

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 2023. Moderator-Elect Dava Hensley and new committee member Gail Heisel joined Moderator Madalyn Metzger, Annual Conference Secretary David Shumate, and continuing committee members Nathan Hollenberg and Jacob Crouse. 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 Madalyn Metzger, the committee reviewed evaluation forms from the 2023 Annual Conference held July 4-8, 2023, in Cincinnati, Ohio. We then began planning for the 2024 Annual Conference to be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 3-7, 2024. 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 and the concerns and recommendations articulated in the “Separate No More” paper adopted by Annual Conference in 2007.

The theme for the 2024 Conference, chosen by the Moderator, is “Welcome and Worthy,” rooted in Romans 16:2. 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, Nathan Hollenberg, 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: Founa Augustin Badet, Amber Harris, and Calvin Park, and music coordinator, Seth Crissman.

P&AC affirmed the decision made two years ago 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, with a scriptural foundation, 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 2023. In addition to traditional activities like business sessions, worship services, equipping sessions, meal events, age group programming, and opportunities to network with exhibitors, the committee also made plans for a late evening concert with Friends with the Weather, excursions to the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, and the Witness to the Host City projects with Sleep in Heavenly Peace and Kids' Food Basket.

In addition, Program and Arrangements Committee has worked intentionally to address three other concerns related to Conference programming.

First, hearing a call for more Bible study, the Program and Arrangements Committee has asked all equipping session presenters to explicitly articulate the scriptural foundation for their work. Furthermore, P&AC has planned a series of five, one-hour Bible studies focused on the Conference theme, which will take place during equipping session time slots and be led by a diverse group of brothers and sisters.

Second, in response to concerns and recommendations in the "Separate No More" paper adopted by the 2007 Annual Conference and ongoing conversation with leaders from the intercultural community, Program and Arrangements Committee has worked to expand programming in Spanish (offering one of the Bible studies in Spanish and partnering with the Discipleship and Leadership Formation department to offer an equipping session in Spanish), and to address deficiencies related to printed translations of Conference materials and simultaneous interpretation during Conference.

Third, in planning for the 2024 Annual Conference, Program and Arrangements Committee has continued efforts at creating a more vibrant atmosphere in the exhibit hall, with the goal of fostering meaningful experiences for both Conference attendees and exhibitors. Once again, the Conference exhibit hall will feature mini-concerts, live podcast recordings, and other presentations on a small coffeehouse-like stage; and a silent auction with proceeds to benefit Annual Conference translation expenses and the general Annual Conference operating budget. In addition, attendees are encouraged to visit the exhibit hall on Wednesday evening following worship (when no other programming is scheduled) to engage with exhibitors, enjoy some music, play some games, and fellowship with one another. We hope attendees will take advantage of many opportunities and reasons to visit the exhibit hall throughout the week: to network with exhibitors, join the quilters to place a few stitches in the quilts and wall hangings, enjoy the concerts and presentations on the stage, grab a bite from concessions, and browse and bid on items in the silent auction. Drawing on her background in marketing, Moderator Madalyn Metzger also led a pre-conference webinar for exhibitors, "Building Community and Encouraging Connections: Making the most of your CoBAC24 exhibit."

1 Site Coordinators Ryan and Rosalie McBride secured a team of volunteers from
2 the Northern Indiana District, with assistance from additional key volunteers
3 from South/Central Indiana and Southern Pennsylvania, to tend to various tasks
4 related to the 2024 Annual Conference. Program and Arrangements Committee
5 is deeply grateful to these district volunteers and all the volunteers who share
6 their time and talents to make Annual Conference possible.

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8 Future sites and dates for Annual Conference have been chosen by P&AC, in-
9 cluding a commitment to honor a contract we were forced to cancel in 2021.
10 Upcoming locations and dates include:

- 11 • 2025 Greensboro, North Carolina, July 2-6 (Wednesday-Sunday)
- 12 • 2026 Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 28- July 2 (Sunday-Thursday)

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14 The Program and Arrangements Committee wants your feedback about this
15 year's Conference in Grand Rapids. An evaluation form is available at
16 www.brethren.org/ac. On the day Annual Conference ends, this link will be
17 emailed to all registrants. Your comments and suggestions are always appreciated
18 and will be taken very seriously as we plan for the 2025 Annual Conference.

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20 These are challenging times for Annual Conference, but such challenges also
21 present opportunities. In her book, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and*
22 *Why It Matters*, Priya Parker reminds us that "Gathering—the conscious bringing
23 together of people for a reason—shapes the way we think, feel, and make sense
24 of our world." For at least 237 years, Brethren have gathered for worship and
25 fellowship and to discern the mind of Christ together. As we work on your behalf
26 during these challenging times, we continue to consider why we gather and the
27 ways in which that "why" does and should shape "how" we gather.

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29 Madalyn Metzger, Moderator
30 Dava Hensley, Moderator-elect
31 David Shumate, Annual Conference Secretary
32 Nathan Hollenberg
33 Jacob Crouse
34 Gail Heisel
35 Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, ex-officio

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