

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Winter 2013

BRETHREN IN CHRIST
WITH A DIFFERENCE

***We
believe***
JESUS IS
LEADING US



THE VIEW FROM HERE

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
— John 1:14

“Ready to discover your family story?” This question, posed by ancestry.com, could have easily been the title of *In Part*’s “We believe” series, which has examined our theological heritage as members of the Brethren in Christ family. Knowing where we come from—individually and corporately—is an important aspect of understanding our identities and stories.

This desire to find our place within a broader narrative is not unique to contemporary times. Throughout the Bible, genealogies trace the covenant of God, kept from one generation to the next. In fact, we see God’s promises in striking relief when viewed as part of a sweeping narrative of faithfulness and grace. In Matthew 1, before the miraculous story of Jesus’ birth, comes the cumulative heritage that imbues the nativity with meaning: “an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

In a similar way, we hope that this “We believe” series serves as a record of God’s faithfulness to the Brethren in Christ family throughout tremendous historical, social, and global transformations. Our shared identity and heritage offers a living testimony to the many ways both our ancestors and present-day believers have relied on Christ while navigating change.

Given our meaningful and multifaceted history, this issue of *In Part* raises the question, Where is Jesus leading our Church family now, as we move into the future and continue to rely on God? We’re pleased to include many perspectives that bear witness to God’s presence and movement in our midst.

In the feature article “The wonder of God revealed,” Hank Johnson

explores an important way that the Word continues to be brought into the world—incredibly, through our lives, as followers of Christ. He observes that Scripture most often uses the term “witness” not as a verb, *something we do*, but as a noun, *who we are*.

This message is “made flesh” through the 10 brothers and sisters who share in this issue about how they live out their identity as Brethren in Christ. And the final feature article, “The whole wheat Gospel” by Alan and Beth Claassen Thrush, articulates that it is in community—local, national, and global—that we can more fully understand who we are as Brethren in Christ.

As *In Part* concludes the yearlong “We believe” series, we are boldly praying that the ideas in this edition move you, as they have moved us. This Advent season, we celebrate the coming of Jesus, who, even at birth, fully contained and expressed the Word in His tiny body. While Jesus’ identity was declared by angels and shepherds, He could not Himself proclaim who He was. Yet His presence was witness enough. He was the Word, made flesh and wriggling with life among us. And *that* is Good News that we want to share with the world, *that* is the essence of our unfolding family story.

With hope and expectation,

Rebecca
Rebecca Ebersole Kasperek,
contributing editor (pictured left)

Kristine
Kristine N. Frey, editor (pictured right)



We believe installation



Created by Andy Rash, of Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC, the “We believe” series depicts the four theological streams that shape BIC life and thought, and find their source in Christ. The series will be installed in the BIC U.S. Offices in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Creative contributors



Naomi Ilgenfritz, a 2012 grad of Messiah College (Mechanicsburg, Pa.), created the watercolor on page 3. In addition to personal art-making, she teaches art for grades 3–12 at a private school. naomi-artist.com



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Gregory Snader, whose work appears on page 13, loves to illustrate and drink tea—especially at the same time. A 2007 graduate of Messiah College (Mechanicsburg, Pa.), he lives with his wife in Lancaster, Pa. snaderillustrator.com

IN PART™

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THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. I Corinthians 13:12

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About “We believe”

“We believe” is a yearlong series examining the four theological streams that shape our identity and values as Brethren in Christ.

In this final edition, we explore how Jesus is leading us into the future. To express this, we’ve borrowed the phrase “Brethren in Christ with a difference” from BIC historian and theologian Luke Keefer, Jr.:

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* Excerpted from “The three streams in our heritage,” by Luke Keefer, Jr., *Brethren in Christ History and Life* (August 2012)



IN MOTION

In Part is a 20-something

This edition of *In Part* marks its 25th issue! Here, we relive some of the highlights from our last six years together . . .

CONTRIBUTORS

122
writers

36
visual artists

DISTRIBUTION

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307

AWARDS

16 received from the Evangelical Press Association, including:

- 1st denominational publication (2013, 2012, 2011)
- 1st Parting Words column (2010)
- 2nd overall publication design (2011)

COMMENTS

- I love this magazine, particularly the paper format. Beautiful art and thoughtful articles. —from Pennsylvania
- A friend shared with me your periodical entitled *In Part*, which I enjoyed very much. Is it possible for me to subscribe?—from California
- As of the summer 2013 issue, the “We believe” series has really been impressive. I just wanted you to know that this person out here, who mourned the passing of *The Visitor*, is feeling more at home again with this “new” denominational magazine. —from Pennsylvania
- Our *In Part* came yesterday. The articles were outstanding—a good read from cover to cover. —from Kansas
- I am pleased and blessed each time we receive an issue. It is so exciting to see what God is doing through the BIC churches across the world.—from Texas



10 BIC blogs to bookmark

In no particular order, here’s a sampling of blogs by Brethren in Christ people. Share your recommendations at INPART.ORG.

