

Unfinished Business

1. Query: Doing Church Business

Whereas: it has been very important in our heritage to seek the mind of Christ together in order to do it;

Whereas: *Robert's Rules of Order* work well in dealing with many issues, yet there are limits to their usefulness in dealing with some issues—particularly in the light of God's New Order (often referred to in Scriptures as the Kingdom of God);

Whereas: the secular *Robert's Rules of Order* tend to make issues adversarial, possibly even accentuating the extremes on a spectrum rather than drawing out voices more from the middle of a spectrum or encouraging both ends of a spectrum to do more affirming of each other;

Whereas: some have concerns that in a culture of democratic politics we may too often reflect worldly assumptions where majorities, money, and might make right, rather than reflecting Acts 15 and faithfully following Jesus in ways of mercy, justice, and peace;

Whereas: the 1988 Annual Conference adopted A STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEALING WITH STRONGLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES which gives Standing Committee the responsibility to decide if a controversial query will be called a Special Response Query needing at least a two-year procedure, yet it seems not to have flexibility and practical helpfulness for some controversial issues;

Whereas: some issues are not resolved by legislative votes;

Whereas: the process of dealing with an issue is often as crucial as the issue itself;

Whereas: when we are not of one mind, we sometimes have difficulties respecting loyal persons and groups who hold minority positions;

Whereas: there are tensions at times between the consciences of individuals and some of the processes and actions of the wider church; and

Whereas: when persons or groups feel sinned against by processes and actions of Annual Conference it is unclear what steps might be taken by them and the people who stand with them;

Therefore, we the members of the Turkey Creek Church of the Brethren, gathered in council meeting on November 10, 2002, petition the Annual Conference through Northern Indiana District Conference to have a committee appointed to study how Annual Conference can enhance and model doing church business in the spirit of Christ as we discern the mind of Christ in order to continue the work of Jesus.

Hurbert L. Krull
Church Board Chair

Sue Brock
Church Board Secretary

Beth Krull
Treasurer

Timothy Sollenberger Morphey
Moderator

The Northern Indiana District conference, meeting at the Elkhart County Fairgrounds, Goshen, Indiana, on September 19-20, 2003, approved the query for consideration by Annual Conference in Charleston, West Virginia, in 2004.

Carol Spicher Waggy, Northern Indiana District Moderator, 2003

Shirley Braner, Northern Indiana District Clerk, 2003

Action of the 2004 Annual Conference: The delegates approved the recommendation from Standing Committee that the query be adopted *and that Annual Conference elect a committee of five to answer the query and report back to the 2005 Annual Conference.* Elected to the committee were: Joe Detrick, Matt Guynn, Verdena Lee, Dale Posthumus, and David Shetler.

Study Committee: Doing Church Business

Progress Report 2005

The query from the 2004 Annual Conference requests “a committee appointed to study how Annual Conference can enhance and model doing church business in the spirit of Christ as we discern the mind of Christ in order to continue the work of Jesus.” The delegates approved the recommendation from Standing Committee that the query be adopted and that Annual Conference elect a committee of five to answer the query and report back to the 2005 Annual Conference. Elected to the committee were: Joe Detrick, Matt Guynn, Verdena Lee, Dale Posthumus, and David Shetler.

The committee gathered for their first meeting September 30 - October 2, 2004 at the Church of the Brethren General Offices in Elgin, Illinois. Dave Shetler was called as chair and Matt Guynn as scribe. Through times of worship, review, discussion and study, the committee came to recognize that to adequately study the query, to gain the counsel and input of the denomination and to prepare a report with recommendations, that an additional year of work will be needed. At the time of the writing of this progress report, the committee does have several additional meetings scheduled and has prepared an outline to complete the task, including a hearing scheduled for this Annual Conference. The committee anticipates presenting a full report to the delegates at the 2006 Annual Conference and thereby requests the delegates of the 2005 Annual Conference receive this progress report.

Joe Detrick
Matt Guynn
Verdena Lee
Dale Posthumus
David Shetler

Action of the 2005 Annual Conference: Annual Conference received the 2005 report of the Doing Church Business study committee and granted the committee an additional year of study.

