

Together

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Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Church of the Brethren

Celebrate
God's
Abundant
Goodness

Celebrate God's Abundance

Our theme for this year's District Conference is "Celebrate God's Abundance," based on Psalm 145. I like Moderator Vicki Ullery's choice of this theme because it reminds us how rich we are with God's blessings. We often take blessings for granted or cannot see them. We look at our life from a negative point of view, focusing more on our scarcity than our abundance. We don't think that we have the material or spiritual resources to be of much use in our churches and our world.

When we approach our material resources from a scarcity point of view, we hear things like:

- "How can we be of help with what little we have? We don't even know how we will get by."
- "How can we feed so many? How can we fund so many? We have so little and the need is so great."
- "What we can do is only a drop in a bucket. We don't have enough money for the mission and ministry God calls us to. We don't have what it takes."

We can hear the same negativity when it comes to our emotional and spiritual resources:

- "We don't have enough time."
- "We don't have enough energy."
- "We aren't enough."
- "We aren't wise enough."
- "We don't have the training we require."
- "We aren't professionals."

These lines of thinking lead me to believe that we're listening to the wrong voices; listening to ourselves and others and not listening to the voice of the One who provides abundantly.

In the story of the loaves and fishes, a meager offering is transformed into an abundant feast when placed into the hands of Jesus. The story tells us that Jesus is used by God, Jesus has the power of God, and that God cares. It tells us that if we humbly offer what we have, God will bless it and use it for His purposes.

The problem with a scarcity way of thinking is that it keeps us from looking to the future in faith, and it

prevents us from offering the abundance we have to God to be used to advance the Kingdom. We spend way too much time arguing about why we can't do this or that, because we think we don't have enough money or forget about the abundant resources of God's blessings. We have the people and the money, if we remember to humbly place them into God's hands.

Psalm 145 is full of praise because of God's mighty works, goodness, faithfulness, and righteousness; and they are all given abundantly to those who honor and love God. We are truly a blessed people with the material resources and the people to grow God's Kingdom in the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. Let us move forward together celebrating God's abundant blessings!

Michael E. B.



Celebrating God's Abundance in our Midst

by Vicki Ullery

Augustine of Hippo is quoted as saying, "The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!"¹

The theme for the 2022 District Conference was
"Celebrate God's Abundant Goodness" from Psalm 145:3-7 NIV

³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

⁴ One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.

⁵ They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

⁶ They tell of the power of your awesome works—and I will proclaim your great deeds.

⁷ They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

As I thought about a theme for the 2022 District Conference, I reflected on the journey of the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District over the past 10 years or so, particularly the past few years. As a District we have experienced congregations leaving the denomination, contentious issues, societal divisions which have impacted congregations in various ways, and most recently, the struggles to follow Jesus and love our neighbors during a pandemic. In addition to these challenges, we have not been able to gather in person for a District Conference for two years.

Therefore, I encouraged the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District to focus on celebrating God's goodness in the life of our district and congregations. There are so many

wonderful ministries happening in our district and in our congregations. I wondered what would happen if we really celebrated how God has abundantly blessed our ministries.

Over the year, I listened to pastors throughout the district share what was exciting in their congregations and what things they were celebrating. I believe we can either focus on what is exciting and what we are doing, or we can focus on what we cannot do. When we focus on what God is doing in our midst, we come alive. We begin to see the possibilities and not the hindrances. As followers of Jesus, we are a people of hope, not despair.

Richard Foster ended his book *"Celebration of Discipline"* writing about the corporate discipline of celebration. He wrote,

"Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. ... Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong. ... Celebration is central to all the Spiritual Disciplines. ... Celebration helps us relax and enjoy the good things of the earth. ... an interesting characteristic of celebration is that it tends toward more celebration."

He goes on to suggest we can "*practice celebration through singing, dancing, shouting and laughing.*" Also "*... to celebrate important events as well as lesser accomplishments or events*"²

What if the district and each congregation would intentionally "Celebrate God's Abundant Goodness" each day? What if all the ministries, leadership teams, committees, small groups, people who volunteer their gifts and talents in service, children, youth, and older adults were celebrated? What if we encouraged one generation to tell stories to another generation of how God has worked in their lives or the life of the congregation? What if we would discover new ways to applaud what God is doing through each congregation and district?