A field of wildflowers

by Kelly Chripczuk, of Engage Community Church (Carlisle, Pa.).
→ *An honest portrait of faith lived out in “real life”*
AFIELDOFWILDFLOWERS-KELLYS.BLOGSPOT.COM

More than this

by Rachel DeMara Sensenig, pastor with Circle of Hope (Philadelphia)
→ *Stunning images coupled with stunning reflections from the city of brotherly love*
RACHELSENENIG.WORDPRESS.COM

Johan Murillo

by Johan Murillo, of La Ciudad de Dios (San José, Costa Rica)
→ *Thoughts on faith, organizational leadership, and tech (en español)*
JOHANMURILLO.COM

The search for piety and obedience

by Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, BIC scholar
→ *Superb storytelling makes BIC history quite thrilling, actually*
DEVINTHOMAS.WORDPRESS.COM

The pangea blog

by Kurt Willems, BIC church planter in Seattle
→ *Bold Anabaptism in a postmodern context*
PATHEOS.COM/BLOGS/THEPANGEBLOG

Julie’s Zambia adventures

by Julie Cook, BIC global worker in Zambia
→ *An inspiring 20-something proves that “accountant missionary” is not an oxymoron*
JULIEZAMBIA.BLOGSPOT.COM

The moonius files

by Jay Johnson, pastor of Zion BIC (Abilene, Kans.)
→ *Theological meditations from a “spiritual revolutionary”*
MOONIUS.BLOGSPOT.COM

Druthers ’n dragons

by Dale Bicksler, of Mechanicsburg, Pa.
→ *Photos and poems that bring the natural world to your computer screen*
DRUTHERSNDRAGONS.COM

Life ’n Moz

by Chris Newcomer, BIC global worker in Mozambique
→ *Seasoned missionaries support an emerging BIC faith community*
PEACE4MOZ.BLOGSPOT.COM

Friar Tuck’s word of the day

by Ron Howell, pastor of CrossRoads Church (Salina, Kans.)
→ *Trying to find a daily devotional? Look no further.*
CROSSROADSDEVOTIONAL.BLOGSPOT.COM

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

WHEN TENSIONS BRING POSSIBILITY

Feeling the pull is a valuable part of our identity as Christ-followers

by ADAM FORRY

Tensions are an expected part of family life. One person likes hiking, another reading, another cooking. More fundamentally, hopes for the future can differ from person to person. My sense is that when we encounter friction between ideas, we typically regard it as a problem. However, what if we began to look at tensions in a different way—not as harmful or threatening but as good and beneficial, as signs of health?

As I reflect on the history and values of the Brethren in Christ Church, tensions abound. Since our earliest days, we’ve encountered dynamic interactions between the theological streams that shape our community. Anabaptist convictions about outward obedience differ from Pietist principles of inner devotion. The “in-the-world” engagement of Evangelicalism is stretched by the “not-of-the-world” separateness of Wesleyan holiness. Yet if any of these theological tensions was completely resolved, we would lose a part of our unique heritage. As I’m discovering, tensions are crucial elements of our identity as Brethren in Christ and, even more, opportunities to express our trust in Christ.

I’m challenged by a talk I heard from pastor and author Andy Stanley, who discussed the difference between a problem and a tension. A problem, he said, you seek to solve; a tension, you seek to manage. Indeed, if you try to fix a tension, you’ll likely create a new one, or even move into the realm of problem!

→ **RELYING ON GOD:** We confess our dependence on God for everything and seek to deepen our intimacy with Him by living prayerfully.

Of course, tensions are not mere abstractions; they’re practical issues in church life. At Speedwell Heights BIC, I wrestle regularly with the conflict that can arise between embracing BIC values and practicing hospitality. I am committed to seeing BIC convictions sustained and promoted in our church. At the same time, I’m devoted to keeping our welcome wide to whomever is within our reach. Yet how do I welcome people in without having them stumble over a doctrinal particularity they don’t share or understand the minute they come through the door?

And that is only one of many questions emerging from the doctrine/hospitality tension. Is there a point at which we must tell potential new members that they are too far out of step with our Core Values to be part of the family? On the other hand, if we welcome anybody and everybody, do we risk losing the uniqueness that makes us who we are? And for that matter, we might consider whether or not there even can be a singular understanding of what it means to be BIC.

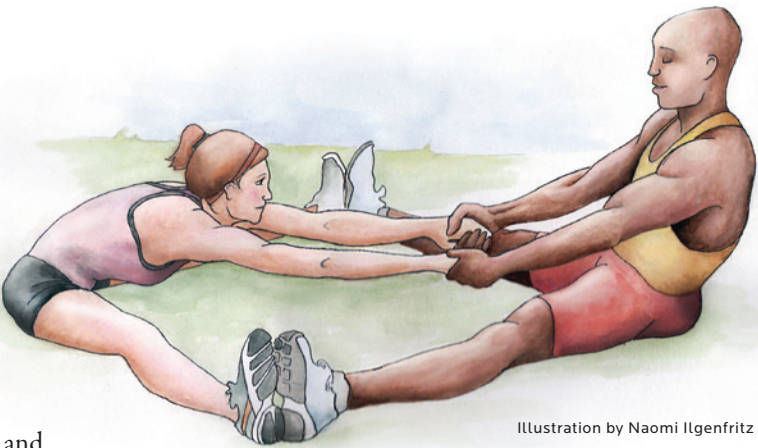


Illustration by Naomi Ilgenfritz

I don’t have firm answers to these questions, and I’m sure that at times I manage the tension poorly. But I’m committed to living with God in the uncertainty. As I do that, I’m learning that although tension is frequently uncomfortable, it is also formational. It’s in the stretching and stressing that muscles grow strong. It’s in the wrestling that we more fully realize who we are in Christ. It’s the process of working out our faith that drives us repeatedly to God in united prayer and humble reliance—to embrace one another as family even amidst the tension. And it would be a problem if it were any other way.



