

Wrap Up

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference ■ Greensboro ■ July 3-7, 2019



Annual Conference moderator Donita Keister preaches the opening sermon. Photo by Glenn Riegel

Annual Conference sets aside business to hold compelling vision conversations

Compelling vision conversations were the highlight of the 2019 Annual Conference. Other business was set aside—except necessary items such as elections and reports—to make time for the process intended to discern a compelling vision to guide the Church of the Brethren into the future. Moderator Donita Keister presided, assisted by moderator-elect Paul Munday and secretary James Beckwith.

Large amounts of data were collected from some 120 table groups of delegates and nondelegates, in response to a series of questions. This will be assessed over coming months by the Compelling Vision Process Team and Compelling Vision Working Group. The goal is to bring a vision statement for consideration by the 2020 Conference.

A love feast followed, open to all present. It was the first time in decades that love feast has been celebrated by the full Conference (*see page 2*).

Elections and appointments

Annual Conference moderator-elect: David Sollenberger of Annville, Pa.

Program and Arrangements Committee: Carol Hipps Elmore, Salem, Va.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, affirmed, represent the district executives: Terry Grove, Winter Springs, Fla.

Mission and Ministry Board, Area 4: J. Roger Schrock, McPherson, Kan.; **Area 5:** Don Morrison, Nampa, Idaho; **affirmed, at-large:** Heather Gentry Hartwell, Harrisonburg, Va.; John Michael Hoffman, McPherson, Kan.; **affirmed, filling an unexpired term:** Paul V. Schrock, Indianapolis, Ind.

Bethany Seminary trustee, representing colleges: Monica Rice, McPherson Kan.

Brethren Benefit Trust Board: Audrey Myer, Elizabethtown, Pa; **affirmed, at-large:** Donna McKee Rhodes, Huntingdon, Pa.; **affirmed, elected by Pension Plan participants:** Russ Matteson, Modesto, Calif.

On Earth Peace Board: Carla L. Gillespie, Tipp City, Ohio; **affirmed, at-large:** Caitlin Haynes, Baltimore, Md.; Lucas Al-Zoughbi, Lansing, Mich.



Photo by Glenn Riegel

Compelling vision conversations

Table groups of six to eight people discussed questions posed by the process team of Rhonda Pittman Gingrich (chair), Michaela Alphonse, Kevin Daggett, Brian Messler, Alan Stucky, Kay Weaver, Keister, Munday, past moderator Samuel Sarpiya, and Conference director Chris Douglas. The Compelling Vision Working Group includes the three moderators and Conference director, general secretary David Steele, district executives Colleen Michael of Pacific Northwest and John Jantzi of Shenandoah.

Tables each had a facilitator and a recorder who typed responses into computer tablets provided by CoVision, a company whose services were engaged by the process team. Tables were encouraged to submit each idea as an individual entry. Some also entered group responses. Responses were automatically numbered as received. They were not identified by table unless the recorder included the table number. Responses included evaluations of each session.

The process team sat at its own table to monitor responses in real time. As responses showed up on their monitors, the team had a few minutes to create a “snapshot” of responses to share with the Conference before going on to the next question. Questions were repeated verbally and on the big screens in English, Spanish, and Haitian Kreyol.

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See www.brethren.org/ac/2019/coverage for full coverage. Order the Annual Conference Wrap-Up DVD for \$29.95 and Sermons DVD for \$24.95 from Brethren Press, call 800-441-3712. This Wrap Up was produced by Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, director of News Services, working with the Annual Conference News Team for 2019: Jan Fischer Bachman, Laura Brown, Keith Hollenberg, Russ Otto, Donna Parcell, Frank Ramirez, Alane Riegel, Glenn Riegel, Frances Townsend. #cobac19



From left: A candlelight vigil July 3 was held in solidarity with immigrants and praying for all suffering from a situation of injustice. Leaders in the intercultural community spoke. It was sponsored by the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy (photo: Donna Parcell). An a cappella quintet of sisters sang for worship including Mary Gorham, Rebecca Keister, Jamie Manbeck, Danielle Sommers, and Nicole Walter (photo: Keith Hollenberg). Children enjoyed playtime (photo: Laura Brown). Junior highs sorted gifts for Backpack Beginnings (photo: Glenn Riegel).

Like drinking water from a firehose

Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, chair of the Compelling Vision Process Team, described monitoring incoming responses from the 120 tables as “a little like drinking water from a fire hose.” A few minutes after the very first question was asked, for example, some 850 responses already had been received.

A comprehensive report will not be available until later this year, after those assessing the data have a chance to read each of the thousands of responses, she said.

Questions ranged widely. The opening question—imagine the church in 10 years and what the manner of our living conveys to the world at that time—was repeated in one of the final questions asking what it will take to become that church. Many questions were based in scripture and called for Christ-centered responses. Participants were pushed to use their imaginations, their personal experiences, and the experience of their congregations when asked about inspiring ministries, needs in their communities and how the church might meet them, “big ideas” to invest in, and more. Some questions focused on the Great Commission and Great Commandment. Some asked about the peace witness. Others were about Brethren ordinances and practices. “What have you heard during the visioning conversations that excites you or gives you hope about our future as the Church of the Brethren?” was the last question posed.

Moderator Donita Keister acknowledged anxiety that the process did not address concerns about division in the church. “I assure you that this work is happening around our division, on a parallel track,” she told the Conference. “We are not kicking the can down the road.”

By the time table groups joined in love feast, the tone of conversation and laughter heard at many tables indicated a feeling of increased relationship. This echoed Pittman Gingrich’s prayer for the conversations. “Open our hearts and minds and imaginations,” she prayed before the first question was asked. “May we grow together as your body.”

‘Draw nigh to God and receive these sacred symbols to your comfort’

With these words, moderator Donita Keister invited all present to receive communion. For love feast, table groups continued to sit together and onlookers were invited to join them. A time of spiritual examination was followed by feetwashing or handwashing for those with disabilities, with areas for men, women, and genders together. The center did not allow water in the basins so washing was done with large wipes. The meal was placed on tables in cake boxes filled with loaves of bread, spreads like peanut butter and jelly, and applesauce cups. Communion was Brethren style: individual cups and home-made unleavened bread.



Photos clockwise from top: Glenn Riegel, Keith Hollenberg, Donna Parcell, Laura Brown

By the numbers

2,155 registered including 677 delegates

\$50,928.49 received in offerings including \$13,212.01 for Brethren Disaster Ministries work in Puerto Rico, \$11,383.41 for Church of the Brethren core ministries, \$11,152.16 for church rebuilding in Nigeria, \$8,171.35 for age-group activities at Conference, and \$7,009.56 for Calling the Called workshops in districts, sponsored by the Ministry Office

5 congregations and 1 project welcomed into the Church of the Brethren including Faith in Action Church of the Brethren, N. Ohio District; Floyd Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Vida, Virgina District; Hanging Rock Church of the Brethren, West Marva District; Living Stream Church of the Brethren (online congregation), Pacific Northwest District; and Veritas Church of the Brethren and the Ebenezer project, Atlantic Northeast District

165 pints collected by the blood drive

2 percent increase approved for the Minimum Cash Salary Table for pastors

\$2,360 received in online donations related to the Conference

\$7,595 raised for hunger relief by the Association for the Arts Quilt Auction

\$1,312 received for ministers’ assistance during the Minister’s Association event

\$5,687.06 received in cash for the Witness to the Host City supporting Backpack Beginnings