



Reflecting news and views

The Reflector

a publication of the Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren

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District Executive: Kevin Kessler

Ponderings from the Moderator - Dana McNeil



As I ponder what it means to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me; as I ponder what it means to receive the blessing of relationship with God through the gift of a babe born in Bethlehem; as I ponder what it means to begin a new

year thinking about new possibilities, especially those brought by the new life offered in Jesus; it becomes easy to put myself at the center of this imagining. But there is one more central than I could ever be because it isn't really about me or about you; it is about the one who takes hold of us, the one who brings that Christmas blessing, the one who offers that new life. It is about Jesus.

When God called Abraham in the 12th chapter of Genesis, yes way back in the Old Testament, God told Abraham, I will bless you. But God gave that blessing not just for the benefit of Abraham. God said I will bless you so that you can be a blessing. Later Jesus uses the imagery of living water to say the same thing. A woman comes to a well seeking water and discovers, in Jesus, the source of living water that not only fills her but flows out of her into her whole village.

"Taking hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" is not about being blessed although that certainly comes with the territory. It is about living into the calling of Christ; it is about being a blessing, a vessel for living water that continues to be filled by Him and flow out for others.

So how might each of us live into this call? How in the coming year might we each be a blessing to our neighbors, to our sister congregations, to our leaders and pastors and especially to our persecuted brothers and sisters in Nigeria?

Please share your thoughts and prayers with me and know that I would welcome the opportunity to visit with any congregation that so desires.

I am praying for all of you that God will bless you and use you to richly bless others in Christ's name.

Disaster Relief Trip



BRETHREN
Disaster Ministries

Just a reminder that our District is taking our Annual Disaster Relief trip this February 7th-15th, 2015. This is a Sunday thru Sunday, which includes travel time. I hope you are praying about your participation! These are a few words that were in a letter I received recently as your District Disaster Coordinator from our head office in New Windsor:

Yes, it's winter in New Jersey with endless toll roads...

Yes, it requires great sacrifice, and ... Yes, the amazing blessings are worth it!

Please share these volunteer opportunities with your contacts. Let them know BDM is receiving cases of families that are in great need. Imagine being struck by the second worst disaster in US history and still waiting for help more than 2 years later!

Thank you for your diligent efforts. May God raise up many willing workers for this important ministry.

Enough said! Please let me know if you have interest in this Ministry opportunity! My email is revrick-dutchtown@jcwifi.com. My phone is 815-499-3012.

Rick Koch, IL/WI District Disaster Relief Coordinator

You are invited to the following event:

PEACE IN THE CITY: MLK NONVIOLENCE & COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION TRAINING

Event to be held at the following time, date, and location:



Saturday, January 24, 2015 from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM (CST)

First Church of the Brethren
425 S. Central Park Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60624

Attend Event

Share this event:



Peace in the City continues! Join us this day of Nonviolence and Community Transformation training as we reflect on the teachings Kingian Nonviolence and its relevance for us today as we are together for peace, healing and transformation of our communities, peoples and world. Ps. Samuel Sarpiya of Rockford Community Church will be our speaker. Refreshments will be provided. This is an inter-generational event. Plan to attend.. . As you may remember, First Church of the Brethren Chicago hosted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1966 as one of their office locations for the housing and justice campaigns. Please be welcome to join us as we share together in engaging nonviolence and community transformation in our times.

We hope you can make it!

Cheers

LaDonna Nkosi, Lead Pastor,
First Church of the Brethren Chicago

DE Ponderings by Kevin Kessler



As we start a new year, I thought I'd share a few items of importance and interest:

1. Mileage rates: The business rate for mileage reimbursement beginning Jan. 1 is 57.5 cents. The rate for medical and moving is 23 cents and for volunteers the rate is 14 cents.

2. Contributions of \$250 or more: A donor making a single contribution (or accumulated amounts on the same date) totaling \$250 or more to a church must have written acknowledgement provided to them. The required written statement must include the following:

- 1) Name of the organization
- 2) Amount of the cash contribution
- 3) Description (but not the value) of non-cash contribution
- 4) Statement that no goods or services were provided by the organization in return for the contribution, if that was the case.
- 5) One of these statements: "only intangible religious benefits were received by the donor" or "value of tangible benefit donor received was \$_____."

