

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.

July/August 2005

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

“Looking in on Outdoor Ministry” by editor Walt Wiltschek (pp. 12-17) is the lead article for this summer’s combined issue. The piece includes interviews with several Brethren church camp directors and members of the Outdoor Ministries Association.

“What I Like Most About the Church of the Brethren” (pp. 9-11) features the winner and five runners up in the Messenger essay contest for youth ages 13-18. Grand prize winner is Chrissy Sollenberger, who writes the first essay in the series.

Graydon Snyder authors the study on “Judges: Strange Times, Extraordinary Stories” (pp.18-19).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Genesis 32:1-2. **Then read** the new book *Kum Ba Yah: The Story of Brethren Camping* by Linda Logan in consultation with the Outdoor Ministries Association (order from Brethren Press for \$9.95 plus shipping and handling; call 800-441-3712). **Recall** for yourself, **tell** a friend or family member, or **write down** memorable experiences you have had at a Brethren camp or other church camp. **Think about** these questions: What kinds of Christian camping experiences have you had? Have you ever been a counselor at a church camp? Did you go to camp as a child or a youth, and what was the experience like? What has made your church camp experiences spiritual? How have you met God at camp?

Read Isaiah 61. If you enjoy sewing or quilting, **make a “Church of the Brethren blanket”** featuring symbols of community such as those referred to by essay winner Chrissy Sollenberger. She mentions things that “have surrounded me through my childhood and into adolescence” including Annual Conference, workcamps, National Youth Conference, ice cream socials, the *Messenger*, and moral, political, and religious convictions such as love for neighbor. **Or design and draw a quilt pattern** for such a blanket. Think about what symbols may represent aspects of Brethren community that have surrounded you in your own life. Think about what Brethren traditions, standards, and values you want to pass on to your neighbors and to the world.

Read some of the passages and stories in Judges that Snyder refers to, with awareness that many of these stories are difficult and disturbing: the background statements in 21:25 and 18:1, the stories of Gideon in chapters 6-8, stories about Samson in chapters 13-16, the judgment of Deborah in chapters 4-5, and the last three “horrifying” chapters of the book. **Find** a good Bible commentary on Judges, perhaps with the help of your pastor or another knowledgeable person. **List questions and concerns** that these stories raise for you. **Then write down** the answers you find in the commentary. Are you satisfied with these answers? If not, discuss them further with your pastor or someone with whom you are comfortable sharing spiritual issues. **Pray about** questions or concerns that continue to be troubling.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you are studying in a group, share some of your memorable experiences at Brethren camps or other church camps. Why are these experiences memorable? How did they change your lives? How was God present in these experiences?
2. How is the experience of church camp spiritual and religious? What do Christian camps teach about the nature of our faith? Read aloud quotes given in the lead article from camp directors and camp leaders about the spiritual growth and Christian education offered by church camps.
3. Why does Matt Rucker, author of the sidebar on p. 14, assert that working at a camp is “real ministry”? Against what arguments does he defend camping as “real ministry”? Why do Rucker and others interviewed in the lead article consider it “real” work? What services do Brethren camps provide—for the church, for children, for adults, for our world, for Christ?
4. What are the challenges facing outdoor ministries and the Brethren camps? On a large sheet of newsprint, write down all the challenges mentioned in the lead article and sidebars. On another sheet write a list of ideas of how to support outdoor ministries and the Brethren camps. Commit to carrying out at least one of the ideas on your list over the next two months.
5. If you are studying in a group, take turns reading aloud each of the winning essays in the *Messenger* essay contest. Which essay do you like best, and why? Why do you think the judges chose Sollenberger’s essay as the grand prize winner? What sets it apart from the others?
6. Write your own answer to the question, “What do you like most about the Church of the Brethren?” If you are studying with a group, try writing a group answer either by writing an answer on which all members of the group can agree, or by writing a compilation of answers given by group members. How does the group’s answer differ from your individual answer?
7. If you and/or others in a study group designed or made a “Church of the Brethren blanket,” ask for a time to present the designs and blankets to your congregation in worship. Write down what you will say about how the designs and blankets capture the Church of the Brethren experience.
8. The stories in the book of Judges are called “great stories” and “remarkable reports” by Snyder. What makes these stories great? Which is your favorite, and why? What do these stories teach about God, and God’s relationship with people? Where is God’s salvation found in Judges?
9. Which of these stories did you study in Sunday school or remember from your childhood? What did you learn from these stories as a child? Which of these stories is not appropriate Sunday school material for children, and why? What challenges to faith are posed by these stories? How do difficult and disturbing Bible stories contribute to our faith?

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