WEST MARVA DISTRICT MEMO FEBRUARY 2024

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Brenda Harvey, Administrative Assistant (301-616-1367)
www.westmarvachurches.org



If God had a message for you

If God had a message for you – how would you want it delivered? This was a question asked by my adult Sunday school teacher one Sunday morning.

I chose to have mine delivered in a song. I am not musically inclined, I cannot play an instrument, but I enjoy listening to music. There are so many uplifting songs. Songs about being strong and courageous to face our 'giants' with confidence; songs about 'how beautiful heaven will be'; songs about having hope in Jesus; strength when we surrender all; shelter in the arms of God. Many songs offer encouragement in our times of need. They give us hope and strength in our time of need. I'm sure we all have a song that speaks to us every time we hear or sing it.

I then asked myself another question. What will I do with the message I am given? Will I be like Abraham and have faith to pack up and move to an unknown land? Or Daniel and continue to kneel at my window and pray even though I may be thrown to the lions? Or like Mary and say, "I am the Lord's servant, may your word be fulfilled."? Many people in the Bible followed without hesitation. Moses needed a little more prodding before he accepted, but he did accept his call. Zachariah also doubted for a time, but he was also faithful in the end. God is patient with us and will gently prod us until we say, "Here am I, send me".

I don't make New Year's resolutions, but I do set goals each year. My goal this year is to MAKE time, to be intentional, about being still in the presence of God so that I can hear what new message he has for me. I pray that I will then be obedient to it.

I pray too that each one of us makes the time to worship at the feet of Jesus. That we pray for each other and encourage one another.

Hebrews 10:24-26 (NIV)

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Each day we wake is a new day in which to serve our Lord. Go and be a blessing!

Anna Skeweris West Marva District Leadership Team Member 240-321-1561 annasauder@gmail.com

NOTES FROM DISTRICT BOARD

The District Board meeting was held on January 27 at the Westernport Church. Jennifer Kreighbaum, the new board chair led the meeting and Allie Crowe, Westernport Church pastor led devotions. Teams met to make plans for 2024 and gave the following highlights:

Spiritual Growth – Richard Funk, Chair, reported they are planning a pastor pulpit exchange, a Deacons and Pastors Appreciation dinner, and a Deacons Workshop.

Ministerial Leadership – John Ellifritz, Chair, reported they approved two pastors for relicensing, discussed possible classes for ceu's including a class to be led by Bob Combs on Genesis, and are planning an Ethics class. The committee will be keeping track of pastors' ceu's.

Mission and Evangelism – Thelma Cox, chair, reported they are planning a Drug Awareness Workshop in various communities within the district; they encourage men's fellowship breakfasts with devotions; stated scholarship funds are available for youth to participate in mission trips; and Beaver Run Church is holding a gospel sing on May 4.

Financial Resources – Bill Shomo, Chair, reported 2023 expenses totaled \$41,740 and income received totaled \$40,895. As the district office copier lease has expired, it was decided it was more cost effective to do a buyout of the copier instead of renewing the lease.

Other reports presented: Leadership Team, Parsonage Rental update, CODE representative, Administrative Assistant, West Marva Ministry Training Program, Disaster Relief, 2024 Moderator, Church Withdrawals update, and District Executive Minister Search Committee. Next board meeting is April 20. Meeting attendance is open to those within the district. Board chair, Jennifer Kreighbaum closed the meeting in prayer. We thank the Westernport Church for hosting and providing lunch for those in attendance.

MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT BOARD CHAIR

A true NFL football fan for life, the tangible skills are always the topic of conversation as the draft draws near. Good hands? How fast are they? Can they break a tackle? That QB, can he read the coverage?

