

UB 3. Request for an Annual Conference Study on Calling Denominational Leadership

The 2022 Standing Committee of Annual Conference received the following request from the Nominating Committee of Standing Committee.

Background

The Nominating Committee, over recent years, has recognized significant challenges in calling and selecting leaders for Annual Conference-elected offices. Among them are:

- Increased difficulty in filling the Annual Conference ballot, often due to one or more of the following:
 - too few nominations from the wider church
 - too few nominees agreeing to be considered
 - more people who are ineligible because of serving multiple roles in the church
 - inability or reluctance to take on denominational positions that have grown to resemble full-time jobs
- Limited representation on the ballot (or subsequent election) of non-pastors, younger adults, racial/ethnic and other minorities, and those who are in local leadership but not visibly recognized in the larger denomination
- Changing configurations of membership and a shrinking pool of available leaders in the church

In response to these concerns, with input from several workshops in 2021 exploring the elections process (sponsored by Womaen's Caucus and the Annual Conference office), and considering questions raised in correspondence following those workshops, the Nominating Committee discussed these issues at its winter meeting.

At its meetings, held online January 24-27, 2022, the Nominating Committee appointed Debbie Eisenbise, Kim McDowell, and David Stauffer to draft a proposal to present to the 2022 Standing Committee concerning an Annual Conference study committee on calling denominational leadership whose positions are filled by Annual Conference elections and confirmations.

Topics a study committee could address:

- How can the discernment process better balance the need to have adequate information about each nominee with the need to have a relatively simple nomination process for the nominees and delegates?
- How can the Church of the Brethren Compelling Vision call to "develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless" apply to calling and equipping candidates for denominational positions?

- What are appropriate and helpful ways potential nominees can gain the experience, skills, recognition, and trust needed to be called to denominational positions? 1-3
- How does the decrease in the number of full-time pastors affect the pool of candidates willing to be considered for denominational positions? 4-5
- How much time do we expect volunteers to take off from work for meetings and travel in addition to the work required between meetings? 6-7
- What are realistic time commitments for volunteers serving in denominational positions? 8-9
- Are we limiting the pool of candidates to older (retired) and wealthier individuals who have the time and money to invest in service? 10-11
- Does the goal of fair representation require us to consider having a structured ballot to assure the balance that we want for leadership?^[1] 12-14

Action of the 2022 Standing Committee 15

On July 10, 2022, the 2022 Standing Committee adopted a motion to present this item of business to the 2023 Annual Conference requesting a study committee on calling denominational leadership. 16-19

Action of the 2023 Standing Committee 20

Standing Committee recommends that Annual Conference accept the concerns of New Business #1 ‘Request for an Annual Conference Study on Calling Denominational Leadership’ and elect three people to form the study committee. We encourage the committee to consult with current members of the Nominating Committee and others who have had experience with the nomination process. 21-26

Action of the 2023 Annual Conference 28

Debbie Eisenbise, Standing Committee delegate from the Pacific Northwest District, presented the foregoing recommendation of the Standing Committee to the Annual Conference delegates. *Annual Conference adopted the Standing Committee recommendation that the concerns of New Business #1 ‘Request for an Annual Conference Study on Calling Denominational Leadership’ be accepted.* 29-34

In a subsequent action, Annual Conference elected Eric Bishop, Erika Clary, and Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred to serve as members of this study committee. 35-37

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For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, 39-46

1 *then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encourage-*
2 *ment; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to*
3 *show mercy, do it cheerfully.* –Romans 12:3-8 (NIV)

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5 The committee began meeting in the Fall of 2023, working to review the Stand-
6 ing Committee Proposal and to work through the necessary steps for completing
7 the task. The Calling Denominational Leadership Study Committee met approx-
8 imately every two weeks between October and February.

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10 During its meetings the committee discussed approaches to answering the ques-
11 tions and concerns posed by the Standing Committee and strategized how best
12 to collect information that would represent the whole of the denomination. It
13 was recognized that a person’s experiences with the calling and ballot process
14 could be sensitive. During the deliberations, the question was raised as to
15 whether the same issues the Standing Committee was having at the denomina-
16 tional level, were also being experienced at the district or other levels of the
17 church.

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19 The committee worked through a list of determining whom shall be consulted
20 in the study and the following was created as a preliminary list:

- 21 • Standing committee nominations subcommittee (present and past)
- 22 • Young adults
- 23 • District executives (CODE)
- 24 • Recent past nominees
- 25 • Current individuals serving in AC-elected positions
- 26 • Organizations within the church that rely on volunteers and servant-lead-
27 ership
- 28 • Experts outside of the Church of the Brethren who can offer insights/prac-
29 tical guidance/best practices on identifying/calling servant leaders
- 30 • Nominating Committee (current and previous)
- 31 • Former ballot candidates
- 32 • Those nominated, but not on the ballot
- 33 • Agencies (those who have representation on the ballot: Eder Financial, On
34 Earth Peace, Mission and Ministry Board, Bethany Theological Seminary,
35 Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee)
- 36 • Service focused ministries (Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Volunteer
37 Service, Camps, etc.)
- 38 • Groups that assist in nominating or calling individuals (Brethren Revival
39 Fellowship, Supportive Communities Network, Womaen’s Caucus, etc.)
 - 40 - Representatives from the Intercultural Ministries office
 - 41 - Program & Arrangements Committee (calls non-elected leadership, e.g.
42 AC Speakers, Bible study leaders, etc.)

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44 Additionally, the committee developed survey instruments to collect informa-
45 tion from a broader group of individuals. The committee intended to spend
46 spring and summer of 2024 in data collection and engaging with denomina-

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| tional leaders. Additional information will be collected during the 2024 Annual Conference. | 1 |
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| Respectfully submitted, | 4 |
| Erika Clary | 5 |
| Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred | 6 |
| Eric Bishop | 7 |
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| [1] The Call to Accountability document prepared for the nominations process by the Annual Conference Secretary each year documents: | 10 |
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| For more than 40 years the Standing Committee has worked diligently at being accountable for equality of representation on Annual Conference ballots. In this new season of seeking nominations for leadership roles in our denomination, you can help obtain more equal representation of women and men, farmers, blue collar workers, professional people, young and old, Black, Hispanic, and Anglo church members – across the spectrum of our church. All of our spiritual gifts are needed if we are to function together as a healthy Body of Christ. | 12 |
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| Statistics have been provided each year to show the trend of election results along with a reiteration of the goal adopted in our 1979 Statement on Annual Conference Elections that we will “provide for fair and equitable participation by all of our people – men, women, various ages, racial and ethnic minorities, rural and urban segments of our church.” Please make nominations and urge your congregation’s delegates to prayerfully cast their ballots with the aim of calling forth the full use of all of our sisters’ and brothers’ gifts and skills. In the words of the 1979 Statement on Annual Conference Elections: | 17 |
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| ... it is incumbent on the church to ensure that the nomination and election process is fair and equitable and that all persons within our denomination have an equal opportunity of receiving that call for service (1979 Annual Conference Minutes). | 23 |
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