

Pastor's memo

NORTHERN OHIO DISTRICT CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
APRIL 2026

Day of Encouragement For clergy and church leaders

We are excited to announce a Day of Encouragement for clergy and church leaders will be held on **Saturday, April 18, 2026 at Maple Grove CoB**. Registration begins at 9 am and the first workshop starts at 9:30 am.



Galen Hackman will provide leadership for this time of renewal. **This seminar draws upon Galen's life experience and God's work in his life, bringing him from a ministry of frustration to one of fruitfulness, from disappointment to joy.**

Galen Hackman has served the Church of the Brethren and other churches/ministries, as a pastor, missionary, teacher, writer, and mentor. After 15 years of ministry in two full-time pastoral roles, facing frustration and disappointment, he decided to leave the pastoral ministry and pursue a teaching career. God had other ideas and called him to the mission field with the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria—EYN). There, in a strange land and a different church, Galen was recalled to pastoral ministry. However, his experience in Africa challenged him to reconsider how he was approaching pastoral ministry. What God did in his life over the next years enabled him to stay the course and to be privileged to walk with God as he brought two congregations “back to life.”

Galen holds degrees in biblical studies and certifications in coaching, transitional leadership, and consulting. He and his wife, Doris, live in Akron PA and together they have three married children and twelve grandchildren.

He will bring encouragement to all who attend. This workshop is available to clergy/spouses and lay leaders. CEU's will be provided along with childcare.

Registration fee is \$15 per person, or \$25 per couple. This includes lunch, snacks and sessions. Preregistration deadline is April 11, 2026. Register by mail with the form provided to congregations or online at <https://nohcob.org/DayofEncouragement2026>

In This Issue

Day of Encouragement.....	1
Clergy/Spouse Retreat.....	2
Pastoral Placement.....	2
Annual Conference.....	3
District Conference.....	3
National Youth Conference....	3
District Prayer Calendar.....	3
Practice of Ministry Day.....	4
Brethren Academy Courses....	4
Annual Conference Delegate Briefing.....	5
District Events Calendar.....	5
District Office Hours.....	5
Pre-Annual Conference Event.....	6
L.E.A.D.....	7
Sisters Retreat.....	8
Peanut Butter and Canned Goods Challenge.....	9-10

Clergy Spouse Retreat 2026

Article provided by, *Laura Huffaker, District Administrative Secretary*



Forty-one gathered at the Amish Door in Wilmot, Ohio for the 2026 Clergy-Spouse Retreat area for the 2018 Clergy-Spouse Retreat February 15-17. This was a time for renewal and rest, laughter and learning. Paul Munday held three sessions focused on “Touring Romans 8”, “Hope for Weary Hearts”. Per Paul, Romans provides wise, “down-to-earth” counsel on how to have a faithful, effective life.

Worship time together was rich – and the singing was beautiful! We stayed up late playing games and talking. Some even enjoyed the pool. Since the weather was so nice some of us were able to get out and enjoy Amish Country a little bit during our free time. And we cannot forget out the wonderful food and hospitality. Thank you to the Ministerial Commission for coordinating this event.



Northern Ohio District Pastoral Placement

Congregations actively in the search process:

Brook Park – Search Committee meeting this month. *Ryan Lopez* serving as interim pastor.

Center – Profile completed. *Joe Routh* serving as interim pastor.

Swan Creek - Beginning to talk about the process. Members of congregation providing leadership

Congregations that have not yet begun the Search Process or have chosen not to seek at this time:

Akron First- *Wayne Kissel* serving as interim pastor. Complete service May 2026.

Freeburg – *Ed Wartluft* serving as preacher.

Silver Creek— *Jason Martin* serving as interim pastor.

Congregations that have completed the Search Process:

Eden- *Jamie Spencer* called as pastor at Eden Church of the Brethren effective on December 14, 2025.

Jonah’s People- *Mark Self* called as pastor at Jonah’s People Fellowship effective on December 7, 2025.

Sugar Creek West – *Ministry Team* serving the congregation.

Updated 3-14-2026



Annual Conference 2026 Sunday, June 28 – Thursday, July 2

Fort Wayne, Indiana
Grand Wayne Convention Center

**Registration is now open for
Annual Conference!!**

**For more information or to register, go to:
<https://www.brethren.org/ac2026/>**

Annual Conference Moderator, Don Fitzkee, will be in Northern Ohio on May 31st for our Delegate Briefing. See page 5 for more information.