Report to the 2006 Annual Conference

Response

Introduction

The query from the 2004 Annual Conference requested that a committee be “appointed to study how Annual Conference can enhance and model doing church business in the spirit of Christ as we discern the mind of Christ in order to continue the work of Jesus.” The delegates approved the recommendation from Standing Committee that the query be adopted and that Annual Conference elect a committee of five to answer the query. Elected to the committee were Joe Detrick, Matt Guynn, Verdena Lee, Dale Posthumus, and David Shetler.

The committee called Dave Shetler as chair and Matt Guynn as scribe through a discernment process. The committee's work took place in face-to-face meetings and conference calls, including times of worship, review, discussion and study.

The committee came to recognize that to adequately study the query, to gain the counsel and input of the denomination and to prepare a report with recommendations, an additional year of work would be needed. The 2005 Annual Conference granted the additional year to complete the task.

The committee recognized the awesomeness of this assignment and approached the work in an attitude of prayer, seeking together the guidance and wisdom of the Spirit in responding to the query. The study of Scripture and consideration of our heritage were included in our preparation of this paper. The committee also sought to discern the mind of Christ in hearing from the denomination through listening sessions, surveys, and interviews. The paper is organized in several sections: Scriptural Reflection; History of Decision-Making and Brethren Heritage; What We Heard (in surveys and interviews); Conclusions and Observations (our summary of findings); Response & Recommendations; Final Remarks; and Recommended Reading. The committee offers this paper for consideration by the 2006 Annual Conference.

Scriptural Reflection

Throughout the history of the Church of the Brethren, scripture has been a guiding and grounding element in faith and practice. In the process of discernment, Scripture contin-

ues to be a guiding and grounding element for us today. The Spirit of Jesus has much to teach us about community, discernment, and guidance through Scripture.

Mentioned in the query itself, Acts 15 has many implications for doing church business. Faced with a difficult issue, the early church came together for prayer, dialogue, debate, discernment and decision-making. Believers spent significant time listening to one another on the issue, not in order to win an argument, but to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit for guidance in building up the church. There were elements of worship in the discernment time: moments of prayer and moments of silence, celebrations of joy, telling the stories of God at work in and through them. As they sought the mind of Christ, they listened to those deemed wise and respected in their midst. When all had been taken into account, they reached a decision “which seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v. 28) and shared their discernment in written form with the rest of the church. Acts 15 provides a framework and a pattern for our doing church business, for discernment, which has been incorporated into this paper and the recommendations of this committee.

In our continuing study of scripture on the issue of discernment and decision-making, the committee was also led to scriptures that not only describe how the church of Acts made decisions, but the spirit in which those decisions were made. Philippians 2:1-11 speaks of our having the same mind and attitude of Jesus in our relationships with one another. Being transformed and living up to ethical standards in our relationships is the message of Romans 12. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 admonishes us to be mature in our faith, seeking God's wisdom in order that we might know the mind of Christ, thus being empowered to be a community able to make decisions in a spiritual rather than human fashion. Passing judgment on one another is not to be the way of the Christian community, according to Romans 14:10-13, 19. We leave the judging to God so that we might “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (v. 19). Jesus also addresses judging and self-righteousness in Matthew 7:1-5. We are called to use good judgment without being judgmental. 1 Corinthians 12-14 speaks of our being gifted for service to one another and the church, working together for the strengthening of the body while being led by the “more excellent way” of love. Growing in grace, love, and faith is the substance of Ephesians 4:1-16. As we exhibit growth in grace, practice love in our relationships, and experience faith in the One “who is above all and through all and in all,” the work and ministry of Jesus continues, growing and thriving in the Body. The church is built up and God is glorified as we love and respect each other and recognize that we all have been gifted by the God of grace.

Ultimately, we turn to the words of Jesus as we seek to be faithful in our relationships, discernment, and decision-making. Jesus clearly instructs us to go to each other for conversation and dialogue in the pattern of Matthew 18. But above all, Jesus tells us that love for God and love for each other are the greatest and guiding commandments for everything else: all relationships, all discernment and all decision-making (Matthew 22:34-40).

We believe that through the power, wisdom and presence of the Holy Spirit, God still speaks to us through the Scriptures. God offers guidance and direction through the Word

as we seek a discernment process that provides a way of entering into and honoring respectful, loving relationships and at the same time allows us to discover the mind of Christ for the issues we face. Adhering to the greatest commandments as defined by Jesus, this paper and the recommendations encourage us to listen to one another and to speak to one another in love as we discern through prayer, Bible study, preaching, and visions that which Jesus would have us be and do.

