



## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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"History Matters" is published three times a year by the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. No subscription charge. Comments, ideas, article suggestions, and letters about "History Matters" may be directed to the Editor:

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## President's Report for 2023

by John R. Yeatts

This was a rejuvenating year for the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. We welcomed one new member, Christina Embree from Lexington, Kentucky. Christina is a church planter, on the pastoral staff at Plowshares Brethren in Christ Church, and founder and president of ReFocus Ministry, which has the mission of connecting generations at church and at home. One of our goals is to bring younger persons into leadership of the Historical Society. Therefore, I am delighted that I am now the only officer that can reasonably be categorized as "old."

We are deeply indebted to our diligent, resourceful staff members who consented to stay in their positions for the immediate future to continue the work of the Society and train persons to sometime move into their positions. Along with the officers, the executive director and editor carry the major workload of the Society.

Our Annual Heritage Service was a joint meeting with our historic brothers and sisters—the Old Order River Brethren, United Zion, and Brethren in Christ Churches. The September annual meeting focused on the seventieth anniversary of the Brethren in Christ Church in Japan. Thanks to our executive director for effective planning and implementation of these excellent programs.

Issues of *Brethren in Christ History and Life* in 2023 included (or will include) scholarly papers from the Sider Institute Conference on Christian nationalism; Jonathan Stayer's exploration of how we got the name, Brethren in Christ; Wendy Urban-Mead's analysis of the Brethren in Christ Church in Rhodesia during World War I; and Richard Hughes's Schrag Lecture on questions related to the Anabaptist Vision. The journal has also continued its focus on storytelling: Costandy Saba's account of growing up in the midst of the Israeli-

Palestine conflict; Pauline Peifer's biography of her parents, Isaac and Maybelle Kanode; Marion Musser's survey of the history of New Hope Ministries in Pennsylvania; Zach Spidel's recovery of the story of Rhoda Lee and how the denomination came to accept women in ministry; Charlotte Brechbill White's account of her Brethren in Christ childhood; Timothy Epp's narrative on how Anabaptists addressed "blackness"; and Nancy and M.J. Heisey's story of Elsie Bechtel's relief work in France after World War II.

Larger projects are in process: Devin Manzullo-Thomas's two manuscripts, a biography of E. Morris and Leone Sider and a history of the Brethren in Christ in the twentieth century; Daryl Climenhaga's history of Brethren in Christ Missions, and Jean Smith Hunsberger's biography of her father, Robert Smith. Thanks to our competent, visionary editor Harriet Sider Bicksler for her hours of work nurturing these articles and books from research to publication.

The Historical Society board approved a formal process for how we will work with potential book authors. Thanks to the Book Publishing Exploratory Committee David Weaver-Zercher, Chair; Glen Pierce; and Harriet Sider Bicksler for their work on this important project.

Our president and executive director met with Alan Robinson, national director of Brethren in Christ U.S. to talk about the relationship between the Historical Society and the church. We reviewed our covenant and affirmed our agreement to meet annually. The Historical Society also reaffirms our goal to serve as a resource to the Church.

We are grateful for those who serve the Historical Society in so many ways. Pray for us as we work to support the Brethren in Christ Church and its members.

## Annual Meeting Celebrates the Seventieth Anniversary of the Brethren in Christ in Japan

The 2023 Annual Meeting was held on Saturday, September 30, 2023, at the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. The focus of the meeting was the Brethren in Christ Church in Japan which celebrates its seventieth anniversary this year. Daniel Deyhle, Ray Hock, and Ruth Zook—all former missionaries to Japan with their spouses—participated in a panel discussion about their time in Japan, led by Ken Hoke, executive director (see photo). We also heard greetings by audio from the church in Japan.



# Short Histories of Two Brethren in Christ Congregations in Africa

by Ayibongwe Hlongwane, Japhison Mudenda, Dwight W. Thomas, and Ruth Frank

Brethren in Christ churches in Zimbabwe and Zambia vary: some are rural, some are urban; some are very big, others quite small; some are firmly established and fully recognized; others are fledgling “preaching points.” Below are descriptions of two congregations, one in Zimbabwe, and the other in Zambia.

## Bulale Brethren in Christ, Zimbabwe

Bulale is a rural church located in Matopo Far West Zone. Rev. Ayibongwe Hlongwane, overseer of Matopo District, describes it as “a small church with sixteen members. It serves as a Zonal Center for Matopo Far West Zone which has five churches.” Started in 1996, a series of people birthed and nurtured it as it developed: Rev Oscar Manzini (current overseer of the Wanezi District), Alexius Nkomo, Supreme Ncube, Nhlalambi Sibanda, Elinah Mpofu, and Nigel Nyathi.

The current pastor, Olly Ncube, and faithful local leaders like Deacon Jecho Dube continue to shepherd the congregation. According to her overseer, Rev Ayibongwe Hlongwane, “Mrs. Olly Ncube is a lay preacher who has never undergone full theological training, but she is equipped through short district and national training programs.” The Zimbabwean Brethren in Christ Church was relatively forward-looking in its training of women and has had a vibrant tradition of “Bible Women.” Pastor Olly Ncube falls in a long line of committed Zimbabwean female church members, but she has faced challenges. Rev. Hlongwane notes, “Pastor Olly Ncube in her leadership testimony states that it was tough when she got into pastoral leadership, being the first female pastor in her church. It was hard for men to submit to her leadership, and she remembers vividly when one male congregant prayed, ‘Lord! We are heading for disaster since we are led by females.’ His prayer discouraged Sister Ncube and she felt like giving up, but with the encouragement of her overseer, she kept pushing forward.”