Contact the district office for sample statements.

3. Pre-tax reimbursement of health insurance premiums for individual insurance policies is not allowed under the Affordable Care Act:

- 1) Starting in 2014 the new healthcare legislation known as the Affordable Care Act (ACA), now requires employers, in certain situations, to report the cost of providing medical insurance for employees as regular income to those employees. Who is impacted by this change? Those employers who purchase an individual medical insurance policy directly for their employee(s) or reimburse their employee(s) for the cost of an individual medical insurance policy must now report the money spent for this coverage as regular income paid to the employee(s). Please note: If your church provides medical insurance through a group plan, there is no change to the way that expense is treated for tax purposes.
- 2) Employers who continue to offer reimbursement or pay for an employee's individual plan with pre-tax dollars are considered in violation of the ACA and may be subject to an excise tax of \$100 per day per violation for each employee

participating in such an arrangement—as much as \$36,500 per employee per year.

- 3) Any salary adjustments as a result of complying with the ACA will affect pension contributions and amounts reported on the W-2 forms.
- 4) The district office has additional information and material to share on this subject. It is also highly recommended that a professional tax accountant and/or attorney be consulted as decisions are made regarding this matter.

4. A short bibliography of books I read in 2014 that I found interesting and/or helpful:

- **Christianity**

The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey (Had read previously. Thoroughly enjoy Yancey's thoughts on Jesus. One of my favorite authors.)

- **Science**

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert (A look at periods of animal extinction and at animal species that are in rapid decline today. The author considers various and possible causes.)

- **Novel**

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (The power of the printed word on the mind and life of a young girl during a time when books were banned.)

- **Pastoral Helps**

The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction; Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work; Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity; Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness. (These 4 books are written by Eugene Peterson; all helpful in strengthening the ministry and life of a pastor. Part of my reading list during sabbatical.)

- **Human sexuality**

Bible Gender Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships by James V. Brownson

The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics by Robert A. J. Gagnon

(Brownson and Gagnon have differing views. I read each to gain a broader understanding of the views expressed from various places on the continuum of thought on same-sex relationships.)

A Most Blessed New Year from the District of Illinois/ Wisconsin 2015



District Executive
Kevin Kessler



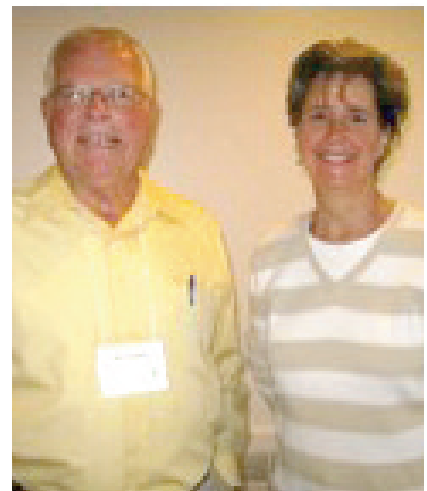
Administrative Assistant
Beth Carpentier



Moderator
Dana McNeil
and
Moderator Elect
Ellis Boughton



Leadership Team Chairperson
Mandy Rahn



District Newsletter
Debbie Noffsinger, Gil Crosby

Going to the Garden



“Peace and social justice practiced here.” Those words are found on a banner hanging outside of the Champaign Church of the Brethren in Champaign, Illinois. This church has

worked for the last few years to house a community garden for their congregation and the local community. The Champaign congregation has used the grant money they received from **Going to the Garden** to revamp their garden beds, increase their growing capacity, and to make a difference in the lives of the community members.

In a recent conversation with **Dawn Blackman**, she told how their community garden has become a safe space for “warring factions” in their community. The part of the city that their community is located in is one marked by ethnic diversity, low incomes, and poor relationships between residents and the police.

