

The Reflector

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



The Village ILWIDlot
By Walt Wiltschek

In a recent Zoom conversation with some pastors and other district leaders, I shared some words penned during the Advent seasons of World War II by noted German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (whose thinking has often resonated with Anabaptists). First, in December 1942, while Bonhoeffer was still free amid the raging war and Nazi persecution, he wrote this:

“The joy of God goes through the poverty of the manger and the agony of the cross; that is why it is invincible, irrefutable. It does not deny the anguish, when it is there, but finds God in the midst of it, in fact precisely there; it does not deny grave sin but finds forgiveness precisely in this way; it looks death straight in the eye, but it finds life precisely within it.”

The themes of waiting and hope were ones that Bonhoeffer visited often, as author Tim George noted in an article for the journal *First Things*, often using the Advent season “as a metaphor for the entire Christian life.”

In December 1943, following Bonhoeffer’s capture and imprisonment by the Nazis, he continued to hold fast to that belief, even in dark days. Writing from his prison cell, he said: “We simply have to wait and wait. ... The celebration of Advent is possible only to those troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come.”

As we journey through this second Advent/Christmas season of the pandemic, Bonhoeffer’s words ring particularly true for me this year. These have been difficult years for congregations, for pastors, and for all of us in various ways—draining energy, strength, health, finances, attendance, and more in turn.

It has not been easy. But as Bonhoeffer proclaimed in the deep darkness of his era and as Mary and Joseph and shepherds and others did in the difficult days of first-century, Roman-occupied Palestine, we, too, continue to hold on to hope. We trust that God is at work in the midst of it all. And what better season than Advent to remind us that the road to miracles and new life often requires waiting and watching.

In his final Advent message, in 1944, Bonhoeffer smuggled out words to his sister that were later shaped into the hymn “By Gracious Powers,” translated into English by Fred Pratt Green. In part it says:

“And when this cup you give is filled to brimming / with bitter suffering, hard to understand, we take it thankfully and without trembling / out of so good and so beloved a hand.

“Yet when again in this same world you give us / the joy we had, the brightness of your sun, / we shall remember all the days we lived through / and our whole life shall then be yours alone.”

Blessings to each of you as we approach Christmas once again, in another year when the dark days of winter might feel especially long. May you live in the hope of the promise

that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5, NIV).

Schedule note: Walt will be on vacation Dec. 23-Jan. 3 and only checking email for any emergency communications during that time.

Upcoming Meetings

District Potluck Team: Tues., Jan. 18, 7 p.m.

Council of District Executives (virtual meeting): Jan. 24-27

Church Revitalization & Development Team (CRDT): Sat., Jan. 29, 9 a.m.

Leadership Team: Sat., Feb. 5, 9 a.m.

Ministry Leadership & Discernment Team (MLDT): Sat., Feb. 12, 9 a.m.

Calling the Called event: Sat., Feb. 26, 9 a.m.

Personnel Update

Greetings to the IL/WI District,

As of December 14, I've returned to the district office. My office hours will be Tuesday through Friday, 8 am-noon. I will be working in the office on Wednesdays and Fridays, and at home Tuesdays and Thursdays. Please note that depending on scheduling issues, I may need to work from home on normally scheduled office days. If you need to contact me, please call the district office or email me at andreag.iwdcob@gmail.com.

I am so grateful for the time I was able to have with my family, especially when Cyrus was in the NICU and while I was recovering from preeclampsia. Thank you for making this possible for us! It's been a blessing to "just be" as my family adjusts to such a huge change. It's lovely to be back after maternity leave and I'm looking forward to getting back into the swing of things!

In Christ,

Andrea Garnett (and family!)



Calling the Called

Have you ever felt God might be tapping you on the shoulder to consider a professional ministry role in the church? Are there others you want to encourage to explore such a path? Are you a pastor or other church leader who seeks to help others discover their gifts? Do you just want to learn more about calling and being called?

If so, Illinois/Wisconsin District invites you to a special event Saturday, Feb. 26, 9 a.m. to noon. (This event had originally been scheduled in late October but was postponed.) Hear personal stories from some of those who have been called, learn about spiritual discernment and opportunities in the denomination, explore your questions about ministry, and connect with others who are trying to hear God's call for them.

This event will be free and held virtually on Zoom. Watch for more details in upcoming newsletters, email announcements, and on the district website!

