

## 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.*

October 2006

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

The **2006 National Youth Conference** (NYC) provides the meat of this October issue. A central four-color section of the magazine doubles as a “memory book” for youth who attended the conference on the theme, “Come and See” (John 1:35-39) held at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo., July 22-27. Writers for the section on pp. 12-25 are editor Walt Wiltschek and summer service intern Jake Blouch.

The Bible study titled “**Ecclesiastes: Reflecting on Life**,” is written by David Leiter (pp. 10-11).

### **Activities: Connecting with the Content**

**Read** John 1:35-39, the NYC theme scripture. **Meet with youth from your congregation** to get a flavor of what NYC was like. If you are studying in a group, invite the youth group or individual youth to meet with your study group to talk about their experience. If you are studying as an individual, make an appointment with the youth group advisor, inviting him or her to bring a couple of youth to meet with you. **From the youth, borrow copies** of the NYC booklet, the music CD, and if possible the wrap-up video and daily news sheets; take a look at the daily news coverage of the conference at [www.brethren.org/NYC2006/index.html](http://www.brethren.org/NYC2006/index.html) and glance over the event website at [www.nyc2006.org](http://www.nyc2006.org).

**Read** the “well-known passages” from Ecclesiastes in 3:1-15 and 12:1-7. Then, if you have time, **read the entire book**. Do sections of the book seem optimistic, and others pessimistic? **Make two lists**, one of verses or sections that seem optimistic, and another of verses or sections that seem pessimistic. Which verses or sections would you read when you are feeling good about life? Which would you read when you are feeling down? Why?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Review the basic facts about National Youth Conference: How often is the event held? Where is it held? Who attends? How many people attended this year? What happens at NYC? Who were the major speakers for worship? What was the theme, and the theme scripture? What special events were included? What organization sponsors the conference? Who plans and leads the conference?
2. Discuss why NYC is an important event for the Church of the Brethren. If you or your study group have a chance to meet with youth who attended NYC, ask them this question too. Compare your responses. How do your answers differ from the answers of the youth? How do Wiltschek and Blouch answer this question?
3. How does the NYC experience differ from the experience youth may have at a congregation

of the Church of the Brethren? How does worship differ at NYC? Does the essential message of the 2006 NYC—as discussed by Blouch and Wiltschek in the articles on pp. 14-15—differ from the essential message of your congregation, and how? What is the essential message that attendees receive at your congregation, and in your church’s worship services? Is this essential message easily identified? Why or why not?

4. The incredible response of the youth to the issue of hunger stunned denominational staff who helped organize events such as the REGNUH walk/run (see “REGNUH: Turning Hunger Around,” by Blouch on p. 16). Discuss how the youth’s response stems from basic Church of the Brethren values and beliefs. What in our denomination has given youth so much energy and motivation to help others and to change the world? Or does the source of this energy and motivation lie in the youth themselves, or in their generation? What does this new generation have to teach the Church of the Brethren? What new gifts do they bring to the denomination? What gifts have the youth of your congregation shared with your church?

5. Wiltschek writes that the conference “leaves the question ‘What now?’” (p. 25). What do you think he means by this statement? Wiltschek continues, “Now that these thousands of youth have been inspired, energized, and encouraged to change the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Are we ready to step up and work alongside them?” What is your answer to this follow-up question? What do you think your congregation’s answer is?

6. Brainstorm a list of ways your congregation, or you individually, may answer the question, “What now?” to help youth retain their energy and excitement for Jesus Christ following NYC. One idea may be to help youth attend a workcamp next summer; or begin a mentoring program for youth in your congregation, for example. Run your ideas by the pastor, ministry team, and youth group advisors in your congregation. Ask if you should put any of the ideas into practice.

7. What is the basic organization of Ecclesiastes? What theme frames the book?

8. Leiter writes that Ecclesiastes takes the approach of “reflective wisdom” rather than “conventional wisdom” (p. 10). Explain what he means by these two approaches, and how they differ. How are they opposed to each other? What are the conflicting world views of these two approaches? Can one be faithful while holding to one or the other of these worldviews? What quest does reflective wisdom lead to, in the life of the reader, according to Leiter? How may such a quest lead someone to greater faith?

9. Ecclesiastes may seem very pessimistic, or even despairing, in its focus on “vanity” or the futile nature of life. How do such scripture passages remain faithful? Or do they? How does Ecclesiastes understand the nature of God? How may such an understanding of God contribute positively to life and faith?

*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](mailto:dstroyeck_gb@brethren.org).