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- Would you say that all CoB congregations affirm this conviction?

We cannot know conclusively whether all persons and congregations in the Church of the Brethren affirm this conviction. However, the fact that all CoB congregations celebrate the bread and cup (the ordinance of the unique Work of God through the Cross, through Jesus) indicates that CoB participants/members affirm Jesus as Savior and Lord, as defined by the Bible.

**Authority and Accountability**

- Overall, what is the Church of the Brethren’s approach to authority and accountability?

It is a system of mutual trust and shared responsibility between the Annual Conference, districts, congregations, and ministers.

- The Annual Conference is the highest authority in the Church of the Brethren; all aspects of the denomination are accountable to its actions.<sup>4</sup> Annual Conference, however, delegates authority to districts for holding congregations accountable.<sup>5</sup>
- Ministers are accountable to both the district and Annual Conference.<sup>6</sup>
- In carrying out accountability, we communicate: 1) “The actions of [the Annual] Conference are directives for the whole life of the church, and implementation is assumed to take place within a reasonable span of time.”<sup>7</sup> 2) “Groups and individuals have channels of review when decisions of Annual Conference are questioned.”<sup>8</sup>
- In carrying out accountability we do not utilize “acts of enforcement by decree. Rather, education, consultation, and patience are [to be employed].”<sup>9</sup>
- Overall, there is to be “mutual trust and shared responsibility between local, district, and denominational structures.”<sup>10</sup> “The goal of the ... [accountability] process is to find God’s truth together in a respectful Christian community.”<sup>11</sup>

- How do we hold districts accountable to Annual Conference actions and decisions? It is apparent that districts vary in their compliance with official statements of the church.

There is no explicit process in our current polity to hold districts accountable. There are, however, understandings related to accountability and districts:

- “Grounded in its discernment of its unique vision and mission, the purpose of the district shall be to administer and coordinate the religious and business activities of the Church of the Brethren within the bounds of the district. <sup>12</sup>
- “Districts are strongly encouraged to review their policies, processes and procedures to ensure that they are in harmony with Annual Conference actions and decisions, replacing or removing these policies, processes, and procedures as necessary. We urge districts to work at discipline in a redemptive rather than a punitive spirit, considering the full life and faithfulness of the parties involved.”<sup>13</sup>

98 - “Each district is encouraged to put in place framework for processing a  
99 congregational disagreement with an Annual Conference action...The process should  
100 be flexible enough to allow for the wide variations of each case, yet specific enough  
101 that it has accountability and direction...The goal of the district response process  
102 should be to help the congregation move to an understanding of the Annual  
103 Conference action and willingness to support the action, or at least a willingness to  
104 refrain from taking any action that would be interpreted as being defiant or  
105 insubordinate.”<sup>14</sup>  
106  
107

## 108 **Abortion**

- 109  
110 • What is the Church of the Brethren position on abortion?  
111

112 In sum: “The Church of the Brethren opposes abortion because the rejection of unborn  
113 children violates the love by which God creates and nurtures human life.  
114

115 “We recognize that our society contributes to unwanted pregnancies in many ways and  
116 gives too little care to those who must bear the consequences.  
117

118 “We recognize also our responsibility to work for a caring society that undergirds women  
119 who choose to carry pregnancies to full term, ... a caring society that [also] protects  
120 integrity of conscience in decision-making in relation to pregnancy and child bearing  
121 while also acting to protect the unborn.  
122

123 “We hold ourselves accountable to develop constructive, creative alternatives to abortion  
124 in the communities of which we are a part.  
125

126 ... “We hold in love and will support those who choose to give birth to children, and the  
127 children themselves, as well as those who believe conscientiously, they must terminate  
128 pregnancy.  
129

130 “We acknowledge our lack of compassion, our judgementalism, and other sinful attitudes  
131 that separate us from the love by which God calls and redeems us.”<sup>15</sup>  
132  
133

## 134 **Black Lives Matter Organization**

- 135  
136 • Has the Church of the Brethren given funds to the Black Lives Matter organization?  
137

