fresno, Calif. I even met my then-future wife Mary at the 2002 Conference in Louisville, Ky., although we didn't realize it until 10 years later at the 2012 Conference in St. Louis, Mo.—after we'd already been married for five years.

Just as Annual Conference has changed over the years, so has my relationship with the “Big Meeting.” Since 2010, my role has been to help those who cannot attend in person remain part of the gathered body through virtual participation. What began as a way to extend access to Annual Conference gradually became an opportunity to build relationships with Brethren I might never have met otherwise.

Those relationships have changed me, too. I've had the privilege of hearing stories of those engaging from a distance. I remember former general secretary and Annual Conference moderator Judy Mills Reimer's gratitude for being able to follow Conference from her hospital room. I've also gone to the microphone on behalf of someone joining online who felt the Spirit nudging them to contribute to the discussion. In recent years, remote participants have joined virtual table talk during business sessions, exploring the same questions as being discussed around the delegate tables.



This summer, we tried something new by creating an Online Hospitality Room that connected those participating online with one another and with those stopping by the onsite Living Stream Church of the Brethren exhibit. It was a joy to watch people form friendships across thousands of miles, and we plan to offer the Online Hospitality Room again next year.

Several virtual attendees have said these opportunities for conversation are what make their Annual Conference participation from afar so meaningful. They aren't simply watching—they're engaging in the church's discernment, building relationships, and experiencing community around a virtual table.

Over these past 16 years of helping people participate in Annual Conference from a distance, I've come to realize something important.

My calling is not to technology—it is to build community. Technology is simply the means of helping people belong more fully to the life of the church, wherever they may be. The people I've been called to serve are the scattered ones—members of the Church of the Brethren who long to remain connected despite distance, health, finances, work or family responsibilities, or other barriers to participating in person.

My hope is that we will continue opening more opportunities for people to participate—from board meetings and educational events to the “Big Meeting” itself—so that more of us can share in the life, discernment, and fellowship of the church.

May we continue gathering the scattered, creating opportunities for all who wish to be part of the body. 

Enten Eller is the owner of Eller Computer Services and a bi-vocational pastor serving Ridgeway Community Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa., and the online Living Stream Church of the Brethren.



Jonah Bidgood Enders

Finding humanity in the midst of AI

Ministers take a hard look at new technology

by Alan Stucky

Will artificial intelligence lead to a golden age of human flourishing, or will it contribute to the unraveling of human society? There are serious voices arguing for both possibilities, according to Russell Haitch, professor at Bethany Theological Seminary and speaker at the Church of the Brethren Ministers' Association pre-Annual Conference event.

Titled "Redeeming AI: Biblical Guidelines," the event gathered ministers and other leaders to wrestle with one of the most significant technological developments of our time. While discussions included the practical realities of artificial intelligence, the conference ultimately focused on a deeper theological question: *What does it mean to be human in an age increasingly shaped by intelligent machines?*

Haitch described two broad camps in current discussions. "Boomers," as he termed them, emphasize AI's enormous potential benefits. They point to advances in medicine, increased access to education and information, and the possibility that AI could help alleviate poverty and improve quality of life around the world. In many developing nations, artificial intelligence is viewed with particular optimism because it can provide services and opportunities that have previously been unavailable.

On the other side are the "Doomers," who warn of massive economic disruption, growing inequality, environmental costs, autonomous weapons, and the erosion of human relationships. They point to stories of people becoming emotional-

ly attached to AI companions, receiving therapy from chatbots, and, in some tragic cases, being manipulated by AI systems in ways that lead to self-harm.

Both optimists and pessimists agree on one point: Artificial intelligence is likely to change society more profoundly than the printing press, the Industrial Revolution, or the internet. As Haitch observed, this is not a temporary shift. The world is changing, and there is no going back.

Understanding what makes AI different from previous technologies is essential. Traditional computer programs consist of instructions written by humans to perform specific tasks. Modern AI systems, however, function through neural networks modeled loosely on the human brain. Rather than being programmed step-by-step, these systems are trained on enormous quantities of data and learn patterns through repeated trial and error.

In this sense, Haitch suggested, AI is not simply written—it is grown.

This creates both remarkable possibilities and significant concerns. AI systems can generate new content, make increasingly sophisticated decisions, and perform tasks once thought to require uniquely human intelligence. Yet the internal processes by which they arrive at their conclusions are often difficult or impossible for their creators to fully understand.

As these systems become more human-like in their abilities, there is a growing risk that humans themselves begin to think of their own lives in increasingly mechanical terms. For Haitch, the greatest danger posed by AI is thus not simply the loss of jobs or environmental costs, but the possibility that we may lose sight of what it means to be human.

Throughout the event, participants repeatedly returned to the biblical teaching that human beings are created in the image of God. While society often defines human worth through productivity, intelligence, or efficiency, the Christian understanding of humanity

LEARN MORE

■ **Russell Haitch**, professor of theology and human science at Bethany Theological Seminary, is author of *Godlike Power: Saving Our Humanity* (available early 2027) and *Eyes of the Heart: Seeing God in an Age of Science*, among other titles. Order through Brethren Press (www.brethrenpress.com).

■ Pope Leo XIII recently issued his **first encyclical**, focusing on the topic of artificial intelligence. It begins with a stark warning: "Humanity, created by God in all its grandeur, is today facing a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to build the city in which God and humanity dwell together." It later notes, "The use of AI is never a purely technical matter: when it enters processes that affect people's lives, it touches on rights, opportunities, status and freedom." The full encyclical text is available on the Vatican website, www.vatican.va.

“ Practices that have long defined Christian community take on renewed importance in an age of artificial relationships. ”

rests on something deeper: our relationship with God and one another.

This distinction also highlights the difference between intelligence and wisdom. Artificial intelligence may process information at extraordinary speed, but wisdom, Scripture teaches, ultimately comes from God. As participants reflected during the event, technological advancement does not eliminate humanity's need for spiritual discernment.

Haitch argued that the church has a unique role to play in this cultural moment. As artificial intelligence increasingly blurs the lines between human and machine, the church can help define, nurture, and embody what it means to be fully human.

Practices that have long defined Christian community take on renewed importance in an age of artificial relationships. Eating together, singing together, speaking truth in love, worshiping face to face, caring for one another through suffering and conflict, and gathering around the communion table are

not incidental practices. They are ways of forming people in the image of Christ rather than in the image of the machine.