District Prayer Calendar

April Prayer Calendar

Churches/Pastors

Brook Park, Ryan Lopez
Center, Joe Routh
Chippewa, Bill Eley

District Leadership

Central Committee
Cindy Peel, Moderator

Sister Districts

Pacific Northwest / Pacific Southwest

National Leadership

Discipleship and Leadership Formation /
Office of Ministry
Church of the Brethren in Haiti

May Prayer Calendar

Churches/Pastors

Defiance, Eugene Yenser
East Chippewa, Mike Huffaker
Eden, Jamie Spencer

District Leadership

Ministerial Commission
Mike Huffaker, Chair

Sister Districts

Missouri Arkansas / Southeastern

National Leadership

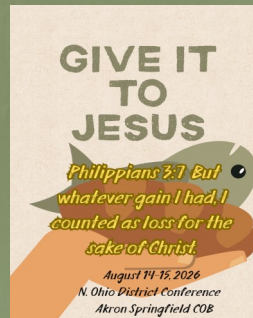
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Church of the Brethren in Uganda

Northern Ohio District

District Conference

August 14 & 15, 2026

Akron Springfield Church of the Brethren



Plans for our 2026 Northern Ohio District Conference Akron Springfield CoB are well underway.

Moderator Cindy Peel (Akron Springfield) has chosen “Give It To Jesus” as the theme with a focus on Philippians 3:7.

This year’s conference will feature Ryan Braught who will speak at the Friday evening worship service and Cindy Peel will speak at the Saturday afternoon service.

More details on the Conference will be coming up in the next Herald – the Pre-Conference Workshop, Insight Sessions, all promise to bring together a weekend of worship, growth, fellowship, and fun.

Conference registration will open May 1, 2026. Coupled with other events that will be happening in and around Akron at that time, lead to a recommendation that **lodging reservations should be made early.**

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Comfort Inn & Suites in Hartville, 3.4 miles from the church. All the rooms are suites and feature a 2-person sofa bed in addition to the King or Queen beds. You can receive the Northern Ohio District group rate by clicking the link

[Reserve Your Room Now](#) or by calling (330) 587-4347 by July 17, 2026.

Other hotels are available 15-20 minutes from the church. Camping is also available. You can find all the lodging information at: https://www.nohcob.org/upload/hotel_and_campground_information.pdf

National Youth Conference (NYC)



Pastor Mike and Laura Huffaker will be serving as Youth Advisors to youth from East Chippewa CoB for the National Youth Conference July 18-23, 2026 at Estes Park Colorado.

They are willing to serve in the advisor role for other youth from other congregations that are interested in attending, but do not have an advisor. If you have youth that are interested in going, please contact Laura at laura@nohcob.org as soon as possible.

“A Deep Dive: Understanding Your Church” / Practice of Ministry Day

This spring’s Practice of Ministry Day is Friday, April 24th from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Northern Ohio District Office. This learning opportunity is required for students from our Buckeye Brethren Institute (BBI) and is available as continuing education for all clergy and those serving on ministry teams.

We are pleased to have Dan Poole, Assistant



Professor of Ministry Formation at Bethany Seminary as our presenter for the day. His topic is “**A Deep Dive: Understanding Your Church**” providing tools and conversation for better understanding your congregation. Lunch will be provided for all participants.

Please register at <https://nohcob.org/PracticeofMinistryDay> or by emailing laura@nohcob.org so we have a count for lunch. Clergy will receive 0.5 CEU’s for attending. The deadline for registration is April 20, 2025.

Upcoming Brethren Academy Courses

Multivocational Ministry

Online - **August 19-October 13, 2026**

Instructor: John Fillmore

Credit: MS

Registration Deadline: July 22, 2026

Course Brochure coming

Cultivating an Everyday Faith

Online - **September 23-November 17, 2026**

Instructor: Joan Daggett

Credit: MS, FCR

Registration Deadline: August 19, 2026

Course Brochure coming

Introduction to New Testament

Online - **October 21-December 15, 2026**

Instructor: Matt Boersma

Credit: BHTS, FCR, BTS

Registration Deadline: September 16, 2026

Course Brochure coming

For more information or to register, go to: <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/brethren-academy-course-listings/>

Practicing the Way: Sabbath Practice

By Ryan Braught

The Part Time Pastor: Full Time Church program of the Church of the Brethren will be sponsoring Practicing the Way: The Sabbath Practice for all Multi-Vocational Pastors this Spring.

Session I will focus on Stop. God built a rhythm of rest into the fabric of creation. When we live in alignment with this ancient rhythm, we find peace and joy, but when we fight it, we fracture our souls.

