

WESTERN PLAINS DISTRICT CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

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Did You Get the Word?

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21 (NRSVA)

We can't always count on everyone getting the word. Often, when the message is very important, we urge those who do get the message to pass it on. That's why the Apostle Paul identified his primary work as getting out the word of the reconciliation that God was accomplishing in Christ.

Why is that message so important? Because it is not what we expect. Humans expect whatever we hold most central to the universe to be demanding and unforgiving. We assume, therefore, that the most important duty is to get ourselves on the right side of that power. Some seek to learn the principles of success because failure to follow those rules will result in failure and poverty. Others spend their lives trying to be pleasing in hopes of finally winning acceptance. Still others try to get what they deserve the old fashioned way ... by "earning it." Yet others have found success, or acceptance, or winning so impossible that they simply find life hopeless.

Granted, many would not give the name, "God," to what they hold most central, but when they do, they might phrase their concern like this, "God will not love me unless I meet God's expectations." One despairing person said, "How can I expect to meet God's expectations? I can't even meet my own!"

The Apostle Paul felt anguish because of his inability to meet the demands of the law. No matter how hard he tried, even when he did it "perfectly," he still felt on the "outside." He and God were still poles apart.

What is at the heart of all this is the assumption that it is our task to reconcile ourselves with God. But Paul heard a different Word in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What God was doing in Christ was turning the tables on human expectation. The Word is that God has done the reconciling! We don't have to live poles apart from God anymore. God has made that unnecessary.

Where once the Word of God called all things into being, now the Word of reconciliation in Christ calls us into a new creation and a new community in which the Word of reconciliation is carried in word and deed.

If you get the Word, pass it on!

Robert W. Dell

From Congregations . . .

Youth from the Garden City Church of the Brethren will be participating in World Vision's 30 Hour Famine project on May 22-23. This will be the second time they have participated. Last year their fundraiser brought in \$2291. They will sleep in large appliance boxes at Stevens Park in Garden City from 1 p.m. Friday until 7 p.m. Saturday. Cash donations for World Vision Famine Relief, along with donations of non-perishable food items to be given to the Emmaus House locally, will be accepted at the park during this 30-hour fast.

Women's Retreat Report

Many thanks go to the women of Colorado for all the time and energy put into the wonderful retreat that was held March 27-30. The attendance was less than expected due to the weather but the fellowship was warm and sincere. Thirty-two women braved the snowy roads to get to Highlands Retreat Center in Colorado.

Ann Bach helped us to focus (using the cups we brought as a symbol) of our lives and what we had or could have our life filled with. We were led in an inspirational time of meditating and sharing with one another on the following topics:

"The Cup of our Life" was a container of God's presence

"The Cup as a Vessel of Loving Energy"

"The Cup as My Teacher"

"Thirsting for Filling"

Vivian Sherred led us in thoughts during the morning watch of "Fill My Cup with the Beauty of Mountains and of you, Lord" as we looked out over the beautiful Mt. Meeker covered with snow and meditated on how God was a part of our life.

Gail Erisman Valeta led the final worship with "The Blessing Cup." She challenged us as we continue our journey to not "go alone", to be sure and take food for the journey (spiritual & physical) and to this she noted we should make use of devotional booklets available for us. She suggested that we should share spiritual snacks along our journey with others we meet on our path. In this idea we could write or copy notes to others that may need the encouragement that we have received from our gleanings of our time with "God". This may even be to the extent of sharing an article or book with another.

The Saturday evening campfire was titled "Fill your cup with laughter" and we all did plenty of that as we participated with skits, songs, memories, and jokes that were presented by the participants.

Again the Nurture Commission of the District thanks all of the presenters, planners and participants for a wonderful time of fellowship shared by all.

Beverly Minnich
Nurture Chair

Prayers for Lybrook Community Ministries



Please put these prayers on your list during your time of prayer each day. For Lybrook we fervently ask you to pray as follows:

May: For our Navajo brothers and sisters who have received much from the Mission and who therefore care that it continues and grows and flourishes.

