

Opportunities To Serve at the District Level



Growing up in the Church of the Brethren, as a child and even into my teens, I was not really aware of what the district we lived in at the time really did. I remember my dad, who was a pastor at the time, going to some district meetings. And from time to time, to the district conference in our area. The only thing that I was really involved with at the district level growing up was going to our district camp every summer. And I really enjoyed that!

When I went to Bridgewater College, I ended up working at that district camp for three summers, though I really didn't know too much about the greater district structure or activities. I experienced a bit of district-level work as I entered into the licensed ministry in college and began seminary. Still, that wasn't much interaction—a few interviews from time to time with the ministry commission, but nothing beyond that.

It wasn't until I began pastoring at the Daleville Church of the Brethren in Virilina District that I started to learn more about the things going on at the district level. There were two reasons for that. First, the district executive minister of the Virilina District was a member of that congregation, and so when I would visit with him, I would hear and learn about what was going on in his work with the district. And the second reason was that he would always try to get new pastors involved in a district-level committee.

For me, that came in the form of an invitation to join the New Church Development Committee, which I ended up serving on for almost the entire time I was in the district. Eventually, I was called to be the chair of that committee, which in that district meant that I was on the District Board and District Executive Committee. As I shared with the search committee when I expressed my interest in the role of district executive minister, this whet my interest in working at the district level.

But many may wonder what the district really does. Our constitution and by-laws lay out the purpose of the district: "The purpose of the District is to unite Church of the Brethren congregations and fellowships within the geographical region of the District in a common mission and purpose and to provide a community within which these congregations may find support, nurture, and mutual encouragement. The District shall provide a forum for the consideration of matters of faith, witness, and service and shall plan, administer, and coordinate the ministries and programs of the Church of the Brethren within the bounds of the District." That's a big mouthful, of course. What it means is that the district works with the congregations to provide common purpose and ministry within the geographic bounds of our district.

We do this in a number of different ways. District Conference each year provides an opportunity for us to gather together in community, to hear reports and make decisions about leadership, financial stewardship, and questions around faith and practice. We saw this just last year with the query that came to our conference, and was ultimately passed along to Annual Conference.

One of the areas that we focus on at the district level is providing administrative support for the district congregations and district programs. This is an important part of the work of the district office, including both myself and our Administrative Assistant Jo Ann Landon. But it also includes the work of the various ministry teams and the Leadership Team of the district. In order to fulfill the many tasks that are needed at the district level to help support our common mission and to support congregations, we need quite a few people who are willing to serve on district teams.

Opportunities To Serve at the District Level, continued...

There are many ways that we find these needed persons. One of our district-level teams is the Leadership Calling Team. This group is tasked with creating a slate for the approval of the District Conference delegates that includes the officers of the conference (moderator-elect and clerk), Program and Arrangements Committee, Leadership Team members, and Annual Conference Standing Committee delegates.

The members of other ministry teams are selected by the teams with oversight from the Leadership Team. These include (but are not limited to) Calling and Credentialing, Spirituality and Congregational Life, Outreach and Service, Church Outreach Renewal and Evangelism (CORE), Communications, and Finance and Property.

Over the last year or so, two of our ministry teams have been looking for new members. The first is the CORE team, which focuses on renewal, evangelism, and, hopefully, new church development. The other is the Finance and Property team, which is the team that works on property issues and finances, including the district budget each year.

We have also been looking for a new recorder for the Leadership Team. Gretchen Zience has been serving wonderfully in this role for a number of years but has asked to have a new person take over. The recorder is responsible for producing the minutes of the Leadership Team meetings.

If any of these particular areas of service appeal to you, please be in touch with the district office. We are always on the lookout for people who have the gifts to aid in the work of the district, whether you have served at this level for many years or have never done so before. Our work at the district level is to build community and empower local congregations to do the work of ministry in their local communities. I invite everyone to consider where God might be calling them to serve, whether that is in their local congregation, at the district level, or even at the national level of the church. In doing so, we are living into our calling to continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, and together.

In Christ,

Doug Veal, District Executive Minister

Jesus in the Neighborhood



Pastor Mandy North of the Manassas Church of the Brethren delivers a sermon most Sundays, but by taking on a leadership role in a local community group, she's found another way to share her VOICE.