My hope for the Southern Ohio/Kentucky District, each congregation, and each follower of Jesus is that you will continue to experience and realize God's abundant goodness in your life. May this realization renew your spirit, lead you to celebrate, and empower you to follow Jesus as you seek God's vision for your ministry.

Amazing God,

We thank you for abundant love and goodness. We thank you for being with us and guiding us through the years. We ask for your wisdom as we seek to follow your vision. We ask for your guidance for all those in ministry through the Southern Ohio and Kentucky District. Encourage us when we grow weary. Awaken our hearts and minds to new possibilities. Inspire us to step out in faith. Excite us to celebrate with enthusiasm how you have been with us in the past, the ways you walk with us now, and the abundant goodness you will continue to share with us in the future.

Thank you, God.

Amen.

¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Harper & Row, 1988, p. 190.

² Ibid., pp. 190-199.



Becky Maurer

**Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good;
for His lovingkindness is everlasting —Psalm 107:1**

During this past year, our District Moderator, Vicki Ullery, (now our past moderator) has been busy contacting each one of our congregations and asking them, “What are you celebrating that has happened this past year?” or “What are you looking forward to celebrating during the upcoming year?” She was able to compile more than 100 slides of stories from our congregations which she shared with us at our district conference!!! Indeed, the Lord is good! Here are stories from two of our congregations.

Eversole – serving generously

by Mike Howard

The Eversole congregation is located one mile north of New Lebanon, Ohio, at the corner of Clayton and Old Dayton Roads. It was originally part of the Wolf Creek Church of the Brethren. After 99 years, in 1910, Wolf Creek made the decision to split into two congregations: Eversole and Brookville. This allowed the church to better serve its communities.



Our church’s vision statement is “Together...Sharing Christ’s Love.” We put that into action by supporting the local food pantry and donating “snack packs” to help feed elementary students on weekends. We donated a new laptop computer to the local police to help facilitate better communication during crisis calls and other times of need and provided new defibrillating gear to the local rescue squad. Our church also provides money, supplies and volunteer labor for U.S. based and international disaster relief.

Eversole presently has 64 active members. We offer Christian worship, fellowship and education. Our pastor, Mark Bowman, is in his 30th year of service to the church. Eversole is celebrating a very active Adult Bible Study and Sunday Children’s Church and is looking forward to increasing our outreach ministries in the coming year.



Trotwood-community generosity

by Mary Boone, information submitted by Judy Gaines

Founded in 1900, The Trotwood Church of the Brethren's vision statement states, *"We are a church celebrating diversity, strengthened by God, transformed by the Holy Spirit to serve and unify in the name of Jesus."*

The church has a long history of connecting with the community, especially with the schools. Many of our members have worked in the schools in a variety of positions. We have formed partnerships with specific schools: supplying school uniforms, books, classroom support, clothing, winter clothing, etc., and adopting families at Christmastime. We have also offered space to a preschool, annual Bible Schools, and Boy Scout Troops. Most recently, Trotwood has welcomed the Peace Place - an outreach to local youth with a curriculum on conflict resolution.

Trotwood Church of the Brethren holds many annual events: Love Feast, a Valentine Banquet, and a Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. We also go Christmas caroling in the community or to shut-ins and walk in the Martin Luther King Jr. event in Dayton. Other ministries include worship, Sunday school, prayer blankets, Beads Education Artisans Medical Support

(BEAMS) in Guatemala, scholarships, books for Ukraine, and offering space to Alcoholics Anonymous. Finally, we provide financial support for the OH/KY district, Bethany Seminary, Manchester University, the church in Nigeria, and the denomination.

The Trotwood Church of the Brethren celebrates the guidance of our Interim pastor, Rusty Curling, and his wife Phyllis. We have also deepened our connections through Zoom, hosted Homefull (a mobile grocery service for folks in food deserts), established a Little Free Library, and put up a tent for study and fellowship. The church also celebrates fewer COVID deaths and the lifting of COVID restrictions such as mask wearing.

In 2023, we look forward to strengthening our connections within the community through the Little Free Library, Homefull, and our work with the schools. We also plan to hold more in-person events to build

fellowship and unity, work on a profile to determine our next steps in leadership, and use the tent to engage with our community.



Bedsheets on the Line

This morning,
like some kind of
hauswife-dinosaur,
I hung the bedsheets out to dry
in the summer sun.

All day
I could hardly wait for this moment.

Because.
When I finish this poem
I will put my face
into the teal pillowcase
like a babe whose mouth
is hungrily pressed
against the breast
of Mother Earth.

