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***The Village ILWIDiot***

Walt Wiltschek

*“So let’s strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.” —*

**Romans 14:19, CEB**

Two conversations recently have lingered in my mind.

Last weekend I had a chance to visit with long-time peace activists Bob and Rachel Gross at Chicago First’s 101<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebration (see more on the celebration below). In the course of our chat, Bob mentioned his experience as a conscientious objector. He was arrested as a non-registrant during the Vietnam War while visiting here in Illinois and spent some time in the Kankakee prison before some kind, local Brethren put up the deed to their home for his bail. He’s gone on to create a long legacy of peacemaking and reconciliation ministries in the church.

Just after that, I did an interview with Brethren folksinger Andy Murray, looking back at his song “Brave Man from Ohio” for a forthcoming *Messenger* article. The song is about Ted Stuebaker, a Church of the Brethren member and conscientious objector from the Dayton area who refused to fight in Vietnam because of his beliefs. Stuebaker volunteered instead to go as an

agricultural worker and teacher with Vietnamese Christian Service. He was killed in Vietnam in 1971, 55 years ago this spring. Andy's song memorably lifts up Ted's witness: "Give me a shovel instead of a gun ... And if I die, I'll die making something instead of tearing something down."

As we find ourselves again in a time of war—as has happened too often in our history—what does it look like now to honor our denomination's historic peace church position? Brethren have never been completely of one mind (at least not for a couple of centuries) on exactly what our peace stance means in times of war, but the strength of that countercultural message seems to have waned much further in recent decades. Perhaps because we don't have an active draft or perhaps simply because our core beliefs have become more diluted, I feel like I hear less and less of that call to be active peacemakers and show a different way of living.

While the sledgehammer of war and violence pounds incessantly around us, sacrificing too many lives on its anvil of destruction, our heritage raises a different vision—a different possibility. What will you create today?

**District executive schedule:** In addition to regular meetings, Walt will be preaching at Naperville May 17, worshipping at Polo and visiting at Camp Emmaus May 24, preaching at Highland Avenue June 14, spending time at Camp Emmanuel June 17-20, and doing church visits in the Decatur-Champaign area June 21-24 before heading to Annual Conference in Indiana. Walt will be on vacation May 29-June 12.

Walt is available to visit your church, do pulpit supply, lead sessions, have conversation times, or otherwise connect with your congregation. Please contact [IWDDE@outlook.com](mailto:IWDDE@outlook.com) to schedule a time. He is half-time and is usually on district duty late afternoons/evenings on weekdays plus weekends.

**REMINDER:** Please use the **correct district office address** for all mail correspondence: *Church of the Brethren IL/WI District, 15071 Luther Ave., Lombard, IL 60148*. As noted previously, please *do not* send district mail to Canton, as there is no longer a district office there. Thank you!

### WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN

by Jocelyn Watkins, 2026 Illinois/Wisconsin District moderator

*"I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Timothy 1:6)*

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)*

Beloved in Christ,

Over the past several weeks, it has felt increasingly difficult to avoid the headlines. Reports of missile strikes, political threats, military movements, nations posturing, old conflicts resurfacing, new ones emerging. ... The names and places change, but the rhythm feels familiar:



people standing at the edge of fear, uncertainty, and violence, trying to convince themselves that power will somehow bring peace. I have found myself reading these stories with scripture in one hand and our Brethren story in the other, and I find myself wondering what, exactly, we have been given for moments like this. When the world grows louder with the language of fear, retaliation, and certainty, what does it mean to be a people whose story has always pointed in another direction?

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (2 Timothy 1:6). The word rekindle has been lingering with me. One does not rekindle something entirely new. One rekindles something already present, something perhaps neglected, something that may have quieted beneath the weight of ordinary responsibilities, difficult seasons, unanswered questions, or the slow accumulation of life itself. And so, I find myself asking: What gifts have been sitting quietly in our hands all along, waiting to be remembered?

I have been thinking, too, about inheritance and about what was placed into our hands long before any of us ever stood behind a pulpit, served on a ministry team, chaired a committee, attended district conference, or found ourselves navigating difficult conversations in our congregations. Long before any of that, we inherited a witness.

In 1708, in Schwarzenau, our spiritual forebears gathered in a world that was hardly peaceful. They knew political instability and religious coercion. They understood the pressures of empire, the dangers of division, and the temptation to secure peace through power. Yet into that world, they chose a different way. They chose baptism as an act of conscious discipleship. They chose simplicity when excess offered status. They chose community when individualism offered autonomy. They chose service when ambition offered recognition. They chose peace when violence offered certainty.

Perhaps most strikingly, when they disagreed—and surely they did—they chose to remain in relationship long enough to listen for the Spirit. I find myself wondering what our forebears would recognize in us if they sat quietly in one of our board meetings, worship services, kitchen table conversations, or online exchanges. Would they recognize the same patience? The same humility? The same willingness to stay with one another when clarity does not come quickly?

That question lingers with me, because for us, consensus has never simply been a method of conducting church business, nor merely a slower way of making decisions. Consensus, for us, is theological. It is rooted in the belief that truth is not something we conquer, defend, or possess, but something we discern together through humility, patience, prayer, scripture, and community. Discernment takes time. It takes the willingness to listen deeply. It takes the courage to admit that even our strongest convictions may still have something to learn. It takes the grace to remain at the table, especially when walking away might feel easier.