VOICE, which stands for "Virginians Organized for Interfaith and Community Engagement," is an interfaith group headquartered in Arlington. According to its website, "VOICE is a nonpartisan coalition of over 48 faith and community organizations in Northern Virginia, working together to build power in middle- and low-income communities ... uniting people across lines of race, class, religion, political party, and geography to take action on key issues in our community."

On the recommendation of a parishioner, North and a few others began attending VOICE meetings several years ago. They were drawn to the group's nonpartisan, interfaith message of uniting communities rather than dividing them. In 2022, Manassas Church of the Brethren became a member institution. North joined the strategy team in 2023 and became co-chair in 2024.

Encouraged by VOICE's commitment to community engagement, North embraced one of the group's top priorities: affordable housing. With Northern Virginia ranked among the most expensive housing markets in the country, she notes, "There's a lot of work to be done there."

Mental health is another focus area for VOICE. During a mental health crisis, people often turn to traditional health care systems—but as North points out, "Emergency rooms are not well equipped to handle them." Still, she sees encouraging progress: Just a few years ago, the Virginia state budget allocated only about \$7 million for behavioral healthcare. Today,

that figure has risen to over \$90 million due to the work of VOICE in partnership with the Virginia Hospital Association and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police.

North compares VOICE's mission to the River Parable—a scenario where people are constantly rescuing others from drowning downstream, without ever going upstream to find out why they're falling in. "Why are people having these problems in the first place? We want to address that."

You can learn more about VOICE from their website at <https://voice-va.org/>.

John Fleming, Communications Ministry Team

Profile of Ruth Aukerman—Faith and Art (Part I)

Last week I had the pleasure of visiting with Ruth Aukerman at her charming cabin in Union Bridge, MD. This is where Ruth and her late husband, Dale Aukerman, raised their family and where Ruth has continued to serve our Mid-Atlantic District Community and the larger community in a wide variety of ways: pastor, artist, teacher, advocate, writer. We sat together on her peaceful front porch as I asked her to share some of her life experiences and thoughts. Below is Part I of our interview.



Q- Please tell me about yourself.

Ruth: I was born in what used to be East Germany and as a small child, I was a refugee child. We fled because the Americans had given up a territory to the Russians, and my father had been exposed to the brutality of war as the Russians came into the farms he oversaw as a manager. So when he found out that the Russians were going to take over the territory where we lived, he took us—my baby brother and I—I was three) and we fled. We broke down a couple of times on the flight, as we fled into the western zone, not knowing where we would actually end up, but hoping to make it to the farm of a friend. There were all sorts of obstacles. My first memory was of breaking down on this trek and then of being raised initially on a farm of my father's friend.

Q- That experience certainly explains why you have such compassion for refugees. What other early experiences have shaped your life?

Ruth: When I was eight years old I fell down into a basement and had a skull fracture. In those days, there was no cure. After having been seen by a doctor, I was transported to the best hospital in Kassel, Germany, but they were not sure I would live. So, they were going to do an experimental surgery that had never been done before. However, in the night before the surgery, the blood found a way of leaving the area and my hematoma subsided. I survived and had a lot of physical therapy. But I had some repercussions from the trauma. I had a collar bone fracture and other coordination problems. I was supposed to play the piano, but coordinating the two hands was too difficult. Once I played the recorder and flute, I was able to flourish and even became a soloist in the orchestra, but this coordination problem continued.

During my growing up and teen years, I was also involved with the Church of the Brethren work camp through my church. My youth group at my Protestant church had connections with the Church of the Brethren House for activities like caroling. When the Church of the Brethren headquarters asked for families to host volunteers, I convinced my parents to host a couple of them. Mind you, we only had a two-bedroom apartment. And my parents still were hospitable enough to host. My family hosted two Brethren volunteer workers in different years who came to Germany; then one of them went on to Jordan and I think the other stayed in Germany. This got me interested in the volunteer work. I did two work camps, one in France and then a peace seminar in Hofgeismar during my senior year in high school.

I met Dale, my future husband, at the seminar. He was one of the speakers in the camp. Campers would work from six to noon in the nursing home and then, in the afternoon and evening, we had our input sessions and discussions. At that particular peace seminar, I developed acute appendicitis and had to be taken by ambulance from that little town back to

Kassel for surgery. There I had my appendix out. Some who lodged at the Brethren Headquarters spent time with me and helped me to recover....and they also visited me at my house. That was how I connected more with the Church of the Brethren and this sparked my interest in becoming a volunteer. I was 18 at the time and after graduating from the German high school system, I was one of the first two Germans to come to America as a volunteer in Brethren Volunteer Service. When I came here, I was trained in New Windsor. Don Schneider and the Coffmans were instrumental. Actually, Max Coffman was the one who had recruited me. In Germany, he and his wife, Janet, were house parents in Kassel. They offered me the strong advice not to get married or date an American. Many know how that turned out!