Each year as we draw nearer to lent, Holy Week, and ultimately Easter, what skills have we honed to prepare us for new life, new chances, for darkness giving way to life? Spiritual disciples are even more important as we journey to the cross, the grave, and beyond! Prayer and solitude seem increasingly important as we grow closer to Jesus at Calvary. Submission and service are necessary to recognize our place in subservience to God and in selflessness to others. Confession is a needed part of love feast and communion, the body broken for us. We must admit our shortcomings. May this season be one where of disciplining ourselves spiritually so that the power and salvation of the cross are guiding us and visible before us.

Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Jennifer Kreighbaum, Board Chair

Pastors – Do you need CEU's? Check out these exciting opportunities!

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center's 2024 Continuing Education Events

To register, email <u>KarenHodges@SVMCcob.org</u>, or call 717-361-1450.

Worship Models from Genesis to Revelation

Leah Hileman, Leader

Saturday, April 13, 2024, 9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon Camp Harmony, Western PA District (In-Person or Zoom)

In-person: \$45.00 for .3 CEUs; \$35.00 for no CEUs Zoom: \$35.00 for .3 CEUs; \$25.00 for no CEUs

How did churches end up with altar tables, tambourines, separate seating, call-and-response songs, house churches, and hymns? How did the way God's people worship morph through the generations, adapting to culture shifts and changing in style, format, liturgy, and theology? In this workshop, we will survey the scripture to see evidence that, while the Good News never changes, the ways and means by which we approach God in worship have undergone dramatic change. We'll explore the biblical basis for large and small assemblies; varying styles of art, music, and architecture; and the "personality" of worship in high- and low-church traditions.

Autism and the Church

Lisa Kruse, Tim Miller, David Crumrine, Stan Dueck, Leaders Thursday, September 26, 2024 – 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM Juniata College (In-Person or Zoom)

In-person: \$65.00 for .5 CEUs or \$55.00 for no CEUs. Includes lunch.

Zoom: \$45.00 for .5 CEUs; or \$35.00 for no CEUs

The church is a place where people should feel welcome no matter what challenges they may have. Families with an autistic member need to feel the welcome and acceptance of a church who cares for their special circumstance. This Continuing Education event will provide information to pastors and other church leaders regarding autism, how to support families with an autistic member, and how to make the church a safe and welcoming place for families.

Grief Literacy

Julie Guistwite, Leader
Tuesday, October 1, 2024, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM – Zoom Only
\$35.00 for .3 CEUs or \$25.00 for no CEUs.

Society's grief-avoiding mentality and limited community-based support initiatives affect the well-being of bereaved persons. This interactive case-based workshop examines the grief literacy movement in connection with Christ-Centered Ministry Leadership. Attendees will gain practical knowledge and skills applicable to enhancing the welfare of grieving congregational members and persons in their community.

The Question of Leadership: Why It Matters

Jeff Carter, Leader

Saturday, November 16, 2024, 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Elizabethtown College - In-Person or Zoom
In-person: \$65.00 for .5 CEUs or \$55.00 for no CEUs. Includes lunch.

Zoom: \$45.00 for .5 CEUs; or \$35.00 for no CEUs

What does it mean to lead in today's church and world? The American protestant church is in steep decline. The Church of the Brethren is experiencing schism. The pandemic accelerated the already changing patterns of religious life. Resources are scarce. Furthermore, Brethren are naturally suspicious of leaders; called, elected, or self-proclaimed. Values, such as humility, consensus, and the priesthood of all believers, lead to a flat hierarchy and a communal pragmatism. We celebrate leaders such as Dan West, Sarah Major, M.R. Zigler, and Anna Mow, but in their day, they stirred controversy by the manner of their leading. So, what does it mean to lead in today's church and world? I believe leadership begins by asking the first question and having the willingness and curiosity to pursue the second question. It is a way of thinking that results in effective doing. And yes, it is something we do together.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR CEU'S:

Mark your calendars for March 9, 2024! Make plans to attend a class where the study of "The Study of Faith Begins". This class will be presented by Pastor Bob Combs and will be held at Hanging Rock Church of the Brethren from 9 until 2.