Session II will focus on Rest. Sabbath isn’t just a day off to take a long nap — it’s a form of resistance that requires us to fight powerful forces that war against Sabbath spirituality.

Session III will focus on Delight. Sabbath is a full day set aside to celebrate our life with God in his world, and it is designed to be done in community — a life-giving day of delight.

Session IV will focus on Worship. Sabbath isn’t just a day to stop, rest, and throw a feast in community — it’s a holy day set apart and dedicated to God himself.

Session I will be on Monday April 27

Session II will be on Monday May 4

Session III will be on Monday May 11

Session IV will be on Monday May 18

Register by Wednesday April 22 by completing this form. The first session begins on April 27, at 7 pm EST. An e-mail will be sent by Friday April 24 with details about the first session including a Zoom log-in.

Ventures Course

“God’s Earth, Our Home”

The Ventures in Christian Discipleship course previously set for March 28, “God’s Earth, Our Home: Engaging Creation Care through Faith,” has been moved to **Saturday, May 2, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Central Time**. The course will be presented online by David Radcliff, director of New Community Project.

Continuing education credit is available for \$10 per course. During the registration process, you will have the opportunity to pay for CEUs and give an optional donation to the Ventures program.

To learn more about Ventures in Christian Discipleship and to register for courses, visit www.mcpherson.edu/ventures.



Meet the Annual Conference Moderator/Delegate Briefing

Sunday, May 31 from 3pm – 5 pm
at Mansfield First CoB, Mansfield, OH



Mark your calendars for **Sunday, May 31 from 3:00 – 5:00 pm**. Don Fitzkee, Annual Conference Moderator, will hold our Annual Conference Delegate Briefing at Mansfield First Church of the Brethren. This session is for Annual Conference delegates, pastors, and all who would like to know more of what will be happening at Annual Conference this year in Fort Wayne, Indiana on June 28th -July 2nd at the Grand Wayne Convention Center. Come hear about “Imagine” based on Act 2:17-18 (theme for Annual Conference), the fellowship and learning opportunities at Conference this year. Light refreshments will be provided. All are welcome to attend!!

Don Fitzkee is Pastor of Worship at the Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren and 2026 Annual Conference Moderator. Previously he served for 20 years as a non-salaried “free minister” in the Chiques congregation, near Manheim, and was Director of Development at COBYS Family Services, an agency affiliated with the Atlantic Northeast District. Don has served in various denominational leadership roles including chair of the Mission and Ministry Board. He earned a Bachelor’s in Sociology from Elizabethtown College, spending his junior year abroad in Marburg, Germany, through Brethren Colleges Abroad. Following coursework at Bethany Seminary and Evangelical School of Theology, he earned a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary. Following college Don served through Brethren Volunteer Service as Editorial Assistant for *Messenger* magazine, which opened doors to other writing opportunities and denominational roles.

Don enjoys disc golfing and riding bike, dabbles in gardening and apple trees, and tries to walk a few miles several times a week. He and his wife, Carolyn, live near Manheim and are parents of Galen and Marianne. In recent years Don & Carolyn have found joy in making new friends through their congregation’s refugee resettlement ministry.

Registration is now open for Annual Conference!!

For more information or to register, go to: <https://www.brethren.org/ac2026/>



He is Risen Indeed.

Hallelujah!

Have a blessed Easter.

District Office Hours

The District Office regular hours are Monday—Friday from 9 am to 2 pm. **The District Office will be closed Friday, April 3rd in observance for Good Friday.**

Kris Hawk, District Executive Minister, takes Monday as her day off. She can be reached at 330-612-2086 or krishawk@nohcob.org.

Laura Huffaker, Administrative Secretary, is in the office Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. She can be reached at 419-281-3058 or laura@nohcob.org.

District Events Calendar

- 4.1 Western Pastors Gathering at 12:30 pm
- 4.3 Good Friday-District Office Closed
- 4.7 Executive Committee Meeting at District Office at 5:00 pm
- 4.9 Central Area Clergy Breakfast at 9:00 am at District Office
- 4.9 Eastern Area Pastors Gathering at 12:00 pm
- 4.9 Central Comm. Meeting at 7:00 pm at Akron Springfield CoB
- 4.14 Strategic Planning Comm. Meeting at District Office at 5:00 pm
- 4.16 Camp Administration Committee Meeting at 6:00 pm
- 4.18 Day of Encouragement at Maple Grove CoB at 9:00 am
- 4.24 Practice of Ministry Day at District Office
- 4.25 Sister’s Retreat at Camp Inspiration Hills
- 5.1-5.3 LEAD Conference

