

Introduction

In 1994 Annual Conference adopted a Standing Committee recommendation that a congregational code of ethics be developed. After two years of work the five person committee submitted its final report, which then became part of Church of the Brethren polity known as “Ethics for Congregations.”

In 2010 the Western Pennsylvania District submitted a query to Annual Conference asking “would it not be helpful and contribute toward the unity of the Body if Annual Conference developed a uniform denominational process by which districts might deal with a congregation that engages in questionable ethical activity?” The Annual Conference gathered at Pittsburgh accepted the query and appointed a study committee. This group reported to Annual Conference in 2011 answering the query in the affirmative and suggested that Church of the Brethren staff oversee the process of updating and revising the 1996 document, and include “guidelines and suggestions for a denominational process of accountability.”

The original 1996 Ethics for Congregations statement began with an outline of principles guiding the document:

1. A paper on congregational ethics should be regarded as a companion piece to the paper on ethics in ministry relations. Therefore, it should be consistent in intensity and format. To be consistent with the Brethren understanding of “voluntarism” in religion, the paper should guard against imposing upon congregations arbitrary requirements that either are not biblically sound or violate traditional Brethren values.

Church of the Brethren

CONGREGATIONAL ETHICS POLITY

2. While the attempt to pull together in one statement a congregational code of ethics is unique not only in our denomination but, as far as the committee can tell, unique within the family of Protestant denominations, most of the values that are in the paper have precursors in various Annual Conference and other denominational statements. The paper will rely heavily upon those references and sources.

3. As with the paper on ministry ethics, this statement on congregational ethics is not to be regarded as a legal document. Rather, it is an affirmation of the faith and discipleship to which we, the Body of Christ, have been called if we are to remain obedient followers of Him who is the Head of the Church. As such, it provides for the corporate body a standard of behavior that is agreed upon by the church, an affirmation by which the congregation as a whole can be held accountable.

4. This paper attempts to speak to congregational actions, or the collective body of believers gathered at one place and acting as a whole, rather than to individual ethics. The paper on ministry ethics notes that “God calls all members, including those in leadership, to live by the high standards upheld in the scriptures” (2008 Ethics in Ministry Relations, 4). That paper recommends the standards of ethical behavior as applicable to all individual members of the church, with the added responsibility for the leaders and ordained ministers to be role models (1996 Ethics for Congregations, 1).

The 1996 paper also noted a legitimate question about the appropriateness of

Annual Conference suggesting a code of ethics for individual congregations: “For some who are accustomed to complete autonomy and to making decisions about congregational life and management by whatever method or value seems most expedient, such a code may be viewed as a threat or at best as unnecessary. Other congregations, struggling with survival, economic and otherwise, may feel that the suggested standards of behavior impose an impossible demand upon them, which may result in guilt and discredit” (1996 Ethics for Congregations, 1-2).

The 1996 Ethics for Congregations offered a simple caveat in regard to any process of accountability: “It is not the intention of this paper to set up standards by which congregations may be graded and compared. But it is the hope that congregations may know the mind of the whole denomination regarding what the Body of Christ should be and how it should act as Christ’s representative today, and use this paper as a guideline for seriously examining their own procedures and life” (1996 Ethics for Congregations, 2)

In the years following the acceptance of the 1996 document, the global church has experienced an array of controversies. While the foresight of many communions within the universal church has helped to address the ethical misconduct of clergy, it is clear that the life of our congregations on occasion does not live up to the call of the gospel. The first decade of the 21st century has made this even more plain to both the church and the wider culture.

This document will follow the pattern of the 1996 document especially in its discussion of the congregation’s intersection with its community, denomination, and wider church. In addition, the code of ethics has been revised to reflect the changes made in 2008 to the Ethics in Ministry Re-

lations. This discussion of congregational ethics will follow the following outline:

I. The Scriptural Visions of the Church

II. The Congregation and its Relationships

III. Practices of Awareness, Assessment, and Accountability

IV. The Code of Ethics

I. The Scriptural Visions of the Church

In the New Testament the early church lived into its call to be a faithful community in an unfaithful world, placed there to witness to God’s love in Christ. Those who shared in this mission were charged to live with the same kind of self-abandonment and sacrifice seen in Jesus Christ. The support and power for this momentous task came from their participation in a community of persons who, with the power of the Holy Spirit, could proclaim their devotion to Christ, share understandings of the way of Christ, and put their devotion and understandings into practice.

