

Preparing for Advent...

Preparation. At various points in our lives, we all go through times of preparation. Earlier this year, my wife Tasha and I had a significant period of preparation as we transitioned from our previous home in Indiana to come here to the Mid-Atlantic District. We spent significant amounts of time preparing our previous home as we worked to sell it, preparing and searching for a new home here in Maryland, and preparing to move our lives from Indiana to here. I also spent time preparing myself spiritually for the transition to this new role as your District Executive Minister. I'm sure everyone reading this has had a time in their lives when you have spent time preparing for something.



In December, we often turn to preparations for the celebration of Christmas. Pulling out Christmas decorations for our homes and our church buildings. Preparing special meals and planning family gatherings. Preparing for exchanges of gifts within families or with friends. Preparations for Christmas often become front and center around this time of year.

The season of Advent is at its heart a time of spiritual preparation. While many of our preparations for Christmas are around family and making sure everything is properly decorated for Christmas, the season of Advent reminds us to slow down and prepare ourselves spiritually. Each Sunday, the traditional themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, or other thematic choices we might make, remind us that ultimately, our reason for celebration is the coming of Jesus as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. A reminder that long ago, God came down in human form and walked among us, starting as a little baby. God is indeed with us still: we proclaim Christ as Emmanuel, God-With-Us. And God continues to be with us, even as God was present in the manger at Bethlehem.

It is my hope and prayer that each person in our District is reminded of this amazing fact: God is with us, through the birth of Jesus, and continues to be with us. Let's use this time of Advent to prepare ourselves to celebrate and share the good news that began with Jesus' birth!

In Christ,
 Doug Veal, District Executive Minister

District Conference Recap



The 57th Mid-Atlantic District Conference was hosted by the Brownsville congregation on October 11 and 12. Calvin Park, conference moderator, chose the theme "Not against flesh and blood," based upon Ephesians 6:12. This year saw a busier than usual schedule that included a query and multiple business items dealing with congregations.

(This photo was taken by Danielle Clary on October 10, the night before District Conference started. The photo shows the magnificent display of Northern Lights over the three crosses in front of Brownsville Church of the Brethren, site of the conference. Danielle's daughter, Erika Clary, is a licensed minister in the District.)

There were 76 participants, both in-person and online, for the Friday evening service. The original intent for the time together that evening was for the installation service for our District Executive Minister, Doug Veal. Sadly, he had an unexpected death in the family the day before and was unable to attend any of the conference. In lieu of an installation service, the Program and Arrangements Committee pivoted and organized a service focused on prayer – the practice of examen, caring for oneself, praying for grief, remembering victims of natural disasters, and a blessing for our District.

Anticipating that there might be difficult conversations during this year’s conference, Saturday’s schedule included a time for feet washing near the beginning of the day and participating in communion shortly before the close of the conference. There were 109 in-person delegates at the conference as well as three delegates online, representing 40 congregations. The proposed slate was approved by the delegate body, calling the following individuals to serve the district:

Moderator-elect: Frank LeZotte

Program & Arrangements: Britnee Linton

Leadership Calling Team: Yakubu Bakfwash (Area 2); Charlotte Bear (Area 4)

Standing Committee: Scott Linton

Leadership Team: Ben Bear (At Large); Terrie Cox (Area 4); Everett Fisher (At Large); Danny Rumpf (Area 6); Jan Siegel (Area 3)

Delegates received reports from various teams, offices, and organizations associated with the District interspersed among the other business items of the day. Included among the items of new business were recommendations for the disorganization of four congregations withdrawing from the denomination – Pipe Creek, Pleasant Ridge, Stone Bridge, and Welsh Run. There were some concerns voiced during the process, wondering about why the congregations were leaving and what would happen to their congregants. It was clarified that “disorganizing” a congregation is simply the legal term used when a congregation chooses to leave the denomination. Each congregation retained their respective buildings and properties as well. While each congregation expressed concerns about the direction of the District and denomination, there was no single reason for any one congregation’s departure. Individuals within the congregation who voted against leaving were counseled to either find a new congregation within the District or have their membership held by the District until that individual asked to transfer it to a congregation. The recommendation to recognize the closing of the Myersville congregation after their 110 years of service came before the delegates, as well, with Rachel Black sharing remembrances and thanks for their life of ministry. With the recommendations for disorganization of the four congregations and closing of Myersville all passing, the District now has 53 congregations.

Another item of business not regularly found on the agenda was the query from the Arlington congregation, “Reducing Harm: Interim Steps to Address Suffering.” The Moderator clarified the process and reminded everyone that, regardless of the outcome, nothing would change the following day – the query would either return to Arlington or be passed along to Annual Conference officers and Standing Committee to be considered for inclusion during the 2025 Annual Conference business. The query was presented by Arlington’s pastor, Matt Rittle, prior to discussion from the floor. Those who spoke were kept to a strict three-minute time limit and were redirected or cut off if their comments strayed from addressing the query or the current motion on the table. There was roughly equal representation from those who spoke for supporting the query and for opposing it. When the vote was counted, it had been approved, 61-40, to be passed along to the Annual Conference officers.