138 No. While it is possible that Church of the Brethren individuals or congregations have  
139 given funds to the Black Lives Matter organization, no official part of the structure of the  
140 Church of the Brethren has given funds to this group.  
141

142 However, a lack of financial support for the Black Lives Matter organization is not to be  
143 confused with a lack of resolve to address racism; in line with the Bible’s commitment to  
144 justice and equality for all (Isaiah 1:17; Acts 10:34-35; Colossians 3:11; Revelation 7:9),  
145 we believe Black lives matter. The Church of the Brethren is vitally committed to  
146 combating racism in all its manifold expressions.<sup>16</sup>  
147

148 **Compelling Vision**

- 149
- 150 • How was the Compelling Vision adopted: by vote or by affirmation, and why wasn't
  - 151 there an opportunity to amend it?
  - 152

153 In keeping with the timeline set forth at the beginning of the process, the compelling  
154 vision was brought to the 2021 Annual Conference for affirmation by the delegate body.  
155 The categories for which delegates voted sought to measure the level of support for the  
156 Vision Statement, rather than to vote simply on whether or not to adopt it, in the  
157 traditional way, with motions and amendments.

158

159 Discernment of the compelling vision emerged from the work of the whole church  
160 through significant conversations that took place at Annual Conference 2018 and 2019, in  
161 districts, and with various constituency groups. For this reason, the Annual Conference  
162 officers determined that the process for affirming the compelling vision should also be  
163 one of creative, prayerful engagement through continued conversation, rather than a  
164 process of motions and amendments.

165

166 162 persons (or 36% of those who voted) said they “feel inspired and wholeheartedly  
167 affirm the vision.” 107 persons (or almost 24% of those who voted) said they “affirm the  
168 vision.” 100 persons (or 22% of those who voted) said they “have reservations, but will  
169 set them aside and affirm the vision for the good of the body.” 81 persons (or 18% of  
170 those who voted) said they “cannot affirm the vision.”

171

172 From feedback, received via a survey question and in conversation following Annual  
173 Conference, we know that those who expressed reservations and those who chose not to  
174 affirm, did so for a variety of reasons. Some were frustrated by the decision to deviate  
175 from the traditional process. Some were frustrated by the wording of the vision statement,  
176 and some were frustrated by what the vision statement didn't say.

177

178 To one degree or another, 82% of the delegates affirmed that God is calling the Church of  
179 the Brethren to carry out this vision: *Together as the Church of the Brethren, we will*  
180 *passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ*  
181 *through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will*  
182 *develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and*  
183 *fearless.*

- 184
- 185 • What difference will it make now that the Compelling Vision is adopted for the future of
  - 186 the Church of the Brethren.
  - 187

188 We pray it will make much difference.

189

190 We believe a focus on Jesus and Mission (the heart of the Compelling Vision) will lessen  
191 strife, as we major in what we all agree on: Christ and Witness.

192

193 The issues dividing us are critical. But more critical is our common conviction that “Jesus  
194 Christ is the Son of God, Savior of the World and the Head of the Church, according to

195 the Scriptures”<sup>17</sup> and that witness in His name in our neighborhoods (local and global) is  
196 the most important thing we are called to do.  
197

198 The beauty of the proposed Compelling Vision is that it encourages us to live out our  
199 witness in Jesus in varied ways, according to our unique calling and context. Thus, it  
200 embodies unity in diversity as we all rally around Jesus yet witness to Him in diverse  
201 ways.  
202

203 Overall, Jesus promises that as we focus on Him and His mission, vitality comes to us as  
204 we drink of and share living water, “an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of  
205 endless life” (John 4:14 MSG).  
206

207

## 208 **On Earth Peace**

209

- 210 • What has been the Leadership Team’s response to the On Earth Peace decision to join the  
211 Supportive Communities Network (SCN)?  
212

213 The Leadership Team concluded that “by taking this action [i.e., joining SCN], On Earth  
214 Peace’s decision to join the Supportive Communities Network conflicts with OEP’s  
215 official agreement to serve as an Annual Conference agency. That agreement, as recorded  
216 in current denominational polity, states that On Earth Peace will “commit itself to  
217 providing ministry that is within the scope of Annual Conference directives and  
218 congruent with articulated values of the Church of the Brethren.”  
219