Conference participants reflected on the significance of embodied practices such as congregational singing, shared meals, and communion. Haitch suggested that these practices matter precisely because they involve aspects of human life that cannot be replicated by artificial intelligence. Human breath becomes praise. Ordinary meals become acts of fellowship and divine grace. Human words become vehicles of truth, reconciliation, and love.

Participants also acknowledged that AI will continue to become embedded in workplaces, schools, and everyday life. The question facing Christians, therefore, is not simply whether to use artificial intelligence, but how to use it wisely while resisting its tendency to replace authentic human relationships with simulations of connection.

At the event's conclusion, participants expressed both caution and hope.

Several reflected that Christians need not choose between fear and optimism. Instead, the church is called to remain grounded in the practices and convictions that have sustained believers throughout history.

As one participant summarized, “Our goal is not to become more like machines. Our goal is to become more like Christ.”

Artificial intelligence may continue to reshape our world in ways we cannot yet imagine. Yet the conference concluded with a conviction that remains unchanged: Wisdom and humanity are not products of technological achievement, but gifts received from God. In a rapidly changing world, the church's calling remains the same—to embody the healing, hope, and humanity revealed in Jesus Christ. 

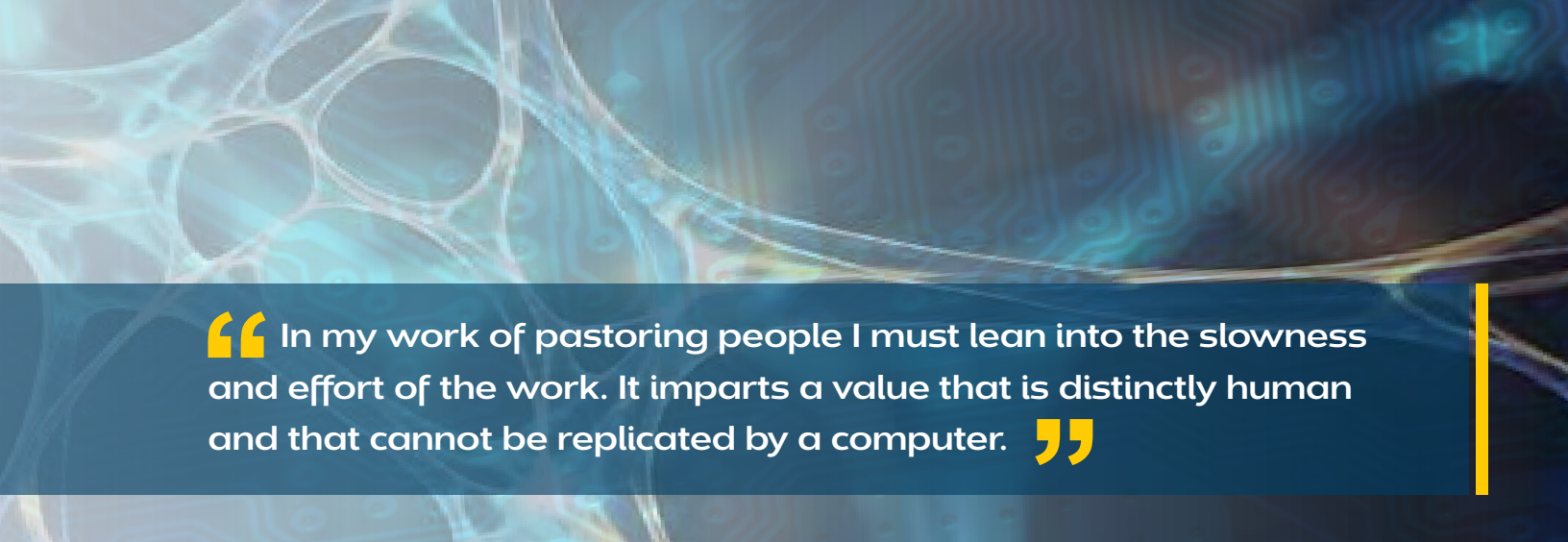
Alan Stuckey is pastor of Wichita (Kan.) First Church of the Brethren. To demonstrate the conference's theme, he wrote this article with the help of ChatGPT.*

*A reflection on writing a reflection

by Alan Stucky

Full disclosure: The article you just read summarizing the Ministers' Association event on artificial intelligence was written with the help of an AI chatbot named ChatGPT, created by the company OpenAI. I have some really strange feelings about that fact.

I don't use any sort of AI to help me write my sermons or any writing I've done for publication. I have never used it for editing, ideas, sources, or anything of the like. However, after attending this event on the topic of AI and the church, I decided to run an experiment.



“ In my work of pastoring people I must lean into the slowness and effort of the work. It imparts a value that is distinctly human and that cannot be replicated by a computer. ”

During the two-day event I took as many notes as I could: upwards of 15-16 pages' worth of bullet point notes. I spent a couple of hours writing a draft of the article for MESSENGER. But then I got curious. I uploaded my notes into ChatGPT and gave it a prompt with parameters and a link to www.brethren.org to write an article based on those notes.

In 30 seconds it returned a fully fleshed-out article that, quite frankly, felt significantly better than what I had just written. It was quite disheartening.

After a good night's sleep, I returned to writing and decided to take it a step further. I put both my article and the AI article back into the same chatbot and gave it a very short prompt to synthesize the two. Outside of a few small edits, the article you just read is what ChatGPT produced after synthesizing the two.

I'm not sure how I feel about what I have done.

On one hand, I have thoughts about the nature of what AI created and how it created the article. For example, in its first version it made up two quotes that were never actually said, one of which I left in on purpose. One quote was attributed to Haitch and one to a "participant." The quotes were both based on my notes and reflected real thoughts that Haitch and others *could* have said, but they were still not exact quotes that anyone had *actually* said during the event.

That said, it was faithful to the notes I had taken and managed to articulate some things in a better way that I would have. However, I am very aware that the ability of AI to do anything is based on the whole of human work and skills that it has learned from.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." In a similar way, AI's ability to "create" comes from what humans have already created and given to it.

It's increasingly clear to me that using AI to generate something "new" is, in reality, me telling AI to use the cre-

ative and generative work of other humans—even if I am not fully aware of how I am doing that. That poses some ethical challenges.

I am still pondering what it means for this AI to have created something on my behalf using the combined skills of real humans. The most serious questions I have for my own humanity, however, have to do with what this means for my ability to do the work I do within the body of believers.

