

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
- Acts 2:1

Dear siblings in the Penn West Conference,

Welcome to our 63rd Annual Gathering and Meeting! From our diverse churches across the Conference—from the rolling farmland of the Mason-Dixon Line to the shores to Lake Erie to the skyscrapers of downtown Pittsburgh—we have come “all together in one place” like the disciples on the day of Pentecost, awaiting the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.

There is a poignancy in this year’s meeting. Even as we look ahead with great anticipation to the new friends we will meet and the expanded ministry we will do together in the Keystone Conference, we also cherish this present moment. Pending the vote of General Synod next month, we anticipate that this will be the final Annual Gathering and Meeting for the Penn West Conference. This milestone makes our time together today feel even more precious. We are so grateful for all that this Conference has meant to us: the ministry and faithfulness and friendship that it represents. We now have the opportunity to “finish strong,” continuing our work in these remaining months before the merger, knowing that the God who brought us this far is not through with us yet.

Today’s meeting also opens a conversation about a new way to be together in the days ahead: a new Association that can reinvigorate wider church work in western Pennsylvania and western Maryland. Today we will explore this possibility together, and I invite you to bring your curiosity, your ideas, and your perspectives into the conversation. Many thanks to our Association presidents who have developed this proposal with such creativity and care.

The Spirit’s gift on that first Pentecost was the gift of understanding: as the disciples began to speak, each person in the crowd understood their words in their own languages. May that same Spirit guide our time together today, blessing our listening, our sharing, our contemplation, and our action.

With gratitude for each and all of you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "The Rev. Liddy Barlow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Liddy Barlow
Assistant Moderator, Penn West Conference