

Birthplace of Nigerian church suffers attack

The town of Garkida in north-east Nigeria was attacked by Boko Haram the night of Feb. 21-22. Garkida is considered the birthplace of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) as the place where the church was started in 1923.

The attack was carried out by several trucks and dozens of motorcycles carrying armed men, who started shooting sporadically and then began burning and looting buildings. Three soldiers who worshiped with EYN were killed and three civilians sustained injuries. Missing after the attack was a staff member of EYN's Mason Technical School.

The EYN Rural Health Training School was burned, but its more than 100 students were on holiday at the time. The EYN women's fellowship of Garkida district was having its annual conference at the EYN Garkida No. 1 church that was attacked and burned. None of the women were killed.

EYN president Joel S. Billi made an assessment visit to Garkida on Feb. 24 and described the destruction as “enormous.” He lamented the destruction of three churches (EYN Garkida No. 1, a Living Faith church, and an Anglican church); the EYN Rural Health Training Center including an administrative block, a student's hostel, and classrooms; the police station and barracks; several shops; and homes of prominent people in Garkida.

State governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri visited Garkida on Feb. 23 and appealed to the federal government and development partners to provide aid.

EYN staff also reported violent attacks on other congregations and church districts in recent weeks, and the abductions of several people from EYN including children.

“We grieve the attack on Garkida,” said David Steele, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren. “We pray for our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. We pray for this violence to end.”



Brethren Faith in Action Fund grants

The Brethren Faith in Action Fund has given grants to six congregations. The fund provides grants to outreach ministry projects of Church of the Brethren congregations, with funds generated by the sale of a portion of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

Alpha and Omega Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pa., received \$5,000 for five outreach projects: a Food Bank, Spanish Vacation Bible program, Fall Festival, 40 Days of Prayer, and Video and Internet Ministry.

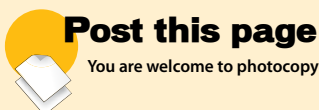
Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., received \$5,000 for a project supporting asylum-seeking families from the Latin American caravans that are seeking help in the US.

Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Church of the Brethren received \$5,000 to help replace the HVAC system in a facility used to host homeless families.

Spring Creek Church of the Brethren in Hershey, Pa., received \$5,000 to replace a heating system in its former parsonage, which is used as a place for people to stay when family members are receiving care at Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

Pleasant Valley (Va.) Church of the Brethren received \$1,250 to host a marriage retreat.

Buffalo Valley (Pa.) Church of the Brethren received \$1,000 to purchase materials for MifflinServe, a ministry of repairing homes for community members.



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Group plans to separate

Our end goal is unity,” said general secretary David Steele in an interview about the Covenant Brethren Church, a group exploring separation from the Church of the Brethren. On Feb. 1, he and Annual Conference moderator Paul Munday met with leaders of the group. Steele said members of the denominational Leadership Team have held meetings with the group “to hear their concerns, what they are working at. We are making efforts to keep the communication lines open.”

The Covenant Brethren Church leadership made it clear their intentions are no longer simply exploratory, but that separation will happen, Steele said.

The Covenant Brethren Church chose its name at a meeting in Woodstock, Va., last November. The decision to explore separation was made last July in Chambersburg, Pa., at a meeting of some 50 people from 13 districts. The group is exploring office locations in West Virginia, has named a temporary executive board and task groups, and is developing bylaws and a statement of faith. The temporary board includes Grover Duling (chair), Eric Brubaker, Larry Dentler, Scott Kinnick, James F. Myer, and Craig Alan Myers. The temporary board includes Brethren Revival Fellowship leaders and prayer summit leadership, including a district executive.

The group has said its reasons to explore separation are to provide “a haven for congregations who are making the decision to leave, but want to retain their Brethren values, and do

not want to be independent” as well as “failure of the denomination to stand strong on biblical authority” and a complaint that the compelling vision process does not address “the homosexual issue.”

Steele spoke about rumors that many congregations have left or are planning to leave in order to join the new group. As of February, Steele had confirmation of only a dozen or so congregations that have withdrawn in just a handful of districts, for a wide variety of reasons, with no indication that they intend to join the new group. In response to criticism of the compelling vision process, Steele emphasized it was never intended to address sexuality but “to move the conversation above that to matters of faith and vision and where the church ought to be.”

Steele highlighted recent successes that he would like the denomination to focus on instead of division. Those include districts that are renewing their passion for ministry together, and the progress toward a new global structure for the Church of the Brethren worldwide.

The general secretary said he wants to work toward an understanding with leaving congregations. He is deeply concerned about how separation “is tearing congregations apart. . . . Some people in those congregations want to stay in the denomination. They are torn between relationships with their family and friends and their loyalty to the Church of the Brethren.”

Personnel notes

An interim team has been named to staff the Global Mission office. **Norman and Carol Spicher Waggy** began March 2 as part-time interim directors of Global Mission. **Roxane Hill** began as interim office manager on Feb. 12. Hill was coordinator of the Nigeria Crisis Response for five years, from Dec. 1, 2014, through 2019. The Waggys, who lived in Nigeria 1983-1988, also spent time working for the church in the Dominican Republic and have been disaster volunteers in Puerto Rico. Carol has been a member of the Mission Advisory Committee since its inception 12 years ago. She is a retired ordained minister. Norm served on the former General Board 1989-1994. He

worked as a family physician for 34 years, retiring in 2015.

Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller have signed a service agreement with the Church of the Brethren regarding their continuing work in China. The couple have worked in Pingding since August 2012, when they were invited to work with the You'ai Hospital that takes its name from a hospital founded by Church of the Brethren missionaries in 1911. Miller grew up in York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren while Li grew up in Shouyang, in China's Shanxi Province. Li has established a hospice program. Miller has focused on improving management and developing inter-



Ruoxia Li and Eric Miller

national partnerships for the hospital.

Gieta Gresh has resigned as camp administrator for Camp Mardela in Denton, Md., one of two camps in Mid-Atlantic District, effective the end of August. She has served in the position since April 2005.