

Regional Ministry Assistants

In 2024, District Leadership Team created a new District support position called “Regional Ministry Associate (RMA)”. This is a part-time stipend position with an expected work commitment of 5-10 hours per week. In 2025, we hired two of the three anticipated individuals, Charlotte Bear and Rusty Curling. Each of them has been assigned to engage with approximately one-third of the congregations in the District with the geographical division being based upon the locations of the RMAs. The RMAs’ ministry will support and complement the efforts of our District Executive Minister (DEM), Doug Veal. They will regularly check in with Doug to share information and receive feedback. The RMAs report to Doug with an annual review and are accountable to the District Leadership Team.

Both Charlotte and Rusty are skilled and experienced individuals, who many of you already know. We anticipate hiring the third person in early 2026. Below is a profile of Charlotte Bear; we will profile Rusty Curling in the next newsletter.

Charlotte Bear



Charlotte has served in a variety of leadership roles for the Mid-Atlantic District for more than 35 years as both a layperson and pastor. Her various experiences have included creating a District Child Protection Policy, implementing new policies, transitioning to a new constitutional structure, and congregational problem solving. She has also worked with children, youth, and adults, in worship, fellowship, and camp settings. In 2004, Charlotte served as the Mid-Atlantic District Moderator.

She feels blessed to have been called to serve as a Regional Ministry Associate and looks forward to building and strengthening relationship within our District. She will utilize the skills she has developed through her years as a teacher, preschool director, volunteer coordinator, musician, lay leader, and pastor.

Charlotte will support the following congregations: Arlington, Dranesville, Hollywood, Manassas, Midland, Nokesville, Oakton, Woodbridge, Brownsville, Allensville, Fellowship, Johnstown, Moler Avenue, and Mountain View.

Hundreds of Monarch Butterflies Released By Members of the Westminster COB

The imagery of a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis is often used as a symbol of transformation, particularly in relation to the Christian faith, as we see ourselves as being transformed into new creations in Christ. However, a couple of members of the Westminster Church of the Brethren have been taking this metaphor quite literally.

Becky Jarboe began raising and releasing Monarch Butterflies more than 20 years ago as a part of the Kindergarten curriculum she used with her students. After she retired from teaching, working with Monarchs became a hobby and a passion for her. During the best years for Monarchs, she has been able to release about 2,000 of the pollinators. Unfortunately, their numbers have declined drastically. This year, she was able to release about 350 butterflies.



As others began learning about her work with Monarchs, she started receiving invitations to release butterflies at a local nursing home as well as at the Westminster church, where she attends services. Becky quickly realized that seeing and carefully handling the butterflies brought joy to others, so she has continued to do so.

Through releasing the Monarchs at the Westminster church, another woman took an interest in helping to populate the environment with these pollinators. Marilyn Ebaugh released about 100 Monarchs this year, and the two look after each other's caterpillars whenever the other is away.

With the reduction in population of pollinators such as Monarchs and Honey Bees, this sort of work (and it is certainly work) is important in tending God's creation, as we have been called to do from the very beginning of our existence.

While not everyone has the time to actively raise and release Monarchs, there are things we can do to help rebuild their numbers. Perhaps the most important is to plant Milkweed. Plants can be bought at nurseries, and the seeds can be purchased online. Becky said it is best to avoid Common Milkweed that can spread aggressively and quickly take over other plants. However, plant varieties such as Swamp Milkweed, Tropical Milkweed, and Butterfly Weed. For more information on how you can help Monarchs thrive, visit MonarchWatch.org.

Adam Lane, Communications Ministry Team

Ruth Aukerman—Faith and Art (Part II)

In the August issue of this newsletter, Louise Scalzi provided Part I of her interview with Mid-Atlantic District's Ruth Aukerman. Here is Part II of her interview, along with several more pictures of Ruth's artwork.

Q. What have been some of the biggest challenges that you've had in creating your art pieces?

Ruth: I think every artist is challenged as we create, and as I teach my students at the senior center, if you wouldn't struggle, you wouldn't really grow; and you wouldn't really create. There are constantly challenges—things that you aren't going to get right away. Sometimes I have to leave it, let it go, and let it sit for a while...or even a longer while, and then go back to it. Returning, I may say, okay, this is where the problem is, and this is where I can improve. I had one painting I've always told my students about. With it, I was so frustrated that I went to the bath tub and rinsed it off. What was underneath inspired something else and so eventually the canvas wasn't wasted. At a time when you're very frustrated with your own art, you may tear it up. I've had students who have done that. But even if you tear it up, even if you destroy it, it is part of the creation process. The frontal lobe of the brain is kicking in and you're no longer rational, and later you may be able to sit back and look at it rationally again.