220 The Leadership Team statement “appreciates that much of On Earth's work engages the  
221 Annual Conference decision to ‘extend Christ-like comfort and grace to homosexual and  
222 bisexual persons.’ However, On Earth Peace's decision to join SCN positions OEP in  
223 opposition to Annual Conference's current discernment about covenantal relationships for  
224 homosexual persons.”<sup>18</sup>  
225

226 “The Leadership Team believes that On Earth Peace’s decision is of sufficient  
227 consequence to require On Earth Peace to enter into intentional, serious, prayerful  
228 engagement with the Standing Committee and the delegate body of Annual Conference.  
229 The Leadership Team believes an outcome of that engagement should be a determination  
230 of OEP’s Annual Conference agency status, given their decision to join the Supportive  
231 Communities Network.”<sup>19</sup>  
232

233

234

## 235 **Same Gender Marriage**

236

- 237 • What is the current Church of the Brethren understanding regarding same sex marriage?  
238

239 “At this time, ministers and congregations are not authorized by Annual Conference to  
240 perform same sex weddings. A majority of the delegate body is clearly opposed to  
241 homosexual covenantal relationships. A significant minority disagrees with this  
242 decision.”<sup>20</sup>  
243

244 • Is it true that some Church of the Brethren pastors have conducted same gender  
245 marriages? How common is that, and why is that allowed to happen without punishment?  
246

247 Church of the Brethren pastors do not report the weddings they conduct to either their  
248 district or a national denominational office; thus, there is no official way to know if  
249 Church of the Brethren pastors have conducted same gender marriages. With that said,  
250 there have been instances when districts have held ministers accountable for conducting  
251 same gender marriages.  
252

253 There is to be accountability to all actions of the Annual Conference including the  
254 Conference's stance that "covenantal relationships between homosexual persons is an  
255 additional lifestyle option but, in the church's search for a Christian understanding of  
256 human sexuality, this alternative is not acceptable."<sup>21</sup> Our approach to accountability,  
257 however, is not one of punishment, or "acts of enforcement by decree. Rather, education,  
258 consultation, and patience are [to be employed]."<sup>22</sup> Accountability details are a  
259 confidential matter between the pastor and the district, who holds the pastor's ordination.  
260

261 • Does the Church of the Brethren have a position on licensing and ordaining persons  
262 living in a homosexual lifestyle?  
263

264 Yes. In 2002 the Annual Conference determined it "inappropriate to license or ordain to  
265 the Christian ministry any persons who are known to be engaging in homosexual  
266 practices, and will not recognize the licensing and ordination of such persons in the  
267 Church of the Brethren."<sup>23</sup>  
268

269 - Overall, "we acknowledge that Christ calls us to live together as one body, centered  
270 in Christ in a life of grace. We will not take lightly decisions that will terminate an  
271 individual's ministerial credentials or disorganize a congregation."<sup>24</sup>  
272

273 It is important to underscore, these accountability understandings are not just applicable  
274 to same sex marriage, but to all aspects of denominational polity, and all statements of  
275 the Annual Conference.  
276

## 277 278 **Covenant Brethren Church (CBC)** 279

280 • What is your understanding of the reasons why congregations are leaving the Church of  
281 the Brethren and deciding to join the CBC?  
282

283 The reasons vary. One often repeated, is that a different system of enforcing the church's  
284 positions on homosexuality/same-gender weddings is needed. While both denominations  
285 have similar positions on these issues, accountability varies in the CoB from district to  
286 district when ministers/congregations stray from the church's official stance. There have  
287 also been claims that the Church of the Brethren does not uphold Biblical authority; the  
288 actual issue, however, is the interpretation of scripture (hermeneutics). Both  
289 denominations uphold the Bible as God's Written Word, our rule for faith and  
290 discipleship.<sup>25</sup>  
291

292 It is important to stress, congregations leave the Church of the Brethren for a variety of  
293 reasons; not all leave to align with the Covenant Brethren Church.

