

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

From the Moderator

Contributions to the column reserved for the moderator will present meditations, written by members of the congregations in the IL/WI District.

On Saturday, August 12 in Charlottesville, VA, a white supremacist committed an act of terrorism, running over counter protesters with a car. The act was meant to strike fear into the hearts of any who would dare to show up with their bodies to say no to racism. Beloved members of the body of Christ, I urge you, “do not be afraid.”

In Luke, an angel appears to the shepherds in the field and proclaims, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10). In the chapter before the angel greeted Mary with these same words: “Do not be afraid.” Mary’s call will be to bear Christ into the world and in him the human embodiment of God’s love. The shepherds’ calls too will be to bear the love of Christ into the world by sharing the “good news of great joy.” I believe that all followers of Christ are called to embody that love. So, I say to you, “do not be afraid.”

At times that means putting our bodies on the line to show that love. Sometimes we are called to risk, as Alexander Mack put it in the hymn Count Well the Cost, “your reputation, your self, your wealth, for Christ the Lord.” Even in those times, I urge you, “do not be afraid.”

Mary’s call most certainly put her in harm’s way. Being an unwed mother in her time and culture could have resulted in a lifetime of poverty if not a death sentence. Yet, she responded, “let it be.” Perhaps she understood, as we may understand today, that not to bear Christ’s love into the world would be a far more frightening prospect.

The “good news of great joy” the angel speaks of is “good news” for “all the people.” It is good news that Jesus—the embodiment of God’s love—is born. It is good news for all the people. It is not good news for just some of the people. It is good news for all

the people, because God loves all the people. That is indeed “good news of great joy” worthy of being shouted to all who would listen, as the shepherds went forth that night. When we cling to that love, what shall we fear?

If you are a white person called to examine your own white privilege and dismantle the systems of racism which hurt us all, “be not afraid.” If you a person of color called to free yourself and others around you from the violence of overt and covert racism, “be not afraid.” If you are a white person who believes white people are superior to people of color and Jews, “be not afraid” to lay down this prejudice that does violence not only to your neighbors but also to you, your relationships, and your own soul. If you are confused and not sure what to make of the news media, social media, or the conversations of your neighbors, “be not afraid” to ask questions, to learn, and to grow. Whoever you are, “be not afraid” to bear the love of Christ in the world. God is with you just as God was with Mary and the shepherds in the field. That is indeed “good news of great joy” that may give us courage despite any headlines or events that come our way.

Katie Shaw Thompson
Pastor at Highland Avenue in Elgin, IL

Please note that the July Moderator’s Column was written by Pastor Ginny Haney of Mount Morris COB.

York Center COB Service Project

District Conference 2017 will have a Community Out-Reach Service Project. We will be collecting non-perishable food items, such as canned goods (soups, fruit, vegetables, etc.), and boxed goods (cereal, pancake mix, crackers, etc.). These items will go to the Lombard / Villa Park Food Pantry, which York Center Church supports.

There will be boxes in the church narthex for the food items Friday night and Saturday.

DE Ponderings

I enjoy reading, especially a novel in which the author delves into a variety of subjects relevant to our human condition. George Saunders does this spectacularly in *Lincoln and the Bardo*. He is also, in my view, a master at character development. These two literary accomplishments alone put the book high on my list of good reads. However, one particular scene in Saunders' novel sheds brilliant light on a matter that has been coursing through my mind most recently, which can be articulated best with a question: In all of our human diversity, what will open the door for us to exist in harmony while still holding on to and utilizing our unique identities?

To understand the scene, I'll lead up to it with a general overview of Saunders' work of historical/fiction. President Lincoln's son, Willie, dies, at which point he finds himself in the bardo, which, according to Tibetan tradition, is an intermediate state or gap experienced between death and next rebirth. In this place, Willie meets a diverse cast of people, or more technically, corpses. Their identities consist of a closeted gay man who had committed suicide; a printer who married a much younger woman simply to care for her and be her friend whose death occurred from a ceiling beam falling on him; a loud, raucous, and foul-mouthed couple addicted to alcohol and users of opium; a contingent of black people constantly harangued by a Lieutenant Stone; a young mulatto girl who had been repeatedly raped; a minister who was given a vision of his eternal destiny which was less than attractive; an unmarried woman with deficiencies of the mind; a man who had been molested when he was just a boy by another man; a boilermaker who became ill, couldn't work, and died before he could inform his wife of who owed them money, leaving his family in a financially challenged position; and many others with unique and unusual characteristics.

