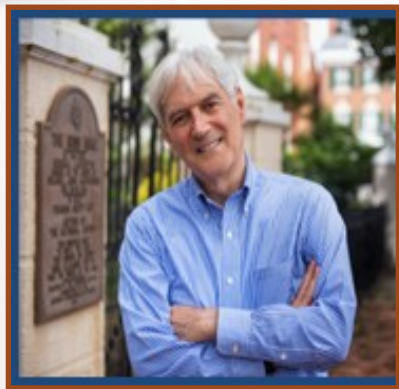


Pastor's *memo*

NORTHERN OHIO DISTRICT CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
DECEMBER 2025



2026 Clergy-Spouse Retreat

February 15-17, 2026

Amish Door Village, Wilmot, OH

Please join us for a time of relation-building, renewal, learning and rest. The facilities will be different this year as the Ministry Team has decided to try something different. We will be at Amish Door in Wilmot, Ohio and like always the food will be great, but having time to reconnect with everyone will be even

greater!! All single and married clergy and their spouses are encouraged to attend. The retreat begins at 4 pm on Sunday, February 15th and finishes with lunch together on Tuesday.

Costs are \$375/Couple (3 days/2 nights, plus 6 meals); \$275/Single (3 days/2 nights, plus 6 meals). Single One Day Registration is available. Single clergy who may want to share a room can do so at the couple rate. Confidential financial scholarships are available by contacting Kris Hawk at kris.hawk@nohcob.org or 330-612-2086. You may register on-line at [clergy-spouse-retreat-2026](https://www.nohcob.org/clergy-spouse-retreat-2026)

Paul Munday is a minister, consultant, and writer. He has served as a church leader for more than 45 years, in a wide range of roles: pastor, church administrator, denominational officer, workshop leader, denominational staff person, and teacher.

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January Prayer Calendar

Churches/Pastors

Swan Creek, Ministry Team
Woodworth, Steve Simmons
Adrian, David Morton

District Leadership

Camp Inspiration Hills, Andrew Kauffman

Sister Districts

West Marva
Western PA

National Leadership

Brethren Disaster Ministries

[Updated 2026 Prayer Calendar Here](#)

Mark Your Calendar

12/24-1/2 District Office Closed for Christmas

1-7 Western Pastors Gathering at 12:30 pm

1/8 Central Area Clergy Breakfast at 9:00 am at District Office

1/8 Eastern Area Pastor's Gathering at 12:00 pm at Front
Porch Café in Hartville

1/9 BBI Class- History of the Church at District Office from
9:30 am-3:30 pm

1/13 CAC Finance Committee at 10:00 am

1/15 L.E.A.D. Workshop with Jeremy Ashworth

1/22 CAC Meeting at 6:00 pm

1/23 BBI Class- History of the Church at District Office from
9:30 am-3:30 pm

2/3 Executive Committee Meeting at District Office at 5:00 pm

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little
among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall
come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose
goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.
Micah 5:2*

Pastoral Placement

Congregations actively in the search process:

Brook Park – Forming Search Committee. *Ryan Lopez* serving as interim pastor.

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

Congregations that have completed the Search Process:

Eden- *Jamie Spencer* called as pastor at Eden Church of the Brethren beginning January 1, 2026.

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

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.

Freeburg – *Ed Wartluft* serving as preacher.

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

Sugar Creek West – *Ministry Team* providing pulpit supply.

What is the Church of the Brethren Deportation Defense Response?

The Deportation Defense Response (DDR) Team was initiated by four Church of the Brethren Districts (Atlantic Northeast, Atlantic Southeast, Virginia, and Pacific Southwest), whose churches and members are most affected by detention and deportation of immigrants. The Church of the Brethren Office of Intercultural Ministries and On Earth Peace joined to help.

The work of the DDR Team is to exhort the church to care for our siblings and neighbors under threat of immigration-related detention and deportation. They have set up a Legal and Mutual Aid Fund to provide grants to Church of the Brethren members affected by detention and deportation. Most of these brothers and sisters came to this country legally under a protected status; but then earlier this year, those programs were suspended placing them at risk for deportation.

Immigrant members of Church of the Brethren congregations who have received grants from the Deportation Defense Response team's Legal and Mutual Aid Fund have expressed to the team that they are thankful, and they feel they are not alone. The funds they have received, thanks to the generosity of congregations across the denomination, have covered the high costs of legal and filing fees and have supported families whose loved ones have been affected by detention and deportation.

While 55 grants (up to \$2500 each) have already been given, "there are many others waiting for grants and we need your help," said an announcement from the Deportation Defense Response team.

