

Together

October 2021 • Issue 8

Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Church of the Brethren

Move in our
Midst, Thou
Spirit of God

Move in our midst

*Move in our midst, thou Spirit of God.
Go with us down from thy holy hill.
Walk with us through the storm and the calm.
Spirit of God, go thou with us still.*

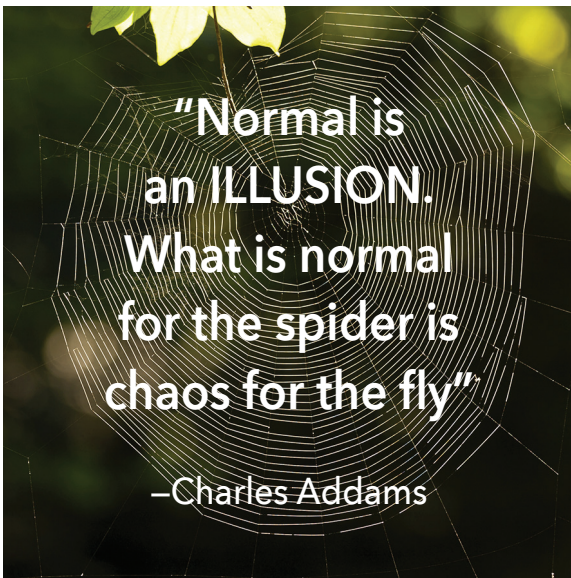
“Move in Our Midst” is a beloved hymn of the Church of the Brethren. It affirms our understanding of God’s presence with us at all times and in all moments. As we contemplate God’s current movement among us for this issue of *Together* and for our upcoming District Conference, it is good to remember the ways in which the Spirit has been active.

The “storms” of the pandemic forced us to stop and see how the Spirit was, and still is, moving among us. We have had to adapt. Through technology, we have found creative and innovative ways to continue worship, fellowship, and ministry. Worship services were

streamed or recorded for our participation. Camping and Retreat Ministries held camp last summer over Zoom. Many of us met each other for the first time via video conferencing. We have been able to find calm moments as the Spirit goes with us.

As we hopefully approach an ending (or at least leveling off) of the pandemic, the Spirit continues to move in our midst, inspiring us to continue the work of Jesus. Some of our time-tested ways of ministry, such as Brethren Disaster Ministries, have resumed utilizing safety protocols. The Brethren Retirement Community has once again begun some “normal” ways of ministry. The Climate Justice and Racial Justice Task Teams have found ways of raising awareness of these vital issues through online events. For many congregations, worship is now happening in a hybrid way, with some worshipping in-person and others joining by technology. Some of those “gathering” are from various parts of the country, while others have never set foot inside our church buildings but are now witnessing the Spirit’s movement as they experience the good news of Jesus. God has walked with us through the storm and the calm.

It is easy for us to desire a return to what we thought of as normal, but perhaps there is never a “normal” in being a follower of Jesus. If we are willing to follow the lead of the Spirit, new opportunities for ministry will ever be before us. The hymn encourages us to ask God to help us “build **new** worlds” in God’s name. May our normal be as “innovative, adaptable, and fearless” as the Spirit moves in our midst.



Dave Shetler,
District Executive Minister

Letter from the Moderator



I was not raised in the Church of the Brethren. I became a member when my wife, Annette, and I decided to marry back in 1977. Annette had been a life-long member of the West Milton Church of the Brethren, so I joined and became involved in the life of that congregation.

Not long after we met, Annette took me to the Brethren's Home so she could introduce me to her grandparents, Perry and Lauree Huffaker. At that time, Perry was in the early stages of what we now call Dementia or Alzheimer's and never remembered my name. He would always ask me when we visited, "Now, what is it you do?" Every time, I answered, "Well, Perry, I'm an accountant."

Eventually, I was called into ministry and have served the past 23 years as the pastor of the Pleasant Hill congregation. When I was affirmed as the Moderator for our 2021 District Conference, it didn't take much time to come up with the theme. "Move in Our Midst, Thou Spirit of God," based on the hymn by

Kenneth Morse and Perry Huffaker, seemed very natural. This hymn holds a very special place in my heart, not only because of the family connections, but also because of the wonderful tune Perry created to go with Ken's powerful words.

