

Reflecting news and views

The Reflector

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

April 2016 / Volume 13 / Issue 2

District Executive: Kevin Kessler

Easter; a time of bunnies, eggs, little children, and candy. Family gatherings, pictures, great food and laughter. We come together as one body. Church attendance swells as families gather to worship and praise God for being in their lives. Children sing special songs and stories of the risen Christ are portrayed. It is a very special season. What about the afternoons following Easter service and after the last meal is served? Each goes back to their own home and Easter begins to fade. What happens to that commonality of the Easter gathering? What happens to the unity felt of the earthly family and the church family that has been shared?

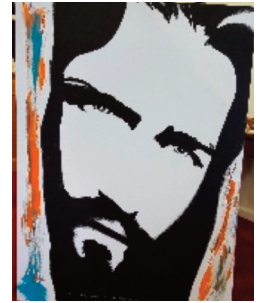
Why not continue to be drawn toward the unity of Easter? After all, didn't Christ call us to learn, teach, and live as one in him? Do we forget and do we fall back into the daily lives as self. Do the mundane things of our daily lives create such a pattern that we forget to set God as first in our lives? Do we stop coming together as the church for a period of time? Do we cease to draw our daily strength from the one who is always willing to shoulder our burdens? The unity of the church can afford each of us the strength to overcome the burdens we face in our daily lives.

Webster's defines unity as: being united; oneness, or harmony; agreement; finally, continuity of purpose or action. In the church, I believe that unity is the common purpose of learning, teaching, preaching and living Christ. Christ told us to go and tell the world that he is Lord. If we continue to do that together we are the true church.

The world is driven by Satan so that mankind will be drawn into a sense of self-ness. We must remember at all times that we are not of this world while we travel the life-journey through this world. We are God's children and as such should feel the strength of God to choose a life that emulates our Savior Jesus Christ. Divisive issues within the church will always find their rise to attention. They should not divide us but serve to draw us closer to our walk with Jesus. Seek and you shall find, knock and it will be opened to you. Our life experiences should make us seek God's will and not man's.

We should always live our lives to learn more about God's inerrant Word and continue to teach others as we grow.

Discussion and discernment should follow a prayerful attitude. Pastors should preach the truth of the Gospel so that the listeners may begin and continue to discern God's will for them in their personal walk. We all should live Christ in our dealings with others. Christ should always be first. Speak to God about man before speaking to man about God.



We have come to the time of the year when Easter and its newness of the risen Christ is still fresh on our minds and the seasonal changes are showing their faces. As we breathe the fresh spring air we should also breathe the freshness Jesus Christ has placed upon our hearts. We see the world in a state of turmoil and some would say that the day of Christ's return is imminent. While we do not know the hour of His coming we need to be prepared. I pray that the Lord sees our Church as united with Christ and learning continually, teaching always, preaching to those in need, and living as Christ to be that light of Jesus to the world.

Jesus Christ is the risen Lord and through that knowledge we can overcome many of the issues the world and the church face today. We probably will not agree on politics, polity, policy or practice but we can all muster the unity of living for Jesus Christ. Are these other issues of the world more important than our love for Jesus? We can become even stronger in our faith by leaning on Jesus more than ourselves. After all He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. Unity in Jesus will make for a stronger church.

May we hold the leaders of the church, our country and the world always in prayer. We will become even stronger through prayer and drawing together in Jesus Christ. May his blessing rain down on each of you. Have a great, God-filled spring.

In Christ always,
Pastor Ellis

You're invited!

Parables Community
Kick-off Celebration

April 10th | 4:00 | Lombard



Parables Community Begins

The new Parables Community in Lombard, Illinois, will begin with a kick-off event on Sunday, April 10, at 4 p.m. The Parables Community will be a new congregation with children and adults who have special needs and their families. We will open up the social norms for worship so that everyone is free to sing out, speak up, move, dance, stim, and flap during the service. It will be a “no shushing” zone where all are free to come as they are and celebrate together.

The Parables Community will not only be a place of belonging but a place of empowerment for children and adults with special needs. People with special needs also have special gifts. Everyone's gifts are welcomed as we celebrate. All can serve in some way – as scripture readers, singers, worship leaders, greeters, ushers, and music-makers. Every part of the Body of Christ is honored and necessary to the life of the whole.

We're grateful to the York Center congregation for providing the Parables Community with worship, fellowship, and office space. We're also thankful for the support of the Ministry Revitalization and Development Team of the Illinois and Wisconsin District.

