

Fixing our eyes on Jesus? No thanks

By 2026 ANE District Conference Moderator David Sollenberger

A few weeks ago, I went around church during the Sunday school hour, asking people at random, “How does following Jesus impact your life?” for a Children’s Day video. Among the answers was a response from one man, who said, “It boils down to ‘What would Jesus do?’ in the varied circumstances in which I find myself.” And although he admitted he doesn’t always imitate what Jesus would do, at least he recognized that there is a recommended path of obedience.

The 2026 Atlantic Northeast District Conference theme of “Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus” from Hebrews 12 asks us to take Jesus’ words seriously. But what happens when we basically say, “Sorry, Jesus, I just disagree with you. I think you’re wrong.” Now that takes some gall, or hutzpah, or maybe arrogance—to say to the Savior of the world, “Go fly a kite.”

Our society’s unofficial “truth source,” artificial intelligence, lists its choices of the most difficult commandments of Jesus. Its top six are loving your enemies, forgiving without limits, giving up possessions, turning the other cheek, and loving God and neighbor perfectly. Most of us who are biblically literate and steeped in Church of the Brethren theology would likely be able to see why Jesus would advise those goals as God’s will for how we should live.

But when we wage war, cut off food and medicine from the needy, tear families apart, and advocate violence, we need to ask ourselves whether we are doing that because following Jesus is difficult, or because we just don’t think Jesus’ words should apply to us.

There are clearly complex choices in this world, but following the Jesus of the Bible should matter. It’s one thing to say, “I’m trying to do what Jesus tells me is the right thing, but it’s difficult.” It’s quite another to say, “I don’t care what Jesus said. I’m going to do what society, my government, my selfish ambition, or my friends tell me I should do.”

It may require taking the approach of an Old Testament phrase from a guy named Joshua, who proclaimed, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Do we have the will to take that approach? Or do we say, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus? Sorry, no thanks.”

Moderator David Sollenberger is a videographer from Annville, Pa., and a member of Mount Wilson Church of the Brethren. He has documented decades of conferences and programs of the denomination, including Annual Conference and National Youth Conference, where he has been a speaker. He is known at National Older Adult Conference for the humorous NOAC News. He has produced numerous documentaries about church ministries and history and has traveled to missions and sister churches in Nigeria and South Sudan, among others. He has served on the former General Board and on the Vision Interpretation and Implementation Committee for the Church of the Brethren Vision Statement 2012-2020. He served as the 2022 Moderator for the Church of the Brethren.