History of Decision-Making and Brethren Heritage

The teaching of Christ which encourages us to love God and neighbor, including even our enemies, has been the basis of a sense of community among Christians. The early church made an effort to consider the thoughts of the community, as exhibited in Acts 15, as it worked through a controversial issue of the day, being at all times led by the Holy Spirit.

The first Brethren understood Scripture leading them to promote a community of mutuality and accountability as an expression of the heart of Christ's love. Esteeming others higher than self, and placing an emphasis on the body of believers, the first Brethren drew lots to specify who would baptize Alexander Mack in order to avoid status or position as they entered the Eder River in 1708. Love Feast became a way to cultivate unity among the Brethren through visits by deacons and community discernment regarding conflict and conciliation. At a point early in the development of Annual Conference, Love Feast was observed as a part of opening worship and attendees were encouraged to cultivate a heart for discernment of the mind of Christ. Other practices of the Brethren set us apart from a secular form of accountability in relating to one another. Practices such as the deacon visit and mutual aid still leave their imprint on our communities today.

In early Brethren congregations, local elders and bishops were trusted to determine what was best for a community. They discerned the moving of the Holy Spirit within the context of a rapidly growing country. The unity of faith was maintained by face-to-face dialogue and care for one another as the family of God.

As the church grew, large annual meetings were encouraged when church leaders sensed a need for centralized fellowship to maintain unity. During the annual gathering, there were opportunities to address weighty concerns in the company of like-minded Christians. At times this involved deep division, disagreement, and rancor, but the context remained a common search for the mind of Christ.

Brethren thought and discernment have prevailed against the tide of simple majority rule in society for almost three centuries. Eventually, the common use of parliamentary procedures of the eighteenth century influenced the Brethren to elect a clerk for the annual meetings. The role of the clerk was similar to the moderator of today. Yet discernment continued to be guided by a desire to reflect the sense of the entire gathered body.

Henry Kurtz, the translator and editor of the first collection of Annual Meeting Minutes, became the clerk of the Annual Meeting in the mid-1800s. He was instrumental in creating the Annual Conference as we know it today. After studying the Yearly Meeting con-

ducted by Quakers in London, which had been practiced since 1666, Elder Kurtz suggested seven principles to guide the formation of Brethren annual meetings:

- 1) Simplicity
- 2) Liberty
- 3) Order
- 4) Subordination of our reason to the word of God
- 5) Due regard to previous decisions
- 6) Love of the Brethren
- 7) A constant aim for union in the body of Christ

These principles guided the Brethren of the nineteenth century as they met each year to discern the mind of Christ in matters of daily living in a rapidly changing world that was at times hostile to the Christian journey.

As the world around the Brethren continued to change, democratic procedures became a primary model for secular governance. Annual Conference adopted 2/3 majority voting in 1847. However, after a brief trial, the conference returned to a consensus model the next year.

In the year 1856, district organizations were proposed. However, in 1866 the Brethren held an annual meeting that unified the districts. Despite these smaller geographic divisions, the Brethren sought and prized a sense of the larger, gathered whole, and laid the foundation for Annual Conference as a cohesive community of Christians.

In the early 1880s, permission was granted to use majority vote. Consensus as a process for discerning the mind of Christ did not survive the painful division of the Brethren body in 1881-1883. Hence, majority rule was used until an adapted form of *Robert's Rules of Order* was formally adopted by the Annual Conference around 1915 (records are unclear).

Annual Conference minutes that followed this vote would seem familiar to those who attend conference today. Though initially there was more attention to an attitude of worship, respect for opposing opinions expressed and time for prayer and the reading of scriptures, the model of parliamentary procedure is the same as we have today. The Church of the Brethren had successfully emulated secular forms of governing.

As time passed and the encroaching American culture increasingly polarized on faith issues, a change came to the Annual Conference floor that was not anticipated by our predecessors. Dissension and arguments over varying opinions have crept into discussion that was once reserved for discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst. If one simply reads the titles of Annual Conference statements and resolutions throughout the twentieth century, it becomes clear that the body of the Church of the Brethren, like many other Christian fellowships, began to struggle with the questions of leadership, identity and the way we conduct business. Language indicating disagreement and the need for further discernment is found throughout queries and statements over the last several decades,

including those dealing with biblical authority, patriotism and the flag, and sexuality, among other issues.

