

1 **NB 3. Query: Breaking Down Barriers –**
2 **Increasing Access to Denominational Events**
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4 Brethren uphold the ideal that all congregations and all members should be
5 equally represented at Annual Conference and other meetings, and we value the
6 voice and participation of the entire body, all our members, to the fullest extent
7 possible, as together we seek the mind of Christ.
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9 Nevertheless, barriers to full and equal participation in wider church events,
10 such as Annual Conference, exist due to factors such as:

- 11 • travel (distance, time, complexity, and cost);
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- 13 • obstacles to travel (which might include pandemic travel restrictions, iden-
14 tification requirements, or others);
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- 16 • cost of meals and accommodations;
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- 18 • necessity of being away from home or work for extended periods of time; and
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- 20 • physical obstacles, and less-than-ideal accessibility on-site.
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23 Brethren from the West, from Puerto Rico, minorities, those with disabilities, those
24 who are economically disadvantaged, and those with on-going work or family re-
25 sponsibilities, are especially impacted by these barriers, resulting in their being under-
26 represented at such meetings. These factors also impact international Brethren.
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28 We hold the realities of these barriers in tension with our ideals.
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30 However, there is hope, as our world has changed and is still changing – as even
31 we Brethren have experienced:

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- 33 • 21st Century technologies now exist to help people and groups overcome
34 barriers and share access easily. These resources are more accessible, secure,
35 and cost-effective than ever before.
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- 37 • The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed us the opportunity to experience first-
38 hand some of the rich possibility for technology to bring us together for
39 worship and business, fellowship and connection. Many congregations have
40 effectively used these technologies, including even home-bound members
41 who were not able to participate previously.
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- 43 • Online denominational events, beginning with the Love Feast in April 2020,
44 reached many times the number of participants of recent Annual Confer-
45 ences, and included Brethren from all over the world who could never have
46 participated in person.

- Many district board meetings and conferences have been held online. They have included worship, reports, and secure methods for voting on business items. 1
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- Alternative meeting strategies can allow good stewardship choices, reducing costs as well as environmental impacts that contribute to climate change. 5
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In light of these observations, we are convinced that our current polity, which restricts voice and vote at Annual Conference to only those who have the ability, time, and resources to be physically present, no longer serves us well. Therefore, we, the Living Stream Church of the Brethren – the denomination’s fully online congregation – feel that this is the proper time in our life together to raise the following question: 8
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Should the Brethren explore the possibilities of how we can faithfully, in good order and with proper representation, use technology to remove barriers and facilitate the full participation of delegates and those desiring to be present for Annual Conference and other events, who might be better served – and could better serve the body – from a distance? 15
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Approved and passed on to the Living Stream congregational body with the full unanimous consensus of the Living Stream Church of the Brethren church board at their regular board meeting, August 11, 2020. 21
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Moderator, Sam Gahm 25
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Approved and passed on to the Pacific Northwest District Board with the full unanimous consensus of the Living Stream Church of the Brethren congregation gathered in a specially called congregational meeting, August 16, 2020. 27
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Moderator, Sam Gahm 31
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Received with appreciation and support, and passed on to the Pacific Northwest District Conference by the Pacific Northwest District Board meeting online August 26, 2020. 33
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Board Chair, Howard Ullery 37
Clerk, Carol Bowman 38
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Approved by full consensus of the Pacific Northwest District Conference meeting online September 19, 2020. 40
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Moderator, Ben Green 43
Clerk, Carol Bowman 44
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