

BenefitNews

NEWS ABOUT THE MINISTRIES OF BROTHERS BENEFIT TRUST

FOURTH QUARTER 2006

Credit Union

New savings options for kids, youth groups, and adults

The Church of the Brethren Credit Union began offering new savings options this month to facilitate good stewardship practices. The new products include regular money market accounts, Traditional IRA and Roth IRA money market accounts, Coverdell Education money market accounts, and five unique club savings accounts.

Two of the new savings accounts, the Kids Club and the Youth Club, are designed especially for children. The Credit Union feels so strongly about the importance of encouraging children to become disciplined savers — it is part of CoBCU's mission — that these accounts offer a higher rate of interest. Nothing teaches sound financial practices like first-hand experience; opening a savings account for your children is an excellent way to get them started on the road to good stewardship. The Kids Club is available to any child through the age of 12; the Youth Club from ages 13 to 18.

The new Christmas Club and Vacation Club savings accounts are designed to encourage members to plan ahead and save towards specific goals, thereby avoiding excessive credit card debt and the risk of

late payment fees and high interest rates. These accounts earn a higher dividend than regular savings, but require a monthly deposit. Withdrawals are limited to four per year.

The Brethren Youth Mission Club is truly unique to the Church of the Brethren. It is offered to encourage participation in Brethren service or educational opportunities such as National Youth Conference, Christian Citizenship Seminar, workcamps, or local projects. The Brethren Youth Mission Club is available to any individual, youth group, Sunday school class, congregation, or district.

Also now available from the Credit Union, and just in time for



Sarah Kovacs for the General Board

Two new savings clubs offered by CoBCU are for youth planning to attend a Brethren workcamp or the next National Youth Conference.

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Staff News

BBT welcomes Mason and Wittmeyer



Nevin Dulabaum

Jay Wittmeyer (left) and Steve Mason recently joined the BBT staff.

A new director of the Brethren Foundation and a new manager of publications joined the Brethren Benefit Trust staff about six weeks ago when **Steve Mason** and **Jay Wittmeyer** became the organization's two newest employees.

Steve Mason joined the Brethren Foundation on Nov. 1. With continued, steady growth by the 16-year-old ministry, the time had come to name a full-time director. BFI currently manages \$125 million in assets and deferred gifts for more than 200 congregations and organizations.

Steve's time will be devoted solely to the Foundation and the related work of investments and socially responsible

investing. He will work to strengthen the Foundation's client relationships, explore adding new services and resources to improve customer service, and assist congregations and organizations with their respective planned-giving initiatives.

Steve came to the Brethren Foundation from the Community Foundation of Wabash County (Ind.), where he had served as executive director. Previously, Steve served as vice president for

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Your personal financial portfolio and betting the family farm?

Individuals work a lifetime to create a nest egg for their retirement and a legacy to pass on to their family, church, or charity, only to find it is depleted in a few short years by prolonged nursing care. Without purchasing Long-Term Care (LTC) insurance, individuals are quite literally betting the family farm that a debilitating health condition will not affect them.

LTC insurance will defray the costs of extended nursing care services — either in the home or at a care facility — for a family member who is unable to perform the normal activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing, getting in and out of bed, or using the toilet. Such need can result from an unexpected accident or incapacitating disease or stroke.

Long-term nursing care is \$\$\$\$

Nursing home care averages \$66,000 per year (\$5,500 per month), but can be as high as \$100,000 in parts of the U.S. If an individual moves into a nursing home facility for an average stay of two and a half years, typically following three years of home care, the out-of-pocket expenditures can exceed \$250,000. Moreover, costs continue to rise; in 2020, a one-year nursing home stay is projected to exceed \$160,000.

Most health care plans will not cover these costs. Nor will Medicaid. Many individuals erroneously believe that, if disaster should

strike, they would be able to systematically transfer assets to their children and then look to government programs to cover the expense of LTC insurance.

Long-Term Care Insurance is right for YOU if . . .

- You have assets to protect
- You cannot afford LTC as an out-of-pocket expense
- You want to protect your family from providing your LTC
- You will not be eligible for Medicaid
- You want to ensure control over your assets

A new federal law, the Deficit Reduction Act, passed in February 2006, has tightened eligibility requirements for Medicaid and has addressed the practice of asset divestment. A family must first spend down its own assets on nursing care expenses before it will be eligible to receive Medicaid benefits. This includes home equity, i.e., the family farm, which is now considered in determining Medicaid eligibility.

