
The Reflector

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

DE Ponderings

by Kevin Kessler

This article is the last one I'll write as the DE of this district. It is one more of the endings to my tenure. While my present responsibilities with the district are ending, my support of the district does not end. I continue to serve as a pastor in this district and will encourage the congregation I serve to send delegates to both District and Annual Conferences. I will also encourage the congregation to continue its financial support of the district. And I will share district news I receive with the congregation.

For a period of time, I am stepping back from any district responsibilities, for two reasons. One, I am looking forward to a break. This does not mean I'm disinterested, only that I desire some time to re-energize. And two, I want to support the interim DE and the next called DE by stepping out of their way to let them lead. I trust that I will let go of responsibility and trust that you as the district will turn to these new leaders among you.

I'm aware that the search process continues for a called DE. The search team is a capable and talented group that will do their work well. I'm confident their efforts will bring forward a viable candidate. You can trust their work.

Meanwhile, Connie Burkholder will serve as the interim DE. Connie has DE experience and has excellent leadership skills and abilities. She has received orientation regarding current work in the district and will receive orientation about the changes in DE work from the Office of Ministry and the Council of District Executives. I'm confident you will appreciate the support Connie will give to this district as she steps into this role. Please help her to feel welcomed and a part of this district. And Andrea Garnett continues as administrative assistant, continuing to serve the district in her capable way.

At some point down the road, after I've had time to re-charge and you've had time to move in new directions with new leadership, I'll consider stepping back into areas of work and ministry in the district. But until that time, know that I support the leadership you choose, and I support all of you in all you do as this district.

In the 3rd verse of the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" is a phrase that gives me pause every time I hear it: "blessings all mine with ten thousand beside". In so many ways I am blessed beyond measure, even in the most difficult of moments and situations. And yet, as the song suggests, there are countless numbers of blessings still waiting. It is what keeps me waking up each day, that I might see those new mercies morning by morning.

The wonderful news is that I'm not the only one who receives these blessings. You do, too! And there are countless others still on the horizon for you. I pray you wake up each day with great expectation to meet those new mercies. I'm confident with new leadership in this district, you'll enjoy some of those countless blessings. Watch for them. Expect them. Bless you all!

Reflections from the Interim District Executive

Though we may not be able to see the whole path, God gives the gift of beauty and goodness along the way. Photo taken at Dyck Arboretum in Hesston, KS.

I posted this photo and the words above on Facebook in August when I was discerning whether to accept the invitation to become your Interim District Executive. As I walked the grounds of the arboretum, I had prayed that God would open me to notice something to aid me as I considered the future possibilities. As I came upon this particular curve in the path, I thought, *There it is! This is what God wants me to notice.* I had walked this path a number of times before, yet I hadn't taken a photo from this angle. I knew where the path at the Arboretum would take me. But in following a path at God's invitation, we hardly ever know what is very far ahead of us in the future. We have to trust that the Holy One who gives the invitation will also provide what we need along the way. And we move forward in trust. So I said "yes" to the invitation to be on the path with you as you seek a person to become your next District Executive.

I've been blessed by willingness of Kevin Kessler and Andrea Garnett to assist me and welcome me into the Interim role. Kevin has provided access to many files and much information that will give me a good start, and Andrea's capabilities and helpfulness will be an ongoing gift in my ministry with you. I respect and appreciate them both!

It's almost time for me to begin. January 1, 2021, is the official start date, and now I am pondering how we proceed in the next steps on the path together. And once again an image has given me reason to pause. Several months ago I was introduced to the artwork

of Janet McKenzie (see her website at www.janetmckenzie.com). She creates these wonderful paintings of biblical persons, depicting them as people of color. I was so struck by their power that

I purchased one of Mary Magdalene, the one pictured here. She is portrayed with open hands, offering something to the viewer. I learned that, as in some Eastern Christianity artwork/icons, she is holding a red egg. There's a legend behind that which I won't go into, but basically the egg is a symbol of new birth, new life (you can Google it and find out more). What strikes me about the image is that I am being offered something; I am being invited to receive something. There is a holy invitation from Mary Magdalene who models openness, vulnerability, and strength. She is ready to give, to share, and I have to decide if I'm open to receiving.

So, of course, I ask you: What is the holy invitation for you, for us, as we begin walking a path together in 2021? Will we approach this new time together with openness, vulnerability, and strength? Will we allow God to gift us with new life? Let us covenant with one another to pray to be open to God's invitation to us in the coming months.

How to Reach Our Interim District Executive

Connie Burkholder is located in McPherson, Kansas and, as agreed upon by the Leadership Team, she will be carrying out her ministry from there as she serves as Interim District Executive. She is available by email at cburkholder56@gmail.com and by phone at 620-245-4600. She will be part of district meetings via Zoom. Her mailing address is 614 North Hartup Street, McPherson, KS. Connie is contracted to work 12 hours per week beginning January 1, 2021.

Connie will attend Council of District Executive (CODE) meetings via Zoom January 25-28, so will not be readily available most of that week.