I wonder if that witness matters now more than ever, because the violence we encounter in the headlines rarely stays on the news. It has a way of finding its way into our conversations, our assumptions, our politics, our social media feeds, our congregational meetings, and our homes. If we are not careful, it can also find its way into our spirits. Long before violence ever becomes physical, it often begins in smaller ways: in our impatience, in our defensiveness, in our

unwillingness to listen, in our need to be right, in our quiet dismissal of those whose experiences, perspectives, or convictions differ from our own. And if that is true, then where does peacemaking actually begin?

Jesus, of course, never promised that peacemaking would be easy. He simply called it blessed. “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). I have been sitting with the word peacemakers, because Jesus does not seem to be describing those who appreciate peace when circumstances allow for it, or who speak about peace so long as it costs them very little. He seems to be describing something far more active, and perhaps far more costly: people willing to step into tension without becoming consumed by it, people willing to ask one more question when assumptions would come more easily, people willing to listen long enough for understanding to begin taking root, and people willing to remain in relationship even when resolution does not come quickly. I suspect our Brethren forebears understood something of that, and I find myself wondering if the Spirit may be inviting us not simply to admire that witness, but to practice it.

Perhaps rekindling does not always look like discovering something new. Perhaps, more often than not, rekindling looks like remembering what has been in our hands all along.

*(2026 logo designed by Madalyn Metzger)*

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS**

Church Revitalization and Development Team, May 16, 9 a.m.

Program & Arrangements Committee, May 18, 6:30 p.m.

Ministry Leadership Development Team, May 20, 6:30 p.m.

Church of the Brethren Young Adult Conference, May 22-24, Petersburg, Pa.

Leadership Team, June 2, 6:30 p.m.

Annual Conference briefing for Illinois/Wisconsin District, June 20, 10 a.m.

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, June 28-July 2, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference, July 18-23, Estes Park, Colo.

2026 Illinois/Wisconsin District conference, Nov. 6-7, Polo (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

*[all meetings via Zoom unless otherwise noted]*

## **IN OUR PRAYERS**

A district prayer calendar has been created for your use in praying for our district and related programs through the year. We invite you to include the following in your prayers in coming weeks:

**Week of May 10:** Pray for the Oakley Brick congregation near Decatur this week, and for all the work of our denomination's Youth/Young Adult Ministries office and the many ways it equips the younger members of our church.

**Week of May 17:** Pray for the district's Program and Arrangements Committee as it works on plans for this year's district conference, and for the denominational Young Adult Conference taking place May 22-24 at Pennsylvania's Camp Blue Diamond.

**Week of May 24:** Pray for the work and witness of all the historic cemeteries maintained in various locations by our congregations, such as Coal Creek near Canton and the Emmert Cemetery of the former Franklin Grove church, as they continue to provide places for remembering and reflection. Pray this week for all those who have lost people close to them, that their memories might be a blessing.

**Week of May 31:** Pray for the Martin Creek congregation near Fairfield, and for the "FaithX" service trips that will take youth and others to a locations around the country and in Northern Ireland to serve this summer.

**Week of June 7:** Pray for Camp Emmanuel near Astoria and another season of camping by the lake. Pray for all the children and youth coming there this summer for residential and day camps, and for managers Don and Kelly Davis (Woodland).

**Week of June 14:** Pray for the Cerro Gordo congregation, and for the work of the Church of the Brethren Ministry Office as it equips and supports pastors across the denomination

## REMEMBERED



The district is continuing to remember with gratitude the life of **Leonard Matheny**, a member at Peoria First and long-time dedicated volunteer in the Illinois/Wisconsin District and denomination. Leonard passed away in Peoria April 20 after a battle with liver cancer.

Leonard was most recently serving as financial secretary for the district. He previously had been chair of the Church Revitalization and Development Team, coordinator of the Potluck Experience planning team, a leadership team member, and served a term as district moderator in 2006, among other roles. Denominationally, he served on the National Older Adult Conference planning team and for many years was delegate registration coordinator at Annual Conference. He was also quite active at Peoria First and the community, serving in a variety of capacities.

We are grateful for Leonard's generous and cheerful life and ministry, and our prayers remain with his wife, Vicki; his children, Wendy and Justin; and the rest of his family, as well as with the Peoria First congregation in this season of loss.

A celebration of life service was held April 25 at Peoria First with a large crowd attending. The full obituary can be found at <https://www.schmidthaller.com/obituaries/leonard-matheny->

[2/#!/Obituary](#) .

**Wendell Cline Eller**, 99, of Bridgewater, Va., who served for a time on the denominational staff of the Church of the Brethren, passed away on April 6. He worked as director of Audio-Visual Education for the Church of the Brethren for seven years from June 1, 1955, through Aug. 31, 1962. Prior to that, starting in 1953, he was on the staff of the Department of Audio-Visual and Broadcast Education of the National Council of Churches, working in Chicago as evaluation assistant. A memorial service was held April 25 at Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren.

## MINISTRY NEWS

Congratulations to York Center and **Gay Bouwmeester**! York Center called Gay as their part-time settled pastor, effective May 1. Gay had been serving there as interim pastor since November. Gay, a member of the Highland Avenue congregation, felt a call to ministry that she finally realized as a second career, and she was licensed by the district last year. The call Sunday and vote occurred April 19, with district executive Walt Wiltschek present to facilitate the event. An official installation service will take place on Aug. 16.

Two congregations have recently called interim pastors. Cerro Gordo has called **David Biggs**, a semi-retired pastor from the Decatur area, effective May 15, and Naperville has called **Tony Asta**, who is ordained in the Church of the Brethren and lives in Wheaton, effective June 1. We welcome David and Tony to these new roles in the district!