Several biblical images instruct us in the nature of this basic Christian community, the congregation:

1. The Bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5, the relationship between Christ and the church is used as the model for the covenantal relationship that should exist between husband and wife. The image is one of mutual love and accountability. An understanding of the covenantal nature of the church begins with the covenant established between God and Abraham (Gen. 12). There was to be mutual respect and accountability. So long as Abraham’s descendants were obedient to God’s will, God would favor them with prosperity and long life. It was the first relationship of its kind in the stories of religion—a personal and ethical pact between a god and humanity.

In Christ, the covenant between God and God's people was particularized. The covenant now had an "administrator," one who could interpret the relationship between the two "parties." More than that, the church would form a covenant with Christ in order to honor his teaching and example. In turn, the community would be the recipient of Christ's sacrificial love—love that would form the basis for all other human relationships. Thus, neither the individual Christian nor the church acts independently, but in relation to Christ.

2. The Body of Christ. The church is more than a collection of individuals who have promised to follow Christ's way. The church is the extension of the Incarnation in that it is to function as Christ's presence in the world and to present evidence of his resurrection. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, makes clear how the health of each individual part impacts the function of the whole body (1 Cor. 12). Each part must work properly, that is, with the integrity and love of Christ, for the body to be healthy.

In Ephesians 4, the image is repeated, indicating that the body is whole when each part "speaks the truth in love, and grows up in every way into him who is the head" (4:15).

3. Sojourners. The writer of Hebrews describes the faithful as those who are aware that their very existence reaches beyond this life. All their actions on earth are grounded in and guided by that hope (11:13-16). They are not, then, bound by earthly standards or limitations. They do things for one another that astound the pragmatists. They choose to follow convictions of justice and fairness, even though those decisions are unpopular. They accept a personal discipline that puts the welfare of others before their own needs.

4. Holy People and a Royal Priesthood.

1 Peter 2:13-17 assigns an awesome responsibility to the church. It is to perform priestly work for the world. It is the priest's function to speak to God for the people and to speak to the people for God. Service, not domination, is a distinguishing mark of the church's life and mission. To serve and not to be served is its first priority.

These biblical images provide a lofty portrait of the church—a covenantal community that is just and loving; one that is not bound or given to earthly attitudes and standards; one that transcends those attitudes and standards through service in the world. Traditionally, Brethren have held to some particular values within that overall framework that have guided both our corporate and individual ethics. These values include the following:

1. The New Testament is our rule of faith and practice. We covenant to live by its precepts as taught and revealed in Jesus and affirmed by the apostles.
2. Our word is as good as our bond. We covenant to be truthful in speech and in honoring the commitments we make. Integrity, fairness, and sincerity are requirements of each member of the church.
3. All members are ministers. We are called not only to serve one another, but also to model abundant life in Christ to all with whom we come into contact.
4. We believe in living in harmony with all persons, in peacefully solving conflict and in not harming or degrading any other person.
5. We believe the corporate judgment of the gathered church is our understanding of God's will.
6. Each member of the church is a valued part of the whole body. God endows each member with spiritual and natural gifts,

and the church values each member's opinion and contributions.

7. We are known by our fruits, and Christ should be glorified and revealed in all we do.

II. The Church and its Relationships

As is evident in the scriptures of the New Testament, the local Christian community does not exist unto itself. As part of the larger body of Christ, the congregation is one mission point among many. As travelers in the world, the congregation also lives as a witness within the local community. The calling of leadership and staff also establishes relationships which create unique expectations and boundaries. Understanding appropriate conduct, then, requires attention to these various relationships.

1. The Relationship to the Wider Church

The Apostle Paul sought to build a close kinship among all the new Christian communities established as a result of his missionary activity. He shared with them the news of what other congregations were doing (2 Cor. 8:1-2). He reported what others thought of them (1 Th. 1:6-7). He took any promising "missionaries" from the various congregations with him on his journeys (Col. 4:15). He promoted a mission offering among the churches of Asia for the church at Jerusalem. He forged bonds of service and love within and between Christian communities, overcoming seemingly irreconcilable differences and diversity.

The Christian faith is belief and action shared in community. Christians need other Christians in order to live out their faith. Just as an individual cannot follow Christ alone, a congregation cannot exist in a vacuum. It will soon become ingrown and will eventually die from lack of shared accountability and mission. Even in the first

days of the church, Paul and the apostles worked to keep the first congregations connected.