There are many ways that you can help support our new community of faith:

- Pray for us
- Visit our website at www.parablescommunity.org to learn more
- Spread the word to others about our new and unique congregation
- “Like” Parables Community on Facebook
- Donate – either by mailing a check or donating online through the website (We still need to raise \$8,000 in order to meet our 2016 budget.)
- Join us on Sunday, April 10 at 4 p.m. for our kick-off celebration

For more information you can reach Parables' pastor Jeanne Davies at 630-991-0473 or parablescommunity@gmail.com.

Dawn Blackman: Recipient of Honors



Dawn Blackman, a member of the Champaign Church of the Brethren, was honored in two special ways recently.

First, she honored as a 2015 Purpose Prize Fellow. The award was given by Encore.org, a

national nonprofit that is building a movement to tap the experience of people 60 years or older who are using their “encore years” to undertake powerful social-impact projects. Thanks to Dawn's work with the Randolph Street Community Garden nearly 2,000 people who previously had little access to fresh fruits and vegetables receive produce from the garden. More of Dawn's inspiring story can be found at encore.org/purpose-prize/dawn-m-blackman-sr.

In addition, Dawn was recognized in a Wall Street Journal article for her efforts with the Randolph Street Community Garden. The school district that owns the garden decided not to plow it up in return for Dawn becoming the steward of it. The garden provides fresh vegetables for local seniors and a food pantry run by the Champaign congregation. Dawn says, “The garden is the heart and soul of our neighborhood.” Why does Dawn serve as the steward? In her words, “Everyone deserves healthy food to eat, no matter how much money they make. So, I take care of a city garden where anyone can grow vegetables.” The full story can be accessed at www.wsj.com/articles/second-acts-a-garden-grows-in-champaign-1458525868.

Ecumenical Prayer Service

Ecumenism Metro Chicago (EMC) is sponsoring the 16th Annual Ecumenical Prayer Service for Christian Unity on Sunday, May 22, 2016, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 393 N. Main Street, Glen Ellyn, IL. Preaching at this event is the Rev. Dr. Larry L. Greenfield who is the executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago, the theologian-in-residence for the Community Renewal Society, and the new executive director of the Parliament of the World's Religions. The service begins at 5:00pm and is open to all who wish to attend.

DE Ponderings

The state of affairs in many sectors of life right now is somewhat bleak. Transition, both expected and unexpected, in our denomination leaves us pondering about the direction that needs to be taken. The political climate in our country is anything but polite nowadays. Polarization on a variety of issues seems to be the norm rather than the exception. Fear and terror lurk around every corner of the world. Climate change opens the door to concern for the planet and all life on it.

The aforementioned is enough to either discourage us deeply or move us to prayer seeking the power of God to transform what seems imminently hopeless. My hope is that the latter is the place toward which we gravitate. But do we believe that prayer will make a difference? And, if so, do we have any part to play in the difference-making other than uttering the prayer?

Eberhard Arnold, founder of the Bruderhof, the international movement of Christian communities, endured horrific difficulties in Nazi Germany between World War I and World War II. Prayer was quite important for Arnold as he navigated tumultuous states of affairs. He believed that prayer was seeking for the impossible to happen, for change that only God could bring into being.

Yet, Arnold asks in one of his writings these questions concerning prayer: "Do we have the faith that through our prayer the status quo can be shattered? Can we believe that at our call Christ will come among us to judge and save? When we ask for the Holy Spirit, are we ready for God to strike us like a burst of flaming lightning, so that at last we experience Pentecost? Do we really believe that God's kingdom is imminent? Are we capable of believing that through our pleading this kingdom will break in? Are we able to believe that as a result of our prayer the entire history of the world will be turned topsy-turvy?"

Arnold believed that with faith through prayer nothing was impossible. But, such prayer is also dangerous because it not only lifts us from the place of difficulty but it hurls us down from our place. We are rescued but also not given a place of superiority over the oppressor or persecutor. Prayer is not us making the change, but God acting on our behalf for the good of all—us and them.

However, according to Arnold, prayer is not passive. It is not enough simply to utter prayer and expect God to act without our involvement. He quotes James: Faith without works is dead. He also lifts up

the Lord's Prayer in that if we expect the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, we have an active role to play to ensure that it happens. We take action by forgiving others just as God has forgiven and forgives our sins. We pray for the injustices of the world to be restored and then watch restoration become reality as we do our part to act justly, to show mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

Eberhard Arnold's philosophy is a lesson for us. We have much work to do in prayer, with faith that God will hear us and bring about change in the state of affairs which tend to discourage us. But at the same time, we cannot sit idly by expecting God's will to be done without our involvement.

