



*Reflecting news and views*

## **The Reflector**

a publication of the  
Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren  
District Executive: Kevin Kessler



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### **We are one in the Spirit**

By Gil Crosby, Moderator –  
Illinois-Wisconsin District

"A wise owl sat on an oak,  
The more he saw the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke the more he heard;  
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?  
(Edward Hersey Richards )



I enjoyed a wonderful opportunity last month baby sitting my 4 ½ month old Grandson. His parents were going to be busy at work and needed a reliable person to take care of their most valuable possession, their infant and only son. Needless to say I was flattered until I realized that his Grandmother wasn't available.. We had a great time as long as I kept him at the center of my attention and responded as he expected me to do. I also now know why old people don't have babies, only younger folks. It is a full time job.

I got to thinking of the parallels of when God entrusted us to take care of his only, infant Son. He needed reliable people to watch after Him. When they failed God turned to the rest of us. For everything to come out right and for us to be at peace with everyone all we had to do was center our attention on Him and do what He expected us to do. As long as we keep our focus on Him everything will work out alright. It is a full time job.

Our world pulls us in many directions; directions that do not always give us a clear, straight forward picture of how God would have us to react. The Old Brethren separated themselves from their "English" neighbors so as not to contaminate their simple life style and what they believed to be straight forward interpretation of the Bible. I believe the church then got caught up in "Phariseism" and began making rules for every facet of everyday life. Rules like lightening rods, rugs on the floor, automobiles, radios and dress style. Jesus spoke of the Pharisees as piling loads on people's backs but not lifting a finger to lighten their load. Finally an Annual Conference said that our rules and dress were being use as a source of pride and ceased to be a source of obedience.

Maybe we have gone too far in the other direction and have too few rules anymore. We still have the Book but instead of using it as a guide to life, we use it as a hammer to beat others who think differently. It really is very simple, however, to know what Jesus wants us to do. The concordance at the back of my Bible lists 310 references to Love in the New Testament alone, second only to the words God and Lord. Jesus said if we loved our neighbors as ourselves everything else would fall into place. So how are we treating our "Neighbors". Jesus told the Israelites that their neighbor was the hated Samaritans who the Jews believed were profaners of the faith.

Our youth use the challenge "What Would Jesus Do" when faced with obstacles in their lives. A simple, straight forward admonition that causes reflection and study. It all comes down to Love God and Love your neighbor.. unconditionally and the rest will take care of itself. Do we really believe that Jesus would do some of the things we do when disagreeing with others?

## DE PONDERINGS by Kevin Kessler, District Executive

Read Ezekiel 15 and John 15:1-17

Both of these texts make reference to a vine. The distinctions though are clear. In Ezekiel, it is the wood of the vine that receives attention. The annotation in The New Oxford Annotated Bible reads, "The wood of the vine is good only when it produces satisfactorily; otherwise, even as fuel, it is practically useless." Vine wood when it has been lopped off from its source of life is rather worthless.



I wonder if Jesus was thinking about this text in Ezekiel when he spoke about the vine, the familiar text we find in the 15th chapter of the Gospel of John? Jesus talks about the vine in a more optimistic, positive way. Here the value of the vine is the focus. Its value lies in its aliveness, its connectivity to the life source. Jesus illustrates the vine's value by sharing about its branches producing fruit. Vine wood is of value when it is productive.

Of course, Jesus goes on to say that he is the vine, connected to the life source, God, and that we who follow Christ are the branches. We are the fruit producers. A vinedresser cares for a vine so that it will produce the most fruit, just as God through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit cares for us that we may be big producers of fruit as well-love being the fruit that counts.

The wood of the vine Jesus speaks about will always have life unlike the wood of the vine mentioned in Ezekiel's allegory. As long as we stay connected, abiding in Christ, we'll always have life and the ability to bear fruit. ALWAYS! That's good news.

