"Vision for a Global Church," a new statement on global mission, was adopted by the Mission and Ministry Board in October 2017. Written by an ad hoc committee of the Mission and Ministry Board and reviewed by the Mission Advisory Committee, the new statement was developed to address an inconsistency between Church of the Brethren polity and Global Mission and Service practice. Current statements on mission set forth a vision of new Brethren forming international districts and joining the Annual Conference in the United States, the way that districts of the Church of the Brethren in the United States do. In reality, new Brethren are forming national, independent legal entities with their own annual conferences. The new statement calls on Global Mission and Service staff to actively work toward hosting a consultation of the national bodies of the Church of the Brethren to discuss how we will function as the Global Church of the Brethren, a gathering of autonomous Brethren bodies seeking mutual encouragement, sharing resources and supporting each other’s efforts. This is in keeping with our current polity, which calls us to "aim to: maintain close fraternal relationships with other regional conferences; seek to be of one mind with other regional conferences as to matters of faith and belief; participate in periodic world assemblies of the Church of the Brethren; and, when appropriate, cooperate with other regional conferences for activities and programs such as disaster relief, leadership training, church planting, and ecumenical activities" (1998 Minutes (1995–1999), “World Mission Philosophy and Global Church Structure,” 766).

**Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren**

The Church of the Brethren understands that Christian mission is God’s mission. Christian mission encompasses all God-motivated efforts to make Christ known, active in human life, loved, and obeyed, so that the good news may result in faithful discipleship in personal lives, in institutions, and in the whole range of human relationships.

The ultimate objective of the Church of the Brethren’s global mission is to redeem, heal, and lift all of life\(^1\) to God’s intended purpose for all creation. Recognizing the increasing dominance of insular and nationalistic tendencies throughout the world, the church must continue to heed the Christian call to be a global community. Church of the Brethren mission philosophy statements have long called for this; it is now time to live more fully into being the global church.

In reviewing the Church of the Brethren’s history of mission, the church may celebrate that it has, in fact, become a global presence. The Church of the Brethren has been established in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, India, Nigeria, Spain, and the United States, and is emerging in other areas around the globe. People are choosing to be Brethren and are choosing to plant the church where they are. Each week, more than half a million people around the world worship in a Church of the Brethren congregation. The documents and practices of the Church of the Brethren in the United States have encouraged culturally appropriate, holistic mission, and this is being replicated by sister churches in a number of nations. In addition, Brethren have had a long history of working ecumenically and influencing the broader church.

However, the Church of the Brethren in the United States confesses that it has made mistakes as it has tried to do mission. American cultural domination has, at times, led to ethno-centric

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decisions and abuse of financial power. The denomination must commit to being attentive to God’s Spirit and to learning and growing. This document is set forth as a reminder that the Church of the Brethren is a commissioned church. As God sent Christ Jesus into the world, so are members of the Church of the Brethren commissioned as his followers to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching everything that Christ commanded. The root word for mission is missio, a Latin word meaning a sending or a sending forth. For Christians to be in mission is to be responsive to the mandate placed upon them by God.


This document also seeks to clarify a 21st century vision of a global structure of “autonomous Brethren groups in different areas of the world: these should be seen as branches from the same vine whose ultimate rootage is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Embracing the indigenous church**

*There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages (Revelation 7:9).*

The Church of the Brethren has long embraced the philosophy of the indigenous church, and continues to do so, seeking to allow the gospel to take root in culturally appropriate forms that arise from the people’s own insights and experiences. An indigenous church, insofar as Christian principles permit, identifies itself with the local culture while adhering to the words of scripture and traditional Brethren beliefs, practicing Brethren ordinances, and interpreting Brethren ideals of service, community, evangelism, simplicity, and peace in its own context, with its own materials for spiritual formation.

The indigenous church is to be an independent church—self-governing, self-propagating, and self-financing. The Church of the Brethren in the United States seeks to plant new Brethren bodies that assume the financial and administrative responsibilities for themselves as rapidly as possible.