Adam Forry is a husband (to Kimberly), a dad (to Cassie and Trace), a pastor (of Speedwell Heights BIC in Lititz, Pa.), a reader, and a runner. He sometimes feels the tension between these roles, but so far he’s managing fairly well.

THE WONDER OF GOD REVEALED

Our call to be witnesses requires not only our actions but our very lives

by Hank Johnson

After his suffering, [Jesus] presented Himself to [His apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Then they gathered around Him and asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.

—Acts 1:3, 6–9

In Acts 1:8, before the Lord Jesus returns to the

house of God to prepare heaven for you and me, He leaves His disciples with a simple message: You will receive power through the Holy Spirit and you will be my witnesses.

This message echoes back to the Garden of Eden, in Genesis. In the beginning, God created men and women in His likeness, so that we could be His witnesses to all of creation. Even when humans were in perfect communion with the Lord, He formed us to reveal Himself; this is *who we are*.

In Acts 1, Jesus calls His first followers as well as present-day disciples to return to our essential identity as image-bearers—to show our world and the people of our everyday scenes what the love of God looks like, feels like, and is like.

Jesus calls us back to the garden to remind us that our family is not yet complete. The work is not yet done, and the kingdom

of God has not yet fully come on earth as it is in heaven. Therefore, we—both individually and as the family of God—long to make our family complete; we must do the work of loving our world like God loved the world. And we must live in a way that makes our Father’s kingdom come and His will be done by us, as His witnesses, right here, right now.

The trouble with witnessing

We Christians often make witness a verb, something we do, rather than a noun, *who we are*.

If we approach witnessing as something we do, then it becomes only part of our faith, a *part-time* duty, or maybe just the work of a gifted few. It becomes easy to view it as an action we take, a message we deliver, a strategy we implement. We may be tempted to relegate our “witnessing” to those moments when we make the intentional effort to tell others about Christ. And yet, our lives keep witnessing long after our words and actions have stopped.

An incomplete view of our witness also widens the gap between those in the Kingdom and the many people who yet may come to know and love our God.

In their book *unChristian*, David Kinman and Gabe Lyons study this disconnect among young adults outside the Church. The authors note that as these young people shared their perceptions of Christians, recurring de-

scriptions of believers as “hypocritical,” “insensitive,” and “judgmental” emerged.

This message is hard to hear. But it highlights that our outreach has been rendered increasingly ineffective because our *witness*—the entirety of our words, our deeds, our lives—often does not point to the Christ we say we love.

Christ’s corrective vision

We contemporary Christians are not alone in the way we often misunderstand or misrepresent Christ’s message. Even after Jesus lived with, died for, and resurrected before them, the early disciples often missed His message. For instance, just look at the final question they had for Jesus before He ascended: “Lord are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?”

In His response, we see Jesus correcting His disciples—then and now—whose dreams are too limited, who only want to see a single nation restored. Jesus reveals the incredible reality that God’s kingdom is the kingdom of every nation, tribe, and tongue. And God’s citizens are all of his children who believe in His name and long to make His kingdom come.

In response to the Good News of God’s borderless love, we must realize that our God saves and then He sends. God so loved the world that He sent Jesus. Then, God so loved the world, that He sent the Holy Spirit. And before returning to heaven, the Lord Jesus calls all of His disciples and followers and says, *Now I’m sending you*. Every believer is called to be a witness as God sustains His redemption plan for the world.

God—revealed

Christ calls us to be His witnesses so that in our everyday lives who we are and how we love testifies, invites, proclaims, and welcomes all of our Father’s lost children back home again.

When people encounter us, they should not have to wonder about who God is, where God is, or whether or not God loves them. Through our witness, our world should see the wonder of God and the beauty and peace of knowing our God loves them. Through our witness, our world should

know the miracle of God’s salvation and the power of a transformed life. Through our witness, our world should get a glimpse of the kingdom of Heaven that lasts eternally.

And our testimony to that Kingdom begins right where we stand. In Acts 1, Jesus calls His disciples to be witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then in all of Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. As heirs to that call, we must be witnesses locally, nationally, and globally.

The practice of love

The first step in relying on God to be a witness right here, and right now, is to pray. We all know people who are outside our Father’s kingdom—our parents and siblings, our friends and co-workers, our acquaintances and even people we might only see once in our lives. Choose one person, and pray. Pray for them and for your interactions with them. Then listen to what the Spirit may be saying.

Secondly, identify your mission field. We used to view missions as traveling to distant lands to interact with people who do not believe. Now, all we have to do is look across the cubicle or down the street, open our eyes at the grocery store or the restaurant. We must be witnesses in the places we frequent and to the people we regularly interact with.

Finally, we must live circumspectly, keeping our eyes, hearts, homes, and lives open to the Spirit and to others. Because, if you pray and if you are a witness in your mission field, the Lord will send a harvest. Live with sensitivity so you will recognize it.