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- What would you say is the fundamental difference between the Covenant Brethren Church’s (CBC) approach to accountability and that of the Church of the Brethren?

The Covenant Brethren Church’s approach is centralized, working at accountability through a single Executive Board.<sup>26</sup>

The Church of the Brethren’s approach is shared, working at accountability through a system of mutual trust between the Annual Conference, districts, congregations, and ministers.<sup>27</sup>

- How many churches have joined the Covenant Brethren Church denomination and how many more are anticipated to leave for the CBC?

The current number of CBC congregations is available at their website.

We are not anticipating a large movement of churches leaving the Church of the Brethren to join the CBC.

- Why was there not a statement about the CBC earlier than there was? Didn’t you know this was going to happen?

The denominational Leadership Team took the intentional, public step of issuing a statement when the CBC took intentional, public steps to become an official denomination. This happened when the CBC gathered at the Antioch Church of the Brethren, Woodstock VA. on November 16, 2019 and officially adopted the name Covenant Brethren Church and choose a location for a central office. Shortly thereafter, on November 21, 2019, the Leadership Team released its first statement.<sup>28</sup>

- Why is the Leadership Team opposed to dual ordination for pastors and dual affiliation for congregations by the Church of the Brethren AND the Covenant Brethren Church?

Dual affiliation/ordination polity is designed for persons who can affirm that both denominations with whom they are aligned are faithful. The CBC by design is a schism intentionally separating from the CoB because they find the CoB unfaithful to the authority of scripture.<sup>29</sup> By joining/affiliating with CBC, an individual/congregation is affirming that the CoB is unfaithful, thus deciding “they cannot be church together with the Church of the Brethren.”<sup>30</sup>

We pray congregations and pastors will find the Church of the Brethren faithful, respecting its beliefs, practices, and polity. Though far from perfect, the CoB strives diligently to be true to God’s Word.

- The opening line of the Leadership Team Statement about the CBC talked about division in the CoB caused by the Covenant Brethren Church. Why was it phrased to suggest that this group is causing division when a division has really existed for some time and this group is formed for those who cannot live any longer in that neighborhood of division?

The CBC by design is a schism, thus divisive. Divisiveness has been with us for some time. However, biblically, divisiveness is not remedied by more division. Rather, “the

344 way ahead is through conversations that seek to discern God’s purposes through the study  
345 of scripture and prayer, yearning for the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s will for our life and  
346 witness.”<sup>31</sup>

347  
348

## 349 **Forbearance**

350

- 351 • What role does the 2008 Statement on Forbearance have on the disagreements that we  
352 have as Brethren?  
353

354 The statement reminds us that forbearance contributes to peacebuilding. Such a stance  
355 “does not require one to accept what another believes, but it does require one to listen and  
356 try to understand what another believes without demeaning, personal attacks, or acting to  
357 disenfranchise the other person.”<sup>32</sup>

358

- 359 • Who came up with these Annual Conference statements and papers? Why should we give  
360 them any weight?  
361

362 Annual Conference statements and papers are crafted by a study process set up by  
363 Conference delegates to respond to queries initiated by congregations via their district  
364 conferences or to recommendations from Annual Conference committees, the  
365 denominational board, or Annual Conference agency boards. The finalized documents  
366 represent hours of Bible study, in-depth research, and fervent prayer.  
367

368 All official Annual Conference statements and papers must be affirmed by at least a  
369 majority vote of the delegate body of Annual Conference. Annual Conference statements  
370 and papers have “weight” because they are the official voice of the denomination on  
371 pressing issues of faith and discipleship.