So, to effect change in the state of affairs mentioned in the first paragraph, praying with faith that God will transform things, and us, is certainly key. And getting involved is also imperative. So let's pray...and let's work...for as hymnwriter H. Ernest Nichol noted, "For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, the kingdom of love and light." (*We've a Story to Tell to the Nations*, H. Ernest Nichol, 1862-1928, The Brethren Hymnal, 1951)

Healthy Boundaries 101 – Basic Level Ethics in Ministry Relations Training

The Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership is hosting a Healthy Boundaries 101 training session May 9, 2016 from 9:30am to 4:30pm (EDST). The session is offered via webcast. This event is provided for newly licensed, commissioned, or ordained clergy as well as for TRIM, EFSM or ACTS ministry training students. The fee for newly licensed, commissioned, or ordained clergy is \$30, which includes a book and a CEU certificate. The fee for ministry students is \$15. Registration forms are available from the district office. Registration deadline is April 25, 2016.

Pastoral Placement

Freeport: Called Christina Singh as part-time pastor, beginning April 1, 2016.

Emerging Ministries News

Parables Ministry – Leader: Jeanne Davies

The Parables Ministry welcomes all people in worship and fellowship, with an emphasis on creating a community of belonging and empowerment for children and adults with special needs and their families.

This new ministry is housed in the York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, IL. It is led presently by an advisory board and a cadre of consultants versed in meeting the needs of their mission audience.

The ministry is registered with the State of Illinois, is incorporated, and has a working constitution.

A website, still under construction, has also been established (www.parablescommunity.org).

A launch event is planned for Sunday, April 10, 2016, at 3:00pm at the York Center Church of the Brethren.

The Gathering Chicago – Leader: LaDonna Nkosi

The Gathering Chicago is an emerging worshipping and service community that will host retreats, prayer trainings and meetings, Peace in the City conferences, and serve as a place of spiritual refreshment, prayer and intercession for those working and serving for justice, peace, healing, and restoration in and for the city.

This ministry will be located in the Hyde Park area of the city of Chicago. It is given focus by an advisory board that is working diligently to find meeting space and putting together a series of launch events, the first of which will be held May 15, 2016, from 5:00-7:00pm at 1700 E. 56th Street on the 40th floor. This event will include a Love Feast with feet washing and communion as well as intentional time for prayer.

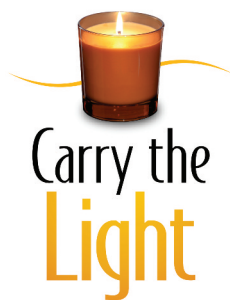
The Gathering Chicago will incorporate an international element with sponsored trips to South Africa, helping seminary students in the area to engage in international connections.

* * * * *

Both the **Parables Ministry** and **The Gathering Chicago** are receiving financial support from the district. The District Leadership Team has set aside \$200,000 of reserves to offer financial assistance for a 5 year period. The first year projected assistance is nearly \$100,000 with incremental reductions of support in subsequent years. The emerging ministries are required to provide financial records and quarterly reports to the District Leadership Team. It is also understood by the emerging ministries and the Leadership Team that fundraising will be required by all in order for the emerging ministry initiatives to be successful and sustainable. Financial gifts may be made directly to either or both of the ministries and /or to the Emerging Ministries initiative of the district. Any questions may be directed to the District Leadership Team and to the District Executive, Kevin Kessler.

Annual Conference “Congregational Collage”

The 2016 Annual Conference theme is “Carry the Light.” Program and Arrangements Committee is inviting all congregations to send creative pictures of different ministries from your church – the choir, the youth activities, mission work, fundraising events, fellowship, etc. that show how your congregation carries the light of Christ. We would like to develop a “congregational collage” that will be displayed on the video screens in the main hall before and after gathering for worship and business. Brother David Sollenberger will use his creativity to develop the collage.



We are requesting no more than ten (10) pictures in jpeg format. It would be good if one of them could be your church building. If you use a phone or tablet, the format might be different, but we encourage you to send them as jpeg files, if possible, and make sure they are clear and are your best set. This might make a good project for your youth or others in your congregation interested in media. These pictures can be emailed to accob2016@gmail.com with the subject as “Collage and [the name of your congregation.]” Please send them no later than May 15, 2016.