The Moderator's Column

Moderator's Musings

I have chosen for my theme this year *Extend Charity*. My scripture text for this theme is Matthew 26:40. This verse is a response to the righteous for their actions towards the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger and foreigner, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Most of us have heard these scriptures as judgement and an admonishment to do good. In my more pessimistic periods of ministry as a chaplain for the State of Illinois, I viewed these verses as a merit badge checklist of good works that needed to be earned to assure one's admittance into heaven.

Earlier this year, as part of a stewardship awareness for the church I serve, I led a Bible study based on the book "Money and Possessions" by Dr. Walter Brueggemann. A secondary resource was the book "Grateful," written by Diana Butler-Bass.

Dr. Brueggemann's book looked at the role of money and possessions in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Throughout each chapter he examined the economy of the empire vs. the economy of God. Scripture is our reminder of how God wants us to act and behave. Rev. Butler-Bass's book examined gratitude as a response to receiving things. She also compared the expectation of gratitude from a secular viewpoint as compared to a viewpoint grounded in Christ.

The judgement mentioned in Matthew 26 is about consequences of behavior. I wonder what those who did not provide food, drink, water, clothes, and compassion thought of those in need. Did they see them as scamming the system, looking for an easy way out? Throughout scripture from the beginning to the end, God's emphasis is on being a neighbor. There are many references to caring for the widow and the orphan, the lame and the sick.

Rev. Butler-Bass walks her readers through the gratitude maze. It starts with a benefactor bestowing gifts and favors on a beneficiary – often a superior making an offering to an inferior. If the recipient does not show an appropriate amount of deference, that person is deemed to be an ingrate.

God – and then Jesus – attempts to turn the worldly view of gratitude on its ear. In the parable of the guests, Jesus suggests that those invited to a meal be those from whom we cannot expect repayment, noting that the pagans invite peers so they can be repaid.

Extending Charity is more than giving to the local food pantry, singing carols at the local nursing home, and supporting agencies that meet the needs in our communities. All of these are important and need our contributions. However, extending charity is also how we act towards one another in our church and our community. How do we care for and interact with those we do not know and who do not act like or think like we do? Do we label them and give them titles that demean their humanity?

As we enter into the Advent and Christmas season, let us not forget that God calls all people his children. If God sees the worth of all, regardless of their circumstances, can we do no less?

Kevin Kessler resigns from leadership of Illinois and Wisconsin District

Church of the Brethren Newsline

August 22, 2020

Kevin Kessler has resigned as district executive minister of the Church of the Brethren's Illinois and Wisconsin District, effective Dec. 31. He has filled the half-time role for 14 years while also serving as pastor of Canton (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, a role he will continue to maintain.

Kessler began his service with the district on Jan. 1, 2007, and is one of those with the longest tenure on the Council of District Executives. He currently serves the council as historian as well as representative to the Brethren Benefit Trust board, and has served on numerous committees of the council including the executive committee. He also has served on the Ministry Advisory Council during the creation of the denomination's 2014 Ministerial Leadership polity.

His accomplishments in the district have included consistent work toward unity, enabling the district to achieve a cohesiveness in the midst of differences. In recent years he supported the establishment of two new church plants and encouraged the formation of a district endowment fund. He has served as co-chair of the Illinois Conference of Churches.

Kessler was ordained in 1997. He completed his ministry preparation in the Education for Shared Ministry program with the Canton congregation.

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN GUIDANCE ON COVID-19

Congregations in the IL/WI District are at a variety of places in matters of COVID-19 response. Some are meeting again in-person either strictly outdoors and others indoors, both with certain restrictions. Some have decided to wait until later to begin having in-person gatherings.

The Church of the Brethren denomination has posted helpful Guidelines for responding to the challenges of the pandemic. To access that information, visit this webpage: <https://covid19.brethren.org/>

Following local community guidelines, if available, is also advisable.

Utilizing best practices to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone is advised especially now that COVID cases are on the rise.

Making webinars count: announcing new policy for clergy continuing education credit

By Janet Ober Lambert

It has long been the practice of the Church of the Brethren to require live participation in educational events in order for clergy to receive continuing education units (CEUs). However, a new policy from the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, in partnership with the Ministry Advisory Council, is changing that.

Recognizing that live participation is becoming increasingly difficult for multivocational ministers and given the growing library of recorded webinars available from denominational agencies, the Brethren Academy is offering clergy the opportunity to view and report on prerecorded webinars and other educational events for CEUs. A standardized reporting process will provide the necessary accountability.

For recordings to be eligible for CEUs, they must: 1) have been created by a Church of the Brethren agency, 2) be no more than 10 years old, and 3) have been originally offered for CEUs according to the criteria set forth by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

After viewing a recording that meets these criteria, clergy may go to the Brethren Academy webpage at <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy> to complete a "Continuing Education Report for Recorded Material." This fillable form requires the clergy person to demonstrate knowledge about the material viewed. Completed forms may then be printed and mailed to the Brethren Academy along with the certificate fee. All submissions will be reviewed by the academy's director.