This class will cover the World of Nature, Human Relationships, Spiritual Relationships, the Tower of Babel, the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The teaching of this class will wind its way through the book of Genesis. The cost of this class is free. There will be a break for lunch, and it is on your own. .CEU's for the class will be available. If you plan to attend, please call the Hanging Rock Church at (304) 359-0652 or (304) 359-0728. You can also email at hangingrock12@outlook.com.

West Marva Ministry Training Program

Our course of study program is thriving with individuals continually working towards their goals in ministry. 2024 classes are lined up with instructors and dates. As of this time, we have three active students and two that have specific courses they need to finish that are waiting for them to come around in rotation. All courses are held at the Westernport Church of the Brethren unless otherwise noted to students.

February 10th: Brethren History/Life/Thought @ 9 AM

Teacher: Allie Crowe

Required Texts: Brethren: Yesterday and Today; Fruit of the Vine

April 27th: Interpreting the Bible @ 9 AM

Teacher: Carl Fike

Required Text: Grasping God's Word

August 24th: Church History @ 9 AM

Teachers: Allie Crowe and Jennifer Kreighbaum

Required Text(s): TBD

October 12th: Old Testament Survey @ 9 AM

Teacher: TBD (Allie Crowe or John Ellifritz)

Required Text(s): TBD

Attending or teaching a course can help our current licensed and ordained clergy maintain their continued education requirements. One can do only some of the assignments; just come and participate and help the students with experience and perspective. For additional information contact Allie at allie.crowe07@gmail.com or call 608-215-8619

CHURCH NEWS FROM WESTERNPORT CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN'

Our church family has been continuing to find ways to minister to the community. We recently welcomed the seniors from Calvary Christian Academy. They are working towards a mission trip to Puerto Rico in March.

One of our Youths, Rachel Wolford, competed in the Patriot's Pen contest and took 2nd Place.

Our church is one of several in the area that have formed the Tri-Town Church Coalition. We have worked together to break down the denominational barriers that separate us and show that we can all work together for God's Glory. Coming up, the coalition is preparing and planning an Easter Ham Luncheon for March. More information will come as these plans unfold.

The Westernport Church is excited for the Easter season. We have our 3rd Annual Community Easter Egg Hunt on March 23rd at 10:30. This event has grown over the last two years and is one of our favorite events. This involves our church family, members of other volunteer organizations, and the local fire department, which tries to make sure the Easter Bunny shows up on the fire truck! We have two egg hunt areas for different age groups and grand prizes for specific eggs. There are guessing games that adults can participate in, such as yard games, food, and drinks. Come and join us.

Holy Week is filled with opportunities such as our Maundy Thursday service involving Love Feast, Good Friday, and Sunrise Service on Easter Morning.

Pastor Allie is working towards her Doctorate, an endeavor she began in January of 2023. If all goes as planned, she will defend her portfolio sometime in July or August of this year. She is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling, emphasizing crisis/trauma and individual/family.

Volunteers Needed

Dawson Springs, KY - Brethren Disasters Ministries

Around 75% of the town of Dawson Springs was leveled during a Dec. 10-11 2021 tornado outbreak. Over 400 of the 1,200 housing units in the town were lost.

West Marva District is planning a trip: March 17-23, 2024

Please consider volunteering...
We could really use the extra hands!



For more information call or email:

Denny Skeweris 301-616-0013 denskew@gmail.com



SPECIAL BLESSINGS TO THE NEWLY WEDS!

Robin Edwards, pastor of the Georges Creek Church of the Brethren, was married to David Smearman, on November 17, 2023. Robin's new address is 132 Smearman Road, Friendsville, MD 21531. Her phone number has remained the same 301-789-3367.



PASTORS/DEACONS DINNER
ALONG WITH THEIR FAMILIES

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2024 5:00 P.M.