When I inhale
I will instantly merge
with all creation.

Like a Master Chef,
the Creator has infused
a billion flavored atoms
into that cotton:
bees and blossoms,
heat and hops
streams and smoke and summer sun
grass and grubs and green moss
cicadas and cirrus clouds,
children at play and
lovers laughing
enemies tossing their weapons
and embracing each other.

God Herself will cradle me, and croon,
and kiss me on the top of my head!

All is a divine demi-glace,
a heady concentration
of pure joy!
I will breathe in
the perfume of Her skin.
I will suckle the sweet
of perfect peace.

Now I lay me down
to Love.

—*paula bowser*
DRAFT - July 24, 2016
right around midnight



Photo credit: My Cozy DIY linen Duvet | The Jungalow
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DIY linen bedding by Justina Blakeney

God's Goodness – Psalm 31:19-24

O how abundant is your goodness
that you have laid up for those who fear you,
and accomplished for those who take refuge in you,
in the midst of everyone!
In the shelter of your presence you hide them
from human plots;
you hold them safe under your shelter
from contentious tongues.

Blessed be the Lord,
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me
when I was beset as a city under siege.

I had said in my alarm,
"I am driven far from your sight."

But you heard my supplications
when I cried out to you for help.

- Love the Lord, all you his saints.
The Lord preserves the faithful,
but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.
Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the Lord.

This prayer of praise closes Psalm 31 with a reminder of how God chooses to act. Verses 1-18 are a combination of pleas to God and statements of lament. The opening words, *In you, O Lord, I seek refuge* (Psalm 31:1a), bring to mind the image of shelter and safety. This is not an image of resting in the comfort of our home, but rather the refuge that is needed when a sudden storm drops torrents of rain. Or the times of life when we face pain or fear, when our safety or well-being is compromised.

The Psalmist spends several verses speaking of refuge before speaking of affliction, adversities, enemies, and distress. Some verses reveal the lament, the hopelessness and the brokenness the Psalmist was feeling. We can relate to this. There were times in 2020 and 2021 when the pandemic felt like a storm. As the number of hospitalizations and deaths were reported, our fear levels rose and we hunkered down. For some it did not feel like a refuge but rather an unwelcome imprisonment. That storm included separation from family and friends. There was confusion as to what was true, and contradictory advice led to disagreements in the country and perhaps in congregations. This is only one example of the distress that causes us to cry out to God.

By verse 15 the Psalmist's thoughts return to confidence in God and we find the often-quoted line, *"My times are in your hand."* At some point, hopefully, we are able to say the same thing. God, we will trust you through the pandemic, or the financial burden, or the

loss of a friend. We allow God to replace our depression and fear with love and hope. Of course, this is not a once and for all solution, because news changes from day to day. Eventually something painful or unfair happens, and fear and lament rise again.

In times of distress and lament we need to turn to Psalm 31:19-24. We need to speak the words aloud as a personal prayer of praise. We need to praise even when reality is harsh, lonely, or painful. Remember, the word *fear* (vs 19b) is not stating that we are afraid of God, but rather that we understand God's power, and might, and ability to intervene. This means that even in difficult times we trust and serve a God who is abundant in goodness. God shows steadfast love in surprising ways. We see two squirrels scampering without a care in the world and we smile. A friend calls or texts when we are feeling lonely, and it becomes a God moment. A hymn comes to mind, and we begin humming or singing. Our confidence in a caring God returns, and we are able to offer an encouraging word to a neighbor or stranger. God's abundant goodness is then passed along from one to another, perhaps reaching thousands.

Where have you experienced God's abundant goodness? Read this Psalm, especially verses 19-24, out loud every day for one week. Watch for God's goodness to be revealed in unexpected places, and offer praise.

—Karen Garrett



You have to appreciate the creativity of kids! This year at SOKD's Creative Arts Camp, participants were asked to draw a picture of God's Abundance. Here is a sampling of what was drawn. Names and ages of the children are included with each picture. Thank you to Mindy Tipton for scanning and emailing these images.

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 publishes. The theme of our next issue is "Hearing God's Voice Together During Challenging Times".

If you would like to receive this publication, send mailing information to P O Box 785 Greenville, OH 45331, or email to sodcob@brethren.org. Although the publication is being mailed free of charge, donations to help cover expenses are welcome and can be made to the District at PO Box 785 Greenville, OH 45331.

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