372

373

## 374 **Unity and Reconciliation**

375

- 376 • There is much talk about wanting to seek unity in the church. What is meant by unity in  
377 that context?  
378

379 Among other things: 1) empathy for all, including those with whom we differ, or consider  
380 Enemy;<sup>33</sup> 2) gathering around Jesus as our center point affirming that: “Jesus Christ is the  
381 Son of God, Savior of the World and the Head of the Church, according to the  
382 Scriptures.”<sup>34</sup>

383

- 384 • Are there attempts to bring reconciliation to these congregations that feel they need to  
385 leave because of these divisions?  
386

387 Yes. Denominational leaders, whenever possible: 1) Underscore our yearning for  
388 reconciliation and unity, acknowledging there are issues that need to be addressed;<sup>35</sup> 2)  
389 Respond to requests to ‘come to the table’ to address concerns, clarify  
390 misunderstandings, and confess oversights or errors; 3) Encourage persons to advance  
391 conflict resolution through the pattern of Matthew 18:15ff.; 4) Commend strategies for

392 moving through our conflict, such as the “Way Forward” process in the Atlantic  
393 Northeast District.<sup>36</sup>

- 394
- 395 ● Can this schism with CBC be resolved and if so, how, and if not, why not?  
396

397 Yes. 1) By confessing we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans  
398 3:23). Both the Church of the Brethren and the Covenant Brethren Church have erred and  
399 need to repent. 2) By remembering that we agree on far more than we differ. In fact, on  
400 two of the most pressing issues for the Covenant Brethren Church, abortion and same  
401 gender marriage, the Church of the Brethren and CBC, in substance, have basically the  
402 same positions.<sup>37</sup> In addition, both the CoB and the CBC recognize the need for  
403 congregational liberty. 3) By developing a way forward (beyond what the CBC views as  
404 disingenuous ‘promises’) through the central reason for our divide: differing views on the  
405 nature and practice of accountability; 4) By recognizing: God hates schism. The slant of  
406 scripture is toward unity in Christ, despite differences. (1 Corinthians 1:13-17; Ephesians  
407 4: 1-3)

- 408
- 409 ● Is reuniting with the CBC churches really the vision we have, that maybe in the future  
410 there can be a reunification of CoB and CBC? It has not happened in our history, but is it  
411 possible that we would do that now, maybe in a few years when things are calmer?  
412

413 That could be. As a living peace church, the Church of the Brethren is committed to  
414 “...discover afresh ‘the things that make for peace’ and discern through honest and  
415 prayerful discussion how to put this knowledge into action...”<sup>38</sup> That commitment applies  
416 to the conflict and division within our own church family. There is no plan to officially  
417 ‘say goodbye’ to CBC congregations/ministers. Given our continuing hope for  
418 reconciliation, we feel such action is premature.

## 419

## 420

## 421 Annual Conference

- 422
- 423 ● Is the next Annual Conference going to be held by zoom?  
424

425 Currently there are no plans to hold the 2022 Annual Conference entirely online. Barring  
426 any new pandemic related developments, the 2022 Annual Conference, meeting in  
427 Omaha, Nebraska, will be in person. Delegates must attend in person. As has been the  
428 case in the past, online access to worship services will be available to everyone free of  
429 charge. Online access to business sessions and some insight session offerings will be  
430 available to non-delegates for a fee. Recordings of at least some insight sessions will also  
431 be made available after Annual Conference to all who register to participate in person or  
432 online. More information about access and registration costs will be announced in early  
433 2022 for the Omaha Conference.

- 434
- 435 ● Who is responsible for the Annual Conference ballot, and how can it reflect the diversity  
436 of our denomination to a greater extent?  
437

438 The Nominating Committee of Standing Committee prepares the Annual Conference  
439 ballot. They do so through a process of discernment and prayer, as they consider the

440 nominations submitted by the church at large. They submit a ballot of four nominees per  
441 position to Standing Committee, which selects two nominees per position. The resulting  
442 ballot is then voted on by the delegate body of the Annual Conference.  
443

444 The Nominating Committee of Annual Conference works intentionally at issues of  
445 inclusion and justice: “Each year the Nominating Committee explains the goals, needs,  
446 and procedures of our election process to the Standing Committee and to the delegate  
447 body. Delegates are reminded to work towards a balance of age/gender/ethnic  
448 representation.”<sup>39</sup>  
449

450 “In 1983, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1999, and 2001, the *Call to Accountability for*  
451 *Equality of Representation on Annual Conference Ballots* for more equal use of all  
452 persons was reaffirmed.” A part of this reaffirmation is a continuing “standard practice to  
453 look at our progress over the past five years.”<sup>40</sup> An annual progress report is presented by  
454 Nominating Committee to Standing Committee and to the full delegate body before they  
455 vote.  
456

