

2. Query: Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper

Whereas: a code of *Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren* was adopted by Annual Conference in 1996;

Whereas: the *Ethics for Congregations* paper originated from a recommendation in the *Ethics in Ministry* paper, originally adopted by Annual Conference in 1992 and renamed and revised by Annual Conference action 1996 and 2008, currently titled *Ethics in Ministry Relations*;

Whereas: the *Ethics in Ministry Relations 2008* paper includes a “Process for Dealing with Complaints of Ministerial Misconduct” which gives clear and specific guidelines to be followed if a violation of trust occurs related to ministerial behavior;

Whereas: the *Ethics for Congregations* paper only suggests, the district “should be prepared to respond at any time it receives an allegation that a congregation has engaged in questionable ethical activity;” (Page 2, Last sentence of first paragraph).

Whereas: the suggestion that each district “be prepared to respond” allows for a wide diversity of actions being taken across the denomination;

Therefore: we the members of the Western PA District Leadership Team, meeting on August 7, 2009, ask Annual Conference through the Western PA District Conference the following question: “Would it not be helpful and contribute toward the unity of the Body if Annual Conference developed a uniform denominational process by which districts might deal with a congregation that engages in questionable ethical activity?”

The Western PA District Leadership Team, meeting in regular session on Friday, August 7, 2009, received the query, and voted to pass the query on to District Conference, which will meet October 24, 2009, in the Fred M. Rogers Center, St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA.

Royden E. Airesman, Leadership Team Chair
Ronald D. Beachley, Recording Secretary

The Western Pennsylvania District Conference, meeting in regular session at the Fred M. Rogers Center, St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA, on October 24, 2009, received the Western PA District Leadership Team query, and voted to pass the query on to Annual Conference.

William A. Waugh, Western PA District Moderator
Cynthia M. Mason, Western PA District, Clerk

Action of the 2010 Annual Conference: The 2010 Annual Conference approved the recommendation of Standing Committee that the query be adopted and that it be referred to a committee consisting of the appropriate Congregational Life staff and three persons appointed by the Annual Conference officers and confirmed by Standing Committee. The Standing Committee appointees are: Joan Daggett, Clyde Fry, and Lisa Hazen.

2011 Report of the Congregational Ethics Study Committee

The Congregational Ethics Study Committee, appointed at the 2010 Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, Pa., met at the General Offices in October to discuss and formulate a response to the query “Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper.” Other meetings were held by phone, e-mail, and Skype. Our first task was to answer the question of whether “it would be helpful and contribute toward the unity of the Body if Annual Conference developed a uniform denominational process by which districts might deal with a congregation that engages in questionable ethical activity.”

After much discussion of the 1996 paper and the current context, the committee recognized several items that affect our response to the query:

- In 2004, Annual Conference approved a paper on *Congregational Disagreements with Annual Conference*.
- In 2006, revisions were made to the *Ethics in Ministerial Relationships* paper.
- The denomination’s Office of Ministry, in collaboration with other groups, is in the process of recommending revisions to the *Ministerial Leadership* paper.
- There is now Church of the Brethren staff charged with oversight and articulation of the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* paper.

What is more, changes in the surrounding culture raise new questions for the life of the church. These include:

- Increased emphasis on risk management, especially the need to implement child protection policies and practices that limit the liability of a congregation.
- Increased impact of internet communications and social media such as Facebook and blogs, which seem to blur the boundaries between public and private information.

In light of these items, our committee recommends that the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* paper be reviewed, revised, and updated. We recommend that these revisions be facilitated by Congregational Life Ministries staff in collaboration with the Council of District Executives and the Office of Ministry. As a result of this review, the revised document should include guidelines and suggestions for a denominational process of accountability.

We further suggest that Congregational Life Ministries give consideration to updating and revising the 1966 *Theological Basis of Personal Ethics* paper and that these revised documents, along with the *Ethics in Ministerial Relationships* paper, be compiled into a booklet with a companion study guide for use by individuals and congregations. By placing these three documents together we can set the value of ethics within the wider context of discipleship, as well as the personal and corporate quest for virtue.

Given our work and reflection, we offer these suggested guidelines as a possible framework for preventing and assessing misconduct, both in the revision and in the interim. These guidelines revolve around three categories: First, a congregation must cultivate an *awareness* of its own expectations and those of its wider community, both denominationally and contextually. Second, congregational and district leaders must identify the *legal and fiduciary responsibilities* that are

explicit in the life and organization of a congregation. Finally, congregations and districts ought to attend to relationships and practices of *accountability*.

Awareness

The practice of awareness is key for any code of ethics or excellence. In other words, there can be no accountability when the members of the community do not know the expectations placed upon them. In order to facilitate increased awareness among the congregations of the Church of the Brethren, the committee offers these guidelines:

- Congregations should engage in a process of self-assessment at least every five years.
- Congregations and districts need to evaluate the impact of social media in order to create policies for staff and articulate best practices for their members.
- Ethics in all forms should be described within the context of the life of faith. Each disciple and congregation must be committed to a life-long journey of transformation.

Accountability

As a faith community, the congregation and its individual members enter into relationships of accountability. And since we are accountable to fellow congregations, districts, and the denomination, we are drawn into common standards of behavior. Though we as the Church of the Brethren have often championed the importance of conscience, this covenantal understanding emphasizes that the Church of the Brethren has never described discipleship as a journey lived in isolation. To support efforts of accountability, the committee offers these guidelines:

- Scripture provides us with a model of accountability in Matthew 18. These guidelines should define every effort to address concerns of misconduct wherever people gather in the name of Christ and the Church of the Brethren.
- Love feast teaches us through shared practice that, when confronted, both congregations and individuals must journey through a process of self-examination, confession, assurance of pardon, giving and receiving of humble service, recommitment to the community, and thanksgiving.
- Together, Matthew 18 and love feast remind us that accountability is not punitive but a process of restoration.

Fiduciary responsibility

As a public entity the church, and its members, engages in ministry and mission dependent on the confidence of fellow believers and neighbors. In many cases it is not just the integrity of the congregation that is put at risk by its actions, but its legal standing as well. This is especially true in financial matters. This reality requires increased attention at all levels of the denomination. To support efforts to maintain fiduciary responsibilities, the committee offers these guidelines:

- Congregations and districts should be aware of local, state, and federal laws that apply to nonprofit and church organizations. This includes the sharing of information related to changes in legal statutes.
- Congregations should maintain high standards of fiscal accountability. This includes the maintenance of public records and measures of transparency for members responsible for congregational finances at all levels.
- Congregations and districts need to consider the ethics of their staff salaries, especially in relation to salary scales published by the denomination. In situations where resources are

limited, every effort should be made to match expectations of time with the offered salary or other compensation.