During and since the 1990s, a number of congregations, districts, and denominational agencies have experimented with other models for decision-making, including Worshipful Work, Formal Consensus, sense of the meeting (Quaker) process, and others.

This query on “Doing Church Business” was accepted by the Annual Conference delegate body in 2004. It is a plea reflecting the frustration of Brethren across the theological and social spectra who sense the changing tide of relationship among those who follow Christ. Earnest time has been spent by the Committee to listen to the concerns of our brothers and sisters as we all struggle to be heard clearly, received lovingly, and treated respectfully.

What We Heard

As a part of its study, the Committee gathered information by listening to the body through interviews with individuals and groups including the following: Annual Conference participants and delegates, past and current moderators, the Cross-Cultural Ministries Consultation, the Council of District Executives, scholars, lay leaders, conflict experts, agency staff, and respondents surveyed at the 2005 Annual Conference. What follows are themes that continuously arose in our conversations.

- We heard that Brethren are a people of the Book, trying to be faithful disciples, from many different theological perspectives, with a strong desire for all to be more patient and forbearing with each other.
- We heard comments regarding confusion about the power and authority of Annual Conference and why Annual Conference exists. What is the prime function and role of Annual Conference regarding faith and polity statements?
- We heard affirmations that matters of faith and practice are individual preferences as well as corporate understandings. Spiritual growth comes when we gather to discern the mind of Christ, and agree to act as one.
- We heard deep concern and pain about the adversarial style of conversation and discussion at Annual Conference. At the same time, we heard exhortation to continue conversation even in difficult times.
- We heard that quiet voices and minority or marginalized positions are often left out of conversation. There is a desire on the part of some to find ways to hear from these individuals.
- We heard that the process we use to make decisions is as important if not more important than the decision being made. We heard calls for creativity in format and physical setup, while not abandoning what works in current practice.

- We heard that an overwhelming majority desire more faith-based tools for discernment (e.g., formal or informal consensus processes, small groups, silence, Worshipful Work) which could complement and enhance current practice, but that, lacking clear and efficient alternatives, there is not sufficient support to move away from *Robert's Rules of Order*.
- We heard persons stating that different kinds of discernment and decision-making may require different processes.
- We heard that there is sometimes a lack of education about what discernment means for Brethren, and that there is a desire for leadership training related to discernment for delegates, moderators, secretaries, and others in leadership roles.
- We heard that many congregations are already using a modified version of *Robert's Rules of Order*. Although they do take recorded votes, often there is also open space for conversation and discussion.
- We heard that some congregations and at least three districts and/or district boards (Illinois/Wisconsin, Oregon/Washington, and Mid-Atlantic), and one agency (On Earth Peace) are already practicing alternative forms of discernment.
- We heard expressions of concern that Brethren seem to have been seduced by the dominant culture and have lost sight of the power of prayer and the value of community discernment.
- We consistently heard that the shortened length of Annual Conference may have done a disservice to the quality of conversation and discernment.
- We heard a number of requests for small-group discernment opportunities.
- We heard questioning whether Annual Conference is an appropriate place or a safe place to share deeply held beliefs, personal understandings, and experiences.
- We heard a strong affirmation that tinkering with the machinery of conference is useless, that it will take a real and significant shift of perspective and belief to refresh the body's ability to discern together.
- We heard that quality delegate preparation before conference and strategies for reporting and follow-up after conference are often lacking.
- We heard strong encouragement to learn from and utilize the wisdom of the senior members of the church.

Survey Results from 2005 Annual Conference

Our committee prepared a survey for delegates and non-delegates, distributed at the 2005 Annual Conference in Peoria. There were 709 responses. What follows is a summary of results.

More than 80% of respondents shared that they read the AC business items in the booklet; 29% attend district-level briefings; 31% talk with their congregations about business items before coming to conference.

83% shared that some, but not many, or none of Annual Conference decisions made a difference in the life of their congregations. It is the perception of respondents that the decisions of Annual Conference have little impact on congregational life.

92% shared that, as a result of AC discussion, they rethink their positions at least sometimes (36% responded, yes, it usually does; 56% responded, yes, but not very often).

65% agreed that, lacking sufficient time to process an item of business, they would prefer to continue the discernment until the body reaches a greater sense of unity.

73% agreed that Annual Conference should continue to make decisions about belief and faith practices AND should also address organizational matters of the denomination.