Some of the art that I have hanging in my house now, I could probably improve on. However, they are from a particular time and period in which they were created. So, I am not going to monkey with them even though maybe it might improve them. It's like when you write a letter and you go back to it at a different time and you think, did I really write this? Well, I did! But it is a testament to a particular time in one's life. Art, for me, is such a gift and it can be very healing.

Q. How would you say that your faith and your art are connected?

Ruth: They always are connected. My art comes out of my faith or my doubt. Now, because faith is not anything static, it's not something that I achieve. It is a gift from God and so is my art. For example, I have a monoprint that I did in relation to the dying and death of my husband. One of the questions that people have upon losing someone that they love is the question, "why?". The question of why is reflected in my monoprint. Just as the exuberance of a wedding or other special event can be reflected in art. Right now, the refugee question and the pain that is there makes my art relevant again. I

reflect on what I can or can't do. Art is a prayer language, just like some people might speak in tongues. Creating is my gift from God just like a sermon may be a gift from God.



There may also be scripture that inspires my art. My Prophet series of paintings I created about how each related to God and how God used them, often, in spite of themselves. So, I kind of hope that my art is going to be able to communicate in spite of myself and make a connection with people so that they may see something that they may not otherwise have seen. Or come closer to God and Jesus to help them love Jesus more.

Q. Where do you believe that you and the church will be in five years?



Ruth: I think that the church—church with a capital C, which is the Church of Christ—will always be there because it belongs to Jesus. I am not that young anymore and don't know where my own art will be. However, as long as God is giving me the ability to do some kind of art or to teach, I will continue to do that. It is not the effectiveness that is so important but what God will do with it; I never can know what that will be.

My art, anybody's art, belongs to God whether in its present form or somehow changed. For me, and for other followers of Christ, art can be a significant part or calling of our discipleship. All I can do is try and do that to the best of my ability. I may fail, just like the disciples. I may deny Jesus. I may not speak up and be counted...we don't know how faithful we will be. The church has always faced persecution, and artists have the problem of being misunderstood or misrepresented. Some artists have never been recognized until after they are dead, just as with

writers, philosophers, and even scientists. Ultimately, I think it is in God's hands and I try, to the best of my ability, to give where there is a need. Right now, it is teaching art at a Bible school or to seniors or including it in a sermon.

Q. Through the years you've worked with a lot of different age groups. What lesson would you feel is the most important to guide them with?

Ruth: To not give up and to work with the strengths that they have. A lot of kids and even adults come to me saying I can't draw a straight line. But they can, and I build on their strengths. I've worked with students who are mentally challenged, and I do the same thing...encouraging them and building on their strengths and seeing the potential that is there. That is my gift from God. I still do that with my seniors. It is wonderful to see them all "bloom." It is important for them to play and experiment with the art and discard judgment. It is allowing students to learn and discover that they are not working towards a finished product but rather to free themselves from judgements. With theology, it is the same, you have to walk your own path and often words don't express the joy in discoveries. The beauty of making the connection is hard to explain; it fills you.

Q. You have been a pastor for many years. What lessons do you feel are most important to share with those whom you pastor?

Ruth: Very similar to my art. I try to find out where the people are and to help them to see where they are touching or reaching out to God. It is never a "finished product." But, instead, it is in the reaching and longing for something. Scripture can help provide a guide.

Q. How would you guide others to live their best life?

Ruth: Again, I would probably not even focus it that way. I would probably say, "Start where you are. What is it that you're doing right now and what gives you joy?" It is not about perfectionism. It is more about fulfillment, and I would direct them to delve into who Jesus really is and how they can emulate and know Jesus more. I couldn't live without Jesus.



Q. What else do you feel would be helpful for others to know about you and the work that you do?

Ruth: I have written a book, *Move over Picasso*, that was produced in connection with the National Gallery of Art. And, I feel that our lives should reflect or try to reflect the Master in some way or shape. Another thought in relation to that is that often success is met with failure or disaster afterwards. I have had my share of them. However, the presence of God and trying to connect with other people to spread God's love and continuing to do so is what I hope to keep on doing.

Interview by Louise Scalzi, Communications Ministry Team

Meadow Branch Celebrates 200 Years of Ministry!!