- Congregations are encouraged to establish comprehensive risk management policies that cover every aspect of its procedures, programs, and resources.
- In all business matters of the congregation, it is essential that conflicts of interest be limited by making decisions transparent and accessible. This is to limit the secrecy often perceived in matters of governance and to reveal relationships that allow for undue influence. This is especially difficult, yet still essential, in small membership congregations with a few core families from which to call willing workers.
- Congregations should also make every effort to ensure the safety of those who enter the building and grounds and participate in its programs and ministries. This includes attending to issues of child protection. Such measures decrease the liability of the congregation and also witness to the wider culture.

Suggested Resources

Ethics for Congregations, with Study Guide and Assessment Tool –

<http://www.brethren.org/congregationalethics>

Keeping Our Children Safe- Church of the Brethren Child Protection Resources –

<http://www.brethren.org/childprotection>

Church Law and Tax Report – <http://www.churchlawtoday.com/>

The Alban Institute – <http://www.alban.org>

Clyde Fry, Joan Daggett, Joshua Brockway, and Lisa Hazen

Action of the 2011 Annual Conference: Annual Conference approved the recommendation of the Congregational Ethics Study Committee that the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* paper be reviewed, revised and updated, and that these revisions be facilitated by Congregational Life Ministries staff in collaboration with the Council of District Executives and the Office of Ministry. As a result of this review, the revised document should include guidelines and suggestions for a denominational process of accountability.

Report to Annual Conference 2012 Congregational Ethics Revisions

Following the decision of the 2011 Annual Conference it became clear that revising the *Ethics for Congregations* document would take some time. This is not to say the document itself is outdated or incomplete, but rather that the persons and groups with a significant interest in the formation of a new document are numerous. In this light, we respectfully request further time to sufficiently and attentively complete the needed revisions and additions.

Given the scope of the process and that the revisions are a charge from Annual Conference it is important to share the significant dates in this request for more time:

2012

- Conduct an Annual Conference hearing to explore possible accountability processes;
- Complete revisions and additions of new content;

2013

- Explore, review and revise an accountability process outline with Council of District Executives;
- Complete first draft of revised document;
- Conduct Annual Conference hearings on full document;
- Revise based on feedback and discussion at Annual Conference;

2014

- Present to Annual Conference for final approval by the delegates.

Throughout these two years Congregational Life Ministries will be working closely with the Office of Ministry, the Council of District Executives, and the Mission and Ministry Board. These elements of our denominational life provide invaluable experiences and wisdom to any revisions of polity. In addition, the Leadership Team will provide essential input and accountability for the time frame outlined above, including any needed conversations with Standing Committee. In the course of these next two years, we invite your own insights, observations and concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
 Joshua Brockway
 Director, Spiritual Life and Discipleship, Congregational Life Ministries

Action of the 2012 Annual Conference: Annual Conference received the updated report of the Congregational Life Ministries and granted its request for two additional years of study to sufficiently and attentively complete the needed revisions and additions to answer the query as well as revise and update the Congregational Ethics paper. The final draft will be presented to the 2014 Annual Conference for approval.

Report to Annual Conference 2013 Congregational Ethics Revisions

A first hearing of the Congregational Ethics Revisions was presented to the 2013 Annual Conference by Joshua Brockway, Director, Spiritual Life and Discipleship, Congregational Life Ministries [see 2013 Annual Conference Minutes].

Action of the 2013 Annual Conference: Annual Conference received a first hearing of the proposed Congregational Ethics Revisions from the Congregational Life Ministries. The final draft will be presented to the 2014 Annual Conference for approval.

Report to Annual Conference 2014 Congregational Ethics Revisions

After the first hearing of the proposed Congregational Ethics Revisions at the 2013 Annual Conference, a few changes were made in response to feedback received, including references to additional scriptures, to simple living, and to the importance of sharing in decision-making as a congregation rather than campaigning for a particular position. Current polity statements regarding congregations holding property and finances in trust for the denomination were also added to the content of the paper and to the Code of Ethics. In addition, a number of minor copy

editing changes have been made. In general, however, the Congregational Ethics paper is very much the same as the draft presented last year [see 2013 Annual Conference Minutes].

This proposed revision of congregational ethics polity retains the basic structure and content of the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* paper, although

- the section on the ethics of congregation-staff relationships is significantly updated
- the previous section on accountability is completely replaced by the new “Practices of Awareness, Assessment, and Accountability” section with its process for confrontation and resolution
- the code of ethics is reorganized, restated in the positive and in the voice of the congregation, and includes four guidelines that were not named in the 1996 paper
- the 1996 recommendations section is fully replaced by the new set of recommendations at the end of this paper.

The following document is a revision and replacement of the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* polity.

Congregational Ethics Polity

Introduction

In 1994 Annual Conference adopted a Standing Committee recommendation that a congregational code of ethics be developed. After two years of work the five-person committee submitted its final report, which was approved by the 1996 Annual Conference and then became part of Church of the Brethren polity known as *Ethics for Congregations*.

In 2010, Western Pennsylvania District submitted a query to Annual Conference asking, “Would it not be helpful and contribute toward the unity of the Body if Annual Conference developed a uniform denominational process by which districts might deal with a congregation that engages in questionable ethical activity?” The Annual Conference gathered at Pittsburgh accepted the query and appointed a study committee of Clyde Fry, Joan Daggett, Lisa Hazen, and Joshua Brockway. The study committee reported to Annual Conference in 2011, answering the query in the affirmative and recommending that Church of the Brethren staff oversee the process of updating and revising the 1996 document and that the revision include “guidelines and suggestions for a denominational process of accountability.”

The original 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* statement began with an outline of principles guiding the document:

1. A paper on congregational ethics should be regarded as a companion piece to the paper on *Ethics in Ministry Relations*. Therefore, it should be consistent in theology, direction, intensity, and format.
2. To be consistent with the Brethren understanding of “voluntaryism” in religion, the paper should guard against imposing upon congregations arbitrary requirements that either are not biblically sound or violate traditional Brethren values.