New Brethren will be taught the practice of an annual conference, so members and delegates from various churches can come together to fellowship, manage the affairs of the church, and discern the mind of Christ. New Brethren will form autonomous, locally registered national Brethren bodies but strive for close fraternal relationships with other Brethren, regionally and globally.

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3 Matt. 28:19-20
We envision a Global Church of the Brethren as a spiritual community of independent, autonomous bodies that are mutually dependent on one another for fellowship, counsel, and mutual encouragement.

New Brethren groups will be encouraged to relate to ecumenical bodies.

**Affirming autonomy**

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* *(Philippians 4:13).*

One aspect of global mission is to establish churches that are fully dependent upon God to supply their needs. Newly established Brethren groups should understand that “the laborer is worthy of the hire” *(1 Timothy 5:18).* If these new groups choose to have full-time, paid clergy rather than bi-vocational ministers, then it is their responsibility to support their ministers.

The Church of the Brethren in the United States believes that other Brethren bodies should be responsible to manage their own affairs, while still recognizing and celebrating their interrelatedness in Christ. Churches are called to recognize the need for and blessings of being connected to the larger body of Christ. Each Brethren body is tasked with the responsibility to be Brethren and to seek to be part of the Global Church of the Brethren.

**Honoring relationships**

*So that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith* *(Romans 1:12).*

The Global Church of the Brethren will be an international denomination that is made up of sister churches that are defined, registered national structures. For example, the Church of the Brethren functions within the United States, Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria functions within Nigeria, Iglesia de Los Hermanos República Dominicana functions within the Dominican Republic, etc. These churches are autonomous in their structure and practice, but are related through a common love of Christ; a theology of peace, community, evangelism, and service; a commitment to participation in the global church; a commitment to share resources; and a shared history. All are branches of the same vine, rooted in Christ.

**Mutually sharing resources**

*The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him* *(Romans 10:12-13).*

Resources to be shared among the Global Church of the Brethren include friendship, leadership, counsel, information, education, spiritual gifts, expertise in conflict transformation, resources for language translation, material relief supplies, and finances. The Church of the Brethren in the United States recognizes the dangers of financially supporting new mission projects in ways that unintentionally discourage local initiative and foster an unhealthy dependence on outside funding. Inappropriate financial support may limit a new Brethren body’s growth, development, and sustainability. Therefore, the Church of the Brethren in the United States will seek to partner with emerging Brethren bodies in ways that affirm, respect, and challenge the development of
the spiritual, material, and personnel resources already present, while offering spiritual, fraternal, and leadership development support.⁵

We recognize that mission projects take intentionality and time to become autonomous Brethren bodies. We realize that new congregations struggle to finance their own local ministries, let alone contribute to the administrative costs of a national church. While financial support can assist to establish a sister church, financial assistance promotes unhealthy relationships. Herein is the tension.

“Passing on the Gift” has been a core Brethren practice. Brethren seek to assist and empower vulnerable communities to become more self-sufficient, so they, in turn, can pass on their gifts to others. Providing funding for ministries that promote peace, education, community development, income generation, and improved agricultural practices can empower communities to become financially healthy and sustainable.

Finances in mission is a sensitive topic. At times, Christians do not recognize the resources that God has given and are not as generous as they could be. We are encouraged to practice good stewardship of God’s resources, to live simply, and to uphold traditional Brethren ideals of mutual sharing. We also recognize that financial resources are only a small part of our faith. The body of Christ has many gifts that are needed for God’s ministry in the world. The Church of the Brethren in the United States must be mindful of the variety of gifts among the Global Church of the Brethren and be willing to both give and receive from this bounty.

Articulating a global Brethren identity

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As the Global Church of the Brethren grows, the Church of the Brethren in the United States may no longer assume that it has the right to control the Brethren movement. Living relationships are dynamic, fluid, and ever-changing. This evolving identity is exciting and cause for celebration, but also will bring up many issues to discuss and will bring unease for some members of the church.

Ongoing questions include: Who defines Brethren identity and how it is formed? How is Brethren identity passed on? What are the basic requirements expected of each Church of the Brethren denomination? How will those requirements be identified by the Global Church of the Brethren? What are the goals and mechanisms for theological education in the Global Church of the Brethren? How will resources and relationships be made available between the different Brethren denominations?

