

Thoughts on Advent and Christmas



When I was growing up, the time right before Christmas was one of my favorite times of the year, and still remains a time that I enjoy quite a bit. There are, of course, the decorations that go up in our homes. Every year, my family would pull out our artificial Christmas tree (due to allergies in our family) and get the decorations put up shortly after Thanksgiving. We'd turn on the Christmas music, and get to decorating. Schoolltime often seemed to slow down a good bit, and of course there was always the Christmas break to look forward to.

At church, we'd have some special things going on, including Christmas caroling, special music being sung, and the lighting of the Advent candles each week. I always liked it when Christmas Eve would come around, and we'd go over to the church building late that day for the midnight Christmas service. Since my dad was the pastor, we would often be the first ones to arrive and there was just something special about being there in the dark before others arrived.

As I transitioned into the pastoral ministry, I found Advent to be an interesting time of the year as well. Planning and leading the services I remembered as a child was always a fun time, though I will admit that sometimes figuring out something new to say on the Advent Sundays felt challenging at times. It is easy to let the familiarity of our celebrations and traditions become the point, rather than letting them point us to how God is continuing to work in our world.

Often, we can simply end up with the familiarity of the season and the traditions passing us by, without really looking too closely at what is, at its core, a celebration not only of how God acted in Jesus Christ's birth, but how God is continuing to act in our world today. The traditional Sunday themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love are not just about what God did so long ago in Bethlehem, but also about how we are called to live them out today.

As you go through your celebrations of Advent this year, I want to invite you to think beyond just what God did in bringing about the birth of our Savior, Jesus. In whatever way your local congregation is celebrating Advent and Christmas, take some time this year to reflect on how the birth of Jesus, and our preparations for the celebration of that birth, can make a difference in your life, in the life of your congregation, in the life of our District, in the life of our denomination, in the life of our country, and in the life of our world. How can we take the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love and live them out so that others can see the Good News of Jesus' birth?

Doug Veal,
District Executive Minister

Regional Ministry Associate

As we reported in the October issue of *The Journey*, the District Leadership Team has created a new part-time support position called "Regional Ministry Associate (RMA)". 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. We anticipate hiring the third person in early 2026.

Below is a profile of Rusty Curling; in our October issue, we included a profile of Charlotte Bear.

Rusty Curling



Rusty was brought up and nurtured in faith and ordained to ministry as a southern Baptist and came to the Church of the Brethren in 1991. “It felt like coming home.” After having his ordination accepted in the COB, he has served as a pastor in Ohio, Oregon, and Maryland. Most recently, he has specialized in interim ministry. He has served on district boards, evangelism and church planting committees, and the Program and Arrangements Committee in our District. Presently, he is busy providing pulpit supply preaching and trying not to retire too quickly.

Rusty accepted the position of Regional Ministry Associate in May and hopes to help provide cohesiveness, open communication, and a consistent presence for the MAD in that position. Rusty is supporting the following congregations: Bethany, Community of Joy, Denton, Easton, Fairview, Greenhill, Ridgely, 1st Baltimore, Friendship, GraceWay, Long Green Valley, Reisterstown, Woodberry, Flower Hill, University Park, and Washington City.

Special Events throughout the Mid-Atlantic District

Every month, Jo Ann Landon, Administrative Assistant in the District Office, sends out a listing and flyers to inform all congregations about various events in our churches. She also posts the information on the MAD website (www.madcob.com). You can imagine that this time of year is busy, but the list below reflects just a small fraction of our District activities. Please remember to send Jo Ann details of your church’s events so she can share with all District churches. We are enriched and inspired when we can join others in their celebrations and worship.



- Baking Spirits Bright – Welty COB, Saturday, December 6 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm
- [Holiday Event – Union Bridge COB](#), December 7 from 11:30 am to 5:00 pm
- [Christmas At Camp Mardela](#), December 12 at 6:00 pm and December 13 at 8:00 pm, 301 Deep Shore Rd., Denton, MD
- [Christmas Luncheon at Shepherd’s Spring](#), December 14 from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Church Organ Available

Beaver Creek Church of the Brethren recently acquired a newer organ and now has one too many! If your church is interested in an organ that is in great condition, please contact Pastor Gabe for more information.