Besides asset protection, LTC insurance can provide more opportunities for quality

time with family by sparing family members — often adult children — the emotional and physical burden of being one's primary caregiver, as well as the awkwardness of providing hands-on nursing care to one's parents. LTC insurance can ensure that the lives of your family members are not unduly disrupted to devote to your long-term care.

LTC insurance also provides independence and choice. It can be provided in a variety of settings, including one's own home, a group family home, an assisted living facility, or a nursing home. LTC insurance gives the opportunity to choose which type of care one receives and where. In general, LTC insurance can allow an individual to reside in one's home for a longer period of time.

There are many variables that determine whether LTC is the best option for a family. BBT encourages you to be informed and to contact an LTC agent if you have questions.

BBT has an LTC group plan with Coventry CareLink to provide coverage for Church of the Brethren employees and their extended families. If you have questions regarding that insurance, please contact Coventry CareLink at www.coventrycarelink.com or at 877-782-4663. Representatives can answer questions, give cost estimates specific to your situation, and help you plan for the future. — JW

BBT at the 2006 National Older Adult Conference



Nevin Dulabaum

More than 140 NOACers participate in the Brethren Foundation-sponsored walk/run, which raised almost \$3,000 for the Global Food Crisis Fund.



Ed Garrison

Matt Meyer, Walt Gingrich, Willard "Duly" Dulabaum, and Ronn Moyer prepare to hit the links in the NOAC golf outing, sponsored by Brethren Foundation.



Ed Garrison

BBT offered workshops on navigating through the healthcare system, how to be a socially responsible consumer, useful computer tips and tricks, and digital photography.

Churches can be a positive force in fighting obesity

America is experiencing an obesity epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 65 percent of all adults are overweight and 30 percent are considered obese. Weight-related diseases will soon surpass smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.

Weight control has become the primary focus of public health intervention today, and every aspect of American life is being evaluated according to how it affects this national struggle. This includes religion, with some very disturbing results.

Sociologist Ken Ferraro of Purdue University's Center on Aging and the Life Course has studied the relationship between religion and obesity and has come to this shocking conclusion — "Churches are promoting gluttony and contributing to the obesity of their members."

In an eight-year study, recently published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Ferraro analyzed the correlation between religious practices and the body mass index (BMI) of more than 2,500 people. His research showed that religious affiliation is a positive indicator of obesity.

The results are counterintuitive, as other

research shows that religion has an overall positive effect on health. People who regularly attend church, read the Bible, or pray tend to have lower blood pressure, are hospitalized less often, are less likely to suffer from depression, and tend to live longer. Religion discourages certain vices, such as smoking or heavy drinking, and, thus, contributes to good health.

However, if the church continues to grow, so to speak, the negative impact of obesity will outweigh these benefits. Overweight people are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses like adult-onset diabetes, arthritis, and coronary heart disease.

If religious leaders and organizations neglect this issue, Ferraro warned, they will contribute to an epidemic that will cost the health care system millions of dollars and reduce the quality of life for many parishioners.

The church's response to obesity is in stark contrast to its attitude toward smoking. The church was decades ahead of the national consciousness in fighting smoking with the dictum, "Keep pure the temple of the Holy Spirit." The same standard is simply not there regarding America's current epidemic. Smoke is impure; trans-fat is not.

Many church activities are centered around unhealthy foods, from donuts at fellowship time to sundae services and cheesy casseroles. These implicitly state that this is how we celebrate — with high fat. Individuals are challenged daily to make healthy lifestyle choices. Church members need to challenge their congregations to make similar choices to improve the overall wellness of their members.

Churches are uniquely positioned to lead the way toward a healthier America. They are a wonderful resource for education and have the moral authority to help counteract destructive behaviors. Ferraro believes that churches can be a positive force in fighting obesity if clergy will simply model and encourage physical health as an important part of a person's spiritual well-being.

Some congregations have intentionally redefined their ministry towards a wholistic faith

and have instituted health-related programs, such as health screenings, blood drives, and fitness classes; some have even added a parish nurse to their staff. Many churches encourage activities that are healthy, like church-league sports, walking for a cause, or cleaning up roadside litter, although these initiatives are not primarily intended to improve health.

