

Reflecting news and views

The Reflector

a publication of the Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren

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District Executive: Kevin Kessler

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. It is like the precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. Psalm 133 (NIV).

2016 District Conference logo created by Debbie Noffsinger



Greetings:

Here we are in the heart of winter and some are saying the groundhog indicates spring will soon be upon us. There is still time for many snowflakes and cold weather. As we feel the cold and damp of the season let us also feel the warmth of God's love for us. Illinois and Wisconsin hold both times of cold and

sometimes warmth during this month. God holds only the warmth of his love for us if we turn to him.

After several years of discussion and discernment of God's will concerning present day issues in society and the church, it is time to turn our focus back to the call of Jesus to serve others in unity. This world will always present issues that we are called to discuss and discern in God's will. The call of the Master is to serve Him in unity as the world suffers. We have the call to be like Christ in service and love for each other. There is way too much suffering in this world for us to expend our energies and talents in matters of social concern that will never be solved by humanity.

Let us love one another in spite of our differences and go forward in service to the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan will use the failings of our human nature to drive a wedge between us while Jesus calls us into a peaceful and servant attitude. Paul reminds us in

Philippians 3: 12-16, as he speaks to the church, of goals set by Christ yet to be obtained; that we all be of the same mind. We accomplish much more if we all pull in the same direction.

I look forward to visiting some of you this year. If you would like me to come and share the Word please feel free to contact me and I will try to schedule the time. Contact me at ellis.boughton@live.com or call at 815-238-1137. I realize that time is always tight so please understand if it is not possible. I am looking forward to serving the District this year and our Lord always.

In Christ always,
Pastor Ellis

Opportunity to Serve as Newsletter Publisher

The District of Illinois/Wisconsin is seeking all who are interested in serving as our newsletter publisher. The task requires gathering articles from various leaders and teams in the district for inclusion in the newsletter. Gathering information from denominational sources to include is needed as well. This work could be done by one person or a small team of 2-3 people. This is a volunteer position but the cost of all pertinent office supplies and needs (stamps, paper, etc) would be reimbursed by the district. If you are interested in participating in the work of the district in this manner, please contact District Executive Kevin Kessler.

DE Ponderings

This column will be a bit longer than usual as I have several things to share.

Newsletter and Gil Crosby

We are glad to publish a newsletter again after a brief period of not doing so. We counted on the skill and passion of Gil Crosby as publisher, and, since his untimely death this past August, the work he so capably did was not continued. This is no reflection on Gil, at all, except to say that he set the bar high and we are committing now to stay at that level.

I want to take this opportunity to express deep gratitude for the work Gil Crosby did as newsletter publisher. We never had to alert Gil that it was time to produce a newsletter. The opposite was the case. He contacted us to say it was time to submit an article or share pertinent information. Such dedication to the effort was a gift to the district and has been sorely missed.

Emerging Ministries

The advent of the district's Church Revitalization and Development Team (CRDT) was announced at the 2012 District Conference at the Lake Williamson Retreat Center in Carlinville, IL. The CRDT's early work focused primarily on church revitalization. Those efforts led the way to several congregations engaging in components of the Vital Ministry Journey, a revitalization initiative supported by our denomination's Congregational Life Ministries office. The CRDT is available to assist in exploring other options for revitalization, as well. In addition, the team has developed a resource list that can be accessed on the district's website (<http://iwdcob.org/crdt.shtml>).

The CRDT is also responsible for new church development, work that has its own set of challenges. The team called and talked with church planters in other districts to hear about their experiences in starting new ministries. I talked with other District Executives about church development in their districts. I also talked with the Illinois/Wisconsin Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) about their church planting efforts. Some valuable information was gleaned from these conversations.

However, questions remained. If we engage in new church/ministry development, where do we find planters, those willing to originate new ministries? Where do we start new ministries and/or congregations? How do we encourage interest in new church/ministry development?

As these questions were being considered, two inquiries about starting new ministries emerged from our district. The CRDT, then, changed the questions being asked. Instead of who will plant and where, the question became, how do we support the ministries being proposed?