Gabriel Dodd, Pastor
540.325.9361
dodd.gabriel@gmail.com



Disaster Relief News

Disaster Response Auction

Before we know it, it will be time for the Mid-Atlantic District Disaster Response Auction! The deadline for booklet ads is Friday, February 6, 2026. Look for an email from the District office with auction forms or find them at [Disaster Response Auction | Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Brethren](#).

Meat Canning Project

Call the office to sign up a group of volunteers from your congregation to take part in canning chicken that will be available to District churches for use in area food pantries. Chicken canning will take place Monday, April 6 through Thursday, April 9, 2026.

Call for Denominational Leaders

The District Office received the following letter from Karl Magenhofer, who is the Chair of the denomination's Nominating Committee--Standing Committee. Even though the deadline for submitting a nomination was Dec. 3, please consider sending one in for the committee's consideration. (Last year they extended the deadline.)

Denomination Nominations for Positions of Leadership

Abounding in the Work of the Lord: Request for Nominations

The work of the church is constant and I was recently reminded of 1 Corinthians 15:58: Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (NASB 1995)

While constantly at work, seasons also change in the church. When it comes to nominations for denominational leadership the same is true. We have recently come out of a season of great need and great response as we were filling positions on the Review and Evaluation Committee, which is being tasked with some incredibly important work. In our current season, the need is still great, yet the response is underwhelming at best. At the current time we have 20% of the number of nominations we did this time last year. That is not sustainable if we want our ballots to reflect the full depth and breadth of the gifted people we call brothers and sisters in the Church of the Brethren.

I write not just seeking additional nominations, but also with a word for those who have been nominated in the past and have not been given the opportunity to serve. I am constantly reminded that God and I do not wear the same watch. His timing and mine are rarely, if ever, the same. I am imploring those who have been nominated in the past and not made it to the final ballot, to be willing to hear the call of your brothers and sisters who are telling you yet again that you have something special to offer the wider church. The same goes for those who have nominated incredibly talented folks in the past and either have not had the opportunity to vote for them or have seen the position go to someone else. Do not lose heart or your conviction that the person you nominated is worthy of consideration. Perhaps the time in which they are needed is now.

This is about the spot I should quote someone brilliant, sharing a pithy comment that turns light bulbs on above our heads. You'll have to settle for my dim bulb simply reminding us all that the quality of the ballot and quality of denominational leadership is up to you. Abound in the work of the church by sending in your nominations.

By the way, the deadline for nominations is December 3rd, so don't wait! A full list of open positions and digital nomination forms are available here: [Nominations – Annual Conference](#).

Humbly submitted,

Karl Magenhofer, Nominating Committee Chair

News Around our District

Congregational Openings, Placements, Updates	Upcoming District Events
Bethany—Profile circulating; Jerry Fike interim	Dec. 6—Baking Spirits Bright, Welty COB, 8: a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Denton—Profile circulating; pulpit supply	Dec. 7—Holiday Event, Union Bridge COB, 11:30 a.m.
Fellowship—No profile available; Brad Webbing interim	Dec. 12 & 13—Christmas at Camp Mardela (Dec. 12 at 6:00 pm and Dec. 13 at 8:00 pm)
Hagerstown—No profile available; Twyla Rowe announced retirement as of May 31, 2026	Dec. 14—Christmas Luncheon at Shepherd's Spring, 1:00 pm to 3:00 p.m.
Harmony—Profile circulating; Leon Yoder interim	Looking forward to 2026
Manor—Profile circulating, pulpit supply	Apr. 11—Auction Benefit Dinner, Bush Creek COB, 6:00 p.m.
Washington City—Profile available; searching for part-time Pastor	May 2—Disaster Response Auction, Carroll County Agricultural Center, Westminster, MD
Welty—Profile circulating; Gideon Elliott interim	Oct. 23—2026 Pastors' Retreat, sponsored by MAD Spirituality and Congregational Life Ministry Team
Westminster—No profile available; Sandi Evans Rogers interim	<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>
Woodbridge—No profile available; Charlotte Bear interim	

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