Viewing a recording after the event will be equivalent to the credit awarded for attending a live presentation. For example, attending a one-hour live webinar is

worth 0.1 CEU. Viewing that same webinar after the fact also is worth 0.1 CEU.

CEU certificates will not be awarded for quantities of less than 0.2 CEUs. Two one-hour recordings may be combined for a total of 0.2 CEUs or one longer recording may be viewed. A separate "Continuing Education Report for Recorded Material" is required for each recording.

The CEU certificate fee is \$10 per submission, with a limit of four recorded events, of any length, per submission. Paper certificates will be mailed to clergy and records of these certificates will be kept by the Brethren Academy.

Participating in live events continues to be valuable for the Church of the Brethren. Gathering in person provides opportunities to ask questions, exchange ideas, build relationships, as well as pray and worship together. The Brethren Academy hopes this new opportunity will supplement rather than replace live events. The intent is to expand opportunities to learn for all who minister, for the glory of God and our neighbor's good.

To read the full policy, visit <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy> and scroll down to the section on "Continuing Education."

Parables Community is Suspending All Ministry Activities

With gratitude for the last four years and in light of current circumstances, Parables Community is suspending all ministry activities at this time. Please read the following letters from [Pastor Jeanne](#) and [Board Chair Jonathan](#) for more information. Thank you for your prayerful support both past and present.

CONSIDERING RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON GATHERINGS

Our district includes two states: Illinois and Wisconsin. Each state has its own set of dynamics related to the COVID-19 pandemic and thus considering the resumption of in-person gatherings of our communities of faith should take into consideration respective state guidelines. In addition, the welfare of our congregational constituencies needs to be considered during decision-making, as well.

Our district has not made a statement or created a document with definitive guidelines to use for resuming in-person services. However, a list of resources, including some helpful questions, has been compiled for your use as you enter into a decision-making process. As we become aware of new information, we will make it available to you through the newsletter and/or occasional memos.

If your congregation has developed guidelines or statements that you are willing to share, send them to the district office indicating this intent, and we will be happy to distribute it.

Questions to consider

- 1) What are the professionals in our area advising at this time? What do governmental leaders say is safe? What do the medical experts in our communities advise as it relates to gathering in person? How will we weigh and balance what may be conflicting information?
- 2) If we were to resume in person gatherings what do we see as the risks? What do we see as the gains? What steps will we need to take to provide a safe and healthy space and experience for people?
- 3) What portion of the congregation would feel safe in returning to in person gatherings? What portion should not feel safe returning at this time because of their age or other medical conditions? Are there commitments we can make as a congregation that would help people feel safe and included?
- 4) If we were to resume in person gatherings how do we provide for those who have been able to be with us in our current forms of gathering but would not feel comfortable coming to the building and being together in the same room?
- 5) If we are to resume in person what will we require of those who attend? How will we support safe practices when together? What is the maximum number of persons we can have in the worship space and abide by government and health guidelines?
- 6) If we resume in person activities, will it only be for worship at this time? What about other aspects of our ministry such as children's, youth groups, Sunday School, meetings, and more?

Resource List

Guide to Returning (Wisconsin)

<http://content.delivra.com/etapcontent/WisconsinCouncilofChurches/attachments/WCC%20Guide%20to%20Returning%20to%20Church%20->

[%20Ministry%20During%20COVID19.pdf](#)

Information from Lewis Center for Church Leadership

<https://www.churchleadership.com/tag/covid-19/>

Article from Congregational Consulting Group

<https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/caught-between-anxiety-and-anger/>

Information from Church Mutual

<http://d31hzhk6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20200518/aa/78/b9/76/a691037ea57238bafccae0cd/CM0308-2020-05-RC-Recommendations-for-a-Safe-Return-to-Worship.pdf>

Information from Brotherhood Mutual

<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/disasters-emergencies-and-health/general-health-and-injury-prevention/coronavirus/before-we-gather/>

Shenandoah District Best Practices

<http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/929/BestPracticesReopening2020.pdf>

State of Illinois Guidance for Places of Worship

<https://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/Church%20Guidance.pdf>

Restore Illinois – Phases 1-5 explained

<https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/restore-illinois-introduction>

District Leadership Team Meeting Places 2021

January 9, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

February 6, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

April 10, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

June 5, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

August 7, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

October 9, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

November 13, 2021: 9 a.m., Zoom

District Leadership Team

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847-404-6635

Moderator-elect (2 year term): Harold Rose, Canton

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309-357-3590

Clerk (3 year term): Kristi Kellerman, Highland Ave.

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Standing Committee (3 year term): Dennis Webb, Naperville

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630-236-8166

Financial Secretary (3 year term): Christine Knotts, Peoria

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Interim District Executive: Connie Burkholder

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District Website

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!

