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# The Reflector

An e-publication of the Illinois & Wisconsin District of  
the Church of the Brethren



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## DE Ponderings

by Kevin Kessler

Matthew 1:18-25

God without us will not; we without God cannot. –St. Augustine

For what purpose did Jesus come into the world especially during the time of the Roman Empire? Matthew suggests it was to save people from their sin. This salvation could be

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defined as being rescued from our individual indiscretions in order to receive an assurance of an eternal residence in a heavenly realm. Another way to view Matthew's understanding of salvation is in terms of subverting a present societal system that functions to institute and perpetuate fear and death through measures of control. The Roman Empire was such a system.

While each purpose above could likely be supported scripturally, the latter view is one that offers inspiration and challenge for me personally. A deist view offers that God has set the universe in motion, stands back, then watches the created order move forward through natural laws. But if that is the case, then what is the need for Jesus? Rather, God embodied in human form in the person of Jesus engages the world to encourage its transformation. My view is that Jesus came at an opportune time during the woes of a crushing system to introduce another way of being that subverted fear and death to promote hope and life. That God was embodied in Jesus, human form, suggests that humanity is empowered with the ongoing work of transformation, of ushering in alternative ways of hope and life in the midst of fear and death. St. Augustine seemingly accepted this view as well. God without us will not; we without God cannot.

We with God have the opportunity with our lives and living to engage in doing what cannot be done without us, that is, to help bring about the salvation that God envisions for the created order.

As we navigate the season of Advent looking forward to the celebration of Christmas, may we do so with renewed vision and understanding, in that we are part of the Advent of a transformed world of Christmas hope, peace, joy, love, and light. In this manner, the Christmas story is more than a historical event that we celebrate and tend to secularize more each year. Instead it becomes the inspiration and challenge for us to become more intentionally involved with God in bringing about transformation that saves the world from its own undoing. God with us. We with God.

(Addendum: In this issue of The Reflector you will find information about the District Leadership Team. It is my goal to add this information to subsequent newsletters to keep the

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district informed of work being done by the dedicated members of the LT. Plus, you will find meeting dates and places (some tentative yet). All meetings are open and as meetings are held near you, please know you are welcome and invited to attend. This is your district! If you have news to share of happenings in your congregation or communities, please submit articles. We are glad to add your good news to the newsletter and share it with the entire district.)

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## **The Moderator's Column**

Merry Christmas District Faith Family!

Your church just finished decorating for Christmas and if you had to describe your sanctuary with one word, it might be “Festive”! You are now ready for the Advent Season - bring on the crowds!

There you are standing at the front door of the church offering warm and inviting hugs and handshakes. The little girls are twirling around in their velvet dresses, while the tiny guys sport their reindeer neckties - all of which bring a grin to your face. You turn to offer a handshake to the next person coming through the door. A young teenage couple stands before you looking anything but festive. Their clothes are dingy, their hair mussed, not exactly “Festive” looking. She’s soon expecting, yet no wedding rings appear on their fingers. As they walk through the church foyer your fellow parishioners resemble the Red Sea after it had been parted by Moses. Each person is giving the couple a wide berth as they look for a seat in the back of the church. Now you know how Joseph and Mary may have felt as they entered Bethlehem on the eve before Jesus’s birth, discarded and in need!

This year’s Conference theme is taken from I Corinthians 12:27, “You are the Family of Christ, and each one of you has a part in it.” Christ’s Church is at a crucial place in time in which it is on the verge of being no more. Why? Because we don’t know what to do with young couples like Joseph and Mary, whose baby isn’t wrapped up in red and green

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velveteen. Instead it wears thrift store seconds.

The Church Family - what does yours look like? In the coming year we are going to explore together who we are now as the Family of God, as well as who God wants us to become. Some of these notes that I write might be a bit disturbing and challenging, but then so is the Christmas Story!

Love ya'll and oh, by the way, Merry Christmas,  
Moderator Rick

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## **DISTRICT CONFERENCE 2019 WRAP UP**

Sadly, Moderator Leslie Lake was unable to see the fruit of all of her labor in preparing for the district conference. Leslie suffered a severe stroke a little over a week prior to conference. She had worked hard to ensure that this was a great conference, and her advanced planning made it easy for everyone to step in and carry out her plans. Her diligent planning and preparation made it possible to present many of the things that she hoped would inspire, encourage, and challenge us at District Conference. The theme was: For Our Neighbor's Good. The conference followed the theme closely. Video presentations and reports revealed that our congregations are serving within our neighborhoods and in-with our neighbors. Funds raised through the silent and live auctions were nearly \$3000 which was designated for disaster response. The Dixon congregation was a stellar host. Neighboring COB congregations assisted as well. Several clean-up kit buckets were brought to conference and will be delivered to Church World Service. In addition, items were donated to the local P.A.D.S. agency to assist the homeless in the greater Dixon area. A district budget was approved that will require using approximately \$31,000 of interest and growth of invested reserves. If the market corrects or appreciates less than expected, the possibility is that principal of reserves may be dipped into. The conference approved to continue financial support to Parables Community and The Gathering Chicago, our two newest ministries, through 2020 at \$6000

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apiece.