Decatur congregation closes its doors

The Decatur (Ill.) Church of the Brethren in mid-November voted at a church meeting to close the congregation. Attendance had been shrinking for some time, and the church had sold its building about a decade ago and was meeting in rented space.

Decatur has generously donated many of its remaining financial assets to the district to aid

in the continuing work of the church in Illinois/Wisconsin. Many of the remaining members have said they hope to join other area Church of the Brethren congregations for worship.

We are grateful for Decatur's long legacy of ministry in central Illinois and grieve with them in this sense of loss. Official action on the closure and a time of remembrance and affirmation will occur at the 2022 district conference.



National Youth Conference 2022

Register for National Youth Conference!

Registration is now open for the Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference (NYC), coming up July 23- 28, 2022, at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. This powerful event, held every four years, will have the theme "Foundational," drawn from Colossians 2:5-7, for the 2022 edition. It's a week of fellowship, worship, workshops, recreation, and more.

Youth in grades 9-12 and one year out of high school this school year (2021-2022) are eligible to attend, along with advisors. More details on the conference, including announcements of speakers, can be found at <https://www.brethren.org/nyc/>. Please spread the word to any youth and advisors in your congregation and other ministries who might want to attend. Anyone who registers by Dec. 31 will receive a free NYC T-shirt.

Illinois/Wisconsin District will work at organizing a bus trip to the event for our attendees. Gio Romero, from the York Center congregation, is part of the planning team, district executive Walt Wiltschek is one of the worship coordinators, and many other members of our district will be involved in various roles. The other worship coordinators include Bekah Houff, Cindy Laprade Lattimer, and Shawn Flory Replogle. Jacob Crouse is coordinating

music.

Erika Clary, working out of the offices in Elgin, is the overall coordinator for NYC 2022, working with Youth/Young Adult Ministries coordinator Becky Ullom Naugle. Please be in prayer for them as they work on plans for the conference in the months ahead.

National Young Adult Conference 2022

After so much pandemic living and the isolation it's caused, the centrality of community compelled the Young Adult Steering Committee to choose Romans 12:5 as the theme for National Young Adult Conference (NYAC) 2022: "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."

NYAC 2022 will take place May 27-30 at the Montreat (N.C.) Retreat Center. Registration opens online on Jan. 6, 2022. To learn more, visit www.brethren.org/yac.

NYC Youth Speech Contest

Do you know a youth who is attending NYC and would be interested in speaking? Encourage them to submit an entry for the Youth Speech Contest! The theme is "Bring Your Own Jesus Story." Youth are encouraged to consider how Jesus' teachings are foundational to their life, and then to choose a story about Jesus from the Bible and preach on it. Participants should send a written entry of 500-700 words and a video entry of about 10 minutes length to the NYC Office by email to cobyouth@brethren.org. The deadline is March 15, 2022.

2022 District Camp Dates

Camp Emmaus (Mount Morris, Ill.):

May 27-30: Memorial Day Weekend Family Camp

July 3-9: Senior High Camp (finished grades 9-12)

July 10-14: Intermediate Camp (finished grades 3-5)

July 15: Counselor Training (CIT, works with Elementary 1)

July 16-17: Elementary 1 Camp (finished grades 1-2)

July 21-23: Women's Camp

July 29-31: Young at Heart Camp (ages 18 and up)

July 31-Aug. 6: Middle School Camp (finished grades 6-8)

Aug. 11-13: Men's Camp

Sept. 2-5: Labor Day Weekend Family Camp

Visit www.campemmaus.org to register or for more information.

Camp Emmanuel (Astoria, Ill.)

April 23-28: Spring Work Week

June 3-5: Women's Camp

June 5-11: High School Camp

June 12-18: Middle School Camp

June 19-22: Junior Camp

June 24-26: Pre-Junior Camp

July 18-22: Day Camp

Visit www.campem.com to register or for more information.

Clergy Tax Seminar

The Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership's annual Clergy Tax Seminar takes place on Jan. 29 via Zoom from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Central Time. It is intended for students, clergy, and anyone who deals with clergy finances. A continuing education credit of 0.4 units is available for credentialed ministers.

The event is sponsored by the academy along with the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry and Bethany Theological Seminary. Leadership is provided by Deb Oskin, a tax professional specializes in clergy taxes and who is chairing the Church of the Brethren Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee. The event will include a special presentation from the committee about the brand new Pastoral Compensation Calculator and Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement expected to become effective as of the 2022 Annual Conference.