The 1992 Church of the Brethren Manual of Organization and Polity underscored this fact:

"The congregation is not sufficient to itself. It is interdependent with other congregations and the larger church. This calls for patterns which allow the congregation to participate in a network of district, national, and ecumenical relationships. By this interaction, both the congregation and the larger church are enriched" (1992 Manual of Organization and Polity, 119).

This was also affirmed in 2010 polity manual: "Openness to our brothers and sisters reaches from the congregation to the district, to the denomination, to the ecumenical church" (2010 Manual of Organization and Polity, 10).

All Church of the Brethren congregations are encouraged to adopt the recommended constitution and bylaws for congregations as outlined in the Manual of Polity and Organization. That constitution states that "the congregation shall covenant 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 shall remain a member of the Church of the Brethren or its successor. The congregation shall send delegates to those official conferences of the Church of the Brethren in which it is entitled to have representation" (2010 Manual of Organization and Polity, 85).

The congregation has an ethical responsibility to support the denomination. There may be rare instances in which, after much prayer and conversation, the congregation may conclude that affirmation of denominational statements or participation in a

denominational ministry conflicts with conscience. A decision not to participate in or support a denominational program should occur only after the congregation has engaged in a responsible process of study and prayer and open and honest dialog with denominational representatives. A recommended model of discernment and conversation regarding disagreements with Annual Conference can be found in the 2004 Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions. Congregations constantly need to examine and renew their covenant with the denomination and seek the counsel of its leaders. The prayerful conclusion not to support a denominational position or program should be a matter of anguish, not competitiveness or superiority.

Disagreement with particular actions of the denomination does not give a congregation the right to disparage the whole church or individuals. The congregation, as part of the denominational family of Christ, must deal with its family kindly, respectfully, and lovingly.

These same principles apply to the congregation's relation to the district. Annual Conference has identified several specific responsibilities to the districts that are directly related to congregational life, such as the authorization, discipline, and placement of ministers; the coordination of outdoor education; and the training of lay and ministerial leadership. The district is solely dependent upon the support and participation of the congregations within its boundaries for the continuation and effectiveness of its ministry.

Congregations are to help establish, support, and abide by the policies and decisions of the district. They are to welcome and work with the district executive or other appointed representatives of the district. They are to cooperate with and

give encouragement to other congregations within the district.

The mission and ministry of the Church of the Brethren at all points of our shared life requires the participation of all our members. The gathered body, in the form of Annual and District Conference, is the place for the discussion of our differences, the hearing of collective wisdom, and the discernment of the mind of Christ. This, then, is the nature of authority among the Brethren. "Authority is held accountable within the community, which in turn diligently seeks the 'mind of Christ' in study of the scriptures, in dialogue with brothers and sisters, and in openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit" (2010 Manual of Organization and Polity, 9).

The local church also is part of a larger whole which comprises the global body of Christ. The Church of the Brethren has a long and productive history of working with other Christian communions in the interest of Christian solidarity, witness, and service. Brethren congregations endeavor to know and relate to churches of other denominations in their communities. Our one Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, prayed for unity within the Body (John 17) and demonstrated that faithful disciples can speak from different Christian perspectives (Luke 9:49-50).

Ethical accountability in relation to other communions calls for the congregation to contribute the uniqueness and strength of its particular witness toward a common goal rather than seeking to impose sectarian bias. It also supersedes a judgmental stance toward persons and groups of a different perspective, and it rejects underhanded or self-righteous means of luring members away from other communions for its own cause (proselytizing).

On the other hand, the congregation must

guard against promoting or aligning with any interest groups or programs that may disrupt the mission of the congregation or pull it away from its covenantal relationship to the denomination.

2. The Relationship to the Community

Jesus made it clear that paying one's taxes was the responsibility of each of his followers (Luke 20:20-26) and Peter suggested that the mission of civil authorities is a part of God's plan for society (1 Peter 2:13-17). Congregations should guard against inappropriate use of their tax-exempt status and should honor, in letter and spirit, laws that clearly are applicable to them. This is especially the case in regards to copyright laws, safety codes, employee rights, discrimination, and accommodation of persons with disabilities. Even when churches are exempted from the requirements of some of these laws, the congregation should aspire to compliance, where appropriate.

By striving to be good neighbors, the congregation embodies the mission of God through its programs, activities and maintenance of its property. Each congregation is to attend to the environmental safety and appearance of its property. And it will model peace and justice in its relationship to the community, in its respect for individuals from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and in the methods by which it witnesses to political issues.

