

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.

January 2005

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

Messenger reflects on the Annual Conference 2004 call for **cross-cultural ministries and multi-ethnic diversity** in the church, with a cover article by Elissa Hoffert, “All Nations, Tribes, Peoples, and Tongues” (pp. 8-11); and a spotlight piece on Atlantic Northeast District’s director of Hispanic Ministries Ruben Deoleo, by Angie Mountain, “A ‘Big Vision’ for Hispanic Ministries” (pp. 12-13).

The quarter-century anniversary of a Brethren favorite is celebrated by Nancy Rosenberger Faus in “**For We Are Strangers No More**” (pp. 14-15).

Two articles can serve as **Bible studies**, “Reading the ‘Other’ Gospels” by Frank Ramirez (pp. 16-17) taking a look at other New Testament passages that can shed light on Jesus; and “Genesis: God’s Promise Comes Full Circle” by Eugene F. Roop (pp. 18-19).

“**Does strong faith require certainty?**” asks Kelly Burk in this month’s Reflections column, “Depth Means More Than Certainty” (p. 6). Burk encourages Christians to allow room in our lives for wrestling, thinking, questioning, and learning.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Revelation 7:9—a key verse for the Annual Conference discussion of cross-cultural ministries and ethnic diversity in the church. **Find** as many different Bible versions of the verse as you can, and if possible write them or print them out side-by-side. **Compare** the different versions. **Ask**, “What do I learn from this verse about God’s vision of God’s people?”

Read Ephesians 2:11-22, focusing on vs. 19. **Look up** the hymn, “For We Are Strangers No More,” #322 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*. **Sing** all three verses of the hymn, or **play** it through on the piano or another musical instrument.

Read some of the many Bible passages mentioned on pp. 16-19, for example the list of gospel parallels in James on p. 17 or the verses related to one of the sagas in Genesis on pp. 18-19. Find a theme in the set of verses you read, or theme words that recur. **Make a collage** representing the theme or theme words that you discover. **Cut** words and pictures from magazines or newspapers that represent the theme or theme words, **then paste** the cut outs on a large sheet of paper.

Read Luke 10:27. **Think about** how you seek to live out this command of Jesus’ that is central to the Christian faith. **Remember** times when your faith has been uncertain. In those times, how did you still seek to live out Jesus’ command?

Questions for Discussion

1. What vision prompts the challenge that Brethren leaders from different ethnic backgrounds are posing to the church (see first two paragraphs of p. 8)? What ethnic barriers have you experienced in the church? How have you experienced them, and in what settings? What effects have they had on your faith and your opinion of the church? What would demolish them?
2. What ethnic barriers are mentioned by the church leaders interviewed in this issue's lead article? What are the congregations and church leaders profiled in the article doing to meet the challenge and demolish the barriers? How are you and your congregation meeting the challenge and helping to demolish ethnic barriers?
3. What is Ruben Deoleo's personal background and what is his experience in the Church of the Brethren? How have his personal background and church experience contributed to his success in Hispanic ministries? What vision drives his work in the church?
4. What cross-cultural ministries are being done in your district? For more information about district ministries, call your district office or district executive minister. How can you and your congregation connect with and contribute to your district's cross-cultural ministries?
5. Summarize the history of the hymn, "For We Are Strangers No More." What does the hymn mean to the author of the article? What does it mean to you?
6. If you are studying in a group, read aloud the gospel parallels from James. What insights into the life and work of Jesus do you get from them? Read some gospel parallels from the work of Paul, Acts, and Revelation. What insights come from these passages? How is your image of Jesus enlarged? What other biblical sources may enlarge our understanding of Jesus?
7. If you are studying in a group, choose a saga from Genesis highlighted by Eugene Roop to read aloud. Roop implies that each saga can be thought of in different ways: as a short story, a drama, a poem, and a journey. Discuss how the saga you read can be viewed in these ways, and how the story may be different with each view. How does God speak through these different ways of understanding the biblical story?
8. Does strong faith require certainty? What experience have you had of communities of faith that require certainty? What experience have you had of communities of faith that are comfortable with uncertainty? How would you characterize your congregation?
9. What is the author's definition of a sophisticated faith? How does your own faith compare with her definition? How did the author move from needing certainty to comfort with uncertainty? How comfortable are you with a faith marked by questions, wrestling, recognizing pain, and admitting uncertainty? What does such a "mature faith" have to offer to the world?

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