

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 2005

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

This issue's review of **Annual Conference 2005** leads off with a cover caption, "Something to Smile About," suggesting the Brethren annual meeting was light in agenda and tone. Coverage continues with "Delegates Find Light Agenda in Peoria" by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford (pp. 8-11), "'Live Report' Gets a Makeover" by Nick Kauffman (p. 9), "When an Arena Becomes a Church" by Jeff Carter (pp. 12-13), "Speakers Challenge Brethren to Reach Out" by Eric Miller (pp. 14-15), "Walk This Way" by Walt Wiltschek (p. 16), "When Annual Conference Comes Home" by Wendy Matheny (p. 17), and "From the Publisher" by Wendy McFadden (p. 2).

The September Bible study on "**Ruth: An Uncommon Story in an Ordinary Village**" (pp. 18-19) is written by Eugene F. Roop, president of Bethany Theological Seminary.

The media review by Frank Ramirez, "**Hotel Rwanda: How Do We Respond to Hate?**" (p. 26) calls attention to the recent Oscar-nominated movie now available on video.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Psalm 46, the theme scripture for "Alive '05—Making Glad the City of God," the multimedia presentation at Annual Conference. Verses from the psalm were interspersed with music and stories of ministries of Brethren individuals, congregations, districts, and agencies.

Create a plan for an "Alive '05" for your congregation, on the same model. **Write a list of** stories of congregational ministries and ministries of church members you would intersperse with readings from Psalm 46. Add the music you would choose for the presentation.

Read the book of Ruth. **Create a multi-sensory experience** of the kind of rural village life portrayed by Roop. **Gather together** music, sounds, images, flavors, and fragrances that evoke rural village life. Gather resources from any of your personal experiences of rural or village life, such as photos, mementos, diaries. Or gather resources from the library, book stores, music stores, friends' collections, or your own back yard—such as recordings of music from Appalachia, Latin America, Africa, Native American communities; photos of village life from magazines such as *National Geographic*; spices, produce, cheese or baked goods from a farmer's market; freshly mown grass from your yard; vegetables from your garden; hay from a nearby farm. Include some of the less attractive sensory experiences of rural life. Once the resources are gathered, **set aside a time to enjoy** sounds, smells, sights, and tastes all together.

Read Exodus 1:1-2:10. **Rent and watch** *Hotel Rwanda*. If you are studying with a small group, hold a "movie night" at a group member's home. Remember that the movie is set during a genocide and depicts atrocities, so restrict viewing by children. **Discuss** the movie at the next meeting of your study group, using the relevant questions below.

Questions for Discussion

1. What were the key business items discussed at Annual Conference (pp. 8-11)? How will these potentially affect you and your congregation?
2. Consider how the Brethren Medical Plan serves the denomination, Brethren pastors, and church workers. Does your congregation participate in the plan? What issues will the study committee face? How do you think the study will relate to national health-care and health-insurance problems? Talk about what health-care and insurance issues face your congregation and its members. For example, are there members who do not have health insurance? What can you and your church do to help address health-care and insurance problems?
3. When does an arena become a church? Discuss this question raised by the title of Carter's review of worship at Annual Conference. If you have attended a Conference, or if you are studying in a group with others who have attended, discuss the experience of Conference worship. How is it different than a congregational worship service? What makes a Conference worship service meaningful? What makes a congregation's worship services meaningful?
4. The Messenger publisher responded to Galen Hackman's sermon at Conference (p. 2). If you or a member of your study group heard the sermon in person, reflect on what you heard. Or read the sermon at www.brethren.org/AC2005/SundaySermon.html. Answer McFadden's question, "Why would this audacity get so many people upset?" How does the column answer this question? How do Brethren understand and use scripture, according to the column? How does your own understanding of scripture tally with, or differ from, this understanding?
5. Why is Ruth a "happily-ever-after" story? Why is it more than that? What makes Ruth more than a romance? Why do you think it is included as scripture in the Bible? How does God "open the future" in the story of Ruth? How do ordinary people take part in God's plans for the future?
6. After viewing *Hotel Rwanda*, what parts of the movie were most disturbing for you? What was life-affirming and positive? What messages will you carry away from the film?
7. Ramirez calls Paul Rusesabagina, the hotel manager, "an ordinary man who accomplishes extraordinary things." How is he ordinary? How is he extraordinary? Ramirez writes that through the tragedy, Rusesabagina learns that all people are God's children. What scriptures are foundations for this learning? How have you learned this truth in your life?
8. The world did little or nothing to stop the Rwandan genocide. How many of the "major genocides" of the past century can you name? What do you know about the Brethren response to the Armenian genocide? Look up "Armenians, Brethren Relief To" in the *Brethren Encyclopedia* (p. 55, Vol. 1). How did the Armenian genocide change the Brethren?

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.