Newsline

— **In the wake of the grand jury decision in the Breonna Taylor case**, an invitation to an anti-racism experience called “30 Days of Anti-Racism” has been issued by the Church of the Brethren Intercultural Ministry. Although the experience was designed for the month of September, the Intercultural Ministry is inviting Brethren to begin this together on Sept. 30. “Start with Day 1 and go from there. Take some moments to journal as you go,” said the invitation. The experience is organized by R-Squared for people who want to do inner, spiritual work to end racism. “Each day we will engage in an activity that helps us to become more anti-racist in the ways we think and act,” said a description from R-Squared. Participants share their progress online with a picture or a reflection using the hashtag #30DaysAntiRacism. “Encourage your friends, members of your congregation, Sunday school class, pastors, and community partners to join this 30 day experience.” Download the resource from www.r2hub.org/library/30-days-of-anti-racism .

— In a **“Statement on Grand Jury Findings in Killing of Breonna Taylor”** the **National Council of Churches (NCC)** cited Deuteronomy 16:19, “You must not distort justice,” to condemn the outcome of the investigation into the police shooting of Breonna Taylor.

“More than six months later, it appears that justice delayed was also justice denied,” the statement said, in part. The NCC “finds the outcome of the investigation into Ms. Taylor’s death, which holds no one directly accountable, unconscionable and unjust. We grieve for her family and loved ones who have borne the burden of fighting for justice for her. We call on all people of faith and conscience to continue the fight for justice and to end systemic racism so that this kind of tragedy never happens again....”

“It is not lost on us that Sept. 23, 2020, was 65 years to the date when the white men who killed Emmett Till were found not guilty by an all white jury.... The handling of this case has been a gross miscarriage of justice from the execution of the warrant to the police actions on the scene, and the prosecutorial review and processing of the violation of Ms. Taylor’s civil rights and the circumstances of her death. We call for a full independent investigation of the facts. We demand a pattern and practice investigation of the Louisville Metro Police Department. We call on the US Department of Justice to immediately intensify its investigation and include a review to determine the extent to which Ms. Taylor’s civil rights were violated. Furthermore, we are dismayed that Det. Hankison, charged with actions that could have resulted in the death of a person, was granted bond of only \$15,000 while protestors, exercising their First Amendment rights, have been arrested in Louisville and elsewhere are given bonds of up to \$1,000,000....” Find the full statement

at <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/statement-on-grand-jury-findings-in-killing-of-breonna-taylor> . — **Volunteer openings have been announced by the Church of the Brethren’s Youth and Young Adult Ministry:**

High school juniors and seniors are sought to serve on the **National Youth Cabinet**, with nominations due by Oct. 19. Nominations are made via a Google form and/or a PDF form at www.brethren.org/yya .

Coordinators are sought for **National Youth Conference (NYC) 2022**. NYC coordinators are typically young adults who serve as fulltime volunteers through Brethren Volunteer Service, working at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill. Room, board, health insurance, and a small stipend are among the benefits offered. Coordinator applications are accepted through Oct. 31. Application forms are online at <https://forms.gle/i4uvEzmyjRzJUT8v9> . — **“How to Become a Climate-Resilient Church” is the topic of an online webinar** on Sept. 29 at 6-7 p.m. (Eastern time) offered by Creation Justice Ministries and recommended by the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy. “You’ll learn practical steps for how your church can become a certified climate resilience hub, provide much-needed support for the ‘new normal’ in your community, and hear from existing climate resilience hubs,” said an announcement. Speakers include Staccato Powell, a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Western District; Vernon Walker of Communities Responding to Extreme Weather; Liz Steinhauer of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Resilience Hub in Boston; and Avery Davis Lamb of Duke Divinity and the Nicholas School of the Environment. Register at https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEkfuyqzvovGNCaDaCTPRZ6WLbXrV_D8ZCT . This event is part of Communities Responding to Extreme Weather’s 3rd Annual Climate Prep Week, a series of events hosted by various organizations dedicated to learning, service, and actions that better prepare communities for extreme weather events. For more events see www.climatecrew.org/prep_week .

— **A series of unique podcasts focusing “On Speaking Truth to Power”** have been produced as episodes of “*Messenger Radio*” at www.brethren.org/messenger/uncategorized/messenger-radio . Each includes a reading of the upcoming Sunday’s lectionary scriptures.

“Many thanks to Anna Lisa Gross and all of those who are contributing,” said a recent Facebook post on behalf of the denominational magazine *Messenger*. The most recent episode features interviews with Audri Svay and Dana Cassell, who share personal insights into the division that is occurring in parts of the Church of the Brethren and continue an ongoing conversation about what it means to be a person of power or a powerless person in the church community and whether we are ever just one or the other.

Also new from “*Messenger Radio*” is publisher Wendy McFadden reading her column from the August issue, “In the Name of Jesus.”

— **The new season of the Dunker Punks Podcast has begun.** “As we kick off a new season of the podcast in episode #102, ‘The Ups and Downs of Being a Tour Guide,’ Christa Craighead tells us some stories from her world and the impact guides and teachers make in our lives,” said an announcement. Listen for her reflections, a new theme song, and more by going to bit.ly/DPP_Episode102 . In episode 103, ‘Defining ‘Apocalypse,’ Alex McBride explores the true meaning of “apocalypse” and the possibilities it might bring. Go to bit.ly/DPP_Episode103 or subscribe at bit.ly/DPP_iTunes .