Our God desires redemption, reconciliation, and then generative response. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection make redemption possible. As the Spirit leads us back to God, the Father’s love and forgiveness of our sins make reconciliation possible. But sisters and brothers, we have the privilege of being partners in the life-giving response—working alongside our God and one another as the family of God—to help expand our Father’s kingdom. It is through *who we are* as witnesses that the Lord’s image is revealed, and it is through the sharing of our lives that those around us can experience our Father’s great love.



Hank Johnson is pastor of discipleship and youth at Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC and also serves as assistant moderator of the Atlantic Regional Conference. He and his wife, Shell, anticipate the arrival of their baby girl this month. Hank loves Jesus, people, and sports (in that order).

When people encounter us, they should not have to wonder about *who God is*, where God is, or whether or not God loves them.

10 perspectives

What it means to be Brethren in Christ

As *In Part* has considered our theological streams and now looks to the future, we've been enriched by perspectives of members from across the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S. In order to deepen this exploration, we recently asked 10 members of our church family to share what *being Brethren in Christ* (BIC) and our Core Values mean in their own lives as they strive to follow the living Christ.



Something I heard many years ago at a national Christian Education conference has stayed with me. "You are going to be confronted with change," the speaker said, "and that is okay. The method can change but the message must always remain the same. You dare not change the Gospel."

In the 1940s, ***I gravitated toward the Brethren in Christ because of my desire to share the Gospel through community outreach.*** My previous church had no evangelistic efforts, and at Hollowell BIC (Waynesboro, Pa.) I became deeply involved in the ministries of Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

More than 65 years later, I'm still Brethren in Christ because we are Bible-centered and committed to outreach.

.....
Ezra Martin, who became known as "Mr. Sunday School" at Hollowell BIC, admits that courting Esther, who would become his wife, was another reason he first came to the BIC.



In my country of birth, I belonged to the Church of the Nazarene. When I came to the U.S., a pastor friend introduced me to her bishop, Eduardo Llanes, and I heard about the Brethren in Christ.

I became interested in Brethren in Christ doctrine and saw that the BIC shared my Wesleyan roots. But the thing that really caught my attention was the expression that Bishop Llanes used to refer to the denomination: "the BIC family."

Over time, I realized that these were not just words; our Church really is a big family. So much so that today, when I visit churches, I like to emphasize that more than a name or a denomination, we are a family of brothers and sisters who love and care for each other.

Other pastors who've joined the BIC have told me they're impressed with how our community models simplicity, humility, and love of those in leadership. A while ago, a pastor who had been independent of any denomination for many years, simply said, "I regret not having heard about this family sooner."

Truly, I thank God for being a part of His kingdom here on earth, but especially for being a part of this great BIC family.

.....
Aner Morejon grew up in Havana, Cuba, and moved with his wife, Vivian, and their two children to the U.S. in 1990. After 21 years as church planter and pastor of Maranatha BIC (Hialeah, Fla.), Aner was named associate bishop of the Southeast Regional Conference.



The first time I remember encountering Anabaptists was in a lecture hall at Messiah College, where we were watching a historical film about the group. Unaware of the College's heritage, it wasn't until the early Anabaptists rode across a large video screen in Frey Hall that I sat up and took notice. What I saw was a group of martyrs whose belief was strong enough to lead them through hell on earth and beyond to the very gates of heaven.

After college, my husband and I attended a small Mennonite church before heading off to seminary, where I wore the label "Mennonite" in a world of Presbyterians and Methodists. Returning to Pennsylvania after drinking the heady intellectual waters of seminary, ***I longed to be rooted in a denomination that was***

spacious enough to embrace a Christianity that's both thoughtful and heartfelt. Sensing a call to ministry, I also wanted to be part of a community that unabashedly embraced the gifts of women in ministry and leadership.

In 2004, my husband and I put down roots in the BIC by joining the New Life Community Church in Carlisle, Pa. Now, almost 10 years later, I'm more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the denomination as the ideals of its faith and practice are worked out in everyday life and ministry. Yet I continue to grow deep roots in the BIC because of the clarity and spaciousness of its convictions and practices.

.....
Kelly Chripczuk is a mother of four and licensed pastor in the BIC. She and her family reside in Carlisle, Pa., where they attend Engage Community Church and she offers the ministry of spiritual direction.



"Living simply" was not a virtue I embraced early in life; it was a difficult reality for our family. I grew up in government-subsidized housing projects in Hong Kong. Our family of nine lived in a 200-square-foot apartment where we transformed a squat toilet into an instant shower by covering the toilet hole with a piece of moldy plywood.

Twenty years later, our family has left the projects and most of us have migrated to the United States. We have been blessed with plenty and a comfortable lifestyle. One of my siblings is even a millionaire who only flies first or business class whenever he travels. People from our past congratulate my parents on their children's successes.

Despite outward success, my siblings and I did not find peace for many years. The hardship of project living haunted each one of us. We retained the scars of witnessing gang violence and various kinds of abuse. We all thought having material comfort would help us leave these torments behind. But, as wonderful as it was to have a full stomach and a warm house, fears and anxiety did not dissipate from my spirit. At

a particularly low point during my high school years, I was introduced to the Prince of Peace. Inviting Jesus to enter into my life filled a gaping hole in my heart and calmed my spirit.