Sonja Griffith for the Lybrook Vision Committee

Congratulations!

Jennifer Jensen (Antelope Park), our district youth minister, was selected by the student body at Bethany Theological Seminary to be on the Student Leadership Team. This is the first time for a non-campus student to be selected. Jennifer attends Bethany as a Connections student. Congratulations, Jennifer!

Chuck Riedesel (Holmesville), who teaches computer science and engineering at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, has won the James A. Griesen 2009 Chancellor's Award for Exemplary Service to Students. This award acknowledges "extraordinary and sustained performance by an individual who goes beyond their assigned responsibilities in serving UNL students." Congratulations, Chuck!

Transformed by Jesus to Make Disciples

Transformation – It's All about Change

This is the third and final article to describe the belief system that has influenced the Western Plains District transformation movement. The first article proclaimed God's presence in all of life—loving, caring, transforming, and calling us into relationship. This is letting God be God. The second article describes the basic human role as miraculous expectation. We are looking for and expecting God's miraculous activity. The scripture gives us promises. We are looking for signs from God to celebrate. This article is about being transformed through all the changes that come our way.

Life is about changing. Perhaps the only constant in life besides God's loving presence is that to live is to change from the womb to the tomb. Think about it. Coming from the comfort and protection of the womb to light, air, human interaction, separation is a big, traumatic change. The changes keep coming. Some we choose. However, most changes choose us. The last change from this life into the tomb may be the most important.

My belief is that God is present in all change – loving us, pursuing us, seeking our transformation into closer, deeper relationship. This seems rather easy to comprehend when our changes are fun or when we sense we are growing. It is sometimes easy to see transformation taking place in others even when their changes may not be easy or fun. It may be more difficult to comprehend when our change involves great loss or tragedy or pain, or in any other way that we don't like or is difficult.

I have invited Carol Mason to share the story of the loss of her husband, Ralph. Just before they were finishing their extensive tour of service as missionaries in Nigeria Ralph was killed in an auto accident. Carol will share this experience, the drastic change it brought to her. At the Gathering Steering Committee's invitation she will share what this tragedy has meant and in what ways it has brought new, transformed life to her.

Robert Quinn, who wrote *Deep Change*, suggests that we have two choices in dealing with change that comes our way. We can either accept it or reject it. If we accept change and work at integrating all changes as they come along, then we will continue to grow. We will become more alive and vital. Joy and happiness will continue to be possible for us. This is moving toward God's transforming love.

On the other hand if we try to avoid or deny change when it happens we lose our spontaneity and ability to respond freely to life. It takes much less energy to face and deal with even difficult change than it takes to fight and deny it. The choice to deny change is a dying process. Facing it is life giving and transforming.

Gilbert Rendle in *Leading Change in the Congregation* suggests the way congregations deal with change is crucial to their survival. There is so much change happening everywhere. Congregations that avoid it or prevent it from happening, he suggests, just won't exist in the future. He suggests that you don't have to like all the change. You do have to live in relationship to it. It is good to understand it, appreciate it for others. Don't try to block it. Try to understand how it is meaningful for others. Congregations and members who live in relationship to change can find ways to move into the future with vitality and hope. Living with openness to change enables new life and can be lived out faithfully.

There you have it – look for God's presence in your experience of change. God does not necessarily cause our changes. However, God is present in them, loving, reaching out to us, and seeking us for God's own.