President Lincoln visits the cemetery to view and talk to the corpse of his son Willie. The other beings in the bardo have never witnessed such visitations and become quite enamored by this display of affection. The scene I reference above is when Lincoln decides in his mind that he will not visit the cemetery again, that he can hold Willie in his heart rather than in his sight and arms. The bardo inhabitants want the visits to continue desiring the goodness they experience in the affectionate moments between father and deceased son. Without concern about the identity of each other, they join together to enter President Lincoln in an ethereal effort to change his mind so that he will make future visits.

The unique identities of the bardo inhabitants became secondary, but not relinquished, at this point. The primary focus became the effort to change Lincoln's mind. Each inhabitant put aside any concern about the others identity in order to embark on fulfilling a single purpose.

Our vast and unique identities in the church cannot be denied. Because the unique identity of the other is emphatically different than our own, it can become the primary focus of our attention. The result is holding the other at arms-length, becoming comfortable with avoiding the other.

Jesus' command is that we love one another. It becomes nearly impossible to abide by this command when we avoid the other. *Lincoln in the Bardo* offers a solution. Allow identity to become secondary and then permit a single, purposeful, relational effort, which we can work on together from each of our unique identities, to become primary.

In a world hungry for strong relationships among a diversity of identity, may we make secondary our identities while confidently affirming and utilizing them to rally around the single purpose Christ gives us to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus has commanded]."

BDM November Project Update

We now have updated information in regards to a BDM project set for the week of November 12-18, 2017. Through discussion with the BDM central office, we have been able to identify the project near Eureka, MO, as the location for our involvement. We need 7-10 volunteers from IL/WI, with an equal number being provided by Indiana South Central district.

The Eureka Methodist Church will provide housing for volunteers. In terms of food, we will be preparing our own meals via a dedicated cook (to be identified), or through a shared group responsibility.

Thanks to early scheduling, as well as a closer location, we are hopeful that we can identify our team members and begin planning the details sooner rather than later. If you or someone you know can participate, or if you are interested in more details, please contact me at: ilwi.ddc.lh@gmail.com

Regards,
Loren Habegger, IL/WI Church of the Brethren
District Disaster Coordinator

Ordination Services Held



James “Jim” Grossnickle Batterton was ordained into set-apart ministry in the Church of the Brethren during a service of consecration held Sunday, July 30, 2017, at the First Mennonite church in Iowa City, IA, where Jim is currently serving in an interim role. Members of the Woodland Church of the Brethren, the supporting congregation, were present, as well, to support and celebrate with Jim.

New Ventures in Christian Discipleship season to begin September 16

The “Ventures in Christian Discipleship” program at McPherson (Kan.) College is moving into its sixth year of providing useful, affordable education to small church congregations. The first course of the year, “Welcoming Muslims: Understanding the Differences between 98% of the World’s Muslim, Islamists, and Jihadists,” will explain the differences between mainstream Muslims, Islamists, and Jihadists, showing that only Jihadists pose a threat to Americans, and will reveal how peace churches can welcome, protect, and build effective partnerships with our Muslim neighbors. The class will be held online September 16 at 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. CST and taught by Dr. Kirk MacGregor, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion at McPherson College.

All classes are donation-based and continuing education credit is available for \$10 per course. To learn more about Ventures in Christian Discipleship and to register for courses, visit www.mcpherson.edu/ventures.

See flyer on page 6 of this newsletter.