Mother's Day Gratitude Project



Honor a woman you know and love by celebrating and supporting mothers around the world!

Global Women's Project announces our annual Mother's Day Gratitude Project! Rather than buying more material gifts for your loved one, express your gratitude with a gift that helps other women around the world. Your donation allows us to fund projects focused on women's health, education, and employment. In return, your chosen recipient(s) will receive a lovely, hand-written card indicating that a gift has been made in her honor, with a brief description of GWP.

To participate, send a donation to:

Global Women's Project
c/o Emily Matteson
1405 Ashwood Dr.
Modesto, CA 95350

Remember to include your name(s) and recipient's name and address. You may also make memorial donations, which will be honored on our website: www.globalwomensproject.org.

Gratitude cards will be mailed in time for Mother's Day if you **send your request to Emily by May 3, 2016**. After the 3rd, she will mail them as soon as she receives your request.

This Mother's Day, share a gift in honor of a woman you know and of women in Indiana, Rwanda, Uganda, Southern Sudan and India, who are improving the lives of women in their communities.

Global Women's Project seeks to raise awareness of the poverty, oppression and injustice suffered by women around the world; to recognize how our overconsumption and misuse of resources contributes to that suffering; to change our way of living; and to support self-help community projects that are led by, empower, and benefit women.

Additional information can be found at www.globalwomensproject.org.



2016 New Church Planting Conference at Bethany Theological Seminary (Richmond, IN) May 19 -21, 2016

Early Bird registration (through April 15)
\$119.00/person

Registration (after April 15)
\$129.00/person

First-time attendee (through April 15 only)
\$99.00/person

Bethany or Academy Student
\$79.00/person

Keynote leaders:



Efrem Smith is an internationally recognized speaker, author, planter, preacher and consultant addressing multi-ethnicity, leadership, and community development. He serves as President and CEO of World Impact, an inner-city missions organization dedicated to planting churches among the unchurched, urban poor in America.



Originally from Australia, **Mandy Smith** is lead pastor of University Christian Church, a campus and neighborhood congregation with its own fair-trade café in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is a regular contributor to Leadership Journal and the author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* (IVP). She is also the creator of The Collect, a citywide trash-to-art project.

Webinars to focus on urban ministry

A new series of webinars will focus on urban ministry, co-sponsored by the Church of the Brethren Congregational Life Ministries. Dates and times, topics, presenter information, and brief descriptions follow:

April 14, 2:30-3:30 p.m. (Eastern time), "Experiencing Gentrification in the East End of London with Squatters and Anarchists," is presented by Rob Schellert, a church planter who has worked in London's radical anarchist and squatter communities. Increasingly, our world is becoming more urban, with over half of the planet's population living in urban communities. As a result, cities are facing the growing problem of gentrification, in which an influx of affluent people into a neighborhood displaces poorer residents and changes the character of the area. This webinar explores how the process of gentrification has affected marginalized communities and how the church may respond.

May 5, 2:30-3:30 p.m. (Eastern time), "The Practical Struggles Faced by Asylum Seekers and How the Christian Community Can Respond," is presented by Rachel Bee, who runs a small aid organization working with refugees and asylum seekers in Easton, Bristol, in the United Kingdom.. This webinar will examine the tensions of living with destitute asylum seekers in community, reflect on theology in light of how angry people may get as they are immersed in this world, and tell stories of courage and chaos and how nonetheless Jesus inhabits the world even when things go wrong.

May 26, 2:30-3:30 p.m. (Eastern time), "Convening Conversations with Muslim Women," is presented by Jan Pike, who lived in the Indian sub-continent for more than 20 years before finding a home and work in Bristol, England, as an ESOL tutor mostly to Somali women.. The webinar will explore how to use conversational spaces to convene with those from culturally and socially diverse backgrounds, including questions such as: Which questions enable the glimpsing of another way of being? Can we hope for intentionally conversational spaces to be transformative for all involved? To what extent can we see conversation as a deeply contextual and radically hospitable approach to mission?

June 15, 2:30-3:30 p.m. (Eastern time), "Forming a Christian Community in the Midst of Our Struggle for Good Mental Health: Reflections from the Geoff Ashcroft Community," is presented by Phil Warburton, part of E1 Community Church in the East End of London and a development worker with Urban Expression, an agency deploying teams to do missional work in marginalized communities.. Social isolation and associated mental health problems are likely to become one of the greatest killers in the western world. Isolation is also the enemy of Christian community. What can we do as churches to connect with each other in health ways that lead to the flourishing of church and society?

