

Leadership Team responds to proselytizing activities of Covenant Brethren Church

The Church of the Brethren Leadership Team in mid-September issued a communication responding to proselytizing activities by the Covenant Brethren Church, a new group that is splitting off from the Church of the Brethren, while offering aid to district leaders during the division. It expressed strong support for church leaders and members who remain loyal to the Church of the Brethren.

The Leadership Team includes general secretary David A. Steele, Council of District Executives representative Cynthia S. Sanders, and the Annual Conference officers—moderator Paul Munday, moderator-elect David Sollenberger, and secretary James M. Beckwith.

“Discord and division are arising within our church body,” the communication said. “This reality has accelerated in recent weeks, as the Covenant Brethren Church launched an official recruitment effort. Congregations and individuals are being invited and sometimes urged to join their denomination, including Church of the Brethren leadership and portions of congregations that are being divided over this movement.”

This activity was identified as unethical proselytizing, citing the Church of the Brethren’s “Ethics in Ministry Relations” and “Congregational Ethics Polity.” The Leadership Team acknowledged that individuals have a right to choose their church affiliation but outlined measures “to preserve the integrity of the Church of the Brethren and our ministries in Christ.”

Sections of instruction were directed to the responsibilities of district and congregational leaders, with other sections stating a position against dual affiliations, citing the Church

of the Brethren’s *Manual of Organization and Polity* and *For All Who Minister*.

District leaders were called to uphold the best interests of the Church of the Brethren and to live out polity expectations. District leaders who have voted in favor of the withdrawal of congregations were instructed to resign from their positions. Districts were urged to provide care for loyal remnants in divided congregations. It was made clear that congregations or portions of congregations that vote to leave their district have ceased to exist or function as a congregation of the Church of the Brethren and are no longer eligible for representation at district conferences and Annual Conference. Loyal remnants of leaving congregations will be eligible for representation.

Pastors and congregational leaders were called to uphold the best interests of the Church of the Brethren, continue their commitment to baptismal and ordination vows, and adhere to ministerial and congregational ethics.

There will be no dual ordinations for pastors, dual memberships for individuals, or dual affiliations of congregations. “Such duality is not wise or healthy,” the communication said. “A choice must be made between the two denominations. Those who choose the Covenant Brethren Church must resign promptly from any leadership roles in the Church of the Brethren. . . . We would expect that people who are participating in efforts to separate from the Church of the Brethren would not be approved for further ministry in the Church of the Brethren.”

Find the full communication at www.brethren.org/news/2020/leadership-team-issues-update-in-response-to-activities-of-the-covenant-brethren-church.

New policy for clergy continuing education

A new policy for ministers to receive continuing education units (CEUs) has been announced by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the Ministry Advisory Council.

“Recognizing that live participation is becoming increasingly difficult for multivocational ministers and given the growing library of

recorded webinars available from denominational agencies, the Brethren Academy is offering clergy the opportunity to view and report on prerecorded webinars and other educational events for CEUs,” said the announcement.

Eligible recordings must have been created by a Church of the Brethren agency, be no more than 10 years old,

and originally have been offered for CEUs according to the criteria set forth by the Brethren Academy. After viewing a recording that meets these criteria, ministers may complete an online report and submit it to the academy with the certificate fee. Find the policy at <https://bethanyseminary.edu/brethren-academy> under “Continuing Education.”



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Bethany Seminary begins in person this fall

Bethany Theological Seminary opened the academic year with an increased overall enrollment, including new residential students relocating to study at the Richmond, Ind., campus. A total of 86 students began classes in August, including 30 enrolled at Bethany for the first time.

Sixty-three students this year are distance learners studying via video conference and remote-learning resources. The 23 residential students include 15 who live in a group of Bethany-owned houses near campus known as “The Neighborhood.”

The seminary put extensive COVID-19 protocols in place for in-person classes. See Bethanyseminary.edu.

Personnel notes

Founa Augustin-Badet has been named director of Haitian Ministries for Atlantic Southeast District in a new part-time position. She works with the 7 churches who use Kreyol as their primary language and make up 40 to 45 percent of the district.

Steve Bickler and **Margaret Drafall** concluded their work with Brethren Press on Aug. 28 because of financial difficulties in budgets for this year and next, including a significant drop in sales due to the pandemic. Bickler was the warehouse/shipping specialist for Brethren Press and also worked in Building and Grounds. He worked for the denomination for more than 42 years, beginning with Brethren Press March 20, 1978. Drafall was a customer service specialist with Brethren Press for more than 13 years, since March 26, 2007.

Andie Garcia resigned July 21 after a year as system specialist for Information Technology for the Church of the Brethren.

Esther Harsh has resigned as Northern Ohio District youth coordinator, a position she held for more than three years, to pursue a master’s degree. Jenny Imhoff is interim youth coordinator.

Kevin Kessler has resigned as district executive minister of Illinois and

Wisconsin District, effective Dec. 31. He has filled the half-time role for 14 years while also pastoring Canton (Ill.) Church of the Brethren, a role he will continue. He began with the district on Jan. 1, 2007, and is one of those with the longest tenure on the Council of District Executives. He served on the Ministry Advisory Council during creation of the 2014 Ministerial Leadership polity and has served as co-chair of the Illinois Conference of Churches.

Scott Kinnick has resigned as district executive minister for Southeastern District, as of Dec. 31. He has held the position for four years, since September 2016. He previously filled three pastorates.

Jon Kobel concluded his work as Annual Conference assistant on July 31 due to budget shortfalls. He worked for the Church of the Brethren for 21 years. He began on June 21, 1999, as manager of the Office of the General Secretary assisting former general secretaries Stan Noffsinger and Judy Mills Reimer. He was conference assistant since June 2009, with a wide range of duties including working onsite at each Annual Conference.

Steve Lipinski retired Aug. 5 as manager of Brethren Foundation Operations for Brethren Benefit Trust. Sherri Crowe, client manager for the

Brethren Foundation, is assuming the duties of manager of Brethren Foundation Operations.

Jon Prater began July 21 as part-time director of Ministerial Services for Shenandoah District. He also pastors Mount Zion-Linville Church of the Brethren in Virginia.

Brethren Volunteer Service workers who have ended or are beginning terms of service with the Church of the Brethren: **Susu Lassa** on July 17 ended a year as associate with the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy; **Alton Hipps** of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren and **Chad Whitzel** of Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren began Aug. 10 as assistant coordinators for the Workcamp Ministry; **Evan Ulrich** began July 24 with Brethren Disaster Ministries in Dayton, Ohio.

Remembering first pastor lost to COVID-19

Timothy Sites, 60, interim pastor of Leake’s Chapel Church of the Brethren in Stanley, Va., passed away from COVID-19 on July 16. His is the first known death to COVID-19 of an active pastor currently serving a Church of the Brethren congregation. He served in Shenandoah District.