



From your Interim District Executive Minister Team ...

Scattered quotes and insights on the church in our time...

Dear Friends in our Mid-Atlantic District congregations:

I was one of those in our District who took advantage of the scholarships to the denominational New and Renew conference. A consistent message there was this: Jesus calls us outward to follow, not inward to preserve our churches. From hours of excellent input, here are a few of the brief quotes and points that struck me:

- Disciple-making (focused in the first century on community, apprenticeship to Jesus, and union with God) is up to all of us. Maybe each of us can do it with 3 to 5 people in our lifetimes. (Jessie Cruikshank)
- To be well and flourish, kids need at least five adults who care about them. Even one can make all the difference. (This is youth ministry.) (Becky Ullom Naugle)
- Church is not about “Come,” but “Go.” (Not about attracting people to attend but about going out to share in ministry.) (Ryan Braught)
- Jesus calls leaders for the purpose of helping others discern their own callings, and equipping them to respond (Ephesians 4). (Nate Polzin)
- A neighbor, per Luke 10, is one who draws near in mercy. How can a church, as neighbor, draw near to the neighborhood in mercy? (Sharon Martin)
- For the church, the season of the past is over but this isn’t failure. Following the pillar of fire does not equal meeting in a building. God will use others to continue the work. (Hebrews 11:39-12:3) (Jessie Cruikshank)

For me, these ideas are provocative and fitting for this time in the life of the church. They bring challenge and anxiety because they suggest change is inevitable. For most of us, it’s already happening in ways we can’t avoid. I am praying for all our churches—pastors and members alike—that we’ll be bold enough to worry less about attracting people who will help us preserve the good we’ve known and created in the past—so that we can open our hearts to going out to join the work God is already doing in the neighborhoods where we live. Blessings to each of you!

Kim McDowell, Interim District Executive Minister

Ethics Training Scheduled—Save the Date

Every five years all ordained and commissioned ministers within the denomination have their ministry credentials re-certified by their respective district commissions, which is the Calling and Credentialing Ministry Team in the Mid-Atlantic District. A part of this re-certification process requires ministers to participate in ethics training during this current five-year ordination review cycle.

Three in-person gatherings are scheduled in our District: April 20 (Frederick); May 11 (Easton); and September 28 (Oakton). The sessions will be led by Joe Detrick, one of our Interim District Executive Ministers. Registration forms have recently been sent to all district ministers.

Proposed District Conference Query

In August 2023, the District received a query from the Arlington congregation. A query is essentially a congregation asking a question of the broader denomination. The District is responsible for demonstrating that it has intentionally and prayerfully wrestled with the posed question prior to it being included in our District Conference business. In order to fulfill that requirement, the Leadership Team called a six-person subcommittee to guide that process. The six-member Query Engagement Subcommittee (QES) includes four members of the Leadership Team--Ben Bear (LT Chair), Erin Olinger, Calvin Park (District Moderator), and Jan Siegel; Arlington's pastor, Matt Rittle; and Kim McDowell representing the Interim District Executive Ministers.

The QES team arranged for conversations around the District to allow for exploration, clarification, and sharing of opinions. There have been four in-person conversations that were held at Brownsville, Denton, Oakton, and Westminster and one conversation online via Zoom. More than 120 members of the District participated in these conversations, representing the voices of at least 25 congregations. There were times when dialogue was difficult based on the convictions of those participating. Even so, the opportunity to engage with one another and seek common ground was a valuable experience as we move forward.

The QES team intentionally planned these conversations early in the year in anticipation that further engagement would likely be helpful to prepare us for our October District Conference. To that end, where do we go from here? If you participated in one of the conversations, where would you like more clarification or time for dialogue? If you have yet to engage with the query, what format would be most helpful to you for dipping your toe in the water? Any and all feedback is welcome and appreciated. Please share your thoughts with the District Office (AAMAD@brethren.org) and they will be forwarded to the QES team. We look forward to continuing the conversation!

Ben Bear, Chair, District Leadership Team

Pulpit Supply in the Mid-Atlantic District

Just a reminder to churches who are using pulpit supply that timely payment for pastors or speakers who fill your pulpit is a sign of appreciation and respect. Whenever a congregation engages someone for this role, they should first discuss with the individuals what their stipend is for the service. Further, the congregation should offer to reimburse the individual's mileage expense at the current IRS rate of \$.67 per mile.

In the past, the District office has shared with the churches that we are maintaining a list of individuals who have indicated they are available for pulpit supply. We also reached out and asked congregations to query their members to see if there are others who might be interested in this. If you know of someone who would like to provide pulpit supply support or if you would like to talk to someone on the list who could assist your congregation, please contact the District office (AAMAD@brethren.org).

Mid-Atlantic District—Jesus in the Neighborhood

The Mid-Atlantic District churches continue to share inspiring stories about how they are living out the denomination's call to be and to see Jesus in the Neighborhood. The District Leadership Team has shared several of these stories with our churches in the past and here are two more. Please continue to send your stories to the District office—we love to hear about the creative and inspiring ways you are reaching out to your neighbors!