— **The September episode of Brethren Voices**, a community access television show that is a project of Portland (Ore.) Peace Church of the Brethren, features Mark Charles on the topic “We the People.” Charles, who has spoken at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, is an independent candidate for president and a member of the Dine or Navajo nation. He was first interviewed by Brethren Voices in July 2018 at the Conference held in Cincinnati, Ohio. This episode was filmed prior to the major onset of the pandemic, when Brethren Voices host Brent Carlson met up with Charles at one of his campaign appearances, said an announcement from producer Ed Groff. “During the past 25 years, his [Charles’s] concerns about the disturbing history of this nation has

led him on a journey as an activist, public speaker, consultant, and co-author of the book *Unsettling Truths*.... In this program, Mark Charles takes us down the path to new understanding, that we never learned in school." Charles stated, "Do you want to live in a nation where 'We the People' means all of the people? We are a diverse people where change can happen." Find this and other episodes of Brethren Voices on www.youtube.com, search for the Brethren Voices channel.

-- **Discipleship Ministries staff have shared a prayer request for the Church of the Brethren-related retirement communities.** "We ask that the church be in prayer for the 21 retirement communities that are part of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes," said Joshua Brockway, co-coordinator of Discipleship Ministries. "Please pray for the administrators as they steward their resources to provide care in the midst of a pandemic. Pray for the nurses and staff as they care for the community members physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And most of all, pray for the mental and physical wellbeing of the community members themselves. May God watch over each one, granting wisdom and peace."

Go to www.brethren.org/homes/directory.html for the listing and web addresses for the 21 communities in the Fellowship of Brethren Homes.

-- **Retirement communities have been sharing suggestions for ways to help their residents and staff during the pandemic:**

Financial donations for purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE) may be particularly helpful during this time. Several of the church-related communities, including Fahrney Keedy Senior Living Community in Boonsboro, Md., have made such requests.

Some retirement communities are welcoming donations of home-sewn masks for staff and residents. There are many websites offering instructions for making masks, here is one recommended by Pinecrest, a Church of the Brethren retirement community in Mount Morris, Ill.: www.regmedctr.org/webres/File/031920%20Properfit%20Clothing%20Co_%202_5%20PM%20Surgical%20Mask%20Sewing%20Instructions.pdf.

Also from Pinecrest comes this suggestion to help residents who may be feeling isolated as their facilities are closed to visitors. "If you're looking for ways to keep your children busy while they are off school, would you consider having them make a card or a picture for our residents? You could mail them to 'Any Resident,' Pinecrest Manor, 414 S. Wesley Ave., Mt. Morris, IL 61054."

-- **Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS)** is inviting Church of the Brethren congregations to send Christmas cards and holiday greetings to the current BVS volunteers. "Our volunteers love receiving cards and greetings from Brethren congregations!" said an announcement. To request a list of the current BVS volunteers contact bvs@brethren.org.

-- **The Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry invites pastors to apply** to participate in its Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program. Open to any Church of the Brethren pastor serving in a congregational role that is less than full-time, the program offers support, resources, and companionship for the 77 percent of the denomination's clergy who serve as multivocational pastors. Pastors who join the program will receive one-on-one encouragement and consultation with a regionally based "circuit rider" who will schedule an in-person visit to encourage and help identify specific challenges and places where some extra support could be helpful. The circuit rider will work to connect pastors with colleagues, educational resources, and experts who can offer guidance, companionship, and encouragement. This grant-funded program is free of charge to Church of the Brethren multivocational pastors. Find more information and the online application form at www.brethren.org/part-time-pastor. Contact Dana Cassell, program manager, with questions at dcassell@brethren.org.

-- **The National Council of Churches**, of which the Church of the Brethren is a member denomination, is offering daily scriptures, prayers, and meditations by Christian leaders from a wide variety of church traditions. Yesterday's meditation, for example, was written by Timothy Tee Boddie, a minister at the Alfred Street Baptist Church and immediate past general secretary and chief administrative officer of the Progressive National Baptist Convention in Washington, D.C. Find this daily devotional resource at <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/topics/daily>.

-- **Messenger magazine is offering online puzzle pages for children and families staying safe-at-home during the pandemic.** The two pages of puzzles have been put together with help from Zoe Vorndran, intern at the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, based on the Church of the Brethren camps at www.brethren.org/messenger/articles/2020/puzzles-brethren-camps.html and the church-related colleges and universities at www.brethren.org/messenger/articles/2020/crossword-brethren-colleges.html. "Zoe, thank you for the challenging clues!" said a note from the Messenger editorial team. Messenger is the denominational magazine of the Church of the Brethren.-- **The World Council of Churches (WCC) has announced a webinar and a new e-book offering examples of "best practices"** from churches across the world that are taking their ministry and services online because of COVID-19.

