



THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY DIRECTOR INTERVIEWS HERSELF



NANCY SOLLENBERGER HEISHMAN, THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY, SITS DOWN FOR A CHAT WITH HERSELF TO SHARE SOME UPDATES ON BEHALF OF THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

GRATITUDE FOR DANA CASSELL'S SERVICE - PAGE 1

PART-TIME PASTOR/FULL-TIME CHURCH UPDATE - PAGE 2

WOMEN IN MINISTRY - PAGE 3

PASTORAL COMPENSATION & BENEFITS COMMITTEE - PAGE 3

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF SET-APART MINISTRY - PAGE 4



Q: Good morning, self! Thanks for this offer of a Q&A. Let's start with a question about some news I just noted in Newline. A valued employee has just departed your staff who has served the Office of Ministry in multiple capacities for the last 14 years. How do you feel about that?

A: It's difficult to sum up the value of the varied contributions that Dana Cassell has made to the denomination over the last 14 years. And it's not easy to find another person whose experience shaping ministerial polity, understanding, and interpretation has been as extensive. While others along the way have been strong partners in the process of developing and implementing ministerial polity,



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DANA CASSELL PREACHING AT
NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE 2018

Dana has given voice to the heart of how Brethren understand ministry, and this is reflected in the introduction, history, and theology sections of the 2014 polity paper. She carried this understanding into her role with the Part-time Pastor, Full-time Church program as she helped the church to come to terms with the shift from, as she termed it in an October 2019 article for Messenger, “an interesting experiment [of full-time, seminary-trained, salaried ministry] that lasted approximately two generations before proving unsustainable for the life of our congregations” into the current world of multi-vocational ministry. She has also contributed to supporting young adults in finding ways to test out their call specifically through the Ministry Summer Service program.

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Beyond these roles, it is my observation that Dana consistently offers a voice that has brought needed attention to the experiences and struggles of vulnerable and marginalized groups within the church and the wider society. Her courageous personal work reckoning with her own internalized racist formation is an example as well as her strong convictions regarding the equal access of women to ministry positions and the need for offering a genuine welcome to LGBTQ+ persons.

Her clear voice continues to inspire and challenge many, including me, to be more authentic in our solidarity and witness with all those who Jesus loves. I will deeply miss her partnership on staff but am excited at all that awaits her on her multi-vocational journey.



Q: So, what's next for the Part Time Pastor/Full-Time Pastor program?

A: This program is half-way through its grant-funded life cycle and frankly it has not experienced the kind of reception that was hoped for. The Thriving in Ministry Advisory Committee believes that several factors have contributed to this, the primary one being the pandemic which limited travel of the staff and circuit riders, cancelled the in-person nature of denomination and district-wide gatherings that would have given greater opportunity for interpretation, as well as the heavy weight of overall stresses affecting ministers and their congregations. And so, this is a crucial time for new staff to build on Dana's excellent work and to assess the steps needed to complete this program seeking ways to support the denomination's overwhelming percentage of multi-vocational pastors. An announcement of the ½ time position will be forthcoming shortly.

Q: What other opportunities are pressing for the Office of Ministry?

A: I am currently welcoming an invitation from Womaen's Caucus to partner towards the goal of more effectively calling, mentoring, and supporting women in ministry in the life of the denomination.

Denominational statistics show that only around 26% of all Church of the Brethren ministers are female and fewer still are serving in pastoral ministry. I have said more than once to district executives who rightfully lament the shortage of pastors that if congregations would call women in proportion to their statistics nationwide the crisis would be greatly diminished. In this regard, we have failed to practice the priesthood of all believers faithfully according to our denominational polity and understanding.

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Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford



However, it is rightly being pointed out by many these days that calling more women to serve congregations that are not well-oriented and intentionally supportive in welcoming and partnering with women in the unique ways needed will not serve these increased efforts well. And so, more focused efforts toward mentoring women in the credentialing process are needed. And it is essential to strengthen and challenge congregations to be welcoming, supportive, collaborative environments for working together with female pastors.

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We are called to be “innovative, adaptive, and fearless” as congregations and these qualities are urgently needed in the partnership with ministers regardless of gender, but especially for the success of female pastors.

Q: What's one more bit of news you're excited about?

A: I am super-enthused about the work of the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee. In the past, this committee may have had the reputation of working on dull, dry financial and compensation details but my experience in these past four years has been anything but that! This group is immensely “innovative, adaptive, and fearless” in their approach to reviewing and renovating compensation tools for pastors. This next summer in Omaha they will present their proposed tool kit of materials which will clearly reflect their recognition of the multi-vocational reality of most Brethren ministers. Pastors and congregations must work in a more intentional partnership in all they do, and they feel strongly that compensation tools should reflect this reality.

The materials will include a new Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement that reflects the multi-vocational reality. There will also be a Shared Ministries Priorities agreement that provides a tool for both pastor and congregational leaders to each identify the aspects of the ministry for which they will be responsible.



Even as they said farewell to several faithful departing members, the committee joyfully welcomes two new members this year, namely Art Fourman, a retired minister and educator from SODKY district and Robert McMinn, a finance attorney from Middle PA district. I tell everyone who asks me about my work, "PC&BAC is the most fun committee I work with!" Of course, I tell every committee that, but PC&BAC really does exhibit a bubbly joy in their work that is contagious. Who would have thought that compensation work could be such fun?



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THE 2020 CLERGYWOMEN'S RETREAT

Q: Are you hopeful for the future of the set-apart ministry in the Church of the Brethren at this time?

A: Absolutely! This has been an extraordinarily difficult time for all set-apart ministers serving in many roles. I have been deeply grateful, for example, for chaplains many of whom have found themselves drawing on their training in trauma-informed care in intense ways during the pandemic. Spiritual directors, counselors, personal coaches, church planters, and denominational, seminary, college, agency, and congregational staff of varied callings have been challenged in new ways to bring the love and grace of Jesus to their ministry roles. District executives and district administrative staff, while stretched beyond their energies most days, have pressed on with the Spirit's power and I am continually grateful for their partnership in living out the gospel. And I must gratefully say that the Office of Ministry's office manager, Mishael Nouveau, has brought extraordinary energy, skill, and grace to her role during the shift to remote work. What a joy it is to work cooperatively with her each day. This role in which I serve gives me the opportunity to watch Jesus at work in thousands of places bringing light, love, grace, comfort, and hope through the Church of the Brethren to the wider world. It's a privilege to have this bird's eye view and I surely don't hold it lightly. I recognize that I won't be serving here forever but for now it's a satisfying ride and I pray for God's wisdom to fill me each day and all whom I serve. ***Until next time, thanks, self, for listening in!***



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