As already discussed, it is the congregation's role to represent the message and the truth of Jesus Christ. Often in its history, the church has not been aware of the image it projects in society. It has often demanded privileges and considerations from its environment beyond its reasonable due. It has sometimes expected to be served, rather than to serve.

A violation of our ethical self-

expectations occurs if the congregation infringes upon the rights of local businesses by repeatedly selling the same or similar products for a price that undercuts the merchants. Businesses understand, and often assist with occasional car washes, bake sales, or auctions. The congregation must be sensitive to the effect its fund-raising activities has on others. The church also must guard against abusing discount privileges and soliciting gifts and gratuities with coercive methods. The church also should examine the ethical implications of expecting or requesting free professional services. It is perfectly appropriate to accept services and products as gifts, yet requesting these gifts should be made with care, aware that each offering comes with some sacrifice. All congregations will fulfill its contracts and obligations on time, especially in regards to financial commitments.

The question of litigation in matters when the congregation may feel its own rights or privileges have been violated is a difficult one. Traditionally, the Brethren considered it not in keeping with biblical counsel to take a dispute into the civil court (Matt. 5:33-37; 1 Cor. 6:1-8). While that conviction may not be as strong today, there is still a clear ethical problem for Brethren resorting to public courts to settle a matter that the congregation ought to be able to handle itself, or to reconcile by more amicable means (cf. Matt. 18:15-17). Both in terms of complying with biblical directives and in the desire to model the peace of Christ, we must seek to resolve disputes in love and harmony.

Another ethical issue for the congregation, in relation to both the local and wider community, is its responsibility to preserve the environment and natural resources. The congregation should model good stewardship of the environment through recycling practices, avoiding

waste of energy, and making choices that minimize refuse.

3. Relationships within the Congregation

There are many New Testament scriptures that admonish congregations to maintain kind and considerate relationships among the members and the leaders of the church. Indeed, the congregation should be the model for relationships that build up one another and that demonstrate respect and admiration for each person's unique gifts. In that regard, the congregation is to strive for harmony and unity in all it does. Any action or statement that does not first seek the best interests of all its members raises the appearance of misconduct and requires scrutiny.

This criterion also applies to the congregation's organizational structures and decision-making processes. For nearly two centuries denominational decisions at Annual Conference were made only by consensus. The wisdom of the collective whole is understood to be the best approximate answer to any question presented to the church. Thus, a congregation shows lack of respect for its members by allowing decision-making to fall into the hands of a few. Each member of the congregation must guard against written or oral statements that appeal to those persons' positions or authority or that are based on incomplete or misleading information. This problem arises in calculated attempts to swing or manipulate attitudes and decisions outside of decision-making gatherings. Full and open communication should be encouraged at all times, and complete records of all meetings, decisions, and finances are to be kept and made available to all members.

The recommended constitution for Brethren congregations gives appropriate direction regarding the mutual accountability of members in the congregation:

“On the one hand, the congregation has a covenantal responsibility to care for its members, to encourage growth in freedom and discipleship, to help members discover their gifts and find ways to serve, and to provide ministries which respond to both spiritual and physical needs. On the other hand, each member has a covenantal responsibility to participate regularly in the life of the congregation, to seek the counsel of the church in living out the way of Christ, to challenge the church to greater accountability to its calling, to respond to opportunities to serve in the congregation and beyond, and to contribute to the church's ministries in every way possible” (2010 Manual of Organization and Polity, 86).

Sensitivity is to be given to the needs of individuals in the church. The congregation shall provide an environment where personal tensions and difficulties can be shared in full confidence of trust, loving response, and confidentiality. The community should establish expectations of care, forgiveness, and safety for all who take part in its ministries. In the cases of conflict, all care should be given to creating a setting in which reconciliation is the norm, not the exception. Handling disputes through petitioning, letter writing, and anonymous communication is inappropriate given the expectations of shared and transparent discernment.

The church's facilities are to be available to all persons seeking to participate with the congregation. There are ethical ramifications whenever anyone is denied the opportunity to worship or to participate in other ministries of the church, whether the denial is due to outdated policies and facilities (such as in the case of accessibility for the disabled) or outright prejudice.

Living into our belief in the priesthood of all believers, the congregation is to be con-

scious of the need for its lay leadership to model Christian lifestyle, just as for its ministers. The congregation is to teach, nurture, and encourage a Christian lifestyle for all its members and should call to leadership those persons who seek conscientiously to live out a Christian lifestyle. When matters of personal lifestyle arise, the congregation is to do everything possible to nurture and restore the person to a Christian lifestyle, as modeled for us in Christ.