Comments and Observations

Based on our listening and research, the current usage of an adapted *Roberts Rules of Order* does not appear to adequately allow us to lovingly and respectfully hear one another or to truly discern the mind of Christ in the most efficient and spiritual way. There is a loss of a sense of community or trust in the process of discernment when it comes to the business sessions at Annual Conference. The Committee wrestled with the question of why this is so. It seems that we have not done well at fostering a sense of Christian community or preparing to truly discern together as we gather for business.

We have observed and heard stories of pain and loss, of persons feeling disenfranchised and left out of the process. We also heard of “winners” gloating over a victory after a vote, and “losers” feeling marginalized, rejected and put down. A process that produces these kinds of experiences would seem to undermine the guidance of the Spirit, the love of God, and the mind of Christ.

The Committee also recognizes that simply changing the model of how we do business will not address or solve any underlying problems or issues. Appropriate tools are needed so that we can do business and discern the mind of Christ, but we also must come to Annual

Conference prepared through Bible and other study, prayer, prior discussion and dialogue, and with openness to the leading of the Spirit through the community of faith.

Although the Committee greatly respects and appreciates the past leadership of Annual Conference, we also recognize that as a church we have not sufficiently educated, trained and coached those called to leadership to facilitate discernment among the gathered church - especially relevant here are Standing Committee, moderators and conference officers. The system and the process have at times failed us through insufficient preparation and training.

Delegates and Conference attendees have also expressed a sense of loss in the amount of time to meet together for discernment, according to the current time frame of Annual Conference. The former schedule of Tuesday evening through Sunday morning allowed more time for discussion and discernment on matters of faith and practice. More time was also available for informal dialogue and conversation.

The committee recognizes that the 1988 paper, "A Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues," is intended to address divisive situations in the life of Annual Conference, and that it has not been applied in recent situations that might have called for it. As it is currently under review by a committee of Annual Conference Council, we have restricted our recommendations to overall business practices of Annual Conference, trusting that the committee reviewing that framework will bring clarifications and recommendations about its use.

Concerns Requiring Further Study

We have not incorporated all concerns into the recommendations and response of our committee. Two concerns have arisen repeatedly in interviews that we feel are outside the scope of our work. We include them for the edification of the body. The first is the frequency and focus of Annual Conference. Should Annual Conference meet every other year, out of concern for stewardship of finances and human labor? Should some years be focused more on teaching, fellowship and worship, and less on business? The second is the process of calling and election used by the delegate body. Would it more truly serve God and our heritage to use a process other than popular election? We leave these for further examination by the body.

As we prayed, as we studied Scripture, as we considered our history, and as we listened to sisters and brothers, we have come to the conclusion that for the spiritual health and well-being of the body, and to enhance and model discerning the mind of Christ, changes need to be made in our manner of meeting.

Response and Recommendations

"Annual Conference is not a place for predetermined points of view representing specific constituencies to be debated, as in the secular political legislative assembly. It is a setting where people come together to consider questions before the church and seek the will of God through prayerful debate and Bible study" (from "Accountability to One Another" in recent Annual Conference booklets).

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace and things where-with one may edify another” (Rom 14:19).

“Discerning the mind of Christ means that you start out not knowing it” (Interviewee).

There is a clear need for significant change, from the level of delegate preparation, to training of moderators, to the format of Annual Conference itself, in order to enhance and model a discerning Christian community and the reign of God. In pursuing together the mind of Christ, we must set aside the contentiousness of mainstream culture in order seek “the glory of God and our neighbor's good.”

The purpose of Annual Conference

“Annual Conference is the highest and final legislative authority of the Church of the Brethren in all matters of procedure, program, polity, and discipline. The authority of Conference has its source in the delegates elected by local churches and districts who come together as a deliberative body under the guidance of the Holy Spirit....It provides an opportunity for face-to-face-confrontation and discussion of major issues that are of vital concern to the church. It serves as a means of building unity, fellowship, and understanding among Brethren, as laity and clergy, people of all ages, and urban and rural people seek to discover the mission of the church in today's world” (Church of the Brethren Polity Manual, Chapter One).

“Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen, and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus” (AC Mission Statement, 2004).

In order to accomplish these ends, Annual Conference needs to be a spiritual training ground for the skills of spiritual discernment and joyful Christian community. How can Annual Conference exemplify these traits in the way it processes discernment and decision-making?

