UB 4. Compelling Vision

Origin of the Study

In response to the 2017 unfinished business item entitled, "The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts," the 2017 Annual Conference adopted a recommendation from the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives "that the church turn its attention to the framing of a compelling vision for how we will continue the work of Jesus together."

2018 Compelling Vision Report

from the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives

In the weeks following the 2017 Annual Conference, the Leadership Team and the executive committee of the Council of District Executives (hereafter: Council) discussed the need to form a small working group to carry out the 2017 Conference's decision to turn the church's attention to the framing of a compelling vision. The Leadership Team chose 2018 moderator Samuel Sarpiya and general secretary David Steele, and the executive committee of the Council chose district executives John Jantzi and Colleen Michael to serve as a four-member Compelling Vision Working Group. Later, as it became clear that the vast bulk of the compelling vision process will take place during the 2019 Annual Conference, the Leadership Team recommended, and the executive committee of the Council agreed that the Compelling Vision Working Group would be expanded to include 2019 moderator Donita Keister and Conference director Chris Douglas, as well as the person yet to be elected to serve as moderator-elect for the 2019 Conference.

In its early meetings the Compelling Vision Working Group (Working Group) focused on identifying the purpose and preferred size of a Compelling Vision Process Team (Process Team) that would plan and implement the denominational process for discerning our compelling vision. The Working Group also identified leadership qualities it hoped Process Team members could exhibit and sought nominations from the district executives and the Leadership Team, requesting nominees who could represent the diversity of the Church of the Brethren.

The Working Group has set in place a timeline for the church to be led through a visioning process that will begin with Annual Conference 2018 and continue through Annual Conference 2019. It is our hope that this process will result in a distinctive new beginning for our life together as the Church of the Brethren. The process is intended to move us beyond our conversations, debates, and official statements into the experience of vision and purpose as we proclaim and serve Christ together.

One might inquire as to what kind of vision would be so attention-grabbing, convincing, powerful, and irresistible that it would merit a description of "compelling"? While we cannot anticipate how God will work through a body of believers seeking God's vision, we can answer that such a vision can only be anchored in Jesus Christ. As the leadership for this visioning process, the Compelling Vision Working Group has embraced the following guiding statement as foundational to the visioning framework and process:
"Confessing Jesus Christ as Teacher, Redeemer, and Lord, we desire to serve Him by proclaiming, professing, and walking in His way together bringing His peace to our broken world. Join us in reclaiming a new passion for Christ and helping set a course for our future as the Church of the Brethren serving Him in our communities and in the world!"

It is our intention that conversations about this vision will start with Jesus Christ as the center of our existence as a denomination. Early in 2018 the Compelling Vision Working Group called seven individuals, who had been nominated by the district executives, to serve as the Compelling Vision Process Team, together with 2018 moderator Samuel Sarpiya, 2019 moderator Donita Keister, and Conference director Chris Douglas. The Process Team will work during Annual Conference 2018 and Annual Conference 2019 and also alongside district gatherings to engage the church in conversations that generate themes which lead us to a compelling vision of a distinctive direction for the Church of the Brethren. The Working Group will provide oversight of the process. Both the Working Group and the Process Team will remain constant in their membership until the process reaches its conclusion.

The Compelling Vision process will begin at the 2018 Annual Conference. One full business session and a portion of a second business session will be dedicated to engaging Conference attendees in the visioning process. Following the 2018 Annual Conference, it is hoped that each district will have at least one district gathering designated for providing input to the development of a denominational vision statement. The Annual Conference 2019 will be primarily dedicated, including most of its business sessions, to the development of a compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren. The Compelling Vision Process Team will plan these Annual Conference sessions, compile the data generated during sessions, synthesize themes that emerge, and report those themes back to the Annual Conference for affirmation. Following Annual Conference 2019 the Working Group, in consultation with the Process Team, will oversee the articulation of the finalized Compelling Vision that will inform our life together going forward.

The Leadership Team and the Council are aware that this process will be greeted in a variety of ways across the denomination. For some it may be difficult to imagine how a denomination that is divided around issues of Biblical interpretation and authority might ever find a common vision together. For others, cynicism and mistrust of leadership may cause disinterest in the process. Whatever our challenges, it is our hope and prayer that the longing to be the Church Christ has called us to be and the desire to see God’s Holy Spirit work a miracle in and among us will compel us forward to see God’s vision revealed as we gather and seek God together. We ask for your prayers as the Working Group and the Process Team do their best to plan and carry out this visioning process. We encourage all congregations to take part in these conversations, bringing your unique contributions and sharing in the hard work of discovering God’s plan for how we will continue to be the body of Christ in this broken world.

Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Mark 10:27 NRSV

In order to provide adequate time to focus on this compelling vision process, the Leadership Team recommends to the 2018 Annual Conference:
that all new business for the 2019 Annual Conference be set aside so that the delegate body and other Annual Conference participants can focus their attention on the essential conversations that will lead to discerning the compelling vision that Christ intends for the Church of the Brethren.

**Action of the Leadership Team:** On February 26, 2018, the Leadership Team adopted this recommendation to be presented for consideration by the 2018 Annual Conference.

Leadership Team

- David A. Steele, general secretary, chair
- Samuel Kefas Sarpiya, moderator
- Donita J. Keister, moderator-elect
- James M. Beckwith, secretary
- David D. Shetler, Council of District Executives representative
- Chris Douglas, Conference director, staff support