Brethren Press has shared that the inventory of printed copies of ***For All Who Minister: A Worship Manual for the Church of the Brethren*** has been exhausted. It is scheduled for reprinting in 2027, but in the meantime downloadable copies of the essential services of ordinances are now posted at: <https://www.brethren.org/bp/ministry-resources/> for those who might need them.

The denomination's **Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church** program will be offering three **online listening sessions** throughout the summer to give opportunity for multivocational pastors (MVP's) to meet with other MVP's and share their thoughts, ideas, and ways that the program can be helpful and supportive of their lives and ministries. The first one will take place on Tuesday, May 27, from 6-7:30 p.m. Central (sign up at <https://forms.gle/iQcLx5bLMyjPhPvm8>); the second will be Wednesday, July 29, from 6-7:30 p.m. Central (<https://forms.gle/LANW8VRXVc938S1FA>); and the third will be Tuesday, August 26, from 6-7:30 p.m. Central (<https://forms.gle/fuzTdcg5rc9KrpVj8>). In addition, there will be an in-person listening session at Annual Conference the morning of Tuesday, June 30 and an **equipping session** that evening from 8:30-9:30 p.m. entitled "Betwixt and Between: Following Jesus in the midst of liminality." If you cannot make one of the in-person or online sessions, a survey can also be completed at <https://forms.gle/pG1BFAUY9MF22sdi9>.

A new **informational resource about sabbath rest and renewal** is available via the "Faith in Process" podcast, which recently featured a conversation with pastor Angela Finet about her book in the Covenant Bible Study Series about Sabbath. They can be found at: Episode 1: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/54SibWOHZRge0tP5lytbjM?si=IFUwuklpQj-yufA9RRfCkA>; Episode2: [https://open.spotify.com/episode/49wWeJHdktZuGsrRd7TLa8?si=Kpjz7plATVGAonIH\\_FpiuQ](https://open.spotify.com/episode/49wWeJHdktZuGsrRd7TLa8?si=Kpjz7plATVGAonIH_FpiuQ). These will also be added to the Ministry Office website under Sabbath Renewal: <https://www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/sabbath/>.

### **Congregational vacancies/updates:**

**Cerro Gordo: David Biggs** has been called as part-time interim pastor for a one-year period beginning May 15. The search committee will remain active, and a congregational profile is available.

**Highland Avenue (Elgin): Krista Dutt** was commissioned (ordained for term of service) in the Church of the Brethren last fall and is serving as interim pastor through at least October. The congregation has called a search committee, and a profile is available. Conversations about next steps are ongoing.

**Mount Morris: Lynda Willmann** began as quarter-time interim pastor for at least six months on March 15. **Jonathan Shively** is also doing a consultation process with Mount Morris this year as they discern direction. Conversations about next steps for pastoral ministry are ongoing, and the congregation is working on a profile.

**Naperville: Tony Asta** has been called as part-time interim pastor beginning June 1. The search committee will continue its work, and a profile for their full-time pastoral position is now available. Naperville is using pulpit supply this month.

**Oakley Brick: Pastor David Roe** retired in March. Initial conversations have begun with the congregation about next steps. They are currently using pulpit supply.

**York Center (Lombard): Gay Bouwmeester** has been called as the part-time settled pastor at York Center, effective May 1. Gay had been serving the congregation as part-time interim pastor in November. The call Sunday and vote occurred April 19.

### **DISTRICT CLERGY GATHERING**

The 2026 **Illinois/Wisconsin District clergy gathering and educational event** took place April 27-28 at Bishop Lane Retreat Center near Rockford,



with 21 people attending. Annual Conference moderator Don Fitzkee spoke on the first day around the theme “So, What’s New,” looking at his own journey as well as all the changes happening in the world and the church. On the second day, the focus was on creating a healthy retirement. Dan Radcliff of Eder Financial led off by talking about financial aspects of retirement, and then National Older Adult Conference coordinator/retired pastor Christy Waltersdorff led a discussion and reflection time with questions around the theme. The gathering, which is sponsored and planned by the district’s Ministerial Leadership Development Team, also included worship times, meals and snacks, and opportunities for fellowship and relaxation.

### CONGREGATIONAL/LOCAL NEWS

**Christine Knotts** (Peoria First) has graciously agreed to serve as district financial secretary for the remainder of 2026. We are grateful for the unique gifts and knowledge she can bring to this role in a time of transition, and we are grateful for Leonard Matheny’s service in this role the past few years.

Why simply celebrate a centennial when you can lift up a more unique 101 years of ministry? That’s what **Chicago First** did May 9-10, marking a century-plus at its current East Garfield Park location on the corner of Central Park Ave. & Congress Parkway. The congregation’s history dates to the 1880’s, but it moved to its current location in January 1925. As celebration coordinator Mary Scott Boria joked,



“the congregation has always been a little weird, so why not do something a little weird and celebrate 101?” The weekend included an open house with food, displays, and program on the congregation’s history and its beautiful stained glass windows on Saturday and a worship service featuring pastor emeritus Orlando Redekopp on Sunday, followed by lunch. Redekopp spoke on the theme “Jesus on the Horizon.” The church once served as an office for Martin Luther King Jr., and today three other churches/organizations also share the facility as Chicago First continues to “cultivate love, peace, and justice” in its community and beyond. Happy 101, Chicago First!

