

NEWSLETTER

February & March 2026

Blue Ridge Region Covenant Brethren Church



2025-2026-Executive Board

Darren Howdyshell, Chair

Ann Jones, Vice Chair

Ron Layman, Treasurer

Diane Pence

Scott Harris

Janet Elsea

Jonathan Farmer

Gary Wingfield

Dale Bowers

Jon Prater, Elder Representative to the Board

1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."

Message from our 2026 Board Chair

Fear Not—God Will Make a Way

During a recent visit with a dear member of our church family who has faced many struggles and setbacks, I was reminded of the familiar phrase, “God makes a way where there seems to be no way.” It is a simple statement, especially when life leaves us feeling stuck, unable to move forward or turn back.

That was the position Moses, and the children of Israel found themselves in at the edge of the Red Sea. Before them stood an impossible obstacle. Behind them came Pharaoh’s army, filled with rage and revenge. There was no escape and no human solution. Only fear and uncertainty.

In that moment, God spoke through Moses:

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord.” (Exodus 14:13)

These words are not only a message for Israel; they are a message for us today. They will also guide our Region Conference and Worship Meeting theme this year: **Stand. See. Surrender.**

What followed was the impossible becoming possible. God placed a pillar of fire between Israel and Egypt, then sent a mighty wind that parted the sea. What looked like a dead end became a pathway of deliverance. God made a way.

Many of us stand at our own “Red Seas.” We face pressure, grief, fear, and uncertainty, feeling trapped and weary. Yet Scripture reminds us that God goes before us, guides our steps, and works all things for good—even when we cannot see the path (Deuteronomy 31:8; Proverbs 3:5–6; Isaiah 43:19; Romans 8:28).

Moses was not the only one in history who stretched out his hands to bring deliverance. On the cross, Jesus stretched out His hands and opened the ultimate path of deliverance—from sin, shame, and death itself. Because of Him, no situation is hopeless and no obstacle is final.

So, when you feel stuck and the way forward seems closed, remember the Red Sea. Remember the cross. Remember that the God who parted the waters is still at work today. He is faithful. He is powerful. And He still makes a way. Amen.

“God is looking for people through whom He can do the impossible. What a pity that we plan only the things we can do by ourselves.” A.W. Tozer

Darren Howdyshell, Chair

2026 Blue Ridge Regional Conference

The Blue Ridge Region 2026 Annual Regional Meeting and Worship Conference will be held on Saturday, **September 12, 2026**, at **Mt Zion Church** in Linville, VA. Registration will be from 8:00 am-9:00 am with the conference beginning at 9:00 am and ending around 2:30 pm. It will be a very special time to fellowship with other Covenant Brethren from our Blue Ridge Region, praise and worship God together and conduct some of the business of our church. There is **no charge** to attend and **lunch is provided**. Your Blue Ridge Regional Board is busy preparing for this conference, so watch your email for more details and registration forms as they become available! Let's pack Mt Zion and worship the Lord together!

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord.”



STAND. SEE. SURRENDER.

EXODUS 14:13-14



The **National CBC Annual Meeting and Worship Conference** will be held **July 16-18, 2026**, at the Pasquerilla Conference Center, 301 Napoleon Street, Johnstown, PA.



Congratulations to Pastor Dan Rhodes who was installed by Pastor Jon Prater, as the new Pastor at Barren Ridge Church on February 1st. Welcome to Blue Ridge Region!



Blue Ridge Region CBC Church Camp will be held at the Highland Retreat in Bergton VA for 2026. Senior and Junior camps will be held **July 5th-9th** (Sunday evening through Thursday at 2pm). Senior Camp will be for completed grades 8th-12th and Junior Camp will be for completed grades 3rd-7th. Summer camp is a great opportunity for youth to grow closer to Christ, make new friendships and unplug from their electronic world. Contact Becky Leland or Tammy Yoder for more details.

Team Reports

Ministry Leadership Team – Jonathan Farmer

The MLT has not yet met in the new year, but we hope to meet in the coming weeks. As in previous years, we hope to organize pastor's gatherings, and work with the Ministry Training Team on providing CEU opportunities for ordained ministers. In addition, we are anticipating new training modules to become available for licensed ministers. We are thankful for each of our ministers in the Blue Ridge Region and continue to support and encourage them through prayer. Respectfully Submitted, brother J.D. Farmer

Ministerial Training Team-Jon Prater

The Ministerial Training committee met on 12/10/2025 at Mt Zion.

