

Moderator Notes

I asked my Jewish friend, as well as Rabbi Alan Cook, about the local Meshiakhii, or "Ones who follow the Messiah". It is agreed among my friends that one who raises from the dead is at least a prophet, although might say he or she could be the Messiah. This leads me to another question: How did Jesus determine truth? There has always been different ways to determine truth.

Pontius Pilatus should not have been a Roman citizen. He was the son of a prominent wine merchant, and the family legend was that the family's citizenship was and the legend of the family bought with a gift or Spanish wine to Ceaser. His other name, Pilatus, referred to his skill with the pilat, or javelin. It is said he demonstrated his skill with the pilat by executing Jewish 'criminals' at one hundred paces. Pontius Pilate said with a sneer: "What is truth?" In his system truth was found at the point of a javelin.

This is not true with Jesus. The Mishna is very specific regarding truth. Very simply, truth is established by two or three witnesses. A witness might refer to a person, but could also be an event or existence. For example, "The stars bear witness", is the first example cited in Jerushalmi Barakhot. According to the Talmud, two stars show are associated with a bit of doubt and three stars establish truth. In the fifth chapter of Matthew, Jesus' ideas of witnessing an argument is no more than the application of the laws cited in both the Talmud and the Mishna. If the witnesses are human or of human action, then there is always some doubt as to the surety of the attempt at reconciliation. In the case a human witness or a divine event, the witness does not bring any doubt. Divine witness is absolute proof of truth. The phrase absolute truth applies only to truth witnessed by the presence or action of God.

In high school, the geometry students were taught by the chairman of the Mathematics department, Dr. Clyde T. McCormick, whose favorite questions were: "What do you know for sure?" or "How do you know for sure?" He taught us the difference between the relative truth of geometry proofs and absolute truth. Please notice, in Acts, that Jesus alone in an upper room persisted in calling his disciples as witnesses, even the one we call "the doubter". They went out to expand the church, and did so almost always at least with two more persons. On an interesting note, Paul was never a witnesses. Paul's blindness is taken by many scholars as prophetic to evils begun in the Pauline church.

Thank you for your prayers for Dawn Blackman. Her heart catheterization found no structural problems, but she still has problems and your prayers should continue. If we as a church need to have things that absolute truth, don't we need God's works to testify?

Blessings to you and yours, Paul Kohler

District Conference 2018 at Cerro Gordo Church of the Brethren

Mark your calendars to the 2018 District Conference! The IL/WI District will hold its annual conference on November 3 and 4 at Cerro Gordo Church of the Brethren. The Moderator is Paul Kohler, of Champaign Church of the Brethren. There will be a preconference continuing education event for ministers from Thursday evening to Friday. Be on the lookout for more information!

DE Ponderings

Neal F. Fisher, president emeritus of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, offers these thoughts in an article in The Christian Century:

"What morality, we might ask, does one culture or social group create that another with equal authority could not revoke? On what basis should my personal perceptions make a universal claim? The issue here is not to challenge universal moral claims. The point, rather, is that many of those who make universal claims disavow any reasonable basis for explaining how that claim can be made."

Fisher's view opens the door to relativism except that he points to universal moral claims. Reading this paragraph more closely, though, Fisher is, in my view, less concerned with relativism and absolutism than he is in the ways we approach and understand authoritative claims. In other words, two divergent claims, seemingly authoritative to the beholders, may each have a nugget of truth. However, the possibility exists that the majority understanding may be revoked by an opposite majority understanding. And, if a reasonable basis cannot be provided in support of a claim, then the validity of that claim may be false or suspect.

In averting a false claim, greater effort is made to provide a strong defense. In turn, a claimant with an opposite view may exert more energy and research into proving the other wrong. This circular approach leads to estrangement rather than relationship. The goal is to win rather than to understand. Or, as Fisher states, "Circles that lack confidence in religious categories of grace, forgiveness, and redemption have no obvious way of resolving moral conflicts. They often must then resort to judging some groups to be guilty and insisting on their own innocence or victimhood."