*To see meeting and event times go to our website <https://www.nohcob.org/>

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN MINISTERS' ASSOCIATION PRE-ANNUAL CONFERENCE CONTINUING EDUCATION EVENT

Redeeming AI: Biblical Guidelines

June 27-28, 2026 prior to the 2026 Annual Conference, Fort Wayne, IN

Dr. Russell Haitch, Presenter

Artificial intelligence has been moving fast, yet many experts say we are still in the early stages—the first drops of rain before the downpour. Now we see coming toward us AI assistants and advisors, tutors for children, aides for the elderly, and even AI companions and romantic partners. People will draw the line at different points, yet more and more of us are on speaking terms with machines. What does it mean for ministry and for the future of humanity? Christian theology offers crucial insights for charting a pilgrim path through this new territory. Join us for learning and conversation on what happens when artificial intelligence meets ancient biblical wisdom.

RUSSELL'S THREE SESSIONS INCLUDE:

Boomers and Doomers

A lively look at the optimism and anxiety surrounding AI—and how it affects the church

In the Image of God

How to keep humanized machines from mechanizing us

For the Road Ahead

Tool kit and first-aid kit for ministry in an AI world



Russell Haitch (PhD, MDiv Princeton Theological Seminary) is professor of theology and human science at Bethany Theological Seminary. He has been a pastor for multiethnic congregations and a writer for a New York advertising agency. His books include *Eyes of the Heart: Seeing God in an Age of Science*, *From Exorcism to Ecstasy: Eight Views of Baptism*, and the forthcoming *Godlike Power: Saving Our Humanity in the Age of AI*.

Russell enjoys running in big cities and traveling with his wife Judi, who grew up in Kenya, along with their two children. Recently they adopted a stray dog, Fifi, after years of saying "absolutely not." He looks forward to coming to the conference and connecting with fellow ministers.

ARRIVAL / REGISTRATION

Saturday, June 27
3:00-6:00 p.m.

EVENT

Saturday, June 27
6:00-9:00 p.m.

Sunday, June 28
9:00-11:45 a.m.
1:15-4:00 p.m.

LUNCHEON

(Available for purchase
only until June 1)

Sunday, June 28
12:00 noon-1:00 p.m.

Beginning March 2026

Register online at
[www.brethren.org/
ministryoffice](http://www.brethren.org/ministryoffice)

or by mail using the 2026
Event Registration Form on
reverse

LEAD

LISTEN • EQUIP • ADAPT • DISCIPLE

CONFERENCE

May. 1-3, 2026

Ephrata Church of the Brethren
Ephrata, Pennsylvania

The Church of the Brethren L.E.A.D. Conference is a gathering space where congregational leaders, pastors, board members, deacons, Sunday School teachers, and others come together to Listen, Equip, Adapt, and Disciple as we learn side by side.

Rooted in our call to follow Jesus into our neighborhoods, this conference invites leaders to listen deeply to God, one another, and their communities; to be equipped with practical tools and fresh ideas; to adapt faithfully in a changing world; and to disciple others with courage and hope.

Join us for meaningful conversations, hands-on learning, and take-away resources you can put to work right away in your own ministry context as we grow into innovative, adaptable, and fearless disciples of Jesus.

Register NOW!

www.brethren.org/dlf/lead-conference

OPENING PREACHER

Michaela Alphonse is a member and pastor of Miami First Church of the Brethren in Miami, Florida. Throughout her life, she has worked with children and youth in the public school system. Michaela is currently serving as a member of Mission and Ministry Board, as the lead for the Atlantic Southeast District Program Team, and as a member of PACT Miami. She loves to sing, dance, read, and go exploring. Michaela is married to Ilxene Alphonse. They have one daughter.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Tod Bolsinger, MDiv, PhD, the co-owner and principal of Sloan Leadership, Inc, an executive coaching and consulting firm that works with church, non-profit, and marketplace leaders in leading change. He is also the Executive Director of the De Pree Center Church Leadership Institute, a Senior Fellow of the De Pree Center for Leadership, and Associate Professor of Leadership Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary, was the founder of the Fuller Leadership Platform, an innovative approach to online formation and leadership development, and served as a Vice President of Fuller Seminary for six years. Prior to his educational career, he served as a pastor for 27 years. Tod is the author of five books, including the Outreach Magazine Resource of the Year in pastoral leadership, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, the Christian Book Award Finalist, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed in the Crucible of Change*, and *The Practicing Change Series*.



