

## 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 2008

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

With this issue, *Messenger* begins a 2008 series examining “300 Years of Being Brethren.” The issue examines the **first half-century of Brethren beginnings**, 1708-1758. “Alexander Mack: A Seeker of Scripture” (pp. 8-9) is written by Alice Archer; “Peter Becker: Forgotten Founder” (pp. 10-11) is by James Benedict; “Schwarzenau: Then and Now” (pp. 12-13) is by Nevin Dulabaum; and a sidebar on “John Naas: Tall Man or Tall Tale?” (p. 13) is by Frank Ramirez.

“A ‘Messed Up’ Minister of Christ” (pp. 14-17) by Nick Miller Kauffman tells the life story of **Gilbert Romero**, pastor of Bella Vista Church of the Brethren in East Los Angeles.

The month’s **Bible study** by Stephen Breck Reid addresses “Zechariah and Malachi: Ending or Beginning?” (pp. 18-19).

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

**Read** John 12:24-26a, the theme scripture for the 300th Anniversary. **Find on a map of Germany**, or via an online map search, places important to early Brethren such as Schriesheim, Schwarzenau, the Eder River, Krefeld, etc. **Do a Google search** for early Brethren names mentioned in this issue, such as Alexander Mack Sr., Anna Mack, Peter Becker, Johannes (John) Naas, Count Karl August of Marienborn, Christian Liebe, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau, and others. What do you find? **Take a look** at A. Mack’s Facebook page, just for fun.

**Read** Philippians 4:13, the scripture identified by Gilbert Romero as the one he lives by. **Search the scriptures** for a verse you could live by. **Make a list of Bible verses** that strike you on first reading, and then narrow down the list until you have chosen a top three. Think about why these three speak to you. With which of your life experiences do they connect? Do they touch your heart, and why? Before you choose one of the three as “your own,” **say a prayer** for God’s guidance.

**Read** the key texts listed for the Bible study: Zechariah 4:6, 9:9, and 13:7; and Malachi 3:1. Reid writes that Zechariah calls for revival of the faith community, purity, and an emphasis on the word of God, in part through a series of eight “night visions.” **Try writing a “vision” or a visionary call** for revival in your own congregation. What images can you use to emphasize your points? What biblical or prophetic language may help communicate your hopes for the church? What challenges do you want to offer to your fellow Christians? What biblical texts will you call on to support your claims? How is God present, and what role does God play in your vision for the church?

## Questions for Discussion

1. Archer characterizes Alexander Mack Sr. as “neither a charismatic leader nor a powerful preacher,” but someone who had a gift for “gathering with others for intense study of the scriptures and guiding the group into a unity of spirit.” How could such a personality found a worldwide movement? Review Mack’s life and consider what factors helped him become a spiritual leader. How do Mack’s personality and spiritual character continue among Brethren today? What does Archer say was Mack’s “spiritual quest”? Are 21st century Brethren continuing that quest, in your opinion? Why or why not?

2. Why is Peter Becker called a “forgotten founder”? Why was Becker’s leadership crucial to the success of the early Brethren movement? How did Becker lead his fledgling church, and help it grow and develop?

3. Read *The Tall Man*, the children’s book about John Naas by Dorothy Brandt Davis (available from your church library or your pastor’s library, or order from Brethren Press by calling 800-441-3712). Compare the children’s story to the account given by Ramirez. Can a story that may not be factually accurate, still be spiritually true? Close your discussion by singing Naas’ hymn, “Savior of My Soul,” 549 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

4. Bella Vista Church of the Brethren has empowered their pastor, Gilbert Romero, to take time for a wide variety of community ministries—including some that might be considered “outside” the church. What community ministries does your pastor have? Invite your pastor to share with you about his or her passions and visions for ministry. How can your congregation empower your pastor to minister in the community? How can members of your church contribute to your pastor’s community ministries? How can community ministries revitalize and grow a church?

5. Review the difficult life experiences that allow Gilbert Romero to claim the title of “messed up minister.” Now take some time to remember the struggles and difficulties of your own life. Through God’s help, Romero’s life propelled him into ministry. How have your experiences led you to God? For what ministries has your past prepared you?

6. How are Zechariah and Malachi, the last two books of the Old Testament, both endings and beginnings? How do they introduce the “second act” of the New Testament? How do they prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ?

7. One theme of Zechariah and Malachi is the search for the “right” shepherd or religious leader in a time of conflict. Why is right leadership important for the faith community, especially in times of conflict? Have you experienced instances of leaders adding to a community’s difficulties during a period of conflict? In these situations, what leadership qualities or techniques contributed to the community’s problems? On the other hand, how can leaders be constructive and helpful during a time of conflict in a congregation?

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