Jay Wittmeyer was ordained into set-apart ministry in the Church of the Brethren during a service of consecration held Sunday, August 6, 2017, at the Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, IL. Jay currently serves as the Global Mission and Service Executive Director for the Church of the Brethren. Jay received support from the Highland Avenue congregation and his immediate family in celebrating his ordination.

Camp Emmaus is sponsoring a District Youth Retreat

Friday November 10th through Saturday November 12th

For the Glory of God and my Neighbor's Good

Please join us for an Illinois-Wisconsin District Youth Retreat. Session leadership will be provided by Pastor Valarie Kline of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren. On Saturday morning, we will help the camp by raking leaves. We will also enjoy ourselves with fun and games and free time.

The retreat is open to young people currently in high school or college freshmen. The cost is \$25, which will cover the cost of food. Please make checks payable to “Illinois/Wisconsin District Youth”.

What to bring: A Bible, a rake, a sleeping bag, a snack to share, and a towel. We recommend dressing comfortably and in layers for the service project on Saturday morning, as it can be chilly in the morning and you can warm up as you rake leaves. Registration forms are available at www.cobyouth.org/ and are due by Sunday, October 29th. If you have questions contact Ralph Miner at rminer151@earthlink.net. This event is being hosted by Ralph Miner, and Daniel and Sarah Radcliff.

From *Newsline*

The Church of the Brethren e-mail news service, to subscribe go to cobnews@brethren.org

A National Council of Churches podcast features Office of Public Witness director Nate Hosler speaking about the Going to the Garden ministry of the Church of the Brethren. Specifically, he talks about how churches are relating to community gardens, and about the unique Capstone Community Garden founded in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans by Church of the Brethren member David Young. Find the podcast, plus more information on community gardening, at www.brethren.org/publicwitness/going-to-the-garden.html.

On July 10, First Church of the Brethren in Chicago, Ill., voted unanimously to support the Palestinian Christian churches' call to boycott HP. "As a community of faith, we recognize that mass incarceration, restrictions on movement, and illegal settlements and occupation are unjust, unsustainable, and irresponsible practices," said a statement provided to *Newsline* by Joyce Cassel, chair of the congregation's Servant Leadership Board. "Until Hewlett Packard ends its complicity in the illegal Israeli occupation and ceases to profit from the violation of Palestinian human rights, we pledge to not buy Hewlett Packard products, including printers, computers, and ink. We encourage other churches to consider to this call."

CWS seeks a savvy digital media intern to support its communications work. This internship offers valuable real-world experience in digital media outreach, online organizing, and graphic design. To learn more go to <https://cwsglobal.org/digital-media-intern>.

Church World Service (CWS) is seeking to fill two positions:

CWS seeks a creative and visionary leader to fill the position of media associate. The ideal candidate will live and breathe a commitment to immigrants' rights and a coalition approach to advocacy, and thrive in a creative environment in which no day is the same. This team member will join and be at the intersection of the CWS Advocacy, Communications, and Immigration and Refugee Program staff teams. To learn more go to <https://cwsglobal.org/1295-media-associate-washington-dc>.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) seeks a full-time director of US Prisons Program to coordinate national interfaith organizing

and strategic state and federal advocacy for its interfaith members working to end the torture of solitary confinement in US prisons, jails, and detention centers. NRCAT has a strong preference for the position to be based in its Washington, D.C., office, although it is open to possibility of remote work. To learn more go to <http://nrcat.org/about-us/leadership-aamp-staff/job-openings>.

The summer 2017 edition of the Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) newsletter, "The Volunteer," includes articles by Sarah Uhl, Andrew Bollinger, Pat Krabacher, Gillian Miller, and Greg Davidson Laszakovits on the topic of "Resiliency." Find the newsletter online at www.brethren.org/bvs/files/newsletter/bvs-volunteer-newsletter-2017-7.pdf.

"BVS is always looking for volunteers!" the announcement of the newsletter added. "Please call Jocelyn Snyder, BVS Orientation Coordinator, if you're interested in beginning a year or two or service." She can be reached at 847-429-4384.