Thanks to Moderator-elect Rick Koch for fulfilling the moderator duties faithfully and well. Rick stepped in without reservation to hold up the conference theme established by Moderator Leslie Lake.

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## **DISTRICT POTLUCK PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren holds a District Potluck every odd-numbered year, with the next event scheduled for 2021. A small committee works diligently to make the event inspirational, exciting, and educational. The planning team is presently Leonard Matheny, Kristi Kellerman, Leslie Lake, and Kevin Kessler. Robin and Matt Rittle were part of the committee prior to moving to Arlington, VA.

The District Leadership Team is searching for persons with interest in serving on the planning committee. If you enjoy helping to plan events and have ideas about how this event can reach folks in our district, then submit your name to take part in a committee that has fun working together. Or, if you know of someone who has gifts for planning, ask them if it would be okay to submit their name. When permission is granted, pass their name along.

Submissions may be made to District Executive Kevin Kessler who will pass the names along to the Leadership Team. Please submit names no later than December 31. Thank you!!

This committee really does have fun in the process of planning.

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**For sending cards and notes to Leslie Lake, please use the following address:  
Leslie Lake**

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**302 W. Webster St.  
Polo, IL 61064**

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## **DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING NEWS**

The District Leadership Team met Saturday, November 9, at Pleasant Hill Village in Girard, IL. The Team was reorganized with Carol Kussart (Cerro Gordo) and Mary Dulabaum (Highland Avenue) being called as co-chairs and Jan Dietrick (Mt. Morris) as secretary. Phyllis Batterton (Woodland) and Ed Watkins (Peoria) were welcomed as the newly called members to the team.

Agenda items to which the team gave attention are as follows:

- Approval of previous minutes
  - Review of financial reports (financial secretary, treasurer, Brethren Foundations Funds)
  - Reserves held as of Oct. 31, 2019: \$499,378.49 of which \$262,394.04 is in the Endowment Fund
  - Total reserves and cash: \$522,371.87
  - Received DE Report (of interest: 5 congregations in or completing the pastoral search process)
  - Discussed at length ways to enhance ministry with the youth, young adults, and families in the district
  - Approved a 4% draw from the Endowment as per the endowment charter and recommendation of the Property and Asset Management Team
  - Agreed to do a fundraising emphasis prior to year end
  - Reviewed appointments to leadership positions the Leadership Team is responsible for
  - Thanked Pleasant Hill Village for being a gracious host. Thanked Dawn Smith for giving us a tour of the facility.
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## **District Leadership Team Meeting Places 2020**

Feb. 8, 9 a.m., Zoom Conference

Apr. 18, 10 a.m., York Center COB (tentative)

Jun. 6, 10 a.m., First COB, Springfield

Aug. 8, 9 a.m., Zoom Conference

Oct. 10, 10 a.m., First COB, Peoria (tentative)

Nov. 14, 10 a.m., Pinecrest Community (tentative)

