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Glen A. Pierce

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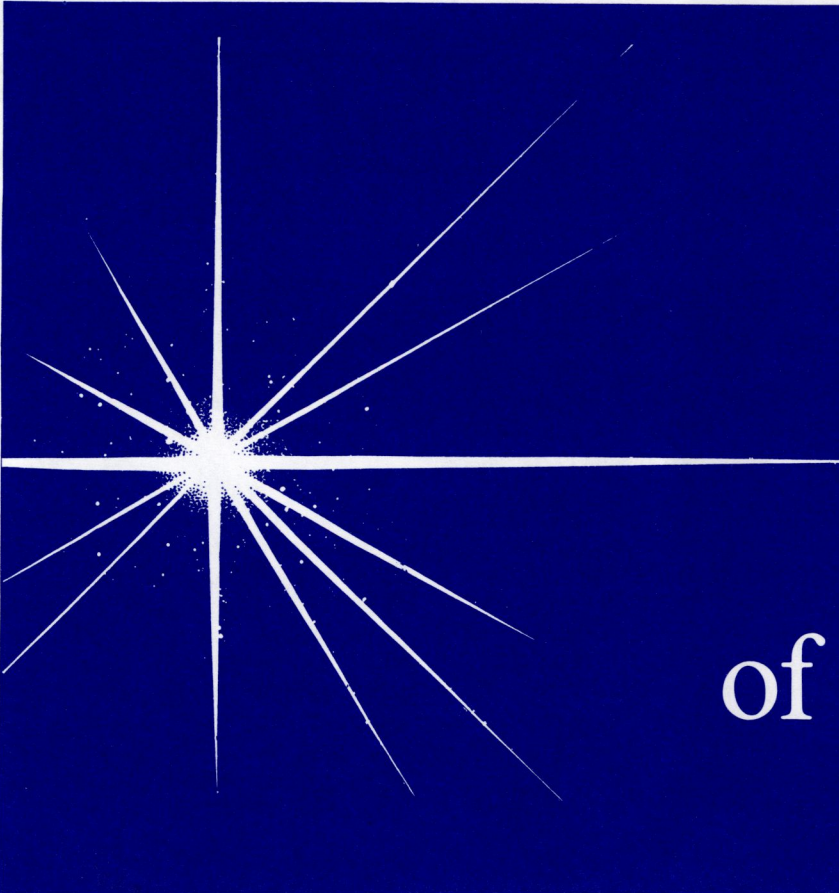
VISITOR

December 1988



You will be
with child and
give birth to a
son, and you
are to give him
the name Jesus.

Luke 1:31



Faith: the crisis of Christmas

by Brennan Manning

The crisis of Christmas in the Christian community, put bluntly, is a crisis of *faith*. Faith is a commitment to Truth, who is Jesus Christ. Faith is dedication to Reality, who is Jesus Christ. When my mind gives to things the importance they have in reality, I am living in the truth. But when the social conventions, artificial distractions, and superficial claims of the unreal world, which is passing away, dominate my time, interest, and attention, I am living in untruth.

The primitive confession of faith "Jesus is Lord" is not an abstract theological proposition but a highly personal statement. It puts my integrity on the line and profoundly affects the way I celebrate Advent, the four weeks of preparation for the birth of Christ. If Jesus is Lord of *my* life and *my* Christmas, I am challenged to submit all the priorities of my personal and professional life to this primary fact.

Paraphrasing Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, "You must lay aside your old self and your former way of celebrating Christmas . . . and ac-

quire a fresh spiritual way of thinking."

The traditional hymn sung in many churches on Sunday morning, "Christ Jesus Victor, Christ Jesus *Ruler*, Christ Jesus Lord and Redeemer," implies that the relationship with Jesus is the most intense and intimate of all my relations. Is this really true? In gut-level honesty, what rules our lives as we prepare for Christmas? What has power over us?

First, I suppose, it's people. Those who speak to me; the men and women whose words I read. Those with whom I associate or would like to associate; those who give to me and those who refuse; those who help and those who hinder; those whom I like and those whom I do not like. Such people occupy my attention, fill my thoughts, in a sense, *rule* in me.

Jesus Christ? Well, he counts, but only after I have finished with the others. Only when they and their claims leave me time for him. Sometimes these others occupy so much of my time that the whole day slips by without a thought of the Lord of

my life. Even at worship, I can be so distracted by my friends and enemies that I forget to lift up my mind and heart to him. Oh, I may recite a few mechanical prayers, but my thoughts are somewhere else. "This people gives me lip-service," Isaiah heard the God of Israel say, "but their heart is far from me." Like King Claudius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below; words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Paraphrasing
Paul, "You must
lay aside your
old self and
your former
ways of
celebrating
Christmas . . .

What else rules in me besides people? *Things*—things I desire. Money, popularity, power, personal appearance, a Mercedes convertible. Also the *problems* that preoccupy me—the future, the past, career advancement, my neighbor's bad breath, a thousand trivial concerns. These fill the spiritual space within me, not Jesus. He is present to me only when the crowding, all-absorbing pressures of my little world leave room for him. No, Jesus does not dominate my life. Any tree in my path seems to have more power than he, if only because it forces me to walk around it! So much of my life is illusory because my values and my mindset belong to an unreal world. What would life be like if Christ did rule in me? If during Advent my primary concern were his Kingdom?

But what rules in me is the kingdom of people, the kingdom of events, petty plans, and personal interests. They stifle Jesus Christ, crowd him out of my life. Who can understand how Jesus can be the Son of God and I can be so indifferent to him? What shape would Advent and Christmas take, if Jesus really *ruled* in me?

If he did, that is, if my faith were deep, burning, powerful, and passionate, my life would be very different. My self-esteem would cease to be based upon the worldly values of possessions, prestige, status, and privilege, and upon the group solidarities of family, race, class, religion, and nation. For to make these my supreme values is to have nothing in common with Jesus. With burning faith I would speak of Jesus not as some distant being but as a close friend with whom I have a personal relationship. The invisible world would become more real than the world of what I see, Christ more real than myself. Christmas would be more than a breathless finale to a frantic shopping season, more than sentimental music or tinsel on the tree. Yes, life would be radically different if Jesus Christ ruled in me, if my faith had the force of a passionate conviction.

But my life *must* be different. To be a Christian means to stake one's

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December 1988

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Are we also following a star that leads to God?

by Luis Elier Rodriguez

The “Wise Men” see the star and they observe that in it there is something very special. They glimpse a message, an important piece of news in their lives.

Here is the real wisdom of those “wise” ones. They don’t only see the surface. They don’t see in the star just a star, and then in the child just a child, but they discover something more. They discover the wholeness of what they observe and therefore they follow its sign.

In the smile of a person we can see not only a face, but also a deeper expression. There is no doubt that all the world has a face, a facade, an outward appearance. But in our life, our encounters, our experiences, in many things a star can appear that shows the way.

It also happens that often we only see the contours of something and we don’t take note of the underlying expression, the content, the message that is found within. In this consists the wisdom of the Wise Men—in looking for what the star really

This Christmas meditation by Luis Elier Rodriguez of Aibonito, Puerto Rico, Mennonite World Conference vice-president for Latin America, first appeared in Alcance Menonita, the magazine of the Puerto Rico Mennonite Conference.

wanted to show them. They see in it a call . . . a provocation . . . a revelation.

A revelation requires human beings that are open to it, and the Wise Men open themselves. They open themselves to the extent that they leave their own world in order to put themselves on the road that the star is showing them, to wherever it guides them.

The others are closed up. They stay in their world and their homes. For them the question concerning the most important thing in life is not so important as staying as they are. Generally, there are only a few who open themselves up and go out on the road.

The star takes them to Jerusalem. Awaiting them there is the greatest illusion and also the most important decision. Because in Jerusalem they find “two kings.” In the first place they find Herod, a symbol of power, of success, of prestige and self-sufficiency.

And before him the wisdom of the Wise Men is on display again. They do not stand still in the face of that man’s intrigues, in the face of his powerful ambition and arrogance. They don’t stay there in front of Herod because they don’t recognize

him as a king; the star does not point to him for the deeper meaning they seek.

The star continues forward and they follow along until they find the other king of the Jews—a child, powerless, and helpless. Poverty does not confuse them. Before him they bow down and worship. The presence of God is not in the world in power and riches, but in the impotence and weakness derived from love.

The Wise Men go back to their land by another road. Anyone who experiences God so simply and deeply cannot return along the same road. They turn their back to Herod, with whom they have nothing to do.

Are we sufficiently “wise” to look for the way of the star? Do we try to get out of our own little world to look always for that something “more” and that something “new” that puts us on the way? Where do we find God? How does he show himself? Is it in the kings and rulers of this world? Is it in the successful ones and in those for whom everything seems to be going well? What is the meaning for us of the doorway, the child, the swaddling clothes, the star? ■

life on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In the early church Jesus made such a profound impact on his followers that they found it impossible to believe that anyone could be equal to him—not Moses or Elijah or even Abraham. And the idea that a prophet or judge or Messiah should come after Jesus and be even greater was simply inconceivable. It was not necessary to wait for someone else. Jesus was everything. If anyone was to judge the world at the end, it must be he. If anyone was to be acknowledged as Lord, King, Messiah, Son of God, how could it be anyone but Jesus?

“The early Christians’ admiration and veneration for Jesus knew no bounds. He was in every way the ultimate, the only criterion of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, the only hope for the future, the only power which could transform the world. Jesus was experienced as *the* definitive breakthrough in the history of man. He transcended everything that had ever been said and done before. He was in every way the ultimate, the last word. He was on a par with God. His word was God’s Word. His Spirit was God’s Spirit. His feelings were God’s feelings. What he stood for was exactly the same as what God stood for. No higher esteem was conceivable.”

To believe in Jesus today is to cry *Amen!* to the perception, assessment, and evaluation of the early Christians. Jesus is the truth, he is reality, he is Lord.

It stands to reason that if during the Advent season we relegate Jesus and what he stands for to second place on our scale of values, then we have already denied him and what he stands for. Either you accept the Kingdom as Jesus understood it or you don’t. You cannot serve two masters. It is all or nothing. Second place or half measures are tantamount to nothing. To believe in Jesus is to believe that Jesus is divine, that he is the Son of God.

Turn the pages of the Gospels: if there is anything that Jesus is abso-

In gut-level honesty, what rules our lives as we prepare for Christmas?

lutely insistent upon, one thing that is indispensable and unequivocal, it is the *necessity* of faith. The Lord never lifted a finger to help anyone unless he first saw their faith. Remember the two blind men on the road to Jericho crying, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” In this unforgettable scene in chapter nine of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus replies, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” They answer, “Yes, Lord.” Only then does he touch their eyes: “According to your faith will it be done to you.”

Recall how Jesus could not work any miracles in his home town of Nazareth *because the people there did not believe in him*.

In chapter fifteen of Matthew, Jesus heals the daughter of a non-Jew: “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And when his own disciples ask him why they were unable to cast out a demon, Jesus answers, “Because you have so little faith” (Matthew 17:20).

Within his inner circle, Jesus never allowed veneration, love, affection, or admiration to substitute for faith. Though he loved Martha and Mary and their dead brother dearly, Jesus demanded an answer before he restored Lazarus to life: “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. . . . Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

There is no need to multiply examples of what is so patently an essential condition of the Christian walk. We are saved through faith—an unflagging, unwavering attachment to the person of Jesus Christ.

What is the depth and quality of

your faith-commitment? Is it a half-hearted intellectual assent to a dusty pawnshop of doctrinal beliefs? In the last analysis, faith is not a way of speaking or even of thinking; it is a way of living. Maurice Blondel said, “If you want to know what a person really believes, don’t listen to what he says but watch what he does.” Only the practice of faith can verify what we believe. Does faith permeate the whole of your life? Does it form your judgments about death, about success, does it influence the way you read the newspaper? Do you have a divine sense of humor that sees through people and events into the unfolding plan of God? When things are turbulent on the surface of life, do you retain a quiet calm, firmly fixed in ultimate reality? As Therese of Lisieux said, “Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing. God alone remains.” Does your faith shape your Advent season this year?

The crisis of Christmas in the Christian community is truly a crisis of faith. Many of us will continue to ignore the invitation, dodge the truth, evade reality, and postpone the decision about Jesus—which is a decision itself.

Yet Christmas is the birthday of the Son of God. What will separate the men from the boys, the women from the girls, the mystics from the romantics this Christmas will be the depth and quality of our passion for Jesus. The insensitive will eat, drink, and be merry; the superficial will follow social customs in a religious setting; the defeated will be haunted by ghosts from the past.

And the victorious minority who are not intimidated by the cultural patterns of the lockstepping, anonymous, and unbelieving majority will celebrate as though he was near, near in time, near in place, the witness of our motives, our speech, our behavior. As indeed he is. ■

From the book Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus, © 1986 by Brennan Manning. Used by permission of Chosen Books/Fleming H. Revell Company.

¹Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), pp. 135-136.

Facing the fathomless

by Keith Graber Miller

fears
fears
fears
fears
fears

In my younger years, I was the most sniveling child I knew. Terrified by every dark corner and traumatized by every bump in the night, I often lived in dread fear that something awful was going to happen to me while I slept—that some large, creepy figure was going to enter my room and snatch me away.

During those fearful moments, I usually headed for Dad and Mom's room and crawled into bed with them. Some couples can appreciate the nighttime joy my parents experienced during those years, knowing that their terrified, frequently-bed-wetting son was sleeping with them.

To a lesser degree, that fear lived on in me throughout adolescence, and even into my college years. One evening, while practicing for a play at Franklin (Ind.) College, I needed to take several letters to an outdoor mailbox. Unfortunately, getting to the mailbox meant going down a dark, partially enclosed staircase and running 50 yards under ancient, creaky, drooping trees in the pitch-blackness of the night.

I survived the trip out, and raced back toward the administration building stairs, which I covered in a few adrenalin-enhanced steps. Ready to breathe a sigh of relief, I rushed through the entryway's first set of

doors, and headed for the second—completely unaware that two of my friends were crouched just inside. And as I opened that second set of doors, those two marauders leaped from their positions and said “Boo!” Now “boo” is not all that terrifying a word, but that evening those three letters launched me higher than I ever leaped in any basketball game. My entire body was literally three feet off the floor, and I landed in an exhausted heap.

I was the most sniveling child I knew.

It brought some comfort to realize recently that I was in good biblical company. Not that God's people throughout history were frightened of midnight marauders or friends crouching in dark doorways—but God's people *were* often afraid. And it was a kind of fear which was tearing and agonizing and paralyzing. It was a fear which caused persons to hide, to seek darkness, to cut themselves off from life-giving relationships or responsibilities.

Abraham was terrified when the Lord first appeared to him. When Moses heard his call from God, he was afraid because he knew he was no match for Pharaoh. When Jeremiah learned he'd been appointed as a prophet to the nations, which was as much a curse as a blessing, he cried out in fear, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

Often in the New Testament we find the disciples afraid. They were scared to death of the rough storm at sea, they were frightened at the Mount of Transfiguration, and they were watching over their shoulders and leaping three feet off the ground every time a branch cracked or a rock tumbled down the hillside. On the night of Jesus' betrayal, all of the disciples forsook him and fled. Similarly, the gospels tell us the followers of Jesus were terrified at the resurrection. Mark says the young man at the tomb informed those seeking Jesus that he had risen. And then the evangelist adds: “Trembling and bewildered, [they] went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8).

And, backing up chronologically, we have the birth stories of Jesus, where one person after another is afraid. In the gospels we read of the angelic visits to Zechariah, and to Mary, and to the shepherds. And there our characters were startled and gripped with fear (that was Zechariah). They were greatly troubled at the words (that was Mary, and we might say that any unmarried 15-year-old told she's going to be pregnant would have reason to be troubled). Even the crusty, calloused shepherds, who weren't afraid of anything, were terrified.

God's people throughout history have spent a fair amount of their

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time trembling in fear. God's people have found themselves shaken and paralyzed with a fear that cuts off relationships, stifles gifts, and moves one to crouch and hide or run away. For those who have experienced it, the fear is almost overwhelming.

But set over against this overwhelming frightenedness, in nearly every biblical story which deals with fear, is the corresponding statement, "Do not be afraid." Over and over again we hear God or an angel or someone saying in response to another's fear, "Do not be afraid" or "Fear not" or some other variation on the message such as that spoken by Jesus on the night of his betrayal, "Let not your hearts be troubled." From the cry of Adam in the opening chapter of Genesis to the trembling of Moses and Jeremiah, from the running away of the disciples to the gasps of the women at the tomb, the word of response is, "You don't have to be afraid." No matter what the nature or form of the fear, the same word comes: "You no longer need to be afraid."

