

Compelling Vision Process

District Conversation SUMMARY (full report available at: www.brethren.org/compellingvision)

From the outset, the Compelling Vision Process was designed to engage as many people as possible by offering opportunities for wide-spread input and communal discernment with a three-fold purpose:

1. We believe the mind of Christ is most faithfully discerned in community.
2. We wanted to nurture a greater sense of ownership in the resulting vision.
3. The fabric of our relationships has been torn by conflict and we felt it important to work intentionally at building and renewing relationships.

Therefore, we designed a model for gathering input within the context of conversation.

Over the course of 71 district conversations, we received response forms from 2,577 individuals and 563 table groups. This gave us a solid sample in regard to the margin of error.

Once conversations were completed, the responses from each participant were entered into a database and analyzed with the goal of identifying emerging themes for deeper reflection as we continue this journey of discernment. The word cloud below, created from the verbatim responses offers a glimpse into our priorities and passions as the body of Christ.



Question 1 - What specifically are you grateful for as we have responded to God's call to do Christ's work as the Church of the Brethren (locally, and beyond)?

In the midst of struggle, we often overlook God's blessings, so we felt it important to start the conversations with prayerful reflection and sharing about that for which we are grateful. Two themes emerged equally in the responses: **service** and **community**. Other responses reinforced and expanded our understanding of these commitments and highlighted other things for which we are grateful.

Questions 2a/2b - Where do you personally need to repent to "prepare the way" for a compelling vision for our denomination? Where do we as the church need to repent to 'prepare the way' for a compelling vision for our denomination?

Participants named judgmentalism, unloving attitudes and actions, and self-righteousness, as well as neglect of spiritual practices and our call to be Biblical and Christ-centered as areas of necessary repentance to "prepare the way" for a compelling vision.

Question 3 - *What are the characteristics of a church that is making a difference in people's lives, and in the world?*

Recognizing that a vital church must be outwardly focused, participants named service and outreach as the most important characteristics of a church that is making a difference in people's lives and in the world. Undergirding these commitments participants identified a commitment to love and undergirding that love is a commitment to be unapologetically faith-based.

Question 4 - *Christ calls us to love our neighbor. Given this call, what are the most significant needs in your community that your congregation is addressing or would like to address?*

Participants identified a variety of physical, spiritual, and emotional needs in response to this question. Responding to issues of food scarcity and security was the most prevalent.

Question 5 – *As you strive to love your neighbor and be a faithful witness, what scriptures energize you and/or your congregation?*

Although there were 404 scripture passages named, the top five were: Matt 22:34-40 – Greatest Commandments (613); Matt 25:31-46 – Parable of the Sheep and Goats (474); Matt 28:16-20 – Great Commission (356); John 3:16-17 – God so loves the world (305); Luke 10:25-37 – Good Samaritan (206), pointing to a Christ's call to love, to service, and to make and be disciples.

Question 6 - *What values and priorities of the Church of the Brethren influence your congregation's ministry on Christ's behalf?*

For many participants, the practice of Love Feast and the Brethren tagline (Continuing the Work of Jesus: Peacefully, Simply, Together) provided a framework for understanding other appreciated Church of the Brethren priorities, key among them: service and a commitment to closely follow the example of Christ.

Question 7 - *The Church of the Brethren affirms: the New Testament is our "rule of faith and practice." What scriptures can unite us as a church, drawing us closer together, both locally, and as a denomination?*

Participants named 489 distinct passages in response to this question. The top 5 pointed to important and recurring themes emerging from the conversations: Matt 22:34-40 – Love for God and Neighbor; John 3:16-17 – Christology; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 – Community/Unity; Matt 28:16-20 – Outreach; Matt 5-7 – Call to Discipleship; 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – Scriptural Inspiration and Authority.

Question 8 - *What changes within Church of the Brethren could strengthen Christ's work among us even as we disagree on how to be faithful to scripture?*

Responses to this question pointed equally to two values we have long struggled to hold in balance: Biblical authority and loving respect for/acceptance of differences.

The full report—including an explanation of how we analyzed the data, additional commentary on the primary themes named above, information on other emerging themes, complete lists of the scripture references cited in response to Questions 5 and 7, and demographic information about participants can be found at www.brethren.org/compellingvision. We encourage everyone to read the full report as we continue this journey of discernment.