In November, the Meadow Branch church in Westminster, MD will celebrate their 200th Anniversary. Special events start on Friday, November 7, continue on Saturday, November 8, and conclude on Sunday, November 9. Here are the details:

- **Holy Grounds Coffee House.** Join at 7:00 pm on Friday for food, coffee, fellowship, and music by the church's very own "Joyful Noise" praise band.
- **Worship Celebration.** On Saturday at 6:00 pm, join in worship to celebrate all that God has done and is doing at Meadow Branch. Guest Speaker will be Rev. Paul Munday. Refreshments will follow the service.
- **Worship and Dinner.** On Sunday at 10:45 am, there will be a special worship service. The Guest Speaker will be Rev. Bob Krause, former Meadow Branch pastor. Following the service there will be a meal and a time of fellowship.

In the denomination's *Newsline* publication on September 27, Meadow Branch's Pastor Amy Bell wrote:

We have been enjoying the planning and preparations over the last year and have found some wonderful information. In reading the history, we found that several churches were all started by Meadow Branch and each developed into an organized church, including Fulton Avenue (now First Church Baltimore), Long Green Valley, Reisterstown, and Westminster.

We give thanks for all the Lord has done and covet your prayers for the Holy Spirit to lead and move mightily at Meadow Branch and in each of our churches.

Please RSVP by 11/1 at meadowbranch.org and select "200th Anniversary Events" under the Events tab. Or call at 410-848-7478 or email at office@meadowbranch.org.

National Junior High Sunday



National Junior High Sunday is an event celebrated by our denomination that focuses on the involvement of junior high youth in worship leadership. It encourages congregations to recognize and support the contributions of young people in their communities. This year, National Junior High Sunday will be held on November 2 and the theme is "Let Your Gentleness be Known."

This special Sunday is intended to empower junior high youth (grades 6-8) to take active roles in worship and to foster faith formation, friendship, and community among youth and their adult advisors. Congregations can access various resources (at this link: [Junior High Sunday – Youth and Young Adult ministries](#)) to aid in planning and conducting worship services, including:

- Creative worship ideas
- Bulletin inserts
- Prayers and music suggestions
- Bible study materials

This event not only highlights the importance of youth in church life, but it also aims to build their confidence and leadership skills within the faith community.

We would love to share stories of what the youth in your congregation planned for worship on November 2. Send your write-ups (with pictures, too!) to Jo Ann Landon in the District office at AAMAD@brethren.org.

Gretchen Zience, Communications Ministry Team

MEADOW BRANCH 1825 ~ 2025



1825 - Met in Homes
1847 - 1st Building



1876 - Building Enlarged
1914 - Rebuilt as Brick Building (below)



1954 - Addition Built (below)



2025 - Current Building (below)



Annual Dunker Church Service



On Sunday, September 14 at 3:00 pm, the annual Dunker Church service was held at the Antietam National Battlefield. Dr. Steve Longenecker, Professor of History, emeritus, Bridgewater College delivered the message.

Rev. Paul Munday, who is the Chair of the Dunker Church Service Planning Committee, sent out an invitation prior to the service. He wrote the following:

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

Arn Platou, member at Sharpsburg, MD congregation, communicated with Dr. Longenecker after the service to ask for a copy of his message. He graciously sent a copy, which we are including below.



Photo by Karen Lowry



Photo by Karen Lowry

“Be Different”

Antietam Dunker Meetinghouse

Steve Longenecker

These words are brought to you by the phrase Be different. Be different.

Jesus was different. How many times did he say “you have heard it said, but....”? Jesus fed the five thousand, respected Samaritans, and treated social outsiders with dignity. That includes lepers, tax collectors, unclean women, and the woman by the well. He was so different that he angered the first congregation that heard him preach.

Jesus told us to be so different that we become the light of the world, a city on a hill.

This building was a church on a plateau. It was named the Mumma meetinghouse after the donors, Samuel and Elizabeth Miller Mumma, who sold the plot to the congregation for the nominal sum of ten dollars.

On September 17, 1862, the Mumma meetinghouse sat on strategic ground. It occupies a slight elevation, a little plateau, and it was ideal for artillery, which were deployed on the rise just across the street. Confederate generals Stonewall Jackson, John Bell Hood, and JEB Stuart used the Mumma meetinghouse as an impromptu headquarters.

This building became the focal point of the Union advance in this part of the battlefield. One division commanded by George Sears Greene actually carried the ground; Greene advanced past the church (from your right to left), but low on ammunition, exhausted, and enveloped on both flanks, it withdrew. Part of being a historian is using the imagination, and as you leave the meetinghouse in a few minutes, imagine fighting all around it that cost a 1,700-man division 552 casualties, almost one-third of the unit.

