

# Together

April 2018 • Issue 1

Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Church of the Brethren



WE ARE  
ALL ONE  
BODY

# Welcome

to this inaugural edition of our new magazine, Together. We are delighted to be able to share this new form of communicating the story of our district, our congregations, and our people. We invite you to share your feedback, suggestions, and content for the next issue which will come out this fall.



The purpose of this magazine is to share inspiration and information of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. There are many areas of excitement and celebration occurring across the district. Persons from across the generations are participating in our ever expanding camping and retreat ministries, enhancing their faith through interaction with God and God's people through Bible study, God's creation, fellowship, service, and of course fun! Many are finding fulfillment and meaning in service through Brethren Disaster Ministries in caring for children affected by disasters and through clean up and rebuilding efforts. Congregations are being renewed and energized by finding new ways of reaching out with the love of Jesus to the people of their communities. Congregations are also discovering new ways of working together with one another through shared worship, service projects, fellowship, and study.

The District Board, commissions, teams, and committees are working at ways to enhance our life together, challenging us to serve and worship in ongoing ministries and in emerging ministries that continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together. Support, encouragement, and guidance is offered to congregations, ministers, and members through tried and true means and creative new ways of sharing and living the good news of Jesus. Grants from our Empowering funds are providing financial support for some of these efforts.

This magazine, along with our other forms of communication (newsletter, website, special communications, etc.), is to inform and inspire you to participate in what God is doing through, with, and in all of us who are part of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District of the Church of the Brethren. As we together discern, discover, and live out our God-given mission and vision, may we support and encourage each other to be faithful to our calling as the body of Jesus in our world. Hear and see the stories, share your story, be part of the story of being God's people where you are and where you are called to be. May God's blessing be upon us as we continue the journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Shott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



# The Thin Place

(2008)

There are moments when things collide,  
 When worlds collide  
 When one is in the place in-between  
 The Thin-Place  
 The fog  
 The silence  
 The sense of aloneness  
 The sense of something  
 The sense that you have left this world  
 And at the same time feel as you have been left  
 A time when in the silence  
 The otherworldly silence  
 God whispers  
 This is the Thin-Place.

*Written by John Sgro*

This poem was written while I was on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne (England). I was part of a cohort group of pastors that were studying Celtic Spirituality.

The Thin-place as the Celts called it, was a place where heaven and earth met, that heaven is so close you are at both in and out of both worlds. The in-between. This is when the God of Heaven is close enough to Earth to be felt, to be touched. It can be any place really; any place you feel connected to the spiritual. It can be the forest, the beach, the mountains, a church, with someone or alone. There is no defined place, it is the acknowledgment that God is all around us, that God is a presence in which we can enter and leave. That God is in and of everything.

One of those Thin-Places for me was in the dense fog. If you have ever been to the British Isles, you know this fog. It's dense, so dense that you cannot see anything around you. You're in the ethereal.

I was walking on the island and came to the shore. The water went on before me and the castle was behind me. This was the first-place Vikings landed when they began their assault on England. It was a place of monks, holy people. I was standing there and the fog was coming in. You can see this happening in real time, it comes slowly at first then before you know it is upon you. Thick, and dense. You feel alone, like you are in the clouds and floating. It is so thick that you cannot do anything but stay where you are and wait it out. Perhaps that is the intent or lesson we are to learn.

So, I stayed, I had no option. It was in this Thin-Place that I once again felt God. I did not hear anything or feel anything powerful, but I felt it non-the-less. It was subtle. I felt like Elijah (I Kings 19:11) when God told him to go the mountain. Elijah went and he thought God was going to be in something big, the thunder, the earthquake, that God would be made known in something spectacular. That is not what happened. If you remember the story you will know that God showed up in a whisper, a still small voice. That is what happened in this Thin-Place. God whispered to me.

I was there and God was there. No words were spoken, but within the silence, God was known. I just stayed there and this presence filled me. It gave me rest. It renewed me. It was as if God came to the battlefield with water and bread. God came to fuel my journey.