The Global Church of the Brethren will need global servant leaders to mutually develop guidelines and methods to respond to these and other questions that will be raised. The Church of the Brethren in the United States may model servant leadership by relinquishing its power and control over international matters to the Global Church of the Brethren.

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Committing to service

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

The Church of the Brethren has sought to follow Christ as the example for life and practice. Christ ministered to the whole person, and Brethren seek to follow that holistic example and become doers of the word, not just hearers. Some describe the Brethren as more focused on orthopraxis than orthodoxy. Brethren share the “cup of cold water” in Christ’s name, working for peace, justice, and equality at home and abroad.6 The Brethren want to be recognized “by the manner of their living.”

Brethren have incorporated diverse ministries into church planting and evangelistic efforts including agriculture, education, health care, community development, and peacemaking. A praxis of service is a defining characteristic of the Church of the Brethren tradition.

In the past, Church of the Brethren mission work resulted in institutions such as hospitals and schools. More recently, mission efforts have included service work such as work camps, done in partnership with sister churches in various countries, and focused on building relationships and strengthening church bodies.

Bridging barriers

And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? (Acts 2:8)

Modern technology has enabled global communication and increased social interaction across virtually all divides—geographic, political, linguistic, etc. Cellular telephone service is expanding into every corner of the globe. Even the poorest and most remote communities are gaining access to the Internet. The gospel is able to penetrate through the harshest of religious intolerance and political oppression in ways previously unimagined.

The Church of the Brethren in the United States and sister churches are using technologies to connect globally, bridging the distances and barriers between them. Social media also can increase connection and identity among individual church members. The sharing of resources for theological education is becoming easier because of these technologies, which open up new possibilities for sharing faith and values with more people, and increase the ability to receive from global Brethren.

Becoming a global church

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12).

The Church of the Brethren in the United States envisions a Global Church of the Brethren as a union of autonomous Brethren bodies, a spiritual community bound together by a common

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passion to be followers of Christ, a common New Testament theology of peace and service, and a common commitment to be in relationship with one another.

Consistent with the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, no one regional or national church will be regarded as the authority over other bodies. No one Brethren body in the Global Church of the Brethren, including the “mother” church in the United States, will presume to have the mind of Christ for its sister churches. Each embraces humility and servant leadership. Each is autonomous in its structure and polity, but all are in a mutual relationship of respect, discipleship, communion in Christ, and shared theology.

Decisions regarding the role and responsibilities of the Global Church of the Brethren, including the acceptance of new Brethren bodies into this fellowship, will be made in mutual consultation with existing national Church of the Brethren bodies.

Ecumenical partners, such as the World Council of Churches, and perhaps the Mennonite World Conference, will be helpful resources as infrastructure for the Global Church of the Brethren is developed.

**Overcoming limitations**

_Overcoming limitations_

_**Straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).**_

The Church of the Brethren in the United States recognizes its own limitations, both in financial resources and personnel, to form a Global Church of the Brethren. It calls on all Brethren bodies and emerging Brethren groups to support a global meeting of representatives of each sister Church of the Brethren. The meeting will have the purpose to dialogue regarding developing a structure for a Global Church of the Brethren.

As progress toward participation in a Global Church of the Brethren, the Church of the Brethren in the United States is challenged to increase the intercultural competency of its leaders, districts, congregations, and members. For example, learning a language in addition to one’s own native language could be a significant step in this process.

While the Church of the Brethren in the United States recognizes its limitations and the challenges involved in establishing a Global Church of the Brethren, it celebrates the global presence of Brethren and looks to God to bless and strengthen this growth. The mission effort of the Brethren is but a small part of God’s over-arching mission in the world.

**Action of the Mission and Ministry Board:** On October 21, 2017, the Mission and Ministry Board approved the "Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren" mission philosophy paper and recommended it to Annual Conference 2018 for adoption.

Connie Burk Davis, chair
Patrick Starkey, chair-elect
James M. Beckwith, secretary
David A. Steele, general secretary