

Wrap Up



Church of the Brethren Annual Conference ■ Cincinnati ■ July 4-8, 2018



The officers for 2018, from left: moderator-elect Donita Keister, moderator Samuel Sarpiya, secretary James Beckwith.

Photo by Regina Holmes

Elections and appointments

Annual Conference moderator-elect: **Paul Munday** of Frederick, Md.

Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee: **Emily Shonk Edwards**, Nellysford, Va.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: **Deb Oskin**, Columbus, Ohio

Mission and Ministry Board Area 2: **LaDonna Sanders Nkosi**, Chicago, Ill.; Area 3: **Carol Yeazell**, Asheville, N.C.; affirmed: **Joel Peña**, Lancaster, Pa.

Bethany Seminary Trustee, representing laity: **Louis Harrell**, Manassas, Va.; clergy: **Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey**, Hagerstown, Md.; affirmed: **Cathy Simmons Huffman**, Rocky Mount, Va., **Katherine Melhorn**, Wichita, Kan.

Brethren Benefit Trust Board: **Shelley Kontra**, Lancaster, Pa.; reported: **Eunice Erb Culp**, Goshen, Ind., **Dennis W. Kingery**, San Diego, Calif.

On Earth Peace Board: **Jennifer Keeney Scarr**, Trotwood, Ohio

Leadership Team, district executive: **Cindy Sanders**, Missouri/Arkansas District



Task of seeking a 'compelling vision' is begun with conversation among Conference-goers

The Compelling Vision Process was begun at the 2018 Annual Conference, involving delegates and non-delegates during two sections of the business sessions.

The process, as outlined in the Compelling Vision report, "is intended to move us beyond our conversations, debates, and official statements into the experience of vision and purpose as we proclaim and serve Christ together. . . . While we cannot anticipate how God will work through a body of believers seeking God's vision, we can answer that such a vision can only be anchored in Jesus Christ."

Last year's Conference set the church to this task when it adopted a recommendation from the Leadership Team and Council of District Executives. Since then, a Compelling Vision Working Group and a Compelling Vision Process Team have been named. The latter led the discussions at this Annual Conference.

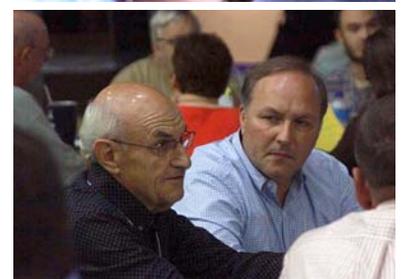
The process will continue denomination-wide through the 2019 Conference, with events in districts, input from boards and staff of agencies, conversations at National Youth Conference, and significant time at the next Annual Conference. Delegates approved a recommendation to set aside new business items in 2019 to give most of the time to the Compelling Vision Process.

As experienced at this Annual Conference, the process involves small groups in deep conversation and sharing. Ground rules for discussion, called "Guidelines for Sacred Sharing," encourage transparency, not naming names, not attempting to convince others, listening and pausing during conversation, not attempting to "fix" or "rescue" others, using "I" statements, and more.

Table talk questions focused on values, vision, and hope, designed to help people bring to mind how their faith has shaped their lives and may shape their future choices. In addition, each person received papers to write down their own responses to the questions, and those were collected by the process team for compilation and analysis. Other information sought on paper was demographic including gender, ethnicity, age, and district membership.

More about the Compelling Vision Process, a FAQ sheet, and contact information for the process team are at www.brethren.org/ac/compelling-vision.html.

Intercultural Ministries director *Gimbiya Kettering* and daughter at a Families Belong Together candlelight vigil. Sponsored by the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, the vigil prayed for families separated at the border and other immigration concerns. Photo by Glenn Riegel



Delegates engage in conversation and prayer during the Compelling Vision Process sessions. Photos by (from top) Glenn Riegel, Glenn Riegel, Regina Holmes

Delegates adopt vision for global church, papers on ecumenism, creation care

Vision for a Global Church of the

Brethren: Brought by the Mission and Ministry Board at the initiative of Global Mission and Service, this paper involved the Mission Advisory Committee and was reviewed by church leaders from several countries. Impetus came from a disconnect between polity and practice. A mandate for a global church is present in previous statements, but they call for international districts rather than the independent Church of the Brethren denominations that have developed. The vision is for a global Church of the Brethren “union of autonomous bodies, a spiritual community bound together by a common passion to be followers of Christ, a common New Testament theology of peace and service, and a common commitment to be in relationship with one another.” The paper opens consideration for such an entity

