

April, 2020
Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Newsletter
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The Church of the Brethren is called to a time of prayer and fasting

By David Steele, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren

Few events have dramatically altered global social, political, and economic realities the way the COVID-19 virus has in just a matter of weeks. To date, over a half a million cases of the virus have been documented around the world. Each country in which the Church of the Brethren has a presence has been affected. In some communities the virus has forced people to shelter at home and in others it has compounded existing needs.

I recognize that this is a time of anxiety and even fear. Yet, as persons of faith in Jesus Christ we know that death no longer holds us captive, for we are people of Christ's resurrection.

The Psalm reminds us that though the world quakes, seas roar, and the nations rage, God is our refuge and God is our strength (Psalm 46).

I invite us to join together as a church in fasting and prayer each Friday in April. By fasting we seek to gather together spiritually before our ever-present God. We do not seek to make statements to our leaders, nor to be noticed by others, but only to center our hearts in the refuge of God's peace. By praying we intercede for our communities that compassion may flourish, that health and safety may reign, and that the peace of Christ will surround the world.

May our prayer together be an offering to our God, and through us may God heal the nations.

Note from our District Executive:

As we are now officially in Holy Week and looking forward to Easter, it is especially hard for us to not be together physically, but we do have alternatives of being together to honor and celebrate these holy days. Our way of doing church, of being church, is dramatically changing to meet the demands of this pandemic. Phone calls, video-conferencing and other means of using technology are increasingly more important. We have the assurance that God is with us in the midst of crisis.

As this pandemic continues, it is more and more important that we heed the advice and counsel of health and governmental officials. Ohio Governor DeWine is strongly encouraging congregations not to meet. Here are several recent quotes from the Governor:

"Any pastor who brings people together in close proximity to each other, a large group of people, is making a huge mistake."

"It is not a Christian thing to do, It is not in the Judeo-Christian tradition to hurt people."

As hard as it is to hear this counsel, it is critical to our witness of love and care for each other that we do not gather in person. A church in Sacramento, California ignored their state's advice and now over 70 persons of that congregation have been confirmed to have the coronavirus infection. Other congregations that are still meeting have garnered news media attention and have harmed their witness as neighbors of these churches share their concern of the virus spreading through these gatherings and into the neighborhood. In conversation

with the District Leadership Team, we are strongly recommending that congregations do not hold in person services at this time, either inside or outside. It is not worth the risk of even one person contracting the infection when we have alternative ways of worship, prayer and celebration.

As we have struggled to adapt and creatively seek out ways to stay connected during this time when we must stay apart, we've added the following elements to our district website. All are easily found on our website, www.sodcob@brethren.org.

- A list of congregations who are offering some sort of electronic worship.
- A place to write any words of encouragement, share ideas, offer prayer, etc.
- A list of resources which we hope will help our congregations minister to each other and to the communities we serve.
- Check the website often for news and updates as we face new developments and move together through this historical time in our lives.

Livestream Love Feast Invitation

By Nancy Heishman, director of the Church of the Brethren's Office of Ministry

The Church of the Brethren's Office of Ministry is coordinating a love feast service to be streamed live over the Internet on Thursday, April 9, at 8 p.m. (Eastern time). The impetus for this service, which features leadership from across the Church of the Brethren denomination, arose out of Holy Week worship planning webinars recently offered by the Office of Ministry for ministers.

This service will feature meditations, scriptures, and music. If congregations or individuals wish to participate, they may choose to prepare their own footwashing/handwashing and communion supplies in advance. In addition to being available live, it also will be available as a recording immediately after the service. Connect at www.brethren.org/lovefeast2020.

Many congregations have either made plans for their own virtual love feast or are planning to delay the service until they can meet in person. Some will choose to join individual congregations that offer worship online or join the Dunker Punks podcast virtual love feast (www.virtuallovefeast.com) or partner with congregations joining together in virtually celebrating love feast as sister congregations.

These efforts provide opportunities to reach out invitationally in mission to our communities, joining Christ where he is already at work in our neighborhoods. I trust that our celebrations of love feast, however and whenever they take place, will be a rich expression of our common love for Jesus Christ, our Savior, Lord, Teacher, and Redeemer.

2020 Annual Conference Announcements

Calling orchestra musicians! Annual Conference, July 1-5, 2020 in Grand Rapids plans to have an orchestra! Any interested musician is asked to fill out a survey which can be found on the denominational website (brethren.org) to indicate your interest and skill level. If you have any questions, you may contact the Orchestra Coordinator, Nonie Detrick at VBD50@comcost.net.

Annual Conference Moderator's Forum

April 18, 2020

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Moderator Paul Munday has announced that the Moderator's Forum scheduled for April 18, 2020 at Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA will be postponed until the fall of 2020.

A revised date will be announced in the weeks ahead.

The decision was made after prayerful discernment, taking into account the evolving nature of the COVID-19 reality, the State of Pennsylvania's current stay at home policy, and the closure of the Elizabethtown College campus for the remainder of the spring semester.

Commenting on the forum's postponement, Moderator Paul Munday noted: "This was a difficult decision, but the evolving COVID-19 reality creates a vulnerability for both our planning and participants. Be assured, we are committed to holding the forum. We are still eager to provide much-needed wisdom from history for issues in today's church."

As previously announced, the Moderator's Forum's focus is "Historical Themes Impacting Today's Church." It will feature leading Brethren historians who will address a variety of historical themes impacting present-day congregations, districts, and national structures. Particular attention will be given to Brethren history and themes relevant to the current reality of Brethren communions, with special emphasis on the Church of the Brethren.