The congregation is to respect the functions and ministries to which it has called its leaders. For example, it is improper to invite former pastors to perform pastoral functions or visitation in the congregation when another pastor is currently employed. Serving in leadership or other highly visible roles by former pastors should be carefully evaluated as to its effect upon the ministry of the current pastor and upon the harmony of the church. It also is unethical for individuals and/or groups in the church to usurp the authority and tasks of officially elected leaders or committees. It is equally inappropriate for leadership to conduct business in such a way so as to inhibit the full and open discernment of the congregation.

A. Relationship to Pastor(s) and Other Staff

From the first conversations about congregational conduct it has been evident that the most serious questions arise regarding staff. This is especially true given pastoral compensation, benefits, and support. Despite clear guidelines within denominational polity, negotiations about salary often present the most opportunity for inappropriate action on the part of the congregation. While identifying candidates for ministry does not usually involve questionable conduct, it is important for the community to take seriously its role in naming gifts, supporting discernment, and

extending a call to ministry. Since polity deals with many of these issues, only a few insights about conduct are offered here.

First, congregations and districts are to give careful attention to the calling of ministers. Congregations in particular should cultivate cultures of calling in which gifted persons are encouraged towards ministry. When persons enter in the discernment process the congregation should make every effort to support and pray for the candidate. Exploring one's call to set apart ministry requires many sacrifices. The role of the congregation does not end once the discernment has begun but extends through a call to leadership and ordination. Although sending of a gifted member to another congregation involves a sense of loss, care should be taken to acknowledge the congregation's role of sending and receiving leaders.

Issues related to the search for and placement of pastors present several ethical considerations. Denominational polity is to be followed in all searches. Confidentiality for the interviewee is very important, especially in cases where the candidate has not yet resigned from a current position or is not definite about seeking the new position. Pastoral profiles are to be kept in utmost confidentiality by members of search committees. Congregations and district executives should communicate openly with the candidates, making sure to honor confidentiality and seeing that information is shared appropriately and fairly. The sharing of confidential information related to staff or potential pastoral candidates undermines the discernment for all involved in the placement process. In addition, persons often seek to influence decision-making in an inappropriate manner or work outside the official committees charged by the congregation with the search process.

The time of searching for a pastor is filled with anxiety and opportunity. In many cases this climate of expectation and even fear opens doors toward inappropriate conduct. Honoring the time of discernment and formation is central to the congregation's role within the calling and credentialing process. Care should then be taken when considering the placement of licensed ministers who have yet to meet the expectations for ordination. Though short term placements or interim appointments provide significant learning opportunities, the congregation and district leadership should be sure to provide mentoring or coaching to licensed ministers called to such positions.

After extending the call to a minister, the congregation needs to establish clear understandings with the new staff member as to performance expectations. Those expectations should be equitable. These expectations should be balanced with the time commitments established in the contract.

Congregations have been slow to recognize the ethical issues relating adequate compensation and benefits for their employees. There are recommendations related to minimum compensation approved by Annual Conference every year. The salary table is a gauge for congregations to measure ethical responsibility in dealing fairly with their pastors. In most cases, abiding by the recommendations can be assumed to affirm the congregation's financial responsibilities to the pastor. The guidelines for providing medical and life insurance, pension, and other benefits, as recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Committee, are to be followed as nearly as possible. If congregations find it impossible to meet the guidelines or to provide benefits, there is an ethical obligation to discuss the reasons and their implications with the pastor and to plan in

good faith to meet the recommended scale and benefits as soon as possible. If, in the midst of open and honest discussion, it clear that scale and benefits are beyond reach, the job description should be immediately adjusted to match salary and benefits with expectations and time requirements.

Another, even more critical issue relates to the emotional and spiritual support of the pastors and other church staff. A committee or group should be in place that regularly relates to the staff regarding their spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, and intellectual well being. Time should be set aside each year to assess the work of staff as well as the ministry of the congregation. Such an evaluation is not an occasion to complain but to identify opportunities and growing edges. Again, care should be taken to balance open conversation and expectations of confidentiality.

The congregation should encourage staff to take adequate vacation and leave time. In ministry it is too easy to work beyond one's energy and ability. In such cases, neither the pastor nor the congregation benefit from such habits or unrealistic expectations. Congregations need to work with staff to see that physical and emotional health are not jeopardized by the staff member's work load. Leaders and their community should expect patterns of rest and sabbath, both during the regular week and at regular intervals throughout the minister's tenure based on the Guidelines for Sabbath Rest.

