

Unfinished Business

1. The Duties and Relationship of Moderators to the Church of the Brethren Organizational Structure.

Whereas The Church of the Brethren as a denomination has not considered the role of moderator for congregations since 1965;

Whereas the Congregational Structure Paper adopted by the 2000 Annual Conference, makes mention of the duties of the local church moderator in a very general way;

Whereas the guidelines for the moderator at the local church level are nonspecific and thus open to a broad range of interpretation;

Whereas the role and practice of the moderator may be different in the local church versus the District and/or Annual Conference;

Whereas the thinking and range of practice found in the denomination about this vital office could be invaluable assistance to the congregations and newly appointed or elected moderators and persons considering being moderators, and

Whereas the Church of the Brethren has published guidelines and helps for deacons, for congregational structure, and for pastors, in the form of manuals and assembled literature;

Therefore, we the Saint Joseph Church of the Brethren congregation, meeting on May 6, 2001, petition the Church of the Brethren denomination to study the office of the moderator, to bring together existing practices, to recommend guidelines for the selection, qualifications, responsibilities, role and action of the moderator and then to publish such a study for denominational use.

Approved and passed to the Missouri/Arkansas District conference by the Saint Joseph Church of the Brethren Council meeting, Saint Joseph, Missouri, May 6, 2001.

James Smith, Board Chair

Patricia Dennison, Recording Secretary

Action by the Missouri/Arkansas District Board: The District Board meeting June 16, 2001 at Cabool, Missouri, recommended this query by adopting and passing it on to the District Conference.

Kenneth Steckly, District Board Chair

Marie Petty, Board Secretary

Action of the Missouri/Arkansas District Conference Passed on to Annual Conference by the Missouri/Arkansas District Conference meeting on September 7-9, 2001 at Camp

Windemere, Roach, Missouri.

Ida Mae Campbell, Moderator

Marie Petty, Writing Clerk

Action of the 2002 Annual Conference: Ann Eberly, a Standing Committee member from Mid-Atlantic, presented the Standing Committee recommendation that the Annual Conference Council direct a revision and update to the existing Annual Conference statements regarding moderators, to use current language, to answer the concerns of the query, and to bring the revision back to Annual Conference for approval in the year 2003. *The delegate body adopted the Standing Committee recommendation with one amendment that is incorporated in the above recommendation.*

THE FUNCTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH MODERATOR

Church of the Brethren 2003

Background

The office of Local Church Moderator in the Church of the Brethren originated following the decline of the free ministry and the advent of the paid ministry. Accompanying that change was the disappearance of a position formerly called "Elder-in-Charge." The Elder-in-Charge was usually one of the free ministers, normally one with the most experience, who was recognized as the official head of the congregation. He presided at business meetings of the congregation. During the transition to paid pastors, some churches retained the position of elder, and he also functioned as an advisor to the pastor. Eventually, the position of elder was dropped from the organization structure of the local church and the term "moderator" came into general use. The moderator also did not retain the prerequisite of being called to the set-apart ministry; a wise and dedicated lay person could be called to the position. Additionally, terms of service were established for the position of moderator. At the beginning of the calling of local church moderators, approval of the person called had to be given by the district before the person could assume office. Some districts still continue that practice.

Current Functions of Local Church Moderator

In the Congregational Structure paper, adopted by the 2001 Annual Conference, the Moderator is considered to be the head of the organization of the congregation. He or she presides at the business meetings that involve the entire membership (called the Congregational Forum in the Congregational Structure paper), and the moderator is vice-chair and a member with vote on the Leadership Team, the group that oversees the administration of the church program. The moderator also serves as an ex-officio member without vote of the Leadership Calling Team and all project group meetings.

It is generally understood that the moderator is the organizational and official head of the congregation and the pastor or pastors the executive head and spiritual counselor and shepherd of the congregation. The congregation and the pastor are free to assign other roles to the moderator that will enhance how either accomplishes his or her tasks. For example, some pastors look to the moderator for frequent counsel and consultation on the status of the church or in improving relationships therein. In some churches, the moderator is recognized as an “ambassador” for the church, representing the church in community functions and in visiting persons who are invited to consider church membership. Some congregations take care to call a moderator who can be a catalyst for unity and understanding in the church.

Qualifications for a Local Church Moderator

The local church moderator can be a woman or a man, from laity or clergy, who exhibits in faith and character Christ-like qualities, including love, encouragement, wisdom, graciousness, faithfulness to Christ, and dedication to the church. More specific considerations might be consecrative living in home, church, and community; faithful service and leadership experience in the congregation; understanding and commitment to the traditions, ministries, and polity of the Church of the Brethren; familiarity with parliamentary procedure and models for consensus-building and discernment; and listening skills which seek and invite open, forthright sharing and willingness to strive for reconciliation of differing points of view.

Although it is not specified in the current congregational structure, the functions assigned the moderator would suggest that he or she could generally come from the membership of the local church, rather than soliciting the leadership of someone beyond the congregation. The assumptions are that a local church member would know the congregation better, and attendance at the required meetings beyond the Congregational Forum would be facilitated. In rare instances in which a dispute within the congregation must be decided and in which the moderator may not be able to be completely objective, it would be possible to call in someone from beyond the congregation to serve as moderator-pro-tem for the business meeting, or to seek assistance from the district’s Shalom Team (formerly Discipleship and Reconciliation Team - “D & R”).

It is further suggested that the moderator be considered “a member of the assembly” over which he/she presides with the privilege of voting in the Congregational Forum. It is recommended that a moderator not hold an additional major office in the congregation during the moderator’s tenure.

The call process, as outlined in the Congregational Structure document of Annual Conference, shall be followed in the selection of a moderator.

Term of Service

The term of office for the moderator shall be three years. A moderator may be eligible to serve a second term, but no more than two terms in succession.

Training

It is recommended that each moderator serve as a mentor for his or her successor, and that immediate past moderators serve as parliamentary advisors for Congregational Forum (Business) meetings for one year beyond their term of service.

It is also recommended that Districts provide at least one training workshop for local church moderators annually. The workshop could include such topics as the role and function of the moderator, the development of listening skills and methods of facilitating a business meeting, appropriate counsel for use by moderators in business meetings, relationship between moderators and pastors, and mediation and reconciliation skills.

Action of the 2003 Annual Conference: Earl Ziegler, chair of the Annual Conference Council, presented the recommendation from the Council. After considerable discussion regarding the variety of practice across the denomination in relation to the role and qualifications for moderator, *the delegate body referred the paper back to the Annual Conference Council with the suggestion that the Council appoint a committee to assist them in rewriting the answer to this query.*