



District Conference—October 11 and 12



District Conference is just around the corner. As we prepare to gather together on October 11 and 12 at the Brownsville (MD) Church of the Brethren, I want to invite us all to look forward to this opportunity. District Conference is a time to renew friendships, to see folks we may not see regularly, to enjoy being together, and to conduct the business of the District. I'm particularly excited about our excellent slate of workshops this year. I hope you will take advantage of these opportunities for learning and growth. From the power of stories to draw us together, to how to interpret biblical narratives for everyday application, to how we enact God's call to fight not people but powers, to how we enliven our congregations with Fresh Expressions of what it means to be church, I believe there is something that will educate, challenge, and inspire you. I can't wait to hear the stories that come out of our workshops at District Conference this year.

Of course, we'll also conduct the business of the District. When we come together, each church sends delegates. In our heritage, when we are at our best, the point of these delegates is to come and discern God's will together. It may be tempting to come with our minds already made up. But what our heritage invites us to do—indeed, what Scripture models for us—is coming together to discern the call of God in the present moment. I want to invite our delegates for this year's conference to approach business with this sense of discerning the call of God. May we seek the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit in our time together at conference.

I look forward to seeing you at Conference!

Calvin Park, Moderator

Celebrating the Myersville Church of the Brethren

On September 29, a service was held at the Myersville (MD) Church of the Brethren to celebrate and commemorate the church's more than 100 years of service. From 1913 to 2023, the Myersville congregation strove to serve as a faithful witness of Biblical hospitality by welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, providing a cup of cold water to the thirsty, clothing the unprotected, having compassion for the sick, and abiding with those in prison.

Over the past year, the congregation has been meeting to discern whether to close their church due to reduced membership. With the support of Eddie Edmonds, then Interim DEM, and others in the District, they made the difficult decision to close the church, with most members transferring their memberships to other COBs in the area. They stated, "We are grateful to God for the life of this church and we pray that its witness continues through the lives of those it has touched—by proclaiming peace, advocating for justice, and answering the call to 'be the feet and hands of Jesus in a hurting world.'"

A special commemoration of the life of the Myersville church will be held at District Conference on October 12. There will be a business item on the agenda to vote to close the church and the Myersville Transition Team will give a brief presentation about the church to the conference attendees. While there is much sadness in making this decision, the church is generously sharing their resources with the many organizations they have supported throughout the years.

Jesus in the Neighborhood—*Union Bridge Garden*



It began with a simple dream. Co-Pastor Britnee Linton of the Union Bridge (MD) Church of the Brethren shared her dream with the congregation to plant a community garden next to the church. She believed it would build stronger community relationships, bring fresh vegetables to the small town, and invite people to share in God’s grace.

The dream slowly became a reality. Over the next year, community and church members came up with a plan for a garden that was large enough to manage but not so large to be overwhelming. In May 2024, the church announced it was ready to bring the garden to life and asked for help.

And the people responded. They donated plants, mulch, compost, buckets, and tools. Working moms and seasoned gardeners gave their time to plant and weed, to convert a plot of soil into a viable garden. In June, a member of the community dropped off a wagon at the church to hold the harvest, and others added items from their own gardens as well.

The garden, known as the “Plot of Hope,” produces fresh vegetables for everyone. It helps those who don't have time or space for their own garden, who can't afford fresh vegetables, and those looking to serve or make new friends. Whatever items remain on the wagon each week are donated to the St. James Food Pantry in Union Bridge. Each week, again, a new harvest, a stronger connection to the community, a chance to serve, and greater fellowship.

John Fleming, District Communications Ministry Team

Northern VA Churches Swap Pulpits

The Midland, Nokesville, Manassas, Dranesville, Oakton, Woodbridge, and Arlington congregations swapped pastors on Sunday September 22. Preachers moved to a different church, but they all preached on the same theme from 2 Corinthians 5, “Ambassadors of Peace,” in honor of International Day of Prayer for Peace.

The pastors gathered about a month in advance and shared a time of Bible study and fellowship together. They were joined at this gathering by new DEM Doug Veal. The Bible study was a great opportunity to share perspectives that could be used as each pastor prepared a unique sermon. The northern Virginia churches have a history of such partnership and look forward to doing more together.

How Do Those Passing by See Us?