The CRDT considered heavily what we learned from the challenges of recent church planting efforts in our district. Using this information, the CRDT worked on developing new policy as well as determining strategy for funding and fundraising. The result was a decision to set aside \$200,000 of district reserves (which was subsequently approved by the District Leadership Team) to be used for specifically supporting emerging ministries. No additional reserves will be allocated for this purpose for a period of five years. In addition, priority will be given to fundraising efforts as a means of securing new money for emerging ministry commitments.

Newly emerging ministries supported by district funding are subject to policy guidelines. The guidelines indicate the amount of assistance a ministry can receive based on a percentage of their annual budget. Funding will be reduced on a sliding scale over a 4 year period. Ministries are required to report to the District Leadership Team on a monthly basis as long as they are receiving assistance. A process for auditing the progress of emerging ministries will be developed and implemented as well.

The CRDT and Leadership Team, and emerging ministries, understand that we are, in some ways, entering into the church development landscape as pioneers. We will likely make mistakes along the way. We will continue to consult with other church planters, districts, and ecumenical middle judicatories to discern and implement best practices. We will revise and update policy as needed. We will strive to minimize risk and frequently communicate news about emerging ministry developments. Following is the beginning of such news, a brief summary of the two emerging ministries.

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DE Ponderings

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Parables Ministry

Leader: Jeanne Davies

Location: Lombard, IL (York Center Church of the Brethren)

The Parables Ministry provides a worship experience that welcomes all people but is designed to be a place of empowerment and belonging for those with special needs. There is great freedom for the participants in the service to speak out of turn, to sing, to dance, to play instruments, to read, to lead in liturgy—to join in the celebration of worship however individuals are able. The only boundary is to make sure that everyone in the room is safe. High functioning young adults with special needs will have the opportunity to take leadership roles—serving as ushers and scripture readers, even giving the sermon or benediction.

The Gathering Chicago

Leader: LaDonna Nkosi

Location: Hyde Park, Chicago, IL

The Gathering Chicago is designed to host retreats, prayer trainings and meetings, Peace in the City conferences and meetings and serves as a gathering place of spiritual refreshment, prayer and intercession and community for those living, working and serving for justice, peace, healing, and restoration in and for the city.

The vision is to have a house of prayer, retreat, and gathering in the city where people from the city and beyond can come for retreat, prayer, discernment and community and can be sent out together in service.

We're All In This Together

I am proud, in a humble, Brethren way, of the IL/WI District. We've experienced conflict within our district over the past year or two that could have but did not divide us. We stayed the course to remain community through structured and informal conversations and dialogue. Granted, our differences are not resolved, and we have more conversation and work ahead of us. But our commitment to that which is beyond and higher than the issues upon

which we disagree continues to be our guiding beacon. So I'm proud, or in a more Brethren frame of speaking, grateful for the efforts put forth by this district to be community.

I'm also keenly aware that to be community requires continued, substantial work. I see this work persisting through the efforts of our standing and ministry teams. Those who serve on these teams consistently sacrifice their time and energy to ensure good progress. Congregations and individuals give dependably in many ways—financially, prayerfully, sharing gifts and talents and skills. Ministers and leaders tirelessly serve their constituencies, spending hours in study, driving countless miles, and praying fervently. How good it is for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor that all of these efforts endure.

A necessary component for all that we do in community is money. I am grateful that our district is privileged with this valuable resource in the form of contributions from congregations and individuals as well as reserves that have accumulated over the years. I recently read that, ironically, "the more we are given, the more our sense of entitlement seems to grow. However, the more we are given, the more that is expected of us, not the more we are entitled to receive. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility" (40 Things to Give Up for Lent, Phil Ressler, 2015). So, with such a great storehouse of riches in this district, we are not entitled to receive more, but rather we are called to wisely use and care for that which we are privileged to have. We have the opportunity to use our funds to reach new people with the good news of Jesus the Christ. We, in turn, have the opportunity to use reserves in a manner that will give us a good base to continue the supportive ministries now offered. Our responsibility is not to choose between using funds to reach beyond where we are or building the base which we have. The responsibility is rather to choose to do both. At this moment in our life together, I believe we are choosing both, a manifestation of the responsibilities we are faithfully called to live out as a result of our great privilege.

I hope I've revealed a few good reasons for why I am proud of this district. We have a lot of different things going on and we are going in a variety of directions and we have a diversity of understandings. But what I'm noticing right now is that we have a keen awareness that we're all in this together. Together, we are most effective...and most responsible.

