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Denominational Leadership Team response regarding the Covenant Brethren Church

Newslines

The Church of the Brethren email news service

Nov. 21, 2019

Denominational Leadership Team issues response regarding the Covenant Brethren Church

The following is a statement from the Leadership Team of the Church of the Brethren, made up of the Annual Conference officers--moderator Paul Munday, moderator-elect David Sollenberger, and secretary James Beckwith--along with general secretary David Steele and Cindy Sanders representing the Council of District Executives:

The Compelling Vision process has provided the church an opportunity to gather together--not only in a multitude of district settings, but also at Annual Conference--to pray and worship, to reflect on scripture, our lives of faith and ministries, and to build relationships. Many appreciated gathering at an Annual Conference that was free from debate on issues that divide, and therefore better able to focus on worship, Bible study, conversation, discernment, and building up the Body of Christ. As we kept Jesus central to our conversations throughout the Compelling Vision conversations, we were reminded that despite our differences there is much we share in common in our mission and ministry both locally and denominationally. There is no doubt that there is a hopeful spirit within the life of the Church of the Brethren!

Yet even in the midst of this hopeful spirit, it is also important to acknowledge a second narrative that is emerging, one that is promoting separation. Its working name has been the Association of Brethren Churches (ABC), recently renamed Covenant Brethren Church. This second narrative is one that claims an exploratory banner, yet by their actions, meetings, and recruitment communicates another intent.

We in no way want to diminish the very real concerns these individuals and others have with the Church of the Brethren; there is much work to do. The multiple issues (“elephants”) that were named at the 2019 Annual Conference remain. But planning and organizing a separation movement--fostering division--is not a path forward. Instead, we believe the way ahead is to continue our conversations, discerning together changes that may be needed, affirming that differences are best addressed together through the study and discernment of scripture, prayer, and trusting that the Holy Spirit will reveal God’s truth.

Of particular concern to the Leadership Team is that some Church of the Brethren ministers, district leaders, and Standing Committee delegates are leading, participating, and recruiting in this separation movement while continuing to serve in current Church of the Brethren positions of leadership. It is our conviction that any initiative or action by Church of the Brethren leaders planning and promoting division in the church calls into question the ministerial conduct of those credentialed leaders. We encourage any leadership participating in these separation efforts to be in communication with their respective district executives. The Leadership Team will be working with district executives as we consider the participation of Standing Committee delegates and district leadership.

Amid this uncertainty and discernment, the Leadership Team is committed to unity and encourages the church to remain focused on the mission of Jesus Christ, our Lord. To that end, we are anticipating very soon a proposed Compelling Vision document, which will guide us forward as a denomination committed to following Jesus together.

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