Delegates adopt revisions of ministerial leadership and congregational ethics polity

Revisions of polity documents on ministerial leadership and congregational ethics were adopted by the 2014 Annual Conference.

**Ministerial Leadership Polity:** With adoption of revisions to ministerial leadership polity, several changes will take effect in January among them establishment of a new category of set-apart ministry: the commissioned minister. The paper also establishes guidelines for more community participation during a minister’s calling, training, and ongoing life. Mentors, small groups for licensed ministers, and cohorts of peers for ordained clergy, are all described in the guidelines.

One goal of the revision is to provide more uniformity among districts in credentialing. Another topic of much discussion was the process of licensing. This revision places a 10-year time limit on licensing in order to encourage licensed ministers to complete their training.

The paper has been in development for seven years. Staff and committees who have worked on the revision include associate general secretary Mary Jo Flory-Steury and Dana Cassell, working with the Ministry Advisory Council. Input on the paper was received from a number of groups including the Council of District Executives and the Mission and Ministry Board.

**Congregational Ethics:** For the past few years Congregational Life Ministries staff Joshua Brockway has been developing a revision of the 1996 Ethics for Congregations paper, called for after a query on guidelines for implementing the congregational ethics paper was adopted. The revision outlines scriptural visions of the church, describes relationships in the congregation and with staff, and has sections on sexual improprieties and on practices of assessment and accountability, as well as a code of ethics. Find revisions at www.brethren.org/ac.
Church commits to pray and fast for Nigeria, among other business

The Annual Conference committed to a week of prayer and fasting for Nigeria on Aug. 17-24 when it adopted “A Resolute Fast and Fervent Prayer: A Resolution Responding to Violence in Nigeria.” The resolution also resolves “to partner with EYN and ecumenical international relief and development agencies to offer support as requested and directed by the leadership of the Nigerian Brethren.” Find it at www.brethren.org/ac/documents/2014/ac-2014-nb4-nigeria-resolution.pdf.

Climate change: A paper from the Office of Public Witness responding to the 2011 Query: Guidance for Responding to the Changing of Earth’s Climate was defeated in a close vote. The query was returned with a declaration that “the church is not of one mind at this time.” Debate was heard both for and against, with some doubting the science on climate change or that global warming is caused by human activity, and others supporting the scientific consensus and expressing strong concern about the damaging effects of climate change.

Equitable representation: The delegates decided to maintain the current structure of the Mission and Ministry Board. A 2011 query on equitable representation had expressed concern that areas with low populations of Brethren were over-represented and high population areas under-represented. However, when a new plan of board member selection was presented in 2013 it was not adopted, the query was returned to the board, and the board came back with a recommendation for no change.

Amendments to the “Special Response” process for strongly controversial issues were adopted, as proposed by the Standing Committee of district delegates. The revision adapts the process in a number of ways including requiring training for facilitators of district hearings, limiting time for open floor dialogue, with no suspension of Roberts Rules of Order, among others. An amendment from the floor added scientific materials to the list of study materials provided to the church in the event the process is used again.

Three items deferred: At the close of business sessions three items had not yet been dealt with and were referred to the 2015 Conference: amendments to the Church of the Brethren bylaws, amendments to Brethren Benefit Trust articles of organization, and an item on agency financial reports.

By the numbers
2,524 registration total: 719 delegates and 1,805 nondelegates.
3 new fellowships: Common Spirit, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Hanging Rock, West Marva District; Remanente de Salvación, Morovis, P.R.
150 units: collected by the Blood Drive sponsored by Brethren Disaster Ministries with the American Red Cross. The number includes 11 double red cell donations. Patient lives potentially saved: 450.
$5,100 for hunger: raised by the Quilt Auction of the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren.
3 Open Roof Awards: South Waterloo (Iowa) Church of the Brethren; Lone Star Church of the Brethren, Lawrence, Kan.; Clover Creek Church of the Brethren, Martinsburg, Pa.
4 top finishers: at the BBT Fitness Challenge. Among runners, male and female first finishers were Nathan Holsler and Christy Crouse. Among walkers, first finishers were Don Shankster and Bev Anspaugh.
514 downloads: of the new Annual Conference app.
20,875 diapers: collected by the Witness to the Host City service project for a YMCA/YWCA shelter. Also received: 1,750 hygiene kits and “more socks than we can count.”

Families enjoyed an intergenerational evening of games and music.

The senior high youth at their service project.

Photo by Alysson Wittmeyer.

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