This is what I long for. This is what I search for. I think that is what we all search for, that place where we enter into the mystery and are content to just be. Something that cannot be explained, and perhaps should never be explained. Within this place God whispers our name.

These are the moments in our journey that keep us going. The hope we have that we will once again enter into that union. Leave this world and meet God in the Thin-Place. Once you experience that, it is part of you. It leaves a mark.

*John Sgro is the pastor of the  
 Oakland Church of the Brethren*

*You are the body of Christ . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

—I Corinthians 12:26-27

# We rejoice. . . . . .with West Charleston!

*Written by Irv Heishman and Caleb Kragt*

West Charleston Church of the Brethren is located in Bethel Township, a rural area north of Dayton and east of Tipp City. The congregation maintains a warm relationship with German Baptist Brethren neighbors and traditional farming families while building relationships immigrant and refugee residents. Six years ago, it was wonderful when there were children present on Sunday morning—but all too often there were none. When that happened, several young adults would generously come forward to hear the children's story. In the process of developing a new mission and vision statement for the congregation, West Charleston members identified their hungering desire to have a thriving ministry with children. A "Serving Courageously" ministry team was formed to reach out to children and build a Sunday school program for them. The first opportunity for service to children was a call for volunteers to help watch and tutor Guatemalan and Mexican families gathering for Bible study at the New Carlisle Church of the Brethren. That congregation's hospitality and partnership was deeply appreciated and key to this new beginning. Soon one of these Guatemalan families began attending West Charleston, and suddenly there were four wonderful children! Then a second Guatemalan family with four children arrived. Then there was a blended family with five



more. Soon a number of Honduran, Mexican, Euro-American, and blended families arrived. More recently a refugee family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo arrived with seven children! All these children have connected the congregation with the world. Through the children, the church is learning about current issues related to immigration, refugees, and blended families. Through the children, our commitment to serve courageously has opened up unexpected opportunities for congregational renewal and vitality. One of our older members expressed her delighted surprise in what the Spirit is doing: We prayed for one thing but God had something far richer in mind for us!



## ...with Stonelick Church!

*Written by Sie Brock, Jr*

Stonelick Church of the Brethren is located in Pleasant Plain, Ohio. It was the first Church of the Brethren organized north of the Ohio River and started in 1795. We worship weekly in a building established in 1854, and genuinely value both the past and the present history of our members.

Over the past few years, our congregation has been working together throughout the EFSM program with our newly Ordained pastor, Sie Brock Jr., to create a focus for our ministry. This step in our journey has enabled us to learn and grow together, both spiritually and in numbers as well. We have been able to take a look “outside of the box” and become active participants in creating a loving, safe and cohesive church body. We have focused on our needs within our worship families and the surrounding community. We are like many other COB congregations, small and rural. However, we have grown from being a small

older adult congregation, to one which spans from 0 to 99 years old and everywhere in between!

We enjoy working together, fellowshiping during specials days such as the Love Feast and Footwashing ceremonies, performing plays, and studying scripture together. We are now thriving with energy and enthusiasm thanks to our District support and the mentors who have helped to give us the needed guidance, tools and resources available. Our congregation is proud of who we are becoming the Light that we are sharing!



## ...with East Dayton and The Shepherd's Table!

*Written by Susan Liller*

In 2015 I began attending Bethany Theological Seminary as part of my discernment process to determine if I was being called to the ministry. My life situation meant I would not be attending full-time so I worked out a schedule that would allow me to obtain my Master of Divinity degree in six years. I'm currently in my third year. Over a year ago my advisor asked me what I was thinking of doing for the required Ministry Formation (internship). I said, “I don't know what I want to do, but I know I don't want to be in a church setting.” Fast forward to today, I am now planning to do my Ministry Formation beginning the Fall of 2018 with The Shepherd's Table, a congregation of Fairview Brethren in Christ, and located in the East Dayton Church of the Brethren building directly east of Dayton's downtown.

