

## Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

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Church of the Brethren

May 7, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

*“When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days? And I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” Nehemiah 1:4 (RSV)*

Nehemiah’s spiritual world was shaken when he heard Hanani’s report on the conditions in Jerusalem and Judah. He engaged in two of the most effective spiritual disciplines in the Hebrew tradition, prayer and fasting. As he did so, a new vision from God began to become clear. We find that this process is mentioned numerous times in the scripture. Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, often went away to engage in these disciplines.

The past few months have been difficult for the world economy in general. The church, being a part of society, has been seriously affected. Staff reductions have taken place. Giving has decreased significantly in some areas. Investments have been frozen or not as productive. Pastoral programs have been reduced. Pensions for retired pastors and church workers are facing a reduction in the assumption rate. There are many ways that individuals, congregations and other groupings could react. Bitterness and anger could develop. Blaming could lead to further deterioration in relationships. Selfishness and covetousness could manifest themselves.

As Christians, we believe, like our spiritual forebears, that the first reaction to difficulty and trouble is to devote ourselves to prayer and fasting. Prayer changes our inner selves and brings compliance with God’s design. Fasting helps us to clear the mind and discern God’s direction with greater clarity. The purpose of such disciplines is not to enact measurable change in the outer world, it is to allow God to change our interior world.

As the Annual Conference Moderator, I join with the leaders of the Annual Conference agencies and the Council of District Executives, in urging every congregation and every member of the Church of the Brethren to set aside May 24-31, 2009 as a “Season of Prayer and Fasting” on behalf of the denomination in particular and the wider church and society in general. Please use the following resource as both a guide and a beginning point for your prayers and meditations during this season prior to Pentecost. Please encourage the placement of these in your worship bulletin for Sunday, May 24th. In addition, we ask that you post the list on your congregation’s bulletin board and/or website if possible. Make a special effort to draw attention to them during your Worship Services, Bible Studies and Prayer Meetings.

May the Lord give us grace, patience and wisdom as we continue the work of Jesus every day and as we prepare for the Annual Conference in San Diego.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Shumate".

David K. Shumate

# *A Season of Prayer & Fasting for the Life and Work of the Church*

May 24 – 31, 2009

## **Daily Themes and Scriptures:**

### **Sunday, May 24**

*Theme: Deeply Rooted*

**Scripture: Psalm 1(3)**

*He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in due season.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- *Acknowledge God's goodness, power and abundant love for all.*
- *Give thanks for God's steadfast love for the Church of the Brethren over the past 300 years.*
- *Give thanks for the faithfulness of Brethren leaders, past and present.*

### **Monday, May 25**

*Theme: "You will be my witnesses."*

**Scripture: Acts 1: 1-10 (8)**

*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.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- *Give thanks for the Church of the Brethren Mission & Ministry Board as it leads our denomination in service and mission to a hurting world.*
- *Pray for the church as it reaches out to individuals and communities near and far with the healing love and power of the gospel.*
- *Give thanks for those servants of the church who have recently lost their employment. May they receive wisdom and guidance as they discern God's will for their life and ministry.*
- *Pray for God's wisdom and guidance for all who serve in positions of leadership within the Church of the Brethren.*

### **Tuesday, May 26**

*Theme: Together*

**Scripture: Acts 2:42-47 (44-45)**

*All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- *Give thanks for the ministry of Brethren Benefit Trust and the challenge it gives to us to care for the needs of the church and for the needs of one another.*
- *Pray that your congregation might be attuned to the needs of persons in your community who may be struggling during these difficult economic times.*
- *Ask God to help you to find ways to work to strengthen relationships within your congregation, your district and the wider church.*

### Wednesday, May 27

**Theme: Messengers of Reconciliation**

**Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:18-19**

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- Give thanks for the ministry of On Earth Peace and Christ's vision peace and reconciliation that it holds before us.
- Pray for a greater awareness of our need for reconciliation within our families, our congregations, our communities and our world.

### Thursday, May 28

**Theme: Many Gifts, One Spirit**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11(4-6)**

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- Give thanks for the ministry of Bethany Theological Seminary as it prepares pastors and leaders for the church.
- Give thanks for God's gifts of knowledge. Ask God to give you wisdom as you cultivate this gift within yourself so that you will use it for "the glory of God and my neighbor's good."

### Friday, May 29

**Theme: Many Parts, One Body**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 (12-13)**

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

**Prayer Emphases:**

- Praise God for the many men and women who serve Christ and the church faithfully in our districts and congregations.
- Pray for God's wisdom and direction for our pastors and district leaders as they lead us during these challenging times.
- Pray for a greater awareness of our connectedness and dependence upon one another as members of the Body of Christ.

## **Saturday, May 30**

**Theme:** *The Old Has Gone; The New Has Come.*

**Scripture:** *2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (17)*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

### **Prayer Emphases:**

- Give thanks for the ministry of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference as it facilitates the work of the church. Ask for God's guidance and inspiration for our Moderator and officers who lead the conference.
- Pray for the gathering of the community of faith on June 26-30 in San Diego.
- Ask God to show you what new thing He is creating in your life and in the life of the church today.

## **Sunday, May 31—Pentecost Sunday**

**Theme:** *Renewal of the Spirit*

**Scripture:** *Acts 2:1-21 (18)*

*Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

### **Prayer Emphases:**

- Give thanks for your faith community and its impact upon your life and spiritual growth as a disciple of Christ.
- Pray for the outpouring of the Spirit on all God's people as they worship today.
- Pray for the leading of the Spirit as the Church of the Brethren and its congregations look to the future.

## **Suggestions for Fasting:**

**General Approach:** You may approach fasting in any manner you choose, consistent with good health practices. The purpose of fasting in this context is to keep the focus on prayer

### **Particular Methods:**

- Fast from one meal per day.
- Fast from desserts.
- Simply keep meals very light for the entire week.
- Fast for one day during the week (e.g., from sunset on 24<sup>th</sup> until sunset on 25<sup>th</sup>).