

WEST MARVA DISTRICT DECEMBER MEMO

384 Dennett Road Oakland, MD 21550

www.westmarvachurches.org



Leah Hileman West Marva District Executive Minister

Please join the West Marva District Board in welcoming Leah Hileman as our new West Marva District Executive Minister. We are so excited to have her in this role that includes the prior financial secretary/admin functions. She started serving our district on December 10, 2024. This is a half-time position.

Leah was ordained in 2011 by the Atlantic Southeast District and is currently serving the Robinson Church of the Brethren in Seward, PA (Western PA District) in a quarter-time capacity. She has previously served congregations in Atlantic Southeast, Atlantic Northeast, Shenandoah, and Southern PA Districts. She is an experienced church planter, musician, and composer, and has served as a member of the Bittersweet Gospel Band since 2008.

She has served the wider church as a member of the Standing Committee, the Church Planting Network, the Intercultural Consultation, and Review and Evaluation Committee.

Leah holds a Bachelor of Art in Music degree from Harding University, has studied at Ashland Theological Seminary, and obtained a Training in Ministry Certificate from the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

Leah resides in Seward, PA and will travel as needed to the West Marva District to carry out this role. The Church of the Brethren Ministry Office and West Marva District Board welcomes Leah as she assumes these new responsibilities.

Praise and glory to God for the call of Leah to join our district!

Leah J. Hileman is available to be reached at:

**westmarvade@gmail.com phone at 540-742-2457
62 Stutzman Road, Seward, PA 15954
([Facebook.com/leahjsongs](https://www.facebook.com/leahjsongs))**

CELEBRATION FOR RETIRING ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Congratulations, Brenda Harvey, on your retirement at the end of this year!

Everyone is invited to join with Brenda to celebrate her retirement:

Saturday, January 11, 2025

2:00 – 4:00 pm at the Oak Park Church fellowship hall

Light refreshments provided by the district

Come, celebrate with Brenda, and show your appreciation for the ways she has helped your church and our district. Brenda has provided exceptional service over the past 34 years as our Administrative Assistant and Financial Secretary, and we thank her! We look forward to seeing you at the celebration and wish Brenda well as she continues to recover from her recent stroke. May God bless Brenda and her family.

DISTRICT CONFERENCE MODERATOR MESSAGE

As we countdown the days of 2024 and begin to welcome the new year, I have a question for you: What is your unfinished business?

When December 31st comes around, many count down the hours, minutes, and then seconds until the ball drops and January 1st arrives. When we say goodbye to 2024 and welcome in 2025, what is happening in your world that you need to either bring to a close or begin to embrace to start 2025 on the right foot? Too many folks struggle to grieve the end of a year because it comes with uncertainty, change (especially remembering to write the correct year for the first few weeks), and anxiety. No one knows what each day will bring, let alone what a new year can bring. Instead of courageously moving on, it becomes a norm to cling to the past, even if it is just clinging to the previous year and not letting the page turn.

What are we telling God when we do this? Imagine if the disciples had continued to cling to the previous days, the 3 years they walked with Jesus, and not be willing to face the future after his resurrection and ascension. In Acts 1:6-8 it says, “Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He told them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Too often, folks spend too much time looking back. Folks look back at a time in their lives where they enjoyed something more than the present. Folks will say, “I miss us when we used to...” not realizing that they are unopen to new beginnings by clinging to the past. Churches cling to the past by holding on to decorations, habits, ways of doing things, because we don’t want to let go of what has been, not realizing the complacency we create by doing so, and the idolatry we create by worshipping people and ways of the past instead of looking to God for his will for our future.

Our district is blessed to welcome a District Executive Minister that will bring a newness and freshness as we continue to redefine what West Marva is all about. As we welcome Leah into our family, we also need to welcome God back into our family, allowing him to lead our lives, our church families, and our district as we continue the work of Jesus Christ. Peacefully. Simply. Together. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a Happy New Year!