The neighborhood immediately surrounding the East Dayton Church of the Brethren building has the following makeup. Race: 65% white, 25% black, 9% Hispanic, 1% other. Median household income is \$29,000. Unemployment rate is 15%. Approximately 23% of the residents are below the poverty level. The median resident age is 30. I've been actively attending The Shepherd's Table for over seven months and now feel I have found my calling – this inner-city congregation. Tune in to more next time to find out how I moved from “anything but a church setting” to “this church setting” as well as all the ways God is moving with The Shepherd's Table congregation and the East Dayton Church of the Brethren congregation!





# Camp Changes Lives

Written by Ted Foster

Camp provides a unique time and place for God to work in our lives. Just ask someone who has attended camp at Sugar Grove, Woodland Altars, Cricket Holler, or the Bergamo Center. Watch as their demeanor changes. The creases fade a bit from their forehead. A smile starts at both corners of their mouth. A twinkle flashes in their eyes. Listen as they tell their stories of sacred time, encouraging people, and life-giving faith.

Camp offers people spaces to rest and to focus on their relationship with God. Madison, an eighth grader and third-year camper said, *"When I come here, I have a stress-free and stress-relieving week or weekend."* Ben, a high school senior and twelfth-year camper added, *"Going to camp and being in nature away from the business of the world helped me to know God on a more personal level."*

For others, camp is a place to connect with people. Michelle, an eighth grader and first-time camper says, *"Going to camp was a way to get away from life and to just spend time with people and getting to know them."* More experienced campers are quick to give credit to people they met at camp for the Christian guidance they received on dealing with questions, problems, and relationships. Eighth grader and sixth-year camper, Dominic, and tenth grader and tenth-year camper, Dillon, agreed that people from camp helped them to think about changes they wanted to make in their lives. Josh, a tenth grader and eighth-year camper, named the importance of *"the countless number of friends that have always been supportive."*



Emma Batdorf is a life-long camper in Southern Ohio. She shared, *"As a child I loved camping, I just loved it!"* More recently, at a difficult time in her life, she was asked to serve as a counselor. *"During Bible Study I would find my self getting emotional about stuff going on in my life. And they the campers would come over and give me a hug and they would start singing songs or we would just sit around the table at meals and sing. Music is what feeds my soul. So that was very awesome to sit there and sing with them and see how close they've all come together."*

Quite simply, camp is about relationships with God and with one another. Karen Dillon, our Camping and Retreats Director believes that *"camps and retreats change lives. With our growing acceptance of diversity, kids are encouraged and supported in their own expression of themselves, and are being led in a way to be tolerant of other people. But without committed, faithful, Christian leadership and committed adults, kids don't always get to see how to live a strong faith that they can embrace. It's really hard unless we set examples, and teach our children how to love unconditionally, and practice this love ourselves."*

*What is your story of sacred time? Of encouraging people?  
Of life-giving faith? Do you have a camp story to share?*

# Congregational Connections

*Written by Julie C. Brewer*

As a means to foster a deeper sense of community and togetherness in these often divisive times, the Pleasant Hill, West Milton, and Troy Churches of the Brethren have begun taking turns hosting a collaborative church service on the fifth Sundays of the year.

The idea was generated out of a sincere belief in the idea of community. As pastor of the Pleasant Hill CoB, Nick Beam puts it, “The more we can reach out to one another in these times of disunity, the better.”

Since the first gathering at Troy Church of the Brethren on July 31st, 2016 with Pastor Fred Bernhard as guest preacher, congregations have been taking turns hosting the larger group worship at their churches, including some kind of fellowship meal afterward. Church choirs have combined for special anthems during worship. Pastors have the chance to worship with their congregations without the weight of leading the service. This combined worship experience has been a great positive for pastor of the Troy CoB, Jon Keller, particularly with the increased volume of the music in the worship experience. Cherished friends from across the district have had a chance to reconnect, and new faces have had the chance to become better acquainted. Pastor Nick Beam shares, “For me, I like the time together because I’ve gotten to know people I didn’t know before, and I have gotten to worship with dear friends I haven’t worshipped with in a long time. It’s one thing to see people at district gatherings, but it is quite another to worship together, for there is a spiritual connection that happens that you don’t get elsewhere.”