**Girard** is making good use of its renovated basement space, including a fellowship hall, kitchen, and children's play room. The congregation has invested significant time on the project in the past two years, countering the effects of water damage and an aging building. It also is working on repairing the stained glass windows in its sanctuary after damage from vandalism last year. ... Nearby, the Girard Area Homes project has received new signage and other improvements as it remains a vital ministry in the community.



Did you know? **Highland Avenue** (Elgin) is one of the only congregations in our district that still has a church choir sharing regularly in worship? Part of a vibrant music program at the church, the active choir is directed by Jonathan Shively.

## DISTRICT CONFERENCE 2026

Mark your calendars! The **2026 Illinois/Wisconsin District conference** will take place **Nov. 6-7** at Polo Church of the Brethren with the theme "Kindled Anew." The conference will begin with worship and ice cream Friday evening, continuing with business, equipping sessions, and lunch on Saturday. Jocelyn Watkins (Peoria First) will serve as moderator and Sharon Rice (York Center) as moderator-elect.



The district Program & Arrangements Committee (P&AC) recently confirmed that 2027 Annual Conference moderator **Dennis Beckner** (whose wife, Beth, is originally from the Franklin Grove area and grew up attending Camp Emmaus!) will be joining us for the event and leading an equipping session focusing on congregational renewal.

Before the official conference starts on Friday, the district Ministerial Leadership Development Team will offer a workshop around the theme of discipleship led by Josh Brockway of the denomination's Discipleship and Leadership Formation office.

Also, the Program & Arrangements Committee wants to see whether congregations expect to have **any children or youth attending** from your church. If so, please email the district office with the approximate number and age of those who might attend. This will help the committee determine whether to schedule children's/youth activities during the conference.

Watch for more details in the coming months!

## **DEPORTATION DEFENSE RESPONSE**

A denominational effort, organized by five districts with large numbers of undocumented members in partnership with On Earth Peace and Intercultural Ministries, has been formed to provide support, advocacy, and legal assistance as needed. A **Deportation Defense Response** (DDR) webpage is now online at [www.onearthpeace.org/deportation\\_defense\\_response\\_team](http://www.onearthpeace.org/deportation_defense_response_team). A toolkit of resources is at <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/168SYb-D3cMBO8ORb4sDXMqMbA2yvSGCN>. To be added to the DDR newsletter list, to share other helpful resources for the toolkit, to share how a resource from the toolkit benefited your congregation or community, to find out how to get involved with the work, or for other questions, email [migrantjustice@onearthpeace.org](mailto:migrantjustice@onearthpeace.org)

The group is inviting local partnerships and offering a process for online donations for the Legal and Mutual Aid Fund at [www.onearthpeace.org/legal\\_mutual\\_aid\\_fund\\_donations](http://www.onearthpeace.org/legal_mutual_aid_fund_donations). You can also mail checks payable to Atlantic Southeast District with "DDR" in the memo line. Checks can be sent to Atlantic Southeast District, 64954 Orchard Dr., Goshen, IN 46526. For questions contact [atlanticsoutheastcob@gmail.com](mailto:atlanticsoutheastcob@gmail.com). Congregations needing financial help to aid their immigrant church members may apply for grants from the Legal and Mutual Aid Fund by contacting [ddrcobcoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:ddrcobcoordinator@gmail.com) or 561-647-8981 to receive the application form. The team will distribute funds received to members of the church facing immigration challenges who need legal support.

**Biweekly Prayer Gatherings for Immigrant Justice** are now held every other Thursday from 11 a.m.-12 p.m. Central over Zoom, **next on May 14**. Find more information and RSVP at [Prayer Gathering for Immigrant Justice - On Earth Peace](#).

The DDR team also is **looking for stories** of individuals in congregations directly impacted by immigration enforcement and policy changes, and for stories of people practicing "faith in motion" on behalf of immigrant neighbors and siblings in Christ.

Contact [migrantjustice@onearthpeace.org](mailto:migrantjustice@onearthpeace.org) with a short, written story or to schedule a virtual call.

*Do you have congregational news: celebrations, milestones, "Jesus in the Neighborhood" stories or other things to share with our district family? Please send them to [iwdde@outlook.com](mailto:iwdde@outlook.com).*

## **EDER FINANCIAL TRANSITION**

**Eder Financial** announced a significant organizational transition following action taken on Monday, April 13, when the Church of the Brethren Standing Committee, meeting in special session, endorsed Everence Financial as the denomination's employee benefits and organizational investing provider of choice. The action, requested by Eder Financial, will transition these services from Eder to Everence, with the process beginning later this year and expected to conclude by March 2027.

For now, Eder members/clients should continue to engage with Eder as they normally do. Eder is working with Everence to ensure a seamless transition and will provide updates as the work progresses.

For details including the full news release, FAQ's, and to watch the video announcement, visit [ederfinancial.org/transition](http://ederfinancial.org/transition). If you have questions, email [customerservice@eder.org](mailto:customerservice@eder.org).

## **CAMP NEWS**

**Camp Emmaus** (Mount Morris, Ill.) was among the recipients of new grants from the denomination's Brethren Faith in Action Fund in this spring's disbursements. The grant of \$2,500 will support renewal of the camp's central activity area that includes a volleyball court and basketball court/campfire-picnic area. The first stage of the project is to renovate the volleyball court with new poles and a net, improved sand surface, and regrading of boundaries. Any funds remaining go toward the work on the basketball court/campfire-picnic area. It is hoped the volleyball court will be finished in time for summer camps this year.

