

# 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.*

September 2004

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

**Annual Conference** dominates this issue with cover photo of Larry Brumfield singing “I Need You to Survive” at a Conference worship service, comments by Wendy McFadden on becoming a multicultural church (p. 2), an overview of business by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford (pp. 8-11), “Living Out the Loving” by Eric Miller (pp. 12-13), “There’s Just Something in the Air” by Amy Rhodes (pp. 14-15), and “A Wild and Wonderful Welcome” (p. 16) and the editorial (p. 32) by Walt Wiltschek.

The **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brethren Service Center** and the issue of **conscientious objection** also are featured, in “Happy Birthday, New Windsor” by Kathleen Campanella (p. 17) and “A Matter of Conscience, a Conviction of Faith” by Phil Jones (pp. 18-20).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

**Read** Mark 12:28-34, Annual Conference theme scripture. **On large sheets of paper make two lists:** 1) a list of ways that you love God, and 2) a list of ways you love your neighbor. Make sure the paper is large enough to leave room for more listings. **Post the lists** on your refrigerator and ask family and friends to add their lists alongside yours.

**Read** the scriptures referenced in queries on “Becoming a Multi-Ethnic Church” and “The Need for Cross Cultural Ministries”: Revelation 7:9, Isaiah 56:6-7, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 15:9, 2 Corinthians 13:12. **Answer** the following questions, then **using words and pictures from magazines make a collage** of this biblical vision of a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural community. Who is part of the community in this vision? Is God calling me to be part of this vision? How can my congregation be part of this vision? If the Church of the Brethren came to look like this vision, what changes would have been made?

**Read** Matthew 5:3-12, 38-48. **Research** Brethren peacemaking and conscientious objection. For example, look up M.R. Zigler in the *Brethren Encyclopedia*, read the 1948 and 1970 Annual Conference statements on war, or get resources on conscientious objection from the Brethren Witness/Washington Office or [www.brethren.org](http://www.brethren.org).

Questions for Discussion

1. Miller wrote about how Brethren were “living out the loving” at Annual Conference. What acts of loving God and neighbor did he witness? What words and themes from worship testified to love of God and neighbor? How can you put these things into action in your life and church?
2. What were the main business items discussed at Conference? In your opinion, which are most important, and why? What effects will they have on the Church of the Brethren, in the short term and in the long term? What effects will they have on your congregation?

3. Two themes from Conference worship—"I need you to survive," and the common understanding of the main speakers that "relationship with God and neighbor was lifted up as more important than being 'right' " (p. 13)—seem to weigh against a "difficult and divisive" business agenda and deep divisions of opinion among delegates (p. 8). What do you think of the notion that being in relationship is more important than being right? What scriptures beyond Mark 12:28ff support this notion? How does "I need you to survive" speak to a church in which opinions are deeply divided? In what ways can you and your congregation use these two themes in a time of divided opinions—in the church, in your community, in the nation, in the world?

4. Becoming a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural denomination was a main item of business. McFadden comments on what this will require, pointing out that it cannot be just a makeover but must be a transformation. How do you feel about the Church of the Brethren becoming multi-ethnic and cross-cultural? What benefits do you anticipate from working at becoming multi-ethnic and cross-cultural? Which of the types of "hard work" listed by McFadden will be most challenging for you, and your congregation? What changes in thinking ("renewing of your minds," Romans 12:2) will be needed? What aspects of church life will have to change?

5. The experience of Conference, and the experience of belonging to the church, is different for youth and young adults than for those who are older, Rhodes writes. How is it different? Which aspects of her experience of the church have you also experienced? Which of her experiences have you not shared? What does it mean to you to be part of the Church of the Brethren? How is the church "family" for you?

6. The Brethren Service Center was founded in 1944 by M.R. Zigler, with a vision of serving the world and making peace. How has the center and its ministries had an impact on your life? For example, have you ever visited the center, contributed to or received one of the disaster relief kits warehoused there, or bought an item from SERRV? How would you characterize the public witness made by the center? How do the ministries based there witness to Jesus Christ?

7. How is the Brethren stance of conscientious objection an "ancient path," in Jones' words? What are the biblical roots of this stand of conscience? What are the historical roots? When has the church strayed from this path historically, and what are current temptations to stray from the path? What helps the church keep to the path? What helps individual Brethren keep to the path?

8. What is your personal definition of conscientious objection? Jones writes of several different ways Brethren have taken this stand. Are you a conscientious objector? Why or why not?

9. Jones also writes of the likelihood of a military draft (p. 20). What should the Church of the Brethren do if there is a draft? How would you respond to a draft? How would your congregation respond? If a young person of draft age—perhaps a child or grandchild, student or friend—asked your advice about what to do if there is a draft, what would you say? What would Jesus say?

*Messenger* magazine is the official publication of the Church of the Brethren, published by Brethren Press, Church of the Brethren General Board, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Subscriptions are \$16.50 individual, \$13.50 church group plan, \$13.50 gift subscriptions. To subscribe, contact Diane Stroyeck at 800-323-8039 or [dstroyeck\\_gb@brethren.org](mailto:dstroyeck_gb@brethren.org).