A thought occurred to me when reading the text in John. Branches are likely to sprout anywhere on the vine. The new branch may be a new follower of Jesus. The new branch may be a new church start. Old branches that have been around for a long time producing a lot of fruit may not like these new shoots. These newcomers may need some nutrition that the old timers have always received. The long time branches may try to take in more nutrients just so the new ones won't thrive. But, it isn't the job of the branches to be concerned about this. It's the job of the vinedresser.

Maybe this is why the vinedresser does a little pruning occasionally. The pruning doesn't get rid of the old so the new can take over. The old is still productive and needed. But the old may need to be trimmed back giving the new a chance to thrive. Together, the old and the new may be able to produce even more than the old one was able to itself.

At 50 years of age and a member of the church before I was a teenager, I'm one of the old branches. As a member of a congregation that is over 150 years of age, I'm part of one of the old branches. I have to be careful that I don't try to take over for the vinedresser. And, I have to surrender myself, like it or not, to the pruning the vinedresser finds necessary for my life. This pruning keeps me productive in my own way and in conjunction with the new.

This isn't an easy lesson for me. Nevertheless, abiding in Christ keeps me connected to alive wood providing all I need to continue being productive. That's really all I need to concern myself with.

## **Leadership Team and New Church Development Team Meet at Naperville Church of the Brethren:**

Keeping with their commitment to meet at different churches in the District, the Leadership Team meets on May 30<sup>th</sup> at the Naperville Church of the Brethren. The New Church Development Team also meets at the Naperville Church and will join the Leadership Team for combined fellowship and information exchange. The Naperville Church will furnish lunch for both teams.

Naperville hosts District Conference this year **November 6, 7 & 8** at their wonderful facility. The featured speaker for Sunday service will be Chris Bowman, ex-Annual Conference Moderator and Pastor of the Oakton Church of the Brethren in Virginia. Insight sessions are currently being arranged and Saturday Night entertainment by the Naperville Men's Glee Club.



Don't forget that the Youth Retreat will be held in conjunction with the District Conference. David Radcliff is the featured speaker. The Youth will perform a Service Project while at Naperville. National Youth Conference comes around in 2010 and will be a topic of conversation at the conference. Many have gone, all were moved and it is a great time for fun and commitment...

**Plan to attend District conference for District business, fellowship and strengthening of the Brethren Body of the Kingdom.**

## **PEORIA AREA PASTORS MEET FOR FELLOWSHIP**

A luncheon and fellowship for Peoria Area Pastors, ordained and licensed, convened at the Peoria Church of the Brethren, Wednesday May 20. Several Pastors were unable to attend because of work schedules or other commitments but Host Pastor Dana McNeil welcomed Greg Beach, Pastor Woodland Church, Kevin Kessler, District Exec., Bob DeBolt, Assoc. Pastor Washington Community Church (Was Pastor at Oak Grove) and Gil Crosby, Moderator.

Bob DeBolt led devotions taken from Ephesians 3 talking about "...strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being." Many minutes was spent on this discussion as ideas of the inner power of the Spirit were explored. At the end of our devotions the group prayed for each other, their congregations and the Church.

It was decided to explore the reading of a book to discuss for the next meeting scheduled at the Woodland Church of the Brethren on June 17th. Pastors are encouraged to suggest books to read before the meeting.

ALL Peoria Area Church of the Brethren Pastors and licensed ministers are encouraged to attend and share in knowledge and fellowship.

## **PINECREST COMMUNITY SELECTED AS BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

*By Chris Johnson, Reporter for the Ogle County News*

May 7, 2009

Support and dedication to the health and well-being of residents helped make the Pinecrest Community the 2009 Business of the Year. Carol Davis, Pinecrest's CEO, learned that her facility was selected as the Business of the Year during the annual Oregon Area Chamber of Commerce dinner on April 30.

"This is so cool." Davis said after receiving the award from Father Richard Kramer. "I am so glad to be a part of this team. I came to Pinecrest five years ago."