Camp Emmaus has announced its **2026 summer camp dates**, and registration is now open at [www.campemmaus.org](http://www.campemmaus.org):

May 22-25: Memorial Day Family Camp  
June 12-14: Counselor-in-Training (CIT)  
June 13-14: Elementary Camp  
June 14-17: Target Sports Camp  
July 5-11: Senior High Camp  
July 12-18: Survivor Camp  
July 19-23: Intermediate Camp  
July 24-26: Young Adult/Young at Heart Camp  
July 26- Aug. 1: Middle School Camp  
August 6-8: Women's Camp  
September 4-7: Labor Day Weekend Family Camp

**Camp Emmanuel** has announced **its 2026 schedule:**

May 29-31: Women's Camp  
June 5-7: Pre-Junior Camp  
June 7-13: Middle School Camp  
June 16-20: Junior Camp  
June 25-28: High School Camp  
July 10-12: Mommy and Me  
July 13-17: Day Camp  
August 7-9: Men's Camp  
September 4-7: Family Camp

Learn more at [www.campem.com](http://www.campem.com).

Camp Emmanuel has added to its website a chart of the **birds that have been identified** on the camp's grounds, aided by the Merlin Bird ID app. More than 50 water birds, songbirds, woodpeckers, raptors, and others have been sighted.

The 2026 **OMA "InsideOut" camp curriculum** will be titled "In the Wilderness." An introduction to the theme notes: "Wilderness is a time or place where we encounter what is new, strange, scary, lonely, unknown or mysterious. The wilderness is a wild and beautiful time and place where we can discover the sacred within each person and all creation. ... The wilderness reveals our strengths, growing edges, and potential as God equips us for the unknown still to come. The wilderness awaits us all, and God meets us there." Daily themes will examine the nature of wilderness and how it's woven into our lives (Psalm 139:7-14); how we experience awe in the wilderness (Job 12:7-10); God's presence in our wilderness times (Exodus 13:17-22); Jesus' example of using the wilderness to recharge and renew our souls (Matt. 14:22-30); the sense of community and never being alone (Esther); and being equipped to face our wilderness moments (Jer. 29:11-14). The annual InsideOut curriculum is a partnership between the Church of the Brethren and a variety of other denominations for use in outdoor ministry. Learn more at <https://insideoutcurriculum.com/>.

## **YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS**

### **NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE**

The Church of the Brethren **National Youth Conference 2026** will take place July 18-23 at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado. The theme for NYC 2026 is "Light Within Us," based on Matthew 5:14-16. Youth who have finished 9<sup>th</sup> grade through their first year of college (or age equivalent) are invited to attend with adult advisors. This will be a week full of fellowship, worship, service projects, recreation, and so much more!



**Registration is open through June 26**; visit [www.brethren.org/nyc](http://www.brethren.org/nyc) for more information. As of mid-March, about 500 youth and advisors had registered. The cost of NYC is \$675 for the late registration period. For any questions, reach out to Rachel Johnson ([rjohnson@brethren.org](mailto:rjohnson@brethren.org)).

The NYC **service project** this year will involve making fleece tie blankets to donate for children's hospitals, in partnership with Fleece and Thank You. In addition, NYC youth participants are invited to **create and send in various worship elements** built around the NYC theme. The plan is to use these worship elements as part of the worship services during NYC, which gives youth the opportunity to help shape what worship looks like. Find the submission form at <https://forms.gle/UP9Y5et17G1FANdz5>. Contact Rachel Johnson at [rjohnson@brethren.org](mailto:rjohnson@brethren.org) with questions.

***\*Six Illinois/Wisconsin congregations (Canton, Highland Avenue, Naperville, Neighborhood, Peoria First, and Springfield First) have reported that they expect to have youth and advisors attending this year's NYC. If you have members planning to attend and have not yet informed the district office, please do so as soon as possible. We will not have enough participants to do a bus, so congregations are working on local transportation options, with most likely flying to Colorado. The district Leadership Team has approved scholarships from the Youth Fund to aid the attendance of our youth participants.***

## YOUNG ADULT CONFERENCE

This year's Church of the Brethren Young Adult Conference will take place May 22-24 at Camp Blue Diamond in Petersburg, Pa., with the theme "Identity in Community," from Romans 12:4-5. It is open to all young adults age 18-35. Registration is open; cost is \$250 through April. Discounts are available for first-time attendees who are 18, or for current BVSers. Intercultural and travel scholarships are also available. Learn more and register at [Young Adult Conference – Youth and Young Adult ministries](#).



## ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

***Our district Annual Conference briefing will be Saturday, June 20, at 10 a.m., via Zoom. We will share updates and the Annual Conference video, and our Standing Committee representative, Kevin Kessler, will provide insights on business coming to Conference this year and answer any questions. No registration is needed; a link will be provided in June.***

*For those who are unable to attend our district briefing, the Annual Conference office will also hold a virtual briefing on **Wednesday, May 27, at 7 p.m. Central**, also on Zoom. **Registration for that briefing is required** at <https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/ZBmMbl8KTsuPXv9qR6Kz4w#/registration>.*

The **2026 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference** will take place June 28-July 2 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the downtown Grand Wayne Convention Center. The schedule is altered this year, running from Sunday to Thursday. Equipping sessions will be added Sunday afternoon, and Tuesday morning will feature a time of “sparking, serving, and stirring,” as Conference officers anticipate a lighter business agenda. The theme is “Imagine!” Don Fitzkee will serve as moderator. Don has provided a theme statement at [2026-Annual-Conference-Theme-Statement-updated.pdf](#). Don will be joining our district for the spring clergy gathering in late April.