2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

Dr. Allie Crowe, District Conference Moderator

THANK YOU, WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP, FROM CAMP GALILEE

On behalf of the many adults and children that use Camp Galilee, the trustees and staff would like to thank you for your generous contribution for electrical work that was mailed to us on June 25, 2024, in the amount of \$452.00. Thank you so much for your support! May God bless you all! "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matthew 21:22.

WEST MARVA MINISTRY TRAINING PROGRAM

I want to thank everyone who helped make the 2024 year for these students a success. This program is crucial to assisting individuals to discern their calling and giving them wisdom, experience, and understanding. Several folks helped to teach courses this year and the class has enjoyed each person. The 2025 year is going to be here before we know it. The courses coming up this year include administering the life of the church, pastoral care, and more. If you are a pastor needing Continuing Educational Units, you can attend a class and help create discussion and perspective for students. I will ensure you get the credit for attending, and the class will be free of charge for you! If anyone in your congregation is interested in joining the program, they are encouraged to come and audit a class, sit in, and get a feel for one before joining. The more the merrier!

The next class is **ADMINISTRATING THE CHURCH'S LIFE** on February 1, 2025. All classes are at the Westernport Church of the Brethren. If weather looks to be an issue, a zoom link will be created or the date will be changed.

Dr. Allie Crowe, WMMTP Director

FROM THE DISTRICT DISASTER TEAM

We had a great response to our call for hurricane relief supplies and food for the animals! We were able to fill 2 box trailers with general supplies and collected over 4 ton of animal feed for livestock and for pets. They were delivered to North Carolina October 14. Since then, a tractor and trailer loaded with hay was also delivered to North Carolina and another load of hay is being delivered soon. Thank you all for the donations!

The Brethren Disaster team is focusing on other ways that we can help such as:

Disaster Bucket drive in January

Mission rebuild trip in March to eastern Kentucky

I will be sending out more information on the disaster buckets and the mission trip at a later date.

I think as we are within the holiday season we should focus locally on our own community needs, such as food banks, children assistance fund (our own district outreach which supplies clothing to children who are less fortunate than most), meals for seniors or shut-ins, etc. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Blessings and Peace,

Denny Skeweris

301-616-0013, denskew@gmail.com

WEST MARVA DISTRICT BOARD CHAIR

As the Thanksgiving holiday is in the rearview and we advent the coming of the Christ Child, may we pause in gratitude for the promised presence of our God in our lives, in our churches, and the district. I am beyond excited at the hiring of Leah Hileman as our District Executive Minister. With her leadership, I see abundance of joy and great expectations for our work ahead. West Marva has long been a district of faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and that mission will continue, with even more vigor. I hope we can take a moment and brainstorm what we would like West Marva to be for the district churches. What can our district provide for our churches? May we pause and consider those questions, also lifting them in prayer that God helps us to realize these dreams. Often we take for granted that presence of Jesus. May we continue to invite Jesus to our district, our tables, our worship, and into our hearts in new and powerful ways. Born in a manger, yes...may he also be born in our thankful hearts to transform our lives daily. Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year to you all!

Jennifer S. Kreighbaum, 2024 Board Chair

NEWS FROM DISTRICT CHURCHES

Article from South Mill Creek Newsletter:

Making Apple Butter

October 13 was the perfect day. The Oscar and Mary Thorn family gathered at the home place to make apple butter. They met at Faye's house on Friday evening to peel and get the apples ready. On Saturday morning the apples were put in the kettle with some water to cook into applesauce. It took several hours to make it. After much cooking, the sugar and flavoring was added. We ended up with 18 gallons. When the last apple butter came out of the kettle, the cornbread and rolls came out as well---ready for everyone to enjoy! The apple butter was shared by all. Some small jars were filled for Christmas baskets at church. The oldest family member attending was Lucy, who had just turned 94. The youngest was Ruth's great-granddaughter, who was 10 months old. A great day of family, friendship, and fellowship---memories made and stories shared!

Oak Grove Church from Facebook Posts:

November 17: "So blessed to be able to dedicate 561 shoeboxes during our service today. It is with deep gratitude that 100 of our boxes will be going into the mission field in honor and memory of Fayann Saturday who played such a vital role in this ministry at Oak Grove for over 20 years. We pray that God will bless each child that receives one of these boxes!"