A previously announced webinar to be presented by Dennis Edwards on the topic, "Jesus and God's Revelation," **has been moved to April 21, at 2:30 p.m. (Eastern time).**

Find out more and connect with one of these online webinars at www.brethren.org/webcasts .

Congregations Assist Brethren Homes

Dixon Church of the Brethren

During Lent, the Dixon Church of the Brethren received a special Lenten offering which totaled \$2,855.00, and has been designated to assist the Brethren Homes in our district. Pinecrest Community and Pleasant Hill Village will each receive \$1,427.50 as a result of the Dixon congregation's generosity.

Naperville Church of the Brethren

Through a special offering emphasis, the Naperville congregation raised \$745.00 to assist the Brethren

Homes. These funds will be divided equally between Pinecrest Community and Pleasant Hill Village.

York Center Church of the Brethren

The York Center congregation held a silent auction raising approximately \$950.00 which was donated to Pleasant Hill Village.

We indeed are blessed with generosity in our district. When needs arise, assistance is given. Thanks to these congregations and all others who have contributed in such generous ways.

“Walking Toward Peace” with John Dear, author and peace activist

Pre-annual Conference

Directed Independent Study Unit

Led by Debbie Roberts

June 28-29, 2016



This Directed Independent Study Unit (DISU) is planned and led by Debbie Roberts, Assistant Professor of Reconciliation Studies. It will include pre-conference reading, a one-hour session before and after the Brethren Ministers' Association Pre-Annual Conference

Continuing Education Event, and attendance at all of the sessions. Following the onsite event there will be additional reading and follow-up projects.

If interested, please contact the Brethren Academy at academy@bethanyseminary.edu. **There will be a registration fee of \$100 for this DISU. Payment must be sent to the Brethren Academy and the syllabus will be sent upon payment receipt.**

Participants must also register and pay for the Brethren Ministers' Association Pre-Annual Conference Continuing Education Event through the CoB website. www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/

Registration fee for this event: \$50 for TRIM and EFSM students. (This brings the total of the DISU to \$150; DISU fee plus event fee.)

Note: If you are planning to take this Directed Independent Study Unit, you will need lodging in Greensboro on Tuesday, June 28.

Pre-conference reading: Please choose and read one of the 30+ books written by John Dear. The DISU syllabus will outline how this pre-conference reading will be used.

A complimentary copy of *The Nonviolent Life* by John Dear will be given to all participants at the Brethren Ministers' Association Pre-Annual Conference Continuing Education Event. The DISU syllabus will outline how this post-conference reading will be used.

Registration form is available from the District Office and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. Deadline for registering: May 28, 2016.

Ventures in Christian Discipleship

The last Ventures course for the 2015-16 season, *Technology for Congregations*, will be held April 23rd from 9:00 a.m. until noon CDST. In this course, there will be opportunity to explore various strategies to improve congregational communication, visibility, and even outreach by leveraging technology solutions that are affordable and appropriate for different contexts. Conference calls, virtual meetings, phone trees, email strategies, websites, streaming or recorded services and copyright considerations will be some of the topics. Of special interest will be an hour devoted to Internet safety with guest presenter Brandon Lutz, a school district internet specialist in the greater Philadelphia area. Time will be set aside for addressing specific questions and concerns that participants bring from their own congregations.

Enten Eller will be the presenter. He has owned and operated his own computer business for over 30

years, is the former webmaster and Director of Distributed Education, Electronic Communication, and Educational Technology at Bethany Theological Seminary, serves as a streaming video specialist (broadcasting various events, from international webinars to Annual Conference), and is currently team-pastoring the Ambler (PA) Church of the Brethren with his wife Mary, as well as the Living Stream Church of the Brethren (a fully-online church based in Portland, OR) with three other pastors from different states. His goal is to share technology in a way that is understandable, accessible, and appropriate, while building community across geographic boundaries.

To register for the course, visit www.mcpherson.edu/ventures. If interested in obtaining CEUs, which are available at no cost to participants from the IL/WI District, please indicate your interest when registering.

2016 Calendar

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

- 1.....Installation of Christina Singh at Freeport
- 8.....Mother's Day
- 9Online Healthy Boundaries Training
- 15.....Pentecost Sunday
- 19-21Church Planting Conference, Richmond, IN

June

- 18.....District Leadership Team meeting
- 19Father's Day
- 27-29Council of District Executives Summer Meeting
- 29-July 3 ..Annual Conference