Cost is \$40 per person. Current students at the Brethren Academy, Bethany Theological Seminary, and Earlham School of Religion students may attend at no cost, although registration is still required. Find more detailed information and register by Jan. 19 at <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/clergy-tax-seminar>.

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

- The Program and Arrangements Committee of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference is shifting away from a long-standing practice of offering "insight sessions" at the denomination's annual meeting, focusing instead on "equipping sessions."

Conference planners first began this shift some years ago, gradually working in specific days for equipping sessions at the denomination's annual meetings. "Now we are asking everyone to make this shift for all of their sessions," said Annual Conference director Rhonda Pittman Gingrich.

She described the difference between an insight session and an equipping session in terms of the difference between an infomercial in which attendees are given information about a program, versus a workshop in which attendees experience and are given hands-on tools and resources to use in ministry.

Presenters are encouraged, in particular, to plan equipping sessions related to discipleship formation, neighborhood engagement and missional outreach, leadership development, and stewardship enhancement.

For more about Annual Conference and the planning for the 2022 event, which will take place July 10-14 in Omaha, Neb., go to www.brethren.org/ac.

- Religious workers and clergy are now eligible for Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). The program offers methods to help all borrowers (including religious workers and clergy) reduce or better manage student loans. View the webinar linked below to learn how to apply for PSLF, with leadership from attorney Ashley Harrington, a senior official of the Federal Student Aid Office of the US Department of

Education. This webinar was offered by the United Church of Christ in partnership with the National Council of Churches. Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2ovXOLhKQw.

- The deadline for nominations for the Annual Conference ballot has been extended until Jan. 1. The Church of the Brethren denomination and its agencies depend on leaders elected at Annual Conference from nominees proposed by the wider church. Look at the open offices at www.brethren.org/ac/nominations and consider the gifted people you know in the church. Then fill out the simple online form to nominate someone.

- The 2021 Advent devotional from Brethren Press, Do Not Be Afraid by Angela Finet, has broken previous sales records for the devotional booklets. More than 7,000 copies of the devotional have gone out so far this Advent season, including copies in regular and large print, and as digital downloads. The regular print size has sold out but the large print version and digital download are still available at www.brethrenpress.com.

- The Part-time Pastor; Full-time Church program of the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry is offering a book study on Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing by Matt Bloom. The online event is planned once a week from Jan. 4 to March 3, 2022, on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. (Eastern time). Continuing education units are available.

If the idea of thriving in ministry seems like a distant hope, John Fillmore, a “Circuit Rider” for the Part-Time Pastor/Full-Time Church program, is inviting pastors to join in this book discussion centered on Bloom’s research contained in his book. Bloom is the principal researcher for the Flourishing in Ministry project and the Faith and Flourishing at Work project. Fillmore will lead weekly conversations for reflection, discussion, and mutual support to explore the principles Bloom outlines in his book. In cooperation with the Brethren Academy for Ministerial leadership, continuing education credit will be offered. Register at www.brethren.org/webcasts.

- Several folks from the York Center congregation (Lombard, Ill.) attended the online National Older Adult Conference (NOAC) in September. They were quite interested in Karen González’s keynote presentation and panel discussion, so they decided to study her book, *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong*.

The book study sessions were facilitated by pastor Christy Waltersdorff and Marty Creager. They discussed the biblical stories of people who were displaced, those who were welcomed to their new homes, and those who were not welcomed. The conversation led the group to talk about the plight of refugees and immigrants in our world today. The participants want to have further conversations about what our congregation can do to assist people in need, possibly by supporting an immigrant family.

- **It's not too late to apply for the next BVS orientation, which will be held Jan. 18 to Feb. 4 at Camp Bethel in Fincastle, Va.** For more information on the application process, as well as available projects, go to www.brethren.org/bvs.

Supporting Your District

The Illinois/Wisconsin District is active in a variety of ministry and mission efforts, both directly and indirectly. For these efforts to continue, resources are needed. We invite you to consider ways that you might share your time and abilities, your physical resources, your knowledge and wisdom, and your financial gifts to be a part of the district's work.

Options for contributing including the following:

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

Every gift, regardless of size, is a significant boost to the abundance of assets in our midst. All contributions ensure that our district can thrive and follow its call to serve faithfully. If you have further questions, please contact the district office.

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.