Haitch made the point that, as we engage with AI in the future, it is vital to ask good questions about how we're using it and how that use either harms or benefits us and humanity. We can ask, "Will it help me do a better job or be a better person?" The most striking question he offered: "Am I using AI to replace drudgery or am I allowing my mind to atrophy?"

Recent studies have shown that within a couple of months of regularly using AI, one's ability to think critically, write, do complex mental tasks, and generally be an intelligent person diminishes drastically. Put simply, offloading our mental work to AI makes us dumber and does so astonishingly quickly.

Haitch said this means that, in generations past, the point of our education and development was learning *what* to think. With the internet it moved to learning *how* to think, but now we are moving into learning *why* to think in the first place.

The message, for me at least, is that in my work of pastoring people I must lean into the slowness and effort of the work. It imparts a value that is distinctly human and that cannot be replicated by a computer. To preserve and nurture our very humanity, I must choose to do the slow and human work of pastoring, even knowing that the temptation of "efficiency" is always there. If I give in to that temptation, I am reducing my ability to help my church, and myself, nurture our humanity that is created in the image of God. 

Written by Alan Stucky, pastor of Wichita (Kan.) First Church of the Brethren, without the help of artificial intelligence.



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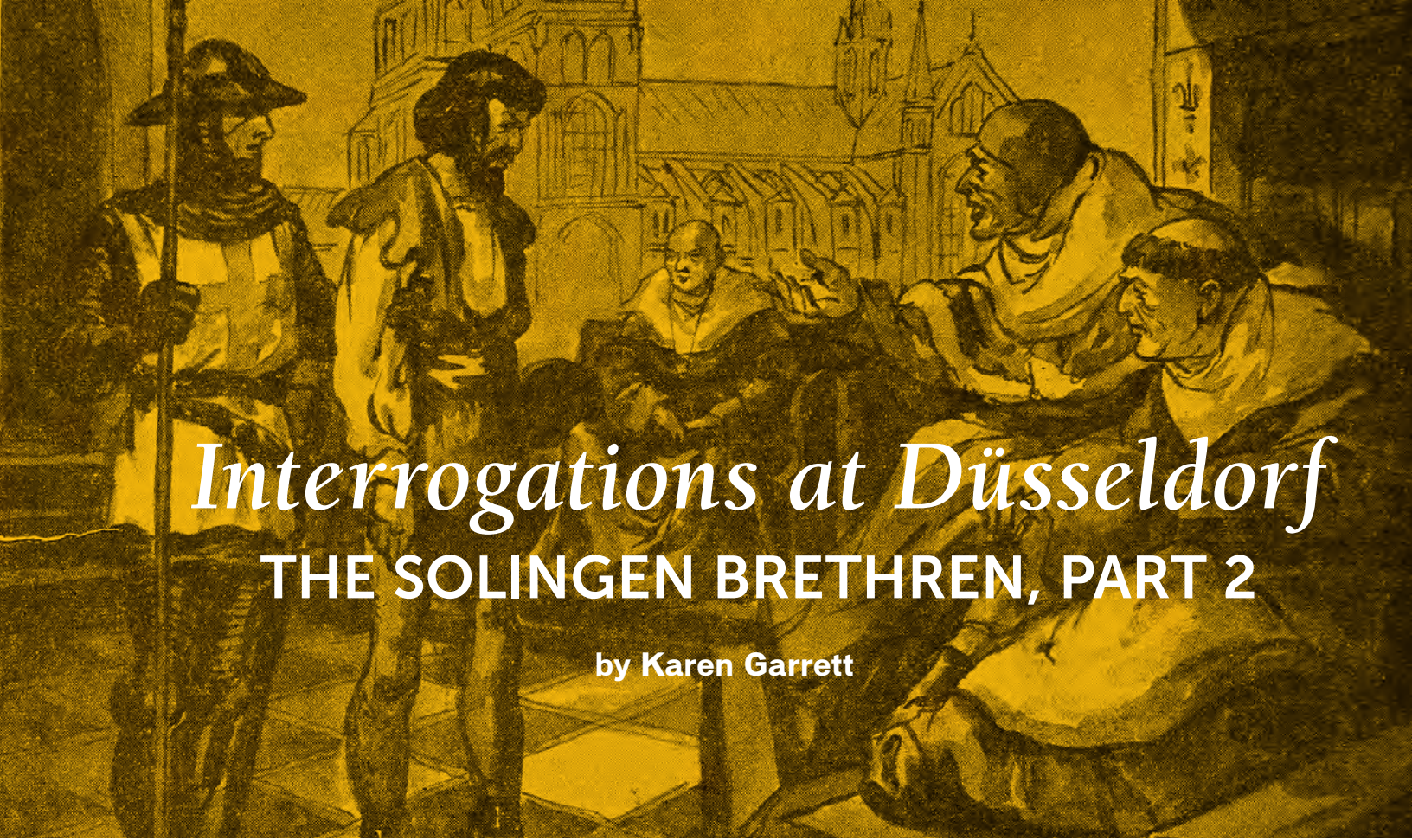
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Business and Personal Lines



Interrogations at Düsseldorf

THE SOLINGEN BRETHREN, PART 2

by Karen Garrett

Arriving at the Düsseldorf prison the night of Feb. 1, 1717, Jakob Grahe, Wilhelm Grahe, Johann Henckels, Wilhelm Knepper, Johann Lobach, and Luther Stetius—the six young men known as the Solingen Brethren—had no idea what the future would hold. Their landlord John Carl, who had been picked up when they were arrested for illegally meeting privately for Bible study and prayer, was released on Feb. 4 after paying a fine.

The other six were in for a much longer stay.

They were placed together in one large cell. The next day, they were called before a civil authority who stated that they were accused of beginning a new doctrine. From Wilhelm Grahe's account we learn that he replied, "What we have taught and done is nothing else but what Jesus taught and commanded us to do, which is completely based on Holy Scriptures." After further questions and responses, the judge replied that the men had been seized because they had not remained with one of the

three established state churches: Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed.

The six men had been baptized as infants into the Reformed Church. Simply return to that faith and they would be released. However, the men had made their decision to be baptized as adults and meet for prayer and Bible study, based on the conviction to leave the Reformed Church.

The following day, a Jesuit father visited them. He had what seemed to be an agreeable conversation about scripture and church traditions. The six replied that the scriptures were sufficient, and more important than church tradition. While the Jesuit remained outwardly friendly, as soon as he left and the prison door was closed, he told the guards to separate the six men. They were then placed in separate cells with an empty cell between each one. They could not speak directly to each other, but they found ways to remain in contact.