This church on a plateau was very different. Unlike most other meetinghouses of its time, it had no stained glass, no pulpit, no pulpit furniture, no pews, no pew rent, no carpeting, no seat cushions, no steeple, no organ, no bell, and barren walls. It had two doors, one for each gender; men entered the east door by the street and sat on the right while women entered the south door and sat on the left.

The Mumma meetinghouse was so different that soldiers did not recognize it for what it was. John Bell Hood called it “Saint Mumma’s Church”; he certainly did not understand. All that many soldiers saw was a whitewashed building that stuck out against the trees and their deep dark-green late-summer leaves. Perhaps it was a small house or schoolhouse. By the standards of the times, the Mumma meetinghouse was very different.

We are to be different. Jesus told us to forgive seven times seventy, go the second mile, and turn the other cheek. Give water to those who thirst, feed the hungry, welcome strangers, and visit the sick and those in prison. Love one another and our neighbors as ourselves. Bless those who persecute us. Deny ourselves and take up the cross. The first are last; we are to be servants. We are to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us. We are to overcome evil with good. All this is different.

Those who met in this different building certainly followed Jesus’s directive to be different. Dunker church architecture, as mentioned, was strange to the world because that’s how the Brethren wanted it. Their preachers were unique; Brethren preachers did not attend seminary, they were called from the ranks of the congregation, and congregational council rather than a bishop or a conference of clergy ordained them. Preachers farmed full-time, or as much as their preaching duties permitted, and went uncompensated for their church work. Although the system was patriarchal, all members, including women, voted in council, and that was uncommon. Members dressed plainly; every morning when they got dressed, they were reminded of their faith. They literally wore their religion on their sleeves. Their hair was different. They baptized adults by trine immersion, washed feet, and greeted one another with a Holy Kiss. In fact, Yearly Meeting wanted white Brethren to greet Black Brethren with this intimate salutation, and although some grass-roots Dunkers resisted, the annual gathering’s instructions themselves were unbelievably different in the context of nineteenth-century America when even interracial handshakes weren’t done. From no steeple to promotion of an interracial Holy Kiss, the Antietam Brethren were different.

Most notably for us this afternoon, those who worshipped here were nonresistant and mostly anti-slavery. Generally, Civil War Brethren opposed military service, and they disfellowshipped those who joined the military. This building, then, is a city on a hill—or a congregation on a plateau—for peace amidst the darkness of one of America’s worst days.

Slavery is a little more complicated. On the one hand, Yearly Meeting was an early and consistent opponent of enslavement, which made it radically different from early nineteenth-century America. Yearly Meeting even used the word abolish, a derivative of abolition and a reference to abolitionists, a tiny minority despised by mainstream America. Yet, the Dunkers were imperfectly human, and a few slaveholders slipped into their ranks. The Mummas owned several young people, but the record strongly suggests that they bought children to free them. John Otto, however, an elder here, owned a woman and her son. He maybe gets credit—maybe—for freeing them after the Emancipation Proclamation and before it was legally mandatory but, according to Yearly Meeting, Otto should have been expelled for his enslaving and he was not.

Another way to view the Brethren on slavery is through the eyes of their neighbors. Sometimes the best test of our discipleship is how others see us. We might think that we walk the walk, but what do others think of us? I have not learned what Marylanders thought of the Dunker position on slavery, but we do know what the neighbors of Brethren in the Shenandoah Valley thought about the Brethren and slavery. The Valley was more heavily enslaved than Sharpsburg and further south, and there Brethren had a strong reputation as nonslaveholders. The Harrisonburg, Virginia, newspaper quickly and unequivocally described Dunkers as opposed to slaveholding. There was no hedging about Brethren nonslaveholding; it was a basic assumption of neighbors that Dunkers did not do it. Moreover, as the secession crisis intensified, opposition to slavery involved physical risk, and those who sat on these benches deserve credit for being mostly, if not completely, different on a big hot-button issue.

For us, then, the task is not to be different like the Antietam Dunkers in specifics. Thankfully, slavery is long gone—we can’t replicate that witness—and maybe a church organ isn’t the worst thing in the world, after all. Instead, we need to listen to Jesus and draw inspiration from those who sat on cushion-less benches in this building to find another way of living that works for us in the early twenty-first century.

One easy way to be a little unusual today is to treat everybody with respect. For a variety of reasons, including but not limited to technology, social interaction has declined. People stay home more often, and if they do interact, it’s over technology rather than face-to-face.

Another problem is that we don't know our neighbors. How many times in the last year have you had a conversation with your neighbors. I confess that I do not know the names of all my neighbors.