Annual Conference has used various models of discernment and decision-making throughout its history. Any process must be proven by its ability to help the body discern the mind of Christ. We recognize that any human model we use will fall short of full discernment of God's will. The challenge for the body of Christ is to balance the need for some measure of efficiency and structure, with yearnings for patient discernment.

It is our perception that the delegate body at this time is not prepared to move into a formally structured discernment model, and wishes to continue to use and adapt *Robert's Rules of Order* primarily out of concerns for efficiency in large group process.

Therefore we exhort the body to freely adapt its use of *Robert's Rules* as recommended below to adequately serve the purposes of discernment.

Delegate Preparation (Congregational). To enhance our search for the mind of Christ, we recommend the following practices on the district, congregational, and individual levels.

District. The Council of District Executives will consult together about best practices for orienting delegates within their respective districts. The district leadership will offer significant briefing opportunities for delegates that will include Bible study, background and discussion about current items of business, orientation on how we discern together at Annual Conference, and spiritual and practical preparation for speaking and listening in controversial conversations.

Congregational. Congregations will provide time in advance of Annual Conference for discernment about upcoming items of business. Delegates need to be adequately informed of their congregations' perspectives on upcoming business items. Delegates must walk a careful line between representing their constituencies' expressed positions and participating in the movement of the Spirit during the business of the gathered body. Congregations will provide time for returning delegates to report on the spirit and content of Annual Conference business, and to consider together the impact on congregational life.

Individual. We will hold ourselves and one another accountable for tone and attitude in the midst of discernment processes, using the direct approach recommended in Matthew 18. The spirit of Christ does not lead to insult, backbiting, politicking, or dismissing other Christians for any reason (for example, based on background, affiliation, or their place on the theological spectrum).

Delegates are commended to the statement on "Accountability to One Another," published annually in the Annual Conference Booklets, as part of their personal preparation.

Study Questions. To enhance our search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* a few key study questions be provided related to each query or new business item, well in advance of Annual Conference. This is to assist the church in preparing to discern the mind of Christ together. Standing Committee will carry the responsibility for developing these study questions. The Annual Conference Office will coordinate their distribution to the church at large.

Process Counselors. As we seek more fully to discern the mind of Christ, we recognize that learning to discern the mind of Christ takes mentoring. To enhance and model seeking the mind of Christ, we recommend the establishment of a group of three process counselors. These individuals will be available to the moderator and other officers during business sessions. Process counselors will serve in addition to the parliamentarian currently available, who typically consults about conference rules and/or *Robert's Rules*. Process counselors join the parliamentarian in providing spiritual support and practical suggestions for planning and facilitating Annual Conference business, in order to enhance our discernment of the mind of Christ.

Process counselors will serve a term of three years, with staggered terms and no term limits, in a volunteer capacity. Criteria to consider in calling a balanced team include wisdom, spiritual centeredness in the midst of controversy, experience with observing and leading

discernment processes in small or large groups, and ability to provide practical ideas for a group to move ahead. Process counselors will have or receive training and coaching in large group discernment processes and *Robert's Rules of Order*. This may include participation in training events for group facilitation, observation of the discernment processes of other traditions in order to compare and contrast, or other suitable experiences.

Process counselors will be called by the Nominating Committee of Standing Committee in consultation with the Ministry of Reconciliation and the Annual Conference Council.

Delegate Preparation (Standing Committee). To model and enhance the search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* Standing Committee members spend at least one session of their regular meeting in training and preparation for discernment and business, to be led by the process counselors.

Training for Moderator and Moderator-Elect. The assumption across our denomination has been that the moderator provides spiritual leadership. So that they might help model seeking the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* moderators be called specifically for gifts in helping the body discern. Along with the polity description of the duties of conference moderator, key responsibilities of moderators with regards to discernment include the following:

- 1) Hearing, clarifying and synthesizing opposing viewpoints,
- 2) Observing the flow of group process,
- 3) Encouraging the engagement of divergent views in search of unity,
- 4) Listening and calling for voices not yet spoken (the margins or the quiet voices) in order to hear the full voice of the body, and
- 5) Leading the body in seeking the movement of the Spirit in our midst.

To enhance our common search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* moderators exercise their role by encouraging Annual Conference participants to engage each other and God beyond merely speaking “in support” or “against” (which can sometimes establish a lamentably contentious tone).