October 29: "We had an awesome night participating in the community trunk or treat at the fairgrounds! It was so great to see all of the kiddos and their families! Thank you to our youth leaders, Jared and Carlea Rodeheaver, Jill and Jamie Rodeheaver, and everyone who helped in any way!"

December 11: "Another trip to OCC (Operation Christmas Child) North Carolina and a bonus trip to Billy Graham's Library. It was such a blessing!"

Bear Creek Church News

During our Vacation Bible School this summer we decided to have a project of making 24 knotted lap robes for clients at Cherry Hill Assisted Living Home. While cutting out the material and knotting them, we enjoyed fellowship together. These lap robes will be distributed to each client at Cherry Hill while we provide a Christmas program for them.

Recently our congregants completed putting together 50 Operation Christmas Child boxes and covered the shipping cost. We were happy to provide these for children in need in various countries, having recently learned that some of our boxes were delivered to South Africa. Due to the great need in North Carolina after the hurricane, congregants donated supplies for our district disaster relief project being delivered to North Carolina. In the past month our church made financial donations to eight different organizations within our nearby community. James Isaac House; Cindy's Fund; Bittinger, Accident, McHenry, and Oakland Fire Departments; Bittinger Rescue Squad; and the Union Rescue Mission.

We look forward to going Christmas caroling in the Accident area in the coming week, continuing to worship together on Sunday mornings, and holding a special Christmas candle lighting service on Sunday evening, December 22, 6:00 pm. All are welcome.

May you have a joyous Christmas season and always keep Christ in Christmas! God bless each and everyone.

Westernport Church News

Hello, brothers and sisters. The church has been a busy place these last several weeks. We have made over 240 pounds of hard-tack candy and are preparing for the holidays. Our youth hosted a fundraiser meal for a classmate at school who was in a significant car accident over 12 weeks ago. Their efforts and love for others greatly impacted Hailey's life. Hailey has since returned home as of Friday, December 6. They will be refocusing their energy on making little gift bags for kids in the neighborhood. They are putting hats, small toys and treats in bags and will be hung around the fence at our church and placed on the "other hill" for kids to come and take one.

We just held our annual holiday meal, which we named the Christ-giving meal. It was a blessing to see congregation members, friends, and members from the Keyser Church of the Brethren join us for service and fellowship! On December 16 at 6:30 PM, we are holding our Blue Christmas Service. This is a service of healing and hope. If you or anyone you may know could benefit from this service, it is both in person and via Zoom.

Topic: Blue Christmas, Time: Dec 16, 2024 06:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82747567028?pwd=ay140MM22j068TwKGCpufzlxrkcaMm.1>

Meeting ID: 827 4756 7028

Passcode: 830333

Our Christmas Eve service will be on December 24 at 7 PM. Again, all are welcome in-person or Zoom.

Topic: Christmas Eve, Time: Dec 24, 2024 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87566763452?pwd=0wmO4cfBtb6ZBgk2cg9yEITxMofwxH.1>

Meeting ID: 875 6676 3452

Passcode: 975622

DISTRICT FINANCIAL RESOURCE TEAM

The Financial Resource Team is pleased to report the financial results for 2024 ending as of September 30th. The West Marva district remains in stable financial condition. Due to the delay in hiring a new DEM, we experienced a decline in forecasted expenses.

The 2024 results January through September:

Expenses = \$32,407

Income = \$39,332

Designated and non-designated fund balances are as follows:

CD = \$130,000

Savings = \$73,987

Checking = \$110,532

The planned 2024 budget includes:

Expenses = \$79,774.57

Income of \$50,100.00

The additional expenses include allocations for a part-time DE.

The forecasted income includes \$12,000 in rental income for the residence portion of the West Marva District Office which has been occupied during 2024.

We pray we will continue to grow our ability to fulfill Gods desire to seek and find opportunities of outreach through the mission of the West Marva District.

