



Church of the Brethren

Dear Friends and Family of Faith in the Shenandoah District,

Greetings in the name of Christ! My thoughts and prayers are with you, as you plan and prepare for your District Conference. I hope it will be a time of earnest conscientiousness and responsibility related to carrying out the denomination's mission, and a time of praise and celebration for the ways your congregations are putting Christ's love into action. May we feel God's presence among us.

I'm looking forward to our 237th recorded Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, scheduled for July 3–7, 2024, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Annual Conference is a special time in the life of our denomination. Yes, it is an occasion to facilitate the business of the church through the various business sessions, study committees, agency reports, and queries. But it is also a time for Brethren from all walks of life to celebrate our unique place and ministry in – and as – the Body of Christ. From inspirational worship services to quality leadership development, open dialogue to rejuvenating fellowship, Annual Conference invites us to welcome, encourage, and engage with one another as a community of faith.

In her book, *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, author Rachel Held Evans wrote that Christianity can't be an individual endeavor. Following Christ is a group activity – and one that, simultaneously, has been messy and incarnate since the beginning. Because, as Held Evans writes, “the church is not a group of people who believe all the same things; the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center.”

As Brethren, we know this to be true. Since our founding more than 300 years ago, we've been a faith family that has chosen another way of living: the way of Christ. We are a people called to live and experience our faith together – in community – in service to and with God, each other, and our neighbors. Each of us brings our own unique perspectives and experiences to this community. And it is through our willingness to share our faith journeys with one another that we can experience and see God's vision for us more fully and, therefore, be transformed together by God's Spirit.

So, I invite you to join me and our denominational community in Grand Rapids next summer. Let's gather together knowing each of us is welcome and worthy – integral parts of the Body of Christ, answering God's call to build authentic relationships and community with ourselves, each other, and those around us.

In grace and peace,

Madalyn Metzger

2024 Annual Conference Moderator