Those present were Jon Prater, Jonathan Farmer, Brian Crickenberger, Douglas Hughes and by phone-Janet Elsea with Jonathan Farmer giving a brief devotion in Psalm 119 and then opening with prayer. Minutes from the last meeting were reviewed and approved. Numbers were drawn to determine staggered terms for the members with the following results: Jonathan Farmer – 3 years, Jon Prater – 3 years, Brian Crickenberger – 2 years, Douglas Hughes – 2 years, and Janet Elsea – 1 year. Needed to elect a new chair of the commission due to Jonathan F elected to the Minister Leadership Team. Jon P agreed to be the new chair for one year. Jonathan F will remain on the commission but just cannot be the chair anymore. Spreadsheet was made by Douglas Hughes, and he just needs to be kept up to date on who has completed trainings to update the spreadsheet in a timely manner. Brethren Bible Institute has certain classes that are accredited and can be counted in addition to any CBC modules. There was additional discussion that BBI will be the best outlet for CEU's for ordained ministers. A reminder would be great to send out to encourage ordained ministers to make this a priority. New classes are coming soon with a worship class planned in early 2026. There is a need for facilitators for modules/classes with the thought that if someone puts the module together, then they would be the first thought on being the facilitator as well. There was discussion on moving more modules to online availability. This would allow students to take them at their own pace with a facilitator checking in periodically on the progress. There was a discussion on facilitators not necessarily needed to be ordained ministers since the actual course is already developed/taught by an ordained minister. Regional ministers could also be encouraged to participate as facilitators. A mentor form will be sent out in the new year that needs to be filled out and sent back for 2026 to the Minister Leadership Team. Mentor guidelines will be sent out with it as well. There was discussion of having Janet Elsea produce a mentor video that could help potential mentor candidates and/or future mentors better understand their responsibilities. There was also discussion of picking great mentors that care greatly and have a passion to do this most important job not just someone that will simply check off boxes. Next meeting is planned for January 21st at Barren Ridge Church @ 7pm. The meeting was closed with a prayer by Brian Crickenberger.

The Ministerial Training committee also met at Barren Ridge Church on 1/21/2026 at 7 pm. Present were Brian Crickenberger, Jonathan Farmer, Doug Hughes and Jon Prater. Jonathan F read Ephesians 6 and gave a short devotion and prayer to open the meeting. Previous meeting minutes were read and approved. Janet Elsea has agreed to make a mentor training video and Jon P will check with her on how long it will take to make it available. Jonathan F will email the mentor progress form to Jon P and then Jon P will disperse it to those that need to use it. Discussion on inviting Mark Jones (oversees the training program) to our next meeting for class offering clarification. Jon P will reach out to him to see if he can attend the next meeting. Discussion on trying to have a CEU event during Regional Conference either beforehand or during a split lunch session. Possible training topic could be on church conflict. Hoping to offer 1 CEU? Jon P will make up a letter of proposal for this. Reviewed mentee and mentor list and had some discussion of where they are in the progress. Jon P closed with prayer. Next meeting will be Wednesday, March 11, at 7 pm at Mt Zion.

Prayer Team -Diane Pence

Prayer Team report from a conference call on January 25, 2026. Present was Diane Pence, Charles Harlow, Nancy Harlow & Ann Jones. Diane opened the meeting with prayer. The team chose a vice chair and secretary.

Team Members:

- Diane Pence, Chair
- Ann Jones, Vice Chair
- Midge Kester
- Jonathan Martino
- Stephanie Shillingburg

Terms for team members were assigned by drawing a name and number from envelopes.

Terms:

- One year: Ann Jones, Diane Pence
- Two years: Stephanie Shillingburg
- Three years: Jonathan Martino

We will meet quarterly via phone conference using the conference bridge at Calvary CBC. · We will send out weekly prayer focuses on Wednesday with other prayer requests on an as needed basis. Currently Diane is managing the BRR Prayer Team email. Team members are encouraged to let Diane know of any items which should go out in the weekly emails. January 28th emphasis will be for the unrest around the world. We read Nehemiah 1, and Diane shared a devotion called “A Prayer God Hears” based on that reading. We prayed for the sanctity of all life including unborn babies, babies who have survived abortion, the elderly and those who are suffering with drug addiction and other issues. We also prayed for the leaders in Virginia to recognize the sanctity of life. Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 16th, 7:00 pm. As a follow-up to the meeting, Diane emailed the expectations for the prayer team found in the Blue Ridge Region Constitution and By-Laws. They are as follows:

Prayer Team- The purpose of this team is to promote the importance and practice of prayer among regional congregations. Members of this team will:

- know how to touch the heart of God through prayer
- devote themselves to praying daily for the region
- develop and publish monthly prayer topics to be distributed through the Blue Ridge Region website, Facebook page, and other avenues of communication
- be available to lead devotions and prayer at regional meetings