Southern Ohio/Kentucky Disaster Ministries Updates

Sew Masks for BRC – Medical masks are in short supply at the Brethren Retirement Community, as they are everywhere. Sewers are invited to help meet this need. BRC has provided a pattern. Contact Barb Brower for the pattern and additional information. Email: barbbrower51@yahoo.com

BDM Site Coming to Dayton – The BDM site in Tampa, FL has closed. The plan was to move in early April to Dayton for tornado recovery. This move has been delayed. The project opening will be after May 2. Whenever this project moves forward, BDM's work will start in Harrison Township and Old North Dayton. Volunteer housing will be at Memorial Presbyterian Church, 1541 S. Smithville Rd., Dayton. We anticipate many opportunities for our district to serve.

2020 Rebuilding Trips – In the midst of the uncertainty of when rebuilding will resume for BDM, we do need to look ahead and be prepared. S. Ohio/KY BDM is scheduled for June 7-13 and July 12-18 at the Dayton site. There are volunteer openings for both weeks. Arrangements can be made for volunteers to sleep at home and be with the crew breakfast through supper. BDM trips are open to adults and youth (fifteen and older, fourteen if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian). Expenses are covered by BDM. Sign up by contacting Burt Wolf at 937-287-5902 or SouthernOhioBDM@gmail.com.

Youth Trip to the Brethren Service Center – New this summer is the June 14-18 youth trip to the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, MD. This includes two travel days and three days for processing school kits and hygiene kits for Church World Service. Youth must be at least 14 years old to participate. Lodging will be at Best Western in Westminster, MD. Transportation will be provided. Participants will cover their expenses for lodging and most food. Click [here](#) for the brochure which includes more information and a registration form. For additional information or questions contact the trip leader, Tony Price, pastor of Cedar Grove COB (937-997-3675, pastortonyprice@gmail.com)

Southern Ohio/Kentucky Camping and Retreat Ministry Updates

What are your plans for summer? Have you decided on a vacation spot, made reservations, called family and friends to join you? My guess is that nothing like this has happened. The coronavirus has completely interrupted our lives and altered so many plans.

This interruption has affected the Camping and Retreat Ministries, too. We have cancelled two spring events - the Ambassadors' Meeting and the Simple Living Weekend. Summer Camps are on hold. Our committee has been unable to meet. We communicate through phone calls and emails, thus keeping everyone safe.

Now the question before us is, will we be having summer camps? At this time, all Boy Scouts of America camps are closed, which includes Cricket Holler, our camping site. We don't know when or if they will open in time for our camps in June. Since we are all on restricted mobility, summer camping is not an essential activity. Will the "Stay in Place" order still be in effect through May and June? We don't know. We will just be waiting to see. All this is new territory for everyone.

As we wait for this pandemic to be over, doing all that we can to protect the safety of others and ourselves, let us remember God and His love and mercy are constant. Lamentations 3:25 says, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him." God is Good!

Summer Camp Idea for Home

Make a S'more: Sandwich one marshmallow, two small pieces of chocolate between two graham crackers. Place on a napkin or plate and microwave for 10 seconds. It is almost as good as over the fire.

Prayer Needs

A very important way we can be supportive of each other is to lift each other in prayer.

- As the situation with the coronavirus affects persons, families, and travel, may we remember those affected by this outbreak. There are many changing directives, regulations and recommendations affecting our country and way of life, may we remember all those adjusting to this changing world.
- May we especially lift the Brethren Retirement Community in prayer as the regulations around nursing homes are rapidly changing and are creating stress on the staff and residents as they adapt.
- May we remember David and Nan Erbaugh and family as David continues living in the VA facility. David's health has reached the point that keeping at home was not possible. With the pandemic, visitors are not allowed making it more difficult for David to adjust. There have been some issues in the transition so prayers are most welcome.
- May we remember Jonathan Brumbaugh Scarr, husband of Trotwood pastor Jennifer, as he recovers from successful heart surgery. Jonathan is improving and hopes to be back to work at the end of this month.
- May we lift Kirt Chronister, son of Jim and Karen Chronister, who suffered a stroke and is in a process of recovery and rehabilitation.
- The Constance congregation continues to discern space needs, although temporarily on hold during the pandemic. Our prayers for these sisters and brothers during this time of transition are appreciated.
- May we continue to lift Mary Sue Rosenberger, as she continues to deal with various health issues. Mary Sue Rosenberger has been receiving care from Hospice since April 2019 because of Pulmonary Fibrosis which had been first diagnosed in the fall of 2017. I spoke with Mary Sue and Bruce recently and they expressed their

appreciation for the love and support. The Zoom conference 80th birthday party was a wonderful time of connecting with Mary Sue and Bruce along with family and friends.

- Rob Raker, former pastor, continues to deal with the heart condition that has plagued him for some time now. He is hoping for a new procedure which may alleviate some of the issues he has been facing. Doctors continue to work with Rob as these heart struggles continue. Rob appreciates our prayers.

- May we remember those congregations in pastoral transition - Good Shepherd has called Mark Lancaster to serve as interim; Fred Bernhard is serving as interim pastor at Brookville during this time of transition; their profile is now posted. White Cottage has entered an agreement with a neighboring congregation to supply pastoral services during a time of transition and discernment. Tara Hornbacker is serving as interim at New Carlisle, their search team has completed their profile. Mel Smith, pastor at Charleston, has retired. May we offer our prayers of love and support for the members of the Bear Creek congregation as they seek new church homes.

- May we remember the possibility of a new church starts in various locations in our district as well as the urban ministry team for revitalizing some of our urban churches.

- There are many issues and situations continuing to face us as we minister in our respective locations, including those who are serving in interim situations and others who are in discernment regarding placement or are considering a move. There are others facing health issues, please keep these situations in prayer.

Please contact Dave if you know of prayer situations of which he should be aware. May we lift each other in prayer as we work to continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together.