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Church of the Brethren

Atlantic Northeast District Office
Treasurer
500 E Cedar St
Elizabethtown PA 17022-2516

November 2025

We walk alongside their footsteps...

Dear Atlantic Northeast District Office community,

Greetings and blessings to you in the name of Jesus Christ. We give thanks for you and the many ways you make Christ's footprints more visible in neighborhoods across the country and around the world.

As we launch a campaign to preserve the Germantown, Pennsylvania property and the history of the Church of the Brethren in America, we want to share the enclosed brochure with you. We invite you to prayerfully consider helping us to take the next step by supporting this effort to raise \$300,000.

By caring for and preserving these sites where the faith of our spiritual ancestors began in this country, we can strive for faithfulness in the present as we walk alongside their footsteps, and share the witness of the Brethren into the future.

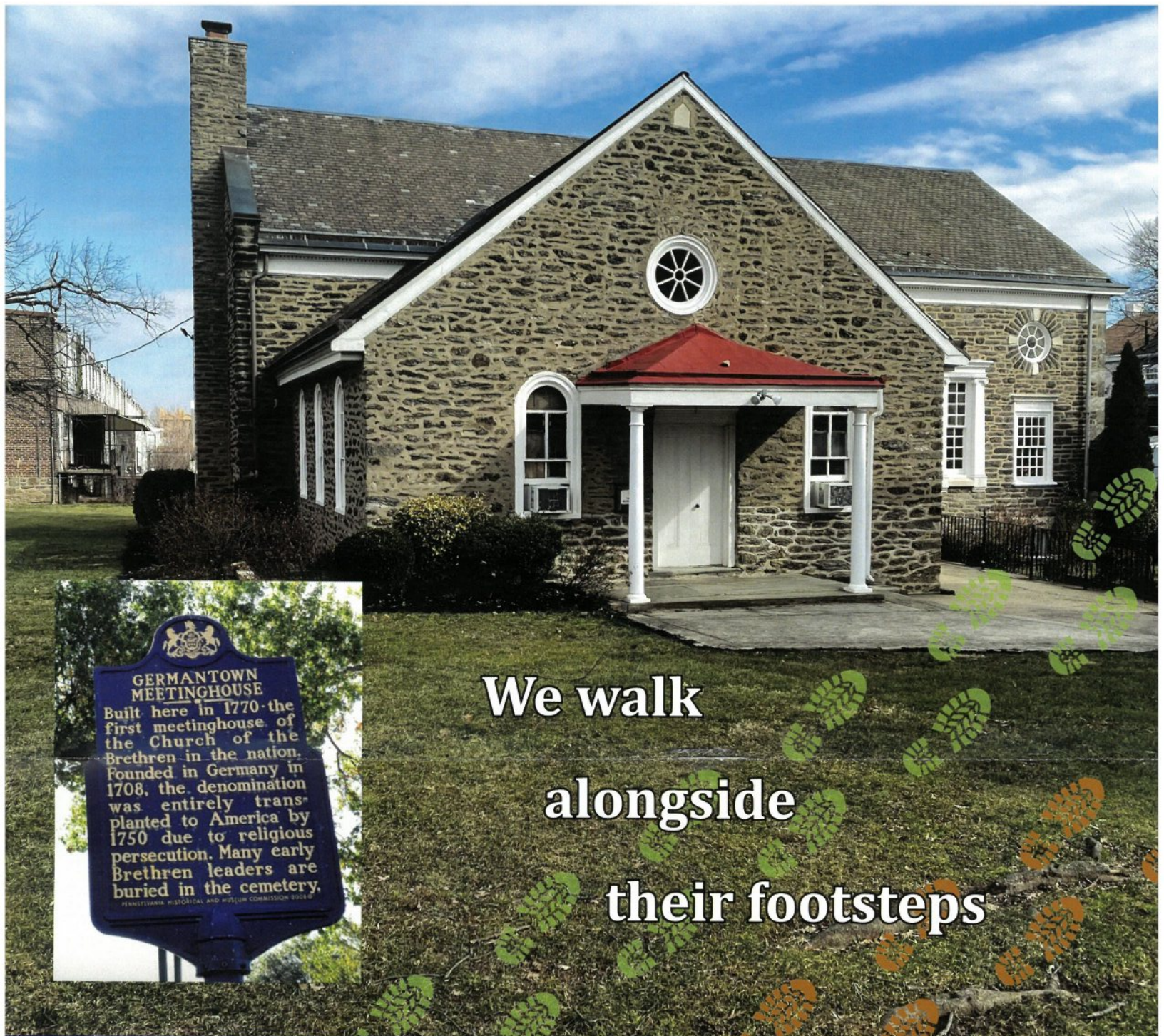
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this opportunity more, please feel welcome to reach out to me.

