



Church of the Brethren General Board

Women in Ministry

Oct. 18, 1999

The 1958 Annual Conference responded with “request granted” to a query from the First District of Virginia (now the Virginia district) requesting that “women be granted full and unrestricted rights in the ministry” (Annual Conference minutes, 1958, Women in the Ministry, page 113). Polity papers on ministry in 1975, 1985, and 1999 state “The Church of the Brethren has two degrees for its ministerial leadership: the licensed and ordained ministry. The policies of both apply equally to men and women” (Annual Conference, Ministerial Leadership, 1999, page 2).

The Church of the Brethren has made progress in granting “full and unrestricted rights in ministry” to women during the past 41 years. We need to affirm and celebrate the church’s response to the challenge by the 1958 Annual Conference. Statistics, however, indicate that the progress has been slow. Currently, we have 2,286 licensed and ordained ministers in the denomination, and only 343 (15 percent) are women. There are 1,194 ordained ministers serving as pastors, and only 154 (13 percent) are women, and many of them are in associate pastoral positions. One has to ask why the numbers are so low for women in these leadership positions. The number of women being trained for ministry is much higher than the placement numbers. Clearly, many women have experienced a call from God and are eager to serve in a wide variety of leadership positions, especially as pastors, but some in the church are reluctant to accept and appreciate women in leadership positions.

Therefore, the General Board:

- 1) Calls the denomination to reaffirm the decision by the 1958 Annual Conference to grant “full and unrestricted rights in the ministry” to women;
- 2) Encourages and challenges congregations and districts to treat men and women equally when persons are being considered for the licensed and ordained ministry.
- 3) Encourages and challenges congregations and districts to treat men and women equally when they search for and call ordained leaders to fill pastoral vacancies.
- 4) Asks the Office of Ministry to develop a study guide, as a companion piece to the 1999 paper on Ministerial Leadership, with special emphasis on biblical, historical, and contemporary materials bearing on the issue of women in ministry, for congregations and district ministry commissions.