Intended uses of the fund are to facilitate mutual aid to cover personal and legal expenses related to costs incurred for immigration, asylum, and related application fees ("papers"), immigration-related travel, airline fees, family support when a deportation has occurred, and more.

How we in Northern Ohio can help

During our District Board Meeting on November 8th, 2025 the board learned that 39 Church of the Brethren congregations had been impacted by various concerns around immigration. Within 4 districts, 8 congregations had been affected by detention and deportation. There had been 15 total congregants detained. Among them, 10 had been deported and 2 had been released. As of December 1st, 20 have been detained and 12 deported.

The board felt that caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ was our scriptural mandate and wanted to provide a way to respond for our churches and individuals that felt called to help.

You can donate: The board voted unanimously to provide up to \$10,000 in matching funds for contributions given to Deportation Defense Response Team through the district. So, to turn your \$20 donation into \$40, or your \$100 into \$200, donate in one of these ways:

Send your check made out to "Northern Ohio District CoB" or "NOHCOB" to the District Office at 1107 E Main Street, Ashland, OH 44805 clearly marked for Deportation Defense Response (or DDR) by January 15, 2026.

Donate online through our district Square account at <https://square.link/u/dNv7IsV5>

You will receive a receipt for your donation; the funds will be matched and a final check from Northern Ohio will be sent to the Deportation Defense Team in early January. **All the funds received go to grants for immigrant members of Church of the Brethren congregations.**

You can pray:

- Pray for all who have been detained, deported, and those who suffered the trauma of detention and have thankfully been released. An updated list will be provided soon.
- Pray for people seeking asylum, green cards, and citizenship and for upcoming court dates.
- Pray for those whose TPS (Temporary Protected Status) has expired.
- Pray for a unified resistance to all injustice against immigrants.
- Pray for all government officials.
- Pray for all legal professionals, faith leaders, and community leaders supporting immigrants.

You can learn more: Watch this 6-minute video (click the link or search for this title on YouTube). [Walking with our Immigrant Brothers and Sisters](#)

Mackenzie Bozman Licensed at Reading CoB



Mackenzie Bozman was licensed in the Church of the Brethren on November 23, 2025 at Reading Church of the Brethren.

Mackenzie attended Malone University and received a BA in History. She is attending Luther Seminary where she is currently pursuing her MDiv. She anticipates graduating in December 2027.

Mackenzie is pictured here with her parents, Paul and Lynne Bozman. Paul is pastor of the Reading Church of the Brethren and the district's Moderator-elect..

Jamie Spencer Licensed and Installed as Pastor as Eden CoB

It was a time of celebration as Jamie Spencer was licensed and installed as pastor of Eden Church of the Brethren during morning worship services on December 14, 2025. He will begin as pastor on 1/1/2026.

Jamie will be a bi-vocational and will continue working full-time at his warehouse job. Jamie attended Fairless High School. He currently is attending the BBI classes through the District.

Jamie and his wife Kristen have 2 children, Kadence and Javin.

Jamie, Krista and their children are pictured here with Transitional Pastor Tom Michaels who is serving as Jamie's mentor; and Bill Cherry and Matt Holstein, Eden's Pastoral Committee members. The congregation celebrated with a wonderful meal together.



Mark Self Commissioned and Installed as Pastor at Jonah's People Fellowship



December 7, 2025 was a special day for the Jonah's People Fellowship as Mark Self was commissioned in the Church of the Brethren and installed as Pastor of the Jonah's People Fellowship

Mark also serves as Chaplain for the Good Shepherd and is pastor of the Trinity

United Brethren Church. Mark is married to Debbie.

The Steering Committee serves as the decision making body for the Jonah's People



Fellowship and are delighted to have Pastor Mark serving the congregation. Pictured are Rose Brinker, Darlene Jennings, Dave Myers, and Janet Fadley (seated). Also on the committee are Pastor Mark, Chris Widman (Ex. Director of Good Shepherd, Agnes Hayhurst (District Board Rep.) and Kris Hawk (District Executive).

Children's Disaster Services

Volunteer Training & Certification Program

CHILDREN'S DISASTER SERVICES (CDS) VOLUNTEERS...

are exceptional individuals with compassionate hearts for serving children. The specialized service they provide focuses on how children experience and react to disaster events.

CDS mobilizes teams of trained volunteers to care for children in communities affected by disaster. Volunteers set up on-site care centers giving children individualized attention that encourages self-expression through play, thereby starting the healing process.

Go to: brethren.org/cds/

The CDS Training Program is a 25-hour overnight training that equips volunteers with the skills needed to understand and respond to children who have encountered both human-caused and natural disasters.

