

## 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 2005

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

A visit with Jim Hardenbrook, moderator for **Annual Conference 2005**, provides the cover story. “Absurdly Happy: Moderator Jim Hardenbrook Loves Serving God and the Church” is by editor Walt Wiltschek (pp. 8-11). An accompanying preview of the Conference, to be held in Peoria, Ill., July 2-6, is by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford (pp. 12-13).

The historic relationship of the Brethren with the universalist movement in American Christianity is explored in “**Brethren and Universalism: A Forgotten Schism?**” by David B. Eller (pp. 14-16).

June’s Bible study is on “**Joshua: Book of Conquest in Canaan,**” by James F. Myer (pp. 18-19).

### Activities: Connecting with the Content

**Read** Hebrews 12:1-4. Annual Conference 2005 will feature a “Hall of Faith” of poems, prose, photographs, and drawings representing the “cloud of witnesses” who have influenced Church of the Brethren faith and life. **Create** a personal Hall of Faith. **Use a notebook** to dedicate a page to each person who has influenced your life and faith, writing that person’s name at the top of the page in large letters, then writing a description of how he or she has influenced you (continue to add people to your notebook as time goes by). **Or use a large sheet of newsprint** to paste photographs or draw pictures of your personal “cloud of witnesses,” writing each person’s name under his or her picture and adding a word or two that describes his or her influence in your life.

**Read** Acts 3:19-21, Colossians 1:19-20, 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, Romans 5:18-19, and Philippians 2:9-11. **Then read** the *Brethren Encyclopedia* articles on universal restoration and universalism in Volume 2, pp. 1291-1293 (borrow from your pastor or church library). **Also read** the pamphlet “Universal Restoration” by Frank Ramirez in Brethren Press’s *Perspectives* series (order for \$2.50 plus shipping and handling from 800-441-3712).

**Read** Joshua 1:8 and 24:15. **Find** ways to meditate on God’s law “day and night” this month. For example, carry your Bible with you during the day—in your purse, your briefcase, or your car—then whenever you have a break during the day, open your Bible and read a verse or a chapter. Or place your Bible on your bedside table and read a verse or chapter each night before you go to sleep, and read a verse or a chapter each morning when you wake up. Or photocopy Bible verses and put them in places where you will encounter and read them during the day: in your refrigerator, taped to the door of your bedroom, in the pages of your calendar at work, on your car’s dashboard, in the book that you are reading, in the backpack that you carry to school, taped beside your computer screen, or at other handy places.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What is the saying by Dan West that Jim Hardenbrook likes to quote (p. 9)? How does this quote describe Hardenbrook and his service to the church, according to Wiltschek?
2. Describe the unique background that Hardenbrook brings to the office of Annual Conference moderator—including his political involvements, his church background, and the area of the country in which he has served as a pastor. What has drawn him to the Church of the Brethren? How do you think Hardenbrook's unique experiences will help him serve as the Conference moderator this year? What gifts does he bring to the job?
3. Talk about the Annual Conference theme, "Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus" from Hebrews 12:1-4. "The church has always been in need of a call to remember Jesus," says Hardenbrook about the theme. How is the church called to remember Jesus? In what ways does your congregation answer that call? How are individual Christians called to remember Jesus? In what ways do you remember Jesus in your daily life?
4. Discuss the difference between universal restoration and universalism. For help in making the distinction, see Eller's article, the *Brethren Encyclopedia* articles on both topics (Volume 2, pp. 1291-3), or the pamphlet "Universal Restoration" by Frank Ramirez in Brethren Press's "Perspectives" series. What other terms are used for universal restoration? What makes it different from universalism?
5. Why do you think the Brethren Annual Meeting opposed universalism, but did not ask Brethren to give up belief in universal restoration (as reported by the *Brethren Encyclopedia* in Volume 2, p. 1293)? Why would early Brethren leaders like Alexander Mack Sr. consider belief in universal restoration something to be kept private? Why did Annual Meeting forbid ministers from preaching publicly about universal restoration?
6. How do you feel about universal restoration? Should it be a private or public Brethren belief, and why or why not? How do you feel about universalism? If your sympathies lie more with the historic Annual Meeting decisions against universalism, or more with the Brethren who joined the universalist movement, explain why you feel the way you do.
7. What are the two "bookend" verses in Joshua, according to Myer? On what aspects of faith do these verses focus? How can we live out these scriptural teachings? In what ways can a Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century be faithful to these verses?
8. "How do you reconcile God's desire for peace with a book in the Bible about military conquest?" asks Myer. How do you answer this question? What is Myer's answer to this question? What distinction does Myer make between Old Testament teachings and New Testament teachings? Do you agree with this distinction, and why or why not?

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