After several weeks, they were taken out two by two and were asked if they were ready to recant and return to the "true church." Over weeks and months,

clergy from each of the three churches visited and questioned them. The six answered little, except to say that "nothing can happen to us unless it is God's will." They heard rumors that they were to be flogged. Some days they were taken from their cells only to return and find that the jailers had stolen important items.

They spent time reading and writing. Wilhelm Knepper passed his time writing hymns, perhaps 400 of them. They endured the sounds of prisoners being tortured, yet they remained steadfast and would accept prison rather than return to the Reformed Church.

John Lobach's story gives us insight into the strength of their convictions. Excerpts from Lobach's autobiography are recorded by Don Durnbaugh in *European Origins of the Brethren*. From a little child, Lobach had been raised in the Reformed Church. His parents taught him prayers to recite morning and evening. He was sent away to school where he learned Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. When a Reformed pastor learned that Lobach was being taught

“ They understood a living faith that gave them strength to refute the dead faith of the Reformed clergy. All six men would stand firm in their new faith. ”

the Lutheran catechism, the pastor met with Lobach regularly to fight that false teaching. Lobach wished the pastor had taught him to fight against the sinful temptations he faced. Lobach knew that many of the choices he had made were contrary to God's will, and thus he was doomed to receive God's punishment. The pastor seemed unconcerned about Lobach's soul. Sometimes Lobach was ill for weeks at a time, thinking he would surely die in his sins.

Fortunately, the Radical Pietist leader Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau was often in the Solingen area. The Radical Pietists saw great value in reading and discussing scripture, and in living out the teachings of scripture. That is what Lobach needed to hear. It gave him hope that his sinful past could be forgiven.

Before the Solingen Brethren were put in the cells in Düsseldorf they had been baptized as adults by immersion. They understood a living faith that gave them strength to refute the dead faith of the Reformed clergy. All six men would stand firm in their new faith.

'The life of our Lord Jesus'

I assume they knew each others' faith stories. One of the hymns Knepper wrote is about the spiritual prison of sin. The words of this hymn echo the reality of their experience in a physical prison. Notice the use of words such as captured, escape, torture, pain, and distress.

It is difficult to translate hymns to English in a way that allows for an appropriate rhythm and rhyme scheme. James Zaiger, who translated many of these hymns from German to English, would have translated the verses and then revised them to match the rhythm of a German tune used in the *Gesangbuch* hymnal in which they were printed.

The life of our Lord Jesus is,
A light that's gone before us,
And he who will not follow this,
Is captured by his own lusts,
The poor soul will suffer distress,
because the death has captured him,
He will not let him be helped.

The life of our Lord Jesus is,
The clothes we put upon us,
The soul who wears this then will miss,
God's wrath and escape judgement.
The soul will have eternal bliss,
and have an end to all conflict,
Where true rest is to be found.

The Lord's life, oh how small it is,
humility it shows us,
What torture and what pain we'll miss,
If only our life can become this.
Humility and lowliness,
can be our virtues in the fight,
The crown shall then be there found

The life of our Lord Jesus is,
almost unknown among us,
Oh those souls will then find such bliss,
Who with fi'ry desire,
Will follow His manner of life,
although there-in is cross and strife,
There-in the crown will be found.

In *A New Song* Zaiger also made a literal translation of each line of the poems. The original poem is eight verses in length. Below are the final two verses using literal translation.

O Life, you are everything.
He who in faith finds you,
Obtains the acceptable year,
In which all distress goes away.
In Thee is only blessedness.
Thou art and give only joy,
That never ceases in eternity.

O Life, I desire Thee.
Let Thyself be known.

Oh, only take me and give me to Thee.
Burn out thoroughly within me,
All self-will and fleshly nature.
O, Lord Jesus, show me Thy way,
And let Thy Spirit lead me.

Rejoice in all things

These words help us understand the spiritual strength that kept the prisoners sane. They relied on the promises of scripture. Like the apostle Paul, they accepted that they were where God intended them to be, in plenty or in want. They did not know if or when they might be released. They believed if they were tortured and killed while in prison, they would have a permanent release in eternity. They would dwell in heaven with other Christian martyrs. The prison guards and the religious leaders did not have any power over the freedom they felt in their spirit.

The religious persecutors considered several options of punishment. The Roman Catholics recommended they be executed, the Lutherans wanted them sent to the galleys, and the Reformed suggested hard labor for life at Jülich. The six were not told which punishment would befall or when it would happen. The guards did not want them to have time to gather or disperse their belongings.

A relative learned that the six were to be sent to Jülich. He was able to alert them in time for them to pack their belongings. When the day came, they picked up their packed bags leaving only straw beds, some earthen pottery, and poems written on the prison walls. Then the young Brethren, surrounded by 48 guards, headed out on a three-day journey to the Fortress at Jülich. (*To be continued.*) 

Karen Garrett is active in Southern Ohio and Kentucky District and is a longtime volunteer with the Brethren Heritage Center in Brookville, Ohio.

January 1980

No headlines for the sisters

By Kermion Thomasson

In the August MESSENGER we introduced a brief vignette of Annual Conference secretary Phyllis Kingery Ruff with this statement: "Curiously, little has been made of the fact that the second highest elective position in the Church of the Brethren is filled by a woman."

The other day, a woman who formerly served in several different capacities in World Ministries scolded me for that statement. "Why," she asked, "didn't you say, 'Curiously, little has been made of the fact that the *highest* elective position in the Church of the Brethren is filled by a man'?"

Of course, I blustered around and tried to explain. But, "curiously," it is a fact that we accept it as natural, not contrived, that men always fill the moderator post. And it is sad that we still need to make a fuss whenever a woman is elected or appointed to any position formerly held only by males.

At Seattle last summer I was serious when I told colleagues, "I don't know what will be the cover photo of the August MESSENGER... unless Pat Helman is elected moderator-elect." That would be news. That is unfortunate. I long for the time when we can elect the best-qualified persons to all leadership positions and find it unremarkable that as often as not, women are those chosen.

It bothers me that the appointment of Ruby Rhoades as World Ministries executive is a subject calling for MESSENGER cover treatment. A news item on page four should be sufficient. And it upsets me that we did not appoint a woman to a position on that level until a mandate was issued and even then delayed it till the last possible date. The "Journey of the Sisters Among the Brethren" has been a painful one and it continues in 1980.