I believe Ken's words are even more relevant now than when they were originally written. There is a lot of gloom in the church nowadays. There is a spirit of distrust, division, and despair that is sucking the life out of our pastors, church leaders, and congregations. We desperately need the Spirit of God to move in our midst.

But, there is good news! The Spirit of God is moving, if we have the eyes to see it. The Climate Justice Task Team has been busy educating the district on the effects of the changing climate. The Racial Justice Task Team has been meeting to come up with ways we can address the racial injustice in our nation. Brethren Disaster Ministries continues to send out volunteers to help people repair and rebuild their homes after natural disasters. And, Camping and Retreat Ministries continues to find creative ways to bring our children, youth, and adults together.

Beyond district ministries, the Spirit of God is moving in each of the district's 48 congregations in quite different and unique ways. This is a great thing to be celebrated! Our diversity means we can be Christ in our neighborhoods, to many different people and in many different ways!

We do indeed have much to be thankful for and much to celebrate as the Spirit of God moves in the midst of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. Please join me online October 8 and 9 for this year's District Conference where we will celebrate the ways God's Spirit has been moving and how God's Spirit will move us into the future.

If Perry would ask me now, "Now what is it you do?" I would humbly answer, "Well, Perry, I'm the Moderator of this year's District Conference."

In Christ's Service,
Nick Beam



Move in Our Midst, Thou Spirit of God

—Ephesians 4:3–4

Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Conference 2021

Another Way of Living . . .

“In the New Testament, the word “brethren” describes a community of men and women who chose another way of living: the way of Jesus. The Church of the Brethren, begun three centuries ago in Germany, still draws people who want to continue Jesus’ work of faithfulness and loving service.” —from www.brethren.org, our denominational website

In the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District, congregations are choosing another way of living in various ways. On these pages we are spotlighting stories of congregations who have trusted in God’s provision and those who are allowing God to use them to provide for others.

Oakland

By Paula Ziegler Ulrich, Associate Pastor

What’s Happening at Oakland Church of the Brethren (North of Gettysburg, OH)

Things have been hopping at Oakland Church of the Brethren, located in western Ohio amidst rolling farmland, rich with crops and cattle. The congregation resumed in-person worship in March, but we continue to offer online options for Sunday morning services, as well as Sunday School and a weekly spiritual support group. During the summer, eight families in the congregation hosted garden tours, followed by an All-Church Ice Cream Social with homemade ice cream and cookies. As we approach fall, our children’s ministries are in full-swing, and it has been fun watching our new Youth Coordinator in action. We are also in the discernment process as we prepare to search for a new lead pastor.

Oakland Church of the Brethren has held several fundraisers this year. Our Lenten fundraiser (which extended into summer) raised \$5,618.50 for Heifer International. This money bought an Ark full of animals, garden seeds, a share of a goat, and sent two girls to school. In June, the congregation pulled together a massive garage sale with the help of over fifty volunteers. The garage sale raised \$6,231.00 for the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Brethren Disaster Ministries. In addition, our Youth Group held a bake sale and snacks during the garage sale, which raised \$1,389.00 for their programming and upcoming conferences.