The Annual Conference office recently announced that advance registration for delegates will be \$350 and for non-delegates \$175. Onsite registration is \$425 and \$210, respectively. Daily fees are also available for those not attending the full week. A virtual registration option will be available for \$220.

The three official conference hotel options will range in cost from \$128 to \$135 per night plus tax, with a discounted daily parking fee of \$8. **Annual Conference registration and housing is open.** All five daily worship services during the Conference will be available both in person and online free of charge to all registrants and non-registrants.

A **special discount** is being offered for congregations that have not been represented at Annual Conference since 2019. The Program and Arrangements Committee is providing this registration discount for in-person attendees (delegates and nondelegates). The discount will only apply to advance registration for in-person attendance at the full Conference. It will not apply to onsite registration. To take advantage of this discount, contact the district office for more information. The special rates are \$75 for non-delegate registration and \$150 for delegate registration, plus fees.

**Attendance for the virtual portions** of the Conference are offered at no charge this year, thanks to generous contributions from Living Stream Church of the Brethren and Pacific Northwest District. This gives people who cannot attend in-person the opportunity to engage in business, a number of Equipping Sessions, and the Wednesday evening concert featuring Brethren musicians—all virtually. Those wishing to participate virtually still need to register to gain access to the streaming platform. Virtual attendees are encouraged to make a donation to the ministry of Annual Conference as an expression of appreciation. Donations can be made at [www.brethren.org/giveAC](http://www.brethren.org/giveAC).

Annual Conference organizers have announced the **preachers for the five daily worship services** to be held during the Conference. Each worship service will focus on a theme and symbol from the Church of the Brethren’s biblical heritage. Speakers will be asked to reexamine and reappropriate historic Brethren themes for our time. They include moderator Don Fitzkee,

Sunday evening; Beth Jarrett on Monday evening; James Washington on Tuesday evening; Becky Zapata on Wednesday evening; and Caleb Kragt on Thursday morning.

The Nominating Committee of the Standing Committee of district delegates to the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference has announced the **ballot for the 2026 Conference**, topped by Amy Gall Ritchie of North Manchester, Ind., and Gilbert Romero of Glendora, Calif., as candidates for moderator-elect. Complete biographical information for all nominees is online at [www.brethren.org/ac2026/business/ballot](http://www.brethren.org/ac2026/business/ballot) and will be printed in the Conference booklet.

The **business agenda** for the conference has been announced. Along with numerous reports and the ballot, the delegate body will receive an interim report from the Review and Evaluation Committee and will consider four items of new business: resolutions on weapons transfer and care for immigrants and refugees, polity adjustments for licensed and commissioned ministers, and the yet-to-be-announced recommended cost of living adjustment for the pastoral scale.

**From the Annual Conference usher coordinator:** During worship we need volunteer ushers to help receive offerings and record attendance. Congregations in the Fort Wayne area will usher at Sunday's worship, while Manchester University students and alumni will do so Tuesday. While an important role in our worship services, ushering requires very little time and does not take away from participating in the rest of the worship service. You will be able to sign up when registering for Annual Conference and/or at the usher table when you arrive and check in for the conference. Once you have registered for conference, please follow the links to sign up to volunteer as an usher. You can also reach usher coordinator Angela Finet at [angelafinet50@gmail.com](mailto:angelafinet50@gmail.com) with your congregation name, and your affiliation (if any) with Manchester University. Please use "AC usher" in the subject line. She can also be reached at 717-916-4694.

As of last report, the following congregations from our district **have registered delegates:** Canton, Dixon, Freeport, Lanark, Mount Morris, Naperville, Neighborhood, Polo, Springfield First, and York Center. We encourage other congregations to consider sending delegates to this important meeting in the life of the church. Find more details and register at [www.brethren.org/ac2026](http://www.brethren.org/ac2026).

## **DISASTER RESPONSE**

We invite continued prayers for the community of **Lena, Ill.**, located just about five miles north of our Yellow Creek congregation near Pearl City. Lena was hit by an EF-2 tornado on Friday, April 17. The Yellow Creek church building had some water in the basement, but otherwise we are not aware of any Church of the Brethren members directly affected by the storms. Lena, however, experienced some significant damage, although there were thankfully no fatalities. Several other tornadoes also hit Illinois, including one near Rockton in Winnebago County and others in the east-central part of the state. Pearl City also experienced trees down and some other damage from storms during the week. Brethren Disaster Ministries and our district

disaster coordinator, Rick Koch, have been monitoring for any possible response needs.

**Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM)** is transitioning toward recovery from 2024's Hurricane Helene in North Carolina. In April it began serving survivors in Ashe, Henderson, and Transylvania counties. For more than three years, beginning in October 2022, BDM ran short- and long-term projects in Kentucky to respond to devastating July 2022 flooding in the south and southeastern part of the state.

BDM also ran a one-week project April 26-May 2 in western Maryland's Allegany County in response to a flash flood that occurred in May 2025 and resulted in extensive damage.

Our district's volunteer week this year has shifted to the summer, in late August/early September.

