

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 2006

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

“Stress in the Body of Christ” by Tim Harvey (pp. 8-11) examines how the spiritual discipline of “regarding others” helps the church grow and gain strength during times of stress.

“What Happens When the Funds Run Dry?” asks Wally Landes in a piece on the financial situation of Brethren retirement centers facing the crisis of uncompensated care (pp. 14-17).

The Bible study looks at **2 Kings**. “Descent into Darkness” is by Kim McDowell (pp. 18-19).

“Who Will Wash the Feet?” asks a news feature on disaster volunteers and others serving in the Gulf Coast following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford (pp. 20-21).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Ephesians 4:17-5:2. “Being a member of a local, living body of Christ ought to make a concrete difference in our lives, even in times of disagreement,” writes Harvey (p. 9). This month, **write a daily journal** noting how being a member of your church makes a difference.

Think each day about how being a church member helps you in times of disagreement or stress in your family, work place, school, or internally as you deal with emotional or physical stress.

Read Acts 2:43-47 and 6:1. From the earliest days of Christianity, “there have been struggles over the care of the elderly,” according to Landes. **Research the history** of how Brethren have cared for the elderly: look in your church library for *The Brethren Encyclopedia Vol. 2*, “Retirement Homes,” p. 1102; and *Caring: A History of Brethren Homes 1889-1989* by Mary Sue H. Rosenberger. Look online for the history of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes, www.brethren.org/abc/homes/history.html. **Research the uncompensated care crisis** by downloading *The Burden of Uncompensated Care in Brethren Retirement Centers and the Church* from www.brethren.org/abc/homes/images/Uncomp%20care%20brochure.pdf.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-19. **Draw a cartoon** telling the story of Naaman’s healing. **Or write a short drama** of the story, suitable for use in worship. Consider submitting the cartoon to your church newsletter; or offer the drama to your congregation’s worship committee.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1. **Collect stories** of people who have answered, “Here I am,” as they have served those affected by disaster. For more stories of Brethren volunteers working in the Gulf Coast, see www.brethren.org/genbd/newsline/past.htm#2005, click on the dates November 18 through November 28. Or find such stories in the newspaper, your congregation’s newsletter, your district newsletter, or at websites such as that of the Emergency Response/Service Ministries of the General Board, www.brethren.org/genbd/ersm/index.htm.

Questions for Discussion

1. “When faced with a controversial matter, what kind of people are we?” asks Harvey (p. 10). Think of a particular church controversy—in your congregation, district, the denomination, or larger Christian circles—and answer his question for yourself: What kind of person am I when there is controversy in the church? Then answer for your congregation: What kind of people are we in ___ Church of the Brethren, when controversy hits? Be honest in your answers, then turn to Ephesians 4:17-5:2 and compare your reaction, and that of your congregation, with the Christian ideal put forward by Paul. How do you measure up?

2. What is the spiritual discipline of “regarding others” (Philippians 2:3), as Harvey explains it (p. 11)? What attitudes mark this discipline? What possibilities does this discipline open up during disagreement or controversy in the church? How can this discipline strengthen the body of Christ? What benefits does it bring? Think of the particular church controversy that formed the background for your answers to question 1: In that situation, how could you and your congregation have put into practice the spiritual discipline of “regarding others”?

3. What is uncompensated care, and why is it a financial crisis for the Brethren retirement communities (pp. 15-16)? How can Brethren respond to this crisis as individuals? How can congregations and districts respond? What can the Brethren homes do to deal with the problem?

4. Which Brethren home listed on p. 17 is closest to you? How does your congregation and its members support that home, or others? How can you (and your class, if you are studying with a group) support a Brethren retirement center? If you know any residents of a Brethren home, how can you or your study group help support them in their retirement?

5. Have you prepared for your own retirement needs? Which of the “Responses as Individuals” on p. 16, or other preparations for retirement, have you put into place for your aging years?

6. “The horrors of war offer context for noticing that God is at work,” writes McDowell in her study of 2 Kings (p. 18). How do the stories in 2 Kings show God at work? Read the story of Naaman’s healing out loud (2 Kings 5:1-19), as an example. How does the story show God at work in Naaman’s life? in Elisha’s life? in the political life of the nation of Israel? How do the horrors of a contemporary war—the conflict in Iraq—offer context for noticing God at work?

7. If you are studying with a group, share some stories of people who have served those affected by disaster that you have collected (see above, “Activities: Connecting with the Content”). If you have been a disaster volunteer, or anyone from your congregation has been a disaster volunteer, tell those stories as well. Spend time praying for those who are still living in evacuation from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, for those who are working to rebuild or repair flooded homes in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and for the volunteers and employees of government, nonprofit, and church agencies who have responded to the disasters of 2005.

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.