Davis had other Pinecrest representatives come up to the podium to be recognized with her. Mary Jo Griffin, Pinecrest's CFO, Jerry Griffin, a board member, and Brent Good, from plant operations, were introduced to the audience.

Kramer read a letter about Pinecrest during the announcement of Pinecrest.

"This facility has been a vital part of the western Ogle County community since 1893, starting with the Brethren Home, then developing into Pinecrest Nursing Home in 1961," read Kramer. "In the 1980s and 1990s, Pinecrest Village Apartments and Pinecrest Terrace were developed."

He said during the past two years, the development of Pinecrest Grove began.

"At the center of the Grove is the new Pinecrest Community Center with its 154 seat theater for live productions that can be a joy for the entire community," read Kramer. The Pinecrest Community has supported education as part of its mission, read Kramer. Pinecrest has been a part of the education of medical students for the University of Illinois College of Medicine and the nursing training program of Highland Community College.

"Pinecrest employees have been long appreciated for their involvement with the community, both in going the extra mile to help their residents, and in serving in many other community activities," read Kramer.

The Loaves and Fish Food Pantry is also supported by the Pinecrest Community.

"Because of this facility's ongoing dedication to the health and well-being of people in Oregon and our area, the Oregon Chamber of Commerce is proud to present the Pinecrest Community with the award of Business of the Year," said Kramer.

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### **FROM THE DISTRICT OFFICE, ILL./WISC. DISTRICT**

The District Office would like to remind all Church Treasurers that there is a new form to use when remitting checks to the District Financial Secretary. Use of this form is very important because it contains a new mailing address. Please destroy all the old Remittance Forms you have and replace with the one included in this newsletter. By using the address for Christine Hoecker the District Financial Secretary, your checks can be received in a timely manner to be deposited and reflected in the next financial statement.

Please make copies of the Remittance Form attached with this newsletter for future use.

If you have any questions, contact Christine Hoecker or Emily Cleer, Administrative Assistant.





\*There are also changes for the district directory.

Vernon Dean has a new address. It is: 315 N Spring St., Franklin Grove IL 61031  
Oak Grove COB. The directory change is on page 18: 801 Bricktown Rd, Lowpoint  
61545-7564



## **CHAMPAIGN CHURCH PRAYS FOR LOCAL POLICE OFFICERS**

The Champaign Church of the Brethren, Champaign, IL, has finished a reassessment of ministry. The first priority of the congregation turned out to be working with the local police department. Late last summer the congregations started praying for the officers of the police department every Sunday.

As officers drove by the church or the homes of members, they were flagged down and asked their names and were told we were praying for them every Sunday. The pastor met with the Chief of Police who did not know about the prayers. Each contact has been very positive. The officers and the Chief were stunned that someone would pray for them, then they were thankful, then they each and all asked us to continue.

Champaign Church of the Brethren regards the prayer as the first step in their word with the police department. The next step is to get the police to interact with the children in the neighborhood in a non-threatening manner. And, the ultimate goal is to get the police department more responsive to the needs in the neighborhood. The church is trying to position itself to be the center, or hub, of the neighborhood activities, in essence to be the agent of change.

Cynthia Taylor pastors the Champaign Church of the Brethren.

## **AN EVANGELISM / CHURCH RENEWAL PROJECT IS UNDERWAY**

Would you like to help? Terry Link, a member of First Church of the Brethren Springfield and one of our district's licensed ministers, is working on a course for the training in ministry (TRIM) program and is looking to compile a listing of "Ideas that Work". Especially those that widen the welcome for others to join in, that have a component of peace- simplicity- and togetherness and that you have utilized either as a one-time event or an on-going activity with a focus of Evangelism and or Church Renewal. We know someone will say "everything we do is about evangelism and renewal!" Great- send in those ideas with a short explanation of the components so others may reproduce them. Depending on the input received we may even categorize and post the listing on a website as a shared resource for anyone to use. No matter when you last did the activity, please send your "Ideas that Work" to [terry.link@yahoo.com](mailto:terry.link@yahoo.com) or PO Box 426 Rochester, IL 62563. The requested timeframe to send the ideas is by June 30th.