SPONSORED BY THE

WEST MARVA SPIRITUAL
GROWTH TEAM AT THE
WESTERNPORT CHURCH
OF THE BRETHREN
198 OAK VIEW DRIVE
WESTERNPORT, MD 21562



Please join us for this
Appreciation Dinner.
There will be no cost for
this meal. Please RSVP
Richard Funk, Chair of
the West Marva Spiritual
Growth Team by 3-22-24
with number of
Pastors/Deacons and
their family members
attending from your
church for this dinner.

PLEASE RESPOND BY

3-22-24,

Richard Funk

Phone: 304-897-5319

EMAIL:

DEBFUNK@FRONTIER

NET.NET

Financial Resource Team Report

The Financial Resource Team is pleased to report the financial results for year ending December 31st, 2023. In general, The West Marva district remains in solid financial condition. Although there has been a decline in membership, we also experienced a decline in expenses to adjust for reduced amount of income for 2023.

The 2023 results are:
Expenses = \$41,740.90
Income = \$40,895.00
Designated fund allocations held in savings and CDs = \$142,815.41
Non-Designated funds held in savings, CDs, and checking = \$193,066.54

The planned 2024 budget includes: Expenses = \$79,874.57 Income of \$50,100.00

The additional expenses include allocations for a part time DE. The actual expenses are dependent on the timing for hiring the part-time DE.

The forecasted income includes \$12,000 in rental income for the residence portion of the West Marva District Office. In addition, the Church of the Brothern was blessed to receive insurance dividends from the Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company. As a result of the distribution, the Church of the Brothern has made a one-time donation of \$3,000 to each district.

In summary, we continue to explore opportunities to reduce expenses and increase income for the continued operations of the West Marva district.

We continue to pray with time and dedication that we can overcome our daily challenges and grow our ability to fulfill Gods desire to seek and find opportunities of outreach through the mission of the West Marva District.

YEARBOOK FORMS HAVE BEEN MAILED TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

We have received word from Jim Miner, the Yearbook Specialist, that Yearbook forms have been mailed to all congregations. Mr. Miner is requesting that you please take the time to return these forms to the Yearbook Office. All forms are due April 15th.





The Keyser Church of the Brethren is celebrating 100 years in their church building. Special times are being planned for every Third Sunday. We invite anyone to come and share in the celebration throughout the year. We are blessed!

For more information call the church at 304-788-3169 and someone will get back with you!

Hanging Rock COB Completes a Community Service Project

The Hanging Rock Church completed a major project on February 4th with support from the West Marva District. A local family asked Pastor Bob Combs if he could help with a pressing need. An elderly family member who has trouble using steps could not safely exit his home. Pastor Bob and several men from the Hanging Rock COB built a sturdy deck with both steps and a wheelchair ramp. This project was completed in a timely manner due to the financial help given by the District through the Disaster Relief Fund. The work crew included Pastor Bob Combs, Assistant Pastor Chris Curry, Joe Combs, and Wesley Luttrell. The Hanging Rock COB is very appreciative for the support given by the West Marva District. This important project has improved the quality of life of one of our elderly neighbors and his family.





SALEM: The roots of Salem Church have a connection with the Sandy Creek Congregation as we learn From Dr. Emmert Bittinger in given in Allegheny Passage.

SALEM submitted by Betty Bane Dzubba. I continue to enjoy learning about our congregations and am convinced we need to honor the important founding work of those faithful servants who wished to create houses of worship that we continue to use today.

The roots of the Salem Church of the Brethren have a connection with the Sandy Creek Congregation. Records show these Brethren elected their own ministers and deacons since 1814, according to Dr. Bittinger's history of the churches of the West Marva district. Many strong Christian men served the needs of their community during those early years. Interesting information was given about congregational history and those who served the churches of the Sandy Creek areas.