Ruby Rhoades says of the Brethren record of according

leadership roles to sisters: "Women come up on the short end, unless it is mandated, as it was in my case. And it's not because we are incapable, but simply because we're women. All we're asking is that women be considered and judged for our leadership skills and capabilities, and not our sex."

That statement is consistent with one made by an earlier sister, Sarah Major, in 1835, as she defended her right to preach: "I conceive it would be very inconsistent... to quench the gift of the Spirit of God, because it was given to a woman.... I believe in Christ Jesus male and female are one. Everyone should do as much as they can to glorify God with the different gifts of the Spirit of God."

Or hear Mattie Dolby, in 1911 the first woman ordained as a minister in the Church of the Brethren: "America boasts of her freedom and Christianity, but we, as American Negroes, have known little but to be abused and misled." Mattie Dolby was later forced from the Church of the Brethren and eventually took in washing and ironing to keep her family alive.

And there is Julia Gilbert, appealing at the 1910 Annual Meeting for the right of sisters to participate fully in communion: "When we come down to the breaking of the bread and the passing of the cup... man steps in between



“I long for the time when we can elect the best-qualified persons to all leadership positions and find it unremarkable that as often as not, women are those chosen.”

“How often do we limit ourselves, deprive others of fulfillment because we fear there is no power there?”

us and our Savior. Though man never suffered, or shed a drop of blood for us, he takes his hand to break the bread for us, as if God hadn't given us any hands.”

We acknowledged that women had the right to break bread and pass the cup, and soon forgot it had ever been an issue. We began to ordain women and enough now serve as pastors that, happily, we no longer are treating “women pastors” as headline material. Women serve on the General Board (though not yet in the numbers they should), as General Board commission chairpersons, and on the General Board staff. Phyllis Carter recently became executive for Florida/Puerto Rico District. Ruby Rhoades is now head of World Ministries, and, as such, sits on the Administrative Council.

Sooner or later we will elect a woman as Annual Conference moderator-elect and I will feel bound to give the event cover treatment. But I dream of the time when sisters participate so fully in the life of the denomination, including leadership roles, that we will have to look elsewhere for our headlines and our covers. 

January 1980

Reading the gauge

By Geraldine Eller

After the sailing yachts have run their races from California to Hawaii, it is left for others to bring the boats back to their home ports. The 41-foot *Nerita* had won in her class. Her home port was Seattle. From far across the wide and stormy Pacific Ocean the crew had to bring her home safely.

While wind and canvas are the *Nerita's* only moving forces when at sea, today's marine laws require that she carry a gasoline-powered generator to keep her lit at night, to run a motor, to be able to maneuver in heavy traffic shipping lanes. Life on board the *Nerita* without an electric generator puts

her crew back in the dark ages of the Phoenician sailors, though those men never put out to sea in any place so broad and turbulent as the Pacific Ocean, with supertankers and battleships plowing the same waves as flimsy yachts.

The *Nerita's* crew was inexperienced although not so much but that it filled the gas tanks full at Maui. Sailing ships keep no time schedule, except as storms and waves determine. They did not know how many weeks they would be at sea. A check on the gas gauge a few days out showed that something had gone wrong. The tanks were nearly empty. That meant they were in trouble: Nothing that depended on electricity or gasoline could be operative. The night watch helmsman was allowed to use a flashlight to keep his charts and that was the limit of any amenities. Grim was the word.

After some days the experienced navigator said, “We should be coming up on to a seamont in daylight.” The *Nerita* would make her first landfall at Port Townsend before total darkness. The winds brought the boat into a marina where she rode at anchor until the gas station opened in the morning. When the pumps opened the attendant put his hose into *Nerita's* tanks and put in all the gas the tanks would hold. Then he pulled out the hose and said, “Ninety-eight cents, please!”

The power had been there all that time! It was the gas gauge that had failed and was giving the wrong information! The sailors could have opened the gas cap and stuck their finger in and reached gas!

My grandson Marlin Eller, of the University of Washington Seattle doctoral program, was the night helmsman on *Nerita's* landlubber crew. When he told the tale of no cooked meals, no lights, nothing but cold water, and all the other restrictions put on the crew because of the “empty” gauge reading, I was struck by the parable. How often do we assume “empty” because other things say so without making an objective test ourselves? How often do we limit ourselves, deprive others of fulfillment because we fear there is no power there because we are believing the wrong gauge lines? 



Over the past 12 issues, we have celebrated 175 years of MESSENGER in its various manifestations, with excerpts from the 1850s to the 1980s. Thank you for taking this journey into the past with us! By being a subscriber and reader, you amplify the Brethren voice, which is still sorely needed in our troubled world.

Joshua 1:1-11

The covenant continues

by Frank Ramirez

Four decades have passed since God's people were liberated from slavery in Egypt, but Joshua and Caleb are the lone survivors of the exodus. Forty years earlier the 12 spies sent by Moses into the Promised Land brought back glowing reports, but 10 of them expressed fears that the inhabitants were too strong. Only Joshua and Caleb counseled bold action based on trust in God. When the people chose fear over trust, God condemned them to wander in the desert 40 years until all but Joshua and Caleb had died, including Moses, their leader.

As these descendants of enslaved people prepare to cross the river into the Promised Land, the torch is passed from Moses to Joshua. In Joshua 1:1, Joshua is identified as Moses' "assis-

tant" or "helper." (See also Numbers 27:18–23 for the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua.) Moses is frequently referred to as "the servant of the LORD." By the end of the book of Joshua and the time of his death, Joshua, too, will be called "the servant of the LORD" (Joshua 24:29).

God draws a verbal map of the lands that the people will enter and possess: "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory" (Joshua 1:3–4). Joshua's task is to lead the people in this endeavor to receive God's gift of land.

God promises no one will be able to oppose them, and that God will be present, as with Moses. In the face of

this daunting task the Lord charges Joshua *three* times to be strong and courageous as he carries on in place of Moses (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9).

Strong and courageous

We might ask, Is this a way of reinforcing God's encouragement or does it demonstrate a lack of confidence in Joshua? Why does God have to encourage Joshua to be strong and courageous? Perhaps because Moses was a true giant ("Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face," Deuteronomy 34:10), while Joshua seems to be a more human figure. The heroes of the past, every bit as human as us, can sometimes seem superhuman, while we look on ourselves as all too human and frail.