Ken Holderread
District Co-Executive/Minister

McPherson College Announces New President

On May 1, 2009, Michael P. Schneider will begin his tenure as the new President of McPherson College. A letter from Craig Little, chair of the college's Board of Trustees, states that Mr. Schneider has been with the college for the past seven years, starting as director of career services and then serving as vice president of advancement and adding the vice president of admissions role in 2007. "Through his leadership, the college enrolled 200 new students in 2008 – the highest number in about 25 years. This helped to propel full-time student enrollment to more than 500 for the first time in more than 30 years." The outgoing president, Ron Hovis, has served over the past six years. (McPherson College in McPherson Kansas was founded by the Church of the Brethren. For other educational institutions affiliated with the Church of the Brethren go to <http://www.cob-net.org/college.htm>)

McPherson College Board Approves “Plan for Sustainability”

McPherson College’s Board of Trustees has approved a revised Plan for Sustainability that retains the philosophy and religion major, the full-time campus ministries position, and enhances programming in the areas of peace and Christian service. According to a March 13, 2009 McPherson College press release, “The board adopted a revised Plan for Sustainability which included numerous changes from the plan presented in December. The original plan was written to address financial concerns relating to a declining endowment and a need to balance the budget and create a plan for future growth of the college. In December, the board invited the faculty to develop alternate proposals that would address the same concerns.”

According to the revised plan “a combination of donor designated endowed funds will allow MC to continue and enhance a variety of programming related to philosophy & religion, peace and Christian service, including the campus ministry position. Herb Smith, department chair and professor of philosophy and religion commented, “I am very pleased that the board has decided to continue the philosophy & religion major. With the addition of the recently proposed Christian service component, I look for exciting possibilities both locally and perhaps even internationally as we redesign the program.”

The full summary of recommendations, which has become the new Plan for Sustainability, may be viewed at www.mcpherson.edu/plan.

Camp Forms

Camp forms for Camp Mt. Hermon and Camp Colorado are available on-line:

<http://www.campmthermon.org/>

<http://www.campcolorado.org/>

How blessed this District is to have two high quality camps! The McPherson Church of the Brethren Youth Team is interested in partnering with other Church of the Brethren congregations to get as many young people to one (or both!) of our district camps as possible. For many years we have coordinated rides of our youth to Camp Colorado and tried to be supportive of youth and parents going to Camp Mount Hermon. Because of distance, one of those takes a little more coordination and effort.

While the possibility of assisting youth from other congregations getting to camp has always been available -- we've enjoyed working with Wichita, Nickerson, Hutch Community, and Newton congregations in the past -- we'd like to extend that invitation as widely as possible. Wanting to be a good steward of resources and/or needing a ride to Camp Mt. Hermon and think McPherson would be an OK place to leave from? Contact us and we'd be happy to connect you with others going from this area.

Wanting to be a good steward of resources and/or needing a ride to Camp Colorado and think McPherson would be an OK place to leave from? Every week during the camping season we have at least one vehicle taking youth to camp and bringing more youth back home. Cost is \$90 round trip and \$45 one way. Those expenses go to cover gas, as well as basic expenses for volunteer drivers (like food!). The goal is simply to break even ... some years we do, and some years we don't. Deadline to *guarantee* a spot is Friday, May 22. After that date, remaining spots will be filled on a first come/first served basis, depending on availability.

To make a transportation “reservation.” simply send the correct amount, made out to *McPherson CoB Youth*, to Shawn Flory Replogle, 200 N. Carrie, McPherson, KS 67460. Please indicate the youth’s name and the week of camp they are needing transportation. You could also contact me with questions at shawn.replogle@sbcglobal.net, or 620-241-1109. See you at camp!

The '09 Men's Retreat

What an uplifting event! Thirty-three men shared together in song, prayer and fellowship. Thanks to Jim Neher, the Sisters at Heartland Center got to hear in concert our male choir and they shared many accolades for the music. The men really got into the music as they shared their voices in praising God with instrumental accompaniment. Thanks to Chris Stover-Brown, the men shared in meditation and transformed spiritual awareness at the Friday night closing vespers. Chris also led us in a session of what can be done with electronic equipment to preserve stories of church members. Kirk Rink led us in a “Get to Know Each Other” session. Stan Noffsinger,

General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren, was our featured speaker of the event. He led us into "The Journey of Life--Where We Are and What We May Become." The men did a lot of soul searching and sharing. The journey also led into "What is Going On In WPD." This led into Barney Stephens and Roscoe Switzer's session on "What Can We Men Do to Help Our Camps." But the greatest challenge of all was met by gathering \$750 that was sent to Disaster Response at the national level. Way to go Western Plains Men! And a big thanks to all the men from Wichita First Church of the Brethren who served as hosts.

