

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Paul Munday, Chair
Dunker Church Service Planning Committee pmunday@gmail.com



55th Annual Dunker Church Service to be Held September 14

SHARPSBURG, MD – On Sunday, September 14, 2025 at 3:00 p.m., the 55th annual Dunker Church service will be held at the Dunker Church, located on the Antietam National Battlefield. Often noted as one of the most remarkable landmarks on this battlefield, the church has long stood for peace and love even during one of the most brutal confrontations of the Civil War.

The afternoon will begin with a tribute to Reverend Edward Poling who passed away in January 2025. Rev. Poling pastored several Church of the Brethren churches in the area, was a board member for the Hagerstown Area Religious Council (HARC) and was a past chair of the Dunker Church Service Planning Committee. The service also will include a traditional call to worship, hymns, sharing of scripture, special music and readings, prayers and a message brought by Steve Longenecker. Steve is a professor of history, emeritus, at Bridgewater College. He taught there for thirty-two years, served as a department head, and chaired the college's Forum for Brethren Studies.

Modern-day Church of the Brethren evolved from German Baptist Brethren, who also were known as Dunkers. The name Dunker came from their practice of baptism by full immersion into the water, therefore "dunking". This group formed in Germany in 1708, and later migrated to the United States, where they became known as the German Baptist Brethren. The name "Church of the Brethren" was officially adopted in 1908, replacing the German Baptist Brethren name.

"For 55 years, people have made a pilgrimage to the Dunker Church on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the battle of Antietam," says Rev. Paul Munday, Chair of the Dunker Church Service Planning Committee. "As they do, they seek an alternative to the conflict, animosity, and violence that mark so much of human history — seeing in the meeting house a people of peace and the possibility of shalom and well-being for all."

About The Dunker Church:

This unadorned house of worship was built by Dunker farmers in 1852. During the September 17, 1862 battle of Antietam, the Dunker Church was the focal point of a number of Union attacks against the Confederates. When the battle ended, Confederate soldiers used the church as a temporary medical aid

station. The church sustained hundreds of bullet marks in its walls and artillery seriously damaged the roof. By 1864, the structure was repaired and regular services were held there until the early 1900s. A treacherous storm destroyed the church in 1921. Sharpsburg resident Elmer G. Boyer bought the land and salvaged the undamaged church material. The property was sold two more times, with the Washington County Historical Society purchasing it in 1951. They donated the site, with just a foundation, to the National Park Service. The Church was restored for the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Antietam in 1962—on the original foundation—with as much of the original materials as possible. The structure is simple with plain wooden benches and no electricity, just as it would have been in 1862. The Dunker Church is likely one of the most well-known churches in American military history.

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