At first, the very small congregation of West Milton was concerned about having such a large group with so few to help host, but after their first chance to host worship, “A lesson was learned concerning God’s providence and faithfulness. Now everyone looks forward to our turn to host,” says pastor of the West Milton CoB, Ty Pyles.

By reading other church bulletins and seeing different worship styles, some people have noticed that even though each church is rooted in the Brethren tradition, the cultures of each church are all different expressions of that tradition. Pastor Ty Pyles reflects, “These times together have solidified our connectedness to the District, and realizations have been made on the importance of staying connected.”



Through these times of connection, congregations have had the opportunity to worship in different ways with folks who may have different views from their own. Pastor Nick Beam reminds us that, “Worshipping together creates bonds that are difficult to break, because in worship the focus is not on ourselves, but on the God who created each of us in his image and loves each of us equally and unconditionally.” Pastor Jon Keller reflects, too, that, “Joining our congregations in worship has allowed us to get to know each other better, and we hope it will lead us into further discussions of how we might continue to work together in spreading the love of God to our community.”

One of the major challenges in hosting a collaboration like this, is encouraging congregations to travel to a different site than they’re used to. While worship is certainly bigger with three congregations than with just one, attendance for each congregation could be stronger when attending at a different location. Collecting the weekly offering has also been a challenge during these combined Sundays, but special envelopes are being made available to help facilitate giving.

This model of collaboration and connectedness is a message to us all in these times of big church questions: How can we love one another through the divisive issues we face? How can we experience revitalization in a denomination whose numbers are in decline? How can we find new and creative ways to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? “What would it look like,” Pastor Jon Keller asks, “to have The Miami County Church of the Brethren, with multiple ministry sites throughout the county?” It’s this kind of creativity and re-thinking about church models that can usher in a new generation and era of life in the Church.



# Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On!

*Written by Paul Bowser*

Most of the time when I think of Easter I think of the women going to the tomb or Mary in the garden, or Jesus walking on the road to Emmaus. I hardly ever think of the earthquake. But when you read Matthew's gospel there it is: "behold, there had been a great earthquake."

An earthquake happens when there is a shift in the layers of the earth's crust. After a long period where nothing appears to be happening, pressure from unseen, powerful forces in the center of the earth finally brings upheaval and change. Mountains are raised, cities are destroyed and the landscape is transformed. An awesome happening.

It seems fitting to me that an earthquake should accompany the resurrection of Jesus. It's a natural, very powerful example of God's providence, and of God's power to transform and rearrange our lives. It's awesome, sudden and uncontrollable. We can't always see what's happening beneath the surface. For long periods of time God's power and our potential may feel dormant. Like the disciples, we may be afraid and thrilled (or maybe just dazed and confused) when God does a new thing in our relationships, our circumstances or our character. We may continue to poke through the rubble of old habits or look for the living among the dead.

Like the disciples, we may be slow to comprehend the change, or assimilate what is new and unexpected. A butterfly takes time to fight its way out of a cocoon, and a chick to peck its way out of an egg. No matter. God is patient. Soon these gorgeous creatures will be released, and in a vibrant burst of color, will fly away and do what they were created to do and be. Praise God for the glory of resurrection power: in our lives, in our church, and in our world.

## Together

**Together** is a bi-annual publication of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Church of the Brethren.

If you would like to receive this publication, send mailing information to PO Box 785 Greenville, OH 45331, or email to [sodcob@brethren.org](mailto:sodcob@brethren.org). Articles can be submitted to the same address. Although the publication is being mailed free of charge, donations can be made to the District at PO Box 785 Greenville, OH 45331. Copyright © 2018

Editorial staff: Mary Boone, John Sgro, Wendy Noffsinger Erbaugh, Miriam Erbaugh, Ted Foster, Susan Fitze, Julie Brewer, Dave Shetler (District Executive). Photos by Ted Foster. Design by Debbie Noffsinger Design.