Go to: brethren.org/cds/training/

Training Includes:

- * CDS Care Centers
- > Setup and operation
- > Safety procedures
- > Self-care on site and after returning home.
- > A shelter simulation

- * Types and phases of disaster
- * Children
- > Their needs after a disaster
- > Responding in a healing manner
- > Using play to begin emotional recovery

Who can be a CDS Certified Volunteer?

- > Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds, including faith communities and community service organizations.
- > Anyone 18 years and over
- > Two personal references
- > Pass a criminal & sexual offender background check

Children's Disaster Services was founded in 1986 as a program of Brethren Disaster Ministries.

410-635-8735 Main Office
800-451-4407 ext. 4 Toll Free
CDS@brethren.org

Children's Disaster Services
601 Main St. PO Box 188
New Windsor, Maryland 21776-0188

Volunteer Opportunities for 2026

Greetings from the District Disaster Ministries team! We have set our weeks for Northern Ohio to volunteer for Brethren Disaster Ministries. Please prayerfully consider volunteering and remember all are needed no matter your skill level. Also, volunteers do not have to be members of the Church of the Brethren, so, you are welcome to invite friends and/or family to volunteer. All expenses and travel are provided by our district.

Our weeks are February 1-7 in Letcher Co., KY (the same site we were at this year), May 10-16 (site to be determined) and September 6-12 (site to be determined). Please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to volunteer because we need to start planning soon - especially for the week in February. We have committed to send seven volunteers each of the weeks.

Also, the Oakland Church of the Brethren in Bradford, Ohio will be hosting a Children's Disaster Services volunteer training February 20-21. Children's Disaster Ministries is another volunteer opportunity!

Thank you for keeping Brethren Disaster Ministries in your prayers and thank you to all who have volunteered in the past! If you would like more information or would like us to visit your church to talk about BDM, please contact one of us on the District Disaster Ministries team.

Peace to you this holiday season,

Sandy Humphrey 330-603-9073
Kim Morckel 330-618-2379
Pete Snyder 419-685-0903

FaithX announces seven service trips for 2026

FaithX will offer seven service trips in 2026, along with the option for custom-designed trips for families, congregations, or districts. To prioritize senior high participation in National Youth Conference (NYC) this coming July, we will be offering fewer youth trips.

Four trips will be available for junior and senior high youth, an older adult trip will take place in February, an adult international trip will be offered in June, and the We Are Able trip will be offered in July. Additional information and trip descriptions can be found at www.brethren.org/faithx.

Registration is now open for the older adult trip at www.brethren.org/faithx and registration for summer trips will open on Jan. 14, 2026, at 7 p.m. (Eastern time).

The theme for FaithX 2026 is "Break Through" based on Isaiah 43:2. Big or small, internal or external, we all face challenges and setbacks—after all, Isaiah speaks of when we pass through the waters or walk through the fire, not if. God is with us through every trial, yet it is still up to us to move our bodies forward. We must choose to "Break Through" the weight that threatens to crush our spirit. We do this by having hope, finding community, and becoming resilient. As we do, we emerge more equipped to handle what appears next, whether that is nurturing ourselves or uplifting others.

If you have questions, contact the FaithX office: Marissa Witkovsky-Eldred (847-429-4337), Aly Heckerth (847-410-1523), or faithx@brethren.org.

Junior and senior high (completed 6th grade through age 19):

1. June 9-14, University Park, Md.
2. June 14-19, Winston-Salem, N.C.
3. June 21-26, Rodney, Mich.
4. July 5-10, Hershey, Pa.

Adult (ages 18-plus):

5. June 14-22, Northern Ireland

Older adult (ages 50-plus):

6. Feb. 22-27, Gotha, Fla.

We Are Able:

7. July 13-16, Sturgis, Mich.

Find out more at www.brethren.org/faithx



Buckeye Brethren Institute

Upcoming Classes

History of the Church
Instructor: Tina Hunt

Meeting dates: January 9, January 23, and February 6, 2026 from 9:30am to 3:30pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an overview of the History of the Christian Faith from Pentecost through the modern day. Emphasis will be given to the events and movements that had a leading role in the development and influence of the Church of the Brethren.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the student will:

- Be able to place at least two dozen key figures and events on a timeline of the history of the church.
- Be able to construct a family tree of the church's story, showing different branches of Christendom and how various denominations relate to those branches.
- Be able to name some significant emphases of both the Anabaptist and Pieties movements.
- Be familiar with the life and thought of at least one Christian leader in (a) the church prior to 1500 and (b) the church since that time.
- Be able to identify one or more episodes in church history that shed light on events or issues in the church today.
- Be able to trace the development of the ecumenical movement and assess its significance for the life of the church.