In my journey with Christ, I've drawn inspiration from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" ***The BIC Core Value of "Living simply" encouraged me to live out this new life by letting go of my old understanding of what gives me security and comfort.*** The freedom to give generously and serve joyfully has unchained my bondage to material possessions. The examples provided by those in the BIC family who embrace this value have given me the courage to let go and give. "Living simply" is a practical act of worship for me: I am giving up the old self and letting Jesus make it new again.

.....
Ling Dinse and her husband have two daughters. An adjunct professor at Lancaster (Pa.) Bible College, Ling offers free counseling services at her home church, Elizabethtown (Pa.) BIC. She loves to cook and counsel (and sometimes does both at the same time).



"You go to church, but you aren't Catholic?" This is a typical question for us in Madrid, Spain, where my husband, son, and I live and serve. It's also

a great opportunity to talk about our Anabaptist heritage and what our church family is all about.

For many in Spain, religion is little more than a cultural norm. So, I love telling my Spanish friends about how my faith is all about Jesus and relationship. I also share about the life of my church—how we value community; how we pursue peace and live simply so that we can give and share generously; how we don't try to change things through the political structures of this world, but instead give up our lives for another Kingdom.

I am thankful for the unique personality of the Brethren in Christ in the post-Christian context in which we serve. Our church family lives out an authentic pursuit of Jesus in practical ways—by gathering in house groups, for example—something that really appeals to those I meet. It appeals to me, too!

The kind of community we are experiencing in Madrid is only one part of the beautiful picture of what God is doing among BIC throughout the world. May our God be glorified!

.....
Kara K. and her family are BIC global workers in Madrid, where they serve at Los Hermanos en Cristo Círculo de Esperanza (Circle of Hope BIC). Her time is spent being a mom and wife, hosting a house group, directing a Spanish choir, and experimenting in urban gardening.

For me, coming to the BIC is about finding family. During my childhood, I always wondered why my biological parents gave me away, and I dealt with related self-esteem issues and unforgiveness.

A loving family, the Fields, took me in at a very young age and showed me unconditional love and attention. After the Fields passed away, I searched for the type of love they'd shown me, but I couldn't find it. In my early 20s, I decided to confront my biological parents, and I started down a road of confusion and bitterness.

Gradually, God began pulling on my heart strings to bring me closer to Him. As I relied on Jesus for love and my identity, He revealed that I needed to work on the bitterness I had towards my biological parents and to move forward in forgiveness.

I began to want to learn more about God, so I decided to visit Western Hills BIC Church and immediately felt at home. After learning about the Core Values of the BIC, I decided to become a part of this church family.

Today, I live with my biological father, and **my home church continues to support and encourage me on the path of making peace.** Instead of questioning why, I now praise God for my childhood.

.....
Deiana Renee Mitchell works at Western Hills BIC (Cincinnati, Ohio), where she does a little bit of everything—she updates the church website, serves on the praise and worship team, participates in the praise dance team, and assists the pastor.



One Friday night, in August of 1969, my family and I attended a revival meeting at the only Brethren in Christ church existing then in Cuba, my country of origin. I was 6 years old, and when the altar call was made, all the members of my family took a step forward and accepted Jesus. We had previously been involved in the occult, but that night, we were delivered from those bondages. That night also placed us within the BIC family, and, since then, we have learned to value the meaning of being BIC.

Learning from the example of others in the BIC family, we began a journey of transformation that changed our lives forever. Living holy lives in a simple way, honoring the Bible as God's word, and serving others with love and commitment became our goals in life.

Years later, I understood more about peacemaking through my father-in-law, a member of one of the founding BIC families in Cuba. My wife's father was a "conscientious objector," even though just using a term like that in a communist system could have meant losing his "freedom."

In 1989, my wife, my 2-year-old daughter, and I traveled to the United States looking for a new life. We have now served the Lord in Miami for about 25 years. Being part of a family with a shared mission and vision, more than simply a denomination, keeps us excited in being a BIC church.

.....
José F. Rodríguez serves as pastor of Esmirna BIC (Miami, Fla.). The church began as a Bible study led by him and his wife, Lourdes, in the living room of his parents' house. Today, it's grown to a family of about 100 people.



In my senior year of college, I received news that I was one of a select number of students in the U.S. to be offered a Fulbright English teaching assistantship. Through this program, I'd be able to learn and teach in an international setting for a year. After serious deliberation, though, I opted in favor of a year of service in Nepal with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a global ministry of Anabaptist Churches, including the Brethren in Christ.

To most, my decision seemed counterintuitive. Many likely asked themselves, "Why wouldn't you further your career by accepting a Fulbright?" I asked myself that very same question. My answer is rooted in my faith and commitment to Christ Jesus.

Struggling to decide between a Fulbright or a year of service with MCC made me think deeply about my passions and convictions. **Growing up in the Brethren in Christ, I always had a clear sense that if**

Ten years ago, I wasn't interested in church. Following a troubling childhood, I was the victim of a rape in early adulthood that resulted in pregnancy and the birth of my daughter. In response to these traumas, I fell into a life of alcohol and drug abuse, petty crime, and sexual promiscuity. I was so broken that I even attempted to end my life at one point.

One hot August day, I found myself in a jail cell, at my absolute bottom. I knew that I had to change, or I could not go on. I cried out to God.