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Upcoming courses from the **Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership** include "Multivocational Ministry," online, Aug. 19-Oct. 13, led by John Fillmore (registration deadline July 22), 2 CEU's available; "Cultivating an Everyday Faith," online, Sept. 23-Nov. 17, led by Joan Daggett (registration deadline Aug. 19); and "Introduction to the New Testament," online, Oct. 21-Dec. 15 (registration deadline Sept. 16). Register and pay online at [Brethren Academy Course Registration/Biannual TRIM Payment | Bethany Theological Seminary \(bethanyseminary.edu\)](https://www.brethrenacademy.org/course-registration/biannual-trim-payment).
- **Lombard Mennonite Peace Center** offers a variety of training sessions. Upcoming options include "Peaceful, Productive, Pastor-Parish Relationships," May 14 via Zoom; "Conflict Transformation Skills," June 10 or Aug. 26 via Zoom; and "Strengthening the Body of Christ," Sept. 16 via Zoom. For details and registration information, go to <https://www.lmpeacecenter.org/trainings>. LMPC has also begun offering free quarterly clergy roundtable events. Watch their website for details on future roundtable opportunities.
- **New Community Project** continues to offer learning tours to "Go. Meet. Learn. Grow. Change – yourself and your world." Upcoming trips include: **Lybrook, N.M.**, July 8-14 (Dineh (Navajo) life and culture, Chaco Ruins, magnificent vistas, medicine woman, daily work around the site); **Denali/Kenai Fjords**, July 27 – August 4 (hiking, wildlife (sheep, moose, bears), volunteer day at dogsled kennels; whales and puffins along the coast); **Yellowstone/Tetons**, early August 9-16 (thermal springs, waterfalls, bison, 'mazing mountains, camp and hike); **Nepal**, January 12-24, 2027 (hosted by Shakti Samuha, learn about human trafficking and meet survivors; visit Chitwan National Park (rhinos!)). Find more information at [www.newcommunityproject.info](http://www.newcommunityproject.info) or contact [dradcliffncp@yahoo.com](mailto:dradcliffncp@yahoo.com).

- The 53<sup>rd</sup> annual **Brethren Bible Institute**, sponsored by Brethren Revival Fellowship, will run July 27-31 on the campus of Elizabethtown (Pa.) College. Courses include “Introduction to Theology,” “The Book of Psalms,” and “Women in the Early Church.” Cost is \$125 for commuters, \$300 with on-campus food and lodging. To register, write to Brethren Bible Institute, 155 Denver Rd., Denver, PA 17517. Deadline is June 25.
- Designed particularly for ministers new to the Church of the Brethren denomination, Bethany Theological Seminary’s new **certificate of achievement in ministry studies (CAMS)** includes six courses that focus on Brethren history and theology, practical experience with the ordinances and preaching of the church, biblical interpretation, and peace studies. The certificate can be completed in two years or even one year, depending on course offerings. Five of the six courses can be completed at a distance. For more information go to <https://bethanyseminary.edu>.

## PERSONNEL NOTES

**Michelle Martinez** has been hired by the Church of the Brethren as the Manager of Accounting and Assistant Treasurer, working from the General Offices in Elgin. Michelle is a graduate of the University of Phoenix with a Bachelor of Science in accounting and a Master of Business Administration. Michelle worked at the Village of Niles as the senior accountant manager. Michelle began her work on April 27.

## JOB OPENINGS

The Church of the Brethren is seeking to fill a full-time salaried position of **Director of Ministry**. The Director of Ministry leads and administers the Church of the Brethren’s Ministry Office, overseeing systems for calling, credentialing, placing, and supporting ministerial leaders. The director is a custodian of ministry polity and documents, collaborates closely with the Council of District Executives, and provides consultation to districts on leadership and organizational matters. Candidates should have a bachelor’s degree and Master of Divinity or equivalent; 15 years of pastoral ministry including administration (5 years of district leadership preferred); bi-lingual abilities preferred; and current ordination and active membership in the Church of the Brethren. They should be knowledgeable and experienced in budget development and management, able to understand and direct the implementation of the Ministerial Leadership and Ethics in Ministry Relations polity of the Church of the Brethren, and have strong interpersonal skills contributing to effective work across the denomination. Position can work remotely within the United States. Applications will be received beginning immediately and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis until the position is filled. Qualified candidates may send a cover letter and resume to [COBApply@brethren.org](mailto:COBApply@brethren.org).

The Church of the Brethren is seeking to fill a full-time salaried position of **Director of Brethren**

**Disaster Ministries (BDM).** Major responsibilities include providing oversight and administration of Brethren Disaster Ministries with a focus on the home rebuilding program. This includes identifying and opening new home rebuilding sites as necessary, managing long-term and weekly rebuilding volunteers and leading the training of volunteer leaders. Required skills and knowledge include strong interpersonal skills; ability to uphold and support the basic beliefs and practices of the Church of the Brethren as determined by Annual Conference; and ability to act within a multicultural and multigenerational team environment. Training or experience with making effective presentations and providing adult education, especially in conducting skill training workshops; managing staff and volunteers and in house construction and repair is required. Knowledge of International Building Codes is preferred. A bachelor's degree is required, advanced degree in related field preferred. This position is remote and based at the Brethren Disaster Ministries office, New Windsor, Md. Applications will be received beginning immediately and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis until the position is filled. Qualified candidates are invited to send a cover letter and resume to [COBApply@brethren.org](mailto:COBApply@brethren.org).