This class is available to those interested in the ministry and to licensed ministers moving towards ordination. Ordained and Commissioned clergy can also take this class for CEU's (1.5 CEU's for attendance at all three Friday sessions) at a cost of \$25.00. **And anyone can take this class for personal enrichment.**

Visit our webpage nohcob.org/BBI to register or for more information.

Clergy Tax Seminar 2026

Saturday, January 31, 2026

11:00am – 4:00pm (EST)



Rev. Deb Oskin

Students, clergy, and anyone who deals with clergy finances are invited to participate in this online Zoom seminar.

- Learn how to prepare clergy taxes correctly and legally.
- Comply with regulations while maximizing tax deductions.
- Earn 0.3 CEUs - for the first 2 sessions only

Schedule:

- 11:00am - 12:30pm EST (0.15 CEUs): **Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Clergy Taxation, part 1.** Topics covered: IRS's definitions of ministers (ministerial "status") and of ministerial work (ministerial "services"), as well as the three kinds of income ministers receive, the two kinds of taxes ministers pay, and the various ways ministers can pay those taxes during the tax year.
- 1:00pm - 2:30pm EST (0.15 CEUs): **Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Clergy Taxation, part 2.** Topics covered: Housing exclusion, parsonages and parsonage adjustments, and self-employment taxes, as well as ways to reduce total taxes.

3:00pm - 4:00pm EST: **Completing the Clergy Tax Return.**

Registration and Cost Registration is \$40 per person (generally nonrefundable to keep fees and overhead low). Prompt registration is advised - registration deadline is January 23, 2026. For quality reasons, registrations may be capped at eighty-five people.

To register, go to: <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/brethren-academy-course-listings/brethren-academy-course-registration-annual-trim-payment/>





Third Thursday Webinars

Join us for these quarterly webinars with the goal of providing church board members, pastors, deacons, Sunday School Teachers, and any other local church leaders tools to grow in their leadership abilities.

Adaptability in Leadership

On Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026, **Jeremy Ashworth**, pastor of Circle of Peace Church of the Brethren in Arizona for more than 10 years, will speak on “Adaptability in Leadership.”

The one hour webinar is from 7-8 pm Eastern Time, is free to the church and will provide continuing education units for credentialed ministers.



[Register Now](#)

Brethren Academy Upcoming Courses

Church of the Brethren Beliefs and Practices

Online

March 4 - April 28, 2026

Instructor: Denise Kettering Lane

Credit: BHTS, FCR

Registration Deadline: January 21, 2026

Church History 1

Online

March 18 - May 12, 2026

Instructor: Tim Harvey

Credit: BHTS

Registration Deadline: February 4, 2026

Introduction to Preaching

Onsite Hybrid (Bethany Theological Seminary)

May 19 - 22, 2026

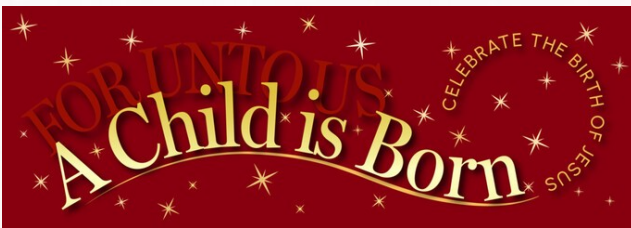
(Two Zoom sessions before May 19)

Instructor: Dava Hensley Credit: BTS, MS, FCR

Registration Deadline: April 7, 2026

Continuing Education (2 CEUs) or Personal Enrichment.

Register online at: <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy/>



District Office Hours

The District Office will be closed December 24th through January 1st for Christmas and New Years. We hope you all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!!!

The District Office regular hours are Monday—Friday from 9 am to 2 pm.

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

Administrative Secretary, **Laura Huffaker** 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.

Check us out on Facebook or the district website nohcob.org for more information about Northern Ohio District Ministries. Click on the icons below or use your tablet/smart phone to connect to our website via the QR Code.



COMMUNITY

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE

A Quiet Service of Hope and Healing

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Soft lighting, gentle music and quiet reflection
- Scripture readings, prayer, and moments of silence
- A compassionate space to acknowledge difficult emotions
- Hope for the returning light as we near the longest night of the year

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
JOIN US FOR A TIME OF GENTLE
SUPPORT AND PEACEFUL REFLECTION.

DECEMBER 21, 2025 • 6:00 PM

**FIRST CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
122 E. 3RD STREET, ASHLAND, OHIO
419-481-0463**