I first served Navajo Indians together with another woman from Pennsylvania in Richfield, Utah.

Q- What are you passionate about and what have you been passionate about in the past?

Ruth: I think I've always been passionate about issues of justice. I have defended fellow students when I felt they were mistreated by the teacher. I am still very passionate about those who have less than others. I'm not saying that I've given enough to it. I mean, I wish I was doing more. My art has been my giving. It reflects that to some degree, I guess. I became an art teacher eventually because of Dale, who had seen some of my art, a book about spirituals and block prints that I'd made. And he said, "Well, you ought to develop this."

So, that's when I came back from my volunteer year in the United States engaged. I took an exam for the Art Academy in Kassel. They only accepted so many, and I knew I wasn't going to get in, but I did. That's how I became an art teacher and have really enjoyed the teaching part, almost more so than my own art. Although I've done my own art and I've done interesting things. But again, my art is also one expression of faith. I call it my prayer language. It is one way of connecting with something within me or with the spirit of God within me.

Q- What originally got you interested in creating art?

Ruth: I've always done some art ever since I was a child. My mother was an artist and she encouraged it, but I've always felt kind of like I could never do what she did. She was very natural and naturalistic and very good at it. I never thought of myself as being worth anything as an artist. But others saw it in me and encouraged me. So, I pursued my art through the Art Academy in Germany and minored in Theology.

When I settled in America, I went to the Church of the Brethren in Frederick, MD for a special event and saw interpretation for the deaf. During that service, it came to me that I should offer to teach art for them. And so I began to teach art at the younger school even before going back to school to earn my masters. That was sort of a calling to teach, and I learned sign language at the same time. My children were little at the time, so I would do this maybe once or twice a week. Eventually, I received a Master's degree from Maryland Institute College of Art plus 30 credits beyond and taught at the young people's studio. After beginning in Carroll County, MD at Sandymount Elementary school, I have since taught at all levels with recognition awards by the county and state.



Mother Finding Her Boy



Three Mothers and the Tomb



Light in the Darkness

Q- Why do you create art and what is your process for creating the art piece?

Ruth: When I create art, I am at a different time...I am sort of lost with it. That is, when my kids might not get lunch on time; I'm completely in a different world. My art is not pre-planned as much as it is a gift and it evolves. I may have a theme in mind...like after the artist/photographer, Phil Grout, came back from Nicaragua, he brought his photographs that inspired me. I felt that I had to paint that, paint the grief of these soldiers (see photo). But, it often ends up completely different than how it started. It's not pre-planned. My mother, for instance, would have a pencil drawing and then she would fill in. Mine is quite different. It kind of changes...the coloring can completely change. It is sort of a prayer language. The interaction with the elements of art connects your brain in a different way and that is hard to describe.



El Norte--Imprisoned and Looking to the North



Prophet Isaiah

I've had exhibits of my own art with two major themes. As I said previously, one is based on the photographs of Phil Grout and the other theme is on the Prophets--Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. I've created smaller works, too. I took a class in print-making, and I've done monoprints. Some of these were on the cover of our denomination's *Messenger* magazine. I love the doing of art.

Interview by Louise Scalzi, Communications Ministry Team

Jesus in the Neighborhood—More on the Growing Project

In the previous issue of *The Journey*, the Grossnickle Church of the Brethren shared about their Growing Project. They stated, "We have been so richly blessed by this opportunity to partner with our sisters and brothers in the developing world and to share our mission with others in our community. Twenty years later, our Project is stronger than ever, and continues to grow! Since 2006, we have raised \$473,000, and our goal is to reach \$500,000 in this our 20th year!"

We have since learned that Grossnickle has partnered with other Brethren churches to make this project a success. The other churches that are or have been part of this project are Harmony, Hagerstown, Myersville, Manor, Welty, Beaver Creek, and Edgewood.

From our Mid-Atlantic District Moderator



Greetings from the Mid-Atlantic District. I am Sharon Linton, the current moderator. The theme for this year's conference is "Centered on Christ."