In that moment, I remembered a radio show hosted on Sunday mornings by Ron Howell, pastor of CrossRoads Church (Salina, Kans.) that I'd listened to with other addicts. We called it our "church," and I said that if I ever went back to church, I would try that one. The first Sunday I was released from jail, my daughter and I attended Cross-Roads Church.

The church welcomed me just as I was ... but I wasn't left that way. BIC Core Values teach that those who follow Christ will not remain the same person that they were. I can attest to experiencing a total transformation—from a ravaged and lost soul to a new creation.

.....
Denise Conway and her daughter "attend" Revolution, another BIC church centered in Salina, Kans., online as part of a satellite ministry in Farmington, N.M.

we claim to be followers of Christ, we should model our lives after His. What I see in Christ is a life devoted to service, love, and humility. In my church and in my family, I witnessed a true commitment to these virtues of Christ, lived out through simple living, serving the poor and marginalized, and radical love.

To have tenured my Fulbright would have been a wonderful opportunity. To work, serve, and learn with MCC, however, invites me to live out my passion to serve the people of Nepal as well as to embody Christ's Gospel of humility and love.

.....
Malcolm McDermond, a 2012 graduate of Messiah College (Mechanicsburg, Pa.), attended Engage Community Church (Carlisle, Pa.), until his departure in August. Since arriving in Nepal, he's been researching food security and nutritional health among children, mothers, and pregnant women.



I've spent much of my life traveling in Anabaptist circles, so my theological and biblical foundations remain solidly molded by Anabaptism. **But in my relatively short tenure within the BIC, I find that I'm beginning to think of myself as more than Anabaptist.**

At Madison Street Church, we've seen an influx of young adults, often spiritual "exiles, nomads, and prodigals," in David Kinnaman's words. Our ability to "speak Evangelical," while grounding our missional efforts within an Anabaptist framework and embracing the warmth of Pietist and Holiness spirituality, has built bridges with a generation that is increasingly disenchanted with Church.

Many movements across the history of Christianity die out because the genuine concerns that gave rise to their formation are no longer the issues their grandchildren face. The genius of the BIC Church, whether intentional or not, seems to be a willingness to experiment constantly in order to seek the fresh experience of a living Christ. Without discarding the best of the past, we openly embrace that which is good about what God is up to today.

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Jeff Wright joined the Brethren in Christ community in 2007 and is pastor of Madison Street Church (Riverside, Calif.). He also serves as missional strategist for church planting with Urban Expression North America. He and his wife, Debbie, live in Riverside.



Living a WHOLE WHEAT Gospel

Unrefined ingredients combine to create a nourishing community

by Alan and Beth Claassen Thrush

WE LEANED IN, straining to understand what he'd said. The Nicaraguan pastor was sharing his vision for the Brethren in Christ Church in his country, when he'd used a phrase that caught our attention—*evangelio integral*. We'd recently arrived in Nicaragua, and since we were still learning the language, the phrase was new to us.

We knew that *evangelio* referred to the Gospel. But we had to think about the meaning behind *integral*. Prior to this, our primary context for the word was in the grocery store, where *pan integral* is whole wheat bread. Piecing the two concepts together, we came up with “whole wheat Gospel.”

As we continued listening, we realized that the pastor was sharing about an *evangelio*, or Gospel, that is holistic, offering good news to transform every part of life and community.

This pastor probably never intended for us to associate his vision with a loaf of whole wheat bread, but we find this analogy helpful as we consider what it means to be an increasingly diverse and global denomination. When we as Brethren in Christ come together with all of our differences, we remember that we seek to live and share an *evangelio integral*, a Gospel that transforms everything—the physical and spiritual, the inner and outer, the individual and the whole body of Christ.

A whole wheat theology

As Brethren in Christ, ours is a history of receptiveness to new moves of God's Spirit, of emphasizing our Core Values on one side while listening carefully to fresh interpretations on the other. We see this over the course of centuries, as our spiritual ancestors experienced awakening and growth through the Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan Holiness movements. More recently, we have found resonance with Evangelical themes from North America, as well as Pentecostal ideas from South America and Africa. Our theology is a lot like whole wheat bread—composed of various fortifying ingredients.

This perspective speaks into the ways we practice our theological convictions. If you look at a slice of whole wheat bread, you'll notice that it is not all the same color or texture, with chunks of grains and seeds interspersed. In a similar way, some churches resonate with Wesleyan teachings on holiness and may reflect that “chunk” of our heritage; others strongly emphasize Anabaptist principles; and still others reflect Evangelical practices.

The challenge for us is to remember that not every part needs to be ground up and refined; in fact, we will be healthier if we are not highly processed and homogenous. Instead, we try to blend our emphases and practices together through prayer and discernment, listening carefully to one another, and trusting the yeast of God's Spirit to shape us into something that can nourish our hungry world.

A sustaining identity

Just as we experience diversity and enrichment through our theological streams, we now have the exciting challenge of honoring diverse perspectives locally, nationally, and globally. At a local level, we recognize that no congregation is homogenous. Even when members might look similar outwardly, each person is shaped by a unique blend of family background, political opinion, and cultural experience.

Each person contributes to our whole wheat community.

From a more collective perspective, the BIC U.S. community grows more culturally diverse every year. Nearly one-third of our churches worship primarily in Spanish, while the other two-thirds worship most often in English.

