

3. Report of the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee

The Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee (P&AC) reorganized at its meeting in August 2022. Moderator-Elect Madalyn Metzger, newly elected Annual Conference Secretary David Shumate, and new committee member Jacob Crouse joined Moderator Tim McElwee, and continuing committee members Beth Jarrett and Nathan Hollenberg. Director of Annual Conference Rhonda Pittman Gingrich meets with the committee as an ex-officio member. Debbie Noffsinger, Conference Assistant, also provides support for the committee and the ministry of Annual Conference.

Chaired by Moderator Tim McElwee, the committee reviewed evaluation forms from the 2022 Annual Conference held July 10-14, 2022 in Omaha, Nebraska. We then began planning for the 2023 Annual Conference to be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, July 4-8, 2023. Guiding our work was a focus on how we can faithfully fulfill the Annual Conference mission to “unite, strengthen and equip the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus”. We were also attentive to recommendations in the “Doing Annual Conference Differently” report completed by a committee appointed by the Leadership Team in 2021.

The theme for the 2023 Conference, chosen by the Moderator, is “Living God’s Love,” rooted in Ephesians 5:1-2. Daily themes and primary scripture texts were chosen for each worship service, along with preachers, worship leaders, and musicians. The Worship Planning Team, chaired by third-year P&AC member, Beth Jarrett, met jointly with P&AC and then on their own to continue planning for the Annual Conference worship services. Other members of the worship planning team include: David R. Miller, Don Mitchell, and Laura Stone, and music coordinator, Kyle Remnant.

P&AC affirmed the decision made last year to pivot away from insight sessions to equipping sessions, feeling that this renewed and expanded emphasis on equipping and empowering congregations and participants for a life of discipleship and service to Christ and the Church more faithfully fulfills both the Annual Conference mission as well as the denominational vision to call and equip “disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless” to engage in ministry with their neighbors. To this end, the Church of the Brethren staff and our other agency partners have once again been invited to plan sessions that are interactive learning experiences, exploring practical tools, skills, practices, or frameworks that participants can take home with them to enhance their personal and congregational ministry in relation to discipleship formation and leadership development, neighborhood engagement and missional outreach, and stewardship enhancement.

Planning continued through a series of Zoom meetings during fall of 2022. In addition to traditional activities like business sessions, worship services, equip-

ping sessions, meal events, age group programming, and opportunities to network with exhibitors, the committee also made plans for a late evening concert with The Walking Roots Band, excursions to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the Nancy and David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center, and a Witness to the Host City project to support Found House Interfaith Housing Network.

A particular focus for P&AC in planning for the 2023 Annual Conference was how to create a more vibrant atmosphere in the exhibit hall. We value the time and expense our exhibitors invest in being present at Annual Conference. They help us fulfill our mission by sharing invaluable ideas and resources with attendees that supporting robust ministry at all levels within the denomination. In an effort to increase traffic in the exhibit hall, we made plans for the addition of a small stage in a coffee-house-like setting which will host mini-concerts, live podcast recordings, and other presentations throughout Conference. We are also hosting a silent auction with 2/3 of the proceeds to benefit Brethren Disaster Ministries and 1/3 of the proceeds to benefit the Annual Conference budget. In addition, on Tuesday evening following worship, P&AC will be hosting a game night in the exhibit hall. We encourage all attendees to visit often throughout the week: networking with exhibitors, joining the quilters to place a few stitches in the quilts and wall hangings, enjoying the concerts and presentations on the stage, grabbing a bite from concessions, and browsing and bidding on items in the silent auction.

While we wish the pandemic was behind us, we continue to live in its shadow. We continue to consult with medical professionals, epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen and physician Dr. Emily Shonk Edwards, to monitor the situation and will put appropriate precautions in place if necessary.

The 2023 Annual Conference is being hosted by the Southern Ohio/Kentucky district. Site Coordinators Nan and Steve Hottle secured a team of volunteers to tend to various tasks related to Annual Conference. P&AC is deeply grateful to these district volunteers and all of the volunteers who share their time and talents to make Annual Conference possible.

Future sites and dates for Annual Conference have been chosen by P&AC and reflect a commitment to honor contracts we were forced to cancel in 2020 and 2021. Upcoming locations and dates include:

2024	Grand Rapids, MI	July 3-7 (Wednesday-Sunday)
2025	Greensboro, NC	July 2-6 (Wednesday-Sunday)

A decision about the location for our 2026 conference was postponed until fall 2023 in an attempt to get a better sense of how the pandemic, ongoing conflict and division in the body, and economic considerations will impact Annual Conference in the future.

The Program and Arrangements Committee wants your feedback about this year's Conference in Cincinnati. An evaluation form is available at www.brethren.org/ac. On the day Annual Conference ends, this link will be emailed to all registrants. Your comments and suggestions are always appreciated and will be taken very seriously as we plan for the 2024 Annual Conference.

These are challenging times for Annual Conference, but such challenges also present opportunities. As we continue to work on your behalf, Mary Anne Radmacher, author of several books about living with intentionality and purpose, reminds us that rather than responding to challenges with discouragement and anxiety, we should "savor the unknown and delight in the taste of possibility."

Tim McElwee, Moderator
Madalyn Metzger, Moderator-elect
David Shumate, Annual Conference Secretary
Beth Jarrett
Nathan Hollenberg
Jacob Crouse
Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, ex-officio

*Annual Conference exists to unite, strengthen and equip
the Church of the Brethren to follow Jesus.*