

## **What we believe**

The central emphasis of the Church of the Brethren is not a creed, but a commitment to follow Christ in simple obedience, to be faithful disciples in the modern world. As do most other Christians, the Brethren believe in God as Creator and loving Sustainer. We confess the Lordship of Christ, and we seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life, thought, and mission. We hold the New Testament as our guidebook for living, affirming with it the need for lifelong and faithful study of the Scriptures. Brethren believe that God has revealed an unfolding purpose for the human family and the universe through the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament), and fully in the New Testament. We hold the New Testament as the record of the life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of the beginnings of the life and thought of the Christian church. Faithful following of Jesus Christ and obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures have led us to emphasize principles that we believe are central in true discipleship. Among these are peace and reconciliation, simple living, integrity of speech, family values, and service to neighbors near and far.

(Drawn from “The Brethren Heritage,” Elizabethtown College)

## **What it means to be a Christian**

The specific words vary from congregation to congregation as members are received into the church, but all affirm their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They promise to turn from sin and to live in faithfulness to God and to the church, taking the example and teachings of Jesus as a model. Brethren never stop discussing what that model means for the daily life of the believer. Seeking to

follow Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world” (NRSV), Brethren insist members should not thoughtlessly adopt the patterns of the world around them. At an earlier time, features like dress, homes, and meetinghouses were distinctively plain as we sought to live what was called “the simple life.” Brethren refused military service and practiced nonviolence in the face of violence. We refused to take oaths or go to court to solve problems. These practices set us apart from the world. Today we seek to interpret biblical teachings in fresh ways for our day. We encourage members to think about what they buy and how they use their money in an affluent society. We are sensitive to the limited resources of our global community. We encourage people to “affirm” rather than “swear” when taking an oath. With earlier Brethren, we believe that “our word should be as good as our bond.” Above all, Brethren seek to pattern our daily living after the life of Jesus: a life of humble service and unconditional love. As part of a larger body of believers—the church, the body of Christ—we go into all the world today with a mission of witness, service, and reconciliation.

(Drawn from “Who Are These Brethren?,” by Joan Deeter; “Reflections on Brethren Heritage and Identity,” Brethren Press; “The Brethren Heritage,” Elizabethtown College)

### **How do we live out our faith?**

It is easy to talk about faith and never get around to doing anything. So the continuing call is to “walk the talk.” Alexander Mack, the leader of the earliest Brethren, insisted that they could be recognized “by the manner of their living.” Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, then, affects everything that we say and do.

Obedience—meaning obedience of Jesus—has been a key word among Brethren. What we do in the world is just as important as what we do in the church. Christ’s style of self-giving love is the example we are called to follow in all our relationships. That belief shows itself in the giving nature of Brethren. We respond quickly to need. We send money and volunteers to disaster sites. We support soup kitchens, day-care centers, and homeless shelters in our communities. Thousands of people have served around the world through Brethren Volunteer Service. People often know the Brethren through our ministries of compassion. We believe following Christ means following his example of serving others, healing the broken, and bringing new life and hope to the despairing. We take seriously Jesus’ call to love all people, including the “enemy.” In fact, the Church of the Brethren is known as one of the Historic Peace Churches. Brethren have considered participation in war to be unacceptable for Christians and have based this understanding on the teachings of Jesus and on other New Testament texts. In our concern for the well-being of neighbors near and far, Brethren have begun creative programs to enable the world’s poor to walk toward a better life. Heifer Project International (providing livestock for poor families) and SERRV International (supporting craft producers in developing countries), for example, were both begun by Brethren before they grew into ecumenical ministries. “For the glory of God and my neighbors’ good” was a motto of an early Brethren leader, whose own successful printing operation was destroyed due to his opposition to the Revolutionary War. This two-part phrase, turning us both toward God in devotion and toward our neighbors in service, remains an appropriate summary of the church’s understanding of the nature of Christian faith.

(Drawn from “Who Are These Brethren?,” Joan Deeter; and  
“Reflections on Brethren Witness” by David Radcliff)