I would admit that such a response seems rather hollow, rather simple. Spoken by itself, the word has no real meaning, and it can be a cruel disregard for the power of fear. That power for me as a child would not have been lessened if my parents would have simply said, "Do not be afraid."

But throughout the biblical story this primary word of good news is always accompanied by some reality which gives it meaning. Each time it is spoken, the person need not be afraid because something is happening which makes the fear no longer appropriate or necessary. God is at work in some way to make fear unnecessary.

In fact, in the experience of the Hebrew people, "fear not" became a battle cry, and a cry for a particular kind of warfare, where only God was the warrior. When the Israelites were ready to cross the Jordan into Canaan, God told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

It is in that statement "I am with you" that we find the most substance, the most significant reason for not fearing. That's what God tells Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob during their moments of fear. It is the sustaining presence that continually enables the prophets to bear witness to the righteousness of God. It is the meaning of the affirmation in Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

God's statement
"I am with you"
gives us the
most significant
reason for not
fearing.

The word takes on various forms to deal with various needs. Sometimes it comes directly from God, sometimes from angelic beings, and sometimes from one human being to another. But always it comes with substance. To Hagar, the abandoned wife of Abraham who fears for her son, the words are, "Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there" (Gen. 21:17). Paul said to the Philippian jailer who was on the verge of suicide, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (Acts 16:28). However the word is spoken, it is presence that gives it substance: "I am with you" or "We are here."

"Presence" includes the willingness to listen to those frightened; it involves encouraging and writing letters and standing with and defending. It means being available for those who are afraid. In its simplest form, the child is most comforted not when the parents say, "Fear not," and then hustle off to their own room, but when the child hears, "It's O.K., Mommy's right here," or "Daddy will be here by your side."

It is significant, then, that we link this with the fear we see exhibited in the stories of Jesus' birth. To Zechariah, the angel reported that his prayer had been heard, and that his wife would have a son. Mary was told that she had found favor with God, and we learn from Matthew that Joseph still desired to marry her. The trembling shepherds learned that their visitors brought good news about Jesus, Immanuel, whose name means "God with us," whose name makes clear the presence of God.

And then during his life, "There were many people Jesus could have been afraid of," wrote Lois Barrett (*Gospel Herald*, Dec. 25, 1984); "the Romans, the Jewish authorities, a traitor among his disciples. But he chose not to be afraid: to keep on teaching and healing, to keep on doing signs and wonders, to keep on calling Gentiles as well as Jews into God's way of living and loving. He stayed on his course, even though it led to his execution, confident that God would ultimately vindicate him."

In this season of Christ, there are many persons who are afraid and feeling troubled. There are those who are fighting righteous battles to eliminate the risk of nuclear holocaust. There are those who are being persecuted by governments for acting out of faith convictions. There are many who are oppressed and need deliverance, but are tempted to give up or respond violently. There are many who are being married in a nation where half of all marriages end in divorce. There are those who are lonely because no one visits them. There are many who are feeling guilty. There are many who are afraid to use their gifts. There are many who are crouching, hiding, trembling, fearing.

With the help of God, in this season when we celebrate Immanuel, God with us, may we provide the substance—the presence—to make our message real. And may that message truly be, "Fear not. Let not your hearts be troubled. You no longer need to be afraid." ■

THERE they were—mom, dad, and the four children—packed into the station wagon for a weekend of camping. Unexpectedly, it rained the entire time! Fortunately, this family maintained enough traditions and memory-making activities—baking cookies, retelling family stories and secrets, playing Monopoly while digging into overflowing bowls of buttery popcorn—to redeem an otherwise washed out weekend. What are traditions? Does every family have them? Are they a result of simply being a member of a group who does things together?

We know from our Brethren in Christ heritage that our ancestors were rich in tradition, in both religion and family life. Are traditions necessary today? As Dr. James Dobson says: "The great value of traditions is that they give a family a sense of identity, of belongingness. And everybody needs this in this harried day in which we live. That we're not just a cluster of people living together in a house, but we're a family that's conscious of its uniqueness, of its personality, of its character, and its heritage. And the special relationship within the family of love and companionship makes us a unit that has an identity, that has, as I say, a personality."¹

Making memories takes time and effort on our part. How will we link the past to the future for our children and grandchildren?

In this article, I would like to pay particular attention to ideas that you might use in celebrating the holidays. My main focus will be on attitudes and activities involved in the process of carrying out these traditions.

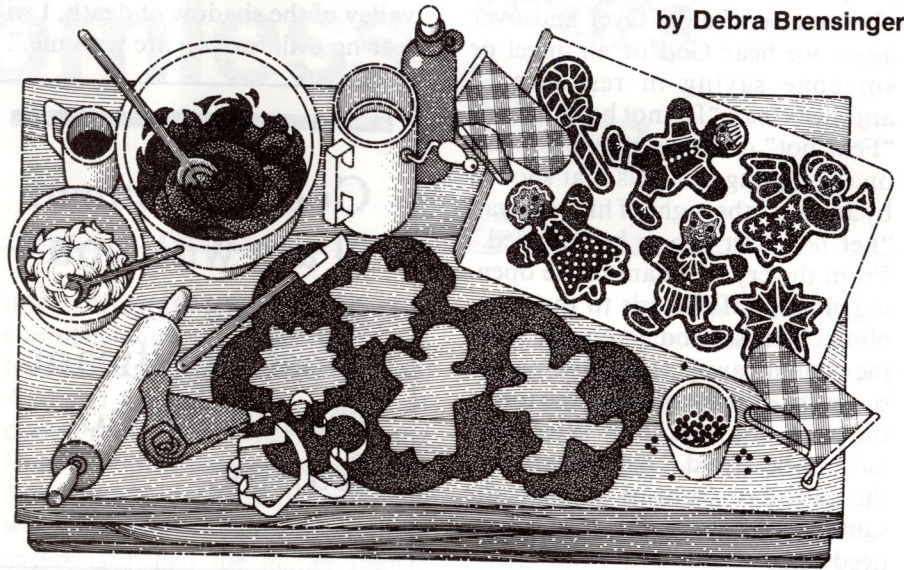
Attitudes

Beginning with attitudes, you should strive, first of all, to make a holiday a festive, joyous occasion. No matter what the holiday or the form it takes, it should be enjoyable.

Debra Brensinger attends the Harrisburg (Pa.) congregation with her husband and two sons. She is currently completing her degree in nursing at Messiah College.

Family holiday traditions

by Debra Brensinger



It is possible to establish a tradition that family members will *not* enjoy. Therefore, even with respect to more solemn occasions, it is important that fond and meaningful memories be associated with the holiday. This includes the food, decorations, and activities that are chosen.

Secondly, stay relaxed! I cannot begin to stress the importance of this attitude. In the midst of holiday preparations, keep a routine—particularly if you have little children. Too much busyness creates only frantic individuals who are unable to enjoy what is going on. On one of my children's tapes there is a song with the chorus line, "I'm climbing my mountain one step at a time."² It is easy to become overwhelmed when you see all that needs to be done. Involving family members of all ages can help lighten the load. Everyone can do something. Such common participation will help establish a sense of ownership for every member of the family.

Thirdly, you should be organized.

Allow plenty of time to complete activities associated with the holiday. Often the best way to do this is to make up a list. For example, if you need to shop for presents, food, decorations, or finish making something, jot all this down so you know exactly what needs to be done. To estimate the time involved, you need to know what you hope to accomplish before you can do it.

Finally, sometimes we can get so wrapped up in the holiday, especially at Christmas, that we may forget what we are supposed to be celebrating. If it is Christmas, talk about Christ as you decorate, shop, and bake. Make a point of centering some of the holiday traditions around religious themes. If you do not, when your child grows older, there may be nothing left to continue. I found this to be true in talking with college students in the dorm. For example, one girl shared how her dad would dress up in a Santa suit, make her sister, brother, and herself march down the stairs with their

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eyes closed, and stand in front of the Christmas tree before they could open their presents. As you can imagine, this girl was not too thrilled about continuing such a tradition—especially at the age of 18!

By way of contrast, another student joyfully shared precious memories of assisting in a mission that provided Christmas dinner for the less fortunate. Likewise, baking for someone in need or saving Christmas cards that you received in order to pray for the individuals throughout the year can all help reinforce the blessedness of Christmas. Additional faith-oriented traditions may include: a birthday party for Jesus; visiting a nursing home or prison to bring some holiday cheer; or, instead of giving gifts to those who already have everything, sending a card notifying them of a donation made in their honor. Our Christianity should influence (indeed dominate!) our holiday mentality. There should be a joy that not only carries us through, but is conveyed to those around us.

Activities

Now, let us concentrate even further on the importance of activities. A part of each holiday is its own special foods, including family favorites and recipes you especially set aside for the occasion. Deciding on a menu for the holiday at hand does not have to be mom's job. A family plan could include suggestions from

everyone; then your unique family menu could be drawn up and adopted annually for this particular holiday. This is what gives your family meaning and importance. You will also be developing cooperation, communication, and decision-making skills.

In arriving at a menu, try using ideas from your own heritage. Are you Portuguese in nationality? Then, go to the library and look up some Portuguese foods. This would be a good way to expose your children to your past as well as open their eyes to another culture. You could then talk about Portuguese customs, practices related to this particular holiday, and religious influences. Or, if your children are well familiar with your own heritage, what about agreeing on one that everyone would like to know more about? Don't be afraid to be creative! The holidays are only as special as you make them.

In addition, decorations or presents, if tied into the holiday, can be either handmade or bought, and may or may not be explicitly religious in character. But whatever you have, make the most of it. You can do a lot with such natural items as pine cones, dried flowers, nuts, fruits, eggs, greens, and plants. Spruce them up with baskets, ribbons, wreaths, ornaments, candles, and art supplies. If you are making decorations for the house, they should be festive. You can also take old items around the house and refurbish them.

Similarly, give some thought to the presents and decorations you give to others. I have an old chair that I would like to refinish. If someone did that for me I would be very pleased. Besides the savings in time, such a gift would restore a family antique rather than adding more materials to my house that I may not need or want. Some handmade items can be fun to make with your children. You can get ideas from friends, family, books, and window-shopping. The key is not money, but a little bit of time and ingenuity coupled with creativity and using the gifts the Lord has given you.

There is nothing worse than getting something you know you will

never use. Remember that purple polka dotted tie, or that brightly colored dish that does not match with anything else? Even if it is handmade, the selection is important. Whether making or buying, have something in mind that would be appropriate. Keeping a list throughout the year of things people may have mentioned they need or want can assist in this process.

Finally, foods, gifts, or the holiday itself are extensions of the family that can be shared with others. Why not reach out to others, either by sharing these with them, or by inviting them to participate in the holiday festivities with you? These acts can be your family's way of extending your love, not simply to church friends who may already have plenty, but also to the poor or less fortunate in your neighborhoods or cities close by. As the Scriptures so graphically indicate, the simple use of food can be an effective way of demonstrating the love of Christ (See Gen. 18:1-15; 1 Kings 17:9-24; Luke 24:13-35).

With all of this in mind, why not take some time and evaluate what you would like to do? Think about those things you may have already done in the past, or things others do, or something not tried yet. What kinds of memories do you hope to build? What messages do you want to convey to your children? What will they remember when they are older?

Having done this, you can begin to implement meaningful traditions now! It is a mistake to think they have to be perfect or that changes cannot be made from year to year. You can refine them and make adaptations as your family changes. Rather than being afraid, be creative. Use the mind the Lord has given you to express joy in your families, as well as Who the ultimate source of that joy is! Happy holiday planning! ■

The great value of traditions is that they give a sense of identity, of belongingness.

¹James Dobson, "Focus on Family," tape series (Waco, Texas: Word Incorporated, 1978).

²Maranatha Music, "Kid's Praise! 5," tape series (Waco, Texas: Word Incorporated, 1985).



A Church-Planting Christmas

The Christmas Angels

by Coe Neil Cabe

Early December snow muffled sound and whitened our little town. Peace Chapel was less than one month old, and the new flock had begun to ask me about Christmas Eve. Would there be a candlelight service? Would there be a program? What can we do with a new church, and a small crowd, on such a special day?

I prayed. Lord, Lord, what can we do? We don't have anything. We don't have a piano; we don't have a real choir; we don't have decorations. How can we usher in the angels, celebrate your birth, know again this year the comfort of your presence in a truly Christian Christmas Eve? Good Lord, can you help us?

Angels. I thought about the angels. One had announced Jesus' birth to Mary. One had spoken words of encouragement to Joseph. To Elizabeth, one brought hope and to the Wise Men after the birth of Christ one brought protection. Why not now? Could we find the Christmas angels? The Christmas angels answered the love and longing in the hearts of all humankind for a Savior. And the announcement rings even now in our ears: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

One young couple called me. Could they donate a baby grand piano to the church instead of making offerings all year long? Another called, and offered a 15-foot live

Christmas tree, delivered and set up in the sanctuary. Another said, "Pastor, I've been traveling with my husband. Could you use a couple of hundred doves and little Christmas baskets I've made for decorations at the church?"

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains.

At November's end we had no promise of a Christmas Eve service. By mid-December, we had music, the tree, the decorations.

We had more. So does every church, no matter how small. We had each other, willing to serve Christ with our selves. How often do we overlook the bounty in our congregations? All we needed, we had already. Christ had provided; we had only to acknowledge that he had.

I sat down in front of my little

What can you do for a special Christmas Eve service? Use the resources God has already given you—each of us in service to Christ.

computer screen and began to write. With no real choir—though some had volunteered to sing, and had done so beautifully—we would be our own choir. We would provide our own music, and fill our little church with praise. And the songs. We all know the songs.

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free. From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

I listened then for the brush of angel's wings, for the choring cherubim and seraphim, for the cry of a little child born in a manger, and simply wrote the music of the season. Each angel had brought an announcement, each was recorded in a story we all know well, and each would bring us again into the presence of Christ.

The service unfolded before me. Joy to the world! What a way to begin! A quartet singing gently, "Come thou long expected Jesus," from the back of the church; an introduction:

Christmas Eve again. Lights and trees. Christmas carols and cookies, brightly wrapped packages and glowing children's faces. What joy it all brings! It was a time filled with angels 2000 years ago; it is again tonight. For just this hour, come quietly visit with us and the Christmas Angels.

"Angels We Have Heard On High!", from a congregation much larger than any of us had expected—

over 100 of us! A poem from Helen Steiner Rice about hope, then a reading from the Scripture. Always, the angels announced, "Do not be afraid!" In every case, after the angel's presence, they were never the same again.

Hear what the angel said. Mary was engaged to Joseph, a man much older than she. It was to be a good marriage; Joseph was a good man, a carpenter and honorable. Then one day, Mary was alone in her small family home. The room was dark and cool in the heat of the day as she lay on her little cot. Suddenly a light appeared, brighter than she had ever seen, filling the room, filling the home—brighter than the hot Nazareth sun. A gentle angel appeared, filling her with warmth and joy. She was frightened, and the angel said, "Do not be afraid! Blessed art thou amongst women, Mary. The Lord is with thee! You will be covered with the shadow of God, and give birth to a holy child who is the son of God!"

One girl sings, "Sweet Little Jesus Boy"; the story of the wise men is followed by "We Three Kings"; one sings a solo of "O Holy Night"; together we sing "Away in a Manger."

And then the lighting of the candles. Each person had been given a small candle upon entering the church. After a service of Holy Communion, everyone kneeling at the altar for it, we sing together, "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright . . .," and one by one, in a darkened room, the candles are lighted.

The light spreads from the candles on our altar to the ends of each pew, from one person to the next. A wave of light moves through the church, washing softly from the front to the last pew. "Silent Night" becomes almost a whisper as the light fills our church. Silence falls, and I read for us all.

The Christmas Angels all answered that love and longing in the hearts of humankind. In the stillness of this starlit night, by the grace of our loving God, the Prince of Peace again enters a

world longing for his presence, longing for his love. He seeks only a place to be born. Friends, take him in. He seeks his own—his angels still are seeking those who will turn to his light. There is no blessing more pure than Christ alive within your own heart. He comes to you this night, in this place. His angels light our presence. Welcome, gentle child; be born in us this day. Amen.

Standing together, and raising our candles above us, we sing one more verse of "Silent Night"; we pray together; and quietly leave, many of us in tears.