Sometimes the congregation is too dependent on the staff for functions that members of the congregation can and should do. Congregational leadership should continually assess and confirm that the current ways of working reflect our commitment to the priesthood of all believers.

Sometimes congregations are not considerate of the families of their pastors. For example, a pastor's spouse is often expected to take certain responsibilities in the church. While the minister's spouse is frequently a member of the congregation, his or her participation in the congregation is to be treated as any other member and not as part of the congregation's staff. It is also common for congregation members to assume the parsonage is a public meeting place. Such assumptions are inappropriate, and the privacy of the pastoral family should be respected at all times.

The maintenance of the parsonage at times can become overwhelming and thus be neglected. The congregation should have clear plans in place for swift and adequate repairs. The appropriate congregational committee should develop clear understandings with the pastoral family regarding regular and emergency maintenance of the parsonage.

Conversations regarding the severance of pastoral leadership are delicate in nature and require the utmost attention to appropriate boundaries and conduct. Any concern about leadership should be communicated to appropriate bodies within the congregational structure such as the Executive Committee. That group should take care to hear the concern and communicate legitimate questions to the pastor. As with any matter of staff assessment, the pastor should be given appropriate time to respond and to address the needed changes. Such an occasion is to be understood as an opportunity for growth and learning, not as a ploy for power or control.

Clearly, before conversations are conducted about the possible severance of a pastor, dialog with the pastor is to take place. Except in cases of blatant misconduct by the pastor, it is unethical for a pastor to be

approached with a severance notice without the attempt on the part of the church to engage in such dialog. The Ethics in Ministry Relations paper provides detailed procedures for handling matters involving allegations of ethical misconduct.

The departure of a pastor is a delicate matter regardless of the circumstances. If the resignation of a leader occurs under good terms, there are still many emotions to consider.

Care should be taken by the congregation and the leader to appropriately grieve and celebrate each other's new journey. If the termination comes under unpleasant circumstances, steps are to be taken to protect the reputation and peace of both the congregation and the employee. Neither is to take advantage of the other, financially or in any formal or informal evaluations made of each other. There should be an attempt to resolve any and all grievances, utilizing the resources of the district or the denomination's Ministry of Reconciliation to accomplish an amicable separation.

In all cases of severance, adequate notice (as set forth in the Pastoral/Congregational Agreement) is to be given by either the employee or the congregation and severance compensation awarded when appropriate. The district executive is to be consulted early in the separation process and remain involved as appropriate.

B. The Congregation and Sexual Improprieties

Much time and energy has been rightly focused on the sexual misconduct of clergy. Our current polity regarding Ethics in Ministry Relations is clear about the oversight and procedures related to such troubling events in the life of a congregation. Yet, sexual misconduct is not just committed by clergy. There are also incidents of

harassment and other sexual misconduct involving congregation members. Sometimes this behavior is directed toward the pastor, particularly where that person is a female.

Baptismal covenants are broken if members engage in conduct of a sexual and coercive nature directed toward another brother or sister. Sexually harassing behavior in the congregational family could include a range of behaviors: sexual jokes and innuendoes; sexually offensive telephone calls; sexual propositions or repeated unwelcome requests for dates; sexually suggestive staring or leering; unwelcome and uncalled-for comments or insinuations about a brother or sister's sex or private life; unnecessary physical familiarity or physical contact involving touching in a sexual way; sexually suggestive comments about a sister or brother's appearance or body; offensive remarks; obscene gestures; indecent exposure; sexual assault and rape.

These behaviors of sexual impropriety are inherently violent and rely on the premise that an individual has the right to impose his or her sexuality on another. As Christians, we need to acknowledge sexually harassing behavior as inappropriate in all its forms and respond appropriately with compassion and accountability. Victims need to be recognized as victims and given the support needed to recover from their experience. Perpetrators also need support and counseling but they need to be held accountable for their actions. Clearly, the conduct must be stopped and all reasonable steps taken to avoid any repetition.

Steps to prevent sexual harassment in the congregation include creating an environment free of power imbalances which make sexual harassment possible: nurturing relationships in which congregational members value one another as per-

sons in their own right; providing education on the unacceptability of sexually harassing behavior; and providing counseling and support for members dealing with this problem. Attention should be given to avoiding circumstances that might lead to misconduct or the perception that improper behavior could occur.

