2013 Department of Defense screens announced; oil and gas companies make this year’s list

Investing against war — as an agency of the peace-centered Church of the Brethren, Brethren Benefit Trust aims to take a stand against companies that have significant revenue streams from U.S. Department of Defense contracts. In April, the BBT Board approved screening lists that identify both the top 25 publicly traded Defense contractors and publicly traded companies that earn 10 percent or more of their revenue from Defense contracts. The companies on these lists are prohibited from appearing in BBT’s actively managed portfolios.

Among other household names that appear on the 2013 list, three consumer-based corporations have been added this year — BP, Royal Dutch Shell, and Valero Energy.

“It’s not just drone manufacturers and munitions producers that play a role in U.S. defense spending,” said Nevin Dulabaum, BBT president. “It’s also companies that we are asked to patronize on a regular basis. By choosing to support oil and gas companies that are not working in a significant way with the Department of Defense, our members can make daily decisions that reflect their values.”

The lists for 2013 can be viewed at brethrenbenefittrust.org/screening.

Peace is not the only historic Brethren value that BBT’s socially responsible investment program advocates for — firms that receive more than 10 percent of their revenue from abortion, alcohol, firearms and other weapons, gambling, pornography, or tobacco are also restricted from BBT portfolios. — B.S.

New features for Brethren Pension Plan explained in webinars for church workers

Enhancements are in store for Brethren Pension Plan users — and members are invited to attend webinars in June to learn about new tools and features they’ll be able to access starting July 1. Pastors and other church workers who are enrolled in the Plan may log in to a one-hour online tutorial to learn about Brethren Pension Plan’s new record-keeping system, daily valuations of accounts, and the new tools available through an updated Web portal.

To register for a webinar, contact Loyce Swartz Borgmann at 800-746-1505, ext. 364 or lborgmann@cobbt.org.

Demonstrations of the new Web portal and other key features of the enhanced Plan will be offered at Brethren Benefit Trust’s booth at Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in Charlotte, N.C. Stop by for a hands-on tutorial and 15-minute group sessions throughout the conference.

More information about Brethren Pension Plan’s transformation is available at brethrenbenefittrust.org/pension-transition.
It has often been said that actions speak louder than words. Brethren founder Alexander Mack believed in this concept. He and other Brethren living in the early 18th century believed that discipleship in Jesus meant walking the walk as well as talking the talk. He stated that people would recognize members of this new group, these Brethren, “by the manner of their living.” I believe that phrase is still appropriate for the group that has been a beacon of service and advocacy for those less fortunate around the world since Alexander Mack’s time. It is an appropriate phrase for a movement that includes the act of washing each other’s feet as Jesus did to his disciples as an example of service to others.

I was reminded of the strong value of being a proactive witness of service to and for others this spring when On Earth Peace announced it was organizing the 3,000 Miles for Peace challenge in honor of Paul Ziegler, a student at McPherson (Kan.) College who had dreamed of riding his bike across the country to raise awareness and funds for peacemaking. Tragically, he was struck and killed by an automobile last September while on his bike. To honor Paul’s dream, more than 50 initiatives have been organized throughout the country this year to enable groups and individuals to travel those 3,000 miles and to raise funds for peace.

One of these events was organized by Jeff Lennard, who is the marketing director for Brethren Press and one of my frequent cycling companions. “We need to ride for peace,” Jeff said to me upon learning of the OEP challenge. He insisted that it could not be a ride that was already scheduled; it had to be something special and unique, organized to celebrate Paul’s dream and Jesus’ call for peacemaking and advocacy. It did not matter that organizing such a ride would be difficult; that it would be difficult is why the ride would be a special witness.

Jeff mapped out a course from the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Ill., to Camp Emmaus, a Church of the Brethren camp in Mount Morris, Ill., and back to Elgin. Seven of us, most with ties to the national Church of the Brethren offices or to Highland Ave. Church of the Brethren in Elgin, made the trek on May 18-19, assisted by five volunteers. Combined, we rode 905 miles and raised more than $1,500 in Paul’s name.

Many who work for a church-associated organization, including all who are BBT members, work in the service of others — either as a pastor or as an employee of a church, district staff, retirement community, Brethren agency, or affiliated social service organization. How do each of us approach that service to others? We don’t have to be Brethren to embody Jesus’ call for proactive, challenging discipleship. Jeff isn’t Brethren, but he embodies some of the same values Alexander Mack held 300 years ago.

