

Jesus in the Neighborhood
A Vision for the Church of the Brethren
affirmed by Annual Conference 2021
(All cited scripture from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.)

Three years ago, denominational leadership recognized that we had reached a critical moment in our life together. While individuals and congregations were engaged in faithful ministry, as a denomination, it could be said we were wandering without a sense of unified purpose. Further, we were mired in soul-sapping conflict. Something needed to change.

As a body, we were called into a time of intentional discernment. Like Noah in the ark, Moses before the burning bush, the Israelites in the desert, Ruth following Naomi to Judah, Elijah on Mount Horeb, Mary during her visit with Elizabeth, Jesus entering the desert following his baptism, and Paul after he had been struck blind, for almost two years, we dwelled in a challenging, disorienting, and uncomfortable, yet creative, exciting, and hopeful season of waiting and watching for God's presence and direction.

Throughout, as a community, we were centered in Jesus Christ, guided by scripture, and led by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the emergence of a new, unifying, and compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren.

Vision Statement

Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

There is much in this rich vision to unpack as we look to scripture and theology to further interpret each significant phrase.

“Together, as the Church of the Brethren...”

Bonded to Jesus Christ,¹ we move together toward God's New Creation.² In our diversity we celebrate our unity in the person and work of the Savior, celebrating the God who makes us one.³ We recognize we are more than individuals; we are the people of God.⁴ In a world that

favors independence and solo effort, we choose interdependence and community.⁵ We do so in the context of our Church of the Brethren heritage, living out our Anabaptist-Pietist ideals empowered by the Holy Spirit,⁶ through congregational, district, and national ministries. We believe our faith legacy lives on as we risk adventuresome acts of radical discipleship,⁷ utilizing every expression of the church, local and trans-local. In doing so, we venture forth boldly as a faith family, expectant and innovative,⁸ serving others and the God who makes all things new.⁹

¹ **Romans 1:1-4** Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

² **Revelation 21:1-4** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

³ **Romans 12:3-5** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

⁴ **1 Peter 2:10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

⁵ **Acts 2:42-47** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
1 Corinthians 12 (12, 24b-26) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ...God as so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

⁶ **Zechariah 4:6** He said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

⁷ **Matthew 16:24-25** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

⁸ **1 Corinthians 2:9-10** But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

⁹ **Isaiah 43:19** I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

...passionately live and share..."

This vision calls us to passionate discipleship, requiring us to embody an enthusiastic zeal that glows from within us as we live and share with others.¹ Our living should exhibit the vigor of one who is alive in Jesus Christ, thoroughly steeped in and guided by the Holy Spirit.² The manner in which we live should radiate in our homes and communities so our good works can be seen and God may be glorified.³ With the same passion that we live Christ-centered lives, we are called to

share generously with our neighbors, in deed and by word, what we have experienced ourselves.⁴ We share so that our neighbors and our communities may participate in the blessing of abundant life in Jesus Christ, now and for eternity.⁵

¹ **Romans 12:11** Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

² **Galatians 5:22-25** The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

³ **Matthew 5:16** [Jesus taught them, saying:] "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

⁴ **2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (8, 13)** And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work...Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and all others.

⁵ **John 10: 7-10 (10b)** [Jesus said to them], "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. **1 John 1:1-3** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

"...radical transformation..."

Radical transformation occurs only through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is characterized by an all-encompassing, profound change within those who place full faith and belief in God incarnate as revealed in scripture—Jesus Christ.¹ This inner transformation manifests outwardly through a life that turns away from the values of a world alienated from God and seeks to understand and embody God's holy values as revealed in Jesus Christ.² Lives radically transformed by Jesus Christ become channels for the flow of Christ's powerful grace, unconditional love, and holistic peace in the world around us where the Holy Spirit continues to draw people into radical transformation for the glory of God.³

¹ **John 1:1-14 (1-2, 12-14)** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. **John 5:24-25** [Jesus said to them,] "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." **John 10:10** [Jesus said to them,] "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

2 Corinthians 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! **Titus 3:5** He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. **John 3:16** [Jesus answered him,] "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

² **Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. **Ephesians 4:22-24** You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. **Galatians 2:20** It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

John 3:5-7 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'"

³ **Matthew 9:35-38** Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."; **2 Corinthians 5:18-21** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **Colossians 1:27-28** To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. **Ephesians 3:20-21** Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

"...holistic peace..."