The Mt. Morris Loaves and Fish Food Pantry hosted at Mt. Morris (Ill.) Church of the Brethren received a gold rating in an assessment conducted by an education representative from the University of Illinois Extension Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. "The gold rating was awarded for implementing many best practices identified for food pantries. The report noted the large garden maintained by volunteers to provide fresh produce to pantry guests, the use of shopping style distribution, well-stocked pantry shelves and the use of the food pyramid as a nutritional guide for pantry guests," said a report on RRStar.com. Find the news report at www.rrstar.com/news/20170725/mt-morris-loaves-amp-fish-food-pantry-receives-gold-rating.

And who is my neighbor? The Good Samaritan, or how we justify ourselves

Samuel K. Sarpiya, moderator of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, has shared this reflection in response to the weekend's events in Charlottesville, Va. This is the first in a series of reflections on the 2018 Conference theme, "Living Parables":

"Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you

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Brethren Disaster Ministries Project

Newsline

continued from last page



L to R: Cliff Kindy, Kim Slater, Curt Rowland, Doug Campbell, Sally Rich, Loren Habegger

Disaster relief volunteers from the Indiana South/Central and the Illinois/Wisconsin Districts of the Church of the Brethren worked together on the Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) Project in Ottawa, IL, August 6-10, 2017. The team of volunteers delighted a homeowner by replacing the entire roof on her house. Loren Habegger reports, "the tearful hug from ...the homeowner on our departure made worthwhile the sore muscles."

The Illinois/Wisconsin District's tool trailer was on site and used extensively for the roofing project, and according to Habegger, "the role of the trailer was crucial."

The Illinois/Wisconsin District is committed to serve on the BDM project near Eureka, MO, the weeks of November 12-18, 2017; January 21-27, 2018; and Nov. 25 – Dec. 1, 2018. If you are interested in volunteering any or all of these weeks, contact Loren Habegger by email (ilwi.ddc.lh@gmail.com) or by phone (630-707-7446).

read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:25-29)

And who is my neighbor? Jesus did not answer this question with a radius measured in cubits. Nor did he reference tribe or ancestral connections. Instead, he told a parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan referenced the "identity politics" and "culture wars" of the day. It is a story that challenges who is doing the holy work of God....

Read the full reflection at www.brethren.org/news/2017/and-who-is-my-neighbor.html

SAVE THE DATES



FALL 2017: Welcoming the Stranger



SEPTEMBER 16, 2017

DR. KIRK MACGREGOR, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION AT MCPHERSON COLLEGE
"Welcoming Muslims: Understanding the Differences between 98% of the World's Muslims, Islamists, and Jihadists"



OCTOBER 14, 2017

REV. ZANDRA WAGONER, PH.D., INTERFAITH CHAPLAIN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE
"Navigating Religious Diversity: An Introduction to Interfaith Cooperation"



NOVEMBER 11, 2017

IRVIN R. HEISHMAN, CO-PASTOR OF WEST CHARLESTON CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
& **BETH GUNZEL** *"Welcome to Transformation"*

SPRING 2018: Empowering Small Congregations



JANUARY 20, 2018

JIM TOMLONSON, RETIRED CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN PASTOR, DISTRICT EXECUTIVE, & TEACHER
"Congregation in Mission"



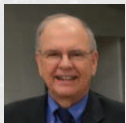
FEBRUARY 10, 2018

CAROL A. SCHEPPARD, 2017 MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN & PROFESSOR OF THE COLLEGE AT BRIDGEWATER COLLEGE *"How the Bible Came to be The Bible"*



MARCH 17, 2018

REV. DR. BOBBI DYKEMA, PASTOR & PROFESSOR SERVING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST DISTRICT OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN *"Revitalizing Worship through the Arts"*



APRIL 14, 2018

JOE DETRICK, RETIRED DISTRICT EXECUTIVE MINISTER IN THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
"Congregations Nurturing a Culture of Call: Why It Matters"

ALL COURSES OFFERED AT 9 AM - 12 PM CST

CEUs are available -- for more details and to register for courses, please visit www.mcpherson.edu/ventures