And Jeff had to convince me, a life-long Brethren, to participate in a ride that was inconvenient — another major event to all of our other activities that we have scheduled for this busy year.

Jesus never said being a disciple would be easy. One thing is certain: As we have seen in people like Alexander Mack or Jeff Lennard or countless others who consciously choose to follow Jesus’ call to promote peace and justice in a self-sacrificing way, their dedication to Christ’s teachings shines through in the manner of their living. — N.D.
In its *State of the Air* 2013 report, the American Lung Association reports that over 131.8 million Americans (42 percent of the population) live in counties in which “pollution levels are too often dangerous to breathe” due to either ozone or particle pollution. In early April, a U.N. official stated, “[Worldwide] air pollution is causing more deaths than HIV or malaria combined.” This statement was based on findings from a World Health Organization study from 2012, which revealed that annually 3.5 million people around the world die early from indoor air pollution, and 3.3 million die from outdoor air pollution.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 and similar measures around the world have helped humanity make great strides in air quality, but it is clear that more needs to be done both domestically and abroad.

**Poor air quality leads to widespread health concerns**

According to the National Resources Defense Council, asthma affects about 20 million Americans, and asthma attacks can be caused by a variety of environmental contaminants including ground-level ozone, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter including dust and smoke, and nitrogen oxide. The NRDC reported in 2002 that 30 percent of childhood asthma is due to environmental exposures, which costs the nation $2 billion per year.

If you suffer from asthma or have a weakened respiratory system, it is recommended that you check with the Environmental Protection Agency’s Air Quality Index, which examines air quality in regions across the country and rates them for safety. If measurements are high, consider altering your day’s plans to help you avoid exposure to outdoor air. To learn about the day’s air quality in your area, visit [airnow.gov/?action=aqibasics.aqi](http://airnow.gov/?action=aqibasics.aqi) and enter your ZIP code.

**Advocate against air pollution**

When was the last time you wrote a letter, typed an email, or telephoned your congress person about air quality in your region? One way to make a major impact on the sources of air pollution is government intervention. With support from lobbying organizations like the American Lung Association and others, major steps toward cleaner air in the U.S. and around the world occur every year. At the end of March, for instance, the EPA proposed new clean air standards for cars and trucks in the U.S. As a leading cause of air pollution, automobile reform can make a significant impact on overall air quality.

Brethren Benefic Trust serves as an advocate for the care of creation, too. Through its socially responsible investing program, BBT pledges to screen out companies from its actively managed portfolios that harm the environment. To learn more about SRI initiatives, visit [brethrenbenefittrust.org/socially-responsible-investing](http://brethrenbenefittrust.org/socially-responsible-investing). — B.S.
Annual Conference-goers: attend insight sessions, 5k, and more

From June 29 to July 3, Brethren Benefit Trust staff will be meeting with members, clients, and other attendees at Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, a yearly event for fellowship, church business, and spiritual strengthening. Learn about BBT’s events below —

BBT Fitness Challenge
Walk or run with BBT at its annual 5k event, which takes place at Freedom Park in Charlotte, N.C., at 7 a.m. on Sunday, June 30. This year, participants have the option of using the 5k to raise money for 3,000 Miles for Peace, a campaign sponsored by On Earth Peace that supports peace education, conflict resolution, peace churches, and nonviolent social change. Register for the BBT Fitness Challenge (and 3,000 Miles for Peace) by visiting brethrenbenefittrust.org/2013-fitness-challenge or stopping by the BBT booth on Saturday, June 29.

Brethren Pension Plan workshops
Fifteen-minute presentations outlining some exciting transformations to Brethren Pension Plan will take place throughout Annual Conference at the BBT booth. Get a tour of Brethren Pension Plan’s enhanced Web portal; learn about daily valuation and your new statement structure; ask questions about the Pension Plan’s new record keeper. Stop by the BBT booth to get the full schedule.

Insight sessions
What do you know about managing the business side of your church? What does it mean to be a socially responsible investor? What’s going on in the economy these days, and what changes are on the horizon? Get answers to these questions — and many more — at BBT’s six insight sessions. Review a schedule and summary of these sessions at brethrenbenefittrust.org/ac-workshops.

Not attending Annual Conference but want to have one of those sessions presented for your church, district, or workplace? Contact Loyce Swartz Borgmann at lborgmann@cobbt.org or 800-746-1505, ext. 364, to find out how to schedule a free session.