Oakley Brick Church of the Brethren



Oakley Brick Church of the Brethren damage.

On Dec. 23, 2015, the Oakley Brick Church of the Brethren, near Cerro Gordo, IL, was heavily damaged by strong winds. The building has been weakened to the point that its future is uncertain but the congregation remains strong. They continue worshiping together in the Brintlinger and Earl Funeral Home in Cerro Gordo with an average of 40 in attendance. The spirit of the congregation is high as they patiently wait to learn what next steps will be regarding the status of the damaged building.

Prayers for Mary Jo Flory Steury

**Associate General Secretary and
Director of the Office of Ministry**

Mary Jo Flory Steury, Associate General Secretary and Office of Ministry Director, was admitted to the hospital and underwent surgery as the result of bleeding on the brain. Mary Jo and her husband Mark were returning home, traveling through Pennsylvania, when she became ill. She was taken to a hospital in Altoona, PA, where she remained following surgery. She will be transferred to a hospital in Hershey, PA, which is much closer to where their children live. Mary Jo serves our denomination and the wider church faithfully. Prayers and thoughts in these moments of healing and rest are deeply appreciated.

District congregations as well as surrounding communities have faithfully reached out to the Oakley Brick congregation. Cards, letters, and phone calls are all appreciated. The district office will strive to provide updates regarding the progression of activity at Oakley Brick.

Mission and Mortar Congregational Support Program

The purpose of the Illinois/Wisconsin District is supporting the growth and development of the member churches. One means of support is financial assistance. Congregations in good standing are eligible to apply for assistance through the Mission and Mortar program. A congregation in good standing is one that has in the past two years sent delegates to district conference and has supported the district with undesignated gifts of at least \$100 per year.

Assistance is provided up to a maximum of \$7,500 of which \$2,500 is a grant and the remainder is a loan. All requests for assistance shall be submitted to the district office.

A letter of request shall include the following:

1. The specific purpose for which the funds will be used.
2. The number of years funding will be needed, not to exceed three years.
3. The amount of money needed. If for multiple years, designate the needed amount each year. A reduction in amount is required for subsequent years. Requests for the funds are required annually.
4. The schedule of repayment of amounts exceeding \$2500.
5. A current Income and Expense Statement and Balance Sheet must be sent with the application. (Applications available from the district office.)

A congregation may not apply for a grant more often than every three years except for special circumstances.

The District Leadership Team has the authority to accept or reject any request.

Preachers announced for Annual Conference 2016



The preachers for Annual Conference 2016: (top from left) Andy Murray, Kurt Borgmann, Dennis Webb, (bottom from left) Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Eric Brubaker.

Church of the Brethren Newsline

January 8, 2016

The line-up of preachers for the 2016 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren has been announced. The Annual Conference takes place at the Koury Convention Center and Sheraton Hotel in Greensboro, N.C., on June 29-July 3. Registration

opens online on Feb. 17 for both delegates and nondelegates. The Conference theme is "Carry the Light" (John 1:1-5).

Preaching the opening sermon will be Annual Conference moderator **Andy Murray**. He will speak on Wednesday evening, June 29. Murray is retired from the faculty of Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., where he was founding director of the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies and also served as a college professor, administrator, and chaplain. He is a member of Stone Church of the Brethren in Huntingdon, and is well known in Brethren circles as a popular singer and songwriter.

Kurt Borgmann, pastor of Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind., will preach for the Thursday evening service on June 30.

Dennis Webb, pastor of Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, and a member of the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board, will bring the message on Friday evening, July 1.

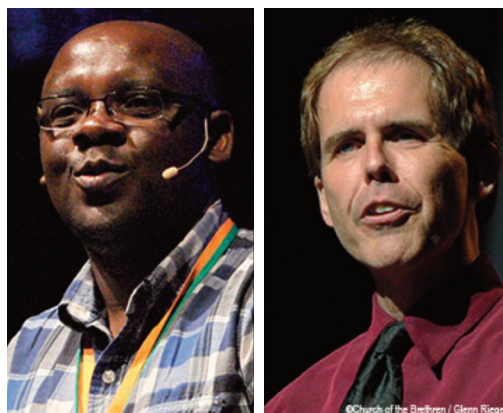
Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind., will preach on Saturday evening, July 2.

