

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.

April 2007

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

Baptism provides the theme for the April *Messenger*. Chris Bowman's "Believers Baptism Offers an Immersion in Grace" (pp. 8-11) is the first of two pieces on **the meaning of Brethren ordinances**, continuing with "What Love Feast Means to Me" by Vicki Kensinger (pp. 12-13).

No, it doesn't stand for "Jesus"—at least not in "Putting the 'J-Word' in Our Vocabulary" (pp. 14-17), in which David Radcliff **reflects on the role of justice** in Christian living.

Are youth "Going Off the Deep End" (pp. 18-19) in their longing for connection with God? Walt Wiltschek writes about **the hunger for spirituality** that youth ministers are seeing.

David Valeta writes the Bible study on **Daniel** (p. 20-21).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read John 3:1-21. This *Messenger* provides several images of baptism. Use these images or others, for example a photo of your own baptism, as focuses to **contemplate this question**: What is the relationship between physical immersion in water, and spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ? **Meditate on the physical sensations of baptism**—the feel of the water rising over your body, kneeling down in water, the minister's hands on your head, dunking your head under.... Or if you were baptized as an infant or have not been baptized, imagine stepping into water to be baptized, and what it would feel like. How does this experience bring one spiritually closer to Jesus Christ?

Read Micah 6:6-8. Radcliff's article is full of instances of injustice, and statistics about injustice worldwide. **Make notes** of points that hit home for you. If you are pet owner, for example, did you notice the \$460 spent on the average US pet annually? Beside each note of a point that hits home, **write an estimate of the correlative statistic or situation in your own life**. Pet owners, for example, may estimate how much they actually spend on a pet each year. **Use these notes as an aid for prayer**, asking God for guidance about how to live justly in your own circumstances.

Read Joel 2:28-29. Invite your church's youth minister or youth group leaders to dinner, and **have a conversation about their work**. Some possible questions to ask: What are the youth of the church looking for? How is the congregation responding to their needs? Does the minister or youth group leader feel more like a program director, or a spiritual director?

Read one of Daniel's "court tales," the story of the lion's den in Chapter 6. Then read one of the apocalyptic visions, of the four beasts in Chapter 7. **Watch the Veggie Tales version** of "Daniel in the Lion's Den," in *Where's God When I'm S-Scared?* or in *Heroes of the Bible, Vol. 1*. If you are living in a household with children, make it a movie night for everyone. Ask the children what they think of the story of Daniel and the lions.

Questions for Discussion

1. What different spiritual realities does baptism symbolize, according to Bowman? He writes of several ways the symbolism may become real for the believer: Discuss how baptism is a visible sign of spiritual grace; how it is a new beginning, both symbolically and in a believer's spiritual and physical life; how baptism signifies the presence of perfection in imperfect people.
2. Read Kensinger's description of love feast, and then write your own. Write an individual description, or write one as a group if you are studying with others. If you or others in the group have not experienced love feast, ask your pastor to lead you in one, or participate in your congregation's Holy Week love feast. As you write about how you experience love feast, note the four traditional parts: spiritual self examination, feetwashing, the fellowship meal, and bread and cup communion. How did you experience each of these? What physical sensations did you feel? What emotions did you feel? What spiritual insights did you receive?
3. Were you surprised by any of the statistics about worldwide injustice, or the specific instances of injustice mentioned by Radcliff? Why or why not? How did his article raise your awareness of the plight of different people, and difficult situations around the globe?
4. Write a list of the reasons Radcliff gives for justice being a part of Christian living. Then write a list of the avenues he suggests for seeking justice. How important is it for Christians to get involved in seeking justice in this world? Which of Radcliff's suggested activities could you personally put into practice, and what difference would it make in the world? Which of these things could your congregation do, and what difference would it make?
5. How does Wiltschek describe the "hunger" that youth in the church are feeling? What are youth seeking? What are they seeking from the church? What spiritual needs do youth ministers see in today's young people?
6. How is the church responding to the needs of youth today, according to Wiltschek? How do you see the church responding to youth—denominationally, in your district, and in your congregation? How can you contribute to your congregation's youth ministry?
7. Why does Valeta write that Daniel and his friends are paragons of virtue and faithfulness? What does faithfulness to God look like, in the book of Daniel? How does God reward such faithfulness? How does faithful behavior bring Daniel and his friends into conflict with the society in which they live, and its political structures?
8. If Christians today lived lives of the same type of virtue and faithfulness as Daniel, how would we come into conflict with our society, and with political structures? What does Daniel have to teach about the true nature of human rulers and political systems? How do you think God rewards Christians today for faithful behavior?

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.