In many cases, space is made for discernment, but only informally or based on personal inspiration. Examples of possibilities for enhancing *Robert's Rules* are times of worship; silent reflection or prayer; song; a pair or small group working on behalf of the body, in front of the body, to seek solution; and conversations in pairs, clusters, or discernment groups. To more effectively model a variety of discernment processes that could enhance *Robert's Rules of Order*, *we recommend that* a simple handbook of facilitation options that support discernment be compiled for the moderator to use. This handbook will be created by the Ministry of Reconciliation, with counsel from former moderators.

To enhance our search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* at times of deep contention or when the body lacks sufficient time to process an item of business, the moderator be empowered to name the fact that the mind of Christ has not been reached and recommend to the delegates that the issue be postponed until a future year.

To more adequately guide our search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* the moderator and moderator-elect receive training and coaching in large-group discernment processes and *Robert's Rules of Order*. This may include participation in training events related to group facilitation, observation of the discernment processes of other traditions in order to compare and contrast, or other suitable experiences. The Process Counselors will encourage the facilitation of this training and coaching.

Discernment Groups During Annual Conference. To model the intentional and intimate work of seeking the mind of Christ, *we recommend that* all delegates and interested non-delegates participate in discernment groups. Small-group discernment is essential to the character and quality of our recommendations as a whole.

Delegate groups, no larger than ten people, will meet at least once daily and additionally as needed, for sufficient time to engage one another. Program and Arrangements Committee will form groups to maximize engagement with persons from different backgrounds and geographic regions.

The intention of these groups is to provide a place of conversation and prayer in which each can speak and be heard and in which discernment is fostered. Each group will include a trained volunteer facilitator and will choose a spokesperson.

Non-delegates interested in participating in discernment groups may use this kind of structured group or a different format, such as informal clusters, larger hearing sessions, or other formats as dictated by interest and need.

As has been the practice of Conference, the opportunity for all persons to share comments from the floor continues to be a significant part of our shared discussion. In addition, to enhance the discussion of the entire body, and upon the request of the moderator, spokespeople from delegate groups will concisely represent the range of views within their group. This may or may not entail hearing from each group individually; emphasis is on hearing the variety of views in the body, not necessarily each individual opinion. Suggestions for the relations between discernment groups and large-group discussion will be included in the moderator's handbook (mentioned above).

Annual Conference officers will contract with an appropriate agency to provide training and process suggestions for discernment groups.

The Committee recognizes the complexity of this undertaking. However, observing the small group models used at other conferences and large group events, we have reason to believe that this kind of effort is both logistically possible and spiritually nurturing. We believe that small-group discussion is essential to creating an environment of true conversation at Annual Conference.

We recommend that discernment groups be seated for business in circles or semicircles on the conference floor, or some other arrangement conducive for both small group discus-

sion and participation in the larger whole. We recognize that, in venues over the transitional years, this may not always be possible. However, in future planning, consideration should be taken for finding locations that allow for discernment groups to meet together on the business floor.

We recommend that the Annual Conference staff, Program and Arrangements Committee, and the Process Committee (see below), be given the care of the specific details related to necessary arrangements.

Format of Annual Conference as a whole. Creating time for discernment groups will necessitate a shift in the daily schedule for Annual Conference. *We recommend that* Program and Arrangements Committee work with the Annual Conference Director to make these adjustments.

We recommend that Program and Arrangements Committee consider format changes to hold space for discernment related to specific items in some of the slots normally reserved for Insight Sessions, and to encourage that some Bible studies and Insight Sessions relate to business items.

Acknowledging Various Voices for the Purpose of Posterity. It is current Annual Conference practice that all discussions are recorded in their entirety for the Conference archives. We recommend that this practice continue.

After decisions are taken, we recommend that the Annual Conference officers to the best of their ability, summarize major dissenting opinions for the minutes. The conference officers will author simple one or two sentence summaries, which will be offered for approval to the delegate body before the close of the year's business.

We recognize that even when we believe Annual Conference has discerned the will of God, our understanding is still incomplete. We also recognize that as humans we are imperfect, and therefore wish to acknowledge voices not reflected in the decision, so these perspectives will be available to inform future discernment. All that has gone before may be vital for future discernment. The fullness of the mind of Christ will reveal itself in the fullness of time.