Denominations, including our own, struggle with the handling of morality claims. An aura of hopelessness pervades our efforts. I am convinced, though, that it doesn't have to be this way. Rather than investing heavily in winning, hopefulness will emerge more quickly and with greater pervasiveness when we devote more time in extending grace, forgiveness, and redemption. Jesus provides the example. In times when he was asked to take a side, Jesus didn't provide opportunity for each one to present its case. Rather he infused the situation with grace. Grace doesn't declare one side right or the other wrong or that both are fully right. Grace opens the possibility for more to be known than is presently known. As a result of knowing more, we can ask for forgiveness for being closed to new insights. And in the end, we have more opportunity for relationships to be redeemed as we all strive to move toward greater understanding.

May grace abound!

Emerging Ministries

Two emerging ministries in our district, Parables Community and The Gathering Chicago, celebrated 2-year anniversaries. The district has provided financial support and will continue to do so through 2019. District support has been shared on a decreasing graduated scale. As a result, the ministries have sought funding from other sources, one of which is the Wieand Trust. At the March meeting, The Mission and Ministry Board approved grants to both ministries from the Wieand Trust through 2019. Directing pastors, LaDonna Nkosi (The Gathering Chicago) and Jeanne Davies (Parables Community) are grateful for the genius and generosity of the Wieand Fund trustees, whose foresight provided a means of funding for ministry in Chicago and suburban areas.

To learn more about The Gathering Chicago, please visit their website at www.thegatheringchicago.org and Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TheGatheringChicago.

To learn more about Parables Community, please visit their website at www.parablescommunity.org and Facebook page at www.facebook.com/parablescommunity.

Church of the Table is joining the emerging ministries effort in Chicago. Led by Joshua Longbrake, Church of the Table is launching Saturday, May 26, 2018. This new ministry will be meeting at St. John's Episcopal Church, 3857 N. Kostner, Chicago, IL 60641. Please Visit their website at churchofthetable.com and Facebook page at www.facebook.com/churchofthetable and Instagram at churchofthetable.

Meeting promotes conversation about biblical inspiration and authority (May 4, 2018 Newsline)

"What kind of authority does the Bible have for us?" asked Karoline Lewis, one of the keynote presenters at the "Biblical Authority Conversations" on April 23-25. The Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, she joined with Jason Barnhart, director of Brethren Research and Resourcing for the Brethren Church's denominational office, in leading a group of about 100 Church of the Brethren ministers and lay people at a meeting called by the midwestern districts.

With an overall theme of "The Bible I Cherish and that Challenges," Lewis and Barnhart led the group through times of instruction followed by times of "table talk" in which participants engaged in lively conversation. Facilitating table conversation, and giving background on Brethren heritage and practice regarding the Bible, were Bethany Seminary professors Denise Kettering Lane and Dan Ulrich. Lane also reviewed the 1979 Annual Conference paper on biblical authority.

"It's one thing to say the Bible has authority...but what kind?" Lewis pressed the group that gathered at the Hueston Woods state park in western Ohio. Often what happens in conversations around biblical authority is the dominance of an unquestioning attitude characterized by the statement: "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it." Lewis noted this approach as "a circular argument," basically that "the Bible is authoritative because it's the Bible." She invited the group to ask why and how the Bible is authoritative. She and Barnhart explained various approaches to biblical authority, various understandings of how to read the Bible, and demonstrated a reading of a passage from her favorite gospel, the book of John.

Among the questions posed for conversation in small group at round tables: What is in the Bible and what parts do you care about? When was the last time you really thought about what the Bible means to you? What kind of authority does the Bible have for you, personally? How do you define and understand that authority?

Barnhart led a session on cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias, noting that each person has picked up attitudes from the popular culture and inevitably "we read the Bible through those lenses," he said. People read the Bible in part "because of some experience I've had in my life. That experience has informed how you read the Bible," he said. "The problem comes when our biases aren't checked." He also asked the group to consider what to do when encountering people who read the Bible differently, calling it a key Christian witness. "When we encounter people who read things differently



Photo by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

District executive Beth Sollenberger (left) hands the microphone to keynote presenter Karoline Lewis at the "Biblical Authority Conversations" on April 23-25 in Ohio. At right is Jason Barnhart who worked with Lewis to present sessions on the overall theme of "The Bible I Cherish and that Challenges."

we get this thing called cognitive dissonance.... I'm looking at the same text as you are looking at, and I am not reading that at all. It is in that moment that our witness really begins. You don't have much of a witness when you are alone reading the Bible."

