

## Outdoor Ministries Association holds retreat

### Camp Eder in Fairfield, Pa., hosted the Outdoor Ministries Association

annual retreat Nov. 12-16. Leadership from 14 camps and Brethren Volunteer Service explored the theme of “Discipleship.” Pieter Tramper from Brethren Woods was the coordinator.

Throughout the four days, time was set aside for worship, conversation, learning, business, and rest. The keynote address was by former Camp Eder staff member Davis Swift. Betsy Kuecker from Camp Pine Lake in Iowa led a discussion about discipleship of staff. At each mealtime, two or three camps shared a few minutes of reflection on the latest developments at their locations. Field trips included a bus ride to the summit of the camp overlooking the camp apple

orchard and a trip to the packing plant that ships the apples.

Garry Pearson from Camp Peaceful Pines in northern California led the annual business meeting. The member-

ship passed a budget, approved a slate of board members, and recognized Shannon Kahler who retired in 2023 as executive director of Camp Inspiration Hills in northern Ohio.

Pieter Tramper



## General secretary signs letter to President Biden

**In a Nov. 9 letter**, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and 30 American Christian leaders including Church of the Brethren general secretary David Steele called on President Biden and his administration to support an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved.

*The full text of the letter:*

November 9, 2023

Dear President Biden:

We, the heads of churches, denominations, and church-based organizations in the United States, remain deeply grieved at the now more than month-long violence between Hamas and Israel. We condemn the brutal attacks of Hamas on October 7th that caused the loss of life of nearly 1,400 Israelis and citizens of other nations, and we call for the immediate release of all civilians held hostage. The horrific violence of Hamas does not justify further violence against Palestinian civilians.

We condemn the collective punishment imposed upon the more than 2.2 million Palestinians living in Gaza when, on October 8, the Israeli government cut off water, gas, and electricity, and all goods and supplies to the territory, putting even more pressure on a community already suffering from a humanitarian crisis more

than a decade in the making. We further condemn Israel's large-scale air bombardment and ground invasion that continues to have an indiscriminate and tragically disproportionate impact on civilians. As of November 6, Israel's unrelenting military assault has killed more than 10 thousand Palestinians in Gaza, including more than four thousand children, and also included the destruction of hospitals, churches, mosques, cultural centers, and other civilian infrastructure throughout Gaza. The lives of all people, be they Israelis or Palestinians, must be protected.

Hamas' actions and the Government of Israel's response in Gaza in no way advance peace. Instead, they have caused loss of life and much harm, grief, and devastation, not only to the individuals affected but also to the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people in seeking an end to the decades-long occupation and the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

We join the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in the call for the international community to enforce immediate protections in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. As the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports, there are currently no safe places in Gaza, as more than 1.5 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced from their homes and



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## CDS cares for asylum seekers in Chicago area

### Children's Disaster Services

deployed a team of three volunteers to Oak Park, Ill., to aid children and families among asylum seekers sent to Chicago from the southern border of Texas. The team served Nov. 6-9, caring for 51 children. Chicago requested Oak Park to house 150 people for a week while work was being done to set up more permanent housing as the weather turned colder.

## Query goes to Annual Conference

### The Illinois and Wisconsin District

**Conference** on Nov. 4 overwhelmingly voted to send to Annual Conference a query titled "Regarding Greater Congregational Latitude on Matters of Sexuality."

The query originated in the York



Glenn Thompson

**Material Resources staff at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., prepared several shipments in late 2023. They loaded ten 40-foot containers for Lutheran World Relief, destined for Turkey, with quilts, personal care kits, baby care kits, and other supplies. They shipped a 20-foot container to Proyecto Aldea Global in Honduras, in a shipment initiated by the Church of the Brethren's Service Ministries and packed with Church World Service and Brother's Brother Foundation materials.**

Center congregation with support from the Highland Avenue congregation. It asks whether decisions related to sexuality should be made at the congregational level rather than by the denomination or

district, given the personal nature of these matters, the wide range of viewpoints, ongoing disagreements, and the inconsistent enforcement of policy from one part of the church to another.

communities, many of whom are refugees already. We also stand in solidarity with the Jerusalem church leaders, sharing their real concerns, which predate the events of the past month, about the sustainability of Christianity and all faith traditions in the Holy Land.

Strong leadership from the United States is needed at this moment. We call on you, President Biden, and your Administration to support an immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved. We have made the same requests to Congress. All efforts, including bilateral and multilateral ones, must be made for this war to be brought to a swift end.

We implore your administration not to ignore the growing catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza and to demand immediate and adequate access to and provision of humanitarian needs. Much more food, water, medicine, electricity, and fuel supplies than are currently provided must reach all the people of Gaza now.

We further support the demilitarization of the conflict rather than supplying additional military aid or arms to Israel at this time. The US already sends \$3.8 billion per year in military assistance to Israel, for which, effectively, the U.S. has not imposed consequences for its gross violations of human rights as required in U.S. laws. Additional military aid will only prolong Israel's offensive, will lead to more Palestinian civilian deaths, and will not likely be subject to any accountability. Please do everything possible to demilitarize the conflict and call for a ceasefire.

We call on you to press all parties to abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law and for the collective punishment imposed upon the civilians in Gaza to be brought to an end. Atrocities against civilians are never justified. We call for actions to be taken to secure the immediate release of all civilians being held hostage and ensure international protection for all civilians.

As you focus on Gaza, we also urge your administration to do all it can to ensure the accountability of settlers in the West Bank who are using this opportunity to attack Palestinians and illegally confiscate even more Palestinian land through violent means. Numerous Palestinians in the West Bank have been shot since October 7 with weapons issued by the Israeli government.

We urge you to recognize that the root causes of suffering must be addressed so that, when this current crisis is over, we do not witness a return to an unsustainable status quo. It is not enough to stop the current fighting.

Peace with justice is the only lasting solution that will protect the long-term security and sustainability of the State of Israel and the self-determination and independence of Palestinians. The United States must demonstrate its commitment to the protection of all human life, advocating for a just and durable resolution to this crisis in which all Israelis and Palestinians might realize a vision of a just peace, illuminating human dignity, advancing security and self-determination for all.