A new publication by one of the featured speakers at the webinar, Heidi Campbell, professor of communication at Texas A&M University and director of the Network for New Media, Religion, and Digital Culture Studies, is called "The Distanced Church: Reflections on Doing Church Online." This e-book was created with input from 30 practitioners and researchers sharing their current experiences and observations. Contributors come from 10 different countries, representing 12 different Christian denominations. "The goal is to get this material out to those who will most benefit from a project of this nature--religious communities wrestling with the sudden move from offline to online ministry through digitally-mediated contexts," said Campbell.

Find out more at www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/taking-your-ministry-online-webinar-new-publication-will-give-solid-how-tos.

-- **Children's Disaster Services (CDS) has added a number of new resources** for children and families to its COVID-19 resources page. Go to <https://covid19.brethren.org/resources-for-children-families>.

-- **Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.**, has been instrumental in advocating for a handwashing station for residents who don't have shelter in downtown Elgin. Cheryl Gray, a church volunteer who leads the congregation's Community Engagement Team and ongoing Soup Kettle ministry, helped advocate with city leaders to provide restroom and hygiene facilities for the homeless population. Reported Gray in the church newsletter: "As businesses and other facilities shuttered mid-March at the urging of our Governor, Elgin residents who lived unsheltered in downtown Elgin found themselves without any restroom facilities. Even the lobby of the Elgin Police Department was deemed off-limits due to COVID-19. The City placed two port-o-lets in Carleton Rogers

Park but were reluctant to provide more facilities for handwashing because of potential vandalism or other misuse." After some weeks of communications with city officials, a creative handwashing station was built by the city's Public Works Department. The newsletter described the handwashing station as having three spigots and a drinking fountain that use a fire hydrant as a water source. The church is providing bars of soap that hang by the water spigots in nylon stockings--"a Brethren-like move," the newsletter commented. Signs posted at the site indicate that users can get individual bars of soap at the Soup Kettle.

-- **Illinois and Wisconsin District disaster response coordinator Loren Habegger** has shared an urgent message from the state's VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters) on the need to support food banks and pantries. "The food bank /pantries are facing imminent substantial shortages from an increased demand in part related to families with bread winners being unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said the email. "Food banks are seeing 70 percent more people seeking assistance with 40 percent of people first-time users." The email went on to list the eight regional food banks that are coordinated by Feeding Illinois, for the purpose of sending donations. Each state will have its own list of regional food banks in need of donations and volunteer support at this time. "Alternatively, donations can be made directly to various local food pantries in your area that coordinate with the regional banks. Donation of 'shelf-stable' items to local pantries is also encouraged," said the email. "Thank you for considering your participation in addressing this urgent need." Find a national listing of food banks at www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank.

--**Mary Scott Boria of First Church of the Brethren in Chicago, Ill.**, has sewn 1,000 COVID-19 masks, "and counting!" report fellow church members Joyce and John Cassel. "Masks for hospital workers, prison inmates, anti-violence street workers, senior citizens in public housing, postal workers, police detectives, disabled people, grandchildren, and others. Masks were sent to Boulder, New York City, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Puerto Rico, Chicago, suburban Chicago, and other locations." Boria is a longtime member and a strong leader in the congregation. She has "always loved fabric, and loved to sew," the Cassels write. "Across the years Mary created many artistic and creative pieces, like the Pentecost banner she made for First Church." They report that sewing has been an important part of life for Boria, who has had connections to the Textiles Department of the Chicago Art Institute, and at one point owned four sewing machines. Her project to sew face masks started when a friend expressed frustration, via Facebook, about not being able to find a mask for her disabled brother. "Mary said to herself, 'I can make a mask.' And she improvised two for her friend." After her friend wrote a post appreciating Boria's mask-making gifts, other people started to contact her asking for masks, "and the requests exploded."

-- **Brethren Disaster Ministries is asking for help with supplying cloth face masks.** "Whenever serving is possible again, these will be used to provide to those volunteering on rebuilding project sites who do not have their own," said an announcement. "Depending on the supply available, more could be provided to homeowners, other partners in the areas of our sites, or other places as identified. Two suggested options with instructions on how to make the masks can be provided." If you, a group at your church, or your district can help with making and supplying masks contact Terry Goodger at 410-635-8730 or tgoodger@brethren.org.

-- **The former associate director of Children's Disaster Services (CDS), Kathy Fry-Miller**, has published a new children's picture book about the coronavirus titled "Helpers Win: Yucky-rus Virus." Fry-Miller is the author of the book that is illustrated entirely by children. The book also is a fundraiser, and donations are being received to CDS. Find out more at <https://lnkd.in/ekKEaB7>.

-- **Eli Kellerman, a graduating senior and member of the youth group at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Ill.**, who plans to study to become a nurse and midwife, has received the James E. Renz Pinecrest Memorial Scholarship from the Pinecrest Retirement Community Board.

