



July 2-6, 2011 — Grand Rapids, Michigan Church of the Brethren Annual Conference *Wrap Up*

Special Response items are returned, '83 paper reaffirmed

The 2011 Annual Conference acted on two business items related to sexuality—"A Statement of Confession and Commitment" and "Query: Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships"—which have been the subject of a two-year Special Response Process across the Church of the Brethren.

The Conference approved the following recommendation from the Standing Committee of district delegates, along with an amendment that added a sentence to that recommendation:

"In light of the Special Response process, as outlined by the 2009 paper 'A Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues,' the Standing Committee recommends to the 2011 Annual Conference that 'A Statement of Confession and Commitment' and 'Query: Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships' be returned. It is further recommended that the 2011 Annual Conference reaffirm the entire 1983 'Statement on Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective' and that we continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process."

The recommendation to return both items was put on the floor the morning of July 5, in Step 4 of the five Special Response steps with which the business was processed.

More amendments were attempted as the Special Response business extended into the afternoon, but all were rejected in a process that suspended Robert's Rules of Order. The delegates voted whether or not to process each motion before discussion was allowed. Numerous points of order were called from the floor, as well as questions of clarification and about how the business was conducted.

Decision to return
Conference secretary Fred Swartz explained what it means to "return" business. It is one of seven possible responses to new business. To return an item may indicate several things, he said, among them that the concern already has been answered, that the concern may not be appropriate, or



Photo by Regina Holmes
Moderator Robert E. Alley (left) presided over the 2011 Conference, assisted by moderator-elect Tim Harvey (at right) and Conference secretary Fred Swartz.

that it has prompted another way of responding other than a simple yes or no. In this case, he said, Standing Committee felt the concern was answered in another way.

To return an item of business is not synonymous with rejection, he added, saying the Forms Reception Committee report indicated both query and statement served valuable functions.

Five-step decision process

The five-step decision process is part of the "Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues." This is the first time the process has been used.

Steps 1 and 2 on July 3 included an introduction by Annual Conference moderator Robert E. Alley, the Forms Reception Committee report summarizing findings from hearings held across the 23 church districts, and the Standing Committee report and recommendation, followed by time for questions of clarification. (Find reports at www.brethren.org/news/2011/newsline-special-standing-committee-report-recommendations-special-response.html.)

Step 3 was held the next day in a "sandwich approach" that began with statements of affirmation, then concerns or changes needed, then more affirmation.

In Step 5, after the vote, the moderator gave a statement of closure, expressed appreciation to those who contributed to the process, and led in prayer.

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Location: DeVos Convention Center in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Leadership: Moderator Robert E. Alley, moderator-elect Tim Harvey, Conference secretary Fred Swartz.

Attendance: 3,200, including 861 delegates, plus 388 online viewers during the peak number for Annual Conference webcasts.

Four new churches and fellowships: Renacer Roanoke, Va.; Peace Covenant Church, in the "triangle" area of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, N.C.; Light of the Gospel Fellowship, Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Mountain Dale Church in West Marva District.

AACB Quilt Auction: \$5,085 raised for hunger relief.

BBT 5K Fitness Challenge: about 150 walkers and runners participated. First male and female runners: Nathan Hosler (17:24), Chelsea Goss (21:43). First male and female walkers: Don Shankster (33:08), Paula Mendenhall (36:30).

Food collection: 314 pounds of food representing 241 1/2 meals given to West Michigan Food Bank.

Conference acts on congregational ethics, Afghan war, climate change



Photo by Glenn Riegel

An offering of district comforters for disaster relief is spread out below the head table.

ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS

Moderator-elect: Bob Krouse of Fredericksburg, Pa.

Program and Arrangements Committee: Thomas Dowdy, Long Beach, Calif.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Herb High, Lancaster, Pa.

Committee on Interchurch Relations: Torin Eikler, Morgantown, W.Va.

Mission and Ministry Board: Area 3 Becky Rhodes, Roanoke, Va.; **Area 4** Jerry Crouse, Warrensburg, Mo.; **Area 5** W. Keith Goering, Wilson, Idaho. **Appointments confirmed:** Janet Wayland Elsea, Port Republic, Va.; Don Fitzkee, Manheim, Pa.; Patrick C. Starkey, Roanoke, Va.

