

**DISTRICT EXECUTIVE MINISTER'S REPORT
DISTRICT CONFERENCE 2023**

I am thankful to the Shenandoah District for the privilege of serving you and your congregation. I do so with joy and delight. The following is a summary of some of the duties of the District Executive Minister and a summary of District programming. The report concludes with a brief overview of challenges facing the District.

These are some official functions to date in 2023.

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| 1. Licensing and ordinations | five |
| 2. Congregational permanent placements | six |
| 3. Interim Placements | six |
| 4. Congregational withdrawals and final blessing forward | three |

Each of these functions involve multiple meetings, both congregational and committees. These include call votes, credentialing interviews, search team meetings, called congregational business meetings and other. In addition, I have been involved in congregational special events, pastoral functions, and filling requests to preach.

Programming and District gatherings increased in frequency in 2023. Pastors met for monthly luncheons hosted by Bridgewater Retirement Community. We are grateful for the hospitality of BRC. Pastoral support groups took shape in different sections of the District, including the Southern and Central. These groups met regularly to share mutual concerns and prayer.

The District and ministry teams also hosted a number of continuing education events to assist pastors in meeting their CEU requirements. Following is a list of some of those events:

Pastors and Mental Health	LaDawn Knicely
Deacon Training	Bernie Fuska
District Bible School	Shane Lilly
Servant Leadership	Jay Forman
Values Worth Preserving	David Shumate

Other events include participation in the National Jr. High Conference, National Older Adult Conference, a big thank you dinner honoring disaster response and auction volunteers and an ice cream social for those associated with the auction and disaster ministry in the fall.

The District continued to gather for service ministries through the efforts of the Disaster Response Auction and Brethren Disaster Ministries. The Disaster Response Auction was held on May 20 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Proceeds were excellent, totaling \$212,941.06.

Brethren Disaster Ministries continued their role by sending crews to six separate locations. In addition, a new trajectory emerged with an increased emphasis placed on local ministries. BDM is partnering with Habitat for Humanity and Renewing Homes of Greater Augusta in meeting the needs in our surrounding communities with several projects either underway or completed.

Brethren Woods continues to thrive with recovery from the COVID years. Summer camp enjoyed broad participation with camps available for K-12. In addition, the Outdoor School for students from local schools continued to thrive. Brethren Woods ministry also continues to expand through the utilization of the camp by a variety of groups such as the Mid-Atlantic Burn Camp and District congregations. In addition, Brethren Woods offers retreats, such as winter retreats offered for grades 3-12 and the Women's Retreat.

There are many, yes many, congregations who are filled with vitality and experiencing both spiritual and numerical growth. These congregations are having a significant impact on members' lives and the neighborhoods in which they are located. Stories of God at work abound. Providing day care for working

families, discipleship ministries through Bible studies and support groups, children and youth ministries, service projects in the communities you serve, and the list continues. Thanks be to God.

Amid congregational vitality, it is also true that district/denominational processes and procedures which provide the infrastructure for congregational life are under increasing duress and struggles to address issues where congregations live and breathe. This fragmentation is exacerbated by the rapid shift in our cultural and political values.

It is no secret that denominational schism continues with the withdrawal of some congregations from the denomination. In 2023 three congregations completed the withdrawal process in the Shenandoah District. These congregations are Elk Run in Churchville, Newport in Stanley, and Oak Hill in Fort Valley. Reasons given for withdrawal are similar. The continued denominational debate and perceived ambiguity around same sex marriage lies at the heart of entering the withdrawal process. In addition, there are several other congregations in various phases of or considering entering that process.

These withdrawals are extraordinarily painful as they end organizational relationships that have existed for one hundred or more years. The Shenandoah District remains committed to walking through these withdrawals with graciousness of spirit and much regret. None of us knows the shape of life together in the years ahead. The way we conduct ourselves now lays the foundation for life together in the future.

A concluding word of encouragement. God has entrusted each congregation with its sphere of influence. This is a geographical location that contains people and neighborhoods. While much of our denominational life remains uncertain each congregation can decide how they are going to respond in the name of Jesus, to those people entrusted into their care. Let us partner together and to the best of our ability, tend those places of first response and together weave the rug of God's Kingdom in the Shenandoah District.

Serving Christ Together,

District Executive Minister
John Jantzi