3. While the attempt to pull together in one statement a congregational code of ethics is unique not only in our denomination but, as far as the committee can tell, unique within the family of Protestant denominations, most of the values that are in the paper have precursors in various Annual Conference and other denominational statements. The paper will rely heavily upon those references and sources.
4. As with the paper on ministry ethics, this statement on congregational ethics is not to be regarded as a legal document. Rather, it is an affirmation of the faith and discipleship to which we, the Body of Christ, have been called if we are to remain obedient followers of Him who is the Head of the Church. As such, it provides for the corporate body a standard of behavior that is agreed upon by the church, an affirmation by which the congregation as a whole can be held accountable.
5. This paper attempts to speak to congregational actions, or the collective body of believers gathered at one place and acting as a whole, rather than to individual ethics. The paper on ministry ethics notes that “God calls all members, including those in leadership, to live by the high standards upheld in the scriptures” (1996 *Ethics in Ministry Relations*, 3). That paper recommends the standards of ethical behavior as applicable to all individual members of the church, with the added responsibility for the leaders and ordained ministers to be role models (1996 *Ethics for Congregations*, 1).

The 1996 paper also noted a legitimate question about the appropriateness of Annual Conference suggesting a code of ethics for individual congregations:

For some who are accustomed to complete autonomy and to making decisions about congregational life and management by whatever method or value seems most expedient, such a code may be viewed as a threat or at best as unnecessary. Other congregations, struggling with survival, economic and otherwise, may feel that the suggested standards of behavior impose an impossible demand upon them, which may result in guilt and discredit. (1996 *Ethics for Congregations*, 1-2)

The 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* offered a simple caveat in regard to any process of accountability:

It is not the intention of this paper to set up standards by which congregations may be “graded” and compared. But it is the hope that congregations may know the mind of the whole denomination regarding what the Body of Christ should be and how it should act as Christ’s representative today, and use this paper as a guideline for seriously examining their own procedures and life. (1996 *Ethics for Congregations*, 2)

In the years following the acceptance of the 1996 document, the global church has experienced an array of controversies. While many Christian denominations around the world are working to address the problem of ethical misconduct by clergy, most prominently clergy sexual abuse of children, it is clear that the conduct of congregations also on occasion does not live up to the call of the gospel. The first decade of the 21st century has made this even more plain to both the church and the wider culture.

This document will follow the pattern of the 1996 document especially in its discussion of the congregation's intersection with its community, denomination, and wider church. In addition, the code of ethics has been revised to reflect the changes made in 2008 to the *Ethics in Ministry Relations*. This discussion of congregational ethics will follow the following outline:

- I. The Scriptural Visions of the Church
- II. The Congregation and its Relationships
- III. Practices of Awareness, Assessment, and Accountability
- IV. The Code of Ethics

This document is a revision and replacement of the 1996 *Ethics for Congregations* polity.

I. The Scriptural Visions of the Church

In the New Testament the early church lived into its call to be a faithful community in an unfaithful world, placed there to witness to God's love in Christ. Those who shared in this mission were charged to live with the same kind of self-abandonment and sacrifice seen in Jesus Christ. The support and power for this momentous task came from their participation in a community of people who, with the power of the Holy Spirit, could proclaim their devotion to Christ, share understandings of the way of Christ, and put their devotion and understandings into practice.

Several biblical images instruct us in the nature of this basic Christian community, the congregation:

1. *The Bride of Christ*. In Ephesians 5, the relationship between Christ and the church was used as the model for the covenantal relationship that should exist between husband and wife. The image was one of mutual love and accountability. An understanding of the covenantal nature of the church began with the covenant established between God and Abraham (Genesis 12). There was to be mutual respect and accountability. So long as Abraham's descendants were obedient to God's will, God would favor them with prosperity and long life. It was the first relationship of its kind in the stories of religion—a personal and ethical pact between God and humanity.

In Christ, the covenant between God and God's people was particularized. The covenant now had an "administrator," one who could interpret the relationship between the two "parties." More than that, the church would form a covenant with Christ in order to honor his teaching and example. In turn, the community would be the recipient of Christ's sacrificial love—a love that would form the basis for all other human relationships. Thus, neither the individual Christian nor the church acted independently, but in relation to Christ.

2. *The Body of Christ*. The church was more than a collection of individuals who had promised to follow Christ's way. The church was the extension of the Incarnation in that it was to function as Christ's presence in the world and to present evidence of his resurrection. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, made clear how the health of each

individual part affects the function of the whole body (1 Corinthians 12). Each part must work properly, that is, with the integrity and love of Christ, for the body to be healthy.

In Ephesians 4, the image was repeated, indicating that the body is whole when each part “speaks the truth in love, and grows up in every way into him who is the head” (4:15).

3. *Sojourners*. The writer of Hebrews described the faithful as those who are aware that their very existence reaches beyond this life. All their actions on earth were to be grounded in and guided by that hope (11:13-16). They were not, then, bound by earthly standards or limitations. They did things for one another that astounded the world around them. They chose to follow convictions of justice and fairness, even though those decisions were unpopular. They accepted a personal discipline that put the welfare of others before their own needs.
4. *Holy People and a Royal Priesthood*. 1 Peter 2:13-17 assigned an awesome responsibility to the church. It was to perform priestly work for the world. It was the priest’s function to speak to God for the people and to speak to the people for God. Service, not domination, was a distinguishing mark of the church’s life and mission. To serve and not to be served was its first priority.

These biblical images provide a lofty portrait of the church—a covenantal community that is just and loving; one that is not bound or given to earthly attitudes and standards; one that transcends those attitudes and standards through service in the world. Traditionally, Brethren have held to some particular values within that overall framework that have guided both our corporate and individual ethics. These values include the following:

1. The New Testament is our rule of faith and practice. We covenant to live by its precepts as taught and revealed in Jesus and affirmed by the apostles.
2. Our word is as good as our bond. We covenant to be truthful in speech and in honoring the commitments we make. Integrity, fairness, and sincerity are requirements of each member of the church.
3. All members are ministers. We are called not only to serve one another, but also to model abundant life in Christ to all with whom we come into contact.
4. We believe in living in harmony with all people, in peacefully solving conflict, and in not harming or degrading any other person.
5. We believe the corporate discernment of the gathered church is our understanding of God’s will.
6. Each member of the church is a valued part of the whole body. God endows each member with spiritual and natural gifts, and the church values each member’s opinion and contributions.