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District Leadership Team					
Position	Term	Name (Congregation)	Address	Email	Phone
Moderator	1 year	Rick Koch (Milledgeville)	P.O. Box 365 Milledgeville, IL 61051	<a href="mailto:revrick4433@gmail.com">revrick4433@gmail.com</a>	815-225-7812
Moderator Elect	2 years	Blaine Miner (Dixon)	115 N. Union St. Elgin, IL 60123	<a href="mailto:blaineminer86@gmail.com">blaineminer86@gmail.com</a>	847-404-6635
Clerk	3 years	Kristi Kellerman (Highland Ave)	380 S. Oriole Trail Crystal Lake, IL 60014	<a href="mailto:kristi.kellerman@gmail.com">kristi.kellerman@gmail.com</a>	815-814-1360
Recording Secretary	Appointed	Jan Dietrich (Mt. Morris)	2770 W West Grove Rd. Mt. Morris, IL 61054	<a href="mailto:jdiet220@hotmail.com">jdiet220@hotmail.com</a>	815-738-2365
Standing Committee	3 years	Dennis Webb (Naperville)	2407 Oakfield Dr. Aurora, IL 60503	<a href="mailto:djkrwebb@hotmail.com">djkrwebb@hotmail.com</a>	630-236-8166
Financial Secretary	3 years	Christine Knotts (Peoria)	2214 W Riviera Dr. Peoria, IL 61614	<a href="mailto:knotts.christine@gmail.com">knotts.christine@gmail.com</a>	309-253-6802
Treasurer	3 years	Ellis Boughton (Yellow Creek)	25156 Spring Valley Rd. Shannon, IL 61078	<a href="mailto:ellis.boughton@live.com">ellis.boughton@live.com</a>	815-864-2049
District Executive		Kevin Kessler (Canton)	135 Ingersoll Blvd. Canton, IL 61520	<a href="mailto:kevink.iwdcob@gmail.com">kevink.iwdcob@gmail.com</a>	309-224-4828 (C) 309-649-6008 (O)
Administrative Assistant		Andrea Garnett (Lutheran)	269 E. Chestnut St. Canton, IL 61520	<a href="mailto:andreag.iwdcob@gmail.com">andreag.iwdcob@gmail.com</a>	309-649-6008
Called Member	3 years	Ed Watkins (Peoria)	1013 W. Wonderview Dr. Dunlap, IL 61525	<a href="mailto:watkinsedwardjc@gmail.com">watkinsedwardjc@gmail.com</a>	309-397-2401
Called Member	3 years	Phyllis Batterton (Woodland)	8441 E. Sand Branch Rd. Ipava, IL 61441	<a href="mailto:pjbatterton@gmail.com">pjbatterton@gmail.com</a>	309-759-4897
Called Member	3 years	Mary Dulabaum (Highland Ave)	401 North Worth Ave. Elgin, IL 60123	<a href="mailto:mdulabaum@gmail.com">mdulabaum@gmail.com</a>	847-989-7723
Called Member	3 years	TBD*			
Called Member	3 years	Prudy Widlak (York Center)	448 Raintree Ct, Unit 3J Glen Ellyn, IL 60137	<a href="mailto:pramwid@gmail.com">pramwid@gmail.com</a>	630-790-1897
Called Member	3 years	Ginny Haney (Mt. Morris)	313 W. Main St. Mt. Morris, IL 61054	<a href="mailto:pastorginny1@frontier.com">pastorginny1@frontier.com</a>	815-677-0975

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Called Member	3 years	Carol Kussart (Cerro Gordo)	12129 Angle Crossing Rd. Cerro Gordo, IL 61818	<a href="mailto:ckussart@gmail.com">ckussart@gmail.com</a>	217-855-3258
		*TBD = to be determined			

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Joyous CHRISTMAS greetings

and wishes for a

Blessed New Year

from the staff of the

IL/WI District

of the

Church of the Brethren

Kevin Kessler  
Dist. Exec.

Andrea Garnett  
Adm. Asst.

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## Longest Night Retreat

**7:30-9:30 pm Eastern / 4:30-6:30 pm Pacific Time**

**Saturday, December 21**

The holidays are a difficult time for many people, especially those of us who are grieving a lost loved one or an estranged relationship, or who do not have the means to celebrate in the contemporary fashion of our culture. Entering into the shortest days of the year can also be challenging for those of us who are energized by sunshine and warmth. Yet there is a wisdom also in the darkness: the tomb is also a womb of resurrection and rebirth. We will gather to reach out to one another across the miles and hold each other tight through the darkness, praying and reflecting together with scripture, poetry, images, and music. Both pain and joy are part of the story of Incarnation, and we will be present to and make room for both. Join us in this tender time led by Pastor Bobbi Dykema. Join us at <https://livestream.com/livestreamcob/Advent2019>

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## Serving together for a purpose

*By Kim Gingerich, long-term disaster project leader*



Brethren Disaster Ministries long-term project leaders Steve Keim and Kim Gingerich (first row from left) enjoy watching

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friendships develop among volunteers coming from different districts and backgrounds as they share God's love together.

*Photo by Brethren Disaster Ministries staff*

As a long-term volunteer project leader with the Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) Rebuilding program, I have had the privilege of experiencing this ministry from the "inside" for more than five years. I've been given the opportunity to see our denomination through different eyes: the eyes of service, compassion, and love. The one thing that keeps standing out to me is how we are united, as opposed to how we might be divided. The "we" are volunteers who come from different districts across the denomination to serve together each week. I often comment to them during our end-of-week debriefing that this ministry is the best-kept secret of our denomination.