Thank You!

## GREAT HARVEST CHURCH PLANTING



### June 2009 New Church Development Prayer Emphasis

*Pray for the new projects, fellowships and congregations throughout the denomination.*

#### Pray For Southeast Wisconsin

Three families have expressed interest in starting a group meeting in the Southeast portion of Wisconsin. One family is from Milwaukee, one is from Kenosha and one from Racine. A meeting of the three families has been scheduled for July 25. Please keep these families in your prayers as they meet and seek the Lord's leading.



#### Rockford Mission Point



Please keep the Sarpiya Family and the Rockford Mission Point in your prayers. Samuel specifically requests prayers for a shield of protect as the family is facing daily intensifying spiritual battles. Samuel and Gretchen are seeking individuals in the district that would commit to pray for them one day per month. Their hope is to raise prayer support for every day of the month. You can email Samuel at [samuel.sarpiya@gmail.com](mailto:samuel.sarpiya@gmail.com)

Please pray for the Lord to raise up support partners for the Sarpiya's. Pray for each family member's physical health. Since arriving at the end of January they have experienced several illnesses. Ella Joy (middle child) is facing surgery to remove her tonsils in the near future.

Pray that the doors that the Lord has open in Rockford and the people that have been reached, will develop into a life discussion group and launch team in God's timing.

Samuel identifies Ephesians Chapter 6 as the scripture that has been impacting their ministry and has guided them lately.



#### Chicago West Side Mission Point

Please continue to keep the Ware's and Richard Marez

in your prayers. The lease on the current space they using to house their ministry is expiring. Please pray for God's direction for the right space to become available. Thank you for your prayers for Betty's mother, she is doing much better and has returned home to CA. Continue to hold them in prayer for support partners to bless this ministry. Pray that the group that has been gathered continues to grow in faith and in numbers and that the ministry grows in influence in the West Side community.



#### Amankwaa Family

Please keep the Amankwaa family in your prayers. Benjamin needs a co-sponsor in order to enter the US. Pray that the person the Holy Spirit is speaking to about this matter will respond in obedience to that call. Thank you for your prayers for Dawn. She is recovering from her recent surgery and the complications that resulted, growing stronger each day. Pray that Benjamin is here before the end of June and the family is finally reunited. Pray a hedge of protection around them and for health and prosperity.

## District calendar

2009

Jun. 21	Father's Day
Jun. 24	Council of District Executives Summer meeting, San Diego, CA
Jun. 26-30	Annual Conference, San Diego, CA
Jul. 4	Independence Day
Jul. 11	IL/WI District Leadership Team meeting, Polo
Aug. 8 10am	Program and Arrangements Committee meeting, Naperville,
Aug. 8	Gifts Discernment and Call Committee meeting, Naperville, 1pm
Aug. 15	IL/WI District Leadership Team meeting, Cerro Gordo
Sep. 7	Labor Day
Sep. 26	IL/WI District Leadership Team meeting, Douglas Park
Oct. 3	District Deacons meeting, Peoria, 10am
Oct. 10	Program and Arrangements Committee meeting, Naperville, 10am
Oct. 10	Gifts Discernment and Call Committee meeting, Naperville, 1 pm
Oct. 12	Columbus Day
Oct. 25-27	Midwest DE's gathering, Camp Mack, Milford, IN
Oct. 31	IL/WI District Leadership Team meeting, Stanley
Nov. 1	Daylight Saving Time Ends
Nov. 6-9	District Conference, Naperville
Nov. 11	Veteran's Day
Dec. 5	Joint IL/WI District Leadership & New Church Development Team meeting, Peoria
Dec. 24	Christmas Eve
Dec. 25	Christmas Day
Dec. 31	New Year's Eve