"Biblical Authority Conversations" was sponsored by the midwestern districts of the Church of the Brethren and planned by their district executives: Beth Sollenberger, South Central Indiana District and Michigan District; Kevin Kessler, Illinois and Wisconsin District; Torin Eikler, Northern Indiana District; Kris Hawk, Northern Ohio District; and David Shetler, Southern Ohio District. Also supporting the event was the Ministry Excellence Project. The event was hosted at Hueston Woods, a state park lodge and conference center in western Ohio.

Michaela Alphonse of Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren preached forcy the opening worship service, and Ted Swartz of Ted and Co. performed "The Big Story" for an evening entertainment.

At the end of two days of intense conversation, some consensus seemed to emerge from the leadership of Lewis, Barnhart, Ulrich, Kettering Lane, and the district executives: The Bible is important to Brethren. The Bible has a lot to teach us today. Reading and studying the Bible together with others is crucial to our faith.

Some questions rose to the top as well: Are our disagreements with each other in the church still about biblical interpretation, inspiration, and authority? Or are they about how we have allowed the culture to dictate the way we approach the Bible?

⁻ Frank Ramirez and Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford contributed to this report.

Pinecrest Community Announces 125th Anniversary Celebration, August 11

Great visions often have humble beginnings. So was the case for the Brethren Home in Mt. Morris, IL. As early as 1878 a simple thought to provide care for widows and orphans emerged among Church of the



Brethren members in the Northern Illinois and Wisconsin District. By 1893 a simple two-story structure featuring 19 rooms had been built on 13 acres of Mt Morris's south side.

Today, 125 years later, that simple vision has transformed into Pinecrest Community, a dynamic and vigorous residence for 175 seniors. Now situated on 40 acres and featuring independent living, intermediate and skilled nursing care, short-term rehab, a specialized memory care facility, and flexible community center, Pinecrest is a 5-star community recognized for its quality care and vibrant senior living.

Our legacy is service, compassion, faith, and caring. The past is rich. The Pinecrest future is even more promising.

Pinecrest is planning a 125th anniversary celebration for Saturday, August 11.

Events will include complimentary lunch under the tent, family oriented activities, music, facility tours, ice cream and more. All are invited to attend. Please plan to join us on August 11. More details to follow.

The Gathering Chicago celebrates their Anniversary with a very special event June 28

Greetings friends,

The Gathering Chicago will have a very special Leaders #Refresh Event as a part of the Anniversary activities.

Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas will be our special guest speaker. He is Professor of Homiletics and Director of the Academy of Preaching and Celebration at Christian Theological Seminary.

We invite all of our sisters, brothers, district church family to join us for this time of refreshment for leaders and Jesus followers for these times.

To register, go to TheGatheringChicago.org. For more information or to join the mailing list, please email connect@thegatheringchicago.org or call us at 773-595-4048.

One of our main prayer points this year is to pray for our Church of the Brethren sister and brothers and churches as we pray for the world and serve, walk with and follow Jesus in these times.

We are thankful for you and continue to hold you in our prayers always.

God bless and thanks, LaDonna Nkosi Convening Pastor - TheGatheringChicago.org



Annual Conference Moderator Visit

On Sunday, May 6, 2018, the Dixon Church of the Brethren hosted an Annual Conference Moderator



Visit. during which Pastor **Blaine Miner** introduced Moderator Samuel Sarpiya. There were approximately forty people, both delegates and nondelegates in attendance. Moderator Samuel Sarpiya shared his story of coming to the

Samuel Sarpiya 2018 Annual Conference Moderator

Church of the Brethren. He stated that he was influenced by EYN, but had not made the connection to the Church of the Brethren. He sees the Church of the Brethren as a caring, compassionate community, who opens our doors to those who are in need and desires ministerial engagement. During the visit, Sarpiya shared a ten minute video of highlights of the Annual Conference. The next Annual Conference will be held in Cincinnati, OH, July 4-8, 2018. He also shared information about the compelling vision process. This year, the delegates will vote to set aside business at the 2019 Annual Conference in order to devote more attention to the compelling vision process. District Executive Kevin Kessler closed the presentation time by praying for Samuel. Refreshments were provided in the fellowship hall following the presentation, and tables engaged in good conversation.