New Carlisle

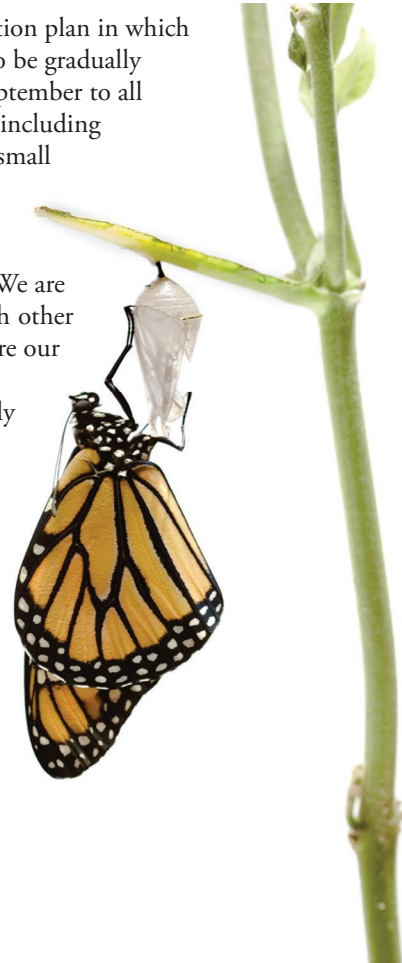
By Tara Hornbacker, Pastor

As with churches everywhere, March 2020 spelled the end of in-person worship for New Carlisle Church of the Brethren. However, we tried our best to remind folks that our church ministries continued. We had been broadcasting our church services on Facebook Live, YouTube, and local access TV for several years, so we were well-prepared to continue that ministry; a small worship team gathered safely on Sunday mornings to deliver the service and make the necessary recordings. Our deacons made weekly calls to check in with church members about their needs. We continued to collect for community and district needs through special giving, with contributions being sent through the mail and PayPal. Monday through Friday, our pastors used the One Call system to make daily calls with Daily Devotionals and Prayer Updates.

In April 2021, as vaccination rates rose and infection rates in our community fell, we added a second worship service. It was a limited, in-person gathering that included masks and social distancing. It featured prayer, meditation, and a sermon, though it did not have congregational singing.

We opened our church building to full in-person worship on June 13th. These services have included masked congregational singing. Our Leadership Team

adopted a transition plan in which the building is to be gradually re-opened by September to all group activities, including Sunday School, small study groups, and all other previously scheduled uses. We are happy to see each other again and to share our worship with our church family and community.



My Calling Story

By Susan Liller

In 2014, my pastors challenged me that I might be hearing a calling to the set-apart ministry. Subsequently, I was licensed in 2015 and ordained in June 2021. But I believe my calling began long before 2014. I just wasn't aware it was happening.

When I graduated from college in 1985, I went to work as an accountant and continued working in that field for over 20 years. Toward the end of that time, I felt a nudge, a restlessness to make major changes in my life. I ended up leaving my full-time employment to teach accounting and finance part-time at a university. This change allowed more time for my family, the church, and God in my life. Nine years later I felt another nudge, this time to leave the teaching field. By then, I had begun selling items on ebay to supplement my income. I decided I could make my entire income from selling online and this would give me more freedom over my time for my family, the church, and God. So I left my teaching job.

These life changes of leaving full-time employment and then part-time teaching were not made lightly. I spent time discerning and praying. I knew these changes required me to change how I live, to reduce my living costs since I was reducing my income. You know what I discovered? The fewer things I owned, the more content I was. I became closer to my family, my church, and to God. This is when my pastors approached me, asking if I might be hearing a call to ministry. I had told my pastors that I wasn't too sure about hearing a call to ministry, but that I would enter a time of

discernment. This time of discernment included attending Bethany Theological Seminary.

About half-way through my 5-year Bethany journey, I did begin to hear a call to ministry, but I was pretty sure it wasn't going to be in a church setting. Having been a part of the local, district, and national church, including attending lots of meetings, I had seen parts of the church that I wasn't sure I wanted to be a part of.

But as often is the case, God had other plans.

While attending Bethany, I continued selling things online for my income. This had me going to Dayton often, to the Goodwill Outlet store to purchase my inventory. Being in that city setting created a longing for the time when I lived in the inner-city of Dayton during the first 16 years of my life. I began thinking, "I could be part of a church ministry, if it were in the city. Perhaps that is my calling."

With the help of my mentor, I was able to locate an inner-city congregation for my ministry internship. In fact, there were two congregations: the East Dayton Church of the Brethren and a Brethren In Christ congregation called the Shepherd's Table. Today these two congregations worship and work as one congregation called the East Dayton Fellowship, which called me to be their Associate Pastor in March 2020.

Are you feeling any nudges?



Two Congregations Share in a Virtual Love Feast

By Daniel Fullen, Pastor, Olivet CoB

It was not the first time that Jesus' disciples had celebrated the Passover, but this Passover meal was different and strange. Jesus, their Lord, came around with the wash basin and towel, washing their feet as a servant. He referred to the bread and cup, saying, "This is my body... this is my blood..." This was unlike any Passover meal that they had experienced. Jesus said to them, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

As folks entered the sanctuary for Love Feast, seeing a TV next to the pulpit probably seemed strange. Trying to figure out how all the wires connected and getting phones and internet hotspots synced posed some frustration. We could hear them, but we couldn't see them. They could see us, but they were having trouble hearing us. This was a Love Feast unlike any we had experienced. Despite technical difficulties, we knew that we were connected as one.