The 2010 retreat will be held March 12-13 and will be hosted by Monitor at Heartland Center.

Brother Jim Neher

Become new!



Western Plains District Conference McPherson, KS Friday, July 31 - Sunday, August 2, 2009

Join us in worship:

Friday night Keith Funk will lead us, and Moderator Leslie Frye will bring the message

Saturday night the Youth will lead us, and 2010 Annual Conference Moderator (and McPherson Church of the Brethren pastor) Shawn Flory Replogle will bring the message

Sunday morning Laura Snyder will lead us, and Oakton Church of the Brethren pastor (and 2004 Annual Conference Moderator) Chris Bowman will bring the message.

Join us in Christian fellowship:

Activities for all ages

Friday Pastor/Spouse Banquet, Ken Holderread, speaker

Friday evening ice cream social after worship, hosted by the Cedars, with a program by professional musician (Eden Valley pastor) Roger Cooper

Saturday Women's Breakfast, Beverly Minnich, speaker

Saturday evening Projects Unlimited auction

Join us in Christ's work:

Anticipated business this year includes a proposed new district board structure, one designed so that we can more effectively be the Church that Christ calls us to be

See the June Shepherd's Voice for more information, or contact a member of the District Conference Planning Committee: Leslie AB Frye, Moderator; Keith Funk, Moderator-Elect; Frances Oltman, Clerk; Cheryl Mishler; Lisa Hazen; Terri Torres; or Elsie Holderread, District Co-Executive.

Denominational Personnel Changes

Bethany Theological Seminary

Steven Schweitzer, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Ind., will become Associate Professor and Academic Dean at Bethany Theological Seminary beginning July 1, 2009.

Mission and Ministry Board

Stan Dueck has accepted the position of director for Transforming Practices in the Church of the Brethren's Congregational Life Ministries. He begins in this position on April 6. The director for Transform-

ing Practices is a new position created as part of a re-design of Congregational Life Ministries

Because of the economic recession and the budget reduction put in place by the Mission and Ministry Board, Church of the Brethren, Inc., the following positions are being eliminated.

The *Brethren Witness/Washington Office* was closed as of March 19. Phil Jones' service as director of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office ended March 19.

The Congregational Life Ministries are being re-designed and the *Congregational Life Team* was eliminated April 6. The plan outlines a new staff configuration with four director-level positions to be based at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill. The four positions are Intercultural Ministries, Transforming Practices, Spiritual Life and Discipleship, and Youth and Young Adult Ministries. Congregational Life Team members whose positions were eliminated are Stan Dueck, Janice Glass King, Duane Grady, Carol E.O. Mason, Carol Yeazell, Steven Gregory, and Jeff Glass. Ruben Deoleo's half-time Congregational Life Team position ends also. Ruben Deoleo will continue full time as director of Intercultural Ministry.

The position of director of the *Wellness Ministry* of the Church of the Brethren and Mary Lou Garrison's service in this position will end May 30.

The position of *volunteer service ministries secretary* was eliminated as of March 24, and Kim Bickler's service in the position is ending on the same date.

Jon Kobel's service as *manager of office operations for the General Secretary* of the Church of the

Brethren ends on June 19, after which he will assume new duties as conference assistant for the Conference Office of the Church of the Brethren.

Nancy Miner's position as *manager in the office of the Associate General Secretary of Ministry and Program/Executive Director of Caring Ministries* will be modified to provide managerial assistance to both the General Secretary and the Associate General Secretary of Ministry and Program.