What can you do for a very special Christmas Eve service in your own church? Listen for the angels. Use the resources God has already given you—each of us in service to Christ. Light the light of Christ.

And may this Christmas at your church be the brightest, most Christ-filled you have ever known! ■

If you would like a copy of "The Christmas Angels," and the program I wrote for the following year ("The Shepherd's Child"), drop me a note at this address: Pastor Neil Cabe, P.O. Box 7, Ravenna, OH 44266. All you need to add is music your own angels can sing!

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The coming of the Lord

88 Reasons and 8 "Secrets"

by Stuart Kelly

September has passed and we're still here. Edgar Whisenant was wrong.

Whisenant is the space-engineer turned prophecy "expert" who wrote *On Borrowed Time* and *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988*. The World Bible Society distributed several million copies of the two books.

Using a complicated hodgepodge of Bible passages, numerology, history, computer calculations, and current events, he determined that Christ's return for believers and the beginning of a horrible tribulation on earth would take place sometime during Sept. 11-13.

Lots of people believed him. They skipped work to wait at home. Some sold their possessions. Some Christians I know—who should have known better—scurried around, worrying and giving out wide-eyed warnings to families and friends.

I was amused and distressed at the hullabaloo. However, since everyone seems to be jumping on the prophecy bandwagon these days to unfold the "secrets" that *God's word really teaches*, I decided to give it a go myself. Let me let you in on my secrets.

Secret #1: Jesus will return. That teaching fills the Bible. It should surprise no believer. Why were so many Christians acting as though they were hearing that news for the first time?

Stuart Kelly is pastor of the Highland Park Community Church, a Brethren in Christ congregation in Dublin, Virginia.

Secret #2: The best evidence is Jesus himself. He came once and lived as a human being. He often promised then to return. Yet people often ignore the words of Jesus, then go bonkers over a dubious interpretation of some obscure passage as though it held the key to future hope.

God hasn't told us everything we'd like to know . . . just everything we need to know.

Secret #3: Nobody knows when. Nobody. No human being is privy to that information, and anyone who tells you he is, is either deceived or a deceiver.

If you want to believe he's coming before the year 2000, go ahead. Why, he could return before you finish reading this article. Then again, it may be another hundred years. Or much longer.

Do we think we're the first generation to insist that final biblical predictions are occurring in our day? Those who cry "Wolf!" with specific dates and details undermine the credibility of this awesome event in the minds of unbelievers.

Secret #4: His coming should make us happy. It's great news for the Christian. It's the final chapter to Christ's triumph over death, sin, and evil. The book doesn't make sense without it.

Secret #5: His coming should make us sober. If Jesus really lived and died and came out of the grave, if he really is Lord of human history, if he really is coming back, it makes all the difference in how I think and live and treat my fellow human beings.

Secret #6: We should live the same whenever he's coming. Martin Luther said, "If Christ were coming tomorrow, I would plant a tree today." Someone else advised, "Live as though he were returning today. Work as though he wouldn't be back for a long time."

Am I walking in the Spirit, living under Christ's lordship? If so, knowing he were coming next week shouldn't necessitate major changes in my lifestyle and priorities.

Secret #7: My secrets aren't really secrets. Had you noticed? The Bible clearly spells them out. In fact, most important truths are plainly identified in Scripture and repeated often. The Church has recognized and taught them through the centuries. Beware of stunning "new" revelations.

Colin Chapman offers three keys to Bible interpretation. Look for the natural meaning, the original meaning, the general meaning. "We believe God intended his revelation to be a plain and readily intelligible communication to ordinary human beings." [*Eerdman's Handbook to Christian Belief*]

"Someone's constantly trying to find the 'missing key' to biblical prophecy," a college professor once told me. "But God hasn't told us everything we'd like to know. Just everything we need to know."

Secret #8: Jesus is coming back because he loves us. The Bible is a story of romance. Those who are in love with God are eagerly awaiting their wedding day. We may not know the date, but we know our matrimonial Mate. The Bridegroom will come for his bride.

That's worth waiting for. ■

Use your knees for world evangelism

by Clay Cooper

Paul was a man with an urgent mission. Speed was of the essence and he knew of no faster way to get the gospel through the enemy's lines than by recruiting Christian converts into the secret service of prayer. He wrote letters to people he knew, and to those he did not know, urging prayer support. It was his permanent request, and when complied with, it seems never to have failed. He depended on it as his basic weapon.

Twice the apostles asked the same group of Christians, "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1-2). He fully believed that the prayers of these formerly heathen Thessalonians would deliver him from the presently heathen Corinthians, and consequently would secure free and glorious spread of the Lord's work in Corinth as in Thessalonica. And these prayers were answered, for Paul successfully founded a church at Corinth.

Leaving Corinth, he encountered stiffening resistance "in the regions [still] beyond," so he sent back the common appeal to the now-enlisted Corinthians, ". . . we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers" (2 Cor. 1:11). Needing to be rescued from his enemies' connivings in Judea, and hoping to proceed to Italy, Paul wrote the Roman Christians, "I urge you . . . to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Rom. 15:30).

Clay Cooper is president of Vision, Inc., Spokane, Wash.

December 1988

When Paul reached Rome as a prisoner, from his cell he dispatched a letter back to the Colossians, pleading, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message" (Col. 4:3). To the Ephesians went the appeal to devote themselves constantly to prayer that he might have utterance and courage (Eph. 6:19-20). To the Philippians he sent proof of how effective prayer had been: "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:12). Prayer prevailed.

The Pauline pattern is obvious. As soon as one hostile area was successfully taken and an assembly constituted, the people were instructed to pray that still another area would be evangelized and other churches established.

Apostolic resources, practices, and devices characteristically employed to overcome barriers and speed the

It is almost axiomatic that where there is no want of prayer there will be no shortage of money—or material or personnel—to round out God's saving designs for the world.

message on its way can be summed up in two words: prayer partnership. It was this which made the sensational advance of the infant church possible. United prayers combined to provide an unbeatable phalanx.

It is a reasonable conclusion that had not the early Christians responded to frequent rousing calls to prayer, the Word would not have had free course so superlatively. A night of intercession delivered Peter from prison only hours before his scheduled trial and probable execution at dawn (Acts 12:1-19). Supplication freed Paul and Silas from the dungeon in Philippi so they could continue their daring exploits (Acts 16:25-34). It forced closed continents to admit them, moved stony hearts, and startled set minds.

In short, prayer accomplished what no other single factor, or combination of factors, could do. Against it, the forces opposed to the spread of Christianity had no apparent defense. Prayer was the ultimate weapon against both the seen and the unseen enemies of the Truth.

This knowledge should encourage Christians who are over-inclined to the view that the seeming standstill of one missionary venture can be attributed to unprecedented problems such as bristling nationalism. Problems or no problems, prayer can again prevail. No other pattern provides greater hopes or presumes to promise so much.

An account of prayer's time-tested potency is told by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. A missionary couple in charge of 10 stations felt constrained to write the Home Secretary, confessing the lack of progress. Indifference, open opposition and ignorance prevented their making headway. The situation seemed hopeless.

The suggestion was made that the Secretary try to find 10 persons, each of whom would make one station a special object of unceasing prayer. With the passing of time, events began to change in 7 of the 10 mission stations. Opposition melted, spiritual revival came, and signifi-

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The following article is based on information provided by Rev. Pramod Roul, one of the two Brethren in Christ district superintendents in Orissa, India. The information comes from two recent newsletters.

Rev. Roul states, "We praise God because we are living in a promising world which is not illusion but real. This year, 1988, has come full of promise and hope of our Lord's return. So God is constantly reminding us to be holy as he is and also to reach the unreached as his day is at hand."

Reaching the unreached is a goal that Rev. Roul and other church workers are earnestly trying to obtain. Moreover, progress is being made. This article reports prayer requests and praises so that prayer can support Rev. Roul and his co-workers. The area in which Rev. Roul serves has been divided into three regions: Gudari, Nuagado, and Nayagarh. There are several villages in each of these regions.

Abraham Lima is supervising the various village churches in the Gudari region. He also provides leadership to the church in the village of Gummi which is the first established church. This congregation has 64 members. Many young boys and girls are witnessing in surrounding areas. Because of the adult literacy program, 10 young people can now read the Bible. Rev. Roul states there is evidence that "this church is growing well in the faith, words of God, and in prayer life."

The Lord has also blessed Gummi by providing for the excavation of a reservoir. In addition to providing water for irrigation of the fields, the creation of the reservoir provided jobs for 150 people. This project was

Kim Jacobs is a voluntary service worker in the Mount Joy office of Brethren in Christ World Missions.

Progress in Orissa

by Kim Jacobs

accomplished through the Mennonite Central Committee and its representative, Anupam Harishchandra, along with two Brethren in Christ men, Prasan Roul and Abeda Nayak.

In Bakagudi, also in the Gudari region, Askok Pradhan guides the believers. Out of 30 families in the community, 28 families have accepted Christ. Twenty people are taking a special Bible class to prepare them for baptism. Also, several people are attending a literacy class. In spite of the fact that the Lord is definitely working among the people of Bakagudi, opposing forces have been threatening them. For this reason and for the continuing growth of this body of believers, much prayer is needed.

Daniel Naik is in charge of the Nuagado region. This region contains a Brethren in Christ church building and a health center. Sata, a village with 35 families, is also included in this region. The people are learning Bible stories. Rev. Roul states, "We believe one day the whole village will come to His knowledge." However, the young people of the village need to have a greater interest in the Lord and activities of the church. They need our prayers. There is also reason for praise. One evening

in February, a young man named Daniel was walking through a forest when he accidentally came face to face with a tiger only five or six feet away. The Lord kept Daniel safe.

The villages of Gunjiguda and Gerenga are led by Soloman Mali and Debendra Paricha, respectively. Church growth is evident in both towns. All of the 12 families in Gunjiguda have accepted Christ. In Gerenga, the location of a relatively new church, 8 of the 50 families present have accepted Christ. In both villages, youth meetings, women's meetings, Sunday school, and Sunday worship are held regularly. In spite of the encouraging reports of the Lord at work in Gunjiguda, some of the people feared an evil spirit. They were experiencing sickness. But God has answered prayer: the fear has gone, and there is no more sickness.

Gerenga was also the site for the Nuagado regional conference. The conference theme, "God's Image is Christ," was based on 2 Corinthians 4:4. Three hundred delegates attended the conference which was held June 17-19. Pastor Birendra Mahan Bihari was the guest speaker. On Saturday evening a film about Jesus was shown, and more than 200 non-Christians attended. During Sunday morning worship 50 people openly accepted Christ by being baptized in a nearby pond. The Lord blessed and protected this conference in spite of the fact that some villages attempted to disrupt it.

The leader of the Nayagarh region, Prakash Nayak, is faced with a difficult challenge. In this region only five families have accepted the Lord, and 10 people are ready to be baptized. Prayer is requested for the new believers and the contact persons.

The Lord is being faithful in helping Rev. Roul and others to reach the Indian people. However, prayer is necessary for continued progress. Let us keep in mind the requests for God's workers in India. ■

Use your knees...

continued from page 13

cant numbers of persons were converted. On the other three stations, there was still no observable change.

Again the missionaries wrote the Secretary, telling him of the phenomenon and expressing concern and bewilderment over the stalemated three.

It was not difficult for the Secretary to clear up the mystery. He had succeeded in getting special intercessors for 7 of the 10 stations, but not for the other 3.

The late Dr. A. T. Pierson declared firmly: "Every step in the progress of missions is directly traceable to prayer. It has been the preparation for every new triumph and the secret of all successes."

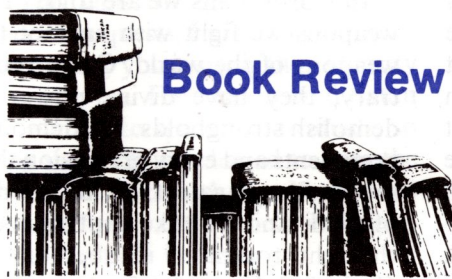
This should encourage those who lament their unavoidably meager contribution in money. It may also hearten those whose more sizeable gifts did not seem to accomplish all they had hoped, when they understand that prayer spells the difference. This does not mean that money for missions is not relatively important. It is only to say that prayer for missions is absolutely important, and that the one who prays most helps most.

This is one field of human endeavor where the proportion of prayer to money is at least 10 to 1 (if one can express a spiritual truth mathematically). Money by itself cannot buy world evangelization—not even lots of money. On the other hand, minimal funds will probably do very little to retard the great enterprise of mercy if there is no lack of interces-

sion. It is almost axiomatic that where there is no want of prayer there will be no shortage of money—or material or personnel—to round out God's saving designs for the world.

Reverting to that which has always been the ultimate weapon of the forward-moving church can only result in a greatly accelerated foreign missions pace in the 20th century, notwithstanding all opposing -isms, -osophies, and -ologies.

The world is not nearly as likely to be won or lost in outer space as it is in our prayer closets. With all the evidence available, we are compelled to state that no successful substitute for prayer has ever been found for redeeming a generation from its tyrannies. Men have their knees. Nothing remains but to use them. ■



Book Review

***The Great Omission* by Robertson McQuilkin. Published in 1984 by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Paper 103 pages. Reviewed by Kevin Kelley, a student at Messiah College.**

Robertson McQuilkin has written *The Great Omission* about our responsibility as Christians to missions because the subject has been overlooked by so many people in the church today—and that includes members of "missions minded" churches. He says that even such a church spends on the average only two to three minutes per week in communal prayer for missions. Throughout the book he addresses a question posed to him by a student: "With so many unreached people, *how come* so few are going?"

We don't care. The book opens with a discussion of three loves which McQuilkin claims serve as motivators for action. First is love for self. This type of love is a good motive, but not adequate. This was not the type of love demonstrated

by the Father when he sent his son, nor by Jesus when he gave of himself. Even though good things can come as a result of this love, there is the danger that, if controlled by this love, others will be sacrificed to attain self-fulfillment. Another type of love is love for people. This is sacrificial love depending "not on the lovability of the object, but on the loving character of the one who loves." A motive even higher than these is love for God displayed by the Son before offering himself as a ransom for many. This is the motive we are to strive to attain: "not my will, but yours be done."

We don't see. Following in the next chapter is the message that we need to "see it God's way." So many churches fail to view the Bible as a missions book, and McQuilkin feels that attitude is overlooking a major aspect of God's message. Through seminars and involvement with missions-minded churches, he has come to expect the leaders to have little understanding of both the Old Testament and New Testament theme of God's "worldwide intent."

Our vision of the lost must be out of line, considering our reaction. Perhaps we have developed a mentality that there must be another way for the unreached people groups of the world to acquire salvation. The fact of the matter is that the Bible speaks of *one* way of salvation, that being through the name of Jesus Christ. The need is urgent, but

our reactions show a different understanding.

Our prayer is peripheral. Prayer is the central theme of one chapter. Because of a lack of prayer, the work of missions is suffering from a "power failure." This is a point so often made by many authors, yet so often pushed aside when it comes down to practice. We all recognize prayer as a necessity, yet after all is said and done we have not done much of it. A recent study shows that the average American evangelical Christian spends four minutes in prayer per day, and a pastor only seven. It is the author's opinion that even the strongest missions-minded churches spend only two to three minutes a week in united prayer over missions.

Someone isn't listening. Finally, the subject of a "calling" is discussed. Many people sit around waiting to be called to missions, yet they have already been called (Mark 16:15). The prominent attitude seems to be that many are "willing to go but planning to stay." But perhaps a more appropriate attitude to have is to be "willing to stay but planning to go." The call has already been given.

After becoming aware of these reasons why people don't go to reach the unreached, we can evaluate our own lives and see how we measure up. Are we simply making excuses, or are we called to stay? ■

Fannie Longenecker:

Not ready for retirement

The following farewell message was presented to the Messiah Village congregation. Fannie was reassigned to Sikalongo Bible Institute in April 1988.

The Lord gave me many years of service to Africa, 1946 to 1984. During that time many changes took place in Zimbabwe and Zambia, changes from colonial rule to self-rule. In the schools, expatriate (foreign) headmasters were replaced by nationals. Nationals took positions of authority over missionaries and other expatriates in government and in church and mission activities. This was good. As change came, I accepted it and moved with it.

When I came home in 1984, I felt that I was not ready to retire. I wanted to return. It was difficult, but I believe God wanted me here these past 4 years. I did not think that I was ready for Messiah Village, but I have come to appreciate my home here. You have been very good friends, and I appreciate you.

