



Reflecting news and views

The Reflector

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District Executive: Kevin Kessler

From the Moderator

This past summer, I finally drove down to see my younger brother in Charleston, South Carolina. One of my travel habits is to watch for my phone's clock to update when entering a new time zone. I've realized that the time zone line on the map has nothing to do with the cell tower placement that sends the signal. Even a "time" sign on the highway would not help.

Usually—without success—I attempt to spot the billboard announcing the welcome station and arrival into the next state. Upon spotting a billboard across the highway, I crank my head backwards and try to read it. For people like me who often miss larger sign, there should be writing on both sides of the sign.

Quickly after our Luke 2:10 theme, "Do not be afraid...I bring you good news", comes the announcement of the sign. They wouldn't miss this, and they needed to get moving. Looking behind us, we see God was already at work. In order to not miss it we all must be attentive, get moving, and invest in the Good News of what God is doing around us. They did not ask for a sign, yet signs were given. Signs abound in life—plenty are given to us! In hindsight, when things finally come to light, you may see that you were given more signs than you noticed. In the meantime, let's press on together and not be afraid!

Terry Link
Chaplain, Pleasant Hill Village

York Center Church wants to thank all IL/WI District Conference people for the donations of food to our service project for the 2017 Conference. The Lombard/Villa Park Food Pantry was very appreciative of your donations.

Blessings to all of you,
Twila Habegger and Nancy Ulrich

Disaster Relief Service

The IL/WI and South Central Indiana Districts teamed up to work at the Eureka, MO, Brethren Disaster Ministries disaster relief site in mid-November. Serving from our district: Cindy Weber, David Stowe, Twila and Loren Habegger (all from the York Center COB), and Rick Koch (from Milledgeville COB, pictured). Dick and Jerilyn Rausch (pictured) hail from the South Central Indiana Dist.



Photos courtesy of
Cindy Weber

MERRY CHRISTMAS
from the
Illinois/Wisconsin District Office

Andrea Garnett, Administrative Assistant

Kevin Kessler, District Executive



DE Ponderings

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." —John 18:36-37^(NRSV)

I wonder what the experience of life is like for someone who is from another country living in the United States today. I have assumptions which are based on what I hear and read in the news, understand from articles in periodicals and on the internet, and learn from books. The bottom-line: my assumptions are troubling. With the increased attention given to immigration laws and concerns, I imagine fear is a common life experience. Fear of prejudicial treatment. Fear of persecution. Fear of being the other. Fear of finding a job. Fear of profiling. Fear of deportation.

Jesus made known that his kingdom was not of this world. Such a proclamation indicated his "immigrant" status not in a specific country but in this world. From the stories of Jesus available to us, we can readily discern the difficulty he endured as a result of his other-kingdom citizenship. Yet he boldly proclaimed that he came into this world for a purpose, i.e., to testify to the truth. Jesus persevered in this purpose regardless of the difficulties he faced.



One dozen freshly laid brown eggs from the "Brethren hens" that Moderator Allegra Hess owns raised \$50 in the district conference auction. The auction proceeds go to the district budget.

*Photo courtesy of
Ralph Miner*

My prayer is for immigrants among us to live boldly with the truth they testify to with their lives and living. I hope for their ability to live courageously and confidently in the truth of being an image of their creator, of being caretakers of creation, of having equitable human value, of having resilience to contribute to the welfare of the place where they live (see Jeremiah 29:4-14).

In this Advent/Christmas season as we remember and celebrate the revelation of God among us through the birth of Jesus, and the wonder and impact of it all, it may be an appropriate time to remember and celebrate the wonder and impact of the immigrants' presence among us. How are we surprised by their presence? How are we encouraged and called to be a better people (more accepting, more open, more respectful) because the immigrant shares life among us?

Jesus, the ultimate immigrant, came to bring peace, joy, love, and hope. Let's find it in our hearts to accept the peace, joy, love and hope that immigrants today bring to us.

Newsline

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) has announced the appointment of Jonathan Shively as interim administrative director. Shively is a member of Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill., and has worked for the Church of the Brethren denomination in various capacities at the administrative level, including eight years as executive director of Congregational Life Ministries. He holds a certificate in nonprofit management from North Park University. Said Jason Boone, CPT Steering Committee chair and coordinating minister for the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA, in a release: "With the completion of Sarah Thompson's term as Executive Director, we wanted to take the opportunity of this transition to explore next steps with intentionality. Jonathan's particular leadership skills will help position CPT to move our mission of building partnerships to transform violence and oppression forward with healthy vigor." In addition to serving half-time with CPT for the next year, Shively continues as director of Advancement for Pinecrest Community, a Church of the Brethren retirement community in Mt. Morris, Ill.

2017 Illinois/Wisconsin District Conference

The Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren held its District Conference November 3 & 4, 2017, at the York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, IL. "Don't Be Afraid, I Bring You Good News" based on Luke 2:10 was the theme of the conference capably led by Moderator Allegra Hess, a member of the York Center congregation.



Photo courtesy of Ralph Miner

The conference began Friday evening with worship led by ministers from the Northeast Region of the district. Christy Waltersdorff preached on the conference theme setting the tone for the remainder of the conference. Waltersdorff proclaimed, "Christ calls us to another way of living, a way that is not defined by fear but courage; a way that is not defined by weakness but strength; a way that is not defined by anxiety but faith." She subsequently asked these questions: "What if this darkness (fear) is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if God is seeking to birth something wondrous in our congregations, in our districts, in our denomination, in our world? And what if we get to be a part of that new life?"

During the business session on Saturday, delegates and conference goers were able to experience the courage of our district which has initiated two new, non-traditional ministries (The Parables Community and The Gathering Chicago) and continues to carry out faithful ministries in our congregations despite the challenges faced in living out the mission of Christ in a post-Christendom and post-Christian era. Jeanne Davies, founding pastor of The Parables Community, shared the value of providing a space and opportunity for worship for persons with

disabilities and their families. LaDonna Nkosi, unable to be present Saturday, nonetheless provided video and live presentations expressing the value of providing opportunities of prayer, partnership, and service on Chicago's south side. The leadership of these two emerging ministries is a testament of not being afraid, of serving unmet needs in spite of the obstacles that at times seem overwhelming.

Six congregations (Rockford, Polo, Stanley, Canton, Cerro Gordo, York Center) were given the opportunity to share a three minute presentation about ministries in which they are engaged. Each congregation is actively involved in their community, outwardly focused, and embarking on creative ministry initiatives. In addition, a video of district activity and ministries was produced and viewed by all who were present at conference. The video can be accessed digitally on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb4SmT4ypJU).

Camp Emmaus and Camp Emmanuel continue to provide an environment for building relationships, enriching our faith, and positively impacting the lives of youth for years to come. Despite overwhelming financial obstacles as a result of late and inconsistent State of Illinois Medicaid disbursements, Pinecrest Community and Pleasant Hill Village continue to provide outstanding service to those who need assisted and extended care.

All of these ministries are evidence of new life that the district celebrates and supports through prayer, relationship, and money. The district is finding renewed energy, excitement, and cohesiveness through efforts to sustain these Christ-centered ministries.

Fear has been a part of this district. We have been afraid of how theological differences may fracture our relationships. We have been afraid of how financial reserves are being used. We have been afraid of the aging of and decline in membership. Other fears have surfaced over the years as well. What we discovered, or maybe re-discovered, at the District Conference this year is that we are not paralyzed by our fears. Instead, we are holding on to and moving ahead in the strength of the word of God proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah, "I have chosen you and have not abandoned you. Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."