457 In addition to Nominating Committee’s intentionality, “congregations, districts, and  
458 agencies are called to do quality leadership development, giving leadership experience to  
459 a wide variety of persons to prepare them for possible denominational leadership, in  
460 particular to identify and call forth ethnic/minority leadership. All nominees for  
461 denominational leadership are encouraged to have participated in at least one intercultural  
462 experience in the past five years.”<sup>41</sup>  
463  
464

## 465 **Communication**

466

- 467 ● There are a lot of people in the congregation who don’t have a clue what is going on in  
468 the larger church (denomination and district). How can we inform people in our  
469 congregations?  
470

471 Ask your pastor to write a pastor’s column – or – permit you to write a column for your  
472 congregation on the topic: “Keeping in Touch With Our Wider Church Family.” That  
473 column can ask members/participants to sign up directly at  
474 <https://www.brethren.org/news/> for *Newsline*, the free Church of the Brethren email  
475 newsletter. Other ideas are found in the endnotes.<sup>42</sup>  
476

- 477 ● With communication being a level of accountability, is there is a better way that we as a  
478 denomination can communicate and let the whole denomination know that yes, an  
479 incident happened and this is the response, rather than it always coming through all the  
480 different back channels?  
481

482 The break-down of communication in our denomination is a major concern; clearly, new  
483 methods for connecting with our members/participants, congregations are needed. For  
484 now, we encourage members/participants, congregations to:  
485

- 486 - Provide direct access to *Newsline* as noted above.
- 487
- 488 - Practice Matthew 18:15ff, going directly to persons connected with incidents that are  
489 problematic and troubling.

490  
491 - Trust leadership that they are acting in the best interests of the church. Accountability  
492 is often a personnel matter requiring confidentiality; thus, there is often an absence of  
493 public details. Such a reality is not to be confused with an absence of accountability.  
494

495 Other ideas are in the endnotes.<sup>43</sup>  
496

- 497 • The denominational Leadership Team typically takes weeks or months to react to  
498 developments in the church. What can denominational leadership do to be more  
499 accessible and have more timely communication with pastors and lay persons?  
500

501 The Leadership Team manages a large agenda; thus, it is not always able to respond  
502 immediately to every item requiring its attention. In addition, members of the Leadership  
503 Team have multiple responsibilities beyond their involvement on the Team, requiring  
504 time and energy.  
505

506 Preceding the recent series of online Q&A events with the moderator, the general  
507 secretary conducted an extensive series of listening sessions in each district. In addition,  
508 each moderator visits district conferences as invited and the general secretary visits each  
509 district conference on a regular, rotating basis. These have all been attempts to provide  
510 more immediate access and timely communication.  
511

## 512 **Health and Wellbeing of the Church of the Brethren**

- 513 • What impact do you anticipate there will be on the funding, and staffing of the Church of  
514 the Brethren denominational program in the aftermath of many congregations' departure  
515 to the CBC? How are the denomination's finances holding up with the pandemic and all?  
516  
517  
518

519 Denominational finances are 'holding their own.' Some units of the denomination have  
520 been 'hit' harder than others, such as Brethren Press. This is due to many factors,  
521 including the pandemic, but donors have been supportive.  
522

523 Ongoing, even stronger gifts, however, are needed.  
524

525 We do not anticipate a significant impact on core ministries of the Mission and Ministry  
526 Board since most departing churches were not supporting those ministries. The impact on  
527 special funds such as the Global Food Initiative and the Emergency Disaster Fund of  
528 Brethren Disaster Ministries remains to seen.  
529

- 530 • When the dust settles and we kind of sense who we will be together, how will we process  
531 our grief, recommit to our values and our understanding of what it means to be CoB, so  
532 we truly live into the new vision with heart and energy and mind and commitment?  
533