God gave me a new job, writing and editing missions materials at the Brethren in Christ World Missions office in Mount Joy, Pa. This broadened my horizons. I shall miss being at the office and hearing the most recent news from our missions areas around the world. Furthermore, I suspect I have been changed while here.

Now, by invitation, I am preparing to return to the place of my previous assignment, Sikalongo Bible Institute. I know the place well, or do I? I taught there over a period of 15 years. During that time we experienced

changes in the church and in the Bible institute. Moreover, during the time I have been away, there have been further changes. One change was to expand the program from a two-year to a four-year course. Some changes have been very good; others have been heart-breaking.

At God's call, I am going back. I shall study and teach. By myself I know I am not equal to the task, especially the personal encounters. I need a greater sensitivity than I have had and an ability to listen without judging. Also, I need wisdom in counsel as God gives opportunity. It is necessary for me to show the love of Christ for all people, to encourage the weak, to seek the straying and to help lift the fallen. I want to be a faithful servant. Pray for me.

Now I want to talk to you a little about prayer, about our authority in prayer.

There is a battle out there. Satan and his emissaries are seeking to destroy the work of God and to keep people enslaved in their sin, their traditional beliefs, and their habits. He does not easily yield his prey.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). Notice the phrase, "Whatever you bind on earth. . . ." Does that mean you and I are to bind something? Or does it just refer to the apostles? I believe Jesus is saying it to us also, but what are we to bind?

Jesus also said, "No one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house" (Mark 3:27). Satan is the enemy, the strong man, who holds people captive at his will. He is the one we must face. It is his power and the power of his emissaries that we must bind in the name of Jesus. How we need the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In Corinthians we are told, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Can we as sons and daughters, children of our Father, take the authority God has given us in Christ, on the basis of redemption, and bind the strong man and draw men and women to Christ? They are Christ's by redemption even though they are slaves of Satan. Jesus redeemed them, but they must be taken from the enemy.

To think of the power of the enemy is frightening, but we are not alone. We abide in Christ, trusting his blood. In the power of Jesus' name and by his blood we must bind the strong man; we must pull down his strongholds and demolish every pretension. We must bring captive every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Can we in Jesus' name and by the

ement

power of his blood bring down the teaching of Islam in the minds and hearts of Islam believers? Does God want us to use the authority he has given us for this? I believe he does. When you hear that Islamic believers, for instance, have come to faith in Jesus, keep holding on in faith for them because Satan will do all in his power to get them back in his fold. Hold on until they are established in faith.

This calls for specific prayer for specific requests. I pray, O God, help me to obey you in using the authority you give me. Help me to bind Satan in relation to specific individuals, so that they will be released to hear the Word of God with their hearts, to hunger for it, and to yield in repentance and faith in Jesus.

Have you received a specific request from a missionary? You may have received several. Perhaps God will lay one of them on your heart for which you will pray to bind the strong man. Pray also that the individual will repent and come to Christ, that he will stand firm and become established in the Word of God, and that the leader will be kept from the snares Satan lays for him. Let us keep alert and trust God for the deliverance he wants to give.

I thank God for you, my Messiah Village family. You have encouraged me. Your friendship and prayers are special. I thank you for all you've given me of yourselves. I believe my life is richer because of having lived here. I appreciate you. And I need your prayers. ■

God at work in our world

God Conquers Fear in a Strange Land

Susie Gilmore—Caracas, Venezuela

When you are in an unfamiliar place, fears often become magnified. In surroundings you are accustomed to, you know how to face threats, or you have some assurance that the dangers themselves have limits. When we moved from rural Canada to urban Venezuela, we found life's challenges very different.

One thing we needed to get used to was locking every door. In fact, to get out of our apartment and onto the street, we had to go through seven sets of locks. You can imagine how cumbersome the process seemed, and how heavy was the set of keys we had to carry! The dangers that necessitated such a lifestyle were a challenge to our faith. But two incidents ministered to us in a dramatic way, showing us that the God who cared for us in Port Colborne was the same one who was with us in Caracas.

The first incident happened not far from our apartment. Baby Olivia was asleep, and Gord was trying to get some office work done. We needed milk, so Benji, Charity, and I decided to walk the few blocks to the grocery store. We went through the process of getting out of the apartment building into the afternoon sunshine. We hadn't gone too far when we noticed a group of older teenage boys coming down the street toward us. No one else was on the street at the time and the thought occurred to me that perhaps we should go back home. But I hated to go through the unlocking process with all those keys again. So we kept going.

As we approached the group, I became more sure of their purpose. I shouted, "You're not going to rob us!" But that is precisely what they intended to do. And they did! One boy kept the children out of the way while the others relieved me of my purse, documents, and jewelry. Despite my struggles and cries, there was nothing I could do. Mission completed, they took off down the street, and we returned to the apartment without milk and without a lot of other things, too.

For a long time after that incident, I was terribly afraid to go out. I realized that I had been reckless. Such gangs are often armed, and I had challenged them! God had spared us from physical harm. He had even seen to it that my empty wallet, my papers, and even the keys were found in the grass by a neighbor and returned to us. But I was left with such a dread of going out and facing the street. I would literally shake at the prospect.

After about two weeks, I realized that I could not go on living in this place with such a handicap. I asked the Lord to deliver me from this paralyzing fear and free me to minister. Immediately and miraculously, he answered my prayer. I can face the dangers of the city, wiser because of my experience, but marvelously confident that God is my keeper.

For a long time after that incident, I was terribly afraid to go out.

The other event took place far from Caracas. We had been invited by Carmen, a Christian friend, to be guests for the weekend at her family's farm in the country. We had settled in our rooms for the night and were sleeping (or resting, as adults often do their first night in a strange bed). Before dawn, I heard a commotion outside and woke Gord. We looked out, and in the moonlight, spaced around the farmhouse, we saw five men in camouflage clothing. We gathered the children. Charity crawled far under the covers and shook; Benji calmly decided that this was not a good time to go to the bathroom. We all got down on the floor and prayed for protection.

After a while there were sounds of people getting into a vehicle. Gord looked out. The bandits were taking Carmen's brother, our host, as a hostage. Carmen appeared and quickly assured us that we were safe; the bandits had what they wanted. So Gord stepped out into the yard. The man who seemed to be the leader spotted him and mo-

tioned him to come to the truck. He asked to see Gord's identification card, which everyone in Venezuela is required to carry. Gord was sure he was going to be taken by the men, and he was berating himself for not having remained hidden. But the leader merely looked at the card, put it in his pocket and motioned Gord away as the truck drove off.

With vivid memories of other North Americans kidnapped either for ransom or to make a political statement, we praised God for his goodness to us! The story has another happy ending: the farmer was returned unharmed that same evening following payment of a large ransom; with him he carried Gord's identification card!

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Giving Joyfully

Mary Olive Lady—Sikalongo Bible Institute, Zambia

The blessing of a good harvest and the joyful giving of the Zambian church have led to a groundswell of support for Sikalongo Bible Institute (SBI).

When the financial position of the school was presented at Choma District church council meeting, people respond-

ed immediately with an offering of K1,000. But this was just the beginning.

The council went on to set in motion a creative plan for families to tithe their maize crops. Two hundred burlap maize sacks were purchased by SBI and distributed to the people. Filling the bags with shelled maize and setting each tenth bag aside for SBI became an exercise in faith and obedience for many families. (Each filled bag is valued by the government at K80.) Some people chose the option of giving money rather than maize. Urban churches were also caught up in the enthusiasm. Each Copperbelt congregation pledged K500. Although the final tally is not yet in, the response has been widespread and gratifying.

This outburst of giving, directed toward the training of church leaders, follows on the heels of extended drought and economic hardship. Even with the relief of a good harvest in 1988, spiraling inflation and shortages of commodities leave many people struggling to feed and clothe their families. With the Macedonian churches, the Zambians have excelled in the grace of giving: "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Cor. 8:2).

Guitarist uses music to help fight world hunger

What do classical guitar music, farm animals, and hungry people in the Third World have in common? They are all the focus of a new musical cassette tape by Ephrata, Pa., musician Randy Zwally.

The cassette, "Bethlehem Twilight—Music for Christmas," was created by Zwally as a fund-raiser for Heifer Project International (HPI), a non-profit, interfaith organization providing food-producing animals to needy families around the world. "For a long time, I've wanted to do something special for Heifer Project and their fight against world hunger," says Zwally, a member of the Church of the Brethren. "My musical abilities have now given me that chance. It means a lot to me, both as a musician and as a Christian, that "Bethlehem Twilight" not only celebrates the Christmas message in music, but that through HPI, it also helps feed hungry people." Fifteen percent of the total tape sales will be given to HPI.

In talking about his new tape, Zwally is equally eager to explain the HPI program as well as to discuss the music on the cassette. "Through Heifer Project dairy goats, honeybees, chickens, or other animals are donated to needy families. The program takes into consideration the local climate, availability of land, and farming methods of the receiving family. The livestock provides an ongoing source of food, income and sense of self esteem; commodities that are so often absent in poverty-stricken communities." An important component of the program is that recipients are

asked to donate one of the animal's subsequent offspring to another needy family so that they may experience the joy of passing on the gift.

In choosing the format for the Christmas tape, Zwally selected familiar Christmas songs for side one, including "What Child is This," "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," "We Three Kings," and others, which he arranged for classical guitar. Side two contains original Christmas pieces composed and arranged by Zwally. Several musical styles are presented, involving guitar, flute, violin and state-of-the-art "sampling" keyboards that recreate the rich sounds of a symphony orchestra. The tape provides 40 minutes of music.

Zwally teaches guitar on a part-time basis at Messiah College, Grantham, Pa. He has also performed with many eastern Pennsylvania orchestras and has been featured as a concerto soloist on the guitar. Zwally was graduated from West Chester State University (Pa.) with a degree in music education and taught music for four years in the Ephrata school district. In addition to his musical pursuits, Zwally works in the marketing department of SELFHELP Crafts, a non-profit job creation program of Mennonite Central Committee.

"Bethlehem Twilight" may be obtained by sending a check for \$8.50 plus \$1.00 for shipping and handling (PA residents add 51 cents for sales tax) to Randy Zwally, Box 432, Dept. D, Ephrata, PA 17522. ■

Growing a Young, Sensitive Missionary

John and Esther Edmonds—Mangochi, Malawi

Our latest project is a new room for Nikki to be added to the back of the house. We have already started making the bricks. She needs a quiet place for her school studies. Right now she has a small room in front where people see her and stop to visit as they are passing by the house. It can be very distracting.

Nikki is really growing, and she spends most of her free time out in the village until after dark. She is learning to eat and to cook local food. She likes to share with us what she has learned. We feel she is developing good relationships and a better understanding of what many people go through just to survive.

When it began to be cool, we suggested that she should put on shoes and a jacket when she went out in the evening. She said she didn't want to wear a jacket because her friends don't have any: "It just wouldn't be right!" We are grateful that she is developing in the Lord and in her understanding of what it means to "love thy neighbor." ■

Evangelical Visitor

Nicaragua

MCC assists hurricane victims; MDS mobilizes crews to rebuild

Andrea Schrock Wenger, MCC News Service

Mennonite Central Committee will send workers and material aid in response to destruction caused by Hurricane Joan in the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua. The hurricane hit Nicaragua October 22 with 125 mile per hour winds and torrential rains, leaving at least 50 dead and 300,000 homeless.

MCC's response will occur through MCC's Mennonite Disaster Service. The MDS network will quickly mobilize work teams to work through CEPAD, a Nicaraguan Protestant evangelical development agency.

MDS is mobilizing teams of workers from each of its five regional networks in Canada and the United States. The teams will travel to Nicaragua for two-week terms, beginning as soon as possible, to help clean up and reconstruct homes and institutions flattened by the storm.

The plan to mobilize MDS work crews came as a result of requests by CEPAD, an organization through which MCC has channeled aid and done development work since 1972. An urgent need, according to CEPAD, is for a Spanish-speaking person with leadership skills to help assess the situation, coordinate group response, and organize work teams. MCC hopes to appoint someone to this task as soon as possible. The person will also help CEPAD organize national volunteer brigades. Possibly a Costa Rican Mennonite team will join the effort.

Jim Hershberger, MCC co-country representative in Nicaragua, who traveled to affected areas with CEPAD representatives October 24, visited three affected areas: Rama, Nueva Guinea and Juigalpa. Bluefields, a coastal town also reportedly devastated, was unreachable by vehicle.

The CEPAD offices in Rama, a town located along the major rivers of Rio Si Quia, Rio Escondido and Rio Rama, were under 30 to 40 feet of water, reported Hershberger in an October 25 phone call from Managua. Since the city

is barely above sea level, flood water is receding slowly. Fortunately, reported Hershberger, nearly 8,000 of the 10,000 residents in Rama were evacuated to Juigalpa, which is higher and farther west, before the storm hit.

While the death toll was relatively low, crop damage was devastating and will affect people until a new crop can be harvested next spring. The rice crop was a total loss, Hershberger said. Corn, coffee, banana and other crops suffered at least 50 percent damage.

Currently CEPAD has enough food stored in Managua to feed the 14,000 refugees in Juigalpa for one week. Some of that food was sent earlier by MCC. About 300 metric tons of food sent by MCC to the northeastern port of Puerto Cabezas will also be sent south to Bluefields for emergency needs there.

CEPAD has asked MCC to ship more corn, rice, beans, cooking oil, and skim milk powder as soon as possible for distribution among displaced people. CEPAD also wants to distribute

corn and bean seed so farmers can replant devastated fields.

Besides shipping food, MCC plans to send blankets, health kits, clothing, soap and canned meat. Money donated to MCC for response to Hurricane Joan will be used to gather and ship these commodities.

MCC began work in Nicaragua following a 1972 earthquake in Managua that killed more than 10,000 and caused destruction still visible today. Some say damage caused by Hurricane Joan is worse than that of the 1972 earthquake.

The effects of the storm are compounded by the country's severe economic troubles, a result of ongoing civil war. Cuba, European agencies and the Soviet Union have sent disaster relief to this country of 3 million. The United States, which funds the contra guerrilla movement there, has refused to give any disaster aid. The Nicaraguan government is unlikely to ask for aid from the United States, however, due to the hostilities between the two. ■



Nicaraguan Brethren in Christ share in hurricane clean-up efforts

In an October 24 letter and November 1 telephone conversation, Enrique Palacios reported no known storm-related deaths among the Brethren in Christ in Nicaragua, although one church building in Bluefields was destroyed. (He had not received reports from the more isolated congregations as of Nov. 1.) Palacios, executive minister of the Brethren in Christ Church in Nicaragua, credited preparations for the hurricane on the East Coast (including evacuation of coastal areas) in helping to minimize the loss of life.

Immediately after the hurricane, Brethren in Christ pastors and church

members from the Managua area went out across the country to help CEPAD assess the extent of damage. Brethren in Christ members also helped to form emergency brigades, which were sent first to hard-hit Rama (where some Brethren in Christ members live), then to Bluefields.

Palacios, who currently is vice president of CEPAD, reported that the capital city of Managua, although not receiving the full force of the hurricane, experienced damage from high wind and heavy rain. He noted the Bible Society in Managua lost 10,000 Bibles when their warehouse was flooded. ■

Church News

Allegheny Conference

On Oct. 22, Jim Roberts visited the **Air Hill** congregation, Chambersburg, Pa., to tell of his recent trip to Rumania to teach and encourage Christians in the underground church. Accompanying him to speak was a Rumanian student whose family has suffered persecution. • On Oct. 30, the **Big Valley** congregation, Belleville, Pa., helped sponsor a concert by the Gospel Tide Hour Choir. • Eber Dourte spoke Oct. 2 to the **Cedar Grove** congregation, Mifflintown, Pa., on Lifeline Ministries in San Francisco. An offering was received for the work. The Golden Age Fellowship planned an Oct. 15 bus trip to Ashland.

On Oct. 22, the library committee of the **Chambersburg**, Pa., congregation sponsored a pancake breakfast. Revival meetings with Don Shafer were Oct. 30—Nov. 4. • The young people of the **Clear Creek** congregation, Everett, Pa., sponsored the film "Love Note" on Oct. 30. • Baritone Dale Schroeder recently sang for the **Cumberland Valley** congregation, Dillsburg, Pa., for a Friend Day service. A new worship attendance record of 517 was set on Sept. 25. • An installation service for Rev. and Mrs. Chris Givler, church planting couple in **Frederick**, Md., was held Oct. 30.