Ferraro's research showed that obesity rates varied by religious affiliation —

- Baptist: 30 percent
- Fundamentalist Protestant: 22 percent (including Church of Christ, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Church of God)
- Pietistic Protestant: 19 percent (including Methodist, Christian Church)
- Catholic: 17 percent
- Reformation-Era Protestant: 9 percent
- No religion: 7 percent
- Non-denominational Protestant: 5 percent
- Non-traditionalist: 3 percent (including Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Seventh-day Adventist, and Christian Scientist)
- Jewish: 1 percent
- Other non-Christian: 0.7 percent (including Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist)

Why the differences among sects? Ferraro thinks education levels and, therefore, socioeconomic status partly come into play. The specific religious practices of dietary restrictions and regular fasting habits may also be a factor. Some sects need to re-examine their theology against gluttony and sloth.

The study did not specifically test obesity rates in the Anabaptist communities, but we know our challenges. We also know our strengths. Brethren can look to our doctrine of simplicity to more actively promote a wholistic faith — *Living simply so that others can simply live.*

As the body of Christ becomes more aware of its bulging BMI, not being conformed to the image of the world has taken on a new light. Obesity is a national epidemic that must be addressed and the church, now part of the problem, can lead the way. — JWV



Nevin Dulabaum

Two national wellness-related initiatives have been launched over the past two years within the Church of the Brethren. In 2005, Association of Brethren Caregivers initiated its "Lighten Up, Brethren" campaign. In 2006, at Annual Conference and at NOAC, ABC, BBT, and the General Board offered "Passport to Wellness" activities. BBT's Fitness Challenge at Annual Conference (above) was one of those activities.

BFI crosses the \$125 million threshold

Due to the addition of new organizational clients and the recent strong overall performance of equities, the Brethren Foundation for the first time has crossed the \$125 million mark for assets and deferred gifts under its management.

The push to BFI's all-time high came from new monies invested over the past two months and from the recent overall surge in stocks. Quarter-to-date as of late November, the S&P 500 domestic stock index had risen 4.89 percent while the MSCI EAFE international stock index had gained 4.62 percent.

"One hundred twenty five million dollars is a significant threshold for BFI to pass," said Steve Mason, BFI director. "When the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference approved the creation of the Brethren Foundation in 1990, the vision was for this Brethren Benefit Trust ministry to provide sound investment and deferred gift management for churches, organizations, and individuals. While BFI's recent asset growth

can be seen as proof that the organization is fulfilling its mission, it also underscores the responsibility that BFI has in managing the assets of more than 200 congregations and agencies and the deferred gifts of Church of the Brethren members."

The Foundation provides 11 fund choices that are competitive with industry benchmarks, including stock funds, bond funds, a short-term fund, and a community development fund. BFI's funds are managed by eight national investment managers, which staff review quarterly. BFI's performance returns can be found at www.brethrenbenefittrust.org under "Brethren Foundation." — ND



Steve Mason discusses BFI with guests at the November BBT Board meeting in Bridgewater, Va.

Nevin Dulbaum

Pre-approval puts you in the driver's seat

A trip to a dealership showroom can be a stressful experience. With the heavy marketing of last-chance deals and special financing options, the buyer is often overwhelmed. "Do you want the zero percent financing or cash back?" On-the-spot decisions may allow you to drive away with a new vehicle, but they can also tie you to a poor financial decision for several years.

The Credit Union can help. Before going to a dealer, visit the Credit Union online. Taking the easy step of obtaining pre-approval for a loan eliminates stress and prepares you to negotiate your next purchase. The Credit Union can answer your questions, calculate the expected monthly payment



Applying for a loan online is easy and fast. Just visit www.cobcu.org and click on "Loans" and then "online application."

for a vehicle, and can even determine its current market value. Pre-approval puts you in the driver's seat.

The pre-approval process is fast and easy and in no way obligates you to finance through the Credit Union. You can apply online at www.cobcu.org by clicking on "Loans," and simply filling in the necessary information. The Credit Union staff will contact you shortly thereafter to finalize your pre-approval. You can also print an application and mail it to the Credit Union or apply by phone, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. CST.

You can also get pre-approval by the Credit Union on a loan for the purchase of a motorcycle or boat.

The Credit Union may even be able to lower your monthly payment on a current vehicle by refinancing the loan at a lower rate of interest. To obtain our current loan rates, visit the Credit Union Web site at www.cobcu.org or call us at **888-832-1383**. — Dennis Kingery

Credit Union

"New savings clubs..." Continued from Page 1

Christmas, are the Coverdell Education money market accounts. This year, one gifting idea could be to open a Coverdell education money market account for your children or grandchildren. Regular contributions to the accounts could be made on subsequent Christmases and birthdays, or at any time.