7. We are known by our fruits, and Christ should be glorified and revealed in all we do.

II. The Church and its Relationships

As is evident in the scriptures of the New Testament, the local Christian community does not exist unto itself. As part of the larger body of Christ, the congregation is one mission point among many. As a community of mission, the congregation also lives as a witness within the local community. The calling of congregational leadership and staff establishes relationships that create unique expectations and boundaries. Understanding appropriate conduct, then, requires attention to these various relationships.

A. The Relationship to the Wider Church

The Apostle Paul sought to build a close kinship among all the new Christian communities established as a result of his missionary activity. He shared with them the news of what other congregations were doing (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). He reported what others thought of them (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). He took any promising “missionaries” from the various congregations with him on his journeys (Colossians 4:15). He promoted a mission offering among the churches of Asia for the church at Jerusalem. He forged bonds of service and love within and between Christian communities, overcoming seemingly irreconcilable differences and diversity.

The Christian faith is belief and action shared in community. Christians need other Christians in order to live out their faith. Just as an individual cannot follow Christ alone, a congregation cannot exist in a vacuum. Even in the first days of the church, Paul and the apostles worked to keep the first congregations connected.

The 1992 Church of the Brethren *Manual of Organization and Polity* underscored this fact: “The congregation is not sufficient to itself. It is interdependent with other congregations and the larger church. This calls for patterns which allow the congregation to participate in a network of district, national, and ecumenical relationships. By this interaction, both the congregation and the larger church are enriched” (1992 *Manual of Organization and Polity*, 119).

This was affirmed in the current polity manual: “Openness to our brothers and sisters reaches from the congregation to the district, to the denomination, to the ecumenical church” (*Manual of Organization and Polity*: “Preface and Introduction,” 9).

All Church of the Brethren congregations are encouraged to adopt the recommended constitution and bylaws for congregations as outlined in the *Manual of Organization and Polity*. That constitution states:

The congregation shall covenant to support faithfully the program of the Church of the Brethren, recognizing Annual Conference enactments of the Church of the Brethren as having governing force in its life, and shall remain a member of the Church of the Brethren or its successor. The congregation shall send delegates to those official conferences of the Church of the Brethren in which it is entitled to have representation. (*Manual of Organization and Polity*: “The Local Church,” 2)

As part of the larger denomination, the local congregation is one mission point for the ministry of the whole church. Not only does the covenant between congregations entail a commitment to the polity and policies of the church, but it implies a covenant of trust. The congregation is entrusted with living out the mission and ministries of the denomination. That trust includes the beliefs and practices of the tradition and the material resources to carry out that mission. Property and finances are, then, held in trust by the local congregation. This covenant is to be made explicit in the property deeds and in the bylaws of every congregation. The *Manual of Organization and Polity* makes clear: “All property owned by a congregation, whether incorporated or unincorporated, shall be held, in trust, for the use and benefit and in conformity with practices and beliefs of the Church of the Brethren” (*Manual of Organization and Polity: “Property Holdings and Financial Resources,”* 1).

Congregations are expected to identify this covenant of trust in their bylaws, titles, and deeds in accordance with state laws. In the case of disbandment or departure of a congregation from the denomination, “the district of the Church of the Brethren in which it is located, or the successor, shall have the right to take charge and control of all property and thereafter to hold and manage, and convey the same at the discretion of the district” (*Manual of Organization and Polity: “The Local Church,”* 3).

There may be rare instances in which, after much prayer and conversation, the congregation may conclude that affirmation of denominational statements or participation in a denominational ministry conflicts with conscience. A decision not to participate in or support a denominational program should occur only after the congregation has engaged in a responsible process of study, prayer, and open and honest dialogue with denominational representatives. A recommended model of discernment and conversation regarding disagreements with Annual Conference is found in the 2004 paper *Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions*. Congregations should continuously examine and renew their covenant with the denomination and seek the counsel of its leaders. The prayerful conclusion not to support a denominational position or program should be a matter of anguish, not competitiveness or superiority.

Disagreement with particular actions of the denomination does not give a congregation the right to disparage the whole church or individuals. The congregation, as part of the denominational family of Christ, must deal with its family kindly, respectfully, and lovingly.

These same principles apply to the congregation’s relation to the district. Annual Conference has identified several specific responsibilities of the districts that are directly related to congregational life, such as the authorization, discipline, and placement of ministers; the coordination of outdoor education; and the training of lay and ministerial leadership. The district is solely dependent on the support and participation of the congregations within its boundaries for the continuation and effectiveness of its ministry.

Congregations are to help establish, support, and abide by the policies and decisions of the district. They are to welcome and work with the district executive or other appointed representatives of the district. They are to cooperate with and give encouragement to other congregations in the district. As Paul made clear in his ministry and letters, the vitality of the church is based on the mutual support each community offers and receives.

The mission and ministry of the Church of the Brethren at all points of its shared life require the participation of all members. The gathered body, in the form of Annual Conference and district conferences, is the place for the discussion of differences, the hearing of collective wisdom, and the discernment of the mind of Christ. This, then, is the nature of authority among the Brethren. “Authority is held accountable within the community, which in turn diligently seeks the ‘mind of Christ’ in study of the scriptures, in dialogue with brothers and sisters, and in openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit” (*Manual of Organization and Polity*: “Preface and Introduction,” 8).

The local congregation also is part of a larger whole, the global body of Christ. The Church of the Brethren has a long and productive history of working with other Christian communions in the interest of Christian solidarity, witness, and service. Brethren congregations endeavor to know and relate to churches of other denominations in their communities. Our one Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, prayed for unity within the Body (John 17) and demonstrated that faithful disciples can speak from different Christian perspectives (Luke 9:49-50).

Ethical accountability in relation to other communions calls for the congregation to contribute the uniqueness and strength of its particular witness toward a common goal rather than seeking to impose sectarian bias. It also supersedes a judgmental stance toward persons and groups of different perspectives, and it rejects underhanded or self-righteous means of luring members away from other communions for its own cause (proselytizing).

On the other hand, the congregation must guard against promoting or aligning with any interest groups or programs that may disrupt the mission of the congregation or pull it away from its covenantal relationship to the denomination.