Rev. Wilbur Besecker was installed Oct. 9 at the **Five Forks** church, Waynesboro, Pa. John and

Esther Spurrier delivered a missionary challenge in the Oct. 16 service. • Steve Kreider, a 1987 graduate of Messiah College with a degree in Christian education and family studies, has joined the **Grantham**, Pa., church staff as Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. He is the fourth full-time staff person. • Twenty women of the **Hanover**, Pa., congregation recently held a retreat with speakers JoAnn Hull and Bonnie Testerman. A senior citizens and singles dinner was slated for Oct. 30.

Jay and Judy Smith, on furlough from Senegal, spoke to the **Hollowell** congregation, Waynesboro, Pa., on Oct. 16. Twenty men worked Oct. 22 to replace the parsonage roof. • On Oct. 16, Ray Sider from Timber Bay Children's Home was Rally Day speaker for the **Locust Grove** congregation, York, Pa. • On Nov. 6, John Rosenberry visited the **Marsh Creek** congregation, Howard, Pa., to bring the morning message and lead in an evening communion service. • A representative of the Pennsylvania Council on Alcohol Problems spoke Oct. 9 to the **Martinsburg**, Pa., congregation.

A series of messages was planned for November by Pastor Ken Hepner for the **Mechanicsburg**, Pa., congregation to aid in a critical look at the theology of marriage as a picture of God's covenant and how to deal redemptively with those

experiencing the pain of divorce. • The Mountain Anthems mixed chorus gave a musical program on Oct. 9 to the **Montgomery** congregation, Mercersburg, Pa. • A Fall Fest evening, Nov. 6, for the **Morning Hour Chapel**, East Berlin, Pa., was to include a hay ride, games, refreshments, and devotions. The youth toured the Hebrew Tabernacle reproduction in Lancaster on Nov. 5.

Walter Winger was scheduled speaker for Nov. 2-6 spiritual renewal services at the **Mt. Rock** church, Shippensburg, Pa. The junior youth recently sponsored two showings of the film "Joni." • Sharon Weisser preached on Oct. 9 to the **New Guilford** congregation, Chambersburg, Pa., on "Finding Your Ministry." Luke Keefer, Sr., was Bible teacher for special services Oct. 30—Nov. 6. • Rally Day, Oct. 16, at the **Rosegen** church, Duncannon, Pa., featured the junior Sunday school in the morning, and the Big Valley Men's Chorus at night. • Earl J. Lehman, pastor of the **Shermans Valley** congregation, Hopewell, Pa., died suddenly Oct. 19 while at the Rosegen church for revival meetings.

William Cramer, a chalk artist from Williamsburg, Pa., presented a program on Oct. 25 to the **Spring Hope** congregation, Bedford, Pa. • The music group Refuge had a major portion of the Oct. 9 morning service of the **Van Lear** congregation, Williamsport, Md. Ken Letner spoke Oct. 23. • Three persons were baptized and four received as members recently of the **Walkersville**, Md., church. • Proceeds from the **West Shore**, Enola, Pa., congregation's Apple Butter Celebration Oct. 21-22 went to the benevolent fund.



Jeffrey House ordained

Jeffrey B. House was ordained to the Christian ministry during the Sunday morning worship service on October 16, 1988, at the Clarence Center Brethren in Christ Church, in western New York. Bishop H. Frank Kipe of the Allegheny Conference preached the ordination sermon and lead in the ordination ritual.

Jeff was born in Fort Erie, Ont., on December 10, 1955. During his childhood years, he attended the Sherston Brethren in Christ Church with his parents, Roscoe and Charlotte House.

After high school he was employed as a letter carrier with the Fort Erie Post Office. At the age of 21, after several years of rebellion against the Lord, he came to find a vital, life-changing faith in Christ. Three years later he enrolled at Emmanuel Bible College, and began attending the West Heights Brethren in Christ Church where he met Bonnie Lofthouse, daughter of Ronald and Marjorie Lofthouse. On August 22, 1981, Jeff and Bonnie were united in marriage. They have two children: Mark, 3, and Sarah, 5. Bonnie works at home where she operates a home day-care center.

During Jeff's years at Bible college, he sensed a call to full-time Christian service. During his final year of college he interned as a student pastor at the Boyle Brethren in Christ Church in Wellandport, Ont. Since graduation he has served as a church planter in Burlington, Ont., and as pastor of the Springvale Brethren in Christ Church in Springvale, Ont.

In March of this year Jeff, Bonnie, Sarah, and Mark moved to Clarence Center, where Jeff has been called to give pastoral leadership to the congregation. ■

Atlantic Conference

In October, persons in the **Community Bible** congregation, Sarasota, Fla., were urged to employ youths of the church in various tasks with proceeds going to the youth group. The film "Beyond the Cross" by Underground Evangelism was shown Oct. 2. • A group from the **Cross Roads** congregation, Mt. Joy, Pa., planned to visit their sister church in Gwinnett, Ga., Oct. 13-17. • The **Day-spring Covenant** congregation, Harrisonburg, Va., planned a building dedication service for Nov. 27. • Five persons from the **Elizabethtown**, Pa., congregation recently attended the 1989 Chapel of the Air 50-Day Adventure training conference in Lititz.

The Wednesday night Bible study of the **Fairland** congregation, Cleona, Pa., has been on "Hard Sayings of Jesus." John Ludwig led spiritual life services in early October. • Several leaders from **Fellowship Chapel**, Bronx, N.Y., recently planned to attend a Navigators' Colossians 2:7 discipleship training clinic at Kenbrook Camp. • Oct. 15 was the Annual Prayer and Share Day for the women of the **Free Grace** congregation, Millersburg, Pa. Dottie Crider of the Antrim Church spoke on "Prayer: the path to power." The youth recently viewed "Origins," a video series about the origin of the world and mankind.

Construction has begun on the **Hershey** church in Hummelstown, Pa. The first work day was scheduled for Oct. 22. Volunteers were requested for any day except Sunday with the hope of getting

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under roof by winter. • Chuck Anderson preached the morning message Oct. 16 for the **Holden Park** congregation, Orlando, Fla. His wife Toni and Ed Bryant, who sang with Prison Fellowship Ministry in 1981-83, gave a gospel concert in the evening. • Henry Ginder led services Oct. 2-5 for the **Hummelstown, Pa.**, congregation. The film "Cry from the Mountain" was shown Oct. 16.

The **Lancaster, Pa.**, congregation has purchased a 15-passenger, previously owned van. The youth had an Oct. 28-29 retreat in Mechanicsburg. • The Ted Cornell Chorale, a 45-voice choir, sang for the **Manor** congregation, Mountville, Pa., on Oct. 16. Esther Snyder has been leading a women's Bible study on forgiveness. • The **Mastersonville, Pa.**, congregation recently had a special offering which liquidated the parsonage debt. Two new members were received in October. • "Grace" was the topic of renewal challenges given by Woody Dalton, Nov. 13-16, to the **Mt. Pleasant** congregation, Mt. Joy, Pa.

The **Palmyra, Pa.**, Kenbrook Ladies Auxiliary held an Oct. 22 yard sale. In early October, the Palmyra and Wainfleet, Ont., youth groups combined for a work day at Paxton Street Home, roller skating, and a program at Messiah Village. • The bell choir of the **Pequea** congregation, Lancaster, Pa., played for the **Summit View** congregation, New Holland, Pa., on Oct. 23. The Pequea youth had a spaghetti dinner fundraiser Nov. 12. Pastor Paul Keefer has resigned effective Nov. 30. • The **Refton, Pa.**, congregation joined with Pequea for a teacher training workshop at Refton on Oct. 11.

The Oct. 22-23 missions conference of the **Shenks** congregation, Elizabethtown, Pa., featured a film on ministry to international students, Sandra Bjorkgren speaking to youth on summer mission opportunities, a play about early work in Africa, and slides emphasizing teamwork between pastor and lay persons. • Oct. 9 was Homecoming Sunday at the **Silverdale, Pa.**, church. Glen Rosenberger, Christian counselor, spoke in the evening on marriage and family. • The **Skyline View** congregation, Harrisburg, Pa., celebrated its 25th anniversary Oct. 8-9 with a Saturday evening banquet; the presence of all five pastors, present and past; and two Sunday services with varied testimonies and music.

The **Stowe, Pa.**, congregation made an assortment of tracts available to its people that gave a gospel message pertaining to some aspect of Halloween. The congregation shared a meal Oct. 23 with Pete and Mim Stern and some international students. • An Autumn Rest Retreat was scheduled Nov. 13-18 at Kenbrook Camp with John K. Stoner offering spiritual direction to individuals. The retreat focused on prayer, Scripture, and A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*.

Canadian Conference

Allan and Anne Wideman, furloughing missionaries to New Guinea, gave the morning message recently to the **Bridlewood** congregation, Agincourt, Ont. Nov. 20 was 25th anniversary Sunday with guests E. Morris Sider and Monique Tute. The offering went toward new sanctuary carpeting. • Don Zook spoke Oct. 22, 23 in missions services at the **Cross Roads** church, Guelph, Ont. • The **Falls View** church, Niagara Falls, Ont., hosted a Women Alive prayer seminar on Oct. 15. The ladies' annual bazaar was Oct. 29. The Omegas had a sub sale on Nov. 5. • The **Heise Hill** congregation, Gormley, Ont., recently received an offering for hurricane Gilbert disaster relief after

hearing a message by Joseph Prendergast, Director of Jamaican Evangelical Mission.

A 50th wedding anniversary celebration was held for Clifford L. and Ada Cober Winger in the Parkview Village auditorium, Stouffville, Ont. It was hosted by their children; Luella Gilmore, Ardys Winger, and Ivan Winger. The Wingers were married Oct. 5, 1938, in the bride's home with the groom's father, Bishop Alvin L. Winger, officiating. Clifford and Ada have seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. They are members of the Heise Hill congregation and served as deacon couple for 23 years.



The Homebuilders group of the **Lakeside Community** congregation, Calgary, Alb., has been discussing Charles Swindoll's book *Growing Wise in Family Life*. A women's group recently studied *How to Have Joy No Matter What*. • The **Kindersley, Sask.**, congregation had a flea market and bake sale on Oct. 15. Members were urged to participate in a suicide prevention workshop in Kindersley, Nov. 25-26. • The first meeting of the

Fireside Fellowship (50 and up) of the **Massey Place** congregation, Saskatoon, Sask., was a bowling outing on Oct. 15. The ladies had eight weeks of "Stretch and Grow" classes in the Fall—low impact aerobics and a fellowship/study time.

On Nov. 6, Bishop Sider spoke to the **North East Community** congregation, Calgary, Alb. "The Letters of John" was the Sunday evening study begun in November. • Wycliffe workers Allan Wideman and family shared about their ministry with the **Oak Ridges, Ont.**, congregation on Nov. 13. John and Lucille Graybill were also missions speakers about Japan on Nov. 27. • On Oct. 15-16, the **Prince Albert, Sask.**, congregation sponsored a marriage seminar, "Love That Lasts a Lifetime," at a local hotel. Newspaper ads and 6,000 hand distributed flyers publicized the event intended as an opportunity to meet the needs of the community. • The **Ridgemount** congregation, Hamilton, Ont., donated home baked pies to the Oct. 1 Heritage Day fair at Niagara Christian College. The congregation actively promoted the Billy Graham crusade in Hamilton, Oct. 26-30.

The **Sherkston, Ont.**, congregation enjoyed a soup and sandwich supper on Oct. 30, followed by the film "Never Too Young." • The Hoppers and ventriloquist Anita and David gave a program for the **Wainfleet, Ont.**, congregation on Nov. 3. • Thirty-nine persons of the **Welland, Ont.**, congregation enjoyed a retreat recently at Camp Kahquah. • The **Westheights** church, Kitchener, Ont., was host for 195 women at the Women's Missionary Auxiliary meeting, Oct. 21-22. Ruth Dourte and Esther Spurrier spoke on "Women in Servanthood," "The Lord's Handmaidens," and "Missions at My Doorstep."



Kirkland Lake observes Canadian Conference bicentennial

Thirty-five people of the Kirkland Lake, Ont., congregation gathered on Sept. 11 at the farm of Mildred and Bill Hatton to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Brethren in Christ Church in Canada. They experienced the various ordinances of the Brethren in Christ, beginning with the traditional love feast lunch, enhanced by homemade bread and pies. Afterwards, a service was held in a clearing in the bush prepared with stumps and boards for seating and a natural canopy of fresh boughs. Some per-

sons added to the setting by coming in plain clothing.

Speakers were Rev. Harold Sherk of the Boyle congregation, and Rev. Arthur Heise from the Bertie Church. Rev. Eldon Byer and his wife Lynn led singing, some of which was attempted in German. Those gathered then experienced a footwashing service, new to some of those in attendance, and communion. Two young people were baptized. The day was a deeply spiritual event in the life of the congregation. ■

Central Conference

Tim Hershberger visited with the **Amherst** congregation, Massillon, Ohio, on Oct. 21 at a wiener roast and family games night. He also spoke in the Oct. 23 worship service. Photos for a new color directory were taken Nov. 11-12. • The **Christian Union** congregation, Garrett, Ind., had an Oct. 29 "How to Share Your Faith" seminar with Ken Gibson. Paul Hostetler gave a presentation the evening of Oct. 30 on "God at Work in our Ministries." • On Oct. 22, John Lieb, pastor of the North Columbus Vineyard, brought a team to the **Highland** church, West Milton, Ohio, to talk in an afternoon-evening seminar about "The Third Wave" movement of the Holy Spirit.

Several men of the **Lakeview** congregation, Goodrich, Mich., have volunteered to do home projects as part of the Handyman Program. A mini carnival with Christian emphasis, candy, and prizes was sponsored for the community children at the church on Halloween night. • The **Mooretown** congregation, Sandusky, Mich., recently viewed the video series on depression, "Happiness Is a Choice." • Coping with alcohol and substance abuse was the topic Oct. 16 for a presentation of the ministerial council hosted by the **Morrison**, Ill., congregation. The young adults had a get-together on Nov. 5 for games.

Pastor Tom and Lynne Kershner of the **Pleasant Hill**, Ohio, congregation attended the Oct. 17 Serendipity Small Group Seminar in Columbus. • On Oct. 18, the ladies fellowship of the **Union Grove** congregation, New Paris, Ind., viewed the Chuck Swindoll video "People of Refuge," about persons' needs for friendship and comfort. Paul Hostetler preached on Oct. 30.

Camp Lakeview Job and Service Opportunities

Camp Lakeview is looking for a dedicated and capable person, full time, to be in charge of maintenance and to assist the manager, beginning April 1 or before.

Also needed for the 1989 summer camping season:

- a health staff person
- a Water Safety Instructor to be in charge of the waterfront
- a person with an Advance Life certificate (or higher) to work with the Waterfront Director

Training can be arranged for interested persons.

If you have questions about these openings, contact Homer Bassett, 5868 Tody Road, Goodrich, MI 48438, phone (313) 627-2530.

Resumes and applications for the maintenance position should be sent to Rev. Ron Slabaugh, 2450 W. Snover Rd., Sandusky, MI 48571.

Midwest Conference

The **Abilene** congregation hosted the Kansas Missions Festival Oct. 7-9 with Alvin and Thata Book, Curtis and Leslie Book, Mgehele Dlodlo, Don Zook, Louis Cober, Merle Brubaker, and Glenn Ginder. • Residents of the Dallas Center, Iowa, community were shocked recently to have members of the **Mound Park** congregation knock on their doors and offer to do odd jobs for them—free—as part of Servant Day. Many new faces were seen in the church on Oct. 9, Friend Day. Response was good to a recent three-day seminar on personal gift analysis by Ken Letner.

Oct. 2 was Celebration Sunday at the **Oak Park** church, Des Moines, Iowa, with guest singers Bob and Carol Connors. The congregation has begun Mountain Movers on three Sunday nights a month—a support group for those wishing to learn more appropriate behavior patterns for dealing with life and to find tools for controlling compulsive behaviors. • On Oct. 30, the **Rosebank** congregation, Hope, Ks., hosted a Sanctity of Life seminar with Wilmer Heisey, executive secretary of MCC U.S. An offering was taken for Lifeline Ministries, San Francisco.

Pacific Conference

The **Moreno** congregation, Moreno Valley, Calif., had an Oct. 15-16 World Christian Weekend with an international dinner, concert of prayer, and a movie. The church coed softball team made outstanding progress this summer and won the league championship. • Charter membership Sunday for the **New Community** church, Pomona, Calif., was slated for Oct. 23. • "Committed to What Counts" was the theme of family camp at Mile High Pines, Oct. 28-30, for the **Ontario**, Calif., congregation. The women's fellowship hosted a ham dinner on Oct. 9 to help with costs. A Christian alternative to Halloween was a "Jesus Is Lord" party for all kids, 0-99.