We chose this theme to bring attention to the fact that Christians should recognize that when they accept Jesus into our lives, He should become the center point of our existence. We are redeemed by the blood of Jesus through His blood, "...the forgiveness of sins. He created all things and by him all things consist." Col. 1:14.

There are numerous times in my life that God has picked me up off the ground and made me realize that he loves me. One example was in 1999 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Receiving both chemotherapy and radiation, my

world was shaken. I thought about my mortality and was very self-centered. One of my aunts gave me a devotional. The first devotion was entitled, "Jesus Loves You." I so needed to hear this. My husband and I began to read this devotional every day, as well as reading the Bible through every year.

Two years later, my oldest son was killed in the World Trade Center. Once again, my world was rocked. I prayed many times for God to bring him back to me, but that was not in God's plan. What occurred in Alan's death would take too long to share.

God has been good to me; He has blessed me with a wonderful marriage. My husband, Pat, and I have been married for 53 years. We had 3 children. We had Alan for 26 years and have wonderful memories. Our daughter, Laura, is the Director of the Caring Ministries at Frederick COB. She is married to Dave Anspach, and they have two children. Our son, Scott, is married to Britnee and they are co-pastors at Union Bridge COB. They also have two children.

Keep your eyes on Jesus and He will walk with you during your trials.

Profile of the Calling and Credentialing Ministry Team

Like all Church of the Brethren districts, the Mid-Atlantic District requires the hard work of numerous volunteers. In this series, we will be profiling the various ministry teams that make up our District to help the church body gain a better understanding of what each team does.

The Calling and Credentialing Ministry Team (CCMT), as its name suggests, is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the credentialing process for ministers. It's also the first point of contact for individuals who wish to explore ministry. Along with ensuring that the criteria for licensing, ordination, and credential renewals are met, they also assign mentors and calling cohorts to potential ministers.

Cohorts are groups of three to five people, including the minister's mentor, their pastor, another member from their congregation, and others who may have contributed positively to their spiritual journey. The purpose of the cohort is to provide support for potential ministers as they work through the credentialing process.

Another goal of the CCMT is to support the well-being of pastors. According to Vice-Chair Calvin Park, this is an area they would like to expand over the next couple of years. They aspire to host events and workshops on discerning and sustaining a ministry call and work to promote spiritual care and development.

Without trained ministers willing to serve, the Church of the Brethren would not be able to answer God's call to share Jesus' love with the world. CCMT plays a critical role in overseeing the training and support of those who are called to minister. Because team members are only allowed to serve two consecutive terms at a time, they are always looking for people interested in helping. If you feel called to support COB ministers in this way, please contact our District Executive Minister, Doug Veal, for more information.

Adam Lane, Communications Ministry Team

News Around our District

Congregational Openings, Placements, Updates	Upcoming District Events
<p>Bethany—Profile circulating; Jerry Fike interim</p> <p>Denton—Profile circulating; pulpit supply</p> <p>Fellowship—No profile available; Brad Webbing interim</p> <p>Hagerstown—No profile available; Twyla Rowe announced retirement as of May 31, 2026</p> <p>Harmony—Profile circulating; Eddie Edmonds and Leon Yoder interims</p> <p>Manassas—Mark Pickens called as part-time Associate Pastor as of July 1</p> <p>Manor—Profile circulating, pulpit supply</p> <p>Washington City—No profile available; searching for part-time Pastor</p> <p>Welty—Profile circulating; Gideon Elliott interim</p> <p>Westminster—No profile available; Sandi Evans Rogers interim</p> <p>Woodbridge—No profile available; Charlotte Bear interim</p>	<p>Aug 5—Registration for 2025 Mid-Atlantic District Conference opens; conference scheduled for Oct 10 & 11, Union Bridge COB</p> <p>Aug 9—MAD Leadership Team meeting, District office</p> <p>Aug 17—Meet-and-Greet with Doug Veal, Moler Ave. COB</p> <p>Aug 24—Daryl Mosley concert, hosted by Meadow Branch COB, 6:00 pm</p> <p>Sept 1-5—National Older Adult Conference (NOAC), Lake Junaluska, NC</p> <p>Sept 27—Crestmen concert, hosted by Downsview COB, 6:00 pm</p> <p>Oct 10 & 11—Mid-Atlantic District Conference, Union Bridge COB</p> <p>Oct 17-18—Children’s Disaster Services volunteer training, Elizabethtown COB (PA)</p> <p><i>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).</i></p>

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