In 1876 Michael J. Thomas noted 23 ministers had served Sandy Creek Congregation as free ministers. Elder Jacob Fike the first recorded was elected in 1814. Other early names of those serving were Solomon Buckler, James Kelso, Jacob Beeghly and James A. Ridenour. Some of these men moved into the congregation from nearby areas to better serve the needs of the young churches.

The Eldership of Jeremiah Thomas (1889-1934) is well known throughout the area. In 1898 he organized a group for young people for "social and prayer" meetings. This was long before regular Sunday Schools were established. He instilled in these youth some leadership skills as well as making it possible for the youth to have companionship with others of like mind, for he believed it was crucial to the future of the church.

There was not a salaried paster at Sandy Creek until Russell K. Showalter began his ministry there. He served approximately five years carrying the responsibility of Mt. Dale, Hazelton, Clifton Mills, Canaan and Mt. Grove. During his service the membership greatly increased more than double in those churches.

The oldest house of worship of the Sandy Creek Congregation is **Salem** four miles north of Brandonville in Preston County, West Virginia. As we know in those early years in all communities Brethren worshipped in homes, school houses and even in barns during the pleasant weather months. It was not uncommon to hold preaching services in a grove of trees.

Land for the Salem church was donated from the Jacob M. Thomas farm. Some reference has been made to this place of worship dating back to 1845 to 1850. Years before the War Between the States took place.

The **Second Salem Meeting** house was dedicated in 1889. This replaced the old building which was removed in 1889. The second church measured thirty-five by fifty feet in size, not counting the kitchen. This structure would have barely accommodated its communicants and it was necessary to use the overflow space in the kitchen.

A new wing twenty-five by thirty-five feet was built in 1914. In the 1930s and 1940's it has been written it accommodated as many as four hundred persons at Love Feasts.

The Salem congregation passed a resolution for each deacon to make a list of the valuation of each member *he* (the deacon) visited in order that a pledge or gift might fit the givers worth. Members were then taxed according to their valuation.

Today, this may be a cause for wonder, however during that time period it was not uncommon to use this way of raising funds for a church house. There are records showing Beaver Run used this approach and manner to "tax" members for this purpose.

A special committee was given "authority to do anything they may think proper to raise the amount of money needed." Over the years various improvements have been made. In 1980 a new wing was added which provided four additional classrooms, tow restrooms and a storage room.

The Cemetery is located on the Noah Thomas farm on land donated by the Thomas family. Additional land was provided by Beulah Wilson Dotson.

Sunday school was not organized at Salem until April 4, 1909.

In 1973 Salem church withdrew from the Sandy Creek Congregation and became a separate congregation.

The current pastor **Donnie Savage** is one of many devout ministers who has faithfully served the Lord and the Salem community. Pastor Donnie has been pastoring at Salem since January 1, 1997.



Registration for the 2024 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, Grand Rapids, Michigan -- July 3 - 7

Annual Conference provides an opportunity for the body of Christ known as the Church of the Brethren to come together to hear the voice of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit within and among us. Please join us for inspiring worship, informational Bible studies, communal discernment, engaging breakout sessions, energizing exhibits, empowering witness, nurturing fellowship and meaningful connection.

Registration Fees: Registration for both delegates and non-delegates for the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference will open at 12:00 Noon Central Time on **Friday, March 1, 2024.**

- The advance delegate registration fee is \$330 per delegate. Advance registration will close on June 10. The fee for registering delegates onsite in Grand Rapids will be \$405. Don't wait!
- The advance non-delegate registration fee is \$150. Advance registration will close on June 10. The fee for registering non-delegates onsite in Grand Rapids will be \$185.
- Registering as a Virtual Non-Delegate to watch business online, view special events and concerts, and
 participate in a number of equipping sessions is again an option. The advance virtual non-delegate registration fee is \$195 through June 10. From June 11 until July 7, the registration fee will be \$225. New this
 year is an option for Groups and Institutions to participate virtually from a common location. For more
 information go to www.brethren.org/ac2024/registration and select Virtual.