The **Pacific Highway** congregation, Salem, Ore., has started a roller skating program one Tuesday night a month with discounted prices according to church attendance, and church bus pickup. • Ken Letner spoke to the **Riverside**, Calif., congregation on Oct. 16. The Intercession Team was in retreat on Nov. 5. • The **Upland**, Calif., ladies had their Fall Fashion Fellowship on Nov. 3 with music by Sounds of Joy and the Byers sisters. The Focus on the Family film "A Man Called Norman" was shown Oct. 23. Dave Brubaker spoke recently in an evening service.

For the Record

Births

Ammann: James Preston, Sept. 26; Joe and Christy (Zook) Ammann, Zion congregation, Ks.

Book: Trevor David, Sept. 25; Chris and Marlys Book, Cumberland Valley congregation, Pa.

Bowers: Donald III, Sept. 12; Donald and Cindy Bowers, Walkersville congregation, Md.

Chafin: Cala Marie, Oct. 15; Hank and Lisa Chafin, Dayton congregation, Ohio.

Crum: Rebecca, Oct. 11; Raymond and Cheryl Crum, Air Hill congregation, Pa.

DeJesus: Tiffany Marie, Oct. 7; Kyle and Stacy DeJesus, Manheim congregation, Pa.

Dezwann: Tara Gerry, July 26; John and Karen (Wideman) Dezwann, Heise Hill congregation, Ont.

Dutweiler: Ashlyn Jae, Sept. 7; Jace and Debra (Rabin) Dutweiler, Fairland congregation, Pa.

Esbine: Abbie Elizabeth, Sept. 24; Don and Josie Esbine, Refton congregation, Pa.

Eshleman: Stephen Edward, Oct. 6; Rodney and Kim Eshleman, Antrim congregation, Pa.

Frey: Jacob Lee, Sept. 21; Wilson and Louise (Bender) Frey, Manor congregation, Pa.

Gerhart: Brooke David, Aug. 13; Clark and Kimberly Gerhart, Souderton congregation, Pa.

Giles: Elizabeth Jean, Sept. 17; chosen daughter of Tim and Martha Giles, Venezuela.

Good: (correction) Dane Jordan, Aug. 4; Clayton and Julie Good, Manheim congregation, Pa.

Gough: Kelly Marie, Aug. 6; Richard and Cheri Gough, Walkersville congregation, Md.

Greco: Cassandra Lynn, Oct. 20; Anthony and Beth Greco, Westheights congregation, Ont.

Hayes: Rebecca Ann, Oct. 14; Kevin and June Hayes, Mechanicsburg congregation, Pa.

Hess: Elizabeth Ann, Sept. 23; J. Richard and Melissa Hess, Manheim congregation, Pa.

Hunt: Brock David, Sept. 19; Bryan and Christine (Musser) Hunt, Manor congregation, Pa.

Keener: Amos Mitchell, Oct. 3; Darwin and Ruth Keener, Manheim congregation, Pa.

Love: Mark Richard, Oct. 14; Richard and Tina Love, Carlisle congregation, Pa.

Martin: Michael Matthew, Sept. 28; George and Donna (Gibble) Martin, Manor congregation, Pa.

Miller: Benjamin Alan, Sept. 1; Alan and Jean Miller, Walkersville congregation, Md.

Moyer: Jeremy Daniel, Oct. 7; Timothy and Carolyn (Martin) Moyer, Mechanicsburg congregation, Pa.

Newschwanger: Michael David, Sept. 24; Duane and Bonnie (Tweed) Newschwanger, Manor congregation, Pa.

Peachey: Alicia Marie, Sept. 23; Warren and Nina Peachey, Cedar Grove congregation, Pa.

Putman: Ryan Andrew, Sept. 11; Neil and Kathy (Wideman) Putman, Heise Hill congregation, Ont.

Rupp: Aaron Curtis, Oct. 24; Carl and Patti Rupp, Manheim congregation, Pa.

Shertzer: Kayla Marie, Sept. 26; Scott and Terri (Moll) Shertzer, Manor congregation, Pa.

Shropshire: Jesse Bruce, Oct. 3; Gary and Wendy (Wideman) Shropshire, Heise Hill congregation, Ont.

Slick: Christopher Robert, Oct. 17; Robert and Karla (Martin) Slick, Chambersburg congregation, Pa.

Weaver: Kaitlin Elizabeth, Oct. 13; Marlin and Jill (Brocius) Weaver, Mt. Pleasant congregation, Pa.

Whritenour: Bonnie Lynn, Oct. 12; Ron and Vicki Whritenour, Palmyra congregation, Pa.

Wightman: Martin Andrew, Sept. 10; Doug and Luci (Heise) Wightman, Heise Hill congregation, Ont.

Wingert: Keith Anthony, Sept. 14; Dwayne and Ida Wingert, Antrim congregation, Pa.

Weddings

Bishop-Anderson: Linda Anderson and Thomas Bishop, Aug. 27, at the Souderton Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Kevin Ryan officiating.

Bricker-Timmons: Patti Jean, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Timmons, Greencastle, Pa., and Edwin Jay, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bricker, Greencastle, Sept. 17., at the Chambersburg Brethren in Christ Church.

Cassel-Denning: Adrienne, daughter of Mrs. Carol Denning, Camp Hill, Pa., and Kevin, son of Dr. and Mrs. Wayne Cassel, Grantham, Pa., Oct. 1, in the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church with Dr. Robert B. Ives officiating.

Cloyd-Rohrer: Corene Renee, daughter of Kermit and Elaine Rohrer, Mountville, Pa., and Philip Daniel, son of Philip Cloyd, Hope, Ark., and Martha Cloyd, Gadsden, Ala., Sept. 24, at the Manor Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. John B. Hawbaker and Rev. Robert L. Sheetz officiating.

Fisher-Long: Beth Renee, daughter of Richard L. and Mary Long, Walkersville, Md., and Timothy, son of Richard and Julia Fisher, Walkersville, Mar. 19, in the Walkersville Church of the Brethren with Rev. Richard Long and Rev. Lynn Thrush officiating.

Gottfried-Johnson: Mildred Marie Johnson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Kennedy, Greencastle, Pa., and John Robert, son of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gottfried, Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 22, at the Antrim Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Wilbur W. Benner officiating.

Grove-Loop: Irene, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Loop, Telford, Pa., and Christopher, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Grove, Perkasio, Sept. 3, at the Souderton Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Barry Loop officiating.

Harshbarger-McConnell: Colette Lee McConnell, daughter of Larry and Bonnie Warner, Laura, Ohio, and Michael E., son of Mr. and Mrs. David Harshbarger, Casstown, Ohio, Oct. 15, in the home of the parents of the bride with Rev. Ed Ashby officiating.

Jenkins-Miller: Pamela Mary, daughter of Leon Miller, Lancaster, Pa., and Anne Miller, Lancaster, Pa., and Paul Adam, son of Robert and Nancy Jenkins, Conestoga, Pa., Oct. 15, at the Manor Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. John B. Hawbaker officiating.

Kebs-Hostetler: Kay, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Hostetler, Orrville, Ohio, and Robert, son of Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Kebs, Bally, Pa., Aug. 6, at the Souderton Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Kevin Ryan officiating.

Keller-Emory: Michele, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Addison Emory, Woodbine, Md., and Michael, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Keller, Greencastle, Pa., Sept. 10, at Trinity United Methodist Church, Frederick, Md.

Ruegg-Kirk: Lynda Anne, daughter of Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Cecil Kirk, Fort Erie, Ont., and Leonard Joel, son of Lorne and Lois Ruegg, Magnetawan, Ont., Aug. 27, at St. Andrews-

Knox Presbyterian Church, Fort Erie, Ont., with Rev. Cecil Kirk and Rev. Greg Funk officiating.

Rees-Wickson: Linda Ann Wickson, daughter of Edward and Doreen Brost, and Antony Brian Rees, son of Stuart Rees and Sandra Thibaut, Oct. 1, at the Sherkston Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Leonard Chester officiating.

Rife-Shives: Barbara Ann, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Merle Shives, Mercersburg, Pa., and Lee Roy, son of Mr. and Mrs. Merle Rife, Chambersburg, Pa., Oct. 15, at the Antrim Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Wilbur W. Benner officiating.

Stoner-Mock: Sharon Jean, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eldon Mock, Johnstown, Pa., and Larry Eugene, son of Samuel and Elizabeth Stoner, East Berlin, Pa., June 25, in Zion United Methodist Church, Elton, Pa., with Dr. Paul Morris, and Rev. Thomas Brown officiating.

Van Helvert-Climenhaga: Kelly, daughter of David and Joanne Climenhaga, Ridgeway, Ont., and David Nicholas, son of John and Margaret Van Helvert, Crystal Beach, Ont., Sept. 10, at the Sherkston Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Leonard Chester officiating.

Yordy-Steager: Dorine Rana, daughter of Norma Steager, Mechanicsburg, Pa., and Robert David Yordy, son of Carol Landes, Harrisonburg, Va., Aug. 20, at the Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ Church with Rev. Luke Keefer, Sr., officiating.

Obituaries

Beach: Craig Howard Beach, born Aug. 17, 1956, died Sept. 17. He is survived by his parents, Howard and Viola Beach; a sister, Karen Nix; and

three nieces. Services were held at the Williams Funeral Home, Ridgeway, Ont., with Rev. Leonard Chester officiating. Interment was in Beaches Cemetery, Sherkston.

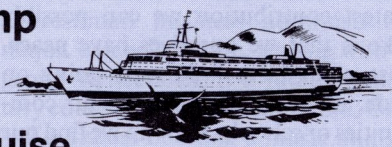
Hoke: Ralph E. Hoke, born Nov. 18, 1913, died Oct. 19. He is survived by his wife, Joanna; a son, Stanley; two daughters, Meredyth Hock and Anita Stoner; six grandchildren; five brothers; and two sisters. Ralph was a member of the Christian Union congregation where he served as deacon for 15 years and church treasurer for 36 years. He served on the Youth for Christ Board, and as treasurer for Child Evangelism Fellowship for 30 years. The funeral service was held in the Christian Union church with Rev. Garland Wittington officiating, assisted by Rev. Rick Mailloux and Rev. Carl G. Stump. Interment was in the Christian Union cemetery.

Krause: Kathryn Krause, born Nov. 13, 1923, died Sept. 27. Surviving are her husband, Samuel J. Krause; a son, Barry R.; four daughters, Donna Breniser, Vickie Flosser, Kathy Adams, and Terri Krause; two brothers, Lloyd and Edward; two sisters, Evelyn Whittington and Delores May; nine grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. Kathryn was a member of the Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church. The service was held at the Fred F. Groff Funeral Home with Rev. James D. Ernst officiating. Interment was in the Millersville Menonite Cemetery.

Schell: Milton H. Schell, born in 1907, died Aug. 9. Surviving are his wife, Florence V.; a daughter, Janet Huff; five sisters, Ella M. Neyer; Alda Blosser, Vi Zeigler; Martha J. Murray; and Zelma Shover; nine grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. Milton was a member of the West Shore congregation, and a retired bus driver for the Valley Transportation Co. Graveside services were held at St. John's Cemetery with Rev. Simon A. Lehman, Jr., officiating.

Kenbrook Bible Camp

is sponsoring an



Eastern Caribbean Cruise

March 4-11, 1989

“We, the Board of Directors of Kenbrook Bible Camp and Retreat Center, invite you to join our Caribbean Cruise Mar. 4-11, 1989. The cruise is an opportunity for you to fellowship with friends of Kenbrook as we anticipate our 40th anniversary in 1990. An added feature is daily worship led by Rev. John Hawbaker and his wife Jolena, who will play the piano for us.” —*Glenn E. Garis, Board President*

Cruise price: \$1,260 to \$1,590

(Per person, double occupancy,
based on availability of accommodations)

Depart from Philadelphia or Harrisburg (inquire about other departure cities). Travel arrangements by MTS Travel, 102 E. Main St., Ephrata, PA 17552. Phone 800-233-0157 (In Pa., phone 717-733-4131).

Graham commends U.N.; notes winds of change in China, U.S.S.R.

Evangelist Billy Graham told a thousand students at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, that the world cannot justify spending billions of dollars on armaments when so many people die of starvation every day.

Speaking to students in the McMaster gymnasium on United Nations Day, two days prior to the opening of the Billy Graham-Golden Horseshoe Crusade, Graham said "the terrible situation (of starvation) in the Southern Sudan, and in Bangladesh where they've had those floods should break every Christian's heart.

"We're spending billions and billions on bombs that will never be used," he said, "and yet millions of people are on the verge of starvation or are actually starving. We cannot justify that from a Christian point of view."

He added, however, that "we are not living in a Christian world—and I suppose we have to accept the world as it is and work toward the elimination of all those arms that are draining the world of its energy and its strength and its wealth."

He told the students that ordinary people can have an influence on world peace. "Be sure that you have the peace of God in your own heart," he said. "The greatest contribution we can possibly make is that we ourselves have peace. Most of us have little wars going on inside, or in our families, or our communities or schools. How do we find our

peace? That's the reason Jesus Christ came and died on the cross. That's what the resurrection is all about. That's what the gospel is all about—to reconcile us to God. To have peace within ourselves is a tremendous thing in the world in which we live, and it has a great impact on people around us."

Graham addressed the students on the subject of world peace. McMaster University is an institution with 25,000 students, which has a nuclear research center and offers a degree in the studies of world peace.

Of the United Nations, Graham said, "I think we are seeing a whole new movement now throughout the world that we have seen before primarily in the United Nations. The UN has helped solve some of the problems in some parts of the world by its intervention in certain areas of the Middle East, and by helping bring about at least a cessation of warfare in Iraq and Iran and in other parts of the world."

He reiterated his feelings about "glasnost," which he had previously said in a press conference prior to his talk to the students. "I think glasnost is tremendous," he said. "There is a lessening of tensions; I could feel it in the streets when I was in the Soviet Union in June."

He told the students that he was "impressed tremendously with Mr. Gorbachev and with what I believe to be his sincerity. And I saw glasnost in operation. I have been to the Soviet Union a

number of times and the people held back a bit, but this time they were open and warm. Glasnost I think is working; perestroika is in the process, but whether the great conservative leaders who disagree with Mr. Gorbachev are going to allow him to get by with all this, I don't know.

"Some of the people who want some things may be going too far too fast, and the same may be true in China. In both countries, these few movements I think are a little fragile. But it's a wind of change. I never expected these changes in my lifetime, and I certainly didn't expect that I would get to go to both the Soviet Union and China and preach the Gospel." He has preached in both countries this year.

In a press conference at the school prior to the student forum Graham said church attendance was one of the reasons for his five-day crusade here this week. "In Canada I have read that church attendance is lower than ten percent," he said. "I do not know the reason for that, but that's one of the purposes of these meetings—to encourage people to go to church, to the church of their choice." ■

CPT scheduled to meet in Chicago May 1989

The first gathering for Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), a Mennonite and Brethren initiative, is scheduled to take place May 26-29, 1989, in Chicago.

"The gathering is planned for people who have been involved in peacemaking and for people who feel a call for more enthusiastic involvement," said Edgar Metzler, CPT steering committee member.

CPT coordinator Gene Stoltzfus noted that the gathering will focus on non-violence training as well as biblical reflections on assertive peacemaking. There will also be an emphasis on exploring what people are already doing in their local communities, he said.

The denominations that are supporting CPT are the General Conference Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church, Church of the Brethren, and Brethren in Christ.

For more information contact Gene Stoltzfus, 1821 W. Cullerton, Chicago, IL 60608, 312-421-5513. ■

Apply now for 1989 Intermenno program

Young people who would like to spend a year in Europe with European Mennonites should contact Mennonite Central Committee now.

MCC is accepting applications for the 1989-1990 Intermenno Program, a program open to young people between the ages of 19 and 27. Those accepted into the program will work and live with European Mennonites. Participants go to Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland; most spend six months each in two locations within the same country.

The program is administered by the

Intermenno Trainee Committee of Europe, a committee made up of representatives from the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland.

Applications are due to MCC by January 15, 1989. The program begins August 12, 1989.

U.S. youth, contact: MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501, phone (717) 859-1151; or an MCC regional office. Canadian youth, contact: MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9; phone (204) 261-6381. ■

Messiah College News

The 24th Annual Messiah College Ministers Conference

On February 21 and 22, 1989, Dr. John Oswalt and Dr. Donald Joy will serve as keynote speakers at the 24th Annual Ministers Conference hosted by Messiah College.

Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Ill., Dr. Oswalt will be speaking on "Expository Preaching from the Old Testament."

Dr. Donald Joy, presently Professor of Human Development and Christian Education at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky., will discuss the subject of "Parents, Kids, and Sexual Integrity."

We look forward to an outstanding time of learning together. Please mark these conference dates on your calendar. Remember, group rates are available, so plan to bring leaders from your congregation along with you.

College offers speakers bureau

Organizers of any church banquet, seminar, or other function are encouraged to take advantage of the Messiah College speakers bureau, a service offered to the community by members of its faculty and administration.

For a small fee plus mileage reimbursement, a speaker may be selected from more than 35 people and 100 topics listed in a free brochure. Call or write the Messiah College communications office, Grantham, PA 17027, (717) 691-6032. You may request a copy of the



Members of Spirit Sound, from left to right: Tery Rhoades, Lori Lee Rhoades, Renee Haldeman, Chris Selkirk, Mark Richline, Sherry Paulus, Laurel Webster, and Sue Ritzman.

brochure to review, or simply request a speaker on a specific topic you have in mind. Requests are appreciated at least two months in advance of your event.

Music ministry teams can present uplifting programs

Three Messiah College music ministry teams are bringing inspirational singing to churches across Pennsylvania and surrounding states this fall. The teams, Spirit Sound, New Song, and Reflections present programs of popular Christian music. This includes songs by such artists as Michael W. Smith, Amy Grant, and Sandi Patti, while also mixing in words of personal testimony with their singing. The audience often gets involved in sing-alongs led by the group.

Four Brethren in Christ students are in the groups, which have between 8 to 12 members each. Singing with Spirit Sound are husband and wife, baritone Tery and soprano Lori Lee Rhoades. Tery, the group's business manager, is a senior accounting major from Lake St. Louis, Mo. Lori Lee is a junior elementary education major from West Milton, Ohio. Also singing with Spirit Sound is Sherry Paulus, Lori Lee's sister, who is a freshman business administration major. Michelle Smith, singing with the group Reflections, is a junior elementary education major from Laura, Ohio.

To discuss booking a music ministry team, write or call the admissions office at (717) 691-6000.

Messiah College China Tour June 7-23, 1989



Messiah College has some exciting news for anyone who is thinking of exploring China next summer.

Friends and alumni of Messiah College will be spending 16 days visiting the forbidden city of Beijing, the awe-inspiring Great Wall, Shanghai—China's most sophisticated city, and scenic Guilin; journeying down the Li River; worshiping with fellow Chinese believers; shopping in Hong Kong; and much more!

This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Get the facts by calling Jeff Krimmel in the Messiah College Alumni Office at (717) 691-6019, or write to Messiah College Alumni Office, Grantham, PA 17027.

Reservations for the tour are limited, so be sure to call or write soon!

Seven vignettes on giving

by Paul Hostetter

I was shocked to discover recently that a lifelong member of the Brethren in Christ Church did not know what "tithe" meant. (The word comes from an Old English word meaning a tenth.) It reminded me of a man in another church of our brotherhood. He thought that tithing meant giving \$10 a week to the church.

When he began tithing many years ago, he was earning \$100 a week. Someone suggested that he give \$10 each week, but somehow failed to point out that the \$10 represented one tenth, or the tithe of his income.

And so, hard as it is to believe, that sincere brother was still giving only \$10 a week many years later when his income had more than doubled, and he thought he was tithing.

A cynic has proposed that the tithe was invented by a rich man so that he would feel comfortable in giving much less than he could/should give. That skeptic made a point worth thinking about.

I am convinced that some people displease God even when giving a seemingly commendable 20 percent of their income to the Lord. Others please him by giving a meager five percent. How can that be? If the 20-percenter is able and is impressed by the Holy Spirit to give 30 percent of his income to help spread the good news, his giving only 20 percent—though ostensibly generous—represents disobedience to God. On the other hand, the 5-percenter may be a new Christian for whom it is a very big step of faith and Christian growth to begin giving a half-tithe. Such obedience will, no doubt, soon result in greater proportions for the Lord.

A friend told me recently that as soon as their last child left home he and his wife decided to double their giving. Since they had steadfastly given at least the tithe during their years of lower income and higher expenses, their giving increase was significant. The new plan was possible only because they chose to increase their gifts to church ministries rather than raise their very modest standard of living.

Back in the '40s the late Dr. C. N. Hostetter, Jr., taught a class in which I was enrolled at Messiah College. He was Messiah's president, a highly respected churchman, and a brother beloved by young and old.

One day, as we were considering stewardship implications, Dr. Hostetter said that some contributors give only once a month for the sake of convenience and in order to save checking costs. "My own giving plan," he shared, "is to give in proportion to my earnings on a weekly basis in the Sunday morning service, but I also give something in all other offerings." He went on to explain that he gave in those

ways in order to set a good example before anyone who might be observing him.

Because of his advice and example, I have from that time purposed to do the same. My grandchildren, often sitting near me in church, are aware of my habit. And so they have their hands out for offering money each time! I hope they are learning a principle of stewardship along with the fact that grandparents are soft touches.

In another class period, Dr. Hostetter told us about a poor widow he knew who gave to the church generously from her desperately-needed income. One evening when she stood to share her Christian experiences in a prayer meeting setting, she described a particularly trying day. Just before sitting down she smiled bravely and confided, "One of my favorite Bible verses is, 'Grieve and bear it!'"

R. G. LeTourneau, a Christian businessman whose company manufactured heavy earth-moving equipment, began his giving with the tithe of his company income. As the Lord prospered him, he gave an ever larger proportion. He finally reached the point where he was keeping only the tithe and giving 90 percent to Christian causes.

I heard him speak to a large crowd more than 30 years ago. In no sense was he a polished speaker, but he stirred the hearts of us all as he testified to the joys of obeying God in Christian stewardship.

At our General Conference of 1986 Lester Fretz, the Associate Director of Stewardship living in the Canadian Conference, said, "Some people say we should give until it hurts; a much better way is to give until we feel joy."

Jesus told his disciples that his Father's house had many mansions, and that he was going there to prepare a place for them. With that text from John 14 in mind, an imaginative evangelist told the following story (parable?) at a revival meeting in the small Sippo Church in Ohio when I was a boy.

A man died and went to heaven. The first thing he did was look for his house. Close to the throne of God were some really spacious mansions, but they belonged to other believers who, in his estimation, had not been important followers of Christ. After a long walk, he finally found his house, a rather tacky looking shack.

The man buttonholed an angel and asked why his "mansion" was so small. The heavenly being had the answer: "All these residences, from the largest to the least, have been constructed in keeping with treasures which the owners have shipped in from the earth through the years."

Let me tell you something I decided on long ago. When I get to heaven, I don't plan to hunt for my hut. I'd rather search for my Savior.

... regarding church growth strategies and questions of accountability

I am writing in response to two articles which were in the October 1988 issue of the *Visitor*. In the articles, "Reflections On Church Growth" by Terry Brensinger and "How Does One Plant A Church" by Phil Kittle, some very important points were made concerning church growth and the need for prayer, keeping God first, letting him build the church, and never compromising the gospel. But I must take strong exception to the underlying message of the two articles, which implies that the use of modern church growth strategies, adapting secular techniques, or that setting goals for accountability is "misdirected zeal."

It bothers me that, as the Board for Evangelism and Church Planting (BCEP) pointed out in their 1988 General Conference report, the North American Brethren in Christ Church of over 18,000 members grew by only 455 members in 1986, and only 188 in all of 1987. We may have problems, but zeal does not seem to be one of them. But what is wrong? Did we not pray? Did God see fit not to bless our church? Did our straightforward, no-nonsense approach to preaching the Word scare prospective new members off?

Or, did many of us sit on our collective Christian laurels and not get out and do the work of the ministry? Why does the mere mention of the word "accountability" send us running to God like he is some heavenly base from which we don't have to fear being evaluated by any earthly peer. It seems to me that the BCEP is trying desperately to find some way to energize our churches, to, as Paul said, "be made all things to all men, that I might by *all* means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

To say, as Mr. Brensinger has, that "what we are plainly not responsible for, however, is the manner in which our listeners respond to us," I think is incorrect. One word he leaves out of his citing of the Great Commission is the word "teach." Instead, he uses "go and tell," which can have an entirely different connotation. It is one thing to tell some-

one how to drive a car, but quite another to teach them to drive. If you don't think so, wait until your child is 16.

As I understand the word "teach," it carries with it great responsibilities for the outcome. Should the fine folks at Messiah College take on an attitude of just disseminating information and let the students be responsible for the outcome? How long would a professor last if all the students were flunking his course and his response was "Well, I gave them the information?" Or would *he*, the teacher, be evaluated to determine what could be done to improve his pass/fail ratio?

Also, to make the analogy that "meaningful growth within the body of Christ is equally out of our hands" by comparing church growth to a farmer who sows his seed, then stands back and watches it grow, outside of perhaps using a few "agricultural techniques and strategies," which could "explain only so much," does not go very far—as far as I can see—from releasing us from accountability and evaluation. The reason is that the parable deals with growth. Many of our churches are not growing. What is that farmer going to do if his crop *isn't* growing? I am not a farmer but I'd say he would do something about it.

Rather, I believe, we as Christians live in fear of the word "accountability." To suggest that the Great Commission does not have accountability built into it I think is inaccurate. Mr. Brensinger cites the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. When I reread these letters, the words "spew thee out of my mouth" are the ones that caused me the greatest concern. He mentions the Lord's approval of the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia, two churches that were small in size. It seems to me that the Lord's approval was based more on their ability to withstand trials than it was on their record for church growth. A long string of trials isn't exactly what I would associate with the North American Brethren in Christ churches over the last 20 years. As a matter of fact, the Brethren in Christ churches with the longest list of trials have been the overseas churches, whose membership now surpasses the North American church. That should tell us something right there.

When my family and I came to this area of Birmingham in October of 1987, we had just three months to begin our first church service. I will make no excuse for the fact that we employed every method we could think of to get people to come to our first service. From prayer to telephone, we did what we felt would produce results, and what we could afford. These results were to be in the form of people coming to hear the Word of God preached, not compromised. We set goals for ourselves. We didn't make them, so we set more goals for ourselves. We didn't make those either but through all the work, the toil, the strategies and the programs, the Lord honored our efforts. As I write this, our last two services had 30 in attendance. Considering we didn't know a soul other than one man when we got here, and nobody had ever heard of the Brethren in Christ, I feel pretty good. Oh, and God *is* working in our church. People's lives are being changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. In a state where the majority of people think they're a Christian but haven't been in a church in months, we are seeing God effecting a change in the community through our church's efforts.

Recently, we did a phone campaign in which men and women from our church invited people to our services, told those

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Contributions invited for *Dialogue* and *Readers Respond*

Persons contributing to *Readers Respond* (letters to the editor) are encouraged to be concise. Letters may be shortened. All letters must be signed. Occasionally we may decide to withhold names due to special circumstances.

Longer contributions are welcomed for *Dialogue*, a forum for readers to express their opinions on a broad range of topics relevant to the mission of the church and to living the Christian life.

Since each article or letter represents the view of the writer, they do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Brethren in Christ Church.

Dialogue . . .

continued from page 27

who asked about the Brethren in Christ, and were prepared to share the Lord. The most exciting aspect of this effort was that every one of those people making the phone calls, except for one, was brought to our church as a result of our initial phone campaign just 10 months before! A slick evangelistic technique? Perhaps, but it was also God working through his chosen servants, and together, their efforts are building his church.

. . . regarding the church appointing trustees to Messiah College board

One of my greatest regrets in going to Africa this past year was missing General Conference. This is the first Conference I have missed in 15 years. I love General Conference. Therefore, I was interested to read the accounts in the *Visitor*. I was pleased to see the glowing descriptions of the fellowship and smiled at the reports of frustration due to quibbling over small matters.

Nevertheless, I was genuinely troubled about one item which was discussed—the issue of the church appointing trustees for Messiah College. I was not so troubled by the resolution of the issue as what seems to have been the spirit of the debate. I was shocked to hear that the church needs to have a “loyal opposition” on the Board of Trustees at Messiah College. Such language implies a complete misunderstanding of the reality that exists at Messiah. A better word for describing the church-college relationship than “opposition” is “support.” Let’s look at the situation that exists.

The Brethren in Christ Church has a great influence on the Messiah College Board of Trustees as it is now constituted. Eleven of the 30 trustees are chosen by the church. In addition, more than half of the trustees are currently active in Brethren in Christ congregations. When those who are traditionally Brethren in Christ, but are located in areas where there are no Brethren in Christ churches, are included, the number of Brethren in Christ members on the Messiah College Board of Trustees approaches two thirds of the total mem-

What I am trying to say is before we go reading and writing articles, complaining about someone wanting us to be accountable for growth, we evaluate ourselves. Don’t be so quick to push everything off on God. True, he does produce meaningful growth, and he has, for the harvest is great; we just don’t seem to be reaping! We get so repulsed by the thought of a “worldly” strategy being used in the church to achieve growth that we never stop to think that if we were using worldly methods of evaluating our success in the church, we would have been fired a long time ago. We’d all be on food stamps. In reality,

shouldn’t our standards of success be higher than the world’s, and not lower? Church planting and church growth is more than just time on our knees. As Paul would surely testify, it is hard work (as in manual labor), it’s long hours, it’s not necessarily fun, and it’s employing whatever method God gives you to spread the gospel. As a wise man once said, the only people who never fail are the ones who never do anything to start with.

Bill Carlin, pastor
Cahaba Valley
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bership. I am also told that these persons, because of their understandable interest in the college, influence board policy more even than their numbers would indicate. The idea of “loyal opposition” is absurd on a board so influenced by Brethren in Christ participation.

The Brethren in Christ Church also has considerable impact on the religious character of the college. Let us consider the make-up of the department most closely related to church concerns—the Biblical and Religious Studies Department. The choice of a department chair is confirmed by the Board for Ministry and Doctrine of the Brethren in Christ Church. Of the eight members of this department, five are credentialed Brethren in Christ ministers: three are ordained and two licensed. Four of the five have served pastorates in the Brethren in Christ Church, and the fifth has been at Messiah for 30 years. Of the three faculty members who are not Brethren in Christ ministers, one is a graduate of Messiah College and from Primitive Methodist background, one is from Mennonite Brethren background, and one comes from evangelical roots and is strongly supportive of the Anabaptist tradition. Certainly the department is thoroughly Brethren in Christ in its orientation.

But what about the other departments. It is true that Messiah College has grown to such an extent that it has been impossible to hire only persons from our tradition. Yet, when persons with relatively similar qualifications are considered, the preference is given to the Brethren in Christ person or the person with an Anabaptist-Wesleyan persuasion. Obviously, it would be inappropriate for me to give specifics, but I am

personally aware of a number of times when this actually happened. Although the faculty has become more mainline evangelical in recent years, I believe that the flavor of that evangelicalism is decidedly Brethren in Christ.

Considering the student body itself, it is true that more diversity is present. The college has grown faster than the ability of the church to supply students. Yet, the college has become increasingly attractive to students from other churches related to our tradition. For a long time, Messiah as attracted students from conservative Methodist churches. More recently, there has been an increase in students from Mennonite and Church of the Brethren backgrounds. Most likely, they are attracted to a college that is quite similar to their Anabaptist-Wesleyan heritage. Although the student body is certainly more diverse than it once was, it is still attractive to persons from our tradition. Moreover, the college maintains a mission of communicating the valuable contributions of our tradition to the broader Christian church.

So, why do we need a “loyal opposition” of Brethren in Christ at Messiah College? Messiah College is the Brethren in Christ college. The Board of Trustees includes strong Brethren in Christ influence; the faculty is composed largely of persons from our church or tradition; the students are subjected to an approach to the faith that is distinctly Brethren in Christ. Messiah College needs, not the “loyal opposition,” but the “loyal support” of its sponsoring body, the Brethren in Christ Church.

John R. Yeatts, chairman
Biblical and Religious
Studies Department
Messiah College

Onesimus

Onesimus, your friend and co-worker, to Paul, a true servant of Jesus Christ.

As you know, my friend, the stories that are being handed down concerning our Lord's birth fascinate me. I send this one to you hoping to encourage you as we celebrate the birth of our King. I don't know how reliable this story is, but it speaks truth.