Preaching for the Sunday morning service and the closing event of the Conference is **J. Eric Brubaker**, who is an ordained minister serving at Middle Creek Church of the Brethren in Lititz, Pa.

For more information about the 2016 Annual Conference go to www.brethren.org/ac.

Sarpiya and Wiltschek top Annual Conference ballot for 2016

On the ballot for the position of moderator-elect are **Samuel Kefas Sarpiya** of Rockford, Ill., an ordained minister, pastor, and church planter in Illinois and Wisconsin District who has been active in local peacemaking efforts; and **Walt Wiltschek** of Broadway, Va., an ordained minister, writer, and editor, who has served in campus ministry at Manchester University and is a past editor of "Messenger" magazine.





Church of the Brethren

IL/WI District Church of the Brethren

269 E. Chestnut Street • Canton IL 61520

Phone and fax: 309-649-6008

District Executive: Kevin Kessler, kevink.iwdcob@sbcglobal.net

Administrative Assistant: Beth Kelly, bethc.iwdcob@att.net

IL/WI District Leadership Team

January 14, 2016

To Congregations of the IL/WI District

Dear Friends:

Illinois' failure to pass a budget has slowed payments to our two retirement communities, Pinecrest Community in Mount Morris and Pleasant Hill Village in Girard, leaving them in great need—a need so great it has reached crisis proportions.

Both communities have had to resort to extended bank loans and have nearly exhausted their lines of credit. A solution to the State's budget impasse does not appear in sight. Some sources predict it may last the entire fiscal year.

Though our congregations can hardly make up the shortfall, your District Leadership Team wanted you to be aware of the crisis. If you have the means to help out, we urge you to respond to this very pressing need. Some congregations already have responded. York Center held a silent auction a few weeks ago that raised \$1,008 for Pleasant Hill. Special offerings or sponsorship of a resident in need are other suggestions.

If your congregation has an idea for raising additional funds, we invite you to share it with District Executive Kevin Kessler or a Leadership Team member. Your suggestion may spark other ideas. We will compile a list of suggestions and share in a future letter.

Send ideas and donations to the IL/WI District Office (checks made out to "IL/WI District" with a notation that they are for one or both of the retirement communities). Send to: IL/WI District Church of the Brethren, 269 E Chestnut St, Canton, IL 61520-2730.

Please pray about this and give as the Lord leads your heart.

Yours in Christ,

The Leadership Team

Vicky Matheny, Chair

Ellis Boughton Allegra Hess

Tim Laird Alan Mackey

Mandy Rahn Purvi Satvedi

Prudy Widlak Gary Yoder

Kevin Kessler, DE

Continuing the work of Jesus peacefully, simply, together.

CONTINUING EDUCATION WORKSHOP FOR MINISTERS

PREACHING THE REIGN OF GOD

Presenter: Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm



Born and reared in Detroit, Michigan, Professor Ottoni-Wilhelm was ordained in the Church of the Brethren in 1987. After serving for three years as a hospital chaplain and nine as a pastor, she completed her doctoral work in Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2004 (focusing on Homiletics and Biblical Studies). She is the Brightbill Prof. of Preaching and Worship at Bethany and teaches doctoral courses for the Association of Chicago Theological Seminaries D. Min. Program in Preaching. She is an active member of the North American Academy of Homiletics and serves on the governing board of Societas Homiletica (the international association of homileticians).

The event is being held at the Bishop Lane Retreat Center, 7708 E. McGregor Rd., Rockford, IL, Monday, April 4 through Tuesday, April 5, 2016. Dinner will begin at 5:00pm Monday evening with the workshop beginning at 7:00pm. The workshop will resume at 9:00am Tuesday morning and end by 4:00pm.

Participants will receive .8 continuing education units. The cost of the event is \$75 which includes lodging for one night at the retreat center, dinner Monday evening, breakfast and lunch on Tuesday, and the fee for continuing education units. The Ministerial Leadership Development Team sponsors this event.

If you are interested in attending this workshop, please fill out the information below and return with payment made out to **IL/WI District** no later than **Friday, March 18, 2016.**

✂

Yes, I will be attending the workshop on Mon., Apr. 4 from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. and Tue., Apr. 5st from 9:00 – 4:00 at The Bishop Lane Retreat Center, Rockford, IL. Enclosed is the fee of:

_____ \$75 for workshop, dinner, breakfast, lunch, lodging, and .8 CEUs

*Scholarships are available to help defer the cost of the workshop.