With zeal,

Traci Rabenstein
Executive Director of Mission Advancement
847-429-4370
MA@brethren.org

Learn more at
www.brethren.org/giveGermantown

The complex block contains a call to action with a URL, four footprints, and a QR code. The QR code is square and features the Church of the Brethren logo in the center.



We walk
alongside
their footsteps



A Capital Campaign to
Preserve the Germantown,
Pennsylvania property
and the history of the
Church of the Brethren in America

Taking the first step

All Brethren groups identify as spiritual descendants of Alexander Mack, tracing their roots back over 300 years to 1708 and Schwarzenau, Germany.

Eighteenth-century Europe was a time of strong governmental control of the church. There were religious dissenters who lived their faith despite the threat of persecution. Some of these dissenters found refuge in the town of Schwarzenau, Germany. Among them was Alexander Mack, a miller who had been influenced by both Pietism and Anabaptism.

In August 1708, five men and three women gathered at the Eder River in Schwarzenau for baptism, an illegal act since they had been baptized as infants. They understood this baptism as an outward symbol of their new faith and as a commitment to living that faith in community. An anonymous member of the group first baptized Mack. He, in turn, baptized the other seven. This new group simply called themselves “brethren.”

Though the early Brethren shared many beliefs with other Protestants, a number of issues separated them from the state churches. Relying on the New Testament as their guide, these men and women believed that Jesus called his followers to a different kind of life—one based on obedience to Jesus’ teaching and practices, including peaceful action, plain and compassionate living, and a shared search for truth.

Moving to America

Due to growing persecution and economic hardship, Brethren began immigrating to North America in 1719 under the leadership of Peter Becker. Most Brethren left Europe by 1740, including Mack, who brought a group in 1729. The first congregation in the New World was organized at Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1723.

The Germantown congregation was formed when six persons were baptized in the Wissahickon Creek on Christmas Day in 1723. They held a Love Feast afterwards. As the first Brethren congregation in America, Germantown is the mother church of all the Brethren groups that trace their origins to Schwarzenau, Germany. In 1770 the congregation built the first Brethren meetinghouse. Additions were added to the meetinghouse in the late 1890s and in 1915.

During a period of inactivity by the congregation, the Germantown Trust was established to oversee the property when the church was not used. The building and grounds became the property of the Church of the Brethren because it was the largest of the Brethren-related denominations in the Germantown Trust. Twenty years later congregational activity resumed, and the Germantown Church of the Brethren currently worships and ministers in the Germantown facilities.

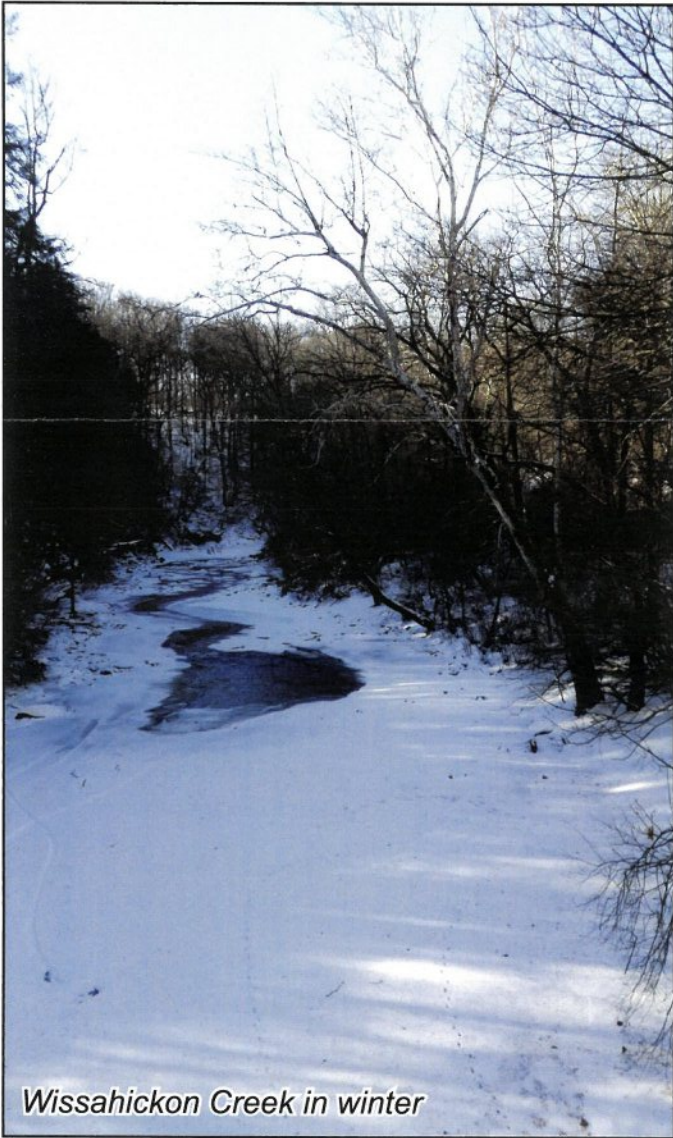
In the years since 1723, all the groups descended from the Germantown origins seek to hold to the New Testament faith and practices of the Brethren.