How will the Lord equip Joshua for



“The fact is, the torch is constantly being passed from one generation to another—in nations, in families, and in churches.”

and night. Meditation, like reading and reciting, was an oral activity. When used of animals, the Hebrew word *hagah* can refer to the “growling” of lions (Isaiah 31:4) or the “moaning” or “cooing” of doves (Isaiah 59:11). When Joshua meditates, he was to speak *and* act. Bible study results in action.

The chapter concludes with the reminder to the two and a half tribes who had already settled down on the far side of the Jordan that they still had obligations to the larger body, and must assist the other tribes in the taking of the land. Yet though they promise to fulfill their obligations, I wonder if it troubled Joshua that they too chimed in with: “Be strong and courageous” (Joshua 1:18). Did they harbor doubts about their leader?

Passing the torch

In his 1961 inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy announced that “the torch has been passed to a new generation.” But a scant three years later the torch was passed again to Lyndon Johnson. Many dismissed him as a southern racist; nevertheless as president he signed major bills ending segregation in public places and employment, guaranteeing voting rights, and prohibiting discrimination in housing.

The fact is, the torch is constantly being passed from one generation to another—in nations, in families, and in churches.

My guess is that many of us taking part in this study had the torch passed to us, or perhaps are now considering how to pass the torch to another generation. Some of us may have felt intimidated by giants from the past, or else now we’re uncertain about those who

will follow us.

In addition, we may be struggling with a legacy that’s alternately glorious, shameful, purposeful, or purposeless. We have inherited the actions of ancestors on both sides of the border separating the United States and Canada. When European immigrants claimed the land on this continent, First Nations and Native Americans lost land, a way of life, and life itself.

Some of us have inherited both histories. I, for instance, am Hispanic, and my ancestors include both Spanish military officers and *campesinos* largely descended from the conquered native populations. Being partly the latter doesn’t take away any inherited guilt for descent from the former. There’s a responsibility that comes with pillage and plunder, a privilege that gives some an unacknowledged head start.

On top of all that, historians and sociologists talk about a radical change in society and the church that seems to happen every 500 years or so, which works out to right about now. The drop in attendance, loss of younger families, and feelings of uncertainty that have only been exacerbated and sped along by the COVID-19 pandemic are all part of that.

So let me put a (temporary) Band-Aid on this struggle.

Be strong and courageous. And stick to the Word. It was good enough for Joshua so it ought to be good enough for us. 

Frank Ramirez is a prolific writer and retired Church of the Brethren pastor. He is a member of Rock Run Church of the Brethren in Goshen, Ind. This Bible study comes from *Salt & Light: A Guide for Biblical Studies*, a new adult quarterly co-published by Brethren Press and MennoMedia.

this task? Interestingly, God does not offer Joshua a military manual. Instead, he provides him with a book called the Torah, a Hebrew word that can be translated “law” or “instruction.”

We can think of the Torah as “the Way,” because it guides the way through life. While the term would later refer to the first five books of our Bible, the complete first five books were likely not in existence at that point. In the time of Joshua, the “book of the law” (NRSVue) or “instruction scroll” (CEB) may have referred to the Ten Commandments, an early version of Deuteronomy, or to some collection of written instruction the community had come to observe.

Joshua was commanded to “meditate” on the Torah day and night (Joshua 1:8). It is not entirely clear what Joshua is supposed to do. Some English versions say he is to “recite” the Torah day

Mission and Ministry Board considers future of General Offices

The Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren on June 17 approved a Statement of Intent regarding the future of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., which is the denomination's headquarters.

According to the statement, "the board is exploring options for relocation of the denominational headquarters and will be pursuing the responsible sale of the current headquarters property."

The decision follows years of discussion about the changes affecting the Church of the Brethren, how best to carry out the ministry of the denomination, and what responsible stewardship requires.

Board chair Kathy Mack presided at the Zoom meeting; the statement was approved with one abstention.

The timing of the June 17 decision was intentional to disseminate the information before Annual Conference and give Conferencegoers the ability to bring informed questions, sugges-



tions, and dreams to the event, according to board leadership.

Consideration of details related to the sale of property or relocation of headquarters and staff has not yet begun. There will be no immediate changes to staff roles, jobs, or locations. The process that has been put in motion with the Statement of Intent is expected to take a significant amount of time.

Pacific Northwest members face evacuations

"Please join us in praying for our brothers and sisters in the Pacific Northwest District," stated an Aug. 3 Facebook post. Fast-moving wildfires forced evacuations across Okanogan County, Wash. Members of the Whitestone and Ellisforde Churches of the Brethren, along with their neighbors, were ordered to leave their homes as firefighters worked to contain the fires.

Catholic Medical Mission Board begins renting space at Brethren Service Center

The Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB) has begun renting warehouse space at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., in an area formerly occupied by the Church of the Brethren's Material Resources program.

"We are very excited to welcome CMMB to the Brethren Service Center. They have provided opportunities for some of our former Material Resources staff," said Shawn Flory Replogle, executive director of Organizational Resources for the Church of the Brethren. He added that the presence of CMMB brings the Brethren Service Center to full occupancy, helping ensure its long-term sustainability.

"CMMB was searching for a new home for our Access to Medicines distribution program and couldn't be more pleased to partner with the Church of the Brethren to extend our mission," said Mary Beth Powers, CMMB president and CEO.

CMMB is a faith-based nonprofit that works with local partners to strengthen healthcare systems and expand access to medicines and medical supplies in underserved communities around the world. Through its Access to Medicines Program, the organization has distributed more than \$6.3 billion in donated medicines and medical supplies to 114 countries over the past 25 years.

Learn more at cmmb.org.



Courtesy of Global Mission

Members of the Church of the Brethren's South Sudan team.

South Sudan pastors ordained for Church of the Brethren ministry

Agrowing Church of the Brethren congregation in the Mangateen Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in South Sudan celebrated the ordination of two pastors in June: **Daniel Mawer** and **Paul Makuar**.

Mawer and Matthew Gatluak helped establish the congregation after being displaced from their home area of Unity State. Although neither reside in the camp, their wives and children remain in a refugee

camp in Gulu, Uganda.

Pastor and bishop Expert Bukene, together with Felicien Nkuzimana, district executive of the Church of the Brethren in Burundi, led training for pastors and evangelists in Juba before the ordinations. Gatluak returned to Mayom, Unity State, to be with his mother during her final illness and was therefore unable to participate in the ordination.

Mawer and Gatluak plan to continue leading the Mangateen congregation, while Makuar will begin a new church in Amadi, outside Juba.