Canton Provides Polo with Rain Barrel

This year, Polo Church of the Brethren is creating a community garden. However, the organizers realized that a water source was needed. Luckily, Canton Church of the Brethren was working on a rain barrel project, which initiated a conversation between Canton COB and Polo COB. These conversations lead to Canton COB donating a rain barren to Polo COB's community garden project. Pastor Kevin Kessler of Canton COB said, "A community garden is a valuable ministry. We, at Canton, are glad for the opportunity to share in a sister congregation's efforts. As congregations, we are not entities unto ourselves. Together we make a difference."

Greetings of peace! Thank you for your prayers and support of the Gathering Chicago.



The Gathering Chicago will be receiving applications for an Administrative and Events Assistant position. Hours will be 12-20 hours per week. For job description and application details, please email:

connect@thegatheringchicago.org.

The Gathering Chicago is a Community of Prayer and Global/Local Service based in Hyde Park Chicago. To join our mailing list or one of the local gatherings go to

TheGatheringChicago.org or email the above address.

God bless and thanks. We are together in the prayers and in Jesus' service.

The Gathering Chicago Welcome Team

From Newsline

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

-- Kesla Klingler began April 2 as admissions recruiter at Bethany Seminary in Richmond, Ind. She will initiate and maintain relationships with prospective students, will guide students through the application process, and assist in recordkeeping and communications. She holds a degree in psychology with a minor in business from Indiana University East. Most recently she was employed with US Track and Field as an administrative coordinator. She also has worked with Boys and Girls Clubs in Wayne County and Indianapolis. She also provided tutoring services in the public school system at the intermediate and high school levels. She is originally from Beech Grove Church of the Brethren in Hollansburg, Ohio.

-- Registration is open for "Dikaios and Discipleship: Righteousness, Justice, and a History of Faith," a pre-Annual Conference pilgrimage on July 3-4 in Cincinnati, Ohio. "Cincinnati is interwoven with the complicated history of race in our nation," said an announcement of the event, sponsored by the Intercultural Ministries office of the Church of the Brethren, a part of the Discipleship Ministries of the denomination. "Christians along the Ohio River have wrestled with scripture in making decisions about how to live out their faith in the context of slavery, Jim Crow, and the ongoing manifestations of white supremacy. Many who participated in the Underground Railroad did so because their faith insisted on the sanctity of life and that we are all equals before God. Yet as recently as 2001, there have been protests as people struggle to be recognized as equal citizens before the law. Join us on a scriptureinspired tour of a region that has monuments to the Confederacy and a museum celebrating the Underground Railroad." Go to www.cognitoforms.com/ChurchOfTheBrethren1/Di kaiosDiscipleship.

-- The April edition of "Brethren Voices," the community television program produced by Portland (Ore.) Peace Church of the Brethren, interviews Gimbiya Kettering, director of Intercultural Ministries for the Church of the Brethren. Brent Carlson talks with Kettering about how she assists the denomination in becoming more effective in living out its intercultural vision. A DVD copy of the program may be obtained from Ed Groff, producer, at Groffprod1@msn.com or view the program online at www.youtube.com/Brethrenvoices . -- Elizabeth Ullery-Swenson brings back a panel of young adults in the latest Dunker Punks Podcast, in order to continue conversation around the Church of the Brethren's "Compelling Vision" process. Panelists include Jennifer Keeney Scarr, Tim Heishman, and Colin Scott, who share their thoughts, concerns, and hopes for the future of the church. The Dunker Punks Podcast is an audio show created by more than a dozen Brethren young adults across the country. Listen at http://bit.ly/DPP_Episode54 or subscribe on iTunes at http://bit.ly/DPP_iTunes.