INTERDISTRICT YOUTH CABINET ROUNDTABLE 2025

Theme: "Growing in Faith, Blooming Through Christ"

Roundtable will be held on February 28-March 2, 2025 at Bridgewater College campus. Friday night IYC will host a carnival of activities with games and snacks! Saturday we will host worship sessions, workshops, and free time.

IYC is pleased to announce that Jeff Carter will be our speaker for this great event! Jeff Carter is the president of Bethany Theological Seminary and has been in the position since 2013. Jeff grew up in the Mid-Atlantic District, and graduated from Bridgewater College and Bethany Theological Seminary. He served a year in Brethren Volunteer Service, then served as a pastor until moving to Richmond, Indiana, to become the president of Bethany. He and his wife Kim have three daughters.

We are excited to welcome youth from all different districts in the United States! Interdistrict Youth Cabinet (IYC) is so excited to meet you all and make meaningful connections! Registration opens this month and is limited to mature 9th-12th graders and advisors. For more information email: iycroundtable@gmail.com



THANK YOU, BEV VETTER DISTRICT TREASURER AND BOARD CLERK

Thank you for serving as the West Marva District Treasurer and District Board Clerk for 10 years! Bev has been a blessing to us in keeping our financial records in balance and keeping the financial records and minutes in excellent condition. Bev resigned from these positions as of the end of December. May God bless you Bev as you take a break from these commitments.

Coming Home for the Holidays By Dr. Allie Crowe

"I'll be home for Christmas. You can count on me. Please have snow and mistletoe...and presents under the tree." First released around Christmas in 1943, the song is written from the perspective of a soldier serving overseas during World War 2. He is telling his family he is coming home and to prepare the place with special requests. Many artists have recorded this Christmas song over several decades. It has become a holiday classic, yet it begs the question, What does it mean to come home for the holidays? Who or what is home to you?

As someone who grew up away from family, coming home for the holidays meant a long drive from whichever state we lived in and returning to the mountains of Western Maryland and West Virginia. Most of my family never left the area; the ones stayed close by in the Pennsylvania region. When we came home for Christmas, it was a 13-hour drive from Tennessee or Georgia, an 8-hour drive from Connecticut, or the lovely 17-hour drive from Wisconsin. When we came home for Christmas, it was a production of packing clothes (with added prep for random winter storms we could see) and, trying to Tetris the back of the van with gifts, luggage, children, and always making room for our poodle, Willie. There was hardly any wiggle-room. For years, I was excited to get back to the mountains, to family, and to see what would be waiting under the Christmas tree, until an event happened:

I was in 6th grade. It was a cold winter (already) for WI. The family piled into the 93 Chevy Astro van to head towards home when suddenly we started to hear a noise. We had made it to Merrillville, Indiana, when Dad realized he had to look at the van before we tried to get further down the road. Long story short, the van needed a part but it wouldn't come until December 26th. We had no way to go anywhere, and no one could get us. Mom and Dad scrambled to call nearby hotels that were willing to take us and our poodle. Finally, they managed to find a place that was compassionate to our circumstances. Willie was a mellow toy poodle, not a barker, which made it a little easier for the hotel to accept us. Mom and Dad went into problem-solving mode when we arrived at the hotel. One was on the phone with family, explaining what was happening. My dad and brother walked to a grocery store to get food we could eat in a hotel without a kitchen. I sat silently (a rare form) because I felt utterly useless. I was 11 and didn't know how I could help.

I kept Willie company while Mom was on the phone. Mind you, this was before the cell phone era, so everything was through the landline phone in the room. My dad and brother arrived at the hotel with microwave or hot water-ready ramen cups, an electric kettle, and other snacks to keep us going. We spent time watching movies on TV and other Christmas shows. It was the weirdest Christmas Eve on record. This was the first time I

could remember without a church service. Mom and Dad realized that finding food the next day would be hard, seeing as most restaurants within walking distance would be closed. We pulled "A Christmas Story" moment and ordered Chinese food delivered to the hotel. Christmas day was so quiet. I remember needing to get out of the room. Mom and Dad told me I could sit by the Christmas tree in the lobby. My brother walked with me. We

sat by the tree for a while before laying on our backs. One thing stood out to us: the star at the top of the tree. The star wasn't what got our attention; it was the shadow the star cast on the ceiling. It was a cross. My brother and I noticed it simultaneously, looked at each other, and smiled. I was 11, he was 15, and for the first time, we both understood what coming home for Christmas meant.