In the beginning, God created the world in Shalom. Shalom is not simply the absence of violence, but rather the presence of a holistic peace—right, or healthy, relationships in four different ways:

- between us and God;¹
- between us and other human beings;²
- between us and ourselves;³
- between us and all of creation.⁴

In Genesis 3 all four of these relationships become broken. Adam and Eve become estranged from God, their relationship with each other becomes distorted, they know their sin and experience internal brokenness, and their relationship with animals and even the ground is cursed. The rest of the Biblical story is an account of God's varied and ongoing attempts to restore this original Shalom, ultimately culminating in sending Jesus Christ to bring about this restoration through his life, death and resurrection.⁵

When we speak of "holistic peace" we are referring to Shalom. Since God's kingdom is already begun, but not yet complete,⁶ we are called by God to strive for and participate in Shalom, both in small, everyday ways and in large, systemic ways.⁷ For example:

- To help others learn about Jesus and become his disciples is to participate in Shalom.
- To work to transform conflict, whether between individuals or nations, is to participate in Shalom.
- To directly address mental health issues is to participate in Shalom.
- To care for God's creation that has been entrusted to us is to participate in Shalom.

¹ **Jeremiah 31:33** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

² **Luke 18:8-9** Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek out and to save the lost." **John 17:20-21** [Jesus prayed,] "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

³ **Romans 7:14-25 (14-15, 22-25a)** For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions, For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! **Mark 5:1-20 (14b-15)** Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid.

⁴ **Genesis 9:8-10** Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. **Romans 8:18-21** I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

⁵ **Romans 5:1-11 (10)** For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. **John 3:16-17** [Jesus answered him,] "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." **2 Corinthians 13:4** For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

⁶ **Luke 17:20-21** Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' for, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." **Mark 13:32-37 (33)** [Jesus said to them,] "Be aware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come."

⁷ **1 Corinthians 3:9** For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

"...Jesus Christ..."

Jesus Christ is the living Word, the Son of God, fully divine and present with God at creation.¹

He was sent from God as a human being, walking and living in the neighborhoods of Judea proclaiming God's kingdom. We continue to delight in the presence of the living Christ through the Holy Spirit, empowering us to live as Jesus' followers in our neighborhoods.² Therefore, we confess together:

- **Jesus Christ is our Redeemer** – Through God's extension of grace and our repentance, Christ's redemption delivers us from sin. Our redemption through Christ restores our broken relationship with God and our neighbors.³
- **Jesus Christ is our Teacher** – Jesus' words, deeds and example are recorded in scripture, teaching us how to live in reconciled relationships with God and our neighbors.⁴
- **Jesus Christ is our Lord** – We pledge to Christ alone our loyalty and obedience. All other loyalties are secondary to our commitment to follow Jesus as his disciples.⁵

¹ **Genesis: 1:1-2** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **Isaiah 9:6-7** For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **John 1:1-14 (1, 14)** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

² **Acts 1:1-8 (8)** [Jesus replied,] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

³ **Exodus 6:6-8** Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord." **Mark 10:45** [Jesus called them and said to them,] "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." **Ephesians 2:11-22 (13,15-18)** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. **Colossians 1:13-14** He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

⁴ **Jeremiah 31:31-34 (33-34)** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. **Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **John 13:13-16** [Jesus said to them,] "You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them." **Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

⁵ **Exodus 20:1-3** Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. **Romans 10:9** Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **Philippians 2:9-11** Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Revelation 17:14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

"...relationship-based neighborhood engagement..."

The body of Christ is called to be generous, sharing its resources with those in need.¹ Many congregations quickly and enthusiastically gather food, clothing, and other resources to help those who face scarcity in relation to basic, physical needs. This vision calls us to go beyond meeting physical needs to a place where we, like Jesus Christ, are walking in authentic friendship with those who share our geographic neighborhoods.² This means responding to needs and sharing our resources without partiality or condescension in the face of any differences, but rather with sensitivity, compassion, respect, and a genuine willingness to learn.³ It is grounded in a deep understanding that every human being stands in equal need of reconciliation with God, and when we have experienced that reconciliation we become ministers of it through trusting, faithful, long-term relationships with our neighbors.⁴

This is well done by the body of Christ when behavior toward those both within and outside the body consistently and seamlessly embodies the call to love as Jesus Christ loved, making the “walls” of the church virtually non-existent.⁵ In these times, God is calling us to be the denomination challenging its congregations to live out a deep sense of love and care for the body, soul, and spirit of each individual with whom we are privileged to engage, and an unmistakable commitment to the overall well-being of the neighborhood.⁶ Such a focus brings deeper meaning to the motto which hung above the Sauer printing press and which many Brethren have claimed as their own: “For the glory of God and our neighbor’s good.”

¹ **Luke 3:11** In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” **Hebrews 13:16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. **Acts 4:32-35** Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

² **John 1:14 (The Message)** The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

³ **James 2:1-4** My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? **Micah 6:6-8 (8)** He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

⁴ **Romans 3:22-24** The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ [has been disclosed] for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **2 Corinthians 5:18-21** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

⁵ **John 13:34-35** [Jesus said,] “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” **1 John 4:7-21 (7,18-19)** Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. **Ephesians 2:17-21** So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

⁶ **John 14:23 (The Message)** “Because a loveless world,” said Jesus, “is a sightless world. If anyone loves me, he will carefully keep my word and my Father will love him—we’ll move right into the neighborhood.” **Jeremiah 29:7** But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

“...culture...”