Two employees of Brethren Press--Jean Clements and Margaret Drafall--are moving to part-time from fulltime positions. Clements serves as Yearbook specialist. While reducing her time in Brethren Press, she also will take on a few hours a week for the Office of Ministry. Her change in employment status took effect this week. Drafall is a customer service resource specialist. Her shift from fulltime to part-time will take effect May 1.

Bryan Douglas (Doug) Donohoo's service as *Special Gifts counselor* in the Church of the Brethren's Stewardship and Donor Development department has ended as of March 31.

BVS Corner

In September 2007 I went to Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) orientation. There were 31 at orientation, the most in a very long time. Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) was my top choice of project. In October 14 I spent two weeks at the New Windsor offices learning about BDM. It was interesting to finally see New Windsor after hearing so much about it.

I then flew to New Orleans and started my service at the Pearl River, Louisiana project. The first week I was a "regular" volunteer, working alongside other volunteers who were there for the week. My second week I started my duties Assistant Project Director. It was a challenging year with a new crew of volunteers every week and every month a new set of Directors. In mid-November I attended a very informative BDM Directors workshop at New Windsor.

The Pearl River/Slidell area is on the Northeast side of Lake Pontchartrain. Homes closer to the lake had water damage from a 20 ft. plus storm surge. Homes away from the lake had wind and tornado damage. Most of the houses we worked on were completely gutted and we helped put them back together. One was a new build. It had been pushed off its foundation and was beyond repair. The new house sits on pillars about 8 feet high. Brethren volunteers dug deep into hard sand, tied rebar, stacked concrete and cinder blocks, and framed this home. We were told that when the inspector came to look at the rebar, he commented that he had never seen a job so neat!

In April the Pearl River project closed and we moved to Chalmette, St. Bernard Parish on the East of New Orleans proper. We became the NOLA East project, but were housed with, shared meals with, and shared work with the Chalmette Project. St. Bernard Parish was completely devastated by Hurricane Katrina. I arrived in the spring of 2008, 2 ½ years after the storm, and blocks of houses and businesses were still shells. Some are slowly rebuilding. I could see a difference from when I was there in April 2007, but there is a long way to get back to "normal."

In September I joined the BDM project in Rushford, Minn. This small community was flooded in 2007. All of the homes we were working on here were new builds. The year was filled with hard work and, at times, frustration and confusion, but was also filled with blessings from new friends and strangers. Hearing the stories of homeowners lives, how the storm has affected them, and how they have persevered gave me a sense that we can overcome great adversity in our lives. I felt joy when a volunteer would say at the end of the week that she/he hadn't expected to

feel blessed, to be thanked. They had come to help, to give of themselves and they had not anticipated anything in return. That is the true reason for volunteering, for serving.

I am currently serving another year with BVS in Lancaster, Penn., with Habitat for Humanity. I work in the Habitat office four days and Saturdays on the construction site. I'm organizing home dedications for the year, creating a newsletter for our current homeowners, gathering information and documentation of work completed on the last 4-unit build, and helping to plan a work trip to the Gulf Coast. I will soon be interviewing current Habitat homeowners and hearing how their experience has been. Homeowners have to put in sweat equity hours, so when I'm on the construction site on Saturdays, I get to interact with them.

I went into Brethren Volunteer Service because I was at a place in my life where I felt I needed to do more with my life. I was having a difficult time finding full-time work in my chosen profession and working another retail job was not fulfilling. I selected Brethren Disaster Ministries and Habitat for Humanity, because I knew I would have an opportunity for some hands on work

While working with BDM I met so many members of the Church of the Brethren that are dedicated to the mission of BDM. Many may not be able to go on trips much longer, but still have the desire to help others. I met 15 and 16 year olds who have already been on numerous trips. Week after week seeing volunteers take vacation time to come help others when they could be somewhere relaxing, was amazing. The first time I saw a "repeat" volunteer, someone I had worked with a few months earlier, was special. And then it happened again and again! I have made connections with many people, they have invited me to their homes and have shown me what service and giving of one's self is all about. One thing about being part of a denomination like the Church of the Brethren, we welcome and show hospitality toward one another.