It is urgent that each congregation have in place a process for dealing with allegations of sexual impropriety. Unless a congregation is able to design a more appropriate process for itself, it is recommended that the procedures outlined in the Ethics in Ministry Relations paper, Section IV, be adopted by the congregation, with the executive committee serving as the assessment team. The executive committee should take into consideration and utilize as needed the resources available to them, including deacons, district or congregational reconciliation teams, the district executive, and professional caregivers available to the congregation.

Of special concern must be instances of improper treatment of children. Psychological or physical abuse of children is unethical and immoral. Children are vulnerable and have a right to protection from all forms of abuse. Child abuse includes the misuse or perversion of the privilege of caring for children. Examples include physical abuse; emotional abuse involving verbal abuse, belittling, teasing or terrorizing; and sexual abuse. In cases of the physical abuse of children in states where the law requires reporting, the church shall comply. In addition, the congregation must move aggressively to stop the behavior and protect against repetition; minister to the affected child and the child's family; and tend to the need of the perpetrator for treatment.

In addition to a process for dealing with incidents of child abuse, the congregation

is to have written policies in effect for the interviewing, hiring, supervision, and reporting of both lay employees and volunteers having child-care duties. Congregations also are advised to explore the feasibility of securing liability insurance to cover instances of sexual abuse allegations. A number of resources and sample child protection statements are available from Church of the Brethren and District staff.

III. Practices of Awareness, Assessment and Accountability

Encouraging healthy communities and establishing ethical boundaries is an important task in the life of the church. Simply establishing a set of expectations is adequate only in so far as the information it contains is integrated into the congregation's culture. To that end, a summary tool has been created to help our communities to assess their conduct and behavior.

Though congregations have been encouraged to study the Ethics for Congregations document during the pastoral placement process, this practice has not been sufficient given our understanding of healthy communities. Congregations, then, are to study this document and administer the assessment tool every five years. The results of the assessment and any intended actions are to be shared with the District Executive. The District office will keep a copy of the most recent study for purposes of accountability and record keeping. This information will be made available only to the congregation as they begin their regular assessment. In addition, denominational staff will work with the Council of District Executives to develop study resources and training tools.

The congregation's self-assessment and any counsel of the district or of the Standing Committee are intended to nurture the congregation in its efforts toward faithfulness to the will of God so that the body of

Christ can better live in obedience and unity.

Any code of ethics is only as good as the resolve to keep one another accountable to the outlined values and behaviors. Within the congregation this is especially important given the culture of the community and the many overlapping relationships within it. Sometimes it is just easier to let actions go unchallenged for the sake of greater peace. For the Brethren today, this is often the case when it is perceived that relationships among the members will never be the same. Yet, the model of discipleship presented in the scriptures points to mutual encouragement as the means of increasing faithfulness. The values expressed in this code of ethics, then, guide us towards nurturing healthy communities by presenting clear expectations and establishing the norms for disciplined correction and shared responsibility.

There are occasions of misconduct, however, that require intentional structures and processes. Most often, these matters concern congregational staff and business. Given that these occasions are prime examples of dual relationships or exertion of undue influence, it is essential that third parties are introduced to guide the process of confrontation and resolution.

The suggestions for process below follow the example of discipleship outlined in Matthew 18. It is assumed, however, that the one-on-one conversations have already taken place. For when a sister or brother "sins against you" go to them alone. When that conversation does not resolve the conflict or concern, then this process below should begin.

1. Any member of the congregation, perceiving a breach of fiduciary responsibility, may contact district leadership regarding their concerns. The district leadership team or executive committee will then

serve as the committee of inquiry. The district executive will serve in a consulting capacity during the inquiry.

This initial process of inquiry will focus on achieving clarity regarding the questions presenting in the complaint. District leadership will meet with congregational leaders as well as others involved. As much as possible, these conversations are to work towards restoration rather than accusation and punishment.

2. If these conversations result in further impasse, the district leadership will take the concern to the district board. Congregational leadership will be invited to further discuss the concerns and the implications for further disagreement. The goal of this meeting, as with the initial inquiry, is to restore relationship and appropriate conduct.

3. If these goals are not met, either from the perspective of the congregation or the district, the Standing Committee delegate will pass the matter onto Standing Committee as the adjudicating body of the denomination. This conversation, by the nature of the bodies involved, is final authority in matters of polity and discipline.

IV. The Code of Ethics

As a congregation within the body of Christ, each community strives to act with integrity in its daily interactions with those outside of the church.