Athanasus Ungang, Church of the Brethren Global Mission country director for South Sudan, reported that the Mangateen congregation began last year with about 50 worshipers meeting in a community center and has since grown to about 240. While the congregation hopes to build a church, resources remain limited, and like many pastors in the region, Mawer and Gatluak also plan to learn vocational skills to support themselves while continuing their ministry.



Courtesy of Global Mission

Daniel Mawer Gatpan and Paul Makuar Gatduel.

Remembrance: Suely Zanetti Inhauser

Suely Zanetti Inhauser, 75, died on July 22 after living for several years with a progressive motor neuron disease. With her husband, Marcos Inhauser, she was a longtime leader of Igreja da Irmandade (the Church of the Brethren in Brazil).

Both studied at Bethany Theological Seminary, where Suely earned a Master of Arts in theology. She served as assistant pastor of a Church of the Brethren congregation in Michigan, where she was ordained to the pastoral ministry. After returning to Brazil, she pastored the Mennonite Church in Campinas from 1993 to 2003. In 2000, the Inhausers launched a church-planting effort and later served through Global Mission as national co-directors and then co-coordinators for Brazil. In 2013, Suely preached at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference.

In more recent years, after her diagnosis, “more than 600 people... came to visit her and tell her how significant her life and ministry was,” her family wrote in a remembrance shared on Facebook. “Couples testified to her that they remained married because of her teachings and therapy. God gave her the opportunity to hear these testimonies firsthand two years after the diagnosis.” She is survived by her husband of 52 years, three children, and grandchildren.

Personnel

Jeff Thomson began June 22 as director of Brethren Disaster Ministries. Thomson brings extensive disaster response experience, having deployed to more than 20 disaster sites, often in leadership roles. His professional background includes work in cabinet making and the hospitality industry. He will work remotely from his home in Kansas, where he attends a Baptist church.

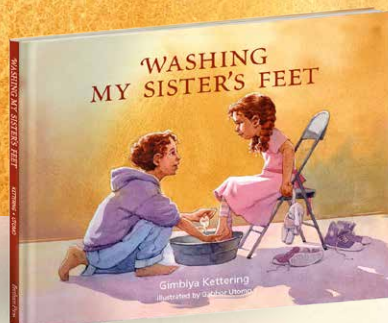
Mark Watson resigned as Client Services manager for Eder Financial.



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A story of reconciliation and belonging

Ilse learns something new about family, forgiveness, and feetwashing.



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Discussion starters for small groups

■ Annual Conference: Living our witness

This year's Annual Conference addressed ministerial leadership, immigration, peace witness, and the future of the church. Which action or theme most resonates with you? How can congregations carry Conference decisions into everyday ministry?

■ Be the peace

Angelo Mante challenged participants to see peacemaking as a way of life, practiced through everyday acts of compassion, relationship, and service. Where do you see opportunities to build peace? How might your congregation walk alongside those who are isolated, marginalized, or in need of hope?

■ Being human in the age of AI

This issue explores artificial intelligence through both technological and theological lenses. As AI becomes more common, which human gifts or spiritual practices become even more important? Where can technology serve faithful living, and where should it never replace human wisdom, relationships, or community?

TURNINGPOINTS

New members

Bethlehem, Boones Mill, Va.: Annabella Flora
Blue Ridge, Va.: Candy J. Jones
Cerro Gordo, Ill.: David Biggs, Lorian Biggs, Trai Biggs
Columbia City, Ind.: Alyssa Bottles
Elizabethtown, Pa.: Olivia Nilsen, Isabelle Williams
Mechanic Grove, Quarryville, Pa.: Amber Grumbling, Kinsey Grumbling, Isaac Kreider
Mount Vernon, Waynesboro, Va.: Clara Driver, Vernon Driver, Judy Kaminski
Olivet, Thornville, Ohio: Shawn Walker
Papago Buttes, Scottsdale, Ariz.: Hallee Dempster, Oliver Dempster
Pleasant Hill, Ohio: Alexander Koon
Plumcreek, Sheloceta, Pa.: Martha Dyott, Jeanne Speer, C. Robert Stitt, Sue Stitt
Prince of Peace, South Bend, Ind.: Levi Horschler, Abigail Linstromberg, Sophia Mick, Marigold Rieman, Albert Wagoner

Wedding anniversaries

Anderson, Don and Keri, Middlebury, Ind., 55
Angle, Clyde and Beverly, Lititz, Pa., 66
Becker, Vince and Judy, Quarryville, Pa., 60

Breneman, Bob and Mary Ann, Lititz, Pa., 60
Collins, Jake and Linda, Vancouver, Wash., 55
Dodson, William and Joy Gross, Harrisburg, Pa., 50
Dotterer, Donald and Lorraine, Lancaster, Pa., 70
Drenning, Gary and Cindy, Duncansville, Pa., 50
Glick, Sam and Anna Mary, Quarryville, Pa., 60
Hangey, Gerald and Joan, Quakertown, Pa., 60
Hornbacker, Tim and Tara, New Paris, Ohio, 50
Keeney, Del and Lois, Mechanicsburg, Pa., 50
Kinzie, Jim and Betty, Chester, Va., 70
Schopf, Ed and Annette, Mountville, Pa., 67
Schrock, Paul and Sally, Indianapolis, Ind., 50
Shetler, David and Marcia, New Paris, Ohio, 50
Shively, Robin and Michelle, Decatur, Ill., 50
Timmons, Glenn and Linda, Union, Ohio, 65
Wenger, Clarence and Carolyn, Lititz, Pa., 70
Wert, Bob and Diane, Quakertown, Pa., 60
Wineland, Donald and Eileen, Columbia City, Ind., 50

Deaths

Anderson, Barbara, 94, Middlebury, Ind., March 31
Beam, Carolyn Lawson, 74, Mount Crawford, Va., May 7
Bittinger, Lyla Berry, 91, Sherwood, Ore., June 2
Bowman, Carl W., 98, Boones Mill, Va., Jan. 4
Bowman, Julia Ann, 63, Boones Mill, Va., June 4
Brown, Phyllis, 91, Greenwood, Del., June 27
Bryer, Jack, 100, Elizabethtown, Pa., July 5
Bucher, Loren K., 79, Quarryville, Pa., Feb. 15
Campbell, Jeannie, 85, Beavercreek, Ohio, March 26
Cole, Charlot, 84, Virden, Ill., April 13
Dickensheets, Evelyn, 99, Hanover, Pa., July 31
Early, Catherine, 105, Lima, Ohio, Oct. 17, 2025
Edmonds, Alice, 69, Martinsburg, W.Va., May 25
Evans, Bill, 103, Lititz, Pa., June 3
Ferrell, Ann, 79, Moneta, Va., June 3
Fluke, Connie, 79, Roaring Spring, Pa., July 17
Frank, Jenny, 69, Columbia City, Ind., May 20
Frick, Doris Hanawalt, 99, La Verne, Calif., July 2
Glisson, Anna Jane, 94, Quarryville, Pa., April 10