Why do I say that? Because those who come to serve strive for a common goal that we fulfill together. What is that common goal? To glorify God as we serve with our hands, feet, and hearts to help restore hope in our clients and the communities in which we serve. Because we have that common goal, we are united. Despite our differences, we are united. We are united because we are motivated by love—God's love for us and our love for Him—which in turn compels us to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Galatians 5:13-14 tells us: "Serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself."

This is how we build the body and unite the church, week after week: through acts of service that provide opportunities to break down barriers and build relationships. Serving. United. Being the church.

Since BDM has combined its two project sites into one in Lumberton, N.C., we have received a lot of feedback from volunteers that illustrates this unity through service. Here are just a few:

- We are working with people for a common goal—an extraordinary goal.
- It's the Holy Spirit taking human form, out of our hearts and into our hands.
- We're so different but we have so much in common.
- Volunteers are like-minded people.
- We come as strangers but leave as friends or family.
- We are stronger together.

Together, across districts and denominations, we come. Different but the same, bound together by love, serving for a purpose, restoring hope, and being the church as we build homes and relationships. These are the real ministries the Rebuilding program of Brethren Disaster Ministries.

*This reflection was originally featured in the summer issue of Bridges newsletter produced by Brethren Disaster Ministries. Learn more about the Rebuilding program at [www.brethren.org/bdm/rebuild](http://www.brethren.org/bdm/rebuild) or support it today at [www.brethren.org/bdm/givenow](http://www.brethren.org/bdm/givenow).*

## **District Website**

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When is the last time you visited the [IL/WI District Website](#)? There you'll find helpful information about your district including but not limited to:

- [District Calendar](#)
- [Eco-Stewardship](#)
- [District Newsletter](#)
- [Ministries](#)

Don't delay! Check it out! See what you can learn about your district!

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## ***Join us for this informational and instructive seminar!***

### **Clergy Tax Seminar**

January 25, 2020

**Students, pastors, and other church leaders are invited to participate in this online seminar.**

- Learn how to file clergy taxes correctly and legally.
- Comply with regulations while maximizing tax deductions.
- Earn 0.3 CEUs - requires attendance in the first session.

The annual Clergy Tax Seminar will consist of two sessions:

- Session 1, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. EST, will focus on the rules surrounding Clergy Tax Returns, including who is subject to these rules, what income is subject to tax, and how to reduce total tax liability using various methods, including housing allowance, business expenses, and medical reimbursement plans. The court case around the housing allowance will also be discussed. Credit for 0.3 CEUs will be available for attending Session 1 only.
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- In Session 2, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. EST, participants will complete a clergy tax return using H&R Block's highest tier (Premium and Business) downloadable software.

This seminar is highly recommended for all pastors and other church leaders who wish to understand clergy taxes, including treasurers, steward commission chairs, and church board chairs.

**Sponsors:** The Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry, and Bethany Theological Seminary

### **Seminar Schedule**

- 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. EST: Morning session
- 1:00-1:30 p.m. EST: Lunch on your own
- 1:30-3:30 p.m. EST: Afternoon session

### **Registration and Cost**

Registration is \$40 per person (generally nonrefundable to keep fees and overhead low). Current Bethany, TRIM/EFSM/SeBAH, and Earlham School of Religion students may attend the seminar at no cost, although registration is still required to reserve space and will allow us to provide you with web access to the seminar; instructions and handouts will be sent a few days prior to the event. Registrations are not complete until payment is received.

*Prompt registration is advised - **registration deadline is January 15, 2020.***

### **Leadership**

Deb Oskin has been doing clergy tax returns since 1989, when her husband left seminary to pastor a small rural Church of the Brethren congregation. As a pastor's wife and later as a tax professional, she learned the tax problems and pitfalls associated with the IRS's identification of clergy as "hybrid employees." In 2011, after twelve years with H&R Block, Deb left to start her own tax practice, specializing in clergy taxes. Clergy clients now make up 75 percent of her client base.

Deb was ordained in 2004 when she was called by the Living Peace Church of the Brethren in Columbus, Ohio, to be their peace minister to the wider community. She served as Southern Ohio District's board chair from 2007-11 and is currently serving as Southern Ohio-Kentucky

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2018 District Moderator. She was elected to the Pastoral Compensation & Benefits Advisory Committee at Annual Conference 2018 and is super excited about it!

She's been teaching and presenting nationally on clergy taxation to clergy, treasurers and administrators, and tax pros since 2004. Other than the fact that she really likes to talk, Deb does this because of her deep belief that clergy can devote more of their energy to ministry if they aren't stressed by tax debt.

Deb is an experienced presenter, and despite the complexity of the material, you'll find yourself laughing. Learn and enjoy!

**Register online now!**

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