Regional Elders-Jon Prater

Pastor Jon P reported that they did two ordinations between him and Pastor George Bowers. He performed the installation for Pastor Dan Rhodes at Barren Ridge Church on Sunday, February 1st. They would like to do a welcome lunch for Pastor Dan in February so he can meet some Blue Ridge Region members. They would like to have someone to do ordinations and installations. They are hoping Bobby & Diann Whetzel will agree to do it. Elder Henry Elsea is away for at least 6 months in Florida, and they would like to have another Elder to help out when he is away. They are hoping to have a CEU class before the Regional Conference at Greenmount. The Elders will be meeting next week.

Mission Team – Gary Wingfield

Missions Team report from a meeting at Columbia Furnace on January 19th. Attending was Gary Wingfield, Pastor Darren Howdysshell, Stephanie Chapman & Deanna Snyder. Pastor Darren opened the meeting with prayer. Discussed officers, however with only 4 in attendance, could not attain a slate of officers. Gary Wingfield will be chair. Will work up a better mailing list to achieve more interest. Discussed success of Operation Christmas Child and some suggestions going forward. Lee Landes is now Administrative Assistant for the Southern Region. Discussed disaster relief and Gary's trip as a volunteer to Burnsville N.C. Also discussed the difficulty in scheduling a larger group of volunteers for one of the rebuilding trips. Gary will be attempting to contact someone from Samaritan's Purse to see how we can make that happen. Discussed low turnout and the possibility of zoom meetings. Discussed local ministry opportunities with an organization in Rockingham County called Rebuilding Hope Missions. Stephanie discussed a mission trip being developed for Castonier Puerto Rico. Dianna brought up the possibility of helping one of her special education kids in repairing damage to their bedroom. Next scheduled meeting will be February 17 at 6:30 PM at Antioch. Gary Wingfield closed the meeting with prayer. Gary spoke with Sarah Bailey about local missions and will be meeting with her on February 16th at Clover Hill. He is putting in for a mission trip from May 17-22 to get one in the books.

Congregational Life Team -Dale Bowers

No Report as they have not met yet.

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**

The **Congregational Life Team** is looking for volunteers to help. The purposes of this team is to promote interaction among all regional congregations so that congregations are vitally connected to one another, and to provide organization and oversight to various regional ministries. Please prayerfully consider helping Dale Bowers with this team and contact him.

Matthew 22:37-39: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

WRE FUNDRAISER

Friday, March 20
7pm

Opener by



The
Hawkins Kids



\$25
Ticket

Lonesome River Band

Host: Antioch Covenant Brethren Church

Reserve your tickets by calling
540-459-3661

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me." - Matthew 19:14 (NKJV)



Valentine's Day Blessings

For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten
Son, that whosoever believeth
in him should not perish,
but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 KJV

May Your Day
be full of Love!

JESUS
is my Valentine

Blue Ridge Region Churches

Church:	Pastor/Associate Pastor:	Address:
Antioch	George Bowers/Dale Bennett, Sr.	23502 Senedo Rd, Woodstock VA 22664
Barren Ridge	Dan Rhodes	1790 Barren Ridge Rd, Staunton VA 24401
Calvary	Jonathan Martino/Charlie Estep	578 Front Royal Pk, Winchester VA 22602
Collinsville	Roy McVey	553 John Redd Blvd., Collinsville VA 24078
Columbia Furnace	Bill Fitchett/Buster Doman	20910 Senedo Rd. Edinburg VA 22824
Community Mission	Dale Bowers	50 Coffmantown Rd, Woodstock, VA 22664
Elk Run	Jonathan Farmer	1599 Scenic Hwy., Churchville VA 24421
Greenmount	B. Scott Harris	4881 Greenmount Rd, Rockingham VA 22802
Moscow	Darren Howdyshell	866 Nash Rd., Mount Solon VA 22843
Mt. Zion	Jon Prater	10589 Mt. Zion Rd. Linville VA 22834
New Life	Vacant	P O Box 123, Bridgewater VA 22812
Newport	Duane Painter	408 Newport Rd., Shenandoah VA 22849
St. Luke	Chris Payne/Dakota Baker	3250 Back Rd., Woodstock VA 22664



Contact Us:

Joy Mauzy, Administrative Assistant

Mailing Address:

P O Box 426

Grottoes, VA 24441

(540) 209-4862

Physical Address:

3250 Back Rd

Woodstock, VA 22664



blueridge@covenantbrethren.org



blueridge.covenantbrethren.org



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Covenant Brethren Church**