



Wrap Up



Delegates sit at round tables during the business sessions. The table seating provided opportunities to engage in prayer together as well as face-to-face discussion and sharing, and received affirmation at the microphones. Photo: Glenn Riegel

Table seating facilitates conversation, opportunities for prayer and sharing

“Watching you all hold hands around the tables and pray is one of the most beautiful things I have seen in my life,” said Annual Conference moderator Tim Harvey. He was speaking to the delegate body after morning devotions during the 2012 Conference, held July 7-11 in St. Louis, Mo.

This is the first time in recent memory that the Conference has used table groups for face-to-face discussion of business items, sharing feedback about the business, and prayer in small groups.

The decision to meet around tables received expressions of appreciation. “This year I really felt I was a part of everything. I love the round tables. It was the best idea,” said one delegate, speaking at the microphone during time for conversation with the moderator. Meeting at round tables “is absolutely fantastic,” said another, recommending that it be considered for future years.

Each table seated eight or more delegates, with one identified in advance as table facilitator. For at least the first day of business, delegates were seated at tables where they would meet people from outside their own districts.

“Table talk” was used in particular following reports from the Conference-related agencies: Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Benefit Trust, Church of the Brethren Inc., and On Earth

Peace. After each report, tables had several minutes to discuss questions posed by the agency. Then, for several more minutes, table representatives came to the microphones to report out of their groups and ask further questions. During “table talk,” the delegates agreed to a rule limiting speeches to 45 seconds in an attempt to allow more people to speak.

Table talk also facilitated discussion of the statement issued by Standing Committee titled “A Way Forward,” intended to address the continuing controversy following last year’s Annual Conference decision to reaffirm the 1983 statement on sexuality and continue deeper conversation outside of the query process. (The full text of “A Way Forward” is available online at www.brethren.org/news/2012/ac2012-onsite-news/a-way-forward.html.) Probing questions from across the theological spectrum were posed to groups that have made decisions some consider controversial—the Mission and Ministry Board, Program and Arrangements Committee, and On Earth Peace.

Despite a sense of underlying controversy at times, camaraderie quickly developed among table groups. Some tables acquired nicknames. Others became known for the snacks and goodies they shared. At one table, envious bystanders even spotted a cake.



Photo: Regina Holmes

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Site: America’s Center, St. Louis, Mo.

Leadership: Moderator Tim Harvey (shown above giving the Sunday message), moderator-elect Robert Krouse, secretary Fred Swartz

Attendance: 2,341 including 731 delegates

New churches and fellowships welcomed: Nuevo Amanecer, Bethlehem, Pa.; Renacer Iglesia Cristiana, Leola, Pa.; Rockford (Ill.) Community Church; Sanford (Maine) Fellowship; Sierra Bayamon Iglesia de los Hermanos, Puerto Rico

Blood Drive: 191 units

AACB Quilt Auction: \$6,000 raised for hunger relief

Service project: 417 backpacks of school supplies, plus 40 more boxes of supplies, plus \$543 in donations to aid school children in St. Louis

BBT Fitness Challenge: First male and female runners: Nate Hosler, Chelsea Goss; first male and female walkers: Don Shankster, Susan Fox

Vision Statement is adopted, polity changes are made

The Conference adopted the following Vision Statement for denomination-wide use through the year 2020:

Through Scripture, Jesus calls us to live as courageous disciples by word and action:

To surrender ourselves to God,

To embrace one another,

To express God's love for all creation.

The vision statement is expected to focus the mission of the church and spur activity on the denominational level and in congregations and districts. Short and memorable, it contains depth and possibilities that congregations can work at in a variety of ways.

A Vision Interpretation and Implementation Committee has gathered related resources including a hymn by Roseanna Eller McFadden, a music video using Joseph Helfrich's "Jesus Calls," a skit featuring Peter and Paul, a study guide, starters for children's stories, sermon notes, video clips for use in worship, and instructions for making banners.

Revitalizing Annual Conference. If the Conference is to survive and thrive, planners will need to make some changes according to a Revitalization Task Force. Delegates approved four recommendations proposed by the Task Force. Two affirm the current length and timing of Annual Conference. The third releases planners

from polity requiring a strict geographical rotation, instead allowing locations that make the event less expensive, and charges Program and Arrangements Committee to offer travel scholarships for delegates from west of the Mississippi. Fourth, by 2015 leaders are to implement recommendations found in the 2007 "Doing Church Business" statement. These will help move "from issue-focused Conferences to relationship-centered Conferences," said the Task Force.

Call to Accountability is reaffirmed.

A query about elections was respectfully returned and delegates reaffirmed the 1979 statement, "Call to Accountability." The query asked about changes to further ensure representation of women, ethnic, and other minorities in leadership.

Better representation for districts. A query requesting more equitable representation for districts on the Mission and Ministry Board was adopted and referred to the denominational board. The board welcomed the query and will bring recommendations back to Annual Conference.

In other business the Conference:

- Gave a first reading to a revision of



Top: A view of the stage during business sessions, with the head table that seats the three Annual Conference officers and assistants. Above: Haitian Brethren leaders and mission staff were on stage during a time of prayer for Nigeria, which has been experiencing increased violence in recent weeks. Photos: Regina Holmes, Glenn Riegel

ministerial leadership polity.

- Discontinued the Committee on Interchurch Relations and approved appointing a committee to write a "Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st Century."
- Approved a number of revisions to polity on districts.
- Removed a requirement for the Church of the Brethren Treasurer to be on Program and Arrangements Committee.
- Approved a 1.7 percent cost of living increase to the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors for 2013.

Senior highs at a service project. Photo: Alysson Wittmeyer

ELECTIONS:

Moderator-elect: Nancy Sollenberger Heishman
Annual Conference Secretary: James Beckwith
Program and Arrangements Committee: Christy Waltersdorff
Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Bernie Fuska

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1: Rhonda Ritenour,
Area 2: J. Trent Smith

Bethany Seminary Trustee representing clergy: Paul Brubaker,
representing colleges: Celia Cook-Huffman

Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) Board: Eric Kabler
On Earth Peace Board: Cindy Weber-Han

APPOINTMENTS CONFIRMED:

Bethany Seminary Trustees: Christina Bucher, Martha Farahat

BBT Board: Ann Quay Davis, Thomas McCracken

On Earth Peace Board: Melisa Grandison, Don Mitchell



Junior highs visit the Arch. Photos: Debbie Surin