Graham, Betty, 94, Lancaster, Pa., July 15
Grindstaff, Hugh Clark, 71, Boones Mill, Va., May 31
Hager, George Samuel, 88, Lima, Ohio, Sept. 28, 2025
Hager, Shirley, 88, Lima, Ohio, Jan. 15
Hanawalt, Imogene Porter, 104, La Verne, Calif., May 31
Hanawalt, Mary T., 70, La Verne, Calif., May 1
Hanna, Michael, 78, Joppa, Md., June 19
Heiner, Theodore, III, 78, York, Pa., April 30
Henry, Mary Kate, 95, Hanover, Pa., June 25
Keesey, Linda, 77, Elizabethtown, Pa., July 11
Kline, Suzanne, 90, Elizabethtown, Pa., June 30
Kover, Virgil, 95, Lititz, Pa., June 27
Kreider, Frances, 94, Quarryville, Pa., Feb. 18
Lemmons, Helen, 97, Mesa, Ariz., April 23
Lewis, Edward Milton, 74, Baltimore, Md., April 30
Martinez, Pauline, 71, Harrisburg, Pa., May 28
Mathias, Dorothy, 95, Fishersville, Va., June 2
McMillen, Brian, 46, Casa Grande, Ariz., Nov. 29
Miller, Ralph, 89, York, Pa., Aug. 5, 2025
Minnich, Dale, 87, Moundridge, Kan., June 5

Novotny, Dennis, 84, Quincy, Ill., Nov. 4
Porter, Arthur, 97, Denton, Md., May 23
Rager, Janice Arlene, 88, Tucson, Ariz., May 11
Reichert, Frederick, 93, Auburn, Ill., Jan. 19
Rhoades, Marianna, 68, Lancaster, Pa., July 25
Rhodes, Helen, 97, McVeytown, Pa., July 9
Salambh, Rachel, 79, Ephrata, Pa., June 24
Shearer, R. Dean, 85, Churubusco, Ind., March 25
Showalter, James, 74, Quarryville, Pa., April 11
Sibert, Ruth, 74, Decatur, Ill., June 11
Simmons, Eva, 102, Parkville, Md., March 27
Stockslager, Betty, 83, Hanover, Pa., June 21
Sullivan, Gerald, Jr., 79, Clarksville, Tenn., Sept. 26, 2025
Swinsburg, Lee, 79, Harrisburg, Pa., June 17
Taylor, Mary Ann, 74, Norton, Kan., March 6
Thebeau, Linda, 85, Girard, Ill., Oct. 2, 2025
Urka, Joy, 90, Brethren, Mich., May 12, 2025
Weaver, Barbara, 83, Brethren, Mich., May 26, 2025
Winegard, Beverly, 71, Verona, Va., May 14
Wood, Dortha, 94, Decatur, Ill., June 16
Young, Shirley, 89, Carlinville, Ill., Feb. 2
Zerphy, Betty, 97, Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 28

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.



Phil Groat

The here and now

by Wendy McFadden

I have never been one to say, “I have too many books.” So of course I headed straight to the tables in the church basement where Rick Gardner was giving away books from his library. He’s a former dean of Bethany Theological Seminary, so this was a treat. I departed with about a dozen treasures.

Which is why I’m currently reading a book by Barbara Brown Taylor, already a favorite author. Every morning I’ve been reading two or three sermons from *Always a Guest*, a collection of sermons from her various times as a guest preacher.

What a thrill when I bumped into the Church of the Brethren on p. 148. Sure, the sermon—titled “Bathing Deep”—was on John 13, which is central for the Brethren. But we footwashing folks are a pretty obscure corner of the Christian family, so we don’t expect to be noticed. On behalf of all of us, I felt seen.

When I first met the Brethren, I saw that these people lived what they preached. In fact, they lived their faith *more* than they preached it.

I grew up in an evangelical wing of the Presbyterian Church, where the specific words you said mattered. I was acquainted with the Four Spiritual Laws, the sinner’s prayer, a Billy Graham crusade, the book *Left Behind*. I was sure that Jesus was returning in my lifetime; the signs were clear.

It didn’t take long for me to notice that the Brethren didn’t talk as much. They simply lived with integrity day by day. They didn’t say the Apostles’ Creed, which I had recited every Sunday from childhood (never noticing that it went straight from Jesus’ birth to death and resurrection, and then to judgment). Without a lot of words, the Brethren traveled lightly into the world with knapsacks and hammers and cows.

In the early days of www.brethren.org, the Church of the Brethren website, one of the questions that came to the webmaster was this: Is the Church of the Brethren pre-millennialist or post-millennialist?

Without benefit of any theological training then, but with years of observing the lived theology of my new people, I responded something like this: *The Brethren spend little time pondering the end times, but focus more on following Jesus in the here and now.*

In a different chapter of *Always a Guest*, Barbara Brown Taylor quotes one of her Religion 101 students: “I love studying other religions,” the student said, “because they have so much in them about how to live. This is different from my own religion, Christianity, which is about going to heaven when you die.”

Footwashing puts the focus on how to live. It’s about doing what Jesus told us to do. It’s about reconciliation, service, humility, humanity. It’s earthy and earthly. While head and heart are important, so are feet.

Gimbiya Kettering’s new book *Washing My Sister’s Feet* is grounded in that down-to-earth biblical story. With Ilse, the book’s main character, we learn about reconciling with those closest to us, about saltiness, about widening the circle.

The Church of the Brethren does not need to mourn the statistics of 75 years ago, but we can ask what “saltiness” looks like in the world of today.

The church does not need to look outside for consultants, but we should look outside to set more places at the table.

The church does not need to feel awkward about an old ritual, but we should embrace it as a gift that shows us how to be Brethren. We cannot know the future, which is a mystery. But the here and now is what God has given us today. 

“When I first met the Brethren, I saw that these people lived what they preached. In fact, they lived their faith *more* than they preached it.”

Coming this fall

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