Love Feast. To model and enhance our search for the mind of Christ, *we recommend* the retrieval of the previous Annual Conference tradition of bread and cup communion and foot-washing to open each Conference. We believe this will bring the body of Christ into a sense of unity and remind us of the magnitude of our charge to maintain the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph 4).

Length of Conference. In the effort to enhance discernment, adequate time must be provided for discussion and engagement.

To that end, *we recommend that* Program and Arrangements Committee along with

Standing Committee develop a five-year plan to expand the length of Annual Conference. The current schedule, Saturday through Wednesday, allows approximately two days for business. *We recommend* an expanded schedule, not unlike the former schedule (Tuesday night through Sunday morning), which permitted four days for business.

Time together is an essential component of enhancing discernment. There is a great deal of time and expense already involved in Annual Conference; adding a day or two to make possible the very important work of discernment is minor in comparison.

Implementation and review. *We recommend that* an Annual Conference Process Committee be formed to coordinate the paper's implementation. A slate for the process committee will be discerned by the Nominating Committee of Standing Committee and brought to the delegate body (in 2008) for affirmation. Standing Committee will provide a review of the implementation and impact of this paper to the delegates of the 2009 Annual Conference and every three years thereafter. In the interest of moving to a discernment model, *we recommend* a new review of the process of calling versus election for officers and positions accountable to Annual Conference.

Final Remarks

The Committee recognizes that the depth and breadth of these recommendations constitute a significant change in the way we do business together as the Church of the Brethren at Annual Conference. As we have at times struggled to be faithful to our understanding of peace and justice in relationships with one another in the midst of controversial decisions, to be faithful to our understandings of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to be sensitive to our heritage of discerning the mind of Christ together as the body of Christ, it became clear in the minds and hearts of the members of this committee that a modified way of doing business together needs to be offered in response to the concerns raised in this query. It is the prayer of this committee that the delegates of the 2006 Annual Conference will prayerfully and carefully consider how we might best discern the mind of Christ together. It is the committee's prayer that this paper will support the transition toward a new way of doing business in the Church of the Brethren.

The Committee offers its appreciation to all those who have helped in the research and writing of this paper. Without the contributions and assistance of many persons, this paper would not have been possible. This paper is offered "for the glory of God and our neighbors good."

Doing Church Business Study Committee

Joe Detrick
Matt Guynn, scribe
Verdena Lee
Dale Posthumus
Dave Shetler, chair

Recommended Reading

Brown, Dale W. *Another Way of Believing: A Brethren Theology*. (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2005) Chapter 11, *Unity and Dissension*.

Butler, C.T. Lawrence and Amy Rothstein. *On Conflict and Consensus: A Handbook on Formal Consensus Decisionmaking*. Portland, ME: Food Not Bombs Publishing, 1987.

Glick, Sally Weaver. *In Tune With God: The Art of Congregational Discernment*. (Scottsdale, PA: Faith & Life Resources, 2004). Useful theological and practical guide including help for facilitators.

Mallott, Floyd E. *Studies in Brethren History*. (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1954) Chapter 19, *Annual Meeting and Church Polity to 1848*.

Morley, Barry. *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet # 307 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1996).

Morris, Danny E. and Charles M. Olsen. *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*. Alban Institute, 1997.

Action of the 2006 Annual Conference: Annual Conference received the 2006 report of the Doing Church Business study committee and referred the report to the Annual Conference Program Feasibility Study Committee. An amendment to delete from the report the section titled “**Length of Conference**” on page 509 was on the floor at the time the motion to refer was made. The Feasibility Study Committee will report back to Annual Conference in 2007 and the Conference will then resume its discussion of adoption of the study committee’s original report at the point of the amendment.

Committee Expenses for Travel, Lodging, Meals, and Miscellaneous.

July, 2004 to July, 2005	\$2,533.00
July, 2005 to July, 2006	\$504.00
July, 2006 to July, 2007	\$47.00
Unfunded mandate	\$3,281.00
Total Committee Expenses	\$6,365.00

Action of the 2007 Annual Conference: Annual Conference passed the following response to the report of the Doing Church Business Study Committee: "That we receive the intent of the report as resource and study information in answer to the query, and that the recommendations be viewed as possible options for use in future Annual Conferences as future Annual Conference officers deem appropriate." In addition, one amendment to the report was passed and it has been incorporated in the text above. The report of the Feasibility Study is on file in the Annual Conference office. The amendment regarding deleting the section on the length of Conference, referred to in the action of 2006, was defeated.