

# Wrap Up

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference ■ Grand Rapids ■ June 28-July 2, 2017



Annual Conference moderator Carol A. Scheppard with moderator-elect Samuel Sarpiya (right) and secretary James Beckwith (left). Photo by Regina Holmes

## Elections and appointments

*Annual Conference moderator-elect:* Donita J. Keister of Mifflinburg, Pa.

*Annual Conference secretary:* James M. Beckwith, Lebanon, Pa.

*Program and Arrangements Committee:* Jan Glass King, Martinsburg, Pa.

*Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee:* Daniel L. Rudy, Roanoke, Va.

*Mission and Ministry Board, Area 1:* Colin W. Scott, Harrisburg, Pa.; *Area 2:* Christina Singh, Freeport, Ill.; *affirmed:* Lois Grove, Council Bluffs, Iowa; Dava C. Hensley, Roanoke, Va.

*Bethany Seminary Trustee, colleges:* Celia Cook-Huffman, Huntingdon, Pa.; *clergy:* Paul Brubaker, Ephrata, Pa.; *affirmed:* Christina Bucher, Elizabethtown, Pa.; Michele Firebaugh, Winnebago, Ill.

*Brethren Benefit Trust Board:* Sara Huston Brenneman, Hershey, Pa.; *reported:* Ron Gebhardtshauer, State College, Pa.; Kevin Kessler, Canton, Ill.

*On Earth Peace Board:* Cheryl Thomas, Angola, Ind.; *affirmed:* Melisa Grandison, Northampton, Mass.; Erin Gratz, Pomona, Calif.; Cynthia L. Weber-Han, Chicago, Ill.

## On Earth Peace retains agency status, in voting on Review and Evaluation recommendations

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference did not adopt Recommendation #6 from the Review and Evaluation Committee “that On Earth Peace no longer remain an agency of the Church of the Brethren.” Recommendation #6 did not attain the two-thirds majority vote required.

“The vote means that On Earth Peace remains an agency of the Church of the Brethren,” announced Annual Conference moderator Carol A. Scheppard.

### Report included 10 recommendations:

The delegate body addressed a total of 10 recommendations in the Review and Evaluation Committee report. As has happened every 10 years in recent decades, in 2015 a committee was formed to review and evaluate the organization and structure of the Church of the Brethren.

In 2016, Annual Conference also referred two queries about On Earth Peace to the committee. The queries from West Marva and Southeastern Districts had to do with whether On Earth Peace should remain an Annual Conference agency.

**Recommendation #1**, to add to the duties of the denomination’s Leadership Team the coordinating of a gathering of denominational leaders every three-to-five years, was referred to the Program Feasibility Study Committee to bring a report on costs.

**Recommendations #2 through #5** were directed to the Mission and Ministry Board, which will consider the changes and report back to Annual Conference. Recommendation #2 would give the Leadership Team further responsibility for implementation of denominational vision, emphasizing a unified vision among denomination, districts, and congregations. Recommendation #3 would amend bylaws to give the Leadership Team general oversight of the Conference budget and supervision of the Conference director. Recommendation #4 would amend bylaws to add a district executive as a full, voting member on the Leadership Team. Recommendation #5 directs the Mission and Ministry Board to appoint a study committee on stewardship of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill.

**Recommendation #7** failed, by a simple majority vote. It would have recommended “that all congregations, districts, denominational, and agency staff find ways to involve the work of On Earth Peace in the ongoing mission and ministry of the Church of the Brethren.”

**Recommendation #8**, to return the query to Southeastern District, was answered when Recommendation #6 failed.

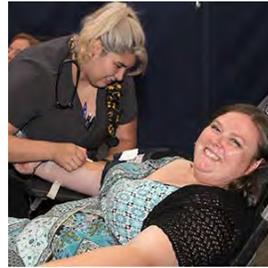
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The delegate body engages in “table talk” in small groups. As at other recent Annual Conferences, delegates were seated at round tables to facilitate discussion of the Conference business. Photo by Glenn Riegel

More information is at [www.brethren.org/ac2017](http://www.brethren.org/ac2017). Order the Annual Conference Wrap-Up DVD for \$29.95 and the Sermons DVD for \$24.95 from Brethren Press, call 800-441-3712. This Wrap Up was produced by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, director of News Services, with the Annual Conference News Team: Jan Fischer Bachman, Laura Brown, Allie Dulabaum, Karen Garrett, Keith Hollenberg, Regina Holmes, Russ Otto, Donna Parcell, Frank Ramirez, Glenn Riegel, Frances Townsend.