Bulale is located in the heart of the Matopo Hills due west of Matopo Mission. At the end of the nineteenth century, these hills served as refuge for the Ndebele from British military. This area is also widely recognized as a stronghold for traditional ancestral worship, a fact that has sometimes impeded the work of the church. However, these same hills now echo with the voices of faithful believers in small churches like Bulale. Remember Bulale and its nearby congregations in prayer as they seek to follow Christ.



*Bulale Brethren in Christ Church, Zimbabwe*



*Bulale Brethren in Christ, Zimbabwe*

## Sichikali Brethren in Christ Church, Zambia

Sichikali Brethren in Christ Church is about twenty to thirty kilometers southeast of Batoka along the Zambezi escarpment. The founders of this church were Brethren in Christ converts in collaboration with Brethren in Christ missionaries. It is likely that the church and school began after the planting of Sikalongo Mission in the early 1920s or 1930s. In this process of opening a church and school, a teacher who was also a preacher was identified and sent to begin works at Sichikali.

It is believed that relatives from the “Mushanga” and “Moono” families could be the earliest converts and founders of the church and school at this place. Living relatives from the two families are strong members in the church today.

Congregants at Sichikali originally worshipped in a small grass-roofed shelter with poles as the walls and logs as chairs for many years. In 2009, the assignment committee sent Pastor Moses Zemba to be pastor of this congregation. He and the family of Deacon Moono, working with other leaders in the church, started building a modern structure using available resources: molding and baking bricks, buying cement, iron sheets, and labor using contributed funds from the members. In 2021, the church embarked on building the pastor’s house.

Sunday worship at Sichikali Church has activities for all ages. The main worship service includes singing praise songs, giving tithes and offerings, praying, reading scripture, and preaching the Word. After the main worship service, there is a Bible Study.

The partnership between the Republic of Zambia and the church is visible at the primary school. Two houses for teachers and two classroom blocks were built by the church in 1950s and 1960s. The structures still stand and are used by the school for teachers and pupils.

Sichikali continues to meet daily challenges. The village relies on gardening for financial income to support the church, but the village needs a reliable source of water since the current source is filled with sand. There are tentative plans to build a dam. Keep Sichikali in your prayers as we continue to serve our Lord.

## News and Notes

*From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives*

### Digging Deeper into the History of the Japan Brethren in Christ Church

If you attended this year's annual meeting of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society (or read the report of that gathering on page 1), you'll know that the Japan Brethren in Christ Church celebrates its seventieth anniversary in 2023.

You may be surprised to learn that the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives has a variety of materials related to the history of this national conference, including published histories, unpublished records, and photographs. Here are some highlights from the materials in our collection.

### *The Threshold is High: The Brethren in Christ in Japan*, by Doyle C. Book

In this historical study, Doyle C. Book traces the founding and development of the Brethren in Christ Church in Japan from 1953 to 1985. He tells stories of North American missionaries and national church leaders drawn from historical records such as published articles, correspondence, reports, and interviews. Additionally, as a former missionary himself, he offers insights into the dynamics involved in communicating the gospel across cultural barriers and comments on possible reasons for the church's growth (and lack thereof).

### *Hospitality Recipe Book*\*

(\*Note: This title is translated into English from Japanese.)

Published in 2008 and added to our collection in 2018, this cookbook was used by the Shimonoseki Church. According to material by Mitsuko Kato and Mitsuko Kaneko in the back of the book, the recipes are based on those used by Brethren in Christ missionary women who taught cooking classes at the church.

### *Firewood-Field of Japan*, by Pete Willms

Written by a Brethren in Christ missionary, this book tells the story of a Japanese man whose name can be translated "Firewood-Field" and who converted to Christianity. According to the back cover blurb, the story "should be looked upon as typical of a great many people who are faithfully following Christ in an extremely difficult culture."

### *Our Journey into the Heart of Japan*, by John W. Graybill

Written by a longtime Brethren in Christ missionary, this book offers personal reflections on service to the church in that nation, including reminiscences of discipling Japanese Christians and comments on the challenges faced in communicating the gospel in that cultural setting.

The Archives has a collection of more than five hundred photographic prints, slides, and other images documenting the history of the church in Japan. Below are three representative images from that collection.



Henry Hostetter (third from left), director of missions for the Brethren in Christ Church in North America, meets with Japanese church leaders during his visit to the country in 1969.



The Yamanota Church in Japan, probably in the 1980s or 1990s.



Hajimi Uno, a seminary student, giving his testimony during a worship service at the Tokyo Brethren in Christ Church, in May 1984.





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## Images from the Past

*From the photograph collection of the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives*



These three photos were taken at the last Brethren in Christ General Conference (now Assembly) held in Ohio—at Memorial Holiness Camp, in 1972.

**Top:** Delegates age 70 and over

**Middle:** Delegates age 25 and under

**Bottom:** Women members of Conference



One wonders what the same group shots would look like if taken of delegates to the 2024 Brethren in Christ General Assembly, which will be held next year in Cincinnati, OH.