By opening their garden to the community at large, the church has established a strong bond with many

of the neighborhood children through an after school program during the school year and a gardening program during the summer. This gives the youth the opportunity to grow their own produce which they can take or home to eat or which they sell at the church's weekly marketplace. It also gives leaders like Dawn time to teach the youth on topics ranging from healthy eating to working on basic life skills.

One of the most meaningful efforts that they have undertaken is to create a bond between the youth and the local police. Given the lack of trust between both sides, the garden is trying to bring the two groups together through work days and garden parties. Dawn said that it is their hope for both groups to learn to trust one another and to foster relationships in the context of community gardening. In this way, the Champaign Church of the Brethren is carrying out the message of peace and justice posted on their banner.

For more information on Going to the Garden and how your church can become involved, please visit www.brethren.org/goingtothegarden or e-mail kfurrow@brethren

Reprinted from Church of the Brethren Action Alerts

Brethren Ministers' Association Pre-Annual Conference Continuing Education Event

Delving Deeply into Compassion is the theme for the Ministers' Association event July 10-11, 2015 in Tampa, Florida. Joyce Rupp, writer, “spiritual midwife,” international retreat, and conference speaker will be the keynote presenter. She has avidly researched and spoken on the topic of compassion for the past ten years and firmly believes that compassion can change a heart, change a life, and change a world. The focus of this event will be personal transformation and the renewal of one's vision and enthusiasm for ministry. Participants in this event will receive a free copy of Rupp's book,

Out of the Ordinary. Rupp will lead three sessions on:

1. Compassion: What the Gospels and the Latest Science Have in Common
2. Compassion: Caring for Self While We Care for Others
3. Engaging With and Being Present to Suffering

Register online at www.brethren.org/sustaining beginning Feb. 1, 2015.

Church of the Brethren Youth/Young Adult Workcamps/Events

The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Church of the Brethren has released information about 2015 Work camps/Events. Following are important dates to keep in mind.

Junior High

January 8: Workcamp registration opens online at www.brethren.org/workcamps

June 19-21: National Junior High Conference. Registration opens Jan. 9 online at www.brethren.org/njhc

November 1: National Junior High Sunday. Worship planning resources will be posted later in the year.

Senior High

Christian Citizenship Seminar registration is open online at www.brethren.org/ccs

January 8: Workcamp registration opens online at www.brethren.org/workcamps

February 1: Souper Bowl of Caring www.souperbowl.org

April 18-23: Christian Citizenship Seminar

May 3: National Youth Sunday. Worship planning resources will be posted online at www.brethren.org/yya/resources

Young Adult

January 8: Workcamp registration opens online at www.brethren.org/workcamps

January 9: Ministry Summer Service and Youth Peace Travel Team applications due, www.brethren.org/mss and www.brethren.org/yptt

February: Young Adult Conference registration opens online at www.brethren.org/yac

May 22-24: Young Adult Conference 2015 at Camp Swatara

Advisors

One hour webinars; .1 CEU credit available for live participation; each webinar begins at 7:00pm central time; more information available at www.brethren.org/webcasts

March 3: Way to Live: Life and Time

May 5: Way to Live: Forgiveness and Justice



Church of the Brethren

Program Assistant For Office Of Donor Relations

The Church of the Brethren is seeking an individual to fill a full-time hourly position of **program assistant for the Office of Donor Relations**. The program assistant is part of the Donor Relations team and reports to the director of Donor Relations. This position is located in Elgin, IL.

The major responsibilities of this position are to support and assist the office of Donor Relations in developing connections with donors and friends of the Church of the Brethren through electronic and print correspondence, individual and congregational contacts, special offerings, and stewardship education resources.

Required skills and knowledge include ease of communication with individuals, congregations and contributors to various projects as well as with donor support. Tasks will include assisting with a variety of production, printing, and proofreading

logistics as well as assisting with development of congregation and donor support materials.

A bachelor's degree or equivalent work experience is required, as is proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite, particularly Word, Excel, and Outlook; ability to become familiar with other software programs including Adobe Acrobat Pro, Photoshop, InDesign and Blackbaud.

This position is based at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, IL.