534 We pray the proposed Compelling Vision will contribute significantly. For example:  
535

- 536 - The Compelling Vision Bible studies provide an excellent resource for entering into  
537 our values and understandings as the Church of the Brethren.  
538
- 539 - The table conversations about the proposed Compelling Vision which were part of the  
540 2021 Annual Conference provided time for talk about both our laments and hopes.  
541

542 - New energy is emerging among us, as we act on the Compelling Vision, moving  
543 forward with Jesus into our neighborhoods. Out of the revitalization of our focus on  
544 engaging in the work of Jesus in our neighborhoods, we hope to find ways to embrace  
545 and embody God's grace to each other in the midst of our differences.  
546

547

## 548 **Pandemic**

549

- 550 ● Have there been any positive elements of the pandemic on our life together as a Church  
551 of the Brethren?  
552

553 Yes. Congregations are discovering the necessity of adaptation, a required part of any  
554 church renewal. One visible expression is the number of congregations learning to 'do  
555 church virtually,' an ongoing requirement for any vital church. The February 27, 2021  
556 denominational virtual worship service explored this development.<sup>44</sup>  
557

- 558 ● Will the pandemic change the denomination permanently, and if so, in what way?  
559

560 In all probability, but we do not know precisely how. In tandem with the Bible's teaching  
561 on exile, we needn't fear outcomes. As God assured the dislocated Hebrew people, God  
562 assures us: "Don't be afraid, for I will protect you. ...When you pass through the waters, I  
563 am with you.... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.... For I am the  
564 Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your deliverer." (Isaiah 43:1-3, NET)  
565

566

## 567 **What is the focus of the 2022 Annual Conference?**

568

569 The theme is "Embracing One Another as Christ Embraces Us" which puts the focus on  
570 learning to not just tolerate one another, but actually embrace each other as fellow  
571 Brethren, with whom we acknowledge we may have differences. We have a vision of  
572 love and grace and mission that calls Brethren of every stripe to band together in what  
573 Jesus wants to do through this body of Christ.  
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1979-biblical-inspiration-authority/> (item 6 in section I)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1998-new-testament/> (see the Reaffirmation section)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991-religious-pluralism/>

<sup>4</sup> "Annual Conference is the highest legislative authority in determining the polity of the church and the final authority of the Church of the Brethren in all matters of procedure, program, polity, and discipline." 1968 Minutes {1965-1969}, "The Frequency and Organization of Annual Conference: 316; "Church Polity, Including Referendum on Merger and Continuation of Ecumenical Concerns, 337. See page 1 of chapter 1 of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/ppg/>).

<sup>5</sup> "Annual Conference ... delegates authority to the district for holding congregations accountable, since congregations are expected '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 to carry out their 'ethical responsibility to support the denomination.' Annual Conference expects the district, however, to wield its

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authority in a spirit of seeking the mind of Christ together: ‘The goal of the ... process is to find God’s truth together in a respectful Christian community.’” - 2017 Report of the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives on the Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2017-report-authority-of-annual-conference-regarding-accountability-of-ministers-congregations-and-districts/>), which cites within this quotation the 2000 Minutes (2000-2004), “Congregational Structure,” 206; 1996 Minutes (1995-1999), “Statement of Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren,” 331; and 2004 Minutes (2000-2004), “Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions,” 1276.

<sup>6</sup> Ministers “are accountable to both the district and the denomination. Annual Conference charges districts with the responsibility of credentialing ministers in the Church of the Brethren, and the denominational Office of Ministry works to resource and support districts in this process.” (page 18 of <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/09/ministerial-leadership-paper.pdf>)

<sup>7</sup> See p. 1 of chapter 1 of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/ppg/>), where this is quoted from the 1968 Minutes (1965-1969), “Church Polity, Including Referendum on Merger and Coordination of Ecumenical Concerns, 337. See also 2004 Minutes (2000-2004), “Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions,” 1270-1280.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> 2004 “Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions” (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2004-congregational-disagreements/>) in the first paragraph of section V.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2021/01/MOP-Chapter-3-Jan.-2021-ed.pdf> (section A.2. on p. 2)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2017-report-authority-of-annual-conference-regarding-accountability-of-ministers-congregations-and-districts/> (from the “Accountability of Districts” section near the end of the document)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2021/01/MOP-Chapter-3-Jan.-2021-ed.pdf> (page 21)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1984-abortion/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/news/2020/what-does-the-lord-require-a/> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2007-separate-no-more/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991-religious-pluralism/> in the second to last sentence