BREAKOUT SESSION PRESENTERS



Early registration through March 31 is \$99 per person/\$79 per person for 5 or more from the same congregation and \$49 for virtual attendees. After March 31st, registration increases \$140 in person and \$75 for virtual attendees.

Note: Virtual attendees will be able to attend the sermons, keynotes addresses, and breakout sessions that occur in the sanctuary, but will not be able to attend breakout sessions held in other rooms.

CEUs are available - \$10 fee required.



Church of the Brethren

Sponsored by Discipleship & Leadership Formation

For information email DLF@brethren.org



2026 spring RETREAT

RENEW + REJOICE AT INSPIRATION HILLS CAMP 4819 W EASTON RD BURBANK, OHIO 44214

When:
April 25th, 2026

Time:
9:00am-3:00pm

Cost:
\$25 per person
Lunch included with cost

Register Online:
**[www.nohcob.org/
sistersretreat](http://www.nohcob.org/sistersretreat)**
OR
Call/Text
(330) 705-0594
Crystal Zellers with
Registrations if you'd like to
pay upon arrival at retreat

We are so excited to welcome our guest speaker who will be leading us in our theme:

Tina Hunt

Tina is the pastor at Mansfield First Church of the Brethren. She also serves as Ministry Education Director of the Northern Ohio District and Director of the Buckeye Brethren Institute (Ministry Training Program on NODCOB). Tina is an elected member of the denomination's Mission and Ministry Board. She is wife to Nelson (47yrs), Mom to Ann and Beth, and Mema to Penelope, Caden, and Asher. She is a published author of Advent, and Lent to Easter Devotionals. Her passion is studying and sharing the Word. Favorite activities are word games and riding her bike. A student at heart, Tina is looking forward to starting her Doctorate of Ministry program this fall.

Tina will lead us using scripture from Psalm 104:30-34. Our retreat will be centered around renewing and rejoicing, using camp as a place to gather for this special time.

We will have scripture led chair yoga, afternoon breakout sessions, expert-led camp hiking, and we would love to put together health kits for BDM. Please see attached list of items to bring with you to assemble kits!





JOIN US FOR A FRIENDLY
NORTHERN OHIO CHURCH
OF THE BRETHREN



**CANNED FOOD AND
PEANUT BUTTER FOOD DRIVE**

— FOR THE MONTH OF —
MAY 2026



Each church is invited to collect **canned goods** and **peanut butter** throughout the month of May.



At the end of May 2026, please total the **number of ounces (oz)** collected.



A UNIQUE TROPHY WILL BE GIVEN IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

- **Highest Total Collected** —
The church with the greatest total ounces collected
- **Highest Per Attendee** —
The church with the highest ounces collected based on average attendance (*ounces per attendee prize*)



Please email your totals to:
LAURA@NOHCOB.ORG

After the collection, we invite you to donate all items to a **local food pantry of your choice** to support your community.



 **QUESTIONS OR MORE INFORMATION?**

Contact **LAURA@NOHCOB.ORG**
or call the district office at **419-281-3058**



Peanut Butter and Canned Goods Challenge

The Northern Ohio Church of the Brethren Connections and Congregational Commissions invite all the churches to participate in a District Wide Canned Food and Peanut Butter food drive. According to statistics approximately 1.8 million people in Ohio face hunger. That is approximately 1 in 7 residents, including over 517,000 children. Food banks in Ohio report record numbers due to higher living costs, ending benefits and supply chain issues. While we as a district in the greater denomination, might not be able to fix this growing problem, we might have the ability to feed some. Matthew 25:35 ESV states, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”*

So, what can you do to help? For the month of May, we will be having a friendly food drive among the Northern Ohio COB churches. Each congregation will collect canned food or peanut butter (that is not expired). We ask that you tally up the total oz of food, weekly if possible, and email it to laura@nohcob.org or call the District Office at 419-281-3058. There will be **Two Winning** congregations. The **First winner** for the highest total oz collected and the **Second winner** for the total number of oz divided by the typical Sunday morning attendees for a total oz per attendee. At the end of May, the winning churches will be awarded each a *“one of a kind”* trophy for bragging rights only! At the end of May after the calculations are computed we ask that you donate the canned food and peanut butter to a local food pantry, shelter, soup kitchen of your choosing. We want to collect food and help those we live among. We might not know when people are going hungry, but we can be willing to do something about it.

If you have any question or need more information, feel free to reach out to laura@nohcob.org or call the District Office at 419-281-3058.