B. The Relationship to the Community

Jesus made it clear that paying one’s taxes was the responsibility of each of his followers (Luke 20:20-26) and Peter suggested that the mission of civil authorities is a part of God’s plan for society (1 Peter 2:13-17). The church has spoken to matters of conscience and civil disobedience (1969 *Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience*). Nevertheless, congregations should guard against inappropriate use of tax-exempt status and should honor, in letter and spirit, laws that clearly are applicable to them. This is especially the case in regard to copyright laws, safety codes, employee searches and employment contracts, discrimination, and accommodation of persons with disabilities. Even when churches are exempted from the requirements of some of these laws, the congregation should aspire to compliance, where appropriate.

By striving to be good neighbors, the congregation embodies the mission of God through its programs, activities, and maintenance of its property. Each congregation is to attend to the environmental safety and appearance of its property. It will model peace and justice in its relationship to the community, in its respect for individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and in the methods by which it witnesses to political issues.

As already discussed, it is the congregation’s role to represent the message and the truth of Jesus Christ. Often in its history, the church has not been aware of the image it projects in society. At

times it has demanded privileges and considerations from the wider society beyond the church's reasonable due. It sometimes has expected to be served, rather than to serve.

A violation of ethical self-expectations occurs if the congregation infringes on the rights of local businesses by repeatedly selling the same or similar products for a price that undercuts the merchants. Businesses understand, and often assist with occasional car washes, bake sales, or auctions that help fund the church. The congregation must be sensitive to the effects of its fundraising activities on others. The church must guard against abusing discount privileges and soliciting gifts and gratuities with coercive methods. The church should examine the ethical implications of expecting or requesting free professional services. It is perfectly appropriate to accept services and products as gifts, yet requesting these gifts should be done with care and awareness that each offering comes with some sacrifice. Each congregation will fulfill its contracts, agreements, and obligations on time, especially in regard to financial commitments.

The question of litigation when the congregation feels its own rights or privileges have been violated is a difficult one. Traditionally, Brethren have considered such litigation to contradict biblical counsel to not take a dispute into the civil court (Matthew 5:33-37; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). While that conviction may not be as strong today, there is still a clear ethical problem when Brethren resort to public courts to settle a matter that the congregation ought to be able to handle itself, or to reconcile by more amicable means (Matthew 18:15-17). Complying with biblical directives and desiring to model the peace of Christ, Brethren must seek to resolve disputes in love and harmony.

Another ethical issue for the congregation, in relation to both the local and wider communities, is the responsibility to preserve the environment and natural resources. The congregation should model good stewardship of the environment through recycling practices, avoiding waste of energy, and making choices that minimize refuse. These practices not only benefit the environment and steward the resources of the congregation, they also reflect the Brethren commitment to simple living.

C. Relationships in the Congregation

Many New Testament scriptures admonish congregations to maintain kind and considerate relationships among the members and the leaders of the church. Indeed, the congregation should model relationships that build up one another and that demonstrate respect and admiration for each person's unique gifts. In that regard, the congregation is to strive for harmony and unity in all it does. Any action or statement that does not first seek the best interests of all its members raises the appearance of misconduct and requires scrutiny.

This criterion also applies to the congregation's organizational structures and decision-making processes. For nearly two centuries, denominational decisions at the annual meeting were made only by consensus. The wisdom of the collective whole is still understood to be the best approximate answer to any question presented to the church. Thus, a congregation shows lack of respect for its members by allowing decision-making to fall into the hands of a few. Each member of the congregation must guard against written or oral statements that advocate for particular positions outside of established business meetings or that are based on incomplete or

misleading information. This problem arises especially when groups within a congregation attempt to manipulate attitudes or affect decisions outside of congregational business meetings or other appropriate decision-making gatherings. It is inappropriate for members or leaders to conduct phone or letter campaigns to rally support for a particular position and to influence congregational decisions by recruiting inactive members in order to form voting blocks for congregational business meetings. The congregational forum is the place for shared decision making and congregational leadership should follow its stated bylaws and take appropriate steps to assure that all members have time and freedom to express their perspectives. Full and open communication should be encouraged at all times in the congregation, and complete records of all meetings, decisions, and finances are to be kept and made available to all members.

The recommended constitution for Church of the Brethren congregations gives appropriate direction regarding the mutual accountability of members in the congregation:

On the one hand, the congregation has a covenantal responsibility to care for its members, to encourage growth in freedom and discipleship, to help members discover their gifts and find ways to serve, and to provide ministries which respond to both spiritual and physical needs. On the other hand, each member has a covenantal responsibility to participate regularly in the life of the congregation, to seek the counsel of the church in living out the way of Christ, to challenge the church to greater accountability to its calling, to respond to opportunities to serve in the congregation and beyond, and to contribute to the church's ministries in every way possible. (*Manual of Organization and Polity*: "The Local Church," 3)

Sensitivity is to be given to the needs of individuals in the church. The congregation shall provide an environment where personal tensions and difficulties can be shared in full confidence of trust, loving response, and confidentiality. The community should establish expectations of care, forgiveness, and safety for all who take part in its ministries. In the cases of conflict, all care should be given to creating a setting in which reconciliation is the norm, not the exception. Handling disputes through petitioning, letter writing, and anonymous communication is inappropriate given the expectations of mutuality and transparent discernment.

The church's facilities are to be available to all people seeking to participate with the congregation. There are ethical ramifications whenever anyone is denied the opportunity to worship or to participate in other ministries of the church, whether the denial is due to outdated policies and facilities (such as in the case of accessibility for the disabled) or outright prejudice.

Living into the Brethren belief in the priesthood of all believers, the congregation is to be conscious of the need for its lay leadership to model a Christian lifestyle, just as is expected of ministers. The congregation is to teach, nurture, and encourage a Christian lifestyle for all its members and should call to leadership those persons who seek conscientiously to live according to the example of the scriptures and the understanding of the church. When matters of personal lifestyle arise, the congregation is to do everything possible to nurture and restore the person to a Christian way of life, as modeled for us in Christ.

The congregation is to respect the functions and ministries to which it has called its leaders. For example, it is improper to invite former pastors to perform pastoral functions or visitation in the

congregation when another pastor is currently employed. Service by former pastors should be carefully evaluated as to its effect upon the ministry of the current pastor and upon the harmony of the church. It also is unethical for individuals or groups in the church to usurp the authority and tasks of officially elected leaders or committees. It is equally inappropriate for leadership to conduct business in such a way so as to inhibit the full and open discernment of the congregation.