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2017-report-authority-of-annual-conference-regarding-accountability-of-ministers-congregations-and-districts/> in the “Accountability of Ministers” section.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1983-human-sexuality/>

<sup>22</sup> See p. 1 of chapter 1 of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/ppg/>), where this is quoted from the 1968 Minutes (1965-1969), “Church Polity, Including Referendum on Merger and Coordination of Ecumenical Concerns, 337. See also 2004 Minutes (2000-2004), “Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions,” 1270-1280.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2002-query-on-licensing-of-homosexual-persons/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2017-report-authority-of-annual-conference-regarding-accountability-of-ministers-congregations-and-districts/> in the “Accountability of Ministers” section.

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- <sup>25</sup> <https://covenantbrethren.org/statement-of-faith/>; <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1979-biblical-inspiration-authority/>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://covenantbrethren.org/bylaws/>
- <sup>27</sup> See p. 1 of chapter 1 of the *Manual of Organization and Polity* (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/ppg/>), where this is quoted from the 1968 Minutes (1965-1969), “Church Polity, Including Referendum on Merger and Coordination of Ecumenical Concerns, 337. See also 2004 Minutes (2000-2004), “Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions,” 1270-1280. See also this FAQ document’s section on Authority and Accountability.
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/09/statement-on-the-covenant-brethren-church.pdf>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://covenantbrethren.org/frequently-asked-questions/>
- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/news/2020/leadership-team-issues-update-in-response-to-activities-of-the-covenant-brethren-church/>
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2008-resolution-urging-forgiveness/> The quote can be found at the end of the “In the Bible and Our History” section.
- <sup>33</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac2021/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/11/Trail-Thoughts-FALL-2020-COLOR.pdf>
- <sup>34</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991-religious-pluralism/>
- <sup>35</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/09/statement-on-the-covenant-brethren-church.pdf>; <https://anabaptistworld.org/conservative-brethren-exploring-separation/>
- <sup>36</sup> <http://ane-cob.com/wayforward/>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1984-abortion/>; <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2017-report-authority-of-annual-conference-regarding-accountability-of-ministers-congregations-and-districts/>; <https://covenantbrethren.org/bylaws/>
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2003-call-for-a-living-peace-church/>
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/election-procedures/> and <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2001-review-of-calling-process/> See the committee’s first recommendation in the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph of the 2001 Report of the Committee just before the appendixes.
- <sup>40</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/07/call-to-accountability-2021.pdf>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/election-procedures/> This is based on (a) the 2001 call for leadership development (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2001-review-of-calling-process/> in the fourth recommendation of the 2001 report) and (b) the 2007 “Separate No More” report (<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2007-separate-no-more/> in the “Denominational Recommendations” section).
- <sup>42</sup> - Include the Newline Digest (a summary of the Church of the Brethren’s email newsletter) in your congregation’s newsletter. A link to that resource follows: <https://www.brethren.org/news/newline-digest/>
- Encourage your pastor to announce all information that comes in the Source Packet and check [brethren.org](https://www.brethren.org) frequently.
- Encourage congregational members/participants to sign up for your district’s email newsletter. A link to District office contact information follows: <https://www.brethren.org/about/districts/>
- Encourage every member of your congregation to subscribe to Messenger, the official magazine of the Church of the Brethren. In particular, form a Messenger Club with a Messenger representative to help promote the magazine. A link to help you do just that follows: <https://www.brethren.org/messenger/subscribe/>
- <sup>43</sup> Promote and make more visible our denomination’s website, [www.brethren.org](https://www.brethren.org), and the denomination’s resource packet, SOURCE. Contact the denomination’s communication’s team at [cobnews@brethren.org](mailto:cobnews@brethren.org) for more information on both communication tools.
- <sup>44</sup> <https://www.brethren.org/ac/online-worship-2021/>