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Photos by (from left) Laura Brown, Regina Holmes, Keith Hollenberg, Allie Dulabaum, Donna Parcell

## By the numbers

2,329 registered, including 672 delegates.

**\$55,280-plus** received in offerings:

\$7,277 to provide *Shine On Story Bible* to congregations that do not use the Shine curriculum; \$13,377 for the Nigeria Crisis Response; \$11,654 for Church of the Brethren ministries in Haiti; \$15,535 for the Core Ministries of the denomination; \$7,442 to go into the Core Ministries Fund for Renaissance 2017-2020, a new initiative of Congregational Life Ministries.

**1 percent increase** approved for the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors.

**190 pints** of blood collected.

**\$11,250 in proceeds** from the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren Quilt Auction.

**4 ministries** received support from the Witness to the Host City: Refugee Education Center, Bethany Christian Services, Well House, and Mel Trotter Ministries. Two received donated items as well as cash donations. Refugee Education Center totaled \$1,140 in cash donations; \$1,280 was received for Bethany Christian Services.

**3 congregations welcomed:** Common Spirit Church of the Brethren (Michigan District), Iglesia de Cristo Sion (Pacific Southwest District), Church in Drive (Michigan District).

**2 fellowships welcomed:** Lost and Found Church (Michigan District) and Wildwood Gathering (Pacific Northwest District).

**17:10.4** was the time of Galen Fitzkee, first male runner in a photo finish in the BBT Fitness Challenge. Other first finishers: runner Rieth Ritchey Moore and walkers Bev Anspaugh and Stafford Frederick.

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**Recommendation #9** was adopted. It recommends that all congregations “examine their financial contributions to both district and denominational ministries, and bring their giving into compliance with the Congregational Ethics Polity.”

**Recommendation #10** that Standing Committee rescind a 2014 statement rejecting On Earth Peace’s Statement of Inclusion, failed by a slim margin in a simple majority vote. A response by the 2017 Standing Committee was presented to the delegates before the vote: “Standing Committee humbly receives the chastisement of the Review and Evaluation Committee in Recommendation #10 of their report. We apologize for the misunderstanding and hurt caused by our 2014 response to On Earth Peace’s ‘Statement of Inclusion.’ The church welcomes all persons to participate in its life. Standing Committee’s comments were meant to be more narrowly focused on the implications of the On Earth Peace statement that were inconsistent with Annual Conference decisions.”

**Delegates process two recommendations from On Earth Peace:** Delegates returned, with appreciation and respect, a recommendation from On Earth Peace titled “Polity for Agencies.” However, they accepted the concern of the recommendation regarding lack of polity for agencies of the Conference. The Leadership Team was tasked with updating polity including the definition of an Annual Conference agency, the process to become a Conference agency, the process for dealing with conflicts with agencies, and the process for reviewing agency status if conflicts cannot be resolved.

Delegates voted not to delay other business, as called for in the On Earth Peace recommendation “Patient Hope in Matters of Conscience,” but did vote to receive the insights of the recommendation: “As a continuation of the work already done on the ‘Living Together as Christ Calls’ query, we further ask the Mission and Ministry Board, in consultation with On Earth Peace and others with expertise in this area, to provide resources and insight as to how to implement more consistently and fully the 2008 Annual Conference resolution ‘Urging Forbearance’ into the life of the church.”

**Conference adopts ‘Authority’ report, approves new vision effort:** The Conference adopted a recommendation from the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives during consideration of “The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts.” The report was received as a response to the concerns of “Query: Same Sex Weddings.”

The recommendation, which was not included in the report, read: “That this statement of clarification about our current polity and standard practice be received as the answer to our assignment and that the church turn its attention to the framing of a compelling vision for how we will continue the work of Jesus together.”

Several changes made in the report also were announced (find details in the Annual Conference coverage at [www.brethren.org/ac/2017/coverage](http://www.brethren.org/ac/2017/coverage)).

Presenting the report and recommendation were general secretary David Steele and CODE chair Colleen Michael, with several other district executives. They expressed hope that with guidance from the Leadership Team and CODE, and through focused work, the denomination may formulate a “compelling vision” for how to move beyond its disagreements. As a vision is formulated, the Leadership Team will work to develop a process for departure for congregations that cannot accept the vision.

**Three business items are postponed to 2018:** “Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st Century,” “Brethren Values Investing,” and “Polity for Electing Brethren Benefit Trust Board Directors.” The Creation Care Study Committee and the Vitality and Viability Study Committee requested another year to complete their work.

Jonathan Emmons giving a recital during Friday’s Jubilee Afternoon. He was organist for the 2017 Conference.  
Photo by Glenn Riegel