1. Relationship to Pastor(s) and Other Staff

From the first conversations about congregational conduct it has been evident that the most serious questions arise regarding staff. This is especially true regarding pastoral compensation, benefits, and support. Despite clear guidelines within denominational polity, negotiations about salary often present the most opportunity for inappropriate action on the part of the congregation. While identifying candidates for ministry does not usually involve questionable conduct, it is important for the congregation to take seriously its role in naming gifts, supporting discernment, and extending a call to ministry. Since denominational polity deals with many of these issues, only a few insights about conduct are offered here.

First, congregations and districts are to give careful attention to the calling of ministers. Congregations in particular should cultivate cultures of calling in which gifted people are encouraged toward ministry. When a person enters the discernment process the congregation should make every effort to support and pray for the candidate as they pursue the requirements and expectations for credentialing. Exploring one's call to set-apart ministry requires many sacrifices. The role of the congregation does not end once the discernment has begun, but extends through a call to leadership and ordination. Although sending a gifted member to another congregation involves a sense of loss, care should be taken to acknowledge the congregation's role of sending and receiving leaders.

Issues related to the search for and placement of pastors present several ethical considerations. Denominational polity is to be followed in all searches. Confidentiality for the interviewee is very important, especially in cases where the candidate has not yet resigned from a current position or is not definite about seeking the new position. Pastoral profiles are to be kept in utmost confidentiality by members of search committees. Congregations and district executives should communicate openly with the candidates, making sure to honor confidentiality and seeing that information is shared appropriately and fairly. The sharing of confidential information related to staff or potential pastoral candidates undermines the discernment for all involved in the placement process, as does behavior such as persons seeking to influence decision-making outside the official committees charged by the congregation with the search process.

The time of searching for a pastor is filled with anxiety and opportunity. In many cases this climate of expectation, and even fear, opens doors for inappropriate conduct. Honoring the time of discernment and formation is central to the congregation's role in the calling and credentialing process. Care should be taken when considering the placement of licensed ministers who have yet to meet the expectations for ordination. Although short-term placements or interim appointments provide significant learning opportunities, the congregation and district leadership should be sure to provide mentoring or coaching to licensed ministers called to such positions.

After extending the call to a minister, the congregation needs to establish clear understandings with the new staff member as to performance expectations. Such expectations should coincide with appropriate compensation and should be balanced with the time commitments established in the contract.

On occasion, congregations have been slow to recognize the ethical issues relating to adequate compensation and benefits for their employees. There are recommendations related to minimum compensation for pastors approved by Annual Conference every year. This salary table is a gauge for congregations to measure ethical responsibility in dealing fairly with their pastors. In most cases, abiding by the recommendations can be assumed to affirm the congregation's financial responsibilities to the pastor. The guidelines for providing medical and life insurance, pension, and other benefits, as recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, are to be followed as nearly as possible. If congregations find it impossible to meet the guidelines or to provide benefits, there is an ethical obligation to discuss the reasons and their implications with the pastor and to plan in good faith to meet the recommended salary and benefits as soon as possible. If, in the midst of open and honest discussion, it becomes clear that the guidelines for salary and benefits are beyond reach, the job description should be adjusted immediately to match salary and benefits with expectations and time requirements.

An even more critical issue relates to the emotional and spiritual support of pastors and other church staff. A committee or group should be in place in each congregation that regularly relates to the staff regarding their spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, and intellectual well being. Time should be set aside each year to assess the work of staff as well as the ministry of the congregation. Such an evaluation is not an occasion to complain but to identify opportunities and growing edges. Again, care should be taken to balance open conversation and expectations of confidentiality.

The congregation should encourage staff to take adequate vacation and leave time. In ministry, it is too easy to work beyond one's energy and ability. In such cases, neither the pastor nor the congregation benefit from such habits or unrealistic expectations. Congregations need to work with staff to ensure that physical and emotional health are not jeopardized by the work load. Leaders and congregation should expect patterns of rest and sabbath, both during the regular week and at regular intervals throughout the minister's tenure. Sabbaticals are to be based on the Guidelines for Sabbath Rest established by the denomination.

At times the congregation becomes too dependent on its staff for functions that members of the congregation can and should do. Congregational leadership should continually assess and confirm that the current ways of working reflect a commitment to the priesthood of all believers.

On occasion congregations are not considerate of the families of their pastors. For example, a pastor's spouse often is expected to take certain responsibilities in the church. While the minister's spouse is frequently a member of the congregation, his or her participation in the congregation is to be treated as any other member and not as part of the congregation's staff. It also is common for congregation members to assume the parsonage is a public meeting place.

Such assumptions are inappropriate, and the privacy of the pastoral family should be respected at all times.

The maintenance of the parsonage at times can become overwhelming and thus be neglected. The congregation should have clear plans in place for swift and adequate repairs. The appropriate congregational committee should develop clear understandings with the pastoral family regarding regular and emergency maintenance of the parsonage.

Conversations regarding the severance of pastoral leadership are delicate in nature and require the utmost attention to appropriate boundaries and conduct. Any concern about leadership should be communicated to appropriate bodies in the congregational structure such as the executive committee. That group should take care to hear the concern and communicate legitimate questions to the pastor. As with any matter of staff assessment, the pastor should be given appropriate time to respond and to address the needed changes. Such an occasion is to be understood as an opportunity for growth and learning, not as a move for power or control.

Clearly, before conversations are conducted about the possible severance of a pastor, dialogue with the pastor is to take place. In such cases the district executive should be included in the conversations as soon as possible. Except in cases of blatant misconduct by the pastor, it is unethical for a pastor to be approached with a severance notice without the attempt on the part of the church to engage in such dialogue and without consultation with the district executive. The *Ethics in Ministry Relations* paper provides detailed procedures for handling matters involving allegations of ethical misconduct.

The departure of a pastor is a delicate matter regardless of the circumstances. If the resignation of a leader occurs under good terms, there are still many emotions to consider. Care should be taken by the congregation and the minister to appropriately grieve and celebrate each other's new journey. If the termination comes under unpleasant circumstances, steps are to be taken to protect the reputation and peace of both the congregation and the minister. Neither is to take advantage of the other, financially or in any formal or informal evaluations made of each other. There should be an attempt to resolve any and all grievances, utilizing the resources of the district Shalom Team or the denomination's Ministry of Reconciliation to accomplish an amicable separation.