As we welcome increasing diversity and move forward into the future, we need to ask ourselves, What are the essential ingredients that make up our identity as Brethren in Christ? And who determines those ingredients?

In responding to these questions, we must intentionally engage perspectives from various backgrounds. This is one way we can model reconciliation to our world. In the U.S. today, polarizing gaps continue to widen between rich and poor, historic and recent immigrants, Republican and Democrat, young and old. Yet we have the opportunity—and the call—to create a community that transcends those gaps to reflect the kingdom of Heaven.

Even more, we have the privilege of talking about the essential ingredients of our faith as members of a global body. Although the BIC community initially emerged in the U.S., our family today includes brothers and sisters in over 30 countries. Since 1987, the BIC Church outside the U.S. has been larger (as determined by attendance) than the BIC Church within it. While our commitment to Christ remains the same, the ways we live out our identity as Brethren in Christ may be different. Again, we have the wonderful challenge of collaborative formation by listening to one another across national boundaries.

A rising community

Each congregation has the challenge and privilege of acting as “yeast” in our com-

munities. Examples of active listening and identity-shaping across cultural divides are already occurring among us.

They're happening across generations. For example, two congregations in central Pennsylvania—Messiah Village BIC, a faith community of retirees, and Engage Community, a church of mostly young families—realized the blessing that fellowship between them would bring, so they've been creating spaces for listening and learning together.

They're happening across ideological divides through projects like Listen, in which young adults from the Pacific Regional Conference are organizing times of listening and respectful engagement with diverse perspectives. Or like the BIC churches that are establishing B.E.L.L.S., small groups that encourage members to Bless, Eat with, Listen to, and Learn from people both inside and outside their normal “Christian” circles.

They're happening across cultures, as youth groups and congregations of English-speakers and Spanish-speakers come together in community service, creative outreach, or collaborative worship times, as we recently saw initiated by the BIC Church of Second Chances (Ontario, Calif.).

They're happening across the world on a leadership level, as evidenced by the growth of the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA), which creates a setting for BIC leaders from around the world to gather, listen, and discern our common grains in the midst of different cultural contexts.

On a congregational level, BIC World Missions, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite World Conference offer opportunities for international partnerships, in which congregations can engage in mutual encouragement, visiting, and learning.

To bless and feed the world

We personally experienced God's spirit of unity this summer as we traveled to Central America, joining with BIC churches from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the U.S. to serve and learn together. Our differences were many, but we connected through Pietist practices like fasting and prayer. We shared in the Anabaptist practice of washing one another's feet. We watched creativity emerge as we used our diverse experiences to minister to children.

We benefited from seeing our Central American team members' commitment to the holistic message of the Gospel. And we realized that our journeys are very much the same—maintaining the substance of our faith while discerning what ingredients are necessary to engage others and demonstrate grace.

Indeed, as members of the global BIC family, we are all trying to live this *evangelio integral*, this whole wheat Gospel. On one hand, we need to be realistic about the barriers—like differences in language, political affiliation, and age—that have the potential to separate us. Yet it is in those moments that we look not to ourselves but to Jesus, who says in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” We trust God to provide for us as we continue listening and actively engaging with one another to participate in how Jesus is blessing and feeding the world.



Alan and Beth Claassen Thrush served in Nicaragua with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for four years. They live with their two young children in Southern California, where Alan is an associate pastor at Upland (Calif.) BIC and Beth serves on the board of the Pacific Christian Center, a ministry of the Pacific Regional Conference.

TO THE POINT

This past August, Alan Robinson began his work as national director of BIC U.S. Like many in our community today, Alan didn't grow up in the Brethren in Christ Church. After moving from Great Britain to the U.S., he joined the BIC in 1999, when he became senior pastor of the Carlisle (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church.

That same year, a consultation of 51 BIC brothers and sisters from across North America gathered to identify and articulate the convictions at the heart of what it means to be Brethren in Christ. As the "We believe" series comes to a close, Alan shares some of his thoughts on the 10 Core Values that unite us in Christ and lead us into the future.

?) What do you think the Core Values communicate about us as a Church family?

I love the story behind how these statements came to be. I find it significant that the 51 members of the consultation weren't chosen because of their level of influence, the number of degrees they held, or their affluence. Rather, these were brothers and sisters from different walks of life—pastors and archivists, parents and theologians, musicians and educators—who were identified for their examples of faith and wisdom and were invited to serve. And then they responded with a willingness to use their gifts.

When I consider our Core Values, I see the Spirit revealed through the statements themselves, as well as the communal process we used to form them. That's who we've always been, and that's still who we strive to be today.

?) From your perspective, what is the purpose of our Core Values?

One thing that strikes me is that these values should be viewed as aspirational. Worshipping God, Pursuing peace, Relying on God—these are things that we aren't ever going to be able to fully realize in this life. Instead, they represent the high calling that's upon us as Christ-followers. Not that we don't take them seriously or strive to practice them, but I find freedom in knowing that I'm not going to get all of them exactly right, all the time—and that's ok, because it's part of following Jesus and experiencing continual transformation through the Holy Spirit.

?) Have any of the Core Values been especially transformative in your own life?

I find all the values to be instructive and challenging. But one that has spoken to me at different times throughout my life is Pursuing peace: "We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and non-violent resolution of conflict." I believe that this message is deeply countercultural and one that Jesus desires us to speak into the world.