University Park Church of the Brethren—Serving Those Who Experience Hunger

Inspired by the church's curbside community food pantry, Alan Siegel, pictured above, requested to use the church fellowship hall to serve a meal to the community as part of his 8th grade service project on hunger. With assistance from the other youth at University Park COB, Alan invited the congregation to a chili luncheon on March 2 from 12:30 to 2:30. Congregations United for Compassion and Empowerment (CUCE), a local nonprofit organization providing services to Prince George's clients who are experiencing homelessness or in economic need, assisted in this effort by sharing the information with guests who receive hot meals through their agency twice weekly. We, at University Park, are proud of Alan and all who helped him with this important event.

Friendship Church of the Brethren—Extending the Hand of Friendship

In 2021, when the Friendship congregation asked parents and caregivers among our church community and our neighbors how we could best serve them, we kept hearing the same concerns over and over – children had missed out on playdates, schooling, Sunday school, and speech therapy. They were behind on developmental milestones; spent too much time staring at screens; were lonely or felt alienated; or were having trouble trying to make friends. In attempting to address these needs, we came up with several new programs aimed at children and young families.

We implemented a *Baby Box outreach program*. When families in our neighborhood or our church community have a new baby, we give them baby outfits, diapers, wipes, and other supplies. We include a welcome letter and flyer of our church's programs for new families. This has also been a great way to encourage our neighbors in need to reach out to us for spiritual and other help.

At the same time, we started raising funds to fix our church playground to bring it up to modern safety standards and to make it accessible. Church volunteers donated time and materials to making smaller fixes to our playground area during the 1.5 years of fundraising. With significant help from our community, the COB's Faith In Action Fund, and Swing Kingdom, in 2023 we successfully designed and installed our brand-new playground.

In 2021, we started a monthly playdate where we invited neighborhood families to bring their children to play with friends, sing songs, and learn a Bible lesson. We also started monthly *Family Fun Days* to invite the whole community into our church. We then started *Church ABC's*, where we used songs and games to teach letters and their sounds and practiced writing sentences and Bible verses. Now we offer a weekly *Neighborhood Play Partners* program that features active play for children of all ages on our church playground and lawn as weather permits, or in our Fellowship Hall. We offer a rotation of songs, crafts, and special activities. Once a member of our church brought chickens for the children to pet and handed out eggs. Our Family Fun Days have something fun for everyone – we've had puzzles and table games, yard games, and once the local firefighters brought the fire truck over. For three years now we've held a St. Patrick themed Irish dinner for 50 to 60 people.

Although our new children's programs started with a wagon full of toys and a few toddlers, they have expanded significantly over the past few years. They have helped to deepen our ties to our surrounding community, and it really feels like we are making a difference as we strive to be Jesus in our neighborhood.

Cherie McCord, Chair, Community Engagement

Congregational Openings, Placements, Updates

Bethany – Profile circulating, Jerry Fike interim

Broadfording – Chris Mohler, placed as pastor

Dranesville – Search Committee formed, Joey Moss interim

Easton – Jody Gunn, placed as pastor

Fellowship – Brad Wibbing interim

Frederick – Peter Myers, placed as lead pastor

Glade Valley – Becky Henry, placed as pastor

Grossnickle – Profile circulating, Greg Laszakovits interim

Harmony – Profile circulating, pulpit supply

Thurmont – Profile circulating, Leon Yoder interim

Welty – Profile circulating, Alan Smith, interim term ending

Woodbridge – Interviewing, Sandi Rogers interim



Annual Meat Canning Project

Please consider participating in the **Annual Meat Canning Project**, a joint effort of the Mid-Atlantic and Southern Pennsylvania Districts. The goal of the canning project is to help feed people experiencing food insecurity. Your congregation can participate in one or all of the following ways:

- **Volunteer to can chicken** on April 1 through 4 at the Christian Aid Ministries facility in Ephrata, PA. Bring a team from your church. This is a meaningful tradition for some congregations and a time of fellowship with each other and other volunteers.
- **Donate money** towards the purchase of chicken to be canned and/or to supply lunch for volunteers. In past years, the cans were divided among MAD, Pennsylvania Districts, and international distribution. However, it has been decided that it is too expensive to ship food overseas, so more of the product will be available to our churches.
- **Pick up and distribute FREE canned chicken to feed the hungry** to use in your food pantry, a food pantry you work with, or a need in your community. Pick up is at the Brethren Service Center, New Windsor, MD.

Please contact the District Office to schedule volunteers or a canned chicken pick-up.

Upcoming District Events

March

March 1: Annual Conference registration opens (Grand Rapids, MI; July 3-July 7)



March 3: Piney Creek COB Lenten Service

March 10: Union Bridge COB Youth Lenten Service

March 17: Glade Valley COB Lenten Service

March 23: Bush Creek COB Dinner, 12:00 pm-5:00 pm

March 31: Easter Sunday



April

April 1 to April 4: Meat Canning Project, Ephrata, PA (see more information below)

April 6: Disaster Response Auction Dinner, Bush Creek COB

April 6: Camp Mardela Benefit Auction, Denton, MD

The District office sends out flyers to all churches that describe many of these upcoming events. Check with your church office or contact the District if you would like additional information (aamad@brethren.org).

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