

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.

October 2004

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

The Brethren and politics is the theme of lead article, “The Politics of Another Way,” by Steve Longenecker (pp. 8-11). Sidebars highlight Brethren leaders who have taken part in politics and the history of the Church of the Brethren Washington Office.

An update on the fledgling Igreja da Irmandade (Church of the Brethren in Brazil) by Greg and Karin Davidson Laszakovits (pp. 12-15), is accompanied by “Does Mission Equal Arrogance?” (pp. 16-17), a look at the philosophy of mission by the same authors.

Two articles examine **spiritual accompaniment**: Connie Burkholder writes about spiritual direction in “The Art of Spiritual Accompaniment” (p. 6) and Chris Meehan writes about chaplaincy in “Fanning Faith in the Midst of Pain” (pp. 18-19). Sidebars are on Church of the Brethren chaplains and the calling of Brethren chaplain Myrna Wheeler.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Romans 13:1-7, Amos 5:24, John 3:16, Mark 12:13-17—referenced in the most recent Annual Conference statements on politics: 1988's “Responsible Citizenship in an Election Year” and 1967's “The Church, the State, and Christian Citizenship.” Both can be found at www.brethren.org, click on Annual Conference and then on Conference Statements. **Read the statements and reflect** on the guidance they give to a disciple of Christ in an election year.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-3, the theme for the World Mission Offering Oct. 10. **Get a copy** of the offering packet from your church or the General Board's Global Mission Partnerships Office by calling 800-323-8039. **Use the prayer cards** in the packet in your daily devotions this month.

Read Romans 8:26-27. **If you are studying as a group**, ask a spiritual director or a chaplain—at a local hospital, college, retirement center, hospice, fire department, or your pastor if he or she is a chaplain—to speak with your group. **If you are studying as an individual**, arrange a meeting with a spiritual director or a chaplain to find out more about his or her work.

Questions for Discussion

1. Longenecker lays out the history of the Brethren and politics. Why did the first Brethren not develop political attitudes in Europe, according to the article? Why did the Brethren relationship with politics begin in the American colonies?
2. What did the first Annual Conference statement on politics advise Brethren in 1813, and why? How did the Conference's advice change during the Civil War? And in the 20th century? What Brethren values undergirded the Conference statements, and how did those values change? Which of those values continue to inform your faith? Which of those values do you think should continue to be part of Brethren teaching?

3. Leaders such as Martin Grove Brumbaugh, and movements such as the temperance movement and the civil rights movement changed Brethren attitudes. What leaders and movements influence Brethren today? How should Brethren relate to political leaders and movements? What opportunities and dangers do political leaders and movements pose to Christians?

4. Calling attention to the figures on the edge of Caleb Bingham's painting, Longenecker implies that faithful Brethren ought to stand with "the modern version of Bingham's downtrodden and exploited." Do you agree, and why or why not? How do you think Brethren can "do this in the voting booth," as the author suggests?

5. What makes Igreja da Irmandade different from other churches in Brazil, according to Greg and Karin Davidson Laszakovits? How have the differences brought people into the church? What do those interviewed in the article say about the attractiveness of the church? Does your congregation share the "different" values of the Brazilian Brethren, such as the emphasis on "freedom to think," studying the Bible in community, resistance to a checklist of beliefs, and serving neighbors? How important is the "emotive side of faith"—another emphasis of the Brazilian church—to you and your congregation?

6. The authors write of the church in Brazil as a dream shared by mission workers, pastors, and congregations together. What do you dream for your church? With whom do you share your dreams? How are they realized and re-shaped when you share them with others? How can your congregation dream together, and what do you think will happen when you do?

7. What negative stereotypes of mission did Greg and Karin Davidson Laszakovits overcome to go to Brazil (pp. 16-17)? Why do they write that "for some, the word ministry is less offensive than the word mission"? What are the problems with a mission style that "equals arrogance"? How does the Brethren style of mission help to avoid these problems, according to the authors?

8. Burkholder writes of spiritual directors as people to talk to about one's relationship with God. How does it help to talk with someone about spiritual matters, according to Burkholder? If you have consulted a spiritual director, what was the experience like? How did it enhance your faith? If not, who do you talk to about your relationship with God?

9. Chaplains make a difference to patient care at hospitals, reports Meehan. What kinds of care does a chaplain provide, according to the article? How does a chaplain make "God manifest to patients, to their families, and to hospital staff," in the words of chaplain Cheryl Paulovich? Have you or your family received care from a chaplain, and how did that help with healing?

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