Money market accounts earn higher dividend rates than regular savings accounts, but limit withdrawals to six a month. Regular money market accounts reward members who maintain a balance of \$2,500 with a higher interest rate. The Traditional IRA and Roth IRA accounts and the Coverdell Education accounts do not have a minimum balance requirement.

Members who wish to contribute regularly to their retirement savings or toward savings for education will benefit from these money market accounts; as their balances reach set amounts, members can transfer their funds into IRA or Coverdell certificates to earn even higher dividends.

For more information or to open a money market or a club account, contact the Credit Union at **888-832-1383** or at dkingery_bbt@brethren.org. — Dennis Kingery

Year-end reminders

Dental and Vision Claims

As a reminder, all dental and vision claims with dates of service prior to Aug. 1, 2006, are to be submitted to the Brethren Benefit Trust Insurance Department by Dec. 31, 2006. If you are aware of any outstanding claims, please contact your provider to have those claims submitted to BBT as soon as possible.

Dental and vision claims with dates of service after July 31, 2006, are to be submitted to Mennonite Mutual Aid, PO Box 483, Goshen, IN 46527.

Use or Lose your FlexCare Money

Brethren FlexCare balances must be spent down by year's end. Members of the Brethren Medical Plan who take advantage of the flexible spending accounts for either medical reimbursements or dependent care costs need to utilize the remainder of the money in their flexible spending account(s) by Dec. 31, 2006, or the balance(s) will be forfeited. FlexCare participants were recently notified of remaining balances.

All purchases and visits to providers must be completed in 2006. However, members will have until March 31, 2007, to submit account withdrawal forms and receipts to MMA (see above) for reimbursement.

If you need a Brethren FlexCare account withdrawal form, please contact Donna March (see below) or download the form from BBT's website. Go to www.brethrenbenefittrust.org and click on "Forms" and then "Insurance."

Identification Cards

Keep your Identification Card. New cards will not be reissued to members of the Brethren Medical Plan (BMP) and/or dental and vision plans whose coverage for 2007 is unchanged from 2006. A new card will only be issued if you have changed your family status by adding or dropping members or if you have changed your dental and/or vision coverage for 2007.

If you are enrolling in the BMP and/or dental and vision plans in 2007 and were not in either of these plans in 2006, you will be issued a card appropriate to your elected coverage.

If you have any question related to insurance, please contact Donna March at **800-746-1505** or at dmarc_bbt@brethren.org.



Attention Pension Plan members —

If your employment has ended, you must notify the Pension Plan in writing, specifying the date of termination. Please send this information to Lori Domich, Brethren Pension Plan, 1505 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Contact Lori with any questions at **800-746-1505** or at ldomich_bbt@brethren.org.



Staff News

"New staff..." Continued from Page 1

College Advancement at Manchester College in North Manchester, Ind.; executive director of Association of Brethren Caregivers; and as vice president for Financial Services and director of Development at McPherson College in Kansas.

"Steve's commitment to relationships and his experience with asset management and deferred gifts development and management will enable the Brethren Foundation to work more closely with its members to help them achieve their investment and planned-giving objectives," said Wil Nolen, BBT president. "We are pleased to have Steve join the BBT staff."

Steve and his wife, Marilyn, attend Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Ind.

Jay Wittmeyer, who started on Oct. 30, serves as manager of publications. His assignment is to coordinate BBT's newsletters and special resources, which includes writing some of the copy and editing all of the text, along with coordinating the planning and overseeing the production processes. Jay's immediate contributions to *Benefit News* can be seen in this issue as he researched and wrote the publication's ongoing columns on *Your Money* and *Heart, Soul, and Mind*.

Another portion of Jay's responsibilities that will become noticeable in the near future is his assignment to update and add content to Brethren Benefit Trust's Web site. He will work with staff to keep content up-to-date and fresh, adding resources and information to make the site more useful for current and prospective members and clients.

Jay brings strong writing and communication skills to this position with graduate degrees in English and Conflict Transformation. Before joining BBT, he was assistant director of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. Prior to that, Jay and his wife, Sarah, spent several terms of service with the Mennonite Central Committee in Bangladesh and Nepal. The Wittmeyers have four children and are members of Highland Ave. Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill. — ND



The BBT staff wish all of our members and clients, and their loved ones, a safe and blessed holiday season. May the love of Christ bring peace to your hearts and your lives.

BBT Holiday Hours

Brethren Benefit Trust will be closed in observance of the following holidays —
Monday, Dec. 25 — Christmas Day
Tuesday, Dec. 26 — Christmas-related holiday
Monday, Jan. 1 — New Year's Day

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