Between workshops, gathering for meals, and recognizing the different ways in which congregations seek to be Jesus in the neighborhood, the Mid-Atlantic District Conference was once again an opportunity to build Christian community and prayerfully seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If you would like a digital copy of the conference materials, please contact the District office. Be sure to join next year, October 10 and 11, 2025, at the Frederick congregation as the new Moderator, Sharon Linton, leads with the theme, “Jesus be the Center.”

Ben Bear, Leadership Team Chair

District Leadership Team Organization

Pop quiz: Can you guess which area your church belongs to? If you can't, you're not alone. The Mid-Atlantic District consists of more than 50 churches organized into eight "areas," and each area has a leadership representative.

Better understanding these areas can help foster greater unity, cooperation, and fellowship within our churches, and, in turn, that will enable us to better serve and support our members and the wider community.

Individual churches can accomplish much, but as church partners, we can do even more. Contact the District Office if you would like to reach out to your area's leadership representative, listed below, to pursue opportunities for collaboration.

"... So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5)

AREA ONE

Representative: Douglas Potvin (Greenhill)

- Bethany (DE)
- Community of Joy (MD)
- Denton (MD)
- Easton (MD)
- Fairview (MD)
- Greenhill (MD)
- Ridgely (MD)

AREA TWO

Representative: Dana Jones (First Church)

- First Baltimore (MD)
- Friendship (MD)
- GraceWay (MD)
- Long Green Valley (MD)
- Reistertown (MD)
- Woodberry (MD)

AREA THREE

Representative: Jan Siegel (University Park)

- Arlington (VA)
- Flower Hill (MD)
- University Park (MD)
- Washington City (DC)

AREA FOUR

Representative: Terrie Cox (Manassas)

- Dranesville (VA)
- Hollywood (VA)
- Manassas (VA)
- Midland (VA)
- Nokesville (VA)
- Oakton (VA)
- Woodbridge (VA)

AREA FIVE

Representative: Dawn Weller (Bush Creek)

- Bush Creek (MD)
- Edgewood (MD)
- Glade Valley (MD)
- Meadow Branch (MD)
- Piney Creek (MD)
- Sam's Creek (MD)
- Union Bridge (MD)
- Westminster (MD)

AREA SIX

Representative: Danny Rumpf (Grossnickle)

- Frederick (MD)
- Grossnickle (MD)
- Harmony (MD)
- Locust Grove (MD)
- Monocacy (MD)
- Pleasant View (MD)
- Thurmont (MD)

AREA SEVEN

Representative: Chris Mohler (Broadfording)

- Beaver Creek (MD)
- Broadfording (MD)
- Brownsville (MD)
- Downsville (MD)
- Hagerstown (MD)
- Longmeadow (MD)
- Manor (MD)
- Sharpsburg (MD)
- Welty (MD)

AREA EIGHT

Representative: Vacant

- Allensville (WV)
- Fellowship (WV)
- Johnstown (WV)
- Moler Avenue (WV)
- Mountain View (WV)

In addition, the Leadership Team has five representatives who are designated as "At-Large":

Ben Bear, LT Chair (Nokesville)

Everett Fisher (Arlington)

Jan Flora (Westminster)

Lindsay Wenger, LT Vice-chair (Woodbridge)

Tom Jouannet (Grossnickle)

Outdoor Baptisms—A District Tradition

Does the Church of the Brethren have outdoor baptisms anymore? Outside baptisms seem to occur on rare occasions these days. When asking members of my own church community if any had had one, many responders said that they had a traditional inside baptism using a baptismal pool tucked behind the communion table most of the time. Many said their parents had an outside baptism years ago. The few who said they had personally experienced an outside baptism remembered it and the circumstances surrounding it with vivid clarity. However, after taking a look around the Mid-Atlantic District, we found a few examples of outdoor baptisms as described below.

Karl Wilkerson, of the Oakton (VA) congregation, recalls his outdoor baptism on his 40th birthday on October 13, 2006, and he has a couple of pictures to share. Pastor Chris Bowman baptized Karl in the Hughes River in the Shenandoah National Park.



Karl was joined by his wife, Bridgette Beach, and several folks from Oakton, including Grady Mendenhall who took these pictures.



The Midland COB (VA) had several outdoor baptisms in June 2023, as shown in the photos. Both took place in a pond at the farm of long-time COB member Jimmie Messick. The photo on the left shows Pastor Richard Wehrle baptizing Wesley Cooke and the photo on the right shows Pastor Wehrle with Jake Messick (left) and Johnny Hitt (right). Both photos were taken by Midland member Regina Holmes.