In all cases of severance, adequate notice as set forth in the Pastoral/Congregational Agreement is to be given by either the employee or the congregation and severance compensation awarded when appropriate. The district executive is to be consulted early in the separation process and remain involved as appropriate.

2. *The Congregation and Sexual Improprieties*

Much time and energy has been focused on the sexual misconduct of clergy. Current polity regarding *Ethics in Ministry Relations* is clear about the oversight and procedures related to such troubling events in the life of a congregation. Yet, sexual misconduct is not just committed by clergy. There are also incidents of harassment and other sexual misconduct involving

congregation members. Sometimes this behavior is directed toward the pastor, particularly when that person is a woman.

Baptismal covenants are broken if members engage in conduct of a sexual and coercive nature directed toward another member in the church. Sexually harassing behavior in the congregation could include a range of behaviors: sexual jokes and innuendoes, sexually offensive telephone calls, sexual propositions or repeated unwelcome requests for dates, sexually suggestive staring or leering, unwelcome and uncalled-for comments or insinuations about a person's sex or private life, unnecessary physical familiarity or physical contact involving touching in a sexual way, sexually suggestive comments about a person's appearance or body, offensive remarks in general, obscene gestures, indecent exposure, sexual assault, and rape.

These behaviors of sexual impropriety are inherently violent and rely on the premise that an individual has the right to impose his or her sexuality on another. As Christians, we need to acknowledge that sexually harassing behavior is inappropriate in all its forms and respond appropriately with compassion and accountability. Victims need to be recognized as victims and given the support needed to recover from their experience. Perpetrators also need support and counseling, but they need to be held accountable for their actions. Clearly, the conduct must be stopped and all reasonable steps taken to avoid any repetition.

Steps to prevent sexual harassment in the congregation include creating an environment free of power imbalances that make sexual harassment possible: nurturing relationships in which congregational members value one another as persons in their own right, providing education on the unacceptability of sexually harassing behavior, and providing counseling and support for members dealing with this problem. Attention should be given to avoiding circumstances that may lead to misconduct or the perception that improper behavior is acceptable.

It is urgent that each congregation have in place a process for dealing with allegations of sexual impropriety. Unless a congregation is able to design a more appropriate process for itself, it is recommended that the procedures outlined in the *Ethics in Ministry Relations* paper, Section IV, be adopted by the congregation, with the executive committee serving as the assessment team. The executive committee should take into consideration and utilize as needed the resources available to them, including deacons, district or congregational reconciliation teams, the district executive, and professional caregivers available to the congregation.

The safety of the children involved in a congregation's ministries is to be of the highest priority. Psychological or physical abuse of children is unethical and immoral. Children are vulnerable and have a right to protection from all forms of abuse. Child abuse includes the misuse or perversion of the privilege of caring for children. Examples include physical abuse; emotional abuse involving verbal abuse, belittling, teasing or terrorizing; and sexual abuse. In cases of the physical abuse of children in states where the law requires reporting, the church shall comply. In addition, the congregation must move aggressively to stop the behavior and protect against repetition, minister to the affected child and the child's family, and tend to the need of the perpetrator for treatment.

In addition to a process for dealing with incidents of child abuse, the congregation is to have written policies in effect for the interviewing, hiring, supervision, and reporting of employees and volunteers having child-care duties. Congregations are advised to explore the feasibility of securing liability insurance to cover instances of sexual abuse allegations. A number of resources and sample child protection statements are available from Church of the Brethren and district staff.

III. Practices of Awareness, Assessment, and Accountability

Encouraging healthy communities and establishing ethical boundaries are important tasks in the life of the church. Simply establishing a set of expectations is adequate only in so far as the information it contains is integrated into the congregation's culture. To that end, a summary tool has been created to help congregations assess their conduct and behavior.

Although congregations have been encouraged to study the *Ethics for Congregations* document during the pastoral placement process, this practice has not been sufficient given the current understanding of healthy communities. Congregations, then, are to study this document and administer the assessment tool every five years. The results of the assessment and any intended actions are to be shared with the district executive. The district office will keep a copy of the most recent study for purposes of accountability and record keeping. This information will be made available only to the congregation as it begins the regular five-year assessment. In addition, denominational staff will work with the Council of District Executives to develop study resources and training tools.

The congregation's self-assessment and any counsel of the district or of the Standing Committee are intended to nurture the congregation in its efforts toward faithfulness to the will of God, so that the body of Christ can better live in obedience and unity.

Any code of ethics is only as good as the resolve to keep one another accountable to the outlined values and behaviors. Within the congregation this resolve is especially important, given the culture of the community and the many overlapping relationships within it. Sometimes it may seem easier to let inappropriate actions go unchallenged for the sake of greater peace or for the sake of maintaining relationships among the members. Yet, the model of discipleship presented in the scriptures points to mutual encouragement and accountability as the means of increasing faithfulness. The values expressed in this code of ethics, then, guide us toward nurturing healthy communities by presenting clear expectations and establishing the norms for disciplined correction and shared responsibility.

There are occasions of misconduct, however, that require intentional structures and processes. Most often these matters concern congregational leaders and business. When these occasions are examples of dual relationships or exertion of undue influence, it is essential that third parties are introduced to guide the process of confrontation and resolution.

The suggestions for process below follow the example of discipleship outlined in Matthew 18. It is assumed, however, that the one-on-one conversations already have taken place. When that conversation does not resolve the conflict or concern, then this process should begin:

1. Any member of the congregation, perceiving a breach of fiduciary responsibility, may contact district leadership regarding the concern. The district leadership team or executive committee will serve as the committee of inquiry. When an issue of misconduct is raised with district leadership, notification of the case will be shared with appropriate denominational staff. The district executive and denominational staff will serve in a consulting capacity during the inquiry.

The initial process of inquiry will focus on achieving clarity regarding the questions presented in the complaint. District leadership will meet with congregational leaders as well as others involved. As much as possible, these conversations are to work toward restoration rather than accusation and punishment.

2. If these conversations result in further impasse, the district leadership will take the concern to the district board. Congregational leadership will be invited to further discuss the concerns and the implications for further disagreement. The goal of this meeting, as with the initial inquiry, is to restore relationship and appropriate conduct.
3. If these goals are not met, either from the perspective of the congregation or the district, the district's Standing Committee delegate will pass the matter on to Standing Committee as the adjudicating body of the denomination. This conversation, by the nature of the bodies involved, is the final authority in matters of polity and discipline.