Amy Fishburn is a member of the Lone Star Church of the Brethren in Lawrence, KS. She is currently in her second year of BVS, serving in Lancaster, PA. She welcomes your thoughts and prayers.

District Calendar

2009

May 3	National Youth Sunday	
May 5	Ethics Training for pastors; Rochester church, Topeka, Kan.	10 am-3:30 pm
May 11-14	District Executives West meet in Kansas City	Office Closed
May 23-25	Young Adult Conference, Camp Swatara (Penn.)	
May 31-June 6	Senior High Camp (CC) Junior High Camp (MH)	
June 7-13	Junior Camp (CC) Senior High Camp (MH)	
June 11-14	Brethren Academy course "Distinctive Marks of the Brethren," McPherson, KS	
June 14-20	Junior High Camp (CC) Junior Camp (MH)	
June 17	Ethics Training for Pastors, Bethel church, Arriba, Colo.,	10 am-3:30 pm
June 19-21	National Junior High Conference, Harrisonburg, Va.	
June 21-25	Pre-Junior Camp (MH & CC)	
June 26-28	"Come Along with Me" Camp (MH)	
June 26-30	Annual Conference, San Diego, Calif.	Office closed
July 13-16	TRIM & EFSM Orientation, Richmond, Ind.	
July 30-31	Executive Committee (30) & District Board (31), McPherson, Kan.	
July 31-Aug. 2	District Conference, McPherson, Kan.	
Aug. 7-9	Senior High Weekend (MH)	
Aug. 22	Ethics Training for Pastors, Newton Kan.,	10 am-3:30 pm

Sept. 7-11	National Older Adult Conference, Lake Junaluska, N.C.
Sept. 18-19	District Board Retreat, Wiley, Colo.
Oct. 12-14	Pastor/Leader Training, Great Bend (tentative)
Oct. 23-25	Gathering V, Webster Conference Center, Salina, Kan.
November 1	National Junior High Sunday
Nov. 6-7	Executive Committee (6) & District Board (7)

Future Dates

March 12-13, 2010	Men’s Retreat, Heartland Center, Great Bend
March 19-20, 2010	Women’s Retreat, Crosswind Conference Center, Hesston KS
Oct. 22-24, 2010	Gathering VI
Oct. 21-23, 2011	Gathering VII (tentative date)

The Shepherd’s Voice is published for church leaders, ministers, church board chairs, Christian Education directors, Youth Leaders, church commission chairs, and many others. We encourage your contributions. Deadlines are noted below. Unless otherwise noted, permission is granted to reprint articles for congregational newsletters and bulletins. If you know someone in the above categories who is not receiving the newsletter, let us know.

**Church of the Brethren
Western Plains**

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Mon	8:30am-3:30pm (Closed 12-1)
Tues	8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Wed	Closed
Thurs	8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Fri	8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

The answering machine will be on during hours when the office is closed.

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Please send all articles and address changes to the District Office.

If you wish to submit articles to the Shepherd’s Voice, please read the following:

**Next newsletter deadline:
On or before May 15th**

- Articles should be sent to the district office: wpdcb@sbcglobal.net
- Articles should be no longer than 400 words. Please allow space for any submitted pictures. Note: Pictures will not be returned so make sure to send copies only.
- Information received after the 15th will be included in the next newsletter.
- If multiple copies of the same article are submitted, the last copy will be used and the others discarded.
- Outdated information will be discarded.

Space is limited so some articles may not be published.

The newsletter will be published the following months with combined months noted: Feb, March, April, May, June/July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec/Jan.

Current Distribution: 393
Plus 145 via email