

**Church of the Brethren**  
**2014 Ministerial Leadership Paper**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

***Why have we adopted new denominational polity for ministerial leadership?***

There are several reasons for this new ministerial leadership polity. It may be helpful to know that in the last hundred years or so, the Church of the Brethren has made significant changes in ordained ministerial leadership through either Annual Conference statements or new polity documents at a rate of once every decade. We find ourselves again in a time of great transition for the church in general, and for ministerial leaders in particular. As congregational life changes, so do the needs and expectations of our ministers. This polity is an attempt to ensure standard processes across the denomination, build in systems of accountability and support for ministers struggling with isolation and loneliness, and to combine the rich theological background of ministry in the Brethren tradition with the important logistical processes of calling, credentialing and sustaining ministers.

Additionally, the new polity is one way to increase the value and awareness of “call” in the life of the church, to increase support, networking and relationships among ministers from the very beginning of ministry and throughout the journey. This polity also offers additional models of ministry for all sizes of congregational life. Many of our district executives made it clear that one pressing need for the denomination is a process of credentialing designed especially for ministers who feel a call and have a heart for small membership congregations.

***How is this paper an improvement over the existing Ministerial Leadership Polity?***

Unlike the current polity, this paper incorporates Biblical and theological foundations for ministry centered on the priesthood of all believers. It also includes an understanding of spiritual and practical formation for ministry in addition to the formal training components. It strengthens and enhances the focus on discernment of call and offers the discerning individual a small group with whom to walk through the exploration. It incorporates the importance of mentoring and coaching one another, and assists in visualizing leadership in terms of Circles of Ministry rather than a linear or hierarchical model.

***In what ways will this revision address these improvements?***

This paper introduces calling cohorts into our polity to serve as spiritual companions to the discerner throughout the process of call. It includes biblical models for discernment of call and encourages connection with peers in ministry through mentoring, life-long learning and being together on the journey of ministerial leadership. It offers tools for ministry commissions to provide more effective oversight and accountability for ministerial leadership on behalf of the district and the denomination. The commissioned ministry circle increases opportunity for both individuals and congregations to explore ministry and models of ministry for a variety of contexts and settings.

***What strengths of the existing polity are kept in this revision?***

Many items remain the same, including:

- the role of both the congregation and the district in calling and credentialing ministers
- interviews with the district ministry commission
- the term of a Licensed Minister remains renewable up to 10 years
- the 9 categories of ordination remain the same
- the process for ordination remains the same
- receiving ordained ministers from other traditions continues with a bit more accountability.

***What is a “calling cohort”?***

A calling cohort is a small group of brothers and sisters who commit to walking alongside an individual exploring a call to ministry. “It is a group of individuals who support and adhere to one another.” (*Roget's II: The New Thesaurus, Expanded Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 198*) This not only implies support but also a common bond, a closeness that extends beyond companionship. The calling cohort meets regularly during the time of calling, training, and discernment, and includes an ordained mentor appointed by the district ministry commission as well as companions from an individual's congregation and district. It may also include spiritual friends, trusted peers, and teachers/professors. The calling cohort spends time together in prayer, Bible study and gifts discernment.

### ***Who is responsible for gathering the “calling cohort”?***

The individual discerner works in consultation with the district ministry commission to create the calling cohort, and the discerner is responsible for convening the calling cohort. It may be that a cohort consists of members who are geographically distant from one another. While in person meetings are preferred, the calling cohort need not necessarily meet together in person: videoconferencing, conference calls, Skype meetings, etc. offer opportunities for gathering geographically diverse groups for deep and constructive conversation.

### ***Why is the calling process so deliberate?***

One of the hopes for this new ministerial polity is that we might learn together new ways of being intentional about calling and forming leaders for our life together as the Church. The spiritual practice of discernment takes time, and the Brethren tradition of calling forth leaders already present in our midst relies on the community to be a part of that discernment. In order to situate the process of calling within the congregational and district communities, this polity requires an individual feeling a call toward ministry to be in conversation and discernment with representatives of both bodies, as well as a small calling cohort group. Engaging together in practices of conversation, bible study, prayer and discernment are ways for us to listen and hear God’s call in our lives.

### ***How does plural non-salaried ministry fit into the new polity?***

All former polity regarding plural non-salaried ministry is now incorporated into this paper.

### ***I have a Master of Theology, not a Master of Divinity. Is that sufficient education for ordination?***

The educational requirement for ordination is a Master of Divinity degree from Bethany Theological Seminary or another institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools; completion of the Training in Ministry program through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, which provides an alternative for those who find it impossible or impractical to complete a Master of Divinity degree; or completion of one of the Academy Certified Training Systems programs certified by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. In addition to the district ACTS programs, the SeBAH-CoB, or Seminario Biblico Anabautista Hispano de la Iglesia de Los Hermanos (Hispanic Anabaptist Biblical Seminary – Church of the Brethren) is an ACTS level, denomination-wide program designed specifically for those ministerial candidates who are non-English speaking.

Each of these educational programs offers intentional instruction in ministerial leadership and formation. They require completion of courses in ministry practice, as well as experiences in supervised field placements. That focus on the skills and practices of ministry is essential in formation of ministers, and other degree curricula lack these requirements.

Bethany Seminary offers graduate level ministry training through the MDiv curriculum. The Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership (a ministry training partnership of the Church of the Brethren and Bethany Seminary) offers certificate level ministry training programs through the TRiM program and certifies the ACTS programs of the districts to supplement the education of those who may hold degrees in higher education other than those named here, such as a B.A. in Ministry, an MA in Theology, a PhD in Education.