

Leadership Team statement to the denomination 9-21-17

The Leadership Team is aware that a district in the Church of the Brethren has made the decision to license to the ministry an individual who lives in an openly committed homosexual relationship. A new fellowship pastored by that individual was recognized by its district conference and was introduced at Annual Conference 2017. Since that time many questions have been raised regarding the accountability of districts. The Leadership Team has sought to clarify that in Church of the Brethren polity, the authority to credential ministers and to establish new congregations and fellowships belongs to the districts. At the same time, the Leadership Team is certainly aware that the intention of our polity is that districts will work within the covenant of our life together and abide by the decisions of Annual Conference.

The 2002 Annual Conference action established the policy that the Church of the Brethren will "consider it inappropriate to license or ordain to Christian ministry any persons who are known to be engaging in homosexual practices, and will not recognize the licensing and ordination of such persons in the Church of the Brethren." It is the intent of denominational leadership to act in accordance with all the policies established by Annual Conference.

The Leadership Team has been studying our polity to discern what actions might be taken when districts choose to act outside the covenant of Annual Conference decisions, and we find that our polity does not specify how the larger church should respond to this particular circumstance. We continue, however, to research Annual Conference minutes and plan to discuss the results of our research with Standing Committee at its next meeting. In the meantime, the moderator and moderator-elect are seeking opportunity to visit with the district that has made this decision, in order to discuss the various expressions of concern we have heard and to seek mutual understanding with district leadership as to why the district has made a decision in apparent contradiction to the 2002 Annual Conference decision, which was adopted by the church as a whole as a part of the covenant for our life together.

Regarding the introduction of new fellowships at Annual Conference, our polity calls us to respect the district's authority to grant fellowship and congregation status. And at the same time, our polity calls us to abide by the policies established by Annual Conference. Our best way of responding to the introduction of this fellowship in light of its pastoral leadership is Brother David Steele's response as general secretary:

"As staff, we are carefully evaluating our practices of recognizing new fellowships at Annual Conference and will make adjustments to make certain that any recognition at a future Annual Conference more closely aligns with our Annual Conference statements."

In the face of these conflicts, it is our deep desire to continue to strive for common ground that can lead us to a compelling vision for our life together. We hold in tension the need for a unified purpose in the midst of diverse points of view. We pray that we all will continue to strive together, seeking peace through love and grace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

David A. Steele, general secretary
Samuel Kefas Sarpiya, moderator
Donita J. Keister, moderator-elect

James M. Beckwith, secretary
David D. Shetler, district executive representative
Chris Douglas, Conference director