

# MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

*Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.*

June 2004

## **Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue**

**Annual Conference** provides the focus for the June 2004 issue of *Messenger*. On the cover is Chris Bowman, moderator for this year's Conference, displaying the cup that he created using the theme for the event, "Loving God and Neighbor." Bowman is the subject of "Brethren to the Core" by Angie Mountain on pp. 8-11; a preview of the Conference, "Doing the Charleston" by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, is on pp. 10-13; and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conference quilt auction is highlighted in "They Keep Us in Stitches" by Rachel Brown on pp. 14-15.

The story of **how an Iraqi school got a fresh start**, thanks in part to the General Board's Emergency Disaster Fund, is told by Roy Winter in "Reading, Writing, and Rebuilding" on pp. 16-17. Sidebars from Architects for People in Need, Christian Peacemaker Teams member Cliff Kindy, and the Brethren Witness/Washington Office enlarge the story.

The first three letters to the editor on pp. 28-29 continue an ongoing conversation in the pages of *Messenger* about Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, that began with a media review by Ron Waters in the April issue. Letter writers Larry Lutz, David S. Coffman, and Sara and David Wilson add their two cents to the controversy.

## **Activities: Connecting with the Content**

**Read** the theme scripture for Annual Conference 2004, Mark 12:28-34, in light of the Conference theme, "Loving God and Neighbor with All Our Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength." **Now look** at the Conference logo design at the top right-hand corners of pp. 9, 11, 13, and 15, which was created by Rosanna Eller McFadden. **Create** your own design using words and images inspired by the scripture.

**Read** Matthew 19:13-15, Jesus' welcome and statement of blessing for the children. **Pray** for the children, teachers, and administrators of the Al Khuraish School, and the families the school serves in Baghdad, Iraq. **Contact** the General Board's Brethren Witness/Washington Office for information about the letter-writing campaign for Iraqi school children (see sidebar bottom of p. 17), and write a letter yourself and/or help a child in your family or church write a letter.

**Read** Mark 14-16—the shortest gospel account of Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, and the events leading up to the passion. (Other, longer accounts are Matthew 26-28; Luke 22:1-24:12; and John 11:45-57, 13:1-30, chapters 18-19, and 20:1-18.) **Compile** a "pros and cons" list of reasons to see the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and reasons not to see the movie.

## Questions for Discussion

1. It would be hard to find someone more steeped in Brethren tradition than Annual Conference moderator Chris Bowman, says the article on pp. 8-11. Bowman shows his Brethren connections and commitment in many ways. Which ways strike you as most important? Which forms of commitment and connection to the Church of the Brethren do you share? Which do you think are necessary for a Conference moderator to fulfill the position?
2. After reading the box on p. 10, “What Does a Moderator Do?” what parts of the job would you enjoy? What parts of the job do you think might be most difficult? Why do you think the moderator of Annual Conference has traditionally been held in high esteem by the church?
3. The story of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conference quilt auction, told by Rachel Brown on pp. 14-15, echoes the “gentle conversation and stories” of centuries of Brethren—mostly women—quilters. What part have quilts and quilting played in your family and your congregation? What stories of quilts and quilting are important to you?
4. The article on the rebuilding of the Al Khuraish School offers a ray of hope in a dark time for Iraq and its children. What are your hopes and dreams for the children of Iraq, and for the country’s future? How does a Christian witness, such as that of the Emergency Disaster Fund, build up your hope?
5. Abdul Amir Al Ta’ee, Al Khuraish’s headmaster, has shown an exceptional level of commitment to the children he and his family serve. What dedicated teachers and school administrators do you know? How are children’s lives improved through their work?
6. How have you and your congregation supported the Emergency Disaster Fund? What past projects of the fund have touched your imagination, such as grants for clean up and rebuilding following hurricanes, tornados, fire, or floods? What things can you do to support the fund in the short term and in the long term—things you could do today, tomorrow, or over the next year?
7. The first three letters to the editor seem to understand the cross and its meaning very differently—Lutz portrays Jesus’ death as blood shed in order to obtain forgiveness; Coffman portrays Christ as a suffering servant; the Wilsons portray Jesus’ suffering as a challenge to compassion. How do you understand the cross? What is your image of the crucified Christ? Why was Christ’s death necessary, in your understanding of the Christian faith?
8. How does Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection affect our daily lives? In what ways does the passion of Christ provoke us to forgiveness, servanthood, and compassion?

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