Memorial Tribute
Each year, Brethren Benefit Trust produces a video presentation honoring Pension Plan members and Church of the Brethren leaders who have passed away. This year’s Memorial Tribute is scheduled to be shown on July 1 at 4:10 p.m. The video will be available the following day at brethrenbenefittrust.org.

Live Report
Learn about how BBT is serving clients and members like you in a 10-minute presentation to delegates and Annual Conference attendees that is currently scheduled to occur on July 1 at 3:40 p.m. BBT’s report will be followed by a time of table-talk discussions based on two questions and a Q-and-A session.

Help shape BBT’s future
As part of a major initiative to revitalize its mission and goals, BBT will be inviting Annual Conference attendees to tell BBT how it can best serve them. Come to the BBT booth when it is open and share your answer to the question, “How can BBT be most useful to you or your church?”
Three new funds for BFI clients and the RBF aim to protect against rising interest rates

It’s a million-dollar question: When will interest rates rise? There is no easy answer. The Federal Reserve announced at the end of April that it intends to keep interest rates near zero at least until the U.S. unemployment rate drops below 6.5 percent — a milestone that isn’t anticipated to occur until 2015.

But once that rate begins to increase, the value of bonds issued before the rate hike will diminish, leaving many bond portfolios with declining returns. To mitigate this anticipated impact, the Board of Directors of Brethren Benefit Trust approved the creation of three new funds that are intended to offer investors a chance to diversify their portfolio with funds that are less directly affected by interest rate fluctuations. Learn about the three new funds, which will be made available to Brethren Foundation clients and Brethren Pension Plan’s Retirement Benefits Fund (the pool of money from which retirement benefits are paid), below —

**Bank Loans Fund — a different kind of fixed income vehicle**

Floating-rate loans, which are debt obligations whose interest rates are tied to another fluctuating rate, are typically loans made by a bank to a company that carries a credit rating below investment grade. This means that those loans pay a yield much higher than a loan to an investment-grade company. The interest payments of loans can reset every three months as short-term interest rates rise or fall. This helps the yield keep pace with interest rates, rather than sink beneath them in a rising interest rate environment.

**Multi-Strategy Hedge Fund incorporates a variety of approaches in one portfolio**

In an uncertain economy when no single sector of the market feels comfortable, the general guidance is: “diversify.” The current strategy for this fund incorporates traditional and alternative asset classes, as well as controlled amounts of leverage, and Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities. The fund manager may take up to a 20 percent short position in U.S. stocks.

**Global bond market at your fingertips with Global Aggregate Fixed Income Fund**

Because the U.S. bond fund has not been at the forefront of the fixed income (bond) market over the past decade, some investors may want to turn to bond markets outside of the U.S. This fund allows them to pursue returns in that sector with a broad-based approach. If and when domestic interest rates increase, which might have a serious impact on the U.S. fixed income market, this fund would provide access to world-wide bond markets that may be less affected by interest rate increase in the U.S.

Please see Brethren Foundation’s Information Statement for more details on these offerings. — B.S.

Board and staff tenures honored at annual BBT banquet

Board meetings for Church of the Brethren Benefit Trust are more than a time of deliberation and planning — they are also a time for fellowship and renewal. The best exemplifier of this is the annual Board member and employee banquet. Board, staff, BBT retirees, and guests gathered at Elgin Community College’s dining room on April 27 for a meal and entertainment by children’s violin group 4 Strings Attached.

Honorees at this year’s banquet included Manager of Foundation Operations Steve Lipinski, who has served BFI for five years; Manager of Production Patrice Nightingale, who has worked in BBT’s Communications department for five years; and Donna Forbes Steiner, whose eight-year tenure on the BBT Board was celebrated. The evening was emceed by Board Member Carol Hess.

To read more about the BBT Board meeting in April, visit goo.gl/D9qhs. — B.S.
BBT releases lists of prohibited Defense contractors. Learn how you can effect change, too.

2012 Annual Report now available online

What does service mean to you? Learn about Brethren Benefit Trust's commitment to service in the 2012 Annual Report, which is now available online by visiting brethrenbenefittrust.org/annual-report. Read testimonials from members and clients who have been served by Brethren Pension Plan, Brethren Foundation, or Brethren Insurance Services. A detailed report of the 2012 financials for Brethren Benefit Trust Inc. and Brethren Foundation Inc. is also included.

Please note: You will not receive a paper copy of the Annual Report from BBT in the mail unless you requested one. Paper copies are available by request or at BBT's booth at Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in Charlotte, N.C.

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- Annual Conference
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