I'm reminded of my childhood years in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Every Saturday, my father and I would get our swimming togs—or "trunks" as you Americans would say—and go to a swimming club. As you may know, Belfast at that time was in turmoil—really, it was the scene of a war—between Catholics and Protestants. We lived on a street of Protestants, but the street



next to us was one on which Catholics lived. Every Saturday, on our way to the club, we would walk to the end of our street and meet up with one of my dad's co-workers and his daughter, who lived in the Catholic section.

But because these neighborhoods were so close to each other, the government erected a huge corrugated metal fence along the edge of our yard, down to the end of our street. This segregated our entire community. Not only could we not walk with our neighbors to the swimming pool anymore, but, after that, I never again saw that man and his daughter—never again.

That really made an impression on me when I was young. And I value that our Brethren in Christ community rejects divisions like that. We say that we're committed to tearing down walls—literal and figurative—that separate people. We're committed to seeking reconciliation and understanding and forgiveness. And this reconciliation is not just between countries, but between all humans—spouses, parents, siblings, neighbors, co-workers, and so on. If we are to be known as children of God, we must hear and take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called the children of God." The Church of Jesus is called to truly love each other and to tear down every barrier. And when we participate in that, I think that we help paint a picture of what Jesus' coming kingdom will be like.

PARTING WORDS

CHURCH OF THE OPEN ROBE

One doctor's prescription for becoming a more authentic faith community

by PERRY ENGLE

He seemed to appear out of nowhere. You could tell he was a professional man, around 50 and nicely dressed. Apparently he'd been eavesdropping on our conversation on the patio outside of the café. He handed us a slip of paper with his contact information. If we didn't mind, he'd like to join us sometime for our discussion on Church and following Jesus.

He showed up the next time we met. The members of our group are all ministry leaders of some kind, and so I listened a little more attentively when he said he works as an emergency room physician. Twenty-some years in the same practice. His wife works as an ER doctor, as well. I imagined the stories they would exchange each evening after the kids had gone to bed.

"I have an image of the Church I'd like to share with you," he said, diving in like an old friend. "Imagine a Church that is really a hospital. Everyone is in some stage of trauma, and you can see it on everyone's face. No one can hide their injuries. All of them are shuffling around, sliding their IV poles beside them. And here's the best part. Everyone has on those hospital robes with the slit down the back—the kind that flaps open when you walk. Everyone is open to everyone else, and there is no way to hide. And it's really ok, because everyone is in the same situation, and everyone can see each other as they actually are."

The visual was too much. We laughed. We made the requisite hilarious comments (pastors can be really funny outside of the church). And then we began to reflect and wonder aloud if such a Church was even possible.

A Church where Jesus is the attending physician. And the pews are filled with people attached to IV poles with the slow, steady drip of love, forgiveness, and mercy. And all the people who don't think they're sick, or who don't want other people thinking they're sick, or who are above wearing those embarrassing, flimsy gowns, go somewhere else and let Jesus attend to the people with the open robes.

People like the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears with an open robe of shame. Or the tax collector who couldn't even lift his eyes to Heaven offering his gift in the temple with an open robe of unworthiness. Or the disciple following his denial of Christ with an open robe of regret. The cohort of lepers with open robes of rejection. The father of a sick child with an open robe of despair.

Move slowly and deliberately through the corridors of Scripture, and in every room you'll find the disease of sin taking its toll. Walk the halls of each of our lives, and you'll find each of us a sinner.

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," Jesus said in Matthew 9:12, reclining in the home of a tax collector, surrounded by a room full



Illustration by Gregory Snader

Imagine a Church that is really a hospital. Everyone is in some stage of trauma . . . and it's really ok.

of scoundrels. He's talking about every single one of us, and He's inviting us into this gathering of the broken, the needy, the corrupt, and the greedy—a gathering of people exposed to each other, and wide open to God.

"Gotta get to work," said the doctor, as he pushed back from the table. We thanked him for joining us and prayed with him. And then he was gone—off to see all of those people with the open robes.



Perry Engle believes if the Apostle Paul was the worst of sinners, then he's a close second. He is also bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Regional Conferences, and lives with his wife, Marta, and their family in Ontario, Calif.

2014

Week of Prayer and Fasting

JANUARY 5-12

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” —Acts 1:8

Each year, BIC churches across the U.S. embark on a new year by spending time with God and the community of faith in prayer.

Visit BIC-CHURCH.ORG to find resources for the 2014 Week of Prayer and Fasting, including:

- Daily devotionals, with Scripture readings, reflections, and prayers
- New ideas for prayer, as individuals, small groups, and congregations
- Prayer requests and praises from local, regional, national, and global contexts

Jesus
is . . .



Brethren in Christ Church
in the U.S.

**general
conference**
2014

Lancaster Mennonite School
July 11-14, 2014

Every two years, pastors and lay leaders from BIC churches across the U.S. come together to worship God, discuss questions facing the Church, and make decisions that guide the denomination.

General Conference 2014 will be the first time since 1946 that we'll gather in Lancaster County, Pa., the birthplace of the Brethren in Christ Church. All are welcome!

Visit BIC-CHURCH.ORG/GC2014 as information on accommodations, schedule, and events are made available.

GC 2014 registration opens on December 2, 2013.