Camp Swatara invites applications for its next **executive director**. The camp is located near Bethel, Pa. The camp is prayerfully searching for the next executive director—a mission-driven leader called to the intersection of ministry, community, and outdoor camp life on 700-plus acres at the foot of Blue Mountain. Learn more, share input, and apply at [www.campswatara.org/leadcamp](http://www.campswatara.org/leadcamp)

## DENOMINATIONAL NEWS/NEWSLINE

**Bethany Theological Seminary** awarded 40 degrees and certificates during its commencement ceremony in Richmond, Ind., on May 9. It was the largest graduating class since the seminary relocated to Richmond from Oak Brook, Ill., in 1994. The commencement address was delivered by former Juniata College chaplain David Witkovsky. The event drew a crowd of 130 in-person attendees, with many more people watching the livestream. A recording is available on [YouTube](#).



**Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS)** applications for this year's summer unit are due May 20 and for the fall unit June 24. For more information about doing a year of service, visit [www.brethren.org/bvs](http://www.brethren.org/bvs) or email [bvs@brethren.org](mailto:bvs@brethren.org).

The **Shine curriculum** (Brethren Press) has released an all-ages resource centered on six key faith practices in order to help congregations cultivate meaningful faith practices in the home. The six practices—talk, pray, celebrate, serve, learn, and worship—are simple, repeatable actions designed to help families integrate faith into daily routines. Churches are invited to download the free resource, share it with their leadership teams, and begin planning a six-week journey that invites participants of all ages to grow in faith together. Download the free worship series at <https://shineeverywhere.com/6practices>

In April, Church of the Brethren leaders from the denomination’s largest congregations gathered in Orlando, Fla., for a time of learning, sharing, and support. Churches that had an average of 200 or more in person at their worship services were invited. Out of 11 congregations of that size, nine sent pastoral staff to join in the conversations. Those churches were: l’Église des Freres Haitiens (Miami, Fla.), Ephrata (Pa.), Lancaster (Pa.), Liberty Mills (Ind.), Mill Creek (Port Republic, Va.), Mechanic Grove (Quarryville, Pa.), Mount Hermon and Monte Hermon (Bassett, Va.), Parker Ford (Pottstown, Pa.), and Pleasant Dale (Decatur, Ind.).

**Duane Grady** of Goshen, Ind., an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and a former member of the denominational staff, has announced a bicycling fundraiser. “After a 50-year hiatus, I’m biking across Iowa again this summer and while doing so, hope to raise some money for Heifer International.” Find out more at <https://fundraise.heifer.org/fundraiser/7186915>

In observance of **World Refugee Day** (June 20) and celebrating 80 years of **Church World Service** (CWS), a “42.5-mile challenge” is being issued by CWS. Inspired by the 42.5 million refugees worldwide, this “flexible, faith-centered” challenge can be met by walking, biking, swimming, or other means to raise funds for CWS programs. Learn more at [Journey for Justice](#).

**Intercultural Ministries Café: Faith & Culture Conversations**—rooted in relationship, discipleship, and practical intercultural engagement—will be held once a month through Oct. 20. The registration link is available at [www.brethren.org/intercultural/#cafe](http://www.brethren.org/intercultural/#cafe).

The Church of the Brethren’s webpage on **conscientious objection to war** is at [www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/co](http://www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/co). Links on this page direct young people who want to learn more about what conscientious objection means and its biblical and Brethren roots to a free downloadable curriculum titled “**Call of Conscience**.” The direct link to the curriculum is [www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/co/introduction](http://www.brethren.org/peacebuilding/co/introduction).

Registration for the **2026 Song and Story Fest** taking place July 5-11 at Inspiration Hills in Ohio is open through June 1. Access all the information about this event at: [On Earth Peace Event Page for Song and Story Fest](#). The organizers note that they have added more detail to the online registration form about which meals and nights participants will be present for. Also, if any members of a family will have different arrival and departure times and therefore different numbers of meals and/or nights at the camp, *please have those individuals register separately*.

The deadline to apply for the Church of the Brethren's **Health Care Education Scholarship** in 2026 has been changed to May 22. This scholarship, made possible by the Health Education and Research Endowment, is available to members of the Church of the Brethren enrolled in degree programs for nursing, medicine, dentistry, physical and occupational therapy, and other health professions. Scholarships of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 are awarded to a limited number of applicants each year. For more information and to apply, go to [www.brethren.org/healthcarescholarship](http://www.brethren.org/healthcarescholarship).

#### **GRANTS AND GIVING:**

Grants available through the district include the following:

1. **Mission and Mortar:** Sustaining and developing ministry (mission) within congregations, as well as maintaining property (mortar), is sometimes hindered because of inadequate financial resources. The Illinois/Wisconsin District, whose mission is to support the growth and development of member congregations, desires to financially support congregations that are in good standing with the district and have specific needs. More information can be found [here](#).

2. **Being Jesus in the Neighborhood:** Congregations can apply for \$100 in seed money to start a new outreach project or initiative in their local communities, or to expand an existing one. These should be projects that intentionally engage with the neighborhood immediately around the congregation or, for those in rural locations, with the town or area around the church. Each congregation receiving a grant will be asked to share a little about their project at district conference. More information can be found [here](#).

3. **Emerging Missions Fund:** To facilitate the growth and establishment of new faith communities, this grant is available for church and ministry planting initiatives. New church and ministry plants are encouraged to apply by contacting the district office and/or the CRDT.

#### **Supporting Your District**

The Illinois/Wisconsin District is active in a variety of ministry and mission efforts, both directly and indirectly. Continuing these efforts requires resources in the form of time, tools, knowledge, and especially finances. Consider a contribution to the district's general fund or one of its special funds (disaster relief, youth, emerging ministries, etc.). Look for the donate button at [iwdcob.org](http://iwdcob.org), or send checks to the district office: 1S071 Luther Ave., Lombard, IL 60148.