-- **Church World Service (CWS) seeks an executive assistant** who will provide executive-level support to the senior vice president, senior director for Resource Generation, and director for Policy and Advocacy, as well as the resettlement and integration team. The position manages expenses, answers routine correspondence, and assembles and manages highly confidential and sensitive information including legal documents and attorney-client privileged materials. The position also deals with a diverse group of important external callers and visitors as well as internal contacts at all levels of the organization. Independent judgment is required to plan, prioritize, and organize a diversified workload, and exercise independent thinking and decision making. The ideal candidate will have several years of experience in handling a wide range of key administrative, research, and executive support-related tasks, and be exceedingly well organized, flexible, and scrupulous with time management. Must be able to function effectively, and within a timely manner, in a dynamic, fast-paced environment under minimal supervision. Find a link to the full position description at <https://cws-careers.vibehcm.com/portal.jsp>.

-- **An article "All About York Center Co-op"** has been published by the Lombard (Ill.) Historical Society. The co-op was begun by a Church of the Brethren member and over the course of its existence from 1947 to 2010 included, among others, members of York Center Church of the Brethren and people related to Bethany Theological Seminary--which formerly was located in Oak Brook, Ill. "In 1947, an idea for establishing a cooperative community was conceived by a man named Louis Shirky, a member of the Church of the Brethren," the article begins. "He learned that a DuPage county dairy farm, owned by the Goltermann family, was for sale, just to the south of the town of Lombard in an unincorporated area of the county known as York Center. Fourteen families raised \$30,000 to purchase the property and began the work of creating their own neighborhood.... The bylaws were written by a Black attorney, Theodore 'Ted' Robinson, who lived in Chicago with his wife, Leya, a Jewish social worker, and their two daughters." The history goes to tell of the co-op's struggle to become and maintain an inter-racial and multicultural community, including a lawsuit that went all the way to the Illinois Supreme Court. Find the article at www.lombardhistory.org/blog/2020/6/16/all-about-york-center-co-op?fbclid=IwAR3JJPPzY7liY4fgeYj4mUiHkXNbjUjTonaMVsq64_akQ9G8e2WW-Tqdt_I.

-- **The document "Checklist for Reopening Church Buildings"** offers practical suggestions for congregations navigating the transition of returning to their church buildings. Now available in both Spanish and English, the resource was developed by members of the Recovery Response Task Team of the Church of

the Brethren denominational staff: Stan Dueck and Joshua Brockway of Discipleship Ministries, Roy Winter of Global Mission and Service and Brethren Disaster Ministries, and Nancy S. Heishman of the Office of Ministry. Go to <https://covid19.brethren.org>.

-- **"Messenger" magazine has posted a racial justice page** at www.brethren.org/messenger/articles/racial-justice.html. This page offers a collection of the magazine's articles addressing race in recent years, plus some excerpts and images from key pieces.

-- **Steve Lipinski, manager of Brethren Foundation Operations for Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT)** for nearly 13 years, has announced his retirement, effective Aug. 5. His last day of work at the BBT offices at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., was July 20. **Sherri Crowe, client manager for the Brethren Foundation**, will assume the duties of manager of Brethren Foundation Operations on Aug. 5. BBT has announced an opening for a new client manager for the Brethren Foundation.

— **A new video resource from the Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church program** features congregational leaders sharing about the joys and challenges of calling part-time pastors. Intended to be encouragement and guidance for congregations that either have called part-time pastors or are considering a shift in how to call ministerial leaders, this conversation addresses both practical considerations and spiritual opportunities of becoming a "full-time" congregation. The video features leaders from Forest Chapel Church of the Brethren in Shenandoah District, Eel River Church of the Brethren in South Central Indiana District, and Cabool Church of the Brethren in Missouri and Arkansas District. View and download the video at <https://vimeo.com/464363428> or learn more about Part-Time Pastor; Full-Time Church at www.brethren.org/ministryoffice.

— **Terry Goodger has resigned as program assistant for Brethren Disaster Ministries**, as of Dec. 31. She is leaving to take another job. She has been the program assistant for the disaster rebuilding program for more than three years, since June 2017. Her work has included scheduling and interacting with weekly volunteer groups and district disaster coordinators, tracking and updating rebuilding program information, among numerous other tasks to help keep the rebuilding project sites running. Goodger previously worked for the Church of the Brethren's Material Resources program for 10 years, starting in Sept. 2006 and ending in Sept. 2016, serving as office coordinator. Her work for the Church of the Brethren has been at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md.

— **Creation Justice Ministries, the ecological justice counterpart to the National Council of Churches, is currently hiring for three positions:** A new **Washington, D.C.-based advocate** to help facilitate faith communities' ocean-climate action, embedding in the Washington Inter-religious Staff Committee and establishing strong relationships in the Biden-Harris Administration and with key committee staff in Congress (see www.creationjustice.org/join-our-team-public-witness-advocate.html). Two fellowships based in California; if an applicant emerges who is well-qualified to complete the scope of work in both job descriptions, Creation Justice Ministries is open to employing the same person to do both for up to a total of 1,000 hours: **A California Conservation Equity Fellow** to center narratives of Black and Indigenous peoples in California, helping to form a network of relationships with California stakeholders for equity in the US public lands and waters system, with a particular focus on Indigenous and Black leaders, among other tasks (see www.creationjustice.org/join-our-team-conservation-equity-fellowship.html). **A California Truth and Healing Fellow** to closely follow the work of the California Truth and Healing Council, as well as the Reparations Task Force, among other tasks (see www.creationjustice.org/join-our-team-truth-and-healing-fellowship.html).