Applications will be received beginning immediately and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis until the position is filled. Qualified candidates are invited to request the application form by contacting:

Office of Human Resources Church of the Brethren
1451 Dundee Avenue Elgin, IL 60120, 800-323-8039
ext. 367 – humanresources@brethren.org

New Position Open at CWS



The Church World Service office in West Chicago, IL, is seeking a full-time administrative assistant to provide support to staff locally and regionally. This position will include being the first point of contact for volunteers, managing databases, and

providing various levels of support for colleagues. Details are available at www.cwsglobal.org/employment/hub-administrative-assistant-west-chicago.html

2015 Calendar

January, 2015

- 1New Year's Day
- 6Epiphany
- 10Program and Arrangements, Peoria
- 16-22 ..CODE Meeting, Coco Beach, FL
- 18-24 ..Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 19Martin Luther King Day

February

- 1Service Sunday
Chicago Visioning Term - Elgin
- 7District LT Meeting - Canton
- 7-15IL / Wisc. Disaster Response Week
- 15Transfiguration Sunday
- 18ASH WEDNESDAY
- 21Ministerial Leadership Dev. Team - Peru, IL
- 22First Sunday of Lent

March

- 1Second Sunday of Lent
- 6World Day of Prayer
- 8Third Sunday of Lent (Daylight Saving Time)
- 14-16 ..Mission & Ministry Bd., Lancaster Pa.
- 15Fourth Sunday of Lent,
One Great Hour of Sharing
- 17-19 ..Midwest DE Meeting, Camp Mack
- 20First day of Spring
- 21Ministerial Leadership Dev. Team, Peru, IL
- 22Fifth Sunday of Lent
- 29PALM SUNDAY

April

- Child Abuse Prevention Month*
- 2Maundy Thursday
- 3Good Friday
- 5EASTER
- 11.....District LT Meeting - Rockford
- 20-21 ..District Ministers Cont. Edu. Event
- 25DISTRICT POTLUCK, Naperville

May

- Older Adult Month*
- 2Ministerial Leadership Dev. Team
- 3National Youth Sunday
- 7National Day of Prayer
- 9Bethany Commencement
- 10Mother's Day
- 14Ascension Day
- 14-1Church Leadership Conf., Frederick, MD
- 24Pentecost
- 25Memorial Day
- 31Trinity Sunday

June

- 5World Environment Day
- 6District LT Meeting - LaPlace
- 19-21 ..Nat'l. Jr. High Conf, Elizabethtown College
- 21Father's Day
- 27 --- Ministerial Leadership Dev. Team, Peru, IL

July

- 4Independence Day
- 9CODE Meeting, Tampa, FL.
- 10-11 ..Minister Assoc. Cont. Edu. Event, Tampa
- 10Mission & Ministry Bd. Meeting, Tampa
- 11-15 ..ANNUAL CONFERENCE, TAMPA, FL.

August

- 1District LT Meeting - Polo

September

- 7-11Nat'l Older Adult Conf., L. Junaluska, NC
- 13National Grandparents Day
- 20Bethany Sunday, Mission Offering
- 21International Day of Peace

October

- Domestic Violence Awareness Month*
- Pastor Appreciation Month*
- 3District LT Meeting - Oak Grove
- 4World Communion Sunday
- 16World Food Day, Peace with Justice Week
- 17-19 ..Mission & Ministry Bd. Meeting, Elgin, IL
- 18Laity Sunday
- 25Reformation Sunday
- 29-31 ..Bethany Theo. Sem. Presidential Forum

November

- 1All Saints Day, Nat'l. Jr. High Sunday
(Daylight Savings Time)
- 3Election Day
- 7-8DISTRICT CONFERENCE
- 8Stewardship Sunday
- 11.....Veteran's Day
- 21District LT Meeting - Pleasant Hill
- 22Christ the King Sunday
- 26Thanksgiving
- 29First Sunday of Advent

December

- 6Second Sunday of Advent
- 10Human Right's Day
- 13Third Sunday of Advent
- 20Fourth Sunday of Advent
- 22First day of Winter
- 24Christmas Eve
- 25Christmas Day
- 31New Year's Eve