-- Bethany Seminary hosted the Council of District Executives for professional growth opportunities and meetings on the school's campus in Richmond, Ind., during the week of April 9. Faculty members Nate Inglis, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, and Dan Ulrich held classes for the district executives, and Bethany president Jeff Carter led a class on strategic planning. The council was able to attend the weekly chapel service, heard master of divinity student Tim Heishman preach his senior sermon, and attended master of arts student Charlotte Loewen's thesis presentation, "From the Reflecting Pool: Exploring Brethren and Mennonite Attitudes toward One Another." Students had the opportunity to meet with the district executives for conversation over a lunch, and faculty and staff also had opportunities to interact with them over shared meals. On April 11, the Church of the Brethren Leadership Team and general secretary David Steele arrived on campus to meet with the group, and students had the opportunity to meet with Annual Conference moderator Samuel Sarpiya.

-- A note about the latest Dunker Punks podcast: Brethren have incorporated themselves into society while still maintaining their beliefs for centuries. In this modern era, publications like "Brethren Life and Thought" provide a platform for an ever-globalizing denomination to stay connected and in community with each other. Explore this concept and more as Jonathan Stauffer interviews the social media editor for the Brethren Journal Association, Chibuzo Petty, on this episode of the Dunker Punks Podcast. Listen at http://bit.ly/DPP_Episode55 or subscribe on iTunes at http://bit.ly/DPP_iTunes.

-- Bethany Theological Seminary seeks a director of student development with an immediate start date. The director of student development will have

primary responsibility to design, implement, and review a student development plan and a retention plan as well as programs and initiatives that nurture current students into highly engaged alumni. Eligible applicants will hold the minimum of a bachelor's degree, with a master's degree preferred, and a master of divinity highly encouraged; a master's degree in a non-theological field with applicable experience is acceptable. Qualified applicants will be personable and able to be selfdirected, manage a complex workload with attention to details, offer support to colleagues, and have the ability to connect with current students as they become alumni. Multi-tasking skills are needed to manage the current student development needs. For a job description, go to www.bethanyseminary.edu /about/employment. Application review has begun and will continue until an appointment is made. To apply, send a letter of interest, resume, and contact information for three references by email to recruitment@bethanyseminary.edu or by mail to: Attn: Lori Current, Bethany Theological Seminary, 615 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374. Bethany Seminary's policy prohibits discrimination in employment opportunities or practices with regard to race, gender, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, or religion.

-- The Outdoor Ministries Association of the Church of the Brethren (OMA) has openings for two contract positions: a communications coordinator and a social media and website specialist. OMA connects, enlivens, and supports the dynamic ministry of Church of the Brethren camps. OMA is a 501(c)(3) organization and is run by a volunteer board of directors. Each of these positions will work closely with the OMA board. These positions are available separately or may be bundled for the right candidate.

The **communications coordinator** will be responsible for checking the OMA general email address weekly, responding to general inquiries, and forwarding emails to appropriate parties for followup; maintaining contact information for camps, members, and other associated parties, and creating and maintaining a contact database; helping the board track and complete assigned tasks following each meeting; creating and mailing a semi-annual newsletter, including related tasks; facilitating an annual membership mailing and additional mailings.

The **social media and website specialist** will be responsible for collaboratively redesigning and maintaining the OMA website, incorporating feedback from the board; creating and posting weekly Facebook posts, or making arrangements for board members to create and post weekly; managing the OMA Facebook presence including monitoring of comment; connecting OMA to appropriate audiences through additional social media; connecting Church of the Brethren camps to OMA via Facebook and websites; posting each issue of the newsletter on the OMA website.