Vision of Ecumenism for the 21st

Century: By adopting this paper, delegates reaffirmed the historical identity of the Church of the Brethren as active in ecumenical work and in relationship with other Christian bodies. The paper also calls the church at all levels to nurture positive interfaith relationships. “In doing so, we strengthen a history of service and missions, disaster response and relief ministries, and peace witness,” the statement said. “These relationships further our understanding of opportunities for mission and ministry, and they instill a cooperative readiness to act upon needs and areas of common concern when they arise.”

Creation Care: Faith into Action:

Recommendations from this report were adopted, including some amendments that strengthen them. They move the church from fossil fuel use to renewable energy at all levels including denomination, district, congregation, and individual. The

committee shared rationale, that care for humanity is part of the church’s calling in Christ, that climate change has potential to cause great harm to people around the world, and reducing fossil fuel use may help avoid that harm. Pollution is a more immediate harm that can be reduced. The committee developed a Brethren Creation Care Network of volunteers with expertise, coordinated by the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, and collected resources at www.brethren.org/creationcare.

In other business:

The Vitality and Viability report was adopted. This committee was formed to address concerns raised in 2015 by a query about district structure, but were assigned the broader topic of vitality. The report offers resources and stories.

Changes to Brethren Benefit Trust Articles of Organization were approved, to use the term “Brethren Values Investing” in place of “Socially Responsible Investing,” and require no more than two nominees for election of a director.

Amendments to the denomination’s bylaws were approved, recommended by the Mission and Ministry Board in response to the 2017 Review and Evaluation report. They add additional responsibility to the Leadership Team for implementing denominational vision; clarify the team’s oversight of the Annual Conference Office and director; add a district executive to the Leadership Team, appointed by the Council of District Executives and approved by the Conference; and change some terminology including updating the name “Southern Ohio-Kentucky District.”

Changes to align polity with practice were approved for the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee.

Delegates did not approve a Review and Evaluation recommendation for a gathering of denominational leadership.



*The Conference quilting bee.
Photo by Keith Hollenberg*

By the numbers

2,233 registered including 673 delegates and 1,560 nondelegates

\$60,223.80 received in offerings:

\$14,774 for Nigeria Crisis Response, \$14,773 for disaster relief in Puerto Rico, \$13,157.03 for Core Ministries of the denomination, \$8,764.25 for Spanish translation for Annual Conference, \$8,755.52 for ministry among Batwa (Pygmy) communities in the Great Lakes region of Africa

2 percent increase approved for the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors

\$2,102 raised for the Ministry Assistance Fund by the Minister’s Association

159 pints collected by the blood drive

\$8,100 raised for world hunger by the quilt auction of the Association for the Arts in the Church of the Brethren

\$9,492.75 received in cash, checks, and gift cards for First Step Home, recipient of the Witness to the Host City donations. Also received were donations of goods such as diapers for use by this organization that serves women and children in Cincinnati.

2 congregations welcomed: GraceWay Church of the Brethren (Mid-Atlantic District), Iglesia Cristiana Renacer Church of the Brethren (Virlina)

2 fellowships welcomed: Iglesia del Buen Pastor (Virlina), Joyful Church Fellowship (Western Pennsylvania)

6 projects welcomed: Centro Agape en Acción and Iglesia Cristiana Elohim (Pacific Southwest); Church of the Table, Parables Community, and The Gathering Chicago (Illinois and Wisconsin); Nuevo Comienzo (Atlantic Southeast)

4 top finishers in the Brethren Benefit Trust Fitness Challenge were walkers Don Shankster (35:56) and Susan Fox (40:42), runners Matthew Muthler (18:48) and Karen Stutzman (25:03)



Children at a picnic (left). A Conference-goer gets free ice cream for completing a Passport to the exhibit hall (center). Nigerian Brethren at an insight session. Photos by (from left) Laura Brown, Donna Parcell, Donna Parcell