Just six months before Christ was born in Bethlehem, six of the shepherds on the night watch had begun flocking their sheep together and sharing their duties. They had become quite a tight-knit group. There was Joshua; he was the leader. And there was Nate, a sort of shadow to Joshua. Then there was Phil, who always had a joke and made sheep-tending entertaining—lots of enthusiasm. Mark was a rough and tumble kind of guy—he'd seen his share of adventures. And there was Lenny—but on the night in question, Lenny wasn't there. He was off across the hills some place keeping his distance because he was angry. The night before, they'd argued about something and he felt ganged-up on. Finally there was Samuel. Sam Shepherd. He wasn't sure how he fit in, but he was there.

The night in question, of course, was that astounding night when the invisible become visible and God revealed himself as his holy, merciful self. It all started when Sam was just about to doze off. Phil was telling a story, but Sam's eyes were slowly closing. Suddenly, it was light, but not morning. They were terrified, but they didn't feel like running. Sam was frozen with fear, so he couldn't. Of course, they were being visited by an angel. The light was God's glory shining into the night—the same glory Moses saw in his burning bush, which Peter and the rest would see later on the Mount of Transfiguration. Sam didn't hear a word the angel said. As he peeked through his fingers all he could think of was dying. But he did think, "Oh man, what a time Lenny picked to be sulking somewhere!"

The angel said something about a manger and suddenly the whole sky lit up and they saw all these angels singing, "Gloria in excelsis deo et in terra pax hominibus gratias agimus tibi."

And Sam said, "What?"

Joshua knew Latin. "They're singing,

'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'"

Sam was impressed. They sat in silence for who knows how long. Then Phil blurted out, "Well, what are we waiting for? Let God take care of the sheep; let's go to town and see what he's done!" Joshua was already up; Nate and Mark were close behind. They turned to Sam.

"You go ahead," he said. "I'll stay with the sheep."

"You want to stay with the sheep?" Joshua yelled. "Didn't you hear the angel?"

"I didn't hear *everything*."

"He said," spoke Nate, patiently, "that the Messiah has been born in Bethlehem! Come on, we're going to see him!"

"You go ahead. My father expects me to stay with the sheep."

Suddenly all the angels were singing "Gloria in excelsis deo et in terra pax hominibus gratias agimus tibi." And Sam said, "What?"

"Your father doesn't expect angels to appear to you," said Phil excitedly.

"That's true. But it's a long way. And I'm not too sure about barging in on strangers and their baby."

"You think the angel came to tell us where he was, to tell us he's lying in a manger, just so we'd be well informed?" said Mark with no little disgust.

"Well, you go. You've always been more suited to religious things anyway. I'll see you when you get back."

The four friends ran off, still excited: the leader, the follower, the enthusiast and the adventurer. Sam was right. They were suited for a message from God, for "religious things" as he called it.

Yet, he pondered, why hadn't he gone? What did he want? What was there to risk in going, really? He wasn't that interested in sheep anyway. What

was there to *gain* in staying? God had come to Sam and Sam sat there. At one point he stood up to see how far away they were. He almost shouted. But he was too embarrassed. He began to get angry, or maybe it was depressed; he couldn't tell.

"Why do these things happen to me?" he asked a particularly fat sheep. "Always left out. Always different. Always left with everyone else's responsibilities. They're off in a great adventure and I'm stuck in nowhere again. And why, God, did you do this when Lenny was gone? Didn't you think *he* might have been interested? I'd hate to go see a Messiah without *him* anyway. Why should he be the *only* one left out? God, you always do this kind of thing to me. I'm always getting hit with something I'm not ready for. And as soon as I can't handle it, which you must know I can't, I feel guilty for *not* handling it. Then I get depressed and can handle even less. I've got sheep to protect here!"

This went on quite awhile and Sam hadn't even gotten it all off his chest before he fell asleep, exhausted. He woke as Phil was shaking him. "Sam, we saw him! It was all just as the angel said! We've been everywhere spreading the good news." They were all talking at once. They couldn't stop talking. Sam felt crummy. Just looking at them made every bad feeling he'd ever felt stick like a ball in his throat. They had so much to say—he had nothing, he'd done nothing. They were so full of joy and they seemed to love each other more—somehow he seemed even emptier in comparison (he'd been afraid of that). They had such a night of purpose. It was all so real to them—what did he have?

"You've got to go see him," Joshua told him. "You saw the angel, too."

As Joshua explained the way, Sam thought surely he was too late. Joshua argued that the sun wasn't even up. Sam's mind told him he'd missed his chance. "I guess I'm just not one of those people who has your kind of experience."

"Just go!" Joshua urged.

Before Sam expressed the "no" that always meant he was digging in his heels—and it was coming—he heard a different kind of voice, a heart voice, saying "Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing!" or something like that. He took off running

and as he ran, he began to cry those I-just-can't-help-it tears, sobbing and gasping for breath as he argued hopefully with God all the way across the hills to Bethlehem. It was a great pouring out of all the hurt and all the hope he had. When he got to town he was breathless and empty in a right sort of way. As he hurried to the stable he prayed he wasn't too late; that he hadn't been too stubborn, too lazy, too held-back too long; that his hard heart could

still be softened; that his made-up kind of self-defeating mind could be changed.

As he opened the door softly and Mary looked at him, he knew he'd made it. And deep in his spirit he heard, "Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn king." Or something like that. When he did, he couldn't tell who was more of a baby. This one Mary held or himself.

"You must be Sam Shepherd. The late-comer," Mary said.

"I am."

But he did come. Maybe he was late, but he did come.

May God bless all the late-comers this Christmas who finally come to him, who are finally born again with him, who finally see the life of Christ brought into being in all the places they are still just protecting the sheep and wondering why. And may God bless you, my dear brother Paul.

Onesimus

Phoebe's Journal

Christmas thoughts on giving

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

The story of the Magi joyfully offering their gifts to Jesus is a good backdrop to a discussion of money, budgets, and stewardship. At Christmas, when we think of giving gifts, it's good to also think about how, why, how much, and to whom or what we give our tithe money.

At every level, I feel the pressure of budgets and limited resources. Besides the significant demands of the present, our family has goals for the future, including but not limited to college educations for our children. We are keenly aware that money is limited. Long ago we decided to give a tithe, but there are far more possible destinations for our tithe than we have the resources to support.

My local congregation struggles each year to meet its budget, and yet every year the budget is increased to fund programs and people considered essential for carrying out God's work in the world. At the General Conference level, it's the same: every year we struggle to fund the Cooperative Ministries budget, and yet every year each board's vision requires a budget increase.

I don't know how to deal with my resulting frustration. I sometimes feel guilty because I'm not able to give more, and I feel guilty if I vote to increase

budgets or begin new programs, worthy as they are, when I know I personally won't be able to increase my giving. I'm frustrated as well by all the other organizations asking for my financial support. Unless I spread myself very thin (a dollar here, a few dollars there), I cannot support them all.

As I've thought about all this, I've come up with several principles that help me:

1. **I can't do everything.** That statement has an obvious corollary: The church (whether the local congregation or the denomination) can't do everything. We have to prioritize, make choices about what we consider most important and most compatible with our understanding of the gospel, and then not feel guilty because we're not doing everything else.

2. **Support Brethren in Christ ministries.** This is not to say that only the Brethren in Christ Church does good and right things in the world, but for me it is the next step from "I can't do everything." I do support some non-Brethren in Christ ministries, but only minimally. I wish I could give to lots of the organizations whose ministries I endorse and appreciate, but I've decided that I can often support the same sorts of ministries by giving through the Brethren in Christ Church.

3. **We need to cooperate.** That's the whole point of Cooperative Ministries, but does it really work? Because we can't do everything, we need to prioritize. Obviously, evangelism and missions should be high priorities; our CM budget reflects that belief. But is it too selfish or unspiritual or indicative of a lack of vision to suggest that we declare a moratorium on new missions ventures,

as just one example, while we work at nurturing the people we already have, training future leaders (including missionaries and evangelists), and adequately supporting our existing social service ministries?

4. **We continue to need stewardship education.** I think that the Board for Stewardship is right when they focus on general stewardship and not just on promoting the budget of the church. Good stewardship is more than giving money; it involves a whole attitude toward life. But often the bottom line is that we need *money* to run our congregational and denominational ministries. Where will it come from and how do we get it? Few of us like hard-sell money-raising techniques, but on the other hand, if we don't challenge people to give, someone else surely will.

Ideally, our commitment to Christ ought to result in cheerful and generous giving (2 Corinthians 9:6-15), but it doesn't always happen. While there are lots of people in the church who are faithful and generous givers, I suspect that there are lots who aren't. Why? Are we unaware of the needs? Have we not been taught basic principles of Christian stewardship? Do we not feel good about supporting the ministries of the church? Or do the pressures of affluent North America require too great a share of our resources? I'm not sure of the answers, but I do sense we have a problem.

Back to the Magi: This Christmas, I'd like to learn from their model of joyful and generous giving to the Christ Child.

Phoebe

Boot, bonnet, spanner . . . and Christmas

Imagine for a moment that you and I are walking down my front steps. I turn to you and say, "Please get the spanner out of the boot while I lift the bonnet." Do you know what I've asked you to do?

Boot, bonnet, and spanner—three perfectly good English words. But the intent of my question may not be clear to you. At least, it didn't make sense to most of the people I talked to in Nappanee. "Boot" to them was obviously a reference to a type of shoe. "Bonnet" was something a woman used to wear on her head. And "spanner" . . . well, no one was quite sure about that word. Only those who had been exposed to the British vernacular (perhaps through contact with missions in Africa) knew that in my original question I was asking them to take the wrench (spanner) out of the car trunk (the boot) while I lifted the hood (the bonnet).

An awareness of the difficulty in cross-cultural communication (even when there is a common language) may help in understanding, at least to some degree, what happened one night in Bethlehem nearly 2,000 years ago. In some respects, the birth of Christ began the greatest example of "cross-cultural communication" that this world has ever experienced.

Luke reports the event from a human point of view: "While they [Mary and Joseph] were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:6-7). John presents a theological understanding of the same event: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,14). And the writer of Hebrews put it into historical perspective: "In the past God spoke

to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

For generations, God had been revealing his nature and will for humanity. The Old Testament is the record of God's progressive self-disclosure. But, as the Old Testament also reveals, humanity had difficulty understanding the "language" of God. Then, "in the fullness of time" (to use the Apostle Paul's phrase), Jesus was born in Bethlehem. God the Father entered into human existence as Jesus, God the Son. Although we cannot begin to understand this mystery, Scripture affirms that it is true. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In Jesus, God has revealed most clearly his nature and purposes. In Jesus, God entered our culture, speaking our language and demonstrating his love for us. By doing that, God has provided a model for our own ministry. We are called to cross whatever boundaries separate us from other people, sharing the good news in words which communicate to them, and demonstrating through our attitudes and actions the love of God.

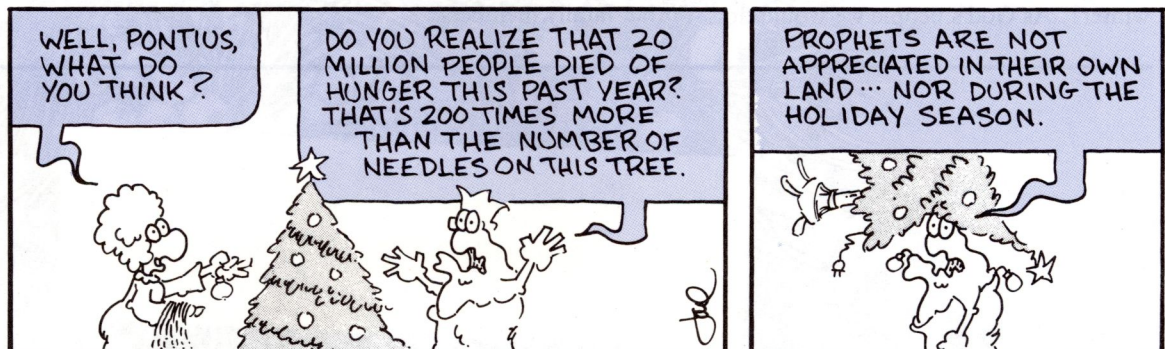
Have you heard and understood the message of Christmas? Has it become the foundational truth in your own life? If so, are you seeking to share that message with others in a "language" that they can understand?

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From the *Visitor* staff, as well as the employees of Evangel Press and the Christian Light Bookstores, our prayer for you: May the peace and joy which come from Christ—the gift of God—energize your life and the lives of your family and friends this Christmas.

Pontius' Puddle

Bulletins and newsletters reprinting "Pontius' Puddle" from the *Visitor* must pay \$10 for each use to Joel Kauffmann, 111 Carter Road, Goshen, IN 46526.



Bishops' Column

What will I give?

by Harvey R. Sider

Perhaps it was selfish, but could I be blamed? Why did Christmas touring *have* to begin a day or two before Christmas and extend all the way into the New Year?

Christmas had always been such a wonderful occasion for the family to celebrate. Now, it was being interrupted by the necessity of touring remote villages in India, taking me away from my family. That seemed bad enough. But to live in a different culture and leave the family all alone on Christmas Day? That was no way to enhance the wonderful spirit of family togetherness. How could I give away this meaningful experience?

To sit on the ground or a rough wooden bench, to sip tea sweetened heavily with sugar (sometimes salt or molasses) and milk, to chew rice popped in sand, to spend endless hours traveling across fields, through rivers, and on dusty roads, to wait and wait for something to happen—this wasn't exactly my idea of how one should spend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. These were enjoyable things to do, but surely not at the cost of separation from the family at Christmas.

Christmas can mean many things, even to dedicated Christians. Traditionally, giving has been high on the list. But what shall we give? How shall we give? Ourselves or things? Christmas is giving, but we succumb so easily to the often lackluster gift exchange knowing full well that many gifts are neither needed nor practical and may not be genuinely appreciated. C. S. Lewis once plaintively said, "Can it really be my duty to buy and receive masses of junk every winter?" As God's people we would do

well to exercise more creativity, giving something truly meaningful, perhaps even sacrificial.

At the same time, Lewis was not a Christmas killjoy. In his 1950 book *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, Lewis made it clear that he was all for merry times, good gifts, and Christmas pudding. The narrative reminds us that the land of Narnia was under the spell of the wicked White Witch who made it always winter and never Christmas. It was only when the great lion Aslan brought the thaw which spelled her doom that Father Christmas could come at last and happiness could reign.

The real heart of Christmas giving is depicted in the biblical story as told by Matthew and Luke. Lewis summed up the essence of that story in one sentence, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."

By the time you read this article, you may have already purchased your Christmas gifts. In addition to these store-bought gestures of love, give the gift of yourself. As you reflect on the ideas that follow, be creative and identify lasting gifts you can present to Christ—and others—this Christmas.

- Many people are lonely and hurting. Some are confined to institutions. Others may have faced tragedies in the recent past which leave them single or orphans. You may know families that are estranged this Christmas. Give yourself to minister appropriately to someone in need.

Just months before my father's decease this year, two of the most meaningful things our family "gave" were: On December 25 our Christmas dinner was shared with him in Grandview Lodge. Two weeks prior to that, for the last time, he was able to be in our home for a time of celebration and Christmas cheer with other family members.

- We can give God some "extra" devotional time for developing the inner disciplines. Out of this will come loving, effective service for our Lord and our fellow human beings. Renewal comes personally, congregationally, and denominationally as we *make* time to fellowship with Jesus. Some of this can be done while we are on the move. But, additionally, let's allot some extra time to give ourselves wholeheartedly in concentrated meditation and devotion, away from the pressures and distractions of life.

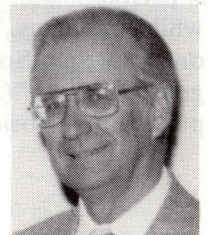
The spiritual renewal which results will facilitate an awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of people. This alertness should motivate us to seek ways to minister to our family and those beyond our doorstep.

- Why not make a very significant, sacrificial gift to Cooperative Ministries? For the Brethren in Christ, this is a very meaningful way to reach people around the world as well as to show our support for those whom we have commissioned to be our ambassadors. Thank God for the growing numbers of people who are experiencing the joy of abundant giving from those possessions with which God has entrusted us.

From today's vantage point, the years of Christmas touring are nostalgic. The family and I received far greater blessing than we gave. The "gifting" of Christmas was indeed a rich experience.

Have a wonderful time giving yourself away this Christmas!

Harvey Sider is bishop of the Canadian Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church. He and his wife Erma live in Fort Erie, Ontario.



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