Qualifications: candidates who are a good fit for one or both positions will demonstrate respect for OMA and willingness to help fulfill the organization's mission; excellent writing and communication skills; ability to proactively communicate and ask questions; ability to work well as part of a team and alone; good time management; high degree of organization and attention to detail; ability to be tech savvy and proficient with MS Office suite, Google suite, and Internet browsers; willingness to give, receive, and act on honest feedback; emotional maturity, poise, stability, warmth, kindness, and a sense of fun. Social media and website specialist will demonstrate passion and "pizzazz" for effective social media communications and strategy; professional experience with website design tools. Preference may be given to individuals who are members of the Church of the Brethren and/or who demonstrate a commitment to the work of Jesus. OMA seeks candidates throughout the US who are comfortable and adept at working remotely. Each position is available as a contract position for a 6-month trial period beginning mid-June or early July, or once a suitable candidate is found thereafter, for approximately 5-10 hours per month. Upon a positive 6-month review, there may be opportunity for a contract extension. Starting rate for each position is \$150 per quarter (three months). Any travel required by the position and pre-approved by the board will be reimbursed. Apply by sending an email to brethrenOMA@gmail.com by end of day May 18, with the following format: subject line: position for which you are applying, followed by first and last name, city, and state; within the body of the email include a brief personal statement, including: why you are interested in working with the Outdoor Ministries of the Church of the Brethren; how your skills, interests, and experience intersect with the responsibilities of and qualifications for this role; your work location; when you would be available to begin work; anything else you want OMA to know about you. Attach a current resume in PDF format. These positions are open until filled. Applications will be reviewed and interviews will be scheduled on a rolling basis after May 23. Email brethrenOMA@gmail.com with any questions.

-- Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) seeks a fulltime administrative director to empower and guide the work of CPT in fulfilling its mission. The administrative director works closely with CPT's program director in a collaborative, consensusbased, team model. Primary responsibilities include overall financial and administrative oversight, strategic planning and culture formation, and board and staff development, with some international travel to meetings and / or project sites each year. Candidates should demonstrate wisdom and imagination; skilled leadership of group and organizational processes and capacity building; commitment to grow in the journey of undoing oppressions; and ability to work independently and collaboratively as part of a dispersed team across continents. Nonprofit management experience and a focus on grassroots social change organizations is preferred. This is a 40 hours per week, 3-year appointment. Compensation is \$24,000 per year. Benefits include 100 percent employer-paid health, dental, and vision coverage; 4 weeks of annual vacation. Location: Chicago, Ill., strongly preferred. Start date is Oct. 1. To apply, submit electronically, in English, the following to hiring@cpt.org : A cover letter stating motivation and reasons for interest in this position, a résumé or CV, a list of three references with e-mail and daytime telephone numbers. Application review begins May 15. Find the full position description at https://drive.google.com/file/d/13ght1zsiSwntAP V0EcryvxYOCuPndh-0/view. CPT is an international, faith-based, non-profit organization that builds partnerships to transform violence and oppression. CPT seeks individuals who are capable, responsible, and rooted in faith and spirituality to work for peace as members of teams trained in the disciplines of nonviolence. CPT is committed to building an organization that reflects the rich diversity of the human family in ability, age, class, ethnicity, gender identity, language, national origin, race and sexual orientation. All members of CPT receive a subsistence stipend currently capped at \$2,000 per month for staff. For more about CPT see www.cpt.org.

-- Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of the Church of the Brethren Global Mission and Service, recently visited with the Church of North India (CNI), and spoke at the commencement ceremony for Gujarat United School of Theology (GUST), of which the Church of the Brethren is a founding member. He also spent time visiting with CNI families and communities. CNI began in 1970 as a merger of several denominations, including the First District Church of the Brethren in India, which has remained independent of CNI. The Church of the Brethren in the US relates to both CNI and the First District Church of the Brethren in India.

-- Pinecrest Community is celebrating its 125th anniversary this summer. To spark the celebration, a "Wish List" has been created to detail specific program and equipment needs that donors can underwrite. With a third of its residents relying on charitable giving and Medicare to cover the cost of care, the retirement community in Mt. Morris, Ill., identifies more than 50 needed items that are outside the ongoing budget, most in the range of from \$50 to \$500.

-- The latest Dunker Punks Podcast features Kiana Simonson, a youth and young adult assistant for On Earth Peace, bringing together three other interns to discuss their roles at the agency. "Listen as the four share their thoughts on finding common ground across a variety of issues including gender, racial, and LGBT justice," said an announcement. The Dunker Punks Podcast is an audio show created by more than a dozen Church of the Brethren young adults across the country. Listen at http://bit.ly/DPP_Episode56 or subscribe at http://bit.ly/DPP_iTunes .