

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 2006

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

The June issue of Messenger **welcomes the Brethren to Iowa** for Annual Conference 2006. Moderator **Ronald Beachley** is interviewed in “On a Wing and a Prayer” (pp. 8-11) by Angie Mountain, an **overview of the Conference** and this year’s business appears in “Together in Des Moines” (pp. 12-15) by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, an Iowa community that shares the Brethren Pietist heritage is highlighted in “**The Amanas and the Brethren**” (pp. 16-18) by David B. Eller, and an **Iowa ice-cream nirvana** is reviewed in “Mission to Le Mars” (p. 19) by Messenger editor Walt Wiltschek.

The month’s Bible study, “**Job: A Study in the Life of Devotion**” (pp. 20-21) is by Robert Neff.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-8, the theme scripture for the 2006 Annual Conference, in as many different Bible translations as you can find. Make sure to read it in such standards as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the King James, as well as *The Message*. **Make lists** of different ways the phrases of the scripture are translated: Take a separate piece of paper for each phrase in the NRSV version of 1 Timothy 4:6-8, and write a phrase at the top of each sheet. For example, for verse 7 write at the top of one sheet of paper, “Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales,” and at the top of another sheet “Train yourself in godliness,” etc. Under each NRSV heading, write a list of the different ways each phrase is translated. How do these different versions enlarge your understanding of this scripture passage?

Read the book of Job, or if you do not have time for the whole book read the key passages listed on p. 21: 1:21, 19:25-26, and 28:28. **Spend some time in quiet reflection**, recalling the personal tragedies of your own life and how you responded to them. What questions have tragedies raised for you? What questions do you want to ask God about the losses you have sustained? What answers have you received from God? How have those answers come to you?

Questions for Discussion

1. What spiritual practices does Annual Conference moderator Ronald Beachley urge for church members? Why does he think these practices are important? What do spiritual practices do for Christians? How have they helped Beachley in his life and ministry? How have these—or other spiritual activities that you practice regularly—helped you in your life and faith?
2. What does an Annual Conference moderator do? Comb through Mountain’s interview with Beachley to compile a list of the duties, official and unofficial, of a Conference moderator. Would you enjoy being Annual Conference moderator? Why or why not?
3. What are the major items of business for the 2006 Annual Conference? After reading the brief

description of the business items (pp. 12-14), which items do you think will generate most discussion? Look up those business items at www.brethren.org/ac/desmoines/2006business.html. If you were a delegate to Annual Conference this year, what questions would you ask about those particular business items? How would you vote on them? What aspects of your faith, and what passages of scripture, would undergird your decisions?

4. What are the commonalities between the Amana Church Society/Community of True Inspiration and the Brethren, according to Eller? What are differences between the two groups? How are their histories different? What common challenges have they faced in the past, and what challenges do they both continue to face today?

5. If you have ever been to the Amana Colonies, what were your impressions? Would you feel comfortable in such a community, and why or why not? Recalling what you know of the early Brethren, would you have felt comfortable among them? Why or why not? Has the Church of the Brethren changed for the better?

6. What role can heritage play in the church, according to Eller (p. 18)? Do you agree with his assessment of the resources that heritage offers to the church today, and in the future? How do you feel about the quote from Metz on p. 18? What are “the lost and the hidden” things that need to be preserved in the Church of the Brethren, from your point of view?

7. Brethren are notorious for loving ice cream—evidenced by long lines at the ice cream bars at each Annual Conference. If you are studying with a group, have an ice cream bar of your own by each bringing your favorite flavor to share. Give a group award to each flavor by making up categories such as “Creamiest,” “Crunchiest,” “Most Exotic,” “Most Likely to Add Pounds,” “Most Likely to Please Chocolate Lovers,” or even “Most Brethren” (your group may debate how to judge a “most Brethren flavor”). Make sure every flavor receives an award!

8. What is the basis on which the book of Job depends, according to Neff (p. 20)? How do you respond to Job’s suffering? What emotions does his story bring up for you? What feelings about God does the story bring up, and what personal experiences of God’s presence or absence? Neff writes that God’s response to Job comes through “words of creative presence” (p. 21). When have you received such words in your life? Have they come in response to experiences of suffering? How have such words expressed the presence of God?

9. Neff focuses on the concept of devotion in his study of Job, writing that the book does not explore the question that readers expect (“Why do the righteous suffer?”) but rather, “Is it possible to serve God without expecting a reward?” What is this understanding of devotion built on, according to Neff? How is it counter-cultural? How does the expectation of reward affect one’s devotion, or one’s relationship with God? What is God’s free gift to us?

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. Yearly subscriptions are \$17.50 individual, \$14.50 church club rate, \$14.50 gift subscriptions, or \$1.25 per month for students. To subscribe, contact Diane Stroyeck at 800-323-8039 or dstroyeck_gb@brethren.org.