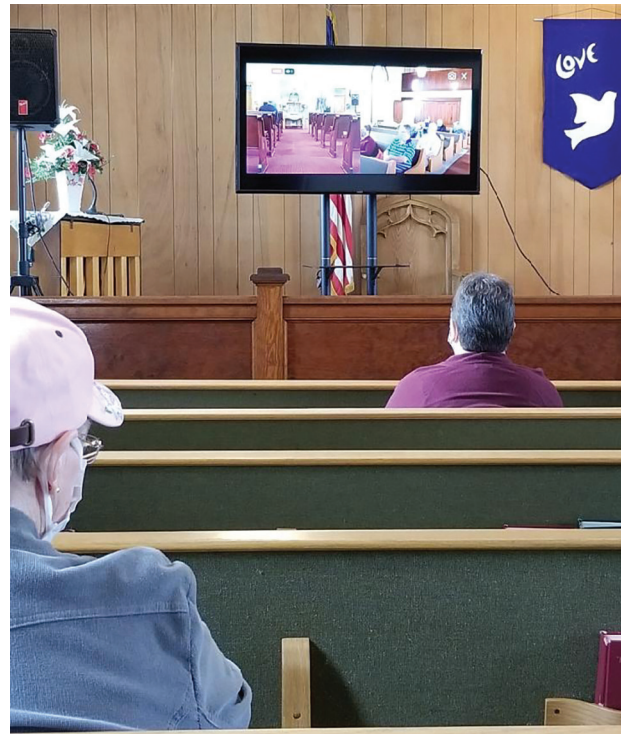
This year of pandemic has been a strange time for everyone, including the church. We've had to learn to do things in new ways.

In August 2020, Olivet decided it was time to regather for worship. We started with outdoor services and then eventually made our way back into the building. Recognizing that not everyone was ready to return to in-person gatherings, we decided we would start recording our services using Facebook Live so that others could view from their homes. To our surprise, people from all across the country and around the world started joining us for worship on Facebook. Our most faithful Facebook worshipper attendees were members from the Circleville congregation, as their church remained closed. They would even enter their joys and concerns in the chat box so that we could be in prayer for one another.

On Palm Sunday, Circleville reopened their building for worship. I was a bit sad that I was losing some of my Facebook church members. But then the thought came: if we can worship on Facebook, why can't we share in Love Feast on Facebook? So, I sent an invitation to Circleville for a virtual Love Feast service.

That Sunday, following morning worship, the two congregations joined for Love Feast. I led the service from Olivet, while Circleville viewed the service on a TV screen from their own sanctuary. This was a Love Feast unlike any we had experienced. People brought along their own food to share with each other for the fellowship meal. For foot washing, we passed around a wash basin with names from both congregations. Whoever's name you drew, you were to make contact with that person by phone or letter in the coming week. Despite technical difficulties, we knew that we were all connected as one. I reminded each congregation of God's love, which keeps us connected, as we shared in the bread and cup of Holy Communion.

More than 10 years ago, while I was serving as the pastor of the Circleville congregation, I had a vision of the far eastern Brethren congregations working together. It took a pandemic to make that vision come true. To God be the glory!



Before I Was Born

By M. Kathryn Reynolds

March 12, 2019

Before I was born into a world of sinew and bone

Did I walk with you?

Before I was born into a world of creatures and objects

Did you count the hairs on my head?

Before I was born into a world of language and sound

Did I talk with you?

Before I was born into a world of highways and sidewalks

Did you show me my path?

Before I was born into a world of relationships and community

Did you inform my family, my church, my people?

Before I was born into a world of conflict and violence

Did you bind up my wounds?

Before I was born into a world of experience and education

Did you ask me to learn?

Before I was born into a world of expectation and omen

Did you grant me free will?

Before I was born...before I was born...before I was born...



Together

Together is a bi-annual publication of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Church of the Brethren. Thank you to all who have contributed to this publication. Submissions of original artwork, poetry, as well as stories of ways we work together, or ways your church fulfills our mission of being Jesus' hands and feet in your community are always welcome. All submissions are subject to approval and editing by the Together editorial staff. Authors of original articles will be given the opportunity to preview before article is published.

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