At a recent District Leadership Team meeting, members shared their impressions of various church signs they had seen lately from many denominations. These included the signs directly in front of their community’s churches, as well as those roadside directional signs that point to rural churches. We discussed how church signs often do not reflect well on the churches and do not present a welcoming, upbeat invitation to visit. We also wondered how we might help churches to improve their signage. Could we develop a template that could be useful if a church doesn’t have a sign? Could we provide examples of signs in our District that reflect a welcoming and vibrant congregation? Should we ask our new DEM to take pictures of welcoming signs as he travels throughout the District visiting our churches?

Finally, many church signs might simply benefit from a bit of paint, cleaning, clearing of weeds, or planting of bushes and flowers at the base. The before and after signs pictured below show how some paint and labor can make a significant difference in an existing sign. (Thanks to Midland COB and Erin Olinger for sharing their success in giving their church's sign a facelift.)



Gretchen Zience, District Communications Ministry Team

Piney Creek Church of the Brethren Celebrates 125 Years



The sun was shining, the air was crisp, the sky a clear blue as I traveled the country road outside Taneytown, MD. Farms dotted the countryside with cows and corn making the scenery quintessentially rural. After crossing the bridge and navigating a few curves, the red brick church came into view. The overflowing parking lot announced that something special was happening.

Piney Creek COB was established in 1899 by Solomon Stoner and Samuel Utz. Services were held once a month in the old Walnut Grove School House. In 1913, The Stone Church was purchased and became home to Piney Creek. The stones from the church were used for the foundation of the brick church that opened in 1920 and remains there as Piney Creek Church of the Brethren.

Reverend Warren Eshbach, pastor from 1961 to 1967, brought the message in the morning worship and a meal followed. Conversation and fellowship continued until the afternoon program. The buzz of talking and laughter filled the room with the warmth and hospitality Piney Creek has spread for 125 years.

Members of the 125th Anniversary Celebration Committee shared the history of the church, present-day mission, and activities, and they ended with a look to the future with clear goals. Reverend Warren and Theresa Eshbach individually shared memories and their gratitude for the growth they experienced as a newly married couple within the family of Piney Creek.

Much more could be said about the day...what seems most significant is that the celebration of 125 years was seen by all as the BEGINNING of the next chapter at Piney Creek. References were made to the 150th anniversary. The energy and enthusiasm were palpable and a treasure in the rolling hills and farmland.

Congratulations to Pastor Stan Diehl, pastor for 20 years at PC, the 125th Anniversary Celebration Committee, and members and friends of Piney Creek for a wonderful day of fellowship and celebration.

Jan Flora, District Communications Ministry Team



Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center News

The Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC) Governing Board Chair, Mark Liller, recently announced the retirement of SVMC Executive Director, Ms. Donna Rhodes, effective April 30, 2025. At the time of her retirement, she will have provided strong leadership of the organization for nearly 24 years.

Under her guidance, SVMC has provided pastoral training education for hundreds of persons exploring the call to ministry and those providing lay leadership. She has also worked diligently to strengthen SVMC's Continuing Education offerings. Donna's efforts have transformed individuals and congregations in the five Districts served by SVMC (Atlantic Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Middle PA, Southern PA, and Western PA).

SVMC is a Church of the Brethren ministry partnership that includes the districts named above, as well as Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and Bethany Theological Seminary. SVMC's mission is to equip leaders for ministry in a regionally based, Christ-centered, culturally relevant context in ways that bear witness to the beliefs, heritages, and practices of the Church of the Brethren.

Congregational Openings, Placements, Updates

Bethany – Profile circulating, Jerry Fike interim
Dranesville – Profile circulating, Joey Moss interim
Fellowship – Brad Wibbing interim
Frederick – Searching for Family & Youth Pastor
Grossnickle – Sandi Rogers interim
Harmony – Profile circulating, pulpit supply
Manor – Profile circulating, pulpit supply
Thurmont – Dylan Rinehart began as part-time pastor
September 1
Welty – Profile circulating, pulpit supply
Woodbridge – Charlotte Bear interim

Upcoming District Events

October

Oct. 11-12—District Conference, Brownsville COB
Oct. 12—Bush Creek, “Trunk or Treat”
Oct. 18-20—Bush Creek, “Let the Light Shine Revival”
Oct. 19—Welty, Fall Fest
Oct. 26—Bush Creek; Turkey, Fried Oyster, & Ham Dinner

November

Nov. 2—Bush Creek, Holiday Craft Bazaar
Nov. 2—Sam's Creek, Holiday Bazaar
Nov. 22 & 23—Oakton Christmas Craft Show

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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Please submit items for *The JOURNEY* newsletter to Jo Ann Landon in the District Office.

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