— **Brethren Volunteer Service is inviting Church of the Brethren congregations and members to help support BVS volunteers** this Christmas by sending cards and greetings. "Our volunteers love receiving cards and greetings from Brethren congregations!" said an announcement. For a list of current BVSers and their mailing addresses, formatted for printing on labels, contact bvs@brethren.org.

— **The Parables Community**, a fellowship of Illinois and Wisconsin District that has focused on serving those with disabilities and their families, will close on Dec. 31. "The COVID pandemic contributed heavily to the decision to close," said an announcement from the fellowship's board. "The Parables Community ministry incorporates many sensory elements when meeting for worship and other events. When in-person gathering ceased because of the pandemic, using non-sensory virtual methods for meeting were inadequate to meet the needs of ministry participants. In addition, a significant fundraising event, which would have helped to sustain the ministry, had to be canceled due to pandemic restrictions. The converging of the aforementioned factors impeded the ability of Parables Community to sustain operations." The board expressed hope that the fellowship has helped the district learn and grow "in ways which will translate into future opportunities for unique ministries to emerge and serve among us." The closure will be affirmed at the 2021 district conference.

— **H. Lamar Gible was recognized for his 65 years as an ordained minister** by the Illinois and Wisconsin District conference in November. Gible served for many years on the denominational staff of the Church of the Brethren, working in the areas of peace witness and ecumenical and international relations.

Extra Tidbits

[2020 IRS Mileage Rates](#)

Supporting Your District

The IL/WI District is active in a variety of ministry and mission efforts, both directly and indirectly. For these efforts to continue, resources are needed. Assets available to keep ministry and mission moving along include you (people serving people), tools (tool trailer w/ tools for disaster response work), knowledge and

wisdom (years of experience and access to institutions of learning), and, of course, money (endowment, reserves, congregational and individual giving, bequests).

Assets are abundant but unless these gifts are cared for there is potential for depleting them. Therefore, district teams and the combined efforts of many work diligently to ensure asset sustainability.

Still, it is important to know where gaps exist, or a little extra boost would be helpful. For instance, our district has deep interest in and long-standing support of disaster relief efforts. A separate fund is established to assist folks who give of their time and travel great distances to assist. The district's Disaster Relief Fund is hovering around \$1,000.00. Sending a team to serve on a disaster response site can cost nearly \$500 or more. To ensure the sustainability of this important ministry, designated gifts to this fund are welcomed and deeply appreciated. Having funds available to assist with travel may be the difference of someone sharing their gifts or staying home. Consider making a contribution!

Other options are available for contributing, as well, including the following:

- Endowment Fund
- Mission and Mortar Fund
- General Fund
- Emerging Ministries
- Ministry Training

Every gift regardless of size is a significant boost to the abundance of assets in our midst. All contributions ensure that our district goes beyond the plateau of survival to the pinnacles of thriving, providing ample opportunities to serve faithfully.

GIFTS DISCERNMENT AND CALL COMMITTEE

The Gifts Discernment and Call Committee (GDCC) is commissioned to discern the gifts of persons for the purpose of inviting and calling them in to positions of leadership and team/committee participation. The GDCC delves into this work based on the names and information available to them. The likelihood is that gifted persons are not invited and called to serve because the GDCC lacks names and information. If you feel compelled to serve in the district and have not been asked, you can connect to the district [webpage](#) and learn how to share your name and information with the GDCC. Simply complete the online profile form after clicking on the "online profile form" link in the website article. Or call the district office (649-6008) and a profile form will be emailed to you.

Do you know someone you believe has gifts to serve at the district level? Invite them to visit the district webpage or share their name with the GDCC or district office.

Serving is rewarding!

District Mission and Mortar Grant/Loan Program

Is your congregation beginning a new mission outreach program but a little short on cash? Is your congregation faced with a major repair or capital improvement project that exceeds your congregation's capacity to pay for it? Did you know that the district has a program to assist with your needs? It's called the Mission and Mortar Grant/Loan Program and is available to help meet the needs mentioned above.

Grants are available up to \$2,500.00 and non-interest bearing loans up to \$5000.00. A congregation that applies must provide financial data and be a regular contributor to the district. Applications are considered on a first-come first-served basis and are reviewed/approved by the district Leadership Team.

If you would like more information or wish to apply, visit the [district website](#). Send completed applications to the IL/WI District Office, 269 E. Chestnut St., Canton, IL 61520.

Upcoming Events

January 9, 2021: Leadership Team Mtg, 9 a.m., Zoom

January 19, 2021: P&A Mtg, 7 p.m., Zoom

January 23, 2021: MLDT Mtg, 9 a.m., Zoom