_____ Yes, I would like to apply for a scholarship.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please return by **Friday, March 18th**, to:

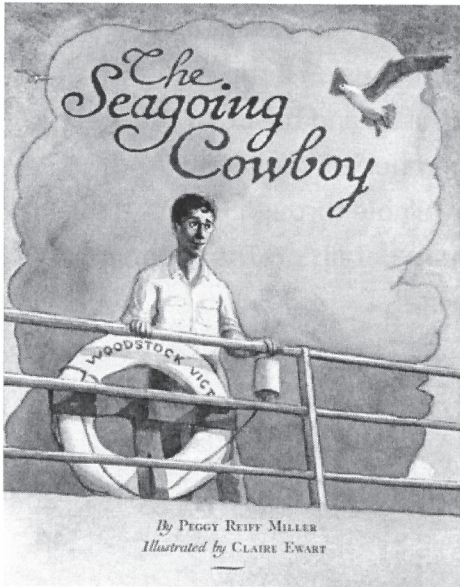
Illinois/Wisconsin District Office

269 E. Chestnut St.

Canton, IL 61520

If you have any questions, please contact Beth at (309)649-6008 or bethc.iwdcob@att.net.

New Picture Book Highlights Seagoing Cowboys Who Delivered Livestock—and Hope—Overseas



Beginning in 1945, while Europe struggled with the desolation left by years of war, over 7,000 men and boys traveled by ship on missions of mercy. They were seagoing cowboys—farmhands and folks from all walks of life: teachers, students, bankers, preachers, carpenters—who were recruited to care for the thousands of horses and heifers sent for reparations. Author Peggy Reiff Miller, the granddaughter of one such cowboy, tells their story for young readers in *The Seagoing Cowboy*, illustrated by Claire Ewart and published by Brethren Press (\$18.99 hardcover, available March 31, 2016, www.brethrenpress.com).

The Seagoing Cowboy follows a young man and his friend as they board a ship bound for Poland. One cares for horses, the other for heifers on the weeks-long journey. What they see when they arrive is sobering: The war had left the country in ruins, and many people had nothing left. The horses and heifers would go a long way in helping them rebuild their lives. Archival photographs, a map, and an author's note supplement the story.

After her grandfather died, Ms. Miller's father gave her a stack of photos. That's how she learned that her grandfather had participated in this program. "Like my grandfather, many seagoing cowboys never talked about their experience with their grandchildren," she says. "With this book, I wanted to give families a tool to share the story with the younger generation—a story of how people helped to repair a broken world after a major war."

The seagoing cowboys program was made possible by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, an international relief agency supported by 44 nations. The Church of the Brethren, through the vision of Dan West's Heifer Project, played an important role in helping to recruit volunteers and in sending livestock. Ultimately over 200,000 head of livestock were sent to Europe and other countries devastated by war. The program eventually evolved into today's Heifer International.

Early-bird discounts are available through March 1, for those wanting to purchase quantities of *The Seagoing Cowboy*. Contact Brethren Press at 800-441-3712, for further details or visit the Brethren Press website: www.brethrenpress.com.

2016 Calendar

March

- 2.....Chicago Visioning Team meeting, Conference call
- 4.....World Day of Prayer
- 5.....Gifts Discernment and Call Committee meeting, Pinecrest, Mt. Morris
- 9.....Property and Asset Management Team meeting
- 12-14Mission and Ministry Board meeting, General Office, Elgin
- 13.....Daylight Saving Time begins
- 20.....One Great Hour of Sharing Offering Emphasis
- 24.....Maundy Thursday
- 25.....Good Friday
- 27.....Easter

April

- 1-3Midwest District Executives meet, place TBA
- 4-5Continuing Education event for ministers, Rockford, IL
- 9.....District Leadership Team meeting, place TBA
- 16.....Program and Arrangements Committee meeting, Rockford, IL
- 17.....Chicago Visioning Team meeting, Chicago, IL

May

- 8.....Mother's Day
- 15.....Pentecost Sunday
- 19-21Church Planting Conference, Richmond, IN