Consequently, as social interaction wanes, distrust and incivility have waxed to alarming levels. I am retired now, but over my career the decline in trust in the workplace has been quite noticeable. Employers and institutions are guilty unless proven otherwise, and people on a rival committee, from a different department, or in a higher pay grade are often held in low esteem. Jesus calls us to be different. We are to respect others as we wish to be respected. As we sit around the meeting table, say something kind about the boss.

Yet another casualty of social isolation is empathy. Few can demonstrate understanding of the other side's viewpoint or motivations. I encounter empathy for conflicting opinions so infrequently that it must be harder than it sounds. For example, my congregation is deeply embroiled in a longstanding disagreement with the district over a culture war issue, and it's disappointing how few people acknowledge that the other side has also prayed about the situation and simply received another answer.

Be different. Respect the other tribe, the one you consider Samaritan. Admittedly, sometimes the other side is simply irrational; conspiracy theories are obvious examples. Conspiracy theories are just wrong. And some belief systems are absolutely sinful: racism, misogyny, and genocide are quick examples. There's no compromising with them. But if I give more nuanced examples of beliefs that are mostly wrong but still have a valid point or two, I'll start losing my audience. People will figure out my political identity and stop listening, we are that divided.

Be different. Admit that the other side, even if overall wrong, still has a point, which it usually does. If you think that your team is always right and the other always wrong, you are part of the problem. Be faithful to core convictions but try to understand the other side.

And, of course, be civil. Civility in today's public discourse is an increasingly scarce commodity and practicing it makes us different. Some progressives justify incivility if they think the other person is a privileged oppressor, and some conservatives cast manners aside if they think the other person is woke, but we can be different by treating the Other as we wish to be treated. Liberals, take a privileged oppressor to lunch. Conservatives, have coffee with somebody who is woke. Be a good listener and get to know them.

Admittedly, this call for respect and civility is not a trumpet summons to cutting-edge prophetic behavior. Yes, stirring the pot has its place. Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and Sojourner Truth are all heroes. But today, as we remember the 23,000 Americans who were killed, wounded, and missing outside these walls, reconciliation seems more appropriate, and this yoke feels easy, though it still makes us different.

Also, as we remember Charlie Kirk today, reconciliation feels appropriate. Historian Jon Meacham explained the current wave of political violence by suggesting that we no longer recognize that all persons have dignity, like the wave of violence in the 60s. As simple as it sounds, recognizing that all persons have dignity is a major contribution and, sad to say, will make us different. The good news is that it gives us something to do.

The call, then, is to find inspiration from a church on a plateau and from those who sat on its cushion-less benches. Help society to lower the temperature. Be empathetic, be respectful, be civil, be a healer, and be different.

Go and find someone sitting alone in a back row and chat them up. Be the first to give somebody the benefit of the doubt who needs it. Go into the faculty room and say something nice about the principal. Give Christmas cookies to your neighbors. Without betraying your values, understand the other tribe. May all see that the lines have fallen unto you in pleasant places and that you are different.

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>Manor—Profile circulating, pulpit supply</p> <p>Washington City—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>Oct 10 & 11—Mid-Atlantic District Conference, Union Bridge COB, Union Bridge, MD</p> <p>Oct. 10 & 11—Jr./Sr. Youth Event, Union Bridge COB, Union Bridge, MD, registration fee \$10</p> <p>Oct 17-18—Children’s Disaster Services volunteer training, Elizabethtown COB (PA)</p> <p>Oct. 11—Welty COB Fall Fest, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Smithsburg, MD</p> <p>Oct. 25—Bush Creek COB, Turkey, Fried Oyster and Ham Dinner, 12:00 pm-5:00 pm, Monrovia, MD</p> <p>Nov. 1—Sam’s Creek Church Holiday Bazaar, 8:30 am-2:00 pm, New Windsor, MD</p> <p>Nov. 7-9—Meadow Branch COB 200th Anniversary Celebration, various events, Westminster, MD (see article in this newsletter)</p> <p>Nov. 8—Bush Creek COB Holiday Craft Bazaar, 8:00 am-2:00 pm, Monrovia, MD</p> <p>Nov. 15—Camp Mardela Service Day, Denton, MD</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>

<p>Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Brethren 19 Bond Street Westminster, MD 21157 443-960-3052 Douglas Veal, District Executive Minister dveal@brethren.org Jo Ann Landon, Administrative Assistant aamad@brethren.org</p>	<p>Please submit items for <i>The Journey</i> newsletter to Jo Ann Landon in the District Office.</p> <p>Permission is granted by the Mid-Atlantic District to reproduce and distribute information from this newsletter.</p>
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