1. We strive to live by the gospel injunction that our yes be yes, and no be no, especially in regards to civil statutes. We honor the creative work of others by abiding with copyright permissions and compensating those who share their creative work with us.

2. We embody our traditional posture of separation of faith from politics by refraining from using our non-profit status to support political candidates.

3. We seek to maintain integrity with the

business community by meeting invoice due dates, not abusing discount privileges, not soliciting gifts in a coercive or threatening way, and not competing unfairly with local businesses in the commerce of products and services.

4. Our integrity also challenges us to work in a transparent manner to the extent that we avoid Dual Relationships or Conflicts of Interest.

5. We strive to be witnesses to Christ's peace in our relationships with one another and our wider community, especially in sharing our message and resources and how we speak to political issues of the day.

As part of the global body of Christ each congregation seeks to be faithful to Christ's prayer for unity through prayer and support of the church locally, denominationally, and universally.

1. We seek to live out our covenant with the denomination and district, supporting its local, national and international program by sending delegates to Annual and District Conferences, through gifts of time and money, and most of all through our prayers.

2. We recognize that other Christian communities around us are brothers and sisters in the family of God. We do not try to proselytize from among our sister communions. In regards to other communities of religions, we seek to understand and be respectful of their beliefs and practices.

While disagreement is inevitable, we seek to enter public conversations with grace and compassion rather than fear and mistrust.

3. We support causes or organizations that reflect the historical and theological understanding of the church, and avoid partnering with groups that may detract from our stated mission.

As a community of disciples following the way and teachings of Jesus Christ, the con-

gregation seeks to treat one another with love and respect, conducting the business of the church openly and according to our beliefs.

1. We adequately compensate guest speakers, interim pastors, and other leaders who provide professional services for the congregation.
2. We are a people of reconciliation and seek to resolve disputes or concerns through peaceful means rather than resorting to public courts for a resolution.
3. We work to exhibit love and respect for every individual and ensure that every person has access to our facilities and ministries. We aim to be sensitive to persons with special needs and seek to accommodate them with adequate access to our worship and pastoral services.
4. We consciously seek harmony and unity in every aspect of our program and fellowship, striving for consensus in our decisions and relating to one another in the Spirit of Christ in the bond of love.

Our call to discipleship prompts us to encourage and instruct our members in maintaining lifestyles, attitudes and actions that reflect the example and teachings of Christ.

1. We steward our time, talent, and treasure as resources for the common mission of Christ's church. Our leaders responsibly manage all the resources and funds entrusted to them in the course of their duties.
2. We address promptly incidents of dissent among us and have a method in place for seeking resolution and reconciliation.
3. We cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving and generosity in all of our life, especially expressing our gratitude to all those who make a significant contribution to the church's work and worship, for all that we have is a gift from God.
4. We endeavor to maintain an environ-

ment and program free of sexual, psychological, or physical abuse and harassment, giving special attention to the protection of children, the elderly, and the disabled. In the event of an accusation of abuse or harassment we will deal with it forthrightly, promptly, and fairly, in order to stop the behavior in question, minister to all victims, effect change in the violator, and seek reconciliation.

The work of a congregation, especially the contractual agreements with staff, creates unique ethical questions (Fiduciary Responsibility).

1. We strive to be fair and equitable in our support of our staff, adopting the Guidelines for Pastor's Salaries and Benefits as our guide for determining what is adequate compensation. When diverting from these guidelines we will adjust expectations and time requirements appropriate to scale.
2. We provide a supportive and nurturing culture for our staff through an advisory committee which meets regularly with staff members in an advocacy and counseling capacity. This group will facilitate regular opportunities for performance evaluation of all staff by providing opportunities for appropriate congregational input.
3. We value the ministry of our current pastoral leadership and discourage our members from inviting former pastors to return to perform pastoral functions, such as weddings and funerals. We treat friendships with former pastors with special care so as not to undermine the ministry of current pastoral leadership.
4. We strive to be open and transparent in our organization and rely on the ministry of all believers in our midst by identifying and nurturing the gifts and skills of our leaders. We expect our members called to leadership to execute the duties of their office in accordance with congregational

by-laws. We entrust our leaders with the work of the church and expect them to avoid asserting undue influence in the matters of the congregation or seeking favors by nature of their position.

5. We conduct business openly, except when the agenda may deal with confidential personnel matters, and expect transparent and honest dialog from all our members at all times. We ask that our members not seek to influence decisions outside of established open forums through alternative and closed meetings or by campaigns through alternative media—in letters, by phone, or on the internet.