Ernie Rice, a senior member of the Westminster congregation remembered, at the age of twelve and an active member of the Rocky Ridge Church of the Brethren, being invited to participate in a baptism by his church Deacons in a cold stream in Detour, MD. “On a Sunday afternoon after Sunday School wearing my regular clothes, I was led into the stream and the minister held my hand and walked me deep enough into the stream so that I could kneel down on my knees and be dunked three times forward. I remember afterwards being given a blanket by my family and taken to a car so that we could return to church and change.” He remembers it as a very personal commitment to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

Lynn Lindsay remembers her faithful mom, Dot LeFevre, saying that she was baptized in the creek near Meadow Branch COB in Westminster, MD.

With this impromptu survey of some church members, we realized that there is clearly no ordinary outside baptism. Each one is personal and remembered as a landmark in one's life/faith journey. Perhaps members, old and new, who have never considered an outside baptism may want to reconsider.

Louise Scalzi, Communications Ministry Team

Shepherd's Spring Looks Forward to 35th Anniversary

In celebration of the investment by the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Brethren and congregations 35 years ago when Shepherds Spring (SS) was opened as a gathering place for summer camp and outdoor ministry programs and retreats, and to help fulfill one of the major missions of the District to "foster unity and fellowship," SS and the Mid-Atlantic District are organizing a major 35TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION/FELLOWSHIP AT SHEPHERDS SPRING, on Saturday, May 17, 2025 (date to be finalized).

This spring event will focus on remembering and celebrating the thousands impacted at SS and envisioning its future ministry over the next 35 years. It will allow District congregations to meet Doug Veal, the new District Executive Minister, fellowship with other congregations, and encourage a spirit of unity and fellowship. Short programs; relevant discussions about SS and the District in general; fun activities for children, youth, adults, and families; a grand picnic feast; bonfires; hikes; music and singing; sharing memories; and more, will highlight the celebration. We hope it will reignite a passion and interest in SS as a special ministry/retreat center for COB congregations and provide the opportunity to rekindle interest and a willingness to volunteer and support SS in the years ahead.

Camp Mardela's Sights and Sounds of Christmas

Camp Mardela is planning to bring the magic of Christmas to the camp on December 20 through 22 with their special event called, "Sights and Sounds of Christmas." Their annual silent auction of Christmas trees will be expanded this year to include new or like-new Christmas items that can be donated until December 13. They will need volunteers who can help in areas such as hay wagon (drivers needed), kids crafts, silent auction, food stand, and others.

Please contact Jennifer Summy, Camp Administrator, if you have questions (campmardela.org or 410-479-2861). The District office also has information about this event.

Myersville's Faithful Generosity

Perhaps the most difficult decision a congregation might ever make is choosing to close their doors. This is a challenge more and more congregations – beyond just the Church of the Brethren – are faced with as congregants age, resources dwindle, and membership declines. Myersville Church of the Brethren faced that same reality and voted to conclude worshiping as a congregation at the end of 2023 after 110 years of faithful ministry to their congregants, among their community, and within the denomination.

Through it all, the half dozen or so remaining members chose to find the joy that this choice would bring – no longer being burdened with caring for an aging building, experiencing new fellowship in the congregations they might join, and sharing their financial gifts with their faith community. While there simply wasn't enough time and energy to continue as a viable congregation, Myersville still had a healthy financial situation.

The members of the Myersville congregation gathered together and made a list of all the partners in ministry they had engaged with over the years – nearby congregations, denominational ministries, and community partners. To each, they allocated a financial gift to support the continuance of those who had been integral to the lifeblood of their congregation. When all was said and done, they had a list of 21 organizations receiving a collective gift of \$125,000!

May we see Myersville as an example for how to embrace the road laid before us, finding ways to continue being Jesus in the neighborhood no matter the situation.

Ben Bear, Leadership Team Chair

Congregational Openings, Placements, Updates

Bethany – Profile circulating, Jerry Fike interim

Dranesville – Profile circulating, Joey Moss interim

Fellowship – Brad Wibbing interim

Frederick – Profile circulating, searching for Family & Youth Pastor

Grossnickle – Calling a new pastor, Kinley Simmers, who will start April 1, 2025

Harmony – Profile circulating, pulpit supply

Manor – Profile circulating, pulpit supply

Welty – Profile circulating, pulpit supply

Woodbridge – Charlotte Bear interim

Upcoming District Events

December

There are numerous events at the MAD churches throughout December. The following were provided to the District office before publication of *The Journey*. Please contact the District office for a current list.

Dec. 6—Christmas in the Park, 6:30 pm, Heidelberg “Lehigh” Park, Union Bridge, MD

Dec. 14—Christmas Carroll Concert, 7:00 pm, Crossroads Church, Hampstead, MD

Dec. 15—Westminster Ringers, Letters from Santa, 4:00 pm, First Presbyterian Church, Westminster, MD (for other concerts, see www.westminsterringers.org)

Dec. 20-22—Camp Mardela, Sights and Sounds of Christmas, 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, Denton, MD

Dec. 22—Christmas Program and Candle Lighting for Peace, 5:00 pm, Sam’s Creek COB

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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