IV. The Code of Ethics

As a part of the body of Christ, each congregation strives to act with integrity in its daily interactions with those outside of the church.

1. We strive to live by the gospel injunction that our yes be yes, and no be no, especially in regard to civil statutes. We honor the creative work of others by abiding with copyright permissions and compensating those who share their creative work with us.
2. We embody the traditional Brethren posture of separation of faith from politics by refraining from using our non-profit status to support political candidates.
3. We seek to maintain integrity with the business community by meeting invoice due dates, not abusing discount privileges, not soliciting gifts in a coercive or threatening way, and not competing unfairly with local businesses in the commerce of products and services.
4. Our integrity challenges us to work in a transparent manner to the extent that we avoid dual relationships or conflicts of interest in carrying out the work of the church.
5. We strive to be witnesses to Christ's peace in our relationships with one another and the wider community, especially in sharing our message and resources and how we speak to political issues of the day.

As part of the global body of Christ, each congregation seeks to be faithful to Christ's prayer for unity through prayer and support of the church locally, denominationally, and universally.

6. We seek to live out our covenant with the denomination and district, supporting local, national, and international program of the Church of the Brethren by sending delegates to Annual Conference and District Conference, through gifts of time and money, and most of all through our prayers.
7. We recognize that other Christian communities also are brothers and sisters in the family of God. We do not try to proselytize from sister communions. In regard to other religions, we seek to understand and be respectful of their beliefs and practices. While disagreement is inevitable, we seek to enter public conversations with grace and compassion rather than fear and mistrust.
8. We support causes and organizations that reflect the historical and theological understanding of the Church of the Brethren, and we avoid partnering with groups that may detract from our stated mission.

As a community of disciples following the way and teachings of Jesus Christ, the congregation seeks to treat one another with love and respect, conducting the business of the church openly and according to our beliefs.

9. We adequately compensate guest speakers, interim pastors, and other leaders who provide professional services for the congregation.
10. We are a people of reconciliation and seek to resolve disputes or concerns through peaceful means rather than resorting to public courts for a resolution.
11. We work to exhibit love and respect for every individual and ensure that every person has access to our facilities and ministries. We aim to be sensitive to persons with special needs and seek to accommodate them with adequate access to our worship and pastoral services.
12. We consciously seek harmony and unity in every aspect of our program and fellowship, striving for consensus in our decisions and relating to one another in the Spirit of Christ in the bond of love.

Our call to discipleship prompts us to encourage and instruct our members in maintaining lifestyles, attitudes, and actions that reflect the example and teachings of Christ.

13. We steward our time, talent, and treasure as resources for the common mission of Christ's church. Our leaders responsibly manage all the resources and funds entrusted to them in the course of their duties.
14. We address promptly incidents of dissent among us and have a method in place for seeking resolution and reconciliation.

15. We cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving and generosity in all of our life, especially expressing our gratitude to all those who make a significant contribution to the church's work and worship, for all that we have is a gift from God.
16. We endeavor to maintain an environment and program free of sexual, psychological, or physical abuse and harassment, giving special attention to the protection of children, the elderly, and the disabled. In the event of an accusation of abuse or harassment we deal with it forthrightly, promptly, and fairly, in order to stop the behavior in question, minister to all victims, effect change in the violator, and seek reconciliation.

The work of a congregation, especially the contractual agreements with staff, creates unique ethical questions (fiduciary responsibility).

17. We strive to be fair and equitable in support of our staff, adopting the *Guidelines for Pastor's Salaries and Benefits* as our guide for determining adequate compensation. When diverting from these guidelines, we adjust expectations and time requirements appropriate to scale.
18. We provide a supportive and nurturing culture for our staff through an advisory committee that meets regularly with staff members in an advocacy and counseling capacity. This group will facilitate regular opportunities for performance evaluation of all staff by providing opportunities for appropriate congregational input.
19. We value the ministry of our current pastoral leadership and discourage our members from inviting former pastors to return to perform pastoral functions such as weddings and funerals. We treat friendships with former pastors with special care so as not to undermine the ministry of current pastoral leadership.
20. We strive to be open and transparent in our organization and rely on the ministry of all believers in our midst by identifying and nurturing the gifts and skills of our members. We expect our leaders to execute the duties of their office in accordance with congregational bylaws. We entrust our leaders with the work of the church and expect them to avoid asserting undue influence in the matters of the congregation or seeking favors by nature of their position.
21. We conduct business openly, except when the agenda may deal with confidential personnel matters, and expect transparent and honest dialogue from all our members at all times. We ask that members not seek to influence decisions outside of established open forums through alternative or closed meetings, or by campaigns through alternate means such as letters, phone calls, email, or social media.
22. We hold our property and finances in trust for the denomination. We care for them as our own and have provisions in the deeds and bylaws of the congregation to identify the district or its successor as the recipient of all property and finances in case the congregation disbands or leaves the denomination.

Recommendations for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Polity

1. Beginning in 2016, each congregation will review this document and begin a process of self-assessment. After this first review, the process will take place alongside the five-year ordination review, beginning in 2020. The process for this regular review will be facilitated by the districts in collaboration with appropriate Church of the Brethren staff. The district office will receive the results of each congregation's study and assessment.
2. Upon completion of the self-assessment, the congregation will be invited to create a covenant that will outline its goals for the next five years related to procedures and practices. Subsequent assessments will inquire about achievement of those goals. Congregations involved in the pastoral search process will note their covenant goals and comment on their achievements on their Congregational Profile.
3. Each district board, especially the leadership team, will study the *Ethics for Congregations* document in order to become familiar with the role of district leadership in the practice of accountability.
4. The district executives and denominational staff will create an ongoing list of relevant materials and resources to support congregations in developing healthy patterns of conflict transformation. This list will include practitioners and groups available to congregations that are in the midst of conflict or that have questions about ethical conduct.
5. Church of the Brethren staff, in consultation with the Council of District Executives, will create a resource applying current ethical considerations to new forms of communication, especially social media.

Note: The current edition of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* is available on-line at <http://www.brethren.org/ac/ppg/>

Respectfully submitted,
Joshua Brockway
Director, Spiritual Life and Discipleship, Congregational Life Ministries

Action of the 2014 Annual Conference: Annual Conference adopted the revised "Congregational Ethics Polity" to replace current polity. This motion was passed by a two-thirds majority vote as a change in polity. Annual Conference also adopted the "Recommendations for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Polity."