The Prophets told the people for centuries about a Messiah to come:

- "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah." Jeremiah 31:31
- "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and [c] will call him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14
- "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction." Malachi 4:5-6
- "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." Zechariah 12:10
- "In my vision at night, I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom will never be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

When we come home for Christmas, what are you coming home to? Are you coming home for a time with your family? Are you coming home to a perfectly decorated home with lights, food, and presents under the tree? What or who drives you to come home for Christmas? I had to learn, in a unique way, what and who we should be coming home to. Christmas is about coming home to the relationship with the Triune God. Coming home is recognizing that God the Father sent his son into a dark world to bring light, hope, and peace. Coming home is about understanding that material things are of this world, but we are not of this world. Coming home for Christmas means realizing that Christmas should remain in our hearts all year long because Easter would not have happened without recognizing the birth. Without Easter, we would not be saved by grace through the sacrifice of the Messiah. Christmas means remembering to cherish the loved ones we have around us because they are gifts from God. It means not taking opportunities to love one another for granted, serving our neighbors, and focusing on peace when the world wants us to turn to violence. Many folks, especially our men and women in the military, cannot be home with their families for the holidays. Sending them prayers and well wishes and doing something in their honor is a great way to "bring them home" uniquely this year.

Coming home for Christmas isn't a destination; it is a journey that never ends until the God I serve calls me TRULY home to the heavenly realm. May your Holidays be merry and bright. May the peace of God be with you and your family and may you and your family be blessed.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government shall be upon his shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6, King James Bible

2025 DISTRICT CALENDAR:

Executive Committee Meetings

District Office, 6:00 pm

January 7

April 8

July 8

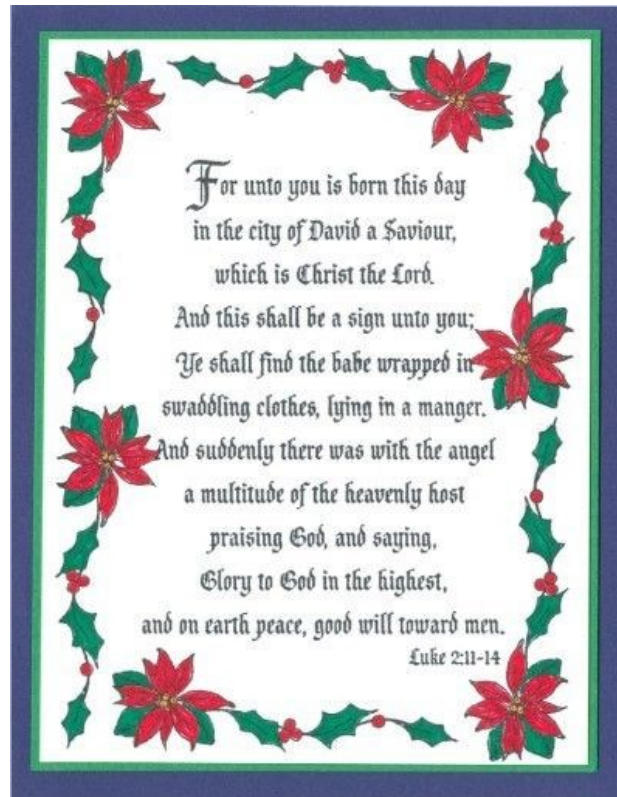
District Board Meetings, 8:30 AM

January 18, Westernport Church

April 26, Oak Park Church

July 26, Bear Creek Church

**Note: As Board and Commission Meetings are held,
more events will be added to the 2025 calendar.**



MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!