We will reorient the entire “nature and being” of our denomination around a missional (e.g., outwardly focused) mindset.¹ To this end, we call every element of our denominational system (Mission and Ministry Board, Annual Conference agencies, Districts, Congregations) to realign their language, norms, beliefs, symbols, values, and priorities around an external focus to reach

persons for Jesus Christ and His other way of living.² We will create a culture of empowerment that encourages and equips the local church³ to reach persons with a comprehensive message of salvation,⁴ declaring Jesus Christ as Lord of all life.⁵

It is understood that such a kingdom emphasis summons congregations to respond prophetically, systemically, and globally, even while reaching out locally.⁶ We recognize such refocus will require loss but claim the biblical hope that as some things die, there is, nevertheless, the promise of new life.⁷ We further affirm such rebirth is a gift of the Holy Spirit; thus, we recommit to a renewed denominational language of dependence on God's provision⁸ and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.⁹

¹ **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **Acts 1:8** [Jesus replied,] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

² **1 John 1:1-4 (1, 3-4)** We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes... concerning the word of life...so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

³ **Ephesians 4:11-13** The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

⁴ **2 Corinthians 5:17-19** So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

⁵ **Philippians 2:5-10** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...And being found in human form humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

⁶ **Luke 4:16-21 (18-19, 21)** When [Jesus] came to Nazareth...to the synagogue...[he read from the scroll of Isaiah]: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

⁷ **John 12:23-25** Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." **Philippians 3:7-9 (7-8)** Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish that I may gain Christ.

⁸ **Proverbs 3:5** Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. **John 14:12-14** [Jesus said to him,] "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

⁹ **Hebrews 1:1-4** Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

“...calling and equipping...”

It has been said that “God doesn’t call the equipped. God equips the called.” Within the Church of the Brethren, we affirm the “priesthood of all believers.”¹ Therefore, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all called to partner in God’s ongoing work of redemption.² Further, we can trust that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will equip us—individually and as a community—with all we need to do God’s will.³

However, that doesn’t mean it isn’t important for us to actively call and equip people to lead us in special ways. As we embark on this journey into our neighborhoods to live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ with grace and humility, it is incumbent upon us to be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and in the lives of our neighbors, to discern the God-given gifts in one another and ourselves, to call out those among us who can lead us into our neighborhoods, and to partner with God in equipping our faith communities—through teaching, prayer, communal study of Scripture, and a consistent, faithful openness to what God is calling us to do and be.⁴

¹ **1 Peter 2:4-10 (5, 9)** Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **Romans 12:3-8 (4-6a)** For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

² **Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. **Ephesians 4:7, 12-13** But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

³ **Hebrews 13:21** [Now may the God of peace] make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. **Philippians 1:6** I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:4-31 (4-7, 27)** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

⁴ **Ephesians 4:15-16** But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

“...disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless...”

Discipleship connects not only the head (learning and growing in faith and knowledge) and the heart (allowing us to feel the needs of those around us); it also connects to our hands (challenging us to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in this world).¹ Consider the disciples who walked with Jesus Christ and the radical manner in which they lived out their call. They

interacted with outcasts, they engaged others in unique ways, they were molded and shaped into evangelists, encouragers, empathizers, and those who empowered others. Even in the first century, these radical disciples changed the way people thought about life, faith, and community. Men and women, together, demonstrated a new hope found only in Jesus Christ.²

To be disciples in the 21st century, we need look no further than those first disciples and the cloud of witnesses that came after them.³ Disciples throughout the years were fearless⁴ in their pursuit of Jesus Christ. They were risk-takers, seeking opportunities to let go of their needs and surrender to the call of Jesus in their lives. They had courage to share the holistic peace and radical transformation Jesus Christ offered. At each step of history, disciples were innovative⁵ in sharing this transformation and peace in a constantly evolving world. New ways of connecting, sharing the gospel, and building community change with every generation. Like the disciples who preceded us, we need to be adaptable⁶ in both the means by and opportunities in which we share that hope. In a fractured culture, we must be courageous and discerning of new ways to proclaim Jesus Christ in order to passionately live out Christ's call for our neighborhoods and world

¹ **Luke 10:26-27** [Jesus] said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself. "

² **Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

³ **Hebrews 11:1-12:2 (12:1)** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

⁴ **Matthew 16:24-25** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. **Acts 5:41** As [the apostles] left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name [Jesus Christ]. **2 Timothy 1:7** For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power, and of love, and of self-discipline.

⁵ **Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

⁶ **Philippians 4:11-13** Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. **1 Corinthians 9:19** – For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.