Registering a Delegate: Congregations may register their delegates using online registration beginning Wednesday, March 1, 2024 at 12:00 Central Time. Payment options include paying by credit card or sending a check. Go to www.brethren.org/ac and click on the "Registration" button and then choose "Delegate Registration". Each delegate's complete name, address, email, and phone number are required. If you need assistance, call the Annual Conference Office (800-323-8039, ext 4366) and we will be happy to assist in registering online. Delegate registration fees provide each delegate with a Conference booklet, the business materials packet, a designated delegate name tag, and seating at the delegate tables at Annual Conference. Each congregation who registers a delegate or delegates will also receive a copy of the 2024 Annual Conference minutes.

Delegate Eligibility and Allotment: Delegates must be full members of the Church of the Brethren. The number of delegates for each congregation is based on the membership statistics as reported in the 2023 Church of the Brethren Yearbook:

Up to 200 Members 1 delegate 201-400 Members 2 delegates 401-600 Members 3 delegates 601-800 Members 4 delegates

Non-Delegate Registration

Non-delegate registration opens Wednesday, March 1, 2024 at 12:00 Central Time. When registering anyone other than a delegate, click on the "Non-Delegate Registration" button.

New Registration System

The Church of the Brethren is rolling out a new registration system this year that looks different than what we have used in the past. For more information about how to use the new site go to www.brethren.org/ac2024 then click Registration and go to the Instructions for New Registration Site. These instructions will be available a week before registration opens.

Conference Hotels

There are two hotels in the conference block: the **Amway Grand Plaza** and **Courtyard Grand Rapids Downtown.** Our Annual Conference Room Rate at both hotels will be \$119 plus tax (15%), totaling \$136.90 per night. Go to www.brethren.org/ac2024/hotels for more information. **The link for hotel reservations will be on the last page of the registration site immediately after you register as well as in the confirmation email sent.** Everyone can reserve a room upon completing their registration. *Do not call the hotel to make a reservation! Annual Conference discounted room rates are only available for online registrations made through our provided link.*

Worship Services

All five worship services will be available free of charge to all registered and non-registered persons.

New Attendee Orientation

We encourage delegates or non-delegates who have never attended or have not recently attended Annual Conference to attend the New Attendee Orientation session in Grand Rapids at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon July 3. The location will be listed in the conference booklet.

Public Health Measures

Attending any group event may increase your risk of illness and injury. Should circumstances dictate, we will implement appropriate and responsive health and safety measures. However, we encourage all attendees to take the precautions they deem necessary and ask that all attendees respect the decisions made by others.

Online Information

Please check our webpage at www.brethren.org/ac2024 for more information about Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, including leadership, themes, schedules, meal and food options, meetings and events, and much more. New information is added regularly, so check back often!

Please feel free to contact either of us if you have any questions.

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Office

1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120

Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, Conference Director

Dial direct: 847-429-4364 | Toll free: 800-323-8039, ext 4364

RPGingrich@brethren.org

Debbie Noffsinger, Conference Assistant

Dial direct: 847-429-4366 | Toll free: 800-323-8039, ext 4366

dnoffsinger@brethren.org

Church of the Brethren West Marva District Office 384 Dennett Road Oakland, MD 21550 February 2024

IN GOD WE TRUST

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

warcr	11	District Executive Search Committee, Oak Park Church, 1:30 pm
	9	Bible Study "Faith Begins" Hanging Rock Church, CEU's available 9:00-2:00
	16	District Conference Meetings, 1:00 p.m. District Office
17	7-23	District Disaster Trip
	28	Maundy Thursday •
	29	Good Friday
	31	Easter
April	2	District Executive Committee meeting, District Office 6:00 p.m.
-	13	Pastor/Deacon Dinner—Westernport Church
	20	District Board meeting, Gortner Union Church 8:30 a.m.
	27	WMMTP class, Westernport Church, 9:00 am