Following the 1723 Christmas Day baptisms at Wissahickon Creek and Love Feast, in Fall 1724 the Germantown congregation sent missionaries on horseback and on foot to rural areas around Philadelphia. These missionaries preached, baptized, and shared their stories of faith, starting new congregations. Their zeal, honesty, and hard work drew many new members into the Brethren faith community, with expansion across the continent and around the world.



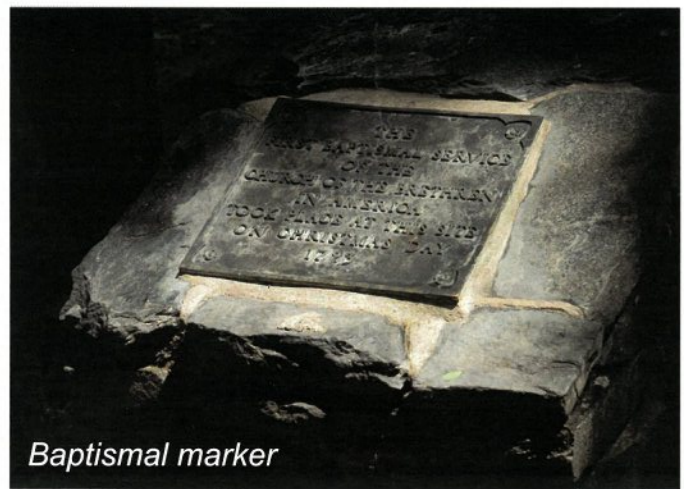
Germantown Church of the Brethren



Wissahickon Creek in winter



Alexander Mack gravesite



Baptismal marker



More than names on a page

Brethren faithfulness in the present and future draws on knowing the way of Jesus and the paths of our spiritual ancestors. Their witness influences who we are today. Our actions can leave a gift for future generations. Preserving the sites where the faith of our spiritual ancestors began in this country can help us trace their steps today. Caring for these sites can help us seek faithfulness in the present and share the witness of the Brethren for the future.

What needs to be accomplished?

Spiritual descendants of the early Brethren share a precious treasure in the Germantown property and cemetery. With that treasure come needs to care for and maintain the meetinghouse, parsonage, and cemetery. Hundreds of people are buried in the cemetery, including many early Brethren leaders such as Alexander Mack, Sr. Funds are needed to address the immediate care and maintenance needs of these historical facilities.

Immediate needs include (projected costs):

- Improve cemetery entrance - \$5,000
- Repair fencing around cemetery - \$25,000
- Conduct Headstone maintenance - \$20,000
- Update meetinghouse roofing - \$90,000
- Update meetinghouse basement (including foundation repair) - \$50,000
- Baptismal marker repair/maintenance - \$2,000
- Complete parsonage renovations - \$90,000
- Additional site maintenance costs - \$18,000

Projected total cost - \$300,000

How can you be involved?

We are the beneficiaries of those who have preceded us. Our mission and ministry have been blessed many times over by gifts from the early Brethren. Today we are charged with safeguarding a future Brethren voice for the generations that follow.

You are invited to join with zeal in sharing the story of the early Brethren in America, and keeping it alive today and for future generations!

Together, we can make Christ's footprints more visible in neighborhoods across the country and around the world.

Help us take the next step!

[www.brethren.org/
giveGermantown](http://www.brethren.org/giveGermantown)

Questions?

Contact the
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Sources consulted: Jeff Bach, Emmert & Esther Bittinger, Church of the Brethren website (www.brethren.org) Germantown Trust, and writings of Robert Matthews.

Photos by Jeff Bach, Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, Nancy Timbrook McCrickard, and Glenn Riegel.