Bethany Theological Seminary Trustees: representing colleges Jonathan Frye, McPherson, Kan.; **representing laity** D. Miller Davis, Westminster, Md. **Appointments confirmed:** Gregory W. Geisert, Harrisonburg, Va.; David W. McFadden, N. Manchester, Ind.

Brethren Benefit Trust (BBT) Board: John Waggoner, Herndon, Va. **Appointment confirmed:** Craig H. Smith, Elizabethtown, Pa.

On Earth Peace Board: Patricia Ann Ronk, Roanoke, Va. **Appointments confirmed:** Madalyn Metzger, Bristol, Ind.; Louise Knight, Harrisburg, Pa.

National Council of Churches representatives: Ron Beachley, Audrey deCoursey, Phil Jones



Photo by Glenn Riegel

The 2011 Conference asked for a revision of the 1993 “Ethics in Congregations” paper, adopted a resolution against the war in Afghanistan and a query on climate change, and returned a query on “proper decorum.”

In other business, the Standing Committee of district delegates accepted a new vision statement for the Church of the Brethren.

Resolution on war in Afghanistan

The resolution was received from the Mission and Ministry Board. The last time the Church of the Brethren spoke on Afghanistan was when the former General Board issued a resolution after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The current resolution in part responds to encouragement from the National Council of Churches and ecumenical colleagues to provide a peace church response to the war.

It calls on the US President and Congress to begin immediate withdrawal of combat troops, and to instead invest resources into the development of the Afghan people and infrastructure. A list of other recommendations urge the church to become more engaged in areas such as humanitarian aid, alternatives to violence, ministry to those affected by the war, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and study, prayer, and action related to just peacemaking.

Congregational ethics

In response to the “Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper” query adopted in 2010, the Conference approved a study committee recommendation that the 1993 “Ethics in Congregations” paper be reviewed, revised, and updated. Revisions will be facilitated by Congregational Life Ministries staff in collaboration with the Council of District Executives and the Office of Ministry, and will come to a future Annual Conference for approval.

Climate change

Delegates adopted “Query: Guidance for Responding to the Changing of Earth’s Climate” from Circle of Peace Church of the

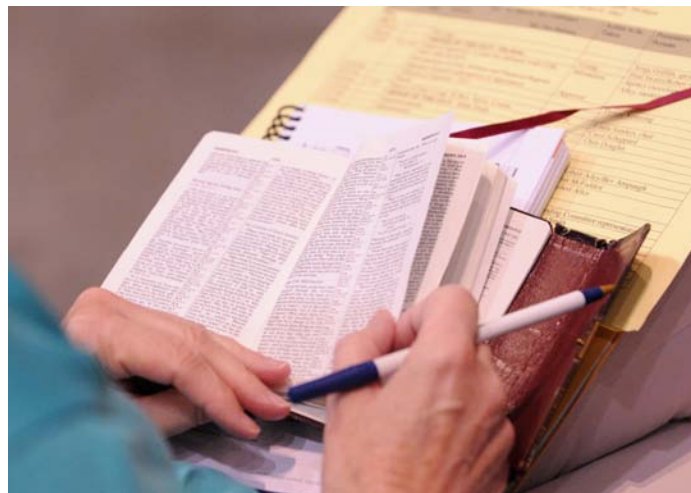


Photo by Glenn Riegel

One of the delegates consults scripture during discussion of Annual Conference business. Each of the main business items received lively discussion from the delegate body.

Brethren and Pacific Southwest District. The query asked for a position on climate change and guidance about how individuals, congregations, and the denomination can take action and offer leadership on the issue. Standing Committee’s recommendation was adopted, that the query should be referred to the Washington Advocacy Office of the Global Mission Partnerships.

Proper decorum

The Conference returned “Query: Proper Decorum” to Mountain Grove Church of the Brethren and Shenandoah District. It petitioned for rules of proper decorum relating to persons’ positions on issues before Annual Conference. The recommendation from Standing Committee was adopted, that the query “be returned with appreciation and that the district be referred to the section in the Annual Conference booklet entitled ‘Accountability to One Another.’ ”

New vision statement for the decade

The Standing Committee accepted a new vision statement for the Church of the Brethren for this decade. The committee has recommended the statement to the 2012 Annual Conference for adoption.

The statement reads: “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.”